

Negro Digest

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IS THE BLACK
REVOLUTIONIST
A PHONY?

A SELECTION
OF POEMS
By Paul Vesey

200 Years of Negro Stereotypes
THE MYTH BAG

A black silhouette of a Buffalo Soldier in profile, facing right, wearing a campaign hat and riding a horse. The soldier is holding the reins. The horse is also in silhouette, facing right.

THE

BUFFALO SOLDIERS:

The Negro Cavalry in the West, 1866-1891

Abundant Potential,
Elusive Fruit

IS THE BLACK REVOLUTIONIST A PHONY?

BY K. WILLIAM Kgositsile

"What we are faced with demands more discipline more tearing apart of the rot in our minds, and very conscious planning. The oppressor is not going to say, 'All right, I'm sorry I was so inhuman,' when we decide we have had enough of his nonsense"

*You and I a tribe of colors
this song that dance
godlight rhythms to birth
footsteps of memory
the very soul aspires to*



slippery road possessed with frenzied rhythms of passionate desire to grasp this historical moment and re-define man in order to keep moving with clarity.

So now I want to talk about somebody most of us are familiar with. The young self-avowed Black revolutionary artist and intellectual. He says he has read Marx, Engels, Lenin, Guevara, Mao, Nkrumah, Du Bois, Frantz Fanon. He says he has looked into Negritude, and though he was somewhat moved and sympathetic, he came

AND this too could have been a paean. But contradictions abound in our history. And there are historical discontinuities. Fortunately, we are constantly, inevitably moved: moved by the haunting memory of minutes measured in drops of pawned manhood. Or by the centuries-old whip like a mule, desperate, bobbing-and-weaving uphill on this

back with a frown. He likes LeRoi Jones' plays because they run the crap down like it really is. This young man knows about the nature of revolutions and counter-revolutions the world over and is never hesitant to express his hostility to the Western world. He is so disillusioned with Western values, he claims, that he will never ever trade in his retrieved soul rhythmic reasoning for the western analytic sensibility.

The upholders and defenders of Western Christian civilization kill Lumumba, and his heart bleeds. The upholders and defenders of Western Christian "democratic" ideals put Kaunda, Kenyatta, Sobukwe, Mandela and countless others in jail, and his heart bleeds. The upholders and defenders of Western Christian morality kill millions of people in Vietnam, Latin America, Africa and America, and his heart bleeds. He probably wishes he had built-in bombs to mow down all these devils.

That shows a lot of potential. But potential which remains potential does not help alleviate or solve anybody's problems. Potential has to grow and the fruits of that potential have to be realizable in very concrete terms as a way of life. Hence my accusation. I accuse the self-avowed young revolutionary artist and intellectual of negligence — or irresponsibility, should I say? It might even be downright cowardice.

Let me point out here that, in

particular, I am talking about the young Afro-American and the young South African artist and intellectual . . . for a number of reasons. In most cases artists from colonial countries have grown up in a not-so-highly industrialized urban society. The South African and the Afro-American are from highly industrialized societies run by racist capitalist exploiters and Judeo-Christian ethics. At all stages of his training, right from kindergarten on up, the values of the colonized were (are) systematically destroyed by the oppressor. The young colonial subject is trained to look down upon everything that is his; he is trained to aspire to the colonialist's ideals and to emulate the oppressor. His heroes, artistic and historical, are colonialist.

The success of the colonialist's damaging of our minds is reflected, for instance, when a young colonial subject watches an American cowboy movie. He finds himself, without knowing why, identifying positively with the white plunderer. He even sees the Indian, who is fighting in defense of his person and his land, as the villain. By the time he is through the master's college, he is so whitewashed and Western-oriented he might as well have had a Greco-Roman ancestry.

But as much of European culture as he assimilates, he finds himself still a nigger in the eyes of the oppressor. Exceptional, maybe, or different, but still a nigger to the

oppressor. This frustrates him and he begs the oppressor to accept him for he is ashamed to go back to his people because *he looks down upon them*. The African in what the oppressor calls the "under-developed" country—meaning that his country is not Western, Christian, industrialized; that the people there do not worship the dollar, the pound or the *franc* and the bomb—does not have our hang-ups. He has never mistaken himself for a carbon-copy, no-ball whiteman. His identity has never been questionable.



Thus, what we are faced with demands more discipline, more tearing apart of the rot in our minds, and very conscious planning. The oppressor is not going to say, "All right, I'm sorry I was so inhuman," when we decide we have had enough of his nonsense. He will be more repressive and he will kill us any time we say his game is over. Anybody who thinks the oppressor will take his hold off our throats when we say it hurts lives under a criminal illusion.

