

**I** am at school when i hear about it. Electric shocks are zooming down my back the way they do when i am about to go temporarily insane. On the train, headed uptown, i am ready to riot. I am having daymares on the subway, imagining myself with a long knife slashing slits in white sheets. Ku Klux Klan blood is spilling. You wanna look like a ghost, you wanna look like a ghost, my mind keeps chanting, you wanna look like a ghost, well, i'll make you one. Sitting on the subway, bloody fantasies. I look out of my nightmare. Nobody is moving. Everybody screams. Everybody has a frozen face. The train is slowing down. Everybody is tensely looking at the door. 125th Street. I am going to a riot. I want to kill someone.

*Martin Luther King has been murdered.*

*The street wakes me up. There is no blood yet. Everybody is getting into position. The wind is blowing rumors. The people are waiting. The streets are rumbling. The tanks are coming. The natives are restless. The tanks will quiet the natives. The tanks are coming. I feel absurd and impotent.*

*Who am i going to attack? Where is a George Lincoln Rockwell? I am ready to kill him. He will get a chance to utter exactly two syllables before i cut him off. He isn't there. Only the rumors and the rumble of the tanks and the waiting. The store windows are filled with shit. You can't exchange Martin Luther King for shit in the store window. Smashing windows will do me no good. I am beyond that. I want blood. The tanks are waiting to crush the resistance, squelch the disturbance. It crosses my mind: i want to win. I don't want to rebel, i want to win. The*

*revolution will not be televised on the six o'clock news. I have to get myself ready. Revolution. The word has me going.*

*I am back on the subway. Nobody is looking at anybody. I think i have my period. Sweat is rolling down my legs. I go home. My mother is glad to see me. She knows that i am half crazy. The television is wet with crocodile tears. REBELLION, REBELLIOUS CHILDREN, TEMPER TANTRUMS, REBELLION, REVOLUTION. I like the word.*

*The grim reapers are abuzz. Reports about the natives. They are excited. This is the stuff that news is made of. We are looking at each other. Impassioned speeches sizzle on their tongues, causing sour ashes to fall from our mouths. We are just sitting there. I am thinking about revolution. The tonic. Abstract. Revolution. I am tired of watching us lose. They kill our leaders, then they kill us for protesting. Protest. Protest. Revolution. If it exists, i want to find it. Bulletins. More bulletins. I'm tired of bulletins. I want bullets.*

While i was going to CCNY, after i graduated from Manhattan Community College, i decided to get married. My husband was politically conscious, intelligent, and decent, and our affair was frantic, high-pitched, and charged with emotion. Somehow, i believed that our shared commitment to the Black Liberation struggle would result in a "marriage made in heaven." I spent most of my time at school, meetings, or demonstrations and whenever i was at home my head was usually stuck in some book. It was unthinkable to allow more than five minutes on mundane things like keeping house or washing dishes. To complicate matters, my husband's ideas about marriage stemmed mostly from his parents' life, where his mother was the homemaker and his father was the breadwinner. Spaghetti was about the only thing i could cook, and he was profoundly shocked to learn i had none of his mother's domestic skills. After a while, it became clear to me that i was about as ready to be married as i was to grow wings and fly. So after a confused and unhappy year, we decided we made much better friends than marriage partners and called it quits.

I decided to go to California. It was becoming increasingly clear to me that, although it was important for students to participate in the struggle, no revolution had ever been won by students alone. Struggling around school issues had narrowed my perspective and i was getting bogged down. I wanted to expand that struggle to the Black community. At that time California, especially the Bay area, was where everything was happening. Some of my

favorite professors were going out West for the summer and they offered to hook me up with a place to stay. As usual, i was flat broke, but a good friend gave me the money to make the trip, with a little spending change thrown in.

My friends found a place for me in Berkeley, the most radical, progressive place i had ever been in. Revolutionary posters were plastered all over the walls, along with "people's murals." The fronts of banks and other official buildings were bricked up as a result of the demonstrations and street fighting that followed the People's Park struggles. Red stars and Mao's *Red Book* were sold on street corners, and food cooperatives sold health food at cheap prices. People's collectives were dedicated to surviving, struggling, and teaching. I was impressed with the kinds of informal solutions they had cooked up to deal with the problems they faced, and i enrolled in the practical skills classes they gave (printing and layout, first aid, etc.).

