

# Detroit: birth of a nation

By Grace and James Boggs

History is being made in Detroit today. As so often happens, those making it are too busy to write it down, while those with the time and resources are either too remote or too hostile to do it justice. Yet the making of history is not complete without its recounting. Hence what follows.

A national movement is developing in Detroit. That is the only phrase to describe it historically and scientifically. It is a movement because it derives its momentum both from within the black community itself and from the tensions of its past and continuing confrontations with the white community. And it is national, that is to say, it is conscious of itself as being in the process of creating from all elements of the black community a self-governing nation which will control and determine its own destiny.

It is important not to confuse this national movement with other more familiar social and political formations. For example, it is not a council of organizations of the kind that arises periodically in any rights movement. In the course of the civil liberties or civil rights or labor movements, a council of organizations is usually formed from various groups coming together over a particular issue, usually a defense issue. After the emergency has passed, the council then usually continues to exist only as a loose federation, functioning chiefly as a means of rapid communication in the event that another emergency arises. In actual fact, it is little more than the telephone numbers of various leaders who can be called together when an issue arises of sufficient urgency to overshadow the differing degrees of militancy which distinguish the organizations involved.

A national movement is also not to be confused with a coalition. A coalition is essentially the coming together of various blocs which already exist in the population and who have a common interest which the coalition reflects. This coalition continues to exist, whether or not it assumes a formal structure nationally or locally, so long as the common interest exists. Thus, beginning with the New Deal, there was a liberal-intellectual-labor-Negro coalition in the Northern United States. This coalition has now fallen apart as a result both of the Vietnam War and the aggressive development of the Freedom struggle in Northern cities.

The impetus to the national movement in Detroit came from the July rebellion which erupted on July

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23 in this city, long regarded as a model city ruled by a coalition of enlightened industrialists, labor leaders and liberals. On Sunday, July 23, the brothers and sisters on the streets of the black community within a matter of hours not only destroyed once and for all the illusion that any American city can be a model of harmonious race relations. They also severed the psychological ties which still bound the majority of employed Negroes to white society. On Wednesday, Aug. 9, not quite three weeks after the first day of the uprising, over 1,000 black citizens representing every layer of the black community, top, middle and bottom, met in the City-County Building (Detroit's City Hall). Out of this meeting was born the City-wide Citizens Action Committee which is the political form presently assumed by the national movement.

## A new emotional unity

In part, the Aug. 9th meeting was a response to the Hudson "New Detroit" Committee which had been appointed by Detroit's Mayor Cavanagh and Michigan's Governor Romney to build a New Detroit out of the ruins of the July uprising and which was scheduled to hold its first meeting the next morning. Appointed to head the committee and giving it its name was the youthful Joseph L. Hudson, Jr., president of one of the nation's largest department stores. At first sight the 39-member Hudson Committee seemed no more than the usual coalition of enlightened industrialists (the heads of General Motors, Ford, Chrysler, Michigan Bell, Detroit Edison, Mich-



Gutted remains of buildings and burning service station (right) show effects of Detroit rebellion.

igan Consolidated Gas, Detroit Bank & Trust, Greater Detroit Board of Commerce, etc.); labor leaders (Walter Reuther of the UAW and Robert Holmes of the Teamsters); intellectuals (Wayne University President Keast and Sociology Professor Mel Ravitz); and Negro "leaders." But there were two new elements in the mix. First, Cavanagh and Romney had given token recognition to the rebellion by including among the nine black members of the committee three known and articulate black militants and black nationalists: Lorenzo Freeman, head of the Alinsky-advised West Central Organization; Alvin Harrison, former head of the Afro-American Youth Movement and now with Neighborhood Legal Services; and Norvel Harrington, former head of the Inner City Student Organization. It was equally obvious that Cavanagh and Romney were not willing to appoint to the committee the one person acknowledged by black and white alike to be Detroit's leading and most firmly-established black nationalist, Rev. Albert B. Cleage, Jr.

Second, there was a fundamental question as to why Cavanagh and Romney had found it necessary to create a New Detroit Committee at all. Was it not a confession that the legally-constituted political bodies, the city council and the state house and senate, had broken down, principally because politicians elected through regular parliamentary procedure must be responsive to their white (backlash) constituents? Was the New Detroit Committee to have governmental (legislative and administrative) or purely advisory functions? What was, indeed, its legitimacy? And why should Mel Ravitz, chairman of the Wayne County Board of Supervisors but also Detroit common councilman, have been appointed to the New Detroit Committee and why did he immediately take far-reaching proposals for the rebuilding of Detroit to the New Detroit Committee rather than to the Common Council?

This fundamental ambiguity as to the role of the Hudson New Detroit Committee lurked in the background as speaker after speaker came to the podium at the Aug. 9th assembly. Some speakers suggested that the chairman of the New Detroit Committee should be black; others that there should be a black majority on the committee, etc. But on some questions there was no room for ambiguity.

