

Black Cultural Nationalism

*My intentions are colors. I'm filled with
color, every tint you think of lends to mine
my mind is full of color, hard muscle streaks,
or soft glow round exactness registration. All earth
heaven things, hell things, in colors circulate
a wild blood train, turn litmus like a bible coat, ...*

("Western Front")

The social and political events of 1964-65; the Black urban rebellions, the murder of the Black children in the church bombing in Birmingham and especially the assassination of Malcolm - X on Feb., 21, 1965 made Baraka leave Greenwich Village and the Bohemian world and move uptown to Harlem and lead a new life as a cultural nationalist,

The new Black ethnicity after which Baraka increasingly aspired, threatened his relationship to literacy prototyped like moderns and white audiences. Baraka's contemporary critics focused their attention on his obvious contradictions. Baraka was especially vulnerable to criticism because of his theoretical advocacy of black violence, and on the other hand for his integration into the white cultural scene of New York by marriage, residence and fame. While supporting the ' Black

lumpenproletarian violence In panel discussions, Baraka also taught a class at the New School about modern poetry, and edited anthologies of contemporary prose. But the most blatant contradiction was seen in Baraka's private life, how could he write lines "Rape the white girls. . . .Cut the mothers' throats" and remain married to a white woman? When he is given his pistol and his signal, will he do his self-declared duty and begin the slaughter with his wife and children?

Baraka was forced to make decisions. Was he a bohemian or a Black spokesman, a political writer or a "priest of the unconscious?" By 1965, he had taken the first step in the direction of an answer: he exaggerated his attacks on the white "liberals" to such a degree as to finally convince himself that the whites in general were not worth attacking that he should address himself exclusively to the Black people. But first, Baraka , pursued his strategy of "white-baiting in notorious speak-outs" in Greenwich Village, and he became synonymous with his emotional anti-white tirades. This prompted critics to hold up Baraka's private life against his public views; in fact several of the quoted references to Baraka's contradictions were responses to Baraka's own diatribes. By telling his predominantly white and overwhelmingly liberal village audiences that "our enemies" include "most of you who are listening," Baraka was posturing in order to exorcise his own association with devil whiteness; increasingly he felt that "I should not be speaking here. ...I should be speaking to Black people." The next years showed that Baraka meant this literally: in the phase of

Black cultural nationalism, he tried to escape what he felt was neutralization and absorption process by speaking to the Black people.

The central element of any Black nationalism is the concept of a Black nation, in which the oppression of the Blacks as a minority would come to an end. The first, most obvious strategy toward such a goal would be a literal, physical escape from the oppressive political structure "back to Africa". With Marcus Garvey's "Universal Negro Improvement Association" as its most famous representative, this concept of a remigration to Africa has been espoused by many Blacks; at present, three and a half centuries after the first slaves were deported from Africa to North America, the realization of a back-to Africa may easily come to mean suppression of Africans by Afro- Americans, whereas "Africa-to-the-Africans" give the Black struggle in America an international dimension. The second strategy of Black Nationalism aims at a Black nation in America. Depending on the assessment of the all-important land question, three variants of this concept have been advocated in recent years. The "Republic of New Africa" demands a separate Black nation in the states of Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama, Georgia, and South Carolina. The "Nation of Islam," popularly referred to as the "Black Muslims" (a religious organization with a vast membership, center around the recently deceased prophet Elijah Muhammad), wants separation of the Blacks from the whites but is ambivalent as to whether this move requires a literal nationhood, or whether a separation within the American nation is sufficient; upon different

occasions. Elijah Muhammad advocated the establishment of a Black nation in America or in Africa, or was content to demand separatism within the United States. The third variant, a Black cultural nationalism as defined by Maulana Ron Karenga, advocates values which would govern the lives of Black Americans as a symbolically separate group within the United States; thus, "nationhood" becomes a metaphor for spiritual and cultural separation.

