

A History of the Revolutionary Action Movement

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## **Dedication**

The author wishes to dedicate this thesis to my “village” for always supporting me, especially my Mother. Without them, none of this would have been possible.

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I would like to acknowledge the history department at Fisk University for mentoring me.

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## **Abstract**

### **A History of the Revolutionary Action Movement**

The Revolutionary Action Movement (RAM) was an organization during the 1960's which adhered to a Pan-African revolutionary nationalist philosophy that blended Mao's critique of Marxism, the discipline and spiritual nature of the Nation of Islam, W.E.B. Du Bois' scholarship, the Black Nationalism of Marcus Garvey, and the grassroots approach of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee. RAM envisioned a World Black Revolution that would combat imperialism through the solidarity of Third World Revolutionaries. The movement was heavily influenced by Malcolm X and Robert F. Williams, especially regarding armed self-defense. Williams served as the international chairman and put forth a strategy of urban guerrilla tactics. Muhammad Ahmad (Max Stanford) was a central figure in RAM's development. The movement eventually was dissolved largely due to the FBI's Counterintelligence Program, but contributed to the theoretical development of the concept of Black Power.

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## Chapter 1: Introduction

The history of Black Nationalism illustrates the quest on the part of African Americans to define themselves and be self-sufficient – whether that be as a changers of the existing system, or the creators of a new system. There is beauty in the struggle and the quest to find a place to call your own. To thrive and not just survive; to be creators of your own destiny rather than mere reactors to oppression. Such is the dream of Black Nationalists. And yet, the question still remained – how “American” can black people really be? Further, how American should they want to be? It has always been a point of contention, the viability of depending on the government to come to the aid of people of color in a historically anti-black society.

At the turn of the Twentieth century in 1903, W.E.B. Du Bois prophesied in his *Souls of Black Folks* that the problem of the century would be that of the color line. He wrote about the veil of double consciousness that blacks feel living in America: the feeling of having to constantly act one way with your people and another around whites. Wilson J. Moses describes the veil as, “...not only a barrier; it is a symbol of the challenge that this barrier provides. Blackness, or the veil, stands between black folk and the full promise of America, but the veil will be put aside for those who are brave enough to see what lies beyond it... It represents the limit within which the souls of black folk are confined, but veils also represent the limitations that white folk have places upon their own vision.”<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Wilson J. Moses, “The Poetics of Ethiopianism: W.E.B Du Bois and Literary Black Nationalism,” *American literature* vol. 47, no. 3, (Nov., 1975), 422.

There seems to be a cyclical nature to the history of black resistance, ebbs and flows between optimism and pessimism. The period of optimism, where some semblance of gains are made is followed by white conservative backlash, often extremely violent, thus leading to periods of pessimism and increased radicalism and militancy. This is not to limit the actors of this history to being merely reactionary; however, it is important to remember because it illustrates the setting in which they lived. The argument can be made that “Black” Nationalism is both a part of and unique from the concept of nationalism due to the particular circumstances based on locality. A single African American community does not exist, however. This is the “paradox of racial identity” described by historian Jeffrey O.G. Ogbar, influencing life but not biologically absolute.<sup>2</sup> In a lot of ways the “black community” is more imagined than real. There has never been a homogenous way of experiencing life and viewing the world, resulting in debates and at times conflicts over ideology. There are, nevertheless, a few ideas that are central to the concept of black nationalism. The core principles of Black Nationalism are: self-determination, self-sufficiency, racial unity, and black liberation. These categories and variations of black nationalism were not mutually exclusive. The fluidity of ideas makes it difficult to label and categorize leaders and movements.

This paper argues that Black Nationalism in the Twentieth century United States was a continuation of a long struggle for black liberation which created new ideas and worked to redefine blackness, nationalism, gender, and citizenship. The writer-activist James Baldwin once said, “To be a Negro in this country and to be relatively conscious, is to be in a rage almost all the time. So that the first problem is how to control that so

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<sup>2</sup> Jeffrey O.G. Ogbar, *Black Nationalism: Radical Politics and African American Identity*, (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004), 15.

rage so that it won't destroy you."<sup>3</sup> In the 1950's and early 1960's Malcolm X represented the emotional rage in reaction to racism in the urban centers of America. The Revolutionary Action Movement (RAM) began organizing in 1962 seeking to build a movement that would harness and politicize this rage to fight against imperialism.

As the Civil Rights Movement transitioned in the 1960s, the focus shifted from demonstrating to integrate the South to the plight of urban black youth. Due to the Great Migration of African Americans to the North, Midwest, and West from 1916 to about 1970 in search of better employment opportunities, by the mid-1960's about 70% of blacks lived in metropolitan areas in central city ghettos.<sup>4</sup> Northern racial patterns contrasted greatly from the South because Northern whites did not share a mutual heritage like their Southern counterparts because they had not lived with blacks for generations.<sup>5</sup> In the South the culture had been cemented over generations of interactions, whereas migrations created urban slums in the North and West. The segregation was segregation *de facto* rather than *de jure*.

The 1960's was an era of increased militancy as numerous more combative organizations were founded, serving as an alternative to the nonviolent Civil Rights organizations. This was a global revolutionary period as former colonies were becoming decolonized and independent. Thus, Cold War politics were critical as the United States and the Soviet Union competed for the hearts and minds of what came to be called the Third World. America, in effect, was concerned about its global image, as the theory-reality divide became more apparent in the pronouncements about freedom and

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<sup>3</sup> James Baldwin, "The Negro in American Culture," *Cross Currents* vol. 11, no. 3 (1961), 205.

<sup>4</sup> George Brown Tindall, David Emory Shi, *America: A Narrative History*, (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2007), 958.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 959.



democracy when the history of race relations was so contradictory. Americans began to question the country's role as imperialists in lands filled with brown people, or at least question the economic viability of spending millions on foreign military projects when there were countless domestic problems to deal with. Activists questioned the morality of unlimited profit while masses of people starved. However, by the late 1960's into the 1970's there was a conservative backlash in America which cracked down on the organizations deemed dangerous to American society. The gains made during the 1960's were followed by the militarization of police, and the increase of surveillance and violence towards black organizations considered extremists.

Revolutionary Action Movement (RAM) was an organization that exemplified the shift in thinking amongst a large segment of black youth from civil rights protest to the demand for self-determination and fundamentally the espousal of the right and necessity for armed self-defense. Historians have often delineated this shift by describing them as two separate eras, Civil Rights and Black Power. However, RAM as a movement illustrates that the two eras cannot be so easily categorized. RAM members believed in participating in organized civil disobedience combined with discipline, pro black ideology, and a deep sense of anti-capitalist and anti-imperialist revolutionary nationalism which connected them to the decolonizing Third World. In other words, black nationalism cannot be limited to the domestic United States because organizations like RAM looked to the Third World for models of black liberation and envisioned a "world black revolution" led by the black underclass. In effect, RAM and other groups directly linked the black freedom movement in the U.S. to the global assault on empire.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Robin D.G. Kelley, *Freedom Dreams: The Black Radical Imagination*, (Boston: Beacon Press, 2002), 62-63.

RAM started out focusing on armed self-defense but became increasingly radical, eventually calling for revolution. Their program was diverse, but the fundamental goal was to form Black Power in order to combat imperialism everywhere.

## Chapter 2: Review of Literature

Much has been written about the Black Power Era, yet there is little mention of the importance of the Revolutionary Action Movement. The precepts of Black Power existed before 1965, as will be shown below in the analysis of RAM. Many historians only discuss RAM in passing. This has been for a number of reasons. RAM was an underground movement; thus, their program was far less public and glamorous than organizations such as the Black Panthers, who captivated the world. Most importantly, the repression of the state even before Counter Intelligence Program (COINTELPRO)<sup>7</sup> led to the seizure and destruction of many of the internal documents of RAM. Also, the incarceration and constant harassment of members led to the dissolution of the organization before their goals could be realized. Nonetheless, a brief review of the literature will shed light on how historians have viewed RAM.

Jeffrey O.G. Ogbar described RAM as a “synthesis of northern black nationalism, southern activism, and Third World revolutionary theory.”<sup>8</sup> Ogbar’s work primarily focuses on the Nation of Islam and the Black Panther Party for Self-Defense, but he illustrates RAM’s connection to various civil rights organizations and discusses the influence that Huey Newton and Bobby Seale’s participation in the Oakland branch of RAM had on their developing political consciousness. Ogbar’s work cogently illustrates the importance of the concept of Black Power in deconstructing notions of race and creating spaces for African Americans to forge an identity largely grounded in the

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<sup>7</sup> FBI program created in 1967 to investigate and disrupt individuals and organizations deemed to be a threat to national security. This clandestine program led to the arrest, deaths, and exile of a number of leaders deemed to be “extremists”.

<sup>8</sup> Ogbar, *Black Power: Radical Politics and African American Identity*, 78.

development of self-love and demands for self-determination. The “classic” Civil Rights era of the 1950’s challenged the legal structure of white supremacy, while also illustrating the limitations of working within the system of an anti-black society.<sup>9</sup> Black Power shifted the dynamics and definition of race and realized the limitations of nationalism in the political science sense. According to Ogbar, black nationalism is a subset of the diverse structure of ideas and illuminates the continuities between the nationalist movements of the last three centuries. In particular, black nationalism focuses on race, not ethnicity – a group consciousness (imagined or real) and belief in black ability to achieve liberation.<sup>10</sup> Black self-love and self-identity were essential. For instance, as racist and demonstrative as the rhetoric of the Nation was towards the white man and the so called deaf, dumb, and blind Negro, the organization was largely apolitical. They nevertheless promoted sobriety and redemption to ex-convicts, drug addicts, and others left out of participation in middle-class black organizations. Their apolitical nature in many ways influenced the radicalism of organizations such as the Panthers who preached direct action. The transition from using the term *negro* to *Negro* to black or African American, to the naming of children using African names or what Ogbar describes as “neo-African” names – all this reflects “the main thrust of Black Power: self-determination and a particular celebration of what it means to be a black person in America.”<sup>11</sup>

Peniel Joseph’s *Waiting ‘til the Midnight Hour* provides a narrative history of the development of Black Power. Joseph places RAM within the developing radical

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<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 191.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 1-3.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 205.

consciousness among black youth in the 1960's by illustrating its connections to various groups. Joseph argues that Black Power is often seen as "the negative counterpart to more righteous struggles for racial integration, social justice, and economic equality."<sup>12</sup>

However, the Black Power Movement was taking place during the classical Civil Rights Era and continued after the death of Dr. Martin Luther King, changing the way that black people struggled for justice. The movement became an uncompromising quest for social, political, and cultural transformation.<sup>13</sup> No longer would the people simply just turn the other cheek or wait on things to gradually get better. They were a part of this revolutionary period in world history. Asia and Latin America were in the process of freeing themselves from the shadow cast by the mountain of colonization. Africa was beginning to have visions of independence after WWII.

The revolutionary and one time chairman of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) Stokely Carmichael and the political scientist and activist Charles Hamilton co-wrote in *Black Power: The Politics of Liberation*. They wrote: "Black people have no time to play nice, polite parlor games – especially when the lives of *their* children are at stake."<sup>14</sup> The radical youths in America were clashing with the elders who spoke of gradual change and non-violent action. Henry Louis Gates argues, "...the spirit motivating [Black Power] was as clear as the fingers of a clenched fist. Young black America was fed up with sitting in. The time had arrived for militant, racial activism and revolt."<sup>15</sup> *Black Power* argues that the Civil Rights Movement did not provide any voice

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<sup>12</sup> Peniel E. Joseph, "Rethinking the Black Power Era," *The Journal of Southern History* vol. 75, no. 3 (August 2009), 707.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid*, 708.

<sup>14</sup> Ogbar, *Black Power: Radical Politics and African-American Identity*, ix.

<sup>15</sup> Henry Louis Gates, Jr. and Nellie Y. McKay, ed., *The Norton Anthology of African American Literature*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2004), 1835.

or outlet for the growing anger and militancy of the youths locked in the urban ghettos. These youths could not relate to the language of love and suffering and turn the other cheek because that type of language had achieved very little.<sup>16</sup> Instead they decided that they would protect themselves. They were not going to sit back and just let anyone harm them or their people. For example, the Deacons of Defense and Justice in Louisiana took it upon themselves to stay armed and ready for white terrorism that was as American as apple pie. Carmichael and Hamilton wrote, "Nothing more quickly repels someone bent on destroying you than the unequivocal message: "O.K. fool, make your move, and run the same risk I run—of dying."<sup>17</sup>

Dean E. Robinson points out the importance of the concept of Black Power to freedom struggles around the world. Robinson wrote, "...modern black nationalism, unlike earlier forms, profoundly influenced the radical politics of its era."<sup>18</sup> Robinson, like many scholars who have discussed RAM, compares them to the Black Panther Party. He argues that RAM can more accurately be described as "nationalistic" although the BPP made claims to be a revolutionary nationalist organization. Robinson places RAM within the category of "paraintellectual" black nationalist discourse, which after the riots of the 1960's sought to represent an "authentic" voice of the black masses.<sup>19</sup>

Joshua Bloom and Waldo E. Martin, Jr. also discuss RAM's influence on the BPP. Huey Newton and Bobby Seale were exposed to revolutionary writings through RAM. Bloom and Martin's main argument is that RAM advanced a pivotal idea that

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<sup>16</sup> Stokely Carmichael and Charles V. Hamilton, *Black Power: The Politics of Liberation in America*, (New York: Vintage Books, 1967), 50-51.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 52.

<sup>18</sup> Dean E. Robinson, *Black Nationalism in American Politics and Thought*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 89.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 60, 71.

became central to the politics of the BPP – that African Americans were domestically colonized rather than citizens.<sup>20</sup> However, due to disagreements over tactics there was a split between factions. The Black Panther Party of Northern California remained affiliated with RAM, while the Black Panther Party for Self-Defense was formed by Newton and Seale to “reach the brothers on the block”. Bloom and Martin argue that Newton and Seale had grown tired of all the abstract theorizing by the primarily college educated RAM members and sought to take action.<sup>21</sup>

Robin Kelley has provided the most extensive writings on RAM in a number of essays and book chapters. Again, the focus was not on RAM specifically, yet he provides important insight into RAM’s admiration of Mao and China’s revolution, as well as Robert Williams. Williams was an ideological mentor because of his constant espousal of armed self-defense for RAM because of his constant espousal of armed self-defense and served as the international chairman. For example, Kelley and Betsy Esch’s essay “Black Like Mao: Red China and Black Revolution” argues that Mao belongs in the pantheon of black radical heroes, thereby placing the black freedom struggle in an international context.<sup>22</sup> It was the example of the Chinese Revolution that showed blacks that they did not have to wait for “objective conditions”. Further, China and Cuba’s willingness to “fight force with force” was an inspiration.<sup>23</sup> Esch and Kelley describe numerous organizations that were either influenced or sought to build a connection between Afro-Asia, most notably the RAM, the African Blood Brotherhood (ABB), and the Black

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<sup>20</sup> Joshua Bloom and Waldo E. Martin, Jr., *Black Against Empire: The History and Politics of the Black Panther Party*, (Oakland: University of California, 2016), 32.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 94.

<sup>22</sup> Betsy Esch and Robin D.G. Kelley, “Black Like Moa: Red China and Black Revolution,” Fred Ho and Bill V. Mullen, ed., *Afro Asia: Revolutionary Political & Cultural Connections Between African Americans & Asian Americans*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008), 97.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*

Panther Party (BPP). RAM is described as representing “the first serious and sustained attempt in the post war period to wed Marxism, Black Nationalism, And Third World internationalism into a coherent and revolutionary program.”<sup>24</sup>

Kelley views RAM from an international perspective, linking them to the burgeoning Third World liberation movements. It is not surprising due to his interest in the history of interactions between African Americans and Communism. In fact, Kelley provided inspiration for this paper with his discussions of “freedom dreams,” choosing to focus on visions and dreams of the future rather than what through hindsight is often viewed as shortcomings and failures. While RAM did not achieve its end goals that does not take away from the importance of dreaming of a better future. Before freedom can become a reality, it must be a dream first. Kelley argues that it was the “pyrrhic victories” of the Civil Rights Movement era that begot Black Power, and RAM played an integral role in its theoretical development.<sup>25</sup> He also provides useful insight on the ways in which working class people create forms of rebellion in their day-to-day lives.

Keeping “freedom dreams” in mind, a useful image of what RAM envisioned itself to be can be found in Sam Greenlee’s 1969 book which later became a movie in 1973 “The Spook Who Sat By the Door.” It was an example of art imitating life. The story’s main character rose in the ranks of the CIA and learned the methods of warfare and espionage. He then took what he learned and returned to his community in the South Side of Chicago, politicizing the gangs and teaching them how to conduct urban guerrilla warfare. The story provides a literary example of what RAM and Robert Williams envisioned.

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<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>25</sup> Kelley, *Freedom Dreams*, 61-62.



Thomas L. Blair wrote about RAM as a contemporary. Written in 1977, his book *Retreat to the Ghetto: The End of A Dream?* examined that cultural, political, and economic movements of the time. Blair describes the clashes between those who claimed to be socialists and those who claimed cultural nationalism. He placed RAM within the context of what he called “New Black Marxists” explaining, “The issue of race and class as the correct ideological basis of the black revolution, one of the most significant developments in black thought in the post-Malcolm X era.”<sup>26</sup> Further, “violence alone rarely leads to the overthrow of society.”<sup>27</sup> Therefore, a revolution requires a cultural component to buttress the scientific analysis and , if necessary, violence in order to succeed. It was in this sense that Max Stanford and RAM most contributed to the Black Power Movement, as Blair argued, “Max Stanford’s main skills...taking ideas he developed in his activist youth groups like SNCC, RAM, and the New York Black Panther Party chapter, and setting them down as organizational principles for the formation of new groups.”<sup>28</sup> In other words, Blair argues that it was the theoretical contributions of RAM that stand out, rather than the shortcomings of the organization.

Muhammad Ahmad (Max Stanford) has written about RAM and other organizations of the 1960’s from the perspective of a participant. Ahmad provides useful primary documents that have heavily contributed to this study. Through his personal contacts Ahmad uses interviews and his experiences to provide insight into the zeitgeist of the era. This is particularly important because it illustrates the ways in which RAM was connected to a numerous organizations, thereby illustrating the versatility and

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<sup>26</sup> Thomas L. Blair, “Retreat to the Ghetto: The End of A Dream?”, (New York: Hill and Wang, 1977), 157.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 49.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 114.

importance of RAM in the developing consciousness of America's black youth and workers.

This paper fits within the historiography by going into further detail into some of the internal documents of RAM in order to better understand the movement's development and goals. By doing so I argue that RAM is underappreciated by mainstream assessments of both the Civil Rights and Black Power eras. RAM's impact goes beyond being a footnote to the much more known Black Panthers. RAM members were also part of a diverse collection of organizations and movements, all as part of their goal to radicalize the black community. By doing so, RAM exemplified flexibility in their program and ability to adjust to the fluid conditions involved in preparing for revolution.

This paper is from the perspective that RAM was a continuation of the black freedom struggle not only in the United States, but also throughout the Third World. RAM looked to history for guidance in planning for the future. The organization and militance of slave revolts, combined with the fiery demands for black people to unite and strike for freedom espoused by David Walker and Henry Highland Garnett served as inspirations of the revolutionary fervor of the ancestors. The scientific analysis and Pan-African Congresses of Du Bois served as an example of the scholarly approach that RAM sought to blend with the black nationalism rooted in the black working class of Garvey. The disciplined and spiritual nature of the Nation of Islam inspired the core of RAM's internal structure. The recurring theme of white backlash brought to light the prevalence of violence as a political tool. Violence historically had proven to be effective in restraining the political aspirations of African Americans. Thus, the vehement

articulations of Malcolm X and Robert Williams preaching the need for armed self-defense lay the foundation for RAM's program. Williams also provided the blueprint for RAM's urban guerrilla tactics. The international perspective and critiques of Communism by organizations such as the African Blood Brotherhood and individuals like Harold Cruse and Audley Moore provided spaces for RAM to form their own analysis of Marxism. The liberation movements throughout the Third World proved that revolution against imperialists was possible. Cuba and China were particularly inspirational, especially Chairman Mao's new form of Marxism for the "colored" world. Finally, SNCC taught RAM the power of the grassroots activism.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> The Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) was founded in 1960. The Organization participated in the Civil Rights demonstrations and was pivotal in the organization of the sit-ins movement and the Freedom Rides. However, under Carmichael's leadership SNCC was becoming more impatient with the slow progress of non-violent protest. Organizations such as SNCC and the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE) had propagated integrationist ideals but became "revolutionary cadres".

