

Stokely Carmichael's "What We Want"

September 22, 1966

What has been called the Civil Rights Revolution took many forms in the twenty-two years between the end of World War II and 1967. At first a movement to obtain such reforms as desegregation of the armed forces, it quickly concentrated on school desegregation, an effort that won a legal victory with the Supreme Court decisions of 1954 and 1955. Desegregation of public accommodations, especially in the South, was the next goal. Although this too was largely achieved, the basic problem remained unsolved. During the late 1950s and early 1960s the movement was essentially nonviolent, and its leaders were often, if not always, clergymen like Martin Luther King. But, as the 1960s wore on, the slogan changed from equal civil rights to black power, which expressed African Americans' continuing frustration with the lack of real progress toward general social and economic equality in the country.

Stokely Carmichael, at the time the national chairman of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, wrote the following article for the New York Review of Books in September 1966. Entitled "What We Want," the article tried to sum up the feelings and desires of younger African Americans throughout the country. Born in 1941 in Trinidad and raised in New York City, Stokely Carmichael joined the Student NonViolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) while enrolled at Howard University. In the mid-1960's, he emerged as the chairman of the organization and shifted its emphasis from voter registration to self-reliance and violent change. His successor, H. Rap Brown, was even more militant, once asserting that "Violence is as American as cherry pie." Carmichael eventually changed his name to Kwame Ture and moved the African nation of Guinea.

One of the tragedies of the struggle against racism is that up to now there has been no national organization which could speak to the growing militancy of young black people in the urban ghetto. There has been only a civil rights movement, whose tone of voice was adapted to an audience of liberal whites. It served as a sort of buffer zone between them and angry young blacks. None of its so-called leaders could go into a rioting community and be listened to. In a sense, I blame ourselves--together with the mass media--for what has happened in Watts, Harlem, Chicago, Cleveland, Omaha. Each time the people in those cities saw Martin Luther King get slapped, they became angry; when they saw four little black girls bombed to death, they were angrier; and when nothing happened, they were steaming. We had nothing to offer that they could see, except to go out and be beaten again. We helped to build their frustration.

For too many years, black Americans marched and had their heads broken and got shot. They were saying to the country, "Look, you guys are supposed to be nice guys and we are only going to do what we are supposed to do--why do you beat us up, why don't you give us what we ask, why don't you straighten yourselves out?" After years of this, we are at almost the same point--because we demonstrated from a position of weakness. We cannot be expected any longer to march and have our heads broken in order to say to whites: come on, you're nice guys. For you are not nice guys. We have found you out.

An organization which claims to speak for the needs of a community--as does the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee--must speak in the tone of that community, not as somebody else's buffer zone. This is the significance of black power as a slogan. For once, black people are going to use the words they want to use--not just the words whites want to hear. And they will do this no matter how often the press tries to stop the use of the slogan by equating it with racism or separatism.

An organization which claims to be working for the needs of a community--as SNCC does--must work to provide that community with a position of strength from which to make its voice heard. This is the significance of black power beyond the slogan.

Black power can be clearly defined for those who do not attach the fears of white America to their questions about it. We should begin with the basic fact that black Americans have two problems: they are poor and they are black. All other problems arise from this two-sided reality: lack of education, the so-called apathy of black men. Any program to end racism must address itself to that double reality.

Almost from its beginning, SNCC sought to address itself to both conditions with a program aimed at winning political power for impoverished Southern blacks. We had to begin with politics because black Americans are a propertyless people in a country where property is valued above all. We had to work for power, because this country does not function by morality, love, and nonviolence, but by power. Thus we determined to win political power, with the idea of moving on from there into activity that would have economic effects. With power, the masses could *make or participate in making* the decisions which govern their destinies, and thus create basic change in their day-to-day lives.

But if political power seemed to be the key to self-determination, it was also obvious that the key had been thrown down a deep well many years earlier. Disenfranchisement, maintained by racist terror, makes it impossible to talk about organizing for political power in 1960. The right to vote had to be won, and SNCC workers devoted their energies to this from 1961 to 1965. They set up voter registration drives in the Deep South. They created pressure for the vote by holding mock elections in Mississippi in 1963 and by helping to establish the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party (MFDP) in 1964. That struggle was eased, though not won, with the passage of the 1965 Voting Rights Act. SNCC workers could then address themselves to the question: "Who can we vote for, to have our needs met--how do we make our vote meaningful?"