All variations of nationalism are ultimately based on an analysis which ascribes the roots of Black oppression to "whites in general," and not to economics or class; nationalist strategies are therefore based on racial, pre-political tenets and require further definitions of "white" or "Black" qualities. Thus Black nationalists may be advocates of capitalism and may agree to preserve the economic structure of America in the Black nation, in Africa or in America. Or they may reject labor union as a "white" conception. The definition of what is positive and what is negative about a Black and a white social reality is crucial for assessing any form of Black Nationalism.

The program of the Black Panther Party, in many ways a secularized version of the platform of the Nation of Islam, attempts to politicize the Black nationalist impulse by defining the "enemy" not simply as the white man, but as the capitalist system. Correspondingly the party's strategy, called "Black revolutionary nationalism," aims at a revolution which would

overthrow the economic rulers of America and lead to a liberation of all Americans, Black and white. In this liberation policy, nationalism has been transcended.

Baraka's form of Black cultural nationalism hovered over the religious and the metaphorical, and was soon in sharp contradiction to the revolutionary nationalism of the, Black Panther party. Baraka's response to the oppression of Black was primarily cultural and his precepts toward overcoming the statusquo were directed at the cultural level. Social change was to come about through Black consciousness, new images and the minds of the people. As a first step toward active Black Nationalism, Baraka rejected white participation in the civil rights struggle. At the village Vanguard speak-out, Baraka and Archie Sheep attacked fellow panelists and the audience for being white, and therefore guilty, whether they were committed to social change or not" "AH whites are equally guilty - All of the unforgivable crime of attempting to destroy my humanity." Baraka tried to translate the impulse of Black political radicalism in the 1060s into a cultural form; and this process continued Baraka's Bohemianism, which equated revolutions in art and consciousness with those in political history.

The first important influence Baraka's Malcolm X adaptation was his contact with the Black power movement, although the term "Black power" is of an older origin and had been used by Richard Wright as the title of a book about 'Africa', Stokely Carmichael popularized the term when he used

it during the Meredith march of 1966 as a slogan which was meant to express a variety of Black political, economic, social and cultural demands. One reason for the strength and attractiveness of the term "Black power" may have been its vagueness, which appealed to many different political tendencies, organizations and individuals, who came together In order to discuss what, in their various opinions, the term should mean.

A National Planning Committee grew out of the 1966 Labor Day weekend planning session and prepared a National Conference of Black power. For over 400 delegates from all over the United States and Baraka attended the conference, which took place in Newark on July 20-30, 1967 just after the Newark ghetto rebellion. A great variety of resolutions were passed which reflected many conflicting steatites among the delegates, who did not share a common political program. Five distinct interpretations of Black Power emerged,

1. Black Capitalism:

Black-controlled financial institutions-banks, insurance companies savings and loan association-to provide for credit unions, housing, loans, etc.

2. More Black Politicians,

Election of 12 Black congressmen,

3. Group Integration (Ethnic Politics):

Selective buying to force job upgrading, and a nationwide "buy Black" move. Boycott of magazines that carry ads for hair straighteners and skin bleachers.

4. Black Control of Black Communities:

A school for Black political organizers.

5. Black Liberation Within the Context of a U.S. Revolution:

Paramilitary training for Black youths.

Baraka's Interpretation of Black power oscillated among several of these alternatives. For him, the most decisive element of any Black movement had to be its cultural unity. Baraka thus sympathized with the Nation of Islam, but for a while also with the Black Panthers, and met even with Dr. Martin Luther king in order to discuss possibilities of a Black united front.

The most important Influence of Baraka's cultural nationalism was exerted by Maulana Ron Karenga, who participated in the Black power conference. Baraka had already met with, and was fascinated by, Karenga and tried to integrate Karenga's precepts In to his works. In 1967, Karenga collected his aphorisms In a small volume, entitled the Quotable Karanga. Baraka read this manifesto and, quoted from it frequently, and attempted to apply the maxims to his private and public activities.