### Chapter 3: The Emergence of the Revolutionary Action Movement

RAM was a revolutionary nationalist organization in the 1960's that used its analysis of history to create programs and a plan of action to accomplish their goal of "world black revolution". Their platform was a blend of earlier black nationalist and Pan-African thinkers with Marxist-Lenist-Maoist theory. RAM sought to build an organization that was based in grass roots activism like the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, disciplined like the Nation of Islam, had a nationalist pan-African vision like Garvey, and the scientific analysis of W.E.B. Du Bois.

RAM was created in 1963 in an era in which African American youth were becoming disillusioned with the gradualist approach of the dominant Civil Rights organizations. RAM's objectives were to give black people a sense of racial pride, dignity, unity, and solidarity in struggle, a new image of manhood and womanhood, free black people from colonial and imperialist bondage everywhere, take whatever steps necessary to achieve that goal, and to give black people a sense of purpose.<sup>30</sup> Their motto was "One Purpose, One Aim, One Destiny," a call back to Marcus Garvey and the Universal Improvement Association's (UNIA) motto "One God, One Aim, One Destiny". RAM exchanged "purpose" for "God" but were guided in purpose by the same spiritual zeal.

A central figure in RAM was Maxwell Stanford (Muhammad Ahmad). He was born July 31, 1941 in Philadelphia. He had his first racial conflict at a young age. In 1950 he

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<sup>30</sup> Max Stanford, "Revolutionary Nationalism, Black Nationalism or Just Plain Blackism," in *Black Nationalism in America*, ed. John H. Bracey Jr., August Meier, Elliot Rudwick, (Indianapolis and New York: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, Inc., 1970), 508.

was chased by older white men yelling “kill those niggers” after fighting with white boys, eventually leading to what he describes as a “minor race war”. When he made it back to the black community safely the older black boys went back to “take care of business”.<sup>31</sup> He was only nine years old, yet he had been threatened by grown men. This was an early formative experience in the politics of race.<sup>32</sup> Another incident took place while he was in junior high. A city wide “race war” broke out after two black teens had been beaten nearly to death, one in particular was beaten by white men and thrown into a creek. He learned a fundamental lesson; whites would unite against blacks and there was only one thing they respected – power. Stanford’s father was fired for striking his boss due to his use of racial slurs. When the black workers walked off the job in solidarity, the boss learned that it would cost more to train new workers than to meet the demands of the black workers. This was an example of the power which he believed whites respected.<sup>33</sup>

Stanford was heavily influenced by his father’s political involvement as an NAACP activist and espousal of black entrepreneurial nationalism which was deeply suspicious of the impact of integration on black businesses. His father also frequently held political discussions and NAACP meetings in his home. Stanford’s mother was a working class woman who questioned his father’s middle-class aspirations. Stanford also absorbed ideas about the Nation of Islam and Malcolm X through a cousin who was a member of Muhammad Mosque Number 12 in Philadelphia. Another cousin introduced

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<sup>31</sup> Muhammad Ahmad Biographical Papers 1, Folder 010629-001-002, The Black Power Movement: Papers of the Revolutionary Action Movement, 1962-1996, <https://congressional.proquest.com/histvault?q=010629-001-002&accountid=11243>.

<sup>32</sup> “All African People are Prisoners of War!”: An Interview with Muhammad Ahmad, Askia Muhammad Touré (1973), Muhammad Ahmad Biographical Papers 1, Folder 010629-001-002, The Black Power Movement: Papers of the Revolutionary Action Movement, 1962-1996, <https://congressional.proquest.com/histvault?q=010629-001-002&accountid=11243..>

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*

Stanford to jazz at an early age. He even saw Charlie Parker perform when he was nine years old.<sup>34</sup> This blend of political ideologies and black culture would have a lasting impact on Stanford's developing consciousness, exemplified year later through the arguments of RAM concerning the importance of culture to the success of revolution.

By 1959 Stanford was heavily influenced by the Nation of Islam with an interest in the study of economics and political science. Prior to college, Stanford was just an "occasional participant, a follower."<sup>35</sup> He had participated in the picketing of Woolworth Stores in Philadelphia prior to attending Central State in the early 1960s and listening to sit-in leaders at different churches. Stanford attended church with a friend to hear the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. speak, and met King afterwards. He was "greatly impressed."<sup>36</sup>

In September 1960 Stanford went to Central State College, an Historically Black College (HBCU) in Wilberforce, Ohio. It was during this time that he became a follower of Robert F. Williams. James Edward Smethurst argues that this was a uniquely formative experience due to the confluence of people and ideas. There were African students, many of whom were radical and sometimes Marxist.<sup>37</sup> For example, while attending Central State Stanford met an African revolutionary from Kenya named George Bengo who taught him about the Mau Mau movement.<sup>38</sup> There were also students who had been kicked out of southern schools for participating in civil rights demonstrations

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<sup>34</sup> James Edward Smethurst, *The Black Arts Movement: Literary Nationalism in the 1960s and 1970s*, (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2005), 165.

<sup>35</sup> Muhammad Ahmad Biographical Papers 1, Folder 010629-001-002, The Black Power Movement: Papers of the Revolutionary Action Movement, 1962-1996.

<sup>36</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>37</sup> Smethurst, *The Black Arts Movement*, 165.

<sup>38</sup> Muhammad Ahmad Biographical Papers 1, The Black Power Movement: Papers of the Revolutionary Action Movement, 1962-1996.

and liberal-Left professors who had trouble getting jobs elsewhere. In effect, Stanford was exposed to students familiar with the sit-in movement of 1960, Malcolm and the Nation of Islam, and Robert Williams' call for armed self-defense outside of the classroom, as well as being introduced to radical ideas about philosophy, art, political science, and economics in class.<sup>39</sup>

When Stanford visited Antioch College he met a white student John Friedman who introduced him to CORE to assist in recruiting Freedom Riders. In fact, he was supposed to be a Freedom Rider himself and travel to Monroe, North Carolina in August. Stanford had been appointed the representative to the National Student Association Congress. However, Williams was forced into exile, leading to Stanford's decision to not participate. He subscribed to Williams' *The Crusader* and began circulating copies on campus.

Stanford created "Soul phi Soul" or "Soul Society" in rebellion against Greek life on campus and the contradictions of the black bourgeoisie.<sup>40</sup> This was indicative of Stanford's growing consciousness that would grow beyond campus in years to come. In September 1961 Stanford, Haskell Brewton, Wanda Marshall, Donald Worthy, and others organized a Students for Democratic Society (SDS) chapter, an off campus group called Challenge. They began to organize a student revolution. Challenge was a group of progressive students that fought for academic freedom and student power. Stanford's consciousness was developing into social rebellion. It was through SDS conferences that Stanford met members of SNCC.

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<sup>39</sup> Smethurst, *The Black Arts Movement*, 166.

<sup>40</sup> "All African People are Prisoners of War!", Muhammad Ahmad Biographical Papers 1.

### *Formation of RAM*

In Spring 1962 a coalition of various groups formed creating the RAM party.<sup>41</sup> The original name was “Reform” Action Movement so as not to raise the alarm of administrators. RAM was in touch with groups across the country and had attended several national conferences.

Donald Freeman, a student turned activist and school teacher from Cleveland, Ohio, became a political mentor for the RAM student coalition. Freeman and Stanford had met at a conference of the Nation Student Association in Madison, Wisconsin in 1961.<sup>42</sup> Stanford also met Malcolm X in 1962 and their relationship would have a significant impact on RAM.

Many left school and returned to their communities. Stanford returned to Philadelphia in 1962 and began working with Marion Barry of SNCC raising money. Freeman and RAM members in Cleveland worked publicly through the Afro-American Institute<sup>43</sup>. The board or “Soul Circle” consisted of a small group of black men with ties to community organizations and labor, civil rights, and student groups. A few members of the board were Henry Glover, Arthur Evans, Nate Bryan, and Hanif Wahab. They gave lectures on African history and politics and organized forums to debate the future of the civil rights movement. Drummer Max Roach was recruited to help organize a panel on “The Role of the Black Artist in the Struggle for Freedom.” Leaflets and pamphlets addressed to “To Whom It May Concern” were distributed to stimulate discussion on

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<sup>41</sup> Muhammad Ahmad Biographical Papers 1, *The Black Power Movement: Papers of the Revolutionary Action Movement, 1962-1996*.

<sup>42</sup> Smethurst, *The Black Arts Movement*, 167.

<sup>43</sup> An activist policy-oriented think tank formed in the fall of 1962. It operated as one of RAM’s many front organizations.



elections, urban renewal, black economic subservience, arms race, and the struggle in the South. Within a year the leaflets would become a newsletter *Afroopinion*.<sup>44</sup> The first community branch was formed in December 1962 in Philadelphia and became public in January 1963. Philadelphia had historically been an important hub in the black freedom struggle. Smethurst points out that Philadelphia had become a “way post” of the Southern movement” and a center of Northern civil rights struggle. This “civil rights dynamism” allowed Stanford to work with SNCC, remnants of the UNIA, Organization Alert, and the Nation of Islam.<sup>45</sup> It was through Organization Alert that Stanford met Larry Neal, who later joined RAM at their national meeting in Detroit in 1964. Through these developing connections, Stanford was introduced to SNCC’s Ella Baker. He was also introduced to the former Garveyite and former Communist Queen Mother Audley Moore at a Free Mae Mallory Meeting at her home in Philadelphia.<sup>46</sup>

Through the Afro-American Institute RAM members worked with CORE demanding improvements in hospital care for black patients and protest exclusion of African and African American history in public school curriculums. Their most important campaign of 1963 was for the defense of Mae Mallory who was held in jail for her association with Robert Williams. The Institute and its allies, including the Nation of Islam, petitioned the governor of Ohio to revoke the warrant of extradition, and organized a mass demonstration in front of the county jail demanding Mallory’s immediate release.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> Kelley, *Freedom Dreams*, 74.

<sup>45</sup> Smethurst, *The Black Arts Movement*, 168.

<sup>46</sup> Ahmad, *We Will Return in the Whirlwind: Black Radical Organizations 1960-1975*, (Chicago: Charles H. Kerr Publishing Company, 2007), 114-15.

<sup>47</sup> Kelley, *Freedom Dreams*, 75.

Stanford was interested in the role of the black working class in the future of the movement. Stanford, Wanda Marshall, Stan Daniels, and Ethel Johnson formed the collective called the Revolutionary Action Movement in Philadelphia in 1963. Guided by Ethel Johnson, co-worker of Robert Williams, they published the journal *Black America*. The journal was edited by Grace Boggs, Roland Snellings, and Stanford. The purpose of the newspaper was to serve as the theoretical journal of RAM, bring clarity and give direction to revolutionary struggle, help build leadership, present revolutionary unity and new international spirit of Pan-Africanism, unite Black America with the Bandung world, and fight for liberation of oppressed peoples everywhere.<sup>48</sup> Grace Lee Boggs wrote in her autobiography describing some of her experiences with RAM. In 1964 about a half dozen RAM members stayed in the Boggs' basement working on the Fall edition of *Black America*. She described the publication as “an excellent introduction into the ideas that went into the creation of the Black Power Movement.”<sup>49</sup>

Between 1962 and 1963 RAM recognized the importance of building a national black revolutionary cadre organization.<sup>50</sup> RAM believed that one of the first stages was awakening the masses to the nature of their oppression. They wanted to develop a mass activist movement that would change the fundamental structure of American and world society.<sup>51</sup> RAM participated in mass demonstrations in support of the southern struggle,

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<sup>48</sup> “Keep on Pushin,” *Black America* (Summer-Fall 1965), [http://Freedomarchives.org/Documents/Finder/DOC513\\_scans/RAM/513.RAM.Black.America.Summer.1965.pdf](http://Freedomarchives.org/Documents/Finder/DOC513_scans/RAM/513.RAM.Black.America.Summer.1965.pdf), 2.

<sup>49</sup> Grace Lee Boggs, *Living for Change: An Autobiography*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998), 134.

<sup>50</sup> Muhammad Ahmad Biographical Papers 1, The Black Power Movement: Papers of the Revolutionary Action Movement, 1962-1996.

<sup>51</sup> RAM internal document “Formative Years: Fall 62/1963,” Revolutionary Action Movement, Internal Documents, 1964-1968, on Black Guard, 12 Point Program of RAM, and Afro-American Student Movement, Folder 010629-005-0787, The Black Power Movement: Papers of the Revolutionary Action

starting in Philadelphia, Cleveland, Detroit, New York, and Chicago. They also participated in and organized demonstrations led by SNCC and NAACP in support of mass voter registration drives in Albany, GA, Greenwood, Mississippi, and Selma, Alabama.<sup>52</sup>

Stanford wrote an article entitled “Revolutionary Nationalism and the Afro-American Student” in May 1962 in which he argues that Afro-Americans had been living in economic captivity. It was Stanford’s view that blacks had become disillusioned, especially the youth. The youth rebuked the bourgeois philosophy of slowly but surely. Because of this, the Afro-American student had to become the “avant-garde” to “form a philosophy... coming from the masses of the people that are exploited by the power elite.”<sup>53</sup> Such arguments were framed based on a colonial model that had been espoused since the 19<sup>th</sup> century through people such as Martin Delaney. Many scholars during the time were beginning to shift the focus of their analysis. Harold Cruse in particular influenced RAM’s early developing philosophy with his 1962 article “Revolutionary Nationalism and the Afro-American.”<sup>54</sup> Cruse posited that African Americans were domestically colonized creating “the socioeconomic factors which form the material basis of revolutionary nationalism.”<sup>55</sup> Cruse continued, “the United States installed a colonial

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Movement, 1962-1996, Series 5: Revolutionary Action Movement Documents, 1963-1998.  
<https://congressional.proquest.com/histvault?q=010629-0050787&accounted=11243>.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>53</sup> Max Stanford, “Revolutionary Nationalism and the Afro-American Student,” May 1962, Muhammad Ahmad (Max Stanford) Writings, 1962-1991, Folder 010629-001-0256, The Black Power Movement: Papers of the Revolutionary Action Movement 1962-1996, Series 2: Muhammad Ahmad (Max Stanford), Writings, 1962-1996, <https://congressional.proquest.com/histvault?q=010629-001-0526&accounted=11243>.

<sup>54</sup> Harold Cruse, “Revolutionary Nationalism and the Afro-American,” originally in “Revolutionary Nationalism and the Afro-American,” *Studies of the Left*, Vol. 2, no. 3, 1962, [http://www.my.list.edu/~jkshapi/Cruse\\_Revolutionary%20Nationlism.pdf](http://www.my.list.edu/~jkshapi/Cruse_Revolutionary%20Nationlism.pdf).

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.

system in the South, rather than colonize Africa...Emancipation raised the Negro to semi-dependent man, not to an equal or independent being.”<sup>56</sup>

The colonial model explains: "Blacks are viewed as a separate nation which exports cheap labor and imports finished goods from the broader community."<sup>57</sup> By controlling the economics the power structure controls the Black community. Under this model, the Black community has suffered from imperialism through slavery, cultural appropriation, and commodification. The destruction of the cultural base of the Black community, therefore, undermines its ability to mobilize resources for effective political struggle.<sup>58</sup> The community did not own or control its labor because it does not own the land. Just as in Ghana the major crop cocoa made foreign investors a fortune but provided very little benefit to the farmers or the country. Walter Rodney writes that while the price for cocoa exports dropped the prices on imported goods doubled and trebled.<sup>59</sup> In Jamaica it was sugarcane and coffee that made the planters and foreign investors wealthy while the masses of people starved. The difference in America was that black people were the minority, whereas in Ghana and Jamaica they were the majority. Colonies provide raw materials, then markets for finished products. They exist to enrich the colonizer. In this sense, it can be argued that the black community is a colony of America. African Americans asked “what about me?” after the African Liberation Movements. J. Herman Blake argues: “While Africans and Asians were gaining independence and taking seats in

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<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>57</sup> Luscious J. Barker and Mack H. Jones, *African Americans and the American Political System*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed., (New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1994), 8.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.* 9.

<sup>59</sup> Walter Rodney, *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa*, (Washing, D.C.: Howard University Press, 1982), 158.

the halls of world council, the gap between black and white Americans was changing perceptibly.”<sup>60</sup>

In October Stanford wrote “Orientation to a Black Mass Movement”, defining the goal of revolution as follows, “The ultimate goal of “World Black Revolution” – a complete change of society, must become his second religion.”<sup>61</sup> Stanford argued that there was a need for social revolution because Afro-Americans tried to liberate themselves by compromising with “the beasts”, only leading to frustrating experiences. Black people had to realize who their true enemy was, to “face reality as it exists, not the way he would like it to be.” Therefore, a permanent organized structure had to be created in order to reach the black masses and create a black inter-national perspective to destroy the universal slave masters.<sup>62</sup>

In Northern California, RAM grew out of the Afro-American Association. Founded in 1962 by Donald Warden, the Afro-American Association consisted of students from UC Berkeley and Merritt College such as Leslie and Jim Lacy, Cedric Robinson, Ernest Allen, and Huey Newton.<sup>63</sup> In Los Angeles, the president of the branch of the Afro-American Association was Ron Everett, who would go on to form the US Organization<sup>64</sup>. In East Bay, the Progressive Labor Movement (PL) sponsored trips to Cuba. Allen was travelling with members of UHURU Luke Tripp, Charles “Mao”

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<sup>60</sup> J. Herman Blake, “Black Nationalism”, *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Sciences* 382, (March, 1960), 21.

<sup>61</sup> Max Stanford, “Orientation to a Black Mass Movement,” October 1962, Muhammad Ahmad (Max Stanford) Writings, 1962-1991, Folder 010629-001-0256, The Black Power Movement: Papers of the Revolutionary Action Movement 1962-1996, Series 2: Muhammad Ahmad (Max Stanford), Writings, 1962-1996, <https://congressional.proquest.com/histvault?q=010629-001-05268&accountid=11243>.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>63</sup> Kelley, *Freedom Dreams*, 75.

<sup>64</sup> US was designed to be a vanguard that would ignite the Black cultural revolution by introducing an alternative value system, ritual, and aesthetic expressions. Karenga called his philosophy “Kawaida” meaning “tradition and reason” in Swahili.

Johnson, Charles Simmons, and General Baker. They later played an important role in the formation of the League of Revolutionary Workers in Detroit. It was on his trip in 1964 that Ernest Allen discovered RAM through interactions with Stanford who was already in Cuba visiting Robert Williams. Allen and the Detroit group left Cuba committed to building RAM. In fact, Allen stopped in Cleveland on the way home, returning to Oakland with copies of *The Crusader* and RAM materials. Isaac Moore, Kenn Freeman (Mamadou Lumumba), Bobby Seale, and Allen established base at Merritt College through the Soul Students Advisory Council. Allen, Seale, and Newton collaborated through Donald Warden's Afro-American Association.<sup>65</sup> In the process, *Soulbook: The Revolutionary Journal of the Black World* was founded.<sup>66</sup> The Soul Students Advisory Council operated as a front for RAM in the Bay area.

