

**LESSONS  
FROM  
THE  
DAMNED**

**LESSONS**

**FROM**

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CLASS STRUGGLE IN

THE BLACK COMMUNITY



BY THE DAMNED



*Class Struggle in a  
Black Community*

11

Years of  
Awareness

15

Conflict and  
Struggle

37

The Revolt of  
Poor Black Women

147

The Education  
of Poor Blacks

189

Lessons from  
the Damned

241

*Appendix: Dictionary*

257





All oppressors and exploiters, against whom everyone like us has been forced to struggle:

Read this book with the knowledge that we have come out of you and in that way, have begun to own ourselves. Now slowly we turn to face you, resolutely, in love and burning determination, to end your unjust rule.

You have been having our rights so long, that you think, like a slave-holder, that you own us. I know that it is hard for one who has held the reins for so long to give up; it cuts like a knife. It will feel all the better when it closes up again.

—SOJOURNER TRUTH, 1867



## CLASS STRUGGLE IN A BLACK COMMUNITY

*Understand what we're saying!* The town we live in is “sweet suburbia,” fifty minutes from the Big Apple. White folks treat niggers good here. A few well-known black families in the fields of entertainment, banking, advertising, brokerage, and the responsible civil rights organizations add to the town’s upper and middle-class reputation.

Our old town has a long history of treating people of color real good. It was purchased from the Indians by the Dutch West India Company in 1640. The Indians lived in the area until 800 of them were massacred, in about 1687, by the white settlers. The history texts show 44 slaves and 188 whites in 1698. The slaves were treated well, given Christian names and set free from time to time.

It’s a good town. Like all Northern cities, the town took in some of the Southern black immigrants after World War I. They were hired as house servants and, like the first slaves, worked in the white homes and gardens. For good and faithful service these house servants were provided, by their rich white employers, with small inexpensive homes near the downtown section of the city.

Niggers began to feel like somebody. With these homes they were able to be devoted workers and eager consumers of the downtown white business. They established many churches, and a few small businesses of their own, mainly barber and tailor shops, newspaper and candy stores. Black churches took away the sting of reality, the sting of powerlessness.

The common past forgotten, the small black community hardened into class differences based on length of residence, domestic employment with “the right, white family,” membership in the “right” church. Quiet and vicious class conflicts separated and mystified each generation. Over all hung a mist of petty puritanism, good over evil, an insane dream that covered the facts. *Understand what we’re saying?*

It would be easy to feel smart about this book and how it has developed—almost as if it had a life of its own. But it would be a lie to feel that way.

Most of us who put this book together are poor blacks, a sub-proletariat just on the edge of the work force. But more important, we all come from families striving to be petit-bourgeois, *field niggers wanting to be house niggers*, project dwellers one step up from the slums. We have all been forced into *house nigger philosophy*. Throughout history every class has created its own philosophy and forced it on other classes as it took

power over them. Since the 1700s the middle class has completely controlled those of us who work for wages and receive welfare by brainwashing us into their philosophy, religion, education, capitalist economic system, and the ideas of male and white supremacy. We all take in the ideology of the ruling class and act in its interest, not our own.

This book covers our struggle over a long span of time—from our first political consciousness as a community of oppressed black people through our growing awareness of our oppression as workers and poor people in a capitalist economic system, and as women and young people oppressed by men and the family.

We have analyzed our petit-bourgeois class—people who strive in vain toward being middle-class and who, at the same time, fear falling back into the poverty that is so close—a class of people who are out of their minds. We have analyzed the enemy, and found it black bourgeoisie as well as white bourgeoisie, relatives and friends who are petit-bourgeois and striving to be bourgeois as well as bosses and politicians who are thoroughly bourgeois. We have analyzed our oppression and found that it depends on our own cooperation. We have studied history and economics and found that poor black Americans benefit from the exploitation of our sisters and brothers in Africa, Asia and Latin America.

The papers we have chosen for this book were written by a large number of poor and petit-bourgeois black people—the damned—poor students, poor, unemployed, young women and men (the street bloods), workers in low-paying, dead-end jobs, and women welfare recipients. With few exceptions, the black liberation movement has been controlled by middle-class blacks in their own interest. This book may be the first time that poor and petit-bourgeois black people have described the full reality of our oppression and our struggle. We have tried to speak in the name of countless others who have been denied the privilege. Please let our individual names pass away and be forgotten with all the nameless like us—and those too who went before and yet in reality made it possible for us to speak today.



A note on the dictionary: This book is being written for the black community and the white community, the poor, the petit-bourgeois and the middle class, the politically experienced and those without knowledge of political concepts. On pp. 259–61 are explanations of some of the political terms used in this book. We encourage those unfamiliar with these terms to check out the dictionary before beginning.

**YEARS**

**OF**

**AWARENESS**





**D**uring the late fifties and through the early sixties, all of us as separate black people felt that we knew something was wrong. We all agreed that, individually and before we came together, we had hazy feelings of being cheated, feelings of emptiness and loneliness and confusion and a kind of cynicism. (Fuck it!) Most of all, we felt our problems were personal and individual.

All of us were looking for a connection and a reflection that would bring us together with others—for what we didn't know. Now we all realize if we had not found each other, each one of us knows we would have destroyed ourselves or allowed ourselves to be destroyed.

When we came into contact with political people personally or through listening and reading, their explanations began to put things in place. We never knew Malcolm X until his death.

The Master gave us Martin Luther King. Those of us who were Southerners dug him because he fit our rising aspirations and dreams of making it. We also had had a chance to go to college. Martin Luther King with his own bourgeois philosophy fit our Southern bourgeois feelings. We had been used to passivity to preacher all our lives. Non-violence and asking

Massa through preacher-man for reforms was our historical reality.

Most of us were Northerners and felt King was a fool. As black, Northern, young city-slickers, project dwellers, jive-ass niggers, we felt you should fight back for power for yourselves. We really wanted power to fuck somebody else. We had taken in the master's standards from church, school and our parents. (Wilhelm Reich called German working-class families, ideology factories—brainwashing.) Our parents were the running dogs of the ruling class. Therefore, we learned to want to become oppressors. That was living—being on top!

Northern or Southern negro—all we wanted was the man's money—not the responsibility for running the society, the banks, the factories, the farms, the mines, the schools, etc. Power was having money and being on top within the system. We didn't understand the, system, what it was called, how it ran worldwide and its long, bloody history. All we knew was, if you get into the system, you've made it!

We acted as if we could physically take power. We imitated the most highly publicized, young black group of that time. We confronted the greater military force of the white man. This landed us into the master's courts, then his jails. All the while we romantically loved the attention, the raised fists, the roars of

“Right On!” We finally felt important, felt that we were somebody and that somehow we had power.

This is when we also confronted the whole negro sub-power structure in the town. In the courtroom they told us, “This is whiteman’s territory. Stick with us! Plead guilty!” They advised us that meanwhile they would take care of licking the white man’s boots, so we wouldn’t go to jail. But we knew where they were at; we didn’t plead guilty.

We began to realize that we had become a threat—not just to “whitey”—but to our parents, ministers, our negro teachers and to many of our childhood friends. We were a threat to their status, their position in society, their privileges, their acceptance of the American Dream. At the fundraising benefits, the negro leaders and our parents warned us, “You’ll never run over me!” Some negro politicians brought guns to show us how they would deal with us.

We called a “Peoples’ Meeting” in the center of one of the projects. This day of public confrontation with our parents was “Our Day.” We enjoy it now, just thinking about it. Some of us stationed ourselves on every rooftop of the projects. Some of us took positions in the crowd. The rest of us, mostly the women, pointed out the “nigger pigs” in plain clothes. Parents reeled backwards as we attacked their historical cowardice and their

hypocrisy. They whispered to each other, “Are they going to kill us?” We yelled, “If necessary, yes!”

This was the first time we had met and begun to deal with family oppression, the first time we got off the whitey-honky bit. The unarmed action not only helped free us further but forced the political recognition that the struggle was not just black against white—there were enemies among blacks.

We felt also that we were running ahead of everything and it was getting hard to communicate with people. They were turned off by our violent talk. We were getting into a lot of conflicts. So we made a retreat, read, rapped a lot and eventually we discovered class struggle. It fit our situation exactly. The concept and idea of class struggle destroyed our all-black hang-up and our all-black organization. It took us to another level of political consciousness. It spread our world out a little further.

Now we could put the Italians in their proper place in the ladder of power in the town. Then we placed the Irish and finally the Jews. Scared away, the WASPs had fled to the northern section of town. Each ethnic group was like a class above us. Black people were at the very bottom. Within that bottom were other layers of power. We determined to go to that bottom layer.

During this retreat, we had to face the fact that we had been jive all along. Most of the very poor blacks knew it and gave us

little or no support. We had to admit that deep down we knew we were phony. We had wanted to use the people for a hustle. We were jive-ass opportunists.

There were those who told us but we blotted it out. When we were pushed against the wall by the white and black power structure, including our parents, the only way out was facing the truth of what we really had been—oppressed people who wanted to take the master’s place, to reverse the roles.

We went to the bottom layer of our people, offering them our services in any and all ways—from fixing cars to baby-sitting. Sometimes we allowed ourselves to be used, thinking that we were supposed to do anything for the people because they were poor and oppressed. We felt guilty because we had fucked up so bad. When the guilt was gone, we leveled with the people and they leveled with us. We were using them to take away the guilt and they were using us because they felt we were like all the rest who had come to them—full of bullshit!

We formed a school and a players group with the idea of de-educating and then re-educating the children in and around the projects. We soon found out that black nationalist and community-action groups wanted to get in on our educational set-up. We didn’t understand that there was still something incorrect in our approach. If these hustlers wanted in, there had to be some-

thing wrong. We thought that we just needed to educate these take-off artists.

Having the masses come from their homes to a central place takes them out of their oppressive environment, releasing them temporarily from their oppression and offering them false hopes, “sugar-coated” bullets full of escape, yet a trap. Their frustrations are released for a little while but there can be no long-term or real change. Bringing the poor out of the slum and away from the physical and mental decay is taking them on a trip—an addict’s trip, an alcoholic trip, a nodding out, a release in the brain and muscles—hooking the suckers on the American Dream.

From the point of view of the oppressed, we dig that temporary trip. We were not all that elite or striving to be bourgeois that we did not appreciate how our brothers and sisters can long for such a brief connection with false liberation.

At the same time, we could dig ourselves and our need to avoid the struggle and pain of the slum. We lived in the projects now, one step up from the hovels around us; our parents were scrambling to get a little house of their own. If we held our classes in some community center or boys club, we could escape the constant interruptions of neighbors stopping in, the damn TV, the phonograph blasting, the sudden arguments

between black man and woman, the running roaches and the occasional rat, the lack of space and on and on and on! We could hold classes like the bourgie white folks did. (The word “bourgie” is slang for bourgeois; it is pronounced *bōō'zhē*.)

This whole gig is the missionary approach . . . “I’ll help you but don’t get me involved with your life and your problems. Just let me get my shit off!” This was an old gig. But now there were some new missionaries. Bourgeois negroes came into our neighborhoods when we rebelled, followed by the nationalists and the community-action groups to cool us down so they could operate on their hustle. These were the new missionaries. And they were black, not white. So we learned that it was better for the growth of the people for them to stay in their environment and deal with it because that is the reality of their life of oppression. They had been forced there by violence, the violence of a striving and competitive middle class; black and white.

As we struggled with the new black missionaries and the missionary in us, we deepened our political analysis historically. We went back into the history of slavery here in the North and the slave hierarchy established by the plantation masters on the Southern farms. We were better able to struggle against and expose the missionaries, new and old.

Finally the negro missionaries were forced to take action against us, and in so doing exposed themselves further. They publicly, and with the help of the police department, put us out of their churches, the community centers and boys club. Young people were receiving an education about their real oppression and about the agents of that oppression. They could see it for themselves.

This decisive action, along with our teaching the young people the history of race and class struggle in this country and Africa, allowed our students to see that they had a real right to rebel against authority. *It was unjust!* Authority in the black community and the white community was used to make each generation submit without question to being used and abused as objects, beasts of burden, machines, unthinking consumers, strike breakers and cheap labor. We could not own anything we made. We could not own land. We were separated from everything that gives people a good feeling about themselves. So most of us ended up feeling like “I ain’t nothing so what can I do but accept things as they are?” For four hundred years we had been handed the racial oppression line with the class line covered up. *It was not one or the other.* It was *both*, damn it! And black intellectuals have been and are liars. Nothing in this world makes young people madder than to trust and then find



out we've been lied to. We will forgive grown-ups anything, even trying to murder us, if they tell the truth.

We were forced closer to our most oppressed brothers and sisters. We went into the homes of our students and politically educated them in depth. We found ourselves being asked by the parents to help them understand what was happening outside in the world. We got passed on to the neighbors. As they opened up to us, we opened up to them.

We want to make it very plain that we, and others like us, are no better than any part of the suffering oppressed masses of poor people. The only difference is that we were forced by the objective conditions in our community to learn through hard struggle who the real enemy is. We discovered the whole web of oppression in America. And, most important, we saw how we helped in our own oppression. And what we've learned we mean to pass on!

The main thing that we found in dealing with other bloods outside of our immediate families was the lack of trust that was left there by too many half-ass people and groups. The contact with other suffering poor people was what we needed. Nothing was more meaningful than the love we were given and still are being given. We finally felt our lives were worth living.

Once we established that trust we were shown the genuine

love that had been missing throughout our growth. Our lives shall never be the same. We have risen from the dead—a concept that occurred to us after reading David Walker’s *Appeal* of 1829, where he gave a history of the word negro. Walker explained that “negro” comes from the Greek word *niger*, and meant soot, ashes, a pot—in other words, dead things which had once been alive. We dug that definition because we knew negroes who were dead—*us!* We began to enter into a process of rebirth. Our base widened and we found ourselves becoming a physical and emotional part of what we had tried to escape—our people, our real life, our real crib. We had been driven home. We were no longer negroes, that class of black people who remain dead.

In the 1960s, students in France, Italy, Germany, Pakistan, South Korea, Japan and Ceylon were revolting against the unjust authority of their society and its agents. Here in the United States, white middle-class students were running away from home, rebelling against their parents, organizing against their college administrations and against the Vietnam War.

In our town, older white people were distressed that young people had no place to call their own, where they could gather for public functions. We were offered, along with white and black students, a white church, with no questions asked, in

which to do our Peoples Theater. Our all-black plays and mostly all-black audience had found a place on the edge of the slums where we wouldn't be hassled. It was given freely by middle-class whites. We responsibly kept it clean and respected the few and necessary property rules. For over a year we have found no conflict with our white hosts. They have fully accepted our separate, black, political development and we have accepted their concern for Private Property.

As we were driven by white and black missionaries backward toward our people, we wrote down our observations and thoughts. We began to write down the voices of the people we were serving. We wrote self-critically of ourselves, our experiences, and our relationships. We encouraged the people to write for themselves, but self-critically, then historically. We saw to it that the black women's thoughts were published.

The black sisters had forged a deeper understanding and working relationship with white women than the black brothers had been able to with white brothers. Many of the black sisters had a stronger feeling about their self-worth, a clearer understanding of the historical reality of their long oppression and exploitation—even back in Africa. The women's liberation movement and a chance to meet with female Vietnamese liberation fighters supported the black sisters from outside. White

women opened their publication resources to them. At the same time, like our white church hosts, white women never interfered with our black sisters separate black development and their political analysis of it.

When we were clear about what we needed and why and asked for it from whites, we were given what we needed. But we never requested help until we had done as much as possible on our own. We depended on ourselves first. We set limits understood among ourselves and the whites accepted those limits. We had developed self-confidence as separate people, female and male, as black people, as poor black people, and finally as political thinkers.

We had developed out of the struggle in our community against the unjust authority of the local white power structure. We had developed out of the struggle with our parents who believed in the whites despite their long suffering under white social and economic domination. We had developed out of our struggle with the negro sub-power structure—ministers, teachers, community-action bureaucrats, lawyers, doctors, dentists, and policemen. Lastly, we had developed out of the struggle with that part of ourselves which had absorbed the white-man's values.

Our political consciousness has grown still finer and more

detailed in the last year. We know now that we have fought, within ourselves, a way of thinking that belongs, not to the white man, but to a social and economic class—the middle class. This class came to power in the white western world with the American Revolution of 1776 and the French Revolution of 1789. This class of merchants, ship-builders, traders, and money-lenders successfully overthrew the feudal class of kings and big landlords. This is the class that enslaved blacks and poor white Europeans in order to make themselves rich. This is the class that continues to enslave Africans, Asians and South Americans in order to make themselves even richer. It is a class that has a whole structure of thinking, a way of feeling, looking, being. To preserve itself, it has to reproduce itself in those it oppresses. We blacks had been educated, systematically socialized and programmed into this mentality. This was what we were fighting in ourselves—a middle-class view of the world.

Slavery was an economic institution that made black men and women and children equal to horses, donkeys, cows—beasts of burden in a time when there were no machines. Racism was a psychological brainwash technique that made whites feel superior and blacks feel inferior. These were two parts of this middle-class philosophy we had been struggling with most all of our lives.

Now we understand that we must struggle with other parts of bourgeois ideology and institutions. Now is the time when a lot of us are able to work with all ethnic groups here and abroad who also understand that they must struggle against bourgeois ideology and system—within themselves and outside themselves. Most blacks are still struggling against slavery and racism. In time they will be forced, like we have been, to move further and to struggle against the whole middle-class structure of society—its educational system, its religious and philosophical system, its economic system, its psychological and law enforcement system, its sexual, ethnic and age divisions, and its ladder of classes.

Our internal feelings began to move and change as outside forces moved on us. We understand more fully now that reality does not stand still but is a constant process of change, both inside the people and outside the people. But if we had not had a pattern to lay over seemingly unconnected events, we would still be confused.

We found out that the old down home saying of “It takes two!” basically described all our dilemmas. We couldn’t have no master unless we agreed to be slaves. That applied to all relationships in this bourgeois system. The Man had to have slaves or his bourgeois capitalist system did not run. The Man could

not be boss unless the workers permitted him to be. The farms, factories and banks did not run unless the workers worked. The husband could be the breadwinner and so-called boss, but the house did not run and the children did not get born unless the women worked for the man and permitted the conception of children. Down through history boss men were shit without workers and women.

We set about to do a historical study of this intimate and two-way relationship between master and slave, men and women. We became concerned with the inside and outside forces that made us and all oppressed people submit to unjust authority. We took responsibility for ourselves and our own particular oppression and stopped yelling at the boss, our parents, our lovers, our husbands and wives. At times they didn't exist for us—so taken up with our own collective wounds and all the things that went into our wounding, did we become.

In this process of self-criticism (of ourselves and our class) we finally discovered that we had less need to submit. We became quiet and cool. We lost the need to explode and retaliate without reasoning. Our anger had become cold and steel-like. We found patience from inside. We who had been brimming over with fury began to have our first irreversible victory and that victory sustains us yet. We have self-confidence

because we understand concrete facts and forces that really molded us, and we see why we had no choice but to cooperate in our own oppression.

We look forward to beginning an analysis of why the bossman has to be boss—all big and bad on the outside with more riches and military power than he will ever need—and all empty inside. We have so recently come out of his thought patterns ourselves. It's easy now to see that the bossman doesn't understand the world he lives in (like we didn't used to understand). His way of thought and logic doesn't provide an understandable pattern to put things together.

We have learned that racism is the most obvious part of the struggle. It keeps us from sharing more justly in food, clothing and shelter. But food, clothing, shelter and the natural resources to make them come to us mostly through the slave and cheap labor of our African, Asian and South American brothers and sisters. We need to understand that many of the resources essential to industry are unobtainable within the developed capitalist world. We need to understand what it means that the United States, with only 6% of the world's population, consumes 20% of the world's cotton, 25% of the world's steel and fertilizers, 36% of the world's oil and coal, and 40% of the world's wood pulp (“Who Is Really Being Aided?” *Africa and*



*the World*, no. 73). The natural resources are on other people's land. Their land was taken by force and treachery by the United States, the biggest landlord, the biggest boss in the world.

We African-Americans who live in the belly of this monster are living on the crumbs that the white middle class lets fall from its plunder. Many of us black men and our fathers went to war to support this plunder. Many of us black women supported and encouraged our lovers and sons to go. So we need to go beyond racism to a deeper reality. The painful reality is that we oppressed descendants of Africans have become receivers of stolen goods taken from our homeland and our own brothers and sisters.



For [H. G.] Wells is a petit bourgeois, and of all the products of capitalism, none is more unlovely than this class. Whoever does not escape from it is certainly damned. It is necessarily a class whose whole existence is based on a lie. Functionally it is exploited, but because it is allowed to share in some of the crumbs of exploitation that fall from the rich bourgeois table, it identifies itself with the bourgeois system on which, whether as bank manager, small shopkeeper, or upper household servant, it seems to depend. It has only one value in life, that of bettering itself, of getting a step nearer the good bourgeois things so far above it. It has only one horror, that of falling from respectability into the proletarian abyss which, because it is so near, seems so much more dangerous. It is rootless, individualist, lonely, and perpetually facing, with its hackles up, an antagonistic world.

— CHRISTOPHER CALDWELL

*Studies and Further Studies in a Dying Culture*



**C O N F L I C T**

**A N D**

**S T R U G G L E**



## WANTING TO BE SOMEBODY!

The negro bourgeoisie is a layer of blacks in this country who are professional people, intellectuals, educators, “token negroes” (with no decision-making powers) in corporations, owners of a very few light manufacturing and insurance companies. It is a stupid class that imitates the white bourgeoisie in customs and ideas and is too dumb to understand that it can never have the heavy money power of the whites.

Petit-bourgeois blacks are a layer of blacks caught between the negro bourgeoisie and poor blacks (slum trapped in the Northern cities and tenant farmers and migrant workers in the South). One step up from the slums and farms, petit-bourgeois blacks carry all the ideas of the bourgeoisie, white and black, but in mean and petty ways.

No negroes or black people own the means of production (land, banks, factories, natural resources like coal, oil, water) on which all our lives depend. Only one ethnic group owns the world’s major means of production. The majority of the world’s basic resources for our life in this capitalist, industrial country

are owned and controlled by the White Anglo-Saxon Protestants—the WASPs—like the Rockefellers and DuPonts, not “whitey.” Even though a large part of the ruling/owning class is white Catholic and Jewish, the Yankee New England WASPs got the financial jump on the later European immigrants of Jewish and Catholic stock, and they have steadily maintained it down to this day.

The Yankee descendants of Pilgrims, ship captains, Boston merchants, and wealthy New England farmers became the financial supporters and advisers for big banks, railroads, and large industries that grew so important after the Civil War. These Anglo-Saxon descendants dominate the U.S. economy and use an imperialist system to try and dominate the rest of the world. They *allow* Jews and Catholics the less dominant industries and businesses. The WASPs hold tight to international banks, industry and insurance.

The negro bourgeoisie is so out of this scene and yet psyched-out by it that they have been unable to take it apart to understand it. If us poor blacks examine them, however, we understand that the negro bourgeoisie is a level of blacks whose very existence, like ours, depends on the decisions of those who own everything. The negro bourgeoisie has been around a long time, ever since there were “free negroes” who were allowed to



own slaves(!), land, livestock and go to college. As far back as 1645, negroes had the right in some Southern states to own property.

The common law right to own and alienate (*transfer the ownership of property to another*) was at an early date recognized as belonging to free negroes, and it suffered fewer limitations in their possessions than any other of the rights generally regarded as fundamental to a free status . . . Contracts involving the recognition of full rights of free negroes to personal property were recorded in the Virginia county courts as early as 1645 . . .

In the case of *Parks vs. Hewlett*, decided in 1838 in the Virginia supreme court of appeals, it says, "He, the Free Negro, is at once entitled to acquire and enjoy property. His person is under the protection of the laws, and he has a right to sue for injuries done to person or to property. He may even acquire lands and hold slaves and will transmit them by inheritance to his children." In 1858 when the laws no longer allowed free negroes to acquire slaves except by descent (*ancestry*), the courts still upheld the property rights of free negroes by holding that when a bequest (*gift*) of slaves was made to persons in trust for free negroes, the slaves must be sold or exchanged for a kind of property which free negroes could lawfully possess, and that proceeds (*money*) of the sale must be distributed among the free negroes according to the provisions of the will.

... The most remarkable property right possessed by free negroes was the right to acquire, own, and alienate slaves. Indeed, for more than twenty years from the time when free negroes first appear in the courts, Virginia—1632–1640, there was no legal restrictions (*stops*) upon their right to own indentured white servants. Such a reversal of the usual order may have been in a few cases actually attempted, for in 1670 a law was enacted which declared that “no negro or Indian though baptized and enjoined their own freedom shall be capable of any purchase of Christians, but yet not debarred (*stopped*) from buying any of their own nation.” There is on record in the Northampton county courthouse Virginia a clear case of such ownership by a free negro servant as early as 1655.” (John H. Russell, *The Free Negro in Virginia*; words in parenthesis are our definitions.)

Free Southern Negroes were economically stronger and wealthier than the Northern free negroes according to Bill McAdoo. He reports in his pamphlet, *Pre–Civil War Black Nationalism*, that free negroes in the North did not have as many economic opportunities open to them as did their Southern class brothers. Southern free negroes could work as skilled craftsmen and mechanics. Northern free blacks were kept out of factories and were generally forced into house servant jobs. Free blacks in the North were too much competition for steadily

arriving poor European peasants after the Revolutionary War. Poor whites fought for and demanded these skilled jobs formerly done by blacks. They fought for land ownership as the big manors were broken up. In the South, free negroes were preferred because they could be used more cheaply than the Southern white worker. Northern blacks, against great odds, did develop a class of famous middle-class negroes that many of us can now read about because of the struggles for Black Studies in middle-class schools and colleges. They were scientists, inventors, writers, city planners, doctors, lawyers.

None of the above can lessen our knowledge of the severe repression of black people historically. But we feel all historical records have to be made clearer and less one-sided, if we are to move to another stage of political development.

A middle-strata of blacks—a black petit-bourgeoisie—did not arise in any great numbers until after World War II. It has grown very large in the Northern cities and their suburbs. But in the 1970s, it has been stopped cold in its rise and struggle to be bourgeois. The failure of the *Dream of Black Capitalism* to become a reality all through our history was a necessary failure. U.S. capitalism naturally and constantly competes with other capitalisms in other countries. It is now entering a bitter competition with European and Japanese capitalists. It would be

against the very nature of big capitalism to support and encourage a black capitalism within its own borders.

But the failure of this *American Dream* saved our souls and what human spirit we had left. When little middle-class black people could no longer dream of having a piece of the pie, of entering business or civil service, of prospering, it was caught in the double bind of damned if it did and damned if it didn't. It couldn't get to be house nigger and it was damned if it was ever going back to being "po' niggers workin' from can't see to can't see!" Members of the petit-bourgeoisie have to break out of it by developing a wider consciousness or be destroyed by the bind. We had no opportunity, by the '70s, to even enter the bind—so it was easier for us to break out of the American Dream ideology.

In Africa, these two black classes are used by the European and U.S. capitalists as caretakers of their neo-colonies—those colonies they gave "independence" but really kept tied to them economically. Most Africans and their countries are *not* independent.

