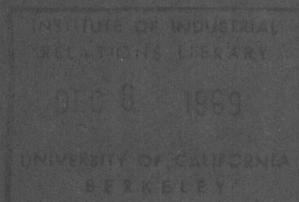


Negroes
(1969 folder)

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Three Essays by Bayard Rustin

Myths of the Black Revolt
The Role of the Negro Middle Class
The Ballot Box and the Union Card



A. Philip Randolph Institute

“Myths of the Black Revolt”

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“The Role of the Negro Middle Class”

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“The Ballot Box and the Union Card”

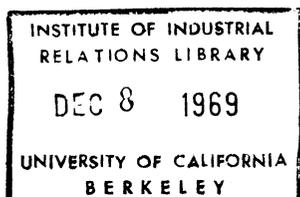
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**Three
Essays
by Bayard
Rustin**

New York **A. Philip Randolph Institute**

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Contents

Myths of the Black Revolt / 5

The Role of the Negro Middle Class / 14

The Ballot Box and the Union Card / 20

The Myths of the Black Revolt

Inevitably during a period of social turmoil there develop conflicting political strategies for change. These strategies will be based on varied emotional responses to daily events as well as on fundamentally different philosophies.

Such intellectual conflict is occurring today in the black community, and I think this is all to the good. The debate may be characterized by great emotion and rhetoric, but ultimately it will serve the educational function of refining theories, delineating positions, and stimulating further dialogue.

A full-fledged ideological and political debate has not taken place in the black community since the monumental exchanges between W. E. B. DuBois and Booker T. Washington which occurred over a half century ago. The intensity of today's dialogue is an indication of the aroused political awareness of black people and an overall heightening of aspirations and militancy. As a result of these developments, there is enormous potential to build a movement for progressive social reform. But this potential can also lead to consequences of a reactionary nature for it is in itself a politically neutral phenomenon. An informed black militancy, based on a clear analysis of the economic and social situation of Negroes both in the South and in the Northern ghettos, an identification of the major institutions which can provide blacks with the maximum power and leverage in their struggle for equality, and a political strategy that can influence these institutions to serve the needs of the poor—such a militancy will move our society in a progressive and equalitarian direction. But a militancy that is based on frustration, withdrawal, and a desire to simplify or avoid reality rather than transform it will unintentionally aid the right, isolate blacks, and destroy the possibility of solving the problems which afflict our nation.

It is with the hope of furthering dialogue so as to encourage the emergence of an effective, programmatic militancy that I offer here a critique of certain myths that have recently become popular among some blacks. Let me be clear that by "myths" I am not referring to those allegorical stories by which a people or nation interprets its history and beliefs, but to a series of concepts that derive from wish-fulfillment or a misperception of political reality, and

which can thus mislead black people in our struggle to achieve equality. Such myths deserve serious critical appraisal.

1) The Myth of Black Unity

The myth of black unity is put forth by those who perceive race as the dominant factor in determining the political consciousness of a group. I do not deny that race is *one* such factor, particularly in the case of Negroes. To a degree, black people have a common heritage of slavery, although one out of every nine Negroes before the Civil War was a freedman, and there were 4,000 *Negro* slaveholders. There was also the very considerable difference between those slaves who were forced to work in the fields and those others—relatively more advantaged—who were house servants. In terms of contemporary experience, a certain unity is imposed upon blacks by those whites who stereotype Negroes and discriminate equally against them. But the failure to differentiate among blacks is the result of white prejudice and ignorance and should hardly serve as a model of belief for those blacks who wish to abolish racism in America.

Of the factors which obstruct black unity, there is age—a generational conflict exists today in the black community to the same degree that it exists in the white community; and geography—blacks have no territorial focus for unity, and beyond that, there is little shared experience between rural and urban Negroes, as well as between Southern and Northern Negroes.

But more profoundly, there are differences of class and philosophy. Negroes, like the Irish, Italians, Jews or any other American ethnic group, are divided socially and economically on the basis of class, and engage in the same practices of residential “grasshopping” and job mobility. One may criticize these practices, but they must be recognized as sociological realities. Moreover, the white employer is divided from the white employe by virtue of the fact that the profits of the one come out of the wages of the other—and vice versa. To deny that this can also be true of blacks is not merely to perpetuate an illusion, but also to lend support to those beliefs—that Negroes are inherently different from whites, that they are not subject to the same laws governing human behavior—which have always been used to segregate blacks and deny them equal access to the social and economic advantages of this country.

Philosophical differences are as pronounced as class divisions. If one were to ask representatives of various black organizations to draw up a program for the education of Negro children, the plans would be far from identical. The Muslims would propose a program based on the teachings of Elijah Muhammad, the NAACP plan would be integrationist, and CORE would demand separate black school districts. There are also serious philosophical differences among the most extreme groups. Those who wish to build a political move-

ment by appealing solely to the racial consciousness of blacks will be deeply disillusioned.