RAM wrote about their trip to Cuba in which members broke the travel ban due to their admiration for the supposed racial progress in post-Revolution Cuba. The “interracial society” in Cuba that RAM admired would prove to not necessarily be true, as Robert Williams would later learn, due to their emphasis on class analysis rather than race. However, the Cuban Revolution served as a beacon of inspiration for RAM and other black radicals, providing an example of a successful revolution against imperialist powers. RAM was particularly interested in the importance of mass education in order to revolutionize the ways in which African Americans thought and viewed themselves in a global perspective.<sup>67</sup> Don Freeman described RAM as “superbly proclaimed” in Castro’s

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<sup>65</sup> Bloom and Martin, Jr., *Black Against Empire*, 31, 32.

<sup>66</sup> Kelley, *Freedom Dreams*, 75-76.

<sup>67</sup> “Our Trip to Cuba,” *Black America* (Fall 1964), 21-22, [http://freedomarchives.org/Documents/Finder/DOC513\\_scans/RAM/513.RAM.Black.America.Fall.1964.pdf](http://freedomarchives.org/Documents/Finder/DOC513_scans/RAM/513.RAM.Black.America.Fall.1964.pdf).

Second Declaration of Havana in which Castro stated, "...it is the duty of the revolutionary to *make* the revolution."<sup>68</sup>

FBI documents show that RAM was being monitored even in the early stages of its development. Max Stanford was particularly surveilled and considered the leader of the organization. An FBI document written 31 August 1964 linked Stanford to Robert Williams noting that attempts were made by Stanford to acquire permission to travel to Cuba under the pretense of one of its front organizations. Stanford was issued a passport 11 June 1964. The FBI stated that Stanford claimed he would be visiting Western Europe for "the purpose of gathering news." On June 26, Milton R. Henry wrote a letter requesting Stanford's travel to Cuba on behalf of the Afro-American Broadcasting and Recording Company (AABRC).<sup>69</sup>

Another FBI document, a memorandum written 25 September 1964, illustrates the continuous surveillance of Stanford and RAM. An informant whose name is redacted but "...has furnished reliable information in the past" detailed a conference held Sunday, 31 March 1963 in Philadelphia. The purpose of the conference was "to outline the present role of Afro-American youth in the struggle for equality and social justice." At this conference the youth agreed that the term "Negro" was a derogatory term used to separate them from the land of their origin, its history and culture. Thus, RAM demanded a separate ethnic group, just as the Chinese were from China. A panel discussion was

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<sup>68</sup> Don Freeman, "Black Youth and Afro-American Liberation," *Black America* (Fall 1964), 16, [http://freedomarchives.org/Documents/Finder/DOC513\\_scans/RAM/513.RAM.Black.America.Fall.1964.pdf](http://freedomarchives.org/Documents/Finder/DOC513_scans/RAM/513.RAM.Black.America.Fall.1964.pdf).

<sup>69</sup> "#20535" detailing surveillance of Max Stanford's travel plans and acquisition of passport, August 31, 1964, FBI File on Maxwell C. Stanford (Muhammad Ahmad), 1964-1974, Folder 010629-004-0301, The Black Power Movement: Papers of the Revolutionary Action Movement, 1962-1996, Series 4 FBI File on Maxwell Stanford (Muhammad Ahmad), <https://congressional.proquest.com/histvault?q=010629-004-0301&id=11243>.

held regarding juvenile delinquency and unemployment to which attendants agreed that “the black man had to become a producer in farming, manufacturing, business, and industry rather than merely a consumer.” This was along the lines of RAM’s belief in the concept that would become known as Black Power. The informant characterized Stanford as an active leader and excellent speaker that attracted many followers and worked “in a tone of a religious speaker promoting Negro nationalism.” One of the important takeaways from the conference was RAM’s declaration that it was “not an organization, but a movement.” The memo states that the FBI was paying close attention to the rhetoric of *Black America*, as well as the activities of RAM.<sup>70</sup>

Stanford and other RAM members travelled throughout North Carolina, Mississippi, Tennessee, and Georgia participating in demonstrations and attending SNCC conferences. He met and created working relationships with local leaders such as Slater King, a revolutionary leader in Albany, GA. While working with SNCC to raise funds for the southern struggle, RAM members met and exchanged views with southern activists.<sup>71</sup> Stanford returned to Philadelphia during the week to work as a mail clerk at the University of Pennsylvania and often travelled to New York Muhammad Mosque, especially to ask Malcolm questions.<sup>72</sup> In the summer of 1963 Don Freeman convened the Black Vanguard Conference in Cleveland, Ohio. Conference participants helped to mobilize the March on Washington For Jobs and Freedom that took place 28 August

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<sup>70</sup> Memo describing information gathered through a confidential informant about a youth conference held by in Philadelphia, September 25, 1964. FBI File on Maxwell C. Stanford (Muhammad Ahmad), 1964-1974, Folder 010629-004-0301, The Black Power Movement: Papers of the Revolutionary Action Movement, 1962-1996, Series 4 FBI File on Maxwell Stanford (Muhammad Ahmad), <https://congressional.proquest.com/histvault?q=010629-004-0301&id=11243>.

<sup>71</sup> RAM internal document “Formative Years: Fall 62/1963,” Folder 010629-005-0787, The Black Power Movement: Papers of the Revolutionary Action Movement, 1962-1996.

<sup>72</sup> Muhammad Ahmad Biographical Papers 1, Folder 010629-001-002, The Black Power Movement: Papers of the Revolutionary Action Movement, 1962-1996.



1963. RAM participated in the march because of their focus on the development of the working class; however, they believed that the movement had to progress beyond marching to address self-determination and class struggle. Stanford then travelled South to meet with leaders of SNCC.<sup>73</sup> SNCC attracted radicals from RAM to organize a black political party in Alabama through the Lowndes County Freedom Organization (LCFO). The symbol for this party was the black panther that became famous years later.<sup>74</sup> That same year Stanford was taught lessons in political theory by Queen Mother Audley Moore. She would become his main mentor besides Malcolm X.<sup>75</sup> Stanford also met John Coltrane and Max Roach in 1963, illustrating the growing network that Stanford was building.<sup>76</sup>

In Philadelphia, RAM was activist minded. RAM worked with Reverend Leon Sullivan and 300 ministers to organize selective boycotts. With about 15 people, Stanley Daniels and Max Stanford distributed leaflets, covering all of West Philadelphia block by block, going into bars and candy stores.<sup>77</sup> They also worked with the president of the Philadelphia chapter of the NAACP Cecil B. Moore to organize week long demonstrations involving 50,000 black workers protesting racial discrimination in the building trades and helping to organize the infamous school construction site demonstration.<sup>78</sup> The demonstration was organized by the NAACP against job

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<sup>73</sup> Muhammad Ahmad Biographical Papers 1, Folder 010629-001-002, The Black Power Movement: Papers of the Revolutionary Action Movement, 1962-1996.

<sup>74</sup> Joseph, *Waiting 'til the Midnight Hour*, 124.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>77</sup> Muhammad Ahmad Biographical Papers 1, Folder 010629-001-002, The Black Power Movement: Papers of the Revolutionary Action Movement, 1962-1996.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*

discrimination at the school construction job.<sup>79</sup> There were 75 NAACP pickets aimed at some unions that provided no job opportunities for Negroes in such professions as electricians, steam lifters, plumbers, and roofers.<sup>80</sup> A scuffle broke out in which three police officers were injured, resulting in the arrest of Stan Daniels and Stanford. The peaceful demonstrators were attacked by police, forcing Stanford to view the police and the entire capitalist state apparatus as opposed to the interest of the African American people.<sup>81</sup> The Assistant District Attorney Gordon Gelford told Judge David L. Ullman that the case was “too weak” to prosecute. Therefore, the charges were dropped.<sup>82</sup>

In 1964 Don Freeman and Stanford travelled south, James and Grace Boggs travelled North, and Milton and Richard Henry in Detroit. They all worked to raise money to convene a student conference sponsored by Afro-American Student Movement (ASM). That year there were two conferences held in Nashville, Tennessee. On 1 May 1964 at the annual SNCC retreat, the leadership was challenged to debate the question of non-violence versus self-defense.<sup>83</sup> By December 1965, field reports received from RAM members in SNCC illustrated a major shift taking place inside the Civil Rights

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<sup>79</sup> Newspaper Clipping, 13 June 1963, Folder 010629-016-0754, Revolutionary Action Movement Newspaper Clippings, 1963-1967, Folder: 010629-016-0754, The Black Power Movement: Papers of the Revolutionary Action Movement 1962-1996, Series 13 Oversize Materials 1962-1990. <https://congressional.proquest.com/histvault?q=010629-016-0754&accountid=11243>.

<sup>80</sup> “3 Policemen Hurt Halting One Scuffle,” 27 May 1963. Revolutionary Action Movement Newspaper Clippings, 1963-1967, Folder: 010629-016-0754, The Black Power Movement: Papers of the Revolutionary Action Movement 1962-1996, Series 13 Oversize Materials 1962-1990, <https://congressional.proquest.com/histvault?q=010629-016-0754&accountid=11243>.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>82</sup> “District Attorney Drops Charges Against 2 Pickets,” *The Evening Bulletin*, 17 April 1964, Revolutionary Action Movement Newspaper Clippings, 1963-1967, Folder: 010629-016-0754, The Black Power Movement: Papers of the Revolutionary Action Movement 1962-1996, Series 13 Oversize Materials 1962-1990, <https://congressional.proquest.com/histvault?q=010629-016-0754&accountid=11243>.

<sup>83</sup> Muhammad Ahmad Biographical Papers 1, Folder 010629-001-002, The Black Power Movement Papers: Papers of the Revolutionary Action Movement, 1962-1996.

Movement.<sup>84</sup> The National Afro-American Student Conference was held October 30 – November 1. This was the first Afro-American Student Conference on Black Nationalism. It was held at the historic Fisk University. RAM noted some important points discussed during the conference including, the development of a permanent underground secretariat to carry out plans, laying a base for an underground movement, unity with the African, Asian, and Latin American Revolution, the adoption Robert F. Williams as leader in exile, the achievement of Afro-American solidarity (to push the restoration of the Revolutionary Spirit to Pan-Africanism), the philosophy of Pan-African Socialism, and the charge of genocide against U.S. imperialism before the United Nations.<sup>85</sup>

Stanford worked closely with SNCC's Roland Snellings (Askia Muhammad Touré) in the Spring of 1964 in Greenwood, Mississippi to test ideas of voter registration and black political empowerment. Snellings was attempting to radicalize SNCC as a member of both SNCC and RAM.<sup>86</sup> They also worked with Willie Peacock, Jessie Harris, Jessie Morris, and other members of the SNCC "Mississippi 12", as well as the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party (MFDP).<sup>87</sup> After the Ku Klux Klan began bombing churches, some of the Mississippi field staff began to arm themselves, leading to exchanges of gun fire. In response to the southern movement there was a meeting in

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<sup>84</sup> Max Stanford note written in 1966, Revolutionary Action Movement, Internal Documents, 1964-1968, on Black Guard, 12 Point Program of RAM, and Afro-American Student Movement, Folder 010629-005-0787, The Black Power Movement: Papers of the Revolutionary Action Movement, 1962-1996, Series 5: Revolutionary Action Movement Documents, 1963-1998, <https://congressional.proquest.com/histvault?q=010629-005-0787&accountid=11243>.

<sup>85</sup> "The Los Angeles War Cry – 'Burn, Baby, Burn'," *Revolutionary Nationalist* (Aug. 1965), 2.

<sup>86</sup> Joseph, *Waiting 'til the Midnight Hour*, 159, [http://freedomarchives.org/Documents/Finder/DOC513\\_scans/RAM/513.RAM.LosAngelesWarcry.pdf](http://freedomarchives.org/Documents/Finder/DOC513_scans/RAM/513.RAM.LosAngelesWarcry.pdf).

<sup>87</sup> Muhammad Ahmad Biographical Papers 1, Folder 010629-001-002, The Black Power Movement: Papers of the Revolutionary Action Movement, 1962-1996.

Detroit where RAM developed into a national organization.<sup>88</sup> RAM members were present at Malcolm's famous "Ball of Bullet Speech" in Detroit. A meeting was arranged with Malcolm X in New York with the purpose "to ask if he would work with them to build an organization to struggle for Black Power."<sup>89</sup> Stanford and Willie Peacock went to New York to work with Malcolm X. In 1964 Stanford became the national field chairman of RAM and worked closely with Malcolm X and Robert Williams.<sup>90</sup> In fact, from 1964-1965 because of his close ties with Stanford and RAM, Malcolm joined and served as its secret international spokesman in conjunction with Robert Williams, RAM's international chairman.<sup>91</sup> That year Stanford also went to Cuba to meet with Robert Williams who had been elected the international chairman.

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<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>89</sup> Grace Lee Boggs, *Living for Change*, 134-135.

<sup>90</sup> Muhammad Ahmad Biographical Papers 1, Folder 010629-001-002, The Black Power Movement: Papers of the Revolutionary Action Movement, 1962-1996.

<sup>91</sup> Muhammad Ahmad (Max Stanford), *Black Social and Political Thought: Selected Writings Vol. II*, (San Diego, California: University Readers, 2009), 41.

## Chapter 4: National Organization: Uprisings Catalyze Revolutionary Dreams

Visions of black revolution were spawned from the violence of the early 1960's. The 1960's brought assassinations of civil rights leaders, as well as other innocent bystanders of the struggle. To begin with, there was the assassination of the Congo leader Patrice Lumumba in 1961.<sup>92</sup> In 1963 President John F. Kennedy was assassinated and while many disagreed with some of his policies, much of the black masses had come to look at him as a supporter of their cause. Then, Medgar Evers was gunned down in front of his home the same year, the bombing of the 16<sup>th</sup> Street Baptist Church which claimed the lives of four innocent young African-American girls, the assassination of Malcolm X in 1965, and the assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr. and Robert Kennedy in 1968. Such violent acts pushed the youth away from the cause of nonviolent resistance. They began to feel helpless and as Malcolm predicted, when people feel that the government cannot enforce its own laws and protect its citizens there will be violence. On 6 August 1965 President Johnson signed the Voting Rights Act to protect against "seemingly race-neutral politics" such as the grandfather clause, poll taxes, and literacy tests.<sup>93</sup> Five days later a police incident sparked the largest and deadliest urban rebellion in U.S. history, as Watts exploded in a blaze of fury and frustration. There was the "Long Hot Summer" of 1965 in which numerous riots took place across the country, including Cleveland, Chicago, and more than forty other cities. In 1967 there were riots in Newark, New Jersey

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<sup>92</sup> The assassination led to the storming of the UN gallery led by Maya Angelou and others.

<sup>93</sup> Ibram X. Kendi, *Stamped from the Beginning: The Definitive History of Racist Ideas in America*, (New York: Nation Books, 2016), 392.

and Detroit, Michigan. In fact, Detroit was one of the most intense riots in American history, with tanks rolling through the streets. It was more like a warzone.<sup>94</sup>

The killing of King was the final straw in many people's eyes. There were riots in over one hundred cities. Blacks had all but given up on nonviolent, peaceful protest leaning towards a more militant stance.<sup>95</sup> All the above was predicted by Malcolm. He warned America of what would happen if they did not realize the fiery passion that was inside the youths, that they would not stand for the same treatment as their parents and grandparents.

In 1964-1965, a broad cadre began to take shape. In the spring of 1964 RAM became a national organization at a meeting held in Detroit, Michigan. Members such as Albert Haynes, Roland Snellings, Elaine Freeman, Barbara Weeks, Kaleil Said, Walter Bowe, Larry Neal, Helene Brane, Jeanette Walton, Herman Ferguson, and Merle Stewart were both members of RAM and Malcolm's Organization of Afro-American Unity (OAAU).<sup>96</sup> Stanford later stated frankly, "I promised Malcolm in June 1964 that I would continue to reveal the truth if he was assassinated, no matter what the odds."<sup>97</sup> RAM sought to turn Malcolm's talks of rifle clubs and self-defense groups into action.

By October 1964 Philadelphia became RAM's home base, as RAM operated openly rather than underground through front organizations. Philadelphia was the home of the national field chairman Stanford, as well as the bi-monthly paper *Black America* and newsletter *RAM Speaks*. Stanford recruited Philadelphia activists such as Ethel

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<sup>94</sup> Tindall and Shi, *America: A Narrative History*, 958.

<sup>95</sup> John Hope Franklin and Alfred A. Moss, *From Slavery to Freedom: A History of African Americans*, seventh ed., (New York: McGraw-Hill, Inc., 1994), 518.

<sup>96</sup> Muhammad Ahmad Biographical Papers 1, Folder 010629-001-002, The Black Power Movement: Papers of the Revolutionary Action Movement, 1962-1996.

<sup>97</sup> "All African People are Prisoners of War!," Muhammad Ahmad Biographical Papers 1.

Johnson, who had worked with Robert Williams in Monroe, Stan Daniels, Maythell Benjamin, Michael Simmons (an author of SNCC's "Black Consciousness Paper"), and Tony Monteiro (became leading national figure in CPUSA in the 1970's and 1980's). The Philadelphia leadership was to the left of Warden in California and Freeman in Ohio.<sup>98</sup>

By 1964, RAM proclaimed adherence to "Marxism-Leninism Mao Tse-tung thought" under Stanford's leadership. This meant that there was a shift in focus from self-defense to planning for urban guerrilla warfare. They sought guidance from many former black Communists such as Harold Cruse, Harry Haywood, Abner Berry, and Queen Mother Audley Moore. Moore became an important mentor, offering training in black nationalist thought and Marxism. She sought to combine Marxism, CPUSA organizational principles, and a neo-Garveyite nationalism.<sup>99</sup> Her home was called "Mt. Addis Ababa", serving as what Kelley describes as, "a school for a new generation of young black radicals."<sup>100</sup> Detroit's ex-Trotskyists James and Grace Lee Boggs also became important mentors. Their Marxist and pan-Africanist writings influenced RAM members. James Boggs briefly served as ideological chairman from mid 1964 to January 1965.

In June 1964 RAM published its 12 Point Program.<sup>101</sup> The step by step definition of their program provided potential recruits with a clear understanding of the goals of the movement. The Afro-American Student Movement (ASM) was formed to organize

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<sup>98</sup> Kelley, *Freedom Dreams*, 76-77

<sup>99</sup> Smethurst, *The Black Arts Movement*, 168.

<sup>100</sup> Kelley, *Freedom Dreams*, 77-8.

<sup>101</sup> "12 Point Program," RAM 12 Point Program, 1964, Revolutionary Action Movement Internal Documents 1964-1967, Folder 010629-005-0728, The Black Power Movement: Papers of the Revolutionary Action Movement 1962-1996, Series 5: Revolutionary Action Movement Documents, 1963-1996, 1-3, <https://congressional.proquest.com/histvault?q=010629-005-0728&accountid=11243>.

students with the purpose of educating students about the economic, political and cultural racial situation in the United States and the world, to develop unity with Africans globally, and to unite and organize students to become active in the Afro-American Liberation struggle.<sup>102</sup> Students were to develop revolutionary cadres in the high schools, junior high schools, and colleges to eventually enact a nationwide black student strike and repudiate the educational system over what was taught, and more importantly, not taught. RAM envisioned students coming to the realization that “the only way to succeed in life is to cause a revolution in this country.” Thus, students had to politicize the student community, as well as rallying young black workers and the unemployed to serve as a base of mass support for the guerrilla force.<sup>103</sup>

This leads to the second objective of RAM’s program, the development of Freedom Schools. The development of Freedom Schools was based on the purpose of creating revolutionary cadres with revolutionary theory and the doctrine of RAM. To accomplish this goal, the curriculum would consist of the history of the movement, current events, political theory, methods of social action, methods of self-defense, basic principles of guerrilla warfare, techniques of social dislocation, propaganda techniques, black history, and indoctrination.<sup>104</sup>

The development of rifle clubs was for the purpose of establishing a black militia capable of protecting the black community and to serve as a base for the establishment of a community government. The rifle clubs would be made up of local veterans and others from the community, and work with the Liberation Army. The Liberation Army

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<sup>102</sup> *Ibid.*, 1.

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid.*, 1-2.