There were books and pamphlets in the San Francisco and Berkeley bookstores i had never seen in New York, and for the first time i read the theory of urban guerrilla warfare as outlined by Che Guevara, Carlos Mariguella, and the Tupamaros. I had been more aware of imperialism in Vietnam or Cambodia, and the extent of u.s. imperialism in South and Central America surprised me. The u.s. government had invaded more than fifteen countries there, not once or twice but in some cases more than ten times, and the guerrilla movements were waging armed struggle in most of them. Reading about guerrilla warfare in South America and Vietnam was one thing, but thinking in terms of guerrilla war inside the u.s. was another.

Back then, people used the word "revolution" just because it sounded hep. Half the time what they were really talking about was change or some kind of vague progress. Some meant a separate Black nation, and others dealt with Black revolution as part of an overall revolution waged by whites, Hispanics, Orientals, Native Americans, and Blacks. Malcolm said it meant bloodshed and land. To me, the revolutionary struggle of Black people had to be against racism, capitalism, imperialism, and sexism and for real freedom under a socialist government. But the reality of achieving it seemed a long way off.

In Berkeley and San Francisco, the revolution didn't seem too far away. A lot of white radicals, hippies, Chicanos, Blacks, and Asians were ready to get down. But i hadn't forgotten the hardhats and the rednecks and the bible belt and the so-called middle amerikans who had elected Nixon. I couldn't imagine the "new

left” talking to those people, much less organizing them and changing their minds. I decided the only way i would come up with some answers was to keep on studying and struggling. I didn’t know how half of what i was studying would fit in, but i figured it would all come in handy some day. I read about guerrilla warfare and clandestine struggle without having the faintest idea that one day i would go underground. It’s kind of funny when i think about it, because reading all that stuff probably has saved my life a million times.

As part of my first aid skills class, i worked as an assistant to a doctor who volunteered once a week at Alcatraz. At the time, Alcatraz had been taken over by Native Americans who were protesting against a long series of broken treaties, genocidal policies, and racist exploitation. Alcatraz symbolized the strength and dignity of Indian people as well as their resolve to fight to preserve their cultural traditions. I enjoyed everything about going there except the trip. The doctor was a motorcycle fanatic who insisted on zooming across the Golden Gate Bridge on that thing, with me hanging on for dear life. Once on the other side we would jump into a rickety little boat with water in the bottom and limp across the bay to the island. By the time we got there i felt as if i had done a day’s work.

The first thing that hit me was the spirit of the people. I felt the tremendous pride, tremendous determination, and tremendous calm from the time i landed on the island until the time i left. They were Native Americans from all over North America, including Canada, from different tribes and backgrounds. They were young and old. Little babies wiggled in their mother’s arms, and one old man who had spent many years in Alcatraz prison said that when he arrived on the island he had taken a sledgehammer and reduced the cell he had once been locked in to rubble. The prison, one of the most infamous and sadistic ever to exist, loomed in the background.

There were many different Indian nations, each with its own rich culture, religious traditions, history, and folklore. Everybody was into learning and teaching each other their own history and culture. It was a surprise to find out how many Native Americans had been raised in cities and knew nothing about who they were. In that respect, they were very similar to Black people. Most of them were from the West Coast, and so i told them about the Indian Museum and the Museum of Natural History in New York. Suddenly, i stopped short. I wondered how i would feel going into some museum and seeing the houses and stolen artifacts of my people

stuck away in some exhibition hall. As i spoke i realized that most of the "history" i had been taught about the Indians was probably lies invented by the white man.

It wasn't until later, for instance, that i learned that scalping was an old European custom. In the 1700s, the state of Massachusetts was paying the equivalent of \$60 for a scalp and Pennsylvania paid \$134. It wasn't until more than a hundred years later, in response to the massive genocide at the hands of whites, that the Indians themselves started scalping. None of the little museum exhibits featuring tepees and feather headdresses had ever mentioned how men, women, and children were mowed down at Wounded Knee or how the u.s. army had purposely given the Indians smallpox-infected blankets. As i listened to those sisters and brothers at Alcatraz i realized that the true history of any oppressed people is impossible to find in history books.