SNCC had already gone to Atlantic City for recognition of the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party by the Democratic convention and been rejected; it had gone with the MFDP to Washington for recognition by Congress and been rejected. In Arkansas, SNCC helped thirty Negroes to run for School Board elections; all but one were defeated, and there was evidence of fraud and intimidation sufficient to cause their defeat. In Atlanta, Julian Bond ran for the state legislature and was elected--twice--and unseated--twice. In several states, black farmers ran in elections for agricultural committees which make crucial decisions concerning land use, loans, etc. Although they won places on a number of committees, they never gained the majorities needed to control them.

All of the efforts were attempts to win black power. Then, in Alabama, the opportunity came to see how blacks could be organized on an independent party basis. An unusual Alabama law provides that any group of citizens can nominate candidates for county office and, if they win 20 percent of the vote, may be recognized as a county political party. The same then applies on a state level. SNCC went to organize in several counties such as Lowndes, where black people--who form 80 percent of the population and have an average annual income of \$943--felt they could accomplish nothing within the framework of the Alabama Democratic Party because of its racism and because the qualifying fee for this year's elections was raised from \$50 to \$500 in order to prevent most Negroes from becoming candidates.

On May 3, five new county "freedom organizations" convened and nominated candidates for the offices of sheriff, tax assessor, members of the school boards. These men and women are up for election in November--if they live until then. Their ballot symbol is the black panther: a bold, beautiful animal, representing the strength and dignity of black demands today. A man needs a black panther on his side when he and his family must endure--as hundreds of Alabamians have endured--loss of job, eviction, starvation, and sometimes death, for political activity. He may also

need a gun and SNCC reaffirms the right of black men everywhere to defend themselves when threatened or attacked.

As for initiating the use of violence, we hope that such programs as ours will make that unnecessary; but it is not for us to tell black communities whether they can or cannot use any particular form of action to resolve their problems. Responsibility for the use of violence by black men, whether in self-defense or initiated by them, lies with the white community.

This is the specific historical experience from which SNCC's call for "black power" emerged on the Mississippi march last July. But the concept of "black power" is not a recent or isolated phenomenon: It has grown out of the ferment of agitation and activity by different people and organizations in many black communities over the years. Our last year of work in Alabama added a new concrete possibility. In Lowndes County, for example, black power will mean that if a Negro is elected sheriff, he can end police brutality. If a black man is elected tax assessor, he can collect and channel funds for the building of better roads and schools serving black people--thus advancing the move from political power into the economic arena. In such areas as Lowndes, where black men have a majority, they will attempt to use it to exercise control. This is what they seek: control.

Where Negroes lack a majority, black power means proper representation and sharing of control. It means the creation of power bases from which black people can work to change statewide or nationwide patterns of oppression through pressure from strength--instead of weakness. Politically, black power means what it has always meant to SNCC: the coming-together of black people to elect representatives and *to force those representatives to speak to their needs*. It does not mean merely putting black faces into office. A man or woman who is black and from the slums cannot be automatically expected to speak to the needs of black people. Most of the black politicians we see around the country today are not what SNCC means by black power. The power must be that of a community, and emanate from there.

SNCC today is working in both North and South on programs of voter registration and independent political organizing. In some places, such as Alabama, Los Angeles, New York, Philadelphia, and New Jersey, independent organizing under the black panther symbol is in progress. The creation of a national "black panther party" must come about; it will take time to build, and it is much too early to predict its success. We have no infallible master plan and we make no claim to exclusive knowledge of how to end racism; different groups will work in their own different ways. SNCC cannot spell out the full logistics of self-determination but it can address itself to the problem by helping black communities define their needs, realize their strength, and go into action along a variety of lines which they must choose for themselves. Without knowing all the answers, it can address itself to the basic problem of poverty; to the fact that in Lowndes County, eighty-six white families own 90 percent of the land. What are black people in that county going to do for jobs, where are they going to get money? There must be reallocation of land, of money.

Ultimately, the economic foundations of this country must be shaken if black people are to control their lives. The colonies of the United States--and this includes the black ghettos within its borders, North and South--must be liberated. For a century, this nation has been like an octopus of exploitation, its tentacles stretching from Mississippi and Harlem to South America, the Middle East, southern Africa, and Vietnam; the form of exploitation varies from area to area but the essential result has been the same--a powerful few have been maintained and enriched at the expense of the poor and voiceless colored masses. This pattern must be broken. As its grip loosens here and there around the world, the hopes of black Americans become more realistic. For racism to die, a totally different America must be born.