Baraka adopted Karenga's demagogic eclecticism, and wrote poems, plays and essays on the basis of *The Quotable Karenga*, which was also distributed through Jihad productions: The most interesting document which reflects Baraka's immersion into Karenga's world is the schooling material for the use by Congress of African people cadres edited by Baraka, 10 phases of the Kawaida Doctrine of Maulana Karenga. This inventory of points to be made in order to convert Black people to Kawaida is thoroughly based on Karenga. The sections of the different phases are entitled, e.g., "3 Functions of a value system;" and in the last phase, the neophyte learns among the "7 things A Good Advocate should Do":

We must first move reconvert ourselves to the acceptance and practice in accordance with the ideology. Then we must move to help others to be converted. ("The Quotable Karenga")

Under Karenga's influence, Baraka discarded his traditional advocacy of anarchist violence, and dedicated his political essays to the task of cultural "nation-building," to the transformation of Black consciousness through positive self-images. By accepting this priority, he also arrived at the conclusion that it was the "ballot, not the bullet" which would free Black people; he became an active organizer in the area of electoral politics, instrumental in getting Kenneth Gibson elected as the first Black mayor of Newark in 1970; At the same time, Baraka's agitation against the Black middle class reached its lowest point, since he believed that only a unified Black group could achieve any political gains in America.

At the Black congress in Gary in 1972. Baraka attempted to practice Karenga's concept of "operational unity" and appeared in the role of conciliator who tried to keep conservatives and revolutionaries together. Like Karenga, he believed that the lack of Black unity was due to a lack of Black values and that the Black intellectual had to provide "direction" and "purpose" (Baraka's Key Words since "Cuba Libre") through the intensive propagation of "A Black value system" among all strata of the Black community. The practical moral, religious system of Kawaida was to serve just that function. Baraka's "7 Principles of US Maulana Karenga & the Need for a Black Value system" is therefore the most important essay of the period of Black Nationalism.

Baraka's move toward an all-Black unity ultimately included Africa as well as the United States; Baraka expanded his narrower concept of Black cultural nationalism into a new Black internationalism, "Pan-Afrikaans". This change in perspective, as well as disappointment in his experiences with the bourgeois politics of Black elected officials provided the basis for Baraka's recent shift to socialist concept, with which he was confronted through the writings of African socialists such as Kwame Nkrumah, Sekou Toure, and Amilcar Cabral. Until that turning point, Baraka's writings remained a "Target Study" (B 45, UP 53) of a white devil enemy image, whose emanations often bore little semblance to capitalism or to the Duponts, Rockefellers, Nixons and Eisenhower's against which Baraka had defined himself in "Cuba Libre." Baraka's devil is white, i

carries in his whiteness fewer emblems of the American ruling class than stigmata of groups discriminated against by "white society".

Baraka's Black cultural nationalist essays and poems incorporated the prejudices of the society at large and directed much of their aggression against traditional outcasts of bourgeois society; in Baraka's works, the image of the devil enemy appears in the shape of bums, policemen, immigrants, homosexuals, Jews, and women. Whereas white Anglo-Saxon entrepreneurs are underrepresented. This observation reveals the Bohemian character of Baraka's Black Cultural Nationalism, which even in the process of negation retains middle class traits and prejudices.

It is this Bohemianism which makes Baraka's expression of nationalism dubious as a counterstrategy that could mobilize effective solidarity among the oppressed. As both Baraka and Karenga would criticize themselves in later years, their fiercely pursued Black cultural nationalism was an exaggerated exoticism brought about by their tendency to take revolution from the partial perception of culture, instead of from lessons learned from global history and struggle. While it is, perhaps, important as a phase of negation which every nonwhite intellectual had to go through in order to "decolorize" himself, Black cultural nationalism does not provide a strategy to "unite the many to defeat the few." (Karenga: *Unity & Struggle*)

In the Poetry during the Black Nationalist Period, 'Invisibility' is a suggestive line of the total annihilation of identity. The dominant structures of power operate by rendering marginalised 'Invisible,' a total erasure of the existence of the marginalised. When the powerful gaze of 'authority' 'sees' a group "invisible" the dominant need for the "invisible" is to transcend their invisibility and take a tangible and "corporeal" form, no matter how strongly the structures of power insist on their intangibility and incorporeality to relegate them into a state of perceptual invisibility.

