

**BLACK AWAKENING  
IN  
CAPITALIST AMERICA**

## I. INTRODUCTION

The course of a social revolution is never direct, never a straight line proceeding smoothly from precipitating social oppression to the desired social liberation. The path of revolution is much more complex. It is marked by sudden starts and equally sudden reverses; tangential victories and peripheral defeats; upsets, detours, delays, and occasional unobstructed headlong dashes. It may culminate in complete victory, crushing defeat, or deadening stalemate. It may enjoy partial success but then be distorted by unforeseen circumstances. The final outcome is not predicted automatically by the initial conditions. The revolutionaries must contend not only with conscious reactionaries and counterrevolutionaries, but also with subtle social dynamics which act to stop or divert the revolution.

The black revolt is no exception to this process. Black America is an oppressed nation, a semicolony of the United States, and the black revolt is emerging as a form of national liberation struggle. But whether this struggle can be characterized primarily as a rebellion for reforms or a revolution aimed at altering basic social forms, even so basic a question as this cannot be given an unequivocal answer. Rebellion and revolution are interrelated but they are not identical, and no amount of militant posturing can alter this reality. It must be asked: Are black militant leaders simply opposed to the present colonial administration of the ghetto, or do they seek the destruction of the entire edifice of colonialism, including that subtle variant known as neocolonialism? The answer, as remarked, is not immediately clear. The reason for this lack of clarity lies partly in the fact that militant black leaders themselves are di-



vided and in disagreement about what they are seeking. All speak of revolution. But revolution has become a cheap word in modern America. It is necessary to probe beyond oratory and rhetoric if one wishes to determine the substance and meaning of the black revolt. Initially, about all that can be said with certainty is that aggressive black anger, the distilled essence of four hundred years of torment and struggle, has burst upon the American scene. It is almost as though the scales of history, unbalanced by the spilled blood of countless black martyrs and heroes, were finally being set right by urban rebellions which were directly comparable to colonial insurrections.

The fact of black America as a semicolony, or what has been termed *domestic colonialism*, lies at the heart of this study. It is at one and the same time the most profound conclusion to be drawn from a survey of the black experience in America, and also the basic premise upon which an interpretation of black history can be constructed.

Many, blacks as well as whites, will object to the use of the term domestic colonialism to describe what they prefer to call the "race problem." Some object because they contend that the solution to the "race problem" is to be achieved by extending American democracy to include black people. Racial conflict would vanish as blacks are integrated into the American political and economic mainstreams and assimilated into American culture. Of course there will be problems, say these critics, but in the long run this is the only feasible solution.

Black militants (and many not so militant blacks) respond to this objection by asking what is meant by "in the long run." Black people have been on the run in this land for four centuries. Even after their so-called emancipation, blacks had to run several times as fast as whites just to maintain their status as impoverished and perennially exploited residents of the United States. These critics, say the militants, can cling to the myth of evolutionary change because they refuse to admit that for the oppressed victims of the United States, both at home and abroad, American



democracy is nothing more than a sham, a false face which acts to hide the murder, brutality, exploitation, and naked force upon which the socioeconomic system of American capitalism is predicated. The critics deny the voices of protesters who, throughout the political history of this country, have indicted the masquerade of American democracy. They ignore a Robert Purvis, a black abolitionist, who more than one hundred years ago vented his contempt for "your piebald and rotten Democracy, that talks loudly about equal rights, and at the same time tramples one-sixth of the population of the country in the dust, and declares that they have 'no rights which a white man is bound to respect.'"<sup>1</sup>

But certainly things have changed since those words were spoken? Not so if one takes seriously the cries of outrage emanating from the supposed beneficiaries of change. Ernest W. Chambers, a black barber from Omaha, Nebraska, gave eloquent testimony to the illusory nature of "racial progress" when he told President Johnson's Riot Commission: "We have marched, we have cried, we have prayed, we have voted, we have petitioned, we have been good little boys and girls. We have gone out to Vietnam as doves and come back as hawks. We have done every possible thing to make this white man recognize us as human beings. And he refuses."<sup>2</sup> The consequence of this refusal was a black revolt which threatens to grow into a full-blown revolution.

