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RESPONDS TO VITAL QUESTIONS
AMERICA ASKS

ORIGINATION OF THE TERM BLACK POWER

The term "black power" has been familiar to me since I was small in the West Indies and when I first came to the United States at the age of ten. SNCC vocally started it among civil rights organizations on the Mississippi March. However even prior to then Adam Clayton Powell had mentioned the term several times in a speech delivered at Howard University.

THE SUPPOSITION THAT BLACK POWER IS OBTAINED IN COUNTIES WHERE NEGROES OUTNUMBERED RACIST WHITE.

Black power means that for once black people are going to have political power. You see, up to this point the black people in this country have had only a moral force. They repeatedly talked about moral power. They tried to get to the conscience of the people so that the so-called "white liberals", whatever that means, would then speak and say that the black poor people need this. It is a good thing morally, but black people themselves have not had the power to sit down and negotiate with whites. Now if in fact black people in Mississippi have all the delta they can sit down with Paul Johnson, and they can say to him, "we represent x number of votes. We want this." They don't have that now and that is what they have to get.

OBTAINING BLACK POWER

What I think we have to do to get black power is to organize ourselves politically, register to vote, and to form independent political bases which will then allow us the chance to carry out and make effective the changes we need to bring about decent lives.

I am saying that in counties where black people out-number whites they have the right to organize themselves politically and, via the vote, seize the power. Just like the Irish people did in Boston and like the Jewish people did in New York with LaGuardia.

THE FALSE ALARM OVER THE CRY OF BLACK POWER

Personally I don't see why the cry of black power should cause any false alarm. We are aware that the cry of the unions was, "Workers of the World Unite". And they were uniting themselves. The people worrying were their employers who exploited them. So when people say, "black power", it seems to me the only people who should be worried are the people who are exploiting and oppressing black people. However, black power as it is used by the press, I feel, is a creation of the press to destroy the black community.

HOW THE CONCEPT OF BLACK POWER INVOLVES COOPERATION WITH THE WHITE COMMUNITY

The concept "black power" does in fact involve cooperation with the white community. The question is when do you do that. We say that when you do it now, you do it from a point of weakness. You beg them. You say, "look, man it's morally wrong for you to treat us this way. We're marching and getting beat up. You should be ashamed of yourself". Rather from a point of strength you say, "we have x number of votes. We want this road fixed right away or else we won't vote for you". Now that seems to me to be a much different point.

GROSS MISCONCEPTION OF THE LOWNDES COUNTY FREEDOM ORGANIZATION AS THE BLACK PANTHER PARTY.

The name of the organization in Lowndes County is not the "Black Panther Party". The symbol happens to be a black panther. The name is the Lowndes County Freedom Organization. I am very much concerned about that because Americans--particularly white americans--have been referring to it as the Black Panther Party, and that is their problem with sex and color. They do not refer to the Alabama Democratic Party as the White Rooster Party, and that happens to be the emblem of that party.

SHIFTING TREND IN LOWNDES COUNTY (ALABAMA)

Lowndes County is 80 per cent black and 20 per cent white. It has been ruled by that minority by force, by violence and by every illegal trick that one can think of. Now the black people in Lowndes County have organized themselves around the question and the issue that they have been oppressed, which is their blackness. They have been oppressed simply because they are black. And, like any other group in the country, they have organized around the issue of oppression.

THE SUPPOSITION THAT THE LOWNDES COUNTY FREEDOM ORGANIZATION LOSES THE ELECTION IN THE LOWNDES COUNTY

If the people lose and it is the democratic process, then there is nothing that they can do. But if they are cheated out of the votes then it seems to me that there must be some means for them to achieve power.

BLACK U.S. SOLDIERS FIGHTING IN VIETNAM

I feel that Negroes now fighting in Vietnam should leave and come back here to fight for these elections. Of course that has to be an individual decision. My own feeling is that there is no reason why black people should be fighting for free elections in Vietnam for some other people to get free elections when they don't have it in their own country.

