

order. Many patterns, themes, and issues, link these essays, however. Lake, Tonn, and Killingsworth and Palmer explore how various strategies, tactics, and arguments function for protesters themselves; Burgess, Andrews, and Browne observe how they function for extrinsic target audiences. Burghardt, Railsback, and Darsey trace the evolution of protest rhetoric over time, identifying changes in tactics and arguments as they are shaped by historical, organizational, and oppositional pressures, opportunities, and constraints. Studies by Conrad and Stewart each focus on the role of rhetoric in a very specific moment of transformation in the history of a movement. Zarefsky and Murphy both address "establishment" influences on protest. Finally, some essays offer distinct vantage points on social movements. Browne locates significant protest work occurring in a single text; Campbell defines an entire movement by its distinctive style and argument; while Olson and Goodnight emphasize the space of social controversy.

These groupings are not exclusive—the essays fit easily into several critical categories—nor do they represent all the potential topoi, or critical topics, explored in the studies. For instance, Tonn and Stewart focus on rhetoric; Campbell and Browne explore style; Burghardt, Railsback, and Goodnight and Olson analyze argument; Andrews, Killingsworth and Palmer, and Zarefsky explicate rhetorical form; Burgess and Lake address audience; and Conrad, Darsey, and Murphy emphasize context. And there are many more valuable combinations. Collectively, however, the studies in this section exemplify and extend the theoretical issues and concepts explored in earlier sections of this collection. Ideally, these essays will lead us to further questions and research, and perhaps inspire theoretical and historical debates about how rhetoric has shaped efforts at social transformation.

The Rhetoric of Black Power: A Moral Demand?



PARKE G. BURGESS

"Black Power" has displaced "Freedom Now" as the most significant symbol of the civil rights movement. "Freedom Now" was a challenge directed primarily at the South; "Black Power" challenges the culture at large, more particularly in the North. The rhetoric of Black Power is a response to a long history of communications between white and black in American culture—finally putting Negro citizens unmistakably on the offensive, stating their claims as citizens and human beings. This change of strategy, however, may be shocking to a large number of Americans accustomed to seeing the Negro on the defensive. The nonviolent rhetoric of Freedom Now continued this trend, while the rhetoric of Black Power clearly reverses it. Thus, many if not most Americans find this new rhetoric abhorrent. They do not like being told, especially by Negroes, that their culture is wrong. As the current retort has it: "This time, they've gone too far!"

Neither the culture at large nor its leadership takes pains to distinguish sharply between the violence of deeds and the violence of words. If the one is threatening and therefore to be discredited and ultimately suppressed, then so is the other. The growing tendency of the culture to respond in this way to the rhetoric of Black

Power could spell tragedy for Negro and culture alike. For both now seem bent upon a collision course. If the collision course is to be altered or reversed, then the civic culture may have to alter its strategy so that both parties to the conflict may undertake a different level of talk and action. Essential to such a change, however, is an alternative interpretation of the rhetoric of Black Power.

The apparent necessity for the culture at large and its leadership to answer this rhetoric threat for threat and rejection for rejection, whether in word or deed, hardens responses to the rhetoric of Black Power. This necessity may, however, be only apparent. Perhaps Black Power advocates actually do intend to "burn the culture down," to employ the idiom of H. Rap Brown, or to persuade others to do so. The leadership of the culture need not respond in kind, when to do so serves to assign this extreme meaning to the rhetoric of Black Power. By the same token, the President of the United States need not have labelled extreme Black Power advocates "poisonous propagandists."¹ Norman Cousins need not have responded in kind with a harsh editorial entitled "Black Racism" in *Saturday Review* later in the same month; he took pains to call Black Power advocates "violence-prone extremists" and "dangerous fools."² If the culture and its leadership choose to respond as if illegitimately attacked, they thereby solidify this particular interpretation of the rhetoric of Black Power as the ground for a battle on the public stage.

The rhetoric of Black Power may be interpreted in another way, however. Perhaps these militant Negro advocates utter not a call to arms but a call for justice, a call uttered outside law and order because they see no recourse within the institutions that prescribe what law and order actually mean for many Negro citizens. The rhetoric of Black Power may be the only strategic choice they have. Nevertheless, behind all the sound and fury of this rhetoric may lie the intention merely to force upon the culture a moral decision.