I will always be grateful for having had the opportunity to visit Alcatraz. I will never forget the quiet confidence of the Indians as they went about their lives calmly, even though they were under the constant threat of invasion by the FBI and the u.s. military. They didn't fit into any of my preconceived notions or the stereotyped images shown on TV and in the movies. They were really open with me and, after a while, we talked about the struggle in general. They had many of the same problems we had: education, organizing the people to struggle, and raising consciousness. They damn sure had the same enemy, and they were doing as bad as we were, if not worse. They told me to check out Akwasasne when i returned to New York. It was a territory they had liberated on the border between New York and Canada. I told them if they ever came to New York they should visit me and check out Harlem. "Sure. When are you going to liberate it?" they asked.

There were a million groups in the Bay area i wanted to check out. There was so much activity i would have had to spend twenty-eight hours a day just to keep up with it all. Someone i was studying with arranged for me to hook up with the Brown Berets, a Chicano group that had been started recently in California and Texas. It was a brief meeting since the brother with whom i had the appointment had to be on the move. He ran down to me some of the conditions they were dealing with and some of the work they were doing. I had always thought of the Chicano movement as a rural rather than an urban one. Most of the information we had received was about the Chicano farmworkers' struggle and people like Cesar Chavez fighting to organize them and abolish the unbearable living conditions

and slave wages they were forced to work for. I was not aware that Chicanos in the city were fighting against unemployment, police brutality, and inferior schools, just like Black people. In the same way that the Black Panther Party was trying to organize and politicize street gangs in Chicago, the Brown Berets wanted to politicize Chicano street gangs in Los Angeles. The brother also told me that they had been doing a lot of work around Los Siete de las Razas, seven Chicano brothers who had been accused of killing a San Francisco policeman. (They were later acquitted.) I wanted to rap some more about this case because i was seeing the same pattern everywhere—sisters and brothers being locked up all over the country, accused of killing pigs or of conspiring to. The brother had to run, though. We promised that we would hook up again, but it never happened.

Next i wanted to check out the Red Guard, a group of young revolutionary brothers and sisters who were struggling in Chinatown, San Francisco. I was especially anxious to meet up with them because it was so hard to get information about them back East. The West Coast has the largest Asian population in the country and i really wanted to get a good idea about what was going on in the Asian communities. A lot of people think Asians do not experience racism, that they are professionals and business owners, unaware that many are poor and oppressed.

Finding the Red Guard was not at all easy. Half the people i ran into had never heard of them, and the other half only had a minimal knowledge of who they were and what they were all about. Someone gave me an address and since i didn't have the faintest idea where it was, i got a brother to drive me over to Chinatown to look for their headquarters. We ended getting lost and never did find the address. Instead, we ended up eating at a Chinese restaurant and getting into a big debate. He couldn't understand why a Black woman wanted to hook up with Chinese revolutionaries in the first place: "ain't nobody gonna free Black folks but Black folks"; "those Chinese don't give a damn about you and me. All they care about is their own people and what's going on in China." I told him that i thought there were a whole lot of us in the same predicament and that the only way we were going to get out of it was to come together and break the chains. The brother looked at me as if i was spouting empty rhetoric. Some of the laws of revolution are so simple they seem impossible. People think that in order for something to work, it has to be complicated, but a lot of times the opposite is true. We usually reach success by putting the

simple truths that we know into practice. The basis of any struggle is people coming together to fight against a common enemy.

When i finally did get around to meeting some brothers from the Red Guard, it was quite by accident and somewhat embarrassing. I was hanging out in the park with a sister and some brothers from the Black Students Union. We were exchanging experiences, talking politics, and smoking reefer. The day was blue and beautiful and we just sat there lazing in the sun without a care in the world, listening to some rock music that was playing in the background. I had brought a whole pile of leaflets and newspapers from New York to give to them. Everybody was feeling laid-back and mellow when all of a sudden a bunch of pigs descended on a group of hippies and proceeded to beat them mercilessly, kicking them and hitting them with clubs. We were all so high, we just sat there watching, like it was a movie or something. By the time we got our voices together to cry out in protest, the pigs were carrying the hippies off.

Two Asian brothers came up to us and pointed to the newspapers.

“You’d better get rid of those before the pigs see them,” one said. “More are on the way. If you’ve got any grass on you, you’d better get out of here fast.”

We were a picture of confusion, stuffing sheets of paper under shirts and into pocketbooks. The Asian brother led our half-dazed procession out of the park.

“You need a lift?”

“Yeah, that’s cool.”

“To where?”

