

STUDENT  
ORGANIZATION FOR  
BLACK  
UNITY

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August 14, 1970

Dear Brothers and Sisters:

I am writing this letter from the Guilford County jail in hopes that it will find its way to the eyes and ears of many Black people. I am here, along with Robert Evans, for allegedly disrupting Dudley High School on May 9th of 1969. This charge is not true for I did not disrupt nor did I promote a disruption at Dudley High School. The real cause of the activities at Dudley and later at A & T State University in May of 1969 resides with the Board of Education, the Greensboro Police Department and to a lesser degree the administration at Dudley High School. You may recall that wild charges of being subversive, militant, a Panther, etc., were made against Claude Barnes, then a candidate for student government president at Dudley, because this courageous young student dared be "Black". The false and slanderous verbal attacks as well as the repression and physical abuse meted out by the Board of Education and police have been aptly substantiated by several investigations, including an investigation performed by the North Carolina Advisory Committee to the United States Civil Rights Commission.

I have been, and I remain, very much involved in efforts in our community to secure fair treatment. The gross injustices at Dudley in May of 1969 did not escape my attention or active participation. The many efforts which I and others made to bring together the parties to the unfair election is a matter of record. It is also a matter of record that the Board of Education would not allow meaningful talks to take place; talks that could have possibly resulted in a fair and peaceful settlement. As a consequence of injustices, insincerity and repression, the students of Dudley began peaceful protest only to have their legitimate and orderly protest crushed by the police. It was against this background of racism and repression that Dudley students and Black community sympathizers were forced to move. It points to my involvement with pride; I can honestly say from this jail cell that if circumstances dictated, I would do the same thing again. I would do it because we were right last year and we are right now. I ask you, "Who are the criminals, those that fight for freedom or those who deny freedom to our people?"

The situation in which I find myself is unquestionably the result of my involvement in the struggle of Black people to acquire the human rights and dignity due us as a people. It is not just the product of the Dudley incident. Although many of us have difficulty understanding

a particular act at a given time (For example, Dudley - A & T), we all must admit that we know and to some degree understand the relationship that has existed between Blacks and whites for the last five hundred years. I point this out to emphasize that it is the basic relationship that has existed and continues to exist that we must oppose. An elementary examination will show that the relationship between whites and Blacks has been one of the ruler and the ruled, the controller and the controlled, the master and the slave, the exploiter and the exploited. We must wage a relentless and unending struggle to change the nature of the relationship between our people and whites all over the world. What happened at Dudley and A & T is a manifestation of that relationship or simply the control which whites exercise over us. It is obvious to those of us close to the situation in May of 1969 that in spite of the fact that the primary participants involved were Black -- Black students, Black parents, Black community, Black administrators -- we were kept apart by whites, i.e., the Board of Education and the police. It was in the interest of whites to first, stop the development of Black consciousness as personified by Claude Barnes; second, to develop chaos and confusion in our community; and third, to use the chaos and confusion to blame someone Black for the situation which they created.

Many of us claim to be students of logic. Let us look logically at our situation. The first thing that we notice is that the Dudley - A & T incident is not fundamentally different from other incidents involving whites and Blacks in North Carolina, in the United States or indeed in the world. It is simply a matter of whites exercising control over Black people using propaganda and, when necessary, the military. Our logic must lead us to recognize such commonalities and draw the appropriate conclusion.

We can see with little difficulty that wherever there are Black and white people in the world, we will find the whites exercising control, and economically exploiting Blacks while attempting to dehumanize us by denying the essentials of our cultural heritage. The position of power maintained over our people is sustained through the technique of misleading many of the stronger minds of our people. This has been done by "educating" a group of Blacks and then convincing the educated minority of Blacks that the masses of Blacks are in a deplorable state because of a racially identifiable deficiency, i.e., lazy, shiftless, stupid, etc. You could, therefore, find many of our educated people saying the problem with Black people is that they won't work or won't do this or that thing or that we can't unite, etc. I do not deny the many internal problems that we have as a people. We must understand, however, that the overriding problem of Black people is that we have been systematically crushed on all fronts by whites.

