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Polarization

On August 6, 1965, Lyndon Johnson celebrated his signing of the Voting Rights Act. "Today is a triumph for freedom," he said to a national television audience, "as huge as any victory that's ever been won on any battlefield." The leaders of the major civil rights organizations who attended the signing ceremony agreed with Johnson. Several of them, deeply moved by the Great Society programs, called him the greatest president American blacks had ever had. Martin Luther King, Jr., discomforted though he was by the escalation of the war in Vietnam, believed that Johnson had "amazing sensitivity to the difficult problems that Negro Americans face." King had just told the president that more federal legislation was needed to combat de facto segregation in housing, schooling, and employment in the North. The rising cost of the Vietnam War made Johnson less amenable to that counsel than he yet admitted or than King yet realized. Nevertheless, King's alert was timely.

1. Watts

Less than a week later, on the evening of August 11, with Los Angeles simmering in a heat wave, a highway patrolman arrested a young black man for speeding. Called to the scene to control a gathering crowd, one police officer hit an innocent black observer with his billy club, and another dragged a young black woman into the street. After the police had departed, the crowd threw rocks at passing automobiles,

attacked some white motorists, and set several cars on fire. The next day city officials rebuffed efforts by community spokesmen to mediate between the police and the residents of the area, a part of Watts, the ghetto of Los Angeles. In less than two days, in the absence of any police response, crowds elsewhere in Watts began looting, fire-bombing, and otherwise destroying property "in order to drive white 'exploiters' out of the ghetto." The National Guard, whose help the police chief requested, and the police themselves retaliated with firearms. Before the six-day riot subsided, thirty-four blacks were killed, nine were injured, and thirty-five million dollars of property was damaged.

Martin Luther King, Jr., had been fearing that something like Watts might occur in some northern city. Desolate about the riot, he flew to Los Angeles to implore his fellow blacks to turn away from looting and burning. In the rubble of Watts, young black men heckled him. "We won," one group exulted. How could they say that, King asked, with so many blacks dead and their community destroyed? "We won," an unemployed youth replied, "because we made the whole world pay attention to us." The rioting, as King understood, was the desperate cry of one "so fed up with the powerlessness of his cave existence that he asserts that he would rather be dead than ignored."

King also understood that the rioting, however provoked, however therapeutic, was illegal and counterproductive. As he had expected, many white Americans responded to the episode by blaming only the ghetto blacks. The Los Angeles police chief dismissed the rioters as criminals and "monkeys," the mayor insisted that the city had no racial prejudice, and the president denounced urban violence. As a liberal white lawyer later said wistfully about Watts, "Everything seemed to collapse. The days of 'We Shall Overcome' were over."

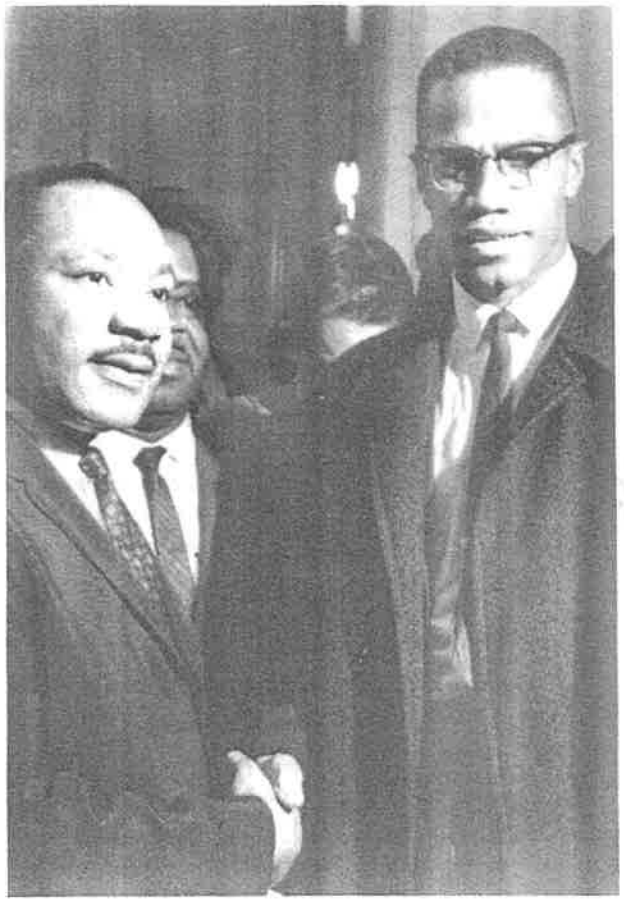
Though the race riot in Watts came to symbolize the beginning of three summers of recurrent explosions of black frustrations in northern American cities, there had been recent earlier episodes of racial violence, most dramatically in Birmingham in 1963, as well as in Jacksonville, Harlem, Jersey City, and Milwaukee in 1964. Ghettos in other cities, in Newark, New Jersey, for one example, were uglier and more oppressive than Watts, which had some treelined streets and middle-class houses. Indeed, the Urban League considered the condition of blacks in Los Angeles unmatched in any other major American city. But in Los Angeles, as elsewhere, most ghetto residents dwelt in slums, confined not by laws but by prejudice operating through economic and political institutions dominated by whites. Urban political machines, providing only token recognition for blacks, allocated to the ghettos