First, the oppressor throws Christ and that glory-after-death bull on you. When that ceases to work, he throws money on you, or a "separate development" plan or a civil rights bill, and selects your "leaders" for you. He will

pass laws to proscribe whatever you attempt to do if it is not in line with what he prescribes. When that fails, he throws a bomb on you. Ask the Vietnamese people or any people involved in national liberation wars.

It is at this point that history calls upon us to try the best we can to fulfill our mission. We owe it to the generations that will come after us. We owe it to the dead of Sharpeville, Watts and the Harlems around the world. We owe it to Malcolm, Fanon and the rest of suffering humanity. It is at this point that we must clearly realize that our problems are not going to be solved in conference rooms. The fight is going to be bloody, and our art, if it is valid, is going to be carved from that portion of history. It is going to reflect, explore and celebrate the nature of that blood. *Condemnation alone spills no liberatory blood*. At best, condemnation without action remains a tension-releasing mechanism. **BUT PEOPLE TRAINED UNDER FASCIST SAVAGERY TO BE SO AFRAID SETTLE FOR THE LEAST BIT OF COMFORT!** But that fear, too, like all Western references, must bleed to death.

All these years our passion and desires have been lying dormant like animals in hibernation. Or like leafless trees between the winter and the summer; not dried up and dead, but alive and waiting for the spring to blossom. Our spring has

been here too long and I'm afraid imperialist floods might ruin us before we bear fruit if we linger here too long. But still terror reigns in the mind. We are so full of fear. Where is the decolonized mind? Many of us realize that the attempt to establish a collective expression of a constructive revolutionary program, a pulling together of our heads to work out a new system of values and an unconditional assertion of those values—national and international in scope—calls for discipline and responsibility of duty.

We are afraid to shoulder this responsibility. As a result, we do not even totally reject the oppressor's values. We rationalize. We become dishonest. We are never hesitant to proclaim our identification with the people. But our identification remains strictly theoretical because there are no acts to give our statements substance.

We make an art and claim it is the people's art. But that is questionable. It seems as paternalistic a gesture as that of the white liberal. The liberal, never hesitant to make statements about how justifiable our fight against racist domination is, is not willing to fight by any means necessary against oppression. And I am afraid the attitude of some people who claim to be Black artists is similar to that of the liberal.

Recently, I asked a group of colleagues if they believed most of our art was truly with the people.

(There's a thing like selling Black, you know, and it seems like it's a commodity very much in demand in liberal circles.) One of them replied, "Man, . . . don't be so naive. You still think them niggers is worth dying for?" Please note that this attitude is not representative but it exists among people who write what they never hesitate to call Black poetry.

Then there are those who do not do much more than talk about or quote Marx. If that is one of the best things we can do for our liberation, we are in bad shape. Look, I do not have anything against Marx; in fact I like him. He is one of the few Europeans who tried to make the white sensibility human. For those self-styled "nationalists" who are as anti-socialist as the oppressor, let me point out here that there is a difference between socialist political and economic theory and the historical selling-out of known communists—I mean card-carrying ones.

Every nation in the world today which rejects Western racist ideologies operates from a socialist economic and political base. What we have to clearly realize, though, is that for the solution of our problems conventional Marxism is inadequate. We do not have a class problem. This does not mean that there is no Black *bourgeoisie*. But they do not have any kind of power in decision-making bodies which have shoved us where we are. They

are insignificant tools—showcase stooges for the oppressor to use in defense of his sinister ways.

If we had a purely class problem . . . if poverty was the major problem to be solved, in a rich country like America or South Africa, the poor, regardless of color or race, would necessarily have been reasonably united and fighting together to eliminate poverty. But our problem is both economic and racial, at the same time, and these two are so intertwined that we do not know which one is really the cause of the other, and it does not matter.



What is abundantly clear is that we are colonized and exploited by white people—all of them Western, Christian, racist. And even the white worker, a little pawn without imagination, benefits from this. Thus, class exploitation is not similar to racial domination and exploitation. And Marx developed theories and strategy to guide and attempt to humanize pre-capitalist Europe. But even he did not spend all his time theorizing his people's problems. He was not afraid. He was out there organizing and mobilizing those forces to get the revolution off the ground. Where is our program of action?

