

Thoughts On What We Are Becoming: A Discussion Paper

"The beginning of wisdom is to know
who you are — draw near and listen:
We are the people of the day before yesterday,
and the people of the day after tomorrow.

The world is our village —
what is good for the world is good for us."

Introduction

1. This paper calls into question the terms and concepts that We use to identify ourselves, e.g., "black," "white," New Afrikan, American, African-American, etc. Whatever your present identity, it ain't static, but a thing in motion and evolving, influencing and being influenced by all social phenomena, as things change, as the old fades away and new things arise. No matter how you define your goals and interests (e.g., for national self-determination, to "smash the white race," to overthrow capitalism, to liberate women, gays and lesbians, etc.), all of these require the self-transformation of each individual and of each group, toward greater philosophical, ideological, social homogeneity — one world, one people — not withstanding the diversity that will remain (since life would come to an end without the (non-antagonistic) struggle of "opposites").

2. Even now, We must use, in various ways, some of the differences as means of evolving into the "New People" that We are becoming. i still have a need (no matter how uncomfortable i feel) to speak from an identity as a New Afrikan (a nationality, not a "race" or "color") Communist (socio-political consciousness) because of the boundaries within which We exist and the need to have a present identity that distinguishes me/us from the enemy — but, at the same time, i must begin to develop a new orientation for the present identity. That is, We must continue to organize on the basis of particular identities and interests as the best means of gaining strength and character, necessary to transform the particular into the general.

3. For example: A) Our identity as a people (New Afrikan) lies at the center of the struggle for self-determination — choosing political destiny requires a specific socio-political consciousness. As We struggle as a people for resolution of our problems, We need an identity that distinguishes us from the forces of evil, which symbolizes our need to move beyond the boundaries of U.S. political-economic structures and its bourgeois/capitalist values and morality. Our evolving identity must inform our new politics and the new socio-economic structure that We need in order to realize ourselves as a New People;

B) "New Afrikans" must continue to struggle as a people — yet trans-

form the meaning and goals of the struggle so that even as a new “national identity is shaped, it comes to be characterized by consciousness, and not by “race” or “color,” and the interests of “New Afrikans” are expressed as the common interests of all peoples (i.e., an end to all forms of exploitation and oppression). Afrikans in the U.S. may or may not “Free The Land” or otherwise realize a “national independence” as presently conceived — but liberation in any form, for any of us, can only come through a challenge and overthrow of capitalism, imperialism, and patriarchy.

It’s really “anti-capitalism” and “pro-socialism” that sit at the center of the identity of the New People — straight-forward challenges and abandonment of the capitalist way, and anything short of this is insufficient, and part of what’s passing away, e.g., Afrocentricity, multiculturalism, and New Abolitionism.

4. Afrocentricity and multiculturalism are both essentially forms of an “ethnic pluralism” that doesn’t critique and abandon capitalism. They join the “New Abolitionism” as petty-bourgeois tendencies which vacillate and fail to cross the boundaries of bourgeois hegemony. (Those who want to challenge “whiteness,” “abolish the white race,” or “overthrow white supremacy” must begin to explicitly name and challenge capitalism, and not continue to omit naming it and instead use such “neo-radical” language as “to challenge, disrupt, and eventually overturn the institutions and behavior patterns that reproduce the privileges of whiteness” — underlying all these is CAPITALISM! “Whiteness” is not the cause, and to merely challenge “whiteness” without an explicit challenge to capitalism is actually a way to continue enjoying privilege while claiming to reject it. It won’t work if one tries to make “the destruction of the white race” central to the destruction of capitalism, rather than making the destruction of capitalism central to the destruction of “white privilege” — “whiteness” is to capitalism, what the shadow is to an object — you won’t destroy the object by trying to destroy the shadow.)

5. Identities based on so-called “race” or skin pigmentation are increasingly inadequate and are fading away. Identities based upon nationality are better, but these, too, will lack and fade if the nations that We claim don’t abandon and challenge patriarchy, capitalism and imperialism. At bottom, the way that We come to identify, as individuals, as groups, as a New People, is and will best rest upon what We believe about ourselves and relationships to other people, and to nature — upon what We do in and for the world.

Part One

1. Who are We? How do We define ourselves — especially, how do We define ourselves in relation to others? Does raising questions such as these draw us into a form of “identity politics” that can divide us, and diminish the struggles around “more important” issues? Only if We fail to see the interconnectedness, and interdependency of all issues, and give a narrow definition to our “identity politics” which tends to isolate one aspect of who We are (e.g., one’s “race,” gender, or profession) from all other aspects, and attempt to make that one aspect the sole focus of one’s socio-political energies.

Of course, knowing who you are is at the "center" of anything and everything that you struggle for — any problem that you have and seek to resolve; any vision that you want to realize — but, who you are is a combination of many elements, is constantly reshaped and influenced by literally all social phenomena — no single aspect of who you are exists in isolation from all other aspects. As best We can, We must begin to define an identity (a "label" if you will) that incorporates all aspects of who We are... that takes into account all of the social phenomena that acts upon us, and upon which We, too, act....

In this sense, We are dealing with an "identity/politics" — but in a broader, more complex, and far more dynamic and evolving context than that in which We generally perceive the issue....