It is and will be the same in the United States. The negro bourgeoisie and petit-bourgeoisie are assigned as caretakers and slave foremen over the black slums (not, as in Africa, over a

neo-colony rich in needed natural resources and cheap labor). The black slum only has cheap labor in abundance, provides a market for white-owned products, and provides further profits through exorbitant rents and high interest loans.

The dead-end jobs as servants and maintenance workers still exist. But these provide fewer jobs as highly technical factories, research and development companies, and highly automated machinery move rapidly to the suburbs. In the past, the black slums have been that extra pool of labor—cheap, unskilled and brainwashed—to be used against white unions as strikebreakers and in small factories that find automation too expensive.

Now the U.S. giant corporations have to strain to increase production and exports cheaply. The U.S. has to compete with European and Japanese capitalists who have developed to a higher level of production since World War II. They have modernized and replaced their industry. Their workers have always gotten paid less than U.S. workers, so their goods can be manufactured at less cost. Meanwhile U.S. human labor has become too expensive compared to Europe and Japan. The U.S. capitalist has to turn to automation and increased production per worker (working a smaller labor force harder). He must transfer whole factories to Europe, Asia and Africa, to exploit

their cheap labor. Black slums are and will be full of unemployed young blacks and ragged poor from the countryside. This is our reality and our future.

Our parents were formed from the crumbs “our white ruling class” began to hustle off the rest of the world after 1945. The U.S. moved into Africa and Asia as the European countries moved out to rebuild their own economies. We gave capitalist Europe loans so their poor workers would not overthrow the bosses and make a socialist revolution. If European workers took over means of production, the U.S. could not exploit them and make huge profits that would sift down to the blacks in this country.

The U.S. gave aid to former European colonies in Africa and Asia. These were loans at high interest and demands that only U.S. manufactured products and patents be bought with the loan money. The U.S. had the poor countries going and coming. The poor countries had to borrow and buy from us.

At the same time the U.S. was paying what it wanted for the vital raw materials it needed for its industry and warfare. It was operating and controlling whatever industries it was necessary to have in Africa and Asia. No industry was allowed to be controlled by the Africans and Asians. All classes of Africans and

Asians worked for the U.S. The profits from this complex hustle were enormous.

All this loot was increased through the U.S.'s two invasions, of Korea and Vietnam, and the war spending. The loot from hustling Europe and ripping-off Asia and Africa filtered down through all the class layers and ethnic groups, finally getting to us poor blacks. We got welfare, some housing, it few more jobs, a little college and some of us "got to be somebody."

The black movement of the 1960s has been dominated by an idea—black power. What it really stood for was blacks getting into the capitalist system and not losing their blackness. Most of those who dominated the movement were black petit-bourgeoisie. They hoped and dreamed that they could replace some of the white bourgeoisie and hustle off both the capitalist system and those poor blacks left at the bottom. Like the black bourgeoisie, black-powerites could not analyze the system deeply enough to understand its worldwide base of exploitation. Black power and black capitalism are just dreams and wishes.

There was another kind of blackness, one that spread the idea of "Power to the People," and it didn't say just black people. It wasn't funded by U.S. corporation grants, like the black-powerites and black "capitalists" were. These blacks were

jailed, murdered and driven from the country. They were analyzing capitalism, studying class struggle, and using Marxism-Leninism.

Most black petit-bourgeoisie reject Marxist-Leninism as “honky shit.” And so they should, because a Marxist-Leninist analysis shows them to be a class enemy of the poor and the damned. It is not in their class interest to study it. It exposes the facts of class oppression for all the poor to see. So it’s cool to keep Marxist-Leninism from the black poor! All the mass of black petit-bourgeoisie wants is to be black and proud, which means to be black and capitalist.

In *Class Struggle in Africa*, Kwame Nkrumah has shown the African bourgeoisie and petit-bourgeoisie to be in a privileged position. Unlike their black class brothers here, they are caretakers of a whole country and continent. Think of the loot they can hustle off the African masses before they pass most of it on to the United States and Europe.

Although the African bourgeoisie is small numerically, and lacks the financial and political strength of its counterparts in the highly industrialized countries, it gives the illusion of being economically strong because of its close tie-up with foreign finance capital (*that’s U.S. and Europe*) and business interests. Many members of the African bourgeoisie are employed by foreign firms (*that’s U.S. and*



*Europe*) and have, therefore, a direct financial stake in the continuance of the foreign economic exploitation of Africa. Others, notably in the civil service, trading and mining firms, the armed forces, the police and in the professions, are committed to capitalism because of their background, their Western education, and their shared experience and enjoyment of positions of privilege. They are mesmerized (*hypnotized*) by capitalist institutions and organizations. They ape the life of their old colonial masters and are determined to preserve the status and power inherited from them. “. . . they live in positions of privilege—a small, selfish, money-minded, reactionary minority among vast masses of exploited and oppressed people.” (Kwame Nkrumah, *Class Struggle in Africa*; words in parenthesis are our definitions.)

We were able to absorb Marxism-Leninism through the single idea of “*it takes two!*” Both opposites—the oppressed and the oppressor—are absolutely necessary for oppression and exploitation. No one can be oppressed unless he allows it. We oppressed allow it, first, out of fear of force and threat of death. Then we are taught by family, school, church, communication media (cultural apparatus), that we are inferior and dumb. We begin to believe it, if there are no other reflections around of our real worth. Finally we submit and begin to admire and imitate our oppressors. This is the only way we feel we can escape their

force and our feelings of inferiority. We literally become like our oppressors in order to escape their oppression. And we give up our reality, the reality of being unjustly used.

We learned this from the black poor by means of political people who had been to the masses before us and had some Marxist understanding. They brought back Marxism in simpler terms and forms. They could read and write, particularly the difficult language of Marxism. But very important, they were able to break it down for us. You see, Marxism is a scientific tool to study societies and so far it has not failed us in practice.

But the term Marxist-Leninism turns a lot of us off because of the way it has been presented to us, in a dictatorial and boastful way. It has been imposed on too many of us from the top down in bourgeois language which is very difficult for poor blacks like us. When upper-class blacks understand it, they use it as a status symbol, trying to show how brilliant they are. Well, they are brilliant to understand it so well. But they are stupid, too, and dangerously mistaken, not to explain it to the masses and to learn it in practice from the masses.

We want to tell the truth—not as individuals, but as historical people who have experienced forces from outside this country, the struggle of the world's poor to get us Americans off their backs. Our country has been naturally trying to stop the rise of

these revolutions of the have-nots. We have been programmed by the ruling class to believe that *the country is in danger*—when in fact, it's only the *American bourgeois class, itself* that is in danger, in danger of losing its control over the people of the whole world.

For us poor blacks, the programming about the American Dream and the Dream of Black Capitalism has kept us striving —“wanting to be somebody,” striving to be bourgeois. So we need to break down the dreams. We have to demystify the black power movement and show that it's a cover-up for black capitalism. We need to start analyzing the black petit-bourgeoisie, this class that is *out of its mind* with frustration at not being “somebody” (bourgeois). People who strive toward dreams live on lies, mystification and illusion. They think something is when it ain't.

And right now, here in the 1970s, that's very inconvenient!

## OUR BLACK NATIONALIST STAGE

During 1968 and 1969 some of us were part of an organization that was formed in the community. We happened to be the most progressive thing around at that time. The reason for this is that we lived in a very bourgeois city and county. Some of the people in the organization were of the middle class but the majority were petty bourgeois.

The organization at this time was making inhabitants of the city very nervous, especially some of the white people. We were at the stage where we were learning about our history and what nationalism meant. We had also developed, out of our black awareness and nationalism, a deep hatred for all whites.

BLACK BROTHERS AND SISTERS  
UNITE AGAINST THE WHITE RACIST BEAST  
KILL THE HONKIE! KILL THE DEVIL! KILL THE  
WHITE BOY!

At this point we decided to print a weekly paper to show the community what the honkie was doing to them. We also wanted to show our new black awareness. We felt that we were real black and could talk that black talk. Being part of the

organization indirectly meant that you were a qualified black person. Learning a little bit about Africa and our people served to inflate our egos. By this we mean that a lot of us used our black awareness as status. If you knew about blackness and were able to talk about it, you were considered heavy.

We never bothered to wonder why some blacks had a house and a car, and other blacks were starving to death. We thought about it but this only led us to the conclusion that we had to bring the poor blacks up to the level of those who had money and cars. If we could do this then all blacks could have power to determine their destiny. We never thought that we would have to be like the rest of the capitalists.

It was very easy for black people to accept black nationalism because it was easy to say, "I hate whitey!" It was always easy to fall back on this as a scapegoat. For example, you could always say, "I am for my people!" without doing any real hard work. As we learned later, it was very hard to recognize the fact that some of our own people were just as dirty and bad as whitey. Whenever somebody talked about blacks having power we would never have realized that that meant *power to rule* over the rest of us blacks.

This nationalism was so blinding that we felt *unity* and *trust* towards any black person, even if they worked with the same whites that we hated. We even praised black pigs. We would

say that he was a black brother trying to tear down the system from the inside. We made the same justification for other blacks who worked within the system, like lawyers, businessmen, store owners, teachers, city officials, community action people and others.

The black nationalist stage really made us black so-called men feel like kings. After a while we would refer to ourselves as kings and our black women as black queens. This automatically set them below us. The women would accept this role and say that they have to stay behind their black man and push him forward. We really wanted to be kings and queens so that we could have our own nation to rule. Check out what's being said here, "our own nation to rule." This means rule by a few people over the masses. And that's the same way this country is set up. So what we really wanted was to imitate the white oppressor. We wanted *power over others*.

The black nationalist stage is a necessary process in the development of all black people. But unfortunately most blacks don't go beyond the nationalist stage. A small number do realize that a lot of whites are just as bad off as blacks. They realize that an *elite class* of American and Western European whites oppresses the mass of people, black and white, worldwide. This class analysis was the start of a new stage of development for us.

## THE BLACK PETTY BOURGEOIS CLASS

It's hard for me to try and get it together because I'm a class member myself. What I'm about to say comes out of experience. My awareness about what's going down in this country first started with the Black Muslims. Well no, that's not true; it started with picketing, marching, and non-violent protesting. I had left that level because nothing resulted from picketing and marching and I didn't get any satisfaction out of that. I saw a lot of disgust and lack of trust in people. And I saw lies. So I left that area and went on. During this time I was in high school and I was having my little fling with the white women, which lasted about two years. This was because I was pretty privileged, Like I had white women and black women, and I wasn't and am still not really poor and I never felt what it means to be a poor person, or an oppressed person, until recently. It's been only since 1969 that I really felt what it means to be oppressed, to really want to do something and not be able to do it. But I'm getting off the track.

After I finished my last year in high school I quit the white women. I cut them loose. I started realizing that I was a so-

called black man and I was trying hard to be black. I related to all white people as “HONKIES, DEVILS, SCUM OF THE EARTH.” I mean this was my whole rap. I told all black people that the white man is a devil and this is where it’s at. During this time I didn’t really realize what effect the Muslims had on me. Everything I did and the way I did it was a part of the indoctrination that I got from the Muslims. Then I started seeing a lot of falsehoods. I read Malcolm X’s book, rapped to some bloods in the streets and I found out that the black people were looking for prestige, money, and safety, too. I mean you can have safety inside of the Muslims; as long as you’re inside you can preach hatred and unity. But like it’s still a little secret organization, separate from the masses of the people. The masses of black people are oppressed in this country. The Muslims’ plea is not for the lower class of black people. It’s for the privileged class of black males that they wanted this organization for. Now I didn’t dig all of this until I got out. When I was in, I was all caught up trying to be a King or a Black God.

I got out. I got away from it. I was never a registered member anyway. After I got out from what I was doing in the Muslims I became more or less like a freelance person. I was just in the street, boog-a-looing, partying, making babies; in a sense trying to be a man, trying to find myself in another



essence because I thought the Muslims were all me. Then I found out that that wasn't really where it was at. I was still saying that I wanted to organize and unite black people, but I wasn't doing a thing. Then one day a brother called a so-called community meeting and he began talking about the plight of black people in the United States. He talked about the plight, he intellectualized about what has happened to black people. But this wasn't really reaching the people's ears at all, because he was blowin' down a lot of fucked-up stuff. Big analogies, with big definitions. He was trying to be important to himself. The people just went on laughing and joking and playing games like they'd do on a hot summer day.

But then a brother (who society would call a bum) got up and started rapping. This brother here affected the people more than this intellectual brother did. This brother was talking out of his experiences, out of his heart, out of his gut. He said, "Man, you can't tell me what the system has done to people; look, I'm a product of it. Look how I look, look how I talk, how I act, look what I do to survive in this society." He was talking about oppression in plain ordinary language. And the people saw him, the way he looked, but still they dug what he was talking about because the whole crowd became quiet. Everybody listened and watched this man's actions. Now I'm saying it

affected me because here I was still half jive and trying to be half black. This is one of the ills of the petty bourgeois class. You know, we want to be important. We have to do everything at one time. We very rarely concentrate on one main point or one main thing to do. It's always if there's something going on over there we must be involved in it. We want the status and recognition. And this ordinary man wasn't into any of this.

I want to make it clear that when I first started I was very racist. Understand I was very racist and still have some basic racism left in me about whites and blacks to a certain degree; but it's in a sense I can deal with now because I really know what is happening. I know it's a class thing. A class thing which is very evident here in the United States; a very evident class thing in this community. I say that the reason why the development of the black people here in this community is at such a low level is because of the lack of unity.

The black petty bourgeoisie here is very complacent. I've never seen a set of people that is so geared to be bourgeois in the whole time that I have been living and able to understand what it is to want to strive, to reach out, to step on others just to be next to the "BOSSMAN" or be in a higher status or a higher living standard. This means so much to these people here. It means so much that they wake up every morning with the same

dream about becoming very important. When this dream doesn't materialize (I mean when failure hits them dead in the face), you find all the compensations for failure coming about—the liquor, wine and narcotics.

The privileged black males and females who are in college today have to stop kissing ass and trying to imitate whitey. Go ahead and get the education and bring it back to the people in the black community and black ghettos. But when you come back here you better come back straight. This is the way to eliminate the puppet or the puppet regime. Because if you come back and run down this damn poverty program shit to us and talking about how you're gonna help the brothers and sister with your intellectual shit, *we're gonna cut your fuckin' neck off!*

When you're privileged you have just a little more than the lower class, the bossman allows you to do a little more, that's all. So you don't see yourself as oppressed as the next brother or sister; you have a little more leeway. You are permitted to have a few more luxuries. In that case you try to assimilate, you try to be like the boss. But with this kind of mentality there's no way possible that you can make a revolution. An effective revolution depends upon the lower-class people in this country.

## DIARY OF OUR ATLANTA TRIP

This is an account of the happenings and events that took place on a trip to Atlanta, GA. The trip was sponsored by a local community organization.

7/31/70

The trip was only a few hours old before the people started getting high. They stocked up on their dope and wine before they left. By the time we got in Maryland, they started getting it on; blowing reefers in the back of the bus.

It's a commonplace occurrence that we trip out and look for constant fun and games. Our not wanting to cope with realities moves us to escapism.

8/1/70

Today we met some of the people here in Atlanta who are going to be with us. The line of authority has been formed among the older people here on the trip. The power plays are also very

evident. I've found out a few hypocritical things about the wife of one of this country's leading civil rights leaders since I have been here.

8/2/70

I've noticed that the poor black women aren't wearing the Afro hairstyle. I think this is because the poor blacks are struggling everyday to imitate the middle-class Negroes. It's a thing where these struggling people want to be like the middle class because they have the economic influence in the black community. But these middle-class Negroes have economic influence only in the black community. The majority of the people that run this city are white, and they have complete control over everything.

I had an experience today that was something else. I can't say I was surprised because I expected it. We went to a section called The Cascade. It was miles away from the downtown area and these homes were like any you would see in white middle-class suburbs where there are fine homes. But these homes were owned by black people. The Negro middle-class elite and black businessmen have done a good job on encouraging black people to strive for economic gains. I haven't yet seen the real poor black area. But I hope that the people there are different.

Our young people are influenced by superficial things; and the blacks that have so-called “made it” are this superficial example. I think that these Atlanta people have been so blinded by the idea of success that they think there is no such thing as failure. We blacks won’t be successful until we have opened our minds and looked beneath the things on the surface.

I’ve also noticed the large number of black policemen in this area, and they are some real whiteman’s niggers.

The people on the trip haven’t really done any heavy thinking yet. But they do want to party and bullshit and I think that that is what they are going to make out of the whole trip. The guys are really hounding the girls for a play. Rum, wine, scotch, pot. Heroin? *“Same song yesterday, same song yesterday.”*

8/3/70

Today we visited two Negro college campuses. There are five in the whole complex—Morris Brown, Clark, Spellman, Morehouse and Atlanta U. Along with the economic strength that the black middle class holds, is the strong influence that the universities have on the people in the area around the colleges. The universities and the officials stress the theme of GREEN POWER. And poor blacks always yearned for education to get to be somebody.

8/4/70

Today we went to see the Citizen's Trust Bank which is supposed to be the world's largest black bank. It cost \$7 million to build and \$70,000 to sustain, so they said. Another promotion for black capitalism and another achievement for the black elite.

Today we also visited the office of the S.C.L.C., the Southern Christian Leadership Conference and met the Rev. Jesse Jackson. The people on the trip are still having fun, fighting over money, getting high, and laying up with everybody else. At this point I've grown totally disgusted with these niggers because today a 15-year-old brother got shot in the back and killed by an Atlanta policeman not far from here and these damn niggers still got time to bullshit. My whole effort now is working with the younger people. They are the most oppressed of the group—not being allowed to participate in the activities that the older people are in. So they are now in my custody, which I don't mind a bit because I love kids, and furthermore I think that they are the hippest thing about the whole trip.

Tomorrow, the 5th, I hope to get to take pictures and visit the lower-class area.

Our so-called leader has been a poor example of everything, buying liquor for people on the trip and getting high and messing with women. A big responsibility and he's messing up like that.

8/5/70

Today was the day to top them all. We went to see City Hall and the State Capitol Building. At the Capitol we saw a mess of bullshit like all of the different American flags, state flags and the Governor's bicycle that he rides around the Capitol Building. The Governor is the white racist Lester Maddox. The people on the trip were dissatisfied because we went to see this jive stuff. Our director is really messing things up.

8/6/70

Today we went to see a young black middle-class man who is running for Congress and will probably win because he talks the kind of program that the people around here like. We also went to see another young black man who is the vice-mayor of Atlanta. He is a very good speaker and is the type of person that can contribute a lot to his people; but like the rest of the people in this city, he believes that politics, voting, and black economic power is the answer to the question of our freedom. Tonight we went to the Regency Hyatt House hotel, very fabulous and expensive. This week was the week that the National Medical Association held a convention at the hotel. The doctors in the



association are all black and middle-class. The night that we went was the last night of the convention and there was a semi-formal dance in the Essex Room. The children of the doctors, ages 15 to 18, were there in all of their finery. They were typical middle-class blacks with all of their falsehoods, fantasies and inadequacies.

8/7/70

Today most of the people just got ready to leave on Saturday. They went downtown to do shopping and what have you. We also had a short black out.

8/8/70

Today we left Atlanta at about 4:00 p.m. and I must say that this has been an experience for all of us. We got on the bus and started for home: There was some more partying on the bus. You would think that people would get tired of so much damn fun and get down and get serious. We had a pretty good trip all the way home except for the fact that one of the sisters got sick and had a temperature of 102°, which we all felt bad about.



It's important to outline the different contradictions that were present on the trip. I think the first thing is the fact that everyone came to Atlanta for the sole purpose of having fun and partying—and they did just that. I'm not surprised in the slightest; I expected it. There was partying and getting high the whole time we were there. From reefer to gin to wine and right on down the line. We're used to doing this when we go someplace. Why? Do we get high to escape reality? (There's no escaping reality as long as you're alive.) Do we get high to strengthen the inadequacies of our character? Do we constantly relate to fun and partying for the fear of doing something constructive or learning something?

Another thing that was evident was that most of the people were very individualistic, caring only about themselves. This is another common attitude of our people and it's very dangerous, especially when you have a group of people or an organization trying to establish true power for oppressed people.

This trip to Atlanta was a failure for most of us. There are many reasons why the trip fell apart and a lot of them have to do with the director. From the beginning I expected the trip to be just what it was, and I'm mainly talking about the tours and trips and activities. The director planned the trip from the beginning to show the so-called economic growth and development of the black people in Atlanta. We saw black businesses,

black colleges, and black politicians. We were shown the middle-class homes out in the Cascade section; we were introduced to people who were the (middle-class) Negro leaders of town, and the shit niggers who were supposed to be revolutionary, and also the “Green Power” fiends. We weren’t once taken to the poor areas where our people really are. Thus being exposed to the middle-class ideas and thoughts, it set a lot of the group thinking about wanting the exact same things.

Atlanta has a situation, concerning blacks, that doesn’t exist anywhere else in the U.S. They have made great advancements money-wise, constantly emphasizing the importance of economic growth and “Green Power” as the means of obtaining black liberation. But the contradiction is still present; you have people who say they are free but who are still living and working under a system that enslaves them. H. Rap Brown spoke of this situation: “As long as the Man controls the water or the electricity coming into a community, it does you no good to control that community. And to control it in a capitalistic way, like the Man, is not desirable.” So what we should be doing is moving to acquire total power. This means taking the means of production and channeling them so that everyone benefits equally. We should be thinking of bringing society to a point where humanity reigns over all. *Struggle on, people.*

## THE WHITE WORLD AND THE BLACK WORLD

FROM A 14-YEAR-OLD  
YOUNG WOMAN'S POINT OF VIEW

The white world and the black world are made into separate worlds by the white world. The white world controls the black world through ownership of the land, the factories, the banks, the houses—everything we need to live. The white world owns all the *means of production* on which all our lives depend. Within each world there is a ladder of classes—top to bottom. But everyone in the white world, no matter how poor, is supposed to be better than the highest class of negroes—this is *racism*.

The ladder of classes leads to fighting each other in order to get to the top of the ladder—*this is class struggle*. But there is only one class on top, trying to keep all the other classes down, trying to keep all the goodies, trying to stay *boss*.

The lower class is used as workers, servants, slaves. They make all the products and serve the *boss* who owns all the land, the factories and the banks, and makes all the plans about who gets what. The boss sets the prices of these products and serv-

ices (like household help, TV repair) very high. He tells us he has to cover the costs of paying the workers, which he is always complaining about. He has to buy machinery, keep it up and replace it. If he borrows money from the banks, which his friends own, he has to pay money for borrowing it; this is interest. But the most important thing to him is that, even with these costs, he makes a *profit*.

Now *profit* is like the cream on top of the milk after you milk the cow. Like the milk, it really comes from the cow. Profits come from us workers and servants and slaves. But the *boss* owns us too. And like the cow, we let him. The boss tells us he has to have profit to keep growing. What he means is, he has to have profit to keep *capitalism* growing.

*Capitalism* means money and property. That's what capital is. It don't say nothing about human beings, just money and property. So profits are put into more money and property, and more and more.

The profit is sucked like blood from all of us poor here in the U.S. and the poor all over the world—Africa, Asia, Latin America. Profits really come from taking the land away from the poor by force and violence. For instance, the European immigrants took the land of the American Indians by killing them off and putting them on “reservations” which are concentration camps.

Then they used other poor, like us negroes, to work it and paid us little or nothing.

My parents worked in the tobacco fields of North Carolina until some big machines put them out of work. The *boss* told my parents that labor costs were getting too high and he had to let them go. We came North to get jobs. My parents separated and my mother got real sick and we had to go on welfare.

But all this is how the rich get rich. They steal from the people and then slave them by force and violence. Then they “mess up” our minds and make us buy the products we make—like cigarettes, coca-cola, mini-skirts, mini-bikes, hot pants, wigs, ice cream, and on and on.

Now do you see how we are used, and do you understand who uses us, and do you see how we let ourselves be used?

*It takes two!*

## STORIES FROM THE YOUNG

The children of black welfare families go through pretty much the same thing as the children of the black petty bourgeoisie. But there is one important difference. The majority of Northern lower-class blacks are from the South and have been living in the North for less than ten years. They moved here from the cotton and tobacco fields, tenant farming and low-paid factory jobs. They came to the North looking for better jobs and a more glamorous life. They found, instead, low-paying jobs in factories, usually without unions. The women found housework, which was up to the early fifties, the work most available. The next step was welfare, for those who became ill or had to take care of young children. The children who came with these parents brought along, just as the parents did, many of the attitudes and ways of Southern life. These children lived a more difficult life because of the racism and discrimination in the rural areas of the South. But at the same time, they had delightful experiences of country life. They had fears, some of them from the racism of whites. But many of the fears related to the

fears and superstitions of their parents. They feared parental beatings; they feared their friends talking about them or looking down on their country ways and fears of demons and “hanks” (ghosts). The following are accounts of experiences that some of these poor black children wrote down.

### **THE BEGINNING AND HOW IT NEVER ENDS**

BY A 15-YEAR-OLD YOUNG WOMAN

I am a black girl who was brought up through a rough and poor life I have been moving from house to house since I was born. We have a large amount of children in our house.

In this movement from house to house, I wasn't aware of this horrible world or who I really am. I was a little “honeysuckle church fan” until one bright day I moved around the corner from a beautiful family. I had known the daughter since the third grade.

Now getting down to facts: one day my grandmother came from down South and demanded—not asked—us to start going to Sunday School and church. So we did and once in a while R (the daughter of the family around the corner) came to church with me. Then I started to get hip to what Mrs. G (R's mother) was saying about our minds being sucked in by these “spooks.”



So I stopped going to church on my own and I would come over to Mrs. G's house.

I used to think that R's family was rich because she had the things that I could never afford. She had two cars for transportation to get where she needed to get, while I was walking. Then after we moved from the big city, I noticed she was the only friend I had that had a father that would take time and play with them. He would participate in any actions his children desired.

I would go home after the day was over and wonder why I didn't have all the things she had. As the years went by, I found out why my father left and how all the things the G's had I could do without. Or shall I say, I have to do without?

Now in our family we take care of each other since there is no man in the home. My mother, motherwise, is doing the part of both my father and herself. The children and aunts are doing both sides—mother and father—like taking the smaller boys to the barbershop or taking my smaller cousins to a basketball game. I sometimes take them to the Boys Room, instead of a father. We shovel the walks in the winter, rake the leaves in the fall, clean the house in the Spring. And through each season, we take care of each other and I hope this will continue 'til death do us part.

## BLACK KIDS ON DOPE

BY A 12-YEAR-OLD YOUNG MAN

I am a black boy from a large family. I live in a big house with sixteen sisters and brothers and cousins and aunts and some mothers. Like poor white families, our fathers just leave after an argument with our mothers. Parents blame each other and don't look at themselves. So our fathers take off and our mothers work or go on welfare to bring us up.

This makes us feel bad when we see middle-class families that have fathers. We need a father or a man in the house. Like if someone comes and tries to break in and rob. We have a nice man, "Fat Boy," who comes and visits and stays with us sometimes. This helps because he makes us clean up and do the right thing and tells us how it is in the Big City. He hips us to the world.

I am writing about dope because I have been asked to. We get lots of white and black kids on dope here and all over the United States. I'll try to tell how it is with those on dope.