The argument for democratization of the American social system assumes that there is still room in the political economy for black people. But this overlooks, for instance, the fact that black unemployment normally is double the rate for whites, and in some categories it runs at several times the white jobless rate. The jobs which black workers do hold are largely the unskilled and semiskilled jobs which are hardest hit by automation. Government-spon-

<sup>1</sup> Floyd B. Barbour (ed.), *The Black Power Revolt* (Boston: Porter Sargent, 1968), p. 49.

<sup>2</sup> *Ebony*, April 1968, p. 29.



sored retraining schemes are at best stopgap measures of limited value. Retraining programs are frequently unrealistic in terms of jobs actually available; people are trained in skills already obsolete. Realization of this fact led one female retrainee to exclaim: "We are being trained for the unemployed." Integration thus fails, not because of bad intentions or even a failure of will, but because the social structure simply cannot accommodate those at the bottom of the economic ladder. Some individuals are allowed to climb out of deprivation, but black people as a whole face the prospect of continued enforced impoverishment. Increasing numbers will be forced out of the economy altogether.

Blacks tend to blame whites as a whole for this situation, but not all American whites are blind to the implications of their country's history. Here and there a Truman Nelson will speak out in defense of the "right of revolution." Referring to the bitter lessons of the Reconstruction and post-Reconstruction eras, Nelson wrote:

It is no answer to this argument of the right of revolution [as expressed, for example, in the U. S. Declaration of Independence] to say that if an unconstitutional act be passed, the mischief can be remedied by a repeal of it, and that this remedy can be brought about by a full discussion and the exercise of one's voting rights. The black men in the South discovered, generations ago, that if an unconstitutional and oppressive act is binding until invalidated by repeal, the government in the meantime will disarm them, plunge them into ignorance, suppress their freedom of assembly, stop them from casting a ballot and easily put it beyond their power to reform their government through the exercise of the rights of repeal.

A government can assume as much authority to disarm the people, to prevent them from voting, and to perpetuate rule by a clique as they have for any other unconstitutional act. So that if the first, and comparatively mild, unconstitutional and oppressive act cannot



be resisted by force, then the last act necessary for the imposition of a total tyranny may not be. . . .

In sum, if there is no right of revolution there is no other right our officials have to respect.<sup>3</sup>

Nelson's analysis is essentially right. And implicit in it are the conclusions drawn by black revolutionaries: that the American oppressive system in its totality is "unconstitutional"; that this same system long ago decided and still maintains that oppressed blacks indeed have "no rights which a white man is bound to respect"; that the right of revolution is not something safely ensconced in the documents of Western history but is indelibly inscribed in the hearts and souls of all men.

But if all these conclusions are valid, then a violent conflict is in the offing. Peaceful coexistence is impossible if the contradictions are too great. It is precisely this possibility, nay, probability, of conflict, and fear of its consequences, which motivate some to discount any talk of domestic colonialism and imperialism. For if it is admitted that blacks comprise an oppressed nation, then it must also be admitted that as blacks press for liberation a violent and anti-colonial struggle becomes increasingly likely. Imperialist powers are not wont to relinquish gracefully and peacefully their proprietary claims over their colonial subjects. Hence to take seriously the concept of domestic colonialism is to require a revolutionary realignment on the part of those blacks and whites who support the liberation struggle. This is not an easy thing to do. It is not easy because of the depth of commitment required. It is not easy because more than a willingness to engage in revolutionary action is asked; another prime requisite is a willingness to study and to sort out the implications and repercussions of the revolutionary act. This means that the revolutionary must not only be armed with the weapons of his trade, but armed also with sufficient knowledge and political understanding to put those weapons to best use.

<sup>3</sup> Truman Nelson, *The Right of Revolution* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1968), pp. 37-38.



Of utmost importance for the revolutionary is a cogent analysis of the situation in which he finds himself. Many black writers and spokesmen have tried to define and analyze domestic colonialism. Back in 1962, social critic Harold Cruse wrote: "From the beginning, the American Negro has existed as a colonial being. His enslavement coincided with the colonial expansion of European powers and was nothing more or less than a condition of domestic colonialism. Instead of the United States establishing a colonial empire in Africa, it brought the colonial system home and installed it in the Southern states. When the Civil War broke up the slave system and the Negro was emancipated, he gained only partial freedom. Emancipation elevated him only to the position of a semi-dependent man, not to that of an equal or independent being. . . . The only factor which differentiates the Negro's status from that of a pure colonial status is that his position is maintained in the 'home' country in close proximity to the dominant racial group.<sup>4</sup>