“Oh, anywhere. Anywhere from here,” one of us answered. We were too high to make any decisions. We piled into a rickety-looking jeep. They told us they would drive us over to Shattuck Street and drop us off. As we were driving, everybody started to talk about the pigs beating up on the hippies. The image was burning in everyone’s mind.

“That was a trip,” drawled one of the BSU brothers. “Did you see those pigs? I thought they were gonna kill those dudes.”

I was still high, feeling too stunned and eerie to talk.

“That’s why we need a revolution,” the sister was saying. “They just think they can do anything they want to.”

“What started the shit?” somebody asked the Asian brothers.

“It was some hassle about some ID or something. They just wanted to hassle somebody. You’re lucky they didn’t see you first.”

We were all silent for a minute, imagining ourselves being beaten and carted off to jail.

"It's a good thing they didn't see those leaflets," the other Asian brother said. "They would have hassled you for sure."

The sister, who was obviously angry, got off into a political rap. Everybody kind of jumped into the conversation, talking about the situation in the Black community, the Black students' struggle, and the overall piggishness of amerika. Everybody was into the rap, all of us presenting ourselves as political activists and revolutionaries.

"Are you guys in the movement?" one of the Asian brothers asked us. Everybody jumped at the opportunity to say yes, giving credentials and naming organizations.

"Right on," they said.

They told us they were Red Guard cadre and that they were having some kind of forum on the revolution in China. In my tongue-tied, confused state of marijuana intoxication, i tried to communicate to them that i had been trying to get in touch with their organization to check it out. The brother who had been doing most of the talking reached down under the seat and handed me a leaflet which had the date and time of the forum.

"Make sure you come and check us out," he said. "Put this somewhere where you won't lose it," making direct reference to my confused, disjointed state of consciousness. "You guys should really be careful with that grass, especially when you've got leaflets or newspapers on you. A lot of good comrades have been busted like that."

"Yeah," said the other one. "You've got to be alert to deal with this situation. You've got to be disciplined and ready to deal with the enemy at all times."

The Red Guard brothers dropped us off and we thanked them and said good-byes amid a hail of "Right ons" and "Power to the people." Carefully avoiding each other's eyes, we wandered aimlessly, looking for someplace where we could plop down and get our heads together. I was feeling guilty and stupid, silly and politically backward. I was embarrassed to be bumbling down the street in the middle of the day not in full control of my faculties, too high to deal with reality, much less change it. I wondered what the brothers from the Red Guard had thought of us, sitting there in a stupor, having to be virtually led out of the park. It was obvious my stuff was raggedy and that i needed to get my act together. If i wanted to call myself a revolutionary i was going to have to earn the title. I had heard somebody say that revolutionaries get high on



revolution and that it was the best high in the world. "I'm gonna check out that high," i said aloud. "Huh? What did you say?" "Nothing," i answered. "I was just talking out loud." "Oh," somebody said, "I can dig it."

We stopped off at a coffee shop and had some tea. Everybody looked sheepish and lost in their own thoughts. Finally, we waved our good-byes and made our separate ways. I walked back to where i was staying, wondering what i was going to have to do to become who i needed to become. Revolution is about change, and the first place the change begins is in yourself.

The most important organization on my list to check out was the Black Panther Party headquarters in Oakland. I had a whole lot of respect for the Party and had been heavily influenced by it, as had almost everyone around my age that i knew. Every time we heard about Huey Newton and Bobby Seale standing up to the power structure, we slapped five and said, "Yeah!" As far as i was concerned, the Panthers were "baaaaaad." The Party was more than bad, it was bodacious. The sheer audacity of walking onto the California senate floor with rifles, demanding that Black people have the right to bear arms and the right to self-defense, made me sit back and take a long look at them. And the more political i became, the more i appreciated them. Panthers didn't try to sound all intellectual, talking about the national bourgeoisie, the military-industrial complex, the reactionary ruling class. They simply called a pig a pig. They didn't refer to the repressive domestic army or the state repressive apparatus. They called the racist police pigs and racist dogs.

One of the most important things the Party did was to make it really clear who the enemy was: not the white people, but the capitalistic, imperialistic oppressors. They took the Black liberation struggle out of a national context and put it in an international context. The Party supported revolutionary struggles and governments all over the world and insisted the u.s. get out of Africa, out of Asia, out of Latin America, and out of the ghetto too. I had gotten to know some of the Panthers in New York when they spoke at the lectures we invited them to at Manhattan Community College. I made it my business to drop by some of the New York Black Panther Party offices and offered to help them with this or that, whatever needed to be done. I was happy to do it. I barely opened my mouth. I just looked, listened, and worked. Some of the comrades would ask why i didn't join. "I probably will, someday," i'd always answer.

