

EBONY IN EXILE: AN EXAMINATION OF REVOLUTIONARY BLACK
AMERICA AND THE CUBAN INFLUENCE 1960s-1980s

by

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ABSTRACT

JOSEPH WILLARD. *Ebony in Exile: An Examination of Revolutionary Black America and the Cuban Influence 1960s-1980s.*
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In the 1960s Black America began to embrace an ideology of revolution shifting their civil rights movement from a peaceful reformist approach to a platform of self-defense and active revolution. This change was very much influenced by the successes of the Cuban Revolution in 1959 and a relationship was cultivated between a burgeoning revolutionary Black America and a new socialist Cuba. The experiences in Cuba by Black exiles fleeing persecution by the U.S. government and oppressive hate groups like the KKK, infused the growing Black Power Movement with a revolutionary fervor and sparked a complicated relationship that lasted strong for over three decades. Through this interaction between the two radical forces, the language of guerrilla warfare was cultivated in Black America along with an active movement of revolution that promoted freedom, power, and self-love through armed struggle.

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INTRODUCTION

Resistance has always been a critical part of the experience of the Black American race. Never passive in their bondage and always determined to seek out freedom, Blacks cultivated a spirit of rebellion from the moment the first African slave shattered his shackles and escaped into the wilderness to fight another day. The maroons, the original American revolutionaries, stalked the mountains, forest, and jungles of the Americas and liberated their fellow brothers and sisters from their terrified slave masters. Their approach was revolutionary and their ideology was basic; liberty or death, which was the same battle cry of a generation of Anglo-Saxon colonial elites nearly two centuries later during the “American Revolution.” The history of escaped slave colonies and early revolutionary leaders such as Nat Turner, Denmark Vesey, and Gabriel Prosser have been mostly forgotten by contemporary mainstream America.

Perhaps, even more shocking is the simple fact that one does not have to look back centuries ago to find more potent roots of revolutionary Black America. The very individuals who forged the revolutionary Black Power Movement of the 1960s and 1970s have also been banished to the most eye-squinting, utterly obscure, over-stuffed cubby in the halls of Black American history. Peer deeper into this lost box of time and legendary figures emerge like ghosts from the darkest depths of the American narrative. Individuals like Robert F. Williams, and Harold Cruse, whose legacies are covered in dust, suddenly

come to life and the bond between the revolutionary development of the Black Power Movement and the victory of the Cuban Revolution begins to organize itself into a logical framework. A sort of cinema of the mind takes place as agents of a forgotten time fix the links of solidarity firmly into place.

The first chapter of this thesis takes into account critical segments of the discourse between Black radicals (some exiles and some not) and Cuban revolutionaries as it advances the argument of the birth of a cultivated language of guerrilla resistance and the Cuban role in helping to shape this concept and attempting to bring forth its reality. To fully understand the nature of guerilla warfare and the language of Black radical revolution during this epoch, it is key to examine a few specific areas of inquiry such as Cuban and Black American concepts of armed resistance and the Guevara *focos* theory, the reality of Black radicals to create and shape the revolutionary movement, and the fundamental transformation of Black resistance language from passive to determinate and eventually active revolutionary struggle.

Overall, this chapter is most concerned with the growing language of revolution and the possibilities of making that language reality. The second chapter of the thesis will go one step further and examine the greater influence of the Cuban Revolution on the development of the revolutionary Black Power Movement of the 1960s through 1980s. The focus of the thesis as a whole will be dedicated to the language, ideology, and legacy of revolutionary Black America and the Cuban connection. For the purposes of this thesis, revolutionary Black Power is defined as any group within the Civil Rights Movement that believed reform was not enough to liberate Blacks in America from oppression and therefore concluded that revolution whether by armed struggle, political

and physical separation, or cultural rebirth was the only method to freedom. Black Power in general is defined as one who subscribes to an ideology that support an increased share of political, economic, and social power for Black people in America and an acceptance of Black culture and identity as beautiful and powerful.

The historiography of revolutionary Black America has fallen into obscurity since the start of the 21st century. What once was a vibrant field during the decades of the 1960s, 1970s, and the 1980s has now largely gone unnoticed in mainstream academia and popular culture taking a back seat to more contemporary concerns in Black America such as gang violence, pop-culture influence, gender revolution, and the pursuit of biographical examinations of already recognized leaders of earlier movements. While the emphasis on police brutality still remains an important topic today, the approach to the situation has definitively changed as the language of revolution in any shape or form is mostly non-existent in the ideology of the present day twitter radicals. The immediate history of a once world recognized revolutionary Afro American force remains abandoned in a contemporary society that views such notions as suicidal, unrealistic, or simply secondary in a reformist liberal culture. Even more so, the connection between this Black revolutionary epoch and its relationship with revolutionary Cuba was swept under the rug and the two were separated from one another in the minds of the contemporary masses.

There are many reasons for this disappearance of the origins and true meanings of revolutionary Black America in mainstream America that range from the meticulous oppression of this movement and its heroes by the silent hand of the oligarchy to the general lack of concern for the roots of the movement by the very people it was designed

for. However, one only has to look back a few generations and the undeniable energy of the movement, the leaders, and the Cuban connection tears at the soul of any individual dedicated to freedom, equality, and revolutionary struggle. The 1960s, 70s, and 80s were alive with the reverberations of revolution and reform seemed a thing of the past in the face of mounting oppression and racial destruction. The warriors of those decades would strategized plans to liberate a people from the bondage of bearing black and brown skin and sought to elevate the oppressed. The inevitability of revolution felt so real during those decades that scholars and revolutionaries alike ferociously debated the actualities and approaches of a guerrilla, political, or cultural revolution in the United States leaving behind a body of written text so full of life, yet currently covered in cobwebs. This section of the thesis on revolutionary Black America will examine two critical elements of this research. It will mainly focus on the historiography on why the revolutionary Black Power Movement collapsed and examine why the Cuban relationship with revolutionary Black America deteriorated and has nearly been forgotten.

The following chapters of this thesis might hint at an idyllic relationship between revolutionary Black America and revolutionary Cuba, but that was far from the case and there were serious issues that developed over the decades, especially after the death of Black America's greatest Cuban ally, Ernesto Che Guevara. Robert F. Williams, early spokesman for revolutionary violence (in exile in Cuba between 1961 and 1966), remarked after his return from exile in Cuba that the Cuban Communist Party "people and I had some problems. They took the position that my position would drive a wedge between the White working class and the Blacks if the Blacks used my method to self-

defense.”¹ Ironically, the very individual who was among the first and most important Black Americans to cement Cuba as a part of the revolutionary spirit of the Black Power Movement in the minds of the masses, was also the first to openly speak out about the concerns he had with the leaders and their views; but he never downplayed the people of Cuba of whom he adored. This was among the first historiographical clues that highlighted the tensions that existed between the two ideologies which differed along the lines of class and race. His analysis was not largely based on the perceived treatment the Afro Cubans received during his time in Havana considering his wife Mabel said in 1964 “You are tuned into Radio Free Dixie, from Havana Cuba, where integration is an accomplished fact,” but instead from his disputes with Cuban officials over the proper path for Black liberation back home in the United States.²

However, Williams was bothered by some of the racial issues he observed by certain officials in regard to the Afro Cuban people and noted that “many Cuban officials were educated in the United States, some at the University of Mississippi, Alabama, and Louisiana...They have gone back to Cuba and the government, and though now they claim to be Socialist, they still have some of the same attitudes, and that is that Blacks are to be discriminated against, and power should be in the hands of whites.” For Williams, the first individual to point out the glory of the Cuban Revolution and the grime, “the discrimination was more subtle, but there was some discrimination there.”³ Although Williams did express his concern to his people about Cuba upon his return, the

¹ Sandra Dickson and Robert Churchill. *Negros with Guns: Robert Williams and Black Power*. (PBS Publishing. 200), 4:00.

² Timothy B. Tyson *Radio Free Dixie: Robert F. Williams and the Roots of Black Power* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999), Pg. 286.

³ Robert F. Williams, *Testimony of Robert F. Williams: Hearings, Ninety-First Congress, Second Session*, (1971), Internet resource. Pg. 92.

revolutionary spirit of the island had already been infused into Black Power and their positive image was solidly in place for decades of Black revolutionaries. He later charged Stokely Carmichael with being “used by Castro and the U.S.S.R” further dividing the Black Power Movement from revolutionary Cuba and exposing the fragmentation that had begun to develop within the movement itself.⁴

Besides Williams, the only individual to provide an early (1960s) in depth analysis on the Black American/Cuban connection based on personal experience was Black Separatist John Clytus. Clytus fled to Cuba in exile in 1964 after deciding to escape the confines of a racist and complacent America. He even had the experience of meeting with Robert F. Williams and he lived on the communist island for over two years. He is not largely discussed in the body of this work because he was not a Black revolutionary, but instead an Africanist who believed in their struggle as the only logical Black battlefield. However, his work does provide valuable insight into the Cuban revolutionary experiment and examinations of racial structures on the island. In 1970 he published his memoir about his experiences on the island, *Black Man in Red Cuba*, detailing his disdain for the country and its racist and oppressive government.⁵ His work is of importance because it is the earliest “complete account of a black American’s experiences in Castro’s Cuba” and it highlights the racial inequality still present five years after the overthrow of Batista. This matters because he arrives at a time where radical Black America has notions of Cuba as a racial paradise and authentic revolutionary force.

⁴ Testimony of Williams. Pg. 141.

⁵ John Clytus, *Black Man in Red Cuba* (Miami: University of Miami Press, 1970)

Clytus argues that while he did receive clothes, food, employment, and shelter in Cuba, it was no substitution for the freedom that was apparently lacking.⁶ He describes a Cuba where race and color do not exist, but only because of a fearful or brain washed populace that ignores their African heritage and instead adopts a false Cuban identity. He describes the racism in Cuba by explaining how Black men who were romantically involved with White women were frowned upon much like in the U.S and noted the racial employment inequality in positions of power. In one of his experiences exploring Havana with White female co-worker, he writes how two Cuban officers remind him that “in the States they would put the dogs on you or lynch you” for accompanying a White woman in an overly casual manner.⁷ He shames Cuban news for the “degrading” light it constantly showed Black America in depicting them on the front page of Cuba’s national newspaper *Granma* as helpless victims of U.S. oppression. For Clytus, “It always amused me the way the Cuban revolutionaries were constantly mouthing their support for black people all over the world, while in Cuba black people were hindered from any identification with blackness.” He believed this ‘mouth support’ for Africa and Blacks in the western hemisphere “prepared many Cubans to bear their deprivation with more equanimity, feeling that they were in a position to help someone even worse off than they.”⁸ In essence, Cubans were being stripped of their Blackness and didn’t even realize.

While Clytus does provide a detailed account of the faults of the Cuban system and does uncover evidence of indoctrination, prejudice and oppression, his account raises concerns for a few important reasons. His narrative exposes that he was a misanthropic

⁶ Clytus. Pg. 32.

⁷ Clytus. Pg. 77.

⁸ Clytus. Pg. 44.

individual who did not seem satisfied with anything or anyone. He never wanted to be in Cuba in the first place, but instead in Africa fighting for their liberation but later reversed and instead looked down upon Africa because of their dismissal of his loyalty. Much like Cleaver, he only planned to use Cuba as a stepping stone to the “motherland.” Therefore, his evaluations of Cuba were already embittered and biased by his expectations that he would be in Africa in a short time after his arrival in Havana and his frustration are easily recognizable as he remarks on the irregularities of revolutionary Cuba. In all reality, Clytus left America in defeat never planning to return and his exodus was as a beggar with little money, no recognition in either the Black Power or Non-violent movements, and no support. He went from working the produce fields of a sweltering Bakersfield, Ca and sleeping in abandoned buildings in Los Angeles with the smell of urine and feces all around to being a Professor of English at the University of Havana with no college degree or valued recommendations and living in romance and peace.

Clytus made more money in Cuba than he did in the U.S. and his level of comfort was drastically different from his country of origin. Everything he has to say is negative in regard to practically everything he discusses in his book (Mexico, U.S., Cuba, and Africa) but his sour narrative contradicts with his rapid rise in Cuba and lack of extreme racial oppression that was a staple of U.S. society. Clytus roams the island mostly unburdened and uninterrupted during his stay and he is constantly being helped by Black exiles, the benevolent Cuban people, and the “tyrannical” government that put him in coveted positions that he was not qualified for. It seems as if nothing was enough to make this man inspired and as if he forgot the lynchings of Emmet Till, Malcolm X, Medgar Evers, and the numerous others back in the states literally dying for being Black.

Nowhere in his account of Cuba does one even come close to seeing this overt form of racism and during many portions Clytus comes across as simply whiny. In fact, according to Clytus, the worst that could happen in Cuba to an individual against the system would be their being labeled “counter-revolutionary,” and not lynched for their views.

John Clytus is a confusing and controversial figure in the historiography of Cuba because he was there during the stay of Williams and they both shared similar opinions on the Cuban government, but they differed vastly on other fundamental approaches and subjects such as revolutionary Black America. They both believed non-violence was ridiculous as Clytus explained that “singing and praying to someone beating me over the head and kicking me in the behind wasn’t my kind of revolution” and they both shared the same sentiments about the unity of Black America and the White working class. Clytus remarked on this implausible unity in his narrative after stating to a Cuban official that in the U.S. the “whites of the working class...were the most virulent racist in the States...the ones who the ‘Negroes’ where getting their licks from while trying to integrate with them in their homes, clubs, and toilets.”⁹

In regard to revolution in Black America, Williams and Clytus approached the subject from polar opposite positions. Williams had grown from a self-defense platform to an active revolutionary method during his time in Cuba. Clytus viewed Black America as complacent cowards and mentally put together bits and pieces of an idealistic African excursion to liberate the home of all Blacks in the world. His only problem was that the African representatives from various embassies made it clear that they did not need or

⁹ Clytus. Pg. 63.

want his help in this struggle but instead recommended that he fight it on his own soil. Ironically, their tone in his account seems to hint that it was Clytus who was possibly viewed as a coward. Yet, his work was a beacon of its era to warn Black America of the failures of Revolutionary Cuba and his account still resonates today. It was a work of dual purpose simultaneously exposing flaws in a “sacred system” and in the very man who saw it all firsthand.

Even with the negative experiences Williams was subjected to by Soviet supporters in the Cuban government, his love for the country, the people, and its revolution wavered little in the years after his return from exile. Clytus, however, decided after his experience in the mid-1960s to publish his book about the negative aspects of Revolutionary Cuba in 1970, but it did little to detract from the positive vision of the island in the Black Power Movement until 1978 when Eldridge Cleaver came forward with a similar accusation of a “propagandized” paradise. Cleaver was expressly outspoken about the “false” image Cuba projected around the world after his difficult encounter with the island during his exile in the early 1970s. He revealed in 1978, that “Ange Diawara, the political commissar of the army of the Congo, told me that ‘everybody understood that Castro was pulling Che out of the Congo because of the pressure from the Soviets, who had arranged things with the Americans. This was the fundamental betrayal of the African Revolution.’”¹⁰

He was also shocked at the perceived treatment his Panther allies received once they reached the shores of Cuba in exile and he wondered how a place that was

¹⁰ Eldridge Cleaver, *Soul on Fire* (Waco, Texas: Word Books Publishing, 1978), Pg. 109.

recognized as a world symbol for freedom from oppression could treat their own brothers and sisters in arms with so much contempt. He remarked how “I was the one to be broken by the collapse of false dreams and faded illusions of revolutionary possibilities.” He explained how during his time in “Castroland” he “was to live six months in a wretched and restless existence-sort of a San Quentin wit palm trees, an Alcatraz with sugar cane.” Cleaver’s disgust with the revolution and its leader’s stemmed from his bearing witness to “the white Cubans locking up all the Black Panthers, putting our hijacker friends in work camps, and increasing their general hostility toward me.” He even tells of a time when it looked like he “would have a shootout with their security police when he refused to turn over some machine guns in his Havana apartment.”¹¹

Cleaver’s position was validated by fellow Black Panther William Lee Brent who wrote in 1996 after his exile in Cuba during the 1970s, “my arrival in Cuba had been spectacular enough, but the reception I received left a hell of a lot to be desired. Straight from the airport to a foul-smelling jail cell.”¹² Brent spent nearly two years imprisoned trying to convince the Cuban authorities that he was neither a spy nor a threat to Cuban society after he hijacked a U.S. plane to reach the island. One can understand the Cuban uncertainty of some of the criminal activities that landed the Black exiles on the shores of the island, but considering how Castro advocated for such disruptions of American society by Black revolutionaries it must have been highly unexpected by exiles to be treated the same way in revolutionary Cuba as racist America upon arrival. Still, he continued to live there until his death in 2006 at age 75 and according to his memoirs was

¹¹ *Soul on Fire*. Pg. 143.

¹² William Lee Brent, *Long Time Gone* (Random House Publishing: New York, 1996), Pg. 147.

generally treated fairly in Cuba. His imprisonment, however, did not sit well with Cleaver and others who began to view the island as a den of White lies.

In the words of Eldridge, the “Cuban disaster was still eating at me. Castro lost a lot of friends in Europe and Asia after I got through telling our brothers overseas what a farce his program had become. I warned Africans to beware of the cigar store revolutionary for I had seen the brutal accomplishments of his grand design... I passed the word back to the Panthers in America...who thought they could make use of Castro in their own liberation struggle. Be careful, or you will trade in your old chains for new ones harder to break than the old.”¹³ Cleaver was without a doubt the most vocal Black revolutionary to address the “illusions” of Cuba and he endeavored to break the Black Power Movement away for its Cuban connection, but his narrative after a conservative transformation was not successful enough to fully shatter the unity as Black exiles continued to pour into the Cuba up until the late 70s and Black leaders frequently visited the island in solidarity. He remains the most prominent figure and one of the earliest to attempt to challenge the historical revolutionary relationship between Black America and “Castroland.”

After two decades of mostly silence on the topic of the revolutionary Cuba and Black America relationship, historian Ruth Reitan provided the most detailed and accurate analysis on the failures of the relationship to date in her 1999 formative text *The Rise and Decline of an Alliance: Cuba and African American Leaders in the 1960s*. Reitan was the first to propose that the alliance had fallen apart due to the pressures of the

¹³ *Soul on Fire*. Pg. 144.

traditional Communist forces in the Cuban government purging the ideas of the Guevarist faction and consolidating power around Castro gaining a place close to his ear. She asserted that it was the meddling of this powerful entity within the Cuban government that pushed Castro towards less revolutionary measures in regard to Black America and a more subtle approach to appease the Soviet Union in its dealings with the U.S. government and a fledgling revolutionary Cuba. Asylum was still provided to Black exiles and verbal inspiration to the oppressed Black America population still a key item in Castro's repertoire, but any legitimate revolutionary aid was a thing of the past with the demise of Guevara in 1967.¹⁴ While her work was only 150 pages and written nearly two decades ago, it remains the most profound examination of the relationship to date and a prominent inspiration behind this thesis. Unlike this thesis, it focuses more on the specific details of the relationship instead of examining the roots of Black Power with a Cuban foundational block, the origins and demise of revolutionary Black power, or the language of guerrilla warfare, but her work still captures the spirit of the era with intrigue and clarity.

The historiography on the genesis and evolution of revolutionary culture in radical Black America in relation to Cuban ideology is attenuated at best. Most of the works that focus on the relationship between Revolutionary Cuba and radical Black America pertain to the lived experiences of various exiles in Cuba and the ideological gaps that contributed to the ultimate failure of the complicated relationship. Pivotal historians in the field such as Reitan and Cuban historian Richard Gott, have advanced

¹⁴ Reitan, Ruth. *The Rise and Decline of an Alliance: Cuba and African American Leaders in the 1960s*. (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 1999), Print. Pg. 1-9.

unique arguments for why the relationship as a whole never blossomed into an authentic revolutionary alliance, yet their focus deals little with the metamorphosis of the language of resistance and the formation of revolutionary Black Power with a Cuban influence. Reitan accurately asserted that the downfall of the relationship was a result of inter-party struggles taking place within both camps over issues like the Sino-Soviet disputes, proper form of exporting revolutionary ideology, importance of race compared to class, and the non-violent versus revolutionary struggle divide present within the fragmented Civil Rights Struggle.¹⁵

Gott in disagreement argued five years later in 2004 that besides rhetoric and asylum, “something more concrete was never contemplated seriously by the Cubans,” Reitan acknowledges a strong foundation of active revolutionary support for Black American armed struggle.¹⁶ This support essentially collapsed after the defeat of the Guevarist influence in Cuban policy in the mid to late 1960s and the death of Che Guevara in 1967. While the death of Guevara was a direct blow to the hopes of any legitimate revolutionary support for Black Americans from their Cuban allies, it did not represent the death of their growing armed struggle language and ideology. It instead acted as a catalyst to spur the development of this relatively new revolutionary voice to greater heights in the decades of the 1960s and 70s.

Prominent Black Power historian, Peniel E. Joseph, offered an analysis on the Cuban and Black American revolutionary relationship that differed in many ways from what had come before. He acknowledged in 2014 that certain influential leaders of the

¹⁵ Reitan, Ruth. *The Rise and Decline of an Alliance: Cuba and African American Leaders in the 1960s*. (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 1999.) Print.

¹⁶Richard, Gott, *Cuba: A New History*, (Yale University Press, 2004) Print pg. 226.

movement such as Bobby Seale had never really trusted the Cuban connection. “Six years older than Huey, Seale had an idiosyncratic mix of patriotism and rebellion that earned him a dishonorable discharge from the air force but made him wary of pro-Castro Cuban revolutionaries as an affront to his love of country.”¹⁷ It may come as a surprise to learn that a founding father of the Black Panther Party and lead figure in the development of Black Power had an unwavering patriotism for his country, but it was not a hatred for America that fueled most Black revolutionaries, it was a disdain for its institutions and destructive ideological doctrines that bred oppression and prejudice.