This is what the white society does not wish to face; this is why that society prefers to talk about integration. But integration speaks not at all to the problem of poverty, only to the problem of blackness. Integration today means the man who “makes it,” leaving his black brothers behind in the ghetto as fast as his new sports car will take him. It has no relevance to the Harlem wino or to the cottonpicker making \$3 a day. As a lady I know in Alabama once said, “The food that Ralph Bunche eats doesn’t fill my stomach.”

Integration, moreover, speaks to the problem of blackness in a despicable way. As a goal, it has been based on complete acceptance of the fact that *in order to have* a decent house or education, blacks must move into a white neighborhood or send their children to a white school. This reinforces, among both black and white, the idea that “white” is automatically better and “black” is by definition inferior. This is why integration is a subterfuge for the maintenance of white supremacy. It allows the nation to focus on a handful of Southern children who get into white schools, at great price, and to ignore the 94 percent who are left behind in unimproved all-black schools.

Such situations will not change until black people have power--to control their own school boards, in this case. Then Negroes become equal in a way that means something, and integration ceases to be a one-way street. Then integration doesn't mean draining skills and energies from the ghetto into white neighborhoods; then it can mean white people moving from Beverly Hills into Watts, white people joining the Lowndes County Freedom Organization. Then integration becomes relevant.

Last April, before the furor over black power, Christopher Jencks wrote in a *New Republic* article on white Mississippi's manipulation of the antipoverty program:

The war on poverty has been predicated on the notion that there is such a thing as a *community* which can be defined geographically and mobilized for a collective effort to help the poor. This theory has no relationship to reality in the Deep South. In every Mississippi county there are *two* communities. Despite all the pious platitudes of the moderates on both sides, these two communities habitually see their interests in terms of conflict rather than cooperation. Only when the Negro community can muster enough political, economic, and professional strength to compete on somewhat equal terms, will Negroes believe in the possibility of true cooperation and whites accept its necessity. En route to integration, the Negro community needs to develop greater independence--a chance to run its own affairs and not cave in whenever “the man” barks. . . . Or so it seems to me, and to most of the knowledgeable people with whom I talked in Mississippi. To OEO, this judgment may sound like black nationalism. . . .

Mr. Jencks, a white reporter, perceived the reason why America's antipoverty program has been a sick farce in both North and South. In the South, it is clearly racism which prevents the poor from running their own programs; in the North, it more often seems to be politicking and bureaucracy. But the results are not so different: In the North, non-whites make up 42 percent of all families in metropolitan “poverty areas” and only 6 percent of families in areas classified as not poor. SNCC has been working with local residents in Arkansas, Alabama, and Mississippi to achieve control by the poor of the program and its funds; it has also been working with groups in the North, and the struggle is no less difficult. Behind it all is a federal government which cares far more about winning the war on the Vietnamese than the war on poverty; which has put the poverty program in the hands of self-serving politicians and bureaucrats rather than the poor themselves; which is unwilling to curb the misuse of white power but quick to condemn black power.

To most whites, black power seems to mean that the Mau Mau are coming to the suburbs at night. The Mau Mau are coming, and whites must stop them. Articles appear about plots to “get Whitey,” creating an atmosphere in which “law and order must be maintained.” Once again, responsibility is shifted from the oppressor to the oppressed. Other whites chide, “Don’t forget--you’re only 10 percent of the population; if you get too smart, we’ll wipe you out.” If they are liberals, they complain, “What about me?--don’t you want my help any more?” These are people supposedly concerned about black Americans, but today they think first of themselves, of their feelings of rejection. Or they admonish, “You can’t get anywhere without coalitions,” when there is in fact no group at present with whom to form a coalition in which blacks will not be absorbed and betrayed. Or they accuse us of “polarizing the races” by our calls for black unity, when the true responsibility for polarization lies with whites who will not accept their responsibility as the majority power for making the democratic process work.

White America will not face the problem of color, the reality of it. The well-intended say: “We’re all human, everybody is really decent, we must forget color.” But color cannot be “forgotten” until its weight is recognized and dealt with. White America will not acknowledge that the ways in which this country sees itself are contradicted by being black--and always have been. Whereas most of the people who settled this country came here for freedom or for economic opportunity, blacks were brought here to be slaves.

