Eldridge Cleaver

Images of 1968: the assassinations of Robert Kennedy and Martin Luther King Jr.; the riots in Cleveland, Baltimore and Washington D.C.; a political turmoil in Chicago; Campus turmoil throughout the country; the trial of the Chicago Eight; the bloodiest year of the Vietnam war; the ascendance of Richard Nixon. The Poor People’s Campaign march on Capitol Hill; Tommy Smith’s Black Power salute at the Mexico City Olympics; the emergence of George Wallace as a serious presidential candidate.

It was also the year that the Black Panther party expanded from its one chapter in Oakland, California, to hundreds throughout the country, and the year one of its main figures, Eldridge Cleaver, was lecturing at colleges and universities, leading rallies against racism and oppression and running for president on the Peace and Freedom party ticket. He received 36,785 votes.

The author of "Soul on Ice" was also running headlong into the power structure as police continued their efforts to shutter the Panther leadership. Harassment ranged from petty traffic citations to the April 1968 police ambush of Panthers headquarters, which left Treasurer Bobby Hutton dead and Cleaver wounded. A carded ex-con, Cleaver knew that his time was almost up, and after exactly two years of freedom, he was ordered back to prison on the grounds of parole violation. He chose, instead, to engineer a suicide confrontation with police at Oakland’s Merritt College (now North Oakland Community College), the birthplace of the Black Panther party. But colonel Harry R. Newton ordered Cleaver underground, with the final destination to be Cuba.

Cleaver’s exile from Huey Newton and the Black Panther party came in the form of a phone call from Algiers during a 1971 television talk show being aired live in San Francisco. Cleaver unexpectedly broke ranks with Newton. David Hilliard and an embarrassed Huey later assigned him to the nearest pay phone. Newton then marched out the studio to the nearest pay phone.
That was, of course, untrue. I was getting very tired of that thing. How ever, let it slide, thinking that they might have their reasons.

"Okay, you" re here there may be six weeks to two months and nothing happens, so what do you do to pass the time?"

Well, at night after my shadow went behind me, I used to go sit on the porch, which was cool by the Cubans. I just sat around, you know, watching the women go by. One night I saw a black guy, an expelled party member I knew from prison, and he gave me the power sign and just kept walking. My security man had told me when I first arrived that the Cubans had not told the expelled hijackers that I was in Cuba and that they wanted to keep it that way, so out of loyalty, I told my man Silva about the change of meeting. He said now the word was out that I could meet with the hijacker. So I had my first contact with an American who could get away in Cuba and he got down on the Cubans and told me that he had met him and that he had told him he knew me from prison. This guy had been there for over a year and was the first Afro-American to hijack a plane. Well, when I saw him I recognized him and he, too, started badum-badum-badum. He knew the score very well because he had been there as long as I had and he had been dose to a Cuban but not really felt out of it. He told me there was a lot of racism still going down."

Wasn't it a matter of course for me to see this? I thought I would have a chance, right after they touched down in Cuba?

Yeah, so the Cubans could watch them and see where they were coming from. A lot of people who hijacked planes in those days had some strange reasons for hijacking planes. A lot of it had nothing to do with politics or liberation. So none of these guys were put out by the fact that they were put in jail; they expected that. Now in my case, it was a contact the hijacker, who had been a Panther, when they found out he was cool and had been a member of the Black Panthers and the revolutionary movement, the Cuban Libre hotel. Anyhow, by this point I'm getting a little shaky.

Did you meet any other Americans during this time, like some of the SDS people and the Vanguard brigade?

Yes, I'll talk about them later. I did meet one person who I sort of knew was Kitty and she was really something else. I was standing in line one night to get ice cream, you always stand in line in Cuba, and I heard this English speaking voice, a female voice with a Georgia accent. I noticed a blonde standing in line. One of the hijackers told me that she was really f**ked up and that she should avoid her; I was naturally over to her and started talking. I told her that I was Bobby Hutton, and she was very attractive in a Georgia sort of way and, man, I really needed some female attention. But it turned out that she knew, you know, it remained all in secret. It seemed she was saving herself for me and I couldn't get her out of my head. Well, when Kitty was down in Florida, I went down there to meet her. She was in her kitchen. She asked me if we wanted coffee from there, and I said yes, and she got it for me. We never did drink his coffee. He finally came out, saying to her in a very loud voice: "Yes, man, I'll certainly take care of your mail. There should be no problem," you know, and shit like that. She couldn't understand what was up with him. Actually, her suspicions were aroused to such a point that she made inquiries and found out who I really was. She didn't show up for two days, which was unheard of, and when she did, she told me, "Why did you try to set up the commandante like that? Are you out to blackmail me? I told you not to contact me."

So I went there, and I started demanding interrogations and asking questions. Now that I knew my way around I wasn't so isolated, you dig? It was at this time that I realized that I was in for a complete tour of the island. Go in the mountains where the revolution started and see the Cubans revolting up close. I would have to pretend to stay and get down to busi ness but they had a point and I hadn't really seen much of the place.