First, the black community was united in its determination not to tolerate a return to the normalcy of "Negro removal," inferior schools, unemployment, white merchant gougers and white Johns in black neighborhoods, and police brutality and criminality. This "Message from the Rebellion" was made clear by speaker after speaker, beginning with Julian Witherspoon, chairman of the ad hoc group which had called the assembly, and proceeding to Clyde Cleveland, Chairman of Detroit CORE; Mrs. Moon, head of a neighborhood renewal group; Edward Vaughn, chairman of the Black Star Cooperative and of Forum 66, a black cultural organization; Nadine Brown, Chrysler worker and labor journalist; Bob Tindal, executive secretary of the Detroit NAACP; Norvel

Harrington, youthful appointee to the Hudson Committee; Mrs. Helen Kelly, veteran fighter for decent education for all black children, including her own seven; Milton R. Henry, militant black lawyer and a close associate of the late Malcolm X; and a host of rank and filers.

Second, in the course of the rebellion, the white power structure had completely unmasked itself before the entire black community by the police massacres of innocent civilians on the street and particularly at the Algiers Motel, and by the open conspiracy of the courts to deny black citizens constitutional rights by keeping them penned up in concentration camps on excessive punitive bonds. The essential identity between Northern police and judges and Southern Bull Connors and Wallaces was now clear. Genocidal extermination of all blacks in America, as of the Jews in Germany, no longer seemed so unrealistic.

Finally, the uprising had demonstrated, again to the entire black community, that the black brothers and sisters in the street have the power to destroy the urban centers of these United States, and that if their needs and aspirations are not satisfied in any rebuilding the whole thing will be burned down again and again.

*On these three points the intense emotional unity, that is necessary to a national movement already existed.*

After more than a dozen speakers had made this unity clear, the meeting reached its climax in a brief and dramatic speech by Rev. Cleage who summed up the lessons that everyone had learned and resolved the still remaining ambiguity about the Hudson Committee by proclaiming: "We have the power! Now we have to organize it! The Hudson Committee will take orders from us. We will set up a committee here that represents us and we will tell Hudson, Cavanagh, LBJ, etc., what we want done in the city of Detroit." Then, having summed up where the movement had reached, Cleage characteristically proceeded to outline the concrete next steps necessary to keep it in motion. A movement must be continuously offensive, and for a continuous offensive a relentlessly aggressive leader is essential.

First, he called on black professionals (substantially represented at the meeting) to "come home," that is to say, to take the concrete step flowing from their common recognition that no black man can escape the criminality of the white man and begin to contribute their skills and talents to the rebuilding of a new black community. Then he declared that all the funds that come into Detroit to rebuild it will be federal funds which is "our money. We will control it and control the rebuilding of Detroit." Third, he warned that it is much easier to declare that we are the power than it is to organize power, and he called for less talk and more organization, dedication, discipline and unity.

And finally, to a standing ovation Cleage announced: "We are the new Black Establishment!" After



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hat it didn't particularly matter what was said. When nominations to the executive committee of the newly-formed Citywide Citizens Action Committee (CCAC) were called for, so many were nominated or volunteered themselves that the meeting broke up with Witherspoon shouting that everyone who wanted to serve should just leave his or her name.

## A philosophy of history

To understand why Cleage could make this pronouncement to such acclaim it is necessary to understand not only the facts of the rebellion itself but his own history as a leader of the freedom struggle.

An absolute prerequisite of a national movement is the consciousness by an oppressed people that they share not only a common oppression but a common destiny. The creation of such a consciousness demands an intellectual vanguard with a constantly developing and expanding philosophy of history. The first black leader to develop such a consciousness in the U.S. was Marcus Garvey, born in the West Indies. In the crisis following World War I, Garvey proclaimed the doctrine of "One God, One Aim, One Destiny" for all black people and rallied an estimated two to three million black Americans behind him. After Marcus Garvey came Elijah Muhammad, who linked his philosophy of history to the Muslim religion. During the tumultuous years of civil rights struggle in the South, beginning with the 1955 Montgomery bus boycott, Mr. Muhammad and the Muslims were busy organizing "The Nation of Islam," chiefly in the Northern urban centers. The influence of Mr. Muhammad was felt not only by the thousands of dedicated, disciplined black men and women who actually joined "The Nation of Islam," gave up their slave names, and found a new selfhood in psychological, cultural and religious separation from white society. Equally important were the millions of others who, despite their skepticism about Mr. Muhammad's religious doctrines, became "80% Muslims," i.e., agree with his prophecy of the inevitable doom of white society and the need of every black man, woman and child to emancipate himself or herself from identification with it.

The most famous of Mr. Muhammad's followers was, of course, the late Malcolm X, who acquired his manhood as a result of the Muslim teachings and who in turn transformed what might have become a sect into a flourishing mass organization. Malcolm's split with Mr. Muhammad did not take place until after the assassination of Kennedy on Nov. 21, 1963. But an astute political observer could have predicted from his now-famous speech to the Northern Negro Grassroots Leadership Conference on Nov. 10, two weeks earlier, that the split was inevitable. Sensitive to the growing revolt inside the Northern ghettos since the Birmingham confrontation in May, 1963, and speaking to a gathering of over 3,000 black militants who had convened for political action, Malcolm was obviously responding to the need to go beyond geographical and cultural separation to political struggle and revolution.