When the Lowndes County Freedom Organization chose the black panther as its symbol, it was christened by the press “the Black Panther Party”--but the Alabama Democratic Party, whose symbol is a rooster, has never been called the White Cock Party. No one ever talked about “white power” because power in this country is white. All this adds up to more than merely identifying a group phenomenon by some catchy name or adjective. The furor over that black panther reveals the problems that white America has with color and sex; the furor over “black power” reveals how deep racism runs and the great fear which is attached to it.

Whites will not see that I, for example, as a person oppressed because of my blackness, have common cause with other blacks who are oppressed because of blackness. This is not to say that there are no white people who see things as I do, but that it is black people I must speak to first. It must be the oppressed to whom SNCC addresses itself primarily, not to friends from the oppressing group.

From birth, black people are told a set of lies about themselves. We are told that we are lazy--yet I drive through the Delta area of Mississippi and watch black people picking cotton in the hot sun for fourteen hours. We are told, “If you work hard, you’ll succeed”--but if that were true, black people would own this country. We are oppressed because we are black--not because we are ignorant, not because we are lazy, not because we’re stupid (and got good rhythm), but because we’re black.

I remember that when I was a boy, I used to go to see Tarzan movies on Saturday. White Tarzan used to beat up the black natives. I would sit there yelling, “Kill the beasts, kill the savages, kill ‘em!” I was saying: Kill me. It was as if a Jewish boy watched Nazis taking Jews off to concentration camps and cheered them on. Today, I want the chief to beat hell out of Tarzan and send him back to Europe. But it takes time to become free of the lies and their shaming effect on black minds. It takes time to reject the most important lie: That black people inherently can’t do the same things white people can do, unless white people help them.

The need for psychological equality is the reason why SNCC today believes that blacks must organize in the black community. Only black people can convey the revolutionary idea that black people are able to do things themselves. Only they can help create in the community an

aroused and continuing black consciousness that will provide the basis for political strength. In the past, white allies have furthered white supremacy without the whites involved realizing it--or wanting it, I think. Black people must do things for themselves; they must get poverty money they will control and spend themselves; they must conduct tutorial programs themselves so that black children can identify with black people. This is one reason Africa has such importance: The reality of black men ruling their own natives gives blacks elsewhere a sense of possibility, of power, which they do not now have.

This does not mean we don't welcome help or friends. But we want the right to decide whether anyone is, in fact, our friend. In the past, black Americans have been almost the only people whom everybody and his momma could jump up and call their friends. We have been tokens, symbols, objects--as I was in high school to many young whites, who liked having "a Negro friend." We want to decide who is our friend, and we will not accept someone who comes to us and says: "If you do X, Y, and Z, then I'll help you." We will not be told whom we should choose as allies. We will not be isolated from any group or nation except by our own choice. We cannot have the oppressors telling the oppressed how to rid themselves of the oppressor.

I have said that most liberal whites react to "black power" with the question, What about me?, rather than saying: Tell me what you want me to do and I'll see if I can do it. There are answers to the right question. One of the most disturbing things about almost all white supporters of the movement has been that they are afraid to go into their own communities--which is where the racism exists--and work to get rid of it. They want to run from Berkeley to tell us what to do in Mississippi; let them look instead at Berkeley. They admonish blacks to be nonviolent; let them preach nonviolence in the white community. They come to teach me Negro history; let them go to the suburbs and open up freedom schools for whites. Let them work to stop America's racist foreign policy; let them press this government to cease supporting the economy of South Africa.

There is a vital job to be done among poor whites. We hope to see, eventually, a coalition between poor blacks and poor whites. That is the only coalition which seems acceptable to us, and we see such a coalition as the major internal instrument of change in American society. SNCC has tried several times to organize poor whites; we are trying again now, with an initial training program in Tennessee. It is purely academic today to talk about bringing poor blacks and whites together, but the job of creating a poor-white power bloc must be attempted. The main responsibility for it falls upon whites. Black and white can work together in the white community where possible; it is not possible, however, to go into a poor Southern town and talk about integration. Poor whites everywhere are becoming more hostile--not less--partly because they see the nation's attention focused on black poverty and nobody coming to them. Too many young middleclass Americans, like some sort of Pepsi generation, have wanted to come alive through the black community; they've wanted to be where the action is--and the action has been in the black community.