Well, some people have problems. Like, say, I had an argument with my mother. I will try to stay away from problems, so I go with my friends. We might snort or shoot—"snort" is up your nose, "shoot" is a needle in the skin. You just can't see

your friends doing it and you not do it. They might call you a punk or chicken if you don't do it. So that sort of makes you do it.

Now white boys here smoke reefers. They sell nickel hags and they might have a black boy with them. They play the black boy for a sucker. Then the black boy tries to do the same thing with the white boy. But the white boy tells the pig on the black boy and he goes to jail.

But there is one thing I know. Even with all these problems, we young poor kids will rule the world someday.

## **ROSE'S STORY**

BY A 12-YEAR-OLD YOUNG WOMAN

I was living down South when I was small and I am going to tell you what I remember. In the summer I would walk bare-footed and when the ground was hot, I had to put my shoes back on.

In the wintertime, when I had to go to school, the wind would blow and blow. One winter evening, about four o'clock, I was running so fast the wind almost blew me down. The wind was coming from the South, from Southern Florida which is very flat.

I use to eat hot lunch in school every day and hot breakfast every morning. I liked school down there. Down South the teachers beat you if you don't do your work and if you fight in school. I had a fight with a girl in my class. She started it and a big boy tried to stop it. I'll never forget this! He was holding me and I broke-a-loose and tore that girl up. The next day was Friday and my teacher's name was Miss Washington. She took us in the bathroom and we got it good. We saw each other get a beating. When we got out of the bathroom—I don't know about that girl—but I was embarrassed, in front of all the boys and all.

I think the teachers should beat the kids if they don't mind and talk back. That makes the kids embarrassed and they won't do it no more. Up here when the kids talk back, they send them to the principal. He doesn't do a thing. It doesn't seem to help the kids . . . People who beat you, at least, care about you. White kids don't get beatings usually. They holler at their mother like they're grown. But I dare a black child to holler at her mother and get away with it.

Down South in Jacksonville, Florida, we had dirt roads. See, the white people had paved roads and didn't associate much with black people. In the school that I was going to, no white children was there . . . we had no white people in the whole school. I liked the schools in the South better because if you are

in the fifth grade, they give you fifth-grade reading books—not third-grade reading books, like I have found up North.

Down south the food tastes better than the food in the North. I miss the food down south—the chicken, the turkey, collard greens, and the cornbread and the biscuits, and the eggs and bacon and o-o-o-e-e-e!

My mother came and got me because she thought life was better in the North. I do not think so! The houses are better down south. If you get a house, you can stay in that house all your life, if you've a mind. When I was staying with my aunt, I was a week old and she's still living there.

You could get better jobs and better money—machinery jobs, hand jobs, ladies carwash. My mother could carwash. She use to work in the crab fields. My mother use to pick the white meat. She'd bring some home sometimes and boy! do it be good! We use to have crabs every Sunday.

### **PATRICIA'S STORY**

BY AN 11-YEAR-OLD YOUNG WOMAN

When I was on a farm, I helped my grandmother pick the eggs for market. I helped my grandmother pick the eggs and milk the cow. We had about seventeen chickens. Grandmother

bought the chicks and after a while we musta' had a thousand eggs. She would sell the eggs in Lancaster, South Carolina.

When my grandmother called for me, I was usually outside. "I thought, "Oh, she has made some homemade bread!" I love homemade bread! I was always the one to feed the chickens. We put the food in a bowl and when we call the chickens, they come running. We take our hand and put it in the food and throw it out to the chickens.

When we were in the country, we went to Atlanta Beach. I love the beach! All my family went—my father, my grandmother, my mother, and my sister. My little brother and sister were not born then. When we went to bed at the beach, we slept in a motel. This lady had a pistol. She shot the pistol at my uncle because she was mad at him. I think it was because he did not buy her a hot dog when he bought all the rest of us hot dogs.

My grandmother was helping my uncle run a cafe. My mother went into the cafe and ordered a hot dog. She did not see my grandmother. My grandmother came over and patted my mother on the shoulder and they got to fighting. My grandmother is very young. My father got mad and came to the North. I didn't know he was going. He gave my sister and me twenty-five cents and left . . . just left, didn't tell us anything.

When he got a place up north, he called and he wrote us to

come north. I did not want to leave because I love homemade bread and butterbeans. I love the chickens and catching fish in the river.

When you go fishing in the river near where we live, you can catch a whole lot of fish. My grandmother could cook up some fish . . . we like possum with baked potatoes around it . . . we eat rabbit. We shoot the rabbits. Sometimes they hop right down the road. My uncle and my grandmother shoot the rabbits with a .22 rifle.

We use to get our sodas from a gas station. They cost ten cents. The gas station was right on the highway. We use to go up a steep hill on this highway. There was this statue there was a big flag on a pole in his hand. He was real big. Once I just know his eyes opened and he looked at me. I flew down that hill and almost got killed by a car.

## **OUR FEARS**

BY FOUR YOUNG WOMEN, AGED 14 TO 15

If we can grow up with our heads together, we have to have power over our fears. We have to look at them, understand them and understand where they come from.

As black girls, our main fears are people talking about us,

making fun of us. It makes us feel embarrassed, humiliated. So we act shy and almost tremble when we are called on to read some of our poems and essays. We carry a lot of fears. We always worry for days when we know we have to go out of our neighborhood. We're scared of getting lost and no one helping us or maybe people picking on us.

All black kids feel fear but they do a lot of things to hide it.

1. talk loud and bad to each other
2. act bossy to each other
3. compete with each other to be better in clothes, boyfriends, looks, everything
4. withdraw and act shy and quiet
5. take out their frustration on others like them, fighting, boys gang-banging a girl and she letting them, gossiping and never keeping secrets.

We all *fear not being accepted*. Now with the skin-color situation. You have fear if you're not around people of the same color (dark blacks feel more comfortable with dark blacks. But some dark-skinned blacks swear they white. Of course, they are out of their minds!)

Most of our fears start in the home, It's the fear in the parents, like when they can't get no money or ain't got none at all.



*Fear of losing the little they have.* For instance, project people look down on us who live in bad housing around the project. Now they just moved out of that housing and they are scared to death they'll have to go back. So to defend themselves from this fear, they loud us, make fun of us, talk about how bad our houses look. Then we have to beat their ass.

*Fear of ghosts and the dark.* I was four when we moved to the "flats" from down South. The landlord, that old white lady everybody use to talk about, told us there were "hanks" in the house. "Hanks" are ghosts.

When we lived on South M Street, I was four or five. This old black neighbor lady, she didn't like us. She told us the devil was going to get us. "You some bad children! . . . You going to hell. You hear?"

In church, the minister, in Sunday School, he use to tell us, "If you don't sit still, the devil going to get you. You'll get sick or something bad will happen to you." My mother use to always say, "If you keep being bad, devil gonna get you! . . . You got the devil in you!"

When they scare you real hard, you start seeing things for real. You have bad dreams and everything. Those who want to control us, so we can't fight back, use false stories, ideas of ghosts, devils and spirits and a punishing God.

*Fears about our bodies.* We are made to feel funny and ashamed about our rich bodies, our full breasts, our big and broad hips' our large thighs, our thick, kinky hair and our earthly blackness . . .

And when she walks  
She wobbles from behind

—FROM A BLUES SONG

We are always made to fear sex with boys—that it's bad, painful, dangerous. Yet our parents always talk about how great it is and then act like they don't do it themselves.

We take on the fears of our parents and take seriously their stories about demons, especially when we are little. Now we have to look further than our parents to find where these fears start, and look at who really makes the big decisions about the poor black men, women and children. We are beginning to see that many of these false ideas are on the TV, in the movies and in our schools and churches. Now our parents don't control these things. The rich white people do and always have.

## A BLACK STUDENT SPEAKS

BY AN 11-YEAR-OLD YOUNG MAN

I am a black boy and I'm glad I'm black, because if one of my friends needs help, I'll try to help. I like to teach my black brothers and sisters about black history. The Freedom School helps us learn about what's going on in the world. And we listen to an album called *The Last Poets* and that's a good hip record.

I think most black people have to go through a lot of trouble. Drugs are bad and you have to steal for dope. And people can't face their problems with their families. Most families are on welfare and welfare is cutting down. Some kids are doing a play about welfare with the play group. Others are writing about Malcolm X.

I want to be a black artist and a photographer, I like to develop my own pictures, I like to help my little brothers and sisters.

I have problems sometimes and I bring them to some of my friends at Freedom School. Sometimes my older friends have hang-ups too. And they like to get them off their backs. Sometimes they explain to us what went down in the community. Sometimes we take visits to the "pig" department.

**WE ARE BLACK AND POOR BUT  
WE DON'T WANT TO FACE IT**

BY A 13-YEAR-OLD YOUNG WOMAN

We Negroes are poor and black, but we don't want to face it. We try to avoid being black and poor. We try not to be black by comparing color with each other—like saying, “I'm lighter than you!”—and by teasing the others about dark skin. We try to avoid being poor by buying fancy clothes and keeping up with the style. We tease others by saying that they can't afford them. We also tease them about prices of their clothes, where they buy, and if they got them on sale. Then there's talk about where you live and how you live . . . But when we do this, whitey is glad because then he knows he has power over us. But when we get hiped to this, he gets scared.

You see, we let whitey control our minds. We believe whitey is going to give us something but he isn't going to give us shit.

We, the ones with our minds together, should get out there and get our peoples' minds together. Because, in order for us to make a revolution, we must be together, we must be united, inside our heads and outside our heads.

We must move on whitey before he moves on us. *All Power to the People!*

**MY NAME IS EVERY BLACK  
CHILD WHO IS REAL POOR!**

I come from the South. My father left my mother when I was six years old. Now I am fifteen years old. My father wrote my mother and asked her to come to the Big City. So she did. When we got there, we were doing all right.

Then my father started to fuck up. He had a good job. I found out that he was going with this woman and I hated him for it. I kept it to myself because I feared him.

So then my mother started to mess up. My mother's hair was hanging on her shoulders. My father pulled it out. He wouldn't bring home no food, no pay, no rent or anything. He take his money and give it to his friends. He tell his friends he beat my mother's ass and give her a black eye. Then was when my mother was pregnant with my little sister. He kicked her in the stomach. I couldn't say anything because I couldn't get myself out of the fear of him. But to this day, I hate him for it. But I haven't let it show. I mustn't let it show.

So my mother and this other man started staying together. I hate him, too! I couldn't tell my mother because I fear her, too . . . and my father.

Then I met this black woman who was always in the streets

helping the kids with their homework. I could talk to her about why all this was happening. You see, I couldn't figure out why my mother started going with this other man. He wasn't no better than my father. He wants to beat on her, tries to rule her and us kids.

I have decided that I'm not going to take that kind of shit from any man—off anyone—because I couldn't go through it again. This man got so bad that three carloads of cops had to come. Now I don't take shit from no one. I don't care who, what, where you come from or who you is.

I met up with some together sisters. I have found out I'm not alone. There are lots of sisters hitting the streets who have the same things in their house. We are studying up on this shit because we want to help the bloods in the streets and also the people. We want to help get their minds together, and our minds, too. There are still problems in the house where I live.

## **BROTHER DAVID**

Brother David:

We are watching a very heavy program about the oppression of the Third World people of the south Bronx. This program inspired me to write you because there was a Puerto Rican teacher amongst the bloods. The way he related to the struggle, and the commitment he showed the Black and Puerto Rican brothers and sisters, is the commitment you should have towards oppressed people. Man, you and others know a hell of a lot, but you're all too damned privileged to feel, I mean feel at the gut level, for other oppressed people.

There were many occasions, past and present, when we were supposed to hook up . . . something always happened to you . . . you showed shaky. Brother, you probably feel that no one cares, and that's not true. We love you more than you'll ever know. It was you who decided to split and do your own thing (which in reality is bourgeois individualism, middle-class ideology). An example of this was the play group. You stopped coming and struggling with us in the plays. Yeah David, we know there were many contradictions about us that you had

inside, but man, you never voiced them. You just faded away leaving the rest of us to carry on and to form our own conclusion of why you split. We hope you understand where we're coming from.

We also found out from you that you considered some of us phony, trying to act too political. Sure David, we were fucked in a lot of ways, but we continued to struggle with one another. David remember, we spent too much time fucking over other people who really needed our help. We must develop our minds to understand that in helping someone else, we in turn help ourselves. David, too many beautiful people have died in the name of freedom. Don't you think we owe them something? You have the potential to be a down blood, so now is the time to develop your inner-self to a higher level. David, if you view your oppression as a personal thing and don't link it with the overall political problems of oppressed people, you'll never really understand how to deal with your imprisonment. Furthermore, take responsibility for your own actions—in other words, you have put yourself in the Man's hands—it took two, David. Don't feel defeated, *remember Attica!*

YOUR BROTHERS IN STRUGGLE



## TRIP TO THE SLAMS

As a result of my political activities I ended up in the slams. Now before I get into my experience, the truth about me has to come out. The whole time I was out on bail, my feelings about going to jail were unclear. The attention that I was given by the people in the community made me feel like somebody. This was one of my biggest problems, the need to feel important—and it's not just my problem, it's a classic contradiction of oppressed people.

For example, when I was a child I always thought that I was ugly because I had a crossed eye and was on the fat side. To compensate for my inferior feelings I developed my external self to such a level that I had psyched myself into believing that my internal problems had been resolved. But in reality they weren't. All I did was to repress my hang-ups, push them to the back of my mind. If I had someone outside of my family to help me deal with myself I wouldn't have had to act phony to make up for my internal problems. I developed my ability to rap. I was able to talk about people to the point where I could make them cry. I took up dancing for more recognition. Finally I bought the latest style clothes to impress the young women.

In order for you to understand why I did all this, you have to go back into my past; because the key to understanding the nature of oppression is to analyze a person's class background. My class background is petty bourgeois, field niggers wanting to be house niggers, vicious strivers. This was the cause of my contradictory feelings about jail. My concern for *myself* became primary over my concern for the masses' well-being (I had been taught that these concerns were separate). When I really understood this contradiction, I was ready to go all the way with the case. I was forced to understand that the personal *is* political.

The trial lasted for seven days. It was a typical railroad job. The state's witnesses told one lie after another. The jury, made up of middle class whites, was in itself a guaranteed conviction. I was found guilty of second-degree assault, (a felony), and resisting arrest (a misdemeanor). As a result of my conviction I have a felony record. I could have been sentenced to the maximum (seven to fifteen years) but the liberal judge knew I was innocent and wanted to make a good slow for bourgeois justice. So he sentenced me to 30 days in the county penitentiary. But that small prison sentence didn't erase the hatred I have for the Amerikan judicial system.

The Brothers and Sisters in the United States have been imprisoned because they have so-called broken the law. When

justice serves the law, and not the people, then there is no justice. Think for a minute—why are most of the people in American jails blacks and Puerto Ricans? When the master doesn't know how to deal with us, he makes a new law, knowing that we will have to violate it. This is how he keeps us under his power. He operates always from the top down, making more laws, making more lawbreakers. The system complains that these people won't work, won't obey and they continue to rebel. The system says it doesn't need these types of people. They're trying to upset the applecart! Those who run the system don't know how to solve the rebellion problems, so they use confinement to keep these problems out of their way.

The ruling class uses the same methods that their forefathers used during slavery. The prisons, penitentiaries, jails and concentration camps are all an extension of the Master-Slave plantation philosophy. The brothers and sisters in jail realize this fact. It is you, America-loving people, who are fooled by mass media misinformation. In northern suburbia especially, the people say that the county pen is a Country Club. This is not true. As one brother put it plainly, "Don't compare this penitentiary with others, because I'm not in other pens. I'm incarcerated in this one!" In other words, as long as a human being is confined and forced to do somebody else's bidding, it is no Country Club.

It's important for the prison authority to divide and conquer inmates. I witnessed them work their show on a brother. He thought he was taking them off. But he was being taken; he played right into their hands. In this joint there are four different cell blocks. They are A, B, C, and F unit. The brother wanted to go into F unit. F unit is the privileged cell block of the penitentiary. It's the newest wing of the prison. It was built basically for the alcoholics. There are no bars on the doors. The unit is built like a dormitory. It gives the effect of being in one's own room. This is the effect that the prison authorities hope it will have upon its occupants. They succeed, with the inmates' help, in furthering the competitive attitude already instilled by family, church, and school. So what you have is a class struggle controlled by the enemy—inmates fighting each other over privileges. In the long run the brother lost out. He sold the rest of us down the drain for his own self-interest. And the rest of us made a mental note to let his ass drag! There were many blacks as well as whites who fell for this shit. Jail is just a smaller example of the overall capitalist society—where competition, self-interest, and greed rule our every movement.

The United States penal system claims to rehabilitate people in confinement. To rehabilitate means to rebuild, to restore people to themselves, to give them confidence, to reassure them

that they are human beings. If the penal system practiced what it preaches, it wouldn't have so many brothers and sisters returning to confinement. It is an established fact that the penal institutions degrade and humiliate the inmates. Their purpose is not to rehabilitate, but to dehumanize, so that when the inmates return to the streets, they will be more cautious of the establishment. The penal system is oppressive. It can never be adequately reformed because its very purpose is to enforce the oppressive policies of this country's ruling class. So what has to be done, dig it?

## **BOSSSES, WORKERS, SLAVES, AND MACHINES**

FROM A 15-YEAR-OLD YOUNG  
WOMAN'S POINT OF VIEW

Slaves were the first machines. In this country, poor whites from the prisons of England were the first slaves; the Indians ran away—they knew the countryside. Then the Africans were brought on ships and sold at slave markets. They were used as machines to plant and to pick cotton and tobacco (field niggers), and to clean the master's house (house niggers).

Slavery was too expensive for the master, so he took the inventions of some people and made machines—cotton gin, spinning jenny, steamboat, iron horse. The master believed his machines were stronger than men, but they were just less expensive.

The men who made and ran these machines were called workers. They were mostly white Europeans—peasants from big estates in Germany, England, France, Ireland and Italy.

The United States found that wars made money—making military machines like guns, battleships, tanks, bombers, and

machines like that. These were made by white workers. The black workers were kept away from machines. They were mostly migrant farm workers, tenant farmers, sawmill workers, house workers, producers of babies who grow into farm workers and the master's sex machines.

*Cybernetics* is where one machine controls many machines. Like a leader of machines, one machine gives orders to the lower machines. This is like what used to happen, and still happens, with human laborers in a ladder of classes, one on top of another. The Boss (the Master) has power over the workers and slaves. This is a class system with an upper class, a middle class and a lower class.

*Automation* is a group of machines run by a few workers, like computers. This is happening now.

The rulers or bosses have so far made all the decisions about the use of machines in this country. The white workers and black slaves have had no say. If the bosses choose to put machines in the place of all human labor, there will be a revolution—the overthrow of the bosses by the workers, the overthrow of the middle class by the lower class and the poor.

## BLACK GIRLS—BIG AND SMALL

FROM A 12-YEAR-OLD YOUNG  
WOMAN'S POINT OF VIEW

*Bigger girls with their so-called ugly bodies:*

Some bigger girls who think that their bodies are ugly think that way because they have been taught this way by their parents. You are suppose to weigh a certain amount, and if you weigh a certain amount, or over it, then your body is considered ugly and out of shape. And the girl believes it.

So this girl will go out and try to get in the in-crowd, that does have bigger girls in it, that only uses their bodies. They have to fuck and smoke and drink and that is called “hip.”

Some bigger girls that do not believe that their body is ugly because they are fat, do not care when the boys call them names like fat, funky and ugly.

But the girls who do think that their body is ugly let the boys use them and their bodies—which is the girl trying to prove that the guys will accept her even if she is fat. She thinks they will ask her to go with them. But the boys never do. The boys only want them as whores, and to use their bodies, and to hang around with this so-called in-crowd.



I am big and I do not feel any more that my body is ugly. I was taught to think that my body was ugly because I weigh too much. I felt left out, too.

So just because you're big, doesn't mean that your body is ugly. I don't feel that way any more and I wish you didn't either. If you are big and don't believe that your body is ugly, and won't be like other girls that give up some pussy, then you are going to be called names because you won't "give up any leg."

*Smaller girls and their so-called fine bodies:*

Smaller girls have been taught by their parents that, if you're small, then you have a nice body. And these girls have been told by boys that they have nice bodies. This has the smaller girl thinking that she is better than the bigger girl. She teases the bigger girl on not being able to get a boyfriend.

This makes the smaller girl feel important, being able to get a boyfriend. She will always say that the man is superior, and that you're suppose to do anything to keep your man happy.

This makes the guy feel good, to be able to control her. The smaller girl always likes to be pulled on and played with. When she gets played with, she feels important.

She can look down on the bigger girls. If the smaller girls don't look down on the bigger girls, then they try to get in their in-crowd. Then she is only making herself look like a whore.

She starts using her body. When she puts herself in this position, it's very easy for her to get raped, because she's asking for it.

She could want some attention. The boy really doesn't want this girl. For one thing, if the boy really respected this girl, this so-called good looking slim girl, then he wouldn't call her names like whore, bitch, pussy-face bastard. He wouldn't go around school saying she really has some sweet pussy.

## YOUNG LOWER-CLASS BLACK MALES ASSESS BIRTH CONTROL

The reason why the following leaflet was written was because there were so many young women who were, what we began to call, "dick-happy." "Dick-happy" women are totally dependent on male opinion as a reflection of themselves, causing them to be totally dependent on authority, oil capitalism, and the loot from capitalism. Now the young bloods who would be at parties with these women or who might have even liked some of them because they looked good, were going out of their minds. They were having group meetings around their frustration with girls like this. They depended on a particular adult to see these girls and make them change their minds. So these group meetings developed into two-sex meetings, with males now inviting their female friends in. These female friends said they didn't care what those males said, they felt this way—they were going to have sex and they were going to have babies and they were going to quit school. So some of the young black males thought, along with some of the young black females who didn't agree with these other females, that we might as well lay this

whole thing out in a leaflet. We would pass it around and begin to build up an atmosphere within which these girls, who said they wanted to fuck around, couldn't function as easily. Two high schools and four junior highs were flooded with the leaflets. They are still being passed around. We've made a thousand of these leaflets so far.

#### THE LEAFLET

YOUNG LOWER-CLASS BLACK  
MALES ASSESS BIRTH CONTROL

#### 14-/15-/16-year-olds:

You know the stores won't let us buy rubbers. They think we're too young. It's embarrassing to ask for them. If it's a lot of trouble to get them, a lot of us just give up and take our chances. But if we have someone to depend on for them occasionally (because we're just jiving about "always having it") we feel safer—not so down and worried.

*We sure do feel having rubbers is our right!* We've tried to get the girls to use that Delfen stuff (contraceptive foam) but most of them are so dumb. They're so stupid! You've heard them saying they want babies from the get-go. They really think having babies is fun. Then they don't want to take care of them. *Sure*

*we use these girls, since we can't talk to them!* Our own sisters are so dumb and won't listen. We try to steer them right but they just won't listen to us.

*So we use rubbers to protect ourselves.* You should see these girls. They act all stoned and like they don't know what they're doing. They chase after us. At first, it used to scare us. Then we got our thing together and just decided to have our fun. *But we did try to talk to these girls first!*

### **17-/18-year-olds:**

Black males like us have different feelings on birth control. So many females are so silly, it's hard to explain things to them. The male has to go through a great deal to make the female understand.

A lot of girls try to act like they're virgins when they're with their friends. But when they're alone with us, they act different. If a girl really cares for you, we feel she'll have sex. Most girls we know seem to feel if they have intercourse at a certain time, they won't get pregnant. A lot of us leave most of the birth control up to women. Now we feel we have to take some responsibility for birth control to protect ourselves, at least.

Many young black males from our social class don't dig using rubbers because they say, "We get a better feeling with-

out it!” They are probably right, but the question we would like to ask all of them is, are they ready to have a child plus support the child and the mother?

Besides, the male has to get hisself out of a lot of jams. He has to face her parents, her friends, his friends. The guy always gets blamed. It never occurs to his parents that “*it takes two!*” Her friends blame him; she blames him because now everybody knows she ain’t no virgin. If he wants to leave the whole mess, then his friends tell him, “Oh man, you dirty for leaving that chick!”

A lot of girls don’t want to practice birth control, so’s they can keep the guy. Most dudes we know only care about the baby—not the chick—unless she’s good-looking. Then they may care a little about her. *But that baby is more important to him than the chick*—especially if she’s bad-looking . . . you know . . . a dog!

### **20-/21-/22-year-olds:**

Most of us ain’t for this marrying shit! If you’re single, you can do a lot more, a hell of a lot more. Lately, most black women have taken on the idea that the black man has to support her and the kids and she’s suppose to just sit home and take care of the kids. You know like she see on TV. Now we out there doing our thing and we have to stop and go get ourselves a job.

Suppose we don't want a job—just want to hang in the streets and have a good time—party, a little wine, a little smokes, scheming on the young girls when their moms and pops ain't home. Now we gotta get a job. And we'll tell you straight—we don't dig working. We're not cut out to be slaves, spending our lives making the *bossman* rich. But these bitches and “hoes,” they ain't for shit. You know, they'll go as far as trying to take their own life just to hook you, just to get you to marry them. “Be my man!”

Getting pregnant and saying, “If it ain't his, he'll support it!” Love is not involved. They want someone to take care of them *like they wanted their daddies to take care of them*. But momma was the one doing everything. Pops had to cut out—with other women, booze, numbers, dope, jail . . .

Why is there all this hate and meanness and jive between us young black males and females? Why do we always blame each other and never look at ourselves? Are we young black people so dumb and stupid that we cannot see what is messing up all our minds? Our minds are so full of phony crap that we turn on each other. Let's start thinking and scoping the real scene. Let's take a good look at ourselves and be honest for once. We got to run the world in a few years, so we better get with it.

## CONFESSIONS OF A DOMESTIC'S SON

The following is an excerpt from a long tape-recording in which James is reading an essay he's prepared while others in the group interrupt from time to time with criticisms and comments.

Let's check out some of the reasons for the frustration and confusion being felt by black youth. Most important is the mental and physical oppression of the youth by their parents. We have to realize that our parents are products of this capitalist society. They have brainwashed us into believing that the white man is superior and always right, and that we are nothing. We have picked up on this and we practice it to the highest. Since we believe that the white man is everything, we have temporarily lost our personhood. The parents of the black youth today believe in the bourgeois philosophy of the .perfect family; and they believe in authority, especially the authority of the bourgeois education system.

When the children of these parents go to school and face the humiliation pressed on them by their white racist teachers, or their negro bourgeois-thinking teachers, they have trouble from



the beginning. Our parents, since they believe in the white society, punish and beat us if we don't study our subjects, if we don't conform to the ways of the system. The parents believe that the only way we can be equal to the white man is to learn their ways and get all of the knowledge we can from them. Our parents fanatically punish us for not bringing home grades equal to those of Joel Goldstein and Karen Katz . . .

SELMA: OUT!

ROBERT: We're taking that out, remember?

SELMA: You're using it as an example of Jewish kids, right?

BETTY: Just say "Jewish kids," that's all, and then explain what you mean.

JAMES: I didn't mean "Jewish kids." I meant white kids.

BETTY: But you were using Jewish names . . .

