WAR AND SOCIAL REVOLUTION IN AFRO-AMERICAN

POETRY SINCE 1960

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ABSTRACT


The problem with which this study is concerned is that of determining the role of war and social revolution in Afro-American poetry of the 1960's. For this study, four major poets were selected: Gwendolyn Brooks, Nikki Giovanni, Leroi Jones, and Don L. Lee. The primary criterion for the selection of these four poets was number of volumes of poetry published since 1960. Also, these four poets would have met the criteria of popularity and recognition had these been established as selection standards.

The Introduction provides biographical and critical comments to acquaint the reader with these writers. These remarks also establish their leadership in both literature and social work. The Introduction briefly summarizes the development of Afro-American poetry since the Harlem Renaissance of the 1920's in an effort to indicate the various social and literary influences which produced the militant overtones of recent Afro-American poetry.

The poetry written by Brooks, Giovanni, Jones, and Lee since 1960 was surveyed, and their attitudes concerning war
1. Their attitudes toward other blacks and their animosities toward whites;
2. Descriptions of racial combat and the results the poets hope will be achieved;
3. The conflicts which have led to the poets' militancy.

A chapter is devoted to each of these points.

Chapter One, "Separation and Unification," outlines the poets' resentment of whites. It is shown in this chapter that black indignation is a result of the characteristics they see in whites of materialism, hypocrisy, and indifference to the needs of non-white people. The poets' feelings toward their own people is that they must unite blacks with a feeling of enmity toward whites. Such a unification based on charges against whites excludes those blacks whom they feel have accepted white values and who attempt to live by white standards.

Chapter Two, "The Revolution and the New World," includes these writers' descriptions of racial warfare in America and the world they hope will result from a social revolution. This chapter attempts to show that black poets hope that racial war will bring about a social system based on love of humanity and respect for one's fellow man.

Chapter Three, "An Act of Desperation," searches the works of these poets for reasons why they have turned to suggestions of war as a means of effecting a social revolution. The chapter traces their disillusionment with political negotiation and peaceful protest to bring about change.
reasons behind their unwillingness to be assimilated into American society are examined as well as their lack of faith in God to provide an answer to social problems.

The Conclusion sets forth the three ways in which the poets' verbal war on white America performed:

1. It unified blacks against a common enemy.

2. The verbal war released hostilities and vented the poets' rage against whites, leaving an opportunity for constructive problem-solving.

3. It outlined to the poets the futility of war and the necessity for substituting more meaningful action.

Having purged themselves of suppressed hostilities, the black poets were able to seek a revolution based on constructive development of black potential. This paper concludes that the role of war in the Afro-American poetry since 1960 was to release hostilities and enable the black poets to strive to create a spirit of unified advancement through which blacks might achieve a social revolution.
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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Contemporary Afro-American poetry developed out of the Harlem Renaissance of the 1920's. Bernard W. Bell, editor of Modern and Contemporary Afro-American Poetry, says of this development:

Modern Afro-American poetry . . . came into its own during the age of the Lost Generation. In revolt against what they perceived as the acquisitiveness and hollowness of the American system, post-war writers like Ernest Hemingway, Gertrude Stein, T. S. Eliot, Ezra Pound, Sherwood Anderson, and Waldo Frank led the search for new social and cultural values. At the same time, the reaction of "the whole generation of young Negro writers . . . to Toomer's Cane," in the words of Arna Bontemps, "marked an awakening that soon thereafter began to be called a Negro Renaissance." The Negro Renaissance, also known as the Harlem Renaissance and the New Negro Movement . . . was the new awakening of Afro-American arts and letters (4, p. 2).

According to Mr. Bell, this "awakening of Afro-American arts and letters" was led by the poets Claude McKay, Countee Cullen, Langston Hughes, and James Weldon Johnson (4, p. 4). These men wanted to write honestly and to explore; therefore, they "turned to Africa and Afro-American folklore for a sense of tradition" (4, p. 2). This search for a sense of tradition was reflected in the literature, and the result was a growing ethnic pride replacing the self-consciousness of former slaves who found themselves freed men. The June 23, 1926, issue of The Nation carried an essay written by Langston Hughes in
which he encouraged the black writer to express himself with ethnic pride:

We younger Negro artists who create now intend to express our individual dark-skinned selves without fear or shame. If white people are pleased we are glad. If they are not, it doesn't matter. . . . If colored people are pleased we are glad. If they are not, their displeasure doesn't matter either (19, p. 305).

Bernard W. Bell explains that "the primary accomplishment of the Harlem Renaissance was to provide a national showcase for a newly awakened sense of ethnic pride" (4, p. 8). He summarizes the "literary legacy" which the poets of the Harlem Renaissance passed to the contemporary poets:

(1) A nostalgic interest in Africa;

(2) A rediscovery and re-evaluation of black folk values;

(3) The elevation of members of the black masses, especially the working class, as heroes; and

(4) The introduction of validation of the blues, jazz, ballads, sermons, and black vernacular as poetic material (4, p. 8).

Contemporary poets, whom Mr. Bell calls the "New Breed poets," are the "bearers of the legacy of the Harlem Renaissance" (4, p. 10). He also indicates that there are distinct differences between black poets of the 1960's and the poets who led the Harlem Renaissance. The primary distinctions between the work of the contemporary poets and their forerunners of the 1920's, according to Mr. Bell, are as follows: the rejection of white middle-class values, the rejection of academic poetic standards, and "a revolutionary commitment to the concept of art as a weapon" (4, p. 11).
The Great Depression brought an end to the Harlem Renaissance. Langston Hughes set 1931 as the year marking the end of this period of Negro awakening (4, p. 7). The rebellious spirit, however, carried over into the 1930's as black writers became increasingly aware of self (4, p. 11). Having accepted the attitude fostered by Langston Hughes in his declaration that the young Negro artist's goal was to express himself with freedom, the poets then turned their efforts to expressing themselves as well as possible. This trend toward perfection of form continued, according to Mr. Bell, throughout the 1940's. He mentions three outstanding poems, Robert Hayden's "Runagate Runagate," Margaret Walker's "For My People," and Melvin Tolson's "Dark Symphony," as proof of this continuing trend toward perfection of style (4, p. 9).

The period following World War II was a time of adjustment in America, an adjustment to the fact that America found herself as the leader among the nations of the world. Houston A. Baker, Jr., author of Black Literature in America, believes that America's emergence as a world leader was one of the most important factors affecting the development of black authors since America was forced to examine her racial policies in an effort to "capture the loyalty of the undeclared colored masses of the world" (1, p. 15). As a result, American social consciousness increased; and blacks, particularly black writers, took advantage of the greater opportunities available to exert their privileges as American citizens.
One result of the evaluation and enlargement of social consciousness was an increasing level of education among blacks and whites (1, p. 15). Blacks particularly found that increasing numbers of their people were receiving education; therefore, they were capable of receiving and evaluating the communication from black writers. The influence of poetry was heightened simply because the audience was larger and better equipped to understand. Writers, particularly black writers, had inherited a greater responsibility in communication than they had previously had because they had obtained a large, educated audience.

In the 1950's, politics began to play a more important role in American poetry than it formerly had. Amistad 1: Writings on Black History and Culture describes the attitude held by most earlier American writers: "... contemporary political realities belong in prose; poetry is too 'pure' to contain them" (19, pp. 236-237). This attitude was rejected in the 1950's by many poets. Amistad 1 names poets Allen Ginsberg, Robert Hazel, Louis Simpson, George Starbuck, and Lawrence Ferlinghetti, who have made major contributions to American political poetry. Some of these names are closely associated with the "Beat" group, whose poetry became a dominant force in literature with harsh denunciations of the American political system. When militant black poets began to criticize the American political system, they were following a trend which was not characteristic of black poetry only;
poetry written by outstanding white poets was also attacking the American establishment.

Richard Barksdale and Keneth Kinnamon, editors of *Black Writers of America*, assign great importance to Malcolm X and Martin Luther King, Jr., for their influence on the literary movement toward militancy in the 1960's. This anthology states that the leadership of these two prominent figures stimulated black awareness and increased black literary activity. "The wave of Black militancy that resulted brought about an outburst of literary creativity that crested in the 'Searing Sixties':" (3, p. 659). This new literary flurry was "separatist," "political," and "revolutionary" (3, p. 660).

Houston A. Baker, Jr., states in *Black Literature in America* that both the philosophies and the strategies of black people became more militant during the early 1960's since "the more forcefully voiced demands of black Americans were met in the early sixties by violence on one hand and indifference and apathy on the other" (1, p. 17). Mr. Baker also assigns credit to the mass media for the roles they played in preparing the black community both mentally and emotionally to be receptive to the militancy of black leaders and black writers. Mr. Baker refers to the literary trend of militancy as "this revolutionary aesthetic" (1, p. 18).

Nick Aaron Ford defines the term "revolutionists":

I have designated as "revolutionists" (with no pejorative connotation) the writers who have expressed allegiance to the revolutionary movement dedicated to the
rejection of current American standards of morality, justice, education, social behavior, beauty, and aesthetics and their replacement by black standards tailored to fit the exclusive feelings and needs of the black American sub-culture. Most of these revolutionists will accept no compromise, no mere modification of the standards of the majority culture. They demand complete rejection of current artistic and other cultural standards not only by those who voluntarily subscribe to their philosophy, but they demand it of all black people as the price of freedom from the charge of disloyalty to the race (5, p. 303).

Dudley Randall explains that the purposes shared by the new revolutionary poets are to make their poetry relevant to the needs of the black people in America today and to cultivate black consciousness, black power, and black unity. Mr. Randall further states that these new revolutionists are indifferent to labels of didacticism or propaganda placed upon their work, for they are "indifferent as to whether their work survives, just so it is effective today" (6, p. 112).

During the 1960's, many new, revolutionary black poets began to take an active part in communicating with their people. New books by previously unheard-of poets began to pour off the presses. Small presses were established to handle the volume of literature being produced. Some of these presses were set up in basements of individual homes. Such is the case with Broadside Press, one of the most important new publishing businesses, which was set up in Dudley Randall's basement in Detroit, Michigan. There are, however, less than 300 black writers published with any degree of regularity, although there are 30,000,000 black people in the United States (10, p. 86). Out of this 300, which
includes black writers of every genre, four poets were selected for study in this paper: Gwendolyn Brooks, Nikki Giovanni, LeRoi Jones, and Don L. Lee. These poets were selected primarily on the basis of their having published more volumes of poetry since 1960 than any other black poets. Incomplete figures of volumes of sales would also suggest that the criteria of popularity might well be met by these four writers as well. However, since many of the black poets' works are published by very small concerns which keep few records and which sometimes do not remain in business for long periods of time, total sales figures are not available for comparison. A brief glance at the tables of contents of a random collection of recent Negro anthologies would also serve to substantiate the validity of selecting these four poets, Gwendolyn Brooks, Nikki Giovanni, LeRoi Jones, and Don L. Lee, for a study of contemporary Afro-American poetry. Their works are included in almost every anthology of recent Negro literature.

LeRoi Jones, of course, is the best known of the young Negro poets publishing during the 1960's. He was born in Newark, New Jersey, in 1934. He received a Bachelor of Arts Degree from Howard University and a Master of Arts Degree in Comparative Literature from Columbia University (15, p. 78). In 1961, Jones was awarded a John Hay Whitney Fellowship and was later awarded a Guggenheim Fellowship. His play The Dutchman won an Obie Award for the best off-Broadway production of 1964. The volume of work he has produced since
1960 is impressive. It includes the following: six books of poetry, Preface to a Twenty Volume Suicide Note (1961), The Dead Lecturer (1964), Sabotage (1963), Target Study (1965), Black Art (1966) (Sabotage, Target Study, and Black Art were later combined into one volume, Black Magic: Poetry, 1961-1967, which was published in 1969 and which was used in preparation of this paper), and It's Nation Time (1970); several plays, the best known being The Dutchman (1964), The Slave (1964), The Baptism (1967), The Toilet (1967), Slave Ship (1967), and Arm Yourself or Harm Yourself (1967); one novel, The System of Dante's Hell (1966); two books on black music, Blues People (1963) and Black Music (1967); one volume of short stories, Tales (1967); three collections of essays, Home: Social Essays (1966), Raise Race Rays Raze: Essays Since 1965 (1969), and Spirit Reach (1972). He has also edited three anthologies of black poetry, The Moderns (1963), Four Young Lady Poets (1964), and Black Fire (1968), which he co-edited with Larry Neal.