When the culture does decide to respond one way rather than the other, it will choose the strategy most suitable to its character as a democratic culture. No one, least of all the opponents, will consider an alternative interpretation, however, until convinced that an undesirable collision is all but inevitable without a change of course. Nor will anyone be convinced of this grave risk unless he first understands the major forces comprising the cultural situation from which the conflict emerges, nor until he also understands how the rhetoric of Black Power necessarily causes the conflict to reach crisis proportions the moment it enters upon the public stage. Without the Black Power advocate the clear and present danger would not exist, yet the central issue of the crisis exists whether he proclaims it or not. Examination of the trends of the conflict will reveal why he apparently *must* proclaim it; this is the first task. Examination of the crisis will reveal what happens when he *does* proclaim it; this is the second task. The final task is to offer a reinterpretation of the rhetoric of Black Power as the basis for a solution that may reverse the collision course and allow the democratic culture to be true to itself.

The three forces most directly responsible for the civil rights crisis are: the issue at the heart of the crisis, the traditional strategy of the culture as applied to this particular crisis, and the strategy of the Negro advocate. All of these forces emanate from the political context which accords each its respective nature and power. Riots, demonstrations, and volatile talk occur in all countries. In the United States, however, these indicators of crisis have a special meaning because of the democratic culture. The three major forces shaping the crisis can be understood only after a brief digression into the fundamental nature of the democratic civic culture, its

traditional profession of faith, its institutional commitments, and its understandable preference for consensus rather than conflict.

In a brilliant study of comparative democratic politics, Almond and Verba point out that a democratic civic culture functions efficiently only when relatively free from divisive conflict and strife.³ Intense and persisting dissension over substantive issues on a culture-wide scale can be mortal. Consequently, citizens of the democratic culture tend to remain uninvolved in the decision-making process during stable periods, and, although always potentially active, they tend to become actively involved only when their interests are threatened. The tension between involvement and non-involvement underlying normal operations of the civic culture allows its institutions to work with relative efficiency in practice, while restrained from excesses by an ideal of potential activism and involvement.

When a crisis such as the present one arises, however, the balance of tension between activity and passivity is affected. Activism heightens the conflict and a breakdown of efficient operations may threaten the normal functioning of the civic culture. Under such circumstances, the leadership and the culture at large will seek to redress the balance as quickly as possible and at minimal cost to the healthy functioning of the culture. The normal balance will be restored by satisfying the demands of those most active or by compromise. When compromise is impossible, however, and demands are not satisfied, activity may become so intense and widespread that virtually no one remains passive. In this extreme, the crisis can provoke violence, even civil war, not an unknown occurrence in American experience.

While over-activity is a sign of crisis in a democratic culture, an abundant source of crisis is the necessary tension between freedom and order. The democratic civic culture professes a fundamental moral commitment to the freedom of self-determination (liberty, equality before the law, equality of opportunity) without which it is not democratic. Yet the culture is also committed to the processes, procedures, and institutions that protect this ideal and actually permit its realization in everyday life; it is committed to "business as usual." The civic culture must maintain a balance between these two commitments—freedom and order—since a marked imbalance toward one would threaten the other, as occurs in anarchy (freedom without order) and tyranny (order without freedom). Therefore, a threat to either commitment can induce a crisis, as an attempt to restore the customary balance.

A peculiar tendency apparent in American political tradition poses dangers when crises occur; for the culture may then pay a price for its enthusiasm for consensus and tranquility. The critical balance between freedom and order, between activity and passivity appears weighted clearly in the direction of order and passivity even in normal, stable times. The basic freedoms at the moral foundation of the culture are themselves actually realized for most citizens within the institutions and processes by which "business as usual" is conducted; they become submerged there, and they are unconsciously identified with the system itself. As Louis Hartz indicates, a nation "born free" has little need to make an issue of freedom;⁴ consequently, citizens can afford to forget about freedom during daily operations of the culture. This imbalance of tensions is preferred also because most citizens have benefited greatly from "business as usual": "They never had it so good!" As a result, they have an understandable commitment to order over freedom, and they may easily lose sight of the dependence of the system of order itself upon the democratic commitment to freedom as well as to order.