2. i'm trying to discuss a concept of "identity" that is based upon what We all have — or should have — in common; upon a set of psycho-socio-economic characteristics that define our common interests, and inform our jointly arrived at and pursued solutions to all questions arising from the struggle to end all forms of oppression and exploitation, and to build a socialist society. (e.g., questions as to why We don't have, and how We can have, FREE public transportation; an end to environmental destruction; an end to the high cost and widespread unavailability of health care; people's control over insurance and pharmaceutical companies; people's regulation of the air waves (t.v. and radio) and phone communication and public utilities — literally any and every issue that We face in our daily lives is related to the way that We define — or should define — our identity and our interests.)

3. i'm trying to discuss an identity — a concept of identity — that is characterized by (one's) politics (and a concept of politics that characterizes (one's) identity; where "politics" comes to be understood by everyone as not just what "they" do in D.C., or at the state capital, or at city hall, but what every individual does or fails to do about all things presently left to "the politicians").

4. "The people of the day before yesterday" are essentially characterized by the socio-economic orders that they developed, on the basis of the conditions under which they lived. We refer to these orders as "communal" or as "primitive communism" — where there were no concepts of "ownership" or of "private property" in the major means of social production, and the people shared in the work and the fruits of the social means of production — no person or group was exploited or oppressed by another person or group (i.e., for reasons of gender, "race," or class)

5. "The people of the day after tomorrow" must create a contemporary form of communal society, where differences between people aren't used to rationalize exploitation; where all of the people again "own" and share in the fruits of the social means of production, and participate in the major decision-making — where all people enjoy the rights to FREE education, health care, and all other major social services....

6. The struggle for a new identity (individual and collective) is a reflection of the process of becoming New People, with new values, a new moral-

ity, and new social, economic, and political consciousness. It's not just about what We call ourselves, but about the kind of people We want/need to be; about the way We want to live, to produce and distribute the goods and services that sustain our lives. It's about shaping new ways of relating to each other and to nature — urging each other to think about and discuss such new relationships, rather than continue to rank commodities above people....

We're engaged in struggle today not only because of things and ideas that We stand in opposition to, but because there are things and ideas that We are/should be struggling to realize — what We want for ourselves and our children and all those that come after us, everywhere in the world. All of this is about "identity," knowing that what We fight too depends on who we are; that who We ought to be, informs what We (should) fight for....

(End of Part One)

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THOUGHTS ON WHAT WE ARE BECOMING: A DISCUSSION PAPER

Part Two

“...black people in the North as early as the 1830s and 40s and perhaps as late as the 1850s, went through periods during which forces of integration and black nationalism (though these terms were not used until much later), grappled on a major scale for authority within black communities.... Not infrequently this battle between contending world views was played out under cover of arguments over what people of color should call themselves...the struggle over names being a surface manifestation of fundamental ideological differences...” (1) (my emphasis)

1. Part One [CROSSROAD, 9#2] opened this discussion by calling into question terms and concepts that We use to identify ourselves, and We should review three points made there:

1) Our present identity isn't static, but is “in motion and evolving, influencing and being influenced by all social phenomena.”

2) “As We struggle as a people for resolution of our problems, We need an identity that distinguishes us from the forces of evil, which symbolizes our need to move beyond the boundaries of U.S. political-economic structures and its bourgeois/capitalist values and morality. Our evolving identity must inform our new politics and the new socio-economic structure that We need in order to realize ourselves as a New People.”

3) “Identities based on so-called ‘race’ or skin pigmentation are increasingly inadequate and are fading away. Identities based upon nationality are better, but these, too, will lack and fade if the nations that We claim don't abandon and challenge patriarchy, capitalism and imperialism.” (2)

2. Here, in Part Two, i focus the discussion upon: 1) the context within which all issues confronting us occur, with particular emphasis upon the “name debates,” the development and change in the form of our collective identity. That context is the loss of our independence and the struggle of our people to regain our freedom. Ours is a struggle against the forces of capitalism, in all of its forms, i.e., colonialism and neocolonialism, and what i call post-neocolonialism (post-1968)-settler-imperialism, as uniquely developed and practiced inside what's called the U.S. of A.; 2) the occurrence of ‘name debates’ as instances of class struggle, through which ever-rising pseudo-bourgeois and pettybourgeois forces struggle to gain ideological and political leadership over our people, and to strengthen their role as intermediary between the people and “America” and its rulers -- each “name debate” also reflecting changes in the structural relation (forms of control and exploitation) between our people and the oppressive state; 3) factors underlying name debates and the development of identity are dynamic and primarily material (political, economic, socio-cultural), and manifest themselves through the interests of the class forces engaged in the debates (i.e., the “masses” versus the “elites” -- and their colonial masters); 4) the struggle over “names” and identity is, at bottom, a struggle for a new, anti-capitalist, people-centered (“humanist”) socioeconomic order.

3. The passage from Stuckey's Ideological Origins that i opened with, throws light on the context within which “name debates” occur, and implies the factors underlying changes in identity, or, the basis and role of identity with particular reference to the process of modern national and social revolution.