2) The Myth of Black Capitalism

The fact that black capitalism has been proposed by Richard Nixon is by itself enough to make one question its efficacy as an economic program. But it is also being proposed by many other people and by some leaders of CORE and consequently warrants close analysis.

I favor some aspects of the proposal for black capitalism more for psychological than for economic reasons, because it is important to destroy the brutal stereotype that black people are incapable of engaging in entrepreneurial activity. But the economic impact of black capitalism has been—and can only be—marginal at best, and if we are not careful, this approach may actually compound the injustices from which Negroes suffer.

There is, first, the very simple fact that the vast majority of black people are not capitalists and will not become capitalists in the foreseeable future. They are salaried workers, and those most in need are the working poor and the unemployed. Any program to economically uplift the majority of black people must be designed specifically for these individuals.

Now black capitalism does not appear to me to be so designed. Its main beneficiaries will be a small number of entrepreneurs, and because of the conditions under which they must earn a living, they will have a stake in racial separatism—a condition that has never been conducive to black progress. In general, black entrepreneurs must oppose economic integration for the simple reason that they are threatened by white economic competition. Andrew Brimmer, the only Negro member of the Board of Governors of the Federal Reserve System, has pointed out that “With the progress of desegregation the considerable protection which segregation provided for Negro businessmen has been eroded substantially. Thus, in virtually every large city (especially in the East and Midwest), hotels and better class restaurants which previously catered exclusively to Negroes have encountered hard times.” Much of the talk we are hearing about black capitalism today, therefore, results from the desire to restore a black monopoly over a segregated black market. Yet this has been difficult in the face of competition from large chain organizations, particularly since, as Brimmer notes, some black enterprises, due to high operating costs in the ghetto, have been forced to raise their prices ten to 15 per cent above those of their larger competitors. I cannot see how under such an arrangement a black worker or welfare recipient can benefit from “buying black.”

But I can see how they will benefit by federal programs to reconstruct our cities, to provide full employment, a decent income and adequate health care for everybody, and to improve the quality education in our schools. To the degree that talk of black capitalism diverts our attention and political

energies away from this fundamental solution to the social and economic problems of black Americans, to that degree its ultimate effect will be deleterious. And to the degree that it re-inforces racial separatism, it will exacerbate those problems of poverty and discrimination which derive from separatism.

3) The Myth of Reparations

Reparations is attractive as a concept, but as a program it is impractical and politically reactionary. The power of the concept derives from its call for justice, and certainly no individual of good will can deny the magnitude of the injustices that have been committed against black people in America. But it is equally a call for retribution, and as such it has become more a *moral* than a *political* demand. James Forman is, in effect, not demanding equality for black people so much as he is condemning white people. He seeks not to correct social injustice but to purge white guilt.

It is in part for this reason that he has chosen to direct his attack at the church, the institutional embodiment of our society's moral and religious pretensions. But I would question the efficacy and the social utility of an attack that impels the attacked to applaud and morally debase themselves. And I would doubt that two such hate- and self-hate-generating feelings as Forman's moral aggression and white churchmen's guilt can produce anything that is socially creative. Certainly such feeling will not improve the lot of the unemployed black man and the miseducated black child.

But of course it will be said that Forman is demanding *money*—"15 dollars per nigger," to quote his own words. This pittance, if ever given, would hardly right the balance of wrongs committed against black people, nor would it appreciably improve their present situation. Most black people, I am sure, do not even *desire* such charity. They want work with dignity. Justice will be embodied in their attainment of an equal social position, not in the flagellation and self-flagellation of white people.

Moreover, the political effect of the demand for reparations can only be reactionary. It will, first, tend to isolate blacks from any political allies. Demands of a purely racial nature cannot appeal to the white poor who have common interests with blacks. And I do not trust those affluent whites who, out of guilt, are sympathetic to reparations. Guilt is an uncomfortable emotion, and the guilty party will ultimately rationalize his sins and affirm them as virtues. By such a process, today's ally can become tomorrow's enemy. Political alliances are not built on the shifting sands of moral suasion.

Second, it is an error for black people to focus their struggle on so organizationally diffuse and non-political an institution as the church. This can only deflect their attack away from the major political and economic institutions of the society and thus seriously weaken the effectiveness of the black movement

for equality. The church may have been chosen as a target because of its vulnerability, but it is precisely because of this debility that black people must concentrate their energies elsewhere.

