

TOWARDS A BLACK AGENDA

IBW

This document represents a preliminary attempt to flesh out some of the ideas, implications and mechanisms which seem to be implied in the discussions we have begun on the subject of our work towards the establishing of a Black Agenda for this generation. It must be understood only as a beginning point for our own more serious discussions of this matter. It is, however, predicated on my assumption that the work I am suggesting here might well become the central corporate task of the Institute staff for the next 2-3 years. (It should also be understood that I find it entirely conceivable that we shall have to carve out for ourselves some portion of the overall work which would be in keeping with our time, skills and interests.)

The background for this suggestion is our persistent statement that we have a collective commitment to work as fully as we can towards Black control over the definition of the Black Experience. Indeed, we have at various public and private times stated this as a general articulation of our most central purpose.

We have said that our own work toward the establishment of that control would be concentrated in three basic arena:

First, would be the research and writing on this historical struggles of Black peoples here and elsewhere towards self-determination and radical change.

Secondly, we said we would engaged in serious analysis of our present situation, especially here in the USA, attempting to understand the nature of our political, economic, cultural, social, etc. position. We said we would seek to understand and identify the mechanisms of white power which keep us from realizing the self-determination we need, and also identify those resources in the Black community which can aid us in the movement towards the goals of self-definition and power for necessary change.

Thirdly, we said we would seek to develop the ideas and concepts which would help to bring into being those educational, political, economic and cultural structures which are necessary to continue in the years ahead the struggle towards the change we need. Therefore we concluded that among the three models we had discussed for ourselves (Black University, Consultant Service, Think Tank), it was likely the Black Think Tank idea which came closest to the task we saw for ourselves--even though it was clear that there were many problems with that analogy itself.

Against that background of earlier discussion and debate concerning our basic purpose and direction, the proposed work toward the establishing of a Black Agenda for this generation (seventies?) seems to have coherence. The agenda would be one that sought to move the Black Community towards that control of our lives, our institutions and our environment which may help to make possible the revolutionary

change necessary to create a humane society in America. (I find, for instance, the basic outline of the goals stated in the Manifesto for a Black Revolutionary Party sufficient for a beginning point description of that society.)

1. Possible Agenda Items

It would seem to me that any discussion of the future of Black People in America would have to address itself to certain key areas of thought and action. I propose here a list which obviously contains both overlaps and gaps. The list is presented primarily for purposes of development and discussion, and is open to many changes. Nevertheless, these seem to be some of the critical areas which must be explored in any attempt to establish a Black Agenda.

- a. Education
- b. Economic Development
- c. Political Organizing and Development
- d. Police Control
- e. Health and Welfare (including control of Urban Environment)
- f. Relationships and Approaches to Black World
- g. Black Response to American Imperialism
- h. Historical Research on Black Experience
- i. Cultural Development and Definition
- j. Communications

2. Method of IBW Approach

a. As a first step, the IBW staff, with some assistance from Associates and other knowledgeable persons, would enter into a 3 day discussion on the questions and issues concerning these Agenda items as they relate to our future as Black People in America. There would be some preliminary discussion papers. In most cases we would be asking:

1. What is the present situation and how did it get that way?
2. What seems to be the trends developing out of the present?
3. How do present realities and projected trends appear to serve or hamper the development of movement towards Black self-determination and revolutionary Black humanism?
4. What must be done to bring about change towards that development?

This initial, exploratory discussion would take place on October 16, 17, and 18, 1970. (In light of our current budget situation, we need to seek funds to help bring that off.) As a result of such a meeting the staff would decide which issues we can focus on as analysts and as catalysts

for the work of others.

- b. The second phase would see various staff members and associates zeroing-in on certain agreed on areas for intensive examination over a period of time. Position papers and analyses, focussing especially on the first three parts of our four-part question, would be prepared. The relatively small group of working analysts would gather for a 3-4 day session. Out of that would come a Preliminary Report, edited and circulated by an IBW staff person or Associate.
- c. After an agreed-upon period of time for refining and rethinking and additional information-gathering, the group would meet again, this time to focus on the issue of What Must Be Done.
- d. The reworked report and proposals would form the nucleus for IBW's Black Paper on that particular Agenda item. After the staff had reviewed the work, it would be published. Eventually there would be two sets of documents coming out of this process. The first would be a series of Black Policy papers dealing with the Agenda we deem necessary for the future of Black people in America--based on the items chosen for the Agenda. The second set would be a series of far

less publicized research documents which could be fed into the process of black struggle for radical change in a much less public way.

The taking up of such an agenda for our own collective work would probably lead us to at least a two-year involvement on the formal level of analysis (and no one can be certain where it would lead on other, informal paths). It would not negate individual research tasks, but it would make clear to those who wish to join us, and those we wish to invite what the nature of our ongoing commitment is.

It appears to me that this kind of focus on the future of Black people in America is a very logical job for us to set ourselves on. (I do not ever envision the IBW having on its own staff all the expertise necessary for even two-thirds of the Agenda items. Rather I see us essentially as catalysts for that organizing of black intellect towards the revolutionary scholarship we have wanted to do. Here, of course, is a very clear and--I think--crucial way to make use of the gifts of our Associates as well.) If for no other reason, work on this kind of task will force us to keep in touch with the daily realities of Black life in America, and will perhaps help some members of the Black community to see our work as valuable to its life. Finally, of course, it is a job that badly needs doing. Is there any reason why we should not attempt it?

Vincent Harding