To Seale, Cuba seemed illogical as a model for Black liberation and Castro an untrustworthy figure. He later moved beyond armed struggle platforms of revolution and embraced a new model for liberation that was founded on education and economics. To many within the radical Black community, he lost his luster and became a reformist instead of a revolutionary. When interviewed in the early 1990s, Seale expressed much to the dismay of the followers of his earlier Panther paradigm that “you don’t need any guns. I wouldn’t even emphasize any guns.” In an era where police brutality and Black oppression was as institutionally ingrained as it was, it caused a lot of controversy when he explained that if your “ideological platform is not about education or economics...I have no time for it.”¹⁸

The critical discussion of why the revolution never happened and why the Black Power Movement splintered and eventually collapsed by the start of the 1990s is also key to putting the movement into a contemporary context. Like Seale, many of the former

¹⁷ Peniel E. Joseph, *Stokely: a life*. (2014), Pg. 165.

¹⁸ Bobby Seale. *Bobby Seal says that the FBI didn't destroy the Black Panthers, He DID!* (Hebrew's Truth and Consequences interview, Feb, 2013), 2:25- 5:30.

leaders abandoned revolution for other approaches to liberation that included economics, politics, education, and cultural reinvention. No matter the approach, revolution was discarded by the prominent leaders of Black America and reform regained the emphasis as the way to freedom. Radical Panthers and BLA members who called for armed struggle were viewed as disruptive to progress in the Regan era that placed capitalism at the top of the list for the contemporary generation of Black leaders. This is also the period in which the enemy of Black America was redefined and the ultimate threat was no longer racist White America, but instead other Blacks. It appeared J. Edgar Hoover's counter revolutionary tactics that had destroyed the Black Panthers by the 1980s had expanded into nearly every corner of urban Black America breeding distrust among a people who only a few decades prior where united around the concepts of Black Power and revolution.

The color line was forever complicated with the growing tension within the Black community as many sought to join the "enemy" and take part in the oppression of their own people. Cleaver had noticed this toxic development in the Black community early on during the late 1970s as he recorded in his memoir *Soul on Fire* "My mother had taught all her children that there were whites you could count on, for they were good and just, and blacks you should avoid, for they were unkind an dishonest...Our claim was simple- we were against police brutality; and some of them were black, and they were the enemy as well as the white holsters. It was an argument that never failed to deliver us from the ultimate destruction, blacks becoming the very thing they were trying to eliminate, racists."¹⁹ It was no longer as necessary for racist White America to openly oppress its

¹⁹ *Soul on Fire*. Pg. 139.

Black population because they had managed to destroy the “Black is beautiful” unity of the 1960s and 1970s and replace it with the age old doctrine of self-hate and inter-racial prejudice.

The infighting that took place within the Black struggle is a historical facet of the entirety of Black American history. Since the earliest days of the indoctrination of the disunity doctrine, the fundamental battle between the “field” and “house” slaves, and the famous debates between W.E.B. Du Bois and Booker T. Washington at the turn of the 20th century, division has kept Black America from realizing their dream of liberation. Much of the division that has traditionally inhibited Black America rest along two fundamental lines; reform versus revolution and in either case who should be the leader of the movement. Revolutionary scholar, Harold Cruse, accused Black Panther Eldridge Cleaver of being a “prisoner of the reformist bind and the agony of its unfulfilled promises as much as anyone else who under, inexorable and excruciating pressures, must resort to revolutionary slogans and threats.”²⁰ He also, to the surprise of many Black Power followers, called Robert F. Williams a “rebel and not a revolutionary.”²¹ The friction between opposing leaders gained more momentum throughout the 1960s and 1970s as Carmichael, after his split from the Panthers, hurled further bolts of dissatisfaction at an unrecognizable Cleaver who changed drastically during his time in exile. “Cleaver couldn’t be a revolutionary. A revolutionary is a principled man” Stokely

²⁰ Harold Cruse, and William Jelani Cobb. *The essential Harold Cruse: a reader*. (New York: Palgrave, 2002), Pg. 108.

²¹ Cruse. Pg. 144.

said to a reporter in 1977 after noticing “the former Black Panther’s newfound patriotism and conservative politics.”²²

Black Panther founder, Huey P. Newton, attacked former ally Carmichael charging him with being “so inconsistent” in his views that “you never know where he is coming from.” He illuminated Carmichael’s own unrecognizable radical change towards cultural nationalism as a form of Black racism, stating, “Stokely told me he would support anyone...he did not care who-if the person was Black. We consider this viewpoint both racist and suicidal. If you support a Black man with a gun who belongs to the military arm of your oppressor, then you are assisting in your own destruction.”²³ Newton later broke off his relationship with Cleaver as well who he viewed as dangerously uncalculated after Eldridge labeled him a “reformist.” Following his release from prison, Huey displayed a new devotion to creating social programs within his community which did not sit well with the more “revolutionary” personalities in the party and further dissolved the movement making it less cohesive.

In 1968, renowned historian Eugene D. Genovese, discussed the conflict over the leadership issue in Black America, asserting that “there was no such thing as a black ideology or black point of view. Rather there are various black-nationalist biases, from leftwing versions such as that of the Panthers to rightwing versions such as that of Ron Karenga and other cultural nationalist.”²⁴ This assertion appears incorrect in many ways because there was indeed a Black ideology, one of revolution which defined the entire

²² Joseph, Peniel E. *Stokely: a life*. (2014), Pg. 305.

²³ Huey P. Newton, *Revolutionary Suicide*, (Penguin Group: New York, 1973), Pg. 165-166.

²⁴ Eugene D. Genovese, *In red and black; Marxian explorations in Southern and Afro-American history*, (New York: Pantheon Books, 1971), Pg. 220.

Black Power period, and the obvious fact that this claim could be leveled at any movement including the Mexican Revolution, Cuban Revolution, and the earlier squabbles of America's "founding fathers" and their federalist anti-federalist divide (was their unity around the earlier freedom from British tyranny not a single point of view?). It does, however; expose the lack of unity on a single direction that exists within all movements across all time. Some manage to overcome these differences and are successful while others remain stuck at the starting line. It was this very division that prevented the revolution from coming full circle in any measure and eventually reduced the movement to rubble.

Genovese also mistakenly asserted that the "ultimate success of Black Power depends on the emergence of a mass socialist movement among whites." He expressed how, "the blacks cannot make a revolution by themselves, and those whites looking to blacks as the revolutionary vanguard...harm both themselves and the black people they claim to befriend."²⁵ While this is a provocative reason for why no Black revolution has occurred considering the rise of such a socialist base would be extremely beneficial to the advancement of the movement (and an idea route to liberation), it is not the only way for the movement to be victorious. It is highly unflattering how once again the fate and liberation of Black America rest in the hands of White America and not in their own. Genovese could have never imagined that America would be a country with a majority non-white population by the middle of the 21st century and a vocally detested racist nation to many non-white countries around the world eager to help with the Black

²⁵ Genovese. Pg. 67.

American liberation mission.²⁶ His decades old assumption seems ill fit for the trajectory of America today and can only be accepted as theory and not reality. Still, his insights on the division within the Black Power Movement were not incorrect and a struggle raged within the Black population on a revolutionary or reformist direction.

The clash over reform versus revolution was manifested in the public confrontations between the non-violent and radical forces (also within the Black Power Movement). Martin Oppenheimer noted in 1969, “that our society will be able to muddle through, or zigzag in and out of a semi-permanent crisis for many years without either solving its basic problems or confronting a revolution, because of its ability to maintain outpost of reform.”²⁷ This passage seems prophetic in nature as it is largely due to the faith placed in the reformist movements by Black America and oppressed White America that has kept revolution at bay. The hope for change through politics keeps the people playing the partisan game and trapped in a mentality in which the smallest momentary victory is inflated to the scale of a grand achievement. It is but crumbs from the cake while the powers that be continue to feast on the empty aspirations of the people.

Another important point of analysis made by Oppenheimer, which is today quite eerie, predicts the current rise of the Donald Trump presidency and his massive support base. He argues that, “In a modern, industrialized, metropolitan setting, the subversion of society by strain, aided by violent or non-violent guerrillas, is very likely to end in a right-wing, counter revolutionary dictatorship.”²⁸ He wrote that “those affected by the

²⁶ Eric Kayne, Census: White Majority is Gone by 2043, (NBC News, June 13, 2013) usnews.newsvine.com/_news/2013/06/13/18934111-census-white-majority-in-us-gone-by-2043

²⁷ Martin Oppenheimer *The urban guerrilla*. (Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1969), Pg. 170.

²⁸ Oppenheimer. Pg. 170.

strain initiated by the guerrillas are just as likely (perhaps more likely) to go in a counter-revolutionary or fascist direction as they are to join the revolution.”²⁹ As we stand at the cusp of a new era in which racism has re-emerged more furious than ever seeking to turn back the hands of time against all things natural and “make America great again”, one can only watch as this prophecy unfolds with eyes wide, heart ablaze, and weapons cocked. For, Oppenheimer one thing was for certain, “Blacks are arming, the police are arming, and the ultra-right is arming.”³⁰ Only God knows where this will all lead in the decades to come. The fall of America or the birth of a new and more utopian America? This is the story of how revolutionary Black Power forced the nation to take up arms and of how the leaders influenced by the Cuban Revolution moved a people to fight for freedom. It is the story of the brave individuals who defied the most powerful government on the planet and motivated multiple generation to fight for their liberty with the power of the gun.

²⁹ Oppenheimer. Pg. 147.

³⁰ Oppenheimer. Pg. 156.

CHAPTER 1: A VIETNAM IN THE GHETTO

“Since the United States of America is the backbone of oppression in the world, the blows of each strike against the empire there will also aid in the liberation struggles in Africa, Asia, and Latin America as we aid ourselves against Babylon”

-*Eldridge Cleaver*³¹

“The blows should be continuous. The enemy soldier in a zone of operations should not be allowed to sleep; his outpost ought to be attacked and liquidated systematically. At every moment the impression ought to be created that he is surrounded by a complete circle”

- *Ernesto Che Guevara*³²

The decades between the 1960s and 1980s were shaped by massive waves of resistance and global revolution. Independence movements from Africa to Asia rocked the already fragile balance between hostile superpowers the United States and the Soviet Union. Nations that were once domains of imperialist forces were reborn from the ashes of revolutionary struggle and briefly shined as symbols of hope for oppressed populations worldwide. One particular war, the Vietnam War or War of Aggression, forced the world to choose sides in the ongoing battles between capitalism and socialism and imperialism and liberation. One particular revolution, the successful early 1959 Cuban Revolution, captured the hearts and minds of a new era of leftist revolutionary warriors. The triumph

³¹ Eldridge Cleaver. *Eldridge Cleaver, Black Panther* (1970), 26:25.

³² Che Guevara. *Guerilla Warfare 1961*. (University of Nebraska Press, Lincoln, Nebraska 1998), Print, Pg. 16.

of Fidel Castro, Che Guevara, and their scrappy bunch of intellectual guerrilla fighters over unexpected odds and a militarily mightier foe was already the stuff of legend. To revolutionary Black Americans like Huey P. Newton (founder of the Black Panther Party for Self-Defense), who suffered persecution in a racially divided United States, it was more than just a good story or inspirational tale. It was a possible blueprint to freedom.

Ultra conservative counter-revolutionaries could never imagine a Black led guerrilla revolution in the United States, but the idea, however, was more than just a concept during the span of these decades and the language of Black exile and Black radical resistance clearly shows a cultivated and conscious connection to a burgeoning violent revolutionary armed struggle ideology. This chapter seeks to analyze the language of Black radical armed struggle arguing that an intentional reshaping of resistance language and ideology took place between the decades of the 1960s and 1980s as a result of the influence and support of Cuban Revolutionary elements. It will examine the metamorphosis of the language of revolution to explain how Fidel Castro and Che Guevara's dream of "many Vietnams" in Latin America was considered by their comrades in the ghettos of the United States of America.

This study does not place this evolution of Black radical revolutionary language and ideology solely on the grounds of Cuban influence as China, Africa, Russia, and the historical Black American experience contributed a great deal to the transformation of the language to revolutionary. It simply acknowledges that the proximity of Cuba to the U.S., the success of their revolution, the perception of Afro Cuban prosperity, and the various forms of support offered to the Black struggle was monumental in shaping the Black radical ideology and language of guerrilla warfare. This work seeks to expose a

fundamental part of any resistance movement which is the language that shapes that movement. The analysis will illustrate how the Cuban influence aided the already militant Black radical exiles and Black Power leaders in defining and perpetuating an ideology and language founded on violent revolutionary resistance with an emphasis on urban and rural guerrilla warfare and cultural revolution.

The language of armed resistance was integral to different developments within the Black radical community. By the end of the 1960s, organizations such as the Black Panther Party, SNCC, and RAM had broken away from more peaceful Civil Rights style protest and replaced that doctrine with one of armed self-defense and “All power to the people.” Advocated as early as the late 1950s by Black revolutionary Robert F. Williams, this style of resistance was deemed obsessively radical and dangerous by more conservative elements in the United States. Although Williams would later take a more revolutionary stance, he essentially argued that oppressed Blacks had the right to physically and if need be violently protect themselves from the racist assault of rural and urban police. However; Williams did not originally call for any aggressive or inciting acts on behalf of the armed Black revolutionaries and senseless rioting was often frowned upon within the Black radical community. Their focus was security, the very security they mocked police for failing to provide and even more for fundamentally denying Black America.

He was pivotal in shaping the armed resistance ideology and language of the revolutionary Black Power Movement and was a pioneer in establishing relationships with a fledgling Cuban revolutionary state. Williams along with other Black radicals from the Black wing of the U.S. Communist Party, the Black Liberation Army, and the

later formed Black Panther Party for Self Defense perpetuated a revolutionary critique for the future of America that was grounded on the inevitability of armed struggle and infused with Cuban ideology. Others, like Stokely Carmichael, former chairman of SNCC (Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee), challenged the very identity of their own Black rights movements and took fundamental shifts towards a recognizable violent stance.

Carmichael, recognized as being one of the early advocates of the Black Power Movement, initially started his path to activism along the lines laid forth by Dr. King and the followers of his non-violence rhetoric in the early 1960s, but had a change of heart a few years prior to King's assassination. He believed the most basic flaw with the non-violent movement in the United States was that it relied on the enemy recognizing the suffering of the oppressed Black population and being moved by morality and sympathy "to change their hearts", but in order for that strategy to work the enemy would first "have to have a conscious." In his opinion, "the United States had no conscious."³³ He later united with the Black Panther's to advocate their platform for armed resistance and ultimately violent revolutionary struggle.

Cuban historian Richard Gott depicts this blend of Black radical and Cuban revolutionary ideology in his epic study of Cuban history describing how the two groups related to one another throughout the course of a period of pandemonium in 1967. During that tumultuous summer the city of Detroit was swept into a series of massively chaotic riots as a result of police brutality. The nation tensely watched as individuals took to the

³³ Goran Olsson, *The Black Power Mixtape*. Story AB, Sveriges Television (SVT), (Louverture Films. Sundance Selects. Sweden. 2011)

streets in protest to vent frustrations rooted in decades of racial injustice, murder, and systematic oppression. Carmichael rallied the citizens of Detroit as well as the nation to create “fifty Vietnams in the United States” adopting the same ideological position as Che Guevara the originator of this method to revolution. He further expressed his support for Cuban styled revolution identifying the role of both Cuba and Black America “to destroy U.S. imperialism from within as you (Cuba) are ready to do it from without.” His final statement shows the fundamental shift from self-defense to revolutionary struggle as Carmichael expressed “We can’t wait for them to murder us. We must be the first to fight and kill.”³⁴

Here, Carmichael represents the Black American struggle as a part of a greater Cold War framework in which Black America is connected to a struggle against imperialism being waged across the globe. Black revolutionaries certainly viewed themselves and were viewed by socialist supporters such as Cuba and China as agents of the greater struggle against capitalist exploitation and racist imperialist oppression. This linked their Cuban rhetoric to a multipurpose struggle that included liberation from racism at home and freedom from U.S. subjugation abroad. The struggles were connected and the language of revolution grew alongside the realities of the Vietnam War, African decolonization efforts, Latin American guerrilla movements, and the tug of war between China, Russia, Cuba, and the U.S.

As the language clearly shows, not only was Cuban rhetoric and ideology tightly interwoven into Carmichael’s Black radical liberation ideology, but also the position of

³⁴ Gott. 228.

self-defense was completely abandoned in the interest of “being the first to kill.” From passive resistance to an all-out active revolutionary armed struggle, the language and ideology of violent revolution completely transformed many facets of the overall fight for Black civil rights. It shifted the movement from a reformist movement working within the established system to promote change, to a revolutionary movement working outside of the institutional structures to seek the destruction of the current system and the birth of a new egalitarian society. This shift largely occurred in the span between 1960 and 1969 as the revolutionary Black Power Movement grew to compete with the traditional non-violent approach. These initial expressions of solidarity and early encounters between revolutionary Cuba and radical Black America led to mixed expectations and disappointments over the space of three decades, but for better or worse, Cuban ideology and support played a crucial role in shaping radical Black warfare language and in some aspects strived to make it tangible.

For Black Americans, such as Assata Shakur, who existed during this stage of the Black Civil Rights struggle in America in the early 1960s, the country already seemed in an internal war divided on lines of racial and economic inequality. Exile and Black Panther Assata Shakur emphasized this as blatantly as possible, saying, “I come from a country that is literally at war with itself.”³⁵ It was during this shift from passive to active resistance that even the notion of armed self-defense was questioned as Black revolutionaries adopted more radical notions of urban and guerrilla warfare. The Cuban model came about at a time when many Black radicals were already in search of an armed resistance platform. It proved that a small group of vanguards could successfully

³⁵ Assata Shakur, *Eyes of the Rainbow*, (1997), 9:20.

create both rural and urban networks while simultaneously fighting and growing the revolution. A people's revolution, one supported and sponsored by the oppressed masses but led by the urban and rural guerrilla vanguard or in Cuban terms the *focos*. In the United States, radical leftist thinkers and revolutionaries agreed that the leader of the revolution should be Black Vanguard because of their position as the most oppressed group in the population, their commitment to liberty, and their knowledge of suffering. Black Power founding fathers Robert F. Williams, Huey P. Newton, and Eldridge Cleaver among others believed that the same goals of the Cuban Revolution could be achieved in the United States and were devoted to the cause of making the final overthrow a reality. This shift from passive protest to armed self-defense and eventually armed revolutionary guerrilla struggle was manifested in the language of the period by Black radical leaders and the explosion of revolutionary ideology coalesced into the Black Power Movement redefining a centuries old struggle and a people.

Cleaver who spent time in Cuba in the early 1970s before going to Africa, spoke in exile from Algiers expressing that “this life belongs to the American Revolution...and that is where it will be spent.”³⁶ This vision of American revolution was very much a central focus of certain Black exiled leaders like Cleaver who at the time gave up all hope of any peaceful alternatives. Cuba was initially, the only proof Black radicals needed to set their hearts ablaze with revolutionary fervor and attempt to overcome their subjugation in a racist and classist America, but it was not enough to seek to recreate the success of that isolated incident with its specific conditions and structures. Black

³⁶ *Eldridge Cleaver Black Panther*, 6:35.

America had to put the pieces of liberation together themselves with the knowledge of their own reality and the spirit of hope pulsating from the streets of Santiago de Cuba.

To simply state that Black exiles turned to revolutionary Cuba for an exact revolutionary paradigm would be an overstatement. Rather, many viewed the teachings of Che Guevara on guerrilla warfare as a frame to build upon considering the unique nature of the urban and rural American situation. They did however, recognize the methods and tactics from the Cuban model or Guevara's "foco" theory that were applicable to their struggle and began to advance knowledge of guerrilla struggle as a means of liberation. This guerrilla struggle would have to be tailor made to fit the conditions of the most technologically advanced and urbanized nation on the planet; the United States. Even with a growing consensus among Black radicals within the U.S. on adopting a revolutionary guerrilla approach, the circumstances differed from region to region, organization to organization, and person to person. Fragmentation was a sorely visible part of the Civil Rights Struggle as a whole.

Early component of the birth of this new revolutionary ideology, Robert F. Williams, perceived the struggle in terms of a rural movement compared to Panther Party members like Stokely Carmichael and Huey P. Newton who were more willing to embrace the urban movement and bring the battle to the streets of America's concrete jungles. Their environment could have not been more different as Williams came from the rural area of Monroe, North Carolina versus the densely populated Bay Area setting where the Panthers were forged. Roberts even went as far to begin "digging trenches and foxholes" to protect himself and his community from the racist raids of white

supremacists hiding behind the impunity of local and federal law enforcement agencies.³⁷ Whether these revolutionary leaders believed in a rural, urban, or total warfare template is not the ultimate point; the key to making any of these visions of opposition tangible rested on the belief in some form of a guerrilla struggle utilizing the vanguard or *focos* as the weapon of the disenfranchised masses and the language of the period clearly displays this transformation.

Since the *focos* is paramount in understanding notions of Black radical revolution, the first section will examine the Guevara *focos* theory as a concept to further explore its relation to the Black radical experience. The next section will offer a more detailed examination of the various Black radical notions of armed struggle in an urban vs. rural approach and examine the growing contemporary language of revolutionary violence. The goal is to recognize how the language itself shifted from previous passive approach, to determinate (self-defense), and eventually to active violent revolution. This will be achieved by a close examination of biographical, documentary, and speech based sources as they are the most immediate and personal representations of the transformation of the language. Most importantly, this chapter seeks to shed light on how the language from both sides of this interaction intertwined and to expose a definite Cuban influence in the evident and elevated growth of armed struggle language being expressed in Black revolutionary liberation ideology (1960s-1980s). A language of resistance that surpassed the early self-defense doctrine and entered a more dangerous space where internal U.S.

³⁷ Robert F. Williams, *Powerful Overview of the on Coming Destruction of Amerika (Let it Burn)*, (Radical Films. 1968).

warfare was considered a possible reality and legitimate revolution was only a gunshot away.