It's very important that We keep this context foremost in mind, and that We adopt a critical approach as We re-view it, and re-interpret it. For example, an approach toward the terms and concepts “integration” and “nationalism” must, first of all, understand them not as different tactical alternatives available within a single strategic vision. They are opposing concepts, fundamentally different ideologies, resting on antagonistic interpretations of our reality, and determination of objectives.

Even Webster's definition of "ideology" and "identity" will serve to help make the point. We'd find that "ideology" is a set of beliefs, assertions, theories, aims, characteristics of a group (people) or culture, that serve to define physical, social, mental and spiritual reality. We'd find that "identity" is a sameness in all that constitutes the objective reality -- a relation established by psychological identification.

It's generally understood that "integration" is a rejection of "nationalism," but it's only the rejection of one nationalism, and the acceptance of another. When We refer to people as "integrationists" We're saying that they embrace the ideology of the "dominant society," (i.e., "white nationalism" or "American nationalism" or capitalism and imperialism), while rejecting the ideology of, say, "black nationalism" (i.e., anti-capitalist, and socialist).

We tend to be unmindful of the fact that "nationalism" is about ideology and politics, not color. When We refer to people as "nationalists," We're saying that they have, or are shaping, an ideology and a particular set of social relations. We tend to use the term or phrase "**black** nationalism" the way We'd ordinarily refer to, say, Angolan or Russian, Chinese or Tanzanian nationalism... Vietnamese or Cuban, Zambian or Algerian nationalism. That is, We use the term "black" to designate a nationality, a people, a country or nation -- We need another term.

We continue to use "black" rather than, say, "New Afrikan" or "Maroonian", because We use the ideological framework of the oppressive society to evaluate ourselves -- even when the evaluation is done by "radical" or "leftist" scholars and activists. That framework becomes "assimilationist" or "integrationist," and ignores or downplays the existence of the opposing "nationalist" ideology and socialist strivings of Afrikans within U.S. borders, obscuring our attempt to preserve and develop a national identity, and to chart a political course that opposes capitalism and (post-)neocolonialism.

These were the concepts and processes that were in play in the 1830s, 40s and 50s -- that have been in play since We were 'taken out of our own history' -- but were unnamed or known by other names, until the use of the terms "integration" and "nationalism".

4. Keeping context in mind, as We move through the process, also means focusing on content over form -- the content of, "nationalism," ideology, identity -- and the tools used. That is, ideology is a set of beliefs about our social reality, but We also use philosophy as a means of determining and interpreting reality. That is, for example, "integrationists" and "nationalists" -- if they truly have opposing ideologies - will consequently also have opposing philosophical frameworks, i.e., the former will probably be some form of idealism, and the latter some form of materialism.

Our collective identity, our sameness in all that constitutes the objective reality, and our relation established by psychological identification, has to rest on a shared understanding of how the world works, of how We determine what's real and what's not real, what's a necessary objective and means to use to reach that objective, and what ain't. In fact, merely raising the point that We must be more cognizant of our philosophical base makes it an element of the identity under development and pushes it to the forefront of the issues to be addressed by the people as a whole, while also making it concrete and immediate, not abstract or remote.

Above all, keeping context in mind means that We continue to debate our collective identity because We're still an oppressed people -- We lost our freedom, and We're engaged in struggle to regain our freedom.

"...in colonialism and in neo-colonialism the essential characteristic of imperialist domination remains the same: the negation of the historical process of the dominated people by means of violent usurpation of the freedom of development of the national productive forces...."

"...the national liberation of a people is the regaining of the historical personality of that people, its return to history through the destruction of the imperialist domination to which it was subjected..."

"...the principal aspect of national liberation struggle is the struggle against neo-colonialism...." (3)

5. What We struggle **against** informs what We struggle **for**. It would seem a rather simple process, but a look back over the past several hundred years -- even a casual observation of our present situation -- tells us that it's not. What are We really struggling against? "Racism"? What are We really struggling for? "Equality"?

If We say We're struggling for "freedom," then We have to know when, how, and why We lost our freedom. Most importantly, **We have to know exactly what it was that We lost!** If We're struggling for "equality," then what was the form and the content of the "equality" that We lost?

Let's gain some understanding of phrases like "negation of the historical process," "usurpation of the freedom of development of the national productive forces," "historical personality" and "return to history." We have to know, in essence, what "history" is, what it means to be "taken out" of it and have it "arrested" by colonialism -- no matter the form of that colonialism.

Let's learn about "productive forces" but understand that their principal element is **people**. We were **peoples** with our own nations and states, our own social/class structures and conflicts. We had our own histories, and We made our history as We, say, gave life to our children and as We developed our economies and managed our commerce. Our historical process was the self-determined pursuit of our aims and our active participation in every component of our social process. OUR historical personality was our individual and collective identity, at any point of development. The conduct of "name debates" should involve discussion of the form and content of the "freedom" that We lost, and of the freedom that We seek.

6. The context and process of our "name debates" on these shores had their effective point of origin at the onset of the oppressive relation -- the moment that We were captured, sold, placed into pens and dungeons and aboard ships bound West. The context and process evolved as We set foot on these shores. All of this constituted an assault upon our freedom, our history and humanity, and upon our identity.