(Guerrilla Youth Force) would carry out the political, economic, and physical overthrow of the system by taking over cities and causing the complete dislocation of communities. RAM's *Manifesto* stated, "Our countryside is the cities all over the country...the cities are the pockets of power and the heart of the economy."<sup>105</sup> Therefore, the Liberation Army would use the principles of urban guerrilla warfare laid out by Robert F. Williams. Rifle clubs were formed, but it is unclear to what extent they were prepared to carry out guerrilla tactics. At any rate, RAM's blueprint was clear. They wanted black veterans to train their communities. RAM, following the teachings of their mentors Malcolm X and Robert Williams, espoused the need for every black person to have at least one gun and must prepare for the coming war.<sup>106</sup>

The development of a propaganda, training centers, and a national organ would train the developing cadre in techniques and methods of propaganda and act as a center for the movement. This required two important things: press and a publishing company. *Black America* was RAM's national organ, a journal of ideas and direction serving as an organizer and coordinator for the movement.<sup>107</sup> RAM considered itself an underground vanguard, with all members working to spread the movement as far as possible. The purpose was to develop a revolutionary machine capable of continuing the revolution if the leaders were wiped out. This is important because, as is shown throughout the literature of RAM, the organization fully anticipated that there would be backlash from

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<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.

<sup>106</sup> "The Struggle for Black State Power in the U.S.," 1966, Revolutionary Action Movement, Internal Documents, 1964-1968, on Black guard, 12 Point Program of RAM, and Afro-American Student Movement, Folder 010629-005-0787, The Black Power Movement: Papers of the Revolutionary Action Movement, 1962-1996, Series 5: Revolutionary Action Movement Documents, 1963-1998, 10, <https://congressional.proquest.com/histvault?q=010629-005-0787&accountid=11243>.

<sup>107</sup> "12 Point Program," RAM 12 Point Program, 1964, Folder 010629-005-0728, The Black Power Movement: Papers of the Revolutionary Action Movement 1962-1996, 2.

the power structure. RAM knew that there would be increasing reaction from apparatuses of the state, so in order to survive and protect each other the underground network would become necessary. The most important factor was loyalty.<sup>108</sup>

As stated above, RAM not only wanted to reach black youth but also black workers. The purpose of organizing workers was to fight for better conditions on jobs and to organize for a national strike of black workers. RAM envisioned the creation of women's leagues to organize black women who worked in white homes.<sup>109</sup> Domestic workers experienced a long history of oppression and were not protected by unions or governmental policies such as worker's rights or welfare. This was a crucial factor in the feminism of women such as Angela Davis who argued that there was an intersection of race, class, and gender oppression that black women specifically experienced. Black women were historically forced to work outside of the home often times as domestic workers that were not protected by government policies creating a different vision of feminism and equality than the mainstream white version. Davis also discusses the differences in the experiences of women in regard to employment, as the majority of black women since the days of slavery had to work. Nothing about that changed after emancipation, as the need for money was and is very real. Even when the number of working women increased black women were excluded from unions. In other words, as Davis writes, "Black women, of course, were virtually invisible within the protracted campaign for women's suffrage."<sup>110</sup>

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<sup>108</sup> "The Struggle for Black State Power in the U.S.," Folder 010629-005-0787, The Black Power Movement: Papers of the Revolutionary Action Movement, 1962-1996, 11.

<sup>109</sup> "12 Point Program," RAM 12 Point Program, 1964, Folder 010629-005-0728, The Black Power Movement: Papers of the Revolutionary Action Movement 1962-1996, 2.

<sup>110</sup> Angela Davis, *Women, Class, & Race*, (New York: Vintage Books, 1983),140.

The development of Black Organization (cell) was for the purpose of organizing the black community to develop self-determination. The organization was to be carried out block-by-block, with each cell organizing themselves with their own black leadership. Once two or more people were organized on a block they became a cell, working with their neighborhood to make the cell larger and to create more cells. Once a group of cells developed they would make a section.<sup>111</sup> The grassroots approach was based upon RAM's position that African Americans constituted "a nation within a nation." From this perspective, blacks were not citizens; rather, they were a "domestically colonized" people because they were denied their rights. Due to African America's position as a captive nation of colonial subjects, RAM's fight was not for integration, but rather one of national liberation. RAM already had their leader who was in exile, Robert Williams, so they believed their job was to educate the black community to who he was and what he stood for in order to build Williams as president in 1968. This would signify a "complete repudiation of the existing political system."<sup>112</sup>

In order for the movement to be successful it would need funding. Therefore, point ten of the program was the development of a war fund and political economy. As RAM stated, the fund was necessary to develop the war machine. Every capable person was to make a weekly pledge, in essence developing a sense of communalism in which each member was responsible for the well-being and growth of the whole. Also, fund raising activities would supplement the fund. The development of black farmer coops "in

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<sup>111</sup> "12 Point Program," RAM 12 Point Program, 1964, Folder 010629-005-0728, The Black Power Movement: Papers of the Revolutionary Action Movement 1962-1996, 2.

<sup>112</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

the delta (black belt)...especially Mississippi,” would serve the purpose of keeping communities and guerrilla force going.<sup>113</sup>

Thus, the development of the black unemployed were what RAM described as “an army to be organized.”<sup>114</sup> This “army” was to continuously pressure the federal government through demonstrations in the North and South against racial discrimination in federally back industries. In the North, the struggle against union discrimination was planned to bring things to a head.

Those critical of RAM might view their 12 Point Program as contradictory due to its frequent emphasis on demonstrating for better conditions while also espousing the need for revolution; however, this is an oversimplification. RAM illustrates the complexity of categorizing movements. RAM both espoused the need for revolution and used strategies learned from their predecessors, namely grassroots organizing and the power of demonstrating to build unity and gain followers. By joining the people in organizing and enacting demonstrations, RAM believed that it could politicize them and prove that the only way to truly liberate themselves was to revolutionize the system completely. For example, the 1963 school construction demonstration in Philadelphia. RAM wanted to work with the people and create relationships to have direct links to the masses, thereby making it easier to interact with, understand, and eventually radicalize them. Also, RAM was evolving over time, becoming increasingly radical due to the conditions faced, especially following the explosion of spontaneous rebellions in cities across the country.

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<sup>113</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>114</sup> *Ibid.*

In the summer of 1964, urban uprisings attracted RAM to revolutionary nationalism. Robert Williams' "USA: The Potential of a Minority Revolution" in *The Crusader* described how to mount urban guerrilla warfare.<sup>115</sup> Williams, like Mao before him, argued that revolution is a continuing process. He had written in 1962 his belief that violence would not be necessary if the oppressive forces did not command the superior power, viewing America as mentally ill due to the "mass psychosis" of racism. Therefore, it was illogical to attempt to negotiate without having the power to make demands.<sup>116</sup> Williams was not against nonviolence as a tactic under certain circumstances, yet as he wrote, "The mythic principle of the power of nonviolence and love borders on the primitive poisonous snake-handling rituals of some religious cults."<sup>117</sup> Further, Williams asks, "Why is the mortal Afroamericans expected to be more peaceful and loving towards his enemy than his divine God?" After all, God did not remove the devil from heaven using nonviolence.<sup>118</sup>

Williams' militancy was crystallized during his experience as a U.S. Marine. He, and countless other black veterans, experienced racism within the armed forces while fighting for the country that they loved. These experiences were compounded when black veterans returned home, illustrating the distance between democratic rhetoric and American reality. Black veterans played an important role in demanding the right to vote because they had travelled and seen different setting, and perhaps, more importantly, they were trained to defend themselves.<sup>119</sup> During this same period there was a resurgence of

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<sup>115</sup> Kelley, *Freedom Dreams*, 78.

<sup>116</sup> Robert F. Williams, *Negroes With Guns*, (New York : Marzani and Munsell, Inc., 1962), 2-4.

<sup>117</sup> Robert F. Williams, *The Crusader* vol. 5, No. 4 (May-June 1964), 3.

<sup>118</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

<sup>119</sup> Timothy B. Tyson, *Radio Free Dixie : Robert F. Williams & the Roots of Black Power*, ((Chapel Hill; The University of North Carolina Press, 1999), 29.

the Ku Klux Klan. Many lynch mobs had formed on the pretense of black men being rapists, linking sexuality (protecting white womanhood) to the black freedom movement. These attacks had become so prevalent that Black activists joked that “the closer a black man got to a ballot box, the more he looked like a racist.”<sup>120</sup> It was in this setting that Williams came to espouse the need for “armed self-reliance”.<sup>121</sup>

It is important to note, however, that RAM never attempted to implement the strategies of urban guerrilla warfare, or to engage police or anyone else in an armed confrontation.<sup>122</sup> RAM, at least in print, believed that race war was inevitable, but believed that the black nation could and would win. In the Fall 1964 edition of *Black America*, Stanford wrote that it was the defeatist attitude that held the black community back from realizing the latent power that they possessed. He described this defeatism as “mental slavery” stating, “In order to free ourselves mentally, we must know the power of black people in this country.”<sup>123</sup> The power that Stanford wrote about was the power to stop the machinery of government (to cause chaos). Causing chaos would hurt the economy in the urban centers of the North and disrupt the agricultural setup in the South. Finally, it would be the power to unleash violence to “tear up Charlie’s house.” The failure to understand these powers was what created a defeatist mentality. Thus, RAM viewed African Americans as the vanguard in the world black revolution due to their strategic positioning behind enemy lines. For RAM, if African Americans began thinking like guerrilla fighters and viewed themselves as revolutionary nationalists, they would

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<sup>120</sup> *Ibid.*, 58.

<sup>121</sup> *Ibid.*, 87.

<sup>122</sup> Kelley, *Freedom Dreams*, 80.

<sup>123</sup> Max Stanford, “We Can Win!,” *Black America* (Fall 1964), 1, [http://freedomarchives.org/Documents/Finder/DOC513\\_scans/RAM/513.RAM.Black.America.Fall.1964.pdf](http://freedomarchives.org/Documents/Finder/DOC513_scans/RAM/513.RAM.Black.America.Fall.1964.pdf), 1-2.

become “blood brothers” with the Bandung world.<sup>124</sup> However, this did not mean that there was a need for Asian, African, or Latin American fighters to come to their rescue, for African Americans had to make their own revolution.

The next step after becoming conscious as revolutionary nationalists was to develop tactics. Stanford compared “Charlie’s system” to an IBM machine, stating that the weakness of the system was its complexity. In other words, “put something in the wrong place disrupts the system,” use chaos to eliminate mass communication and rapid transportation.<sup>125</sup> RAM believed that by studying the history of slavery, African Americans would learn to appreciate the organization of slave revolts. As examples RAM looked to the international perspective of the Denmark Vesey revolt and the attempted coordination with Toussaint L’Ouverture, a leader of the Haitian Revolution, as well as the impact of Nat Turner’s revolt method of “strike by night and spare none.”<sup>126</sup>

In the Fall 1964 edition of *Black America* James Boggs wrote an article “Integration and Democracy: Two Myths That Have Failed,” in which he argues that African Americans should know better than to trust the government after 300 years as a semi-colonial people inside the United States. Boggs explains RAM’s view of democracy as a tool to confuse, from the Greek society, which was built upon slavery, to the Western form that rested upon capitalist and imperialist exploitation. Thus, he wrote, “Democracy has never been nor was it ever meant to be a process by which exploited people could

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<sup>124</sup> The Bandung Conference (Asian-African Conference) was held April 1955 in Bandung, Indonesia to discuss the role of the Third World in the Cold War and sought to build solidarity among recently independent nations. Twenty-four nations from Asia, Africa, and the Middle East were in attendance. The core principles were self-determination, mutual respect for sovereignty, non-aggression, non-interference in internal affairs, and equality. The conference laid the foundations for the nonaligned movement in which countries refused to take sides in the Cold War. The “Spirit of Bandung” declined by the end of the 1960’s because most of the leaders in attendance were no longer in power.

<sup>125</sup> Stanford, “We Can Win!,” *Black America* (Fall 1964), 1-2.

<sup>126</sup> *Ibid.*

make a revolution.” Minor reforms were achieved in between revolutions through the process of negotiations. RAM therefore believed that a revolution was necessary. Boggs viewed socialism as a “watered down concept of revolution,” due to the focus on revolt through the democratic process. Yet, by the 1930’s the labor movement was taking over the plants but not the political arena which controlled the military and police forces of the state.<sup>127</sup> The erroneous conception of working class unity in North American history was the basis for the so called “classless society” that U.S. socialists espoused, but was based upon white workers climbing on the backs of others to climb into the middle class, therefore, seeking to become a part of the system rather than to alter it.<sup>128</sup> For RAM, to be revolutionary was to demand total change. As Boggs wrote, “The role of the revolutionist is not to encourage others to become part of a system. It is to change the whole system.” Boggs believed that demanding integration into the affluent society was no different than becoming a capitalist exploiter of each other at home and imperialist exploiter abroad.<sup>129</sup>

Rolland Snellings wrote an article in June of 1964 before the riots in Harlem, Brooklyn, Rochester, and Patterson and Elisabeth, New Jersey entitled “The Long Hot Summer”. He was a member of both SNCC and RAM. In the article he articulated the crisis within SNCC regarding the future of the freedom struggle. Snellings noted that both SNCC and SCLC had begun to hear the “death knell for civil rights” due to the “black masses’ smoldering consciousness... turn from ‘nonviolence’ to the same

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<sup>127</sup> James Boggs, “Integration and Democracy: Two Myths That Have Failed,” *Black America* (Fall 1964), [https://freedomarchives.org/Documents/Finder/DOC513\\_scans/RAM/513.RAM.Black.America.Fall.1964.pdf](https://freedomarchives.org/Documents/Finder/DOC513_scans/RAM/513.RAM.Black.America.Fall.1964.pdf), 4-5.

<sup>128</sup> James Boggs, “The Land of Opportunism,” *Black America* (Fall 1964), [https://freedomarchives.org/Documents/Finder/DOC513\\_scans/RAM/513.RAM.Black.America.Fall.1964.pdf](https://freedomarchives.org/Documents/Finder/DOC513_scans/RAM/513.RAM.Black.America.Fall.1964.pdf), 12.

<sup>129</sup> Boggs, “Integration and Democracy,” *Black America* (Fall 1964), 4-5.



vigorousness of self-defense against the racist beast.”<sup>130</sup> Snellings believed that white liberals had formed power blocs within the decision making structure of the bourgeois reformist organizations, thereby “castrating” them. It was necessary for blacks to develop their own indigenous leadership and prepare for the “long awaited Black backlash” in order to forge a new kind of freedom fighter – the universal revolutionary nationalist. In effect, Snellings was predicting the confrontation between the “irresistible force” of black revolt and the “unmovable object” of white America and white backlash.<sup>131</sup>

Don Freeman wrote in 1964 criticizing the concept of an autonomous black economy as well as bourgeois reformists. By not differentiating from capitalism, those who adhered to such principles were failing to condemn American imperialism and neo-colonialism. Freeman believed that there was a need to control the black community through a resurgence of Pan-African objectives. “Communalism” rather than capitalism. By harkening back to the formation of the Organization of African Unity in Addis Ababa in 1963 and the Manchester Pan-African Conference of 1945, Freeman placed RAM within the pantheon of black thinkers seeking to unite the black world and strike for freedom. Freeman believed that the prerequisite of genuine black revolution was a fundamental cultural revolution, or “Re-Africanization”. Thus, by adhering to Pan-Africanism, Re-Africanizing African American culture, and utilizing “strategies of chaos” espoused by Reverent Albert Cleage, Jr.<sup>132</sup>, revising Black nationalism to

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<sup>130</sup> Roland Snellings, “The Long Hot Summer,” *Black America* (Fall 1964), [https://freedomarchives.org/Documents/Finder/DOC513\\_scans/RAM/513.RAM.Black.America.Fall.1964.pdf](https://freedomarchives.org/Documents/Finder/DOC513_scans/RAM/513.RAM.Black.America.Fall.1964.pdf), 13-14.

<sup>131</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>132</sup> Cleage published a collection of sermons in 1968 in a book entitled *The Black Messiah*. Cleage would later publish *Black Christian Nationalism* in 1972. Cleage’s promoted a black theology more communal in nature than the individualist principles of capitalism and American society. He believed that by doing so, African Americans could form a sense of pride and unity. Cleage even went so far as to point to Jesus as a revolutionary.

incorporate the theories of Du Bois and Garvey, RAM sought to create a potent ideology that eradicated “ideological confusion” and facilitated the formation of strategy and tactics. Freeman wrote that these changes would “enable nationalists to participate more meaningfully in the Afro Americans freedom struggle, and exert a significant influences on the revolutions of the Bandung nations and Latin America.”<sup>133</sup> In sum, it was up to the youth, the vanguard of Black Revolution in America, to organize and sustain the movement.

Malcolm X was assassinated on 21 February 1965 in the Audubon Ballroom in Harlem sending a shock wave throughout the black community, especially amongst the radical urban youth. Stanford kept a low profile after the assassination due to the increasing level of surveillance of his activates by law enforcement. He had greatly admired Malcolm and missed his mentor. Stanford believed “Brother Malcolm’s assassination was a test for revolutionary nationalists,” that the government had called the “bluff” of those claiming to be working towards revolution.<sup>134</sup> He worked to establish connections to the youth and worked closely with Larry Neal and Amiri Baraka of the Black Arts Movement. In fact, Stanford directed leading members to work with emerging institutions such as Umbra and the Black Arts Repository and Theater and School. This was what Baraka described as, “convergence between political types with an interest in culture and cultural types with an interest in politics.”<sup>135</sup> The essays of RAM members

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<sup>133</sup> Don Freeman, “Black Youth and Afro-American Liberation,” *Black America* (Fall 1964), 15-16, [https://freedomarchives.org/Documents/Finder/DOC513\\_scans/RAM/513.RAM.Black.America.Fall.1964.pdf](https://freedomarchives.org/Documents/Finder/DOC513_scans/RAM/513.RAM.Black.America.Fall.1964.pdf).

<sup>134</sup> “The Struggle for Black State Power in the U.S.,” Folder 010629-005-0787, The Black Power Movement: Papers of the Revolutionary Action Movement, 1962-1996, 8.

<sup>135</sup> Smethurst, *The Black Arts Movement*, 170-71.

Larry Neal, Stanford, and Askia Muhammad Touré (Roland Snellings) were published in *Liberator* magazine defining the ideological field of the Black Arts Movement.<sup>136</sup>

Stanford began building a city-wide network for the emergence of a new organization. Following up on Malcolm's plans, in 1965 Stanford began working with the Deacons for Defense and Justice in Louisiana and established rifle clubs in the North. RAM even printed images of Ernest Thomas, the founder and field organizer of the Deacons for Defense in their publications such as the August 1965 issue of *Revolutionary Nationalist*.<sup>137</sup> Stanford became an organizer for Jesse Gray and the Black Street Youth Program in New York. He met Five Percenters, a Harlem street gang, and tried to politicize them. He also met youth leader Shelton (Alkamal Muhammad) Duncan who had been a youth organizer under Malcolm. In conjunction with SNCC, they organized the youth cadre (Black Panther Athletic and Social Club) that would become the youth core of the New York Black Panther Party. In 1965 Stanford stepped down from his position as National Field Chairman because his term expired and the organization had collective leadership.<sup>138</sup>

That same year RAM worked with ASM and began to develop the motion to establish Black Studies on college campuses.<sup>139</sup> The movement to create Black Studies on college campuses came to a head in 1968 in California. Rolland Snellings worked with LeRoi Jones and Sonia Sanchez through the Harlem Black Arts experiment in

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<sup>136</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>137</sup> "The Next Step and Road Ahead," *Revolutionary Nationalist* (Aug. 1965), 3, Freedom Archives Collection: Revolutionary Action Movement (RAM), 3, [http://freedomarchives.org/Documents/Finder/DOC513\\_scans/RAM/513.RAM.LosAngelesWarcry.pdf](http://freedomarchives.org/Documents/Finder/DOC513_scans/RAM/513.RAM.LosAngelesWarcry.pdf).

<sup>138</sup> Muhammad Ahmad Biographical Papers 1, Folder 010629-001-002, The Black Power Movement: Papers of the Revolutionary Action Movement, 1962-1996.