Right before I left, this strange thing happened with Kitty and the whole scene crystallized a lot about my position and how upheld the Cubans really were. One night we had gone for our usual walk and get back to her place near three in the morning. I was sipping one of those sweet drinks and she was just lying there like a dream in the bed with me telling me to go when the phone jingled. I could tell it was a man and that he wanted to come over. I said, "No," and she said, "Yes, but don't be afraid, it's just my clothes." The phone rang again. It was a man, and she told me it was her brother and he said he was bringing me something on my clothes." She said that very distinctly and the thing in man, she already had them on. I told her that I should split and had I understood the implications, I would have fled midway. Raymond Johnson was cool and that they shouldn't worry about the dude, he was cool. It turned out that they sent him to a camp any way. The trip ended and I went back to Havana, all ready to get down to work. It seemed that everything was happening at once, because no sooner had I re turned than I heard over the radio that the UN delegate, who had discussed the whole organization with the first place, was denied an extension on his visa by the Americans, which meant that he would be coming home. So, I thought, at least I could get through to someone. I had had meetings with people, you know, but I simply just shook hands and never got down to the fine points. I also sent word that I wanted to see Raymond Johnson. When the Cubans told me that Raymond did not want to see me, then I knew they were very fucked up. There was no reason why he couldn't see that, but I had no way of knowing because I was out in the provinces at a camp.

Where was Kitty when you returned?

I went to see her and she showed me these diaries that she had written all the time that she was in Cuba. She showed me the first entry that she had made under the title "Kitty." Well, man, when I read that shit I said, "These things have got to be burned!" The stuff she had on Fidel was really too much. She told me that I should leave and that the Cubans had no intention of letting me work out my program. I think she was also pissed at Fidel because it was becoming obvious that he was not going to marry her.

Let's get back to Raymond and all your hassle with the police.

Somehow, under some rose, Raymond arrived at the Libre Hotel where I put the message to him to get his ass over to my pad which was sort of, like, neutral territory. Raymond arrived there at a ball run with police chasing him. He got in and informed the police that they could go on my pad.

Had you met with the ex-UN delegate yet?

Yes, and he really blew my mind because I thought at least I could sit down and talk with him.

What was particularly different about the person I had met in New York? He had been cocky and self-assured; now he was nervous and quite quiet. I pressed him about my program and he came back with this that he had never really believed that we would actually accept their invitation and that they made it at a kind of public relations gesture. The man was on the central committee—a very important position—so I guess he knew.

Why didn't you just leave? I still thought there might be some hope and also I was so involved with all these hijackers. At that point I decided to start the program anyway, not to wait for more people from the Panther Party. I had been in contact with every Afro-American in Havana. So my pad became sort of a headquarters.

Was this before or after Raymond Johnson arrived?

About the same time, I told them that I would not give him up. My man Silva arrived with these letters for Raymond by force. Well, my pig had forgotten that he had left the guns from our tour in my pad. He did that so he could, I suppose, have his own cache. (Every once in a while some and a woman would show up, take the guns, go out, then bring them back. There is more fighting going on even in Havana that we ever hear about. So anyway, my man had to leave. He told me that I would have to be repatriated."

Asking as we had the guns fell like we had a little power. With my status as a special guest I feared that the Cubans would not off me, but I didn't think they felt that way about the hijackers back at my pad. The hijackers wanted me to
make a deal with the Cubans to guaranty safe conduct to Africa for all who could pay five thousand dollars for each Negro and thus escape with other governments. At this point Kitty really came through—the informed a Russian where to go; she had the protection of the press knew of my whereabouts and that I was in trouble. So we lived under siege for a while. We left some brothers in the pad when we went out and we only traveled in China.

How soon before your departure was this?

I left right after this, or I should say during this. One day an official came to go to some goddamned camp with a wife who was about to have a baby. By this point I didn't trust those damn Cubans at all. Kathleen called friends in Paris who could communicate with the Algerians to see what my condition was. So I left within 48 hours for Algiers to meet Kathleen.

Was there a lot of press coverage when you got to Algiers?

There was none at all. The Cubans did act on one of their turnarounds. They told me that I was there to simply pick up Kathleen and that the Algerians had changed their minds. Instead, I was supposed to go to Amman, Jordan, to visit some Palestinian camps. I was supposed to go in Jordan, climb the Euphrates, and get back to Jordan. I did agree to give the Cubans the guns before I left and the brothers understood this too. So I left within 48 hours for Algiers to meet Kathleen.

Going back to Africa is an absurd idea... I mean, just picture 25 million blacks getting on a boat back to Africa.

Well, I'm student at the Cubans for what they did to those radicals who came tripping through Cuba in the 60s. I told the Cubans fully responsible for the crazy tango that sent the Weathermen into their whole violent trip. These kids would come down there like I had

in awe over Fidel and Che and the Revolution. The Cubans would show you their island, maybe get them exposed to the subject of how to carry out the revolution in Africa. Obviously the Cubans were powerless to do anything about the US but these students weren't, and so the Cubans prevented them in a very cynical way.

The lecturers would tell them to keep an eye on their outbreaks of disorder and violence to create a revolutionary atmosphere. You know, like drive down a few miles to an explosion or tacks to tie up traffic, blow up electric stations and water supplies. Now, it is your relationship with the Cubans and me, and not my action in a struggle, but only when large numbers of the population support the liberation movement. As was the case in Cuba: Such actions helped encourage the people to join in opposition. But in the US, where the movement was small and isolated, it was just a lot of crazy.

A friend of mine was down and they actually showed him how to make bombs.

Some, that was part of it. All this got me very upset because there was no program, no organization; it didn't fit into any scheme, you dig. When I told them the kids that, they just didn't listen; they were still in the rosy glow. So finally I went to the city, the one who had been telling all this shit, and I got very angry and tried to tell him of the ramifications of his acts. I got nowhere. You see, all of these things were just empty gestures because later I learned that the Cubans had abandoned all ideas of liberation movements and this stuff was just like NR, just like what they did to me in make it look as if they were involved. It was a knockkneed, people were asking around. In Venezuela, this revolutionary name Brau denounced Fidel from his mountain hideout; he called him a revulsionist and a blocker and in

1969 that was like herey, but it was true. Also, there was this whole macho thing, and a lot of women were coming to Cuba and some of them thought the best way to get injected with the revolution was by sleeping with a revolutionary. These guys all walked around with cigars sticking out of their pants and guns around their waist and they liked nothing better than meeting these women's fantasies. I really do blame them for sabotaging the radical left movement in America; they totally nullified the effectiveness of the Weathermen.