(Do you recall the scene in the movie Roots -- We're inside the ship and the brother says: Talk to the Sister or Brother next to you. Learn their language; teach them your language. We must become one people!)

We didn't land on these shores with a collective identity as "slaves," "negroes," "blacks," -- not even as "Africans." We arrived here as, say, Wolof, Ibo, or Fula. However, We had already begun to change, to develop an identity as a **new people**.

We initially called ourselves "Africans," but underneath it all We knew (then, better than most of us know now), that We were "new" Africans -- a new people, forged through our collective oppression, by an emerging capitalism and a unique form of settler-colonialism.

We called ourselves "Africans" not solely nor even primarily to maintain a link with a "place". Being "Africans" gave us a new status, a new dignity, a new identity as human beings with a way of life clearly separate and distinct from that of the oppressor. It reminded us of the type of freedom from which We'd been "usurped," and which We sought to regain under a new set of conditions (e.g., "Maroons").

We became "Africans," but soon, some among us wanted to be other than what We were -- "negro," "colored," "American" -- anything but "African" or New Afrikan. These some no longer wanted to identify with the majority of the people and our interests; they no longer wanted to maintain a united opposition to the oppressive social order, while seeking to regain lost independence. Instead, these some opted for "inclusion" and "equality" **as defined by the oppressor!** These some were the embryonic "native elite" among us, and on these shores -- the emerging pseudo-bourgeoisie and petty-bourgeoisie, whose successors were among those who, in the late 1980s, called for a new term by which to identify us, by way of renegotiating the terms of rule previously agreed to by them and their colonial masters.

Point: We don't have to start in the 1830s to begin analyses of "name debates," class formation and class struggle among New Afrikan people inside U.S. borders.

The first thing to remember, here, is that We were not torn from classless societies, and therefore not unfamiliar with class struggle. So, it's easier than most imagine to go back to the 1630s, the 1730s, to uncover the extent to which We've debated what We should call ourselves, and the struggle to shape a new identity on these shores. All of this was a natural consequence of **being** human, **having** history **and** culture, resisting oppression, and fighting to regain our independence -- as a people -- on these shores.

7. The 1830s, 40s and 50s weren't the first, nor the last periods during which We waged class struggle under cover of debates over what to call ourselves. Most people over 30 years of age will recall the debate in the 1960s over "negro" and "black," while people under 30 may best recall the debate in the late 1980s over "black" and "African-American".

Few of us, however, understand these debates as forms of class struggle among the people, which also mark changes in the developmental and structural form of our collective oppression. For example: The move from, say, Ibo to "slave," represents a transition from independence to dependence; from "slave" to "African" represents the formation of a new people, our resistance to **colonial** domination, and our struggle to regain independence in a new setting; from "African" to "colored" or "negro" represents a transition from a predominantly horizontal internal social/class structure and "colonial model" of relations with the U.S., to the greater development of a vertical social/class structure, a "neocolonial model"; from "negro" to "black" represents a transition to an anti-colonial struggle -- the failure of that struggle led us to the transition from "black" to "African-American" -- the development of what i call "post-neocolonialism," wherein what was perceived as a "purely nationalist" objective is now perceived as a "revolutionary nationalist" one -- but it's a move "beyond nationalism" and toward a new type of humanist, socialist, society.

It won't hurt to re-state the point: "Name debates" occur periodically because they reflect our effort to resolve the fundamental contradiction between ourselves and the U.S. settler-imperialist state.

We lost our "original" identities, and their corresponding socioeconomic formations (i.e., states and nations) when We lost our freedom. We shaped a new identity in the process of collective oppression, and resistance. **We will continue to conduct "name debates" until We regain our freedom** and, consequently, shape yet another identity. The new identity that We're now shaping will be characterized not by color, nor by a place, but by a set of political, economic and socio-cultural behaviors and values, new philosophy and ideology.

8. The most recent "name debate" occurred in the late 1980s, and was marked by a 1988 "Call" issued by Ramona Edelin, of the National Urban Coalition, and Jesse Jackson. On the surface, they sought to have the term "African American" recognized as "official" (re: the U.S.) and as the "reference of choice" (re: the people). Under cover of that debate, pseudo-bourgeois and petty-bourgeois forces were placing themselves in position to play new or modified roles as "compradors" and "partners" in the new world order of global capitalism, under U.S. leadership.

A **Chicago Defender** editorial on the debate pointed out that on the surface, the concern over what We should be called may have seemed meaningless, and draw attention away from more pressing concerns such as drug abuse, family disintegration, and economic under-development. The editorial noted, however, that such concerns have a common root, "lost, misplaced, or confused identity."

(The late 1980s was, looking back, a transitional period in the development of U.S. imperialism abroad, and its "structural adjustment" (Thanks, Marilyn) inside the borders, and with particular attention to New Afrikan people. To the New Afrikan bourgeois forces, the name debate symbolized an "arrival". The structural adjustment in issue, between the U.S. and New Afrikan people, began in the late 1960s, marked especially by the events of 1968 and the final recommendations-of the Kerner Commission.