inadequate and inequitable funds for education, housing, sanitation, and police protection. White landlords, their properties filled with blacks who were excluded from other areas by unwritten real estate agreements, charged exorbitant rents for substandard flats. White storekeepers gouged black customers, who lacked automobiles to drive to shopping centers outside their neighborhoods. That immobility also kept blacks from reaching jobs in the outer cities and suburbs to which manufacturing was moving. Discrimination in employment reduced the availability of jobs for blacks. Poor prospects as well as poor schools contributed to the high incidence of dropouts among black students, of whom strikingly few completed high school. Throughout the ghetto, residents continually feared the spreading crime that flourished in the absence of law enforcement and on the traffic in numbers, prostitution, and drugs.

In the North among the majority of urban blacks, recognizably an underclass, hope withered as the tinsel of a prosperous society remained tantalizingly beyond reach. Against those conditions, civil disobedience seemed irrelevant, partly because there were no obvious laws against which to demonstrate. Segregation and discrimination were rooted instead in caste and class. So rage grew, and rage produced the riots.

2. BLACK POWER

Black rage also fractured the civil rights movement. The angry militants of the northern cities had kindred spirits among southern black separatists, who were scornful of the tactics of civil disobedience and of the rate of social change. Those separatists took some of their emerging doctrines from the Lost-Found Nation of Islam—the Black Muslims, and their leader, Elijah Muhammad. Elijah, who rejected Christianity as a white faith that deluded black men and women, had carried his gospel of black solidarity to the disadvantaged of the ghettos. His disciples adopted his prescription for abstinence from drugs and liquor and promiscuous sex, as well as for hard work and self-education. Muslim leaders, particularly Elijah's fiery lieutenant Malcolm X, also called for hostility toward whites. Malcolm urged blacks to separate from white society into "a land of our *own*, where we can . . . lift up our moral standards." To achieve that end, he argued, blacks needed a "bloody" revolution. Malcolm broke with Elijah in 1964 and turned toward integrationist solutions before his assassination in 1965.



Martin Luther King, Jr., and Malcolm X: They delivered different sermons.

But his earlier preachings and autobiography influenced young blacks, North and South, who identified with his message of black nationalism and black pride.

Two of the most prominent young militants, Stokely Carmichael of SNCC and Floyd McKissick of CORE, were committed to radical separatism. Each was working, at times in harness with the other, to take over his own organization, to achieve national primacy in the civil rights movement, and to convert that movement to a strategy of class action

and violent confrontation. In formulating their radical doctrines, both Carmichael and McKissick drew heavily on Malcolm X. Carmichael, a native of Trinidad who received his collegiate education at Howard University, had never believed in the philosophy of nonviolence, though as an inveterate opportunist he subscribed to the tactic of nonviolence in the struggle for voting rights in Alabama and Mississippi. A tough, cynical, fearless man, he had concluded after the defeat of the Mississippi Freedom party at the Democratic convention of 1964 that black people could not rely on white allies. He found a supporting text in Frantz Fanon's *Wretched of the Earth*, which exerted a major influence on American black radicals. Fanon, also a West Indian, married aspects of Marxist ideology to an exhortative black separatism in his angry indictment of European and American treatment of "colonized peoples," especially black people in Africa and in the United States. Rejecting both compromise and nonviolence, he exalted the therapeutic value for blacks of violence as a "cleansing force" that would expunge fear and restore self-respect.

Fanon's manifesto, originally directed against French rule in Algeria, gave a revolutionary twist to the platform of Carmichael, McKissick, and their youthful adherents both in the South and increasingly in the ghettos. In the spring of 1966 Carmichael and his faction gained control of SNCC, as had McKissick and his associates in CORE, which then expelled whites from its ranks. The two leaders, eager to challenge less radical civil rights organizations, soon found a ripe occasion to do so. It arose in June, when James Meredith, the hero of the integration of the University of Mississippi in 1962, began a personal march from Memphis to Jackson to inspire Mississippi blacks to exercise their rights to vote. On the second day of that march a white assailant fired a shotgun at Meredith, who was wounded all over his body. Civil rights organizations then sent representatives to Memphis to consider how to continue Meredith's cause. McKissick and Carmichael, aggressive in their new authority, constituted the left at that meeting, offset on the right by the older and more prudent Roy Wilkins of the NAACP and Whitney Young of the Urban League, as well as by Martin Luther King, Jr.