So after Che had only been dead for two years, his influence had just become a revolutionary lift service. He just became a useful symbol for Fidel's cynical ends.

Exactly, I'll give you an example. I was told this story by a man who was assigned to Che when he was in Africa. I think it was 1976 when Che went to the UN and then on to Algiers and Tanzania and then disappeared altogether.

Well, he went to the Congo to meet civil, who was the focal point of a lot of the people of Lumumba's forces. Che went to help make a supply line that was going to be dependent on the revolutionary party in South Africa. Che would have been the South African leader, and Che had his own cadre of Cubans with him who had accompanied him throughout the revolution. Well, just before the connection was to be made, Che got a message from Fidel, and he was pulled out. The rebellion against the government is that action to be the fundamental betrayal of the African liberation movements. They felt that it was a part of a deal between the Americans and the Kenyans, and in turn the Russians to the Cubans. It was right after this that Che went into seclusion and started giving out those "self-criticism" and all that shit. They were just trying to reprogram the man but it didn't work as they used him to Bolivian compensation.

There are many people who think that Fidel actually helped the CIA find Che and therefore remove the threat from Fidel's side.

I don't doubt it for a minute.

So the Cubans really wanted you out.

You found yourself in Africa in the Pan-African movement much like Stokely Carmichael. How were you welcomed by the Algerians?

As I said, the Cubans had never bothered to tell the Algerians that I was even there, so it was up to me to make contact. We made contact through the NLF using the Vietnamese as a channel.

Why the NLF?

You have to go back to 1969, before I left the U.S., when we were working on the white idol idea of the International section of the party. At that time, the war in Vietnam was the hottest issue in the world; it was the focal point of all of the country's imperialist nature. We saw the Vietnamese as the spearhead of opposition to the imperialist presence. There were differences of opinion about this in the Fifth of the members wanted to focus more locally, heavily to Africa, you know, a policy based on skin color, but that was rejected because it wasn't political—it was racial and ethnic. So at that time we planned a sort of Asian strategy and the Viet-Name National Liberation Front was aware of the importance of the African Left; they knew about us and we had a very good relationship from the outset. So that is why it was very natural for me to get in contact with the NLF when I arrived in Algiers.

How did they assist you?

They were incredible. I went to see the NLF representative who welcomed me very warmly. It just so happened that the representative was leaving Algiers for a more important post. He told me that he was meeting with President Houari Boumedienne that day and that he would ask the Algerians to extend to us all the rights normally given an important liberation front asking for recognition. Algeria was like a center for liberation movements around the world and the NLF was the most important, followed by the PLO. They were also a group with groups like FELIMO and smaller groups like the liberation movement in Chad. Later on, the NLF became the PRG, and the regime of Gaddafi's regime under the NLF, they became in the PRG, gaining full diplomatic status, they recommended that the Pan-African put the movement in the PRG to move to Embassy Road and that greatly helped our status. The Vietnamese were always the best informed and easiest to talk with of all the countries we dealt with.

Did you have any of the same problems with the Algerians as you had with the Cubans?

Not at the beginning—toward the end, around the time of the split in the party, then, well, the whole situation began to repeat itself. I arrived there without any prior arrangements with the Algerians and yet they treated us as they would have any other liberation movement. I have nothing to reproach them about that. They were not that aware of the Black Panther party; only later when the American government was around. We were given quasidiplomatic status which was about equal at that time, 1970, to the status of the American government itself.

What was your view of the black liberation movement in America in general?

I discovered that they had a very narrow view of the black movement in America, they knew the name of Martin Luther King, they knew the phrase "black power" and they knew the name of Stokely Carmichael. The latest word that they said was that Stokely was the thing and I heard a lot of criticism of him from them. So the thing we had to do was to explain why we were coming, why we were coming, because they didn't like where he was coming from.
thing involved. They also criticized Stokely for some political things. You see, reactionsaries use black power and negotiate with whites and black people and Stokely played right into that and in so doing he got a lot of the sympathy of the blacks. There are a lot of personal jealousies in Africa. When I first arrived in Africa, I saw this was focused on Stokely. I didn't understand it at that time but later when they started putting the same stuff on me, then I realized where it came from. Sometimes it appears to be just because you're in the forefront; like, why is this guy down on me—I never did anything bad by him; but then you begin to see that there is a kind of rivalry between black nationalists and Black Americans.

I suppose you want to keep up as many contacts as possible with your Asian brothers; it is that way you travelled so extensively in 1970?

Yes. I wanted to see more of the world, see how other socialist countries worked. So far I had only been to Cuba and it was very interesting. I went to North Korea, North Vietnam and China.

Let's take them one at a time. What about North Korea?

Well, they are in a very strange position—the war has been over, yet a kind of struggle goes on. I did not relate to them as well as I did the North Vietnamese. For one thing, the social structure generally the North Korean women have it very much together because they don't confine sex with politics. I mean, they are liberated without all the hang ups on the sexual act. You meet very much as equals and it's not a big thing. China, I really don't want to go into; it would take too much time and I really don't have the perspective yet. It is all changing so fast. My visit there was so strange because, you see, I was there as Lin Piao's guest and right in the middle of the visit, poof, he was gone and Nixon was on his way. The whole thing turned around.

Back in Algeria, what were some of the activities you were involved with and how did they relate to the American government?