Houston A. Baker, Jr., calls LeRoi Jones "the father of the present-day black aesthetic" (1, p. 306), and Calvin C. Hernton states that "it is LeRoi Jones who stands, for the present at least (1965), as the master of these writers and of the movement" (19, p. 215). Jones's position as a leader of the movement of black militancy in poetry is clear; however, as Calvin C. Hernton points out, literary response to Jones's work is mixed. The variation in response can be
illustrated by noting the evaluations of two critics, Houston A. Baker, Jr., and David Littlejohn, of Jones's second volume of poetry, The Dead Lecturer. Mr. Baker says, "The Dead Lecturer strives for the complexity, wit, and symbolism of the Pound-Eliot tradition" (1, p. 306). When speaking of Jones's poetry as a whole, he compares Jones's ability to maneuver the language into new meanings with that of T. S. Eliot (1, p. 18). David Littlejohn, author of a book of criticism entitled Black on White, is less enthusiastic about Jones's ability. His criticism regarding The Dead Lecturer includes the following comments: "We have more odd noodling about with word noises, pages in which no single word group between periods coheres into sense. 'Obscure' is too concrete a word . . ." (14, p. 99).

Literary sophistication, whether one deems it successful or unsuccessful, does not make Jones's poetry irrelevant to his people. Gwendolyn Brooks says of Jones, "His work, works" (18, p. 4). According to Miss Brooks, Jones's popularity with black people rests upon the fact that he speaks to them with uncompromising belief in black consciousness.

LeRoi Jones's belief in black consciousness is not only evident in his poetry, but it is also attested to by his very active participation in the affairs of the black community. He founded the Black Arts Repertory Theatre/School in Harlem and is leader of the Black Community Development and Defense Organization in Newark, New Jersey (5, p. 322). Nick Aaron
Ford mentions the fact that this organization has been responsible for bringing thousands of dollars of resources into the black community of Newark and has brought about a substantial increase in the number of registered voters among the black people of Newark. Jones is also a member of the Nation of Islam (Black Muslim) and prefers his Muslim name, Imamu (Spiritual Leader) Amiri Baraka.

Nikki Giovanni is also a leader in the black community. She was born in 1943 in Knoxville, Tennessee, but grew up in Cincinnati, Ohio. After completing her Master of Arts Degree at Fisk University, she returned to Cincinnati to work with black people there. Her activities include participation in the Black Arts Festival of Cincinnati in 1967, establishment of a black theater in Cincinnati called The New Theater (7, p. 1), and teaching black history in Cincinnati, in Wilmington, Delaware, and Rutgers University (4, p. 181).

On May 14, 1973, Nikki Giovanni was named by Ladies' Home Journal as one of the nation's most outstanding women of the year for her youth leadership activities.

Nikki Giovanni is the author of three books of poetry. Two volumes, Black Feeling, Black Talk and Black Judgement, were published in 1968 by a small press called Afro-Arts. These two were combined into the volume Black Feeling, Black Talk, Black Judgement in 1970 by William Morrow and Company. Her third volume, Re:Creation, was published in 1970, by Broadside Press. Gemini, which consists of autobiographical
sketches, was published in 1970. Literary criticism of Giovanni's work is scant. However, the poet Don L. Lee in his book of criticism, *Dynamite Voices: Black Poets of the 1960's*, surveys Giovanni's work and provides some evaluation of her poetry. Lee explains:

Nikki writes about the familiar: what she knows, sees, experiences. It is clear why she conveys such urgency in expressing the need for Black awareness, unity, solidarity. She knows how it was. She knows how it is. She knows also that a change can be affected (11, p. 70).

Lee criticizes her for oversimplification which makes her sound "rather naive politically" (11, p. 73). He also points out that Giovanni's poetry lends itself to and is complemented by oral reading. Her best work, he says, is the short poem, a "fast rap," which loses some of its effect when read silently (11, p. 74).

Don L. Lee was born in Little Rock, Arkansas, in 1942 (16, p. 74). He says of himself in the Introduction of *Think Black!*, his first book of poetry: "I was born into slavery in Feb. [sic] of 1942. . . . Black. Poet. Black Poet am I. This should leave little doubt in the minds of anyone as to which is first" (12, p. 6). His childhood was spent in Detroit; and later he moved to Chicago, where he graduated from high school and junior college. He served as writer-in-residence at Cornell University, 1969-70, where he posted the sign on his door "black writer in residence" (16, p. 74). Lee previously rejected the offer of this position at Cornell,
hoping for a similar position at a black college in Alabama. When the position at the black college was not offered, he accepted the offer from Cornell. He explains that he feels he was not accepted by the black college, "because I don't write like a white boy" (16, p. 74). Although Lee was previously a Catholic, he, like LeRoi Jones, is now a member of the Nation of Islam. Also, like Jones, he is active in the black community, having founded Third World Press in Chicago, which publishes work done by Negro writers. He also founded the literary journal Black Expression.

Apparently, Lee's poetry has a tremendous popular appeal, for the sales figures have been large. All his poetry has been published by Broadside Press. Dudley Randall, the founder of Broadside, said in an essay published in 1970, that at that time, Lee's first volume, Think Black!, was in its twelfth printing since it was published in 1969, and there was a total of 25,000 copies in print (2, p. 142). In August, 1972, the book was in its fifteenth printing. At the time Mr. Randall's essay was written in 1970, Black Pride, Lee's second volume of poetry, was in its seventh printing; and his third volume, Don't Cry, Scream, was in its third printing since its first publication in March, 1969. Mr. Randall declared that sales figures would be much larger, for the demand far exceeds the supply, if lack of funds were not a factor. Lee has published five books of poetry, Think Black! (1969), Black Pride (1968), Don't Cry, Scream (1969), We Walk the Way of the New
World (1970), Directions: Selected and New Poetry (1971), and one book of criticism, Dynamite Voices: Black Poets of the 1960's (1971). He also frequently contributes articles to Black World, which was formerly known as The Negro Digest.

One journalist says of Lee's poetry:

His work is permeated not with that appeal to conscience fundamental to protest literature, but, instead, with an urgent appeal to the reason of black people regarding the values of white America and the need for black unity (16, p. 76).

This same writer calls Lee's untitled poem included in the Introduction of Think Black! the "poet's precise interpretation of how black fits into the white, red and blue scheme of the American Dream and [the poem] serves, as well, to identify its creator as an outsider" (16, p. 76):

America calling.
negroes.
can you dance?
play foot/baseball?
nanny?
cook?
needed now. negroes
who can entertain
ONLY
others not
wanted.
(& are considered extremely dangerous.) (12, p. 6).

Unlike Giovanni, Jones, and Lee, who have all begun to publish since 1960, Gwendolyn Brooks has been well-known for many years. Her poetry has been appearing in print since 1934, when, at the age of seventeen, she became a regular contributor to The Chicago Defender, a newspaper of nation-wide popularity among blacks. Gwendolyn Brooks was born in
Topeka, Kansas, in 1917; but her family moved to Chicago when she was a child. In Chicago, she graduated from high school and attended Wilson Junior College. Her poetry has been published regularly in such magazines as *Poetry*, *The Yale Review*, *Saturday Review of Literature*, and *Harper's*. She has taught for many years at such schools as Chicago Teachers College, North (5, p. 223), Northeastern State College, Columbia College, and Elmhurst College in Chicago (4, p. 179). In 1968, her plans were to give up teaching in order to allow herself more time for writing (18, p. 4).

Gwendolyn Brooks has received several distinguished awards for her poetry. In 1946, her first volume, *A Street in Bronzeville*, won an award from the American Academy of Arts and Letters; and she was awarded a two-year fellowship from the Guggenheim Foundation. She received the Pulitzer Prize in 1950 for her second volume of poetry, *Annie Allen* (4, p. 179). She was named Poet Laureate for the State of Illinois in 1968 following the death of Carl Sandburg, who had been Poet Laureate for several years (5, p. 223).

Allen, The Bean Eaters, In the Mecca, and Maud Martha were combined in a single publication in 1971 entitled The World of Gwendolyn Brooks, which was used for preparation of this paper. Gwendolyn Brooks has published more poetry since 1960 than any other established Negro poet with the exception of Langston Hughes. Although Hughes published more poetry after 1960 than Gwendolyn Brooks, most of it was children's poetry.

Although Gwendolyn Brooks can hardly be called a militant black writer, Dudley Randall wrote in 1969:

Gwendolyn Brooks' latest book, In the Mecca, shows the influence of her association with militant young Chicago South Side writers. There are still the precise, glittering, startling phrases, but there are fewer "feminine" epithets, and certain passages have a raw power that overwhelms. As well as her piercing insight into people's minds, there are violence, horror and tragedy in this book (6, p. 114).

Nick Aaron Ford commends Miss Brooks for her strong sense of irony and her imagery, which "is usually fresh and arresting, occasionally even startling" (5, p. 223). He also calls her poetry a challenge to the intellect.

Gwendolyn Brooks discusses the goals and objectives of contemporary black poets in an interview published in Contemporary Literature in 1970:

Black poets are becoming increasingly aware of themselves and their blackness, as they would say, are interested in speaking to black people, and especially do they want to reach those people who would never go into a bookstore and buy a $4.95 volume of poetry written by anyone... And I don't think we can turn our backs on these people/black poets and say airily, "That is not good poetry," because for one thing the whole concept of what "good poetry" is is changing today, thank goodness (18, p. 3).
Traditionally, poetry has been an expression of a wide range of emotions, including frustration, alienation, desperation, and even hatred and anger. War and revolution, however, have not been frequent themes of poetry; but in today's black poetry, war and social revolution are prominent features. White readers, who are sometimes distressed and even frightened when first being exposed to contemporary black poetry, usually attempt to assign some concrete significance to the concept of revolution. Evidence indicates that black writers are also seeking to understand the full meaning of the word. Malcolm X discusses the meaning of revolution in his autobiography:

The word for "revolution" in German is *Umwälzung*. What it means is a complete overturn—a complete change. . . . It means the destroying of an old system, and its replacement with a new system (13, p. 367).

LeRoi Jones equates the term "revolution" with the concept of National Liberation, which he feels is a more accurate expression of the meaning behind the term "revolution." He defines "revolution" and "National Liberation" as "... the restoration of our national sovereignty as a people, a people, at this point, equipped to set new paths for the development of man. . . . We are trying to destroy a foreign oppressor" (9, p. 138). He also points out that the word "vita," which means "life" in Latin, means "violence or war" in Swahili, a language which has taken new significance as a result of the interest black people have taken in African affairs since the Harlem Renaissance. To Jones, "war" or "revolution" signifies the means by which the Negro race can achieve a "replacement
of the old system] with a new system" (13, p. 367), and thereby construct a new life for blacks. Don L. Lee questions the validity of the word "revolution" because he expresses doubt that the people who most frequently use the word would be willing to perform those acts necessary for a revolution in the usual sense of the word (2, p. 243).