Black people do not want to "take over" this country. They don't want to "get whitey"; they just want to get him off their backs, as the saying goes. It was, for example, the exploitation by Jewish landlords and merchants which first created black resentment toward Jews--not Judaism. The white man is irrelevant to blacks, except as an oppressive force. Blacks want to be in his place, yes, but not in order to terrorize and lynch and starve him. They want to be in his place because that is where a decent life can be had.

But our vision is not merely of a society in which all black men have enough to buy the good things of life. When we urge that black money go into black pockets, we mean the communal pocket. We want to see money go back into the community and used to benefit it. We want to see the cooperative concept applied in business and banking. We want to see black ghetto

residents demand that an exploiting storekeeper sell them, at minimal cost, a building or a shop that they will own and improve cooperatively; they can back their demand with a rent strike, or a boycott, and a community so unified behind them that no one else will move into the building or buy at the store.

The society we seek to build among black people, then, is not a capitalist one. It is a society in which the spirit of community and humanistic love prevail. The word "love" is suspect; black expectations of what it might produce have been betrayed too often. But those were expectations of a response from the white community, which failed us. The love we seek to encourage is within the black community, the only American community where men call each other "brother" when they meet. We can build a community of love only where we have the ability and power to do so: among blacks.

As for white America, perhaps it can stop crying out against "black supremacy," "black nationalism," "racism in reverse," and begin facing reality. The reality is that this nation, from top to bottom, is racist; that racism is not primarily a problem of "human relations" but of an exploitation maintained--either actively or through silence--by the society as a whole. Camus and Sartre have asked, can a man condemn himself? Can whites, particularly liberal whites, condemn themselves? Can they stop blaming us, and blame their own system? Are they capable of the shame which might become a revolutionary emotion?

We have found that they usually cannot condemn themselves, and so we have done it. But the rebuilding of this society, if at all possible, is basically the responsibility of whites--not blacks. We won't fight to save the present society, in Vietnam or anywhere else. We are just going to work, in the way we see fit, and on goals we define, not for civil rights but for all our human rights.

REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. What did Carmichael mean by "black power?"
2. Why did Carmichael reject the principal of racial integration?
3. What did he mean when he said that blacks should create a society that was not capitalist?

Source: Encyclopedia Britannica's Guide to Black History, <http://www.britannica.com/blackhistory>

Interested in reading and listening to an mp3 audio file of another Stokely Carmichael "Black Power" speech from Berkeley, California in October, 1966? Visit American Rhetoric's Online Speech Bank:

<http://www.americanrhetoric.com/speeches/stokelycarmichaelblackpower.html>

Stokely Carmichael, Rights Leader Who Coined 'Black Power,' Dies at 57

By MICHAEL T. KAUFMAN

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By MICHAEL T. KAUFMAN

Kwame Ture, the flamboyant civil rights leader known to most Americans as Stokely Carmichael, died yesterday in Conakry, Guinea. He was 57 and is best remembered for his use of the phrase "black power," which in the mid-1960's ignited a white backlash and alarmed an older generation of civil rights leaders, including the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

The cause was prostate cancer, for which Mr. Ture had been treated at the Columbia-Presbyterian Medical Center in New York in the last two years. He once said his cancer "was given to me by forces of American imperialism and others who conspired with them."

Mr. Ture, who changed his name in 1978 to honor Kwame Nkrumah and Ahmed Sekou Toure, two African socialist leaders who had befriended him, spent most of the last 30 years in Guinea, calling himself a revolutionary and advocating a Pan-African ideology that evoked few resonances in the United States, or, for that matter, Africa.

Mr. Ture's advocacy of Pan-Africanism was the last phase in a political evolution that passed from indifference to the civil rights movement when he was a high school student to emergence as an effective nonviolent volunteer risking his life against segregation to honorary prime minister of the Black Panther Party.

Though his active participation in the struggle for civil rights lasted barely a decade, he was a charismatic figure in a turbulent time, when real violence and rhetoric escalated on both sides of the color line.