Malcolm X sought to relate the black freedom movement to the general and anticolonial revolt taking place throughout the world. After his assassination, this ideological work was continued by SNCC (and later by the Black Panthers), which viewed black people as an internal colony of the United States. At a meeting of Latin American revolutionaries in Cuba in 1967, Stokely Carmichael elaborated upon this theme:

We greet you as comrades because it becomes increasingly clear to us each day that we share with you a common struggle; we have a common enemy. Our enemy is white Western imperialist society. Our struggle is to overthrow this system which feeds itself and expands itself through the economic and cultural exploitation of non-white, non-Western peoples—the THIRD WORLD.

Black people in the United States are a part of this Third World, Carmichael said, and he continued:

<sup>4</sup> Harold Cruse, *Rebellion or Revolution?* (New York: William Morrow & Co., 1968), pp. 76-77.

Cruse

3rd World



Our people are a colony within the United States; you are colonies outside the United States. It is more than a figure of speech to say that the black communities in America are the victims of white imperialism and colonial exploitation. This is in practical economic and political terms true.

There are over thirty million of us in the United States. For the most part we live in sharply defined areas in the rural black belt areas and shantytowns of the South, and more and more in the slums of the northern and western industrial cities. It is estimated that in another five to ten years, two-thirds of our thirty million will be in the ghettos—in the heart of the cities. Joining us are the hundreds and thousands of Puerto Rican, Mexican-American and American Indian populations. The American city is, in essence, populated by people of the Third World, while the white middle class flee the cities to the suburbs.

In these cities we do not control our resources. We do not control the land, the houses or the stores. These are owned by whites who live outside the community. These are very real colonies, as their capital and cheap labor are exploited by those who live outside the cities. White power makes the laws and enforces those laws with guns and nightsticks in the hands of white racist policemen and black mercenaries.

The capitalist system gave birth to these black enclaves and formally articulated the terms of their colonial and dependent status as was done, for example, by the apartheid government of Azania [South Africa], which the U.S. keeps alive by its support.<sup>5</sup>

Perhaps the best starting point for an analysis of domestic colonialism was provided by J. H. O'Dell, an editor of *Freedomways* magazine:

. . . Generally speaking, the popular notion about colonialism is one of an overseas army and an overseas establishment set up by the colonial power thousands

<sup>5</sup> The text of this speech was published as a mimeographed pamphlet by the Third World Information Service, 35 Johnson Avenue, Thornhill, Ontario, Canada.



of miles away from its home base. Thus, the idea of colonialism becomes identical with an overseas territory and strange, unfamiliar people living on that territory. However, this picture of colonialism is a rigid one and does not allow for its many varieties. A people may be colonized on the very territory in which they have lived for generations *or* they may be forcibly uprooted by the colonial power from their traditional territory and colonized in a new territorial environment so that the very environment itself is "alien" to them. *In defining the colonial problem it is the role of the institutional mechanisms of colonial domination which are decisive.* Territory is merely the stage upon which these historically developed mechanisms of super-exploitation are organized into a system of oppression. [Emphasis in original.]<sup>6</sup>

O'Dell's central point is that colonialism consists of a particular kind of institutional or social system, and this system does not necessarily have to be tied to a specific disposition of territory. It can take a variety of forms, of which domestic colonialism in this country is one.

From this thesis, a working definition and analysis of domestic colonialism can proceed. Broadly speaking, colonialism can be defined as the direct and over-all subordination of one people, nation, or country to another with state power in the hands of the dominating power. Politically, colonialism means the direct administration of the subordinate group by persons drawn from the dominant power. Thus, in the classic African situation, European officials controlled the parliaments and governments of the colonies. Although there may have been some token representation of the indigenous population, effective power was in the hands of the European settlers. This political control was buttressed by a legal system designed to serve the interests of the white settlers. Europeans sat on the courts and operated the prisons, and white-controlled legislative bodies made laws, which carefully discriminated between

<sup>6</sup> *Freedomways*, Vol. 7, No. 1.



settlers and natives application. Under this legal system there was no such thing as a native winning a case against a white man. Finally, this whole political and legal edifice was protected and maintained by colonial armies composed of white and native mercenaries or members of the indigenous population who had been press-ganged into service. These colonial armies were charged with enforcing undemocratic colonial laws and generally keeping the natives in a state of subjugation.