4) The Myth of Black Studies

In the long history of the black struggle, many slogans have emerged which have defined the demands of Negroes at a particular point in time. During Reconstruction, for example, the slogan was "Forty Acres and a Mule." It was both precise and practical. Today's slogans are neither, and Black Studies is a good illustration of this point.

What Black Studies *should* mean is a thorough and objective scholastic inquiry into the history of the black man in America. This history has been scandalously distorted in the past, and, as a field of study, it has been relegated to a second-class status, isolated from the main themes of American history and omitted from the historical education of American youth.

But I am afraid that Black Studies, as it is presently conceived by its proponents on campus, will not correct these errors so much as compound them, for its primary purpose will be to further ends that are fundamentally nonscholastic. It is hoped, first, that Black Studies will serve the *ideological* function of creating a mythologized history and a system of assertive ideas that will facilitate the political mobilization of the black community. Such an ideological undertaking would necessitate the substitution of a glorified version of black history for the present debased version, but *neither* version seems unduly concerned with the discovery of historical truth.

It is also hoped that Black Studies will serve the *political* function of developing and educating a cadre of activists who conceive of their present training as a preparation for organizational work in the black community. One may feel—as I do—that there should be more young Negroes engaging in activities designed to uplift their brethren, but to the extent that Black Studies is used as a vehicle for political indoctrination, it ceases to be a legitimate scholastic program.

What I find most distressing about the ideological and political conception of the role of Black Studies is the contempt that is shown toward black history and culture as potential academic disciplines. Faculty members will be chosen on the basis of race, ideological purity, and political commitment—not academic competence. Needless to say, this is not the best way to go about developing an intellectually respectable program. Under such conditions, competent black professors will not even *want* to teach in Black Studies programs—not simply because their academic freedom will be curtailed by their obligation to adhere to the revolutionary "line" of the moment, but because their association with such second-rate programs will threaten their professional status. If such a situation is permitted to develop, Black Studies will become little

more than a haven for opportunists and ideologues.

There is, finally, the *psychological* function of Black Studies. It is hoped that by studying Negro history and culture, the self-image of young blacks will improve. Implicit here is the dual assumption that first, young Negroes have a negative self-image because second, they are ignorant of their history. If there is truth to either assumption, then I entirely agree—they should devote many intensive hours to the study of our people's rich heritage of struggle and achievement.

But Black Studies is also serving the psychologically protective function of enabling black students who have been brutalized in the past by segregated education to withdraw from the demanding competition of the university. In this I see little virtue. Providing these students with separate courses of study in soul music and soul poetry—things they can just play with and pass—will enhance neither their competence nor their confidence. Nor will it deal with the fundamental problem of improving the quality of their education in order that they can obtain skills that will be useful in the world they must eventually enter as adults.

To solve this problem would require larger and better trained teaching staffs, remedial efforts, and an expansion of facilities, all of which can be obtained only through a massive increase in present expenditures. And if these changes are not made, the cheap separatist solution will ultimately boomerang, for Black Studies can provide psychic comfort for Negro students only temporarily. When they realize that college administrators are interested more in political accommodation than quality education—when they realize that New Leftist students and faculty members are using black students for their own revolution-by-proxy—and when they realize that they are not being given an education but only a paper degree that will hardly improve their intellectual competence or their economic power, then they will rebel with far greater violence and bitterness than anything we have yet seen.

I want to conclude by emphasizing that I am opposed to any program in Black Studies that separates the contribution of black men from the study of American history and society. Racist textbooks and historians have played this game too long for black people to add to the damage that has already been done. The magnificent contribution of black people to America must be recognized and recorded, not only by black people, but also by whites who can benefit at least as much from such knowledge.

5) The Myth of Violence

There are those who propose violence as the solution to the problems of poverty and injustice. The rationale here is that by threat of force, black people can extort from the white community the resources they need to improve the conditions of their lives. I disagree with this proposition not only

because I believe that unjust means cannot lead to just ends, but also because the tactic of violence is suicidal. Whites may for a time make minor concessions to blacks who use violence—and thereby help to discredit non-violence as an effective means for achieving social change—but the point must inevitably be reached when the state will take repressive measures which will inflict untold harm upon the black community. Those who romanticize black violence—particularly the pseudo-revolutionaries of the New Left who can retreat into their universities and suburbs when the repression comes—deserve special condemnation.

Moreover, the solution to social injustice cannot be brought about by violence which is calculated to increase white fear and political reaction. Black violence will strengthen George Wallace sooner than it will increase the economic and political power of Negroes. If blacks are enraged because they do not have jobs and whites are fearful that somebody may take their jobs away, the solution is not social warfare but full employment. If blacks are enraged because they do not have decent homes, and whites are fearful they will lose their homes that are still not fully paid for, then the solution is not violence destructive to the entire social fabric, but the construction of adequate housing for all. It is because what is needed is the expansion of resources in order to reduce competition over what presently exists and to provide a secure existence for everybody that A. Philip Randolph proposed a Freedom Budget for all Americans.