One first step, for the invisible, incorporeal to be corporeal and visible, is to develop a consciousness of their invisibility and incorporeality. Developing such consciousness involves understanding and analyzing the operation of power structures, which render them invisible. The next logical step seems to "corporate" their in corporeality to assert their tangibility, reality. The excursion from awareness to assertion, from consciousness to corporealisation, always fraught with fractures and relentless resistance, thereby giving birth to two forms of 'resistance's'-- the resistance of assertion of the invisible and the resistance of negation of the dominant group. The conflictual relationship tops assertion and negation and becomes the matrix of identity politics. The degree of assertion by the negated group can range from mild petition of the subaltern to the overwhelmingly militant demand of activist militia.

Le Roi Jones being born into a dominant white society with its own history of brutality and sublime record of suppression, remained invisible to himself and to the world at large for a long period. The dominant culture of the visible, the dominant religion of the tangibles (reflected in his Christian name), the dominant socio-politico-ideological structure of the "fair" corporeals the totaling, overarching universalizing metanarratives both its essential essentialising tendency with its "Le Roi Jonesising" homogenisation seemed completely to obliterate the earlier life of a would be Baraka. When LeRoi Jones visualizes his invisibility, touches his intangibility, experiences his incorporeality, it becomes imperative for him to assassinate himself to assassinate LeRoi Jones so that the tangible, a visible, a corporeal Baraka can come into being - a politically assertive race-conscious Baraka who gazes at the world with "Dull unwashed windows of eyes" and dissects, analyses and evaluates the epic invisibility of the black people in the Poem " A Poem Some People will have to understand".

*What industry do I practice? A slick
cloured boy, 12 miles from his
home. I practice no industry.
I am no longer a cradity
to my race.*

To the "omni potently" oppressed even nature seems to align herself with the oppressive mechanism. The "Slow spring after noon's the dry

charcoal winters" only help to bring into motion "the wheels, and the wheels" of oppression and invisibility. Invisibility cannot be annihilated. Hence the rhetorical quest of the writer for annihilation, for erasure remains unfulfilled

Will the machineguns please step forward?

The Black identity like the "water color ego" remains insubstantial a 'fantasy' like the

.....coming of a natural
phenomenon. Mystics and romantics, knowledgeable
workers of the land.

Hence the personal pessimism of the poetic persona assumes a sinister, macabre cosmic proportioned in the next poem - "Citizen Cane" with the images of death, incarceration, and brutal self-annihilation,

the courage to kilt myself or drink myself
be herded off like a common Jew and
denunciation"

"not even
to death. Just
roasted in my teary

The poet and his race seem to have some alternative; the alternative of insubstantiality; annihilation the alternative to conform to the dominant race; the alternative to be not like one of them but to be "them", the alternative to

*.....Work out your problems
tike your friends on some nice guy's couch*

*Get up
tlirow that ball. Move your hips, cut, like the
white boys,
for ten more yards*

The process of moving " your hips" and cutting "like the white boys" is the process of uniform universal "white washing" the potential black consciousness.

The Intangibility of the black identity is also reflected in the poem, "Leadbelly gives an Autograph", Nat Turner an Image of the black identity in this poem exists to execute the command of a mighty resonant voice

*Pat your foot
and turn the corner Nat Turner.*

Or may be Nat Turner exists in order to rhyme with "corner": An irony of a shadow that is Nat Turner facing an existential crisis in the realm of "Lead belly" and his powerful" autograph."

In a world characterized by the binary opposition of the substance and the shadow, the dominant and the marginalised, the oppressor and the oppressed, language has the potential to become a tool for the oppressed to express their oppression. Yet the language, instead of expressing our "vacant lot" had become " the twisted myth of speech". The images of " the boards brown falling away," the metal banisters cheap and ratty" remind us of the cityscope with its heightened techno-culture capable of taking sinister forms for those who " practice no Industry",

The language fails the failed and does not come to them easily and naturally and they have to pay a heavy price for their logocentric inaptitude,

Need.