The purpose of this paper is to examine the attitudes of these major poets concerning "revolution." In the popular concept of the terms, "war" and "revolution" are synonymous. When the white reader relates the usual meaning of the words to the violence contained in the works of LeRoi Jones, Nikki Giovanni, Don L. Lee, and Gwendolyn Brooks, he tends to interpret the messages of these writers as a desire for literal warfare between the races. A first reading of the poetry by a white reader also results in the impression that this war or revolution is to be an act of vengeance against the white race as well as an effort to establish a black value system, with both aims being of equal importance. A closer reading of the poetry will reveal that an act of vengeance is of minor significance as an issue of the revolution. It is true that some of the work of these poets reflects bitterness over the Negroes' treatment in America. Although this paper attempts to outline some of the reasons why the black American feels outrage at his position in the United States, a complete explanation of his anger cannot be presented. Such an undertaking must be left to social scientists, for it would result,
in fact, it has resulted, in volumes of sociological analyses of the factors at work in American society now and over the past centuries which have served to maintain racial stratification. The Report of the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders, published in 1968, provides an excellent beginning for study of the black protest movement of the 1960's and the forces behind that movement. The report was compiled by members of the Commission on Civil Disorders appointed by President Johnson on July 17, 1967. The introduction to the report contains a charge against white Americans which must serve here to explain the bitterness of blacks and their desire for vengeance:

... the single overriding cause of rioting in the cities was not any one thing commonly adduced — unemployment, lack of education, poverty, exploitation — but that it was all of those things and more, expressed in the insidious and pervasive white senses of the inferiority of black men. Here is the essence of the charge: "What white Americans have never fully understood — but what the Negro can never forget — is that white society is deeply implicated in the ghetto. White institutions created it, white institutions maintain it, and white society condones it" (17, p. vii).

Bitterness over the social situation has become a minor factor in most of the works of Jones, Giovanni, Lee, and Brooks. The creation of a black value system is of the greatest importance, and this has become their primary goal during the thirteen year period since 1960. A black value system has been outlined by LeRoi Jones in his collection of essays entitled *Raise Race Rays Raze*, published in 1969. The black value system, or to borrow Jones’s Swahili equivalent, *Kawaida*, is
expressed in the Swahili language. Jones explains that the Swahili language is used to express black values because he feels his people are African even if they have been "trapped in the West these few hundred years" (9, p. 137).

Umoja (Unity) - To strive for and maintain unity in the family, community, nation and race.
Kujichagulia (Self-Determination) - To define ourselves, name ourselves, and speak for ourselves, instead of being defined, and spoken for by others.
Ujima (Collective Work and Responsibility) - To build and maintain our community together and to make our brothers and sisters problems our problems and to solve them together.
Ujamaa (Cooperative Economics) - To build and maintain our own stores, shops and other businesses and to profit together from them.
Nia (Purpose) - To make as our collective vocation the building and developing of our community in order to restore our people to their traditional greatness.
Kuumba (Creativity) - To do always as much as we can, in the way we can in order to leave our community more beautiful than when we inherited it.
Imani (Faith) - To believe with all our hearts in our parents, our teachers, our leaders, our people and the rightness and victory of our struggle (9, pp. 133-134).

The instituting of Kawaida among the members of the Negro race has become the major issue in contemporary black poetry because the poets believe a black value system is the key to cultivating pride and dignity among blacks. This "weapon," "shield," and "pillow of peace," as Jones refers to the black value system, becomes increasingly important and more heavily stressed in the poetry during the years since 1960 (9, p. 136). A black value system is another step in the search for a means to change the social conditions under which blacks live.
Herbert Hill has said about the literature of Afro-Americans: "... most significantly, the literature of American Negroes is an attempt to explain the racial situation to themselves" (8, p. xv). Afro-American poetry since 1960 is an attempt by the poets to explain the social revolution to themselves. This paper attempts to penetrate the attitudes and implications in the poetry of LeRoi Jones, Nikki Giovanni, Don L. Lee, and Gwendolyn Brooks pertaining to social revolution and war. A study of the poetry of these four writers is a study of the attitudes of many black people, for these poets are clearly leaders. From the words of Malcolm X, LeRoi Jones, and Don L. Lee, one can see that the social revolution is a means to an end—the end being a life of dignity and self-respect for black people after the initiation of the black value system. The problem lies with the interpretation of the course by which those goals may be achieved. This interpretation will indicate the actual meaning of war and revolution in the works of Gwendolyn Brooks, Nikki Giovanni, LeRoi Jones, and Don L. Lee rather than the various definitions that have been given by these poets and other black leaders.


CHAPTER II

SEPARATION AND UNIFICATION

The term "Negritude," coined by the West Indian poet Aime' Césaire to denote "that particular quality, those certain nuances which are universal to the thought, action, and behavior of Black Africans" (7, p. 54), had been accepted by the black poets of the United States in 1960. Since then they have concentrated on Negritude and have tried to add to its meaning by striving to instill a sense of pride in blackness. LeRoi Jones, for example, encourages his people to create a Black literature which will create a sense of pride in blacks rather than a sense of shame that they are not white (2, p. 24).

As a first step toward freeing black people from the allegedly false values of white people, Gwendolyn Brooks, Nikki Giovanni, LeRoi Jones, and Don L. Lee in their poetry attempt to establish clear lines of demarcation between blacks and whites.

These four poets lash out at the false values of materialism of the white race and of a political system which fosters economic interests above social concern. LeRoi Jones calls this materialism "the jewelry cold cancer/identifying these diseased creatures (6, p. 149). His poem "Square Business" shows that he believes that the white man's materialism insures an atmosphere of hatred in the nation.
The faces of Americans
sit open hating each
other. The black ones
hating, though they laugh
and are controlled by
laughter. The white ones
blown up hot inside, their projects
are so profitable . . . sixteen stories
in a sultry town . . . wind bends them
back.

These are boxes
of money. With lids
these winds wont lift.
Winds from foodless mouths.
Steel boxes floating in tears.
In panama hats and floppy pants
in love with happy tasteful God. They
own-him. But what do they own? And can it
be chewed to a liquid? (6, p. 29).

This poem then enumerates the several possessions of the
white man: money, churches, time, God, light, sound, music,
and each other. Jones suggests that the white man's materi-
alist attitude destroys the value of all these things, and
he predicts that America's destruction will result from the
false values of the white man:

The magic dance
of the second ave ladies,
in the artificial glare
of the world, silver-green curls sparkle
and the ladies' arms jingle
with new Fall pesos, sewn on grim bracelets
the poet's mother-in-law thinks are swell.

So much for America, let it sweep in grand style
up the avenues of its failure. Let it promenade smartly
beneath the marquees of its despair (6, p. 17).

Jones sees the white man as living in total despair
because of his materialism. "Caucasian Devachan" charac-
terizes the white man as an elf who, though he possesses much,
remains utterly alone and in darkness. His life is like death in that there is no meaning; and he sits waiting for some relief from despondency, not recognizing that elements of his nature are responsible:

In the dark the elf who had inherited the material world sat in a dark room with only himself, with only his eyes and his stomach and tried to look out the windows but there were no windows, and no light, no sound, just the things he sat there surrounded by the things of the world, transformed by their deadness, transfixed, yet leaning to listen as if there were still sounds he could hear or objects he could see, he would lay down in his subjective stillness, new worlds humming out of range of his outmoded ears (6, p. 156).

The younger militant poets generally present the "natural" enmity between the races, another mark of demarcation, in violent terms. In order to understand the enmity between the races in the black/white war, one must study the progression of levels or degrees of warfare it involves. This combat ranges from simple competition between the races to general warfare on the level of the Third World War, complete with mass bloodshed and concentration camps.

Nikki Giovanni implies that black people are treated as inferiors by the whites because blacks do not understand the "game" that white people are playing using blacks as their toys. With the images of a jack-in-the-box and a spinning top, she conveys to her people their helplessness and their status as "play toys for master players." "Toy Poem" states:
if they took our insides out would we be still
Black people or would we become play toys
for master players
there's a reason we lose a lot its not our game
and we don't know how to score (5, p. 40).

The actual extent of the enmity between the races
becomes very clear to white minds when she calls the white
man a "vampire" and a "nocturnal" being who preys on blacks
during the night to return to his living death, "his casket
or office as/they call them now," at dawn (5, p. 35). This
poem, "Twelve Gates to the City," predicts that the white
man is going to bring destruction to the world, for he is
violating nature. With a play on words, Giovanni points out
that racial prejudice has been a mark of mankind since its
beginning. "Hueman beings" always see their fellowman by
color. Thus, she explains, developed our present system of
"demoncracy."

Gwendolyn Brooks's view of the antagonism between blacks
and whites is limited to material jealousy, indifference, and
individual acts of oppression arising from personal prejudice.
The title poem of her volume In the Mecca treats as a minor
theme jealousy of blacks for the material possessions of
whites. The black characters of "In the Mecca" despise
people who possess greater material wealth than they:

Melodie Mary hates everything pretty and plump.
And Melodie, Cap and Casey
and Thomas Earl, Tennessee, Emmett and Briggs
hate sewn suburbs;
hate everything combed and strong; hate people who
have balls, dolls, mittens and dimity frocks and trains
and boxing gloves, picture books, bonnets for Easter.
Lace handkerchief owners are enemies of Smithkind
(1, pp. 381-382).
The hatred that Melodie Mary feels for whites is particularly biting since the poem establishes that "Melodie Mary likes roaches, / and pities the gray rat" (1, p. 382). These creatures offer no threat to Mary, and she can identify with them because of the indifference of the world to their pain, suffering and death. "Trapped in his privacy of pain / the worried rat expires, / and smashed in the grind of a rapid heel / last night's roaches lie" (1, p. 382). Melodie Mary feels that whites who possess material wealth feel the same impersonal disgust for blacks that her people feel for the creatures, the rats and roaches, which they try to crush.

The major theme of "In the Mecca" is the indifference of the white world for the suffering in black neighborhoods. The white sheriff of "In the Mecca" is summoned to search for a lost child whom the reader later discovers was murdered; but he makes only a half-hearted attempt to find the child, feeling no necessity to hasten the search for one human of such minor importance. The character Amos reflects that America needs a "blood bath" to cause her to begin to evaluate her actions:

"Bathe her in her beautiful blood.  
A long blood bath will wash her pure.  
Her skin needs special care.  
Let this good race continue out beyond  
her power to believe or to surmise.  
Slap the false sweetness from that face.  
Great-nailed boots  
must kick her prostrate, heel-grind that soft breast,  
outrage her saucy pride,  
remove her fair fine mask . . ." (1, p. 394).
Brooks uses fairy tale imagery to show the human cruelty arising from racial bias on a personal level in the poem "A Bronzeville Mother Loiters in Mississippi. Meanwhile, a Mississippi Mother Burns Bacon." A young, white husband and his friend kill a young Negro boy when they discover the boy and the white man's wife together in a barn. Brooks indicates that the boy's guilt or innocence is unimportant, for even the wife "could not remember now what/that foe had done/ Against her, or if anything had been done" (1, p. 319). What is important is the attitude of the white man toward the boy's death:

What he'd like to do, he explained, was kill them all. The time lost. The unwanted fame. Still, it had been fun to show those intruders A thing or two. To show that snappy-eyed mother, That sassy, Northern, brown-black-

Nothing could stop Mississippi (1, p. 320).

While the "Fine Prince" spoke these words, the wife, the "Milk-White Maid," wondered:

Had she been worth the blood, the cramped cries, the little stuttering bravado, The gradual dulling of those Negro eyes, The sudden, overwhelming little-boy-ness in that barn? Whatever she might feel or half-feel, the lipstick necessity was something apart. He must never conclude That she had not been worth It (1, p. 320).

Brooks, in telling this story, uses two characters: a young, strong white man who delights in an opportunity to vent his racial hatred by choking to death a black adolescent, and an attractive young white woman whose primary concern is that her husband thinks she is worth the trouble of murdering the
boy. The purpose of the poem is to show the human cruelty arising from racial bias.