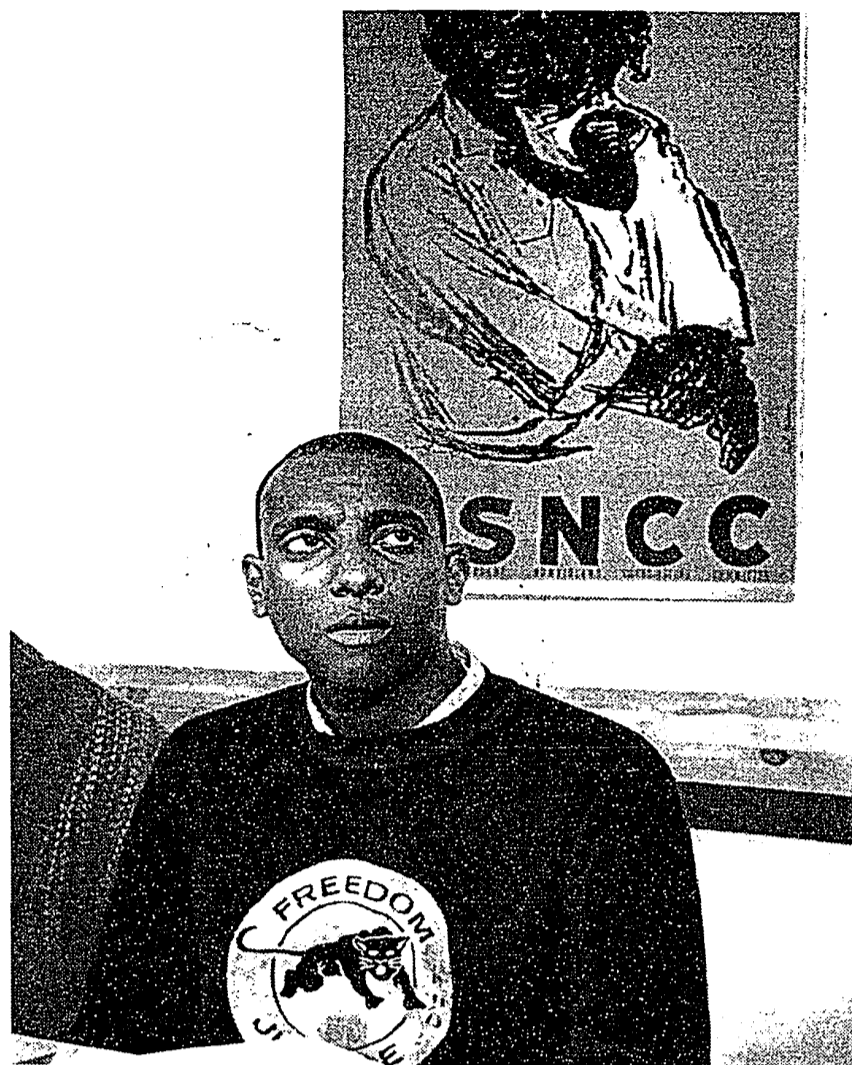
Stokely Carmichael was inspired to participate in the civil rights movement by the bravery of those blacks and whites who protested segregated service with sit-ins at lunch counters in the South.

"When I first heard about the Negroes sitting in at lunch counters down South," he told Gordon Parks in Life magazine in 1967, "I thought they were just a bunch of publicity hounds. But one night when I saw those young kids on TV, getting back up on the lunch counter stools after being knocked off them, sugar in their eyes, ketchup in their hair — well, something happened to me. Suddenly I was burning."

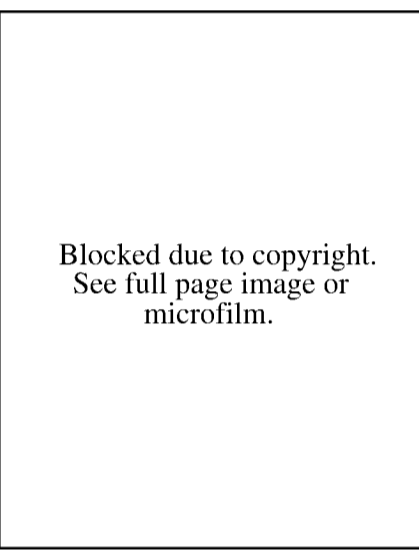
Rejecting scholarships from several white universities, he entered Howard University in Washington in 1960. By the end of his freshman year, he had joined the Freedom Rides of the Congress of Racial Equality, hazardous bus trips of blacks and whites that challenged segregated interstate travel in the South. The Freedom Riders often met with violence, and at their destinations Mr. Carmichael and the others were arrested and jailed, the first incarcerations he experienced. One early arrest brought him a particularly harsh 49-day sentence in Parchman Penitentiary in Mississippi.

Graduating with a bachelor's degree in philosophy from Howard in 1964, he joined the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee. It was "Freedom Summer" in the year that SNCC (popularly pronounced snick) was sending hundreds of black and white volunteers to the South to teach, set up clinics and register disenfranchised black Southerners.