The Grassroots Leadership Conference had rallied black militants from all over the North to launch the doctrine of self-defense as opposed to nonviolence, the Freedom Now Party, a Christmas boycott in memory of the four little girls killed in the Birmingham church bombing and solidarity with the world black revolution. The temper of the gathering was clearly for "Black Ballots and/or Black Bullets."

The conference organizers were close associates of Rev. Cleage, who for many years and to this day has gone out of his way to credit Mr. Muhammad with awakening the black masses of the U.S. to the need for separation from white America. At the same time, as a Christian minister Cleage was convinced that Christianity had within it the resources for a revolutionary ideology for black Americans. Also, unlike Mr. Muhammad, he has urged political struggle as a means of organization and mobilization.

## Black Christian Nationalist Movement

Rev. Cleage is the first Christian minister who has become a leading black nationalist spokesman in this country. (In Africa, Black Christian Nationalist churches, sometimes aided by Garvey's bishops, often acted as centers for the liberation movement). Pastor of the Central United Church of Christ at 7625 Linwood in the heart of the black community, Cleage has, from the beginning of his ministry, insisted that the historic Jesus, as distinguished from the Christ interpreted by the Apostle Paul for gentiles, was a revolutionist and that the role of the black Christian church is to act as a center of the black man's struggle for freedom on earth. Early this year, Cleage be-

gan to expand on this concept of Jesus as a revolutionist. "For nearly 500 years," he pointed out, "the illusion that Christ was white dominated the world because Europeans dominated the world. But now with the emergence of the nationalist movements of the world's colored majority, the historic truth is finally beginning to emerge—that Jesus was the nonwhite leader of a nonwhite people struggling for national liberation from a white nation, Rome. The intermingling of the races in Africa and the Mediterranean is an established fact. The nation, Israel, was a mixture of the Chaldeans, the Egyptians, the Midionites, the Ethiopians, the Kushites, the Babylonians and other dark peoples, all of whom were already mixed with the black peoples of Central Africa." Based on this interpretation of Jesus as a nonwhite liberation leader, Cleage has shown how it is possible to give new life and meaning to the Gospel and to the Christian calendar. "The world in which Jesus lived was like our world; the decisions people had to make in his time are the decisions we have to make today. The activities of Jesus are essentially to be understood in terms of his efforts to lead his people from oppression to freedom by rebuilding the Nation and the great difficulties of leading a people who have succumbed to individualism and like the Toms of today have so identified with their oppressors that they cannot identify with their own people."

On Easter Sunday of this year, an 18-foot chancel mural of the Black Madonna by Detroit artist Glanton Dowdell was unveiled at Central Church. At the same time a Call for a Black Christian Nationalist Movement was issued: "The Resurrection which we celebrate today is the Resurrection of the historic Black Christ and the continuation of his Mission. The Church which we are building and which we call upon you to build wherever you are is the Church which gives our people, black people, faith in their power to free themselves from bondage, to control their own destiny, and to rebuild the Nation."

The Call went out to point out that "The Black Church in America has served as the heart and center of the life of black communities everywhere but for the most part without a consciousness of its responsibility and potential power to give a lost people a sense of earthly purpose and direction. . . . The present crisis, involving as it does the black man's struggle for survival in America, demands the resurrection of a Black Church with its own Black Messiah. Only this kind of a Black Christian Church can serve as the unifying center for the totality of the black man's life and struggle. Only this kind of a Black Christian Church can force each individual black man to decide where he will stand—united with his own people and laboring and sacrificing in the spirit of the Black Messiah—or individualistically seeking his own advancement and maintaining his slave-identification with the white oppressor."

## The gift of prophecy

At the beginning of 1967, in a New Year's Message to his congregation (published in the Michigan Chronicle and the March, 1967, Monthly Review), Cleage predicted that "1967 will be a year of racial violence and conflict during which the impotent civil rights organizations will be unable to maintain the status quo. . . . Conflict is inevitable because the black man is no longer psychologically able to accept his subordination or his powerlessness, and the white man is not prepared to give up either his power or his favored position of white supremacy." The proposals of the civil rights organizations for an impossible integration, Cleage predicted, would be helpless to meet either the massive counterattack of the white power structure (drafting black youth for Vietnam, the poverty program, urban renewal, unemployment due to automation, government-sponsored birth control, etc.) or the black masses' need for black economic and political power. "Out of the frustration of this kind of immobilization will come constant 'Burn, Baby, Burn' riots and bands of confused black terrorists determined to blow up the white man's world." The Message concluded by calling upon black militants in every urban center, North and South, "to begin the slow, hard, step-by-step process of organizing grassroots organizations capable of making an effective stand against white power as the condition for survival."

Throughout the winter, spring and even summer of 1967, this message of "organize for survival" was heard wherever black militants met formally or informally, as in the Black Survival Conferences in San Francisco and Los Angeles and in Newark, N.J.