1.1: The Vanguard and the Guerrilla Agenda: Understanding the *Focos* in a Cuban and Black American Context

Che Guevara is a controversial figure in the realm of 20th century socialist revolution and guerrilla warfare tactics. He is a figure surrounded by a dense fog of myth generated by devoted followers of his rhetoric. They view him as revolutionary prophet who sacrificed his own life to realize a vision of a world free of imperialism, capitalist exploitation, poverty, and racism. On the other end of the spectrum stand his indefatigable opponents who situate him with the likes of the 20th centuries most notorious madmen such as Adolf Hitler and Joseph Stalin. Beyond the obsessive praise and unworthy derision, it is often difficult to assess the core of the man and his authentic values and contributions to the improvement of society. There is, however, no denying the pivotal role the legendary strategist played in cultivating the ideology of guerrilla warfare, moral persuasion, and liberation from oppression that he passionately disseminated in his fiery speeches, cherished collection of writings, and his eventual sacrifice for these beliefs.

His contributions are best represented by Cuban historian William E. Ratliff who wrote, "More than any other theorist, Guevara was responsible for developing and popularizing the concept of continental revolution, both through his writings and his personal efforts to turn Bolivia into the Vietnam of the Americas... As Guevara saw it, the struggle for socialism necessarily involved an international army of guerilla fighters

whose revolutionary successes, through the implementation of guerilla *focus* in critical strategic areas, would liberate the continent as a whole.³⁸ He truly believed in the possibility of an international revolution and committed the last half of his life to creating solidarity amongst the oppressed populations of the world in the wake of decolonization movements in Asia and Africa, civil rights battles in the U.S., and brutal reactionary dictatorships throughout Latin America.

Guevara promoted and cultivated the concept known as the guerrilla *focos* defining the vanguard party (leaders in revolutionary ideas and action or the “fighting *focos*”) as the origin of revolution. Both Guevara and Castro sought to export the concept of guerilla warfare as the only legitimate path to global liberation up until Guevara’s death in Bolivia in a failed effort to put into action his ideology. Che, as he was known among friends, family, and fellow revolutionaries, constructed his beliefs from three fundamental theories that were the foundation of his universal platform of guerrilla struggle and final liberation. The first principle states that popular forces can defeat a trained government army no matter the circumstances as long as the fighters represent the peoples majority, followed by the principle that conditions for revolution do not have to be present in the society attempting to overthrow a tyrannical government because the rebellion will help create those conditions during the struggle. Lastly, the majority of the guerilla movement and the ultimate battlefield should be waged in the rural and less populated areas of the Americas while still conducting small scale urban operations.³⁹

³⁸ William Ratliff. *Castroism and Communism in Latin America, 1959-1976: The Varieties of Marxist-Leninist Experience*. (Washington: American Enterprise Institute for Public Policy Research, 1976), Introduction. Print.

³⁹ Guevara, Che. *Guerrilla Warfare*. (University of Nebraska Press. Lincoln, Nebraska. 1961), Print pg. 7.

Che produced and cultivated the concept of the guerrilla *focos* or the vanguard party (as it pertains to guerrilla warfare) which was a small group of fighters who represented the aspirations of the masses in both military conflict and ideological objectives. The guerrilla *focos* was responsible for the creation and distribution of the social, political, and economic rhetoric that was designed to represent the will of the people and to inspire mass support for the vanguard struggle. Guevara's concept expressed the guerrilla *focos* necessity to summon strength and support from the masses while in return spreading ideology and battling relentlessly against the oppressive regime to gain the hearts and the minds of the people.

Che emphasized the make-or-break role of the people's allegiance writing, "It is important to emphasize that guerrilla warfare is a war of the masses, a war of the people. The guerrilla band is an armed nucleus, the fighting vanguard of the people. It draws its great force from the mass of the people themselves. The guerrilla band is not to be considered inferior to the army against which it fights simply because it is inferior in firepower. Guerrilla warfare is used by the side which is supported by a majority but which possesses a much smaller number of arms for use in defense against oppression.⁴⁰ For Guevara, the support of the people was paramount when attempting to maintain guerrilla operations against a government supported by powerful imperial allies and equipped with superior technology. The *focos* is more than a band of rebels lurking about in the wilds, they represent the dreams of the oppressed masses and are the first to fight for those who cannot defend themselves from the might of the tyrannical power structure.

⁴⁰ Ernesto Che Guevara. *Guerrilla Warfare*. (Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1969), Pg. 1-22.

Guevara was sure to explain that the guerrilla struggle was not contingent upon the reality of having inferior firepower because the source of strength, the people, can overcome this disadvantage through support of the *focos* and their systematic small scale “hit and run” tactics. He elaborated on the *focos* as vanguard of the people writing, “Why does the guerrilla fighter fight? We must come to the inevitable conclusion that the guerrilla fighter is a social reformer, that he takes up arms responding to the angry protest of the people against their oppressors, and that he fights in order to change the social system that keeps all his unarmed brothers in ignominy and misery. He launches himself against the conditions of the reigning institutions at a particular moment and dedicates himself with all the vigor that circumstances permit to breaking the mold of these institutions.”⁴¹ Guevara depicted the guerrilla fighter as the champion of the people. Entirely influenced by the will of the masses and driven by a need for social progression for the subjugated population, the guerilla is the fighting manifestation of the desires of the people. Most importantly, the *focos* is responsible not only for militarily resisting the ruling tyrants and their forces, but also for creating social and political reforms beneficial to the well-being of the majority of the people. The *focos*, in essence, is the people’s party and the people provide sustenance for the *focos* through mental, material, and eventual physical support.

Guevara alongside Castro developed these theories with the help of communist rhetoric from Karl Marx and Vladimir Lenin and texts like *The Communist Manifesto*. Powerful war cries from Marx and Engels over a century old at the time of the Cuban Revolution were the basis for the armed struggle ideology of many Cuban

⁴¹ Guevara. Pg. 4.

Revolutionaries. Words from these early creators of this brand of revolutionary rhetoric called for international unity. Marx wanted the movement to leave the shadows and enter the ranks of a global phenomenon enthusiastically stating, “The Communist disdain to conceal their views and aims. They openly declare that their ends can be attained only by the forcible overthrow of all existing social conditions. Let the ruling classes tremble at the Communist Revolution. The proletarians have nothing to lose but their chains. They have a world to win. Workingmen of all countries unite!”⁴² This passage is visibly a foundation for the ideology of Guevara and his armed struggle platform. It was a foundation upon which likeminded leftist thinkers could refer to in order to bolster their own revolutionary ideology for more contemporary situations, but similar to how the Black radicals perceived Cuban doctrine, it was not an exact blueprint to triumph.

Perhaps, more importantly, Lenin provided a version of Marxism and revolution that melded more valuably with the doctrine Che believed was supreme. The fundamental difference between Lenin and Marx was situated upon how the revolution would eventually occur. Whereas Marx placed the factors of consciousness raising and ultimate revolution in the hands of “a natural process in which events are determined by the interplay of forces and not by the will or ideas of men, be they individuals or groups,” Lenin upheld “the idea of the party (*focos/* vanguard) as the guiding force or the general staff of social progress.”⁴³ This concept was also shared by Mao Tse-tung, another pivotal figure in the development of Black radical revolutionary language and leader of China’s own peasant revolution in 1949. He whole-heartedly believed a revolution’s

⁴² Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels. *The Communist Manifesto*, (New York: International, 1948), Print. Pg. 44.

⁴³ Alfred G. Meyer, *Leninism*, (Frederick A. Praeger Inc. 1962), Pg. 21.

“basic element was man...He is endowed with intelligence, emotions, and will. Guerrilla warfare is therefore suffused with, and reflects, man’s admirable qualities as well as his least pleasant ones.”⁴⁴ Here we see the most elementary difference between the divergent ideologies within the realm of socialist revolution; one that relies on destiny and one that relies on agency.

Much more in line with the thinking of Lenin and Tse-tung, Guevara believed that the will and determination of the party could bring about the destruction of oppressive forces and one did not have to wait for an unrecognizable point in the future where natural forces outside of humanity would bring about change. He cultivated his *focos* theory in the garden of contemplation planted by Lenin, but watered by his own personal experiences and convictions. Yet, even with a guide being handed down from Karl Marx, Friedrich Engels, and Vladimir Lenin as a framework for the Cuban leadership’s general thought process, Fidel Castro and Ernesto Che Guevara took liberation ideology even further through their own positive experience as guerrillas in the successful overthrow of the Batista dictatorship in 1959. They contributed precise tactical information on how to achieve the victorious overthrow of a rogue government utilizing what had been beneficial for them and their particular struggle and created a potential model for other struggles to emulate.

The guerilla *focos* ideology was embraced worldwide in countries like Guatemala, the Dominican Republic, Bolivia, Venezuela, Nicaragua, Panamá, Angola, Congo, Guinea-Bissau, and substantially penetrated the Black Power Movement during the last

⁴⁴ Mao Tse-tung, *On Guerrilla Warfare*. (Praeger Publishing, 1962), Pg.7.

decades of the 20th century. Prominent Black Panther leader and Minister of Information, Eldridge Cleaver, even remarked in his exceptionally strident book *Soul on Ice* how he would “like to leap the whole last mile and grow a beard and don whatever threads the local nationalism might require and comrade with Che Guevara, and share his fate.”⁴⁵ Che was viewed as a martyr who relinquished his life for the cause of global liberation from oppression. In his memory the Black Panthers and other radical groups elevated Cuban revolutionary ideology and its heroes from being only Cuban treasures to the status of international blessings as a method to sovereignty.

Between the 1960s and 1970s many leading Black radicals were given asylum on the island after tensions reached dangerous boiling points in the U.S., but only scant military support was ever given to this particular struggle due to the hostility already present between the Cuban and U.S. government and internal divisions within both movements. The Panthers however stayed armed and active and compared their struggle to that of the impressively victorious Cubans. Both Castro and Guevara were highly regarded for their ability, strategy, and bravery just as the Black revolutionaries were greatly respected by Guevara and Castro for their initiative against American imperialism and their program of international solidarity among the oppressed.

Castro openly praised the Black radical struggle with his characteristically defiant intensity asserting “They didn’t talk about objective conditions before they seized weapons to defend their rights. They did not seek... a revolutionary philosophy...to justify inaction...Here we have United States revolutionaries setting examples and giving

⁴⁵ Eldridge Cleaver, *Soul on Ice*, (New York: Delta, 1968), Print. Pg. 38.

us lesson.”⁴⁶ At the time, he may have not realized that these United States revolutionaries were indeed seeking a revolutionary philosophy to guide their struggle, but he did recognize they were capable of forging their own path regardless of the current lack of a concrete model. Even with the support offered by their Cuban comrades and the 1959 Bautista overthrow to analyze and construct upon, the circumstances for Blacks in America could not have been more foreign to the doctrine presented by Guevara and his allies. It would have to be a piece of their platform instead of the whole. The flame and not the inferno.

The radical Black forces in the United States realized early on that they would have to expand their thinking beyond the pages of foreign manuals of revolutionary prosperity. The Cubans had relished in the popular support of a people ready for change and mostly united in the efforts to bring about such a new begging. They conducted urban campaigns under the instruction of a charismatic Frank Pais Pasqueira and rural campaigns under the lionhearted Camilo Cienfuegos and Che Guevara. They garnered mass appeal from the disaffected masses and under the spirit of *Cubanidad*, a concept that presented the notion that all Cubans were one, Castro transformed a *focos* of 82 warrior intellectuals into a revolution.

The Black revolutionary forces present during the aforementioned decades in the United States inhaled a vastly different air than that present in the cobblestoned streets of Havana. They understood that the masses were the main ingredient to any achievable struggle and carefully paid attention to the instruction of Guevara and the detrimental

⁴⁶ Reitan. Pg. 49.

position in which he placed the people, but sought to reconcile these worthy instructions with the uniqueness of their own situation. No matter how they achieved freedom, they knew well that the passion of the people was the main ingredient for victory and without their fealty, bloodshed was but stains on the concrete. Assata Shakur emphasized the importance of armed struggle, but only as a method supported by the masses writing, ‘Revolutionary war is a people’s war. And no people’s war can be won without the support of the masses of people. Armed struggle can never be successful by itself; it must be part of the overall strategy for winning.’⁴⁷ Her statement reveals a direct connection to the critical role Guevara assigns the masses in his much earlier work, but also shows that the utilization of armed struggle should never be considered outside of the realm of the people’s platform for liberation. She was not alone in this armed struggle interpretation and cultivated this mode of thought within the Black radical circles she penetrated.

A publication from the Panther Party newspaper further represented their understanding of the life-or-death role the people occupied in the revolution explaining how “The Black Panther Party (or any Black liberation force) cannot be successful without the complete support of the people. All power comes from the people...The man with the gun only has the power to destroy, but not the power to control.”⁴⁸ The foundational role of the masses in the struggle was cultivated and spread throughout all sectors of the Civil Rights Struggle, not just the radical forces, but with so many competing factions vouching for the devotion of the disenfranchised and offering totally opposed platforms, the Black revolutionaries often received less support than more

⁴⁷Assata Shakur, *Assata: An Autobiography*, (Chicago, Ill: L. Hill, 1987), Print. Pg. 348.

⁴⁸ Phillip S. Foner, *The Black Panthers Speak*, “The Black Panther: The Power of the People 1968”, (J.B. Lippincott Company, NY. 1970), Pg. 23.

passive coalitions of the day. Black leaders, such as Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., truly believed that peaceful tactics were the only way to topple the institutions of modern slavery and accepted the aggression and genocidal acts of his enemies in hope that humanity would intervene and morality would prevail.

Black radicals were far from this epistemology. They respected King and his mission, but validated the teachings of Guevara, Castro, and their iconic predecessor Jose Marti, arguing, “The Black Panther recognizes, as do all Marxist revolutionaries, that the only response to violence of the ruling class is the revolutionary violence of the people...Black people picking up the gun for self-defense is the only basis in America for a revolutionary offensive...As Jose Marti, the Cuban revolutionary said, ‘the best way of telling is doing’”⁴⁹ This was visible acknowledgement of their role as *focos* in the revolutionary campaign and their commitment to an ideological platform of offense over defense.. Huey P. Newton, the heart and soul of the Black Panther *focos*, was a student of revolution moved to action by the brutality he faced in the ghetto of Oakland, California. His ideological position was directly influenced by Guevara and very similar to Che he was blessed with a keen intellect and magnetic demeanor.

Newton respected and recognized the teachings of Guevara, but knew all too well that “Although the relationship between the oppressor and the oppressed is universal, forms of oppression vary. The ideas that mobilized the people of Cuba sprang from their own history and political structures... Our program had to deal with America.”⁵⁰ He invested all of his energy into the *focos* and believed “the vanguard Party must provide

⁴⁹ Foner. Pg. 19-21.

⁵⁰ Huey P. Newton, *Revolutionary Suicide*. (Penguin Publishing, 1973), Pg. 121-122.

leadership for the people. It must teach the correct strategic methods of prolonged resistance...if the activities of the party are respected by the people, the people will follow the example...When they see the advantages in the activities of the guerrilla warfare method, they will quickly follow this example.”⁵¹ Huey was certain that passive tactics would not bring about the change that was necessary for Blacks and other oppressed populations to thrive in. His status among Black radicals reached the epic proportions of revered Cuban revolutionaries in Cuba and he attempted to set in motion the wheels of revolution with the aid of his Panther brothers and sisters from the slums of Black America.

In almost any Panther Party headquarters across the nation the iconic pictures of Ernesto Che Guevara and Huey P. Newton could be found placed side by side as reminder of the solidarity and ideological platform shared between Revolutionary Cuba and The Black radical struggle. Violence was not their identity and not a choice they happily accepted. It was Guevara after all, who famously stated that the “man who fights when it is not time to fight is as much of a fool as the man who does not fight when it is time.” For Cuban revolutionaries and Black American radicals, violence was a means to an end that they viewed as indispensable in their fight for the creation a more humane society. Yet, in an epoch defined by violence, whether as a weapon for oppression or a tool for liberation, the very notion of bloodshed was taboo for many Americans. Living in the wake of Vietnam, police oppression, racism, women’s rights, attacks on the structures of white supremacy, Jim Crow, Civil Rights, the fear of communism, weapons of mass destruction, the dismantling of imperialism in Africa, Asia, and Latin America, and a new

⁵¹ Huey P. Newton, *The Black Panther*, “The Correct Handling of a Revolution,” (May 18, 1968).

found global unity; Americans pressed for change. The type of change, however, was not as coalesced as it was in Revolutionary Cuba and the possibilities of embracing one route to glory was a minimally feasible reality in a divided America. Black revolutionaries and their new language of armed struggle tempted the people to tip the scales of justice in favor of the masses. In favor of themselves. In a terrifyingly uncertain moment in American history the masses open their ears and listened...but not everyone liked what they heard.

1.2: Violent Words and the Vanguard Viewpoint

Violence was not the prime objective of Black radicals seeking to liberate their people from the links of a centuries old infrastructure of oppression. As author Kenneth O'Reilly expressed "political violence, as opposed to violent rhetoric, was never more than a peripheral part of the Black struggle for equality. Political violence, in contrast, was a central part of the FBI response to that struggle."⁵² Violence was conceived as the last resort, but one Black radicals believed was essential if all other forms of resistance proved inadequate for liberty. Stokely Carmichael was often critiqued for his role in spreading the contemporary language of revolution due to his former alliance to the non-violent branch of the Civil Rights Struggle. He was challenged on many occasions by the conservative media and U.S. government officials who could not fathom how someone who belonged to an organization known as the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee could become an outspoken advocate of active armed struggle. When asked on the CBS news network what Black Power meant and how Blacks should go about

⁵² Kenneth O'Reilly, *Racial Matters: The FBI's Secret File on Black America, 1960-1972*, (New York: Free Press, 1989), Print. Pg. 324.

“obtaining that power,” Carmichael straightforwardly responded since non-violence had failed they would have to “obtain it in other ways.” When it was brought to his attention that this was contrary to his former platform within the SNCC organization, he reinforced his beliefs in armed struggle asserting “that ‘non-violence’ is a ‘tactic’ of the SNCC organization, but not necessarily mine... if all legal means were exhausted, then violence would be justified.”⁵³

The very notion of Black revolutionary violence as excessive or unprovoked was nonsensical to the enlightened thinkers leading the revolutionary transformation of language and ideology. How could they be held accountable for adopting a system of violence born out of the terror they had been subjected to in an ultra-violent and racist United States? How could one be at fault for fighting fire with fire and no longer accepting any infringements on their humanity, dignity, and very existence? Carmichael was clear to note that this foundation of violence was not the sole creation of a radicalized oppressed Black American population or a Cuban influence. In his opinion, the United States did “not run on reason. It ran on violence. That is the reality of how things are done here.”⁵⁴ It was considered an ignorant insult to simply label Black radicals as violent while simultaneously ignoring the history of violence against Blacks in the U.S. as well as the ongoing wars of oppression being waged on people of color all around the world. This violence was rational, not illogical. Revolutionary and not reactionary. Justified in the eyes of all righteous men and women. If Cuba’s overthrow of a violent and oppressive regime was validated by its own people, so too would the

⁵³ Stokely Carmichael, (Federal Bureau of Investigation: Freedom of Information Act HQ 100-446080 Section 1, August 21, 1964), Pg. 11.

⁵⁴ Carmichael. Pg. 17.

violence of a diminished Black America with no access to social, political, or economic elevation from contemporary slavery.

Angela Davis believed that “Black liberation would only come about through the complete overthrow of the U.S. capitalist system.”⁵⁵ She found the assertion of Black radical violence as an unprovoked and unproductive course of action to freedom a blatant insult. Far from the projected media image of the “dark-skinned,” “gun totting,” “angry” Black radical, Davis was graced with charm, razor sharp intellect, and a beautifully powerful appearance. When asked in an interview in 1972 why violent revolution was a part of the modern Black revolutionary paradigm, she could only respond with confusion for the complete state of ignorance that existed in the perceptions of many White Americans. For Davis, being aggressively questioned about Black radical violence by uninformed members of the reactionary White American populace, meant that “the person who ask the question has absolutely no idea what Black people have gone through. What Black people have experienced in this country since the time the first Black person was kidnapped from the shores of Africa.” It was a total denial of a historical and present-day violent reality on behalf of the prejudiced and ignorant sectors of American society. It was a denial of her own personal struggle to overcome southern violence at the hands of the KKK and attempted murder by the lynch ropes of the United States justice system. She found the very question itself, “incredible.”⁵⁶

Yet, even with this obvious explanation for why violence was necessary, the U.S. government utilized conservative media to skew the message of the freedom fighters of

⁵⁵ Reitan. Pg. 99.

⁵⁶ Black Power Mixtape. 32:32.

the day and painted them as radical terrorist hell-bent on the destruction of *ALL* of White America. This, however, was simply a façade as prominent Black radical leaders like Newton and Bobby Seale sought to establish connections with every race and oppressed minority group to obtain liberty. Newton scolded the “fascist police” from the confines of his Alameda County jail cell for systematically endeavoring to “repress the White revolutionaries as well as the Blacks for attempting to obtain liberation.”⁵⁷ Outside of the institution of modern slavery sat people of all colors holding “Free Huey” posters in support of his own personal liberation; many of them young, courageous, White Americans.

Controversial Black radical Assata Shakur, who remains in exile in Cuba to this day after her imprisonment and escape from near execution, reminisced about “reading the theory of urban guerrilla warfare as outlined by Che Guevara” and viewing “Black revolution as a part of an overall revolution waged by whites, Hispanics, Orientals, Native Americans, and Blacks.”⁵⁸ The violence promoted by these freedom fighters was for the benefit of all humankind, not just for Blacks. For revolutionaries like Shakur, “A victory of oppressed people anywhere in the world is a victory for Black People” and that logic also ran reverse in contemporary Black radical ideology.⁵⁹ This epistemology was in the vein of Guevara’s international struggle for the freedom of oppressed masses and the Black American experience and incomparable relationship with oppression fortified them to take on the dangerous role of the *focos*. For who knew the bosom of oppression more intimately than the sons and daughters of Black America? Those who had traded

⁵⁷ Huey P. Newton, “Huey P. Newton interview in Jail” (1968), 6:00.

⁵⁸ Assata. Pg. 283.