Finally, I should add that blacks have already suffered great losses from the ghetto riots of recent years, not only in lives, but also in property and jobs. The burned-out homes and places of business have not been rebuilt but remain as glaring monuments to the futility and self-destructiveness of violence. And a study has shown that in Washington, D.C. alone, 4,900 employees—the majority of them Negroes—lost their jobs as a result of the riots which swept the city following Dr. King's death. Violence may indicate to America the despair which blacks feel, but its major effect is the aggravation of the degrading social and economic conditions which have nurtured and perpetuated that despair.

6) The Myth of Separatism

Separatism is valid neither from a psychological nor a political point of view. Dr. Kenneth Clark has recently argued that "There is absolutely no evidence to support the contention that the inherent damage to human beings of primitive exclusion on the basis of race is any less damaging when demanded or enforced by the previous victims than when imposed by the dominant group." Some separatists today are withdrawing in despair from American culture, others out of a nationalist affirmation of the desirability of a separate black society. But both are withdrawing from the challenge posed to

the Negro by W. E. B. DuBois “to attain self-conscious manhood, to merge his double self into a better and truer self . . . to be both a Negro and an American. . .”

Even if separatism were psychologically sensible—which it is not—it does not make political sense. The only reason the Civil Rights Bills of 1964, 1965 and 1968 were passed was because Negroes had allies in the labor movement, the liberal community and in religious organizations. It was only this coalition of forces that had the power to defeat the Republican-Dixiecrat coalition that has traditionally blocked any progress in the field of civil rights. Black separatism will strengthen the conservative coalition by weakening its opposition (that is why Republicans and Southern conservatives have always favored segregation), and it will be an obstacle to the realignment of the Democratic Party. Let us remember that it was the *integrated* delegations from Mississippi and Georgia which forced the segregationists from those states out of the last Democratic Party convention.

Black people are being elected to offices throughout the country for the very reason that they are *not* campaigning on a separatist line. Charles Evers' slogan, “Don't vote for a black man. Or a white man. Just a good man,” is being adopted in concept by black politicians in every region. In the Southern states, the number of black elected officials has increased dramatically in recent years. There were only 72 in 1965 when the Voting Rights Act was passed, and today there are 461, and that number is steadily growing. Men like Evers, Howard Lee, Carl Stokes and Richard Hatcher are proving that black separatism is an obstacle to black political power. This point was also proved by Tom Bradley who, though defeated by a man who deliberately aroused racial fears and hatreds, nevertheless won 47 per cent of the vote in a city only 18 per cent black. It is only a matter of time before Los Angeles too shall have a black mayor.

7) The Myth of the Black Revolution

I believe that the black struggle for equality is revolutionary but not in the traditional sense of a violent seizure of state power. The black revolt is fundamentally *cultural* in that Negroes are affirming their dignity as black people and are demanding that their humanity be fully recognized and appreciated. But *politically*, blacks are not demanding revolution but rather participation in the democratic process and the enjoyment of the fruits of American society. In general, they want their rightful share of the pie.

Thus, the demand for equality is itself not revolutionary, but the response that must be made in order to satisfy this demand very much is. By this I mean that justice cannot be done to blacks in the absence of a total restructuring of the political, economic, and social institutions of this country. There cannot be full employment, the rebuilding of our cities, the reconstruction of

our educational system and the provision of adequate medical care for everybody within the context of our present definition of social and economic priorities. When we talk about the achievement of these goals, let us be clear that we are proposing nothing less than the radical re-fashioning of our political economy.

The Negro struggle for equality will continue until the kind of revolution I have described is achieved. There will be periods, such as the present, when progress will be slow, and as a result, there will be bitterness, frustration and a casting about for instant solutions that avoid the challenges of fundamental social change. But even in what I have called "myths" I see a sign of hope, for they represent a sustained protest against injustice and thus symbolize the refusal to accept the condition of inequality. But our task must now be to transform these myths into the reality of a political strategy and a social program so that we can get on with the job of transforming America.

The Role of the Negro Middle Class

The question of the role of the Negro middle class has been a persistent source of controversy and confusion since the time of Reconstruction. There have been some who have castigated this class and others who have glorified it, but few have been able to treat the subject with the objectivity they could call forth in discussing any other middle class racial or ethnic group in America.

I think the confusion results from the fact that the Negro middle class behaves in a way that is characteristically middle class but uniquely Negro. The sociological distinction I am drawing between class and race is essential to a full understanding of the problem. But unfortunately, it is a distinction that is rarely made, with the result that we are burdened with analyses of the Negro middle class that are superficial or misleading.