When i heard on the radio that the New York Panthers had been busted, i was furious. The so-called conspiracy charges were so stupid that even a fool could see through them. The police actually had the audacity to charge them with plotting to blow up the flowers in the Botanical Garden. And the 21 were some of the baddest, most politically educated sisters and brothers in the Party. It was an insult. I thought about joining the Party right then, but i had some other things i wanted to do and i needed a low profile in order to do them.

As much as i dug the Party, i also had some real differences with its style of work. As i opened the front gate of the Oakland headquarters, i felt just as nervous about going inside as i did about the Doberman pinschers running around the yard. A brother opened the door and i nervously blurted out that i was from **New** York and had come to check out the Party. He acted like he **was** glad to see me and brought me into a room to meet some of the other Panthers. A group of sisters and brothers were sitting around the room, laughing and talking. They greeted me casually, passing over a chair for me to sit in. Artie Seale was there and i had to control myself to keep from gawking at her. I wondered how **she** felt with her husband in jail, being railroaded and bound and gagged in kourt. I recognized the names of others. It was strange to be there in a room with those people. It was like sitting down on the pages of a history book.

They asked me about New York, and i told them what **was** happening with the Black students at Manhattan Community College, CCNY, and the Black student movement in general, the antiwar movement, Black construction workers, and whatever other work i was involved in at the time. I told them i had **done** some work for the New York Panthers and ran off a list of the ones i knew. Somebody asked my why i had never joined the Party.

Half stammering, i told them i had thought about it but had decided not to. "Why?" everybody wanted to know. It was hard for me to say it because i felt so much love and respect for the sisters and brothers seated there, but i knew i'd hate myself if i didn't say what was on my mind: that i had been turned off by the way spokesmen for the Party talked to people, that their attitude had often been arrogant, flippant, and disrespectful. I told them i preferred the polite and respectful manner in which civil rights workers and Black Muslims talked to the people rather than the arrogant, fuck-you style that used to be popular in New York. I said they cursed too much and turned off a lot of Black people who would otherwise be responsive to what the Party was saying.

When i had finished, i waited nervously, fully expecting them to jump all over what i had said. To my profound surprise, nobody did. Everybody agreed that if that was, in fact, how Party members were relating to the people, they should change at once. One of the sisters pointed out that there was a leadership crisis in the New York chapter caused by the arrest and imprisonment of the Panther 21. It was well known by everybody in the movement that the New York police had kidnapped the most experienced, able, and intelligent leaders of the New York branch and demanded \$100,000 ransom for each one. One of the brothers explained that the Panthers were facing the same problem all over the country because of persecution by the pigs. We spent the rest of the afternoon rapping about the Black struggle in New York and in the u.s. in general. I was deep in a discussion about strategy and tactics when Emory Douglas came in. I was as happy as a bee in a pollen factory to meet him. I dug his artwork a lot and had even taped a piece he had written on revolutionary art to my closet door. We hit it off at once and, when everybody finished rapping, he took me up to see how the Black Panther newspaper was put together.

I was truly impressed by the Panthers in Oakland. After my first visit, i dropped in at their offices regularly. I visited some of the other branches in the area, talking to the people and asking my usual ton of questions. I spent a couple of nights working at the distribution center for the Party paper, which was located in the Fulton district in San Francisco. It was a trip! The papers wouldn't get picked up from the printer until late in the evening, and people would work until the wee hours sorting them out and preparing them for distribution to the Panther offices all around the country. Panthers worked there, but the majority seemed to be sisters and brothers from the neighborhood who had just dropped in to give the Panthers a hand. A lot of young people were there and some elderly sisters and brothers. As we wrapped the papers in bundles, printed addresses, and counted out papers, we sang Panther songs and marching chants. Every now and then, a few stepped outside to sip a little bitter dog. This was supposedly a Panther invention made of red port and lemon juice. It wasn't too bad, once i got used to it, and by the time 1 A.M. came around, i loved it. Working on the paper distribution didn't even seem like work—it was more like a party. Somebody always gave me a lift home and i would fall into a happy sleep feeling refreshed and renewed.