If the status of the black population in the United States before World War II is examined, a situation strikingly similar to this colonial model is immediately evident. Even after emancipation, in states where blacks constituted clear voting majorities, political power was usurped by whites. (The brief Reconstruction era was the only period when blacks held some measure of political power roughly commensurate with their numbers.) This was done openly and blatantly without even the courtesy of a shame-faced renunciation of the principles of democracy—principles upon which this country was supposedly founded.

Legally, black people were always at the mercy of whites. The Constitution decreed that slaves were not whole human beings, and a separate system of laws was relied upon in meting out “justice” to any unfortunate slave who provoked the ire of his master.

Each slave state had a slave code which was designed to keep slaves ignorant and in awe of white power. Slaves were forbidden to assemble in groups of more than five or seven away from their home plantation. They were forbidden to leave plantations without passes and they could not blow horns, beat drums or read books. Slave preachers were proscribed and hemmed in by restrictions; and slaves were forbidden to hold religious meetings without white witnesses. Other provisions forbade slaves to raise their hands against whites and gave every white person police power over every Negro, free or slave.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>7</sup> Lerone Bennett, Jr., *Before the Mayflower* (Chicago: Johnson Publishing Co., 1964), p. 93.



After Reconstruction these slave laws were in effect reinstated in the form of the infamous Black Codes and segregation statutes. Under these codes "It was a crime . . . for black people to be idle. . . . In some states, any white person could arrest any black person. In other states, minor officials could arrest black vagrants and 'refractory and rebellious Negroes' and force them to work on roads, levees, and other public work without pay. . . . Special provisions in other states forbade or limited the black man's right to own firearms."<sup>8</sup> Right up through modern times laws such as these were vigorously enforced against blacks even though the "laws" may not have been formally inscribed in any codebook.

Behind the political and legal framework of domestic colonialism stood the police power of the state, the state militia, and the U. S. Army. As if this were not enough, an informal colonial army was created by the Ku Klux Klan and other "white citizens" groups. It was the armed terrorism of these groups that helped in successfully undermining Reconstruction. And anyone who has lived in a "modern" black ghetto knows, it is no mere figure of speech when the predominantly white police forces which patrol these communities are referred to as a "colonial army of occupation."

Colonialism is not, however, a system of domination and oppression which exists simply for its own sake. There are very specific factors which account for the creation and continuation of colonialism. "Colonialism enabled the imperialist powers to rob the colonial peoples in a variety of ways. They were able to secure cheap land, cheap labour, and cheap resources. They were free to impose a system of low-priced payments to peasant producers of export crops, to establish a monopoly-controlled market for the import of the manufactured goods of the colony-owning power (the goods often being manufactured from

<sup>8</sup> Bennett, *Black Power U.S.A.* (Chicago: Johnson Publishing Co., 1967), pp. 50-51.



the raw materials of the colony itself), and secure a source of extra profit through investment.”<sup>9</sup> Certainly not all of these specific factors were operative under the American form of domestic colonialism, but general economic motivation was of utmost importance. The colonial subjects were transported from their native land and brought to the “mother country” herself. There they became a source of cheap labor for a rapidly expanding economy. In large measure the foundation of American capitalism was built upon the backs of black slaves and black workers. As with other colonial peoples, the colonized blacks were prevented from developing a strong bourgeois middle class which could engage in widespread economic activity and compete with the white masters. Instead, the blacks were restricted to providing unskilled labor in the production of raw materials (e.g., cotton) for “export” to northern mills and foreign consumers.

But colonialism does make for some class divisions within the ranks of the colonized. In fact, colonial rule is predicated upon an alliance between the occupying power and indigenous forces of conservatism and tradition. This reactionary alliance was made in order to minimize the chances that the colonial power would have to resort to brute force in preserving its domination. This was an early version of modern “pacification” techniques. Thus, the colonial power played tribes off against each other and used traditional tribal chiefs as puppets and fronts for the colonial administration. In return, the rajahs, princes, sheikhs, and chiefs who collaborated with the colonial powers were rewarded with favors and impressive-sounding but usually meaningless posts. Hence, although colonialism is defined as direct rule of one group by another, it does nonetheless involve a measure of collaboration between the colonists and certain strata of the indigenous population.