<sup>139</sup> Muhammad Ahmad (Max Stanford), *Black Social and Political Thought: Selected Writings Vol. II*, (San Diego, California: University Readers, 2009), 42.

conjunction with the San Francisco State Black Student Union to become the first campus organization to establish black studies as a legitimate academic enterprise. Peniel Joseph describes the movement as a launching pad for Black Power on college campuses and organized student takeovers in support of black studies that transcended regional and class differences. On 3 May 1968 there was a confrontation at Northwestern University in Evanston, Illinois. The confrontation involved two groups, For Members Only and ASM. They seized and occupied the university business office until their demands were met.<sup>140</sup> The students were demanding a more “multiracial and cultural society within university walls,” from the admissions process and scholarships, to housing, curriculum, counseling, and facilities.<sup>141</sup>

RAM voiced its opposition to America’s war in Vietnam long before it become popular to do so raising the slogan “America is the Blackman’s Battleground.” RAM’s “Greetings to Our Militant Vietnamese Brothers” illustrated their solidarity with Third World revolutionaries. Written on 4 July 1964, the message praised and congratulated the Vietnamese Front of National Liberation for their “inspiring victories against. U.S. imperialism.”<sup>142</sup> Rather than seeking to fill the void left by former colonizers and sharing in the oppression and assimilation into the “Free World”, RAM believed in coordinating efforts to create a new world free from exploitation. The date July 4 was significant and intentional. RAM was declaring independence from the policies of the U.S. government,

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<sup>140</sup> John H. Bracey Jr., August Meier, Elliot Rudwick, ed., *Black Nationalism in America*, (Indianapolis and New York: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, Inc., 1970), 464.

<sup>141</sup> Northwestern University Black Students, “If Our Demands Are Impossible, Then Peace Between Us is Impossible Too!” in *Black Nationalism in America*, ed. John H. Bracey Jr., August Meier, Elliot Rudwick, (Indianapolis and New York: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, Inc., 1970), 476-85.

<sup>142</sup> “Greetings to Our Vietnamese Brothers (July 4, 1964),” *Black America* (Fall 1964), [21, http://freedomarchives.org/Documents/Finder/DOC513\\_scans/RAM/513.RAM.Black.America.Fall.1964.pdf](http://freedomarchives.org/Documents/Finder/DOC513_scans/RAM/513.RAM.Black.America.Fall.1964.pdf).

just as the founders of the country had done two centuries earlier against those they viewed as tyrants.<sup>143</sup>

Charles W. Johnson, Jr. also wrote his “Declaration of Conscientious Objectorship to Local Board 90” in 1964. He stated that he wanted no part of the white man’s army, describing the drafting of black men as an “insult to intelligence” because of discrimination within the armed forces. He did not want to be an “instrument of racist thug society”. Johnson went so far as to pledge to agitate among black soldiers and unite them around revolutionary principles if he was drafted against his objections. The revolutionary principles that Johnson referred to were self-defense and vengeance, all-black independent action, and to fight for “integration: integrated pools of blood.”<sup>144</sup> Additionally, Johnson wrote about RAM’s adherence to the policy noted by Mao Tse-tung, “to give it-for-tat and to fight for every inch of land...we will not attack unless attacked, but if we are attacked, we will certainly counterattack...to wipe you out resolutely, thoroughly, wholly, completely, and utterly.”<sup>145</sup> Johnson saw the contradiction of drafting black men to fight wars abroad when they were oppressed at home. His militancy signified the views of RAM, as well as a growing mentality among the black youth when he vehemently stated, “Either we get our human rights immediately or we’ll tear it up and nobody gets nothin’.”<sup>146</sup> On the following page there was a picture of Patrice Lumumba, the murdered Prime Minister of Congo with the title “Lest You

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<sup>143</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>144</sup> Charles W. Johnson, Jr., “Declaration of Conscientious Objectorship to Local Board 90,” *Black America* (Fall 1964), 20, [https://freedomarchives.org/Documents/Finder/DOC513\\_scans/RAM/513.RAM.Black.America.Fall.1964.pdf](https://freedomarchives.org/Documents/Finder/DOC513_scans/RAM/513.RAM.Black.America.Fall.1964.pdf).

<sup>145</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>146</sup> *Ibid.*, 19-20.

Forget,” further illustrating RAM’s international perspective.<sup>147</sup> For them, black people were at war globally not just in the United States.

On 4 July 1965 RAM sent a message to black soldiers asking, “Why are you in Charlie’s army?... Whose side are you on?”<sup>148</sup> Black soldiers needed only to look at history to find proof that their patriotism had been misguided. African Americans had fought in every war and been loyal for 400 years, only to return home to “the land of the tree and the home of the grave.”<sup>149</sup> RAM’s message to black soldiers was to let their manhood be born, to stop fighting to “free” their oppressed brothers abroad. The only way to truly liberate oppressed people everywhere was to free themselves and destroy imperialism at its root in the U.S. In the periodical *Revolutionary Nationalist* in August 1965, RAM described the Deacons of Defense and Justice as a signification of a major development within the black freedom struggle due to its black working class leadership, as well as its espousal and practice of self-defense.<sup>150</sup> RAM showed admiration for the Deacons of Defense’s use of technology to their advantage with a photograph depicting their use of walkie talkies to communicate during marches. Thus, enhancing their guerilla war capabilities. RAM believed that the time had come for black men to ask themselves, “Should I join ‘Charlie’s’ army or the black liberation army (Deacons)?”<sup>151</sup>

There was an explosion of violence in Los Angeles from August 11-16 due to tensions created by the interaction between police and the black community. RAM

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<sup>147</sup> *Ibid.*, 20.

<sup>148</sup> “Message From RAM the Black Liberation Front of the U.S.A. to the Afro-Americans in the United States Racist Imperialist Army,” July 4, 1965, in Muhammad Ahmad (Max Stanford), *Revolutionary Action Movement (RAM): A Case Study of an Urban Revolutionary Movement in Western Capitalist Society*, (Master’s Thesis, Atlanta University, 1986), 212.

<sup>149</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>150</sup> “The Next Step and Road Ahead,” *Revolutionary Nationalist* (Aug. 1965), 3, Freedom Archives Collection: Revolutionary action Movement (RAM),

<sup>151</sup> *Ibid.*

viewed these events as proof that African Americans were at war with the U.S. government, likening the use of the National Guard to the use of Federal troops to crush slave revolts.<sup>152</sup> The “semi-guerrilla tactics used in L.A.” were what RAM sought to organize and politicize, especially among the youth. RAM described the ‘insurrection’ as youth led, deepening the organization’s belief that the black youth played an essential role revolution. RAM believed that “overt social protest” began in junior high school. African American children were taught the American Dream, that people “can make it if they try” and lift themselves up with their bootstraps. However, after leaving school and entering the real world black youth quickly learned that this was not the case. RAM describes it as, “the feeling of being run smack into a brick wall by the educational system.”<sup>153</sup> Therefore, in order to create a new world with greater opportunities, RAM believed that the youth had to unite for confrontation – the intellectuals and those in the streets.

RAM described black gangs as “the most dynamic force in the black community.” The lack of opportunity left black youth with no room for expression and no image of manhood or womanhood they could identify with. Therefore, the youth formed gangs to create a sense of belonging and power. They represented the organization, identity, and power of urban black youth that could be transformed into a “constructive force” for black liberation.<sup>154</sup> Further, RAM looked around the world and noted that it was the youth that led revolutions in Angola, the Congo, Vietnam, Kenya, and Cuba, underlying

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<sup>152</sup> “On the Eve of Black Revolution: Los Angeles We Will Win,” *Revolutionary Nationalist* (Aug. 1965), 3, Freedom Archives Collection: Revolutionary action Movement (RAM), [http://freedomarchives.org/Documents/Finder/DOC513\\_scans/RAM/513.RAM.LosAngelesWarcry.pdf](http://freedomarchives.org/Documents/Finder/DOC513_scans/RAM/513.RAM.LosAngelesWarcry.pdf).

<sup>153</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>154</sup> *Ibid.*

their belief that black youth were the key to revolution.<sup>155</sup> RAM wrote in *Revolutionary Nationalist*, “This is the Negro revolution we want the world to know... we want to set fire right here (in L.A.) rather than go to Vietnam and fight. We’d rather fight for the Negro here.”<sup>156</sup>

On 10 June 1966, *Life* magazine ran an article entitled “Plotting a War If Negro Leadership Fails, Extremists”. The cover read in bold letters “Plot to Get Whitey: Red-hot young Negroes plan a ghetto war.” The article described the “growing cult of Negro extremists” and specifically names RAM as the number one threat. Russell Sacket wrote, “Currently the most influential and feared of the black revolutionary groups is RAM – Revolutionary Action Movement – or more recently, some insiders insist, the Revolutionary Armed Movement.”<sup>157</sup> Sacket describes RAM as an “umbrella-like fraternity” with “violence-bent brothers” throughout cities on the East Coast.<sup>158</sup> The article, although it mocks the possibility of urban guerrilla warfare tactics, discusses the clandestine nature of RAM and other groups like it. The “prevailing attribute” of being “impressively well read in revolutionary literature.”<sup>159</sup> What makes this particular article interesting is the language employed, as example, the differentiation between “responsible Negroes” and extremists. Also, the article claimed that authorities were

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<sup>155</sup> “Role of Black Youth,” *Revolutionary Nationalist* (Aug. 1965), RAM Black Liberation Front of the U.S.A., Freedom Archives Collection: Revolutionary action Movement (RAM), [http://freedomarchives.org/Documents/Finder/DOC513\\_scans/RAM/513.RAM.LosAngelesWarcry.pdf](http://freedomarchives.org/Documents/Finder/DOC513_scans/RAM/513.RAM.LosAngelesWarcry.pdf), 5.

<sup>156</sup> “On the Eve of Black Revolution: Los Angeles We Will Win,” *Revolutionary Nationalist* (Aug. 1965), 3.

<sup>157</sup> Russell Sacket, “Plotting A War If Negro Leadership Fails, Extremists,” *Life* (June 10, 1966), [http://www.siamcostumes.com/cutters\\_guides/pdf/life-by-time-inc-published-june-10-1966.pdf](http://www.siamcostumes.com/cutters_guides/pdf/life-by-time-inc-published-june-10-1966.pdf), 100, 101.

<sup>158</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>159</sup> *Ibid.*, 104.



convinced that RAM was receiving material support from “sources unfriendly to the United States – China, Cuba, and some African republics.”<sup>160</sup>

This tactic unsurprisingly raised alarm within white society, just as the 1959 article about the Nation of Islam “The Hate That Hate Produced” had done. In particular, as if being linked to “Red China” was not enough to put fear into white Americans, the article illustrates the importance that RAM placed on radicalizing and politicizing black youth, particularly the street gangs. As the article notes, “Bitter youngsters see in the concept of armed revolution a tangible prospect of striking back.”<sup>161</sup> “Super gangs” such as the Five Percenters in New York admired RAM’s brand of extremism. According to the article there were five cities that authorities were particularly cognizant of as the “hottest prospects” for the “next Watts” – Los Angeles, Oakland, Washington, D.C., New York City, and St. Louis. This article, if nothing else, illustrates why RAM produced its own periodicals and newspapers in order to spread its message rather than to have the mainstream media misrepresent them through what RAM considered to be psychological warfare.<sup>162</sup> An internal RAM document describes the article as “designed, coordinated, printed and planned with the collaboration of the CIA, FBI, and others.” The document continued stating that the purpose of the article was “to expose, draw to the open, and set-up for destruction, the most highly organized and aware group of our people.”<sup>163</sup> The underground movement was now in the spotlight. The aggressive repression by the FBI

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<sup>160</sup> *Ibid.*, 102.

<sup>161</sup> *Ibid.*, 106.

<sup>162</sup> RAM internal document entitled “Black Fire Power,” Revolutionary Action Movement, Internal Documents, 1964-1968, Folder 010629-005-0787, The Black Power Movement: Papers of the Revolutionary Action Movement, 1962-1996.

<sup>163</sup> *Ibid.*

in conjunction with local police departments intensified through infiltration, arrests, and all around harassment of known members.

Between March and May 1966 RAM began focusing on building a coalition party with an emphasis on black voting power to provide a new direction for the growing awareness of the black community through an independent black political party.<sup>164</sup> In August 1966, Stanford moved to New York and was the co-founder along with Al Haynes, Larry Neal, Alkamal Muhammad, Queen Audley Moore, Sam Anderson, and Lloyd Weaver, of the first Black Panther Party (BPP) in New York and other areas across the country.<sup>165</sup> The New York BPP was created in solidarity with SNCC's Lowndes County Freedom Organization, the original Black Panther Party.<sup>166</sup> SNCC chairman Stokely Carmichael went to New York to make the Black Panther Party into a national organization.<sup>167</sup> RAM also worked with Carmichael to lead school boycotts and demonstrations over the quality of education. The purpose of the Black Panther Party was to build a mass political base across the country and to develop "an even level of consciousness in every black community."<sup>168</sup> In other words, to develop Black Power. RAM believed that through grassroots organizing, all of Black America could be united and organized by 1968 "block by block, city by city, county by county, and state by

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<sup>164</sup> RAM internal document entitled "Black Fire Power," Revolutionary Action Movement, Internal Documents, 1964-1968, on Black Guard, 12 Point Program of RAM, and Afro-American Student Movement, Folder 010629-005-0787, The Black Power Movement: Papers of the Revolutionary Action Movement, 1962-1996, Series 5: Revolutionary Action Movement Documents, 1963-1998, <https://congressional.proquest.com/histvault?q=010629-005-0787&accountid=11243>.

<sup>165</sup> Muhammad Ahmad Biographical Papers 1, Folder 010629-001-002, The Black Power Movement: Papers of the Revolutionary Action Movement, 1962-1996.

<sup>166</sup> "All African People are Prisoners of War!", Muhammad Ahmad Biographical Papers 1.

<sup>167</sup> Stanford note written in 1966, Revolutionary Action Movement, Internal Documents.

<sup>168</sup> "Steps Towards Organizing a National Movement in the African American Struggle for National Liberation," August 1966, Revolutionary Action Movement Internal Documents 1964-1967, Folder 010629-005-0728, The Black Power Movement: Papers of the Revolutionary Action Movement 1962-1996, Series 5: Revolutionary Action Movement Documents, 1963-1996, <https://congressional.proquest.com/histvault?q=010629-005-0728&accountid=11243>.

state.”<sup>169</sup> RAM had long held the view that debates over integration and separation were irrelevant, arguing that it would only be possible to achieve any objectives in the United States if socialism was established. By doing so, the fundamental right to self-determination would allow the black community to decide its own future, a right that was seemingly unattainable under the nefarious nature of capitalism and exploitation.<sup>170</sup>

In October, Stanford returned to Philadelphia to work with Lonnie Anderson, George Anderson, Ibn Yusef Muhammad, Booker T. Washington, and others organizing black youth gangs in political organization, the Black Guards. Black Guards agitated against the draft and opposed U.S. imperialism in the People’s Republic of Vietnam. Black Guards were also organized in Detroit, Cleveland, Chicago, and Newark. They fought against racist police leading to Stanford’s arrest on several charges in 1967. Stanford sent a message from jail in April 1968 in which he argues, just as Malcolm X had done towards the end of his life, that African Americans should take the United States government to world court in the United Nations to bring an international indictment for violation of human rights and racial war crimes of genocide.<sup>171</sup> In this message Stanford referred to the United States government as the “Fourth Reich” and the enemy to all freedom loving peoples, illustrating his position that the United States was worse than the Nazis. For him, African Americans had to fight for their independence and nationhood because they could expect no mercy from “the racist beast”. Harkening back

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<sup>169</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>170</sup> Ahmad, *Black Social and Political Thought*, 42.

<sup>171</sup> Max Stanford, “Message From Jail,” April 17, 1968, in *Black Nationalism in America*, ed. John H. Bracey Jr., August Meier, Elliot Rudwick, (Indianapolis and New York: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, Inc., 1970),513.

to the “Black Belt Thesis” that was proposed by the COMINTERN in 1928<sup>172</sup>, Stanford believed that the black nation should demand “the land we tilled” Mississippi, Louisiana, Alabama, Georgia, Florida, Texas, Virginia, South Carolina, and North Carolina.<sup>173</sup> This led to a split within RAM over the viability of a Black Nation in the Black Belt versus a revolution to overthrow the system.

In his message from jail Stanford predicted that the year 1968 would be the worst year of racial war since the end of the Civil War in which America would “be destroyed by its own creation – the so called Negro.”<sup>174</sup> Further, “The Summer of 1968 will be a summer of a fight for survival for Black militants.”<sup>175</sup> He continued his apocalyptic message predicting that 1968 would be the year that integration efforts would prove a failure. He believed due to the mechanization of industries, “black servants” were no longer needed. The lack of jobs would create competition which history had shown would erupt in violence against blacks viewed as a threat for employment. Additionally, America was in the midst of the costly Vietnam war. The latest technology in warfare (electronic, biological, chemical, and psychological) was being implemented abroad, and Stanford believed it was only a matter of time before it was also utilized domestically, even going so far as predicting the use of napalm.<sup>176</sup> Therefore, African Americans had to realize that they were the vanguard of world revolution, lest they allow the United States to kill two birds with one stone – “us and the Vietcong.” To prepare themselves, the black

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<sup>172</sup> David J. Romagnolo, ed., *THE 1928 and 1930 COMINTERN RESOLUTIONS ON THE BLACK NATIONAL QUESTION IN THE UNITED STATES*. REVOLUTIONARY REVIEW PRESS, (Washington, D.C., 1975), <http://www.marx2mao.com/Other/CR75.html>.

<sup>173</sup> Max Stanford, “Message From Jail,” *Black Nationalism in America*, 514-15.

<sup>174</sup> *Ibid.*, 515.

<sup>175</sup> *Ibid.*, 517.

<sup>176</sup> It is interesting to note that napalm was in fact used in Philadelphia against the organization MOVE in 1985.

community had to learn all forms of self-defense. Stanford ended his message with a quote from H. Rap Brown stating, “It’s time to stop lootin’ and start shootin’.”<sup>177</sup> In other words, Stanford and RAM believed that the black community had to organize and train to defend themselves so that when rebellions erupted they would be organized with specific goals rather taking the form of mere riots.

Stanford was released in 1968 after the assassination of Martin Luther King.<sup>178</sup> A brief discussion on the counterintelligence tactics of the state reveal the gravity of law enforcement’s view on RAM, as well as other groups they referred to as “black extremists”. A review of FBI files released under the Freedom of Information Acts provides proof that the so called paranoia of organizations such as RAM was grounded in reality. A memorandum written 25 August 1967 defines the purpose of the newly instituted Counterintelligence Program (COINTELPRO) as follows, “The purpose of this new counterintelligence endeavor is to expose, disrupt, misdirect, discredit, or otherwise neutralize the activities of black nationalist hate-type organizations and groupings, their leadership, spokesmen, membership, and supporters, and to counter the propensity for violence and civil disorders.”<sup>179</sup> The FBI stated frankly, “Under no circumstances should the existence of the program be made known outside the Bureau...”<sup>180</sup> The counterintelligence tactics were enacted to “frustrate the efforts to recruit new and youthful adherents” through the use of local news media to “endeavor to establish unsavory backgrounds” of leaders.<sup>181</sup> The document names SNCC, SCLC, Deacons for

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<sup>177</sup> Max Stanford, “Message From Jail,” *Black Nationalism in America*, 517.

<sup>178</sup> Muhammad Ahmad Biographical Papers 1, Folder 010629-001-002, The Black Power Movement: Papers of the Revolutionary Action Movement, 1962-1996.

<sup>179</sup> “Counterintelligence Program: Black Nationalist Hate Groups, Internal Security,” August 25, 1967, Freedom of Information Acts, Subject: COINTELPRO, 100-4406 Section 1, 1.

<sup>180</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

<sup>181</sup> *Ibid.*, 1-2.