In normal times, any threat to individual freedom and activity is usually removed by traditional processes and procedures, and no crisis arises. Even in times of war, the external threat to the civic culture as a whole is believed to be so great that only extreme libertarians worry about the limits placed upon freedom, and again crises are normally avoided. "Business as usual" functions efficiently throughout the culture when the threat to freedom is relatively localized or when it is aimed at the survival of the culture itself. However, when the threat is no longer localized and does not yet endanger the survival of the culture as a whole, the potential for internal crisis arises. The civil rights conflict is a classic, if not historic, case. A minority suffers restriction of freedom and becomes excessively active in order to counteract the complacency, or even the aggressive opposition, of those citizens who may feel that the freedom of other citizens is expendable. A crisis may be about to be born.

The movement of the culture in relation to such crisis should be clear and understandable. The strategy that is natural and traditional to the democratic civic culture emerges, by extension, when a widespread and intense crisis threatens to upset the preferred balance of tensions. The culture at large and its leadership, in particular, tend to insist upon an increased emphasis on order and passivity so as to restrict freedom and activity and consequently to return to the required state of equilibrium and tranquility. Having no other option in the face of what may be or may become a threat to its existence, the civic culture necessarily utilizes its traditional strategy to suppress the threat. Yet it may be unable to exercise this option against such a threat without also threatening its character as a democratic culture.

From the point of view of many Negro citizens, the character of the civic culture may be precisely what is at stake in the civil rights crisis. These citizens appear to seek what they have not been given, what they cannot actually take, and yet what the democratic culture, being democratic, cannot in good faith deny them: self-determination as citizens and human beings. Negroes do not ask that the basic system be altered or that something new be added to it; they cannot be identified, on this issue, with the far left or the far right. Negro citizens are in dead-center. Thus, the substantive issue dividing them from the culture at large is its denial of their right to self-determination. To resolve the issue, the culture need only reverse its denial. The issue remains unresolved, however, and worse, the crisis appears to intensify despite recent progress in civil rights reform.

How can this be? There is no controversy about the inconsistency in affirming the democratic commitment while denying its full application to Negroes, nor about the necessity to reverse this denial if the culture is to be true to itself. Why, then, does the culture not do in its many public acts what it has recently and repeatedly admitted in its public rhetoric that it must do? This is a question that long perplexed traditional civil rights advocates and framed the rationale for the rhetoric of Freedom Now, with its moral and legal emphasis upon the democratic commitment.

The inescapable conclusion is that the issue actually does not lie in the *fact* of the denial but in the *reason* for the denial. Since nearly everyone admits that the denial is morally illegitimate, then the continued denial appears to suggest that the culture does not wish to be true to itself. Yet, since the denial is not generally and systematically applied to any other group as it is to Negroes, then it is not a widespread denial of the democratic commitment itself, but only a denial of its application to Negro citizens.

Why the special treatment? The reason for the denial is revealed to be racist, and the true issue of the crisis becomes the racist moral issue. Both appear to posit the uniqueness of the Negro citizen as justification for deny him the right to self-determination. Is this justification legitimate? It is sometimes legitimate for the democratic culture to affirm its commitment to freedom and yet to deny freedom to individuals when the denial is justified, for example with regard to aliens and some criminals; such individuals are not "citizens." However, since Negroes must certainly be considered "citizens," then the only ground on which the denial could be based is that these "citizens" are Negroes. The denial is racist and its justification is therefore illegitimate.

The core of the moral issue, then, is not the substantive and legalistic issue of self-determination for Negro citizens, nor even the moral fact of the culture's denial, but rather the racist issue that divides the culture at large from its Negro citizens. The expression of the issue in terms of self-determination and civil rights correctly denotes its substantive content in relation to the democratic tradition of the civic culture, and thereby suggests steps to be taken to correct the denial once the culture decides to move fully in that direction. To express the issue in racist moral terms, however, denotes that the culture may not yet have decided to move fully in that direction, on racist grounds.

No other explanation of the conflict appears to reveal why the civic culture has moved so slowly to reverse its denial to Negro citizens, nor why the crisis harbors such intensity of feeling and divisiveness of purpose. Thus, the moral issue of race may be considered the engine that drives culture and Negro advocate alike to a choice of strategy that is likely to result in collision course.