Well, we were like a clearinghouse for information. The first months spent in Algeria was a time for planning and learning to do. We didn't see it like that. It would come to us because we were an indigenous U.S. group and they wanted to know how we responded to specific events that were going on in the U.S. Depending on what country they were from, they would ask us a lot of questions, and we would try to answer their questions, maybe asking the same questions they had asked us.

Did you think that the Algerian government was being swayed by the fact that the U.S. was not stopping the fighting?

We had always felt somewhat isolated in the party and were therefore always interested in expanding our base to include radicals in the white community. We thought that that was the shape of their party. Now, I had hoped all along that some underground leader would surface and look for a way to do something different. I had hoped for someone like Bernardine Dohrn, who could relate to political terms, but she never turned out to be a leader; she just became a person carrying the banner of the Algerian Front. I thought that maybe it was a good idea. Being a good organizer, man, I had to get Hoey's approval, which he gave. So Leary arrived with his wife Rosemary in September of 1970. I had not been there long myself, so it was very important that our new organization not be jeopardized. As part of the asylum process, he had to write a proscription of what he wanted to accomplish and he wrote a lot about politics, but it was not very sophisticated. We agreed that he was in need of some political consciousness raising and he went along with that.

I gave him the whole thing, all the books piled high. He also agreed that we would meet with the Algerian leaders. We would be invited to represent the U.S. and the U.S. delegation would be expected to sign an agreement. I hope this is the way he is treating the Algerian Front and the Miss Dohrn. The Miss Dohrn was not Bernardine but her sister, and they both wanted to be involved in the book signing, so we had engaged in a little media rip-off there. The Algerians began making requests for press interviews and so they agreed to the press conference. Frankly, our Algerians couldn't explain all the commotion around the man they referred to as the Pope of Dope. Well, the whole thing was terribly tense. It happened that in New York at the time, the Algerians were leading a very important debate which we were not aware of. Later, the UN delegate told me that after one of his early speeches he went back to his hotel to watch himself on the tube and all he saw was the Pope of Dope at the Algiers airport. By this time the embarrassment was beginning to hit me, and I had to deal with the Algerians and negotiate with them and carefully explain this wasn't the sort of thing we wanted to happen. But the Algerians were angry and wanted to establish some sort of connection with the U.S. And so, I told them I would go to Algiers to talk to them about it. Of course, the Algerians were very angry about this, but they were not going to accept it. So, the next day the Algerians showed up with four airplanes tickets to all of places, Amman, Jordan, and they wanted Leary on the flight and out of the way. So Leary, Miss Dohrn and some others headed off for Amman. They stopped in Beirut. There were reports that if Newsweek didn't leak it. When they arrived in Beirut hundreds of reporters were seeking them; they finally disappeared somewhere hiding in a stall in the men's room. He was pretty nervous, this was too new a baby for him. When they were in Beirut for him, he was feeling a little more secure.

What about the acid and all those people who used to follow him around like a court?

That was all happening, but hardly at all. I found out that he had not been giving it out to people—you know, turning on reporters and students in the university—then I had to get my feet down. A lot of women from the university were coming to him for acid. They were very weird, you know, constantly looking for acid for the world of the future. We met with some of these women, I suppose, in some way that acid might help them be the acid would do things like that. We met with these two women and we met with some shepherds who would come by, flip, and sell the first cup what he saw. The cop then talked to the authorities, who identified Leary, and then got me to leave. I had brought him there. So, you, you always reflected on us. He never realized that. Well, somewhere along the line some kids came to visit him and before he had his trip there was 10,000 tabs of acid in his group, you know, they called themselves the Brotherhood of Acid. That kid was very lucky that the Algerians don't check much for acid. I brought him into the country. I mean, if you found that shit they would have thrown away the key off and the kid right off the bat.

Word started to spread about what was Tim was up to and I got nervous so I sent this young woman to his pad to be his bookkeeper and to inform me what was going down. Well, sure enough if the dude isn't turning on the world. Tim always needs ego stroking and having people pursue him is very important.

I couldn't go on like that so I went to him and told him he had to stop all this shit and that I wanted all the acid. I wanted to know how many tabs he was distributing and how many he had. He was very apologetic, very angelic; little boy Tim. I said the 10,000 tabs to my place, plus some other stuff. I'm sure he had plenty more because there were plenty of people when he would take it every day. He had vials, blotters, pills, you name it. He said to me, "Just take this little bit." And he took me out and put it on his tongue. "Just enough to get you flowing, just enough so when you write the word "flowing.""

Did all of this lead into your bust of Leary?

Yeah, because as he got more relaxed and less concerned about politics, he just started taking more chances. Like, I would tell him he shouldn't talk to Elmer Fornm from Newsweek because he gave a lot of information to the wrong people. Then I argued that that talked with him, so why couldn't he. He didn't, or he couldn't realize that on certain issues at certain times, he was biased. But we had to be careful, he was not being careful. He was very open and a little naive. When Leary announced that he was going to be giving a sort of coming-out party to some newspapers and to some friends. After these few months that that would be cool, but that some links had to be made. I thought that was very funny, it was a slightly political nature. So I asked him to show me the list he had made up, the guest list. Well, yup, there were all these people: informants, secret police, shady press people, who we knew all about and who we avoided. I went right back to him and told him the whole thing had to stop. Well, it had been a long time since he had the spotlight so he was really upset. He accused me of sabotage, of being para- noid. He called me a "paranoid". Well, the party was the next day and it just couldn't happen. So I bust Tim Leary. I burst him because this was very risky and it involved all of us and all the work we had put in. There wasn't supposed to be any work involved, like, he just never showed up. And good old Elmer wrote in Newsweek, "Leary Disappears," and they all ran to the Algerian authorities.