I feel that first they should have free elections in their country and then decide whether or not in fact they want to participate in that war. Again, it is an individual decision based upon what the consequences are.

OUR REASONS FOR REJECTING AN INVITATION TO ATTEND THE WHITE HOUSE CONFERENCE.

1. The foundations of racism are not rooted in the behavior on black Americans, yesterday or today. They are rooted in an attempt by Europeans and white Americans to exploit and dehumanize the descendants of Africa for monetary gain. This process of universal exploitation of Africa and her descendants continues today by the power elite of this country. In the process of exploiting black Americans, white Americans have tried to shift the responsibility for the degrading position in which blacks now find themselves away from the oppressors to the oppressed. The White House Conference, especially with its original focus on the Negro family as the main problem with which America must deal, accentuated this process of shifting the burden of the problem.

2. Regardless of the proposals which stemmed from the conference, we know that the Executive Department and the President are not serious about insuring constitutional rights to black Americans. For example, murders of Civil Rights workers and black citizens roam free in this country with the desire to kill more freedom fighters, and the national government claims it is impotent in many situations to bring about justice.

Another example is the Police Chiefs, Sheriffs, and officials who have victimized, beaten, and jailed black people and further suppressed our dignity are fully aware that they were in effect given a blank check by the Executive Department of this government to inflice these lawless acts upon Negroes, since it is common knowledge throughout the South that killing a "nigger" is like killing a coon.

3. We feel that the President called the conference within the United States at a time when United States prestige internationally was at a low ebb due to our involvement in the Vietnam Civil War, the Dominican Republic, the Congo, South Africa and other parts of the third world. We could not be a party to attempts by the White House to use black Americans to recoup a loss of prestige internationally.

4. Our organization is opposed to the war in Vietnam and we cannot in good conscience meet with the chief policy maker of the Vietnam war to discuss human rights in this country when he flagrantly violates the human rights of colored people in Vietnam.

5. We reaffirmed our belief that people who suffer must make the decisions about how to change and direct their lives.

THE QUESTION OF FREE ELECTIONS

This country is fighting in Vietnam. We are dropping bombs in Vietnam around the whole question of free elections and the right for people to participate in the decisions that affect their lives. Now that is precisely the same thing we are doing in Lowndes County. We are fighting for people to have free elections and that this government and this country has a responsibility to the black people in Lowndes County, to insure them free elections. Now if this country neglects to do that then it seems to me that the responsibility of assuring free elections lies in the hands of the black people in Lowndes County and anybody else in the country who is willing to have free elections there. Whatever means to be decided are left up to them and they are completely justified if they have tried every legal means and this country does not respond.

HYPOCRISY AND CIVIL RIGHTS LEGISLATION

I think that the fact that federal registrars have not been sent into the 600 counties and the fact that the United States has federal registrars indicates a certain degree of hypocrisy. Frankly, I don't go along with the feeling in this country that the government is doing so much. Instead I give the responsibility and all the credit to the black people in this country who stood up and started to rebel, that the rebellion brought the voting rights bill and the voting rights bill had to be passed because the government was aware of the fact that if they did not the black people would move to disrupt this country, and that internationally this country could not afford that. So it had to pass the voting rights bill.

It should be noted that the Voting Rights Bill is very tricky. To cite just one example, the literacy portion of that bill expires on August 6 of 1970 and the literacy test can once again be used. Now what that means is that if federal registrars are not in Mississippi and black people do not vote, that Eastland can move to reinstitute literacy tests by 1970 and be elected again by 1970 too, because he will block black people from voting. And the government has not spoken to that issue and they will not because Eastland happens to be a very powerful figure.

COALITION

If people wanted to be really serious they would look at the Alabama primary of May 3, 1966. They would realize that there are no white moderates in Alabama. That state voted wholeheartedly for Wallace.