During the earlier, civil rights stage of the conflict, the dominant leadership of the culture showed an awareness, as it still does, of the substantive moral contradiction and of the necessity to remove it. The leadership and many citizens consequently realized their responsibility to redress the imbalance of tension between order and freedom and to move in the direction of greater freedom and equality for Negroes. Seen as a civil rights crisis of relatively limited proportions, a proportionately limited application of traditional strategy appeared effectively to maintain the normal balance of tensions. It did so, however, at cost to some citizens and institutions (primarily in the South) and at the cost of limited gains for Negro citizens. These limited gains were consistent with the limited strategy and aims of traditional civil rights advocates and the limited willingness of citizens and institutions to respond to their strategy and to the strategy of the culture. One cannot deny, however, that the strategies of the Negro advocate and the civic culture worked more or less in harmony to achieve gains, however limited, under the aegis of the civil rights movement.

A shift in the issue can bring only a shift in the use and effectiveness of traditional strategy. Once Negro advocates move from the courts, the city halls, and other sanctioned centers of decision into the streets, or, with fiery words, upon the public platform, the response of the culture at large and of its leadership also shifts. The threat posed is perceived by the culture to be out of all proportion to the issue of the crisis, when the culture and its leadership are either unable or unwilling to recognize that the issue has shifted from civil rights to race. Thus, the culture may fail to realize that its traditional strategy, so recently effective, now becomes paradoxically ineffective.

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The need to apply the strategy in a form less in harmony with Negro demands now increases and yet makes its application self-defeating, as more and more citizens and institutions become active. Citizens with racist inclinations who are especially threatened by the new turn of events will seek to employ the strategy to promote whatever policy or action is likely to minimize the threat to themselves. They will utilize any part of the system of order that tends, by tradition, to be racist in its structure or composition. They will press their denial of self-determination for Negro citizens on pragmatic rather than on moral grounds, unless they can find moral grounds having no obvious relationship to racism. They have nothing to lose and perhaps everything to gain by translating a personal threat to themselves into a crisis perceived by other citizens as a threat to the culture at large. The culture responds, in turn, with insistence upon order; it becomes overly acquiescent to "white backlash"; it moves forthrightly to resolve a crisis provoked by racism in the first place.

Greatly aggravated by the issue and, indirectly, by its effects upon incipiently racist citizens, the entire culture becomes more and more embroiled. Strong pressures within the culture to correct the denial of self-determination to Negro citizens give way to overriding pressure to redress the new imbalance of tensions. The national leadership in politics and other areas of decision hardens its attitude. This very result was most noticeable, for instance, after the riots of 1967. Even highly respected Negro civil rights leaders, to say nothing of nearly all other leaders, had to disown Black Power "extremists" and, of course, had to reject rioting in no uncertain terms, insisting with the rest of the leadership upon a return to law and order. Such reactions are not completely unjustified under the circumstances, but they can only postpone meeting the justified moral demands of Negro citizens. More important, however, the crisis appears more intense and widespread than ever, affected more positively by changes of season than by application of traditional strategy.

The racist, moral issue also creates a strategic paradox for the Negro advocate because of his peculiar relation to the culture as he advances his claim for self-determination. He does not advance it as worker, Democrat, intellectual, baseball player, or musician, but simply as a Negro. He cannot "pass" for anything else, being substantively a marked man. To the extent he is seen by others essentially as a Negro, he cannot be seen as are other citizens within the civic culture, as citizens "without respect to race, creed, or national origin."

It is quite normal for an advocate in the midst of crisis to be identified with his cause and to suffer the consequences, for good or ill. Yet he is rarely so completely identified with his cause that he cannot rise above it or leave it behind him and "return to private life." The situation of the Negro advocate is quite different and perhaps painfully abnormal. He does not suffer the consequences by reason of his identification with his cause but by reason of the fact that his cause is himself. He cannot simply leave his cause and "return to private life," since even when he returns he remains identified as a Negro.

The paradox he faces applies also to his relation to the claim he advances. The denial of the right to self-determination applies to him no matter what he attempts to *do* (it is the "door to other doors") and *because* of what he *is*. Unable to dodge the fact that he is essentially a Negro, he can hardly avoid the conclusion that must confront him regarding his advocacy: The right he demands is one he must be given in order to "belong" to the culture at all, and he can be given it *only as a Negro*.