What did the Algerians do?

Well, they really jacked me up because the press was going crazy. This official wanted to know what was happening. At first I protested Tim but this guy was so angry and accusatory the whole thing just got so stupid. I told him about the 10,000 tabs of acid, and the guy told me to come off it. So I put up in my car, picked up the acid and, poof, laid it on the man's desk and that was the end of that. The Algerians wanted Leary and they got him.
There were a number of things. One was the whole split with the party. And also there was a change in the Algerians' attitudes about us that was due to their splitting with Kissinger and the split with Houari just sort of set it up. There was not much Houari could do to me in Algiers except try as best he could to discredit me. So through channels he sent a letter to President Boumedienne that I was no longer responsible to the party and that the international unit was dissolved.

Boumedienne had met you. You had a reputation in the liberation circles that was good. Why should he listen to Houari?

The Panthers were an organization. Houari was at the top and that was that. I was just like the home office and I could always be recalled.

What about the support of other countries, of the Asian countries you had been so aligned with?

There is a correlation with this. If the country was undergoing acute problems with the U.S. like the North Vietnamese, then they tended to side with me. But a country like Algeria, which was in the process of courting the U.S., went along with Houari because it was expedient. The North Vietnamese were very concerned about Houari's charges. They spoke to me about it on many occasions. They were completely supportive of me and Houari knew that. He tried to contact them through Canada and other sources, to try to ensure my status with them. By this time the Chinese were into a full embrace with Nixon so they used any excuse they could to drop us.

So even before you left you were getting isolated bit by bit.

Yes, I heard that every time the U.S. had private talks with the Algerians about relations, they would always bring us up as a condition for recognition. We were to be sacrificed because we were such an embarrassment to them. For a while the Algerians could play us both. In the beginning it was more useful for them to be friendly to us because it evoked such a reaction from the U.S., and of course it helped them with their Third World image. But as time went on, they realized, like all emerging countries, that the power still rests with the imperialists, then they change and start to be like the previous colonial powers. Everyone can become an oppressor—the more power that is accumulated, the greater is the risk becomes.

We're talking in very specific terms about Algeria. Can we broaden it and talk briefly about the Third World? It's such an amorphous phrase, such an illusive concept. How do you see it now, after your travels throughout Africa?

It really has come sort of full circle. You start out with being very preoccupied with the events and happenings within your own country. Then you get linked up with the international thing. We started thinking in terms of the international ideology that encompasses so many people. There was the capitalist world, the socialist world, the Third World and there was the international struggle with everyone linked arm in arm; everyone supporting each other. But the situation has changed; it's no longer like that. I am not really sure that the whole thing existed in the first place. When I left the U.S. I went first to Cuba, then to Algeria, China, North Vietnam and North Korea. Face it, people are nationalists more than they are internationalist and they use nationalism in a very cynical way in order to further their own national aspirations. And when I began to understand that, I became less of an internationalist in the critical sense. Now, if you relate to people internationally, that's a different question because it's a human question, not a political question.

So, in other words, you think that a lot of the talk of a Third World, the united struggle, etc., is just another phrase.

Yes, it's an empty phrase. It's not a homogeneous Third World. Now they're beginning to talk about a fourth world in order to differentiate the poorer Third World countries from, say, the richer Arab countries (laugh). I mean, they're right—there are incredible differences. They do have different needs and priorities. It just helps to further point out the many differences between the needs of the various countries involved. Now, those aren't strong reasons for being down on Pan Afrikanism. When Malcolm X was in the Nation of Islam he was still in the separatist thing and vaguely Pan Afrikanist, but when he made his decisive break from all of that, he transposed that whole relationship and spoke instead about a whole cultural and spiritual relationship between America and Africa. The Afro-American thing really should be like Italian American or any other cultural group; that identity is important but you shouldn't get hung up in a back-to-Africa thing because, regrettably, going back to Africa is an absurd idea, particularly because the people in Africa just wouldn't allow it. I mean, you're not part of their tribe or culture, not anymore. You'd just be a problem because besides your color you don't have much in common—just some vague and very distant ancestry. I mean, they'd accept a certain number of immigrants and help them fit in but nobody's talking about a mass influx of American blacks. I mean, it's just stupid to picture 25 million blacks getting on a boat back to Africa. Besides, American blacks aren't up for it either. You see, I'm trying to get back to the U.S. myself because that's my home. It seems that one by one the things that you believed in—the ideologies, the individuals—all seemed to be fantasies. Cuba was not what it had appeared, the Algerians played with you and it seems that a lot of the socialists were just sort of entertaining you, using you as a PR image with the people's struggle. How do you feel about all that and was there one particular point when the whole thing just turned to shit?
Yes, I was being disappointed and constantly exasperated. The final shock came on the day I saw Richard Nixon shaking hands with a Chinese man. When you see Nixon and all that he stands for shaking hands with Mao and all that he represents, you have a turning point in history and a personal turning point for me. It completely exploded the political spectrum that has dominated the world since 1850—since the First International—when Marx defined the nature of the capitalist system, provided an ideological framework for that, and started the turning point of society and, most importantly, gave people an alternative to capitalism. Well, it had gone through a lot of changes. The Russians could even become revisionists and betray that ideology but as long as you have Mao presenting the people's struggle, an alternative still existed. But then, that visit and those commies apparent dominance in China, it's all just gone. We need another international; we need some new fathead to define and to analyze the nature of the world today as it exists now. There is a new left-to-right spectrum that no longer can have the socialists on the top and the fatheads on the bottom. There are progressive forces separate from that ever-growing power club but they mainly exist out there on the margins, laboring at the powers behind the scenes. Because, you see the socialists have betrayed the liberation movements, they have dropped out of the struggle. As far as I am concerned, they are wallowing in the dust of the mub of their hamlets and squilkes.