Jones implies that the hatred whites feel for blacks is so much a part of the white man's nature that the man himself must be destroyed in order to destroy the hatred, "if I kill you/will not even have chance to hate me" (6, p. 72). He believes that the hatred of the white man is not only directed toward the black man physically but also toward the black man's consciousness, because the white man feels his superiority is threatened. According to Jones, the white man's intention is to prevent the black man from being an individual characterized by love:

And who is the master who corrupts the silence of our beautiful consciousness. . . .
I am a mad nigger in love with everything
You make it impossible to be myself in this place. Where can I go? Where is my self to live in this shaky universe (6, p. 96).

In this same poem, Jones encourages blacks to realize the value struggle which is so much a part of the race conflict and, convinced of the superiority of black motives, to view the clash as one between black humans and "depraved eagles" (6, p. 96). The opposition is that of beauty, which Jones equates with blackness, versus evil, which is white.

The poetry cited thus far in this chapter expresses a deep-rooted frustration growing out of the race conflict. Much of the black poetry of this period gives the black man a choice of the death of his race or the death of the enemy, the white man. "Love Poem" by Nikki Giovanni predicts the
death of the white man by saying it is difficult to love those who are soon to die, but easy to love the black man, who must not be permitted to die (4, p. 33). Nikki Giovanni uses a flag flown at half mast, a familiar symbol in our country of the death of an important figure, on Inauguration Day to symbolize the political death of America:

    the sixties have been one
    long funeral day
    the flag flew at half-mast
    so frequently
    seeing it up
    i wondered what was wrong

    it will go back
    to half
    on inauguration day (4, p. 33).

The many deaths of important figures in America and the frequent lowering of the flag represent to her a perpetual state of mourning caused by the corruption of America in the hands of bigots. The poem compares the political system in this nation to a corporation whose business is death, "united quakers and crackers/for death, inc.,/are back in the driver's seat" (4, p. 34). In this poem, Giovanni speaks of an eternal flame which will be fed by the bodies of those blacks who do not plan the death of whites, for she sees the necessity of death for one group:

    it's a question of power
    which we must wield
    if it is not
    to be wielded against
    us (4, p. 34).

In order to destroy totally the image of a benevolent America, these writers show white America as the enemy of all
non-whites. Giovanni, for example, mentions the death of the Indians at the hands of early Americans, the death of children in Vietnam from napalm, the death of black people from "exposure to wine/and poverty programs" as a result of the life white America forces upon them (4, p. 24). Giovanni believes whites are guilty of exonerating themselves from responsibility in their acts of aggression. She refers to the death of the Carthaginians and the death of the Moors, a war which the white man said he conducted to "civilize a nation" in her poem "The Great Pax White" (4, pp. 61-62). In the name of the white god, whites brought destruction; and, ultimately, "America was born/Where war became peace/And genocide patriotism/And honor is a happy slave" (4, p. 61). While America was "making the world safe for democracy," says Giovanni, twenty million slaves were supporting the country. Economics was confused with true values, and out of these misplaced values came death. Giovanni mentions deaths caused by wars as well as the deaths of John Kennedy, "our great white prince," who was shot "like a nigger in texas"; Malcolm X, "our Black shining prince"; and Martin Luther King, Jr., "our nigger in memphis." With her statement, "Only the torch can show the way," Nikki Giovanni suggests that white America responds only to violence (4, p. 62).

When these writers refer to the war in Vietnam, it is with the purpose of showing America as the enemy of all
non-whites. America fought in Vietnam, they believe, in an effort to inflict American values on others just as the white man sought to inflict his values on the savages transported from Africa centuries ago (4, pp. 71-72). Satirically, Giovanni says of Vietnam that a war over "those slant-eyed bastards" is beneath the dignity of America; and putting herself in the nation's place, she states that if she were given the choice,

I'd go
and let those un
grateful
coloreds
try to get
along
without
me (4, p. 72).

Don L. Lee also treats the subject of the war in Vietnam in order to show whites with a villainous strength which they use to oppress peoples of color. He is in sympathy with the Vietnamese who resist white intervention. He admires those who die at the hands of the whites, those who are "dying for emancipation" (10, p. 22). According to Lee, just as the white man is destroying peace and freedom in Vietnam with napalm, so is he doing in America with broken promises and hypocrisies to the blacks in this country. Lee calls upon his "Viet-brothers" to assist him in his fight for freedom. "Message to a Black Soldier" emphasizes Lee's strong sense of identification with the Vietnamese because of the color line America has drawn:
The black brothers at home refuse
to go to war. They say:

"the Viet Cong never
called us nigger."

As the black soldier shot the Cong,
the Viet cried:

"we are both niggers---WHY?" (8, p. 27).

Lee pictures World War III between the USSR, England,
France, and the United States versus the Third World Power,
the colored peoples of the world. The end result of this
war, says Lee, will be "30 million niggers in/uncle's concen-
tration camps" if blacks do not put consideration of their
people first (8, p. 34). Lee believes that the white man
is creating war among the colored and the weak, letting them
annihilate themselves (9, pp. 43-47). The question "suppose
those/who made/wars/had to fight them?" suggests that the
real enemy of blacks is white power. The whites in power
are using that power to reduce the colored masses to the
status of fools, fighting their wars for them. Lee refers
to his brothers as "blackgold," implying that the white power
structure is using them as cheap, hired killers to build
economic power for the whites. The white man even uses the
educational system to turn blacks against blacks, "his
momma didn't even know him/ . . . /he/cursed at her in per-
fekt English" (9, p. 44). The result, says Lee, will be the
crippling, raping, and killing of the "real blackgold."
Jones, Giovanni, and Lee attempt to bring society in America to a complete circle by making black people feel that whites are unfeeling brutes much as the white people engaged in slave trade in prior centuries felt about their black commodity. Their attempt is evident in their use of animal imagery. Giovanni refers to whites as "lecherous dogs," "white things/ jumping wildly on their feet/banging their paws together," and mentions "the physical nature of the beast" (4, pp. 51, 81, 82). Jones mentions that the battle being waged is between black humans and "depraved eagles" (6, p. 96). He calls the white man an elf (6, p. 156) and speaks of "pink meaty eaters" who aspire to be human, but who can only become human by the purification of fire, the revolution (6, pp. 201-204). Only war and the subsequent defeat of the white man can transform him from a beast into a human being. Lee says that "animals come in all colors" (9, p. 33) and points out that the white man was the real savage but convinced himself that he was doing a humane service for Africans by saving them from savagery and bringing them to America. Lee raises the question of what the Africans were being rescued from, "our happiness, our love, each other?" (8, p. 24). White Americans replaced Africanism with what Lee terms a rape of the mind: "T. V. & straight hair," "Used cars & used homes," "Reefers and napalm," "European history & promises" (8, p. 24). The slave owners, he thinks, were devoted to changing the Negro's
The black revolutionaries then see white people as more than an enemy. To them, the white man is an unscrupulous, savage animal bent upon their destruction. He is a beast which reacts toward the world with violence and can only be dealt with violently. The response of the black revolutionaries over the past few years has been to meet this violence with violence if necessary. The blacks feel justified in expressing willingness for action:

Blessed be machine guns in Black hands
All power to grenades that destroy our oppressor
Peace, Peace, Black Peace at all costs . . .
Blessed is he who kills
For he shall control this earth" (4, 57).

In instilling a sense of pride in Negritude, however, more is involved than merely a physical separation of black and white. More important, in fact, is the goal of creating a unified pride in blackness. For purposes of furthering the social revolution, Jones, Giovanni, Brooks, and Lee must not only instill in their readers an awareness of the distinction between the races, but they must also make their readers aware that there is a marked distinction between Negroes and blacks as they see them. Throughout the sixties, the nation was aware of several factions operating within the black communities. On one hand, Martin Luther King, Jr., and other members of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference were encouraging black people to make their wishes known non-violently. This group advocated use of influence through sheer numbers and through negotiation. King adopted the
social philosophy of Mohandas K. Gandhi, which was based on a Hindu term "satyagraha," literally meaning "truth-force" (12, p. 93). By confronting America with the truth of her racism, Martin Luther King hoped to bring about social revolution. On the other hand, white America was confronted with the militant leadership of Malcolm X, Eldridge Cleaver, Stokely Carmichael, the Black Panther Party, and others. Clearly, there were differing factions within the black communities. Therefore, much black poetry in the 1960's was aimed at unifying black people toward a goal of black consciousness.

Realizing that black people have too long associated the word "Negro" with all the inferior connotations which the term "nigger" has given the original word, the black poets are attempting to create an identification with the term "black" and a pride in the quality of blackness. Don L. Lee expresses the idea quite simply in his poem "The New Integrationist":

I
seek
integration
of
Negroes
with
black
people (8, p. 11).

The poets recognize that before blacks can accomplish any social goals, the divisiveness among themselves must be eliminated. That this divisiveness is apparent to the black community as a whole is shown by the words of a retired maid
round/her every weekend that white man don't/haveta" (11, p. 31). His poem "For Black People" carries the notation just below the title "(\& negroes too, . . .)" (11, p. 55). Here, Lee describes the beginning of the revolution, and colored people are shown to be fighting among themselves, "colored people were fighting each other knowingly." In almost every picture of the early stages of the revolution presented by Lee, this is the recurring situation.

Much less gently than Lee, Nikki Giovanni expresses the same concept. With repetition of the phrase, "Nigger can you kill, Can a nigger kill a honkie," she instills in the black reader's mind the enmity between blacks and whites (4, p. 19). In this poem entitled "The True Import of Present Dialogue, Black Vs. Negro," racial violence seems to be the inevitable outcome of racial differences. In order for this violence to take place and for the black man to conquer the white either symbolically or in reality, the black man must kill something in himself: "Can you kill the nigger/in you/Can you make your nigger mind die/Can you kill your nigger mind" (4, p. 20). The creation of black men is contingent upon the death of the "nigger" qualities. Jones exhorts his people to reject the feelings of inferiority which he has inherited, "quit stuttering and shuffling, look up/black man, quit whining and stooping" (6, p. 112). A black tradition must replace the Negro tradition.
At this point, the poets feel, it is not the white man holding back the social revolution as much as that part of the black which is labeled "nigger." Like Jones and Giovanni, Lee also identifies the real enemy as the "nigger mind." He believes a shift in values is necessary to eradicate failure; the black man must change his attitude toward himself and change his ambitions if he is to accomplish change: him wanted to be a TV star. him is. ten o'clock news. wanted, wanted. nigger stole some lemon & lime popsicles, thought them were diamonds. change nigger change. I know the real enemy[sic] (9, p. 37).

Bitterly, Lee satirizes the Negro's desire to be "cool" and his sacrifice of meaningful action toward this effort: "standing on the corner, thought him was/cool. him still/standing there. it's winter time, him cool" (9, p. 37). Those qualities Lee calls "nigger" are destined to die, and Lee leaves the choice to the Negro whether the eradication is by the black man or the white man.

Gwendolyn Brooks likewise satirizes the Negro's misguided sense of success. "We Real Cool," which is frequently anthologized, strikes out at those who drop out of school to become part of a street gang (1, p. 315). These young people consider their actions to be an acceptable means of proving their adulthood. By loitering late on the streets and taking part in drinking bouts and gang warfare, they seek to become a part
of a social group which gives them a sense of belonging. Her message to these young is the same as Lee's message; it is a warning that such actions bring death. The poets seek to bring an end to this way of life before it brings death to their people singly or collectively.

Not only do the frustrated black poets recognize an enemy in the attitudes of their own people who cling to the types of behavior appropriate to slaves instead of free and equal brothers, but they recognize an enemy in many of those blacks who have succeeded in the white value system. Jones blames whites for the divisiveness this causes within his race. The white man's materialism has spread to members of the "black bourgeoisie" even though they may hate the white man silently for causing the "sickness" they suffer:

There is a sickness to the black man living in white town. Either he is white or he hates white, but even in hating, he reflects, the dead image of his surrounding. His moon is saw dust marble. His walk is long and fast, because he doesn't want the reality of his impotence to sting, instead he will sting you, before you ask him to look deeply into any reflector and see himself eating gravel and dust, and old wood hearts (6, p. 89).