The meeting came at a difficult time for King. He and his associates in SCLC had joined a nonviolent campaign against segregation and poverty in Chicago, where his personal participation was important. He had also recently spoken out for the first time, in spite of the advice of his closest friends, against the war in Vietnam. As a committed champion of peace he felt he had to do so, particularly since the war,

as even the president acknowledged, was limiting the availability of funds to fight poverty. But Johnson, resentful of any opposition, stepped up FBI surveillance of King and terminated King's access to the White House. That hostility was bound to hamper SCLC's campaign in Chicago, as was also the diversion of King's personal energies to the Meredith March.

Yet King had no choice. He could not turn away form Meredith's cause at a time when the civil rights movement was splintering. At the meeting in Memphis the NAACP and the Urban League wanted to bring whites into a nonviolent demonstration to raise support for the Johnson administration's 1966 civil rights bill, which banned discrimination in the rental or sale of housing. With McKissick's backing, Stokely Carmichael rejected that possibility and demanded instead a manifesto condemning Johnson's policies as inadequate. He also insisted on arranging to protect the Meredith march with a group of armed blacks and on minimizing the role of whites. Deliberately to offend Wilkins and Young, Carmichael, as he later admitted, "started acting crazy . . . started cursing real bad." Disgusted, Wilkins and Young withdrew. Their departure, as Carmichael had intended, prevented King from holding a center position, where he might have been most influential. King had sat silently through Carmichael's diatribe in the hope that he could keep Carmichael and McKissick from leaving. Now he found himself yoked to them in the Meredith March, which they had successfully skewed to the left.

As the march got under way, King agreed to focus its efforts on voter registration. While he was briefly in Chicago to confer with his staff there, police in Greenwood, Mississippi, arrested Carmichael for trespassing and held him for several hours. Upon his release, he addressed an audience of marchers and local blacks. "Every courthouse in Mississippi," he said, "should be burnt down tomorrow so we can get rid of the dirt." Then, using in public a phrase he had previously employed only in private, he shouted: "We want black power." The crowd responded, chanting: "We want black power."

That demand continued to punctuate rallies even after King returned. Over his protest, Carmichael and McKissick made "black power" their slogan for the balance of the march. Though the SCLC contingent continued to call instead for "freedom now," King had lost ground to the radicals. As he put it sadly to one rally, "I'm sick and tired of violence. I'm tired of the war in Vietnam. . . . I'm tired of shooting. I'm tired of hatred. I'm tired of evil."

Though King wired President Johnson to request protection for the

march, the state patrol that the president said would provide it instead used tear gas against the demonstrators. The marchers reached their destination in Jackson anyhow, but they had made relatively little impact on public opinion. Though King tried to reassure white supporters of civil rights whom Carmichael had offended, King had concluded he could no longer cooperate with SNCC. The NAACP, for its part, had decided it could no longer work with King. "Because Stokely Carmichael chose the March as an arena for a debate over black power," King said, "we didn't get to emphasize the evils of Mississippi and the need for the 1966 Civil Rights Act." Instead, Carmichael had made himself a national figure and black power a national issue. In the process, he and his allies irreparably damaged the civil rights movement.

3. CHICAGO

"Black power" then and later had many connotations. It signified black pride, an apt and necessary attitude. It reflected an identification of American blacks with blacks in Africa and elsewhere, a historic association like those cherished by other ethnic groups. It also often expressed a separatist black nationalism that most American blacks did not want. In its most extreme usage, "black power" communicated a vindictive hostility to whites. "The Negro," Carmichael had said during the Meredith March, "is going to take what he deserves from the white man." He soon thereafter threatened the press with language like "offing the pigs" and "killing the honkies." He intended, he said, to "smash everything Western civilization has created." H. Rap Brown, who succeeded Carmichael as head of SNCC, called Lyndon Johnson a "honky cracker" and urged blacks to "get some guns" and shoot "that honky to death." He predicted that angry blacks would "burn America down." Those were the sentiments that had animated rioting in Watts, that stirred unrest in urban ghettos, and that frightened whites and spurred their retaliation.

Those were also the sentiments that King and SCLC in 1966 were trying to channel into nonviolent demonstrations in the campaign to desegregate Chicago. After the Watts riot in 1965, King had led some thirty thousand people to Chicago's City Hall in a march to protest racism. Early in 1966 he leased an apartment for his family in a black neighborhood known locally as Slumdale. The wretched condition of the flat underlined the importance of housing, which served as one major theme in the mobilization of Chicago blacks. Desegregated public schools and the appointment of blacks to the police board were among other local goals. To that effort King recruited leaders of several street gangs. They needed power, they said, and he agreed, but he told them that power in Chicago meant getting the country's most notorious political machine to go their way.