PAMELA: Because the petit-bourgeois always wants to blame their problems on the Jews or another ethnic group. They don't want to think about class struggle.

JANE: Being petit-bourgeois and racist can be very subconscious, you know.

JAMES: Okay.

PAMELA: Did you mean, does the group mean, our parents make us act and think and do our homework like Jewish kids?

ROBERT: Damn right, they talked about it all the time!

JAMES: Yes, that was what I meant but I didn't mean Jewish kids . . . Well, maybe I meant it subconsciously. I think I meant white kids.

SELMA: But then you would have put "John Palmer" or somebody . . .

JAMES: I'm going to tell you the truth, I didn't look at Jews, in school, I looked at everybody as white.

BETTY: It's not a question of an ethnic group, it's a question of a class of people.

PAMELA: But James wasn't thinking that way . . .

ROBERT: No, he wasn't thinking that way, then.

PAMELA: I think he's thinking that way now.

BETTY: That's what I mean. Now, he's thinking of class. But when he wrote it, he wasn't.

PAMELA: I think when he wrote it, he came out with all his feelings about Jewish kids. They were always supposed to be the top kids, scholastically.

ROBERT: Because in high school that's the way it was. They were always the kids who had the money . . . that's who we always took it from. Damn right! Sometimes they'd put up a good fight and you couldn't get a dime. Italians would always fight back.

JAMES: Oh, man. Italians didn't have no scratch.

ROBERT: Goddamn right! They sure didn't. Sure our parents told us to be like Jewish kids! Momma and Poppa would say, "Why don't you be like those kids?" You know, get good grades and shit like that.

SELMA: Even more so, James thought about Jewish kids because James' mother works for Jews.

PAMELA: Oh, she doesn't work for WASPs. She works for Jews, eh? (SILENCE)

PAMELA: You know there's a difference when you work for Jews and when you work for WASPs. When you work for WASPs it means you're higher class. When you work for Jews, it means you're lower-class.

(SILENCE)

PAMELA: Right?

JAMES: What's "Phelan" in social standing? Is that Jewish?

JANE (HERSELF A DOMESTIC WORKER): Phelan? That's Irish . . . Scotch and Irish.

JAMES: Well, my mother works for Phelan and Gootblatt, too.

PAMELA: That's still lower-class domestic. If you work for one family continually over many years, then you're upper-class domestic, right? (TURNS TO JANE)

JANE: Uh huh!

JAMES: Well, she's been in those two families for years.

ROBERT: There's more status in having one family, James!

SELMA (JAMES' WIFE): His mother works for one Jewish family  
and two English ones. (SILENCE; JAMES IS EMBARRASSEDLY  
SILENT)

JANE: The greatest status is being named in the will.

ROBERT: Damn right!

JAMES: Can I say something right here? It's off the subject but  
I just got to tell it. You all made me think about it . . . Miss  
Phelan got sick a couple of weeks ago. (STARTS BREAKING UP,  
LAUGHING) Miss Phelan got sick, right?

(EVERYBODY STARTS LAUGHING)

ROBERT: (SARCASTICALLY) Oh-h-h, too bad!

JAMES: (STILL LAUGHING) She's in a coma. She's in the hospital.  
I went down to the house and my mother told me about it.  
Now this was an honest reaction. My mother said (VOICE  
LOWERS IN IMITATION), "James, Miss Phelan is sick. Don't you  
feel bad?" I said, "Ma, why I got to feel bad?" (LAUGHING)  
"What do I got to feel bad about? No, I don't feel bad!"  
Then she said, "She gives you things for Christmas and  
every thing." "Ma, I know how you feel, but how can I feel  
bad? No, I don't feel bad about that woman!" . . . (TURNS TO

THE PAPER HE'S READING) "... grades that are equal to the Jewish kids." All right?

ROBERT: Now it's more alive.

BETTY: Go-o-od!

JAMES: Are there any more questions?

ROBERT: No. Go on brother! You've done it for yourself.

JAMES: Yeah, I had to do it for myself. (GOES ON READING)

When going to school to check on their kids, the parents take everything that the teacher, principal or counselor says as the truth, even if they are lying. The parents believe in authority and in anyone who has a position of authority. The principals and teachers know this and play on it and use it to their advantage.

Imagine what happens to a child who is known to be a "troublemaker" or who is "hard-to-handle" or is "emotionally disturbed" (these are common terms used by the school system and its administrators when they get a student they don't understand). Something happens and although it may not be the child's fault, they will accuse him anyway. Then some psychiatrist, who is half-cracked himself because he thinks he's Sigmund Freud, examines the child and recommends that he be given tranquilizers, or that he be sent to a state training school.

Or the child can be taken out of his regular classes and put in a vocational or work-study program. Here he is encouraged to get a part-time job (half-day in school, half-day on the job), or to take courses in shop or cosmetology. This is supposed to prepare you for a low-class job in a 5-&-10¢ store, gas station or sanitation truck. This is by no means a racial thing because many white children are put in these programs. To complete the oppression, the child's friends call him stupid or crazy. They crack jokes about him being in a special class or laugh at the fact that he had to be sent away. Now he has lost all the way around.

To compensate for the educational failure, young people like this try to be something they are not. To keep people from laughing at them because they are educationally inadequate, they must build up a new image. This is done in various ways. The most common is the blood who cops out on dope. Another way is to find some job that requires little or no education, but naturally, it doesn't pay a lot. But it's enough to pay for the latest clothes, transportation to weekend parties, a little dope. Constant social competition is one more way to seem big and important to themselves and their friends. Some take to the streets to hustle, steal and rape, finally leading, in many cases, to arrest.

Meanwhile, the homelife of most black students is oppressive, tense, and uncomfortable. (PAUSE)

JAMES: Shall I make a class distinction here? (EVERYBODY

MUMBLES TO EACH OTHER AND THEN SAYS IT'S NOT NECESSARY)

JAMES: Okay. (LAUGHS) Just thought about that.

BETTY: Even the bourgie's homelife is bad nowadays.

JAMES: Okay. (CONTINUES READING)

Children who have only a mother to support them don't get all the attention that they need because the mother has to do too many things. The mother sometimes has a boyfriend to help her out with the children and the apartment. But most of the time, he's just looking for slaves. He wants the highest of respect because he represents the father image. But these children are not really his, he thinks, so his interest is not totally on their well-being. Parents, especially the ones who are striving so hard for social prestige, are blind to their real relationship with their children. They do not see that they are oppressive, degrading and phony. A relationship in which the parents do not let their greed for material wealth harm the well-being of the family is almost impossible in this capitalist society.

The black petit-bourgeoisie is a class of people that is bent on being bourgeois. But they don't have the necessary resources

or power to do it, so their identification with the bourgeois class is psychological or make believe. The petit-bourgeoisie is a class that doesn't know what it is to be really poor. It's a class of people who are wasteful and neglectful. The children of the petit-bourgeoisie reflect their parents. They are little strivers. This class is dangerous—dangerous to themselves, to others, and to their race—because they will do anything for money. They are full of contempt for the poor and will side with authority. They believe, like the black middle class, that money and economic power are the keys to freedom. They are very careless investigators of fact, preferring to take the master's analysis. "Well, the *Reader's Digest* said so!" "The doctor told me!"

The parents tell the children that they can make it if they get out there and compete and beat the hell out of the next person. They tell them, "You can have a home with all the lovely things of life!" Petit-bourgeois children often ask to be taken into the "lovely" homes in their communities, and they literally drool over the contents. Then as teenagers they scope the joint for a later date when they will lift what takes their fancy most. Theirs is a sharp suffering because they are raised in an atmosphere of hate, deceit, and mistrust.

The constant tension, which literally stretches their muscles without release, can especially be seen in families living in the



Projects. Here parents teach their children that they are better than other children who live in the same Projects, sometimes not even letting them outside to play with these children. Telling the children that little Willie Flip has a bad mother because she is separated and he has no real father, or using the fact that someone is on welfare, they tell the children that these other tenants are inferior or lazy or “ought to be put out.” The children pick up all these lies and start to destroy each other.

The children of the petit-bourgeois class suffer because they are raised to believe in lies that are accepted and set down by their parents. The parents are obsessed with the idea of wanting to be like the white and black bourgeois class and they constantly relate to that “Sweet Life.” So the children are caught—in a racist and dehumanizing educational system, and in the illusions and lies of their parents. This is the basis of the destruction of the minds and bodies of black children in this country.

## THE CAPITALIST SYSTEM'S FAMILY

AN ANALYSIS BY FOUR

16-YEAR-OLD YOUNG WOMEN

*I am the most powerful part of capitalism—the family. When you've destroyed me, you have started the most powerful revolution in history. But I, the family, must try to keep this from coming about.*

*First, let me define myself. I am called "family," from the Latin familia, meaning a household, the slaves or servants of a house; from familus, meaning a servant, a slave. Now let me show you how I structure myself. In the family I have the father. He's at the top. He's the master under the big ruling-class Master. I call him the money-maker and provider. Therefore, I let him know that he's supposed to put his woman second and /his children last. There is another type of father in poor families—the mother's boyfriend. These fathers are supposed to treat the daughters as their "field-nigger pussies." That means making them Dick-Happy and dependent on men, like the momma. The son is to grow up to be another father under the ruling-class Father. I make the father the oppressor of the family. He oppresses the momma*

*and, in tum, the momma oppresses the children. I call the children the slaves. I put them at the bottom.*

*Then I have the Dick-Happy momma. She is closest to the children early in their lives when they must be taught to be slaves. And so she is the most dangerous of them all. She lies, cheats, and kills. She'll do anything to keep her man, including having children just for his satisfaction, not hers. She is the one who can destroy her child from the day she gives birth. When her man is mean to her she makes her children pay for this oppression. She is just a weak woman who provides the father with strength to oppress. I let her know that she is to feed the man first and the children later. She is to take better care of the father than the children. She is even to let the father sleep with her. I consider no woman strong and I will let no woman be strong. That is why I make the momma Dick-Happy and dependent on daddy and the ruling-class Master.*

*Then I have the children. I call them the slaves. They are placed at the very bottom and this is where I plan to keep them. Why? Because the children know too much and I need to brainwash them. They can rebel very easily against family authority before the brainwashing of the Dick-Happy momma sinks in deep. Therefore, I have to give the children fear of things in the outside world. I have to make them distrust outsiders who might*

*open their eyes to the brainwashing. I have to give them lots of fairy tales full of strong, powerful fathers who will punish or kill them if they do not give in. I have to make them fear women as witches who will steal them away and eat them if they do not behave. I give poor families drunken, brutal fathers, and weak, Dick-Happy mommas, and there are fights every night. I give them welfare just to keep them surviving, because families have to be kept surviving so they can work for the ruling-class Master. All of this makes the children fearful and ashamed of themselves. Now they will not fight back. Now I can keep them at the bottom.*



Now we, *the children*, know who you, the family, is. We children, who are slaves but who are rebellious, are beginning to understand the system. And we are going to tell you why we are writing to you, the *old family*. We are writing to you, old family, to let you know that your time of destruction is coming. We are going to put an end to you and to the money you consider more important than the children. We are going to destroy you, and now we let you know why you must come to an end.

Why? Because your name reveals what you really are—an institution that holds the slaves of capitalism in line. The only love you gave us was distrust, hate, anger, fear. You have made us so afraid of you that now we can go no further backwards in

our fear. We are surging forward with a new strength. At this time in your history, you, the old family' are beginning to lose your identity. The ruling-class Master worries about keeping our daddies at home, in poor black families, to make sure that we children don't rebel against Him. We will not let these black destructive daddies in. We will not let this old family destroy us!

Our Dick-Happy mothers still try to raise us "the right way," the system's way. In poor black families we are still being led to church and God—all imitations of the ruling white Master and His capitalist system. "Bow down and sing His praises!" We young females, the most oppressed in the old family, know we have to destroy you, old family. In the long run we know we shall win.

First we must understand that no God is going to take care of us. We can scream and holler no more for His love. Our Dick-Happy mothers look only to their man and God. Our mothers' men look only to the big white Master and warn us to give in to the system. They look up; we look down and at ourselves. Too many of us are full of the system's lies already. We keep our eyes closed, afraid to see. We move on each other trying to get our parents' attention and love; or we strike out at them, cussing and screaming. Our parents send us to "the Man" and His prisons. Our Dick-Happy mothers give us away to the system if they themselves don't destroy us first.

It is up to us, poor black children, to stop our petty shit, acting all retarded in hot pants and jive-ass suits. We've got to re-educate our younger brothers and sisters, show them that our parents are full of the system's lies, show them that the school is full of the Master's lies. When we are very poor and black, we hold things back. When we hold our feelings in, we cannot share our fears. All of us know deep down that you are killing us, old family. We cannot allow it because we have children to bring here also.

Now that we see you, the old family, more clearly, we don't hate you and we don't love you—we understand you. You, the old family, are not wrong for what you are doing to us because you were taught under the capitalist system and you are following the Master's orders. In this way you are very right to try to destroy us if we don't follow the capitalist system. But, you see we cannot allow you to kill us. It is our historical duty to begin to bring in the new family.

The real power in the old family and the new is the children. We could give in to capitalist brainwashing and carry on the system, fight the new family and the revolution. Or we can struggle against the brainwashing, slowly destroy the system from the bottom, and begin the new family with the help of mommas who are not Dick-Happy, who struggle against being second to their man, who struggle for their children first, the

man later. We need the help of young brothers who do not mess over women, use them or look down on them. We found love among men and women like this. They showed us who we really were and what power we could have once we stopped cooperating in our own oppression. They never betrayed our trust. They never told our secrets. Through them we see the beginnings of a new kind of family, a family with mothers who put children first, brothers who love women like they love themselves. We see brothers who do not have to have power over anyone to know that they are men. We see them as the new fathers. We see the non-Dick-Happy mothers as the new mothers. And now we are finding a new way. We will not give our children what you have given us. The buck stops with our generation. We are willing to fight the Master, His system, and you who believe in both. You see we don't fear you anymore, old family, so we will not let you oppress us anymore. We are not out to kill you; we want to kill the illness, not the human being. We want to kill the part of you that is already dead.

We will be the rebirth of mothers. We are now going through a long and hard struggle that may last for many, many years. The old mothers will not give in so easily. But it is the time in history for the rebirth of mothers who are lovers, who will raise lovers, who will raise young women and men who can give without fear and without greed for self. We need young

people who are not afraid to feel deeply and to give themselves all the way, even when they are betrayed at times. We need young people who are not afraid to think for themselves, even when they have to go against *all* the authorities that try to stop them. We need young people who will read even when it is so hard that they want to give up. We need young people who will stand strong against you, old family, even if it means death or imprisonment. We know that you are cowardly inside, old family. That's why people are always running for outside things to make themselves feel strong, like dope, liquor, big cars, pussies, and dicks.

We must never let you rise again, old oppressive family. We must have our children and teach them to fight to keep the new life with its lovers. We shall remember never to become oppressors ourselves, over our children. If we do, then we must be re-educated by our children or we must be destroyed. We shall deserve to be destroyed for we know the truth of the new. We may even have to destroy the family entirely and not have it anymore.

We are not alone. We already have with us millions of children and non-Dick-Happy mothers from the liberated countries. They are waiting for us and we must hurry.



## TO KILL THE CHILDREN

Parents are waging a war against their children because the children want to change this evil and rotten society. This threatens what all parents strive for—to be good systematic robots; to follow every rule, command and law set down by the ruling forces. The ruling forces want to destroy all the children who are fighting this system, this system that denies us the right to think, to live and to decide for ourselves. The forces used against the children are parents, police, National Guard, militia, chemicals, and other things used to keep the rebellious in place.

These parents don't realize that they ain't shit. They are supposed to raise the children to stand by themselves, to make independent decisions. But parents really make children their slaves, their work force and whatever else they want them to be. Parents act as if they own the children, which they don't. Slavery has been abolished for quite some time, but parents still practice it and get away with it. *The ruling forces make parents think that they must rule the children.* But a lot of us ain't for this parental rule anymore.

The true identity of the parents becomes known when a child begins to disturb their social and economic position. Their fascist tendencies to hit and hurt are terrible. They try to put us away. They are a complete and total danger to their children's existence.

All you parents who are fascist, totalitarian, authoritarian—who enjoy your lust for power—Watch Out! Anytime, any place, you will be totally and utterly destroyed for your inhumane acts against the most loving of all humankind—the children, the future peaceful people of the world.

Ask yourselves about the wrongdoings you've done to your children. Then you will realize that the children are right. Don't let it be too late! *All power to the children.*

**MOMMA, MOMMA, WE HAVE  
A MESSAGE FOR YOU!**

Momma, momma, you swallowed the Master in.  
Momma, momma, you gave birth to me.  
But seems as though you don't give a damn about me,  
Momma, momma, something wrong with you?  
You don't act like you got any momma in you.  
Momma, you know what I see when I look at you?  
I see all the teachers, presidents and preachers, too.  
Momma, momma, I see the Master in you.  
Seems to me you done got like him, too.  
Momma, momma, you act and think like Him.  
Makes me think you becoming one of Them.  
Momma, momma, please love me.  
Then one day we may all get free.  
Momma, momma, why don't you let Him loose?  
That Master got you so tied to Him  
I'm going to have to kill you, too.  
Momma, momma, please don't get in our way.  
When we take the Master, going to have to take you, too.

Momma, momma, you may be the last one to go.  
But the Master in you will make you have to go.  
Momma, momma, why do you have to be like Him?  
Don't you know the Master made you swallow Him in?  
Momma, momma, you may get shot in the back.  
Ain't no way the Master going to take you back.  
When you dead and gone, you think the Master going to care  
'bout you?  
Momma, momma, He'd be just as glad to get rid of me, too.  
Momma, momma, the Master done swallowed you in.  
Time now for our revolution to begin.  
Momma, momma, you swallowed the Master whole.  
Now you dead and gone 'cause He already reserved you a hole.  
Momma, momma, why you let Him do this to you?  
Cause momma, momma, we know *it takes two!*

## REFLECTIONS ON FROM WHENCE WE CAME

Who am I whose skin is black and wears the face of sorrow and pain?

Who am I who runs the streets in fear, gets beaten and bruised?

Who is the pusher who sells the dope to us, the poor, and then struts among us everyday?

Who is she who takes the dope and receives the pain, the torture, and gains—only the *illusion* of life?

Who carries the mind that is always depressed, full of fears and lies—a dream world?

Who am I who carries this torture from day to day, night to night, from family to family, from generation to generation?

Who am I who hears the screams and cries that pour from the flesh of my people?

Who is the homosexual who is deprived of the happiness of life, who is made unequal among her own people?

Who is the prisoner who is beaten and battered, denied the rights of a human being, but who gains the equalities of a beast?

Who is beaten by the pig, set up, and charged with murder?

Who am I who watches the rats of my rundown house, the  
roaches, the cracks in the walls, and hears the sound of drunken  
voices?

Who am I who gets educated by the white man and don't take it  
back to the block?

Who am I who eats steady day to day and still wants more?

Who am I who sees others starve, saying nothing and giving nothing  
in fear I will starve?

Who am I who takes the white man's side and helps bind my  
people in chains?

Who is the black man who wears the blue suit, the gun to his side,  
who will shoot his own child to gain money and position?

Who is the mother who always chases *dick* and will sacrifice the  
child to whom she gave birth?

Who am I who never fights back?

I showed this poem to some people over at the college and  
everybody who saw it thought that it was written by somebody  
who was eighteen or nineteen. I said it was written by a young

sister in the ninth grade. They got upright. They said it wasn't a poem; it didn't have the right structure or form—you know, all that bourgeois shit we get in college? I said, "It's what you'd call an outline of life." This poem is the stages we've all gone through—all of us here. When I read it, I almost cried. I've been forced to think a hell of a lot about myself lately. *Who am I?*

Last week when I was on the block, I told one of the bloods that a lot of the things I want to share I'm afraid to share, because then I'm naked. I don't have nothing to hide behind. I have no power. I have no power over myself or over anybody else. As long as I have things inside me that are sacred only to me, then I feel I have some sort of power. You see what I mean? It's that individual feeling that I'm different, special; only I have these special feelings, only I can express them. Well, this poem hit me hard because it said things I felt and said them just as good or even better than I could say them. This young sister and I were together. Like . . . well, I've been thinking about this whole internal thing in all of us. I've been thinking about making a choice of whether I'm really going to say what I feel or trip-out and jive some more. Are we going to keep on imitating the bourgeois, playing games?

But it goes deeper than that—to why we're playing games. The reason why I play the game is that I feel I can hang onto

this part of the system and get away with it. In all my dealings with people, I've never been confronted, pushed against the wall totally, and criticized out and out. It's been superficial at times and I've stayed away from those who may know too much. But lately I've gotten it. I've gotten jumped on and torn apart, you see what I mean? I've welcomed it. Consciously I didn't welcome it. Understand what I'm saying. I didn't want to hear it because it took all my maleness away from me what I thought was my maleness, what I thought was being a man. Because I don't have an inkling of what it means to be a man. All I know is what has been taught to me.

So when someone confronted me with that part of my life, with how I act, I'd get uptight and I'd start to lie. You dig what I'm talking about? I'd make up a lie because that's the ideology I know the best. Now that's the reality we have to face that when we tell a lie, we think it's the truth. We're taught in this capitalist society that when we do talk, we always tell a noble lie. You see? Plus I internalized all of this. To make up for my inferiority, I developed a way of talking. It helped me when I became politically aware, it helped me move into a better hustling position, I could out talk everybody and they couldn't get inside of me, couldn't get to me at all. It's very hard for people to get inside of me because I could always coin what they sny,



put it in a political context, and feed it back to them. Then they couldn't understand how to get to me, It's knowing the struggle, knowing the dialectics, right? But knowing, at the same time, that I could lean on bourgeois ideology, too. Playing the game to the bust.

To be straight about it, I have to put myself in a class perspective. Just looking at the petit-bourgeois class historically, there's very few people who come out of this class and stay totally revolutionary. So what happens is that we are forced by the lower class to stay true—maybe at the point of threatening our lives. But at no cost should we be allowed to escape our revolutionary responsibilities. This is very important. This is why the petit-bourgeois can't work with each other—everybody has the same tendencies and knows each other so well. That's why we can always smell each other out. Each one wants to maintain power over the other.

Last night I went to look something up in a book, the part about self-cultivation. Every time I open this book, it opens up to a certain page. It always opens to a page about how the bourgeoisie and the petit-bourgeoisie always talk out of their class interests. It's underlined in black pen and when I opened the book I said "This is an indictment." Then I turned to another page where I read that to come out of this class hang-up you

have to work it out with other people. But I have trouble knowing who to share it with because sometimes, when you tell somebody something, it gets around in the form of idle gossip. People have learned, in this bourgie society, to deal with real feelings only as idle gossip. The real feelings of all of us who have been suppressed by this system, fucked over by it, are too dangerous to this system. That's why they rush us all off to some psychiatrist or social agency, to verify that we're crazy. Then they can put us away. Or the social worker can sit there and talk us out of our real feelings. If people got in touch with our real feelings we'd all start overthrowing the system. But when we're brainwashed, we like the system. I liked the image it gave me—you know, big-dick male. I was afraid that if I did tell somebody my real feelings, my image would be blown. I wanted some relief from all this pain, this jive, but I wanted to keep some of my image at the same time.

You see, these phony values, this shitty individualism, “my problem”—these values are shit! But they have gotten you inroads into the system. You've made some success with them—from balling a chick to a fine job with the anti-poverty agency. So, for a lot of us, it's very hard to even consider giving these techniques up. We imagine we're going places, we're going to

own “whitey’s thing.” Do you see this awful illusion? Why, niggers and poor folks don’t even own the water they drink!

Like we talk about the sisters being equal, but we’re phony. What we really like is for them to be submissive, but in little ways. In the old days, we loved a sister saying to somebody that she dug us. We loved being chased. Then we had control. At last we had control over something! Naturally, we didn’t respect these chicks, because you don’t respect anybody that sells themselves so easy. But we could fool ourselves for a while, thinking they looked up to us.

That makes me think about play practice last week. We were talking about parents, particularly poor black parents always having to have this same kind of control over their children. At least, they could control their kids. “Don’t ask me why! I’m your mother. You do as I say, not as I do!” Black parents, bowing to Mr. Charlie” all day, come home and beat on the kids, the men beat on their woman, beat up on the brother in the street. All because they ain’t got no control, no power, over nobody really got to something at that play practice. The brothers said to the young sisters, “If we know about all this shit in our parents, why do we still hang on to ’em?” And one of the sisters, playing dumb, said, “I don’t know!” (You know how

we are when we don't want to let something out—we act all dumb, “we don't know.”) Finally somebody said, “We don't want to let it out because then we'll be naked.” We were afraid. You have to respect your parents or you'll get put away. But then we got to the truth about how our parents, or anybody in authority who is unjust, can only be unjust if we let them.

Now we've been talking about how it “takes two” for any process to take place. Our mothers get drunk and beat us, and then chase us with knives and threaten to kill us—and still we hang on. Now hanging on when you've been betrayed like this, over and over again, is sick. Not to defend yourself is sick. People say that parents are always right. You see, even in poor bloods bourgeois ideology is intact! Every area of society, every class and ethnic group, is infested with bourgeois ideology! Everything and anything comes from the upper class. Values and information have been historically molded to insure the bourgeoisie's position of power over the rest of us. They hand us all this crap about white is right, family is sacred, get the black man back in the family. And we accept it. That's how it takes two. You accept it as the normal way of life.

Sometimes we can't get out of petty criticisms. We get into that sadness shit, that self-pity. “Life is a trap; everything is inescapable.” Hell, you know the bourgie tragedy bit—can't get

out of the middle. That's why they're the middle-class, always caught in a double-bind, damned if they do and damned if they don't. Our petty hostilities and angers come from this. We get uptight because there are different levels of consciousness among us. Some of us don't want to say we don't understand something. Everybody acts like they know what it's all about—that bourgie phony bit again. Like during your childhood in school, everybody sniggered and laughed at you if you asked questions, "Ha, ha, *dumb bastard!*" Kids ask questions and embarrass not only grown-ups but those who control the entire system. So it's to the authority's interest that we lose faith in ourselves and stop asking about things. And to cover up our ignorance, we lie. You know the panic you feel when the truth starts rising up in you—right away, you start lying to stop the panic. Everybody is a fool, they'll believe you, they always did before. It's easy to be false and phony. The people don't never call you on those lies.

The truth comes from deep down and has been hidden for so long that when it comes up, it has a rotten smell to it. Yet, it has something good and something very real about it. Now, for some of us, it is quite hard to get out the truth. It's like hitched to our guts, not wanting to come out. At least, that's how it feels to me. After awhile, it seems as if it starts to eat your insides

out. You think it isn't anything serious, if you leave it alone it will go away. But then you have another problem. It starts all over again and you feel, "When will this shit leave me alone?" Sometimes I used to cry about it. But I'd think, "Crying is a sign of weakness in men." And that would suppress the tears. My image would be OK.