What we have really been talking about all this week is ending the Sixties. Taking all those ends and putting it into the perspective we never seemed to get around to. It was a time to react and experience, not to reflect. I disagree with that. It was a time to reflect, it's just that we never did it. We don't have to reflect so much now as to analyze a lot of the shit we believed at that time. We have to look very hard at what we did and listen to the criticism that exists. We have to be prepared to do some turnarounds. For example, after all my travels and see-


I'm on a honeymoon with the U.S. military, I love 'em. Military people are very patriotic and that's no bad trait. I can agree on that. Let's get on to the military itself, I consider them madmen. They're not madmen!

Come on, Eldridge, it's my turn to be insistent and pragmatic. I consider them to be as evil as the Soviets. They are very, very strong. The CIA, when it was formed in the Forties, was made up of liberals, men who really believed in a political form of internationalism, who were damn stupid if they didn't all turn into paranoid-commune-under-the-rugs types.

But there were commies under the rug.

Jesus, Eldridge, you know they were never a threat to the U.S. except maybe during the early Thirties.

I think you are wrong. If the war had not come along to save the American economy, I think that they might have had a chance. And I'm glad that FDR blocked them. I really am.

Okay, so I am. Most of the American communists I know are totally out to lunch, we are agreed on that. Let me finish... and you, Eldridge, I always thought the military mind so dominated the CIA that what we have now is, well, a cure of worms that is so faint I can't see any hope for them.

You're right but I can't blame the military so much because they just went on by their own choice. They left it just as it was on them. They should have fought more. I think that the real left has to look at the political forces at work in the United States and has to work out an understanding, has to realign its position. I, for one, intend to develop a new relationship with the U.S. military. I'm on a honeymoon with them myself. I love 'em [laughs].

What about the military mind, what about a reorganization of the military? Is that what you are getting at?

Yes, if the left had not backed out on the military, written it off so completely, it might not have gotten so extreme. It is going to take a major purge of the offi-
cers, the breaking of the manuals and a lot of changes. It's no easy process. Military people are very patriotic people and they have a hard time. I'm not talking about the right wing. These people are Americans, they should be treated that way. If we are going to really talk about progressive change in America, then we have to talk about moving on the military, not excluding it. Because without that support, brother, there ain't goin' to be no revolution.

Okay, so you are saying that the military mind is somewhat malleable as far as political ideologies go.

Sure. Just like other people. We have to work on the younger members, they have to be talking differently after Vietnam. What if there had been some favorable support for some of the dissenting military officers to stay in the military during the war? We encouraged them to drop out, to go home. If you tell all I am saying, we just can't ignore them anymore. I think sometimes that some of them have to be brought back because of the saying about us was true. They said we were traitors selling the U.S. down the river, moving against them. So let's not do that and I can't subscribe to that. I want the U.S. to be vastly improved, not be done in. We have to maintain a vigilance against people who want to destroy the U.S.

But what about the internal forces, the people who are harassing the U.S. for themselves, for their own ends? The cyni-cal thing that comes to mind is, what about them? Aren't they a threat?

Yes, of course. We have to be vigilant on that level too and, so far, the progressive forces have been moving in on those new areas, the ones we have overlooked or been afraid of in the past, the military is one of them. Also, we have let the big powers control our world view. They have to be in, it's an old idea. I see all right and we have not looked at that very closely. I mean, instead of moving toward detente, with the Soviet Union I think we should be resolutely opposed to the present regime. I want to see the American military establishment, its power, supporting people who are being fucked over in the world.

Do means that we get into a whole balance of power thing again? That we are trying to change the balance of power, between the U.S. and the Soviet Union, because the Soviets are giving an equal share to the Arabs. Doesn't that bring us closer to an inevitable confrontation?

Well, on that particular subject, I have been closely identified with the Pal-e-stinian people because I think they have some long overdue justice coming their way. But I don't endorse driving the Jews into the sea. You see what I mean? It is a matter of balance, a new balance that comes from reexamination. Myself, I have to begin to separate the true interests of the people from the imaginations of the imperialists, and in the way that's the problem, especially with a different political direction is the U.S. which includes a new military that is so strong, it will still take new controls of the political mechanisms.

Since you have brought it up, let's talk about U.S. military relationships with the Soviet Union and China.

Like I said, I think it would be treasonable to make concessions with the Soviet Union. I agree with Scoop Jackson on that. Only that just been [Continued on Page 46]
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used the Jews like all politicians use issues; he didn't take it far enough. Because the Soviet Union is very shaky at this point and we should not be trying to hold them up, and that is just what we are doing with détente. The stuff we are saying, that Kissinger is saying, about not interfering with the internal affairs of the Soviet Union, well, that sounds like Chamberlain's kissing Hitler's ass all over again. If we are truly the force for democracy in the world, then we have an obligation to help in the disintegration of the totalitarian Soviet regime. They have to go just like Nixon did; they are the same. Who of the white leaders were most upset at Nixon's passing? The totalitarian leaders. Now, that is a frightening switch. Unfortunately Nixon's ghost lives in Kissinger but I think that if people like Jackson keep up that pressure, the American people will side with them.

Doesn't our relationship, our new détente, really have to do with these new markets that our country is so in need of? We have a complete turnaround; the forces of conservatism—the businessmen—want to sleep with the Russians simply because of the rubles; they could really give a shit about freedom. And here we are saying leave the fuckers alone, let them sink, they no longer have anything to do with liberation.