That machine answered to Mayor Richard Daley, the last of the traditional political bosses, who ran the city with a tight hand. He had bribed enough blacks with political office and favors to exert a large influence in Chicago's slums, where most of the city's eight hundred thousand blacks lived in conditions of poverty and squalor. Because of Daley's strength, a victory in Chicago would do for King in the North what Birmingham had done for him in the South. But Daley was a shrewd and tough antagonist. He was a friend and supporter of the president's. His black lieutenants organized diversionary community actions of their own, and he announced a city program, a phantom as it turned out, to clean up the slums by the end of 1967. The business community stood behind Daley, not least because the issues in Chicago, as SCLC leaders realized, were as much the function of social class as of race. King insisted that "we're not interested in a campaign against Mayor Daley. We're fighting the system." But Daley represented the system—a loose collectivity of political and economic interests—which would stand or fall with him in command. King intended it to fall. As he said boldly and explicitly, "The slum is little more than a domestic colony which leaves its inhabitants dominated politically, exploited economically . . . segregated and humiliated at every turn." The basic "problem is economic"; the solution, "to organize this total community into units of political and economic power."

SCLC was itself disorganized. Rivalries among the men in King's entourage, inadequate financing, and wasteful spending crippled the campaign in Chicago. So did the continuing lack of cooperation from the Black Muslims, from CORE, and from Daley's loyal black constituents. Conscious of the growing militancy among blacks, King wanted to keep that mood free of violence. Daley failed to understand King's warning that unless gains were "made in a hurry through responsible civil rights organizations, it will open the door to militant groups." But a major rally of July 10, 1966, drew only half the crowd King had expected. To his demand that real estate brokers list properties without discrimination, Daley replied that Chicago was already doing its best to alleviate conditions in the slums.

Two days later, on July 12, 1966, a hot day in the city, black youngsters were splashing in an illegally opened fire hydrant when two police

officers turned it off. A young black opened it again, the police arrested him and seven others, rumors spread that they had been beaten, and black teenagers, joined by some adults, for several hours broke windows and threw rocks and fire bombs. King tried but failed to restore calm. The next day the violence began again, with some random gunfire that the press exaggerated as "guerrilla warfare." Still, in the language of an official national report, "[b]efore the police and 4,200 National Guardsmen managed to restore order, scores of civilians and police had been injured. There were 533 arrests, including 155 juveniles. Three Negroes were killed by stray bullets, among them a 13-year-old boy and a 14-year-old pregnant girl." The riot resulted in less damage than had the riot in Watts, but in Chicago, as elsewhere, "the long-standing grievances of the Negro community needed only minor incidents to trigger violence." King was disconsolate. "A lot of people," he said, "have lost faith in the establishment. They've lost faith in the democratic process. They've lost faith in nonviolence."

Though King rejected black power, he had developed no alternative new strategy of his own. At least one of his aides believed SCLC was failing in Chicago because it had not forced an open confrontation with Daley. There might have been more serious trouble. When several hundred blacks marched into a white neighborhood in a demonstration for open housing, hostile residents threw bottles and rocks at them while the police stood by. Daley then urged white community leaders to preserve law and order. "Ignore the marchers," he told them, "and they'll go away." SCLC in its turn threatened a protest march into Cicero, a notoriously tough white district. The Chicago Realty Board then agreed to endorse open occupancy of private housing, and the city promised to construct scatter-site public housing instead of the high-rise buildings that tenants so disliked.

Those were limited concessions little honored thereafter, but King accepted them. Without remaining leverage in Chicago, he called off further demonstrations there. The agreement he had obtained, he claimed, was "the most significant program ever conceived." But many blacks felt "sold out." In fact, Daley had won the battle, though the war had shifted to the tumultuous streets of other American cities.

4. CITIES ON FIRE

Less than a week after calm returned to Chicago in July, rioting went on for four nights in another black ghetto, the Hough section of Cleveland, Ohio. Black extremists did not instigate the disorder there, but they did exploit it. All in all, according to the later *Report of the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders*, forty-three instances of urban turmoil occurred during the summer of 1966, most of them set off by minor episodes, all of them "fueled by antagonism between the Negro population and the police." All of them also took place in cities where blacks had long suffered from discrimination in employment, education, and housing, as well as from underrepresentation in local government and on local police forces. And in all of them, too, blacks felt the oppression and alienation inherent in their poverty.

Those conditions and the failure to remedy them underlay the resumed sweep of rioting through the summer of 1967. In Tampa, Florida, on June 11 and in Cincinnati, Ohio, on the next day, with temperatures over ninety degrees, small incidents involving police and local blacks quickly inflamed long-simmering grievances. Blacks constituted 20 percent of Tampa's population, but no one of them served on the city council or school board or in a high post in the police department. Most blacks left school before eighth grade. Sixty percent of housing available to blacks was substandard. So, too, in Cincinnati, blacks were almost without political representation, one of every eight black men was unemployed, two of every five black families lived below the poverty line. Young black militants believed that nonviolent protests were futile. The disturbances in Cincinnati followed the usual pattern of urban violence with Molotov cocktails setting off fires, crowds stoning cars, random gunshots wounding innocents, "all hell" breaking loose, according to the chief of police, before the National Guard arrived to help restore order.