Wanting to "be somebody" was always on the minds of all the people around me. Never being satisfied with life, or even being human. Never enough. Always you had to have more, more than the people around you, even people you didn't know. All these people were, however, intimately involved in your scheme to become important. This is the beginning of all the lies, beginning at this point with this person you don't even know maybe, but want to impress. You continue to lie every time you see this person, really not caring if they have anything to say. As long as they listen, it's alright. You're home thinking of the next lie you're going to tell this person and maybe their friends. So you think of an extra good lie for them. You're still not thinking of the people who know you. You're still trippin' on the super-lie you told those people you just met. After all this lying, you start to wonder if they might run into someone who knows you very well. This is when you begin to think you did the wrong thing, but it's too late. People are beginning to

find out who you really are and they are saying less and less to you. This is when your real self begins to come out. You're being eaten up inside by all the lies that you told those people. Back then it didn't matter because they also told lies. The only difference is that now you have some feelings toward the whole thing. This is when you begin to pay your dues.

It has been hard for me to get the truth out because of what I have let my class do to me. As bad as you may want to tell the truth, it is quite hard. When you begin to want to tell the truth, you tell the little things that don't hurt so bad—and it goes from there. More truth and more truth. One reason why I never told the truth was because I was afraid that people would take advantage of it. I have valued my feelings and didn't want to feel any pain. That's why I never told people how I really felt. It is also why I acted hard to anything that happened to me. My hardness was a mask. I never wanted the truth about me to be revealed. But now I'm able to deal with the truth, and I'm able to face myself as a human being. The truth has come to mean a great deal to me.

## THE PEOPLE'S PLAYERS

JOHN: Well, while the sisters are in the front room having their meeting, what should we do?

ANDY: Let's rap.

SAM: OK. About what? (SILENCE AS EVERYONE THINKS.)

JOE: Shit I don't know, anything. (MORE SILENCE.)

JEFF: What about school?

ANDY: Yeah, let's talk about that.

JOE: (SOUNDING RELUCTANT) Well, it's a start.

JOHN: Remember how we use to act in school?

JOE: Yeah, I was always the class clown. I could crack jokes and sound on your mama like anything.

SAM: There was always a damn bully in the class who wanted to be a tough guy.

JOHN: OK. I'll be the teacher, and Joe, you be the class clown.

JEFF: Andy, you be the tough guy.

ANDY: Yeah. OK. And what we could do is to show how some black kids get into trouble. Then after they get kicked out of school, they go running to the big deal black community action leader to get themselves back in school.



JEFF: Right. And then after the black big shot gets to the school and talks loud, he turns right around and lets the principal and the teacher change his mind around.

SAM: Yeah. Then the community action guy starts believing that the child was wrong too.

JOE: And the worst part is that they all convince the child that he was wrong, and the child believes it.

JOHN: That's good. Let's take it from there.

JEFF: Let's start.

This is how the People's Players got started—a group of brothers, all feeling the same vibrations and being able to put them into a workable play or skit.

In the early days of the players group we would do the plays in this form everywhere that we went. In the streets, in the meetings, in the laundry rooms, on the subway, everywhere that we went. Doing the plays in these different public surroundings was very educational for us and the unsuspecting people around us. An example of this is a subway ride in the city one day that drew response from onlookers. A couple of us pretended to be hard-working black brothers who were janitors. The “janitors” “met” an “old friend” (played by another brother) who was now working in an executive position and

didn't want to be associated with them. Well the two janitors told him off and explained to him that he should never forget where he came from or who his friends and relatives were, especially being black. They talked him down to their level. One woman who had been watching and was about to get off the subway, said to the executive brother, "Man, you better get yourself together." This was a surprise. The woman's reaction made the group feel very good.

The players group has continued to do plays in this very same way. Never have we written any of our plays. Everything is coordinated by the members of the group having similar experiences, living under similar conditions, and being able to examine the outside and inside forces that shape things around the world. In this way we are able to learn from each other. Not working with a script gives the players group more room to move and make changes. Also, onlookers at rehearsals can offer suggestions and make criticisms where they feel it is necessary.

The first place that the players group used to rehearse and present our plays was in the combination gym and auditorium of one of the black churches in the community. In our first meeting with the minister and some people who were to serve as directors, we actually performed a play to win the confidence

of the church people. We acted very courteously and spoke politely. The players even told one of the directors, who was an older woman, that she was looking quite well and that she didn't seem as old as she said she was. She giggled like an ass and grinned all over the place. The reason for our act was because we had just come out of a black militant-type organization that made enemies of some of the community's leading middle-class blacks.

The rehearsals went well to start. As the players became more involved with the plays, we became more involved in helping each other with our individual problems and contradictions. All of the plays had to do with the oppression of lower-class and black people, and how we should deal with the "Man." But we found that we had to deal with *each other* more than we thought. This got to such a point that the group didn't rehearse on some nights—we would sit and talk.

There were discussions after the plays. The players group would start out by asking people in the audience if they had any questions. Many times these question-and-answer periods were very slow getting started because no one wanted to open their mouth to say anything. A lot of us still hold on to what the "Master" taught us—about being afraid that some one will

laugh if we say something “wrong.” Then there were times when things just flowed like water. The audience would ask a lot of questions and make statements about their own feelings.

One night things got very lively. The People’s Players had just finished a play that was about the poor family and the petty-bourgeois family. The group members asked for questions and no one said anything. Then this young black street brother, trying to find something wrong, attacked the group on the only thing he could think of—the cursing in the play. One of the young women in the group answered his question, but he acted as if her answer was not good enough. At this point, a poor black mother in the audience stood up and said with a mouth full of snuff, “You know damn well what she is talking about.” The woman then said, “Don’t people in the streets and in the homes curse?” The brother answered, “Yeah.” Then the mother said, “Alright then.”

At another performance which also had to do with the family and the oppression of women, another good reaction was sparked. At one point in the discussion, the players group members were discussing a particular aspect of female oppression, and a black woman in the audience said, “That’s right, that’s the way it is.” Her husband was embarrassed and tried to shut her up and make her leave the auditorium.

No one can forget the time when an old black man and his wife came to one of the plays and he commended the group on their good work. He said, “I enjoyed it and you were very good and you have some good ideas. But be careful, don’t move too fast and blow it.”

The people in the black community were very responsive toward the plays, which is why the group’s membership grew from eight to about thirty-eight. Most of these were very young black brothers and sisters from the community who were struck by movie-star fever. Because the players group rehearsals were so loose and open many people chose to try their hand at being a star. Well this thing about overnight stardom is not a part of what the People’s Players is about. So this very large number of members started getting smaller and smaller. Doing the type of plays that we did, sitting all night talking about very deep and so-called personal problems, making each other tell the truth as we have never done before—all this was hard work, not the kind of work that most of these young brothers and sisters were ready for.

Another very important fact is that these young brothers and sisters were from petty-bourgeois families. This is why a class struggle developed when five very hip young poor black women from a neighboring community joined the group. They

weren't the type of young women that would take a lot of shit from anyone, much less some young little jive ass black guys. Like the time when the young brothers were making jokes and laughing at these sisters about their looks. Most young black women in that position would be very weak and not know how to combat this onslaught. But not these young women—they stood their ground and told these guys just what they felt. “You all ain't nothing but a bunch of jive ass niggers, you all ain't shit,” the sisters said. This was new and shocking for these young brothers. As more of this happened, the brothers stayed away from rehearsals more and more until they stopped coming altogether. Now they didn't stop coming to the plays; they still came, but only in a different way. They had formed a little gang, which was what was happening around the country at that time. The upsurge of the gangs (like in the fifties) was back again. Now when they came to the plays, they would heckle and make noises and try to disrupt the performances. But the tide would turn right back on them as the time for discussion came, following the play. These young gang members would be exposed and, in truth, exposed themselves, when a group member faced them with a question that they couldn't answer. The gang didn't form just because it was happening all over the country. For these young brothers it was a way to get back at

the players group. These young brothers, at the time that this is being written, are still struggling in some ways to get back in the group. They haven't yet found out that all they have to do is come back and talk. It takes time.

The truth about things can hurt very badly, especially if it's told to people who are used to being lied to. This is the reason why the People's Players had to leave the black church. The church people felt that the subject matter of the group's plays was getting a bit too truthful for the church people. The group, instead of doing plays just about black history or slavery, started doing plays that attacked the institutions and class oppression of this society. This directly attacked and exposed black middle-class interests, including the interests of the church itself.

The first confrontation came early in the summer of 1970. The players group was scheduled to have a performance that Saturday, as the minister had promised. But he went back on his word. Well, when all the people arrived to see the performance, what would you tell them? The people decided to liberate the auditorium. The play was done and the films were shown. During the last film the minister came in, some deacons with him, and all of them were very upset. The minister went up and pulled out the projector plug. What the hell did he do that for?

“Put that plug back” “What in the hell do you think you’re doing?” people shouted. Another person said, “If you don’t put that plug back, I’ll kick your ass.” The minister quickly obeyed that order, and then went to call the police. When the police came you could hear “Here comes the pigs” . . . “It’s going to be some shit now” . . . “That minister is a punk,” said another person. “If you people don’t leave you will be placed under arrest,” said the officer. “Shiiit” said an unknown voice. Well the people of the community and the People’s Players stood our ground, finished the program, and then everybody left. This was truly a victory for the poor black community.

A second confrontation followed a short time after. This was the result of another lie on the part of the minister. Again the police were called, but the players group finished the play nevertheless. The minister, this so-called black man, proved to everyone how black he really was, If he really cared about the young black people and believed in non-violence, like he said he did, he would not have called the police. This proved that black ain’t shit when it comes down to private property and ownership. That’s the way the church people really felt—it was private property, the basis of capitalism.

The next place that the group used was the white-owned interracial church near the poor black community. The players



group had a meeting with the church's drama director and an interracial drama group that also used the place. This drama group, after seeing the people's Players work, wanted to join the groups together. But our players group members were very truthful and explained to them what the group's purpose was—to help blacks first. The few rules that the church people set down were very fair and were followed by our group. We didn't mind the rules at all because the white church people were more fair than the black church people.

The People's Players began once again to take an idea or fact from the people, turn it around and give it back in a way that is understandable. We are continuing to do this for the people and for each other. If there are to be meaningful changes in society, every possible step must be made. The People's Players is one of those steps.



**THE  
REVOLT  
OF  
POOR  
BLACK  
WOMEN**



## PART 1

In our memory no one had ever come to really help us. History had taught all of us that negroes up North leave the slums and never come back. When we think on this deeply, most of the black women who made it out of the neighborhood were chosen by the Master. You see he recognizes himself in them. These black women do everything for money and nothing for no pay. They are very weak and unsure of themselves. Therefore they “gots to be pretty,” “always primping for Mr. Man,” “tipping in the latest threads,” imitating, aping the white scene.

The only women we were used to was the welfare visitor—sometimes good sometimes bad—and the “good lady in blue,” the visiting nurse. They were white. (Once we had a negro worker—a drag—a striving old lady.) Then there’s our faithful, old negro doctor. He always came out to us when we were real sick, especially the children. He still does. But he never tried to open our minds. He had no faith that our minds could be opened. We were the way we were because that was the way we were supposed to be. He would have been shocked, maybe even scared, if he had known we could think. What does every-

one out there call us—underprivileged? Well, underprivileged blacks is how he saw us. And he made his “little change” on us. Oh yes, a whole lot of “change.” Welfare paid for every visit. And his bourgie wife—she hated us! How she togged herself with that change and how she strutted to civic meetings with the white folks! We heard the doctor wrote a book about us two years ago. Nobody we know got a copy except those who were middle-class. That’s the way it is. The middle-class blacks write about us but never come down here to let us know what is going on and what they are doing.

All these jivers for the Man took care of their little business with us and we appreciated it. But we had never had any experience with anyone who had faith in us, had faith that we could think for ourselves, that we could change our lives. You know, if you’re poor, you’re poor. You don’t miss what you’ve never had. You just do the same thing, day in and day out. What could change our lives? Damn, our own people never wanted to help! They just wanted to get away from us. We disgusted them. Where was this freedom, except in heaven! We had never even heard the word revolution; even in school we don’t remember the word being used. And we certainly had never seen a revolutionary.

So someone coming in 1963 and wanting to take us to hear

Malcolm X, a real black revolutionary, and talking quietly to us about our history of oppression as black women, taking our sides against the black men (were fighting them over birth control) was like out of this world. This was crazy; yet we listened! We never read the world news in the papers or looked at the evening bulletins on the TV. We had never even heard of Malcolm X or Martin Luther King either. Then we learned that the white man had paid to have Malcolm killed—and no one had to tell us. We could figure it out for ourselves by then, because no black man is killed by Mr. Man unless he is really with the people. We really dug this when they killed King, striving, bourgie King, trying to come home, trying to help poor black sanitation men instead of helping bourgie niggers to hustle an integrated cup of coffee.

Those of us who worked in small factories knew our working conditions were unjust. There were no unions for us and we didn't have no faith in unions. We thought everybody had to do their own thing, fight their own individual battles. Most all of our factory experiences were short. The abuse was out in the open. It was not hidden. Most of us told off the foreman sooner or later and left.

A lot of us started out in the late fifties in that electronic factory in the next town. There is also that tomato-packing plant

where a lot of us could work at night while the neighbors listened out for the children. But factories are notorious for their exploitation of poor women, black and white. You were put in packing first. Then you went to soldering and grinding, then counting and sorting parts. Starting pay was \$1.00/hour with a nickel raise after six months. The tomato plant was \$.85/hour. In the electronics factory they would transfer you to another department before your six months was up and you'd have to start all over again at \$1.00/hour. That's why none of us stayed long. That was alright with the bosses because there was always someone to take our place. In those days we thought, each person for herself, so we never bothered to rap with each other much over conditions.

The majority of us women workers were Puerto Rican and black. The black and Puerto Rican men had all the heavy work in shipping and packing. The secretaries and foremen were white, usually Italian, maybe Irish. There were all the racist ideas we'd grown to expect, even accept in a way. But the restrictions on time off the line were terrible, especially for those women who felt they couldn't get jobs anywhere else. You couldn't be sick or go to the bathroom, never mind a smoke.

Most of us black women could get jobs as domestics. Money was way better, \$1.35–\$1.50/hour. That's how we started out



when we came up from the South. The Master prefers black household servants because of our historical servility. Puerto Ricans are considered too passionate and excitable, and the women too pretty and competition for “Miss Anne.” So you see, many Puerto Rican women must work in those factories. Some of us know of full-blooded Indians in construction but the Indian woman is not considered for household work. She appears too impassive and Miss Anne gets nervous wondering what she is thinking.

We black women do take great pride in our household work, but down through history black peoples’ work was the dirtiest and the most unwanted. No other racial group had to do it. We blacks were always on the bottom and we kept these other racial groups free of it. How could black people take pride in this kind of work hated and refused by everyone else in society?

We blacks have been studied a lot lately and we have read some of these studies. We are called a passive people. We have learned to study the history of words. *Passive* has the same Latin root as the word *passion*. The Latin root means suffering. Passivity is the smothering of suffering and passion is the explosion of suffering. Passivity and passion—the ways to keep living when you’re damned, even by your own people. We smile at these studies that can never touch the roots of things.

We were living in real cramped quarters back in the fifties and early sixties—seven or eight of us in one or maybe two rooms. We were isolated from each other even though we lived close together. Some nights those halls jumped out with fights, bloody too! But when it was a quiet night we would read, even think deep on things when we turned the lights out to sleep. There was someone with us who rapped and gave us books on subjects we were curious about. Still we doubted. Wasn't this a hustle after all? Maybe they weren't right in the mind? The men said we should be careful of radical people. We didn't know that word radical then, but poor black women long ago learned not to take the advice of black men. These "mothers" always operated in their own interest. We were hip. We were not like so many of our self-destructive, dick-happy sisters who were always longing for a man, fighting and woofing on other women. Leaving their children for some man. Our children came before *any* man.

We tried to get together with other women to have a rent strike like they were having down in the big city. We just wanted to get rid of the roaches and have some decent heat. We got as far as reporting the building to the Health Department. We were not too together, fussing and carrying tales on each other. There was an organization that wanted us to make a big

thing for the newspapers, to make a bigger point. But some of us thought we were just being used so we didn't go for it. The group dropped us and the landlord moved, moved a whole lot of us out of the buildings. And we thought our men-folk would have a natural fit. They blamed us, they blamed the outsider and maybe we did too, a little. But the men were upset because they had lost their crib. We had lost our small places, and apartments were always hard to get in our small slum. So we really had no time for blaming. We had to hustle. We women found ourselves new places near to each other, and our men came along, all mean and complaining. Some didn't come along. Some just left because we had changed. We were mad now and we were not taking shit from anybody. We could find new men—like that old saying about never chasing a bus because there's always another coming along.

Welfare, as usual, didn't give much help, and in fact, tried to cut our money down. For a long time that department had been able to have their way with us. We didn't fight back. Like our children didn't fight back in school either. But some of our sisters were so uptight by now that they moved on the welfare workers, beat up a few and dared the department to bring charges. Not all of us were so daring but it sure raised our spirits.

The schools always complained about our children. Either our children were dumb or “little animals.” Our kids were scared to tell us how bad it had always been for them in school because we always sided with their teachers. We had learned to look up to teachers. We asked for help for our children in school. There was none. Then we got the help we needed from outside the school.

The outsider was still there, listening to our hurts, our rage, making things come together. Our business never hit the streets. Our secrets were kept, even within families. The children listened and began to learn far quicker than they had ever learned in school. We became so impressed with their progress that we agreed to help and we formed a Freedom School—right in our kitchens where everybody gathered anyhow. A tape recorder was brought to us and we used it with the children and afterwards we taped our own discussions about the school and plans for the next week.

We got interested in the Vietnam War in 1966 when some of our young men began to come home in boxes. We were given material from the Vietnamese fighters themselves. We could compare it to what we were being told by the Man. Many other young black men were signing up to go and we were very disturbed that they did not know the Vietnamese peoples’ side. A

whole lot of us tried very hard to talk the young men out of going, tried to show them how it was really a war against people like us. But our sons and brothers ignored us. We were just black women and the schools had long ago convinced them not to listen to poor people (particularly women) who had never even finished high school. These black men saw only the bread and the chance to get away from home, the chance to be big and had like John Wayne, as white as he was! Some of the women in the neighborhood wanted their sons to go. The boys were already drop-outs from school, causing them trouble at home, tripping out and going to jail. They thought the army would make men of them. We always depended on white authority when we didn't know what else to do with our children.

We took an opportunity to go to the city to picket an Army–Air Force Recruiting Center in the black slum area. We took some of the older children with us. We wanted to bring this unjust situation to the attention of more poor black mothers and their children. We came home and argued with those women in our community who said the boys should fight for their country against communism. But we understood their real fears. They were the striving poor. They had really accepted capitalism (although none of us ever used that word) as the only way for

them to escape upward. Then, of course, this system was in their interests. But we tried to show them how we were losing the war and they were sending their sons to their death. They could not believe us. Whitey was Superman!

Some of the women who organized that picketing came back to our neighborhood with us. We had told them about our school and they wanted to help us. A few of us thought it just might be possible for bourgeois negro women to come home. Those who had their doubts kept their mouths shut. Some of us were very touched deep inside because these were honest-to-goodness trained schoolteachers, gone to college and everything. We were open to them. They were against the unjust Vietnam War, had taken real action against it, and they had offered themselves to us for no pay. We were happy to have them. We insisted on paying them with our surplus food. Some of us noticed their embarrassment, but others just remarked that it was easier to give than to take. We all had to learn how to take.

Finally they had to leave us. Our thoughts as we look back on it was that they couldn't take all our love and gratitude. Perhaps they couldn't take the fact that we had minds of our own. We could think for ourselves, given half a chance. We had ambitions of our own—not to be bourgeois, but to reach out to

everybody like us and move with them to change all our lives. We knew we were somebody!

They thought we should want to go to college and have our children make high marks. We wanted our children to learn *how* to think, not *what* to think. Lord knows we had had enough of that! They favored the children who were quick in the mind. They ignored the children who were slow but thorough. We opposed this bourgeois way of teaching. We wanted our children to know the power poor people had to understand things deeper than the bourgeois. For instance, we did not permit the children to compete with each other. We showed them in history how this competition had been used to divide and conquer us.

At the same time we wanted these educated black sisters to feel our love and respect for them. We struggled with them after school hours, helping them to look at their family problems in a wider way, showing how secure they were compared to us and therefore how they could fight harder for their just rights. We struggled with them to see our ways, to see how full of love and togetherness they were. We did not split up like their anti-war group had had to do. We told them that we had done those foolish tricks in the beginning and once was enough. We could not afford to pay those kinds of dues again—being evicted and

getting beat up on by our old man. Even though we teased them about their funny, bourgie ways, we loved them for coming to us every week and giving us their time. They even brought their own children and we loved them like our very own. To this day we think about them, wonder about them, and miss them—five years later.

We think we understand why they had to leave us. Some of us really thought they would stay and be taught by us. But we had to learn how bone-deep is the bourgie way among our educated black women, even when they want to help us poor black women. That bourgie fear of the poor can make them want to annihilate us if they can not control and lead us. Their fear of us is very strong.

We would never submit to bourgie ways even before we walked outside of our world. Now that we had some inside power, we read and scoped for ourselves just how we were being screwed by everybody—blacks included. Perhaps we weren't much, but we were enough to help our children have this knowledge and we would struggle with them to make it deeper.

There were many weeks when we would be depressed because so many around us knew we were right and didn't want to admit it. We have a saying, "People know; they just don't



want to know!” A lot of our neighbors tell us now that they couldn’t bare to admit that the dreams of making it were impossible. Now in 1971 they see and admit it is impossible. More and more of them are forced, just as we had been, to look deeply into conditions and to prepare themselves for a great loss of what little security poor people got after World War II. They are learning little by little not to be so afraid.

Out of our occasional depressions came a decision to write about our experiences as poor, struggling black women. Some black men listened and helped us to be published. But bourgeois negro women— ignored us and our writings until we were published by white women. Some radical white women with great intellectual prestige also ignored us after writing to us for information, which we laboriously wrote down in longhand and sent out. We’ve learned through experience about this thing called class struggle and we became determined to struggle against it and expose it.

In 1969, through the white Women’s Liberation movement, we received an opportunity to meet with North and South Vietnamese revolutionary women invited to Canada by U.S. and Canadian women. All of us wanted to go but black people were now being urban “removed” and we were uptight about where we were going to live. So, in our place, we let some of our teen-

age children go with young black women we had grown to trust. Like us, these women were struggling to help others who lived around them. They were standing up to their parents who really did threaten them with the FBI, and loss of all privileges if they went to see those communists. These young women would not be stopped and we believed in them even more when we saw this kind of courage. We were proud to let our children go with this new generation of young black people.

We also understood their parents. They were reactionary, poor like us but addicted to a system they wanted into even though it exploited us all. Now we are studying deeper and we know that reactionary thinking leads to the support of fascism. After all, fascism needs human beings to run it and support it or it doesn't work. There are reactionary poor black people in the slums who are capable of moving on revolutionary blacks just as there were reactionary young black men ready to kill Vietnamese when they were ordered to do so. Not all of them, by any means, but too many. Yes, there were reactionary sons and brothers in our community who did not want to know the truth about this country; that it had been built on wars against dark-skinned peoples from the American Indian to the Vietnamese.

They were reactionary because they put money and the white man over us—their mothers and sisters. Because we are

now politically aware. We can face the fact that they killed dark-skinned women and children who looked like us. We can face the fact that some come home and become policemen who will be ordered to kill us if we move against their bosses, the capitalists, and capitalism, the system to which they have become addicted. We can face this horror because it is no longer a personal question but a political question.

Sons and daughters from our bodies have often been warned that they are on this earth because we allowed them to be born. We could have flushed them down the toilet if we'd a mind to. But we wanted them. It was important to remind them of this when we were met with their uppity ways and they always signifying about their pops and blaming us if he was gone again. We hit back with the reality that black women are the basic power holders. Maybe we didn't want to bring so many children into the world anymore if they were going to be going around killing other black people here and overseas.

And we understand reactionary parents around us. Some of them have chosen to become policemen, prison guards, youth house workers, torturers, bullies. They already fight the rise of the poor at every turn. They eagerly become fascists when the Master, under siege, turns to them for help to keep the capitalist system going. Like some poor white folks, they are addicted

to the Master's fierce outside power—his guns, airplanes, napalm, hydrogen bombs. They feel machines and money are the only power, stronger than people. (They are always terribly one-sided.) The people are weak when they are badly exploited and feel empty inside. Then they look to the ruling class to do everything for them. But when we are touched by outside forces that reflect our worth, we can begin to struggle against the ruler's racism and exploitation. We even begin to fill up with ourselves and we think: "it is written that the meek shall inherit the earth; the last shall be first." We begin to grow from inside just like all waiting seeds, slowly but surely.

We smiled and silently blessed the young white people when they began to bomb buildings to show their rejection of this money society. Those of us who were domestics knew these young white people as a generation that we had helped to bring up. We were impressed and proud that they had been careful not to injure people.

We would tease our striving poor black sisters who fled home terrified that their working places might be bombed. They had struggled so hard under the poverty program to get that education and be somebody. They are now the lowest class of civil servants and will be the first to be laid off whenever depression deepens. But they have to see for themselves. We

were trapped in the slum because we could not bare to kiss ass. They were chosen because the Master knew how bad they wanted the goodies.

We have studied slavery very carefully. We see how the Master always divided the slaves into privileged and non-privileged. There was a class structure within the slave system and it was based on privileges, not money; slaves were not paid. House niggers got house privileges, like some of Massa's food and clothing and a chance to run errands. Some house niggers were mixed bloods, light-skinned. Very early in slavery, in the 1700s, some of these products of Massa got an education, even got taught foreign languages and could travel to Europe with Miss Anne. A kind master could afford to educate "educate those house niggers whose minds he already controlled . . ."

Then there were the in-betweens—neither house niggers nor field niggers. They were field niggers wanting to be house niggers. This group got to be real good at skilled jobs on the plantation, working with machinery, making tools, buildings, carpentering. They had the privileges of foremen over other slaves and were sometimes trusted bounty-hunters and transporters of slaves. Their privileged class interest influenced them to spy and tell Massa about slave unrest. House niggers and "in-betweens" weren't bad black folks; they just got caught up

in the privileges and, seeing no other way out, sold out. (But there is another way out—the overthrow of the Master.)

Then there were the field niggers—bad and non-privileged, like us. They might get a lucky chance to prove themselves to the master and could get favors from time to time. Field niggers did all the work our migrant and tenant farming relatives still do today. They tended and brought in the crop.

Those slaves who were able to arrange their freedom, particularly in the South, could use the craft skills they learned on the plantation to earn money. They could go north or buy land and they could own slaves of their own. In 1830 there were 3,777 negro slave owners, owning their own brothers and sisters. Today we can look forward to black capitalists doing the same thing, trying to use us as wage slaves.

Now we have to tell you. A whole lot of us very poor blacks didn't go for the Black Power shit. There were a lot of different reasons—but class difference is the one we're talking about here. The short history above shows the black class structure, including slaves, which is the same as the one that we blacks live under today—only it isn't obvious. We would be very foolish not to look at this “black unity” shit very carefully.

We have also studied African history outside of those black study courses some of our sisters are taking in the community

colleges. African women have long been slaves to African men and still are. From our reading on the liberation struggles now going on in Guinea-Bissau, Angola and Mozambique, we have learned how bad it was for African women under colonialism, as well as before the white man ever hit Africa. Now, like in Vietnam, women in these countries are fighting as revolutionaries beside their men, and they are getting out from under male rule, white and black. No longer are they treated worse than barnyard animals.