Under American domestic colonialism, since the African

<sup>9</sup> Jack Woddis, *An Introduction to Neo-Colonialism* (New York: International Publishers, 1967), p. 16.



social structure was completely demolished, the beginnings of class divisions had to be created among the slaves. The most important such division was between "house niggers" and "field niggers." The former were the personal servants of the masters. They were accorded slightly better treatment than the field hands and frequently collaborated and consorted with the white rulers. Vestiges of this early social division still can be found in black communities today.

Another important collaborator and force of conservatism was the black preacher. The black minister remains today an important, if not the most important, social force in most black communities. This is because historically the black preacher was the first member of the black professional class, the black elite. He frequently had, no matter how small, some degree of education; he enjoyed a semi-independent economic status, and he had access to God-given truths which were denied to ordinary blacks. Consequently, he was highly respected and looked upon by the black community as its natural leader.

While it must be said that the black church has performed an essential function in maintaining social cohesion in black communities through decades of travail and suffering, it cannot be denied that the black preacher is often identified as an "Uncle Tom," a collaborator. He is seen as a traitor to the best interests of his people. This is not a role which the black minister consciously assumed. Like the modern black middle class, he is torn with conflicting loyalties, sometimes drawn to his own people, sometimes drawn to the "foreign" rulers. The minister, in accepting Christianity, also in some degree identified with the major moral values and institutions of white society. Consequently it was relatively easy for him to work with whites, even though this sometimes amounted to a betrayal of blacks.

In general the black community experiences little difficulty in seeing white so-called morality for the hypocrisy and cant that it is. Yet the black middle class, of which the



black preacher is only the most conspicuous part, as the artificially created stepchildren of white society, acts as though it is driven to uphold that society's values and attitudes—even when whites fail to do so themselves.<sup>10</sup>

Colonialism is more than simply a system of political oppression and economic exploitation. It also fosters the breakup of the "native" culture. Family life and community links are disrupted, and traditional cultural forms fall into disuse. Under domestic colonialism this process is even more destructive. Slave families were completely shattered and cultural continuity almost totally disrupted. The blacks who were kidnapped and dragooned to these shores were not only stripped of most of their cultural heritage, they soon lost the knowledge of their native African languages. They were forced to speak in the tongue of the masters and to adapt to the masters' culture. In short, blacks were the victims of a pervasive cultural imperialism which destroyed all but faint remnants (chiefly in music) of the old African forms.

(2)

Despite the analysis just made, there will still be those who object to the application of a framework of domestic colonialism to the internal structure of the United States. Their chief argument is that black people more and more are being granted the same political rights as those accorded to whites. The passage of a host of civil rights laws and their enforcement, even though less than vigorous, clearly supports this conclusion, it can be argued.

It must be admitted that there is some merit to this argument. Certainly the situation of black people has changed in recent years. However, whether this can be counted as anything more than a mixed blessing is the subject matter to be investigated in this book. To be more explicit, it is the

<sup>10</sup> It was this peculiar compulsion to which E. Franklin Frazier addressed himself in his classic study, *Black Bourgeoisie*.



central thesis of this study that black America is now being transformed from a colonial nation into a neocolonial nation; a nation nonetheless subject to the will and domination of white America. In other words, black America is undergoing a process akin to that experienced by many colonial countries. The leaders of these countries believed that they were being granted equality and self-determination, but this has proved not to be the case.

Under neocolonialism an emerging country is granted formal political independence but in fact it remains a victim of an indirect and subtle form of domination by political, economic, social, or military means. Economic domination usually is the most important factor, and from it flow in a logical sequence other forms of control. This is because an important aim of neocolonialism is "to retain essentially the same economic relationship between imperialism and the developing countries as has existed up until now."<sup>11</sup>

An especially instructive example in the methods of neocolonialism is provided in the case of Ghana. Ghana became an independent country in 1957 and projected throughout the progressive world the hope that all of Africa might soon be composed of free nations pursuing an independent, self-determined course to economic development. Kwame Nkrumah, the new nation's leader, was known as an outstanding opponent of colonialism and a champion of African unity. But in 1966 Nkrumah was overthrown in a bloodless coup and the face of neocolonialism—a neocolonialism which had been active in Ghana since independence—was exposed.