In Atlanta, Georgia, on June 17, "the same type of minor police arrest that had initiated the Cincinnati riot took place." The endemic inequalities were also similar. In Atlanta "the economic and educational gap between the black and white populations may . . . have been increasing." Blacks were confined to several ghetto areas, where housing was dismal, schools were badly overcrowded, "garbage sometimes was not picked up for two weeks . . . littered streets and . . . empty lots were breeding grounds for rats," and nearby parks lacked swimming pools and recreational equipment. SCLC was strong in Atlanta, but so was SNCC, whose leaders were eager to make trouble. Stokely Carmichael urged blacks "to take to the streets and force the police department to work until they fall in their tracks." He seemed to have his way for a day until the city government reduced tensions by beginning to equip the playgrounds and by establishing a Negro Youth Patrol.

Those gestures and the promise of more substantial change permitted moderate black leaders to prevail. But Atlanta had had a close call.

In Newark, New Jersey, on June 20, residents of the black ghetto crowded a meeting of the city's planning board "to denounce the city's intent to turn over 150 acres . . . as a site for the state's new medical and dental college." The city had serious problems. It had reached its borrowing limit. Property taxes were soaring, as were welfare costs. Whites who could afford to were moving into neighboring suburbs. In the Central Ward, the heart of the ghetto, blacks were left with crowded schools, dismal housing, a police department they perceived as hostile, a high crime rate, and rising unemployment. A large segment of the black population had become militant, primarily because of the city's failure to improve conditions, secondarily in response to social activists from SDS and other groups involved in the federal antipoverty program. The militants packed the planning board meeting.

A week later, led by local members of CORE, militants disrupted a meeting of the board of education. On July 12 still another police incident led to looting and rock throwing, which resumed the next evening. Shouts of "Black power" accompanied a barrage of rocks that held one police station under siege. Heavy looting, some shooting, and some fire bombing in the downtown area persuaded the governor to call in the National Guard. During the next afternoon stray police gunfire wounded a black child and an aged civil rights leader. Black snipers retaliated. In the confusion, the director of police later said, "Guardsmen were firing upon police and police were firing back at them. . . . I really don't believe there was as much sniping as we thought." Nevertheless, the frightened police and guardsmen continued their shooting and random killing. Before the city settled down on July 17, the riot had resulted in ten million dollars in damages and in twenty-three deaths—one white detective, one white fireman, and twenty-one blacks, six of whom were women and two children.

Rioting continued intermittently elsewhere in New Jersey before jumping north and west to reach a culmination from July 22 through July 27, 1967, in Detroit. There the hostility between the black community and the police department contributed to the "high stress and tension" of the Twelfth Street area, the heart of the city's ghetto, where the density of population was double the average for the whole city, Detroit, like Newark, was deeply in debt. The city had inferior schools for blacks, inadequate garbage service in slum neighborhoods, a declining economy with more than a quarter of young black men unemployed, and a high crime rate. Polls had revealed a deep dissat-

Detroit: A city saturated with fear.

isfaction among blacks residing in the ghetto. They had little political representation and little hope for a better life. About a third of the inhabitants of the slums owned weapons.

In the heat of a late July Saturday the ghetto blew up, ignited initially by a police raid on a drinking club. As looting increased, a "spirit of nihilism" took hold. Destruction became an end in itself, an outlet for years of accumulated grievances. Fire started by a Molotov cocktail engulfed one block of houses, then several blocks, then an area of some three square miles. On Sunday afternoon Mayor Jerome Cavanagh called for the National Guard and imposed a curfew. Governor George Romney declared a state of emergency. But the looting continued in spite of the gunfire of police and guardsmen.

On Monday the governor and mayor requested federal assistance, President Johnson authorized the dispatch of a task force of paratroops to a base near Detroit, and that afternoon and evening its commander and Cyrus Vance, the president's representative, toured the city. Since they saw no looting or sniping, and since the fires seemed to be coming under control, they decided to delay sending in federal troops. But Monday night, when sniping resumed, they concluded troops were needed. The president then authorized their employment and federalized the Michigan National Guard. His tense statement to the nation about the necessity for law and order said nothing about the seeds of ghetto anger and revenge. In Detroit the guardsmen, inexperienced and excited, again and again opened fire on the basis of suspicion or

rumor, as, for their part, did the snipers, too. The city had become "saturated with fear. The National Guardsmen were afraid, the residents were afraid, and the police were afraid." The commanding general ordered the troops to unload their weapons; but some never received the order, and gunfire continued into Tuesday evening. In one instance that night guardsmen, looking for snipers, poured hundreds of bullets into a house where the bewildered residents, all black, had committed no crime. In another, police volleys killed three young blacks in the Algiers Motel though no one had fired from inside that building.

When at last the rioting ended on Thursday and Friday, twenty-seven people had been charged with sniping, but charges against twenty-four of them were soon dismissed. One man pleaded guilty; only two cases went to trial. The damage from the riot, which early estimates put at five hundred million dollars, actually amounted to some forty million dollars. Forty-three people were killed during the riot; thirty-three blacks and ten whites. Seventeen were looters, two of them white. After examination most of the deaths appeared to be accidental. The police and the guardsmen together were responsible for at least twenty-seven of the killings; the rioters, for no more than three.