When considered in the light of the issue of the crisis and of the strategy employed by the culture to resolve it, the strategic paradox of the Negro advocate becomes clear. His only available strategic alternative is to advance his claim in the way least likely to win acceptance in a culture apparently "designed" to suppress precisely the kind of conflict this crisis and his advocacy are destined to produce. Being unable to avoid the racist implications of his advocacy, he can neither withdraw nor succeed. Here may lie the tragic irony of the rhetoric of Black Power and its potential meaning to the culture at large. The unavoidable issue in the crisis demands unavoidably that the Negro advocate press that issue, even in the face of violence.

Analysis of the historical and cultural situation reveals that the stage is set for the rhetoric of Black Power to make its entrance and to tip the balance in the direction of a collision course. This rhetoric forces the issue and creates the strategic paradox for advocate and culture alike. No rhetoric could be more provocative in teasing out the inner logic of the moral crisis and the culture's strategy to resolve it. The reason is simple. The rhetoric of Black Power is framed as if it were aimed precisely at these ends; it is a direct response to the civic culture. Yet this particular way of responding is historically inconceivable without the movement that preceded it, for the rhetoric of Black Power is also an answer to the rhetoric of Freedom Now.

The civil rights movement has addressed the traditional rhetoric of the civic culture. Despite some progress before 1954 (in the armed forces, for example), and despite increasing interest and support by many white citizens since then, the culture at large has continued to say *No* to its Negro citizens in many systematic ways. The movement sought to change this response. In the early 1960's it scored some success under the banner of Freedom Now with its "non-violent" demonstrations and compelling moral tone. The culture's answer to this plea was complex and ambiguous. In the South it answered *Yes*, but perhaps only because to answer *No* to Martin Luther King would clearly have been to answer *Yes* to George Wallace and Paul Johnson. And who is to say that the violent reactions of some Southerners did not actually command stage-center? For example, President Johnson's "historic" Voting Rights Speech of 1965 came only after the tragedy of Selma. The rhetoric of Freedom Now was never persuasive in the North, where even Martin Luther King was stopped by "the white power structure," most notably in Chicago. Freedom Now appealed to the clear-cut legal issues in the South which were easily accommodated by "business as usual." Confronted by the more subtle machinations of the culture at large, this rhetoric seemed to get a response to which Negro citizens had long been accustomed: promises, delays, and piecemeal tokens could only be taken now as an actual denial.

King has said, with some pain, that the very success of the rhetoric of Freedom Now, the "positive gains" it in part produced, only made matters worse.⁵ This rhetoric was most effective in raising the hopes and expectations of Negro citizens. When hopes and expectations were not realized, however, they seemed cynically to produce worse conditions, especially in Northern ghettos.

Tempers were thereby sensitized for a new level of talk that could not be dodged, talk that would demand rather than plead, that would insist that the civic culture honor its commitment to Negro citizens—or else. The ground was laid for the militant rhetoric of Black Power, a rhetoric that voiced its demand on a tonal scale somewhere between Martin Luther King and Malcolm X. It had learned its lessons from both men, in a school built by the culture itself.

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The rhetoric of Black Power acknowledges what King's rhetoric did not. Unlike King's rhetoric, Black Power denies that a moral plea to the democratic conscience would gain a commensurate moral response. Except in the South, King was wrong. The rhetoric of Black Power reveals that King's strategy, although logically correct, was rhetorically inadequate. Logically speaking, a clearly moral issue demands a clearly moral strategy in keeping with the democratic traditions of the civic culture. Since discrimination is itself contrary to those traditions, the logical result of this strategy, its ultimate moral demand, would be integration as the true measure of equality and freedom. What Black Power advocates have realized (due in part to King's experience) are the rhetorical realities that made the strategy inadequate. King missed the gravity of the tension within the American tradition, exacerbated by his own efforts, between "business as usual" and the commitment to self-determination. By attempting to operate within that tradition, moreover, he necessarily underemphasized the uniqueness of the Negro, as a Negro, within the same tradition; he ignored the specifically racial conflict, the racist core of the moral crisis.

The rhetoric of Black Power is more perceptive and "corrects" both errors. It acknowledges, first, that America actually has no moral conscience in the face of a threat to its "traditions," which means that only power can meet entrenched power, racist or not. It acknowledges, secondly, that the culture now confronts the Negro not as a human being or citizen-minus-rights, but as a Negro who is not yet regarded by the culture as a citizen or a human being *because* he is a Negro. This rhetoric brings to the surface and loudly proclaims what heretofore had been fearfully hidden and yet silently worked its effects. It loudly confronts the racist moral conflict.