We have to examine the class hopes of many negroes who run down this great African drama on us. They seem to want to go backwards to the days when there were kings and queens. During those times we understand there was slavery in Africa, and women had lost the power to own land. And in some African societies men had many wives. This is a dream—not American this time, but African. As long as this class of negroes just dreams, we're not worried. But the dream of black nationhood has very often been used, in Africa, to exploit poor Africans and African women. The position of poor African women has not changed but grown worse. They are driven to the cities after they cannot accept the burden of heavy farm work. There they become victims of all the kinds of exploitation common to a society that puts money over people. Nationhood still has a

capitalist base. As long as it has, there can be no freedom for poor black and African women.

Middle-class black males never seem to publish these facts in their publications, but we are hip. It's not to their interest to have black women deeply aware of our historical oppression by black men. There is a lot of money to be made from the social and economic exploitation of black women. Look how much loot the middle-class white male has been able to make on the white female (with her cooperation) by keeping her ignorant of her historical oppression. It seems very clear to us that middle-class black men have a class interest, not a racial interest, in keeping us black females almost as dumb as their white class brothers have been able to keep white women. It's a wild hustle! But historically black women have been notorious in not cooperating with black men. We shall see if poor black women plan to exchange a white master for a black one. Our middle-class sisters are busy chasing their black men. We only remind them that black men need status symbols when they lust for capitalism and white women make better ones than middle-class black women. Under capitalism white is still right!

We have larger apartments to hold our schools in. There are no jobs available now, so we study more. We have the right to free birth control and we can get abortions. We realize Mr. Charlie had other reasons for pushing these two programs. But



every action is two-sided—now we are freer of our menfolk always messing over us, freer of the fear of unwanted babies. We can love the children who are already here, especially those of our dick-happy sisters who need to have babies because they (mistakenly) think it'll keep their man. When the sisters are real young and it's been bad for them at home, pregnancy is sometimes their leap into "independence." Their mommas had preferred the sons; and they themselves prefer men—period. These dick-happy mommas are located in all classes, but they are especially deadly to poor black children who have so little to depend on.

We have a lot more knowledge and it did not float down to us from heaven, It was brought by human beings who loved and believed in us. We had to read it, sometimes with dictionaries in the other hand, and we had to think hard on it. The struggle for our children, who will carry greater burdens than we did, has kept us working hard to learn more. Our struggle to open their minds beyond the brainwashing of the schools has been joined by more and more young black people. These young black women and men listen to us, learn from us and we listen to them and learn from them. We all realize that we face a lot of set-backs because this system is still very strong, It's going down but the men who need it and support it, black and white, will try to keep it going as long as they can.

All of us have begun to learn to live beyond rhetoric, beyond Black Power, beyond the American Dream, beyond striving for bourgeoisness, beyond leaving our brothers and sisters who are now trapped in the slums. We know the struggle from deep down below and we know it must be hard and we know it must be long because we know it must be thorough so it can not be turned around. We are keeping on, getting up!

#### **AFTERWORD TO PART 1**

The poor black women had been struggling against the Vietnam War since 1966. It was they who received an invitation to go to Canada to meet three Vietnamese women. U.S. women's groups against the war supported the visit and encouraged North American women to talk with Vietnamese women and learn about the war from their side.

At the time, urban renewal was taking over the houses where some of the poor women lived, so they couldn't go. But they wanted their children to go in their place. Drivers and cars were needed so there would be little expense. Some of us could provide these and it was an opportunity to get out of the projects for a while. We would take the children to Canada to meet the Vietnamese women.

We, who had never been outside of the country before,

jumped at the chance to go to Canada. But we did not deserve the opportunity to go. In all honesty we were thinking of ourselves first—that petit-bourgeois mentality again. We had been fighting our parents in an effort to make decisions for ourselves. Oppression of young black women in the Projects was simple—parents would physically keep us away from anything that might upset their dreams for us, or anything that might make us pregnant, or anything that might make us human beings. During most of our young lives, we had been kept in the church, in the house, in the books, in the school, in our bodies. Any misstep and all hell would break loose. It was nothing for all of us to be carrying red whelps across our faces, our legs, or our backs. The fury of parents against rebellious girl-children could know no bounds.

When word got around where we were going, we had to hide out at college friends' houses. We hid the cars, too. We stole out of town at four in the morning and sang all the way to Canada. We were helping the poor women, but we were on our way to “freedom.” It was simple escape!

The Vietnam War was always very far away. Everything about it was theoretical and abstract. We had cried at the funerals of some of the boys who had been killed there. But never did we make a political connection. Never did we realize that these brothers were black mercenaries who killed other

oppressed people for money and dope. This is still a sickening reality for us.

The Vietnamese women were a whole new world that could stand off “Big Whitey” and black men, too, with all their guns and planes. Vietnamese women, particularly of the poorer classes, were struggling against the U.S. invaders and earning equality and admiration from Vietnamese men and the people of the whole world. It really stirred us for a while, but only for awhile. We slipped back to our individual concerns immediately after the trip.

We blacks praise our own ability to be feeling when compared with the whites in this country. But that “soul” talk is shit! Now we are pushed to tell the *truth*. Many of us have died inside, just like the whites. The military and genocidal forces of this country have outraged the world, but they no longer outrage many of us blacks. Our emptiness and pettiness stand out most clearly when placed beside the real feeling of those Vietnamese women and the Vietnamese revolutionary/poet who spoke through a film made by Yves de Laurot:

... Before all, and after all, we are fighting for revolution! But revolution not only as the righteous violence among the damned of the earth!

Revolution as it was seen by one of our guerrilla fighters, when

he shouted in the face of the firing squad: "Even if I die, *IT* will not die at dawn!"

This "*it*," our American friends, is what we feel as revolution in our hearts . . . Because revolution for us is the day-to-day struggle now . . . but ultimately . . . the salvation of the human spirit.

That is why here, in Vietnam, we are not sure what ring of the eternal, what obstinate yearnings this single word "*it*" strikes in your hearts!

Because you see, we looked for this "*it*," not only among your captive soldiers, but more regrettably, also among your Leftist leaders and intellectuals whom we have invited to our country for propaganda.

We have looked for this "*it*" in their articles, where they write pragmatically about what they have seen, but of course, write nothing about what they couldn't see. We have looked for this "*it*" in your militant press, in your radical books and films, and even in your revolutionary poems!

But each time we looked, we looked in vain; for that "*it*" in them is absent.

This is the soul of the new world's people. It is also their indictment of us. Our pettiness and individualism are symptoms of petit-bourgeois ideology. This ideology is a product of capitalism, which destroys the human spirit, destroys even "*black soul*"! We must look for the "*it*" and find it in ourselves.

## PART 2

Those of us who were born and have lived in the projects all our lives are the failures of the system. We didn't get those single-family homes everyone was hustling for since 1948. Most of us black women were born from 1948 on down to the early fifties. We have seen "striving poor" black families move out and sharecropper families from the South or black families without fathers move in. All of our families had fathers. Most of these new families didn't, or the men moved in and out and weren't the fathers of the children.

The projects always needed repairs from the beginning and we children had too much energy to be cooped up in high-rise apartments with an elevator. We wanted to get out fast, so we always took the stairs. We wanted to run, free ourselves. The pressures were had. But we didn't know this in our heads. We just felt the urge and we acted. All the families were like this. There was always gossip, each family moving on the other, out-doing the other, the kids fighting and playing. The games were down and dirty.

Our mothers still dream of having our own house. Many

families are still struggling to get out. You see, in the beginning we knew no low-class folks were let into the projects. If you weren't married you couldn't get in. If you had a baby out of wedlock, you got put out. There's one among us who had some bitter memories about that. Later, when welfare pushed and the housing shortage for poor blacks got worse, her mother and the kids got back in. But while they were out, they lived four to one room, and they got burned out twice. In that time the mother felt forced to give one of her babies away to relatives down South. This is not an individual story. It's happened to lots of us.

Our fathers were mostly veterans of World War II. If they couldn't get to college, at least they got good-paying jobs as skilled factory workers, especially during the Korean War. A lot of our mothers worked, mostly in domestic service, and a few had low-paid typist jobs. Some worked in the local hospitals as cleanup women and a very few as nurse's aids. Our fathers made the most money and no one ever questioned why this was. It was accepted that our mothers worked to help save for the house. She would get paid less since daddies were supposed to make more money. That was the American way. Daddies were supermen, not mommies.

Our fathers could really rap! They didn't fly through the sky like whitey, but they bopped and glided along the pavements,

and in the bars they were kings. Around 1955–56 our daddies started swilling liquor, drinking real bad and just about making it home on their knees. We black women-children didn't know, nor did anyone tell us, that black men were losing jobs or being offered jobs of lower status, like in shipping or packing. This was downgrading and the beginning of one of those economic slumps you read about in the Wall Street Journal but you never hear about in school. No one told us jobs had to be automated so the factory owners could produce more cheaply, Like when some of us came from down South, it was because machines could do our jobs for less money than the boss paid us.

Our pops were much talk and no action! We loved them very much as young, teenage black women. We cannot make the intensity of this love for our daddies so's you can touch it unless you have lived the way we did. As they drank more, they beat momma more and she turned on us. Daddy now stayed away for days and you'd see him on the corner moving on some "bitch." But he still came home occasionally and he brought home some money part of the time. But the arguments between him and moms got brutal. Our momma didn't understand that he'd lost his job because the system, capitalism, didn't need him. She blamed the loss of the job on him. He blamed the loss of the job on her.



We were left with half-fathers or none at all. Too many of us have spent our teen-age life looking for another daddy and the security we learned went with having daddies. This is our basic history—loss of security and loss of our daddies. It made everyone of us dependent on males economically and psychologically. We can put this together now, but then there was *absolutely nobody* to hip us to what was really happening, to how everything was connected.

The fighting between our parents and between our brothers and sisters spread and worsened. Each of us saw our own individual problems as bigger and more important than anybody else's. We never look back on ourselves. We always blamed the problem on someone close to us. That's as far as we could see. Families moved on families and our older brothers, the favorites of the parents, slowly began to trip out on smack. Now everybody was fighting everybody else and none of us ever considered it had anything to do with big capitalism and imperialism and neo-colonialism. We would have laughed at the words. They were too damn big and we had never heard them in school. We lived from one day to the next, with no past and no future. So fighting among ourselves and tripping on a little smokes or a little wine was a release. We talk about the old days now and fall out laughing. To some of us who laugh the har-

dest, the memories are still too painful because we are still caught on the system. We can still fantasize about “being somebody” or having this dress or this piece of furniture. But we know the power is in us basically because we cannot want those things if we really decide. Ain’t nobody got the power outside of us. We have it inside! Talking about this and the old days is a replay, like it’s a way to get it out of our system because even with political consciousness, we are still trapped and everybody is getting poorer.

There was just no way for our world to be broken into and made real by connecting it to the economic system we lived in, which we now know as capitalism. Each apartment was a separate world. Each individual in the family was a separate world. The very word *apartment* describes the reality of apartness. Each member of the family lived for that day, or better said, each of us lived to get to Friday, when we could party and get ourself a boyfriend. We were successfully cut off from each other and the world around us.

When the world moved, it moved on us separately and we dealt with that attack separately. We admired that world, depended on it for all our necessities, like food, clothing, water, housing, education, and the goodies, like fancy clothes and pretty furniture. Yet, we were constantly put down by it. We

were caught in a bind we couldn't get out of. Lord! How we loved fine clothes! But when we stole them, the clothes were taken away and sometimes we were put away. When we tried to get jobs with big money to buy those pretty things, we were only allowed little petty jobs with low pay, If we studied hard and got good marks so we could go to college, there was no money, our parents were too poor.

All during the late fifties and early sixties, every move outward to join the white world was stopped cold. But the first problem was in us. We wanted that world *bad!* It didn't need us or want us young black women, except as domestics, cleanup personnel in some institution, pool secretaries, waitresses and five-and-dime store clerks. The second problem was we didn't understand why we couldn't have it. And the third problem was, at this critical time—early sixties—no one came to patiently explain anything to us.

But now we have gone back, ourselves, to our mothers and fathers, and made them tell us about their past. We've forced them to the wall many times in the last four years, making them tell us things they had learned to be ashamed of—mostly low social status. We have put together a picture of Southern poor black women pulling together to get north. Some of the stories are exciting, like when the Ku Klux Klan attacked in North

Carolina and some of the women determined to get out because the terror was too much. Others were plain and simple stories of never having enough, shacks built by the family itself on somebody else's land, no work, little income, family quarrels, and boyfriends who had already come north leaving pregnant young women behind. Many of those babies were born and were left in the South with granma. The young mother followed her man north, got a job and sent money home for the children. The young father had long ago just disappeared. A new man came along and there were children born here. But there was no fit place for the children to play, no one to help take care of them, and the man wanted to "play." So these children went south to be raised in the country away from the bad city.

Many of our mothers followed their older sisters up, where the first job was almost always in domestic service. They'd live together in one of the Big City slums and commute to the suburbs by bus and train. Some would sleep in at first, save their money. Bet an apartment and send for other sisters, aunts or cousins. They'd work in domestic service for years, saving their money and helping to support families, their own children down South and their nieces and nephews. Sometimes they'd save up enough to buy an old house and rent out rooms to other black women who had just come North and were domestics

and wanted the privacy of their own room on their day off. This income, along with the income from renting rooms to single men doing factory work, helped to pay for the house. Most of our parents wanted to forget this past.

Our parents have always looked up and onward. This was the American Way of Life. Now here they were living right next door, almost, to the American Dream, the rich whites. They had made it out of the South, out of the big Northern city slum into the slums of suburbia . . . just one more step . . . just one more step and they could be out of the slums entirely. So close . . . so damned close, and yet so far, so far away! Greedy hogs skewered to a spike, prepared for slaughter. Anytime they could lose their jobs . . . twisting, turning, trying to get loose. No *way*!

The word “pigs” is really a placing of our own contradictions outside of ourselves. We put the term “pigs” on the white cops who come from the same class we do, only they are white-skinned petit-bourgeoisie. They, therefore, are more privileged. But they have the same kind of frustrations we have. They, too, are so close to the goodies, but still so far away.

Now you take the nigger cops in our town. They all come from outside of the projects and their families look down on us still trapped inside the projects. We look down on the poorer families around the projects who can't get in. When we were

kids together we sniggered and made fun of those just up from the South.

There is a saying kids have—“takes one to know one!” When we started calling cops “pigs” and black-skinned cops “nigger pigs,” it took a pig to know a pig. It would have been more honest of us if we had recognized that we and the cops are greedy, hungry, and eager for the goodies of the middle class. We both are caught between having and not having.

In the early sixties, the projects finally blew wide open. The evening was hot. Everybody was hangin’ out, grouped around the benches, sitting on the fences, laying out on the grass, sharing a bottle in the ball field. A white cop beat a blood to the ground, right in plain sight of everyone. Just getting his balls off on “the nigger” ’cause he’s a nigger! . . . Niggers are disgusting anyhow! . . . You know how lazy they are . . . They’ve got real hateful lately! . . . Besides, they’re scary!” Fear and anger, all knotted up together. “Hit that son-of-a-bitch!” Then the women moved, covering their “sons” with their own bodies, screaming at the cop, cursing and moving toward him. The black men stood stock-still—watching, tense, rigid, unmoving.

The next day the entire project marched on City Hall. Never had there been such a spontaneous collective action. But never had a people experienced such long-lasting razor sharp frustra-

tion—living so near to the finer things, yet so far away from “them goodies.” This reality had been building up since the early fifties. Other cities began to blow. “Burn that mother-fucker down! . . . Here, sister, take these clothes home to yo’ kids! . . . Man, gimme that bottle of gin. You know I don’t dig J&B! . . . Hey, get that color TV over there! . . . Get the kids out. The place is going up! . . . Oh lordy me, what am I gonna do now? I ain’t got no place to go!” Everybody black suffering the same contradiction, like a knife in the stomach. We had gotten to the North, made it to the Promised Land—and everything was slipping through our fingers. It was steadily getting worse and there was no other place to go.

The anger subsided. The court case went on and on, put off and postponed, like this would tire us out. We were already empty. Our fury had spent itself. We went back scratching for bread and louding each other.

But not all of us. We younger black women hung in there for the brother who got his head cracked open. The white lawyer took the case for nothing. He was mad! And, with the young black women’s help and the pushing of the mother, they won a legal victory.

Some of the young black sisters over at the high school moved on the shit the teachers have always handed out. The

brothers, too, were moving on racism. We got ourselves a group going—black brothers and sisters, raised fists, bluejeans, khaki jackets, cool—we were moving. But the brothers wanted us to walk behind them. They started giving orders for us to walk between them when we went down to the Big City to liberate books on politics. They had to protect us. Where were they coming from? Black women never got no protection from nobody. We could fight as good as any man. Black brothers told us it was time to “get back” and let them lead.

Manhood was privilege—to be somebody, at least and at last, over black women and children. Ain’t that a bitch? Acting just like Mr. Whiteman over his women and children. Was this a revolution or were we exchanging one master for another? No bet! No matter how the bloods tried to dress this shit up in political terms, it was plain—they were playing the master and we were to play the slaves.

Play-acting didn’t really make any difference, but when we graduated we learned that women’s inferiority was real and deadly. We got training jobs in the office pool. The bloods were on the production lines and putting in more an hour than we were. The economic oppression for us was still as real as it had been for our black mothers. We either took those minor office



jobs or went back to momma's job at Miss Anne's or into the hospital scrubbing floors or carrying meal trays.

A very small number of us got scholarships at the local colleges. We tried our "bad-all-black-shit" there, staying to ourselves, dressing like revolutionaries. We black women were play-acting and being educated by the system. We were off the job market that was getting smaller (particularly for black women) and being allowed by the college administration to strut our black power shit as long as we didn't go too far. We were going to get that education and take it back to the people. Now in college we were getting the same lies the poor people were choking on in high school. Those poor people knew we were bullshitting. We had privilege and didn't want to admit it.

Those of us who got neither on-the-job-training or a college scholarship got ourselves pregnant. We didn't really mind, because it would make us dependent on men and we liked that no matter what the political sisters said. For too many years black women have had to carry the whole load of the family without a man. Poor black women who lived outside of the projects reminded us that poor women all over the world, especially in Africa, had to keep the family going because their men were sent away when the Europeans and Americans colonized

their land. Men were sent to the West as slaves, or they became migrant laborers in other parts of Africa and later Europe. When they revolted against the colonial system, they were sent to prison or killed. Thousands of Asian men became the crews of trading ships, leaving their families for years. In South Africa today, black African men are forced into the mines to pay taxes put on them by the white occupiers. They have to leave their children and their women for six months to a year. In the Southern U.S., black men ran away from the constant economic and psychological harassment. South American males travelled to the big cities for work to feed their families. All poor families have had their men ripped from them by colonialism, capitalism, and imperialism.

We petit-bourgeois women, at least, did not suffer from our men being driven from the home in quite the same way. They could get low-paying jobs under capitalism. But since the middle-sixties, our men have lost jobs, gone on dope or been sent to jail for felonies. We project women have competed like crabs in a barrel for a blood with a job—not a human being, an *object*, a means to get the loot. Like our brothers we are hooked, but not on scag. We are hooked on the goodies and on men who can provide the bread to get the goodies.

We were and are the most tripped out on clothes and furni-

ture. Unless you've lived in a low-income project, you can't feel what it is like to have to drop everything, go downtown, and buy and buy and buy. We'd take *everything* in sight if we could. If we run out of money, we come back home evil, with an attitude, snap at anybody in a minute—our heads aching with the tension, with the rage, our stomachs tied in knots with fury! Goddamn it!

To see our kids the best dressed in the projects, five pairs of shoes for one child . . . o-o-h, that's a good feeling! But still we live in a dirty, crowded project. So near and yet so far away.

To see our man bop down the project path, every woman's head turned toward him—and he's all ours! How they envy us because he's so fine and he belongs to "this woman"! Back in the apartment, he's uptight because we spent the food money on clothes. He gets an attitude, because we don't have supper ready and the dishes are still in the sink from this morning. He says we don't care about him. "Black women ain't shit!" . . . So near and so far away.

As one sister put it, "Being in love with the Master and the goodies makes you very empty. It drives you into fantasy and dreams. I can dream I am in this place or that place. But I can't read when I'm like this. I can't concentrate. I look at TV. It romanticizes me." You have to have been in this predicament to

know how difficult it is to come out of it with nothing waiting for you but political struggle with other women who are just like you were. They do everything not to hear you. But they know, like we knew, deep down. They just can't bear to know just yet.

**THE  
EDUCATION  
OF  
POOR  
BLACKS**



## THE NEW EDUCATION COMING OUT OF THE OLD

The beginnings of a new and revolutionary educational system inside the old is a normal process of change. It does not attempt to reform, but to eventually replace, the old. Our new educational practice started outside of the schools, in the homes of the students themselves. The kitchens and living rooms of our poor students became classrooms. In the summer, the streets and playgrounds became classrooms, and at times even the beach. All material brought home for homework was connected wherever possible with class struggle, racism, the history of capitalism and slavery in this country and in the world.

One simple idea was constantly practiced when feelings about school, homework, and all social and economic (even sexual) relationships came up. That was the fact that it takes two for anything to happen. We repeat daily that the oppressor is not the problem now—*we are!*

The oppressor is supposed to oppress. To expect the oppressor not to oppress is a false analysis, and eventually it's an analysis that drives one mad. So it is important to understand that all people in authority have the role and the purpose of oppres-

sion—not that they are mean or evil, just that in capitalist reality that is their role. To call names and moan and groan in self-pity may let off steam and calm us for a while, but it analyzes nothing and makes nothing clear.

Now what is our analysis of the oppressor and the oppressed? And following that, what are our tactics as new revolutionary teachers? The importance of the oppressed to the oppressor is pointed out in each case. For instance, there could be no teachers if there were no students. There could be no social investigators without social welfare clients. There could be no bosses without workers. There could be no male supremacists without female submissives. There could be no white supremacists without black submissives. The oppressed and the oppressor are intertwined with each other. But who really needs who? Obviously the bosses need the workers, but do the workers need the bosses? *No!* The workers through their practice of work can run the factories themselves. They just do not feel that they can because they have been programmed by the bosses to believe that the bosses are necessary.

The students are told the very same thing by their bosses—the teachers. They tell you that they got their position by studying hard. But, in fact, the teachers got their position by taking in, like any computer, chaotic bits of information, and spitting



them back out on a test. They never put these facts together into an understandable whole, which moves and changes even as it is being studied. They are programmed. Then the teachers inflict the same process of programming upon their own students. They have lost their humanity for the time being.

Students look for humanity and warmth and relationships when they start school. Immediately there is antagonism between the student's need for humanity and the teacher's need for programming. If the child is black and poor, we have a deeper wound to struggle with. The child has lost much of his humanity already, through racism, family stresses, poverty and sexism. The student has less strength to analyze, in his own way and at his own level, what in the hell is going on. That's where the new revolutionary teacher comes in.

It is very easy to see Big Boss as an oppressor, but it is much harder to see the teacher as one. Yet, the classroom is a work place, and over those who work there, is a foreman, the teacher. For poor black children with a white teacher full of false notions of his own white and educational supremacy, the oppression is clear. The more obvious the oppression, the easier it is to analyze it for the oppressed person; they can see it for themselves. With white middle-class children, the oppression is cloaked with jive and petty privileges, and if the white child revolts

against a teacher, he is considered neurotic. This leads the white child to doubt the oppression and feel perhaps that he is insane. But with the poor black child it is clear, and this is the opening for the new revolutionary teacher to give that poor child the knowledge of how all this really came about, for what purposes, and most important, how to deal with it.

In a class society, the economic and social position of those on top depends on their power over the lower classes. The lower classes are given material “goodies” (which they themselves produce) to pacify them just enough to keep them mystified as to their real situation. But the “goodies” (and the Man’s technology) are external shit. The major psych-out of lower class people is their belief in those on top being supermen. But when the people down below begin to discover that those on top ain’t Superman, the poor and oppressed, with the help of revolutionary teachers, begin to really dig the whole scene. They begin to see that those on top need that power desperately, not only to keep capitalism going and their position safe, but their very sense of themselves depends on their being on top. Inside, they would freak out if they lost that power. Now that’s a super vulnerability! When the poor black student sees this for himself, he starts a deep scoping of the teacher, and all bosses, and their history. The student’s struggle against the

teacher begins. And what is most important, there is no destructive anger on the part of the student. Instead, a quiet discipline begins to rise in him. A “peoples’ intellectual” starts to grow before your very eyes. All that capacity for brilliance that had been kept down due to the student’s unanalyzed fear of the teacher and Big Boss now emerges.

We work patiently towards students taking responsibility for their own oppression. This seems to bourgeois like a very unfair load to put on poor black children. But bourgeois need to avoid the real facts, because their privileged position rests on *not* seeing how they are living on top of and off somebody else. All they can allow themselves, when they do begin to see it, is a kind of pity and a “big deal” attempt to get the poor to raise themselves up to a bourgeois position. It is still a fact that no oppression can take place without the cooperation of the oppressed, like it or not. No teacher can humiliate a student unless that student lets him, by feeling inside that “I ain’t nothing.” The history of that feeling in the student has to be gone over with the student, and he gets a real historical lesson with it.

For instance, when there is a confrontation between a student and teacher, the student is clarified as the slave the teacher as the master. This is a very old class set-up and we show the student some of its past. Then the revolutionary teacher wants

to know who started the confrontation. If the oppressed student was responsible, by breaking some rule, the rule is analyzed. “The master put it there for his control and comfort, not the student’s; that’s the psych!” Then the revolutionary teacher wants to know what the student’s real reason was. If the reason was reactionary—like, “I was tired of this shit!”—then there is an analysis of the student and other oppressed people who have felt similarly. This is a direct opening up on the individualism taught by the master. “Well, this is my individual situation!” There are no individuals in a capitalist society. Everyone is programmed into the system to serve the bosses, just like in slavery times and in feudalism, the time of kings. The student is identified with others who have had to serve the same purpose for the master, that of an emotional scapegoat for the master’s (the teacher’s) frustrations. Now how oppressed people handled it is discussed, and we can always talk about the student’s older sister who was similarly tired of the shit and tripped out on dope or slept around, just “doing her own thing.”

There is an awful lot of pain and frustration wrapped up in being so tired of “this shit.” But that’s not as important as recognizing that this is the social set-up. If poor black students are going to own their own minds they cannot afford to play around with just “their own thing,” their own pain and frustra-

tion. Slowly but surely, and with a hell of a lot of mistakes, they begin to see the whole system. In the seventies, we new revolutionary teachers have the external break-up of capitalism helping us through its withdrawing of the “goodies” from the workers. The old teachers are workers who are uptight over losing control of the students and over their own working conditions. They come down on the student rather than their own bosses. The teacher’s role of oppressor and plantation foreman becomes clearer. When the reality of boss-teacher oppression is accepted and understood by the student, he is better able to work on his side of the problem, on his own wounds and their history, and on how, at times, he cooperated to make it worse.

