



ON CULTURAL NATIONALISM

By Linda Harrison

Cultural nationalism is recognized by many who think in a revolutionary manner as a distinct and natural stage through which one proceeds in order to become a revolutionary. Such is not always the case, and many people remain at the level of a cultural nationalist all of their lives. In the United States, cultural nationalism can be summed up in James Brown's words - "I'm Black and I'm Proud."

Cultural nationalism manifests itself in many ways but all of these manifestations are essentially grounded in one fact; a universal denial and ignoring of the present political, social, and economic realities and a concentration on the past as a frame of reference.

This phenomenon is not unique to this stage of the revolution in which we find ourselves; neither is it unique to the United States Black "citizens" struggle for freedom. Frantz Fanon - in THE WRETCHED OF THE EARTH said of this phenomenon that "There is no taking of the offensive - and no redefining of relationships. There is simply a concentration on a hard core of culture which is becoming more and more shrivelled up - inert and empty."

Those who believe in the "I'm Black and Proud" theory believe that there is dignity inherent in wearing naturals; that a buba makes a slave a man; and that a common language; Swahili; makes all of us brothers. These people usually want a culture rooted in African culture; a culture which ignores the colonization and brutalization that were part and parcel; for example; of the formation and emergence of the Swahili language. In other words cultural nationalism ignores the political and concrete, and concentrates on

there to go after a woman has got a natural -- to the natural shop of course! - and pay \$5.50 for a hairdo, \$2.00 for oil spray; \$2.00 for comb out conditioner, \$3.50 for a line and comb-out, and then to the dress shop for a traditional wrap priced at \$25.00 to \$50.00. On the way to and from this shopping and spending they are still observing the oppression and exploitation of their people - in different clothes.

Because cultural nationalism offers no challenge or offense against the prevailing order; the influx of "Black and Proud" actors, movie stars, social workers, teachers - probation officers and politicians is tremendous. Bourgeoisie and upper class standing is no handicap to the "Black" and vice versa. The power structure, after the mandatory struggle, condones and even worships this new found pride which it uses to sell every product under the sun. It worships and condones anything that is harmless and presents no challenge to the existing order. Even its top representatives welcome it and turn it into "Black Capitalism" and related phenomenon. Everyone is black and the bourgeoisie continue to hate their less fortunate black brothers and sisters; and the oppressed continue to want. The "Black" social worker continues to work for the degrading welfare system, and the "Black" probation and parole officers continue to violate their probationers and parolees.

We have no nation without a fight against those who oppress us. We have no culture but a culture born out of our resistance to oppression. "No colonial system draws its justification from the fact that the territories (and people) it dominates are culturally nonexistent. You will never make

a myth and fantasy.

A man who lives under slavery and any of its extensions rarely regains his dignity by rejecting the clothes of his enslaver; he rarely regains his dignity except by a confrontation on equal grounds with his enslaver. All men can die, and this is the only thing that equalizes them. Under many systems those with money die less often. Any confrontation which gives men, no matter what their social or economic position, an equal chance to die under equal conditions is uplifting for those who consider themselves at the bottom and degrading and toppling for those who are at the top. To see himself on an equal plane with his enslaver is to realize that the ones who enslave and oppress do not have the divine right to do so. There is nothing to be proud of in colonization and slavery and only out of the initiative of the oppressed can come something meaningful and amending to his existence.

Quoting Fanon "The desire to attach oneself to tradition or bring abandoned traditions to life again does not only mean going against the current of history but also opposing ones own people." Cultural Nationalists in their finery support many of the evils which have put them in the position of servitude. In the absence of constructive and corrective platforms and actions, the support and profit from "Being Black" they become profit seekers selling earrings at 400% mark up and buba's from dime store yardage at Saks 5th Avenue prices. Sort of a hustler trying to become respectable. Exploiting those with weaker minds and weaker pocketbooks.

And because cultural nationalism has no political doctrine as a rule - the limits of being black and proud are proximate. Where is

colonialism blush for shame by spreading out little known cultural treasures under its eyes." the peoples of Africa had cultures. It is only racism and economic necessities and whims that enslaved these countries and people. Apes have cultures - they are put into zoos. Economics transcends cultures in the capitalistic context. That is to say that capitalism will always use as its basis for expansion a real or imagined economic necessity. It will of course justify with racist conclusions and explanations of the progress that they bring to the "Natives" and "Savages," and no culture in the world, except a revolutionary culture will stop or halt or destroy that advance. Colonialism, slavery, neocolonialism, and other extensions of capitalism thrive over a thousand and one cultures.

"It is around the peoples struggles that African-Negro culture takes on substance - and not around songs, poems or folklore." A culture that does not challenge wholly and resolutely the dominant and exploitative forces - political, economical, and social forces - is a culture which is either pre-slavery, pre-colonialistic or completely made up and in either case completely useless. And cultural nationalism is most always based on racism. We hear "Hate Whitey" and "Kill the Honkey". These statements ignore the analysis - intellectual analysis such as those made by Eldridge Cleaver on the relationships between the government and the pigs and marines etc; and they ignore the possibility of allies. In all cases cultural nationalism - in the midst of struggle, seeks to create a racist ideology. To be a racist in America is certainly justified, but it is a handicapped position

to take as a revolutionary.

"Adherence to African-Negro culture and to cultural unity of Africa is arrived at in the first place by upholding unconditionally the people's struggle for freedom. No one can truly wish for the spread of African culture if he does not give practical support to the creation of the conditions necessary to existence of that culture. . ."

How can a cultural nationalist claim to love and to be proud of a country - and a continent that has suffered for hundreds of years in colonialism and slavery, and is still suffering in all the cleverly disguised and open forms of these institutions. How can he himself deny the political realities of his own life in America by dressing up in a maternity smock (brightly colored) to participate in the culture of a people torn by revolution and revolt. How can a cultural nationalist claim adherence to the cultures of Africa, when the culture of Africa is a revolutionary culture. Solidarity with the revolutionary people all over the world has brought about a common culture to people who know nothing of each other except that they suffer under similar systems of exploitation; degradation, and racism. That their people have undergone much the same changes and that in no case will the people regain their dignity and find their freedom except through a face to face and equal confrontation through revolutionary tactics and actions "A revolutionary culture is the only valid culture for the oppressed!"

All quotations except the last one from "THE WRETCHED OF THE EARTH" by Fanon.

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