That's just it. It all really is changing and we have to see that. We have to, as always, stay ahead of the fuckers. It's a vigilance again. I think with pressure being applied by the Chinese and a new pressure being applied by the U.S., the Soviets might crumble. It's changing and I've been very provocative with all this military stuff.

That is definitely the word.

Well, everyone seems asleep or just confused and by being provocative maybe some action can take place, some movement. They got down on me when I criticized Hoey, when I criticized Leary and when I got down on Fidel and finally Mao. But what I'm trying to show is that everything has changed; it is just comforting to see. Sowells changed day Nixon shook hands with Mao. It all became cynical politics. The new situation, what's going on now, scares me. And I'm afraid I'm missing the boat. I'm afraid the left is going to miss the boat. We're going to miss it because of the agenda of the past. It's here now and we have to get on the boat. It's just a question of where we're going. We can't wait, understand, before we start thinking about moving on these questions.

I'd like to go back to the Sixties and talk about that period, about radicals. I always felt that white revolutionaries of that period had a choice; we should always get off the train and just blend back in, while you and the Panthers really had no choice. I always thought you would have preferred to be a writer or philosopher or being a gun-slinging radical waiting for the inevitable end.

There was a golf, there is no question of that. Like when I was planning the Merritt College standoff right before I went to Cuba, all of the people inside the college with me were brothers, were black. I went to some white radical friends and asked them for help, and they said sure, they would gladly be in medicine and food if things got rough. Like the Red Cross with coffee and doughnuts?

Right. I mean, I had something different in my mind, like them attacking the enemy from the rear, but they just could not get into that. I understand that now but it really blew me away at the time. It's often very hard for me to understand people because when I talk to them on an individual basis I don't get the feeling that this is someone who, when a crucial point in the struggle comes, will turn back on it. You see, I sometimes forget that when you're in a peaceful period, when you're discussing options, then agreement's the easiest thing in the world. But when you start pushing toward a confrontation, then people too often begin to reassess that commitment. They should have realized all along that the problems demands somewhat drastic action. How far to go. People will always do the minimum until finally they are pushed over the line. No one wants to die, no one wants to put their body on the line, but when things get so bad that death is a legitimate alternative in intolerable situations, then it is an easy decision. That period seems to be over now.

I think that a lot of the commitment shown by blacks in the late Sixties, when they first started to enter the power structure, has abated. It seems like the melting pot is really working overtime on black Americans.

It's not so much that it's working overtime as finally regurgitating something that was indigestible. The whole idea behind the melting pot is that you go in and you cook until you become American done. So it's only natural that people who have been wallowing in the blacks came out very well done. It looked pretty much the same when the Italian or Irish came trucking in, it just took longer. Well, man, you've got that same shit in New Jersey where the Puerto Ricans are rioting against the black government there. They are throwing the same charges. Outliers used to throw at whites. It's really a good example of how the system functions and how the human parts are really interchangeable. It's the system speaking very clearly.

If you went back, you certainly would address yourself to the class differences more than the racial ones. But still, wouldn't blacks be the major group who would be willing to listen and take heed of what a person in your position would advocate? Would you try to reach the people who have become assimilated?

No. Why bother? Besides. I have nothing but contempt for those people who allowed themselves to be bought out. You see, that buying out process was a very clever tactic in the defusing of the different black movements. You figure that the government calculated that for now but it fixed up the many inadequacies that black people are forced to live with—whether it's political power or housing—would cost the billions of dollars. By starting a program of black capitalism where corporations and the government salted the black communities with a million in this city and a million there, they figured that this saved them a lot of money and at the same time this money could buy out the very people who might, because of their power and position, lead blacks. This way they just get defused, you see what I mean?

Now it's common knowledge that all of that money never trickled down to the people it was supposedly intended for. The government knew that but that wasn't the reason for the investment of the money in the first place. Now change has taken place and the system does work differently and somehow the blacks are better vis-à-vis blacks. And one of the ways the power structure made these changes seem greater than they actually were was by bringing the members of the black bourgeoisie into the power structure and giving them lower levels of political power, and it's the whole melting pot thing digesting the indigestible black element.

In the past, you could see when all levels of power were controlled by the Anglo-Saxon elements. When the Irish came in 1848 they had little power.
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To keep order in the Irish area, a few Irish cops were hired to keep their folks in line. More and more of them came onto the force until they really were no longer a minority. Then they got promotions until most police chiefs were Irish, which led to a power base which held the Irish went more control away from the power structure. Then Italians went through a similar process. With the decision to pull blacks into the system the same process began to happen but with more confusion. People who were out front leaders of the black cause, like the minorities leaders before them, began to take the positions offered to them. In Vietnam, for example, more and more blacks went up the ladder till some came home majors, sometimes even generals, and then they were made heads of local police departments. Well now, back in the street we were demanding community control of our police and they met this outcry with the appointment of black cops and a few officers. So we got black cops and mayors and congressmen and this served to tranquilize people, or at least confuse people, because they had to wait to see if it was going to work. I think now there are people who werestoned nationalists and Pan Africans who are being forced to look at these changes and think the process through until they begin to see that it is basically a class issue, not solely a racial one. They have to reject unity on the basis of color because if they don’t, they’re holding hands with the enemy. Take, for example, the mayor of Los Angeles, who is black. Very rarely do people talk about the fact that Tom Bradley was a police lieutenant in the L.A.P.D. and that he came up the ladder when the department was run by Chief [William] Parker, who is a known butcher of black and minority peoples. The man was an outspoken racist. Now, any black man who becomes successful in a department like that has had to go through changes that can’t help but separate him from his people. Just because he changes his policeman’s uniform for a civilian suit is no indication of black power or of success for the cause. It’s actually the continuation of the American power structure, which is able to assume any color, white, black, Italian or whatever fulfills the need of the moment. Maybe we have to go through all of this just to understand the process so that we can ultimately reject it.