From the beginning of his active leadership in the freedom struggle, Cleage insisted that the struggle for rights is a power struggle. In every speech, every sermon and on every issue he emphasized the essential conflict between black and white interests in this country and that the black man will win only such rights as he has power to wrest from the white man.

The black community must therefore mobilize its economic power (selective patronage) and its political power (a black bloc vote to put black representatives into office).

To introduce the concept of independent black political action, in 1964 Cleage acted as state chairman of the Freedom Now Party and ran for governor on the all-black ticket which was launched after a statewide petition campaign put the party on the ballot. In the 1965 primaries he ran as a Common Council candidate to dramatize the growing proportion of blacks in the Detroit population and their right to at least proportional representation in city government. When he narrowly missed qualifying for the general election, he immediately called for a black bloc vote behind the four qualifying black candidates. This call, known as "Vote Four and No More," gained the support of a substantial section of the black leadership and helped dramatize the impending breakup of the labor-Negro coalition. In 1966 he entered the Democratic Primary against incumbent Congressman Diggs in the 13th District, chiefly to expose Diggs' acquiescence in the Vietnam War and his indifference to the spread of urban renewal and its calculated destruction of the black political community. While campaigning on these issues against Diggs, he also ran (in the nonpartisan primary) as a candidate for the Detroit Board of Education. Despite the fact that he did no campaigning for the latter post he received 40,000 votes, indicative of an increasing recognition by black voters of the need for militant leadership on the school issue.

## Whites keep control

But the lesson of each political campaign was unmistakable. The black population of Detroit was approaching 40%. Yet as long as the elections remained citywide, only those black candidates who had the approval of a substantial section of the white community could be elected. Thus the decision as to how many and which black leaders were qualified to represent the black community remained in the hands of whites. Black militant leadership through the democratic process was preordained to failure unless the city was redistricted on a ward basis. In the spring of 1967 every black religious, political and community leader in Detroit joined to support such a redistricting proposal — with the sole exceptions of Horace Sheffield and Nelson Jack Edwards, two UAW Negro appointees. Edwards' and Sheffield's denunciation of the redistricting proposal not only exposed their lack of roots in the black community and their complete dependence upon their white labor bosses. It also helped to deepen the growing gulf between organized labor and the black community. The white dailies and white liberals like Mel Ravitz also came out against the proposal, claiming that citywide elections were no barrier to qualified Negroes and that as more Negroes became qualified more would be sure to be elected to keep the solitary Negro on the Common Council company. Little did they realize that they were exposing their own determination to hold on to white power, thus contributing to the black community's disillusionment with the democratic process and helping to provoke the July rebellion.

Cleage's political campaigns and his periodic intervention on every issue affecting the Detroit black community from 1963 to 1967 served to establish his image in the black and white community as an extremist and a black nationalist. They also helped to educate a corps of several hundred militants, mostly inside the church, who were not only dedicated to the struggle and to Cleage's leadership but had gone through and evaluated each stage of the struggle together.

Meanwhile, on a national scale, the struggle in the South had been driven by its own dynamic confrontations with the white power structure towards the concept of Black Nationalism and Black Power, as manifested in the development of SNCC and the speeches of Stokely Carmichael. On a national scale also, the theoretical work establishing "Black Power as a Scientific Concept Whose Time Has Come" was reaching more and more black activists, intellectuals and students. On May 1, 1965, the Organization for Black Power meeting in Detroit issued a statement proclaiming that:

"The Negroes today play the role that agricultural workers played in bringing about social reform in agriculture and the role that the workers played in the 1930s in bringing about social reform in industry. Today the Negro masses in the city are outside of the political, economic and social structure, but they constitute a large force inside the city and particularly concentrated in the black ghettos. . . .

"The civil rights movement which originated in the South cannot address itself to these problems of the Northern ghetto which are not based upon legal (de jure) contradictions but upon systematic (de facto) contradictions. It remains therefore for the movement in the North to carry the struggle to the enemy in



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fact, i.e., toward the system, rather than just de jure toward new legislation.

"The city is the base which we must organize as the factories were organized in the 1930s. We must struggle to control, to govern the cities, as workers struggled to control and govern the factories in the 1930s." (See Monthly Review, April 1966.) In April, 1966 "The City is the Black Man's Land" was published in Monthly Review, and later that year "Black Power—A Scientific Concept Whose Time Has Come" appeared first in Quaderni Piacentini (an Italian magazine), then in Elan, a Fisk University student journal, and finally in the April and May, 1967, Liberator.

Since the Grassroots Leadership Conference in 1963, Detroit had become the center where fundamental political distinctions of national importance were clarified. At the Black Arts Conference in June, 1966, in a statement issued by the Ad Hoc Committee, black militants were warned not to get bogged down in black idealism. In part, the statement read:

"The Black Arts Conference meets in Detroit at a historical crossroads in the development of the black liberation struggle in America. For the first time in the history of this continent the cry for Black Power now echoes nationally from South to North, from East to West and back again. . . .

