

HISTORY OF RAM —
REVOLUTIONARY ACTION MOVEMENT

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Note: This paper was advanced as an initial Black Studies document and therefore does not give a complete account and analysis of RAM's activities.

INTRODUCTION

In approaching a study of RAM — the Revolutionary Action Movement — the student of history and political science needs to identify the modus operandi of studying the era that produced it.

The 1960's is unique in the sense that it has been noted as an era of political activism particularly on the part of a large segment of the black community. In the black community among the masses, the 1960's is remembered as the black revolution. There are several things we must understand in our study of the black revolution in the 1960's. One is that the 1960's represented a climax or high-tide stage in the continuous struggle of African people striving for national liberation in the United States.

The 1960's did not occur in a vacuum nor did the massive resistance stage subside because it was the end of an era. These two points are important to remember. We must view the black revolution in America as a continuous historical process, taking many twists and turns, having advancements and setbacks, employing different tactics in different historical periods. The revolution, because it faced a powerful oppressive system, is a protracted or prolonged struggle. It aims to weaken the system, which is both racist and monopoly capitalist, before it launches the major thrust in the final blow for national liberation. The revolution in the '60's went through three distinct stages:

- a. The non-violent direct action phase against segregation, 1960-1963.
- b. The transition period, 1964-1966.
- c. The insurrectionary stage, 1967-1969.

In the initial stages of the black movement in the sixties, its center of activity was in the south. The movement utilized non-violent direct action tactics against segregated public facilities in the south. Support demonstrations developed in the north protesting the Jim Crow laws. Towards the end of 1963, spontaneous violent demonstrations occurred in

Jacksonville, Florida, and Philadelphia, Penn. Starting in 1964, spontaneous violent urban rebellions occurred in approximately five northern inner cities.

Between 1964 and 1966 the form of mass protest began to change from mass non-violent demonstrations against segregated facilities in the south to violent mass urban rebellions against the capitalist system in the north. This period we call the transition period because the two forms of protest existed at the same time with non-violent demonstrations still being the predominant form of protest.

The year 1967 represents a different stage. In this year over 200 cities had reports of violent rebellions. Mass spontaneous urban rebellions continued until 1969, when they seem to have been replaced by sniping of police in 1970.

We should remember that the organizations and personalities who were the most revolutionary in the 1960's were not projected by the mass media and are probably the least heard of, and in many cases they have been purposely written out of history.

The revolution of the 1960's dates back to the Montgomery boycott. On December 1, 1955 a black seamstress named Mrs. Rosa Parks refused to give her seat to a white man because she was too tired to stand. She was arrested for violating the city's segregation laws. After the arrest, a group of black women asked ministers and civic leaders to call a boycott on December 5, the day of Mrs. Parks' trial. One of the ministers who responded to that call was twenty-six-year-old Martin Luther King, Jr., pastor of Montgomery's Dexter Avenue Baptist Church. From mass meetings, the Montgomery Improvement Association was formed. The M.I.A. organized a car motor pool to transport brothers and sisters who lived too far to walk back and forth to work. The M.I.A.'s demands were:

- a. a guarantee of courteous treatment
- b. passengers to be seated on a first-come, first-served basis with blacks seating from the back

- c. employment of Negro drivers on predominantly Negro bus routes.

At mass meetings Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. emerged as the main mass leader of the boycott. Montgomery tried to break the boycott but after a year of struggle, the U.S. Supreme Court declared Alabama's state and local laws supporting segregation on buses unconstitutional. The Montgomery boycott served as an example of successful mass direct action. Other communities organized similar campaigns.

By 1957 Dr. King had organized SCLC (the Southern Christian Leadership Conference) to develop the non-violent mass direct action movement. By 1958 small non-violent demonstrations were tested in different places in the country. 1960 came in with the aura of high expectations from black working class struggles for national democratic rights. On February 1, 1960, four freshmen at A & T College in Greensboro, North Carolina, sat in at a Woolworth lunch counter downtown. In a matter of days the idea leaped to other cities in North Carolina. During the next two weeks, sit-ins spread to fifteen cities in five southern states. Within the following year, over 50,000 people — most were blacks, some white — participated in some kind of demonstration or another in a hundred cities and over 3,600 demonstrators spent time in jail. In a year, several hundred counters had been desegregated in southern cities.

The main centers of protest were Nashville, Tenn., Atlanta, Ga., and Orangeburg, S.C.

Nearly 1,300 arrests had been made by this time. . . . There were 400 arrests in Orangeburg, about 150 in Nashville, nearly 40 in each of Tallahassee and Florence (South Carolina), about 80 in Atlanta, about 65 in Memphis and nearly 85 in Marshall, Texas. In the North, college students staged supporting demonstrations and raised funds for arrested Southern students. The focus of the sit-ins was broadening to

include libraries, museums, and art galleries; the methods . . . were . . . wade-ins, stand-ins, kneel-ins and other forms of non-violent direct action.¹

On April 15, a student conference was called under the auspices of Miss Ella Baker, field worker for SCLC. The students formed the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC).

In October of 1960, at a student conference of several hundred delegates in Atlanta, SNCC became a permanent organization.

Throughout 1960 and early 1961, SNCC demonstrated against segregation in public facilities in the south. In the spring of 1961, CORE, the Congress of Racial Equality, decided to test laws pertaining to inter-state travel at segregated terminal facilities at bus stations.

As white mobs attacked the CORE freedom riders, CORE decided to end the rides. But SNCC picked up the freedom rides and continued them throughout the spring and summer of 1961.

In the north, another type of mass movement was developing. It was the Nation of Islam, led by Elijah Muhammad. The Nation of Islam, branded by the white press as the Black Muslims, believed the white man was the devil, advocated racial separation and a black nation in the south, and practiced unarmed self-defense. It was a religious nationalist movement created in 1930 by Wallace D. Fard. After Fard's disappearance in 1934, Elijah Muhammad took over the N.O.I. as the last messenger of Allah. The movement began to grow in the late fifties, when Malcolm X was recruited and became national spokesman.

So two mass movements were developing — one integrationist/non-violent in the south and the other separationist/self-defense in the north. Both movements had religious overtones. The movement in the south had strong ties to the Black Christian church, and the northern movement was an

Islamic movement.

A third trend in the movement was represented by Robert F. Williams. Williams in 1957, as president of the Union County, N.C., branch of the NAACP, armed the black community against KKK attacks. Williams used direct action mass demonstrations of the integrationists but his demonstrations were protected with armed guards. His open advocacy of armed self-defense and public statements of "meet violence with violence" led him to clashes with the national leadership of the NAACP.

This is a brief backdrop to the climactic events that led to a new development in the black liberation struggle. This paper is an incomplete analysis of RAM — the Revolutionary Action Movement. It is hoped it will be the basis for a more thorough study in the future and will provide social researchers with material for making empirical studies of the subject matter.

EARLY BEGINNINGS

The Revolutionary Action Movement (RAM) evolved from the southern civil rights movement of the early 1960's and the black nationalist movement in northern cities.

As a result of the sit-ins, students in northern cities organized sympathy (support) demonstrations. Traditional civil rights organizations like the NAACP and CORE held mass rallies in northern black communities.

Black and white students demonstrated against Woolworth stores and along with progressive clergy led economic boycotts.