Tall, slim, handsome and a dynamic speaker, Mr. Carmichael soon emerged as a leader, cocky enough to be described as looking like he was



Stokely Carmichael at a news conference when he was SNCC chairman.



Kwame Ture in 1996.

strutting when standing still. Mr. Parks wrote that watching him made him believe that the young man could "stroll through Dixie in broad daylight using the Confederate flag for a handkerchief."

A Radicalism Born Of Raw Experience

As a SNCC field organizer in Lowndes County in Alabama, where blacks were in the majority but politically powerless, he helped raise the number of registered black voters to 2,600 from a mere 70, or 300 more than the number of registered whites.

Displeased by the response of the established parties to the success of the registration drive, he organized the all-black Lowndes County Freedom Organization, which, to fulfill a state requirement that all parties have a logo, took a black panther as its symbol. The panther was later adopted by the Black Panther Party.

The young Mr. Carmichael was radicalized by his experiences working in the segregated South, where peaceful protesters were beaten, brutalized and sometimes killed for seeking the ordinary rights of citizens. He once recalled watching from his hotel room in a little Alabama town while nonviolent black demonstrators were beaten and shocked with cattle prods by the police. Horrified, he said that he screamed and could not stop.

Mr. Carmichael was arrested so often as a nonviolent volunteer that he lost count after 32. His growing impatience with the tactics of passive resistance was gaining support, and in 1966 he was chosen as chairman of SNCC, replacing John Lewis, a hardworking integrationist who is now a Congressman from Georgia.

Barely a month after his selection, Mr. Carmichael, then just 25, raised the call for black power, thereby signaling a crossroads in the civil rights struggle. Increasingly uncomfortable with Dr. King's resolute non-violence, he sensed a shift among some younger blacks in the direction of black separatism. Many were listening sympathetically to the urgings of Malcolm X, who had been assassinated a year and a half earlier, that the struggle should be carried out by any means necessary.

It was June 16, 1966, and Mr. Carmichael, a spellbinding orator, was addressing a crowd of 3,000 in a park in Greenwood, Miss. James Meredith, who had integrated the University of Mississippi, was wounded on his solitary "Walk Against Fear" from Memphis to Jackson, and volunteers were marching in his place. When they set up camp in Greenwood, Mr. Carmichael was arrested and his frustration was obvious.

"This is the 27th time," he said in disgust after his release. "We been saying 'Freedom' for six years," he continued, referring to the chant that movement protesters used as they stood up to racist politicians and hostile policemen pointing water hoses and unleashing snarling dogs. "What we are going to start saying now is 'Black Power!'"

The crowd quickly took up the phrase. "Black Power!" it repeated in a cry that would soon be echoed in communities from Oakland to Newark. But if Mr. Carmichael's call for black power galvanized many young blacks, it troubled others, who thought it sounded anti-white, provocative and violent. And it struck fear into many whites.

Adverse reaction was powerful and immediate. After the integrationist, nonviolent speeches and sermons of Dr. King and others, few Americans, white or black, were prepared for the uncompromising demands of black militants who rallied to Mr. Carmichael's cry.

Newspapers deplored the term and editorials warned of "reverse racism." Contributions to civil rights groups from sympathetic whites fell. Voting results that November in many state and local elections reflected a white backlash.

A Widening Split With Black Leaders

Many black leaders of the civil rights movement, though eager to avoid a split, were clearly upset by the use of the phrase and the separatist it seemed to advocate.

Dr. King called it "an unfortunate choice of words." Roy Wilkins of the N.A.A.C.P. scorned it as an example of "the raging of race against race." Perhaps the most indignant response came from Whitney Young Jr., the director of the National Urban League, who said: "Anyone can arouse the poor, the despairing, the helpless. That's no trick. Sure they'll shout 'black power,' but why doesn't the mass media find out how many of those people will follow those leaders to a separate state or back to Africa?"

In the book "Black Power," which Mr. Carmichael wrote in 1967 with Charles Hamilton, now a professor of political science at Columbia University, the authors tried to explain the term. "It is a call for black people in this country to unite," they wrote, "to recognize their heritage, to build a sense of community. It is a call for black people to define their own goals, to lead their own organizations."