In this "Poem for Religious Fanatics," Jones refers to the "white" black man as a cannibal, "king of the tribes of the lost and the dead" (6, p. 89), the loneliest of men, for he can share in no brotherhood with men of either color. A later poem entitled "Madness" refers to the black bourgeoisie as deserters who are "destined to die with the white man" (6, p. 165)
In "Black Bourgeoisie," Jones attacks these men for their false pride in obtaining outward symbols of acceptance after centuries of abuse from those whom they now feel are associates. As a result of their desertion, they must play a part in the crucifixion of their race. In return, the members of the black bourgeoisie receive a materialistic attitude, symbolized by a gold tooth and dreams about Lincoln automobiles, the "privilege" of straightening their children's hair so they will lose their "identity" among the other children at their white school, the opportunity to smile in a white restaurant, and the curse of self-hatred (6, p. 111). Jones sees these actions as a perversion, and he expresses with obscene scenes the vulgarity of the situations in which blacks find it advantageous to prostrate themselves before the white man: "Another negro leader on the steps of the white house one/kneeling between the sheriff's thighs/negotiating coolly for his people" (6, p. 116).

There are, of course, those blacks who point out to the militant segment that actual racial war can only mean total defeat for the Negro race. Addison Gayle, Jr., discussed revolution in the June, 1972, issue of Black World (3, p. 4). He stated that a Negro revolution in the classic sense of warfare is impossible in America because of the fact that "Power comes from the barrel of a gun. . . . Only men ignorant of these facts would think of patterning an Afro-American revolution after that of the Russians, Cubans, or Africans" (3, p. 4).
Those, like Gayle, who discourage racial warfare are the subject of Nikki Giovanni's "Concerning One Responsible Negro With Too Much Power" (4, p. 52). The "responsible Negro," she states, works in opposition to the black revolution because of fear of the United States military power, and this indicates a lack of manhood on his part. Although she expresses sadness that this is the case, she believes the death of the responsible Negro is a necessity for the benefit of blacks. It is later that she calls "black judgement" upon traitorous blacks who seek protection in the white system at the expense of people of their own color (4, p. 98). This occurs in the title poem of her second volume of poetry, Black Judgement, which grows increasingly vindictive throughout and climaxes with this final poem. Here there is no trace of sympathy, but only hatred for those who preach "responsible revolution."

The primary targets of Gwendolyn Brooks, Nikki Giovanni, LeRoi Jones, and Don Lee are an over concern for economic well-being and the moral hypocrisy which often accompanies monetary aspirations. The poets regard both of these traits as characteristic of whites. They seek to destroy America's image of herself as a country based on equality and justice. In keeping with the attitudes prevalent among many Americans in the last decade, they question our long held self-concept. As the Vietnam war forced individuals in this nation to question America's motivations in foreign involvement, so black poetry raises similar questions regarding social involvement.
These writers view intra-racial divisiveness as an extension of the dishonor brought to the race by those who seek to reject their blackness and force the culture to absorb them. They are convinced that the social structure of America is adverse to pride in Negritude. Therefore, if the black man is to become a part of American culture, he must increase his white consciousness at considerable expense to black loyalty. The middle-class black at whom these young writers strike so forcefully has made his way individually into American culture. Thus, to those left in the ghettos, he seems a traitor. He is suspected of lowering himself in abject submission to the superiority of white values. Militant blacks cannot conceive of a blending of white and black. On the other hand, the "hip" black of whom these writers speak, has also forgotten his responsibility to his race. Adoption of street values has destroyed any social consciousness he possessed. He too makes no contribution to black supremacy. The poetry indicates that the ideal is to unify blacks into a large body with a singular and separate life style qualified for the description "beautiful" which blacks often use to describe their life following the revolution.


One of the first questions to arise in reading contemporary black literature is the question: What do these writers mean by revolution? Should the reader accept the literal, violent meaning of the word? If this is the meaning one accepts, then one envisions a re-play of the 1860's, organized attacks of one group of citizens against another. Perhaps the reference is to a cultural and intellectual revolution. In this case, the death one envisions is that of cultural dualism rather than massive deaths of American citizens.

In Detroit, Michigan, 1963, Malcolm X addressed blacks concerning the revolution. Malcolm X reproached his listeners for using the term loosely. In a discussion of the French, American, Russian, and Chinese revolutions, he pointed out that a revolution involved two concepts - bloodshed and a bid for land. He mentioned these to illustrate his belief that there cannot be a non-violent revolution; therefore, Negroes should decide collectively what they mean by revolution in order to define their goals. Don L. Lee also expresses doubt about the accuracy of the term "revolution."
Like Malcolm X, Lee deplores the freedom with which the term is used. He compares the freedom with which the term is used with the abandon with which drugs are used (1, p. 243). Along with this attitude, he expresses doubt that those who use the word most freely would be willing to perform revolutionary acts.

According to LeRoi Jones, a revolution is occurring now. His book *Home: Social Essays* makes reference to the resulting deaths of many blacks. Specific reference is made to the deaths of four Negro children in a Southern church and the deaths of black leaders as a result of this war (7, p. 133). "A Poem for Oswald Spengler" by Jones suggests that the war is an attempt to halt the Negro's ascent (6, p. 71). As the climbers in this poem attempt to scale "the delicately balanced mountains," their ascent is filled with delays because of the white man's constant attempt to prevent the climb and eventual success of the Negro in attaining the heights of power and acceptance. According to Jones, the only way blacks can survive this war is by being prepared for battle:

So here's a tip
romantics, be on time in your adventure
be on top of the tables with a bottle in your hand
if you want to survive that way,
otherwise retire to your invisible conning tower
that's the house they have the telescope going in
lay then
like they say lay, my man
and wait cold stony eyed
for evolution (6, p. 153).

If the black man chooses the alternate to violence, evolution,
then he has no control over his destiny but must wait for a
natural change to eliminate color barriers.

Brooks, Lee, and Giovanni also feel that war is being
conducted now against blacks just as it has been conducted
against colored peoples throughout history. In their identi-
fication of the white man as the enemy of non-whites, they
set no historical limits. They feel that the interests of
blacks have been, at best, overlooked by whites on this
continent; therefore, every attempt blacks make at equality
or separatism based on racial pride is an act of warfare
with the white establishment. The belief that the revolution
is currently in progress is revealed in Don Lee's "The One
Sided Shoot-out," which bears the notation "for brothers
fred hampton & mark clark, murdered 12/4/69 by chicago
police at 4:30 AM while they slept" (11, p. 52). This poem
illustrates Lee's conviction that the warfare between the
races is a twenty-four hour occurrence. Lee also believes
that the tactics employed by blacks of hiding behind dero-
gatory words which they expect to destroy whites assures
defeat for the race.

The continuance of the revolution seems inevitable
to Giovanni. There is no way to halt it. Even black people
cannot stop the revolution if they should desire to do so.
Her poem entitled "My Poem" declares:

  the revolution
  is in the streets
  and if i stay on
  the 5th floor
it will go on
if i never do
anything
it will go on (4, p. 96).

In Gwendolyn Brooks's latest volume of poetry, Riot, she includes a quotation of Martin Luther King, Jr., "A riot is the language of the unheard" (2, p. 9). The black characters in this volume are determined to make themselves heard, and the most expedient manner by which to accomplish this is war. Throughout Riot, Brooks describes revolutionary acts of the unheard, whose "chains are in the keep of the Keeper/in a labeled cabinet/on the second shelf by the cookies" (2, p. 11). This expression coincides with those charges Brooks makes in "In the Mecca" regarding the indifference of whites toward blacks (1, pp. 377-407). Riot conveys the confusion of war in terms of the individuals involved in it. Brooks describes the death of a young mother, the desperation of white John Cabot as he cries out to the Lord to protect him from the touch of blackness, the children who still chatter, and the young men who run through the streets.

To Brooks, the purpose of the social revolution is to unmask America to allow the nation to see "how she was so long grand,/flogging her dark one with her own hand,/watching in meek amusement while he bled" (3, p. 395). If the mask of pretense is destroyed, then the nation will realize the extent of her transgressions and hypocrisies. But, unlike other recent black poets, Brooks predicts that America, as currently constituted, shall recover from the experience of war.
Three of these writers make it quite a point in their poetry to call blacks to unity in the name of revolution. Don Lee does so by satirizing what he sees as the weakness of blacks in their attempt to be "cool" (10, pp. 24-25). This prior interest preempts any effort they might make for the benefit of the black community. He further implies that the black man's pleasure is in talking about the revolution rather than acting to further the cause in any way (10, p. 57). By choosing the way of inaction over meaningful performance, the black man is tacitly agreeing to the supremacy of white over black, and every act of conscious choice reflects his subconscious preference for white over black (11, pp. 67-70). The revolution is hampered by these vain acts of disunity. Sacrifice of self is a requisite.

Giovanni's call to action includes the reminder in "No Reservations" that there will be no formal notices supplied by a draft board (5, pp. 9-10). The response must be based on a personal attitude of self-sacrifice. There is no way the black man can take part in the revolution on a part-time basis. There will be no commemorative activities to increase morale, no banners, and no music. Instructions will be few and will depend on a personal motivation to be carried out with a devotee's energy. The strongest motivation will be knowledge of the results of failure:

there are no reservations
for the revolution ...
there will be reservations only if we fail (5, pp. 3-10).

The steps Giovanni outlines for preparation begin with a total separation from that which is considered white and build to the point where "all honkies and some negroes will have to die" (4, p. 46) when black law shall be dominant.

Giovanni compares the revolution to birth. Like an unborn child, the black man's significance in this country was a tiny speck unnoticed by anyone. As he grew, people became aware of his presence, which brought joy to some and sorrow to others. Ultimately, the will for freedom which developed in the child overcame any efforts to suppress his birth:

we grow
in a cell that spreads
like a summer cold
to other people
they notice and laugh
some are happy
some wish to stop
our movement . . .

they put us in a cell
to make us behave
never realizing it's from cells
we have escaped
and we will be born
from their iron cells
now people with a new cry (5, p. 11).

LeRoi Jones sends out an "SOS" calling blacks to unify for action (6, p. 115). He calls other blacks to action in "SOS," and he bids himself to act in "Citizen Cain" (6, p. 3). Jones and the other three poets frequently refer to interracial divisiveness and resulting conflicts as a game. In
"Citizen Cain," the game is football; and blacks must master the techniques of the game in order for them to become winners. Jones believes that the war which is in progress must be faced as a reality and met as one does the challenge of competitive sport with the same spirit of dedication to team. "The Calling Together" expresses his conviction that there is no limit to the amount of progress which can be achieved by black unity (6, pp. 173-174). The result could be the destruction of the white man's world, and the new life that could be established thereafter Jones equates with heaven.

If this is to be a revolution in the classic sense of the word, then the oppressed must gain financial power to sustain the war. The white man's power is based on money, and the extent of his economic superiority equals the extent of his control over colored peoples, according to Jones's "Black People" (6, p. 225). Therefore, the revolutionaries must obtain large sums of money. For this reason, implies Jones, the first revolutionary act following the unification of Negroes is the accumulation of wealth by the only way open to blacks - theft. The first stage of the revolution is looting and pillaging. This poem describes these acts of theft as occurring against a background of music, and Jones refers to them as the "magic dance." The purpose of this dance is to take what the black man needs to develop his own world and to finance the revolution which he believes is his only
hope for an opportunity to develop a world of his own. The combination of looting, dance, and music occurs again, this time against the backdrop of actual war in "Three Movements and a Coda" (6, pp. 104-105). Jones describes the cough of mortars and machine guns in the background as blacks loot and pilfer through ruined shops and stores. Encouragement shouted from one looter to another he refers to as the "words of lovers," suggesting that these acts are not a result of hatred, but of love for one another, and are enacted with similar passion. He declares that all white heroes are dead or soon will be. This is the natural way; the black man is attempting to carry out the will of God in destroying the white nation.