(The Kerner Commission was, for us, like the commission the British sent into Kenya after the Kenyan people and their Land and Freedom Army struck for their independence, and Kenyatta was set up as President, and not Odinga. Inside the U.S., the 1960s had seen the rise of a violent mass-based resistance that was not only "nationalist" ("It's Nation Time!"), but "revolutionary" (the people were calling the capitalist system into question, and beginning to discuss socialist options). The Kerner Commission was charged with determining 'What happened? Why did it happen? How to prevent it from happening again?' In essence, they recommended that New Afrikans must be made to think that they were, or could become, "Americans." At the top of the list of measures proposed to help bring this about was the "expansion of the negro/black middle class.")

(Of course, in order to make New Afrikans feel "American," all of America's major institutions had to extend themselves toward New Afrikans, "include" them and treat them more "fairly." As a consequence, however, of these adjustments by American institutions as they promoted their nationalism, the national consciousness of New Afrikans had to be undermined, and the institutions of New Afrikan people -- colleges, hospitals, banks and insurance companies, community-based small business etc., -- had to be "integrated," or destroyed.)

(Check: Brothers stood at the 1968 Olympics with raised fists. At the 1972 Olympics, George Foreman ran around the ring waving an American flag! No wonder he was scorned in Zaire and is still loved by America.)

9. We've seen some of the background for the 1988 "Call," but it was also prepared by the conduct of ideo-theoretical struggle among the people. Therefore, before We discuss the 1980s debate, We have to first touch upon a speech delivered by Ron Karenga, which will necessarily take us through Frantz Fanon, Amilcar Cabral, and a bit of their contributions to the discourse on the basis, role, and objective of identity in the struggles of oppressed peoples. (4)

We must start with Karenga's speech because it contains ideotheoretical propositions which were at the center of the 1980s debate, e.g., premises and phrases used by those urging the use of "African-American" during the debate seemed to have come straight from the mouth of Karenga (altho they could have come from the mouths or pens of any number of petty-bourgeois intellectuals). However, the premises used by Karenga were "borrowed" from Frantz Fanon, and Amilcar Cabral.

On February 15, 1985, Karenga addressed an audience in St. Louis, Missouri, and his presentation included a discussion of identity. As his point of departure, he claimed that Frantz Fanon had urged oppressed peoples to ask themselves "three fundamental questions: 1) Who am I?; 2) Am I really who I am?; 3) Am I all I ought to be?"

According to Karenga (and Fanon?), oppressed peoples must ask these questions of themselves in order to determine their relation to (world) history, which, he said, manifests itself through Values (because they inform what We're committed to, and they dictate our possibilities), and National Culture (because it's self-conscious, and collective: "We are what We do; our practice identifies us and makes us.").

To emphasize the importance of our need to understand our relation to it, Karenga made the following four points on the role of history:

1) It's the basis of identity. However, in light of the three questions cited above, and the following three points, it seemed strange to me that Karenga then, very matter-of-factly, stated that "We are African-Americans," and that this was so because (and here he borrowed from Cabral, but without attribution) "identity is based on historical origin and social location...where you came from and where you are now -- Africans in America, or African-Americans." (my emphasis)

2) It "tells you who you are in relation to your possibilities...by what you've done, and can do again."

3) It helps us to pinpoint and to understand "where things are tending."

4) It helps us to discern "a development pattern, and it says **We're not what We are**, but what We're **becoming**...If all you are is what you are now, you're actually dead." (my emphasis)

10. Can you see my problem with this? Well, let's go to the first point made about the role of history.

Karenga says history establishes the basis for identity -- and, as if to illustrate the point, he says, We "are" African-Americans. That's right, you say? Well, what about the three questions that We started with: Who am i? Am i really who i am? Am i all i ought to be?

After you deal with those questions for a while, consider the other three points made on the role of history, i.e., in relation to our possibilities; in relation to where things are tending; in relation to his statement that "We're **not** what We **are** -- but what We're **becoming** -- If all you are is what you are **now**, you're actually dead." Because everything changes.

Well, maybe everything changes except Karenga's perception that We "are" Americans. "History" is dynamic; dynamism runs through each of the three questions and each of the four points on the role of history. It's only that line "We **are** African-Americans" that's static.... Karenga could have qualified that statement, but i contend that it was deliberately made, and served as the linch-pin in a strategy by bourgeois forces to pose as "leadership" of "Africans in America," as they helped the U.S. to, for example, spearhead a new phase of economic exploitation of the African continent. But i stray....

11. Karenga says "We **are** African-Americans" -- **Why** are We? He says it's because our identity is based on "historical origin" and "social location" -- again, concepts borrowed from Amilcar Cabral, and too loosely adapted and inappropriately applied (misinterpreted and misused).

Is it really that simple -- that We must be "African-Americans" because of where We came from and where We are now? Does being in this place actually, or alone, make us "Americans"?

No, it's not that simple, and only in part because "America" is not just a "place". "America," as We now know it, is a culture, an ideology, a specific way of organizing production, of distribution and exchange of goods and services. "Americans" pledge allegiance to the political and other social demands and expectations of "American" nationality, and bourgeois/capitalist, anti-humanist values.

However, assuming that We are, now, "African-Americans" -- will this or must this always be the case? What about those "possibilities" -- are We to pursue them **as** "African-Americans"? Can this pursuit be done within the boundaries of what We now know to be "American" values and culture, "American" nationality and identity? What about "where things are tending." inside these borders and throughout the world? What about the "development pattern" which tells us, among other things, that We aren't what We are, but what We're becoming? "If all you are is what you are now, you're actually dead."