Black students with more radical leanings in the north, while supporting SNCC, had a tendency to reject its non-violent philosophy. Some of these students joined CORE to participate in direct action activities.

In the summer of 1961, at the time of the freedom rides, Robert F. Williams, president of the Monroe, N.C., NAACP, issued a nation-wide call for Afro-Americans to arm for self-defense and go to Monroe for a showdown with the KKK.² Williams also called for freedom riders to go to Monroe to test non-violence.

Also within the white left, The L.I.D., The League for Industrial Democracy, planned to form a student branch called S.D.S. — Students for a Democratic Society. S.D.S. was to hold a conference on the new left at the N.S.A. (National Student Association) conference in Madison, Wis. SNCC was also represented at the N.S.A. conference.

During the conference, news of Williams' flight into exile reached movement circles. Discussions among black SNCC and CORE workers and independent black radicals took place as to what significance the events in Monroe, N.C., had for the movement.

Black cadre inside of S.D.S. met and discussed developing a black radical movement that would create conditions

to make it favorable to bring Williams back into the country. This was a small meeting of about four people. Donald Freeman, a black student at Case Western Reserve College in Cleveland, Ohio, said he would correspond with everyone and would decide when to meet again. One of those present at the meeting was a student at Central State College in Wilberforce, Ohio.

During the fall of 1961 an off-campus chapter of S.D.S. formed at Central State, called Challenge. Challenge was a black radical formation having no basic ideology. Part of its membership was students who had been expelled from southern schools for sit-in demonstrations, students who had taken freedom rides and students from the north, some of whom had been members of the Nation of Islam and African nationalist organizations. Challenge's main emphasis was struggling for more student rights on campus and bringing a black political awareness to the student body. In a year-long battle with the college's administration over student rights, members of Challenge became more radicalized. Challenge members would attend student conferences in the south and participate in demonstrations in the north. Freeman would send letters to the Challenge cadre discussing ideological aspects of the civil rights movement.

In the spring of 1962, *Studies on the Left*, a radical quarterly, published Harold Cruse's article, "Revolutionary Nationalism and the Afro-American."³ Freeman wrote a letter to the Challenge cadre telling them to seriously study the article. He also said black radicals elsewhere were studying the article and that a movement had to be created in the north similar to the Nation of Islam, using the tactics of SNCC but outside of the NAACP and CORE. The Challenge cadre studied Freeman's letter but did not know where to begin.

After much discussion, the cadre decided to form a broad coalition to take over student government. Meetings were held with representatives from each class, fraternities

and sororities. A slate was drafted and a name for the party was selected. It was called RAM, later to be known as the Revolutionary Action Movement.

The Challenge cadre met and decided to dissolve itself into RAM and become the RAM leadership. RAM won all student government offices. After the election, the inner RAM core discussed what to do next. Some said that all that could be done at Central State had already occurred, while others disagreed. Some of the inner core decided to stay at Central State and run the student government, while a few decided to return to their communities and attempt to organize around Freeman's basic outline. Two of the returning students were Wanda Marshall and Max Stanford.

Freeman wrote to Stanford in Philadelphia, saying that he was going to Philadelphia in the summer of 1962 and that he wanted him to organize a meeting. Freeman went to Philadelphia and met with a group of Stanford's high school friends. He discussed the movement and the direction it had to take. Later in discussions with Stanford, Freeman gave instructions that Philadelphia should become a pilot project. The movement would eventually be called RAM. Freeman continued to travel from city to city. In September of 1962, Stanford went to the National Student Association headquarters in Philadelphia, where he met Marion Barry from SNCC, who was in Philadelphia to help raise funds for SNCC. Wanda Marshall transferred to Temple University and began working with black students there.

In the process of working with SNCC, Stanford met the black left in Philadelphia. One acquaintance was Bill Davis, who was leader of an independent black Marxist cadre called O.A. (Organization Alert). Also during this time Stanford had discussions with Marion Barry about the direction of the movement. One night while listening to the discussion in the N.S.A. office, Miss Ella Baker encouraged Stanford to continue to develop his ideas.

After Marion Barry left Philadelphia, Bill Davis asked

Stanford to join O.A. Stanford wrote Freeman about O.A. and Freeman decided to meet with Davis. Freeman went to Philadelphia in October of 1962 and after long discussions with Davis told Stanford that O.A. was too intellectual and not action-oriented enough. Freeman had organized the African American Institute in Cleveland. He was also a school teacher in the Cleveland school system. He told Stanford that he had to start something independent of O.A. Stanford was still not convinced. Freeman left and returned to Cleveland.

During a meeting of O.A., Davis harshly criticized SNCC and said that SNCC would never change. Stanford opposed that position, saying that SNCC was at the center of the movement and events would force SNCC to change. The discussion ended in a heated debate. Stanford discussed the debate with Wanda Marshall of the original RAM cadre, who had to refuse to join O.A.

During the Thanksgiving break, Marshall went home to White Plains, New York, and Stanford visited her. He decided to visit Malcolm X to ask him if he should join the Nation of Islam. Marshall and Stanford met with Minister Malcolm at the Shabazz Restaurant in New York. After a lengthy black history lesson by Minister Malcolm, Stanford asked Malcolm if he should join the Nation of Islam. Malcolm, to his surprise, said no. He said, "You can do more for the honorable Elijah Muhammad by organizing outside of the Nation."

Minister Malcolm's statements convinced Marshall and Stanford to do independent organizing. Stanford drafted a position paper titled "Orientation to a Black Mass Movement, part 1" and circulated it among the black left in Philadelphia. He went to visit Mrs. Ethel Johnson, who had been a co-worker with Robert Williams in Monroe, N.C., and who was then residing in Philadelphia. Mrs. Johnson read the paper and later told Stanford she would help him organize.

Freeman returned to Philadelphia for the Christmas holidays. At a meeting with Marshall, he harangued Stanford for not having organized. It was decided at that meeting to

organize a study group in January of 1963. Towards the end of 1962, Marshall and Stanford called together a group of black activists to discuss organizing around orientation to a black mass movement.

Within a month's time, key black activists came into the study group. Two central figures were Stan Daniels and Playthell Benjamin. The group decided to call itself RAM — Revolutionary Action Movement. It decided it would be a black nationalist direct action organization. Its purpose would be to start a mass black nationalist movement. By using mass direct action combined with the tactics of self-defense, it hoped to change the civil rights movement into a black revolution. RAM decided to work with the established civil rights leadership in Philadelphia and eventually build a base for mass support.

RAM contacted Rev. Leon Sullivan and volunteered to help organize with the mass selective boycotts the Philadelphia ministers were conducting against industries that discriminated in their hiring practices.

RAM distributed leaflets in the tens of thousands door to door throughout the community. In the early months of 1963 a new Philadelphia NAACP president was elected named Cecil Moore, an attorney who was direct-action prone.

Temple University initiated a pilot project called PCA, composed of white liberals who had been given a grant of one million dollars to study north Philadelphia. No black people from the community were included on the commission. The NAACP decided to hold a mass rally to protest the commission. Moore asked all community groups to help in organizing the project.

The RAM action study group immediately became involved. RAM members circulated through north Philadelphia streets with homemade loud speakers, holding street meetings and handing out leaflets. RAM members went into the bars and pool rooms holding rap sessions.