Motive

The delay of language.

A strength to be handled by giants.

The possibilities of statement. I am saying now.

What my father could not remember to say.

What my grand father

Was killed

For believing

The failure of verbalization leads to intangibility of non-existence, the success of verbalization leads to intangibility of death. No wonder, "The City's is Rise!"

looks like a jungle

where the history of the oppression of the intangibles has been erased from the collective memory - complete with the assassination of history itself-

(And what is history, then ?

And old deaf lady)

burned to death

in south Carolina.

Baraka is extremely critically aware not only of the assassination of the history of marginalisation but also of the historical logocentric linguistic dilemma of the Black people. The use, abuse and misuse of language by the tangibles have placed the intangible at a complex relation to language. The use as well as non-use of language by the intangibles becomes a political question leading inevitably to insubstantiality of intangibility or the insubstantiality of death.

Baraka going beyond such historical logocentric marginalization, uses language to shock and appeal; to subvert the very structure of

gentility which characterized the poetic language and is dominantly controlled by the dominants.

The poetics and politics of intangibility reach their logical conclusion when Baraka acknowledges the collective invisibility of the Black- people and the identity critics generated by such intangibility. In "Numbers, Letters", he says,

*I can't say who I am
unless you agree I am real*

The poet presses hard for the acceptance of his visibility, his reality, his tangibility,

*I am real, and I can't say who I am. Ask me if I know, i'H say yes, I might say no.
Stilt ask.*

The dialogicity involved in the entire trajectory of questioning implicitly carries a political intention. The intangibles do not have any defined, refined identity. Hence he "cant say who I am". Yet he presses hard to be questioned. The very trajectory of question means an acknowledgement - the acknowledgement of the existence of the shadow, the invisible, the intangibles. Hence,

Still ask.

Poetry of Black cultural nationalism Black magic & other poems

In the poetry after *The Dead Lecturer*, many of his themes and techniques are the same, his new poem, *The Scholar* (Uncollected , Poetry 59) which is about his grandparents and (*Black Magic* 217) about his mother are poems with the theme of love. There are other poems on love eg "The World is Full of Remarkable Things" (*Black Magic* 193) and alienation eg "Citizen Cain" (*Black Magic* 8) and many poems on American popular cultural (*Black Magic* 44,76,81,89,90,207-208)'. Yet the poetic voice is new and different. In the poems of this period there is a struggle for self-liberation and an expression of the new ethnic polarization:

Listen to the somber deepness of black singing soul the emptiness and silence of absolute stillness. ...manifest the emptiness and stillness in the middle of the wrapped around flailing.

The expanding inner identity or self-liberation is found in many poems as "screams" or free expression of everything that was once repressed from political anger to violent anti-Semitism and the poetry tended to be formless. The poem "Vowels 2". (*Black Magic* 189-19) celebrates the explosion of the inner self in original sounds:

f^reeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeee

Freeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeee

Freeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeee

EEE EEE EEE

EEE BEE EEE

EEE EEE EEE

EEE EEE EEE

Freeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeee

BURST (B 189}

The scream was there in Baraka's poetry but it moves to the foreground of the poems. Another poem *Trespass into Spirit* "{*Black Magic* 151-52) is even more abstract than the shouting of free! And burst! In "Vowels 2".

aaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaahahaha

neeeeeneeaahaaahneeeahhh

dehhhhhdehhhhdadadadadadehhhhheheheheheh

dededededededededededededaaaaaaaaaaaaaa

A Chant to risev/ithl witli all

Witti all rising thru and let the scope

diryjsolekks eoo fjoel fjkks el oo

dkkle:pspeks"melds;;a;;sll

a;; ome. The rpse. Asmd;;e; nA/odespimd;;s kek/112w 1/21/2

k;;;a ::dkp

The machines head is gone

(*Black magic Black Poetry*- 151. 52}

The poem is full of scream but trying to portray the difficulty of modern writers who are trying to break away from form and intelligibility into arbitrariness. And Baraka tries to give an answer in *Black Magic* by

assigning aesthetic arbitrariness, a supportive position In a Black revolution and by making spontaneity a specifically Black quality which moves such poems out of the realms of white society.