The "Black Art" section of Black Magic Poetry is described by Jones in "An Explanation of the Work" as the "crucial seeing, the decisions, the actual move" (6, n.p.). What he terms the "actual move" includes a glimpse of literal war:

Of the fire, or the red bursts, eyes hearts yellow girls explosive disillusions. Oh yes the fire, the running, and pistols cracking. Of the fire, the smoke, the yells, and disaster. The dead babies, and blown resolutions, . . . (6, p. 122). This scene is included in a poem entitled "Movie." When this poem is studied in combination with Jones's comments from "An Explanation of the Work," the poem appears to foreshadow a literal black/white war. However, when LeRoi Jones
speaks of the revolution, his meaning is never completely clear. Critics cannot say that the picture of war presented in "Movie" is Jones's preconception of a future state of events. All the critic can safely say is that Jones has given a surrealistic portrayal of a movie. In this portrayal, "we," the black people, "were without" while "I," presumably a mythic identification of the black man with the hero of the movie, "am beating the life out of him" (6, p. 123). Jones seems to want to describe in explicit terms the death of the enemy with such words as "his/grey pulpy shit from his head 'stickies the floor'" (6, p. 123), but only if he defends himself with obscurity.

In an interview with Jones on the David Susskind Show, April 3, 1966, Susskind and Norman Mailer attempted to establish the exact meaning of the revolution of which Jones spoke. In the interview, as in his poetry, LeRoi Jones managed to evade this question. His evasions usually centered around the phrase "by whatever means necessary" or synonymous implications. When asked whether this destruction of whites in this nation was to be an act of some foreign power, a Negro act, or an act of God, his answer was very noticeably inexplicit.

An article published in Commonweal in June, 1968, "Pursued by the Furies" by Paul Velde, states:

There is an imaginary battle going on between blacks and whites in this country, not unlike the chess
battles fought by Chinese generals in lieu of a real slaughter. Nobody seems to want to get killed, though clearly a lot of people want to do some killing (13, p. 441).

According to Mr. Velde, literal translation of Jones's poetry is an indication of immaturity and fear because Jones is constructing imaginary disaster to bring about a realization of what might very possibly occur. David Littlejohn, author of Black on White, holds a similar opinion. He calls Jones's poetry "an attempt at a new stimulation of consciousness through words made malleable" (12, p. 100). Whether Jones is attempting to work on the imagination or to speak literally, fearful whites interpret his poetry as a physical assault.

Giovanni wants blacks to stimulate the awareness of social revolution in America. "Record" sets forth the need for blacks to commit a major assassination (4, p. 66). Such an act would serve as an indication of the revolution which whites could not ignore. Giovanni's concept of the revolution is somewhat unrealistic. "Of Liberation" describes her concept of the revolution:

The Red Black and Green must wave from all our buildings as we build our nation
Even the winos have a part - they empty the bottles which the children can collect
Teen-age girls can fill with flammable liquid and stuff with a rag (4, p. 48).

She goes on to say that guns and ammunition must be smuggled underneath clothing to suitable arsenals in bookstores and dress shops, while the church provides a blessing. These are disruptive tactics which will cause unrest in the nation,
but will not result in the deaths of all whites which she so frequently mentions.

Complementing Giovanni's idealistic attitude toward the nature of the revolution are the visions she, Lee, and Jones have of the results of the revolution. This act is to result in nation-wide peace and brotherhood. Poverty will be eliminated. Strife and bigotry will no longer exist. National concern will be centered on the welfare of all. Materialism will not threaten man's sense of value: therefore, crime will cease to be a problem. Neighborhoods will be purified by "the Black Flame" of revolution (4, p. 49). The death of the white man will allow survivors to "gather the fruit of the sun" (6, p. 225).

The cycle of despair, revolution, and freedom can be traced in Lee's poem "For Black People" (11, pp. 54-59). The tolling of a church bell heralds the beginning of the revolution when the two opposing factions in American duality begin the battle for survival. Christ and Allah are engaged in a battle for leadership, with Christ, at this point, the seeming victor. The black people are struggling with each other, and members of the black bourgeoisie attempt to maintain their positions in spite of efforts of black revolutionaries to call them back to their own people. The section "Transition and Middle Passage" is characterized by unity among Negroes as they become victorious. Napalm raids and gas masks are frequent sights in the midst of the rapidly
cruining economic and social structures. In the end, the
Reel World emerges with black people and Allah as the
victors:

men stopped eating each other and hunger existed
only in history books.
money was abolished and everybody was rich.
every home became a house of worship & pure water
runs again.
young blk/poets take direction from older blk/poets
& everybody listens.
those who speak have something to say & people
seldom talk about themselves.
those who have something to say wait their turn
& listen to their own message.
the hip thing is not to be cool & get high but
to be cool & help yr/brother.
the pope retired & returned the land & valuables
his organization had stolen under the guise
of religion.
Allah became a part of the people & the people
knew & loved him as they knew and loved
themselves.
the world was quiet and gentle and beauty came back.
people were able to breathe.
blk/women were respected and protected & their
actions
proved deserving of such respect & protection.
each home had a library that was overused.
the blackman had survived (11, p. 59).

Suddenly, the black man is at home in a Utopian world
where he may feel self-respect. His children can be reared
without degradation and educated in the ways of black
people (6, p. 225). Their religion dominates, and all are
in harmony with the will of Allah. With the annihilation
of the white man has come the annihilation of human weak-
nesses. Materialism has been replaced with brotherly concern.
Lust exists in no form; it has been replaced by reverence
between the sexes. Seeds of apathy and ignorance have been
killed by love of knowledge. There is no provision made for a system of trade or a maintenance of livelihood. Presumably, with total brotherhood, one will derive pleasure from building homes, providing medical care, and growing food for his neighbors. Thus, money has been abolished since no need exists for it. Money represents the moral vacuum of the white man and his abuse of power. Now in the Third World, man has freed himself from this pecuniary evil which has haunted him throughout history. The black human struggle with "depraved eagles" (6, p. 96) has been won; righteousness has conquered power. The white man has made it impossible for the black man to be himself, to live according to his ethical values. Now, the black man has made a place for himself in the universe.

Jones states in "Labor and Management" that it is the nature of change that the way must seem jagged but, in truth, contains the smoothness of "universal wisdom" (6, p. 141). The black man has been predestined for mastery because of his strength. His will to endure has been like that of the earth, unconquerable. Jones often speaks of the period of darkness while the white man dominates and the period of light to follow when black shall dominate. In "Ghosts" (6, p. 97), Jones describes the darkness followed by sunrise. At dawn, white power, which Jones personifies in the figures of three
dead policemen, lies staring in the cold while a clean wind blows. To Jones, the purification process has been completed. "Ballad of Morning Streets" describes the dawn following the revolution as a time of "pure love magic" (6, p. 166). The projection of warmth in this poem contrasts sharply with the physical images of cold found throughout his poetry when he refers to the white world.

Lee's latest volume of poetry, Directionscore, was published in 1971, only one year after the preceding volume, We Walk the Way of the New World, was published. Although the period of time elapsed between the two volumes is not great, there is a tremendous change in the tone of Lee's poetry regarding his vision of the new world and his call to revolution. He is still condemning his brothers for their shallow materialistic desires, and he is still trying to eradicate those qualities he has previously called "nigger" from his people. But now, he is not calling them to acts of violence, but to constructive acts of unity. He exhorts them to "trick the brother into learning" to think, read, and teach (9, p. 200). At the same time, they should remain loyal to black leaders of the past. He encourages blacks to become "somethin'/u ain't suppose to be" (9, p. 200), and thereby gain respect. Lee's vision of the new world in this volume is a "jump forward into the past/to bring back/ goodness" (9, p. 203). Blacks should be cleaner, stronger, wiser, and quicker than they have been previously (9, p. 202).
Black unity is still important, but the unity he stresses now is with the black people of the world; Kenya, Tanzania, Guinea, West Indies, and Harlem (9, p. 202). African names of the Swahili language are used to indicate desirable qualities which blacks should cultivate: Mwilu, likes black; Musyoka, one who always returns; Musomi, scholarly; Kitheka, wanderer of the forest; Amana, peacefulness; Kinanthi, one who searches for freedom (9, pp. 206-208). The new world pictured in Directionscore is still based on love, but industrious application of the individual is also stressed.

The question regarding the actual meaning of the black revolution still has not been answered. At best, it can be said that the poets' concept of the revolution is ambiguous. At worst, it can be said that their concept of the revolution is absurd. LeRoi Jones wanders around the subject in an illusory manner, describing how "I stood upon a mailbox/waving my yellow tee-shirt/watching the grey tanks/stream up central Avenue" (8, p. 16), but not explaining the source of the tanks or who mans them. He implies that the revolution is to be funded by the robberies and looting of blacks. He does not clarify whether these funds shall be used to purchase the tanks which he describes in New York City or whether these tanks are in use to prevent the pillage. Since he does make a substantially clear statement in his Social Essays that there is a revolution occurring now, it seems that Jones's most lucid concept of the
revolution is a gradual process marked by many deaths, but not massive deaths. In his essay "What Does Nonviolence Mean?," he states that if the Negro protest grows into actual massive violence, then America would be forced to follow the example of South Africa or Hitler's Germany. He expresses his hope that this is "ugly fantasy" (7, p. 154).

If the purpose of the revolution is to annihilate the white man, and it has been shown herein that this is a commonly stated goal, then one must assume that the uncoordinated efforts of a group which is clearly divided within itself could be capable of overcoming the strength of the entire nation. Homemade firebombs combined with devotion to cause could result in victory. If the result is not victory for black people, then the result could be the concentration camps which Lee describes. Brooks alone is not given to fantasies regarding the black/white war. Riot does not extend its description beyond the realm of the possible, but it describes isolated scenes of conflict which can and do occur.

The assumptions made in the preceding paragraph are inevitable if the poetry is to be taken literally. However, these poets are neither untalented nor unintelligent. They would not let errors in judgment creep into their work without being aware of it. Because the absurdity of total war on America must surely be obvious to them, one can conclude, as Mr. Velde stated in his article in Commonweal, that
literal interpretation of their poetry is a mark of immaturity and fear in the reader. If the reader is to give literal meaning to this poetry, he must judge the writers as immature as well as unaware, and such a judgment is not logical. The only logical conclusion, therefore, is that the work of these poets serves some broader function. Yet the significance of their work cannot be understood without examination of the conditions which produced the frustration behind this poetry.
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CHAPTER IV

AN ACT OF DESPERATION

The American Negro obtained his freedom from slave masters over one hundred years ago through war. Whites and blacks alike believed that this would be the end of bloodshed among Americans. Through the first half of this century, both groups clung to the conviction that the conflict within the country could be negotiated intelligently. Confidence in humanity kept these hopes alive through the 1950's in spite of sporadic outbreaks of racial violence throughout the preceding five decades.

The period following the Civil War made it clear to Negroes that freedom from slavery would not bring relief from persecution. The nature of the racial conflict of these years can best be illustrated by figures provided by sociologist C. Eric Lincoln in his book Sounds of the Struggle: Persons and Perspectives in Civil Rights, which traces the civil rights movement since its beginning. He states of the thirty years from 1884 to 1914, a period which ended only six years before the beginning of the Harlem Renaissance:

In the last sixteen years of the 19th century, 2500 human beings were sacrificed to the rope and faggot. Thereafter from 1900 to the outbreak of World War I in 1914, the pace of the killings was more leisurely; an annual average of seventy-eight black men and women graced the magnolias, or popped and sputtered in the bonfires before the altar of white supremacy (12, p. 229).