The rally was a total success. But all the petty bourgeois

leadership did was give flowery speeches. The week following, the NAACP and RAM picketed the PCA offices. For some reason the NAACP called off the picketing and not too much came of the protest.

RAM members felt the movement needed a voice that was independent of the existing civil rights groups. RAM assessed all the civil rights groups except SNCC as bourgeois and also analyzed the Nation of Islam as having a bourgeois orientation. It was thought that a black radical publication should be created. RAM began publishing a bimonthly called *Black America*. To begin to agitate the masses, RAM circulated a free one-page newsletter called *RAM Speaks*. *RAM Speaks* addressed itself to local issues and issues that were constantly arising in the movement. *Black America* was more theoretical. Members of RAM went on radio and publicized their study group and program.

As more community people joined the RAM study group, the class and age composition of the study group changed from basically students in their early 20's to black working class into the early 30's.

RAM decided to begin mass recruitment. The organization began to hold mass street meetings in North Philadelphia. Free weekly African and Afro-American history classes were held, taught by Playthell Benjamin, a young self-educated historian. Other meetings would discuss building RAM into a mass movement.

Through its publication, *Black America*, RAM began to communicate with other new nationalist formations. In San Francisco, Donald Warden had started the Afro-American Association. In Detroit, Luke Tripp, John Williams, Charles (Mao) Johnson, General Baker and Gwen Kemp were the leadership of UHURU, and Freeman had organized the Afro-American Institute in Cleveland. Sterling Stuckey, Thomas Higgenbottom and John Bracey, Jr., had formed N.A.O., National Afro-American Organization, in Chicago, and there was a black cultural group in New York called Umbra.

Stanford would travel around on weekends in the south and across the north to keep in touch with new developments.

SNCC began mobilizing blacks in mass voter registration marches in Greenwood, Mississippi. Mississippi state troopers attacked the demonstrators and masses were being jailed. Then came the mass demonstrations in Birmingham. The movement seriously began to jell, as the mood of black people in the north became angry.

The NAACP called a mass demonstration in front of Philadelphia's City Hall in which RAM participated, carrying signs calling for armed self-defense.

NAACP president Cecil Moore decided to test mass direct action in Philadelphia by protesting against union discrimination on a construction site at 30th and Dauphin Streets in the heart of the black community in North Philadelphia. He asked RAM to help in the mobilization. The construction site was in RAM territory, three blocks from its office. Moore made NAACP equipment available to RAM.

RAM immediately took a survey of the community, asking residents if they would support demonstrations in Philadelphia similar to the ones being held in the south. The overwhelming response was "Yes." RAM members circulated throughout the community with leaflets and bull horns, going door to door, talking to street gangs.

The demonstration was scheduled to start at 6 a.m., May 27th, 1963. RAM leaders Stan Daniels and Max Stanford joined the picket line, which blocked the workers, all whites, from entering the construction site. Within minutes the Philadelphia police formed a flying wedge and attacked the picket line. Singling out Daniels and Stanford, twenty police jumped them as they fought until unconscious.

As word spread throughout the community, masses went to the construction site. Daniels and Stanford were arrested. In the police station, Stanford asked to make a phone call. He called Minister Malcolm X and told him what had happened. Malcolm promised to publicize what was

happening in Philadelphia. He went on the radio that night in New York and traveled to Philadelphia two days later, speaking on radio again. Word swept not only Philadelphia but the entire East Coast. Within a week, 50,000 to 100,000 people participated in demonstrations that often turned into violent clashes between the masses and the police. The pressure became too much for the NAACP, and they called off the protests.

The word RAM had become known among black radical circles in the north. The May demonstrations were the first mass breakthrough in the north of mass involvement.

The national NAACP convention was being held in Chicago during the summer of 1963. Moore decided to take Stan Daniels and Max Stanford "to keep them out of trouble while I'm gone."

Stanford and Daniels stopped through Cleveland on the way to Chicago. There they conferred with Freeman, who decided to drive into Chicago and introduce Daniels and Stanford to the cadre there.

There was general discussion of what had been started in Philadelphia and then the discussion centered around what could be done in Chicago. Someone mentioned that Mayor Daley and Reverend Jackson (head of the Baptist convention who had publicly denounced Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and civil rights demonstrations) were going to speak at the NAACP rally that Saturday.

It was decided that the cadre would organize community support to protest against Daley, and Daniels and Stanford would organize the youth inside the NAACP convention.

Daniels and Stanford stopped an NAACP Youth dance. They called for support of the upcoming demonstration. NAACP officials became alarmed and stopped them from speaking. The Chicago cadre in the meantime contacted activists and others in the community about the demonstration, which was scheduled for July 4th. Leaflets were handed out on the streets, subways and buses.

The NAACP rally proceeded as planned, with top NAACP people in attendance. To keep the NAACP Youth from participating in the demonstration, the top brass had all the youth delegates sit on stage with them. Mayor Daley was introduced. Demonstrators marching from the back of the park began booing Daley. The booing was so loud that Daley couldn't finish speaking; he became angry and left. Then Reverend Jackson (head of the National Baptist convention) was announced next to speak. As Jackson approached the podium, the demonstrators began to chant, "Uncle Toms Must Go." The audience picked up the chant. Demonstrators charged the stage. 25,000 became enraged and a full-scale riot broke out as the masses chased Jackson off the stage into a waiting car that sped him off to safety.

It was decided by the cadre to get Daniels and Stanford out of town immediately because the city might bring inciting to riot charges against them. Daniels was sent back to Philadelphia and Stanford to Cleveland. In Cleveland, Freeman told Stanford to go to Detroit to check on UHURU and to help them get things going. In Detroit, Stanford met with UHURU and told them what had transpired in Chicago.

A black prostitute named Cynthia Scott had been shot in the back by a white policeman and killed the previous weekend. UHURU decided to hold a rally and protest demonstration in front of the precinct of the guilty cop. UHURU approached G.O.A.L., a black nationalist civil rights group, for help in the demonstration. Within two weeks, marches were organized against the precinct with the community participating in the thousands.

Stanford returned to Cleveland and reported what was developing in Detroit. From Cleveland he returned to Philadelphia.

By mid-July, local grass roots activists were talking about marching on Washington and bringing Washington to a standstill.

Freeman decided the time had come to call the various

revolutionary nationalist cadres together in what was called a Black Vanguard Conference. The Black Vanguard Conference was to be a secret, all-black, all-male conference to draft strategy for the proposed march on Washington and direction of the movement. The conference was held in early August in Cleveland, Ohio. Activists attended from Chicago, New York, Philadelphia and Cleveland. Detroit was barred because of a security leak in the cadre there.

Freeman presided over the conference. Discussion centered around changing the existing civil rights movement into a revolutionary nationalist movement. It was discussed that the cadre could achieve this by infiltrating the existing civil rights groups and also by providing a left alternative from outside of the existing civil rights groups (CORE, SNCC, NAACP, SCLC). The march on Washington was also discussed. It was decided that an organizer would be sent into Washington prior to the march to decide what kind of a strategy the cadre should take during the march.