If the student felt he could win the confrontation and brought it up with that in mind, then the student has already begun to accept responsibility for himself. More, he has begun to practice a two-sided analysis. At this point, the revolutionary teacher helps the student to see clearly where he, the student, stops and the boss-teacher begins. This is getting to know the enemy and yourself.

In such beginning confrontations the student always makes small subtle mistakes. We all carry the old around in us and it keeps popping up. Because of it we continue to make mistakes and we have to go back to find what the hang-up is. If it is in

us, we have the power to change it. So where is power, really? When you realize it takes two, *the power is in you!* What greater victory can there be for an oppressed student than to know he has real power? It is inside and has been there all along; it was just suppressed by outside oppression.

Poor black children are very wise to the small things, what bourgeois call subtleties. They have to be to survive in their race and class. It is in the very small things that a poor black student can outwit a bourgeois-oriented teacher, white or black. Bourgeois, always looking for the big things, miss the small.

It is very important that all of us who work in the new education understand that our oppressed students must see things for themselves. People do not really learn by being taught from the top down. That way they learn only to memorize in their head, and that's where it stops. People learn thoroughly, in their guts, only through experience and practice. When people have an outline or a structure that shows simply and theoretically the general process of the experience' learning has taken place in the guts.

Marxism is a tool of social analysis that uses dialectics (it takes two) to analyze the movement of opposing forces as they slowly approach each other, become part of each other, change into something that didn't exist before.

For instance, a dialectical analysis is very easy to put into practice in the slums. There are always conflicts in such close quarters. The people involved can be questioned in front of others. (This becomes the revolutionary teacher's classroom.) They can be helped to see what the responsibility of each was and what each was suffering from, and how it moved into a "confrontation. Almost without exception, someone wanted to be Boss, to have power over another, because that is what the system teaches us and we accept it. So where, pray tell, is their so-called individualism? Everybody has been too psyched-out to be truly individual. Nobody has enough ownership of their own mind to be a truly individual thinker. Individuality can only arise when people are no longer oppressed, no longer psyched-out by a social system that pits people against one another. Through struggle, people can begin to develop a real individuality that at the same time does not disconnect them from their fellow human beings.

We always point out to the children that they are class brothers and sisters and it is unreal and blind to fight each other. They unite to fight the oppressor, whoever that might be that day. With poor black children there are so many. When people of the same class or group disagree, it can always be worked out in just such a process as above, when there is a

structure within which to see the disagreement, which is usually a class struggle, somebody trying to be over somebody else. Within an oppressed class, all people have something unique to offer to the struggle, and it goes together easily with the something unique from someone else. There is no antagonism between these gifts because the whole class is united already in the determination to throw off the oppressor. Dialectics and Marxism and the new revolutionary teacher are the third force, so to speak, to help put this all together. There are the two fighting individuals from the same class, suffering the same oppression. They stop fighting and begin to analyze the movement of their struggle as it took place. Each person's inside hang-ups are taken apart and analyzed. Then the outside forces on both of them are analyzed, and at this point both of them see the unity. They are both oppressed by outside forces. So it is not a matter of preaching unity but analyzing and showing the unity that is already there.

If the teacher is a Marxist-Leninist then he already thinks in a two-sided way. He can see which part is more important and which is less important as the whole constantly moves and changes, the parts moving and changing, being pushed or pulled by outside forces and inside forces. Teachers who have learned Marxist-Leninism are also widely read, historically



knowledgeable, and willing to learn from the people, the poor black students. The poor deeply respect this.

The teacher in the new education has great feelings of love and respect for the children. And perhaps at this transition time in history, it is the most essential part of the revolutionary teacher, more essential than a knowledge of Marxism-Leninism. That can come later but love cannot come later when you work with oppressed children, white or black. At this historical time, love is primary and Marxism-Leninism is secondary. However, there soon comes a time when orderly structure is needed and then the understanding of dialectics becomes primary and love secondary. The longer a revolutionary teacher has been dedicated to oppressed workers and the poor, and in our case, the black poor, the easier it is to love and respect this class. They teach it to you, in fact. The class simply reflects your own human worth. The revolutionary teacher's inside feelings of love and respect are part of the third force in teaching oppressed black children. If they feel deep respect and love for the children, that very feeling makes their teaching simple, patient, warm and full of sureness that, indeed, the students shall be able to see for themselves. The students' seeing for themselves is the first real major victory for the students and the revolutionary teacher. The students begin to be able to

practice on their own and have victories on their own. They begin to turn automatically to teaching others and being concerned about others.

The revolutionary teacher already understands that capitalist oppression is the root cause of the suffering of the children and their parents. None of these people are evil or bad. These adjectives are convenient labels used by the bourgeoisie to put away such people and not have to deal with reality. But oppressed poor black children can be dangerous to themselves and others until they understand all of the above. Oppression naturally causes the turning in of anger—fear of the oppressor is very strong, so anger is turned inward rather than outward. It becomes self-destructive. Unplanned and impulsive expressions of anger directed against great external force, like the cop, the boss, the old teacher, exposed one to destruction by these forces.

The human factor must be primary in the revolutionary teacher and material things must come second. That means the revolutionary teacher works for the triumph of his students over the oppressor—that is primary. The revolutionary teacher does not work primarily for money, whether he be outside the school or inside the school.

Most of our revolutionary teachers have experienced revolutionary teaching themselves. They had revolutionary teachers

while they were still students or in their work place. This revolutionary teaching has continued. The revolutionary teacher constantly becomes stronger in the human factor as there is practice with the children. As the revolutionary teacher feels free to bring his problems as a teacher to the students themselves, learning in depth is increased. The children become concerned and love the revolutionary teacher, and they want to help. It gets to be a two-way street. The revolutionary teacher carries his contradictions to an outside group also, a group of revolutionary teachers who are practicing in the same way. The revolutionary teacher has to have a base in the people he is teaching, as well as an outside base in a group that is structured to deal with the situations of people in his position.

Capitalists and their sympathizers, black and white, are still in control of the institutions of this society. But in the belly of these institutions rise new people struggling within themselves and outside themselves for the primacy of humanity over bourgeois greed and materialism. It is the new coming out of the old.

## OUT OF OUR MINDS

The old brainwashing educational apparatus we came out of indirectly pointed all of us toward college and professions and replacing daddy in the business. We use the words, “indirectly pointed,” because our guidance counselors directly pointed us toward vocational and business courses. But we had eyes on our rich surroundings—the atmosphere of money and power was what we looked to. Our parents, and we too, “jumped salty” when the educational system progressively and missionary-like tried to train us to fit into the class system of northern suburbia. Rich white students were being prepared to run the banks and corporations, poor whites were being schooled as skilled office-workers or union apprentices. We would have to accept our historical jobs—servants and clean-up personnel.

We looked to the rich white standards, the students, their sprawling and beautiful homes, their “daddy-bought-’em” cars, the weekend parties that many of us got invited to (even when middle-class negroes barred us from theirs), the booze and the white chicks (if we were male), and the manner of dress and conduct (if we were female). In school we were placed in our

historical low-class position. Socially, liberal whites drew us into their plush world, with our panting and drooling cooperation. We were living a contradiction of mind-blowing intensity.

Our mommas pushed us endlessly to work hard, read more and more, get those grades up, and “It’ll be there waiting for you!” “It” would be something great, nothing small. It would be a dream job. It would literally be handed to us as soon as we got that diploma. That piece of paper, momma kept driving into our heads, would give us a job better than hers. We were going to have it better than her. She had come north and into suburbia to be sure we got to be *somebody*. We were going to school with her employers’ children (she had seen to that during the sixties by picketing and taking the local school board to court), and so we had the opportunity to be somebody. Now, people are born somebody, yet our parents always said, “Grow up and be somebody!” That makes us two people. In bourgeois psychiatric terms that makes us schizophrenic. In street terms our minds are “ripped.” We literally became insane.

At parties in our neighborhoods we drowned ourselves in jive, booze, and nodded out on smokes and horse. Some dude would start screaming that inside himself he was Nero, Alexander the Great, Caesar. “One of these days I’m going to sweep across the world!” Women would say how they dreamed last

night they were already out of school and had a professional job. Some of the very intense bloods were going to be great painters, artists, writers, singers, football and basketball players. Every party we tripped out on dreams and we literally, let us emphasize, we truthfully believed we were headed for some top job without any work.

In the late sixties there were scholarships for us Project kids. We thought we were all going to be specially picked to go to college. Guidance counselors had begun to push some of us into college-prep courses, liberal white students came to the projects once a week to tutor us, negro leaders met with leading town bankers and businessmen to form special programs for us underprivileged. We were all going to *be somebody*—and we were all going out of our minds!

The contradiction between our acting-out dreams and the reality of token scholarships and rare middle-income jobs blew many of us into a fury of self-destruction and rebellious violence. We ripped off stores, private houses, other students. We stayed on the stuff, telling our moms to be cool—we'd get off dope when we were ready, not now. And a very few of us started digging the political raps, dressing up to it with bullets on our chests and long knives in special holders inside our coats. The poor white kids were strutting their costumes as

well—thick leather jackets, long hair, motorcycles. They were as fucked up as we were, only we were into that “whitey-honky” bit and they grew up with that “nigger-spic” rap. So we were bound to be at each other’s throats.

Finally, we were transferred by the courts into other educational-custodial institutions—correctional institutions, youth houses, and treatment centers. Our daddies used to call their lives “from the womb to the tomb.” Well, we were coming off our high and most of us were headed for the “Tombs” (a notorious New York City prison).

But the first “tombs” had been the suburban schools we went to. Like a few northern suburban towns have negro mayors, so a lot of these towns have negro school principals, psychologists, social workers, and newly-graduated negro teachers. These negro teachers have contempt for black slum children and teenagers. They suspend students, give them special classes or sessions with a social worker, or finally recommend that they be sent away. Nigger students are sometimes chosen for scholarships. But they really have to be strivers, and, of course, out of their minds.

## THE FREEDOM SCHOOL

The Freedom School was set up in 1966. It started with twelve children and had as many as thirty-five at one time. Their ages ranged from two years to fourteen years old. We met every Saturday from three o'clock until seven o'clock. We had a senior high school Math teacher and an elementary grade school teacher, my sister, myself, and always two other mothers who lived in the neighborhood.

We encouraged the children to bring home their Math books. They all seemed to love Math the most. If they had any school papers wrong, we wanted them to bring them so we could learn through making mistakes. You see, the children were made to feel ashamed in school if they made mistakes. Other children learned from the teachers to tease a child when they were wrong. We wanted the children to know that that was the real way to learn, through mistakes. In fact, it is the best way to learn because we say to ourselves, "We'll never do that again!" In bourgie schools the children learn to never make the mistake of making a mistake. So they shut up and don't talk. Some of the children had awful fears from this.



The children always forgot pencils or books to write in, so we always had them around. We had English, Spelling, and Math papers they could just pick up and work on. They liberated from public school some of the texts they were using, so we could have them on hand. We called taking whitey's property "liberating" it, when the property was shared with the people. We called it "stealing" it, when it was taken and kept for self or sold for profit.

In learning about our African history, we used a tape-recorder so that the children could voice their views. As we learned, we saw how our attitudes changed. The children didn't want to be called black. They giggled when we showed them pictures of African children that looked just like them. We were very hard on them about this, telling them that they had really been brainwashed if they didn't think these children, and they, too, were beautiful. We showed them we were indignant. You see we really did feel all of them were beautiful and it just came right through.

We had very few failing marks on report cards. Almost all the children had been failures according to the public school. We just found the children to be terribly confused. They were encouraged to talk as they thought so we could hear their thought process. (All this was explained to them.) Then we

could catch the point where they went off and we told them, “Oh, now I see where you’re coming from!” Then we started from that point and guided them to the right step. They were thoroughly corrected and happy to see exactly where they went off. It was a little victory for all of us because we understood where the difficulty was and they did, too. You see, it takes two, but we grown-ups are supposed to be wise enough to start where the children are’ not where we think they should be, or where we are. We call that the bourgie way—top down—and it’s awful for our kids, hammers them right down into the ground.

Now they were freer in spotting the contradictions of “Miss Ann” and “Mr. Charlie.” But they had a lot of trouble with the bourgie negro teachers who the children accused of being harder on them and nastier than some of the white teachers. Most of us mothers were used to this attitude. We tried to explain why this was so by using the example of the Jews and Italians, who when they get a little bit, move out of the poor neighborhoods, and look down at those poor Jews and Italians left behind. We were trying to explain the American Dream as a class struggle—each group standing on somebody else’s head, trying to reach the top where there is only room for a few rich white people. We were trying to show them that most grown-

up people are a little crazy because of this system. The children were right to think adults are crazy when we do such silly things. We wanted them to see that children are smarter than grown-ups until they start imitating grown-ups. We wanted them to be proud to be children.

We instructed them that when they were in public school and they got into trouble, *they* were at fault, not the teacher. They were supposed to be smarter, because they knew “it takes two” for anything to blow up. They had to be shown many times that the teacher was there, not to help (unless the teacher is an exceptional human being), but to control the children, to tell them *what* to think, not *how* to think, and to make the children think that the teacher is special and all-powerful. That part was the teacher’s hang-up, not the child’s. We supported them in the belief that such notions about special power over children is downright silly, especially when grown-ups act so dumb most of the time. They began to see that the teacher wasn’t mean or evil, but that he had a problem. The teacher was living under false pretenses, thinking he was something he wasn’t. Let the teacher have his problem; the child was not to get involved in it, only in his own problem. Why did the children answer back? Why did they permit the teacher to get under their skin? Usually, we found, it was the little wounds from passive attacks,

and we all worked on that wound and the next time, maybe, the child wouldn't have to blow-up. We advised the children that they only blow when the teacher steps on their sore spots. So they had to take care of those sore spots. That part was the child's problem and it was within his power to take care of it. That really made the children start to feel powerful.

We had to help the children to have victories by analyzing deeply and in a two-sided way. We had just begun to learn dialectics. That's a big word, but we knew it as "It takes two!" The dialectics worked much better when the kids were in the same room together. They supported each other. It was much harder when they were alone or unpopular for one reason or another. We had to repeat the process a lot because the public schools could really wear the kids down. It was tuck and go, but we knew that, in the long run, we were on the right road in our analysis. And the children felt our sureness. This was the way we taught the children how to think. But we didn't know all the things that might come up in school to throw the kids off, so we tried to prepare them for anything. Also we felt very unsure about the future of public education, so we worried a lot, too.

We started to teach the children a lot of things bourgeois schools could not afford to let them know—like how children have been exploited and used and oppressed. When studying

the slave trade, we showed how the cotton that young black kids picked, went to England where white children worked on it in big factories. Then the rich Englishmen shipped it back, in the form of cloth, to the colonies where white people bought it at very high prices. This made the rich Englishmen richer, and made the white colonists pretty silly. Then we showed them how the white colonists made a revolution in 1776, because of this kind of thing. But the colonists had only their own interests in mind, not the interests of the children. Because after a while those colonists were doing the same thing to the European immigrant children in factories in the North. Then we gave the kids the punch line—black children were still down on the farm picking cotton all this time. When it got to the question of what were the adult black folks doing, we told the children about the slave rebellions, Sojourner Truth, Harriet Tubman, and Nat Turner. But that was hardly enough, and sometimes we felt ashamed.

Sometimes we held classes outside and we really had a ball. Those beautiful children were eager, bright, and damned brilliant—not a dumb, stupid animal in the bunch. We had them in groups of two to three or five, with mixed ages. This allowed the older children to help the younger ones, and made the teacher more of a companion to the group, since she had

teacher-helpers, so to speak. Our children came from big families and naturally helped with the other children at home. This helping each other had to be encouraged in order to break the competitive spirit, “Mr. Charlie’s divide and conquer,” Children can lose their natural non-competitive spirit easily through the brainwashing in bourgeois schools.

We named our school *the Freedom School*, after a lot of thought. We’d heard about these Liberation Schools being formed for black children, but we thought they were formed by petit-bourgeois negroes who needed to be “liberated.” This class of people are not free but tied to the bourgeois in many ways. We were not in bondage mentally, like the petit-bourgeois. We belonged to the loved ones and they belonged to us. The word free means peace and love. Our kids were at peace. They were never forced to do anything they didn’t want to do. Children not in the mood for work were free to move about, to find interests of their own.

We had some problems with the mothers in the neighborhood who felt that only the bourgeois school was right and looked down on our school. We didn’t worry about this because we had seen how the children handled it. They’d sneak away from home to come. We had a few mothers, who helped occasionally with the school, who had petit-bourgeois ideas. We didn’t

argue with them, after we'd made it clear where we stood. They wanted to fight the schools, picket the school board, integrate the schools. We didn't waste our time trying to change their minds, but told them that we poor blacks weren't going to get no rights in this country. We cared about doing something for ourselves now, leaving "Mr. Charlie" alone until we could get our own selves together. We'd found out that this petit-bourgeois attitude is really an awful self-pity trip. These people moan and groan about their black oppression; but if you look closely, they are afraid of losing what little they have. They never carry through on anything. But the new generation of young people are not getting caught in this phoniness.

Our Freedom School teachers who were bourgeois were struggling to find themselves. They had their problems—lags in growth which are normal contradictions in finding yourself. Their self-pity was also quite a problem. When one of them had a major problem, how the children showed their compassion, concern and love! They went home and told their parents about it to see if some of them could help. These teachers had the love of the children. The children had them around the neck, loving them, not choking them. The teachers' class struggle was hard. Some changed their whole class outlook. But some went back to where they came from.

When we have more love and compassion in this world, we will have defeated the petit bourgeoisie. It concerns us deeply that so many of our own people have petit-bourgeois ideas and are too filled with self-pity. The black petit-bourgeoisie would like to colonize us poor black people. We're not worrying only about "Mr. Charlie" right now. We're worrying about our own black petit-bourgeoisie striving so hard to become bourgeois. Educating the children (in schools like our Freedom School) about class struggle, and supporting them to keep hold of their self-respect, will help the new generation deal with the mess we grown-ups have left them.



## A LOVE LETTER TO MY BROTHER

Revolutionary teachers and their students grow to love writing and reading. It is not unusual for them to write love letters to each other. For the very young students there is great joy in reading simple love notes from a teacher. "A Love Letter to My Brother" was written to a six-year-old blood who reads everything he can get his hands on. He is also the only child in a family of ten children who is "different." He is the most oppressed child, the "nigger of the family"; he is, at the same time, the most sensitive and perceptive.

Brother: brother-love never dies. Be strong brother, thousands of people are on our side. Remember, you're less hooked on whitey and that's a fact. Don't worry about your family; they'll have to come back. Many of us didn't and still don't get the love we need from our families because they're too busy selling-out to the system. Brother, you may feel a lot of pain now, but it only makes you stronger in the long run. Your strength has taught me never to underestimate the power of the soul, the inner self. Your hurt and my hurt are one. Brother, the power

you have kept you from being destroyed by the phonies—especially the ones that live with you. I've watched you shut your family off, keep them out of reach—which forces them to turn on each other. So you see, brother, you win every time, you have the power.

Brother, you are the true revolutionary of the family. Don't change, don't let them buy you off. Don't beg for their love, because they're not able to love themselves yet. Remember, when you feel down and out—stop and think, go inside yourself. This will save you. Brother, if you fall I'll be there in your heart to help make you strong. And when I feel myself falling apart I'll go inside my heart and talk to you. You see, I sold out at a very young age, because I had no one to tell me my history or show me the way not to get hooked on the system. Keep your inside strong . . . time is on our side.

## HELP!

### A TUTOR'S SELF-CRITICISM

In helping the people, no matter what you're helping them with, you've got to learn to develop a high degree of patience. You will experience times when you think about saying to them, "I don't have to help, don't give me such a hard time—besides I'm doing this for you." Well, don't kid yourself—you're doing this as much for yourself as you are doing it for them. You might think like that because you've been conditioned to have things easy or to wish that you had things easy. Sure, you're able to analyze a situation and maybe put it in its proper context. But that's because you've studied things for the new education, such as the laws of opposites, nature, revolution, science, also the history of people's oppression, the system, and more. Don't get your ass on your shoulders and think that you're any kind of fuckin' genius who can't be told anything. Don't think that your revolutionary ideas have status over those of the people.

Sometimes your egotistical feelings, along with your class hang-ups, lead you to get very uppity, conceited and arrogant. Who the hell are you to underestimate the masses of people?

Who are you to say that you have to think for them? Like I said before, you have to discipline yourself to have patience. Everything is not going to go the way that you want it to. You have to move at the pace of the people who you are helping. And I did say helping. You're not an instructor or preacher or any so-called authority—you are a tool of the people to use as they need. But sometimes that gets distorted because people still try to exploit others.

Don't always run your mouth trying to give somebody advice, or the correct line to follow, especially the older people. They have been here longer and have a lot of experiences. These experiences could help you at one time or another. Because they are old, doesn't mean they are unfamiliar with famous revolutionaries. They might not have studied these people to the extent that you have, because during the time they were coming up they were denied the knowledge that books could offer. But they got it together too, in their own way, with their own heroes. On a very popular record made by a young black sister there is a poem about a student at a Southern university. As the student walked past an old black woman sitting on a porch, the woman said, "Are you on your way to the university? Well, you better come over here and study these feet of mine! I'm going to cut off a bunion soon. And my feet have seen more than your eyes could ever read."

It is necessary for us as revolutionary teachers to gain the trust of the people through being patient, disciplined, punctual, and honest. Some people start out by doubting your sincerity and your convictions. As soon as you do something wrong or make a slip or not complete something, they will say, “See, I knew it all the time, you’re nothing but another jive-ass nigger calling yourself ‘helping somebody.’” If you start out trying to help somebody and you start wrong, well, that person is going to remember his first impression of you. If you tell someone that you are going to do something, try your hardest to do it. If you say you’re going to do something and then don’t do it without a good explanation, the person is going to develop a negative attitude about your honesty. You have to develop trust. The people have to trust you and you have to trust them. Then trust grows into love and friendship.

Remember that you, as a revolutionary teacher, are in the position you’re in because the mass of poor people put you there. You’re in a higher position because you benefit from their work, sweat and blood. You are a member of a class that oppresses the poor masses, so remember—as someone once said, “I am but the product of many, many people.” Check it out.

## THAT BIG WORD, DEMOCRACY

The following essay was written by a young person in 7th grade in answer to the question, “How did democracy improve in the Northern states after the American Revolution?”

First, let us look at that big word, DEMOCRACY. Let’s take it back to its root in history, back to the Latin language. A lot of our English words come from Latin. DEMOCRACY comes from two Latin words—*DEMOS*, meaning “people,” and *KRATOS*, meaning “authority,” or *KRATEIN*, meaning “rule.” Now we see that DEMOCRACY means PEOPLE RULE OR PEOPLE AUTHORITY. So let’s go back to the question and put our root meaning in place of the word, DEMOCRACY. Now it reads, “How did PEOPLE RULE OR PEOPLE AUTHORITY improve in the Northern States after the American Revolution?”

Now I have a question. *Who are the People?* When I read this textbook, I see rich white landowners, rich white merchants, rich white people, who make the laws (legislators). I see that these legislators make a lot of laws about poor white people and negroes. Poor white people and negroes were property.

In a paper on “Rip Van Winkle,” written by another 7th grade student, I read:

In *The New York Gazette*, Aug. 28–Sept. 4, 1732, Thomas Noble, a merchant, has for sale, in New York City, Welsh and English indentured servants, “several negro girls and negro boys and likewise good Cheshire cheese.”

The writer of this paper took the word *indentured* back to its Latin meaning. She traced it up to the meaning it had during early colonial days and right before the American Revolution. *Indenture* was a legal piece of paper that made a human being from Europe or Africa bound to work for a master.

Now I see that *the People* are rich white people, poor white people, and poor black people. But I also see that poor white people and poor black people were owned by rich white people. They were machines for rich white people.

In those days, machines had not yet been invented, so poor black and white people were used as machines, as horses, donkeys, beasts of burden. I read about people being used as machines in another paper by a 9th-grade student.

I can answer the question now because I understand the word DEMOCRACY and I understand who the people are. Yes, DEMOCRACY improved in the Northern states after the Ameri-

can Revolution—but only for *poor white people*. Poor whites were able to get farming land for themselves because the rich white people's big estates were being broken up. The poor whites fought the big landlords, refused to work for them, and ran away to the West to start their own farms. They had to compete with blacks for jobs and they fought for the skilled jobs (such as carpenters, builders, bakers, sail-makers, millers, etc.) that had previously been done by black slaves. Rich white men made laws to stop the slave trade so that the poor whites could have the jobs that were being done by slaves. Poor black people in the Northern states were kept out of skilled jobs more and more after the American Revolution. Under the law, most jobs had to go to the poor whites. Poor black people lost the skilled jobs that they had learned before the American Revolution.

Yes, DEMOCRACY improved in the Northern states for *poor white people*. But it got worse for *poor black people*. In our Social Studies textbook, it is proven that poor black people could not improve—because black people were put under the section, *Social problems*.



## A STUDENT EDUCATES THE TEACHER

Poor black children are the victims of an ageist and racist education system in which children are constantly made to believe they are at fault, when in reality, it is the ignorance of the teacher that is responsible for the children's lack of understanding. In "A Student Educates the Teacher," rather than trying to stumble or bluff her way through an unclear question, Lila faced the real situation. Both in her answer to the test question, and to her teacher's reply, Lila shows her knowledge of where the real ignorance is to be found—

### QUESTION

Look at Fig. 5-15 on p. 254. Read the explanation on p. 254, second row. Now what force would be necessary to lift a 500-pound weight with that combination of machines?

### LILA'S ANSWER

Don't understand, because you are a middle-class teacher and we are all lower-class students. But the school is set up so that

we do not understand. The school and you want to keep us dumb. But it takes two. The poor shall inherit the earth and this classroom . . . speaking for some of your poor black students.

P.S. Communication is not reached between practically any students and teachers. That is why this class is not interested in your science or any of these classes.

#### **MRS. D'S RESPONSE**

Dear Lila,

Maybe you should know that I'm just as "low-class" as you are when it comes to the artificial status of society. My family never had the finer things of life. We waited five years to have enough money to buy a TV. And that's what this is all about, financial position, not human dignity.

The fact that I've been able to get a pretty good education doesn't suddenly make me a better person. But it does give me the tools to use my God-given gifts in a way so as to become "better." No one I know wants to keep you "dumb."

Very honestly, I am astounded at how people can, from the midst of ignorance, take on such arrogant attitudes. My education has humbled me. That's something you probably find hard to believe.

As for communication, just look around the room. How many students in here could communicate on a level approaching the one you showed? Or are your ideas someone else's, which you can only repeat? In any event, there are so many different people in this room that no one approach can reach all. As a teacher, I can only hope.

MRS. D

#### LILA'S RESPONSE TO MRS. D

Mrs. D:

You cannot say that you are just as "low-class" as I am for any reason. Because you have not lived among us—the lower-class blacks or the poor blacks, or even tried to understand us. Because if you did you would not be so hard to understand. And you would certainly not be teaching us false facts or trying to act as though you are better.

You would not want the finer things of life. You would want the basic needs of life, and you would struggle not only for yourself, but others like you, too. Just because you went through one incident in life that made you think you were low-class, that doesn't give you the right to put yourself in our position.

You were and are striving not to be like us. And because you hated being poor for that little while, you decided to put yourself above the poor and try to control us, show us that you are better than we are. But you aren't.