It was splashed across the papers, blaring on the radio, and yet i still couldn't believe it. The face of the serious young man with the

gun refused to leave my thoughts. I must have picked up the same newspaper and put it down a hundred times. This shit was serious! Seventeen years old with a rifle under his raincoat. Seventeen years old and taking freedom into his own hands. Seventeen years old and defying the whole pig power structure in amerika. Seventeen years old and dead. Tears i didn't even know i had poured out. I got on the phone to find somebody who could explain it all. Who was Jonathan Jackson? Who was the young man who came to free a revolutionary Black prisoner, holding a district attorney and a pig judge hostage, shouting, "We are the revolutionaries! Free the Soledad Brothers by 12:30"? Who was he?"

I had only vaguely heard of the Soledad Brothers. A brother who knew all about the case broke it down to me. Three unarmed Black prisoners were shot down in the yard by a white guard. A grand jury ruled it "justifiable homicide." After the verdict, a white guard was found dead. Three politically conscious Black prisoners were charged with the murder and thrown into solitary. They all faced the death penalty. John Clutchette, Fleeta Drumgo and George Jackson were the brothers charged with the murder. George Jackson, a brilliant revolutionary theorist and writer, was Jonathan Jackson's brother.

I couldn't get the whole thing out of my head. Why were grown men and women living while Jonathan Jackson lay dead? What kind of rage, what kind of oppression, and what kind of country shaped that young man? I felt guilt for being alive and well. Where was my gun? And where was my courage?

I was dry-eyed when i attended the funeral. There were hundreds of people. We could barely get into the church. They set up a loudspeaker outside so that people could hear the sermon. Black Panthers, solemn and determined, marched in military formation. I was so, so glad they were there. Black people need someone to stand up for us or we will always be victims. I held my arms real close to me, feeling a bit unraveled. Life for us gets so ugly. If i stay a victim it will kill me, I thought. It was time for me to get my shit together. I wanted to be one of the people who stood up. These were serious times.

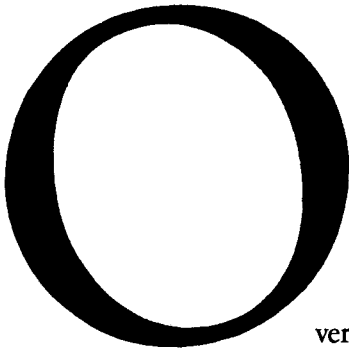
Angela Davis was running for her life. They had hooked her up with Jonathan Jackson, charged her with kidnapping and murder at the kourthouse, even though she was nowhere on the set. They charged her with murder because they claimed that some of the guns used belonged to her. She was one of the most beautiful women i had ever seen. Not physically, but spiritually. I knew who she was, because i had been keeping clippings of her in my file. She

was the sister who got fired from her job teaching at a California college because she told everybody she was a communist and if they didn't like it, they could go to hell.

But i wasn't surprised. They will charge Black people with anything, using any flimsy excuse. We were very glad they hadn't caught her. I hoped they never would. The air was charged, everything was happening so fast, and i wasn't blind anymore. I was seeing things straight, seeing them more clearly than ever before. I had so many things to do. If you are deaf, dumb, and blind to what's happening in the world, you're under no obligation to do anything. But if you know what's happening and you don't do anything but sit on your ass, then you're nothing but a punk.

I tried to explain how i felt to some of the people i knew. I wanted to struggle on a full-time basis. They urged me to join the Panther Party. I went over in my mind all the criticisms i had of the party. They had said, "You'll be good for the Party, and the Party will be good for you. The Party is only as strong as its people." It made a lot of sense to me. For the first time in months i felt calm and sure of what i was going to do. I told them that the first thing i was going to do when i returned to New York was join the Party.

I thought about it all the way home. Of all the things i had wanted to be when i was a little girl, a revolutionary certainly wasn't one of them. And now it was the only thing i wanted to do. Everything else was secondary. It occurred to me that even though i wanted to become a revolutionary more than anything else in the world, i still didn't have the slightest idea what i would have to do to become one.



ver the next few years, home became a lot of places. I traveled quite a bit and met up with some really beautiful people, people so beautiful they restored my faith in humanity each time i passed through their station. Like most of us back in those days, i was new at this, learning about clandestine struggle as i lived it. I didn't have many fixed ideas at first about what i thought armed struggle within the confines of amerika should be like. I had done a lot of reading about it in other places, but i had no concrete idea how to apply the lessons from those struggles to the struggle of Black people within the United States.