During the discussion on what form the coalition of activists should take, the beginnings of an ideological split emerged. Chicago and New York favored using the name RAM — Revolutionary Action Movement — since RAM had established a mass breakthrough. Those advocating this position wanted a tight-knit structure based on disciplined cells, with rules and organization based on democratic centralism. Freeman argued against this position and advocated a loose coalition called the Black Liberation Front. Philadelphia voted with Freeman, and because Freeman had more experience than most of the activists there, the rest voted on calling the gathering the Black Liberation Front. Chicago also raised the question of whether the BLF should be a Marxist-Leninist formation, but there was no consensus or agreement, so it was decided that the BLF would be revolutionary nationalist.

At the March on Washington, the cadre again met. The BLF organizer who had been sent to Washington reported that the march didn't have support from the majority of the

black community there; from his conversations with people on the street, many didn't know a march was being planned for D.C. It was also observed that the army was posted at strategic places in the city and was on alert to move in case of trouble. On the basis of the report, it was decided just to participate in the march and observe.

By chance, while cadres were handing out leaflets in the community, they ran into Donald Warden, who was then chairman of the AAA (Afro-American Association). A meeting was set up with Warden, who ran down what the AAA was about for about 2 1/2 hours. After the meeting it was decided that the cadre would stay in touch with Warden, but Freeman concluded that Warden was a bourgeois nationalist. It was decided that the cadre would go back to their respective locales and build bases.

Several events occurred which shaped the civil rights movement and later the black liberation movement. One was the bombing of four black sisters in a church in Birmingham, Alabama. The news of this both angered the black community and sent waves of demoralization inside the civil rights movement. It was like a mortal blow after the March on Washington. Then came the assassination of John Kennedy, president of the U.S. Many Negroes across the country felt they had lost a friend. To the cadre, the ultra-right had made a move.

Malcolm X, speaking the Sunday after the assassination, made reference to the Kennedy assassination as "chickens coming home to roost." Elijah Muhammad, head of the Nation of Islam, suspended Malcolm from speaking for 90 days and later extended the suspension indefinitely.

In Philadelphia, a white cop shot a black epileptic in the back of the head and killed him. A coalition of black radical groups held mass rallies to protest police brutality. After one of the rallies, black teenagers began small-scale rioting. RAM, observing the riot, began to theorize about the potential of this kind of activity.

The coalition led mass marches on the cop's police station only to be met by machine guns staring them in the face. The coalition decided it had gone as far as it could go without getting innocent people hurt.

Freeman traveled to Philadelphia to talk to the RAM cadre. He told the cadre to cease all public activity and said that the ultra-right was preparing to crush the movement. The word was, "go underground."

DEVELOPMENT OF RAM INTO A NATIONAL ORGANIZATION

The year 1964 was a year of transition for the civil rights movement and a year of ideological development for black radicals. In January, Brooklyn CORE, led by Isaiah Brownson, planned the Stall-in at the World's Fair to protest discrimination being practiced there. The purpose of the Stall-in was to stop or slow down traffic in the streets and subways, to bring New York City to a standstill. It was a new tactic of using civil disobedience to disrupt the function of a city. While the Stall-in was not successful, it raised questions of the possibility of the movement disrupting the functioning of the system.

Two events occurred in March 1964. Malcolm X announced his independence from the Nation of Islam. Robert F. Williams' article "Revolution Without Violence?" in the February 1964 issue of *Crusader* reached the states. Almost every activist was watching Malcolm's development to see what direction he was going. Freeman from the BLF was at Malcolm's press conference and encouraged him to proceed in a more radical direction.

Robert Williams' article "Revolution Without Violence?" raised many eyebrows. In it he described how many blacks could bring the U.S. to a standstill through urban rebellions and urban guerrilla warfare. This went beyond the concept of armed self-defense. Freeman decided it was time to challenge SNCC on its own home grounds, the south. He called Stanford to Cleveland and gave him instructions to organize an all-black student conference in the south. The BLF had connections with nationalists who were inside local SNCC groups. One particular group was ASM, the Afro-American Student Movement at Fisk University in Nashville, Tennessee.

Stanford was sent to Detroit to raise money for the

conference. While fund-raising he went to see James and Grace Boggs, then two leading theoreticians of the black liberation struggle. In discussions with Grace Boggs, she described the problems that had emerged in the Michigan Freedom Now Party as lessons to avoid in organizing. Robert Williams' February 1964 *Crusader* article was discussed, and Stanford described RAM. Boggs asked Stanford to write an article on RAM, which she later printed in *Correspondence*, a bi-monthly periodical which was published in Michigan. Stanford also wrote Malcolm telling him of the upcoming student conference. From there Stanford went south to the annual spring SNCC conference to recruit SNCC field workers, especially from Mississippi, who were responsive to an all-black student conference.

On May 1st, 1964, the first Afro-American Student Conference on Black Nationalism was held at Fisk University. It was the first time since 1960 that black activists from the north and south sat down to discuss black nationalism. Don Freeman, in his article "Black Youth and Afro-American Liberation," describes the conference:

The first conference session evaluated "bourgeois reformism." The integrationist civil rights organizations of CORE, SCLC, SNCC, NAACP, etc. substantiate Dr. W. E. B. DuBois' conviction that "capitalism cannot reform itself; a system that enslaves you cannot free you."⁴

The conference stated that black radicals were the vanguard of revolution in this country, supported Minister Malcolm's efforts to take the case of Afro-Americans to the U.N., called for a black cultural revolution, and discussed Pan Africanism. The impact of the conference was such that the Nashville Student Movement brought Dr. King to Nashville the weekend of the conference. During his speech, Dr. King attacked the conference as "hate in reverse."

From the conference BLF-RAM organizers went into the south to work with SNCC. With the permission of SNCC

chairman John Lewis, an experimental black nationalist self-defense project was started in Greenwood, Mississippi.

In discussion with Mississippi field staff of SNCC, BLF-RAM organizers found the staff was prepared to establish a statewide armed self-defense system. They were also prepared to move in an all-black nationalist direction. All that was needed was money to finance the project.⁵ In the meantime, *Monthly Review* published an article titled "The Colonial War at Home," including most of Stanford's *Correspondence* article "Towards a Revolutionary Action Movement," edited with some of Malcolm's remarks, and excerpts from Robert Williams' "Revolution Without Violence," in an analysis of the black liberation struggle.⁶

The article was discussed by the majority of the SNCC field staff. SNCC was polarized between black and white organizers and between left- and right-wing forces within SNCC.

Most of the whites opposed armed self-defense and black nationalism. They and their supporters considered the BLF-RAM cadres as enemies. Political debates took place within field staff meetings as to the direction of SNCC and the black liberation movement.⁷

Stanford called an emergency organizational meeting in Detroit of BLF cadres, James and Grace Boggs, and supporters. He gave a report on the condition in the south with the Mississippi field staff ready to move into armed self-defense. It was discussed that a national centralized organization was needed to coordinate the new movement. RAM - Revolutionary Action Movement - was the name chosen for the new movement. After much discussion it was decided that the movement should be structured on three levels: one of tight-knit cells in cities that would build political bases and financially support roving field organizers, who would work full-time like SNCC field organizers in the community and at the same time act as a national liberation front coordinating a broad coalition of black nationalist groups.

Ideological contradictions were present from the start. Political debate centered around the status of black people and strategy for liberation. The nationalists stated that black people were an internal colony, a nation within a nation whose national territory was the black belt south. They said that in the process of liberation through a black socialist revolution, the black nation would separate from the United States.