"At this historical juncture, it is a matter of life and death that we reject the road of black idealism, based on sentiment and self-agitation, and embark resolutely on the road of black realism, projecting a vision of black power and analyzing scientifically where, how and when it can be achieved.

"Power means state power or that control of the political apparatus of a given governmental unit (be it the nation, the state, the county or the city) which guarantees control of economic, military (i.e., army, national guard, police or sheriff) and informational resources. For black people in America the struggle for this power begins at the county level in the South and the big city level in the North, where we have or will soon have a majority, giving us the legitimacy not only of social need and social force but also of historical right."

The statement went on to warn that "Power of this scope is not achieved overnight or in a single battle or even a series of battles. To gain such power we need:

"1. A vision of the new society which black political rule will initiate. . . .

"2. Mass community organizations dedicated to the struggle around immediate grievances. . . .

"3. A cadre organization dedicated to the realization of Black Political Power, and conscious of the discipline and patient struggles necessary to achieve it, able to defend itself and the community in these years of the gun, and able to command the resources needed to sustain itself".

## Cadre is formed

The formation of such a disciplined cadre was undertaken by the Inner City Organizing Committee, (ICOC), meeting at the Central United Church of Christ with Rev. Cleage as chairman. The first paragraph of the preamble to the ICOC constitution indicates the main thrust of the organization:

"We the people of the Inner City, likening our condition to the dispossessed of the earth and believing that our determination and our ability to organize first ourselves and then the population of the Inner City, do hereby pledge ourselves to the building of a disciplined organization whose responsibility shall be to promote the welfare, organize the power and expand the rights of the people of the Inner City and thereby safeguard the future of ourselves and our children."

The action programs of the ICOC include: 1) A selective patronage campaign against the three inner city Sears stores demanding 80% of the jobs from top to bottom commensurate with the 80% black patronage of these stores; 2) A campaign for community control of schools, including black administrators in all Inner City schools to counteract the powerlessness which black children see and feel all around them in American society, and immediate appointment of black administrators to fill all vacancies until their proportion in the school system corresponds to the 57% black percentage in the school population; 3) A campaign against drafting any black youth until local draft boards in the inner city are black-controlled and until the proportion of black youth in the U.S. Army in Vietnam falls below the black 10% of the American population; 4) A campaign for community control of urban renewal; 5) A training program for student youth to prepare them for leadership and administration of Black Power; 6) Freedom Caravans

to help neighboring cities to organize. These programs are carried out through ICOC-affiliated organizations such as the Negro Retail Employees Association, the Inner City Parents Council, the Afro-American Committee Against Racist Wars, the Inner City Housing Conference and the Inner City Student Organization.

## No halfway revolution

In his sermon Cleage reported to his congregation how the radio stations had called him that morning and asked if he was going to issue a statement asking the people on 12th St. to cool it. "I said I had been trying to get people to do something that would make it possible to cool it for years and nobody had paid any attention. I tried to explain that if everything is all right in Detroit, if nobody is alienated, if nobody feels oppressed, if black people feel that they have alternatives to violence, then it is just a little thing that has broken out and it won't last long. But if all black people in Detroit feel that they are helpless and hopeless and that there is no chance of solving their problems by the ballot, by organizing or by economics, then you have a rebellion on your hands—because more people are going to join it."

Cleage also warned his congregation against the illusion that there is any halfway revolution. "It is so easy after we become involved in a struggle to say, 'Well, we have gone far enough now, let's cool it. I got some of the things I wanted.' But essentially what we were trying to get from the very beginning wasn't something for you—it was equality for all of us. And when we once started it about 13 years ago with the Montgomery boycott, there wasn't any calling it off.

"Everything that happens in a revolution is not sensible," he went on to explain, "because a revolution explodes in people's heads. We have got to understand that it takes all kinds of people to fight a rebellion and a lot of them are not going to be doing it the way you are doing it at any single moment. And a whole lot of people are not going to agree with the way you are doing it. Essentially we are trying to get free, and we want justice, and we are no longer talking about love and all these other things that cluttered up people's minds for so long. We want justice and we are going to fight for it. But there are a lot of ways to fight. Because we fight one way let's not join in some universal denunciation of people fighting in some other way."

In the next six days the rebellion took the course that Cleage had anticipated, not because he was directing it but because the black revolt was following its own internal logic. As the looting was succeeded by the burning and the burning by the shooting, the pattern became clearer. The initiative having once been taken by those furthest outside the system, the whole black community had joined in support of this revolt which declared that 1) black people had already paid enough in blood, sweat and toll for the goods piled up in the stores; 2) white gouger merchants would have to leave black neighborhoods; and 3) the military authority of the police and National Guardsmen had to be combatted because it was upholding a criminal law and order against an oppressed people.