Defense and Justice, CORE, and the Nation of Islam in addition to RAM, specifically naming Stokely Carmichael, H. Rap Brown, Elijah Muhammad, and Max Stanford as “extremists who direct the activities and policies of revolutionary or militant groups.”<sup>182</sup> In fact, in the Spring of 1967 the head of the FBI J. Edgar Hoover had named Max Stanford “the most dangerous man in America.”<sup>183</sup>

According to police sources, RAM was suspected of acting as a cadre or advisers for slum youth gangs. Police speculated that members of RAM participated in big-city riots, accumulating ammunition stockpiles, but not yet ready for guerrilla warfare. According to the *New York Times*, “one admitted extremist” doubted that the general black community would join in the revolution because they were too busy “soul searching” for a well rooted philosophical base.<sup>184</sup> This is exactly what RAM sought to build. Whether RAM truly plotted the acts that they were charged with is doubtful; however, the radical rhetoric they used made them easy targets for such charges as conspiracy because of the rhetorical plans which called for organized chaos, assassinations, and overall revolution. Even so, the state sanctioned repression was unconstitutional because RAM’s members were all citizens, at least in theory, further illustrating RAM’s fundamental argument that African Americans were domestically colonized people denied their rights.

### *Black Guard*

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<sup>182</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.

<sup>183</sup> Ahmad, *Black Social and Political Thought*, 42.

<sup>184</sup> Army for ghettos. 1967. *New York Times* (1923-current file), May 17, 1967, <http://proxygw.wrlc.org/login?url=https://search-proquest-com.proxygw.wrlc.org/docview/117582417?>

The Black Guard first formed in 1966. This branch of RAM was created to focus on black youth, particularly to unite street gangs in various cities to form a national youth organization.<sup>185</sup> In 1967, the Black Guard grew, and as described by a RAM internal document, in many cases came under attack by the white power structure.<sup>186</sup> Mass organizing for the Black Guard began in January in Detroit, Cleveland, New York, New Jersey, and Chicago, and later in Los Angeles and San Francisco. RAM recruited new members from “hard core street force elements” such as gang members and one time members of the Nation of Islam and ex-SNCC field organizers. RAM also formed coalitions with local groups.<sup>187</sup> The Black Guard was strategically designed into a paramilitary structure to train revolutionaries. The details with which this segment of the organization was organized illustrates the seriousness of their intentions.

The Black Guard had a paramilitary structure with a hierarchical chain of command. This type of structure made it possible to operate in separate cells, in theory making it harder to destroy the movement because it is easy to kill a man, but it is far more difficult to kill an idea. The Black Guard was comprised of five sections: political, field operations (military), defense (protective, propaganda – public relations, and intelligence. The Black Guards were organized into units made up of five, each with

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<sup>185</sup> RAM Internal Document “To All Black Guards: Prepare to organize the 11 million Black Youth in America and the national mass rising,” 1969, Revolutionary Action Movement, Internal Documents, 1964-1968, on Black Guard, 12 Point Program of RAM, and Afro-American Student Movement, Folder 010629-005-0787, The Black Power Movement: Papers of the Revolutionary Action Movement, 1962-1996, Series 5: Revolutionary Action Movement Documents, 1963-1998, <https://congressional.proquest.com/histvault?q=010629-005-0787&accountid=11243>.

<sup>186</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>187</sup> RAM internal document discussing the growth of the Black Guards, 1968, Revolutionary Action Movement, Internal Documents, 1964-1968, on Black Guard, 12 Point Program of RAM, and Afro-American Student Movement, Folder 010629-005-0787, The Black Power Movement: Papers of the Revolutionary Action Movement, 1962-1996, Series 5: Revolutionary Action Movement Documents, 1963-1998, <https://congressional.proquest.com/histvault?q=010629-005-0787&accountid=11243>.

expertise in one of the five sections. Therefore, every Black Guard unit could rebuild the entire army and carry out the revolution.<sup>188</sup> There were also levels of membership and 12 stages of development. The intention was to train each member so that they could become guerrilla warriors prepared to govern any society and fight in any guerrilla movement in the world.<sup>189</sup> In addition to vigorous study and training, another role of the Black Guard was to recruit and politicize others in their communities.

RAM defined the Black Guard as “a Black youth group dedicated to BLACK POWER, BLACK UNITY AND SELF-DEFENSE.”<sup>190</sup> RAM believed that the youth were being miseducated and needed to be taught who the true enemy was through a study of the history of black people and the world, unencumbered by the whitewashing of the educational system. The “Black Guard Manual” discusses the need to recruit high school students and to provide black history clubs, Black Power committees, and other activities to educate, politicize, and train the youth. During the summer, Liberation Schools would serve as mobilization centers for the youth and continue their education in the movement through the study of African and African American history. The Black Guard Manual also illustrates the importance placed on the organization of gangs to serve as the base for the Black Guard. Members were to “rap with gang leaders” to consolidate their forces and stress the need for them to stop fighting among themselves. If the gangs could unite they would become a vital part for the Liberation Army that RAM sought to build. RAM

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<sup>188</sup> “Black Guard Structure and Organization,” Revolutionary Action Movement, Black Guard, 1967-1970, Folder 010629-005-0592, The Black Power Movement: Papers of the Revolutionary Action Movement, 1962-1996, Series 5, Revolutionary Action Movement Documents, 1963-1998, <https://congressional.proquest.com/histvault?q=010629-005-0592&accountid=11243>.

<sup>189</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>190</sup> “Join the Black guards! A Call to Self-Defense,” Revolutionary Action Movement, Black Guard, 1967-1970, Folder 010629-005-0592, The Black Power Movement: Papers of the Revolutionary Action Movement, 1962-1996, Series 5, Revolutionary Action Movement Documents, 1963-1998, <https://congressional.proquest.com/histvault?q=010629-005-0592&accountid=11243>.



used Black Guard literature, the teachings of Robert F. Williams, and other revolutionary theorists to spread their message of self-defense and revolutionary nationalism. The

Black Guard Creed went as follows:

Let the Troubles and responsibilities of life come thick and fast  
I am ready for them.  
My Soul is unconquerable.  
I represent the infinite law of force and power.  
This God within is my all sufficient strength and ever present help in time of trouble.  
The more difficulties, the greater the triumphs through me.  
The harder my trials, the faster I go in the development of my inherent strength.  
My higher self is all-wise, all-knowledgeable, all understanding, all powerful, and all righteous.  
The right must prevail for  
I am Me; I am My People; I am the Gods (Allah) of this Nation.<sup>191</sup>

The Black Guard Program consisted of Swahili as the national language of New Africa, nationalist reeducation program through the establishment of community based on Black institutes that become Black Universities, the formation of Black Student Unions that fight for black education and community control of schools, uniting all black student groups and youth groups into a federation (to unite with African youth movements), karate and other forms of self-defense to become the national pastime for black youth, technical science training on mass community scale for black youth and developing nationhood skills through Black Institutes and Liberation schools, and the liberation of New Africa (Mississippi, Alabama, Georgia, South Carolina, and Louisiana) to become an independent self-governing nation state.<sup>192</sup> The duties of the Black Guard

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<sup>191</sup> "The Black Guard Creed," Revolutionary Action Movement, Black Guard, 1967-1970, Folder 010629-005-0592, The Black Power Movement: Papers of the Revolutionary Action Movement, 1962-1996, Series 5, Revolutionary Action Movement Documents, 1963-1998, <https://congressional.proquest.com/histvault?q=010629-005-0592&accountid=11243>.

<sup>192</sup> "Black Guards Program," Revolutionary Action Movement, Black Guard, 1967-1970, Folder 010629-005-0592, The Black Power Movement: Papers of the Revolutionary Action Movement, 1962-1996, Series 5, Revolutionary Action Movement Documents, 1963-1998, <https://congressional.proquest.com/histvault?q=010629-005-0592&accountid=11243>.

were to become a dedicated and disciplined man that places more importance on the whole rather than the individual. The cause of the World Black Revolution was all important, there could be no compromise.<sup>193</sup>

In 1968 Blacks Guards again expanded and used the Swahili title “Mlinzi Mwuesi.”<sup>194</sup> In Newark RAM embarked on a mass street force recruitment and coalition. By 1968 there were 700 Black Guards in the city (500 men and 200 women).<sup>195</sup> In Cleveland there were 1000 who considered themselves part of the Black Liberation Army and in Cincinnati there were 200. In New York the original Black Guards became the Black Panther Party. On the west coast, a RAM internal document states that there was a split in the original Black Panther Party over tactics.<sup>196</sup> The mass drive took a more cultural approach through the House of UMOJA. The Black Guard was reorganized with an emphasis on organizing black workers, youth, and students around the thoughts of Chairman Robert Williams. They sought to mobilize college students in order to reeducate them and organize them to return to the black community to organize and unite black workers. The plan was to prepare for a national black strike. The tactic was to win people over step-by-step each day by doing “practical work” such as cleaning streets,

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<sup>193</sup> “Duties of the Black Guard,” Revolutionary Action Movement, Black Guard, 1967-1970, Folder 010629-005-0592, The Black Power Movement: Papers of the Revolutionary Action Movement, 1962-1996, Series 5, Revolutionary Action Movement Documents, 1963-1998, <https://congressional.proquest.com/histvault?q=010629-005-0592&accountid=11243>.

<sup>194</sup> RAM internal document “To All Black Guards: Prepare to organize the 11 million Black Youth in America and the national mass rising,” 1969, Revolutionary Action Movement, Internal Documents, 1964-1968, on Black Guard, 12 Point Program of RAM, and Afro-American Student Movement, The Black Power Movement: Papers of the Revolutionary Action Movement, 1962-1996, <https://congressional.proquest.com/histvault?q=010629-005-0787&accountid=11243>.

<sup>195</sup> RAM internal document discussing the growth of the Black Guards, 1968, Revolutionary Action Movement, Internal Documents, 1964-1968, on Black Guard, 12 Point Program of RAM, and Afro-American Student Movement, Folder 010629-005-0787, The Black Power Movement: Papers of the Revolutionary Action Movement, 1962-1996, Series 5: Revolutionary Action Movement Documents, 1963-1998, <https://congressional.proquest.com/histvault?q=010629-005-0787&accountid=11243>.

<sup>196</sup> *Ibid.*

organizing black workers into black unions, and teaching self-defense warfare.<sup>197</sup> In Detroit the Black Guards were described as a “tight knit organization”. With a wave of mass rebellion, the city-wide citizens council was formed. DRUM became the highest development of the period. By 1969 DRUM merged with other black worker organizations to form the League of Revolutionary Black Workers (LRBW). At its peak the LRBW had 300 members.<sup>198</sup>

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<sup>197</sup> “To All Black Guards,” Revolutionary Action Movement, Internal Documents, 1964-1968, on Black Guard, 12 Point Program of RAM, and Afro-American Student Movement, *The Black Power Movement: Papers of the Revolutionary Action Movement, 1962-1996*.

<sup>198</sup> RAM internal document discussing the growth of the Black Guards, Revolutionary Action Movement, Internal Documents, 1964-1968, *The Black Power Movement: Papers of the Revolutionary Action Movement, 1962-1996*.

## Chapter 5: Keep on Pushin' - Working Towards Revolution

After 1966 the term “Bandung humanism” was dropped and replaced with “black internationalism.” The meaning was laid out in RAM’s manifesto “The World Black Revolution” which strongly identified with China. China was the “wedge that sharpened the contradictions between colonial peoples and the West.”<sup>199</sup> RAM adhered to an international perspective of revolution; the unification of the Bandung world against European, white, capitalist, and the social bourgeoisie. In an internal document RAM wrote, “the only thing that can bring destruction to the Western (European) Empire is an International Organization or movement of Bandung revolutionaries.”<sup>200</sup> This unity and cooperation did not mean that African Americans would depend upon others to come and fight for them; rather, each revolutionary movement would have its own particularities and should be conducted by those on the ground with the end goal to bring down the imperialist powers and their “lackeys”. This was a policy of self-reliance that would carry over into the new world that the revolution created.

RAM defined the Black Revolution as, “A revolution is total being – 360 degrees, a complete circle—overthrow and recreate new system.”<sup>201</sup> A RAM internal document stated that the primary contradiction in the freedom movement was that self-defense was seen as the program for black liberation rather than as a cornerstone of that program. It is a stage, not the revolution itself. Further, the document argued that the black revolution

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<sup>199</sup> Kelley, *Freedom Dreams*, 82.

<sup>200</sup> “The Struggle for Black State Power in the U.S.,” Folder 010629-005-0787, The Black Power Movement: Papers of the Revolutionary Action Movement, 1962-1996, 12-13.

<sup>201</sup> *Ibid.*

was not a question of concepts but of survival.<sup>202</sup> RAM believed that it was impossible to fix the system; therefore, it would take a revolution to secure victory for communalism over capitalism.<sup>203</sup> RAM defined revolution as, “a political war in which the oppressed class or caste comes to power using any means necessary.” Further, “Universal harmony can only be achieved through World Black Revolution and the establishment of a Black World revolutionary Government.”

RAM believed that the urban rebellions followed a dialectical progression. In other words, the urban rebellions of the 1960’s served as a “curtain raiser” to a developing African American people’s war. The development of a revolutionary national consciousness forced many to see themselves as linked to the World Black Revolution.<sup>204</sup> RAM stated, “Afro-Americans will be the single spark that starts the prairie fire in the World Black Revolution.”<sup>205</sup> In February 1964 Robert F. Williams advanced the theory of “urban guerrilla warfare” through publications of *The Crusader* and broadcasting *Radio Free Dixie* over the radio while in exile in Cuba. Inspired by their leader in exile, RAM put forth their concept of urban guerrilla warfare: does not attempt to project itself publicly (using oppressors’ mass media), old tactics of beginning in rural areas would easily be wiped out in powerful United States, new concept is to huddle as close to the enemy as possible to neutralize modern and fierce weapons, sustains state of confusion and destruction of property, and sporadic riots during the day/ all-out-warfare at night

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<sup>202</sup> Internal document “Analysis of RAM”, Revolution Action Movement Internal Documents 1964-1968, Folder 010629-005-0787, The Black Power Movement: Papers of the Revolutionary Action Movement, 1962-1996, Series 5: Revolutionary Action movement Documents, 1963-1998, <https://congressional.proquest.com/histvault?q=010629-005-0787&accountid=11243>.

<sup>203</sup> “The Struggle for Black State Power in the U.S.,” Folder 010629-005-0787, The Black Power Movement: Papers of the Revolutionary Action Movement, 1962-1996,15.

<sup>204</sup> “RAM Manifesto: The World Black Revolution,” <https://www.marxists.org/history/erol/1960-1970/ram-revolution.pdf>, 16.

<sup>205</sup> *Ibid.*

(organized fighting and unlimited terror against oppressor and his forces).<sup>206</sup> RAM planned to serve as “a tightly organized and well-disciplined underground guerrilla force formed to perform a more aggressive mission” that would be “clandestinely organized and well-versed in explosives.”<sup>207</sup>

RAM was typical of the organizations of the Black Power Movement and the left in general in the 1960’s in their use of masculinist themes. RAM often framed their arguments in masculinist language largely viewing the revolution as a quest to reclaim black manhood. For example, in an internal document entitled “Black Manhood and the Revolution” it stated that the black man was, “totally castrated in the white man’s world physically and psychologically...submit before the beast...a man stands on his feet rather than live on his knees begging.”<sup>208</sup> Snellings believed that white liberals had formed power blocs within the decision making structure of the bourgeois reformist organizations, thereby “castrating” them. This gendered language was typical of the era.

However, RAM did have many women who actively participated in building their program, as well as influential older women who served as mentors, as example Queen Mother Audley Moore, Grace Lee Boggs, and Ethel Johnson. RAM provided spaces for women to build up young black women and girls. For example, the “Soul Sisters” whose general purpose was to organize and politicize African American female youth seeking to promote their social, cultural, and economic development, as well as teaching self-defense. The Soul Sisters’ immediate task was to make contact with high school girls in

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<sup>206</sup> Ibid., 17.

<sup>207</sup> Ibid., 19.

<sup>208</sup> “Black Manhood and Revolution,” (Oct.-Nov. 1965), Revolutionary Action Movement, Internal Documents, 1964-1968, on Black guard, 12 Point Program of RAM, and Afro-American Student Movement, Folder 010629-005-0787, The Black Power Movement: Papers of the Revolutionary Action Movement, 1962-1996, Series 5: Revolutionary Action Movement Documents, 1963-1998, <https://www.congressional.proquest.com/histvaul?q=010629-005-0787&accountid=11243>.

order to organize them early. This tactic was in line with RAM's focus on youth development. They wanted to provide safe spaces for young black girls and to protect them from police harassment and white men in general. More importantly, RAM wanted to teach them to protect themselves, organize, and to promote the necessity of influencing non-militant Negro men to involve themselves into organized self-defense.<sup>209</sup>

This was a very limited space and primarily focused on a traditional vision of what women's roles were, namely as "helpmates". This sentiment was never voiced in that manner, yet the organization never articulated any specific views on the role of women outside of recruiting other women, educating the youth, and radicalizing "uncle Tom" men. Thus, RAM fits into the dominant trend of the era. Perhaps the reasoning was that RAM viewed itself as an underground paramilitary Black Liberation Army.

Seemingly, women would not participate in carrying out the guerrilla warfare tactics that RAM envisioned. But, as can be seen in the history of many revolutionary movements, women have the potential to be fierce warriors just like their male counterparts. In fact, black women have historically often been more radical in their demands for equality.

### **Defining Black Power**

In June 1966, Carmichael famously coined the term "Black Power" during James Meredith's "March Against Fear." In July, Carmichael said that the SNCC would "join hands" with Elijah Muhammad and RAM with the purpose of defining a common philosophy on Black Power because it had been distorted by the white press.<sup>210</sup> In May

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<sup>209</sup> Document describing the purpose of "Soul Sisters", Revolutionary Action Movement Internal Documents 1964-1967, Folder 010629-005-0728, The Black Power Movement: Papers of the Revolutionary Action Movement 1962-1996, Series 5: Revolutionary Action Movement Documents, 1963-1996, <https://congressional.proquest.com/histvault?q=010629-005-0728&accountid=11243>.

<sup>210</sup> By Austin C. Wehrwein, Special to the *New York Times*, "Carmichael Plans Black Unity Talks with Muslims," *New York Times* (1923-current file), July 29, 1966,

1966 SNCC chairman Stokely Carmichael popularized the term “Black Power”, but it was not a new idea. Many individuals and organizations had espoused the essence of Black Power since the 19<sup>th</sup> century. What the term did do was create something to galvanize the people and organize around. RAM had always been proponents of Black Power since its formation. In 1966, RAM officially defined what it meant by Black Power. To them Black Power meant the control of all institutions of the society in which black people live, control of the political institution, and that political power comes from the barrel of the gun.<sup>211</sup>

Carmichael later argued in 1970 that if the trend continued, there would continue to be destructive riots such as those during the “red hot summers” of 1964-68, because the urban youth did not have an outlet for their anger. There was no organization which would give them a voice, no organization to help ease their growing sense of despair. Carmichael argued in “Toward Black Liberation”:

As long as people in the ghettos of our large cities feel that they are victims of the misuse of white power without any way to have their needs represented ... we will continue to have riots. These are not the products of Black power, but the absence of any organization capable of giving the community power, the black power, to deal with its problems.”<sup>212</sup>

In other words, the black community had to come together and form unity to help itself because the white power structure, through its history, illustrated it had no interest in improving the lives of its black citizens.

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<https://proxygw.wrlc.org/login?url=https://search-proquest-com.proxygw.wrlc.org/docview/117004023?accountid=11243>.

<sup>211</sup> “The Struggle for Black State Power in the U.S.,” Folder 010629-005-0787, The Black Power Movement: Papers of the Revolutionary Action Movement, 1962-1996, 2.

<sup>212</sup> Stokely Carmichael, “Toward Black Liberation”, in *LeRoi Jones and Larry Neal, ed., Black Fire: An Anthology of Afro-American Writing*, (New York: William Morrow & Company, Inc., 1970), 129.