The devastation in Detroit placed still another major mark on the path of urban violence and destruction that had begun before Watts. Television had carried pictures of Detroit to the whole country, pictures of a city in flames, flames that silhouetted the figure of an angry black man whose implicit message was "Burn, baby, burn!" The fear that suffused Detroit, as it had Newark and Chicago and Los Angeles, touched Americans far away. It affected whites who were afraid of blacks and blacks who were afraid of whites. From the resulting hostile attitudes, neither white nor black had anything to gain.

5. The Black Panthers

With Detroit the worst of the urban rioting was over, but a legacy of hatred remained. It was a legacy ripe for exploitation by extremists, by white reactionaries and black revolutionaries alike. It terrified much of white America in its expression in the Black Panther party, an overtly revolutionary, paramilitary organization. In the autumn of 1966 two young ghetto militants, Huey P. Newton and Bobby Seale, had formed that party in Oakland, California, though other militant groups had used the same name earlier in San Francisco and New York. Newton and Seale, self-proclaimed minister of defense and chairman respectively, had absorbed the texts of Frantz Fanon and Malcolm X and applied their message to the mood of the ghetto. "We want freedom," Newton's program began. "We want power. . . . We want full employment. . . . We want an end to robbery by capitalists. . . . We want all black men to be exempt from military service. We want . . . an end to POLICE BRUTALITY. . . . We want land, bread, housing, education, clothing, justice."

The Black Panthers, the two leaders decided, had to establish disciplined armed patrols for "policing the police." Those patrols drew attention to the organization, which recruited only from the ghetto. As Seale put it, he sought "brothers off the block—brothers who had been . . . robbing banks . . . pimping . . . peddling dope . . . brothers who had been fighting pigs—because . . . once you organize those brothers . . . you get niggers . . . you get revolutionaries who are too much." Recruits received training in the use of firearms, agreed to abjure alcohol and drugs, and dressed in a uniform of black trousers, a light blue shirt, a black leather jacket, a black beret, black shoes, and dark sunglasses. They also learned the constitutional rights of all suspects so that they could assist any black who was arrested.

The increasing visibility of the Panthers and the resulting trepidation among whites provoked the Oakland representatives in the California legislature to introduce a bill barring the carrying of firearms in any public place. On the day in which the bill was to be debated, thirty armed Panthers marched into the California statehouse, where TV cameramen recorded their arrival on the floor of the assembly. Seale and five other Panthers were arrested and sentenced to jail for "the willful disruption of a State . . . legislative body." The incident gave the Panthers instant celebrity nationwide. It also persuaded the California police to increase their surveillance of the party. In October 1967 Oakland police stopped a car Huey Newton was driving. As Newton left the automobile, shooting broke out, killing two officers and wounding Newton. Newton claimed self-defense; but details of the incident remained murky, and he was charged with murder and held without bail.

With Seale and Newton in prison, Eldridge Cleaver took over the leadership of the Panthers. While in prison for rape in the early 1960s, Cleaver had become a Black Muslim minister, then a disciple of Malcolm X, and also an avid reader of Marx, Camus, and Fanon. A fluent writer, he published articles in *Esquire* and *Ramparts*, a magazine of the left. He received parole late in 1966 to become a senior editor of *Ramparts*. Soon thereafter he began to serve as the ideologist for the

Huey Newton.

Bobby Seale.

Black Panthers. In that role and later as the party's leader, Cleaver held that American blacks had to be prepared to fight their way out from under white colonialism. He called for the overthrow of the American state and for the establishment of a socialist society, both to be accomplished with the help of sympathetic whites. Early in 1968 Cleaver and Seale brought Stokely Carmichael into the Panthers, and later also H. Rap Brown and James Forman. But the SNCC leaders soon clashed with Cleaver. In less than a year personal feuding drove the two groups apart. Meanwhile, police harassment of the Panthers intensified while national membership in the party grew, partly under the spur of Cleaver's "Free Huey" propaganda.

By 1968, with Cleaver planning to run for the presidency of the United States, the Black Panthers had become the foremost symbol of black radicalism and the foremost object of white fear. Cleaver's collection of essays *Soul On Ice* (1968) was providing texts from which radicals of both races could draw confirmation for their revolutionary views. Those essays, written over the previous decade, equated the domestic role of the police with the role of the armed forces in Vietnam. Cleaver interpreted both as instruments of "those in power." He wrote: "Blacks . . . all over America could now see the Viet Cong's point: both were on the receiving end of what the armed forces were dishing out." The police, he held, were the "armed guardians of the social order." That social order protected the private property of the large corporations

within the United States and imposed their will on black and yellow peoples everywhere. Consequently, the "lasting salvation" of the black American required at once the socialization of property and freedom for the nations of Africa, Asia, and Latin America. Merging the issue of social class with the issue of race, Cleaver related both to "the black man's interest in . . . a free and independent Vietnam."