If the black community was being driven by the logic of the black revolution, the white power structure was equally relentlessly pursuing the internal logic of a racist society. On the streets and in the courts the cops and judges were dealing out in concentrated mass form the kind of deadly injustice which is the daily experience of black men and women in America. Of the 43 known killed during the Rebellion, all but six were black. "The majority," according to a Detroit Free Press investigation, "need not have died. Their deaths could have been and should have been prevented." The same investigation concluded that only one (!) of those killed by police and guardsmen was a sniper. At the Algiers Motel three innocent black youths were massacred by police and national guardsmen. Yet only after a private investigation by black newsman Joseph Strickland and pressure from black Congressman John Conyers would the prosecutor even order an investigation. There were at least half-a-dozen cases of cold-blooded murder in which police forced black men to run so they could shoot them in the back. There were innumerable (according to a Michigan Chronicle estimate, more than a thousand) cases of brutal, sometimes crippling beatings by police who smashed into homes on the pretext of searching for loot.

Over 7,000 black men, women and children were arrested during the rebellion. The ones who did not receive a bayonet wound on the streets got one as they were pushed off the trucks and into the police station. A white minister who witnessed the bayoneting described how a pregnant woman getting off a truck was told by police to jump. She said, "I'm pregnant, I don't think it would be so good for me to jump." "Jump!" the policeman repeated. She jumped and had a miscarriage there on the street. Whereupon they dragged her into the police station and threw

her into a cell with all the other prisoners. She screamed but they paid no attention. The white minister said he went out into the street and threw up.

It was more than an individual who had been playing at civilization for a number of years could stand.

As to the treatment of prisoners by police and courts, the telegrams sent on July 25 by the Inner City Organizing Committee to the U.S. Attorney General, the Michigan Attorney General, and the president of the Michigan State Bar tell the story:

INNER CITY ORGANIZING COMMITTEE OF DETROIT, MICHIGAN DEMANDS AN IMMEDIATE INVESTIGATION OF THE DENIAL OF CONSTITUTIONAL RIGHTS BY THE LAW ENFORCEMENT AGENCIES AND COURTS OF THE CITY OF DETROIT TO THOSE PERSONS ARRESTED DURING THE CURRENT EMERGENCY. WE ALUDE SPECIFICALLY TO PREJUDICIAL PUBLIC STATEMENTS BY JUDGES ASSUMING GUILT BEFORE TRIAL AND STATING THAT HIGH BONDS SHALL BE ARBITRARILY SET IN ORDER THAT DEFENDANTS SHALL BE DENIED THEIR FREEDOM IN CONTRAVENTION TO A SPECIAL CONSTITUTIONAL DIRECTIVE THAT EXCESSIVE BAIL SHALL NOT BE REQUIRED AND ALSO IN SPECIFIC CONTRAVENTION OF THE SEPARATION OF JUDICIAL AND EXECUTIVE POWERS. LAW ENFORCEMENT AGENCIES ARE ALSO DENYING DEFENDANTS THEIR CONSTITUTIONAL RIGHTS TO COUNSEL.

The Justice Department responded to these complaints and to hundreds of others exactly as it had responded in the South. John Doar and others came in, took copious notes and flew back to Washington and to other cities to make some more notes.

## A mighty fortress

*A national movement needs a centripetal force powerful enough to attract spontaneously-erupting revolutionary elements to itself.*

By July 30 the black brothers and sisters on the streets had begun to look for the leadership that would help transform their spontaneous rebellion into revolution by giving it historical perspective and organization. They found it in "The Nation" of Central United Church of Christ. Even before the July Rebellion "The Nation" had begun to attract to itself a new breed of young black militants who had been aroused to black pride and consciousness by Stokely Carmichael's manifesto of Black Power and were now looking for a stable place and base from which to build.

*A people building a national movement needs the conviction that history is on their side and ultimate victory is certain because as a people they have an inherent dignity which no amount of brutalization and degradation can destroy. It is not oppression which destroys people. It is the acceptance of oppression.*

*A people building a national movement also needs the conviction that they are creating new social values among themselves. When an individual joins the movement, he must know that he is not doing it just for his own selfish ends but that he has put individualism behind him in order to join a new brotherhood dedicated to changing the world.*

It is this philosophy of history and politics which is renewed and developed every week at Central United Church of Christ, in the closest relation to the week's political developments and activities. The result is that every week more black militants are join-

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ing "The Nation," while those who remain skeptical about a black Christianity still get "The Message" through Cleage's weekly columns in the Michigan Chronicle. On Sunday mornings newsmen from all over the world come to look, listen and report on this strange new black Christian nationalism and substantial excerpts from the sermons on the revolution (available on tape) have been published in European and Asian journals.

At the entrance to the Sacred Heart Seminary on the corner of Linwood and Longfellow, about six blocks from where the rebellion began on July 23, there stands a giant statue of Jesus before which black women can sometimes be seen worshipping. One night during the rebellion the hands and face of the statue were painted brown. The seminary authorities, obviously hoping to avoid further conflict with the black community (they had only recently revisited their all-white policy) made no effort to repaint the statue. Then a few mornings ago, more than two months after the rebellion, neighborhood residents woke up to find that the statue had again been painted white. The repainting was evidently the work of some whites associated with Breakthrough, the local fascist group which has been holding nightly mass meetings of thousands in the outlying white areas calling for whites to arm themselves against black invasion.