There are some, for example, who are asking the Negro to behave as if class were totally unimportant. By ignoring the class factor, they arrive at a sentimental notion of black solidarity if they are apologists for middle-class Negroes; and if they are their critics, they condemn them for deserting their poor black brothers. Both the apologists and the critics in this case fail to understand that there are serious class divisions in the Negro community which must be recognized for what they are. The apologist is blind to these divisions while the critic thinks that they should not exist, and both are bound by the feeling that race—and not class—is the force that motivates group behavior. Therefore, they are caught by surprise when the Negro middle class acts in a way that is typically middle class, and their response is either to close their eyes to this phenomenon or to become enraged about it. The fact of the matter is that conflicts of an economic nature have arisen within each minority group in America. At the turn of the century, for example, the relations between the wealthy “lace curtain Irish” and the poor “shanty Irish” were anything but friendly. Moreover, Jewish organizations, which developed as a means of forwarding Jewish life and culture, emerged along class lines. The American Jewish Committee attracted the very wealthy, the middle classes were drawn to the American Jewish Congress, while the poor joined more orthodox groups.

Further evidence of these class divisions can be found in a pattern of be-

havior known as “grasshopping” which describes the residential changes made by individuals during the process of upward mobility. As the poor Jew rose economically, he left the Lower East Side for the Upper West Side and eventually ended up in Scarsdale. And as the head of the Irish family accumulated capital he moved out of Hell’s Kitchen into what is now Harlem. The Italian worker, when he was upgraded by the emergence of trade unions, left Mulberry Street for a six-room house in Queens. It is little wonder that the Negro should act similarly. The process of economic mobility, which carried him from Harlem to Jamaica and eventually to St. Albans, should not be ignored or condemned so much as analyzed as a sociological reality.

While it is true that this social process has created a distance between middle-class and lower-class Negroes, it has also enabled the former to be of great assistance to the latter. I am here referring not only to the historical fact that it was middle-class Negroes who founded the universities, schools, churches, and newspapers which have helped unify and uplift all black people. I am also speaking of the political role they have played in the Negro struggle for equality.

Here again Negroes do not differ substantially from other groups. In times of cultural and political revolution, the money, the energy, and the leadership for a forward social thrust is provided by the class that is better off, in the interest of the poor. This has been true of the independence movements in Africa and the West Indies and of the struggle for the extension of democracy in Latin America. It was also true of the American and French revolutions in the Eighteenth Century, and more recently, of the Russian and Chinese revolutions. And, finally, it is true all over the world today in countries where there are minorities who have suffered from discrimination. This includes the Untouchables in India, the French Canadians in Canada, the Walloons in Belgium, and the Welsh and the Scotch in the United Kingdom.

And it is true of the Negro movement in America. It was the NAACP, which is predominantly middle class, that won all the great legal battles which gave rise to the period of protest and sit-ins. The greatest protestor of all was Martin Luther King, Jr. who came from the privileged upper middle class of Atlanta. Even the young SNCC people, who dramatized and accelerated the sit-ins and who helped establish a high degree of political freedom in Mississippi, were children of middle class parents.

Moreover, it was middle-class Negroes who provided the leadership and the initiative for the black struggle during its very early stages. Leaders like Frederick Douglass, W. E. B. DuBois, and A. Philip Randolph were all men of immense learning. Their profound social vision was the result of long hours of study and reflection which required certain advantages that have been denied the most brutalized segments of the black community.

We are thus dealing with a paradox. Those blacks who are most exploited are often least inclined to engage in political protest, while the greatest revolutionaries emerge from the wealthier classes and would thus seem to have least reason to revolt. I am aware that there are exceptions to this rule—that there were many slave revolts and that in our own time oppressed masses of black people have engaged in violent protest. Yet these protests have tended to be more spontaneous expressions of despair and frustration than disciplined political movements for social justice.

The psychological dynamic that is at work here is that oppression leads to despair which will manifest itself in apathetic inactivity or sporadic outbursts of undirected rage. A more advantageous social condition, on the other hand, leads to hope and, therefore, to activity that is designed to improve one's situation. In the magnificent autobiography of Frederick Douglass he recounts his transfer from an evil master to a relatively good one and the psychological effect this had upon him:

“The freedom from bodily torture and unceasing labor had given my mind an increased sensibility and imparted to it greater activity. . . . Beat and cuff the slave, keep him hungry and spiritless, and he will follow the chain of his master like a dog, but feed and clothe him well, work him moderately and surround him with physical comfort, and dreams of freedom will intrude. Give him a bad master and he aspires to a good master; give him a good master, and he wishes to become his own master. Such is human nature. You may hurl a man so low beneath the level of his kind, that he loses all just ideas of his natural position, but elevate him a little, and the clear conception of rights rises to life and power, and leads him onward.”