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Mr. Lincoln further explains that the greatest threat to the black man's self-respect is not the physical injury which has been inflicted upon his race, but his loss of the history and culture of his race coupled with the rejection he has received in America (12, p. 219). Another writer, Eugene Perkins, also agrees that the greatest harm has been inflicted on the black man by the obliteration of black consciousness with the result that the black man has had to adapt completely to American culture "thus negating his own fundamental existence" (3, p. 87). According to Mr. Lincoln, there has been a social neurosis produced in the American Negro which can only increase as the margin between those Negroes at the bottom of the social pyramid and those at the top is increased by education and economic advantages available to the uppermost (12, p. 219).

Having accomplished what blacks see as only mild reform within America since the Civil War, they began to search desperately for some solution. The poverty in which they continue to live is to them proof of America's repression of their race. The contrast between the prosperity of white Americans and the material needs of black people convince some of them that there is a conspiracy functioning to maintain deep levels of poverty and inferiority among blacks. Both these attitudes can be seen in the introduction to Don L. Lee's most recent volume of poetry, Directionscore.

The Civil Rights legislation of the 1950's renewed the promise that social revolution could be accomplished without more war. However, this same legislation soon became a source of bitterness while it had been a source of hope and aspiration while it was being sought. The results proved to be a disappointment. Although the black man could now take a seat on a city bus wherever he pleased or could eat in his choice of restaurants, he still found his economic opportunities limited; and his children still attended below standard schools. His disappointment began to turn to anger. It was at this crucial point that Martin Luther King, Jr., intervened with his non-violent protest groups. The activities of these groups dispelled, momentarily, the anger and hatred of frustrated blacks. For a while, some blacks felt as if they had channeled their energies into meaningful activities which would surely bring favorable results. As the furor in Washington mounted over the racial situation yet no significant changes resulted, bitterness increased; and the literature reflected this bitterness. As Richard
Wright predicted in the 1940's, Negro literature was turning to strictly racial themes as a result of persecution (1, p. 17).

Nikki Giovanni's "Adulthood" traces the development of despair within the black community as a whole, but also on a personal basis (5, pp. 68-70). In her increasing involvement with the black cause throughout college, in organizing a theater and lecturing on black history, she found that she had faith in progress and human nature that the problems the country faced would be solved intelligently. Then the violent sixties arrived. The poem includes a list of twelve significant murders and assassinations as well as various arrests and discriminatory acts. Such actions, Giovanni implies, destroyed her faith in human nature to progress cooperatively. Suddenly, she finds herself wondering if it is worthwhile to be a committed individual:

and i sometimes wonder why i didn't become a debutante
sitting on porches, going to church all the time,
wondering
is my eye make-up on straight
or a withdrawn discoursing on the stars and moon
instead of a for real Black person who must now feel
and inflict pain (5, p. 69).

The feeling of futility and despair which replaced her faith as a result of the discord in America is the reaction many blacks felt. At this point, Giovanni feels that the solution lies in inflicting pain rather than in cooperation. She expresses a common opinion held by blacks and whites when she suggests that had it not been for the brutality of the
past decade the crisis might be past. Following the unfortunate incidents of the 1960's, black people saw no choice open to them, "we got war" (5, p. 48).

Blacks believe that civil rights legislation and pressure exerted by influential citizens groups have resulted in mere tokenism. The occasional black found in a titular position within the business heirarchy serves as an example of tokenism. "The Only One" illustrates the perpetuation of the myth of equal opportunity as a result of a "visit from some human righters" (9, p. 20). After serving the company for fifteen years, the black man is given a titled position which was created in order to maintain the semblance of progress. The poem is based on Lee's experience when he was promoted to section supervisor in a mail order house for which he worked (13, p. 74).

The black man, however, is not satisfied with what he sees as tokenism. He senses that the white man still contends that collectively his people are unfit to become a part of the true American society. In Giovanni's words:

when we integrated the schools
they began moving away from public education
when we integrated the churches
they started the god is dead bit
now we're integrating the politics
and they're moving to a police state (5, p. 85).

Black values are not in keeping with white standards. The bitterness of these poets can only be understood when one recalls the black concept of the nature of the white
man. Lee describes the irony that because blacks have resorted to violence, looting, and burning, to obtain what white America was unwilling to grant them otherwise, they are by nature unfit for communion with "pure Christian Americans" (11, p. 23). Yet the black man is attempting to destroy, in the only way left to him after the failure he has faced in the previous decades, what seems to him as pure evil. Evil is the only word he is emotionally capable of applying to a society which permits his people to suffer the direst poverty in the midst of abundance. Lee voices the hopelessness cultivated in blacks by the priority values of America when he states simply, "Parking lots are more important than I am" (11, p. 23).

Giovanni's "Of Liberation" points out that the white man insists on applying white standards to every phase of black lives (5, p. 45). The introduction to Directionscore by Lee suggests that many blacks believe that whites systematically strive to destroy the Negro's self-concept (10, p. 23). As a result, a marked change is made necessary; black Americans realize that status quo can no longer be maintained. Status quo, to them, means that black people exist on the fringe of society. They will not change their values to fit into the white system, and the system will not change its values in order to fit them into the scheme somewhere. Therefore, a social revolution is necessary. The type of revolution seems to be a decision that can be made only by the people themselves.
The last decade has shown blacks that political negotiation will not solve the problem. Blacks have lost faith in both the ability and the desire of the government to provide an answer. Giovanni expresses this disillusionment in her poem "A Historical Footnote to Consider Only When All Else Fails": "LBJ has made it/quite clear to me/He doesn't give a/Good goddamn what I think" (5, p. 16). With a glimpse at aspirations behind the Black Nationalist movement, she envisions the time when the Black Power revolt is completed and the black people have their own leader "in/The Black House" (5, p. 17). Her poem "Ugly Honkies, Or The Election Game and How To Win It" shows American politicians to be unequal to black standards physically and morally (5, pp. 81-86). This poem uses the metaphorical rape of innocent Americans to symbolize the decadence of the political system:

"if we must be screwed - they could at least be pretty"
"but the uglies kill"
"all the pretties"
"like john and bobby"
"and evers and king (5, p. 82).

"Ugly Honkies" salutes "the Chicago kids" (5, p. 82), who, Giovanni says, pointed out to the world the bestiality of the white power structure as proof of a fact blacks had tried to establish long ago. She also says that the older politicians despise white youth because of their departure from acceptable middle-class standards.
At this point, changes within the government matter little to blacks. "Ugly Honkies" says this is true because there are only two parties in America, the "pro-niggers" and the "anti-niggers"; and the "pro-niggers" are being killed. The deaths of the Kennedy brothers are mentioned as proofs of this fact, just as the assassinations represent the corruption of American values:

the politics of '68 remind us grievously
of the politics of '64
the deal to put the bird
and his faggoty flock in the white nest
(which began in dallas)
is being replayed and repaid
(the downpayment being made in los angeles)
with tricky dicky to win this time
(the final payment chicago)
cause there's only two parties in this country
anti-nigger and pro-nigger
most of the pro-niggers are now dead
this second reconstruction is being aborted
as was the first
the pro-niggers council voting
the anti-niggers have guns (5, p. 83).

Since she sees the only choice in politics as being the selection of a lesser evil, she exhorts blacks to reject both choices. Because violence has controlled American politics in recent years, "the barrel of a gun is the best/voting machine/your best protest vote/is a dead honkie" (5, p. 83).

Giovanni's antipathy toward the government is based on what she sees as bigotry, decadence, and ruthlessness. Also, American imperialism is recently under attack from blacks and whites. The Black Manifesto adopted by the National Black Economics Development Conference in Detroit,
Michigan, on April 26, 1969, attacks the United States on the basis of its imperialism which blacks feel is designed to protect only the few rich whites who control the country. "These ruthless, barbaric men have systematically tried to kill all people and organizations opposed to its imperialism" (3, p. 293).

Jones's disillusionment with the political framework is expressed as an abhorrence for the "lies of death" of a "man growing bald and fat" in "Election Day-2" (6, p. 213). He believes that the election process leads to a corruption which results in death, and America regards the killers as heroes. With revulsion, he describes the black politician, who is an unfeeling man, "made of iron," directed by the white establishment. Again, Jones obscenely expresses the perversion the black man submits himself to as an instrument of white debasement. He satirizes the indifference the "victorious candidate ... imitation whiteman" manifests toward the black communities when he agrees that the black man is "indeed scum" (6, p. 213). The black man is a vulnerable observer who can do nothing except, perhaps, pray. "Babylon Revisited" speaks metaphorically of America as a white bitch who faces no future because she is empty and sterile, having no reproductive organs (6, p. 159). She is a parasitic witch living off the weak, containing inside only infected memories. Jones prays for defeat to enter this empty creature "like lye mixed with/cocoa and alaga
syrup" that she will find death approaching where she least expects it (6, p. 159).

Lyndon Johnson represents to Jones the perpetuation of corruption. He speaks of the "Congealed Vomit/In Lyndon Johnson's Mouth" which is a deterrent in the progress toward understanding (6, p. 219). He calls the former President and members of his family mass murderers in a poem which gives the greatest evidence of his deep-seated hatred, "Word from the Right Wing" (6, p. 93). This is a hatred for more than Lyndon Johnson. It is a loathing for the American system, which Johnson represents, in addition to those elements which have created the system, personified by Johnson's mother, and that which encourages and fosters its continuance, his wife. Another poem discusses Lyndon Johnson. "What Am I Offered" describes a slave auction where Johnson is the merchandise for sale. Johnson's character flaws are enumerated, and he is assigned responsibility for the "blood of the century" (6, p. 64).

Jones also assigns to Martin Luther King, Jr., much responsibility for the conditions under which black people continue to live. In Home: Social Essays, Jones indicates that King's policy of non-violence served only to maintain life as it has been since Reconstruction (7, pp. 46-54). He sees King as functioning in coordination with the evils of the system and, therefore, repressing progress (6, p. 18).
Jones believes that there is no compromise possible, for any concession to the power of the white enemy would mean total defeat. The first step the black man wishes to accomplish is that of recognition: "I can't say who I am/unless you agree I'm real" (6, p. 47). Therefore, his position is that if the black man attempts to negotiate with white power, the whites offer measures to placate temporarily. Jones believes the white man is afraid to identify a legitimate social error which would call for an admission that injustice has existed in this country for centuries.

Blacks feel as if they have made fools of themselves by placing any faith in peaceful protest. Disgusted and disappointed with the events as they have remained for some time, blacks want "no more marching." A poem by this title written by Don Lee reflects an awareness that peaceful protest is useless:

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now you is marchen
& singen
"we shall overcome"
getten hit &
looken dumb
& smilen (9, p. 33).
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In desperation after other methods had failed to bring about change, black poets of the 1960's began to discuss war. "I began to dance dangerous steps,/warrior's steps" (9, p. 31). "The Death Dance" is dedicated to Lee's mother. This narrative of a black mother forced to accept a job in a white man's kitchen to pay for her son's education discloses the indignities she suffers from her white male employer. The
son, aware of the mother's sorrow, withdraws into the pride of his African heritage as many Afro-Americans are doing today. He and his black brothers threaten a war born out of the black man's desire to prove himself a human. The young warrior says of his dance:

my steps took on a cadence with other blk/brothers & you could hear the cracking of gun shots in them & we said that, "we were men, black men" (9, p. 31).

He threatens to commit an act of war, but he does not project himself beyond the act to see the consequences. The death dance itself has become the all-consuming ideal.