If there are to be any white moderates and if there is to be any coalition, then people have to go into the white community and develop that base. What we are saying to the white workers in the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee is that you have to get into that community and organize that base. So that when we talk about coalitions, we will have somebody we can have coalitions with. Not the George Wallaces and not the "Dixies" in the South.

INTEGRATION -- AN INSIDIOUS SUBTERFUGE FOR WHITE SUPREMACY WHEN INITIATED BY BLACKS

Integration is an insidious subterfuge for white supremacy when initiated by blacks. What I mean is that throughout this country since 1954 there has been a move for integration. That is all we talk about. Now what has been happening in this country is that you have poor black kids, for example, in the South that are told to go to white schools because they are good. They leave their black schools which they are told are bad. The problem is that during this process there is no one who speaks to the issue of that black school which now has in it the rest of the students.

In the North you take black kids out of the ghettos and you bus them to white neighborhoods, again to good white schools. This process definitely heightens the inferiority process in those children who are left there and who go there. White kids never initiate a move for integration. They only very rarely move into black schools. White people who believe in integration--Westchester and in Hollywood--never move into Watts or Harlem--if they truly believed in integration this would not be the case. And what I am saying is that what

black people have to do is to, among themselves, develop their communities first. They must control their school boards and when they control their school boards they will have good schools. After this happens then you can talk about integration. Then you can send white kids to black schools and send black kids to white schools. Until you do that you have an insidious subterfuge for white supremacy because you have black people being asked to forsake their neighborhood.

THE TRAGEDY OF THE WATTS RIOT

I think that a tragedy of the Watts riot was that it was romanticized by white people in their articles about "let's get whitey". I feel that the black people of Watts, and not anybody else, should decide what steps are taken to solve their problems. I will never say that the people who rioted had no right to riot or that is outside of the way to get whatever they want to get. They have the right to decide whatever means they want to use to achieve that, and that is up entirely to them. They live in Watts with rats and roaches. They are the ones that live in Harlem, Chicago, and the delta of Mississippi. They are the people earning three dollars a day. They are the poverty stricken people and they have to speak to the ways to get out of it and I cannot and will not tell them that they must do it a certain way.

THE USE OF VIOLENCE

I don't organize around violence or around nonviolence. The Student Non-violent Coordinating Committee organizes black people to get certain things that they have to get like decent houses, decent jobs, decent schooling, and a right to participate in decisions that affect their lives. The question of violence or nonviolence just happens to be tactical as far as we are concerned and we have made that clear since 1960.

THE CIVIL RIGHTS MOVEMENT

I think the civil rights movement has to stop acting as a buffer zone between the black community and white community but to express the feeling of the black community in the tone of the black community.

SNCC'S DIRECTION

As I see the problem in this country, it is an economic problem in terms of black people being oppressed and exploited. We are, mind you, propertyless people in this country. We are property-less and we have to seek to redress that and the only means open to us now are political means. So we grasp that political power now and then we see how we can work with that political power to then achieve economic power. It is quite true that we never received our forty acres and a mule.

If we had political power the Chief of Police of Indianola--who was the Chief of Police last year that beat up black people--and is now the C.A.P. director in Sunflower County, Mississippi--would not have had that power.

FINANCE

I think we are going to lose a lot of money from a number of whites who will be concerned that we are no longer acting the way they define that we should act and that now we're "acting out". When we took our Vietnam stand, against the war and in sympathy with draft resisters, we realized that it would mean a sharp cut in funds. However, it has always been our policy to never let funds decide for us what we will say.

MESSAGE TO WHITE AMERICANS

What whites have to realize is that psychologically the Negro has been in a box that he could not get out of and that what he wants to do now is to do what everybody else in the world has done. He wants to build something of his own; something built with his hands. And that is not anti-white. When you build your own house it does not mean that you tear down the house across the street. It just means that you're building your own house. Whites in this country have to understand that black people don't want to have to look to Tom, Dick and Harry. Negroes want something that they can own and control. That's what everybody in this world wants and if white people are sincere in this country about freedom they have to realize that.