The answer to white power is Black Power—to white racism, black racism. But this usage of the term "black racism" must be clearly distinguished from its earlier usage by some American Negro citizens. The Black Power movement has its roots in a racist perception of cultural reality no less than the Black Muslim movement, for example. Yet "Black Power" is not merely a concept which reflects these realities nor a rallying symbol addressed to Negroes alone in order to unite them; if it were merely these, this movement would be indistinguishable from that of the Black Muslims. Unlike the idiom of the Black Muslims, however, the rhetoric of Black Power is significantly addressing the civic culture no less than Freedom Now did. It speaks directly to that culture, "courting" its acceptance; it does not withdraw into its own house, pulling down the blinds, absolutely refusing to communicate with the outside world, having "lost its suit." On the other hand, to continue the metaphor, it cannot in the nature of its case win acceptance by singing romantic songs and parading before the house of the beloved.

Black Power therefore signifies a rhetorical movement which seeks entrance into the hallowed and rich house of the American culture, *but on its own terms and by means which the culture understands and accepts*. It is ironic indeed that its terms are identical with those of the American promise (self-determination with no strings attached), and perhaps still more ironic that the means it employs, including the whole strategy of black racism, so precisely portray the means used against the Negro citizen, then and now. In these facts lie the tragic justice and sadness of the rhetoric of Black Power.

The powerful logic of this rhetoric originates from a white racist culture and is apparently forced upon black citizens against their deepest desires and better judgment by the naked and subtle power of that culture. Its adoption represents a

last-ditch effort by these citizens to wrest final affirmation from generations of denial. The poignant irony of this rhetoric is revealed in the different ways it seems to stand the logic of the civic culture on its own head, taking its racist attitudes with deadly seriousness.

Contradicting its democratic, procedural ideal, the civic culture regards the Negro citizen not for what he can *do*, but for what he *is*, regardless of what he can do. He is regarded as substance. The rhetoric of Black Power begins from this historic fact and *responds* as substance. Regarding the Negro citizen essentially for his difference as substance, the culture segregates him on this basis, drawing procedural and organizational lines about him—lines he can seldom cross. The separatist rhetoric of Black Power accepts this language and *responds* as substance thus segregated. Having effectually prevented his access to the procedural pursuit of happiness on substantive grounds, America yet goads the Negro citizen in countless ways to get his, as everyone else gets theirs. Again taking America to mean what it says, Black Power demands for the Negro what he has been promised and threatens to get it by the only means America has left it—"by any means necessary." Especially trying to some Negroes, and clearly one of the tragedies of the ghetto riots, is this reduction of the American promise and the Negro answer to such crass, materialistic terms. It is as if Black Power advocates had once again captured and turned against itself one of the truisms of the civic culture—the democratic commitment to self-determination becomes an acquisitive and materialistic commitment to self-interest.

This is the ruthless but nevertheless valid logic of Black Power advocates. Its naked clarity and brutal honesty put the civic culture in an unenviable position. Like the honest parent caught stealing from his child's piggy bank, what does he do when the child calls him a liar and throws the bank through the nearest picture window out of disappointment and anger? The normal response is to focus upon the bad name and the broken glass and not upon the tragedy of the unjust act that may have caused both reactions. The normal response is to redress the balance by resorting to "business as usual" now clearly divorced from its moral foundation.

This response means to Negro advocates the use of traditional methods of establishing order and equilibrium, including force. It means "positive gains" only when there is token resistance against them, or, contrary to the rhetoric of the culture, when Negro demands for their achievement are violent in the extreme. Traditional strategy is interpreted as an essentially white racist response to Negro demands and thus provokes an increased hardening of a black racist response on the part of Negro citizens. The rhetoric of militant racism becomes more justified than ever.

Charging that the culture is racist and that it is moved by nothing but sheer power, the culture responds accordingly. As Norman Cousins observes, "When Negroes act like Ku Klux Klanners, they must be treated like Ku Klux Klanners."⁶ Racism and power become the idiom of battle on both sides. Whatever the vocabulary of the culture may be, it is likely to be pregnant with the undertones and overtones of power, of force, of violence. And the intended target will be clear enough and often justifiable. As this response to the crisis intensifies, the full effect will be for the culture to consider Black Power advocacy in all its forms as violent, reprehensible, and un-American, and for Negroes to consider responses to it as but further evidence of the racist attitudes and rhetoric of the civic culture.