⁵⁹ Assata. Pg. 380.

the cotton fields for the convict's cage. Violence was only the key, if the lock of tyranny would not relent.

In order for this violence to obtain liberation, it would have to be meticulously structured to produce the intended results, which never included the reciprocal genocide of White America, but instead the destruction of Western European systems of injustice and oppression. The debate over the rural versus urban approach was never truly a debate among leading Black revolutionaries as much as a logical restraint that placed each branch of the movement within the locality they knew best. Following the teachings of Guevara, many Black revolutionaries wanted to begin the struggle from an impenetrable rural base, but the concentration of most of the Black radical forces existed in places like Los Angeles, the Bay Area, New York, Chicago, Detroit, Atlanta, and other urbanized American cities. There was also the obvious massive Black rural population of the South, but led by individuals like Dr. King, their numbers were often viewed as reformist instead of revolutionary. Leaders such as Cleaver and Newton fully embraced the *focos* theory and believed that while the concentration of forces should be in an impregnable rural base, an urban vanguard was to maintain the movement in the city. This was evident by their passion to spread the Panther Party to every nook and cranny of the Black American populace; even to rural locations like Alabama and the Carolina's. Organization was key to the success of the movement by way of establishing both rural and urban bases. This is what Newton viewed as the "prelude to revolution."⁶⁰

⁶⁰ Huey P. Newton, *Prelude to Revolution: Huey Newton in Jail*. (Cougner Productions, 1971), 0:10.

More moderate thinkers within the Black Power Movement, such as co-founder of the Black Panther Party Bobby Seale, believed that caution should be exercised before completely devoting the manpower of the movement to a rural based Cuban styled armed struggle. He expressed his concern for the Cuban influence both before and after the Black radical movement had reached its climax stating “many times you had party members reading the works of Che. We are living in a different situation. You are not living in the rural, you are living in the urban.”⁶¹ Seale respected the solidarity and influence established between the two revolutionary camps, but was hesitant to attempt to recreate a foreign themed resistance in a supremely mechanized and urbanized United States. He was most certainly not afraid to fight and die for the cause of liberation and emphasized the *focos* role of “Black soldiers as revolutionaries to overthrow the ruling class” arguing that Black troops in Vietnam were obligated to return home from fighting the “fascist ruling class” war and “fight here at home.”⁶² Instead of fighting a war of oppression in Vietnam, fight the war of oppression in the U.S. by making it the new Vietnam. While there is an obvious link to Che’s “many Vietnams” doctrine, Seale was simply was not quick to rush to the manual left behind by an influential ally outside of the Black American primarily racial and secondarily classist struggle for equality.

This concept of not adopting a foreign model was a much bigger debate than any rural versus urban discourse ever was. For historian Ahati N. N. Toure, to even utilize the Cuban, or Chinese, or Russian method was viewed as a betrayal of all of the hard work previous generations of Black freedom fighters, abolitionist, and pan-Africanist had

⁶¹ Bobby Seale, *Black Panther Co-Funder Bobby Seale Discusses Huey*, (Hebrew’s Truth and Consequences, 2013), 11:40.

⁶² Bobby Seale, “Black Soldiers as the Revolutionaries to Overthrow the Ruling Class, (*The Black Panther*, September 20, 1969)

strived for. It was not the platform of the Black people, but instead another European contraption much like communism, liberalism, and racial superiority. He argued that “because African revolutionary nationalism has been Europeanized to the extent that its proponents rejected Africa as the base and source of culture, identity, and struggle, African revolutionary nationalist unconsciously cling to a Europeanized identity-at best an African veneer over an essentially European approach.”⁶³ Although many supported this stance against adopting the Cuban model due to Castro and Guevara’s elite origins and White identity; others labeled this outlook as Cultural Nationalism and defined it as Black racism. The Black radicals promoting revolutionary violence, rebuked this analysis and asserted it bred divisionism and a false sense of cultural superiority without advancing the liberation cause in the smallest of ways. For Newton and other like-minded leaders, it did not matter what color of skin his allies in Cuba had, as long as they provided support, recognized the struggle, and perpetuated a useful platform for liberation.

Robert F. Williams also rejected this cultural nationalist perspective boldly stating “Cuba supports the liberation struggles of the world” and that “Che supported the cause.”⁶⁴ His rural upbringing in Monroe, North Carolina contributed to his inclination for a more rural form of resistance and his many years spent on the island of Cuba gave him an insight that many opponents and advocates alike severely lacked. His intimate revolutionary relationship with Che solidified the Guevarist approach in his own model of revolution during his time in Cuba. There was no doubt to either Williams or Guevarist

⁶³ James Conyers and Ahati Toure, *Black American Intellectualism and Culture: A Social Study of African American Social and Political Thought*, “Assata Shakur and the Dilemma of Afrikan Revolutionary Nationalism in the United States,” (Jai Press. Stamford, Connecticut, 1999), Pg. 199.

⁶⁴ *Let it Burn*. 21:00, 29:45.

Cubans that violent armed struggle was the only true platform to Black liberation in the U.S. as this was expressed in 1970 in a Cuban Tricontinental Bulletin, reading, “that any attempts to stop ghetto revolts...were futile since racism had been institutionalized and could only be purged through radical transformation of the entire system, as the Black militant fighters had correctly pointed out.”⁶⁵ Williams advanced an armed struggle paradigm up until his return to the United States after eight years of exile and although his perspectives on race and class in Cuba shifted during his time there, his loyalty and respect for Guevara and the Cuban Revolutionary model remained unwavering. He also never forgot and was profoundly thankful for the “exile given to him by Fidel.”⁶⁶

Cleaver, considered by many to be the most radical of all the contemporary Black revolutionaries, “envisioned and urban-based assault led by a Black revolutionary vanguard.” In direct relation to the *focos* theory he argued that the “party saw itself as the guerilla leaders of the oncoming insurrection, because its members...viewed the guerrilla not only as a warrior in the literal sense but also as a military commander and political theoretician...the ‘perfect man’-who was embodied in the example of Che.”⁶⁷ His platform for urban revolutionary guerrilla war eventually led to disagreement between the Black Panther Party leaders creating a split along the fundamental lines of revolution and reformism.

He believed that Newton’s “toning down of the confrontational language of revolution” in the later years of the Party were steps as a “reformist rather than a

⁶⁵ Reitan. Pg 44.

⁶⁶ *Let it Burn*. 18:30.

⁶⁷ Reitan. Pg. 66.

revolutionary and rejected them in favor of a more militant agenda.”⁶⁸ He sought the immediate material support of Cuban leaders during his brief exile there during the mid-1970s, but came during a period where the influence of Guevara was but a bygone dream. He left with the sentiment that “A lot of people think they can go to revolutionary places (Cuba) in the world to get training,” but in his opinion that was only a propagandized falsehood.⁶⁹ Yet, violence remained a tactic of nearly all the Black radical leaders. It was an integral facet of their ultimate plan for universal liberation, but was promoted in conservative media as their unequivocal total identity.

The people of a divided America if not diametrically opposed to the false images of the Black radical movements projected on their small RCA television screens, were at least skeptical of the intentions of individuals like Newton, Cleaver, Carmichael, and Williams. For numerous Americans, their brand of achieving justice went beyond the limits of the contemporary imagination and they were kept in a constant state of fear of the “dangerous Black revolutionary.” The popular support the Black radicals so desperately needed was severely lacking from both inside and outside of the Black community. With very little access to traditional national media outlets, these shunned groups were often misunderstood and directly sabotaged by conservative media and ongoing government propaganda. This is not to say that the Black radical movement did not have a solid infrastructure of support, for it was quite the contrary and people of all colors and creeds rallied to their battle cry because their message was much more profound than just race. It is simply to relate that their endeavors were far less buttressed

⁶⁸ Perkins. Pg.86.

⁶⁹ *Eldridge Cleaver, Black Panther*. 37:15.

by popular support than those of their Cuban counterparts who were idolized as noble defenders by a greater segment of their own society.

Respected scholar and African American historian Henry Louis Gates Jr. commented on the realities of the Black radical situation during the era explaining “the Panthers never were that big. I mean no one in their right mind would ever believe that the Black Panthers were going to bring down the greatest military force in the history of the world.”⁷⁰ This comment was not meant to belittle the Panthers or their movement by any means, but instead was used as an indicator of just how seriously of a threat the United States government and right wing radicals viewed this vanguard by the Bay; for history has exhibited the lengths the U.S. government went to crush their egalitarian crusade. The Panthers were literally labeled as the “greatest internal threat” to American society by controversial authoritarian and F.B.I. director J. Edgar Hoover.⁷¹

The size of their active forces may have been small-scale, but their rhetoric, passion, intelligence, ability, and leadership were monumental in the eyes of both advocates and adversaries and their commitment to their liberation mission is what motivated their party. It was not so much the fear of the Black revolutionary physical capacity to wage revolution that spurred their enemies, but a matter of their ability to mobilize unpredictable segments of American society through the use of their language of armed resistance. It was their “rhetoric that sought to organize, raise the consciousness of, and ultimately mobilize the masses of people, particularly across social/economic boundaries that was dangerous. This is why Malcolm X and Martin Luther King were

⁷⁰ Ava DuVernay. *The 13th*, (Netflix Original Documentary, 2016), 40:00.

⁷¹ Brian Baggins, *History of the Black Panther Party*, (Marxists Internet Archive (marx.org). 2002, Retrieved on 11/1516), URL: <http://www.marxists.org/history/usa/workers/black-panthers/>

permanently silenced, Fannie Lou hammer was harassed and tortured...and Fred Hampton was killed.”⁷²

Individuals within the Black revolutionary campaign even voiced their subtle reservations of a revolutionary approach in an urbanized United States. How could a small minority act as *focos* in a highly polarized society with supreme counterrevolutionary tactics, cannibalistic intelligence machines such as the FBI and CIA, and weapons of war the world had never imagined? Cleaver while in exile for fear of assassination or imprisonment spoke about the actualities of violent revolution in the U.S. stating, “We see the people’s struggle turning towards armed struggles. We know people have had very disappointing experiences struggling in urban situations.”⁷³ Far from a denunciation of the guerrilla approach, Cleaver alternatively expressed an insightful evaluation of the truth of an urban guerrilla struggle; the possibility of a bloody failure. His willingness to make manifest revolution was not contingent upon his fear of failure or probability of death.

He accepted the certainty that at any moment he could feel the sting of the oppressor’s ammunition tearing into his flesh and ending his life. This had already been attempted multiple times and he had witnessed first-hand the assassinations of his brother’s and sister’s in the struggle; those left laying forever silent in a puddle of blood surrounded by agents of racial tyranny. Individuals like young Bobby Hutton (only 18 years old) who was murdered by Oakland police in 1968 “dying courageously as the first Black panther to make the supreme sacrifice for the people” and Fred Hampton (only 21

⁷² Margo V. Perkins, *Autobiography As Activism: Three Black Women of the Sixties*, (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2000), Print. Pg.86.

⁷³ *Black Panther*. 31:30.

years old) who was assassinated in his sleep without any provocation.⁷⁴ Who knows what his last dream or nightmare was as he lay unsuspecting before the firing squad? Much like the popular images of mob lynchings of the Jim Crow South where celebratory congregations took place around the twisted corpses of sacrificial young Black men, the murder or imprisonment of a Black revolutionary was a spectacle to behold. The Panthers knew death was surely a whisper away, but welcomed their role as both revolutionaries and members of the *focos*.

In Cleaver's opinion "the revolutionary was doomed man" because one had to be willing to pay the utmost sacrifice in order to bring about the ultimate societal shift.⁷⁵ His reasons for self-imposed exile had less to do with fear, but more to do with staying alive in order to move the revolution forward and to not become an early martyr for a cause that needed his council, ability, and potential to make it beyond the cradle. This need for the guerrilla fighter or revolutionary to not die in vain was a principle that Guevara himself upheld as critical to the success of the struggle as he fervently taught that, "the guerrilla fighter is ready to die, not to defend an ideal, but rather to convert it into reality...At the outset, the essential task of the guerilla fighter is to keep himself from being destroyed."⁷⁶ Tragically, the death of key individuals like Malcolm X, Martin Luther King Jr., Fred Hampton, and even Guevara himself in a failed Bolivian operation had shown that a movement could be crippled with a deathblow to a single prominent leader. Killing the messiah figure or revolutionary band was an age old and effective

⁷⁴ *Revolutionary Suicide*. Pg. 126-127.

⁷⁵ *Black Panther*. 16:20.

⁷⁶ *Guerrilla Warfare*. Pg.14-15.

practice for mass control. It was always a burden these leaders of change would have to bear.

For Cleaver, and others like him, it was a matter of both life and strategy. Of not being a wasted warrior. The mission was to create a permanent change and not to send soldiers to a fruitless grave. The *focos* would have to survive if they would be of any use to the silent masses who relied on them to be the embryo of revolution. In his own words, Cleaver's goal was to "go back to fight, to die, and to kill to bring an end to the misery that had engulfed the world" and an untold amount of Americans from all backgrounds shared his beliefs.⁷⁷ The vision that he and his allies promoted was one that involved being willing to trade their own lives for the creation of a new and more utopian society; selflessness at its maximum potential. This vision, however, was merely an illusion without the vanguard to act as the metaphorical trigger on the gun that was popular aspirations. The Black vanguard would have to be that trigger and the target was a decadent, classist, racist, misogynistic, morally corrupt society that deprived those at the bottom of even a view of the blue sky.

For in the words of Mao, "A potential revolutionary situation exist in any country where the government consistently fails in its obligations to ensure at least a decent standard of life for the great majority of its citizens. If there also exist even the nucleus of a revolutionary party able to supply doctrine and organization, only one ingredient is needed: the instrument for violent revolutionary action."⁷⁸ Whether the subjugated masses of the United States realized, cared, or desired it, the Black *focos* between the

⁷⁷ *Black Panther*. 10:10

⁷⁸ *On Guerrilla Warfare*. Pg. 6.

1960s and 1980s was this instrument for action. Under a spell of dedication and conviction they took to the streets armed with a legacy of unimaginable suffering, a newly formulated guerrilla language, the revolutionary Black Power Movement, an unshakable commitment to liberty or death, and a fully loaded shotgun demanding immediate change or revolutionary guerrilla warfare.

CHAPTER 2: SOME SIERRA MAESTRA IN THE MOVEMENT

“Because we have known oppression, because we have suffered more than any other Americans, because we are still fighting for our own liberation from tyranny, we Afro-Americans have the right and duty to raise our voices in protest against the forces of oppression that now seek to crush a free people linked to us by the bonds of blood and common heritage...Afro-Americans don't be fooled...the enemies of the Cubans are our enemies, the Jim Crow bosses of this land where we are still denied our rights”⁷⁹

-Robert F. Williams

The first chapter displayed how the language and ideology of the most militant elements of revolutionary Black America were inspired by the Cuban Revolution and the armed struggle doctrine of its revered leaders. This chapter explores the relationship even further by looking at the formation of the legendary Black Power Movement as a whole. It asserts that the Cuban Revolution was a central influence in the development of 1960s and 1970s Black culture and helped to create a new revolutionary approach absent in Black America for untold generations. The leaders of the New Black Left emerged at a time where a new vehicle for change was direly in need and they embraced the success of the Cuban Revolution as if it were their own. There are two specific reasons why the

⁷⁹ Timothy B. Tyson, *Radio Free Dixie: Robert F. Williams and the Roots of Black Power*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999), Pg. 243 Print.

revolution was a fundamental block in the foundation of the Black Power Movement and the culture of revolutionary Black America.

The first reason is the influence of the Cuban Revolution on the leading Black militant intellectuals of the era and their subsequent adoption and dissemination of Cuban ideas. Pioneers of the New Black Left such as Amiri Baraka and Stokely Carmichael were greatly shaped by the quasi-Afro-revolutionary spirit of Cuba libre. Carmichael was especially noted for his “ability to draw lesson from Malcolm X, Fannie Lou Hammer, Martin Luther King, Ella Baker, Fidel Castro, and Kwame Nkrumah.”⁸⁰ These individuals would be crucial in shaping the ever evolving Carmichael over his transformation from non-violence to armed struggle and later Cultural Nationalism. Fidel Castro was lovingly embraced as an ally and Che Guevara as a symbol. Castro was successful early in the formative period of the Black Power Movement in establishing himself as a comrade and supporter of Black liberation. He encouraged the Black population to resist their racial and class subjugation and beckoned the people to learn from the examples set forth by him and his comrades. Guevara was idolized for his international mission and devotion to the liberation of all oppressed peoples. He reached the iconic status of a martyr in the Black Power Movement much like Malcolm X after his assassination in 1967. The second and last fundamental reason was the failure of the American Marxist Movement and Non-Violent Civil Rights struggle to provide a suitable path to true liberation of Black Americans in comparison to the Cuban Revolution. Black

⁸⁰ Peniel E. Joseph, *Stokely: A Life*, (2014), Pg. 324.

Power firebrand, Eldridge Cleaver, forwardly mocked the American Marxist platform writing, “the practical application of Karl Marx made us very bitter.”⁸¹

Radical Blacks were weary after the 1940s and 1950s flood of watered down American Marxist rhetoric emphasizing class over race prerogatives and illogical non-violence methods that did little than get its practitioners left exposed and targeted in the backwoods of the U.S. South. Following the infamous 16th Street Baptist Church bombing that stole the lives four Black children and a series of racially motivated terrorist attacks in the U.S. South in 1963, “the rhetoric of the freedom movement shifted significantly” as Blacks could no longer subscribe to open attacks on their very existence.⁸² This failure to provide a blueprint to sovereignty was paramount in the shift from non-violence (passive), to self-defense (determinate), and lastly revolution (active). Radical Blacks were intensely driven by the Cuban success and the perceived liberation of the island nation and its majority Afro-Cuban population from U.S. imperialism. They deeply desired the same salvation for themselves. In impact, the Cuban Revolution was to the Black Power Movement what Gandhi was to the Negro Non-Violent Movement. A literal example of how to attain success and a core component of a new model for the advancement of an entire people. Black Power.

Over the decades since the 1960s only a sprinkle of scholars have addressed the relationship between Cuba and Black America, but even fewer have detailed the revolutionary influence of Cuba on Black America. Some, such as Jeff Woods have

⁸¹ Eldridge Cleaver, *Soul on Fire*, (1978), Pg.120. Print.

⁸² Annelieke Dirks, "Between Threat and Reality: the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People and the Emergence of Armed Self-Defense in Clarksdale and Natchez, Mississippi, 1960-1965,"(*Journal for the Study of Radicalism*. 1.1, 2007), Pg. 83. Print.

alluded to the possibility that the Black American and Cuban experience were clearly symbiotic in nature, arguing, “Racial clashes in Mississippi and cold-war confrontation in Cuba erupted almost simultaneously.”⁸³ Much like the quote from Williams at the start of the chapter, this assessment hints at the duality of Black America and Cuba. A relationship grounded in the “bonds of blood and common heritage.” Blacks of the New Revolutionary Left viewed the people of Cuba as an extension of the African slave family fighting against the exact same oppressive forces of U.S. racism and imperialism. Revolutionary scholar, Harold Cruse, carefully noted how “Cuba, which narrowly missed becoming a slave state, is now more advanced than Mississippi.”⁸⁴ He exposed the American South’s past annexationist dream to expand its slave empire to the shores of Cuba and juxtaposed the racial and social stagnation of contemporary Mississippian society in comparison to a newly liberated Afro Cuba.

The objective of this chapter is not to deny any other important contributions to the formation of Black Power and the development of revolutionary Black culture. It is simply to highlight the often overlooked Cuban Revolution and its relationship to the leaders of a new epistemology of Black liberation. It was widely how discussed by Black Power intellectuals how influences such as China, Vietnam, and Africa played important roles in the revolutionary progression of Black America. It was also understood by contemporary radicals that Malcolm X was essential to the origins of Black Power and that the historical Black struggle and heritage of resistance fostered a people who were always imbued with revolutionary energy. As historian Annelieke Dirks expressed,

⁸³ Jeff Woods, *Black Struggle, Red Scare: Segregation and Anti-Communism in the South, 1948-1968*, (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University, 2004), Pg. 153. Print.

⁸⁴ Harold Cruse and William J. Cobb, *The Essential Harold Cruse: A Reader*, (New York: Palgrave, 2002), Pg. 9. Print.

“Black violence of the 1960s was part of a tradition of armed resistance.”⁸⁵ There is no denying that the Black American people were always willing to raise arms for their freedom. Cleaver proudly acknowledged “The spirit has always been there. Only the racist under-estimation of the humanity of black people has blinded America to the potential for revolutionary violence of Afro-America. Nat Turner, Gabriel Prosser and Denmark Vesey, black men who led the most successful slave rebellions in North America, are the spiritual fathers of today’s urban guerillas.”⁸⁶ The passion for revolution was always present in this persecuted people. It had only lay dormant during decades of systematic oppression and commitment to failing alternatives.

It was evident to Black Civil Rights activists that the failure of the passive and Marxist movements by the late 1950s had created a vacuum in Black America after not creating immediate change and failing to protect the people. Radical Blacks could not identify many logical progressive transitions in their program of political uplift besides picking up the gun and uniting against oppression. Prominent civil rights activist turned revolutionary James Foreman openly admitted “We knew that the dynamic of forging revolutionaries in the United States or anywhere is a long and complicated process. People must learn from their own experiences... We knew how great a handicap was the lack of historical models for our particular group.”⁸⁷

The Cuban Revolution appeared both glorious and possible as a suitable alternative to freedom for a new generation of revolutionary Blacks. What is of utmost

⁸⁵ Dirks 74.

⁸⁶ Eldridge Cleaver and Robert Scheer, *Eldridge Cleaver: Post-prison Writings and Speeches*, (New York: Random House, 1969), Pg. 70. Print.

