Carmichael on Black Power
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Carmichael came, and we were conquered. Both the white and Negro communities of Houston turned out in full force to hear Stokely Carmichael, the messiah of Black Power, "tell it like it is." If they were expecting an irrational harangue of hatred and frustration, they were disappointed, for his speech was a reasoned account of the Negro's position and of the courses open to him.

His appeal was for the Negro to escape from the "dictatorship of definition" imposed upon him by white Americans and to create his own terms specifying his place in society. He explained his conception of the Black Power movement by saying, "The need to define is precisely the fight Negroes are fighting. We will define our terms. And white America will accept them."

"Negroes are defined by two forces; their blackness and their powerlessness," Carmichael continued. He described the Negro as impotent in a world which does not recognize prejudice and poverty—the realities of his existence. Because the Negro is not given the justice that his conscience demands, he loses his own self-respect, Carmichael said.

Carmichael continued by describing the position of the Negro as essentially a Riesmanesque "veto group" in society. In a pluralistic culture various groups compete for the decision-making power in particular spheres of concern, but the Negro has been totally excluded from this process.

Carmichael develops his concept of "black power" from this exclusion of the Negro veto group. He explained that the integration supported by the white liberal would involve the assimilation of individual Negroes into the white community, and therefore would effectively destroy their hopes for creating a place for the Negro in the decision-making process.

This "integration," he pointed out, would be contrary to the traditional route taken by groups entering the American pluralistic society. He said that such groups generally joined society "through the organization of their own institutions with which to represent their communal needs within the larger society."

Within the Black Power movement, however, the Negro is throwing off the restrictions which the white liberals have defined for him. Negroes will be independently organized so that they can join only those coalitions which would suit their own interests.

Carmichael attempted to assuage the fears, held by many white members of the audience, that he and his followers were trying to gain control over America. He said, "No one is talking about taking over the country—we wouldn't know what to do with this monster—but organizing our own neighborhoods."

Carmichael can only be described as urbane; he came across not as a terrifying spectre to fear but as a reasonable man fed up with the impotence of his position. He charmed the audience, white and black, and was perhaps more in control of the situation than any one of the eighty police agents in the audience.

It was only in the question-and-answer period which followed his address that he made any fiery or quotable-by-the-Houston-press statements. Even then he was an island of sanity in an auditorium filled with people who were having their basic attitudes toward the black/white issue shaken.

Carmichael did not call for a "revolution." His audience did. He did not tell his audience to dodge the draft. He did tell Negroes to go to jail rather than go 8,000 miles "to fight a colored man who ain't ever called you nigger." No one who was in that audience could ever call Stokely Carmichael a