

# Dialogue, Language and Race: The Intellectualization of Race

BY ADWOA BUAHENE

Intellectualized racism is a form of racism which is pernicious, yet subtle. It is done by the very people that I, idealistically, thought the least likely: people who are well educated, the people who at convocation are referred to as the "future of society." The reason this form of racism is subtle is that the conversation in which it manifests itself always seem to start off as a mere debate on topics that relate to race or gender. These discussions are supposed to be intellectual exchanges on issues such as affirmative action, racism or women's issues. Both the person and I are supposed to understand the rules of the game: if s/he objects to my position or vice versa, then we have a continuing right to question each other on the held position.

Quite frequently, the discussion will contain the infamous sentence: "I know that I am not a

racist and I really do not think that racism (or sexism) is that much of an issue anymore." Or I will hear, "I do not believe that inequality between races exists, so we need to move on." The premise in this argument is that the speaker does not consider, her/himself, to be a racist. The conclusion is that racism does not exist.

Initially, I give such statements the benefit of doubt. I charitably take it for granted that the person has good intentions and just does not realize what s/he is implying by making such a statement. So I point out that even though it is great that s/he is not a racist that it does not mean that racism does not exist. Furthermore, denying the reality of present day society is actually an insult to a great many people who frequently face racist situations.

It is inapposite to go from a random sample of one to a gross conclusion about a state of affairs that is actually contra-indicated

by evidence. Sometimes, people try to use me as their sample by saying, "Well, look at yourself, you are educated without having been given any benefits due to colour, and you do not claim that racism gives you any differential rights." This tokenization of my experience as representative of all black people's experiences is not uncommon, yet it is entirely improper.

However, I think, a lot of people feel comfortable in talking to me about these issues because they think I will be an ally. Since I do not appear to be a representative of the perceived stereotype of the "angry" black who demands consideration due to colour, I must believe that equality has been achieved and that those who continue to point out racial inequality have no justification.

Sorry people, I am not deluded into thinking that my experience is everyone's experience. The only problem is that I am in a no-win situation: if I do not feel like point-

ing it out because it is not the time or the place; or I would rather have a beer; or I simply cannot be bothered, then the person will perhaps say, "I had this discussion with a friend/acquaintance/classmate who is black and she did not disagree with me and so I must have a valid point because she generally would say something if she disagreed." On the other hand, if I do get into the discussion and start peeling back the layers to show what one's statements might really be implying, then the person may claim that I am just another hysterical and "angry" black or, even better, that I am a racist myself.

So what happens next in this particular saga? In this "intellectual discussion", I start pointing out how the person's assertions or assumptions could be viewed as racist. I am not making an accusation. After all, since we are

only having a discussion, the person must anticipate that I might raise objections and try to point out flaws in her/his argument. Especially since the person "is not a racist", one of her/his goals must be to care that s/he is not implying racist statements. What I have found astounding is that quite frequently true colours (no pun intended) come shining through.

The great thing about university education is that it can teach a person how to cloak her/his true inclinations behind words of style that on the surface seem to represent present day liberal sentiments or valid concerns. However, after a few queries into the nature of what the person truly means by her/his statements, I come to discover that all s/he has done is learned the talk without having any conviction behind that which s/he professes.

## The Black Power movement

BY PAULA CORNWALL

One of the most inspiring and instructive periods of Black history has got to be the Black Power movement in the U.S. in the mid-1960s.

The term itself was first coined by Adam Clayton Powell in the mid-1950s, but it was popularized by Stokely Carmichael, leader of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), who used the phrase first in 1966 at a rally in Greenwood, Mississippi.

The young militants in SNCC had been growing impatient with the moderate civil rights movement, particularly with its strategy of nonviolence, its search for a place in the "American Dream" and the very limited gains it had won.

"We been saying freedom for six years and we ain't got nothing. What we gonna start saying now is Black Power."

The slogan caught on like a prairie fire, in part reflecting a geographic shift in the Black movement.

While the struggle in the South had focused on ending the apartheid-like conditions of Jim Crow, the growing fight in the North faced aspects of racism that were more deeply embedded in American society. These conditions in the North led to a series of urban rebellions that rocked every major city in the mid-1960s.

The Black Power movement posed a challenge to US capitalism, yet it was unable on its own to overthrow it.

The demise of the movement was, in the first instance, the result of government retaliation with every means at its disposal — from the brutal murder of dozens of Black Panther leaders to a strategy to coopt other figures. But this alone does not explain the defeat of the Black Power movement. One also has to consider its political outlook.

The Black Power movement was dominated by Black nationalist politics. The Black nationalist position is that the main division in North American society and elsewhere is

between Blacks and whites.

There is a flaw at the heart of Black nationalism. Even at its most revolutionary, it looks to the unity of Blacks across class lines. But the aftermath of the 1960s movement shows that Blacks of different classes have different interests.

A small group of middle-class Blacks benefitted more than others from the reforms won in the 1960s and 1970s. There are now, for example, more than 6,000 Black elected officials in the US overseeing the decay of urban America.

Thus, the civil rights movement's gains, as important as they were, accentuated class divisions within Black America.

It is at the workplace that Black and white workers together have the power to overthrow the system. This unity will not be achieved without anti-racists — both Black and white — fighting for it.

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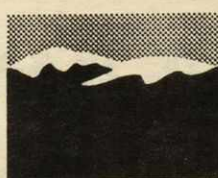
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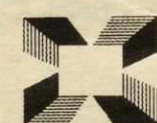
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