⁸⁷ Herb Boyd, Robert L. Allen, and Tom Feelings, *Brotherman: The Odyssey of Black Men in America*. (New York: One World, 1995), Pg. 755. Print.

importance in the chapter is the reality of how Cuba has largely been disregarded in its role of shaping the New Black Left and how Robert F. Williams has perpetually lived in the shadows of more recognized leaders such as the beloved Malcolm X. Malcolm X himself once expressed how Fidel Castro was “the only white person he ever liked” after a meeting in Harlem during 1960 in which Williams was also present. *Both* acted as representatives of Black America during their talks with Castro and *both* were respected as the two most important radical Black leaders of their time. If this is the case, why has the importance of both Williams and the Cuban influence in the development of the then new revolutionary movement gone mostly unnoticed for nearly five decades?

Peneil Joseph, esteemed Black Power historian, asserted over a decade ago that “Malcolm X and the Nation of Islam, the political activism of Robert F. Williams, and the Cuban revolution helped create a new generation of black nationalists who studied local organizing, the politics of armed self-defense, and global upheavals with equal fervor.”⁸⁸ Yet, many have no clue of the Cuban influence on the foundation of Black Power and how this interaction and exchange of ideas unfolded. Black Power itself has grown into a contemporary cliché. Its meaning lost in commercialized products bearing the angry grin of fist quenching Afro-warriors. All the intellectual acrobatics and ricocheting of ideas that took place between the Black Power icons of the origins era, is now currently muddled and butchered in the chaos of this new digital age where “alternative facts” take the place of actualities. Currently, in 2017, Cuba stands near the end of a revolution daring to let it die. A complicated dance that has lasted since 1959

⁸⁸ Peneil E. Joseph, *Waiting 'til the Midnight Hour: A Narrative History of Black Power in America*, (New York: Henry Holt and Co, 2006), Pg. 38. Print.

comes to an end. It appears the celebration is long over. Almost half a century has passed as the sands of time have buried the knowledge of the origins of revolutionary Black America and its relation to the Cuban Revolution. This chapter will place this foundational Cuban building block in its proper place. It will illuminate the Cuban influence in molding the culture of the revolutionary Black Power Movement and on transforming the individuals who galvanized the hearts and minds of the 1960s and 1970s wildest youth.

Today, Williams' gift to the Black struggle and the Cuban influence that gave him inspiration go largely unnoticed by Black America. He has resurfaced in conversation among certain intellectual circles, but usually as a footnote to a larger discussion. Historian Tim Tyson, greatly responsible for the resurrection of Williams in modern American academic culture, detailed how "Williams not only conferred with Castro privately but attended grand receptions" along with Amiri Baraka "and many others whose names would soon be familiar in the New Left, the Black freedom movement, and the arts."⁸⁹ These radical intellectuals were present in Cuba absorbing the revolution from its infant days in the early 1960s. In their speeches and literature they all reveled in the manner in which they were profoundly moved and affected by the grace of the Cuban people and their revolution.

A movement can only be effectively analyzed if the foundations of its influence are properly understood. The Cuban Revolution is only given proper meaning in light of the earlier liberation movement of Jose Marti over a half-century before Castro's July

⁸⁹ Tyson Pg. 234.

26th Movement. So too, can the Black Power Movement only be properly understood with the acceptance of the integral Cuban element which aided in breathing life into three decades of Black freedom fighters. Cuba was the fountain from which the weary warriors of Black Power and revolution revitalized their spirits and created new revolutionary doctrines that ranged from warfare to racial harmony, socialism, and artistic expression. At its peak, the revolutionary influence led to media and law enforcement speculation that certain factions of the Black Power Movement such as the “Black Panthers were even training in guerrilla warfare.”⁹⁰ Cuban Revolutionary ideology penetrated mainstream Black American culture and fundamentally changed the nature of the struggle and the approach to liberation. It no longer sought to work within the system and called for total revolution whether by political separation, cultural rebirth, or guerrilla military assault. In the 1960s and 1970s radical Black America was drunk with the romance of revolution and the fountain flowed freely from Havana to Harlem.

2.1: The “Guru of Ghetto Guerrillas” and the Disciples of Revolutionary Gospel

Theories of revolution were plentiful during the period between the 1960s and 1970s. Historians, military strategist, and “arm-chair” revolutionaries alike concocted manuals based on the topics of urban warfare, guerilla warfare, rebellion vs. revolution, cultural revolution, and the possibilities of a Black American vanguard ascending. Often these individuals had either zero or non-existent experience in the field of warfare let alone the personal life experience of having a crooked “pig” fire a 45 into your vehicle

⁹⁰ Stanley Nelson, *The Black Panthers: Vanguard of the Revolution*, (Public Broadcasting Service, 2015), 60:00.

before planting false evidence. While some kicked out rushed manuscripts with makeshift components from more recognized works, others engaged in a more personal study by breaking the advancement of Black Americans down to a science based on learned experience, proven tactics, and philosophy. Black culture was on the horizon of a storm of new ideas and new processes to bring forth freedom. Supporters from all sides of the Civil Rights Struggle engaged in sharing ideas and challenging others deemed too dangerous or too safe.

Cuba's guerilla warfare was tantalizing to certain elements of the New Black Left such as the Black Panthers and the followers of Robert F Williams. The perceived cultural revolution that elevated the Afro-Cubans was viewed as the most important aspect to other sectors of the burgeoning Black Power Movement including Harold Cruse and Amiri Baraka. In the early 1960s, Williams was on the cusp of becoming a living legend after his exile to Cuba in 1961, while Carmichael was breaking away from non-violence and becoming more revolutionary with every speech. Amiri Baraka was essentially rewired after his visit to Cuba in 1960 and set off on a journey to become the poet and cultural warrior of the movement. Cruse, the revolutionary scholar, helped fashion together a new Black Nationalist framework from his transcendental experience in early revolutionary Cuba and the Black Panther Party was only a few years from becoming the most recognizable icon of the revolutionary movement in 1966. They combined the theories of Williams, X, Guevara, and Mao to advocate for the collapse of the U.S. capitalist imperialist system.

Change was in the air, and this new generation of radical leaders loomed large in the minds of the masses. Whether the people knew or not, they were being introduced to

something new, something a product of both their own oppression and Cuban freedom, something revolutionary at its core. Black Power was taking form from the smoke and ashes of the bombed churches, burning crosses, and the inferno's of the urban riots. Black was beautiful and revolution heavenly. These new militant intellectual leaders were passionately building the foundation of the Black Power edifice using the resources left behind by a history of bondage and third world revolution. During this time, the Cuban struggle and Black American liberation were united as one in the coalescing ideology of Black Power.

Revolution was palpable and even the figures of the American Negro Non-violent Movement evaluated the ideas of guerrilla warfare or the use of its organizational tactics for other less aggressive purposes. N.A.A.C.P. heroes "Charles Evers and his slain brother Medgar had been early admirers of guerrilla leader Jomo Kenyatta and the freedom struggle" and spoke about how "they even played with the idea of waging a Black guerilla war."⁹¹ By the time portions of the Black community began to turn away from non-violence at the start of the 1960s, Cuba was shining bright as the next underdog nation to gain its freedom through armed struggle. Its immediate African slave relation to the U.S. and the Afro-Cuban devoted support of their own changing society convinced disenfranchised Black Americans that there was potential insights to be gained from the Cuban Revolution. James Forman, who transitioned from SNCC (Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee) to the Black Panther Party explained that "In the absence of revolutionary theories," Black Americans read the works of "Castro and Guevara" among

⁹¹ Dirks Pg. 89.

other third world revolutionaries searching for answers to their specific experience.⁹² It was apparent to radicals living during those rapidly changing times that new approaches were necessary to change the reality of Black America. Some, believed that America as a whole needed to be changed at a more elementary level and advocated for less reformist tactics. The Black Power Movement advocated for revolution.

Around 1960, influential Black supporters of the Cuban Revolution disgusted with the American media portrayal of the island, created an organization called the Fair Play for Cuba Committee (FPCC) in order to experience the fruits of the revolution first-hand and bring a more accurate account back to the Negro communities. This group was composed of an intellectual stew of competing views and herculean egos, but they all agreed on the wonder of the Cuban Revolution and a need for Black liberation. Some of the visitors to Cuba would go on to become the foremost revolutionary leaders of the Black Power Movement in every way from literature to art and warfare. They included “leading Black literary and intellectual figures” James Baldwin, Julian Mayfield, John Oliver Kilens, John Henrik Clarke, Richard Gibson, William Worthy, Harold Cruse, LeRoi Jones (later Amiri Baraka), and the one and only Robert F. Williams.⁹³

William Worthy, a radical Black journalist, was greatly responsible for bringing the news of Cuba back to the U.S. He was considered “the outstanding black foreign correspondent of his generation, attracted to stories taking place in the far reaches of the world.”⁹⁴ Through his interactions with revolutionary Cuba he was able to construct a

⁹² James Forman, *Making of Black Revolutionaries*, (Macmillan Company, New York. 1985), Print, Pg. 450.

⁹³ *Waiting Til the Midnight Hour*. Pg. 29-31.

⁹⁴ *Waiting Til the Midnight Hour*. Pg. 46.

more authentic picture of the movement taking place. He was the original Black revolutionary journalist for his in depth knowledge of third world developments and his position as “one of the few reporters who could boast of personally interviewing leaders...enabling him to become one of the era’s few black journalist to operate comfortably in both the black and the white media.” According to Peniel Joseph, “Considering Worthy’s radical politics and Jim Crow-era press, this was no small feat.” If Cuba ever needed a news element to do them justice in the minds of Black America, it found that man in Worthy. If the Black Power Movement needed a seeker of global truths they also found their candidate. It was Worthy who educated a young Stokely Carmichael about “his demeanor on national television” helping Carmichael “project an aura of serene confidence...as he sparred with reporters about the merits of Black Power.”⁹⁵ In his most important work on Cuba, Worthy compared the social and political growth of Cuba to that of Black America much in the fashion of Harold Cruse.⁹⁶ Their comparisons were truthful and skeptical of the so-called progress made by Blacks over the last decades. Revolutionary Cuba appeared to be vastly superior in the conditions of life for its Black citizens. All one had to do was go and see for themselves.

Black Power grew exponentially over the decade of the 1960s and the media aided in creating an unbridgeable chasm between the new movement and the older non-violent factions. Both ideologies held sway during this era, but besides Dr. King and a few of his followers, it was mainly the Black intellectuals who had a relationship with revolutionary Cuba that created new works of literature that captivated the minds of the

⁹⁵ *Stokely: A Life*. Pg. 116.

⁹⁶ *Waiting Til the Midnight Hour*. Pg. 47-48.

masses. Everyone was seduced by the bold new rhetoric of the Cuban influenced revolutionary paradigm. In 1967, Carmichael published the prolific *Black Power: The Politics of Liberation in America* bringing his theories of resistance and revolution to the masses. “*Black Power* represented the rare best seller that introduced a new academic and literary genre. Along with two other books published in 1967-Martin Luther King’s incisive *Where Do Where We Go from Here: Chaos or Community?* and Harold Cruse’s groundbreaking the *Crisis of the Negro Intellectual-Black Power* established black political thought as a mainstream topic of historical and intellectual interest. All three would become required reading in the Black Studies programs” during the following decades.⁹⁷

Cruse, the cultural revolutionary scholar, was driven to Cuba out of a need to find answers to the secrets of liberation. Similar to James Forman, Cruse upheld that “Black intellectuals do not possess a cultural methodology that is both critically functional and historically grounded in the evolutionary aspects of the culture.”⁹⁸ His experiences in Cuba changed him profoundly leading him to help create the basis for Black Power in 1962 after his visits to the island. His new revolutionary model advocated that “black activist in America were in need of an indigenous political orientation, similar to what was occurring in Cuba yet unique to black American history and culture. He called this philosophy ‘revolutionary nationalism.’”⁹⁹ This ideology would become the basis for multiple movements seeking to create the same political orientation but utilizing different methods. He is credited with being one of the single most important individuals in

⁹⁷ *Stokely: A Life*. Pg. 232.

⁹⁸ *The Essential Harold Cruse: A Reader*. Pg. 228.

⁹⁹ *Waiting Til the Midnight Hour*. Pg 31.

connecting Black American intellectuals to the Cuban Revolutionaries. Cruse proudly boasted in his writings on his role as an early intellectual ambassador of Black America stating, “my group in Cuba had several Negroes writers among them, which already establishes the first beginnings of the cultural exchange program between American Negroes and Cubans.”¹⁰⁰

Cruse was highly respected in academic and intellectual society and held a position as a professor at the prestigious University of Michigan’s Center for Afro American and African Studies. He was also a staunch adversary of the American Marxist approach after his break from the party in the late 50s and was one of the first Americans to openly acknowledge that the Cuban Revolution was not traditionally Marxist. He made this claim years before Castro buckled under U.S. and Soviet pressure declaring himself a Marxist. Cruse asserted that “the Cuban revolution is an un-Marxian revolution and was carried out by non-Marxist. A Marxist revolution is not intended to make individual landowners out of landless peasants as the Cuban reforms have done.”¹⁰¹ He defended Cuba against the communist propaganda early on and analyzed the structural differences in the Cuban and Soviet model. Cruse recognized the essential third world and Afro-Cuban flavor of the revolution and like many of his FPCC allies, he felt like a human being for the first time near the shores of Havana. For Cruse, “Cuba was the new movement’s most precious jewel.”¹⁰² Black Power was slowly evolving beneath the palms of Santiago as its founders basked in the spirit of the revolution.

¹⁰⁰ *The Essential Harold Cruse: A Reader*. Pg. 10.

¹⁰¹ *The Essential Harold Cruse: A Reader*. Pg.19.

¹⁰² *Waiting Til the Midnight Hour*. Pg. 31.

He spent the greater portion of the 1960s and 1970s writing and teaching his ever developing platform of Revolutionary Nationalism eventually settling on a more cultural revolutionary approach in the later 1970s. By 1978, the same year Eldridge Cleaver openly rejected Cuba he was still not impressed with the status of revolutionary ideology in Black America demoting the so-called revolutionaries of the day to simple rebels. He later labeled Williams a rebel and not a revolutionary and rested on the opinion that “the movement at this moment is not a revolutionary movement because it has no present means or program to alter the structural forms of American institutions. It is pure political romanticism, at this point, to call the Negro movement the ‘Negro revolution.’ It is more properly called the ‘Negro rebellion’ against the American status quo.”¹⁰³ He may have given up hopes on a true revolutionary movement later in his life, but this did not stop the youth of the 1970s from embracing variations of revolutionary Black Power that he himself helped create nearly two decades earlier with a Cuban influence. Black Power was in full effect in the 1970s and not even a founding father of the doctrine could control its explosion.

Cruse was not the only Cuban influenced literary genius who added to the foundation of the Black Power Movement. In seminal works like *Home*, Amiri Baraka offered a revolutionary framework for those seeking a cultural rejuvenation while Black Panther Eldridge Cleaver produced epic pieces *Soul on Ice* and *Soul on Fire* to detail his struggles in racist America and evaluate the guerrilla movements of revolutionary third world champions. After visiting Cuba with Williams as a member of the FPCC, Baraka reminisced how he “was never the same again” and that he “was completely turned

¹⁰³ *The Essential Harold Cruse: A Reader*. Pg. 144.

around and began to go on a really aggressive attack as far as politics was concerned.”¹⁰⁴ In essence, Baraka had been enlightened by the spirit of the Cuban Revolution and he brought that spirit back home with him to the third world of America’s inner-city ghettos. Known for his “angry plays, raging poems, and caustic essays,” Baraka was revered as a “hero to an entire generation of young artist and writers who saw their role as political propagandist on behalf of a cultural revolution.”¹⁰⁵ His major transformation to a new cultural revolutionary approach was born of his experiences in Cuba and his radicalization was a direct product of the Cuban Revolution and the culture of racist White America.

Baraka was not new to the intellectual scene when he first burst forth with his new Black Power ideology, but by the “1960s he emerged as one of the few notable black poets of the beat era. By 1965 Jones (Baraka) had become a radical, after taking two trips to Cuba where he met Fidel Castro and left behind a white wife and two daughters in Greenwich Village to pursue a new career as the literary avatar of the Black Nationalist.”¹⁰⁶ According to historian Peneil Joseph, “Jones stopped pretending to be a black revolutionary and became one.” It was “Jones’s poetry and prose during the 1960s that would help transform black culture, antagonize mainstream sensibilities, and turn him into a literary and political phenomenon.”¹⁰⁷ This lightning quick seemingly overnight change was no doubt brought about by his pilgrimage to Cuba. Baraka infused his rhetoric with Cuban elements and shaped Black Power with his enthusiasm for the liberated Afro-Cuban Island. He was not an open advocate of guerrilla warfare like his

¹⁰⁴ Tyson. Pg. 232.

¹⁰⁵ *Stokely: A Life*. Pg. 289.

¹⁰⁶ *Stokely: A Life*. Pg. 249.

¹⁰⁷ *Waiting Til the Midnight Hour*. Pg. 118-119.

Panther counterparts, but instead believed in a cultural revolution led by the vanguards of the intellectual and art facets of Black America. In his opinion, “the struggle is for independence, not separation-or assimilation.”¹⁰⁸ His words, along with the other major figures in the development of the revolutionary Black Power Movement carried the masses for nearly two decades and similar to Cruse, Williams, Cleaver, and Carmichael his views were fundamentally influenced by his Cuban interaction. Black Power and the Cuban Revolution became further melded in the minds of the revolutionary generations who grew up on these radical teachings. It appeared that revolution was surely the next logical step in the struggle no matter the path to be travelled by Black America.

Far from the center of the Harlem Renaissance, where Baraka and Cruse held intellectual sway, the Black Panthers of Oakland, California were thoroughly convinced that revolution was the next and *only* step. Much of their inspiration came from the military success of Cuba combined with the uplift of its once oppressed Black citizens. For them, it was the perfect example of Black liberation by the “fighting vanguard” or the *focos*. The Black Panther Party expanded over its short life from the late 1960s to the early 1980s to encompass most of the urban and many of the rural Black strongholds in America. Their platform was put forth by the three leading members of the organization for liberation; Eldridge Cleaver, Bobby Seale, and Huey P. Newton. Both Cleaver and Newton had a deep affinity for the Cuban Revolution and its leaders since the young days of the party. Their self-defense program, keen intellect, and gun totting persona wielded them extreme influence over the growth of the Black Power Movement during the late 1960s and early 1970s. The Panthers, recognized as “the most widely known black

¹⁰⁸ *Waiting Til the Midnight Hour*. Pg. 120.

militant political organization of the late 1960s,” built their platform for change from the teachings of Robert F. Williams, Malcolm X, Mao Tse-tung, and Che Guevara.¹⁰⁹

Newton, the iconic leader and founder of the Black Panther Party, remarked how Williams “had a great influence on the kind of party we developed.”¹¹⁰ He also recalled how during the formative period before the creation of the Black Panther Party for Self Defense they read Che Guevara’s *Guerilla Warfare* “to see how their experience might help us understand our plight.”¹¹¹ The active resistance doctrine of Williams and the Cuban Revolutionary ideology were at the root of Newton’s approach to Black liberation. Much like his revolutionary mentor Robert F. Williams, Newton evolved from a determinate self-defense platform to an active revolutionary outlook in the span of a few years. This was a typical shift that took place in the universe of the Black intellectual radical.

The young leaders of the era saw revolutionary armed struggle as the only rational progression in the final freedom of Black and third world peoples. Guerrilla warfare was not simply a romantic idea to Huey, it was a cold and bitter reality he and his comrades courageously accepted as the only means to break free from the suffering of racial inequality. By the time the Panthers were formed in 1966, Williams had abandoned his determinate self-defense stance for a total active revolutionary approach preaching his new gospel of armed resistance in exile from Havana. The Panthers heeded his call from beyond the sea. They put together their revolutionary ten point platform and set out to change society only a few strong but dedicated to their commandments. To Newton,

¹⁰⁹ Tyson. Pg. 298.

¹¹⁰ Huey P. Newton, *Revolutionary Suicide*, (Penguin Publishing, New York. 1973), Pg. 117.

¹¹¹ *Revolutionary Suicide*. Pg. 116.

“Mao, Fanon, and Guevara all saw clearly that the people had been stripped of their birthright and their dignity, not by any philosophy or mere words, but at gunpoint...for them, the only way to win freedom was to meet force with force.”¹¹²

Cleaver, who followed in the footsteps of Williams and fled to Cuba in exile during the early 1970s, confessed the “Castro regime believed there could be a U.S. revolution.”¹¹³ He reached the understanding that if he was “going to sustain a revolutionary protest and program, it would have to come from the living; and this meant my going into exile. Cuba was our first choice.” The Panthers were actively working towards developing a method to liberation and searching for support and tactical wisdom from their Cuban comrades. They had already displayed to the entire world their fearless resolve in the face of the firing squads and gas chambers. Ruth Reitan, foremost scholar on the Cuban/Black revolutionary relationship, concluded that “the Black Panther Party platform represented the closest ideological fit of any U.S. militant organization with the Cuban rhetoric.”¹¹⁴ This was easily recognizable during this period due to the vocal support of the Panther Party for the concepts of Che, Castro, and the Cuban Revolution. In return for their revolutionary fervor for the Cuban model, the Cuban “regime promised to train U.S. militants in insurrection, tactics and weaponry.”¹¹⁵ The Panthers truly believed that with Cuban support, revolution was a possibility and Black liberation no longer a dream.

¹¹² *Revolutionary Suicide*. Pg. 117.

¹¹³ Ruth Reitan, *Cuba, the black panther party and the US black movement in the 1960s: Issues of security*, (New Political Science, 21:2, 217-230, 1999), Pg. 217.

¹¹⁴ Reitan. Pg. 221.

¹¹⁵ Reitan. Pg. 218.