What next, the residents wondered. They did not have long to wait. The next morning the statue had again been repainted, this time the blackest black that anyone had ever seen. The rector and the seminary students had done it, they said, because they didn't want outsiders coming in and defacing their property. Whereupon the police had threatened to arrest them for malicious destruction of their property!

## Is God black or white?

Nobody is quite sure what color the statue will be tomorrow. But it has obviously become a symbol of the conflict between black and white for control of the black community. Similarly, in every discussion of the July rebellion on TV or radio, the question keeps coming up "Is God black or white or is he without any color?"

The controversy over the color of Jesus and God reflects the role which religious ideas and symbols have come to play in the black revolution in Detroit. It all began with the painting by Glanton Dowdell of the Black Madonna in the sanctuary of the Central United Church of Christ. Dowdell, a quiet, stocky man who talks like a philosopher, has experienced every brutality which white America reserves for black people. A dropout from the 5th grade, he was put into a home for the mentally retarded at the age of 13. In prison on and off since he was 16, he was finally incarcerated on a murder and robbery charge in Jackson. There he organized a strike of black prisoners against discrimination by forming a selected cadre. In prison he read voraciously, learned to paint and after 17 years was released through the intervention of a black probation officer who recognized his genius. Last year, during the Kercheval riots, he was arrested on a gun-carrying charge, convicted, and then, on the day after the unveiling of the Black Madonna, given a suspended sentence when his black attorney pointed out the symbolic significance that his art had assumed in the black community.

On Monday night, July 24, Dowdell disappeared. Not until days later did his wife and five children learn that he had been picked up a few steps from his gallery on Dexter Avenue and sent to Jackson Prison on a \$50,000 bond.

This was the man who was elected co-chairman when the meeting was held on Aug. 16 to set up a structure for the Citywide Citizens Action Committee. The elections took place following a brief speech by Cleage in which he emphasized that the assembly must elect a chairman and co-chairman whom they were willing to entrust with setting up an executive board. If, on the other hand, they were going to spend the evening in a "democratic" debate about structure and personnel, they might as well disband before they organized. Following this speech, Cleage and Dowdell were elected as a team. Also elected were Nadine Brown, Chrysler worker and labor journalist, as secretary, and Detroit CORE Chairman Clyde Cleveland, as treasurer.

On Aug. 18 the CCAC held a press conference to introduce the new officers and to announce that this would probably be the last CCAC press conference for some time since the organization henceforth would depend primarily upon the black press to get the message to the brothers and sisters in the black community. The CCAC officers also announced that

they would hold a conference with J. L. Hudson, Jr., of the New Detroit Committee that afternoon. At that time they would make clear to him that the only basis for a working relationship between the CCAC and the Hudson Committee would be if the Hudson Committee was ready to act as an instrument for the transfer of power from the White Establishment to the Black Establishment. There was no other way to avert further violence.

That afternoon when the CCAC officers arrived for the conference with Hudson, the corridors were packed with newsmen anxious to know the outcome of this first confrontation between the White Establishment and the Black. After two hours the conferees emerged and announced briefly that they had reached an understanding. Since the CCAC had made clear that morning what the terms of such an understanding must be, the implication was clearly that the Hudson Committee had accepted the demand for the transfer of power.

To convey the temper of the Detroit black community today, the story of two recent happenings must be told. On Sunday, Aug. 27, H. Rap Brown came to town. He had been scheduled to appear at the Dexter Theatre at 3 p.m. but his plane was several hours late. By 3 p.m. the theatre was filled to capacity and the surrounding streets were jammed with over 10,000 brothers and sisters waiting to hear and see him. Traffic was stopped, buses were re-routed. Black brothers who had been nowhere near the movement a few weeks ago were standing on cartops holding their own impromptu street meetings to explain the meaning of Black Power, the black bourgeoisie, self-defense, etc. Anyone who would have used the word "Negro" in that assembly would at the very least have been jeered. Fathers and mothers stood waiting in the chill and drizzle, holding their little children by the hand. When Brown finally arrived at about 5 p.m. it did not even seem strange that hundreds of men and women rushed forward to touch and kiss him. It did not really matter what Brown finally said at the theater. What was important was that the thousands who had gathered to greet him knew that "The Man" had gone out of his way to harass and intimidate a brother and was trying to get the black community to repudiate a leader whom it had chosen in order to impose some Uncle Toms on it. And thousands of black men, women and children had gathered inside and outside the Dexter Theatre to let the man know that the Detroit black community is united in its determination not to be confused by the enemy any longer.

## A Peoples Tribunal

At the Aug. 16th meeting of the CCAC, Dan Aldridge, a former SNCC worker, reported what was taking place downtown in the pre-trial examination of the two police officers, Ronald August and Robert Paille, who had been arrested in connection with the Algiers Motel slayings. Paille's and August's fellow police officers were crowding the courtroom daily to show their solidarity. With the eyes of these policemen upon him, the judge had refused to hear the testimony of black witnesses who had been in the motel the night of the murders and had themselves been beaten and brutalized—even though these witnesses had been subpoenaed to testify. It was obvious, Aldridge said, that there was going to be a whitewashing.