In defining revolution an important distinction must be made between what the mainstream media labeled as “riots” as opposed to insurrection, rebellion, and revolution. RAM made a point to differentiate between riots and revolution, viewing riots as spontaneous actions to express frustrations which usually begin and then are organized. Conversely, revolutions are organized then expanded. The lack of political objective, philosophy, or program would limit even a series of riots from becoming a revolution.<sup>213</sup> It was the revolutionary’s role to provide political direction, organization, and leadership.<sup>214</sup>

At a news conference at the Orington Hotel in Evanston, Illinois, Carmichael stated that people should use the term rebellion rather than riot. When asked whether he agreed with the Democrat Senator of Ohio Frank J. Lausche’s charge the rioting and looting was part of “national conspiracy executed by experts” Carmichael argued that had it been a conspiracy, Negroes would have “got a lot more out of the rebellion”.<sup>215</sup> H. Rap Brown wrote a letter from Parrish Prison (New Orleans) on February 21, 1968 in which he stated, “For every Max Stanford and Huey Newton, there must be ten dead racist cops.”<sup>216</sup> He believed that the movement had to move “from resistance to aggression, from revolt to revolution.” To desire freedom was not enough, the will to live could not

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<sup>213</sup> “The Struggle for Black State Power in the U.S.,” Folder 010629-005-0787, The Black Power Movement: Papers of the Revolutionary Action Movement, 1962-1996, 1.

<sup>214</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>215</sup> By Austin C. Wehrwein, Special to the *New York Times*, “Carmichael Plans Black Unity Talks with Muslims,” *New York Times* (1923-current file), July 29, 1966, <https://proxygw.wrlc.org/login?url=https://search-proquest-com.proxygw.wrlc.org/docview/117004023?accountid=11243>.

<sup>216</sup> “Letter from Rap Brown.” *Milwaukee Star* (Milwaukee, Wisconsin) VIII, no. 12, March 23, 1968: 5. *Readex: African American Newspapers*. <https://infoweb-newsbank-com.proxygw.wrlc.org/apps/readex/doc?p=EANAAA&docref=image/v2:12A7AE31A7B3CA6B@EANA-AA-12C59D67AE5E6068@2439939-12C59D67D6BDC700@4-12C59D68706E54A8@Letter from Rap Brown>.

supersede the will to fight. Brown was willing to die “to organize the people, the prisons, the troops, your children, your God, your poor, your country, Mankind to revolution and rejoice in your [America] destruction.” Further, “No slave should die a natural death. There is a point where caution ends and cowardice begins.”<sup>217</sup> Brown was not a member of RAM, but he espoused a solidarity with the ideology of the movement. He believed that in order to be free, blacks had to fight to take it from a system that would not willingly grant it. To further illustrate the rising sentiment among black youth one man was quoted in the *New York Times*, “Whitey pushes and pushes until you’re like a coiled spring. What can you do but explode? The idea is to explode where and when it will do the most good.”<sup>218</sup>

RAM’s view of revolution was all encompassing, meaning that it went beyond just the overthrow of the capitalist system. The successful black revolution would involve the political, educational, spiritual, and cultural life of the black community. In an internal document written by Max Stanford, he describes the inherent spirituality involved in the revolution. Stanford argued that the successful revolution required a superior “will force” that was internal and intangible. He continued, “a ‘supernatural’ force embodied by revolutionaries and transplanted to the masses through mental transmutation and physical manifestation of concentrated thought.”<sup>219</sup> This spirituality had to be developed within the revolutionary. By honing and nurturing the spiritual

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<sup>217</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>218</sup> Army for ghettos. 1967. *New York Times* (1923-current file), May 17, 1967, <http://proxygw.wrlc.org/login?url=https://search-proquest-com.proxygw.wrlc.org/docview/117582417?>

<sup>219</sup> Max Stanford, “The Spirituality of the Afroamerican Struggle,” Revolutionary Action Movement, Internal Documents, 1964-1968, on Black guard, 12 Point Program of RAM, and Afro-American Student Movement, Folder 010629-005-0787, The Black Power Movement: Papers of the Revolutionary Action Movement, 1962-1996, Series 5: Revolutionary Action Movement Documents, 1963-1998, <https://www.congressional.proquest.com/histvaul?q=010629-005-0787&accountid=11243>.

nature within one's self it would then become possible to believe in the attainability of victory against all odds. This was a fundamental aspect of the revolution – the belief that “we will win”. As RAM stated, “A people can only do what they feel they can do. The psychological mind of make-up of a people can determine whether they can survive.”<sup>220</sup> The people had to know that they could win.

RAM believed that the spirituality of the revolution was embodied in the tradition of black music, linking the spiritual aspect to the cultural. In 1965 Stanford wrote about the spiritual component of revolution. In an internal document he describes the spirituality or “soul force” of people's revolutions. He believed that the revolutionary nationalist had to find this spirituality within themselves, to rediscover his “roots” and historical culture in order to take his people's culture and way of life and transform it.<sup>221</sup> Stanford looked back to the griots of West Africa, who served as the historians as well as musicians – essentially the priests and translators of the people. This tradition was passed down through generations even through the trauma of slavery, evidenced by the important role music has historically played in African American life. Stanford particularly was interested in the singers of rhythm & blues and the jazz musicians. He wrote, “The singer describes the condition of our people and blows how they feel while the musician blows direction. Both translate what to do and how to do it.”<sup>222</sup> Their role was to interpret the political philosophy and to keep in touch with the people's soul and to set the tempo of struggle. Therefore, black musicians should serve as the vanguard of

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<sup>220</sup> “The Struggle for Black State Power in the U.S.,” Folder 010629-005-0787, The Black Power Movement: Papers of the Revolutionary Action Movement, 1962-1996, 17.

<sup>221</sup> Stanford, “The Spirituality of the Afroamerican Struggle,” 1965, Revolutionary Action Movement, Internal Documents, 1964-1968.

<sup>222</sup> *Ibid.*

the “spiritual or soul revolution”.<sup>223</sup> The unity between singers, musicians, writers, poets, actors, and political theoreticians was essential for the spiritual essence of the African American revolution’s full development. In other words, the intensity of John Coltrane’s horn and Malcolm’s voice could create a political-cultural synthesis if a happy medium could be found. Following this logic, Stanford viewed the separation of the singer and the musician as the effect of commercialization or “cultural genocide”.<sup>224</sup>

In another internal document, Stanford illustrated the importance RAM placed on the development of black culture. He posed the question, “What does art mean if it doesn’t offer a solution to a people’s problems and bring a message to them?”<sup>225</sup> The document was written in 1965, at which point RAM believed that the cultural genocide of commercialization had led popular African American culture to serve a negative function – a tranquilizer for frustrations. Through commercialization, the ‘beast’ became able to contain the social purpose of the music and control the content. By raising the spirituality of the movement and forming a black consciousness RAM believed it was possible to turn this negative function back into a positive. According to a RAM internal document, the envisioned Black Cultural Revolution was designed to bring a higher degree of black consciousness.<sup>226</sup> Another internal document written in April 1967 RAM defined the purpose of the proposed Black Cultural Revolution as follows, “to destroy the

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<sup>223</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>224</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>225</sup> Max Stanford, “The Cultural Root of National Liberation,” Revolutionary Action Movement, Internal Documents, 1964-1968, on Black guard, 12 Point Program of RAM, and Afro-American Student Movement, Folder 010629-005-0787, The Black Power Movement: Papers of the Revolutionary Action Movement, 1962-1996, Series 5: Revolutionary Action Movement Documents, 1963-1998, <https://www.congressional.proquest.com/histvail?q=010629-005-0787&accountid=11243>.

<sup>226</sup> RAM internal document discussing the growth of the Black Guards, Revolutionary Action Movement, Internal Documents, 1964-1968, The Black Power Movement: Papers of the Revolutionary Action Movement, 1962-1996.

conditioned white oppressive mores, attitudes, ways, customs, philosophies, habits... which the oppressor has taught and trained us to have.”<sup>227</sup> RAM would seek to accomplish knowledge of self and the enemy, black pride and black nationalism, self-help, self-determination, Black Power, and black unity.<sup>228</sup> RAM believed that the cultural revolution would be resisted by certain black institutions such as black churches, colleges (professional class), beauticians and process shops, and politicians. These institutions benefitted from the status quo and would view the cultural shift that RAM envisioned as a threat to their prosperity. Those further along in the assimilation process who benefit from the system and have more to lose would be less willing to adhere to a revolutionary ideology.

Rolland Snelling wrote a poem in the Fall 1964 edition of *Black America* which correlates with Stanford’s argument that art must serve a purpose. The poem goes as follows:

Save your tears/cries  
Shango, Allah,  
Chosen children: your day will come

Blood...  
(Fire!)  
Bright red flames. Burnt charred death!  
(Fire!)  
scorch like Hiroshima  
(Fire!)  
Resurrect mangled Jesus from the Nordic lynch tree!  
(Fire!)  
Will cauterize the racist plague!

We Will “all fall down” someday

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<sup>227</sup> “America is the Blackman’s Battleground,” April 1967, Revolutionary Action Movement Internal Documents 1964-1967, Folder 010629-005-0728, The Black Power Movement: Papers of the Revolutionary Action Movement 1962-1996, Series 5: Revolutionary Action Movement Documents, 1963-1996, 2, <https://congressional.proquest.com/histvault?q=010629-005-0728&accountid=11243>.

<sup>228</sup> *Ibid.*

to start anew – old must fall away or burn or crumble  
dry your eyes!  
Lift your withered hearts; throw your chains away and wait for:  
The smell of BRIMSTONE!<sup>229</sup>

This poem succinctly illustrates the philosophy of RAM. Firstly, the people should save their tears and cries because they are the chosen people, chosen by God to serve as the vanguard in the liberation of all exploited peoples of the world. Crying and begging for integration would not grant freedom; it would take fire. Fire is symbolic because it represents destruction but also rebirth. Revolution also represents destruction and rebirth. The phrase “scorch like Hiroshima” signifies the imperialistic nature of America and the lack of respect for human life. The need to “resurrect Jesus from the Nordic lynch tree” further illustrates the lack of respect for human life, as well as the contradiction of Christian principles in a nation that prided itself on its Christianist and Nordic heritage. The fire of revolution would cauterize the racist plague by burning it out of existence to kill the disease and to provide the possibility of a future. Snellings’ apocalyptic tone and prophesy of “the smell of brimstone” is indicative of RAM’s belief in the inevitability of race war in capitalist America and throughout the decolonizing world.

Rolland Snellings (Askia Muhammad Touré) also believed that music historically held a place of importance in the lives of African Americans. He wrote, “Our main philosophical and cultural attitudes are displayed through our music, which serves as the root of our culture; from which springs our art, poetry, literature, etc.”<sup>230</sup> Snellings looked

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<sup>229</sup> Rolland Snellings, “Song of Fire (to Asia, Africa, Latin America, and the emerging Black America),” *Black America* (Fall 1964), 17, [http://freedomarchives.org/Documents/Finder/DOC513\\_scans/RAM/513.RAM.Black.America.Fall.1964.pdf](http://freedomarchives.org/Documents/Finder/DOC513_scans/RAM/513.RAM.Black.America.Fall.1964.pdf).

<sup>230</sup> Rolland Snellings, “We Are on the Move and Our Music is Moving with Us,” (Oct. 1965), in *Black Nationalism in America*, ed. John H. Bracey Jr., August Meier, Elliot Rudwick, (Indianapolis and New York: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, Inc., 1970), 447.

back to role of the griot in West Africa as the priest-philosopher of their people and linked the role of the African musician in America to this historical role as the “keeper or guardian of the spirit of the nation”.<sup>231</sup> Snellings argued that slavery had inhibited the ability of African Americans to read and write, but they were able to create a system of encoded messages within their songs as they worked. These spirituals were passed on and became renowned globally through Fisk University’s Jubilee Singers in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. What’s more, Snellings believed that black culture was the people’s most important wealth, a wealth that was being coopted by the white power structure. This argument further ties into the belief held by RAM that African Americans were a colonized nation. It was not raw materials that were being exported, but rather black culture. To combat this “cultural slavery” Snellings argued for the creation of black literary journals, recording companies, and book distribution firms. In other words, the means by which the community that creates the financially lucrative culture to benefit, rather than “supporting Zionist Israel and the Mafia with our Soul music and further helping to impoverish the Black Nation.”<sup>232</sup>

The cultural aspect of RAM’s program put them at odds with the Black Panther Party for Self-Defense. However, Huey Newton and Bobby Seale’s Panthers had their own cultural aspect to their organization. Newton and Seale viewed RAM as “porkchop”, “armchair”, cultural nationalists who were too busy abstractly theorizing to reach the people on the streets. Seale wrote in his autobiography that he became “frustrated by

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<sup>231</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>232</sup> Askia Muhammad Touré (Rolland Snellings), “We Must Create a National Black Intelligentsia in Order to Survive,” in *Black Nationalism in America*, ed. John H. Bracey Jr., August Meier, Elliot Rudwick, (Indianapolis and New York: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, Inc., 1970),452-62.

cultural nationalists...the 'so called' West Coast underground RAM."<sup>233</sup> Seale continued, "[we] wanted to show the brothers on the block that they had an organization that represents the community."<sup>234</sup> Further, David Hilliard called the members of the RAM affiliated Black Panther Party "paper tigers" who projected a militant stance, but did not live up to the rhetoric.<sup>235</sup>

The Black Panthers were talking about the West Coast branch of RAM that was less radical than branches on the East Coast and in Detroit. Another important factor was the clandestine nature of RAM. It was illogical to patrol the streets with loaded weapons when it would immediately draw the attention of authorities and give them an excuse to crack down. RAM was developing a "philosophy of underground and faceless leadership with phantom organization."<sup>236</sup> The purpose of RAM was to build the capability to carry out urban guerrilla tactics, but it became increasingly difficult to do so due to COINTELPRO. The Black Panthers for Self-Defense was founded in 1966 and rose in popularity by 1968, at which point RAM's decline was almost complete. BPP in many ways would learn why RAM tried to stay out of the national spotlight as law enforcement cracked down on the Panther movement in the 1970's.

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<sup>233</sup> Bobby Seale, *Seize the Time: The Story of the Black Panther Party and Huey Newton*, (Baltimore: Black Classic Press, 1991), 18.

<sup>234</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>235</sup> Bloom and Martin, *Black Against Empire*, 113.

<sup>236</sup> "The Struggle for Black State Power in the U.S.," Folder 010629-005-0787, The Black Power Movement: Papers of the Revolutionary Action Movement, 1962-1996,17.



## Chapter 6: Legal Trouble – Beginning of the End

In 1967 Stanford was framed on two cases involving RAM in Philadelphia and New York.<sup>237</sup> Eleven other men and four women were arrested in New York. Informant Earl Bailey claimed to have been approached by RAM members to join a plot to gun down city officials. Whether true or not, this illustrates the importance of secrecy.<sup>238</sup> Hence, the selective nature of RAM membership was not merely based on paranoia, but rather an accurate assessment that the powers of the state would do everything in their power to stop the creation of a black mass struggle for freedom, as had historically been the case. Police alleged that the group planned to kill Roy Wilkins, executive director of NAACP, and Whitney Young Jr., the director of the National Urban League. In a series of raids the police seized thirty weapons, 1000 rounds of ammunition, and “a quantity” of explosive materials used to make bombs. In Stanford’s home there was a .30 caliber carbine and .22 caliber revolver with 150 rounds of ammunition. Police also confiscated eight large cartons of books and pamphlets from “Red China”, Russia, Cuba, and African nations, as well as a red Chinese flag and a painting of Mao in the bedroom. Stanford was indicted by a Queens, New York grand jury on charges of advocating criminal anarchy, conspiracy to advocate criminal anarchy, and conspiracy to commit arson.<sup>239</sup> It is

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<sup>237</sup> Muhammad Ahmad Biographical Papers 1, Folder 010629-001-002, The Black Power Movement: Papers of the Revolutionary Action Movement, 1962-1996.

<sup>238</sup> “3 in Philadelphia Held in Poison plot,” *New York Times* (1923-current file), Sep. 29, 1967, <http://proxygw.wrlc.org/login?url=https://search-proquest-com.proxygw.wrlc.org/docview/117898312?accountid=11243>.

<sup>239</sup> Newspaper clipping “16 Arrested in Plot to Kill Moderate Negro leaders,” 21 June 1967, Revolutionary Action Movement Newspaper Clippings, 1963-1967, Folder: 010629-016-0754, The Black Power Movement: Papers of the Revolutionary Action Movement 1962-1996, Series 13 Oversize Materials 1962-1990, <https://congressional.proquest.com/histvault?q=010629-016-0754&accountid=11243>.

interesting to note that Detective James Ferrell was involved in the raids, illustrating that he was still after Stanford four years after the school building demonstrations.

Police believed that RAM planned to blow up a subway station, a lumber yard, gas stations, and other targets in New York. The police were “concerned” that RAM planned to murder “various members of the Negro race who it believes are in opposition to its policies.”<sup>240</sup> Magistrate Raymond Malone held Stanford without bail for a hearing on 21 July 1967 on charges of being a fugitive, but was informed that the District Attorney lacked the power to hold him without bail, at which point Stanford’s bail was set at \$100,000.<sup>241</sup> A \$500 bail was set on June 30 for two charges, possession of marijuana and violation of the Uniform Firearms Act.<sup>242</sup> This was the policy of COINTELPRO – to constantly arrest, charge, and set high bails. Eight were seized in two separate police raids on reputed RAM headquarters. Three were released, but four were charged with vagrancy and subsequently released, and one was charged with a concealed deadly weapon.<sup>243</sup> George Anderson was held for a concealed deadly weapon (knife). There was a raid of his home in which police claimed to find literature and handbooks on guerrilla warfare, how to make bombs and Molotov cocktails, and how to stop a tank.<sup>244</sup> Two men were charged with conspiracy to commit homicide, Herman B. Ferguson and

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<sup>240</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>241</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>242</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>243</sup> McCandish Phillips, Newspaper clipping “3 Names Added As Plot Targets: Mackell Says negro Group Planned Other Killings,” 23 June 1967, Revolutionary Action Movement Newspaper Clippings, 1963-1967, Folder: 010629-016-0754, The Black Power Movement: Papers of the Revolutionary Action Movement 1962-1996, Series 13 Oversize Materials 1962-1990, <https://congressional.proquest.com/histvault?q=010629-016-0754&accountid=11243>.

<sup>244</sup> Newspaper Clipping “Police Free 7 of 8 Linked to Hate Group,” 23 June 1967, Revolutionary Action Movement Newspaper Clippings, 1963-1967, Folder: 010629-016-0754, The Black Power Movement: Papers of the Revolutionary Action Movement 1962-1996, Series 13 Oversize Materials 1962-1990, <https://congressional.proquest.com/histvault?q=010629-016-0754&accountid=11243>.

Arthur Harris. The indictments charged that in December 1966 the Jamaica Rifle and Pistol Club was formed as a cover and front for legal possession of weapons.<sup>245</sup> This is an interesting choice of words that are reminiscent of the troubles faced by Robert Williams when he began forming rifle clubs and sought to become a member of the National Rifle Association (NRA).

An example of how RAM sought to utilize the system for its own benefit can be found in its creation of rifle clubs. The NRA was a nonprofit, tax-exempt organization which was permitted to lobby. It received a subsidy from the Defense Department totaling \$2,717,300 a year. When RAM formed the Jamaican Rifle and Pistol Club, it was endorsed by the NRA, thus entitling them to participate in the civilian marksmanship program of the Defense Department. In effect, it was believed that the NRA and the subsidies it received from the Defense Department “may contribute to big city rioting.”<sup>246</sup> What is interesting is the ways in which law enforcement and the media viewed the prospect of “negroes with guns,” automatically assuming that the formation of rifle clubs directly correlated with rioting. This view is not wholly inaccurate as it relates to RAM, as can be seen in the revolutionary literature of the organization. However, the formation of rifle clubs fundamentally was for the purpose of self-defense. In an article in the journal *Nite Life*, Stanford described how in 1957 Robert Williams began organizing

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<sup>245</sup> Emanuel Perlmutter, Newspaper clipping “16 Negroes Seized; plot to Kill Wilkins and Young Charged,” 22 June 1967, Revolutionary Action Movement Newspaper Clippings, 1963-1967, Folder: 010629-016-0754, The Black Power Movement: Papers of the Revolutionary Action Movement 1962-1996, Series 13 Oversize Materials 1962-1990, <https://congressional.proquest.com/histvault?q=010629-016-0754&accountid=11243>.