In fact with Cuba as an ally, the dream seemed a short flight to reality. Cleaver explained how “the locating of a Black Panther training facility in Cuba had been proposed by Castro’s people in New York...by their representative in the United Nations.” He further elaborated on the Panthers expectations of the Cuban alliance writing, “Our highest hope was to have a center in the Caribbean that would prepare revolutionary cadres to slink back into the United States, many to blend with the urban scene and function as guerrillas on that sidewalk level.”¹¹⁶ The Panthers looked to Cuba before any other ally to help establish the revolutionary Black Power Movement as a force for the purification of Black persecution. Beyond the obvious guerrilla success of the Cuban Revolution, the perceived power it placed in the hands of its Black citizens was fundamental in capturing the loyalty of the Panther Party. It cemented the revolution in the Black American consciousness as intrinsically Black in nature. This is what makes it so foundationally potent on the formation of the revolutionary Black Power Movement of the era. For Cleaver, “the Castro Island seemed ideal in many ways. They were Communist, blacks had a share in the power, and they were close enough to America for a return of guerrilla forces.”¹¹⁷

Stokely Carmichael, was already widely regarded as a young, bold, intellectual whirlwind by the time the Black Panther Party gained the revolutionaries of the Bay Area a national voice. He along with James Forman combined members of their former civil rights organization SNCC with the fledgling Panthers helping to bring the Party further notoriety. Now the Panthers possessed more than firepower, a keen sense of fashion, and

¹¹⁶ *Soul on Fire*. Pg. 107.

¹¹⁷ *Soul on Fire*. Pg. 138.

a vision for the future. They had Cleaver the Black Power literary executioner, Carmichael the seasoned iconoclast of the new Black left, and Newton the revolutionary prince of the unspoken ghetto masses. They had the makings of a movement; of a revolution. They acted as catalyst for the cultural revolution known as Black Power that changed everything from Black style to Black language and liberation ideology. Most importantly, they projected an armed revolutionary paradigm carved from the rhetoric of their heroes Williams, Guevara, and X.

Carmichael and his Panther allies did not look to the Russian model or American Marxist edifice as much as it has been asserted by previous scholars, instead “their speeches frequently alluded to the teachings of Communist icon Che Guevara, Ho Chi Minh, and Mao Tse-tung as possible guides to black equality.”¹¹⁸ The Marxist revolutionary rhetoric of these countries seemed fundamentally different from their European counterparts. It had a more recognizable feel because of their racial and third world components which made them much more adaptable to the specific U.S. situation. The Soviet brand advocated for better diplomatic relations between the world powers and the American Marxist still utilized the Black struggle as nothing more than a tool for their White proletariat objectives. Their ranks had long been infiltrated by the very bourgeois they mobilized against and the Russian government encouraged Castro to only support the non-violent elements of Black America for their own personal gain. The third world nature of the Cuban, African, and Asian armed struggle triumphs gave the Black Panthers a global outlook in their advancement of the liberation movement. Everywhere they looked they saw oppressed people of color gaining their liberty through blood and

¹¹⁸ Woods. Pg. 227.

sacrifice. Earning it one bullet at a time. The cheers of the Cuban people for Black revolutionary heroes such as Juan Almeida Bosque and Victor Dreke had more of an impact on the Black American psyche than any mental image of Lenin or Stalin. It gave them Black pride and a yearning for Black Power.

Constant interaction between the Black Power advocates and the island of Cuba solidified a bond that held fast for decades; spanning from the first encounter of Robert Williams in 1960 to the current asylum of Assata Shakur in present day 2017. Revolutionary Black Power is still young in the entirety of the Black American experience; still reeling from growing pains and a lack of identity. Yet, even with its young life span critical portions of its ideological foundation remain overlooked, unacknowledged, and intentionally concealed. J Edgar Hoover and his F.B.I. counter-revolutionaries did more than just attempt to conceal the truth of the Black Power Movement, they endeavored to erase every trace of its existence from the American collective conscience. They poisoned the character of the movement depicting the members as “terrorist” and “race war instigators” all while ignoring the massive support for the movement from every race in America and place in the world.

The American government was terrified of these Black freedom fighters. They were terrified of the very idea of a Black vanguard and ever more spooked at the thought of a Cuban/ Black America alliance. It appeared the Panthers had managed to gather all of the most “notorious” revolutionary figures of the day under one roof. Cleaver, Carmichael, and Newton were the young champions of revolutionary Black America. Cuba stood by eagerly watching and learning of the intensity of this new generation of leaders as the U.S. government implemented plans to break this rising coalition of

enlightened native sons. Carmichael was in the F.B.I. spotlight for the radical transformation he made over the decade of the 1960s. Like many of the new left revolutionaries, “he traced his first encounter with the Cuban Revolution back to the visit Fidel Castro made to Harlem in 1960 and vocally hailed Che Guevara as a hero.”¹¹⁹ His radical movements around the world very much concerned the U.S. government and his relationship with Cuba appeared too close for conservative America’s comfort.

“According to government officials, Carmichael’s travels through Communist countries, liberated African kingdoms, and left-wing European conferences marked him as both dangerous and unpredictable—a civil rights militant turned Black Power revolutionary who trekked through Cuba’s mountainous terrain with Fidel Castro.”¹²⁰ Carmichael had stood at the foot of the mountain where Castro and his brothers in arms set out to change the fate of a nation. He basked in the luminosity of possibility and felt moved by the bearded “Moses” like figure before him as they traded intellectual revolutionary theory beneath the shadow of the mountains. Carmichael without a doubt felt alive during his time in Cuba. He “was received in Havana as a representative of a people, of a nation, and, in principle, the assembled revolutionaries were recognizing the sovereignty of Afro-Americans.”¹²¹

Stokely was incessantly candid about his Black liberation framework. He embraced essential elements of the Cuban model such as land redistribution and armed struggle, arguing, “We need a revolution so we can live like proud human beings. Our revolution is for land and until we take the land we are going to stay poor. If you’re poor

¹¹⁹ *Stokely: A life*. Pg. 203.

¹²⁰ *Waiting Til the Midnight Hour*. Pg. 204.

¹²¹ *Eldridge Cleaver*. Pg. 66.

and if you're black, you've got no rights. We want redistribution of wealth in this country."¹²² Like the FPCC members before him, Carmichael was exposed first-hand to the positive improvements made in the Afro-Cuban community due to the reforms put into action by Castro and the revolutionary government. He acknowledged that there was something to be gained from the Cuban model and analyzed the separate structures of revolutionary Cuba and Black America looking for the solution to centuries of slavery.

He explained how "Cuba had permitted us to observe many kinds of tactics in its struggles which we can adapt to ours" noting how as the progression of the Black Power Movement moved toward "urban guerrilla warfare" the various inner city riots were a "form of guerrilla warfare inspired by the Guevara policy of creating other Vietnams to bring down capitalism and imperialism."¹²³ Here lies the conceptual basis for the armed struggle branches of the Black Power Movement; the continuous, spontaneous, regionally diverse assault on the American system by way of disarray and visible decay. They believed that creating too much for the establishment to handle and making it look weak would push the broad masses towards changing the mechanics of society. Carmichael played an epic role in developing this Cuban influenced revolutionary Black Power platform during the days of its early evolution. His supporters were numerous and his connections of the highest caliber. The whole world watched as he travelled the globe spreading Black Power and embracing global liberation.

His time in Cuba was monumental in the design of his revolutionary identity. His meeting with Castro was life changing. The inspiration of the Cuban Revolution was

¹²² *Eldridge Cleaver*. Pg. 66.

¹²³ *Woods*. Pg. 250.

ingrained in his personal development from “his days as a ‘little nationalist in Harlem’ inspired by the Cuban Revolution” to the day he and Fidel stood together in a liberated Cuba and “bonded as fellow revolutionaries who cultivated equal interest in political and intellectual pursuits.”¹²⁴ Carmichael fused his devotion for Black liberation with his passion for the Cuban Revolution into a mainstream brand of Black liberation. He called for revolution and Black Nationalism. Once again, a leading Black Power figure who had the sworn allegiance of an entire era of disenchanted youth, returned from the surreal shores of Cuba, took a good look at his own American reality, and added some Sierra Maestra to the movement. Another ingredient of Black Power was tossed into the cauldron as the elixir of exodus began to boil.

Carmichael, along with his Panther allies and the literary intellectuals of the East Coast, transformed the civil rights struggle into a revolutionary approach foundationally modeled after crucial Cuban components. They were the disciples of the New Black Left and the force for change in a stagnant social system. Their words were carved into stone and placed on an altar for two decades of loyal adherents of Black Power to see. Their language was liquid to a sea of ears longing for liberty. Cruse, Baraka, Cleaver, Newton, and Carmichael challenged the American people to rise in revolution to purify the nation of ignorance and prejudice. Some called for blood while others tiptoed the outer boundaries of violence and proposed a cultural and political approach with self-defense as a reservation. They looked to Cuba as the breathing example of a society free of colored goggles, invisible walls, and “Whites only” décor. They were the disciples of a new revolutionary revival and Williams was the “guru of the ghetto guerillas.” Almost

¹²⁴ *Stokely: A Life*. Pg. 205.

nobody had contributed more to the revolutionary cause and human rights struggle of Black America as Robert F. Williams; a legendary being and “bad ass brotha” heralded by some as “America’s Negro Che Guevara.”¹²⁵ In the “cloak and dagger world of the CIA and the FBI, Williams had made just as much an impact as Malcolm, because Williams had hurled a challenge at both the white mother country and the black colony: let the issue be settled by war, let the black colony take up arms against the mother country!” In the words of Eldridge Cleaver, “the black urban guerillas had already accepted Williams’ challenge.”¹²⁶ Revolution was coming and Williams was Black Power’s Commander in Chief.

To the opponents of Black Power, it was the blowing of the ram horn the day the local North Carolina news station WBTV reported how “Williams and his followers had strayed farther away from the mainline of Negro thinking...in line with his policy of self-defense,” Williams had organized “Negro gun clubs.”¹²⁷ This was almost a decade before the highly publicized rise of the fully loaded Panthers during the late 1960s and it was Williams 1962 written testimony *Negros With Guns* that became “the most important intellectual influence on the Black Panther Party” and a “kind of founding document for the Black Power Movement “ as a whole.¹²⁸ Williams was cast headfirst into a political vortex during the late 1950s following the rise in tension between the Black and White citizens of the small and rural Monroe, North Carolina community. A series of racially antagonizing events pushed Williams from an earlier political platform working within

¹²⁵ Sandra Dickson and Robert Churchill, *Negros with Guns: Robert Williams and Black Power*, (PBS Publishing. 2004), 0:18.

¹²⁶ Eldridge Cleaver. Pg. 71.

¹²⁷ Dickson. 0:46.

¹²⁸ Sandra Dickson and Robert Churchill, *Negros with Guns: Robert Williams and Black Power pt.5*, (PBS Publishing. 2004), 0:21.

the established judicial structure for justice to a later refusal to recognize the institutions as trustworthy towards Black defendants. He lost all of his faith in the U.S. legal system after experiencing the ingrained racist corruption that acted as a cancer to Black equality. These inflammatory events included the imprisonment of a Black child for “being kissed on the cheek by a white girl,” the assault of a pregnant Black woman by a drunk White man who was acquitted, and the constant gunfire from the KKK caravans beneath the cloak of the Monroe moon.

After taking the blame from the women of the Black community for failing to protect the people and for naively believing in the U.S. justice system, Williams organized, strategized, and declared that it was time to meet violence with violence. The armed defense of his community from over-confident KKK factions and his fiery denunciation of the crooked institutions of America placed him on the U.S. government and national N.A.A.C.P. radar. They both viewed Williams as a problem and potential threat although he was the popularly selected and respected president of the local Monroe N.A.A.C.P. chapter. Things escalated fast for Williams during the early years of the 1960s leading to the false “kidnapping” incident that prompted his escape from North Carolina death squads (a mixture of law enforcement agents and KKK volunteers). Williams found himself at the center of a scheme to place him in chains or legitimize his assassination after two white citizens recognized as clan members were removed from their cars by concerned Black citizens when they became oddly “lost” in the Black neighborhood and brought to Williams’ home without his prior consent or knowledge.

He sheltered the couple from the threats of the enraged Black community and explained that they could leave anytime they chose. They were not under orders to stay in

the community and never had been under any command of Williams. They should have known better than to enter the Black community to spew their racist sentiments from the suspected safety of their cars during a period of heightened frustration. His famous words “I am not taking you out of here because I did not bring you into here” signified the utter confusion Williams must have felt at the sight of these two terrified supremacist and contributed to the ever-changing story of the “victimized” White woman who called Williams everything from a “kind” soul to a “kidnapper” during the length of the investigation. Williams recognized the strategic move made by the oppressive forces to corner and execute him. He had no choice but to act fast. Escape was the only option available at the moment and his life was on the line.

After a call from a North Carolina law enforcement agent informing him of his immediate murder at the hands of approaching state troopers, he grabbed his family, his gun, and burst out of the back door of his Monroe home. He could have never known he would be in exile for almost an entire decade; Monroe but a memory, and robbed of his former life for daring to resist the strangle of inhumanity. He escaped to Cuba where he lived for nearly six years from 1961 to 1966 and became the *first* to preach the new revolutionary doctrine of armed struggle in America. His “miraculous reappearance in Cuba was the stuff of legends” and “his travails influenced radicals from Monroe, North Carolina, to Accra, Ghana.”¹²⁹ The Cuban people adored him and the socialist third world rolled out the red carpet for this radical commander. His transformation in Cuba reinforced his role as a founding father of Black Power elevating Williams to an iconic symbol of the struggle and foremost leader of the new revolutionary Black left. He

¹²⁹ *Waiting Til the Midnight Hour*. Pg. 49.

penetrated nearly every facet of the ideology of the movement and influenced every organization including the Panthers, Black Liberation Army (BLA) and the Revolutionary Action Movement (RAM) “who advocated for racial and class struggle based on the ideas of Williams and Malcolm X.”¹³⁰

By the time Williams reached Cuba in 1961 for his era of exile, he was no stranger to the island, its people, or its leaders. Williams had already made an impression on the young, popular, former guerrilla leader Fidel Castro during his 1960 visit to Harlem (Malcolm X was also present) and had been personally invited to the island twice during the same year with the FPCC intellectuals. He was the “man largely responsible for Castro's interest in American Negroes” and the focus of the Cuban approach to U.S. imperialist antagonism and Black liberation.¹³¹ There was a mutual respect between Castro and Williams and an admiration for the revolutionary zeal apparent in both men. To Williams, Castro and his warriors had liberated the poor and Black citizens of Cuba from its imperialist heritage and now it was time for Black America to achieve the same triumph.

The Guevarist ideology asserted that guerrilla warfare was the only true way to liberation from imperialism and capitalist exploitation and called for the exportation of Cuban revolutionary ideology and military support to other oppressed people around the world. The goal, as stated earlier by Carmichael, was to create “fifty Vietnams” to overwhelm the capitalist forces of imperialist and racist subjugation. Early on, when Guevara still held a position near Castro’s ear, Black America was viewed no differently

¹³⁰ *Stokely: A Life*. Pg. 302.

¹³¹ Tyson. Pg. 220.

from any other oppressed third world population and revolutionary indoctrination and support was still a legitimate consideration. For “both Castro and Major Manuel Pinera Losado, the head of Cuban intelligence, the recruitment of black Americans” was a “political priority” and Williams was to be “their vehicle.”¹³² Williams did indeed become a vehicle for Cuban revolutionary propaganda as he greatly infused their rhetoric into the Black Power Movement, but always under his own guidance and never under the doctrine of Marxism. He moved a generation to action setting off the initial fireworks of the new revolutionary movement through his radio broadcast *Radio Free Dixie* with the express support of Castro and the Guevarist faction within the regime.

Williams made such an impact on the U.S. government with his revolutionary doctrine and combative stance that he was perceived by various agencies as the leader of the next American Revolution. After his return from exile in 1969, almost a decade abroad, he was still accepted by much of counter-revolutionary and radical America as the immediate general of the Black Revolution. He was openly asked in a 1970 court proceeding by chief counsel J.G. Sourwine if he “had any plans to lead a Black revolution in the United States?” Williams calmly responded “No” after which he was asked again “are you working for a Black revolution in the United States?” Williams once again responded “No” but this was beyond the grasp of believability for the chief counsel and his fellow investigators who immediately followed the question with “Do you seek to overthrow the government of the United States by force and violence!?” Williams, no doubt puzzled by the same question, again responded “No” to which Mr. Sourwine ended this line of questioning by asking one last time, “Are you a member of

¹³² Tyson. Pg. 226.

an organization having that objective?”¹³³ It does not take a genius to guess how Williams responded to the same question for the fourth time, but the repetitive presentation of Sourwine’s inquiry illuminates the severity of the contemporary identity of Williams as a revolutionary chief. He was without a doubt, the most logical leading suspect for a Black revolution and both he and the U.S. government well understood this. The fear of Black revolution was electrifying to government agents and confederate minded torchbearers and Williams’ reputation tantamount. Robert F. was the father of revolutionary Black America and during his exile Cuba was the pulpit he preached his gospel from. His congregation were the American slaves in Dixieland, Yankeeland, and the wild White west. He passionately infused the Cuban experience into the Black Power Movement marking the revolutionary transition from picket signs to “All Power to the People.”

His monumental image in the left wing U.S. and around the world was assuredly a result of his rhetoric, resistance, and his travels to the revolutionary nuclei of the period where he was directly exposed to newly liberated people of color. In his exile, Williams was in an ironically privileged position as an advocate for revolution in Black America because he had earned the respect and loyalty of the enemies of his enemy; Racist White America. He personally engaged with the leaders and citizens of Cuba, China, Vietnam, and North Korea and newly liberated African nations during the formative period of their own victorious movements. His revolutionary passport was “a F.B.I. wanted poster that gave him entrance to a lot of places other people couldn’t go and his reputation kept him

¹³³ Robert F. Willimas, *Testimony of Robert F. Williams: Hearings, Ninety-First Congress, Second Session*, 1971, Internet resource, Pg. 76-77.

regularly travelling the globe.”¹³⁴ His safety in Cuba was without question and he maneuvered in places such as Asia and Africa welcomed and unburdened. In America, he would have certainly been at the bad end of a barrel had he stayed. His journey was both exodus and exile and Williams devoted himself to learning everything he could about liberation and revolution.

The Black Panther’s even acknowledged in 1968 “that Malcolm X is dead and Robert Williams is still alive. Now in China, the guest of the Prophet of the Gun, Mao Tse-tung, Williams is coming into his own because his people have at last risen to his level of consciousness and are ready for his style of leadership.”¹³⁵ He solidified the bonds of third world solidarity and campaigned as a champion of anti-imperialism and racism. Williams expressed how during his “more than eight years of exile,” he had “been near the center of the past decade’s most astounding storms of social conflict and change.”¹³⁶ Cuba impacted Williams at a cellular level exposing him to a status of Black existence he had never known was possible. A life free from racial persecution. He felt a temporary freedom in Havana that he had not encountered during his life in the bitter heart of Willie Lynch; the segregated American South.

The lack of racism compared to the U.S. was perplexing to a man who had grown under a system that labeled everything Black as “inferior,” “ugly” or “evil.” In Cuba, much like in the U.S., Black culture was an integral part of the overall culture, but there was a crucial difference in how it was openly accepted as intrinsically Cuban and participated in by the masses. This is what gave Cuba a distinctive Afro flavor. In the

¹³⁴ Robert F. Williams. *Interview with the Honorable Robert F. Williams*. (RGB Productions) 14:25:40.

¹³⁵ Eldridge Cleaver. Pg 71.

¹³⁶ *Testimony of Robert F. Williams: Hearings, Ninety-First Congress, Second Session*. Pg. 91.

U.S., Black culture was appropriated, watered down, and repackaged as “American” with a white washing process that usually stripped it of its essential Black oils. It was only considered worthy if it was touched by Anglo hands giving it the “civilized” element it direly needed. Cuba appeared a paradise, for a simple Black man from good ol’ Jim Crow Monroe. For Williams “the vast majority of U.S. whites had been mentally poisoned with racism. It was asinine to expect them to recover from their race psychosis without a severe shock treatment.”¹³⁷ The revolution gleamed as a medicine for the mentally poisoned minds of racist America and Williams desperately prayed for a cure. Armed struggle was that panacea for prejudice and the barrel of the gun the necessary “severe shock treatment” for racial superiority.

Williams concluded that Black people “must prepare to wage an urban guerrilla war of self-defense. Self-defense develops to the stage wherein the source of evil and terror must be eliminated.”¹³⁸ The self-defense definition of the war is slightly misleading considering how destroying the “source of evil and terror” would shift the movement from determinate to active making it revolutionary and not simple self-defense, but none the less the verity of his transformation from the earlier Monroe way of thinking to his later Cuban outlook was evident. He evolved as a man and as a liberator. Williams stood tall against the U.S. forces sent to destroy him and managed to return from exile back to his home of Monroe in 1969. He beat the false kidnapping charges and many believed his arrival signified the coming of a new age. An age in which Blacks were no longer banished to the bottom ranks of society. An age where humanity was not something that

¹³⁷ *Testimony of Robert F. Williams: Hearings, Ninety-First Congress, Second Session.* Pg. 154.

¹³⁸ *Testimony of Robert F. Williams: Hearings, Ninety-First Congress, Second Session.* Pg. 156.

one had to demand, but was given and respected by every living person on the planet. He remained active after his return from Cuba, but his radical stance slowly cooled overtime as he focused his energy on more reformist tactics continuing to be a local hero of the resistance scene. Eight years of searching the world for the solution to sovereignty had momentarily sapped him of much of his strength and many so-called guerrillas had moved on from revolution by the time Williams returned.

In the short span of a decade, the man who changed the direction of an entire movement was back in the cradle of oppression, but no revolution came and his name was systematically wiped from the mainstream record of American history. As the years passed him by he continued to fight for the freedom of Black America, but in a different time and against a more knowledgeable foe. His international escapades were the serenade of an entire generation of romantic revolutionaries waiting for their chance to unite and raise arms against the machine, but the fragmented multi-directional development of the Black Power Movement he helped create with a Cuban influence exposed a serious flaw within the culture; a lack of unity on a singular revolutionary approach. It appeared that his calls to action had indeed moved the people, but into separate factions vying for the ideal position as leader of their own specific revolution. The cult of the ego was born beneath the wobbly legs of a few iconic leaders and some lost sight of the purpose of their mission. They became their own greatest heroes who worshiped themselves and whispered into their own ears. The flower of Black Power fell apart and the pedals scattered in the winds of fear and contentment. The relationship between Black America and Cuba was lost but the cultural melding was permanent. No matter what the outcome or direction of the Black Power Movement, it had been

fundamentally altered by this interaction making it forever revolutionary in its aspirations. This was the gift Cuba gave to Black America and the potion their leaders eagerly consumed. The culture of Black American revolution was born from this complex companionship and the names Castro, Che, and Cuba became forever synonymous with the pillars of Black Liberation.