12. We can't stop at "African-American," just as We couldn't stop at "slave," "colored," "negro," or "black". We haven't completed the process -- from independence, to independence. Who We **ought** to be is determined in the process of struggle to end our oppression and exploitation, and to build a new type of society -- where We are now, and throughout the world, for ourselves and for all peoples. It has to be a society unlike the "America" that We now know, free of capitalism, racism, sexism and homophobia.

Because it is a systematic negation of the other person and a furious determination to deny the other person all attributes of humanity, colonialism forces the people it dominates to ask themselves the question constantly: "In reality, who am I?" (5)

13. Karenga remained a bit more faithful to Fanon than he did to Cabral. Fanon says that the question is asked because colonialism negates the other "person" and denies oppressed peoples all attributes of humanity. (It would be necessary to treat "humanity" as i suggested treating "history," above, i.e., what is it? What are its "attributes"? What's the relation to "identity"? Both relate to the capacity for self-realization, social behaviors, sets of characteristics which, while "universal," distinguish one people from another when their concrete, particular social processes are examined.)

Essentially, Fanon means by "humanity" and its "attributes" the same as Cabral when he refers to the "historical process" and the "historical personality." What Fanon doesn't mean is that peoples dominated by colonialism must ask themselves "Who am I?" because of some meta-physical "where you are now"....

The people have been "dehumanized" by colonialism, and in order to regain their humanity they must combat and destroy colonialism, and re-establish their identity as a sovereign people.

In this sense, "regaining humanity" doesn't mean that We must "be like" those who oppress us (because they've told us and made some of us believe that they're human, and We're not). We don't want an "equal opportunity" to plunder the world and ravage its peoples. "Regaining humanity" also doesn't mean that We somehow return to the past and adopt an identity for which conditions no longer exist -- there's no going back, only forward and upward development.

Decolonization never takes place unnoticed, for it influences individuals and modifies them fundamentally. It transforms spectators crushed with their inessentiality into privileged actors, with the grandiose glare of history's floodlights upon them. It brings a natural rhythm into existence, introduced by new men [people], and with it a new language and a new humanity. Decolonization is the veritable creation of new men [people]. But this creation owes nothing of its legitimacy to any supernatural power; the "thing" which has been colonized becomes man [new people] during the same process by which it frees itself. (6)

14. Here is Fanon, and he's talking about the fundamental character and objective of decolonization or, as We call it, the "freedom movement." Decolonization/the freedom movement is the process through which the people answer the question "Who am I?" and shape a new identity.

Fanon's The Wretched Of The Earth is, taken as a whole, about the struggles of oppressed peoples as they shape a new identity. Most readers of Wretched come away without making the connections, and say that the book is about narrow perceptions of anti-colonialism or antiracism, or the need for oppressed peoples to use "violence" (narrowly conceived) in their struggles against oppression. i say that all of these, and the process of shaping a new identity, are one and the same.

You've just read Fanon, who said that the struggle against colonialism "influences individuals and modifies them fundamentally." The struggle against colonialism is the veritable creation of new people -- the creation of a new identity for peoples oppressed and exploited by capitalism.

We all become "new" during the same process by which We free ourselves from capitalism -- We are the "thing" that has been colonized and created by colonialism -- no matter whether We're called "slaves" or "natives," "coloreds" or "negroes," "blacks" or "African-Americans"....

...[T]his struggle which aims at a fundamentally different set of relations between [people] cannot leave intact either the form or the content of the people's culture. After the conflict there is not only the disappearance of colonialism, but also the disappearance of the colonized [people].

This new humanity cannot do otherwise than define a new humanism both for itself and for others. It is prefigured in the objectives and the methods of conflict... (7) (my emphasis)

For Cabral, neither form of identity (original or actual) is fixed or immutable, because the biological and sociological elements that define them are in constant motion -- change.

The biological element (inherited genetics) is the physical basis of the existence and growth of identity, and the sociological element gives identity "objective substance by giving content and form, and allowing confrontation and comparison between individuals and between groups....

"This shows on the one hand the supremacy of the social over the individual condition, for society...is a higher form of life. It shows on the other hand the need not to confuse, the **original identity**, of which the biological element is the main determinant, and the **actual identity**, of which the main determinant is the sociological element. Clearly, the identity of which one must take account at a given moment of the growth of a being (individual or collective) is the actual identity, and, awareness of that being, reached only on the basis of... Original identity, is incomplete, partial and false, for it leaves out or does not comprehend the decisive influence of social conditions on the content and form of identity." (13)

The "social conditions" that serve as the dynamic determinants in the evolution and role of identity, arise from economic, political, social and cultural aspects characteristic of the growth and "history" of the individual or collective in question.