Such is the collision course predetermined by the paradoxical logic of both sides. By its own terms, this logic denies alternative interpretation and response. It

would appear also to have inevitable and unavoidably harmful consequences for the civic culture: Citizens who fear increased violence and even incipient revolution may have good reason for their fears. To avoid these consequences would demand a change in course derived from a new strategy having a different logic. It would demand a reinterpretation of the rhetoric of Black Power and a commensurate response on the part of the culture at large and its Negro citizens.

The dialectic of racism and power can be transcended only by refusal to respond to the rhetoric of Black Power as if it were a call to battle. The civic culture can respond instead at a level more in keeping with the moral nature of the crisis. It can respond as if this rhetoric were a call for a just moral decision. Such a response appears neither artificial nor utopian; it may be more realistic than the present one and is certainly more just. The rapier-like logic of the rhetoric of Black Power and the elementary justice that beckons from beneath it leave no doubt that the men who talk this way mean what they say and that their appeal will probably convert an increasing number of Negro citizens in the future, for the appeal is largely to Negroes of the same mind who share the tragic lack of alternative. Beneath the call to arms may be a cry for justice and community, as beneath the anger may be disappointment and disillusion. The dominant leadership and particularly the mass media of the culture can respond to what lies beneath and cease to respond to what shouts on the surface.

This new response to the rhetoric of Black Power would require two admissions on the part of the culture and its leadership. Both would admit that the immoral racist denial constitutes the core of the present crisis. Both would admit that this denial offers adequate moral justification for the rhetoric of Black Power. These admissions would require, as a result, that the civic culture return unequivocally to its moral foundation as a democratic culture and meet there, at its own roots, the source of this crisis. In this way, the language of racism and power would be transcended through translation into the nonracist language of the democratic commitment. Such a shift in basic interpretation would call for a marked shift in strategy, and would portend different consequences for the civic culture and for its Negro citizens.

The civic culture would then repudiate traditional strategy in response to just Negro demands. The paradoxical effect of that strategy is that its movement toward order and away from freedom, as against Negro citizens, can only further exacerbate the crisis it seeks to forestall. Moreover, the trend of that strategy is typically to encourage greater and greater separation of institutional response from the democratic base of the civic culture. A strategy of moral commitment would reverse the trend; for the function of the new strategy would be to infuse institutional responses with the moral quality appropriate to them as institutions within the democratic culture.

By adopting the strategy of moral commitment the civic culture would acknowledge that racism of any kind is clearly immoral and therefore not to be recognized as grounds for behavior or policy. It can only do this if it accepts the black racist contention regarding the presence of, and absolute lack of moral justification for, white racism in the culture itself. The refusal to tolerate a racist justification would not be a refusal to admit its existence. On the contrary, the language of democratic morality could assert its power and its relevance exactly here: Standing firmly on moral grounds as the traditional strategy seldom can, it could be unequivocal in its demands of all citizens precisely at those points where its traditional form equivocates in the interest of "business as usual."

Further consequences would, of course, ensue. Application of the new strategy would initially intensify the crisis and not quickly resolve it. To admit and unequivocally to confront the presence of white racism within the culture would be to oppose a real force that cannot be ignored or averted. Citizens with this cultural malady will indeed have cause for alarm. They can be expected to continue to move for order and to intensify the crisis, but with a fervor magnified to meet what would be for the first time, an open assault upon them by the civic culture. Another consequence of repudiating traditional strategy in order to arrest tensions would result in the civic culture recalling that strategy, as it were, but in a significantly different way. The culture must maintain itself and it can do so only by pressing for order and passivity over freedom and activity. The significant difference of this reapplication of old strategy would be its different target. The price to be exacted as a result of the application of institutional power and consequent loss of freedom would be paid by those who truly cause the racist crisis in the first place, and not by those whose civil rights and freedom have been unjustly withheld.