2.2: No More Marx or Marches for the Militants

The second key reason for the Cuban influence on the development of Black Power pertains to the extremely positive image of Castro, Guevara, and the revolution in radical Black America in comparison to the non-violent and American Marxist movements. More than just impacting the leaders who changed a generation, the revolution as a whole was viewed favorably in the radical Black community and Castro and Guevara were honored for their support of Black liberation from Latin America to Africa. Revolution seemed a reality to a generation of youth who longed for a better life. Che became a symbol of armed struggle against oppression and chief ideologist among certain Black radical circles and Castro charismatically courted Black America seducing them to his revolutionary platform. The revolution was popular, purifying, and particularly Black in the assessment of Black leaders and the people paid attention to the progress of Afro-Cuba and their patriots. The effect the revolution had on the mood of its own Black populace further propandized the successful struggle in the minds of the Black masses. Thousands gathered to celebrate the end of imperialism and racisms all across the country cementing the idea of the revolution as liberating in essence. Looking at the multitudes praising their Cuban guerrillas gave Black America hope for their own

similar movement. For Newton, the Cuban people had “become more secure and had more faith in the vanguard group.” His only wish was for the same offering of loyalty from his own people, a possibility, he asserted “I think will happen in this country.”¹³⁹ Non-violence and American Marxism were out. Revolution was in.

Cuba spread the revolutionary program all around the world emphasizing unity amongst the global forces of liberation. Carmichael was even moved to the opinion that Black America “must internationalize our struggle, and if we are going to turn into reality the words of Che to create two, three, or more Vietnams, we must recognize that Detroit and New York are also Vietnam.”¹⁴⁰ The identification of radical Black America as a colonized people fighting against a racist imperialist structure perfectly meshed with the exportation of the revolution that Cuba proposed. Radical Blacks in America found more in common between themselves and Cuba than the “Uncle Toms” of the passive movement and unconcerned bourgeois Marxist. Most importantly, Cuba called for solidarity and the Black revolutionaries accepted this based on a relationship of historical oppression. They treated their Black population equally in the eyes of Black America and revolutionary visitors to the island often experienced enlightenment and massive acceptance. Carmichael during his visit was “portrayed as the iconic figure of America’s Black revolt” and was treated by the Cuban people “like a ‘mythological creature’ temporarily roaming their island.”¹⁴¹ Carmichael, in turn, was so inspired by Cuba and Guevara as a symbol for the ultimate revolutionary, that following Che’s death in 1967, “he offered a moving eulogy” at the African university of Dar es Salaam and another at

¹³⁹ John Evans, *Huey P. Newton: Prelude to Revolution*, (1971), 11:50.

¹⁴⁰ *Waiting Til the Midnight Hour*. Pg. 193.

¹⁴¹ *Stokely: A Life*. Pg. 203.

the Palais de la Mutualite in Paris' Left Bank with his "two fist raised beneath a giant poster of Che Guevara"¹⁴²

In 1969 revolutionary analyst Martin Oppenheimer observed, "With the failure of non-violent movements in American race relations, violence has once again become respectable, even a mark of prestige in left wing circles. Guevara, Fanon, and Debray have become New Left heroes."¹⁴³ The violence perpetuated by Guevara was respected because it seemed righteous to the Black revolutionaries' and not because of a New Left bloodlust. He was the physical incarnation of Robin Hood in the popular imaginations of the global revolutionary uprising. His image beckoned the devotion of a legion of passionate guerrillas who risked it all to obtain control of their destinies. Cruse, who never advocated for Che's guerrilla themed revolutionary approach, did however recognize him as a hero and wrote how "the wish to emulate these Third World movements in the United States is understandable."¹⁴⁴ He heralded the societal victories of the revolution, writing, "The revolutionary government of Cuba has declared war on human degradation of all kinds. There are no beggars to be seen in Havana today and the homes of some of Batista's henchmen have been handed over to young girls 10 to 14 years old whose mothers were prostitutes and deserted them."¹⁴⁵

Forman, who also embraced Guevara's ideology, explained how Che's guerrilla warfare theories ironically contributed to the organization of his early SNCC non-violent campaigns. He detailed this in his 1985 book *The Making of Black Revolutionaries*,

¹⁴² *Stokely: A Life*. Pg. 224-227.

¹⁴³ Martin Oppenheimer, *The Urban Guerrilla*, (Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1969), Print. Pg. 62.

¹⁴⁴ Cruse. Pg. 105.

¹⁴⁵ Cruse. Pg. 13.

writing, “In the fall of 1962 I had read Che Guevara’s book on Guerilla Warfare and drew some lessons from it for our work. I saw SNCC establishing bases throughout the South, bases that would grow into larger units. As we consolidated our power in the rural areas and the smaller cities, the time would come when we would work in larger cities.”¹⁴⁶ Even to the rising pupils of the non-violent coalitions, Che was honored and his teachings held in high esteem. His words were considered valuable and his sacrifice priceless to Black American revolutionaries.

Left wing warriors suffering in the slums and shanty towns throughout the world accepted Guevara as a heroic individual. His sacrifice for his beliefs touched every sector of the Black Power Movement from the militant armed struggle advocates to the calculated radical scholars. Newton, while on trial and facing the death penalty, fondly looked back at Guevara’s bravery and remarked how “Che was very aware of the fact that the villagers might give him up at any moment simply because of the fear and the strength of the Bolivian Regular Army with the help of the C.I.A.”¹⁴⁷ For Newton, this was the ultimate example of courage and the foundation for his landmark literary achievement *Revolutionary Suicide*. It was the fundamental acknowledgment by any true revolutionary that to fight in the most epic of struggles for human freedom entails the possibility of the greatest sacrifice. Life. Guevara time and time again personified his ideas in action and put his life on the line from Africa to Latin America. By the time of his death and disappearance in a Bolivian jungle in 1967, he was already a legitimate icon

¹⁴⁶ Forman. Pg. 338.

¹⁴⁷ *Prelude to Revolution*. 12:20.

in the revolutionary Black Power Movement and a martyr next to Malcolm, Martin, and others who perished for the people.

Guevara's death did not deter the passionate revolutionaries of Black America who were committed to change. It acted as a catalyst in their struggle for justice and increased their intensity proving once again the tyranny of the power structure. With Che now immortalized in the Black Power hall of fame, Castro stood as a living example of the strength of the Cuban Revolution and the character of its people. He took up the banner of liberty in his speeches and denunciations of U.S. prejudice lyrically uplifting the Blacks in America and chanting their battle cry. Historian and activist Clayborne Carson, admitted that "All of us during that period kind of felt a certain amount of the romance of revolution...you look around the world during that time and you saw in Castro's Cuba that a small group of revolutionaries had overcome a government, so it seemed that maybe it was possible."¹⁴⁸ Fidel and *his* Cuba, were the manifestation of freedom in the eyes of third world Black Americans. If their Cuban cousins could do it, so could they. Thus, the revolutionary torch was passed from Cuba to Black America and Black Power forever fertilized with the soil of the Sierra Maestra.

The Cuban revolutionary enlightenment taking place in radical Black America obviously did not go unnoticed by conservative White America. Devotedly racist Governor of Alabama, George Wallace, claimed during a speech in 1966 for the Fraternal Order of Police that "the riots in American cities had nothing to do with poverty or racism. They were instead direct results of plans developed by a 'conference of world'

¹⁴⁸ *Negroes with Guns* (FILM). 9:40.

guerrilla warfare chieftains in Havana, Cuba.”¹⁴⁹ While the assertion that the riots had nothing to do with “poverty or racism” was blatantly false and ignorant, his claim of Cuban subversion in Black America would not have been farfetched back then. Leading Black Power figures like Carmichael, Newton, and Cleaver had all openly called for a Vietnam in the Ghetto, but never as a result of some secret meeting considering most of the Panthers did not reach Cuba until the 1970s. At that time, the relationship was mostly ideological and Williams was the only leading figure present on the island. Still, Carmichael’s “talk of guerrilla warfare sent American intelligence figures scrambling, including the exasperated CIA Director Richard Helms, who fired off a secret memo to Johnson that promised to shed light on emerging connections between Latin American insurgencies masterminded by Castro and those imagined by Carmichael.”¹⁵⁰ The connection was subtly apparent, but shrouded in mystery. Castro’s legend continued to skyrocket and his influence expanded beyond the boundaries of Black Power.

Congressman Adam Clayton Powell challenged expectations by flying “to Cuba two weeks after Bautista fled and stood alongside Castro at a huge rally in Havana. Powell praised the revolution for putting a decisive end to Cuban segregation.”¹⁵¹ A healthy stream of Black American visitors brought the revolution back from Cuba to the people. Everyone from politicians, to poets and professors felt the radiance of the revolution and the masses in Black America blossomed in the light of that radiance. Black became beautiful, powerful, and revolutionary. Williams relished in that glow and moved millions to see the beauty of Cuba and its revolution. He “described Castro as

¹⁴⁹ Woods. Pg. 233.

¹⁵⁰ *Stokely: A Life*. Pg. 208.

¹⁵¹ Tyson. Pg. 221.

‘colored’ and portrayed the revolution favorably, helping to insert the Cuban revolution into African American political dialogue.”¹⁵² It was apparent to both conservative Whites such as Wallace and revolutionary Blacks like Williams that the Cuban and Black American connection was inseparable. Cuba and its colorful collection of characters were core components of Black Power and its development. The cultural exchange was in motion and thriving.

It was not by chance that Castro’s Cuba entered the imaginations of radical Black America pushing them towards a more revolutionary stance. As previously stated it was the circumstance of a historical relationship of blood and oppression, but it was also a deliberate motivation of Fidel himself. He endeavored to romance the hearts and minds of the children of U.S. slaves with his intentional visit to Harlem, his asylum of freedom fighters, and his sonnets of solidarity. He worked out his approach to Black America and used Harlem as his springboard for their loyalty. “Castro made race relations the focus of his visit; he walked arm and arm through Harlem with Commandante Juan Almeida, the dark skinned Afro-Cuban military leader who was flown in by Castro from Cuba to remind Harlem of his personal commitment to racial equality.”¹⁵³ This was a power move on behalf of Fidel to charm the overly ignored and often forgotten populace of Black America. The presence of the decorated General Almieda was prolific in Black Harlem. “Charismatic, dark-skinned, and good humored, Almieda seemed to represent living proof of the revolution’s ambitious agenda.”¹⁵⁴

¹⁵² Tyson. Pg 221.

¹⁵³ *Waiting Til the Midnight Hour*. Pg. 37.

¹⁵⁴ *Waiting Til the Midnight Hour*. Pg. 32.

Castro was very careful how he addressed the issue of color in both Cuba and America, but always outspoken about the latter. One could say that early on Castro had an affinity towards Black America and the leaders that represented the people. It was no accident that he campaigned for their support of Cuba while relations deteriorated with the U.S. government. His reason for unity appeared to some as the inherent nature of a liberator yearning to dream for an oppressed people, but to others as a sinister tactical ploy to recruit agents in America, disrupt society, and establish well-hidden eyes and ears. This was after all, the wildly provocative Cold war era in which obsessed minds concocted conspiracies at every shadow. There was no doubting, however, the evident influence of Cuba on Williams in the early years of the 1960s and the evolution of Black Power in America for two decades.

The Cuban Revolution was most certainly a part of the overall conceptualization of Black freedom to Blacks in America. It was not separate from their own freedom for many living in the same system of racial superiority that overburdened their existence. Their liberation meant a little piece of our own, even if it was off our shores by ninety miles. “Cuba, and desegregation became quite common in a wide range of printed media” during the 1960s.¹⁵⁵ Black America and Cuba coalesced in the national media during a time when freedom was the topic of the day. For Carmichael, after his pilgrimage to the Sierra Maestra, “The international struggle became tangible, a human reality, names, faces, stories, no longer an abstraction. And our struggle in Mississippi or Harlem was part and parcel of this great international and historic motion. It was both humbling and

¹⁵⁵ Woods. Pg. 155.

inspiring. I felt recommitted and energized.”¹⁵⁶ Black America and Cuba were a part of the same war; but fought on different battlefields. An international game of chess being played by revolutionaries and reactionaries with higher stakes than ever before. Empires toppled as underdogs ascended and Afro-Americans still picketed for peace and a piece of the pie. Cuba and Black America were eternally bound together in the popular perception of the revolutionary Black Power Movement; emphasizing self-love, intellectual enlightenment, and a thirst for radical change by armed force. The revolution engaged Blacks to look at their lot in life and ask was it acceptable. Was it simply enough to live, if ever to live oppressed? For many radical followers of Malcolm X and Robert F. Williams the answer to that question was a resounding “NO!”

According to historian James Woods, “While the civil rights movement alarmed segregationist by engaging in mass direct action on a regional scale,” some Communist Party members and Black revolutionaries “looked to Cuba as the new leader of the...plan to bring an independent Black Belt to the South.”¹⁵⁷ Revolution replaced reform and “We Shall Overcome” was sounded out by the shouts of “Black Power!” Williams, who stood beneath the shadow of the Sierra Maestra, emotionally exclaimed “For what can one say of a glory that mankind has never before approximated?...I simply say that I have seen the face of Cuba...in the beauty and happiness of her sons and daughters who made a pilgrimage to hear the modern version of the sermon on the Mount.” He championed the Cuban Revolution in aspiration of his own people’s liberty calling it “one of the greatest democracies in the world today,” and “the great social miracle of the twentieth

¹⁵⁶ *Stokely: A Life*. Pg. 206.

¹⁵⁷ Woods. Pg. 136.

century.”¹⁵⁸ He even confided in fellow Cuban supporter John Hendrik Clarke, “that no experience in his lifetime had impressed him more profoundly than the Cuban Revolution.”¹⁵⁹ For Williams and others like him, freedom never looked so vibrant, and surely never felt so close.

The symbol of the Cuban Revolution and the men from the Sierra Maestra Mountains transformed the civil rights struggle from the earlier non-violent and self-defense frameworks to a new revolutionary epoch. It was tantalizing to the senses to imagine such liberty for Blacks and surreal to see it firsthand near the shores of Havana. It created a spiritual bond between Blacks and concepts of revolution demarcating the origins of Afro American urban and rural armed struggle ideology and overall Black Power. For Eldridge Cleaver, “the mountains were the people’s fortress, and the American people were blessed in that regard... What Castro had done in the Sierra Maestra Mountains as a step in his overthrow of Batista, we felt we should try. We would trigger a general uprising and go on to save America from the fascist dictatorship looming on the horizon.”¹⁶⁰ Visions of hit and run guerrilla ambushes and urban underground networks activated the revolutionary energy that had lay dormant during the years of loyalty to non-violent tactics and Communist infatuation. Cuba changed the immediacy of freedom for Blacks in America. It made it no longer possible to wait patiently year by year and decade by decade for sluggish reforms to finally show a pulse. It made it unacceptable to stand by and watch ones children suffer beneath the boom of the billy-club and hungry howl of the lynch mob. Cuba proved to Black America that the

¹⁵⁸ Tyson. Pg. 231.

¹⁵⁹ Tyson. Pg. 227.

¹⁶⁰ *Soul on Fire*. Pg. 19.

only thing that kept them oppressed was their fear, disunity, and lack of firepower. If they were willing to resist tyranny and create allies among their fellow oppressed Americans, then immediate and radical change was surely a possibility.

Black Power developed along revolutionary lines because something had been missing in the march for equality. There was a sense that non-violence was out of touch with reality in regard to the death and terror that was still inflicted upon the meekest of individuals. Afro American social hubs buzzed with the news of the era and the ideological debates over Black liberation. In taverns from Harlem to Oakland “regulars discussed the latest happenings in Cuba, prospects for armed self-defense, the incompetence of white liberals, the naiveté of Martin Luther King Jr., and the frightening power of Malcolm X and the Black Muslims.”¹⁶¹ Violence and revolution became the rationale of the New Black Left. They pondered the illogical facets of non-violence adding to their certainty that it was a fundamentally broken system. How could one morally move their enemy to feel compassion when the enemy was sick with a mental disease called racism? The very nature of racism is predatory. It asserts an illogical superiority which in turn justifies the right to destroy. It was like asking a lion not to eat you if you stumbled into a pride. How could an individual indoctrinated with hate even look beyond their own understandings to feel sympathy for someone else of another race? It would be commanding the blindfolded to see.

This was the basic argument presented by the followers of the Black Power Movement. It was the question of how being killed for free could save a people from the

¹⁶¹ *Waiting Til the Midnight Hour*. Pg. 42.

feeding bowl of avaricious American elites and scorned sons and daughters of the Confederacy. It was not to argue that the Non-Violent Movement did not make progress and create change, for it certainly did both. It was to note that this progress and change came on a turtles back and even in passivity lives were still being taken. If they were going to die, then they were going to die like men and women fighting in the revolution of America. For Cleaver, the 1965 Watts Riot, was the “first fruit of Malcolm’s prophetic call for armed self-defense. It “signaled the dramatic transformation of the black movement from the philosophical perspectives of nonviolence, to meeting violence with violence.”¹⁶² While that “dramatic transition” had already begun to occur in the late 50s under the leadership of Williams, Cleaver still depicted the contemporary shift from non-violence to popular support for armed struggle only half way through the decade of the 1960s.

It was clear to all spectators that Black Power was emerging as the new movement to lead the people. The murder of Malcolm X, Martin Luther King, Medgar Evers, Emmett Till, Fred Hampton, Bobby Hutton, and all of the other Blacks lynched around the country since the end of the Civil War had fundamentally altered major sections of Black America. The pain was no longer numb, it was excruciating. Everyone who tried to save them from their suffering; was erased. Non-Violence had proved one thing. It is never non-violent if the opposition is prepared to kill and the oppressed are prepared to die. It is only a massacre. For who could explain it better than James Forman himself, who abandoned non-violence for revolution? He recalled how he made that transition under the most tragic of circumstances, writing, “Students from the Tuskegee

¹⁶² *Soul on Fire*. Pg. 115.

College had begun massive protest in Montgomery and asked for our help. It was there that I met Sammy Younge, Jr., a Tuskegee student who joined SNCC and who, in January of 1966 was murdered by a white gasoline station attendant when he tried to use the “white” toilet...The killer was freed by an all-white jury. For myself, Sammy’s murder marked the final end of any patience with nonviolence-even as a tactic.”¹⁶³ To many exhausted of this narrative, this was also their “final end of any patience” and the beginning of their revolutionary fervor. Dr. King’s assassination was an unequivocal blow to the non-violent movement for the youth of the 60s and 70s. The man who had devoted his life to the peaceful uplift of his people, was *violently* gunned down at the podium for the whole world to witness. He was publically lynched.

Following the death of Dr. King in 1968, Mao Tse-tung eloquently acknowledged the death of the nonviolent movement and the growing power of the Black revolutionary forces, stating, “Some days ago, Martin Luther King, the Afro-American clergyman, was suddenly assassinated by the U.S. imperialists. Martin Luther King was an exponent of nonviolence. Nevertheless, the U.S. imperialists did not on that account show any tolerance toward him, but used counter-revolutionary violence and killed him in cold blood. This has taught the broad masses of the Black people in the United States a profound lesson. It has touched off a new storm in their struggle against violent repression sweeping well over a hundred cities in the United States, a storm such as has never taken place before in the history of that country. It shows that an extremely powerful revolutionary force is latent in the more than twenty million Black

¹⁶³ *Brotherman*. Pg. 749-52.

Americans.”¹⁶⁴ It was evident that the revolutionary change in Black American was on the verge of separating the people into separate entities searching for different societies. Non-violence, for the time being, was buried with Dr. King and his legacy as the day of the gun was at hand.

The collapse of the Non-Violent Movement happened on a grand scale after the death of Dr. King. Up until that point, it had run neck in neck with the burgeoning Black Power Movement of the 1960s, both holding massive sway in the Black communities. But now, with the leader of the movement dead, people looked toward the revolutionaries to progress the masses towards liberty. Only a year after King’s death, even the intellectuals had begun to notice the deterioration of the non-violent campaign. Oppenheimer remarked in 1969 how the “desperation born of the apparent failure of both conventional politics and non-violence direct action to secure significant changes in the condition of the American Negro” have resulted in “many black leaders being forced to the conclude that, for the time being at least, the civil rights movement is dead and Black Power...is the only viable strategy.”¹⁶⁵

Non-violent movements collapsed under the revolutionary zest of the awakened youth who rushed to Black Power as “the organizational structure of the NAACP caused conflicts over all kinds of issues; armed self-defense among them.”¹⁶⁶ Cruse further detailed the demise of the loyalty to non-violence and the increasingly capitalist NAACP, remembering, “the newspapers attacks on Joe Louis’ business dealings with Cuba was a clear case of discrimination against the Negro in trade and commerce, but the NAACP

¹⁶⁴ Mao Tse-tung, “A New Storm against Imperialism,” (*Peking Review*, April 19, 1968), Pgs. 5-6.

¹⁶⁵ Oppenheimer. Pg. 111.

¹⁶⁶ Dirks. Pg. 74.

wouldn't touch it with a legal brief a mile away...Henry Moon, Public relations director of the NAACP, had turned down an invitation by the Cuban government to visit and see what a real revolutionary middleclass looks like. Moon refused which explains a lot about the NAACP which might loom as some sort of revolutionary bugbear...but which is in reality as safely conservative as the typical American bourgeois."¹⁶⁷

The civil rights era that began after WWII had finally halted after the murder of their saint two decades later in 1968 and the watering down of its most cherished institution the NAACP. Their martyrs remained revered in the Black Power Movement, but pitied by some who saw their sacrifice as all for naught. The Non-Violence Movement took a backseat to the revolutionary Black Power Movement for much of the 1960s and most of the 1970s, but it was not the only separation that took place in Black America during their period. American Marxism had suddenly grown sour in the mouths and minds of the new era of Black revolutionaries and the old style Communism of the 30s, 40s, and 50s was ridiculed.