A suggestion for a Peoples Tribunal was then made by Dr. Karl D. Gregory, Wayne University economics professor who had chaired the Freedom School during last year's Northern High School strike. The machinery for such a Tribunal was immediately set into motion and the date set for Aug. 30.

The Tribunal had been planned for 7 p.m. at Dexter Theatre, but after the Aug. 27th demonstration for Rap Brown the white owners refused to permit its use. The officers of Central United Church of Christ then met in a special session to sanction the use of the church for the Tribunal. Despite the last minute change of location, people began to arrive at Central Church at 5 p.m. and by 7 p.m. both the sanctuary and Fellowship Hall were filled to capacity with over 2,000 people. Hundreds were waiting outside to get in.

Until the Tribunal actually got under way, there was serious doubt whether it could be held. Tirelessly accumulating evidence and contacting witnesses, the youthful organizers of the Tribunal had been harassed and threatened. One of them had to have his phone removed because of threatening calls to his wife. The witnesses, whose testimony had not been considered worth hearing downtown, were now being picked up by police on various pretexts and questioned. Some of the lawyers who had originally agreed to appear backed out. Finally the committee could not be sure that an injunction or some legal maneuver might not be used to block the hearing as had been done in

1963 to prevent the playing of a tape of Officer Speicher's testimony in the Cynthia Scott murder. On the very night of that meeting everybody involved had been served with an injunction.

But the Tribunal was held. Under the reassuring gaze of the Black Madonna every one of the witnesses appeared and testified. Milton R. Henry and Andrew W. Perdue, chairman and co-chairman of the Legal Department of the CCAC, acted as prosecuting attorneys. Russell S. Brown, Jr., CCAC finance chairman, and Sol Plafkin, a white lawyer, acted as defense attorneys. The jury included Mrs. Rosa Parks, whose refusal to go to the back of the bus sparked the Montgomery bus boycott, and novelist John O. Killens who acted as foreman, as well as Frank Joyce and Pat Murphy, members of People Against Racism, an organization of whites with a program for civilizing whites.

As the witnesses testified, the packed auditorium became more quiet than a courtroom. Each individual relived the horrible moments faced by three unknown black boys, victims of nothing more profound than the hatred of white men who hated them because they were black. But in a sense the story told by the witnesses was a familiar one. What was new was the fact that so many black men and women who a few weeks ago would have been afraid even to use the word "black" were now participating in a Peoples Tribunal. It was obvious that fear had been driven from the hearts and minds of the black community by the July rebellion. "The Black Madonna is our Statue of Liberty," one sister was overheard saying.

## The message

It is from these brothers and sisters who are outside any political structure that the CCAC derives its legitimacy, and it will maintain its legitimacy only as long as it depends upon them and maintains their confidence. The message of black control of the black community and the absolute necessity for an immediate transfer of power if future violence is to be averted is now being taken every Saturday to 600,000 other black brothers and sisters in every section of the city by motorcades of more than 100 cars under the direction of Communications Chairman Glanton Dowdell. Chairmen have been appointed to head up the various committees to work for black control in every sphere of daily life: Consumers Control, Labor, Redevelopment, Education, Employment, Poverty Program, Political Organization, Legal, Ministerial Relations, Culture. CCAC is urging the formation of Black Caucuses wherever two or more black people work together, go to school together or attend a conference together. A Black Arts Festival, based on the script "Going Free With Unity" by novelist-playwright Ronald Milner, is planned for Dec. 10 at the Ford Auditorium. This festival will launch a cultural revolution to be taken by black artists, dramatists, dancers and singers to the community in playgrounds, schools, on the streets and in churches.

At the same time CCAC is working on redevelopment plans for the areas destroyed during the uprising to be worked out by technicians in close contact and consultation with the black community. All plans for redevelopment will involve the use of black labor in construction, control by the black community, and procedures spelled out by the transfer of ownership to the black community wherever the initial capital comes from white investors. These principles are accepted by American investors in foreign countries all over the world—everywhere except in the black ghettos where they set up businesses or pure exploitation of black people. Now the CCAC is saying, "The black community is our nation and the white investor must respect it as such."

This is the form presently assumed by the national movement in Detroit. The movement may assume another form tomorrow as the result of a variety of circumstances beyond its control, for example, the whip of the counterrevolution. The whites are arming in the suburbs and the police are being systematically infiltrated by the John Birch Society with whom they plan private rifle practice in the use of special privately-purchased riot guns. Or the CCAC may be unable to produce results quickly and massively enough to satisfy the impatience of the black masses. Already scarcely a night passes without a rumor that another explosion has started. Meanwhile, in the middle, the enlightened whites like Hudson are characteristically trying to appease both the black community and the white, while at the base of both the restlessness grows. But a national movement of such vitality does not depend upon its organizational form or personnel at any one time. The movement has been in the process of development in Detroit for over ten years. Its accelerated momentum today is only the promise of greater momentum tomorrow and the day after.