That conclusion seemed to many blue-collar and middle-class white Americans to be as threatening as they had found the Panther's militancy and the urban riots. In that view, the Panther leadership, informed by Cleaver's ideology and drawing support from the alienated within the ghetto, pointed to the possibility of a major social eruption. For those who were alarmed, as for the police, the path of prevention lay in repressing the Panthers. For more thoughtful Americans, vigorous social reform offered a preferred alternative.

6. BACKLASH

Radicals like Cleaver were not alone in seeing the connections between racism and poverty and between those conditions and the Vietnam War. Martin Luther King, Jr., had been talking in those terms before 1964. Eager to combat black radicalism and to prevent urban violence, King after the Chicago riot began to organize what he hoped would become a national campaign against poverty. He understood that poverty among blacks and in American cities was only a part of the poverty, rural as well as urban, white as well as black, that persisted throughout the country. Federal legislation to provide decent, guaranteed annual incomes to all needy families became one of King's major objectives, as it was also for white reformers like Adam Walinsky and Mayor John Lindsay of New York. Others committed to reform, Robert Kennedy for one, urged "a massive effort to create new jobs," a goal King also supported. The troubles of the cities called, too, as King argued, for federal legislation and executive action to reduce the cost of housing by restricting the power of the building trades unions and for federal efforts to end de facto segregation in northern public schools.

Those were the conclusions that the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders later spelled out as essential ingredients of a remedial social program. As the commission noted, the legislation of the Great Society had required of both local agencies and federal departments "a level of skill, a sense of urgency and a capacity for judgment" never previously encouraged. Beyond the necessary improvements in

public service, the nation also faced the "difficult challenge" of training and finding jobs for five hundred thousand "hard-core" unemployed residing in the central cities. By 1970 the country would need two million new jobs, half of them in the public sector. Factors of both class and race, the commission also reported, had burdened the education of black children in the cities. Apart from new efforts to integrate northern public schools, schools in the ghettos required major educational improvements, especially in teaching the disadvantaged skills in reading and arithmetic. The increased costs of an adequate educational program would have to fall on the federal government. The commission also recommended expanding the welfare program to include all Americans in need, lifting the assistance provided to reach the "minimum necessary for a decent level of existence," and undertaking new ventures to encourage welfare recipients to seek employment. "After . . . three decades of fragmented and . . . under-funded federal housing programs," the report continued, "decent housing remains a chronic problem for the disadvantaged urban household." Two-thirds of all ghetto housing was substandard. The supply of new housing had to be "expanded on a massive basis" and subjected to a comprehensive and enforceable open housing law.

Those proposals, implicitly critical of the achievements of the Great Society, went beyond the tolerances of the consensual liberalism of Lyndon Johnson and most of his supporters. The president had no stomach for a volume of spending that would have required genuinely redistributive taxation. That taxation would have fallen on the middle class as well as the wealthy. He had no interest in battling with the conservative unions in the building trades or with working-class whites, Democrats most of them, in northern neighborhoods opposed to integrated schooling. Johnson had cultivated consensus politics, policies attractive insofar as possible to men and women of every class and color. But that kind of reform was no longer enough. The liberal agenda had to expand, just as King and Robert Kennedy maintained. The agenda as it had developed through 1965 could not assure the creation of a just society. Calculated incrementalism in the course of reform was now too slow to meet the deferred expectations of the underclass. Indeed, the old formula of moderate reform at home mixed with the cold war abroad had ceased to work after the escalation in Vietnam first froze and then reduced the persistent underfunding of the Great Society.

Even if Lyndon Johnson had advocated all the remedial measures requiring increased federal expenditures, he could not have reconciled their cost with the size of the military budget. Nor could he have brought

social peace to the country without ending the Vietnam War. As it was, his obsession with Vietnam kept him from recommending any costly reform. Indeed, by the end of 1966 he had stopped talking much about the Great Society. Later he refused to accept the report of the Commission on Civil Disorders. But he was not peculiarly to blame. The impact of black power and of the urban riots denied the prospect of reform any real chance.

White backlash to those developments engulfed cities and suburbs alike. At the extreme, the National States Rights party preached racial hatred and proposed the deportation of all blacks and other nonwhite peoples. The suburban middle class had always insulated itself from blacks and other minorities. Similarly, ethnic neighborhoods in northern cities, especially but not exclusively those consisting of blue-collar workers and their families, organized to keep blacks out of their residential turfs and their public schools. Scornful of black pride and black nationalism, they rallied to Polish pride or to Serb or Croatian or Greek or Italian or Irish or Jewish pride. The backlash affected Congress, where most members had had enough of reform. Everett Dirksen opposed the housing provisions in the administration's civil rights bill as "a package of mischief." He stood aside while southern Democrats conducted a filibuster that killed the measure. Though without the concurrence of the Senate, the House had already responded to urban disorder with a bill making rioting a federal crime. Congress also voted to deny antipoverty funds to persons who incited or participated in riots or other civil disturbances. As the *New Republic* then observed, "Riots are nasty, and every effort must be made to control them when they occur. But what sense is there . . . to insist that vocational education or youth employment benefits be withheld from participants in a riot . . . that they shall remain—they of all people!—untrained, unemployed, on the streets."