Trust for the Communist Party of the United States had been crumbling for years by the time revolutionary Black Power emerged. The most talented Black literary icons of the 1960s such as Ralph Ellison and Harold Cruse openly mocked the American Marxists' for their manipulation of the race issue for their own class based agenda. Ellison exposed the parasitic nature of the party in his thought provoking novel *Invisible Man* telling the story of a wayward, southern born, educated Black man used as a Communist puppet in Renaissance Harlem. For Cruse, "The Third World, ignored by

¹⁶⁷ Cruse. Pg. 10.

Marx and the contemporary American Left, could be the vanguard for the modern age of revolution.”¹⁶⁸ He believed that revolutionary Cuba and its supportive third world Afro Cubans were a far better model for liberty than anything concocted by the CPUSA, writing, “To smear the Cuban revolution with the charge of ‘communism’ is to do the Western Hemisphere a great disservice.”¹⁶⁹ Cruse went further by charging them with distorting the platform of Williams and encouraging him to be something he was not. He wrote that “the America Marxist of certain tendencies... are incurable romantics.” They “tried to make a revolutionary out of Robert Williams who was not a revolutionary but a rebel.”¹⁷⁰ Williams was definitely a revolutionary individual and did much on his own to cultivate this identity, but the CPUSA definitely did much to attach themselves to his rising notoriety and clung to his movement.

However; Cruse, had a much earlier disdain for the party that preceded Williams by three decades. He claimed that “The Communist of the 1920’s looked with disfavor upon A. Phillip Randolph’s organizing of the Pullman porters into a *separate all-black union*.”¹⁷¹ Once again, it all boiled down to the perceived racist structure of the CPUSA and their class over race prerogatives. Renowned historian, Eugene D. Genovese, highlighted Cruse’s position in his formative study *In Red and Black*, arguing, “He comes down with special severity on Marxists, whose alleged intellectual hegemony in Harlem during the 1930s and 1940s he deplors, and charges them with being imprisoned by and ideology that waives culture as mere ‘super structure’ in favor of a primary concern with

¹⁶⁸ *Waiting Til the Midnight Hour*. Pg. 31.

¹⁶⁹ Cruse. Pg. 19.

¹⁷⁰ Cruse. Pg. 144.

¹⁷¹ Cruse. Pg. 97.

‘economic’ base.”¹⁷² For Cruse, it was ridiculous to wait passively by for an economic revolution to occur after the enlightenment of the white masses while his people were systemically being destroyed for cultural reasons. It was a war against Black Americans, not working class Whites.

Williams himself, who always vocally combated the Marxist platform, acknowledged that some “Cuban Communist and the increasingly influential CPUSA expatriates ‘are only interested in Martin Luther King and the cracker workers in the USA.’” They would rather the Blacks stay non-violent and follow the lead of the the white proletariat and if violence was to be used it was best for the party to capitalize off it by somehow making sure their influence was suspected. He expressed that Cuba was never intended to be a Communist nation, adding, “I was in Havana when the Cuban Revolution was declared Socialist, and when it was declared Marxist-Leninist. When I went there it was not supposed to be a Marxist-Leninist government.”¹⁷³ He believed the U.S. embargo forced Fidel into the Communist embrace and credited the CPUSA and CPSU (Soviet Union) for making his exile in Cuba difficult because of his Black liberation ideology. Williams linked the friction with the Marxists’ in both the U.S. and Cuba to the fact that they believed “I should reflect this political line and I wasn’t going to do it...I took the position that this was largely a race struggle, which meant that the dominant class would be the whites who had the power, and that there would be no such

¹⁷² Eugene D. Genovese, *In Red and Black: Marxian Explorations in Southern and Afro-American History*, (New York: Pantheon Books, 1971), Print. Pg. 246.

¹⁷³ Williams’ testimony. Pg. 91.

thing as unity between the black workers and the white workers to overthrow the captive system, because it had to do with race.”¹⁷⁴

Cleaver, who also experienced a negative reception from traditional Marxist both in America and Cuba, recalled how “These people of Marxist persuasion and communist doctrine could never answer my deliverance on human rights in America. What answer could they give me?”¹⁷⁵ For him, the platform was inherently color biased and “the poison of racism... was the communist style.”¹⁷⁶ The ideology of traditional American Marxist and Black Power revolutionaries at times appeared totally separate in nature. The Black Power advocates were endeavoring to create the revolutionary spark utilizing the *focos* method of Guevara, but for “Marxists, conditions cannot be manufactured by tine elites. They must be developed so that revolutionary movements are responses to them.”¹⁷⁷ This was the second essential difference in the Black Power and American Marxist paradigms. Class over race and nature over agency. It seemed nearly impossible for these two camps to function as one, but at times they managed in the most moderate of terms.

Blacks who did openly align with the CPUSA found it difficult to reconcile their status in the party with their Black Nationalist brothers and sisters. Angela Davis, the most notable of the Black Power American Marxist, a hybrid of sorts, often clashed ideologically with her Black power allies. “Her own Marxist beliefs placed her at odds with black nationalist who openly dismissed socialism as unsuitable for African

¹⁷⁴ Williams’ testimony. Pg. 137.

¹⁷⁵ *Soul on Fire*. Pg. 110.

¹⁷⁶ *Soul on Fire*. Pg. 122.

¹⁷⁷ Oppenheimer. Pg. 53.

Americans.”¹⁷⁸ Davis did much to advance the cause of both movements, but experienced conflict herself within the CPUSA and later broke away. It seemed, for the time, that revolutionary Black Power was the path to liberation over non-violence and communism. Blacks could not allow the Marxian process to take its sweet time. It was up to them to secure their freedom; it was a matter of agency over destiny. They loaded their guns, studied their ideology, and allied with the multitudes of the oppressed.

Dr. King was no more and inhumanity intolerable. Cuba gleamed in the distance, forever a reminder of the possibilities of utopia. Freedom's song could be heard across the sea by the Afro Cubans and revolutionaries who looked on as the slaves of America fought and died but remained imprisoned. Williams, Baraka, Cruse, Carmichael, Cleaver, and Newton challenged the children of Babylon, to either rise and fight or lay down and die. Guevara called from beneath the grave for redemption for his sacrifice as Castro opened his ports to the refugees of Black America. Black Power was alive in the blood of the long burdened and revolution an ancestral duty. One could have only hoped, that this would be the final movement for freedom. That this was the last step to breaking a chain almost five centuries long. Black Power was born of oppression, and violence of violence. As the world stood by, it seemed that the Black vanguard would finally triumph. But that narrative has long since unfolded and the storybook ending still far in the distance.

¹⁷⁸ *Stokely: A Life*. Pg. 198.

CONCLUSION

This destruction of the revolutionary Black Power Movement did not occur in a vacuum and was but a response to the conditions created by the federal government and the infighting within the movement during the decades of the 1960s, 70s, and 80s. It was not as if Black America as a monolith decided to trade in their black fist for gang signs. It was mostly by design. It was an open assault on revolutionary elements of Black America combined with a new government program committed to the destruction of the credibility of the Black struggle. Famous Black Panther lawyer, Charles Garry, estimated in 1969 that around 28 Panther revolutionaries had been murdered in the span of only two years by law enforcement agencies across the country. 28 Panthers in only two years. While his numbers have been fiercely debated and the estimate remains unclear, it was verified that at least ten of these incidents did occur during this period of time.¹⁷⁹ Garry called the assault on the Panther's a "genocide" and illuminated the intentional assassination of its members at the hands of the various government agencies who conspired against them. He noted how any Black person that supported the Panthers in any way were a target of law enforcement and hate groups. This essentially created a fear in much of Black America that to be associated with any revolutionary organization was an act of suicide.

¹⁷⁹ Edward Epstein, "The Black Panthers and the Police: A Pattern of Genocide?" (*The New Yorker*, Feb 13, 1971)

It pushed the masses away from this platform and like Robert F. Williams explained it instilled fear in the generations that came after the movement.

The criminalization of Black America skyrocketed after the early revolutionary decade of the 1960s. The media contributed to a false image of Blacks as the *only* criminal elements of an otherwise safe and White society while totally ignoring the economic, social, and political conditions they were systematically forced to exist in. While people of color make up about 30 percent of the United States' population, they account for 60 percent of those imprisoned. The prison population grew by 700 percent from 1970 to 2005, a rate that is outpacing crime and population rates. The incarceration rates disproportionately impact men of color: 1 in every 15 African American men and 1 in every 36 Hispanic men are incarcerated in comparison to 1 in every 106 white men.”¹⁸⁰ Richard Nixon's "War on Drugs" projected the identity of Blacks as the sole perpetrator of a violent drug culture and helped solidify the new image of Black America in the minds of the American people as criminal by nature; the same way Jim Crow era propaganda portrayed the Black man as a threat to the purity of the White woman with no evidence or basis in reality. Yet, "according to the Human Rights Watch, people of color are no more likely to use or sell illegal drugs than whites, but they have higher rate of arrests."

African Americans comprise 14 percent of regular drug users but are 37 percent of those arrested for drug offenses. From 1980 to 2007 about one in three of the 25.4

¹⁸⁰ Sofia Kirby, "A Look at the Racial Disparities Inherent in Our Nation's Criminal-Justice System," (www.americanprogress.org. March 13, 2012)

million adults arrested for drugs was African American.”¹⁸¹ Studies from the NAACP, American Progress Organization, and Human Rights Watch show that an African American individual is no more likely to commit a crime than a White American, but the media continued to intensify the image of the Black man as a murderer, dope pusher, and pimp. “ From 1980 to 2008, the number of people incarcerated in America quadrupled from roughly 500,000 to 2.3 million people...African Americans now constitute nearly 1 million of the total 2.3 million incarcerated population,” many of whom were imprisoned for minor drug offenses and given harsher sentences than their White counterparts.¹⁸²

Between the destruction of the positive Black image in the global media starting with the birth of the revolutionary era, a new modern form of slavery in 1980s and 1990s by way of the prison boom, and the continuous attacks on the Black revolutionary culture, Black Power deteriorated under the weight of a new set of circumstances that Blacks had to unfortunately adapt to. Children became the focus of new modes of oppression and something such as a typical school yard fight was no longer an American rite of passage for children of color, but instead a criminal act with punitive consequences. The controversial, but real, school to prison pipeline was created as Black children were ensnared as early as possible in the lynch ropes of the justice system. While Black students only make up about 16 percent of public school enrollment, they represent over 31 percent of school related arrest.¹⁸³

¹⁸¹ Sofia Kirby.

¹⁸² NAACP, Criminal Justice Fact Sheet, (<http://www.naacp.org/criminal-justice-fact-sheet>, 2017)

¹⁸³ American Civil Liberties Union Foundation,(www.aclu.org/infographic/school-prison-pipeline-infographic?redirect=racial-justice/infographic-school-prison-pipeline. 2017)

The ACLU aided in uncovering the targeting of young Blacks and Hispanics by predatory systems that sought to criminalize them before they were even adults, but much of the damage had already become systematic and internalized. In urban environments all across the country, the next generation of future revolutionaries, intellectuals, and warriors were being torn away from their families and placed in the poisonous care of the United States justice system. Black Power was no longer a threat to racist America or the government entities that sought to preserve their way of life.

The Black Power Movement crumbled during the late 1980s and early 1990s as the Cuban connection lost clarity. Animosity developed within the hearts of influential Black leaders such as Eldridge Cleaver who felt betrayed by the reality of Cuba versus the perceptions they attached themselves to in order to fuel their movement. Yet, revolutionaries such as Assata Shakur still remain safely shielded from American assault on the island and forever indebted to the revolution for producing a place where freedom fighters could find solace. She wrote passionately about her devotion to Cuba Libre, stating, "Cuba is a country of hope. Their reality is so different...I am amazed at how much Cubans have accomplished in so short a time since the Revolution."¹⁸⁴ The knowledge of the influence of revolutionary Cuba on the development of the Black Power Movement is now nearly non-existent, but there still lingers some collectivity between the two groups as support for normalizing relations between Cuba and the U.S. is relatively high within the Black community and the recognition of the sovereignty granted to Shakur still inspires Black America in a post-revolutionary period.

¹⁸⁴ Assata Shakur. Pg. 381.

In his final days during 1996, Robert F. Williams still held status among older radicals of his time and some intellectuals of the day, but the masses of America drew a blank at the mentioning of his name. He eloquently explained why he had faded from the conversation by the 1990s offering a simple but all-encompassing answer. The man still reverberated with magnetism, power, and wisdom after so many years of passionate resistance. Simply expressed, death in the line of duty is what gave King and X so much weight in the minds of the masses. They died fighting and Williams lived to fight another day. It is this very purpose why he and other Black revolutionaries have been erased from the narrative. He believed the American elites wanted the Black people of the United States to remember King and X not for their equality struggles, but for how they died resisting the structure. MLK day is hardly of a celebration of the beautiful contributions of this amazing advocate of equality, it is the reminder for the Black youth that if you go up against the interest of elite White America, you will be executed. Nothing more, nothing less.

Malcom X lives on as an example of an outspoken intellectual champion who dared to deny the oligarchy terror over his people, but was assassinated for this apparent infringement on White privilege. Both of these men function as imbedded warnings deeply inserted into the Black American subconscious as a lesson to stay in your place or die like a dog. In the words of Williams “they wanted to show us, if you resist white tyranny, white oppression, you will die.”¹⁸⁵ He explained how America implanted the idea in the new generations that following the revolutionary path was pure suicide. We would be denied our own George Washington or Fidel Castro. If the legacy of Williams

¹⁸⁵*RGB Interview*. 4:21.

was revived, and Black America learned of his contribution to their own radical existence and the fact that he survived the onslaught of his attackers, they might be more inspired to embrace revolution than to view it as certain death. As inevitable extermination.

Williams was buried because his very essence was too potent to be released into the ghettos of America. Shakur, eloquently captured this sentiment, writing, “The schools we go to are reflections of the society that created them. Nobody is going to give you the education you need to overthrow them. Nobody is going to teach you your true history, teach you your true heroes, if they know that that knowledge will help set you free. Schools in amerika are interested in brainwashing people with amerikanism, giving them a little bit of education and training them in skills needed to fill the positions the capitalist system requires. As long as we expect amerika’s schools to educate us, we will remain ignorant.”¹⁸⁶ To allow a symbol of revolution who overcame his oppressors to share his story and his ideology was a risk the United States government would never take. To allow the authentic history of the founders of Black Power and their Cuban influence to reach the oppressed was outright dangerous to individuals like J. Edgar Hoover, Richard Nixon, and Ronald Reagan.

Instead, the masses were to live with their safe icons who fit neatly into the “we don’t stand a chance” narrative the rulers preferred and perpetuated. For the fabricators of society, Williams, the founding fathers of Black Power, Cuba, Castro, Che, and the fundamental roots of revolutionary Black America were to always remain disjointed and undiscovered. That revolutionary energy was to be infinitely contained preventing its

¹⁸⁶ Assata: An Autobiography. Pg. 259.

explosion from destroying the decadence of racist America. That is possibly why something as evident as the Cuban revolutionary influence on Black America and its leaders has been barely discussed to its full extent in either intellectual or popular circles. For, it is best to keep a people confused and separated from their history to perpetuate their state of bondage and division.

The division, ever-present in Black America, spread from a single debate on revolution versus non-violence to encompass new divisions along the lines of the revolutionary approach, who should lead, and when and how reform should be used if at all. The federal government, under the guidance of J Edgar Hoover and his COINTELLPRO (Counter intelligence Program) targeted members of the ideology for over three decades effectively killing, imprisoning, exiling, and fragmenting the Black Power Movement. The positive media image accepted on a global scale of Black America as the beautiful, powerful, bold, and righteous vanguard of liberation was dissected and a new image as a criminal, dangerous, inhuman, malevolent source of all American chaos and calamity was projected.

The gangster took the chair of the guerrilla and Black hate replaced Black Power while unity was lost to the flames of self-gain. The revolutionary Hip Hop Movement of the 1980s replaced the revolutionary Black Power Movement of the 60s and 70s, but sadly Hip Hop only remained revolutionary for a short time eventually becoming a reflection of the false conservative media image of Black America and the new culture of self over society. Individuals like the late urban poet Tupac Amaru Shakur, the last great Black revolutionary figure to the youth of the 80s, 90s, and early 2000s, struggled to deliver a revolutionary message to a people moving further from that doctrine every day.

For all of his positive poetry crafted to elevate the minds and spirits of a broken people, he at times gave into the contemporary gangster culture of the era promoting powerful but confusing platforms for both self-enlightenment and self-destruction.

Police brutality lived on a plague of the past as Blacks remained the unproportioned targets of government assassination. Now in 2016, under the leadership of the first Black President Barack Obama, Afro American blood continues to spill as in the days of mob rule under the Jim Crow banner. “According to the most recent census data...White people make up roughly 62 percent of the U.S. population but only about 49 percent of those who are killed by police officers. African Americans, however, account for 24 percent of those fatally shot and killed by the police despite being just 13 percent of the U.S. population...black Americans are 2.5 times as likely as white Americans to be shot and killed by police officers...But because the white population is approximately five times larger than the black population, that means unarmed black Americans are five times as likely as unarmed white Americans to be shot and killed by a police officer.”¹⁸⁷

Today organizations like Black Lives Matter continue to fight for the simple right to breathe and be Black, but the fight for Black lives lost to the racist power structure suffers in light of the explosion of Black on Black violence in cities across America and the lack of any long-term, legitimate, righteous culture of Black unity. How can Black America point the finger like they had in previous generations to gain support and understanding when it is now themselves who are responsible for much of the death, fear,

¹⁸⁷ Wesley Lowery, Aren't More White People than Black People Killed by Police? Yes, but no. The Washington Post. (www.washingtonpost.com/news/post-nation/wp/2016/07/11/arent-more-white-people-than-black-people-killed-by-police-yes-but-no. July, 11 2016)

and oppression within their own communities? This is the basis of argument for those who seek to discredit the Black struggle and present it as a movement swayed by false objectives and claims.

Without the aid of the global image of positivity and solidarity that Black America cultivated since the days of Frederick Douglass, the cause lost its luster and many failed to analyze the reasons behind the decay of the Black Power Movement or its revolutionary foundation. The wisdom of the revolutionaries was locked away and hidden in a cloud of confusion and contradictions. I, along with the passionate devotion of scholars such as Ruth Reitan, Tim Tyson, and Peniel Joseph among others, have endeavored to uncover these secrets and expose the contents of the forgotten box to the people of Black America. One can only hope, this time, that the seeds of Black Power grow in the light of observation and that the sacrifices and struggles of the individuals who devoted their lives to freedom never again fall into the shadows of contentment and despair.

Knowledge truly is power, and clarity cosmic. To the manipulators of society, the legacy of Williams, the disciples of revolution, and the Cuban alliance must eternally remain padlocked in that obscure, eye-squinting, cubby of American history, lest the children of the slaves recover the roots of their revolutionary spirit and finish a movement the founding fathers of Black Power were never able to accomplish. It would simultaneously be the birth of a new revolutionary fire in Black America and the tides of change in post-revolutionary Cuba. An epic moment in the human narrative as two eternal allies linked by the sands of Africa and the chains of bondage grow in opposite directions during a time when they need one another the most. Maybe then, the roots of a

new movement in Cuba could grow from the resilience of the Black American people as Black Power grew from the Cuban Revolution. Maybe then, could heroes like Williams, the Panthers, Carmichael, Baraka, and Cruse be properly situated next to their Cuban brothers and sisters as relatives in the family of freedom. It would be a transcending experience to witness the masters of oppression tremble at the sight of the slaves of the new world; finally united as one. Surely, then would the names Castro, Guevara, and the Black Power freedom fighters be redeemed in the epic narrative of the liberation of the oppressed masses and Cuba and revolutionary Black America cemented as one.

As the Cuban people come to terms with the death of their revolutionary leader Fidel Castro in 2016 and struggle to define him as hero or heathen, it is best to remember the positive impact he and his revolution had on their own fate and the inspiration that it gave the whole world. Only in the light of the truth can the pages of history tell the true human story and illuminate the characters who changed the world. For in the words of the revolutionary scholar Harold Cruse, "Castro passed within two feet of me and I looked into the face of the hero. It was strangely sober as with the melancholy of responsibilities. Minutes before his face shown as he stood in the spotlight of personal acclaim from those who danced in the sunlight of liberation. But when he turned away his face bore the heavy shadows of statesmanship. This was startling. For that fleeting moment, I must confess that I felt a pang of apprehension mixed with compassion for Fidel Castro, the compassion one feels for those who carry heavy burdens. I wondered what he was thinking at that moment as he turned away from his people, from the warmth of personal communion with them to face the hard, impersonal realities of his place in history and

world politics.”¹⁸⁸ Thus, as he leaves behind only a legacy and a people, his memory alongside his fallen allies and Black Power comrades must now more than ever be properly honored. For once a people forgets the roots of their own revolutionary struggle, it is only a matter of time before they cease to struggle all together.

This outcome is surely the direst future waiting in the distance for a courageous people who survived the slave ship, the hangman’s noose, and the warden’s cage. The power necessary to be victorious is present inside of every living being who has both know oppression and sympathized for those who exist within its clutches. Before any true revolutionary culture can be materialized, the movement must start at an individual level as each person must experience their own internal revolution before they attempt to spread the fire to the masses. One must overcome their inner demons and bask in the freedom of liberation from themselves and their toxic culture before they can aim their gaze at the puppeteers of society and chant the battle-cry of sovereignty. Once we accept the proper responsibility for our perpetuated state of suffering and maximize our righteousness, ability, and unity, the revolution will no longer be a theory or a concept, but a reality manifested in the flesh and spirit of a newly minted people. One forged into a single weapon by the flames of racial tyranny. This moment of ascension over the material world to find peace in ourselves as a single unit will be the nexus, the historical moment in the human narrative where the children of the slaves will look to one another as brother and sister and joyously exclaim, “All Power to the People!”

¹⁸⁸ Cruse. Pg. 17.

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