People like Mayor Bradley were always fencesitters anyway, but what about people like Bobby and Huey and the more radical elements in an organization like SNCC? Isn’t it discouraging when you see the changes in them?

Oh yes, when people who used to be willing to put their lives on the line go over, that’s very depressing. When Huey became religious and began relating to black capitalism and rejected armed struggle—I mean, nothing is easier to reject than armed struggle (laughter). The thrust of it is that he got involved in associations with black businessmen and that whole bourgeoisie circuit. The only difference is that Huey had pull with the people who had been involved with the party in the past, and there were many and they had trust in him. It’s very, very depressing to me because these series of events leading up to the new line destroyed a generation of radical leadership. I don’t think the people that really were involved in the party will in the long run find themselves content in these new organizations.

What about congressmen like Ron Dellums of California?

Ron Dellums is a sort of special case. He was in the Bay Area and he knew the whole history of the Panthers and he knew the falsity of the charges and he knew the political problems involved. I asked Ron Dellums to help me in terms of helping me get back into the States without going back to prison and he sent a message telling me that he didn’t want to get involved in the conflicts between me and Huey. Well, that’s not really the reason because I know that he really preferred to work with Huey. Because Ron is a politician and he knew how to give Huey advice and get him money and work the system, and real understanding took place. It’s only when you really move on these issues toward confrontation that people start to turn.

In a very strong way Watergate has united the American electorate, but unfortunately not around a new approach or new ideologies, but through cynicism. I don’t buy the line that Americans are apathetic but just weary. I think they have one cynical eye left open and that one is watching the economy. The government is so worried that I’m told, Los Angeles has started to train tactical police forces to deal with food riots. What do you think is in store over the next two years?

Well, as I said, I’m the guy who predicted a military coup in 1969 so I don’t know how good I am at second-guessing. However, there are some his-
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Historical connections that can be made with the Depression years. It is very obvious that the government is very frightened about the economy. Why else would they be playing all these semantic games with recession versus inflation when the real world is depression? In the Thirties, when the economy went, the left cheered because they saw it as the fulfillment of Marx’s prophecy: the final collapse of the capitalist system. Of course it didn’t happen that way. The thing was propped up by FDR, the New Deal and most importantly by the war, which got the economy rolling. That led right into the Korean War and the Cold War boom. Couple this with the world’s appetite for American goods and the economy which was then very strong. Vietnam pumped tens of billions of dollars into the system. So this all gave a distorted view of growth. Unfortunately, with the coming of age of other producers like Japan and Germany, we were no longer the sole producers. Add the oil mess which hits the kingpin, the auto industry, and we are in deep trouble; we are near a depression. Maybe the Thirties leftists were correct because all this did was artificially stimulate things and put off the inevitable, which seems to be coming. The ultimate paradox in all of this is that without the recent support of the communist nations, without those new markets, this might have happened sooner. Now they’re being drawn into the whole mess.

Where would Cadillac and Pan Am be today without the Arabs? Now that they have found oil in Alaska, I expect that G.E. will finally start selling refrigerators to the Eskimo. So what is going to happen when this gets worse?

Well, there are two ways to go, depending on the leadership, and both of the approaches are similar. You can go the way of Mussolini and Hitler, and set up a tightly controlled state economy where the money still remains in the hands of the wealthy, still in the royal coffers. This is the approach which is most appealing to people like Rockefeller. Now, if this is employed and the people who still have jobs get fat again, you won’t hear a word out of them; they will become hard hats again. But if that doesn’t work, then maybe some liberals will come with the left solution, which would be a state-run economy with the wealth more evenly distributed. The solutions are similar; it’s just the ultimate destination of the money that differs.

Who would bring this about? It is not going to be Alan Ginsberg or Mark Rudd or me, but most likely, some liberal senator with the right credentials and program.

How would he arrive at that program? Surely even the Democratic party couldn’t come up with such a far-out solution.

I’m not so sure about that. When they realize what is happening, when their constituency starts demanding, they might come up with such a program. You see, the pressure is going to be coming from more people, not just the disenfranchised people of the Sixties but women and the unemployed. Remember how the truck drivers became violent almost at once and how the government settled with them so quickly? That is going to be the new radical leadership.

Perhaps, but can the two parties go along with this?

Not as they exist now. You see, the Republican party is a discredited party. All that Ford wants to do is limp to 1976, if the Democrats win big, as I think they will in 1976, then things might happen. You see, change won’t come about in the Democratic party while the others are out of power. They must be united to win. But once they are in, you know, it’s going to be like with LBJ and the war. He got all the flack from his people. Now what might happen is that the left faction of both parties might split off and form a new coalition, a new force, that will address itself to the needs of the people. This is what I would like to see happen.

What is the role of the left in all of this?

People in the left, in America anyway, are primarily motivated by an intellectual understanding of the situation. These are people who have seen and studied the irrationality of the system for a very long while but it is still an intellectual process. Now no one ever said that the left was the movement, except maybe the left itself. The left is like a gullible in the system and that it actually what it should be. These people who understand the roots of the problems are important because they explain to the majority of the people things that they never put together before. So when an upheaval comes, there is a role for the left and most of them have always known that. It is hopefully at this point that they can come down off the mountain and really deal with the people.