As for financial position, I have learned that money and power are not basic needs of life, nor does having those things provide a happy way of life. Mrs. D, you are thinking about financial position and that is your problem. You want money and power—but as long as the poor are around we will see that you never get either one.

You can't handle the days of depression coming again, you don't want to be put through something that you hate and fear. Human dignity, the way you stated it, is about the same thing as financial position. You want a good place in life.

You are so confused that you are repeating yourself and trying to prove something—trying to prove to yourself that you are better and that we need you.

As for thinking that these ideas, as you call them (I call them reality), are repeated from someone else, I think that by showing you my position in your classroom, you can see that I have a mind of my own, I can analyze things. But your main problem is that you think none of the poor can think for themselves.

But we can. You see me as a threat to you and what you have been striving for in life.

And the note you wrote to me (on the back of my test, for which I received a “D” because I did not understand the questions}, only shows that you are talking to yourself. You think that if you can convince the poor that you are better, you can assure yourself that you are better. You are the one who can’t think for yourself.

You fear that the poor people will soon take over.

L I L A

## THE COMMUNITY COLLEGES

The following tape has Mrs. H, a 52-year-old woman who is a domestic; I, a 22-year-old woman who is a school bus driver; J, a 35-year-old woman who is the daughter of Mrs. H and also a domestic; and P, a woman in her forties who is a psychologist—all friends—talking about the Community College in their neighborhood.

MRS. H: (LAUGHING) We were in a cab coming home from the market. I happened to look over and said, "Oh, there's Community College . . . it's done changed. It looks right funky and run-down." I don't know why I said it . . . because I had never seen the place. (LAUGHING) I saw the niggers all dressed in their college best, sprawled all over the steps. And then it dawned on me, that was Community College.

P: What do you think of Community College? The negro professors are always saying, "We've got to have a better relationship with the community. We are too isolated from it." What do you think?

MRS. H: Well, I never knew they were there before, to tell you

the truth. We've lived over here all these years and I never knew they had the college until the churches started the nurseries for the children across the street from the college. I never knew they existed. It was just an old building, I thought.

P: Do any of the families you know have children who go there?

MRS. H: Yeah, some do now.

I: Do any students come around here to talk to you?

MRS. H: No, no. (THINKING) They don't talk about the college.

I know some who are going . . . Big stuff! Big stuff! But I don't know what they're teaching them. The way I look at it, it's just the white man giving you a little something, making you think you got something—but you ain't got nothing, really.

P: Have the students changed?

MRS. H: No, No! They're still the same old way.

P: When they're at tire college, they're another way . . . they act real intellectual when I see them.

MRS. H: Oh, yeah? Well, I ain't seen no difference in the ones I know.

P: They try to use big words and they walk hinky . . .

MRS. H: Oh, I see. They try to be big, big . . .

P: I want to know how they are when they're back home again.

In the classroom, they bow and scrape to their professors, and they try to give the right answer, and I never hear street terms. I always hear very humble, courteous remarks. I really expect some of them to say, “Yessa’ boss!” It’s the kind of attitude. I know some of these women and I see them hanging out at the so-called finer bars. But when they get into that classroom, they tell their negro professors that they want to get back into the community, they want him to help set up a project where they can study the community and make it better.

MRS. H: (SARCASTICALLY) They can “help make it better” and still do their same shit! What a hustle.

J: You see some of them on the buses, with their books and everything. I just crack up laughing at them because they’re nothing but a big bunch of dummies to start with . . . and they’re even dumber when they come out of there. Each and every day they’re there, they’re getting dumber. They still don’t know what’s going on. You hear them say, “Oh, I’ve got to do such and such today” . . . (VOICE GETTING HIGHER) “I got to do so and so today.”

MRS. H: I’ll tell you, they’re messed up. Education is messing them up. Their minds are gone.

J: You see, their minds are already splitting before they go to



the college. Now their brain is splitting more. It's not even in quarters anymore. (LAUGHING) Some of the girls have their little Volkswagens—I have to laugh—cars all shiny new. And they say, “You can't get in on that side!” The way they talk, “No, I don't think so.” “Oh, really?” Who in the hell got all that time to put your tongue round all those uppity expressions? I got to get to work.

MRS. H: Yeah, but the paper says they're gonna close up their asses. They say they're going to have to close up Community College.

J: Jimmy was telling me they have to bring people in off the street to fill up the classes. The students don't come to class, and they were thinking of offering the courses to street people . . . Negroes are dying to get into college, but the white kids are giving it up. You see this separation of white students from black students is not a racist thing—they are in two different worlds of political awareness. Negroes want into the system; white students want out of it. We poor blacks will be exchanging one set of oppressors for another. The college-educated negroes are already taking over our communities in droves . . . Now, we have never heard of anybody coming into the community to explain how you go about applying for this college. Nobody has once held a

meeting, or come to our homes, to tell us how to get into a college.

P: No, the masses are not to be encouraged to go to college, just individuals, picked for the amount of brainwashing already successfully administered. These people are individually picked according to their acceptance of the dream. They know the one's who've been taken in by the system. Social workers pick them, guidance counselors choose them, community agencies refer them. It is definitely not a mass process at all. It's an individual process and they know the token nigger's mind. It's the striving poor person who is chosen. It's obvious.

MRS. H: Yeah, they're strivers. They got to do it. Can't help themselves.

J: Even so, even if they are strivers, they ain't striving no damn place except for around the corner.

MRS. H: Mr. Whitey says they have to do it.

P: They've been *chosen*.

MRS. H: Right! You go to the welfare worker nowadays and you have to fill out all these forms telling everything about yourself, two and three times. Now I'm kind of dumb myself, manage to stay dumb like Mrs. Rivera who won't learn English so she can't understand all these new rules. We stay

dumb to keep smart, if you see what I mean. So (LAUGHING) I listen real polite to the social worker. She says, “You want to go to school?” I say, “Me? Go to school? No. *I’m sick*. I got high blood pressure. Besides, I’m kind of old now, too old to be going to school. I don’t know why they got my name down there.” The social worker agreed with me. “I don’t know why they got your name down here either.” But this woman standing next to me says, “Yeah, but I want to go to school. I want to go to school.” Ah-h! Me and these other older women got too many ailments, we can’t go. But these other fools, “Yeah, I want to go to school. Yeah, I’ll take the test.” Ah-h, that’s why they have to do it. They ain’t gonna eat if they don’t. These women figure they don’t have our ailments and they’re glad. But they are the fools. We keep our ailments up just like Mrs. Rivera keeps her Spanish up. They think going to school is the way out—but it’s only the way into Mr. Whitey’s system.

## STAYING IN THE SYSTEM FOR THE CHILDREN'S SAKE

### A STUDENT TEACHER'S STRUGGLE

When we first became student teachers, we were not sure what would be expected of us. We chose to student teach in an experimental program in a high school. In this program, the student was supposed to be more or less on his own.

This special program was having many problems at the time of our arrival. For one thing, there were only 25 black students, compared to some 107 white students. It was the same old song—the black students felt that they were being “washed-up” and left out, period. They couldn't relate to the white students because the white students, for the most part, came from well-to-do-families. So when discussion time came, the blacks felt no need to participate because they would be coming from a point of view that the white students wouldn't understand, mainly because their class background was different. These discussions were called “tutorials”—a program calling for curiosity, involvement and independent studies. When the tutorials were controlled by white teachers, there was the same lack of

communication. The black students began calling them “white tutorials.”

The student teachers had time, two days a week, when we had no assigned classes. So we decided to work with the black students. We were told by one of the negro teachers that these black students wouldn't open up to us. She said they had many problems. We thought that they had many problems they did not feel free to tell her. We were also told by one of the white teachers to have a class of white and black students—open to all. We never shut the door to any student when we began this class. But naturally, when a group of whites see a group of blacks gathered together, they are not going to feel comfortable about getting involved. This class became a “black tutorial,” which met after lunch.

The first day that we got together with the black students, we asked them what they wanted out of life. Some of their answers were: architect, actor, nurse, real estate man, etc. This showed us how much the educational system had pressed them into false and unrealistic values and the middle-class status-quo. They looked down on the petty jobs that their parents and others in the neighborhood had. Therefore, they looked down on themselves. We realized how these students were being misled by some of the negro teachers in the program who were

in the “Black On” stage—cultural nationalists. This is very bad for blacks because we get so mixed up in “blackness,” we fail to see how blacks with petty puppet positions take us off worse than the whites.

We realized that there was nothing for us to do but hold rap-sessions on the nature of the system that we and they live under. We also involved other nations, most of them being stepped on by the same government that steps on us blacks. In this way, we showed them the worldwide struggle of people wanting to be free. We had to analyze the system of capitalism and show the violence, hatred, racism, etc. that it breeds. We had to explain why the theory of racism was created, and how and why it had been successful in dividing the labor force of the whole world. They began to have faith in us after a few sessions because we had done what no one else had done for them—explained simply and accurately why they are forced to live the way they live, and how they aid this force against themselves. We forced them to think for themselves. What helped them a great deal was that once they began thinking for themselves, they began to make connections about what purposes the negro school officials really served. They saw that these puppets were no different from any other person in authority, except for their skin color. The students began to rebel against the school

authority. Now the real enemy was evident, and no color was involved.

Some white students with whom we had also worked wrote an article in the school paper calling some of the authorities “pigs.” Things were getting hotter. The day finally came when a meeting was called by the black students, against the teachers’ wishes. The students saw how weak-thinking authority really is. The teachers just couldn’t deal with valid, realistic criticism. Some “lady” teachers grabbed their hair and became hysterical. The more intellectual, pipe-smoking, trying-to-be-college-professors types also became emotional. But the students were calm and intellectual—and black students at that, known to be emotional. Yet they were cool and calm, and at the same time, coming from the guts.

The same day, we student teachers were told that we were forbidden to bring “community life” into the classroom situation. In other words, we couldn’t teach the children the basic truths about their problems. We couldn’t talk about our experiences in relationship to the students’ experiences. We couldn’t talk about our problems being not individual problems, but problems of our whole class—white and black, with black being worse because of racism.

We were forbidden to teach them about dope, and how and

why it is killing the youth, and how the system knows about it and regulates it for its own purposes. As long as we taught that dope was an individual problem, then we could talk. We were forbidden to talk about how sex is misused and how it affects us all. We were forbidden to talk about the plight of the world's poor—their being kept poor and uneducated so that they are not dangerous, not thinking for themselves. We couldn't teach them that there is only one race and that's the human race. We couldn't tell them, in short, of the problems of the world which affect us all—the problems of life and survival.

The day came when the school authorities requested that we student teachers be immediately withdrawn. Students asked us what they could do to help us. We had to deal with it alone. But we didn't do it all alone, because we had the students behind us spiritually. Of course, we won, as we knew we would. We were not about to let them throw us out after the long hard work we had done.

The students told us about how they had to deal with the backlash from the negro teachers, once the students gave up the "Black On" stage. But the students said they were beginning to know the truth now. They said they had not begun to learn until we came. And now they will pass it on . . .



**LESSONS**

**FROM**

**THE**

**DAMNED**



**W**e, the authors, were the outcasts in our families, and being poor blacks made us the outcasts of an entire white capitalist society. Our families didn't dig our stubborn and lonely stands. When our parents weren't around to divide and conquer us with special privileges and money, we got along real good with our brothers and sisters. But because we didn't bite for those little goodies and extras, our parents sew to hate us. Our resistance was not in their interest or that of the Master whose ways and ideas they fully accepted.

All of the authors have in common a deep resistance to being brainwashed. Some of us are more stubborn than others. We sell out here and there, but always we return to resistance and rebellion.

The traditional left turned us off. They usually attack the system from the top down, using big words they never explain. They only discuss and write about the economic issues. Now, these issues are very important because they form the base on which any society lives and therefore affect us all in the long run. But at the same time, the left does not want to break down these big issues to the smaller issues of daily life, inside the fam-

ilies of workers and the poor. They call themselves Marxists, yet they contradict it by forcing a separation between inner life and outer life, or what they call personal and political. No true Marxist separates phenomena because he knows everything is intimately connected and at the same time has individual aspects and constantly changes.

Inside oppressed families and inside us we have found the seeds of fascism that the traditional left does not want to see. Fascism was no big, frightening issue for us. It was our daily life. The fascism of our parents, and our brothers and sisters, forced them to beat the hell out of us, put us out, deny us food and clothing. Finally, they cooperated with the white system's fascism and had us put away in institutions.

We now understand through political study that fascism is a natural stage in the final period of capitalism's decay. This dying stage can take many years. All the institutions that support the ruling class, which in our lifetime has been the big white rich middle class, are no longer believed in by the masses of people. The schools, the churches and all the ideas taught as truth are attacked repeatedly. The economy on which all our lives rest brings hunger and poverty to millions of people. Even masses of the middle class become unemployed. There is nothing sacred anymore and things fall apart.

The ruling class has an absolute need to stay in power. We didn't learn this from political study but from our parents and brothers and sisters and lovers around us. They would do the most way-out things to deny our questions, our doubts. We watched them become hysterical, lie and misquote, and worse, actually believe their own lies. How they needed to underestimate us, downgrade us, and finally enslave our minds. Slowly it dawned on us that they absolutely needed unquestioned authority to keep their very sanity, not just their social and economic status above us. Simultaneously, we found their inner weaknesses that would eventually allow our victory over them and their petty authority.

Fascism is impossible for the ruling class to sustain without the support of thousands of people, thoroughly programmed into the worship of money and property and military power and the magical prestige that accompanies this material lust. Fascism is the last stage of capitalism and imperialism and desperately appears to be externally strong, but in fact is internally weak. And so are the people who are fascist.

We know because we have traced our own fascism in this book and the fascism of those we once loved and needed. We have paid some heavy dues to get it out, vomit it up. Our development in getting this book out has been a slow purging of the

fascism in ourselves. Some of the authors have given in temporarily to the fascism, that stubborn attitude of, “I’ll have it now!” and “Me, first!” that stupid, ignorant, narrow, petty bourgeois individualism. These brothers and sisters may one day be a part of the police and military who will imprison and torture and kill those of us who are equally determined to struggle with and for all the oppressed of the world. Political conflicts due to class, sex and age exist within our revolutionary group, and these are forms of fascism that also have to be dealt with.

Only under fascism is the petit-bourgeois class, white and black, called on by the big white bourgeoisie to run things, although in its own bourgeois interest. That means, in the case of black folks, lots of black policemen, military people, prison guards and matrons, as agents of force against the rebelling poor, black and white. It means lots of black “psych-artists,” like psychiatrists, psychologists, and social workers, who preach adjusting to or reforming the system. It means black school principals and teachers to educate black students on the dreamy wonders of capitalism and the sinister evil of communism and the poor. It means black entertainers of all kinds, including sports, “a-singing and a-praising the system,” and growing rich and famous in the process. White fascism has been bad enough, but black fascism is too close for comfort.

We know that many people who read this will say, “Oh, this is bullshit!” And we say to you, “Watch it, fascist!” We’ve come out of you and stepped away from you. That’s how we know more about you than you can know about yourself. Fascists never understand themselves; they fear to look within. To them all problems have to be external and come from other people. All answers to their unhappiness can be found outside themselves. All danger comes from other races and outsiders. All happiness comes from money, status, and a *MAN* or a *WOMAN*, all objects to be used for their needs. They do not know about their inner life, their responsibilities for what is happening. It does take two for any one process to occur. This is a dialectic and scientific fact fascists ignore at their peril. Eventually, ignoring it brings on their destruction. Fascists around us laugh and kid about the apparent breakdown of the revolutionary forces throughout the world. But because they can not understand historical dialectics and class struggle, they can not see that this apparent breakdown is only the shedding of another skin of illusions, allowing the rise of greater internal strength and a new unity within ourselves and with others like us.

Fascist reactionary parents, relatives, lovers, and friends made us revolutionaries long before we stumbled onto Black History and Marxist-Leninism. But through these we found the big

reality, that the struggle within our lifetime is between two world outlooks, that of the bourgeoisie and that of the workers and the poor of the world, the proletariat. There are only two sides and they are directly opposed to each other, irreconcilable, existing at this time together, and they will fight it out for a new future and a new world. What was last shall be first!

The bourgeoisie's economic system is capitalism; the workers' and the poor's economic system is communism. This is why the bourgeoisie has fought so hard to keep the poor from knowing and understanding communism. They tried to make us hate and fear it as they do. But the economic system of communism belongs to us and we have to begin to learn about it. Fascism is in our immediate future and communism lies in our distant future.

Meanwhile the mass of black and white workers and the poor in this country produce and support law and order (fascism) because they dream of exchanging roles. They want to be on top so they won't be low no more. Their urge is religious in nature, to be on top and close to God (Master), and not below, close to the Devil (the poor), Fascism is the blind, obsessive need to be better than others, to be a God, a leader, to "be somebody," and to do absolutely anything to get there. This is the accepted code of capitalism and is most obvious under fas-



cism with its male-God-leader, since historically, only males are Gods and supreme in our culture.

It started with us when our poor, dick-happy mothers put on us all that respect for God and private property. God, the Great Landlord in the sky, the image of whitey, the big rich WASP landlord and factory owner. Our mother's boyfriend helped and perhaps our daddies would have too, if we'd had daddies. "Come unto me, all ye who suffer and are heavy laden and I shall give you peace!" (a piece). That piece is the crumb, the dope, the petty dream, to keep us addicted and begging for more. We went to church with our mothers while she prayed to hit the number!

People in the United States are desperately fighting to hold on to an illusion that middle-class values and capitalism are supreme. That's when fascism arises. It arises to hold back the force of the poor and the workers, the only class never to have its time in history. Fascism arises to hold back by brute force the new woman, the new man, a new world with new social and economic relationships. The workers and poor, out of their very experience of work, no longer need anyone on top to direct them. Nor do they need to exploit or be in power over others. Workers and the poor produce everything that is needed for life; they can control the production process and learn to run it

entirely. They need no more bosses who only suck off of them, trying to appear as some sacred, all-powerful messengers from God. Who needs bosses when we can take care of everything? Who needs some God way up there? Maybe God is inside of us and all along we have been inventing Gods when we were God. What a big joke on us! “So think about it, and one day you will find that this is true . . . *for there is no God*, if there is . . . *then God is you!!* (from “Who is God?” a poem by a 22-year-old sister on welfare.)

For all our most cherished revolutionary brothers and sisters, we discuss below tactics and their history which we learned from practice and study, a brief outline to help our long-term strategy of overthrowing the bourgeoisie, black and white, and their system, capitalism. There are also tactics for the eventual defeat of those fascists close to you, your dick-happy mother, your ass-kissing brothers and sisters, your soap-opera dreaming and leaning woman, and last but not least, your big-dick black Daddy—big-dick Daddies who do Mr. Charlie’s thing in black face.

The base of our present problem is that poor and working-class people are confused about their position in the world. It’s a confusing process, coming out of the brainwashing. The myths no longer suppress the truth. Not having a tried and

tested new structure which describes reality causes a transitional confusion, a time of chaos and disorder. Into this transitional time moves fascism and fascists, and they offer only the old all over again. This time it is ridiculous!

Fascism is expensive; that is why it is only used as a last resort. Brainwashing keeps the oppressed oppressing themselves and each other. It is less expensive to have the oppressed do the job on themselves. But fascism is necessary now that the people are slowly waking up to reality. The armed force needed to keep the oppressed down requires material and people and lots of bread.

To understand this thoroughly, the masses need help to analyze capitalism historically and our slave relationship to it. The master and his black puppets would be out of their minds to teach the truth of class struggle and the violent history of capitalism in this country. And that is one thing the ruling class is not; it is not out of its mind. It does everything in its own interest, down to the last years of its rule; then it tends to get sloppy. But until that time it does what it is supposed to do—seduce and use the petit-bourgeoisie, and oppress and exploit the poor and the working class.

In the beginning, analyzing the system is done by going into the history of how we got pushed to the wall, who put us there,

and how we cooperated in the process. This is in total opposition to how the ruling class has taught us to think—in a straight line. But revolutionaries must learn to think dialectically, analyzing the movement and interaction of opposites.

We have to find out how we were forced to cooperate in our own oppression, to literally forge our own chains of slavery and dependence. We study both sides—the Master and us, how historical conditions deepened our awareness of our real condition and how the Master tried to prevent this developing political consciousness, and how and why we gave in time and time again.

We have to understand class struggle, how at each historical stage one class has been able to rule over the rest—the African tribal elders over the women and the rest of the tribe, the kings over the serfs in feudal times, the middle-class white capitalist and industrialist-banker over the slave blacks and white workers since the 18th century. We have to understand our present historical stage beginning with the final coming to power of the workers and peasants in China in 1949 and Cuba in 1959.

We have to be aware of a person's class background and the class he admires and imitates. This has to effect his thinking and world outlook, which in turn determines his actions.

In other words, start with where his head is at! Don't open his nose too fast. You can't give a person what their hand don't call for.

You can take a brother or sister to the entrance of the tunnel of self and political discovery, but you can't go in there with them. They have to trip alone without a guide. They have to see for themselves before political consciousness can travel from the head to the gut. Everyone needs concrete proof from practice before theory is formed and absorbed.

The attacks on us by black reactionaries and Uncle Tom opportunists can be neutralized by reporting them to their white bosses and proving they are not doing their puppet job effectively. You know. Big Whitey prides himself on order, form and so-called proof. He will be very impressed with your intellectual clearness and will want to make you a puppet. Watch that! You just concentrate on them—turn Master on his black puppet and puppet, having very little internal strength, falls to pieces. The great external need of the reactionary puppet is for money and status. He is thoroughly dependent on Master's will and approval, and therefore is very vulnerable to criticism from the Master. He will be so busy licking his wounds that he'll forget about you temporarily.

But reactionaries and fascists cannot give up, so obsessive is

their need to keep the poor down and themselves up, to be somebody important and powerful. But their obsession lessens their ability to scope us accurately. The oppressed, on the other hand, being dialectically and politically conscious, scope themselves and the fascists very accurately. This allows the oppressed to see many of the fascists' vulnerabilities and to use these weaknesses against them. Dialectical consciousness allows the oppressed to confront their own weaknesses, correct them and learn from their mistakes. Political awareness allows the oppressed to tell, at last, where the oppressor stops and they begin.

Knowing where you stop and the other begins makes it easier to confront a reactionary. He is, after all, an old friend—the neighborhood bully. You know, the bully don't fight unless he thinks he has might on his side: a big body or a big weapon. We black women understand in detail the power of internal strength to psych-out a bully to the point where he runs away in fear. We also know that we cannot depend only on big bodies and big weapons; so like the Vietnamese women revolutionary fighters, we wait in hiding for the night. When we move, the bully is asleep, tuckered out from fighting the fear that we may come. We have learned from the rebellions in the cities that to take on a big group of bullies you absolutely need the masses

with you, prepared for a massive assault that will completely overwhelm the reactionary force.

We have had some delicious victories defeating individual fascists by never laying a hand on them. Our stubborn and unending resistance to their unreal dreams and demands, which cannot be carried out without our cooperation, frightens and finally wears them out. We resist the demands most crucial to their great need for power over others. The masses of the poor and black of the world wear the Master out and then defeat him when he has grown weak from overextending himself. On the other hand, the workers, whom the Master needs more, are too dependent on the Master materially; it is almost impossible for them to hold out in the way the masses of the poor, and the women, can. But when the workers move together against the Master, and are prepared to run the economy and the state themselves, the future has begun. The responsibility of the world's poor, particularly the women, is to wear the Master out in the way our Indochinese brothers and sisters are doing.

Fascists and reactionaries are unable to be deeply dialectical and analytical. They have no sense of historical forces constantly interacting and bringing unending change. They cannot see life as a process that can be understood by the oppressed of the world who will use this knowledge to overthrow them. The

reactionaries' need to stay on top at any price absolutely blocks their ability to see, think and act in a correct way.

We are young black and poor people who knew when we were small that many of the grown-ups around us were dangerous to us and to life. At that time, we couldn't put it into words or abstract it into a Marxist-Leninist theory. The historical changes in our world revolutionary era, and in our own lives, finally showed us that we were the life of the future the grown-ups feared and hated. They could not stand the reality of being displaced and the necessity of death any more than their Masters can. That's why none of them can stand to be reborn or change. For out of death and change come life and the new, again and again, and that's a fact!

In the coming historical period, the poor women, the workers and peasants, the youth and the third world people will have to take responsibility. We must go deeper into our class and racial experience, and the women and youth into their need to subordinate themselves to men and adults. We must learn why we have loved our chains and not wanted to throw them off. Only we, the politically-conscious oppressed, can find out how we were molded, brainwashed, and literally produced like any manufactured product to plastically cooperate in our own oppression. This is *our* historical responsibility.



# APPENDIX



## DICTIONARY

Words have a class meaning. The class that controls the society controls the meaning of words. Words change meaning according to the way each class in power sees the world through its experience. Since all other classes have used and abused the poorest class, we encourage the poorest class of blacks to dig down to the root of the word, what it meant originally. This allows us to see the history of words and classes.

English is based on Greek, Latin, Sanskrit (India), and the Indo-European ancient languages of German, Goth, Middle-English, etc.

**BOURGEOISIE** (“BOURGIE”): from old French *burgeois*, inhabitant of a borough, a fortified town in feudal times. Later, a French shopkeeper, trader, origin of the capitalist middle class.

**PETIT-BOURGEOISIE**: from Latin *pittinus*, referring to a word of child speech. Later, very small, minor, secondary, middle-class.

**PROLETARIAT**: also from a word describing children, Latin *proles*, off-spring. Later, *proletarius*, Roman citizen of lowest class who served the state, not with his property but with his offspring.

Finally, common, low factory worker.

**FEUDALISM**: from Latin *feudum*, a fief, and a Greek word meaning cattle. Cattle originally used as money. Finally, a social system in

which the land was owned and controlled by a king and inhabited by poor farmers who had lost control of their cattle and labor, forced to work for the king.

**CAPITALISM:** from Latin *caput*, head and *capere*, to take. Finally, ownership of all means of life and production by a few rich, a small class, the bourgeoisie, capitalists.

**NATIONALISM:** from Latin *natio*, breed, stock. Later, born of a race or place. Finally, love of race and nation.

**COMMUNISM:** from Latin *communaenis*, common, and *commoinos*, shared by all or many. Finally, the taking back by the common workers of their labor and means to life.

**RELIGION:** from Latin *religare*, to tie fast, tie up. Later, an obligation. Finally, an outlet of those oppressed by feudalism and capitalism.

**GOD:** from Old French *guth*, voice and Greek *kouchasthai*, to boast and Sanskrit *havate*, to call forth. Finally, an idea created by man.

**PRESTIGE:** from Latin *praestigium*, meaning illusion and *praetiglae*, meaning magician's tricks; root meaning illusion and trickery.

**PRIVILEGE:** from Latin *privi*, meaning separate, hidden, secret and *legis*, meaning law, separate and secret law.

**RADICAL:** from Latin *radicis*, meaning root. Basic meaning, one who goes to the root of things.

**STRATA:** from Latin *streita*, meaning layer.

**REBELLION:** from *re*, meaning again, and Latin *bellare*, meaning to wage war again and again.

**REVOLUTION:** from Latin, *revolvere*, meaning to turn over totally.

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