The systematic abuse of our people both physical and mental is a historical phenomenon. The process continues today; the only change has been in the degree of sophistication making it more difficult to recognize. We cannot afford to be dogmatic and inflexible in our thinking. Our predicament requires us to adjust our thinking and to become more astute in our ability to recognize what is happening to us and why. We should not allow ourselves to fall victim to stop-gap

measures designed to give the illusion of sincerity and progress. Such measures usually promote the economic well being of a selected few while neglecting the masses. Our energies must be employed toward a long range authentic solution for all of our people. The first step in such a long range solution is to develop a world perspective which allows us to see that our struggle is against a giant world coalition of whites. With such a broadened view, we can guard against fragmentation of our people whether it be local (GAPP Blacks versus OEO Blacks) or national (Black militants versus Black middle class) or international (one neo-colonial state versus another neo-colonial state). We need to recognize that it is never in our interest to fight one another because the only winner will be the whites who are both the promoter and the audience in such a fight.

While the realization of our priority of problem aims us at the white world, our fight must be dual in nature. We must on the one hand develop an internal sense of independence based on discipline, love, respect, dignity and the ability to do work among our people; while on the other hand we must move against dope, mis-education, degrading social conduct and other fault-ridden habits and modes of thought now being pushed on us by the white world; we must stop the spreading of self-hatred, disrespect and indignities among our people.

In order to fulfill our role as maintainers of the struggle for freedom passed on by our fore parents, it is necessary for us to understand - really understand - what our situation is. We must always study honestly and analytically so as to develop the correct approach to our problems. We must guard against becoming reactionaries for we must know that what we are doing is the right thing. We need to overcome our petty differences and forgive those of our people who may have acted against us in the past; we must become a working unit with a common cause.

In Greensboro, in spite of the differences that we have had in our community, we have been able to sit down and reason one with another. In spite of the vicious efforts of whites to divide us through economic bribes, through spreading false and inflammatory information, through socially promising positions; we have been able to maintain a united front. Maybe a weak front, but a "united" front. I believe that the Greensboro Black community possesses tremendous potential to continue its forward march toward a greater measure of freedom and dignity for Blacks. We must continue to exhibit patience and understanding for our people while developing an individual sense of sacrifice and ideological direction. Let us not be misled by those who oppose freedom for us. They will attempt to control our thinking by spreading negative concepts of race hatred, violence, separatism, etc, through the news media and more dangerously through their books and other entertainment media.

It is interesting to note that the concepts developed by whites to negatively project the honest efforts of Blacks accurately define the historical conduct of white people. For example, who has promoted more "race hatred" than whites; who has promoted more race

violence than whites; who has sought to separate more than whites (the white nature of being separate was based on a human - non-human outlook , not the practical considerations which motivate us to develop our own communities). We need to abandon the idea that we must reverse everything that whites have done to us. Our efforts are and must continue to be designed to develop our communities economically, politically and culturally. We need to recognize that such developments cannot take place without struggle and sacrifice on our part. Struggle and sacrifice should bring us closer together.

It does not matter what economic bracket you might be in; it does not matter which social circle you exist in; if you are Black, then we should seek to unite one with another. To those who would argue that all people irrespective of race should unite, let me say that such a goal is both admirable and desirable. As a practical matter, however, individual friendships notwithstanding, such a move at this time would be a political trick for whites and only serve to tighten up their control. We cannot allow ourselves to get caught up in the racist thinking that physical closeness to whites automatically works to our benefit. Further, it seems to me that until we have demonstrated the ability to unite and work with one another it is foolish to talk of unity with our historical enemy. "Charity begins at home," -- so does love, respect, dignity and solidarity for a people. Let us develop those qualities among our own people; the relationship with other people will then take care of itself. If our past has always found us being the greatest critics of Black people, let the future show us as the hardest workers to remedy what we have criticized our people for.

Let me point out that if my presence in jail can stimulate some re-thinking by a few of our people, then my confinement here is rewarded. I emphasize that no person, young or old, should withdraw a single inch from the struggle. In fact, our efforts should be intensified for while I, like any normal person, would like to be with my people, I am prepared, as Black people should be, to undergo whatever injustices whites may inflict upon me. I ask that you be prepared to continue our struggle.

"The jails are filled with Black men and the courts are 'white' with hate." This statement was spoken by Stokely Carmichael more than two years ago; it is truer than ever today. We must "keep the faith" nevertheless for I am convinced that "we shall overcome."

For our people,

*Nelson N Johnson 1/8/49*

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