It was clear that the Black Liberation Army was not a centralized, organized group with a common leadership and chain of command. Instead, there were various organizations and collectives working out of different cities, and in some of the larger cities there were often several groups working independently of each other. Many members of the various groups had been forced into hiding as a result of the extreme police repression that took place during the late sixties and early seventies. Some had serious cases, some had minor ones, and others, like me, were just wanted for "questioning."

Sisters and brothers joined these groups because they were committed to revolutionary struggle in general and armed struggle in particular and wanted to help build the armed movement in amerika. It was the strangest feeling. People i used to run into at rallies were now in hiding, sending messages that they wanted to hook up. Sisters and brothers from just about every revolutionary or militant group in the country were either rotting away in prison or had been

forced underground. Everyone i talked to was interested in taking the struggle to a higher level. But the question was how. How to bring together all those people scattered around the country into an organized body that would be effective in struggling for Black liberation.

It became evident, almost from the beginning, that consolidation was not a good idea. There were too many security problems, and different groups had different ideologies, different levels of political consciousness and different ideas about how armed struggle in amerika should be waged. On the whole, we were weak, inexperienced, disorganized, and seriously lacking in training. But the biggest problem was one of political development. There were sisters and brothers who had been so victimized by amerika that they were willing to fight to the death against their oppressors. They were intelligent, courageous and dedicated, willing to make any sacrifice. But we were to find out quickly that courage and dedication were not enough. To win any struggle for liberation, you have to have the way as well as the will, an overall ideology and strategy that stem from a scientific analysis of history and present conditions.

Some of the groups thought they could just pick up arms and struggle and that, somehow, people would see what they were doing and begin to struggle themselves. They wanted to engage in a do-or-die battle with the power structure in amerika, even though they were weak and ill prepared for such a fight. But the most important factor is that armed struggle, by itself, can never bring about a revolution. Revolutionary war is a people's war. And no people's war can be won without the support of the masses of people. Armed struggle can never be successful by itself; it must be part of an overall strategy for winning, and the strategy must be political as well as military.

Since we did not own the TV stations or newspapers, it was easy for the news media to portray us as monsters and terrorists. The police could terrorize the Black community daily, yet if one Black person successfully defended himself or herself against a police attack, they were called terrorists. It soon became clear to me that our most important battle was to help politically mobilize, educate, and organize the masses of Black people and to win their minds and hearts. It was inconceivable that we could survive, much less win anything, without their support.

Every group fighting for freedom is bound to make mistakes, but unless you study the common, fundamental laws of armed revolutionary struggle you are bound to make unnecessary mis-

takes. Revolutionary war is protracted warfare. It is impossible for us to win quickly. To win we have got to wear down our oppressors, little by little, and, at the same time, strengthen our forces, slowly but surely. I understood some of my more impatient sisters and brothers. I knew that it was tempting to substitute military for political struggle, especially since all of our aboveground organizations were under vicious attack by the FBI, the CIA, and the local police agencies. All of us who saw our leaders murdered, our people shot down in cold blood, felt a need, a desire to fight back. One of the hardest lessons we had to learn is that revolutionary struggle is scientific rather than emotional. I'm not saying that we shouldn't feel anything, but decisions can't be based on love or on anger. They have to be based on the objective conditions and on what is the rational, unemotional thing to do.

In 1857 the u.s. supreme kourt ruled that Blacks were only three-fifths of a man and had no rights that whites were bound to respect. Today, more than a hundred and twenty-five years later, we still earn less than three-fifths of what white people earn. It was plain to me that we couldn't look to the kourts for freedom and justice anymore than we could expect to gain our liberation by participating in the u.s. political system, and it was pure fantasy to think we could gain them by begging. The only alternative left was to fight for them, and we are going to have to fight like any other people who have fought for liberation.

I wasn't one who believed that we should wait until our political struggle had reached a high point before we began to organize the underground. I felt that it was important to start building underground structures as soon as possible. And although i felt that the major task of the underground should be organizing and building, i didn't feel that armed acts of resistance should be ruled out. As long as they didn't impede our long-range plans, guerrilla units should be able to carry out a few well-planned, well-timed armed actions that were well coordinated with aboveground political objectives. Not any old kind of actions, but actions that Black people would clearly understand and support and actions that were well publicized in the Black community.