While those who are better off are thus in a position to lead a social struggle, it is of course true that they do not always wish to do so. Their interest in their own welfare may cause them to exploit the lower classes or to totally ignore their plight. Moreover, for reasons of status they may often try to disassociate themselves completely from those below them.

This is again a universal phenomenon, but it applies to middle class Negroes in a unique way *because they are Negroes*. For example, they are in a weaker position in relation to the whole society than the white middle class because of the historic exploitation of black people in this country. They have less capital than whites of the same class, and they have been adversely affected by segregated institutions, particularly in the fields of education and employment. Yet at the same time they are far more advantaged than the Negro lower class which has suffered even greater damage from the evils of slavery and discrimination.

The middle-class Negro, therefore, trapped between privileged whites above him and exploited blacks below him, finds himself in a difficult and frustrating position. He does not have the full status attributable to him by virtue of his

class, and he suffers from the indignities that have been committed against his race. With full access to the wider society denied him, he has been forced to achieve wealth and status within a segregated context — and this has not been easy. Although the situation of the Negro middle class has changed appreciably since 1939 when E. Franklin Frazier wrote *The Negro Family in the United States*, his analysis sheds light even today on the hardships which segregation has caused middle-class blacks, and the sometimes questionable activities which, out of their frustration, they have resorted to:

“. . . behind the walls of racial segregation, where they enjoy a sheltered and relatively secure position in relation to the lower economic classes, they look with misgivings upon a world where they must compete with whites for a position in the economic order and struggle for status. Hence much of their racial pride is bound up with their desire to monopolize the Negro market. They prefer the overevaluation of their achievements and position behind the walls of segregation to a democratic order that would result in economic and social devaluation for themselves.”

This is, of course, not to say that the Negro middle class *in general* is guilty of the faults which Frazier has analyzed, but rather that the evil of segregation has made possible a situation in which some middle-class Negroes have been forced to seek economic and social advantage to the detriment of their poorer black brothers.

The gains made by the civil rights movement during the past decade and a half have substantially altered the conditions underlying the relationship of middle class to lower-class blacks. As the struggle for equality continues the process of black liberation, the need of middle-class blacks to accumulate wealth within a segregated context should be reduced. And as the walls of segregation are broken down, there will be more healthy interaction between the races, which should enhance the development of a genuine sense of identity among middle-class Negroes. They will, therefore, no longer need the protection of segregation to insure a false sense of status.

But of course there are still problems. Many blacks today with master's degrees and Ph.D.'s cannot find employment that satisfies their aspirations. They rightly desire the same opportunities that whites of equal qualifications now have open to them. But because segregation and discrimination still exist, they are frustrated in their drive for advancement. Without a full outlet for their aspirations in the wider society, they are seeking to monopolize the avenues of advancement within the ghetto and are thus calling for all-black schools with black teachers and supervisors, black capitalism, and other forms of racial separatism. According to social psychologist Thomas F. Pettigrew, a study completed in 1968 shows that “college graduates tended to be the more separatist in those realms where their training gives them a vested interest in competition-free positions — Negro-owned stores for Negro neighborhoods

and Negro teachers in mostly-Negro schools. . .”

While some middle-class blacks may derive moderate economic benefits from this kind of separation, I doubt that they shall find total self-fulfillment. The ghetto does not have the economic resources sufficient to satisfy their demands, and they cannot achieve the status they desire if they avoid the challenges of free and open competition with the wider society. They may find temporary comfort in the ghetto, but ultimately confidence and self-realization come from leaving a protective environment, not by retreating into it.

The demand for “Black Power” that is being made by many of these Negroes today is, therefore, a demand for “*Black Middle-Class Power*,” and I fear that even if they achieve their goal it will not enhance the economic and political power of lower and working-class blacks. It is this latter group, however, that is most deprived and most numerous. Consequently, the energies of the black struggle for equality must be concentrated above all on improving its lot.

If these poor black people are to be uplifted we need an economic package — a comprehensive program designed to achieve full employment, a minimum wage, and a guaranteed income. In addition, our cities must be reconstructed, millions of new homes must be built so that people will no longer be forced to live in deteriorated housing. Funds must be provided so that each child can receive the superior education to which he is by rights entitled. And we must also have free medical care so that, among other things, the infant mortality rate among Negroes does not continue at its present catastrophic level.