Briefly, Ghana achieved formal independence, but the government's belief that foreign financial and economic institutions could provide the vehicle for economic development resulted in Ghana's being subservient to foreign capital. Ultimately a coup was prompted by the contradictions stemming from this situation.



Until 1961 governmental passivity and reliance on foreign economic institutions was Ghana's economic development strategy. For example, cocoa is Ghana's chief export product. The owners of Ghanaian cocoa farms are Ghanaian. However, the prices paid to cocoa producers and the export of cocoa were controlled by the British-dominated Cocoa Marketing Board. The CMB was set up in 1948 ostensibly to protect the cocoa farmer from the uncertainties of the world cocoa market and to provide a reserve fund which could be used to develop the country's economy. In actual operation, the CMB served as a convenient way for Britain to drain off Ghana's "surplus" capital. This capital was then used to enhance Britain's economic standing.

Imports from Great Britain into Ghana were controlled by the United Africa Company, a firm which was active in several African countries and which accumulated yearly net profits higher than the tax revenues of most of them. The UAC, because of its interest in maintaining its market for foreign imports, adopted a tacit policy of containing or taking over for itself any independent manufacturing operations which threatened to get under way in Ghana. Consequently, the UAC played a prominent role in preventing the development of a genuine and strong native, capitalist class. Rather, Ghanaian capitalists were kept dependent on foreign capital and foreign economic institutions. This entrenchment of huge amounts of foreign, merchant capital, coupled with the fact that foreign-owned banks largely controlled the availability of domestic investment capital, assured that Ghana could not be economically independent.

In 1961 Ghana sought to break free of the grip of neo-colonialism. An increasing balance of payments deficit, dwindling financial reserves, and failure to attract new foreign investment capital forced the Ghanaian government to search for a new development strategy. The government adopted a new Seven-Year Plan which held out



socialism as a goal. However, by socialism the ruling Convention People's Party meant merely "a set of techniques and institutions which enable rapid economic progress and economic independence in the face of a colonial heritage."<sup>12</sup> It did not mean the restructuring of property relations and the reorganization of the whole mode of production which is normally identified with socialism.

In any event, the change came too late. Ghana's economic condition had deteriorated dangerously, and a new military-bureaucratic elite was preparing to replace the old political elite of the CPP. This new elite believed that by consciously acting in favor of the old colonial power (instead of "flirting" with socialism), and by proclaiming its intention to govern in the name of austerity and efficiency, it could resolve the economic problems with which Ghana was afflicted. But in reality this new elite was simply pursuing in revised form the old policies which the CPP advocated until 1961. And Ghana remains a victim of neocolonialism.

One further point deserves comment. Neocolonialism is a form of indirect rule, which means that there must be an agency in the indigenous population through which this rule is exercised. Fitch and Oppenheimer in their study of Ghana noted that:

The colonial governments yield administrative powers to the "natives" only when vital British interests are reasonably secure. These natives must show themselves willing and able to serve as post-colonial sergeants-of-the-guard over British property: rubber in Malaya, land in Kenya, oil in Aden, bauxite in British Guiana. When no cooperative stratum has yet emerged, "independence" is delayed. Meanwhile, elements hostile to British interests are liquidated, shoved aside or co-opted.

The problem for the British in colonial Africa has been to shape a native ruling class strong enough to

<sup>12</sup> Bob Fitch and Mary Oppenheimer, *Ghana: End of an Illusion* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1966), p. 109.



protect British interests, but still weak enough to be dominated.<sup>13</sup>

The Nkrumahian political elite served for a time as just such a "native ruling class," even though the members of this elite were militant nationalists. When Nkrumah awoke to this reality and attempted to reverse himself, he was soon ousted from office.

## (3)

In the United States today a program of *domestic neo-colonialism* is rapidly advancing. It was designed to counter the potentially revolutionary thrust of the recent black rebellions in major cities across the country. This program was formulated by America's corporate elite—the major owners, managers, and directors of the giant corporations, banks, and foundations which increasingly dominate the economy and society as a whole<sup>14</sup>—because they believe that the urban revolts pose a serious threat to economic and social stability. Led by such organizations as the Ford Foundation, the Urban Coalition, and National Alliance of Businessmen, the corporatists are attempting with considerable success to co-opt<sup>15</sup> the black power movement.

<sup>13</sup> Fitch and Oppenheimer, p. 12.