The socialists, on the other hand, represented by James and Grace Boggs, asked the question, what would happen to the rest of the country? Could the white left be given the responsibility to govern? What would guarantee that they would be any less racist? After much discussion a compromise was drafted. The position was that black revolutionaries would have to seize power in a socialist revolution in the United States, maintaining a black dictatorship over the U.S. with the south being an autonomous region. The Boggses presented the argument that black migration was moving towards cities and that by 1970 blacks would constitute the majority of inner cities in the 10 major urban areas. Their position was that the organization should place emphasis on building black political power in the cities.⁸

A twelve-point program was drafted by a committee, read and discussed by the conference. The program included:

1. Development of a national black student organization movement.
2. Development of ideology (Freedom) schools.
3. Development of Rifle Clubs.
4. Development of Liberation Army (Guerrilla Youth Force).
5. Development of Propaganda, training centers and national organization.
6. Development of Underground Vanguard.
7. Development of black workers "liberation" unions.

8. Development of black organization (cells).
9. Development of nation within nation concept, government in exile.
10. Development of War Fund (Political Economy).
11. Development of black farmer coops.
12. Development of Army of black unemployed.

Officers for the movement were elected.

International spokesman	X*
International chairman	Robert F. Williams
National Field chairman	Max Stanford
Executive chairman	Dor Freeman
Ideological chairman	James Boggs
Executive secretary	Grace Boggs
Treasurer	Milton Henry/Paul Brooks

*It was suggested that Malcolm X would be spokesman for the movement. The field chairman was to go to New York to talk to Malcolm about it. RAM members went back to their communities to organize cells, while others traveled around the country spreading the movement.

MALCOLM X AND RAM

The RAM field chairman, upon arriving in New York in 1964, met with the RAM cadre there and immediately contacted Malcolm X. After describing the new developments in the black liberation movement, he asked Malcolm to become RAM's international spokesman. Malcolm agreed to become the spokesman but felt it should remain secret because the intelligence apparatus would become alarmed about his connection with Robert Williams, who was in exile in Cuba.

Malcolm was preparing to develop a public mass organization which he intended would be instrumental in leading the broad mass movement and would serve as a united front. He asked that RAM organizers help in forming that organization and also infiltrate it to develop a security section. He knew the Muslim Mosque, Inc. was infiltrated by police agents and didn't know who he could trust. Malcolm had just returned from his first trip to Africa. He was in the process of attempting to get African nations to endorse his proposal to take the U.S. to the United Nations for its violations of the Human Rights charter in its crimes against Afro-Americans.

Both Malcolm and RAM saw that the internationalization of the Afro-American struggle was necessary to win allies and to isolate the U.S. government. In the organizational discussions which were held daily for a month, various aspects of the struggle were analyzed. The field chairman asked Malcolm about his statements of white people being in Mecca and his feeling that some would be worked with. The field chairman stated that he felt Malcolm would lose his black nationalist following, which was his base of support.

Malcolm stated that while in Algeria an Algerian revolutionary showed him a picture of himself that looked as dark as Marcus Garvey, and the statements under the picture made it appear that Malcolm was advocating the superiority of

people based on skin pigmentation, i.e., that darker-skinned Africans were superior to lighter-skinned Africans. The publication had been circulated by the U.S.I.A., U.S. Information Agency. The Algerian revolutionary convinced Malcolm that if this kind of propaganda had confused him and was isolating him on the continent of Africa, then the racists must have been successful in isolating him from the broad masses of Afro-Americans. The Algerian revolutionary discussed the concept of the mass line with Malcolm. Malcolm felt that there would always be black nationalists in America but that he had to reach the masses of our people who hadn't become black nationalists yet. He had also been under pressure of the Arabs to practice "true Islam." So he felt it was best that he tone down his line.

It was decided that Malcolm would infiltrate the civil rights movement and later transform it into a black revolution. In order to do this, RAM and others would make preparations for Malcolm to go south. Malcolm would eventually join demonstrations utilizing the right of self-defense. He would be the mass spokesman for armed defense units that would be centered around him and a black united front.

Malcolm then set about creating the mass organizational form. Malcolm's hard core wanted to call the organization the NLF (National Liberation Front) but it was decided that a public NLF was premature and would frighten most people. Malcolm asked the organizers to come up with a name for the organization. The next week the OAAU (Organization of Afro-American Unity) was chosen. A program for the OAAU was drafted and presented at Malcolm's Sunday mass rallies at the Audubon ballroom.

The NLF faction in Malcolm's organizations, OAAU, and the Muslim Mosque, Inc. were in military training. RAM sent organizers to train with them. Within Malcolm's ranks were several brothers who had martial arts and military training for years in the F.O.I. (Fruit of Islam, military wing of the Nation of Islam). Some were 5th degree black belts. The

field chairman of RAM and Malcolm, during the month of June, worked out plans for developing an international black nationalist movement. From daily discussions on the political perspective of RAM, Malcolm would incorporate the ideas in his Sunday speeches.

The OAAU was to be the broad front organization and RAM the Black Liberation Front of the U.S.A., the underground.

Malcolm in his second trip to Africa was to try to find places for eventual political asylum and political/military training for cadres. While Malcolm was in Africa, the field chairman was to go to Cuba to report the level of progress to Robert F. Williams. As Malcolm prepared Africa to support our struggle, "Rob" (Robert F. Williams) would prepare Latin America and Asia.

Malcolm left for Africa in July and Stanford, the RAM field chairman, left for Cuba the end of July. While Malcolm was in Africa, Harlem exploded. The para-military in Malcolm's organization decided to join the rebellion and participated in armed self-defense actions against racist oppressive forces. Masses of our people exploded in Rochester, N.Y. The revolutionary Muslims (Malcolmites) engaged in armed struggle against the repressive forces there. Brooklyn CORE held a demonstration to protest police brutality. The demonstration precipitated a mass rebellion. The Brooklyn RAM cadre went into revolutionary action.

While in Africa Malcolm was poisoned. He also received news of a split within his organization created by police agents.

In Cuba, Robert Williams told the field chairman that the movement was too out in the open, that it was being set up to be destroyed. He felt Malcolm's press statements exposed too much prematurely, that he was functioning as if he had a force which he hadn't developed yet.

In retrospect, Malcolm knew and told Stanford that he was a marked man and had a limited time to live.

Also while in Africa, Malcolm met with John Lewis and others of SNCC. Malcolm had a tremendous impact on African leaders and had an explosive effect on the masses of Africans. One incident occurred while he was in Nigeria, speaking at a university. During the question and answer period, a negro from America working with a U.S. government program there, made some remarks defending the U.S. government. After Malcolm answered him, the Nigerian students were so angry that they chased the negro out of the auditorium to a field and were going to hang the negro on a flag pole. The negro would have been hung if professor Essien Udom hadn't intervened and saved the negro's life. This will give the reader some idea of the impact that Malcolm had on Africa.

From government documents published in 1964 on Malcolm, the U.S. government estimated that Malcolm had set U.S. foreign policy in Africa back ten years. Malcolm became a prime target of the U.S. government's intelligence apparatus — FBI, Army Intelligence, CIA, etc. Other cities also exploded during the summer of 1964, and the repressive forces were blaming it on Malcolm, rather than on the conditions that caused it.