It is obvious that an increase in black businesses or in the number of managerial positions open to Negroes will not bring us any nearer to the economic program I have described. We need what A. Philip Randolph has called a “Freedom Budget”—a ten-year commitment by the Federal Government to spend \$18.5 billion annually over present expenditures so that all poor people in America, black *and* white, will no longer suffer from poverty.

The achievement of such an economic program would require a strong political movement, one which today does not exist. It requires building a coalition of Negroes, the trade union movement, and liberals who together would constitute a political majority in America.

This coalition cannot sustain the loss or decimation of any of its component parts without suffering irreparable damage. It is here that the role of middle-class Negroes becomes so essential, for they must provide the leadership that will help make the black community a powerful element in this majority movement. The central question, therefore, is not so much whether these Negroes remain in the ghetto, but whether they will join in doing those things that will uplift the black poor.

Finally, in struggling for a program of integration and equality for poor black people, the Negro middle class will find that it has benefited itself as well.

For the segregation of the black community will lead to the isolation of the black middle class, and the impoverishment of masses of Negroes will ultimately affect the conditions under which all Negroes must live. The primary role of middle-class blacks, therefore, is within a political movement for social justice. And by participating in the struggle to uplift their impoverished brothers, they will find their identity and become liberated as human beings.

The Ballot Box and the Union Card

In the black man's long history in America, no decade has been filled with more significant events than the one terminating at the close of this year. The 1960s have witnessed great social and political triumphs, and also saddening defeats. Men of great stature emerged only to disappear suddenly. There has been an unprecedented rise in the hopes and aspirations of black people, and the frustration of these hopes has led to despair, violence and withdrawal. We would have to go back a century, to the time of the Civil War and Emancipation, to find a decade whose importance approaches the one we are now living through.

The sweep and complexity of events require that we resist the temptation of an emotional and simplistic response, and instead try to analyze the present situation with the utmost precision. Accordingly, what is demanded of blacks is not undirected rage—however compelling this may be—but a clear definition of political and economic objectives, as well as a strategy for achieving them. In the absence of such a program, rage must feed upon itself and inspire comforting but self-defeating forms of withdrawal, or violence—which is destructive to all concerned—and induce in the white community the uncreative feelings of guilt or fear. This dynamic of rage, fear and guilt is unusually forceful today, and its social consequences can only be reactionary.

The prevalence of confusing emotions has led to the identification of white racism as the most pressing and immediate problem that must be solved. I reject this analysis, not because I think white Americans are innocent—I am sure many are prejudiced, as are some people of every race—but because it cannot lead to a constructive programmatic solution to the plight of black Americans. In the first place, if we locate the source of the problem in the attitudes of white people, it follows that the solution has to be mass psychoanalysis, something I find neither practical nor appealing. More importantly, white breast-beating will hardly help the black youth who is unemployed or the black child who is being miseducated. Quite the contrary, it will compel the well-meaning yet guilty individuals to justify their position by a soothing process of rationalization and self-delusion. Thus unintentionally, and perhaps even unconsciously, they may end in giving tacit approval to the growing white reaction against the movement for equality.

We have to focus our attention, therefore, on the social and economic conditions that have produced poverty, segregation, deteriorated housing, inferior schools, and poor health. If we can make improvements in these fundamental areas, I think it is possible that—as emotions and attitudes adjust to the new and more equitable social conditions—we shall also see a marked reduction in rage, fear, and racism. But of course, such changes do not evolve spontaneously. They can be brought about only by a political movement whose specific objective is their attainment.

Regrettably, no such movement exists today. Nor is any serious thought being given to how to build one, or what groups it should be composed of. All that exists are various go-it-alone proposals, made more out of the desire to withdraw from social struggle than the hope that anything worthwhile can be achieved. Filling the vacuum created by the absence of effective programs, we have a *mélange* of cheap solutions, new forms of exploitation and psychological palliatives.

For example, there is the peculiar notion of drawing industry into the ghetto through tax incentives. The new concern of business leaders with the plight of the poor is admirable, and the Urban Coalition and similar organizations have an important contribution to make. It is highly misleading, though, to suggest that private enterprise can rebuild our slums more cheaply than the Federal government. If anything, I think it would be more expensive precisely because business, unlike government, demands a profit margin—in this case provided by tax advantages. As the 1969 Report of the Council of Economic Advisers pointed out, “a dollar of direct expenditure and a dollar of tax incentive have identical effects upon the budget, requiring either a reduction in other Federal programs or an increase in taxes. One technique adds to Federal expenditures; the other lowers Federal tax receipts.”

Thus by the second technique, funds that might otherwise build homes would be used to guarantee earnings for the investor. At a recent meeting of bankers, lawyers and businessmen who favor tax incentive proposals, it was explained how by sponsoring a Federal housing program a private investor might earn an income of \$126,000 and avoid paying any taxes. The source of enthusiasm for schemes of this kind is financial profit, not social justice.