But even as the book, which is still in print, appeared, Mr. Carmichael's speeches became more provocative. "When you talk of black power, you talk of building a movement that will smash everything Western civilization has created," he told black audiences. And as civil unrest flared in Detroit and Newark, Mr. Carmichael's call became associated, as

Mr. Hamilton put it, "with riots and guns and 'burn, baby, burn.'"

Instead of young people singing "We Shall Overcome," new images of militant black men and women were being shown on television — black berets, raised fists, men with guns. And along with goals of social justice and integration came ideas of black separatism and power harking back to the black nationalism that had been preached in the 1920's by Marcus Garvey.

In 1966 and 1967 Mr. Carmichael lectured at campuses around the United States and traveled abroad to several countries, including North Vietnam, China and Cuba. He made perhaps his most provocative statement in Havana. "We are preparing groups of urban guerrillas for our defense in the cities," he said. "It is going to be a fight to the death."

In 1967 a declining SNCC severed all ties with him. Soon after, he became honorary prime minister of the Black Panthers, the ultra-militant urban organization begun by Huey P. Newton and Bobby Seale. But he soon found himself embroiled with Panther leaders for opposing their decision to seek support among whites. He moved to Guinea, in West Africa, in 1969, saying, "America does not belong to the blacks," and calling on all black Americans to follow his example.

Even Black Panthers Not Radical Enough

In July 1969, three months after he moved to Africa, he made public a letter announcing his resignation from the Black Panther Party because of what he called "its dogmatic party line favoring alliances with white radicals."

The letter signaled Mr. Carmichael's break from the main currents of American life. He made his home in Conakry as the guest of Sekou Toure, the Marxist head of a one-party state. His next-door neighbor was Kwame Nkrumah, the Pan-Africanist first leader of independent Ghana, who after being deposed in a coup in 1966 was offered sanctuary in Guinea.

In 1968, now calling himself Kwame Ture, he married Miriam Makeba, the South African singer. They lived in a seaside villa where he sometimes greeted visitors wearing the green uniform of a Guinean soldier, a pistol at his side. After they divorced, he married Marlyatou Barry, a Guinean doctor who now lives in Arlington, Va., and from whom he was also divorced. He is survived by his mother, three sisters and two sons, according to a statement by the All African Peoples Revolutionary Party.

He became a globe-trotting exponent of the All African Peoples Revolutionary Party, returning to American campuses to recruit. He maintained that continued progress for black Americans could be made only through "mass political organization on a Pan-African scale."

"Black power," he said, "can only be realized when there exists a unified socialist Africa." He sounded the idea that blacks must work with blacks for their cultural, economic and political liberation.

As early as 1971, he was already on the margins. Julius Lester, who had helped Mr. Carmichael draft the radical speech in Havana, compared the speeches of Malcolm X with the speeches and essays that Mr. Carmichael collected in a book called "Stokely Speaks." Mr. Lester wrote in The New York Times Book Review: "Though dead, Malcolm is terrifyingly alive in his speeches; Carmichael is alive but his speeches are depressingly dead."

Stokely Carmichael was born on June 29, 1941, in Port-of-Spain, Trinidad, and he spent his first 11 years there. His father, Adolphus, a carpenter and taxi driver, and his mother, Mabel, a stewardess for a steamship line, had emigrated to the United States when he was a toddler, leaving him in the care of his grandmother.

In 1952 he joined his parents in Harlem. By the time he was in the seventh grade, his family had moved to Morris Park, an old Jewish and Italian neighborhood in the East Bronx. He said in the 1967 Life interview that he was the only black member of the Morris Park Dukes, a gang, and described himself as "a wild, aggressive boy, boozing it up and getting a kick out of petty theft."

But after he passed the admissions test for the elite Bronx High School of Science, he broke with the Dukes. "They were all reading the funnies while I was trying to dig Darwin and Marx," he told Gordon Parks.

He was popular in high school, he said, and remembered dating white classmates and visiting Park Avenue apartments. "Now that I realize how phony they all were, how I hate myself for it," he said in the 1967 interview. "Being liberal was an intellectual game with these cats. They were still white, and I was black."

Mr. Ture never publicly criticized President Toure, who was known to jail and torture his opponents. The Guinean leader died in 1984, and two years later Mr. Ture's alignment with him led to his arrest by the military government that had taken over. He spent three days in jail, accused of trying to overthrow the government.

Mr. Ture continued to live in Guinea. To the end he answered his telephone with the greeting he had used for more than 20 years, "Ready for the revolution!"