When Malcolm returned from Africa in the fall of 1964, his organization was in a shambles, including his personal life. The pressure from the repressive forces was taking its toll on him. Malcolm tried to regroup. He set up a liberation school within the OAAU. He returned to Africa to consolidate support for his petition to the U.N. Malcolm had opened up avenues for brothers and sisters who were Muslims to go to the University of Alcazar in Cairo, Egypt, and other places in the world for guerrilla training.

RAM published its periodical *Black America*. Malcolm in his speeches in Africa would say, "This is my publication." Malcolm returned from Africa and began to have mass meetings in January 1965.

Early in February, Kaniel Said, a member of RAM who

had been sent into Malcolm's organization to develop a security wing, was arrested on the Statue of Liberty bomb plot. Inside the Muslim Mosque, Inc. and OAAU, Kaniel's arrest upset Malcolm's internal security. It also set the public climate the intelligence forces wanted for conspiracy.

Malcolm was assassinated February 21st, 1965. The revolutionary nationalist movement was under attack.

ORGANIZATIONAL ACTIVITIES OF RAM 1964 to 1965

During the summer of 1964 RAM concentrated on building secret political cells in different parts of the country. These cells were to remain underground and to develop an underground movement. They were to be the support apparatus for field organizers who were openly trying to transform the civil rights movement into a revolutionary black nationalist movement. These cells were to finance the activities of the field organizers and the liberation army once developed, to hide the organizers when forced underground, to secure the liberation forces with supplies and intelligence information on the activities of the racist governmental apparatus.

RAM also established rifle clubs in various northern communities. Many times followers of Malcolm X were part of an alliance inside these rifle clubs.

RAM infiltrated CORE (the Congress of Racial Equality) in several cities. RAM's strategy was "to push the bourgeois reformers as far 'up tempo' as fast as possible, while at the same time laying a base for an underground movement."⁹

RAM organized black nationalist-oriented student groups on black campuses in the south and white universities in the north. These groups had various names at different times. RAM also established contact with gangs on the west side of Chicago. In Cleveland a youth group was formed.

The Afro-American Student Movement sponsored a National Afro-American Student Conference on Afro Youth in Nashville, Tennessee, October 30th - November 1, 1964. This conference was attended by gang members from Chicago and students from other areas of the country. The conference was entitled "The Black Revolution's Relationship to the Bandung World."

In January of 1965, RAM experienced its first organiza-

tional crisis. James and Grace Boggs resigned from their positions in the movement. This left only two public officers, Freeman and Stanford. Through correspondence, both decided to resign their positions in the organization. An emergency meeting was convened in Cleveland, where it was decided that new leadership should be elected. Discussing the analysis of Robert F. Williams, the new leadership decided it was best to remain secret. From that point in January 1965 on, all leadership in RAM was secret and all articles written for RAM publications would be anonymous. The political perspective of RAM changed. The concept of a black dictatorship of the U.S., while still being maintained, began to take a secondary position to the black nation in the south.

After Malcolm's assassination, ex-RAM officials experienced repression by various aspects of the state. Freeman was indicted by a Cleveland grand jury and fired from his job as school teacher in a Cleveland junior high school. All the black student participants who had traveled to Cuba were subpoenaed by a federal grand jury in New York investigating the Statue of Liberty bomb plot. Stanford was investigated by the federal grand jury for subversive activities.

The Deacons for Defense formed in Louisiana in 1965. RAM formed northern support groups for the Deacons.

In August 1965, the Los Angeles black community exploded. Revolutionary nationalists engaged in armed struggle against the racist repressive forces. Not knowing RAM was in Watts, RAM organizers from New Jersey went to Watts, where they found strong revolutionary black nationalist cells.

In New York, RAM members began meeting with black youth discussing the formation of a black liberation army.

Revolutionary nationalists around the country studied the August mass rebellion in Watts. They saw that spontaneous mass rebellions would be the next phase of the protest movement and began discussing how they could give these rebellions direction.

RAM was also active with helping Le Roi Jones develop

the Black Arts Movement. The Black Arts Movement was originally to be the cultural wing of RAM. RAM, though a secret movement, was gaining popularity and influence in northern black communities. On the international level, Robert Williams, RAM's chairman in exile, issued an appeal for world support and spoke at international conferences in Asia and Cuba. The Communist Party of Cuba disagreed with his black nationalist analysis and began to sabotage the movement's influence in international circles. This produced a crisis for the movement as avenues of potential support were cut off.

In the United States, the American Communist Party disagreed with RAM's race and class analysis and its clear conclusion black people were a colonized nation in the U.S., and fought tooth and nail against the movement.

In 1965 several movement activists were drafted into the army. Some decided to go, while others decided to start a black anti-draft movement. Those who went into the army were immediately isolated from other soldiers by army intelligence. Mass organizing occurred around General Gordon Baker, Jr.'s refusal to go into the army in Detroit. On the west coast, Ernie Allen held a news conference announcing his refusal to participate in the racist U.S. army.

SNCC began to undergo a policy change. Its staff decided to organize an all-black party in Lowndes County, Alabama. When RAM leadership received news of this, it decided to closely study these developments.

ORGANIZATIONAL ACTIVITIES OF RAM 1966 to 1968

During the winter months of 1965, RAM leadership developed their ideological perspective into a political document entitled "The Struggle for Black State Power in the U.S." The document described the difference between a riot and a revolution and outlined what RAM felt was the future direction of the black revolution in the U.S. This document was widely circulated among movement activists. It called for raising the question of Black Power within the movement. In Detroit the RAM cadre published a periodical in the automobile plants titled *Black Vanguard*. In New York RAM began working with a youth gang called the "Five Per Centers." After having been radicalized through political education classes, they formed themselves into the Black Panther Athletic and Social Club.

James Meredith was shot while on his march against fear in Mississippi. The civil rights group decided to complete the march. One night at a mass rally, SNCC organizer Willie Ricks raised the cry of Black Power. Stokely Carmichael, SNCC chairman, raised the slogan the next night in a mass rally. The Black Power movement began to sweep the country.

RAM began having a series of meetings with local nationalist organizers in Harlem along with Harlem representatives of SNCC. These meetings, which were a coalition of activists, decided to set up an independent black political party which would be a northern support apparatus of the Lowndes County Freedom Organization, whose symbol was the Black Panther. It was decided to call the party the Black Panther Party. Stanford wrote Carmichael asking if it was alright to use the name Black Panther for the party. Through the N.Y. SNCC office the word came back, "Ok, go ahead." The Black Panther Party was established in New York in

August 1966.

Stokely went to New York and met with the party. Discussions centered around outlooks, direction and national expansion of the party. It was decided that the party would be a coalition of SNCC, RAM and other organizations.

Through the RAM structure, a directive was sent to RAM cadres to develop a public coalition with community activists to develop the Black Panther Party. The purpose of the BPP was to provide a political alternative for black people to the capitalist, racist Democratic and Republican parties and also exhaust the legal political means of protest.

Black Panther Parties were established in Detroit, Cleveland, Chicago, San Francisco, and Los Angeles and eventually Oakland, California. Within the party was also discussion of organizing black workers.