One of Baraka's most typical nationalist poems, "Black Art" (*Black magic* 1961) is an expression of his Black Aesthetic but It is striking for its language and rhetorical violence. The poem characteristically casts the "Liberal", the "Jew Lady" or "the Jewewners" as the enemies. The arbitrary sounds "rrrrrrr" and "tuh tuh.....are volley shot & of poem that kill", their enemies. The poem itself is to commit the violence that Baraka considers the prerequisite for the establishment of a Black world. Perhaps the most extreme example of Baraka's 'pragmatic' and functional poetry of this period is "Black people"

What about that bad short you saw last week

On Frelinghuysen, or those stoves and refrigerators, record, players,

Shotguns,

In Sear, Bambergers, Klein's, Hahnes, Chase, and the smaller joosh enterprises?

What about that bad jewelry, on Washington Street, and

those couple of shops on Springfield. You know how to get it, you

Can

Get it, no money down, no money never, money don't grow on trees

No

Way, only whitey's got it. makes it with a machine, to control you

The poem juxtaposes the sacred and the profane, the Biblical and the street language, in order to launch its attack on the old Newark and to prophesy in Black Utopia rather a Holy war against the whites and again specifically against the Jews. This poem was printed in innumerable newspapers and journals; not, however in the poetry sections, but on front pages, as part of the reporting of Baraka's Newark trial. Baraka first read the poem on October 3, 1966 at the Village Theater in New York. In the newspaper reports, the poem was interpreted as a direct, agitational "lecture" which exhorted Blacks to smash the "Jelly white faces". When Baraka became involved with the Newark ghetto rebellion of 1976, the poem was used as an evidence of his evil Intentions.

On July 14, 1967 during the Newark "riots", Baraka was injured and arrested by the police for alleged illegal possession of firearms.- In the course of the trial. Judge Leon Kapp read the entire text of the "Black People."

This striking use of literature was widely reported under bold headlines such as "poetic Justice," "The Magic Word was Prison," or "curtains for LeRoi". A wave of protest followed the unusually harsh sentence of two and a half to three years of imprisonment and a fine of \$1,000. A group of writers argued that Baraka was a conspicuous American artist imprisoned for his poetry during a crisis of authoritarianism in these states. P.E.N, and A.C.L.U. criticized the violation of the principle

of freedom speech. And the Black intellectuals as well as the civil right leaders saw the sentence as proof that any Black man that expressed the anger of an oppressed people is going to be treated as a political prisoner. The sentence was later reversed and Baraka was acquitted by a higher court.

In poems such as "Black people," Baraka established his position as a poet agitator-leader. After 1967, however, he came to deplore the political effects of this art. He felt that the rhetoric of violence appealed to the lumpenproletariat, but did not lead the way to meaningful change for most Black people. The poems were primarily destructive and nihilistic not yet part of the nation building process.

Baraka's poetry attempts to incorporate the Black street English, folk forms such as "the dozens" and "signifying" the oratory tradition of the Black sermon, religious and secular and other Black rhetorical devices. The poem. "It's Nation Time" appears, on the printed page, as an unpretentious sermon to Black readers to "get together" and "nationally." Before reading this poem at the "First modern Pan African Congress" in 1970, Baraka explained its background:

In Newark when we greet each other on the street we say. 'What time is it? We always say, 'It's Nation time' (African Congress 101). The

poem illustrates the process of "raising". In the concrete sense of getting up
and in the sense of Black nation-building,

time to get up and

be

come

be

come, time to

be come

time to

get up be come

it's nation time eye ime

it's nation it eye ime

chant with bells and drum

it's nation time

(It's nation time 21,24