18. It has to be understood that no correspondence exists, or can exist between Karenga's "historical origin" and "social location," and Cabral's "original identity" and "actual identity," unless, first, the dynamic character is present in the former set of terms. Second, emphasis must be properly given to the role of sociological factors, and actual identity. For us (this applies to the biological element in ways that it doesn't necessarily apply to peoples not subject to our unique form of oppression), again: The Ibo or Fulani taken from their homes -their societies -- in the early 16th or 17th centuries did not remain Ibo or Fulani, as they resisted oppression in the late 16th or 17th centuries; nor were they, in the 17th, 18th, 19th or 20th centuries, Ibo or Fulani -- and nor were they "Americans". On one hand, their biological elements had changed. However, We especially can't ignore the decisive dynamic character of the "actual identity," the importance of the sociological element and social conditions on the content, form, and role of identity in the context of our struggle to regain independence and new social development. "Actual identity" ain't about some static, metaphysical conception of mere "location" -- it's about the characteristics that you share with your people and which give you an identity "separate and distinct" from that of your oppressor! And, these social conditions inform the context and goals of the struggle. In fact, identity is the position that you take with regard to the struggle!

19. Karenga's adaptations of Cabral's terms omit their full meaning and they don't contain their dynamic character. Karenga's terms denote fixed status. This immutable character, absent the full range of political relationships to questions of struggle, was the foundation upon which petty-bourgeois forces in the late 1980s rested their rationale for adoption of the term "African-American." In doing so, they demonstrated a general abandon of the need for the identity of the people to be distinct from that of the oppressor, and they failed to connect the question of identity to the concrete reality of the ongoing struggle for national and social revolution. As Fanon would put it, "their objective is not the radical overthrow of the system." (14)

The question of identity doesn't arise independent of struggle against oppression and for a new type of social order; it doesn't arise independent of struggle between the classes of the people, because some class forces are in league with the people's enemy. If Karenga had referred us to Cabral and "Identity and Dignity" (which should be read and studied together with "National Liberation and Culture" and "The Weapon of Theory") (15), We'd have seen that the question of identity (and "name debates") is set within the context of struggle of a people against colonialist/capitalist oppression -- a people whose identity is shaped by that oppression.

20. Cabral's "Identity and Dignity" was set within the context of struggle -- one in which the mass of the people had maintained an identity distinct from that of their oppressor, because the people had never stopped resisting oppression, in all forms, and the basic elements of their culture and social structure had remained intact.

It was within this context that the question of identity arose, with particular reference to the problems of a "return to the source" of that identity, by individuals from the petty-bourgeois class, "culturally uprooted, alienated or more or less assimilated."

These petty-bourgeois individuals have allied themselves with the oppressor and sought to serve the interests of the oppressive state, as well as their own class interests: "...they live both materially and spiritually according to the foreign colonial structure. They seek to identify themselves with this culture both in their social behaviors and even in their appreciation of its values." (16)

The petty-bourgeoisie "assimilates the colonizer's mentality, considers itself culturally superior to its own people and ignores or looks down upon their cultural values. This situation, characteristic of the majority of colonized intellectuals, is consolidated by increases in the social privileges of...the group, with direct implications for the behavior of individuals in this group in relation to the liberation movement." (17)

However, they can't get past the barriers -- the "racial discrimination" -- thrown up by the system, or escape their role as a marginalized class. They begin to suffer a "frustration complex" which causes them to question their status, and to begin to struggle to regain identification with the mass of the people -- to regain an identity distinct from that of the oppressor:

The "return to the source" is therefore not a voluntary step, but the only possible reply to the demand of concrete need, historically determined, and enforced by the inescapable contradiction between the colonized society and the colonial power, the mass of the people exploited and the foreign exploitative class, a contradiction in the light of which each social stratum or indigenous class must define its position. (18)

Whether, and to what extent the "reconversion of minds" is genuine and effective is determined through practice and the choices made by individuals re: the goals and methods of daily struggle, i.e., the degree to which they oppose capitalism and pursue socialism in union with the masses, because the masses don't merely oppose the oppressive "culture," they oppose colonial domination as a whole.

Cabral's terms are thus seen as the necessary basis to define the characteristics of identity: the political, economic, social and cultural aspects which qualitatively distinguish the oppressed people from the colonial state. They illuminate the role of material forces and social practice in the shape and function of identity.

It is the struggle which "reflects the awareness or grasp of a complete identity," a grasp which is strengthened by the development of political awareness. (20)

The options before the petty-bourgeois individuals are more or less universal, and the masses have a need to maintain a vigilance over the class, because the petty-bourgeoisie has a tendency to assert the identity of the masses while pursuing their own class interests. (21)

21. As We move to "define our positions," We move beyond the frame of reference established by liberal and most so-called "left" interpretations of colonialist hegemony. That is, "assimilation" is in the interests of the colonizer; having the people believe that they are some sort of unequally treated "Americans" is in the interests of the colonizer; having the people define the nature of the problem as a struggle against mere "racism" is in the interests of the colonizer. "Assimilation" inside these borders really means acceptance of capitalist hegemony. To define the nature of the fundamental contradiction between our people and the U.S. as one against mere "racism" obscures the role of "racism" as a creation and tool of capitalism, and We end up struggling against "racism" but not against capitalism, and therefore, not struggling for real freedom.