For Black Panthers to be meaningful it must deal with the question of economic power as related to the political system. This means Black Panthers must develop an overall program. The question of economics presents the development of Black Union organizations as part of the party to seize economic power in both the urban and rural south. In the urban south it would pose the fight against job discrimination and white union discrimination especially on federal supported projects and in the rural south it would deal with "peoples' ownership of the land."¹⁰

In New York "Black Women Enraged" began picketing against U.S. army recruiting offices. They were protesting the U.S. government drafting black men into the racist U.S. army to fight in a racist and imperialist war. The "Atlanta project" of SNCC was also engaged in mass demonstrations and jailings in Atlanta. Mass spontaneous rebellions occurred in more northern inner cities in summer 1966. House-to-house fighting occurred between the liberation forces and the racist

repressive forces in Cleveland, Ohio.

Problems soon emerged in the Black Panther movement. Differences over tactics arose. In the N.Y. BPP, a faction led by Larry Neal and Eddie Ellis wanted to picket and pressure the black mafia into financially supporting the party. They also wanted to pimp local politicians for support. Egged on by agent provocateur Donal Washington (who was eventually shot by the people in Washington, D.C.), the party split into two factions. Similar developments occurred in Detroit. But the major split occurred on the West Coast. Bobby Seale (who had been purged from RAM for drunkenness and stealing the BSU's funds) joined Huey P. Newton in forming the Black Panther Party for Self Defense in Oakland, California. Major differences and near gun play occurred between the Black Panther Party of Northern California led by Ken Freeman and the BPP for Self Defense led by Huey P. Newton. The ideological differences stemmed from Huey's open display of guns, brandishing them into the police's faces and challenging them to shoot-outs. The dissension between the Panther parties continued until May 1967.

During the early months of 1967 the RAM leadership analyzed that because of the vast amounts of poverty, unemployment and police brutality in the black community, the summer of 1967 was going to be one of mass rebellion. RAM decided to give the forthcoming mass rebellions a political direction and arm the community for defense against racist attacks. It proposed to develop black militias and organize black youth into a youth army called the Black Guards, the forerunner of a Black Liberation Army. The Black Guards were to be a defense army and also to be the political cadre that would aid the vanguard, RAM, in leading the world black revolution. RAM saw black youth as being the most revolutionary sector of Black America. They analyzed that black people needed to engage in a black cultural revolution to prepare them for a black political revolution. Within this movement, which would also be a black anti-draft movement,

the slogans of "America is the Black Man's Battleground," "Unite or Perish" and "Black Power" were raised. RAM described the cultural revolution:

The purpose of a Black Cultural revolution would be to destroy the conditioned white oppressive mores, attitudes, ways, customs, philosophies, habits, etc., which the oppressor has taught and trained us to have. This means on a mass scale a new revolutionary culture.¹¹

RAM called for unity of revolutionary nationalists:

The first step is for revolutionary nationalists and those who agree on basic principles to unite and form a Black Liberation Front. This does not mean that any group dissolve its autonomy, but rather work in common agreement.¹²

RAM issued its critical analysis of the Communist Manifesto and the world Marxist perspective and published its interpretation of black people's relationship to the world socialist revolution in a document named "World Black Revolution." RAM decided to issue a nation-wide call for armed self-defense and be active in the mass rebellions.

Along with the mass uprisings in the inner cities, RAM planned student revolts in black colleges and among high school students.

The Black Guards, RAM youth leagues, were to organize African-American history clubs to teach black history. These clubs would lead protests demanding the right to wear hair "natural," African dress, and the right to fly the Red, Black and Green flag. The college students would demonstrate for more student power with the purpose of turning the Negro colleges into black universities:

In March 1967 students of the Black Power committee at Howard University demonstrated against General Lewis B. Hershey, Director of the Selective Service System. As he attempted to deliver a speech, they jumped onto the stage

shouting, "America is the black man's battleground."¹³

SNCC organizers and student activists from around the country met with the RAM leadership in the spring of 1967. They were told to pick up on developments at Howard. Their activities spread to different black universities and eventually to white campuses, demanding black studies programs. As part of the black cultural revolution, RAM attempted to organize a revolutionary black women's movement and worked with other groups to set up black cultural committees to spread "revolutionary black culture" in the black community. RAM felt:

The key move in this period of the revolutionary nationalist is to develop a popular movement inside Black America. The purpose of creating this popular movement will be an attempt to develop a national united front or Black Liberation Front. This would mean attempting to unite all sectors of Black America under a common slogan led by revolutionary nationalists.¹⁴

RAM organizers were imprisoned "en masse" in the summer of 1967. Some of those remaining in the streets were killed in the process of fighting police, national guards and the U.S. army. Others continued to organize the street force and students and mobilized the community for legal defense of incarcerated members. Some 200 inner cities went up in flames in the summer of 1967.

The black cultural revolution reached the high school level when seven thousand black students demonstrated at the Philadelphia board of education on November 17, 1967, demanding black history classes, the right to wear African clothes, and the right to salute the black nation's flag. Frank Rizzo, racist police commissioner, attacked the demonstration. Black guards, unarmed in the demonstration, engaged in hand-to-hand combat with police. By 1968, the movement had spread to many cities, with black students organizing

massive boycott walkouts, demanding black history courses.

On April 4, 1968, according to informed sources, the intelligence apparatus of the U.S. government assassinated Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Thousands of angry Africans rose in revolt as over 100 American cities burned.

DISSOLUTION OF RAM

By summer 1968 some RAM organizers were back on the streets. RAM and the Black Guards especially had grown into a mass organization. The issue that arose within ranks was how to survive the pending repression against the movement. Internal contradictions began to become prevalent as arguments over direction occurred and some secondary cadres began striving for personal leadership. Some made themselves generals or regional commanders of the black nationalist army that emerged.

How to maintain discipline within a politically underdeveloped army and transform it into a political force became a preoccupation of the RAM leadership.

Also, new forces had emerged within the black liberation movement. The Black Panther Party (Oakland) was growing into a national organization. On the other hand, the concept of "cultural nationalism" was gaining popularity as Ron Karenga and associates were emerging as a force representing the radicalized black middle class.

The Republic of New Africa had been formed in March 1968 in Detroit. All three organizations were struggling for dominance over the black liberation struggle.

But RAM leadership knew that the force the FBI wanted to crush consisted of those who had fought the state and had been advocating urban guerrilla warfare. In Cleveland, Ohio, RAM section leader Fred "Ahmed" Evans was being constantly harassed by police. On July 23, 1968, the racists in Cleveland's police force fired on the apartment house where Ahmed was staying. A gun battle occurred, killing seven Afro-American freedom fighters and wounding 15 police.

Gun battles were occurring between the police and Black Panthers on the west coast. With several key RAM members under legal indictments, others incarcerated in

different parts of the country, and the U.S. government and FBI planning a major conspiracy against the movement, the RAM leadership decided to convene a conference to re-organize.

It was felt that it would be dangerous for black revolutionaries to assemble in one place, so it was decided to form a broad coalition that would host the Black Power Conference. The Black Power Conference was used as a front for the revolutionaries to assemble and discuss strategy. Eldridge Cleaver during this period was calling for the open display of guns by revolutionaries. RAM felt this tendency represented left-wing adventurism, a tendency that might liquidate the entire armed movement.