But violence and the preaching of violence had had predictable effects. The riots and the revolutionary doctrines of the radicals bore no relationship to civil disobedience. Those who had practiced civil disobedience broke the law with the expectation of being arrested. Arrest was the anticipated result of their witnessing, part of their self-consciously moral act. Rioters and revolutionaries broke the law with the intention of defying the state or of destroying it. But the state had the means to protect itself. Revolution, even riot, could be validated only by success, and the great majority of Americans were resolved to prevent that success. Neither the alienated nor the radicals had a chance to prevail. There was need for reform, but also, as always in times of racial and

class tensions, for order in the process of resolving conflicts. When protest became massive, as one perceptive conservative critic wrote, "when it is not civil, when it borders on violence or threatens it, when it is coercive . . . in its immediate impact, when its impact is not of inconvenience but of terror, then it is unacceptable."

Without recognition of the accompanying need for reform, the Republicans seized the hot issue of law and order after the riots of 1966. They attributed both riots and radicalism to the "soft" social programs of the Democrats. In November 1966 the GOP gained forty-seven seats in the House of Representatives and three in the Senate, enough to restore the conservative coalition that the Johnson landslide of 1964 had only temporarily overcome. "I view this election as a repudiation of the President's domestic policies," said Gerald Ford, the Republican leader in the House. ". . . Congress will write the laws, not the executive branch." Appropriations for the antipoverty program fell in 1967, and the administration's housing measure again stalled. It passed in 1968 only after Congress had added a section making it a crime to cross state lines in order to incite a riot. Riding the backlash of 1966 by campaigning against the Watts riot and campus disorders at Berkeley, Ronald Reagan, who stood where Goldwater had, won office that year as governor of California. Politics there reflected the national mood. Black radicalism and urban turmoil, by no means yet spent, were pushing the American political center to the right. More and more of the Johnson electoral coalition were moving that way. Left of the center there remained only the radicals and a diminishing number of committed liberals clustered around King and Kennedy. Increasingly those two men and their adherents were aware that the financial means and the moral energy essential for further reform were vanishing in the expense and futility of the Vietnam War.

7. THE NEW LEFT

During 1966 the antiwar movement in the United States steadily grew, moving, as it did so, along two separate tracks. One was still largely invisible within the federal government. The other had increasing visibility primarily on the campuses of American colleges. The latter had begun earlier and had drawn, as it continued to draw, upon the spirit and ranks of the civil rights movement. Indeed, in 1966 the outspoken opposition to the war of Stokely Carmichael and of Martin Luther King, Jr., marked the informal merging respectively of the radical and

liberal wings of the civil rights movement with their antiwar equivalents.

Unrest on American college campuses expressed student concern with a number of issues, of which the Vietnam War was not initially paramount. That unrest involved students and faculty, of whom a majority were never radical. So it was that the disturbances of 1964 at the University of California at Berkeley began as a student protest against an arbitrary order of the administration restricting the access of student organizations to desirable space for making speeches, recruiting members, and raising funds. The protest had links to national issues. Among the organizations involved were local chapters of CORE and SNCC, and the leading student spokesman of the protest had participated in the Freedom Summer of 1964. A later, less disruptive protest at Yale University, a bastion of conventionality, began over the dismissal of a popular assistant professor whose scholarship had failed to meet his department's criteria for promotion. A leading member of the faculty in that incident and his close associate, the university chaplain, both were veterans of civil rights agitation in the South. Like the undergraduates, they interpreted the dismissal of an outstanding teacher as a violation of student interests. Soon thereafter they found a new cause in opposition to the Vietnam War.

So had the Students for a Democratic Society. Its Economic Research and Action Program (ERAP), after ebullient beginnings in Newark and Cleveland, had begun to falter. Tom Hayden had expected ERAP to mobilize the urban poor. But ERAP efforts in various city slums, while effective in teaching the poor about their rights, had made few converts for the SDS or its political goals. Turning back to recruitment on college campuses, SDS leaders realized that antiwar activities would attract students. Late in 1964 the SDS started planning a march against the Vietnam War. The reprisal bombing that Johnson ordered in February 1965 prompted guarded cooperation in that march by other national organizations identified with movements for nuclear disarmament and peace. The antiwar impulse at that time largely reflected moral repulsion against the bombing and killing of helpless and innocent people. At teach-ins on campuses throughout the country, student and faculty speakers also expressed doubts about the integrity and representativeness of the government of South Vietnam and about the existence of any essential American interest in Southeast Asia.

By April 1965 Senators Ernest Gruening, Wayne Morse, Frank Church, and George McGovern all had openly opposed the war. Those senators and the national peace organizations were restless in harness