

WHITE MYTHS AND BLACK PANTHERS

Rosemary Ruether

Despite its creaking inefficiency and patent injustice, the American courts have twice proven their superiority to the myopia that reigns in the Justice Department. Although it can never restore to victims the brutal years lost in prison, the courts in New Haven and New York have managed to unravel two more of the Government's pet conspiracy indictments and released the victims. Let us hope that the labored victories won in the cases of Bobby Seale, Erica Huggins and the Panther Thirteen can be repeated in the case of the Government against Angela Davis if, as it seems, it is equally contrived.

The animosity in the country toward Miss Davis is particularly notable. A student of Herbert Marcuse, she joined the Communist Party in an almost archaic gesture of European intellectualism, and managed thereby to violate simultaneously a collection of the most sacred taboos of the American myth by being an intelligent black Communist woman philosophy professor! If she can receive justice, despite popular animosity abetted by the Government, we may yet feel that there is something in our machinery of justice worth saving.

But this is not the time to cheer the courts, or even that new breed of radical lawyers which has made them somewhat serviceable. Let us rather examine that peculiar symbiosis of the mythologies of the white establishment and the white Left that is largely responsible for putting the Panthers in their predicament. It was in 1965 that Stokely Carmichael rang the bell of "Black Power" and told the white Movement to go back home and deal with their own society. The white Left was derailed, ejected from the Eden of righteousness and left floating disconsolately between Berkeley and Haight-Ashbury. Then there appeared on the horizon a black savior of the injured, white, radical ego. A black man "with a gun," who had transcended racism and had discovered the "class struggle."

Never mind that the white Left was just as bourgeois as it was white and had never talked to a member of the working class in its life. Marxism has always left a little loophole for the "alienated intellectual from the ruling class," since most Marxist

leaders have belonged to this class. The black savior from the ghettos of Oakland was swept on to the shoulders of the Berkeley radicals, and a new mythology began to form. The Black Panthers were to become the Viet Cong of America and to "bring the war home."

Charge and counter-charge rang out among the white Left as groups eagerly vied for a place on the new bandwagon. The S.D.S. splintered into warring factions over the place of "revolutionary nationalism" in the class struggle. The Weatherman faction endorsed the Panthers as the vanguard of the working class of America, while the Progressive Labor Party rejected this Maoist deviationism.

All this might have been harmless enough, except that the posturing of the white Left at once activated the paranoia of the white establishment—with which, indeed, it lived in symbiotic conflict. The children of the white upper middle class were playing games with their parents, and the Panthers were tailor made to be the pawns in that game. Did the F.B.I. and the Justice Department really believe all that talk about the Panthers being the Viet Cong of America and the *avant garde* of a Communist revolution rising from the black ghetto? Unfortunately, we suspect that they did, for the same reasons that the Weathermen believed it. Both lacked a sense of realistic political analysis, and both possessed a gullible Manichaen mythology. The Panthers were launched on a career as radical celebrities and national enemies.

Few white Americans bothered to read their "ten point program," which sounds rather like the American Bill of Rights. They only knew that they were "black Communists with guns," and all the bells of the American national paranoia were set ringing at once. The harder they stepped on the corns of the white fathers, the better the white sons loved them. But unfortunately or fortunately all this had nothing to do with the working class, nothing to do with the real use of political power—including the sort that comes out of the barrel of a gun—nothing to do with revolution, and less and less to do with the real needs and interests of the black community—a fact which that community itself discovered rather quickly.

The result was the sad demise of a once promising black movement. Spreading quickly to new groups whose membership they could not easily control, the

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A LOOK AT THE INTELLIGENCE ESTABLISHMENT

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leaders in Oakland let the reins slip into the hands of that underworld of criminals and police informers that threaten any ghetto movement. Walking targets for every police pogrom, proclaimed the most dangerous men in America by the National Policeman who stands watch over the storehouse of the American Myth, the Panthers struggled valiantly in the net. But the most cherished tenet in their creed—their rejection of black racism—had led them into this trap. For they could never have become so vulnerable to the wrath of the white fathers without the help of the white sons.

The black community today is not greatly disturbed by the demise of the Panthers. They concluded some time ago that they made a mistake in making coalitions with "white radicals." The problem quite simply is that the revolutions in the black and white communities necessarily move in opposite directions. Black people are still validly concerned with "making it," while white people are concerned with ceasing to "make it" at the expense of other people. These are not necessarily contradictory, but they do entail very different programs. Whenever the white radical incorporates the black movement into his own program, invariably the black movement is derailed from its own authentic purposes. Unsatisfactory as black cultural nationalism may be in the long run, I must conclude that, in the short run, it serves a valid purpose for the black community. It partially insulates them from the white program so that black people can discover what their own program is all about.

White people really do not have to worry about black separatism. Nothing is more ideologically self-serving than the argument that, since black people will no longer "work" with white people, the cause of social justice has come to an end. Black people in America have every intention of making it right here in the existing system, simply because there is no other one available. They have not rejected "working with white people." They work with white people every day. But they need to pick the allies that really serve their needs, and those allies will prove quite surprising to many of the ideologues of the white Left. When the Black Liberation Army of Washington, D.C., a group which arrayed itself in the para-military garb of the Panthers, but, unlike the Panthers, chose to build from their own base in the black ghetto, recently announced a coalition with a white group, it was not with the Weathermen from Global Village, but with the Girl Scouts from Silver Spring. Together they planned to link the ghetto and suburbia in an educational program against drug addiction.

Under a new title, *The Intelligence Establishment* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1970), Professor Harry Howe Ransom of Vanderbilt University has thoroughly revised and up-dated his original work, *Central Intelligence and National Security*, which first appeared in 1958. The result is a highly readable, well-informed survey of the intelligence community (including a new chapter on the British intelligence system), plus penetrating essays on the nature of intelligence, its relationship to national policy and decision-making, surveillance by Congress, and the related problems of administration and executive control. Throughout the book, but especially in the final chapter, "The CIA Problem—Some Conclusions," Professor Ransom critically examines the role of C.I.A. as an instrument of American intervention abroad in the form of "underground political action and psychological warfare overseas."

Professor Ransom has set himself a limited goal—"to describe objectively contemporary intelligence insofar as this can be done from non-secret sources"—and has succeeded admirably. *The Intelligence Establishment* is thus an indispensable guide and reference work not only for the policy-makers and planners who must make the decisions on which national security depends, but also for the layman or man on the street whose ultimate fate in a thermo-nuclear age hinges directly on the intelligence estimates underlying such decisions. Although, as he states in his preface, Mr. Ransom has never been "an active member of the professional intelligence guild," he shares with its members a keen appreciation of the need for the best possible intelligence base for decision-making. For example, in an introductory chapter on "Intelligence in the Space Age," he writes:

The broad strategic doctrine of the United States must be geared to the best attainable intelligence forecasts. United States success in fulfilling commitments and attaining foreign policy objectives will depend heavily upon the

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