Most left groups were supporting the Panthers and they were capturing the imaginations of many black youth. The other tendency which RAM felt was just as dangerous was right-wing opportunism of cultural nationalism, represented by Ron Karenga, which refuted armed struggle and advocated electing black politicians as a solution. Karenga saw the black middle class as having the resources to create a revolution and saw them as a leading force.

During the summer of 1968, RAM cadres and others had formed a black caucus of workers in the Dodge Hamtramck plant in Detroit around a newspaper called *Inner City Voice*. A spontaneous wildcat strike by black workers led to the forming of DRUM (Dodge Revolutionary Union Movement).

RAM leadership felt that the most important thing in that period was maintaining unity among the various major groups around the country. Because it would be too dangerous for RAM to call for the front, Amiri Baraka (Le Roi Jones) was approached and asked to go around the country to call for a National Black United Front. Several meetings were held of the front, but the front soon dissolved as friction among the Panthers, SNCC, and U.S. (Karenga's group) continued. During the third National Black Power Confer-

ence, political differences between the Black Guards and Karenga's Simbas nearly led to shoot-outs. At the RAM meetings during the Black Power Conference, RAM decided to go into the Republic of New Africa (RNA) and be the left-wing inside the RNA. The RNA was to be the broad front of the movement.

RAM leadership also decided that a mass revolutionary action movement had been created but that there was ideological confusion within it. It was felt that a revolutionary nationalist party had to be created. A news release was sent out announcing the formation of the African-American Party of National Liberation that would be popularly known as the Black Liberation Party.

Several meetings with cadres were held to explain the program and tactics of the party. The party's program was the same as the RNA's: self-determination of the black nation in the black belt south; the secession of the states of Mississippi, Georgia, South Carolina, Louisiana and Alabama to become an independent black socialist republic.

This was a major shift ideologically for the RAM leadership. They dropped the black dictatorship of the U.S. concept; the nationalist position had gained prominence within the organization.

Towards the end of October, internal contradictions polarized inside of RAM and the Black Guards. Some members of the cadres got strung out on drugs and internal fights broke out between different factions.

The political section of RAM held soul sessions dealing with internal problems and discussed or dealt with mistakes they had made. They had built a sizeable force, but now how to maintain unity, consolidate the ranks, increase political education, develop a day-to-day work style, and transfer the lumpen — who maintained a military adventurist approach — into political cadres? They realized they had been wrong in previously saying that the black youth (the black street force) was the vanguard of the revolution. While many of our

people were youth, the overwhelming majority were workers, working or trying to work for a living.

Having mobilized a community, the organizers were trying to address themselves to whose class interests the organization of the people is going to represent, and how the organization is going to finance itself.

Towards the end of October a shoot-out occurred in the Black Guards in West Philadelphia. The police used the shoot-out as an excuse to repress the organization. Mass arrests took place as others went underground. The RAM national central committee met in Cleveland, Ohio. It was decided that the intelligence apparatus of the U.S. capitalist state was using the word RAM as an excuse to arrest brothers and sisters not even in the movement. Many members were under indictment, others in prison and others underground. The organization had exhausted its contacts for financial support. It was under attack, infiltrated and full of internal contradictions. There were different ideologies and factions in the organization; militarism — "the gun in command" — was rampant. A report on the breakthrough in mass organization in Detroit was given. Discussion centered around saving as many cadres as possible from the counter-insurgency program being waged by the government. It was decided to dissolve RAM and that the word RAM would no longer be projected.

Efforts would be centered on training second-line leadership for the Black Liberation Party, and all cadres would focus on DRUM as a model for mass work. The leadership would concentrate its efforts on building strong DRUM movements in Detroit.

The meeting analyzed that the black working class was the vanguard of the revolution.

Strategic retreat was the topic on tactics. Protracted struggle (war) was tossed around for some time. Political asylum for those underground and under legal indictments was hammered out. How to regroup a badly shattered movement was talked about into the wee hours of the night.

CONCLUSION

Though the Revolutionary Action Movement failed in its objective of a black nationalist socialist revolution and national independence of the black nation, it was an important movement in the history of the black liberation movement in the United States.

It was the first revolutionary nationalist movement to emerge in the 1960's and the first black organization to advocate revolutionary violence against the capitalist system. It was the prototype for later developments such as the Black Panther Party, the Republic of New Africa, the League of Revolutionary Black Workers and the African People's Party.

It was the first black organization in the 1960's that attempted to analyze the condition of black people in the U.S. through a dialectical and historical materialist approach. It attempted to apply Marxism-Leninism-Mao Tse Tung Thought to the unique conditions of the United States. In revising many of the basic pre-conceptions of the founders of scientific socialist thought, particularly Marx-Engels and Lenin, it advanced the theory that the black liberation movement in the U.S. was part of the vanguard of the world socialist revolution. And unlike most of the contemporary black Marxist-Leninist groups, the Revolutionary Action Movement developed a mass following. Its major weakness was its failure to develop a long-range strategy for the overthrow of the capitalist system — how its actions would relate to other sectors of the population, i.e., white, Chicano, Puerto Rican, Asian and Native American communities.

The Revolutionary Action Movement's confrontation politics was a singular approach strategy and was not flexible enough as a comprehensive strategy for carrying out a socialist revolution in the United States.

In only having (or at least being publicized as only having) a singular approach — violent confrontation politics

against the state — RAM was out-maneuvered by the U.S. capitalist state and was isolated from its potential support base, the radicalized sector of the black middle class.

The Revolutionary Action Movement was an embryonic revolutionary nationalist, scientific socialist movement — the first of its kind in the history of the black liberation movement. Through the study of the movement, we see that ideological outlooks were in constant flux and often in contradiction with one another. It is interesting though that the two major high tides of the black liberation struggle in America, the 1920's and the 1960's, produced similar organizational developments. In the 1920's, the African Blood Brotherhood (ABB) was the black radical organization of that era and in the 1960's the Revolutionary Action Movement emerged. While RAM was instrumental in transforming the civil rights movement from a non-violent movement seeking peaceful reform to a black movement seeking racial change or revolution through armed struggle, it never was able to become the hegemonic group in the black liberation struggle. It therefore failed to gain leadership of the movement.

Because of the underground nature of the movement, it failed to utilize most of the avenues of mass communications and thus didn't utilize all of the resources in the black community. While RAM had major impact on northern inner city black communities, as was evident from the spontaneous mass urban rebellions from 1964 to 1968, it was unable to consolidate this mass movement and to lead it to its historical conclusions. RAM was plagued with the problem of translating theory into practice, that is, developing a day-to-day style of work (mass line) related to the objective materialist reality in the United States. Like most black revolutionary organizations, RAM was not able to deal successfully with protracted struggle. RAM as a social movement is an important study because it was instrumental in the mass urban rebellions of the 1960's. It also set the stage for more advanced types of liberation organizations to emerge in the 1960's.

Given the evidence released about the U.S. government's constant war against the black nation through local police departments, national guard, army, CIA, and the FBI's infamous COINTELPRO program, RAM's ideological perspective may one day become the future direction of 30 million captive Africans in the U.S.

In the words of the late RAM spokesman El Hajj Malik El Shabazz (Malcolm X), We will win our liberation by any means necessary.