<sup>14</sup> For an insightful recent study of corporate domination of American society, see *Who Rules America?* by G. William Domhoff (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1967). Domhoff concludes in this carefully documented study that an identifiable "governing class," based upon the national corporate economy and the institutions nourished by that economy, exercises effective control over the national government and indeed the whole of American society.

<sup>15</sup> That is, to assimilate militant leaders and militant rhetoric while subtly transforming the militants' program for social change into a program which in essence buttresses the status quo.

Domhoff's conclusion is supported by an investigation of the American economy. In 1967, the most recent year for which complete figures were available, there were over one and a half million corporations active in the economy. Yet, of this



Their strategy is to equate black power with black capitalism.

In this task the white corporate elite has found an ally in the black bourgeoisie, the new, militant black middle

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corporate multitude, a mere five hundred, the top industrial companies, accounted for nearly 45 percent (\$340 billion) of the total Gross National Product for that year. Economist A. A. Berle has estimated that the 150 largest corporations produce half the country's manufactured goods, and that about two-thirds of the economically productive assets of the United States are owned by not more than five hundred companies. Markets for whole industries are each dominated by fewer than five corporations: aircraft engines, automobiles, cigarettes, computers, copper, heavy electrical equipment, iron, rubber, structural steel, etc. All of this places enormous economic power in the hands of a small number of semiautonomous firms. These firms in turn are controlled by largely self-perpetuating and interlocked managerial groups consisting in all of a few thousand managers and directors—the core of the corporate elite.

The fantastic economic power of these autonomous corporations has direct repercussions in the nation's political and social life. In fact, the corporations are a primary force shaping American society. Andrew Hacker, writing in *The Corporation Takeover* (New York: Harper & Row, 1964), remarked that "A single corporation can draw up an investment program calling for the expenditure of several billions of dollars on new plants and products. A decision such as this may well determine the quality of life for a substantial segment of society: Men and materials will move across continents; old communities will decay and new ones will prosper; tastes and habits will alter; new skills will be demanded, and the education of a nation will adjust itself accordingly; even government will fall into line, providing public services that corporate developments make necessary." (Emphasis added; p. 10.)

Multiply this by five hundred, and the magnitude of corporate power is immediately evident. More and more, a relative handful of firms dominate the society, yet they are not subject to the sort of democratic checks and balances which are (formally, at least) imposed on the government. These firms can decisively affect the fate of American society, but they are not controlled by that society. Consequently, bringing corporate power under social control should be a major problem listed on the public agenda.



class which became a significant social force following World War II. The members of this class consist of black professionals, technicians, executives, professors, government workers, etc., who got their new jobs and new status in the past two decades.<sup>16</sup> They were made militant by the civil rights movement; yet many of them have come to oppose integrationism because they have seen its failures. Like the black masses, they denounced the old black elite of Tomming preachers, teachers, and businessmen-politicians. The new black elite seeks to overthrow and take the place of this old elite. To do this it has forged an informal alliance with the corporate forces which run white (and black) America.

The new black elite announced that it supported black power. Undoubtedly, many of its members were sincere in this declaration, but the fact is that they spoke for themselves as a class, not for the vast majority of black people who are not middle class. In effect, this new elite told the power structure: "Give us a piece of the action and we will run the black communities and keep them quiet for you." Recognizing that the old "Negro leaders" had become irrelevant in this new age of black militancy and black revolt, the white corporatists accepted this implicit invitation and encouraged the development of "constructive" black power. They endorsed the new black elite as their tacit agents in the black community, and black self-determination has come to mean control of the black community by a "native" elite which is beholden to the white power structure.

Thus, while it is true that blacks have been granted formal political equality, the prospect is—barring any radical

<sup>16</sup> In size this new black middle class is still quite small, although it has grown rapidly. A rough estimate of its dimensions can be gathered from the fact that in 1966 about one-eighth of all black families had annual incomes of \$10,000 or more. In that same year, however, more than 70 per cent of black families received incomes of less than \$7,000, and about half of these reported incomes below the poverty level.



changes—that black America will continue to be a semi-colony of white America, although the colonial relationship will take a new form.

But this is getting into the substance of the study. To understand the meaning of this process and how it has come about, it is necessary to recall the events of a certain summer day when a new phrase was thrust into the popular American vocabulary.