Yet even white racists might then expect better treatment under a strategy of moral commitment than Negro citizens often receive at present, especially with regard to violence. Under present strategy, the leadership of the culture often appears open to the charge that it considers violent acts of Negroes to be particularly reprehensible and therefore demanding excessively punitive suppression. Insofar as spokesmen of the new strategy sense the serious democratic commitment at stake in the racial crisis, however, any citizens continuing to respond violently in word or deed are more likely to be considered as misguided citizens, whatever their race, than as mere objects of ruthless "justice." The distinction is important, for it entails a mood and a manner more suitable to the democratic tradition and certainly more conducive to minimal conflict at a time when punitive action, may be required.

Fully implemented, the new strategy would unequivocally commit the culture at large to the democratic goals formerly sought by the civil rights movement and by black separatist citizens not widely represented within that movement. It would eliminate the need for the movement to advance minority claims against the balance of the civic culture. It also would eliminate the *raison d'être* of black separatists, including Black Power advocates. But the goal imposed upon the vast majority of citizens by the strategy of democratic commitment would be neither integration nor conformity to white demands. The goal would be self-determination for Negro citizens, consistent with the cultural realities that actually confront them.

A reinterpretation of the volatile rhetoric of Black Power may offer the democratic culture a strategic alternative to violent confrontation and therefore a more desirable way to resolve the present crisis. If interpreted as calling America to its moral self, then this rhetoric forces upon America the acknowledgment that a racist moral conflict lies at the core of the crisis. The old rhetoric of "business as usual" loses its credibility. The new rhetoric of democratic commitment arises to meet the rhetoric of violence that must be repudiated and transcended so that the culture can be true to itself and to all of its citizens. From the irony of this tragedy, the culture may derive historic opportunity.

NOTES

¹*Time*, XC (September 22, 1967), 23.

²Norman Cousins, "Black Racism," *Saturday Review* (September 27, 1967), 34.

³Gabriel A. Almond and Sidney Verba, *The Civic Culture: Political Attitudes and Democracy in Five Countries* (Boston, 1965), Chapter XIII, especially pp. 344-356. Only the notion of

balance between activity and passivity is taken directly from their study, which would consider the balance between freedom and order a function of several factors.

⁴Louis Hartz, *The Liberal Tradition in America* (New York, 1955), Chapter II, passim.

⁵Andrew Kopkind, "Soul Power," *The New York Review of Books*, Vol. IX, No. 3, 3. A review of King's book, *Where Do We Go From Here: Chags [Sic] Or Community?*

⁶Cousins, "Black Racism," p. 34.

Confrontation at Columbia: A Case Study in Coercive Rhetoric



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On the broad steps leading up to Columbia University's Lowe Memorial Library, dominating College Walk, sits the placid, weather-stained figure of *alma mater*. On April 30 of last year there swirled about her feet the currents of anger, fear, puzzlement, and frustration; about her neck hung a boldly lettered sign: "Raped by the Cops."

The University had, indeed, been raped; it had been seized, immobilized, and ravished before the eyes of millions of American television viewers and newspaper readers, and word of the assault was reported throughout the world. But the attack that paralyzed the one hundred and fourteen year old institution¹ was not only an attack on Columbia University, it was the rejection of persuasive rhetoric for coercive rhetoric. To say that the "rape" was carried out "by the cops" is simplistic and propagandistic. What occurred on Morningside Heights was much more complex and has serious implications for the student of rhetoric.

The actual events of the crisis have been described exhaustively by the news media; it would be pointless to reiterate them here.² But the ends of a relevant rhetorical criticism may well be served by an immediate and intimate examination of the rhetorical issues posed by the upheaval at Columbia. As a member of the Columbia University community I observed much of the action firsthand, while, at the same time, as a faculty member of Teachers College I was not involved as a direct participant in the actual circumstances of the rebellion.

The Columbia incident forces the critic to face squarely the distinction between coercion and persuasion. Leland M. Griffin makes a clear distinction between these two concepts.³ He sees a rhetorical action as being "coercive rather than persuasive" when it is "essentially non-rational," when it is "dependent on 'seat of the pants' rather than 'seat of the intellect.'"⁴ Nevertheless, Professor Griffin does see even coercive actions as rhetorical, identifying, for example, a "physical rhetoric of resistance" and "body rhetoric."⁵

It seems eminently reasonable to view rhetoric as embracing all the available means of influencing human behavior and to recognize that some of these means are *persuasive* and some are not. Rhetoric, then, may be either persuasive or coercive. To make such distinctions is not merely to quibble over terminology. To be able to recognize a difference in these types of rhetorical activities should serve to