A reconversion of **minds** -- of mental set-- is thus indispensable to the true integration of people into the liberation **movement** [which is] completed only during the course of the struggle, through daily contact with the **popular masses** in the communion of sacrifice required by the struggle. (22)

The greater the effectiveness of colonialism's policy of assimilation (in our case more effective since 1968 and the post-neocolonialist phase), and the more effective colonialism is in suppressing all forms of revolutionary resistance, the greater the need for **the whole people** to re-define their position, re-assert an identity, pursue the development of a revolutionary culture, and generally undergo a "reconversion of minds."

22. The late 1980s thrust by the bourgeois forces for the term "African-American" was consolidated at a press conference held in Chicago in December of 1988. Called by Ramona Edelin and Jesse Jackson, it was attended by a number of academics, writers, activists, and business people.

Jesse Jackson, acting as spokesperson, articulated the explicit rationale for the Call -- a rationale that echoed Karenga:

We are fundamentally an African people, with the blood of two continents flowing through our bodies, thus giving us a sense of obligation and participation in the world community. (23)

It was somewhat revealing, and not coincidental, that Jackson made the above statement while in Zambia in February of 1989--manifesting the implicit rationale of the Call, and effectively serving as ambassador for the petty-bourgeoisie and U.S. interests in the penetration of African markets.

Also echoing Karenga, the rationale and interests were articulated somewhat differently by John Jacobs, of the Urban League: "All other ethnic groups in America connect their heritage to their mother country and where they are now." Jacobs further asserted that the proposed term "reflects the duality of all Americans -- their ethnic or religious identity, and their status as Americans. Only Blacks are identified by a term that is purely descriptive of a physical characteristic -- color. Our priorities have to reflect the drive for parity in all aspects of life...."

23. Here is that one-sided "biological element," now framed as an "ethnic pluralist" rationale for an assimilationist objective, which guarantees that thought and practice remain within the so-called "mainstream" of American ideology and politics, masking the real nature of the colonial phenomenon. It's a narrow "culturalist," bourgeois nationalist line, placing their class interests above and opposite to the line of the masses, which is based on the historic necessity to ground a distinct nationality through a social revolutionary process. The line of the masses **refutes** American ideology and politics, with all underlying assumptions and values; it seeks to establish a new politics and a new culture.

24. We should also note that when "black" is argued as 'purely descriptive of a physical characteristic,' as Jacob does, this, too, is incomplete, partial and false. It contains a bit of truth, and no doubt helps some imagine a sound basis for adoption of the new term (e.g., in February of 1989, it was claimed that the people supported adoption of the new term by "consensus.") Yet, a 1991 poll taken by the Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies, indicated that 72 percent of the people preferred to be called "Black," while 15 percent preferred the term "African-American."

For a majority of the people, "black" is not a term that's "purely descriptive of a color" -- it's a term that they use to signify a politics, an ideology, **a consciousness** of distinct nationality -- a nationality that the assimilationist framework suppresses and obscures. However, when Prof. Michael Dawson and others

conducted the National Black Political Study (1993-1994), they found that half of the people surveyed characterized our status as "a nation within a nation," and that 14 percent (app. 4,200,000) wanted an independent "black" state.

25. The last "name debate," under the leadership of New Afrikan petty-bourgeois forces, placed form over content by concentrating the effort upon what We should be called -- and resting this on a narrow, one-sided premise -- rather than upon why We have a continuing need to assert and re-assert an identity that satisfies our material and psychological needs -- as a people.

Identity designates one's position with regard to the fundamental problems confronting the whole people, i.e., colonialism and capitalism. Our search for a collective identity is part of the process of our struggle to regain our freedom, and to build a socio-economic order that places people over profits.

— End of Part Two —

(o.y.y. -- 2-15-01)

NOTES

1. The Ideological Origins of Black Nationalism, Sterling Stuckey, Beacon Press, 1971, p.19.
2. CROSSROAD, Vol. 9, No. 2, pps. 3-6.
3. The Weapon of Theory," Amilcar Cabral, in Revolution In Guinea: Selected Texts, Monthly Review Press, 1970, pps. 102-103.
4. My notes, taken from radio broadcast of speech.
5. The Wretched of the Earth, Frantz Fanon, Grove Press, First Evergreen Edition, 1966 [1963] p. 203.
6. Ibid., p.30
7. Ibid., p.197.
8. The Conservation of Races, W.E.B. DuBois; quoted in Black Exodus: Black Nationalist and Back to Africa Movements, 1890-1910, Edwin S. Redkey, Yale U. Press, 1969, p.10.
9. Wretched, p.30.
10. Ibid. p. 107.
11. Ibid., p. 61.
12. "Identity and Dignity," p. 65.
13. Ibid., p.65.
14. Wretched, p. 47.
15. "Identity and Dignity in the Context of the National Liberation Struggle," and "National Liberation and Culture," in Return To The Source: Selected Speeches of Amilcar Cabral, African Information Service, Monthly Review Press, 1973.
16. Identity and Dignity, p.61
17. National Liberation and Culture, p.45
18. Identity and Dignity, p.63
19. National Liberation and Culture, p.45
20. Identity and Dignity, p.69
21. National Liberation and Culture, p.46-47; Identity and Dignity, p.68
22. National Liberation and Culture, p.45
23. "African-American": What's In A Name? More Than Meets The Eye," Herb Boyd, The Guardian, 2-22-89