The salvation of the world, we now clearly know, lies in the destruction of the power of the West-

ern world. It lies in the establishment of a system of values hostile to any manner of exploitation, oppression and the domination of one race by another race or one nation by another nation. This calls for an understanding of the world we live in and a clear vision of the world we want to construct. This calls for collective planning. Our lack of planning programs of action and establishing revolutionary social institutions renders us weak as a group. And I say Lumumba got killed because of our collective weakness. Mandela and Sobukwe, and thousands of others, are in jails, immobilized, because of our collective weakness. Brother Malcolm was assassinated at the beginning of his revolutionary maturity because of our collective weakness. Countless other perverted atrocities are continually perpetrated on us because of our collective weakness.

Brothers, what I am driving at is, for instance, the following: if our historical enemy—now practically our natural enemy—had known that should anything have happened to Brother Malcolm X there would have been chaos in Harlem that night; that the following day there wouldn't have been a single white-owned store on 125th street; that the very foundations of this system would have had to cope with a Black uncontrollable power; the chances are that Brother Malcolm would still be with us.

I do not accuse the group of wanting to be owned—even re-

motely, psychologically—by imperialist forces. I believe that we would rather die than be weak and enslaved in whatever form modern-day slavery is practiced. I believe that we want to live in a world with a new order of things, a new image of man, loving love, loving life, feeling and really living instead of being perverted with material values. I believe that we all no longer want any stupid iffy concessions from liberals who are essentially in sympathy—and collaborate—with the forces we want to destroy for the survival of humanity. We know the aspirations and the needs of the people because, if we are not just maladjusted Western artists with Black faces (mere carbon-copy whitemen), our consciousness and collective conscience find direction from the throbbing of the people's collective heart.

Of course, the people are not always right, hence the absolute necessity for institutions that would guide the development of their values. If we have this consciousness, and we are moved by our conscience as men in search of a new order of things, we will realize that the frustrated, opportunistic, dishonest white Left's anti-capitalist whimpering is not our problem. I believe it is time for us to stop and check ourselves out thoroughly, and, as LeRoi Jones said "... you might surprise yourself right out the window."

We are preoccupied, if we are

sincere, not necessarily with the atrocities of the Western world, but with turning the world into a better place for human habitation. We feel and think as we do only because we now believe that we are inherently more interested in humanity than in the material values of the white Western world. This does not mean that we have not killed men and raped women. But our historical experience is such that, since we came into contact with the white sensibility, the concentration of our efforts, our attempt, as a race, to live, has boiled down to means of survival. However, right now we are not concerned with what we might have been but with what we will be. We clearly understand that we are at war. We have always been at war—only for so long we pretended that we did not clearly realize we were. Now we clearly realize, also, that whether we fight back or not, the enemy continues to molest us.

There are some mature artists and intellectuals around. Unfortunately their growth is mainly personal, virtually divorced from the masses of the people though forever given momentum by the people's collective desire for liberation. In this aspect of our development our acts, the constant broadening of our consciousness of the world we live in, our psychological liberation, have been mainly personal because we have not developed a body of thought, an ideology to de-

termine our collective behavior, a firm uncompromising stand as a liberatory vehicle. The people must know what is going on and what can be done. This means we should be prepared to analyze situations and help to clarify the peoples' vision. When Johnson comes out and threatens, "Remember, there's only ten per cent of you . . ." we must clarify the implications of that move to the people. A speech at a rally or an article in a magazine will not do this. We have to establish institutions which will facilitate the political education of the people, where our strategies can be mapped out.

And then, there is the crucial question of symbols. The symbols that the majority of the people relate to have been created by the oppressor to ensure our psychological captivity. We must create more relevant symbols that the peoples' development of a system of symbols that will intensify the people's determination to be free, politically, economically and psychologically; symbols that will facilitate the

peoples' development of a system of thought which will enable them to readily see through the oppressor's strategies so that we will not be caught off-guard again as it so damned frequently happens. Our awareness of where we are, historically, demands this responsibility of us.

Finally, I think our method, at this historical moment, as a group, is bankrupt. Our literature and the arts, I believe, should be the solid coil around our collective desire and method. Make no mistake. There is some beautiful poetry around, some beautiful music and the rest of the arts too. But the people do not know this. The people do not read; they are too busy at the grind, trying to make it. Perhaps, even if they read, at this stage of our development, they would not recognize the beauty because of the symbols they have been trained to relate to. And poetry is not enough. It is not, and has never been, because of a lack of poetry, song or dance that we are in our present condition.



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