There is also much talk of black capitalism as the means by which Negroes can achieve “self-determination.” This is a highly dubious economic strategy, since Negroes are overwhelmingly a working-class people, and where they have engaged in entrepreneurial activity, it has usually been in the marginal area of small-scale neighborhood services. Yet while Negroes in general have little to gain from black capitalism, the concept is highly popular today among a small, vocal minority of black nationalists. For them, profit and separatism are interdependent, for behind the walls of segregation they will be able to

monopolize the ghetto market. But segregation—especially for the benefit of the few at the expense of the many — can by no means be considered progressive.

In addition to tax incentives and black capitalism, we are increasingly hearing proposals for reparations, decentralization, and community control, all of which reveal a preoccupation with peripheral issues and a failure to come to terms with the problem of altering the basic forces shaping the lives of the poor in America. Businessmen, out of altruism or a need for workers in a tight labor market, have hired thousands of hardcore unemployed, yet at the same time they support recommendations to curb inflation that would leave *millions* without jobs, including those who have recently benefited from their generosity. Decentralization and community control may provide some needed administrative changes, but its major effects will be to remove the burden of abolishing poverty from the rich and place it on the shoulders of the poor, and to justify a reduced governmental role in the struggle for social justice. By supporting such proposals, Negroes and liberals may well play into the hands of the conservatives.

In addition, since every one of these solutions is predicated upon the maintenance of the ghetto, whatever small contribution they can make will be negligible compared with the massive social injustices magnified daily by ghetto conditions. Black capitalism or “reparations” may in fact bring several hundred thousand dollars into the ghetto, yet from Central Harlem, the South Bronx and Bedford-Stuyvesant alone, \$223 million are siphoned out annually by racketeers. A forest fire cannot be extinguished with a garden hose.

If the fire is to be quenched, a political strategy must be devised and an economic program planned to attack injustice at its source. I am not concerned with designs that might elect a local official or employ a few individuals, but with building a movement that can change the fundamental social and economic relations in the society. For this, it is essential to work within the institutions capable of providing black people with the maximum power and leverage in their efforts to achieve equality. I am referring to the Democratic party and the trade-union movement, and the instruments that black people must use to make them more viable and progressive are the ballot box and the union card.

The Democratic party is essential to the black struggle because it is the sole mass-based political organization in the country that has the potential to become a majority movement for progressive social reform. True, it is not a majority party at this time, and there remain within it powerful reactionary elements, particularly the Southern conservatives. Yet at the 1968 National Convention in Chicago, many of them were unseated by insurgent delegations from Mississippi and Georgia composed of Negroes and white moderates. The

dominant forces within the party are now precisely those groups — Negroes, liberals and labor—that form the basis of a majority coalition of the democratic Left, and which can move the Federal government to act upon the problems afflicting our nation. It is toward such a coalition that we must build, and we can only hope to do so through the active and effective use of the ballot box.

The trade-union movement is essential to the black struggle because it is the only institution capable of economically uplifting the masses of impoverished and exploited Negroes. Its legislative program for the creation of jobs, urban reconstruction, education, health, and tax reform is specifically designed to help the lower and lower-middle classes in which blacks are so disproportionately represented. By organizing the unorganized—whether farmworkers in California, sanitation workers in Memphis, or hospital workers in New York and Charleston—the trade-union movement enables hundreds of thousands of poor Americans to escape from the lumpenproletariat and achieve a measure of dignity and economic security. The union card, therefore, must be combined with the ballot box to form the basic dynamism of the black struggle.

Many young Negroes today deny that the electoral process and the trade unions can play an effective role in the black movement. But they have no comprehensive strategy to replace the one I have just outlined, and without such a strategy their protest, though militant in rhetoric and intention, may be reactionary in its effect. For in the present political period, protest is of value only to the degree that it can creatively and nonviolently call attention to social injustice and enhance the use of the ballot box and the organization of the unorganized. To the extent that it becomes violent, protest will strengthen the Rightist forces in the country and make impossible the further advancement toward political and economic equality.

While the objectives I have proposed can be achieved nonviolently, their realization would nevertheless amount to a revolution in our society, to a fundamental reorientation of our social and economic priorities. Indeed, the problems of our cities cannot be solved by anything less than a revolution.

I must caution, however, that even if we were to achieve these objectives, there would still be protest, since the change we are presently undergoing also involves the demand for dignity and democratic participation in the political process. There must, in other words, be visible minority representation in governmental decision-making bodies. What is more, these bodies must become responsive to the needs and aspirations of their constituencies. Until this final objective is achieved, we cannot in all honesty claim to have built a democracy in this country.

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