<sup>246</sup> Drew Pearson & Jack Anderson, “Public Funds Used to Support Rifle Lobby on Capitol Hill,” *Washington Merry-Go-Round*, July 10, 1967, 12.

Negro rifle club and formed a defense guard to protect the black community.<sup>247</sup> RAM also wanted to form rifle clubs to train armed defense guards to protect the community.<sup>248</sup>

The former national director of CORE James Farmer was later named a target as well claiming to have been alerted by police two years prior. He was an example of what RAM referred to as bourgeois reformist. Farmer spoke at the State University Agricultural and Technical Institute in Farmingdale, Long Island. During his speech he stated, “This shows that we are really equal now... You’ve got your Minutemen, and we’ve got out RAM.”<sup>249</sup> Farmer would go on to claim that Malcolm would reject them. This, however, was a false assessment and illustrated how little he knew about Malcolm or RAM. Malcolm was a mentor to RAM prior to his death and often spoke about what it meant to have a real revolution. Farmer’s comparison of RAM to Minutemen and right-wing extremist organizations were inaccurate, ignoring the racial factors.

A New York Times article linked Carmichael to the “Red Group”, stating that Carmichael had given Stanford, “Assistance and guidance in forming a Black Panther Party in New York City.” Carmichael gave a speech in 1966 labeling RAM as reactionary, reacting to the pressures put on them as black people in America. To him, it was “white people who force us to live this way.”<sup>250</sup> Therefore, such labels as

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<sup>247</sup>Max Stanford “Who Are the Rams OR What Is a Ram?”, *Nite Life* (July 4, 1967), Found in Folder 010629-016-0754, Revolutionary Action Movement Newspaper Clippings, 1963-1967, The Black Power Movement: Papers of the Revolutionary Action Movement, 1962-1996, Series 13: Oversized Materials, 1963-1990, <https://congressional.proquest.com/histvault?q=010629-016-0754&accountid=11243>.

<sup>248</sup> “RAM Manifesto: The World Black Revolution,” 19.

<sup>249</sup> Phillips, Newspaper clipping “3 Names Added As Plot Targets: Mackell Says negro Group Planned Other Killings,” Revolutionary Action Movement Newspaper Clippings, 1963-1967, The Black Power Movement: Papers of the Revolutionary Action Movement 1962-1996.

<sup>250</sup> Stokely Carmichael, “We Are Going to Use the Term ‘Black Power’ and We Are Going to Define It Because Black Power Speaks to Us,” July 28, 1966, in *Black Nationalism in America*, ed. John H. Bracey Jr., August Meier, Elliot Rudwick, (Indianapolis and New York: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, Inc., 1970), 473.

“extremists” or “radicals” were methods to discredit and dismiss those viewed as threats. According to J. Edgar Hoover, it was communist policy to “charge brutality to discredit law enforcement and to accentuate racial issues.”<sup>251</sup> It is apparent that the FBI was fearful of the frequent contact and the potential repercussions. The argument that RAM, or the black community in general, needed communism to discredit law enforcement is almost comical. It was a way to dismiss the protests against police brutality as propaganda.

State Supreme Court Justice J. Irwin Shapiro in Queens, New York dismissed the indictment on 17 January 1968. However, the court arraigned 15 of the 17 on fresh charges, of which all 15 plead not guilty. Ten in the group were accused of possessing dangerous weapons, instruments, or appliances and nine of conspiracy to commit arson. There was a hearing set for February 19. The original charges were dismissed as defective because it failed to specify that it was the New York state government that the defendants allegedly sought to overthrow. However, the dismissal did not affect the separate indictment of Herman B. Ferguson and Arthur Harris.<sup>252</sup>

An internal FBI document dated 30 August 1967 discusses Philadelphia, the home base of RAM, but is relevant to the case in New York. First, it is important to note that all names were redacted from the document. The document states plainly, “Any excuse for arrest was promptly implemented by arrest,” as example one person was noted as having been arrested for passing out RAM literature and charged with “inciting to riot”.<sup>253</sup> The document continued, “People re-arrested several times until they could no longer make

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<sup>251</sup> “Hoover Links Stokely Carmichael to Red Group,” *New York Times*, May 17, 1967, Revolutionary Action Movement Newspaper Clippings, 1963-1967, Folder: 010629-016-0754, The Black Power Movement: Papers of the Revolutionary Action Movement 1962-1996, Series 13 Oversize Materials 1962-1990, <https://congressional.proquest.com/histvault?q=010629-016-0754&accountid=11243>.

<sup>252</sup> “Charge of Anarchy Against 17 Dropped,” *New York Times* (Jan. 18, 1968), 25.

<sup>253</sup> “SAC – Philadelphia,” August 30, 1967, Freedom of Information Acts, Subject: COINTELPRO, 157-2371, 1-2, <https://archive.org/details/FBI-COINTELPRO-BLACK>.

bail,” a tactic which was seen as “an example of effective disruptive counterintelligence technique.”<sup>254</sup> The FBI planned to supply local police departments with information concerning the ideas of organizations and their vital and weak sections or “profitable points of attack”.<sup>255</sup> In the section entitled “Future Action Planned by Philadelphia” it is noted that “pursuant to Bureau instructions...” about a dozen RAM members that were incarcerated would be interviewed by police. Further, the documents states that most of the known RAM activists in Philadelphia were incarcerated. A list of names and addresses that were compiled into private address books were seized in the raids of the home of an individual whose name was redacted at the times of his three arrests. The redacted name was most likely Max Stanford, although this is difficult to verify. Police planned to analyze the names and addresses with the hope of leading to further counterintelligence suggestions.<sup>256</sup>

FBI documents reveal that officials also monitored “white hate groups” such as the Ku Klux Klan. However, an important distinction must be made regarding the language used to describe such organizations as opposed to those deemed black extremists. A 16 October 1967 memorandum discusses the Michigan March by United Klans of America, Inc. and Knights of Ku Klux Klan (UKA) in Flint, Michigan on October 14. The language is distinctly less aggressive than previous documents describing RAM. One of the starkest contrasts is that the FBI tracked the movements of the march, but did not harass members for distributing literature and attempting to recruit

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<sup>254</sup> *Ibid.*, 3

<sup>255</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

<sup>256</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

new members.<sup>257</sup> This distinction is indicative of the ways in which law enforcement viewed different communities. For example, in a memorandum to the director of the FBI the Nation of Islam was noted for attempting to create a regular day school at Muhammad Mosque # 4 in the District of Columbia. The Attendance Department of the District of Columbia Board of Educations was notified and the harassment of the Mosque ensued. They were harassed by the Board of Education, Zoning Board, Health and Fire Departments, as well as the Tax Division due the Mosques claims that the day school was non-profit. This is but one of the countless examples that illustrate the difference in approach by law enforcement toward white organizations versus black organizations. For the Klan it was a march, but if an organization such as RAM were to march it would likely be deemed as an attempt to “incite to riot”.

On 13 January 1968, King gave a testimony in which he proposed a bill of rights for the disadvantaged that would be similar to the G.I. Bill., though he would never live to see anything of the sort be implemented. He was assassinated in Memphis, Tennessee 4 April 1968. This assassination for many was the straw that broke the camel’s back. It left many confused and bewildered – if they would kill a leader who fought for peace and love where did that leave the rest of black people in America? As a result, people took to the streets as riots ensued across the country. The public, as Lyndon Johnson stated in his State of the Union Address on 17 January 1968, was tired of the urban unrest, they had had enough of rising crime and lawlessness. By 1968 “law and order” rhetoric was used to defend police brutality. It was a vicious circle, with rhetoric and brutality triggering

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<sup>257</sup> “Michigan March, United Klans of America, Inc., Knights of Ku Klux Klan (UKA), Flint, Michigan (October 14, 1967),” Detroit, October 16, 1967, Freedom of Information Acts, Subject: COINTELPRO, 100-4406 Section 1, <https://archive.org/details/FBI-COINTELPRO-BLACK>.

urban rebellions that in turn triggered more rhetoric and brutality.<sup>258</sup> It was time for law and order and Richard Nixon was elected in November 1968 amidst the changing national mood. The repression of black organizations such as RAM was subsequently intensified, as the case in New York illustrates.

An article describing the claims of Robert Earl Bailey, a fugitive from a Georgia prison gang, claimed that RAM plotted to blow up City Hall, the Federal Courthouse and the Police Administration Building, and called for the assassination of Mayor Tate and Police Commissioner Frank L. Rizzo, District Attorney Arlen Specter, President Lyndon Johnson, and J. Edgar Hoover. Bailey claimed to have been approached in prison by RAM members promising to get his bail lowered. They allegedly planned to put dynamite in mayor Tate's vehicle, to incite riots and "explosions and assassinations" in Richmond, Virginia, New York, Washington, and Baltimore. Bailey told investigators about training grounds owned by RAM in Richmond, VA and a chemist who was compounding high explosive. Three out of the four men accused in the plot to poison "hundreds of policemen" during a race riot were Williams James Lyles (Rashid-Abdullah "Pumpkin"), Anthony B. Monteiro, Reginal Grantham, and John Doo (Sakeeb). The alleged plot was to incite a riot and distribute potassium cyanide to police.<sup>259</sup>

The journalist and activist William Worthy wrote an article in *The Boston Globe* discussing the trial against Stanford. Worthy described Stanford as "a thoughtful man of action to the fiery young international generation, black, yellow, brown, and white, here

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<sup>258</sup> Kendi, *Stamped from the Beginning*, 399-401.

<sup>259</sup> H. James Lavery, Newspaper clipping "RAM Plotted to Wreck Hall, Convict Says: Ex-Sharpshooter Tells of Racist Plans to Murder Officials," *The Bulletin*, 1968, Revolutionary Action Movement Newspaper Clippings 1963-1967, Folder: 010629-016-0754, The Black Power Movement: Papers of the Revolutionary Action Movement 1962-1996, Series 13 Oversize Materials 1962-1990, <https://congressional.proquest.com/histvault?q=010629-016-0754&accountid=11243>.



and abroad, that will soon be transporting us into far more momentous, considerably more disciplined and internationally better coordinated struggles.”<sup>260</sup> Worthy’s argument was along the lines of RAM philosophy, that African Americans were a colonized population, a nation within a nation. Therefore, their solidarity with other colonized peoples throughout the world was not only a logical step, but an essential element of the black freedom struggle as well as the global struggle of the former colonies against neo-colonialism. In his view, the trial of Max Stanford was well known by mean of color as “colonial justice” due to the long use of “vindictive harassment” by Western democracies. However, Worthy believed “it didn’t stop the independence tide in the colonies, and it won’t stop the freedom tide in the ghettos.” This article illustrates the salience of RAM’s dreams of building solidarity against American imperialism at home and abroad and the attempts of the government to silence them. For them it was just another example of fascism, for as Worthy wrote, “The Intellectual is always a danger to the fascist mind because the intellectual demands the right to think for himself. The fascist mind cannot deal with issues through logic, reason, and persuasion.”<sup>261</sup> In other words, instead of disproving the rhetoric and arguments, the power structure instead killed, arrested, or forced radical leaders into exile. All In the name of “national security”. Stanford was forced underground in November 1968. In the same year, his father was harassed by the Internal Revenue Service (IRS). He mysteriously died in January 1969.

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<sup>260</sup> William Worthy, “Max Stanford: Profile of a Black Revolutionary” in *The Boston Globe* (June 16, 1968). Muhammad Ahmad Biographical Papers 1, Folder 010629-001-002, The Black Power Movement: Papers of the Revolutionary Action Movement, 1962-1996, <https://congressional.proquest.com/histvault?q=010629-001-002&accountid=11243>.

<sup>261</sup> *Ibid.*

Stanford later told Askia Muhammad Touré in a 1973 interview that he had learned “taking a stand for liberation against the system puts family in danger.”<sup>262</sup>

US Attorney Edward R. Neaheer listed Fred Fernandez as a suspect under indictment for anarchy and arson as a member of RAM. He was arrested 18 February 1971 on charges of bank robbery and was seized by the FBI at his home. He was described as a “triggerman” for RAM. After the robbery of First Federal Savings and Loan Association in Flushing, Queens, New York, Fernandez allegedly planned to meet with Herman B. Ferguson and Arthur Harris in Algiers, Algeria. Fernandez was facing up to 50 years. He was among the sixteen arrested in 1967 on charges of plotting to terrorize the city through bombings, but the trial was stayed pending the Supreme Court ruling on the constitutionality of the anarchy statute.<sup>263</sup> Article XIV of the laws of the state of New York defined criminal anarchy as, “the doctrine that organized government should be overthrown by force of violence, or by assassination of the executive head or any of the executive officials of government, or by any unlawful means. The advocacy of such doctrine either by word of mouth or writing is a felony.”<sup>264</sup> According to this statute advocacy of anarchy, assemblage of anarchists, permitting premises to be used for assemblages of anarchists, and liability of editors were all punishable. Even leaving the state to elude provisions of this article was punishable. Witnesses were granted privilege if they could produce evidence, shielding them from criminal proceeding should they provide evidence that also implicated themselves, thus providing incentive to provide

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<sup>262</sup> “All African People are Prisoners of War!”, Muhammad Ahmad Biographical Papers 1.

<sup>263</sup> Morris Kaplan, “Ex-Antipoverty Official Seized as Armed Bank Robber Here,” *New York Times* (1923-current file), Feb. 19, 1971, <https://proxygw.wrlc.org/login?url=https://search-proquest-com.proxygw.wrls.org/docview/119365713?accountid=11243>.

<sup>264</sup> Annotated Consolidated Laws of the State of New York as Amended to January 1, 1918, Vol. V, (New York: The Banks Law Publishing Company Baker, Voorhis and Co., 1918), 160.

information.<sup>265</sup> These amendments were ruled constitutional in 1925, but were challenged during the case in 1967. This case indicates that suspected members of RAM were still on law enforcement's radar, even after it was dissolved as an organization. In 1972 Stanford was arrested in San Diego, California, released then re-arrested. The Muhammad Ahmad Defense Committee (MAOC) was developed.

### *Beginning of the End*

The year 1968 marked the decline of RAM as an active organization due to the constant pressure put on members by COINTELPRO. However, RAM members participated in the third National Black Power Conference held in Philadelphia and worked with SNCC, and progressive forces in Newark and Brooklyn led by Amiri Baraka and Sonny Carson to convene the first meetings of the National Black United Front. Sections of RAM transformed into a coalition political party, the Afro-American Party of National Liberation known also known as the Black Liberation Party (BLP).<sup>266</sup> Founded by Ware Bey, General Gordon Baker Jr, Glanton Dowdell, Louis Randall, Fred Ahmed Evans, and Ken Freeman, the party remained underground for two years and emerged publicly in 1971 in Philadelphia as African People's Party (APP).<sup>267</sup> Stanford described the party as a revolutionary Pan-Africanist organization.<sup>268</sup> All of these activities indicate one of RAM's focuses was gaining black political power before the organization was dissolved.

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<sup>265</sup> *Ibid.*, 160-66.

<sup>266</sup> Muhammad Ahmad Biographical Papers 1, Folder 010629-001-002, The Black Power Movement: Papers of the Revolutionary Action Movement, 1962-1996,

<sup>267</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>268</sup> "All African People are Prisoners of War!", Muhammad Ahmad Biographical Papers 1.

By the end of 1968 RAM was dissolved as an official organization. Many members were also active in other organizations, so they dispersed with the intention of continuing the work of radicalizing them. Stanford and other former RAM members assisted in the development of the Republic of New Afrika (ROF).<sup>269</sup> Richard and Milton Henry founded the Republic of New Afrika in March 1968 for the purpose of creating a sovereign black nation in the black belt. The new country would not “have any hang-ups about socialism” and be based on collective and cooperative farms. Milton Henry used the term “ujamaa,” which he defined as “an African conception of the organization of society. It means we have total responsibility for one another.”<sup>270</sup> The group planned to conduct guerrilla warfare if their demands were not met and claimed to have purchased 100 acres of land in Mississippi. ROF had consulates in New York, Baltimore, Pittsburgh, Philadelphia, District of Columbia, Chicago, Cleveland, Los Angeles, and San Francisco.<sup>271</sup>

Former RAM members were also involved with the Dodge Revolutionary Union Movement (DRUM) in Detroit. DRUM’s constitution states that its purpose and objective was “to break that bonds of white racist control over the lives and destiny of black workers.”<sup>272</sup> Stanford kept a low profile during 1968-1972 but worked with the League of Revolutionary Black Workers (LRBW) in Detroit, which was inspired by DRUM. He

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<sup>269</sup> Robinson, *Black Nationalism in American Politics and Thought*, 61.

<sup>270</sup> “The Republic of New Afrika: “We Are the Government For the New Self-Governing Blacks Held Captive Within the United States,” in *Black Nationalism in America*, ed. John H. Bracey Jr., August Meier, Elliot Rudwick, (Indianapolis and New York: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, Inc., 1970), 518-23.

<sup>271</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>272</sup> “DRUM: “DARE TO FIGHT! DARE TO WIN!,”” in *Black Nationalism in America*, ed. John H. Bracey Jr., August Meier, Elliot Rudwick, (Indianapolis and New York: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, Inc., 1970), 551-55.

also worked with Howard Fuller and Nelson Johnson of Malcolm X University and Student Organization of Black Unity (SOBU) in forming African Liberation Day.

## Conclusion

RAM played an integral role in the emergence of the Black Power Era. At its founding, the organization was largely focused on the concept of armed self-defense due to the inspiration provided by Malcolm X and Robert F. Williams. Over time the philosophy became increasingly radical and international in its perspective, eventually leading to their belief that the world black revolution was inevitable. Therefore, they set out to prepare the black community to join their revolutionary brethren throughout the Third World. To do so, RAM used the lessons they learned from history to create a movement that blended grassroots activism, a Maoist vision of Marxist theory and revolution, black nationalism rooted in the desire to improve the lives of the black working class, scientific analysis of history, and a strategy of urban guerrilla tactics.

RAM is an example of the difficulties in categorizing the complexities of people and organizations. RAM learned from the experiences of their predecessors, especially the power of grassroots organizing. Their historical narrative became increasingly radical over time, but the fundamental principle was to create a better world for the oppressed masses. To spread their message and build their movement RAM used various art forms and created a number of theoretical journals, newsletters, front organizations, youth organizations, and briefly created several branches of the Black Panther Party across the country. RAM, however, was forced underground and eventually dissolved by 1968 due primarily to the FBI's COINTELPRO. Nevertheless, their impact can be felt through their influence on a number of organizations. For example, RAM existed before the term Black Power was coined and the rise of the Black Panther Party for Self-Defense. This

more iconic version of Black Panthers in the Bay Area in many ways put into action much of the rhetoric that RAM had promoted. In other words, RAM walked so that the Panthers could fly.

Although Stanford was under constant pressure from law enforcement he continued to work tirelessly for black liberation. He converted to Islam in 1970 and changed his name to Muhammad Ahmad. Ahmad got a Bachelor of Arts degree from the University of Massachusetts in 1976, his Master of Arts from Atlanta University in 1986, and his Ph.D. from Union Institute and University in 1992. He continues to advocate for the betterment of his people to this day. In many ways he is unique in that he was not killed or forced into exile as many of his contemporaries that attracted the attention of COINTELPRO. Ahmad and RAM belong in the pantheon of black revolutionaries because many of their theories foregrounded the emergence of the Black Power Era which, in the words of boxer Muhammad Ali, “shook up the world.”

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