Neither does Gwendolyn Brooks's character Rudolph Reed look beyond the act of vengeance in "The Ballad of Rudolph Reed." When his daughter, small Nabel, is injured on the third night of harassment from white neighbors, Rudolph Reed fails to consider the results of his actions. With a recklessness caused by despair, he is "no longer thinking" when he rushes from the house armed with a pistol and a butcher knife (4, p. 362). Rudolph Reed and Lee's young warrior are involved in a situation calling for violent reaction as a natural human impulse. Several poems illustrate the poets' thoughts that violence may be the only path left for the Negro. Giovanni's "The Great Pax White" asserts that this country was established, liberated, and preserved by aggression; therefore, blacks feel that they must react to this aggression with physical resistance (5, n. 62).
Jones feels that Americans have been conditioned to respect force. "The Death of Nick Charles" declares:

We love only heroes. Glorious death in battle. Scaling walls, burning bridges behind us, destroying all ways back. All retreat. As if some things were fixed (6, p. 31).

Jones's "Tone Poem" implies that history has glorified the disasters of the past which arose out of man's lust, and violence has been used to settle most disagreements. Wars have always been the result of the passions of the powerful because "the general good has no troops or armor" (6, p. 28). History forgets those who love while focusing on those who hate. For these reasons, Jones believes, war stems from the nature of humanity, which exalts it.

The attitudes of blacks toward social revolution cannot be adequately understood without some brief acknowledgement of their changing attitudes toward religion. Benjamin E. Mays's book, *The Negro's God as Reflected in His Literature* traces the development of the Negro's religion from approximately 1760 to the present trend away from God, which began about 1920. Written in 1937, this book contains a paragraph which serves as both a summary and a prophecy applicable to the black poets today:

Though it is beside the point in this study, it is the belief of the writer that the Negro's firm faith in God has saved him up to this point from violent revolutionary methods of achieving his rights. His faith in God has not only served as an opiate for the Negro, but it has suggested and indicated that pacific and local methods are to be...
progressively to the left in the effort to achieve complete citizenship rights for the Negro, he will become more irreligious and he will become more militant and communistic in his efforts to attain to full manhood in American life. It is significant to note that prior to 1914, one finds no ideas of God that imply doubt and repudiation. Since the War, and particularly since 1920, there is a wave of cynicism, defeat, and frustration in the writings of young Negroes where God is discussed (14, p. 244).

James Baldwin refers to the role of religion in the black communities as a "complete and exquisite fantasy revenge" (2, p. 54). The social conditions under which the black man has lived while his white neighbors enjoyed comfort and prosperity have forced the Negro to anticipate justice in the after life. This is not an individual peculiarity of black religion, of course, but a confidence found in many oppressed peoples that difficulties in this life prepare one for salvation. A strong faith in God would seem to be an outgrowth of the condition of slavery.

No attempt shall be made here to analyze in depth these writers' attitudes toward God. To do so would be unnecessary and inappropriate for the purposes of this paper. However, there is an important relationship between the fact that some blacks can no longer find solace in religion and the fact that some blacks are willing to conduct a large scale war, if necessary, to improve their earthly lives. A brief enumeration, by no means exhaustive, of some of the points brought out in the poetry would be sufficient to show this important relationship.

The poetry of Lee, Giovanni, and Jones is marked by rejections of God and religion as well as efforts to justify
their militancy which borders on the patriarchal attitudes of the Old Testament. Leroi Jones refers to God as "skinny and timid, and finally nasty" being whom people do not recognize, presumably because this is not the figure they have believed themselves to be worshipping (6, p. 58). Another reference to God as a "white man/with/a dueling scar" emphasizes Jones's conviction of God's prejudice (6, p. 61). Lee stresses the futility of Christianity when he describes his feelings of God's irrelevance and the absurdity of dependence upon prayer:

Whom can I confess to?  
The Catholics have some cat  
They call father,  
mine cutout a long time ago --  
Like His did ...  
To a Buddhist friend I went,  
Listened, he didn't --  
Advised, he did,  
"pray, pray, pray and keep one eye open."  
I didn't pray -- kept both eyes open (9, p. 21).

Lee decries many aspects of white religion and describes various Christian figures as mercenaries engaged in sordid ventures for their own temporal advantage in "The Black Christ" (9, pp. 22-23).

In spite of these denials of God's power, there is evidence of personal identity with Christ:

without a doubt  
rome did the white thing when it  
killed  
christ  
it has been proven
that j. c. was non-white in the darkest way possible (3, p. 22).

Jones uses numerous equations of Christ with the black man. The frame of reference in these analogies is usually that the black man, like Christ, must perform a function of salvation. The black man must "evolve again to civilize the world" (6, p. 199).

Both Jones and Giovanni seem to echo the Bible in seeking to absolve their people from guilt feelings over having willed destruction on whites. Jones accomplishes this by repetition of the proverbial sounding words:

I will slaughter the enemies of my father
I will slay those who have blinded him (6, pp. 197-198).

Giovanni often uses such a recurring device and intersperses phrases from familiar hymns (5, pp. 48, 57, 60-62).

As usual, Brooks does not take the approach used by the younger poets. She describes the return of Christ to a war-torn earth where He found His message of peace unwanted. She expresses faith that Christ can offer mankind peace, but she possesses no faith that human nature will desire any type of life but that which is marked with conflict:

Now tell of why His power failed Him there?
His power did not fail. It was that, simply,
He found how much the people wanted war.
How much it was their creed, and their good joy.
And what they lived for. He had not the heart
To take away their chief sweet delectation (4, p. 369).
Naturally, a civilized being must rationalize and try to justify acts of physical violence upon another, particularly if he has long been the victim of social aggression. Although Jones is perhaps best known for the bitterness and hatred in his work as a reflection of a deep personal conflict with society, he also shows a greater effort to justify his hatred, revealing an uncertainty in his own emotions. He questions whether any individual can expect a man to live in oppression without experiencing the feeling that any means would be appropriate for use in terminating the unbearable conditions under which he lives (6, p. 27). Thought will accomplish nothing. For too long, the world has been of the opinion that hardship proves to be its own reward, but Jones sees no value in "giving medals to every limping coon/in creation" (6, p. 27). He questions if there is not more demanded for reparation than this. Only the poor themselves are qualified to judge whether the ends, in this instance an end to poverty and discrimination, can justify the means, the type of social revolution made necessary. The choice must be made at this point. If the black man chooses not to force society to acknowledge him at this time, then it means total defeat for the race. Jones indicates that black people want to be recognized as a unit, not to be assimilated into society and lose their identity as blacks feel Italians and Jews have done by accepting white American standards and values.
These poets feel that blacks must choose whether to act now or accept gradual racial death. The evidence indicates that blacks no longer have faith in a God of deliverance. God now seems to be, at best, indifferent to their plight. Political assistance has proven to be disillusioning. Assimilation is undesirable because it requires a debasement of that which is regarded as black and obeisance to that which is considered white. The only substantial progress the race has made in this nation was accomplished by the Civil War. Grimly and somewhat unwillingly, these poets find their thoughts turning back to war as the only means. LeRoi Jones attests the fact that the black man is not necessarily eager to engage in warfare with whites. He describes himself as walking the streets "confused and half sick/with despair at what I must do" (6, p. 85). Yet the vision of the outcome which will result from complacency makes it possible for him to face the inevitable. He also anticipates those who would point out to his people that revolution is impossible for practical reasons. He is reasoning with himself by an admission that visions of revolution might be an escape mechanism cultivated by total hopelessness of significant change when he writes "Perhaps/it is best to ease into kill-heaven than have no heaven at all" (6, p. 27).

Jones defines both the extent and the source of the desperation felt by black people when he reveals that some
had placed their faith in a natural occurrence to bring an end to their suffering; some had placed their faith in the belief that an unnatural occurrence brought about by some spirit greater than man would deliver them from their oppression; some had evinced confidence that political leaders could offer advantageous action. "But none has come. (Repeat) but none has come."

Therefore, "Will the machinegunners please step forward?" (6, p. 6).
CHAPTER BIBLIOGRAPHY


CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

The last five decades have proved to be a period of great development for black poetry. The initial stages of independence were suggested by Langston Hughes's comments published in The Nation in 1926 that the young Negro writer's primary responsibility was to express his thoughts with pride and self-assurance (16, p. 303). Black poetry has developed to the extent that today's black poet is now expressing himself with that pride and self-assurance that Mr. Hughes encouraged and with racial pride and an assurance of black worth and dignity. The thirteen-year period since 1960 has seen a tremendous increase in the exhibition of these qualities in black poetry. The attempts of Gwendolyn Brooks, LeRoi Jones, Nikki Giovanni, and Don L. Lee to express their convictions of the value of blacks have resulted in inner conflicts. The study of the poetry of these writers is a study of their personal conflicts regarding society and their relationship as black people to a white-dominated society.

Herbert Hill's statement that "the literature of American Negroes is an attempt to explain the racial situation to themselves" (7, p. xv) is accurate. But Mr. Hill's definitive
statement might be extended to add that since 1960 much of the poetry has been also an attempt to find a solution to the racial situation. Black poetry since 1960 has been an introspective examination and search for understanding and solution of America's racial problems as viewed by the black poet.

Since war is a common method for resolving long-lasting conflicts, it is logical for considerations of war to enter into the black-white conflict, which has been of long duration in America. Because Negroes were granted freedom from physical slavery as a result of the Civil War, it is reasonable for them to contemplate the effectiveness of this means of obtaining further liberty. Blacks reaped the benefits of the Civil War although it was conducted mostly by whites, and the outcome of that war was the major turning point in their life in America. Its accomplishments cannot be overlooked by blacks. A combination of forces, mainly strong leadership, civil rights legislation, and increasing educational levels, created a dedication among blacks to obtain greater opportunities for their people. The poetry shows a growing disillusionment as black leaders were slain, results of political negotiations proved to be disappointing, black schools remained largely inferior, and poverty still plagued many blacks. Religion no longer provided adequate solace for these pains. Racial war appeared to be the last prospect for salvation. Influenced by the violence and brutality of the sixties, Brooks, Jones, Lee and Giovanni turned in rage and desperation to thoughts of war.
They conducted a war against white America, a war with words as weapons. This poetic war performed three major roles:

1. It unified blacks against a common enemy.

2. This verbal war released hostilities and vented the poets' rage against white America, leaving an opportunity for constructive problem-solving.

3. It outlined to the poets the futility of war and the necessity for substituting more meaningful action.

These poets want to unite blacks against whites to force a realization that blacks must not depend upon understanding or assistance from any part of white America. They attack the myth of white superiority by pointing out acts of cruelty, oppression, and hypocrisy performed by whites. Brooks and Jones concentrate upon exposing the sins of white America while Lee and Giovanni include whites of other nations and other eras in their denunciation. Giovanni and Jones strike out at white politicians, theoretical liberals who only voice a desire to assist blacks. By destroying the concept of white virtue, the poets hope to achieve black solidarity. This effort, however, results in even more dissension among blacks, for it means that blacks must turn against the black bourgeoisie who have seemingly joined forces with whites. If these people cannot be summoned back to the black cause, then they have to be included in the accusations against whites. The poets feel their cause is being damaged by the black bourgeoisie and by those blacks who are dedicated to physical
pleasure, those who, as Lee and Brooks express the idea, want to be "cool."

While it might be an oversimplification to surmise that these poets consider all whites to be enemies, they do not make exceptions when calling for the annihilation of whites. Giovanni does concede that there are some "pro-niggers," but she evidently believes they are of little consequence because already they are being eliminated by the "anti-niggers" (5, p. 83). For unification purposes, whites are considered as a large threatening unit which must be eliminated or, according to Brooks's poem "In the Mecca," purified of their cruelty, insensibility, and hypocrisy (3, pp. 394-395).

Brooks, Jones, Giovanni, and Lee show varying degrees of enmity between the races. Brooks shows a lesser degree of inter-racial hatred than the younger poets. She emphasizes the indifference of whites for the difficulties of blacks, for instance, in the character of the white sheriff of "In the Mecca," who is unconcerned about the lost black child (3, pp. 377-407). Descriptions of white aggression are generally limited to individual actions springing from a personal bias on the part of Brooks's white characters which does not permit them to see their objects of scorn as human beings. The white husband of "A Bronzeville Mother Loiters in Mississippi. Meanwhile, a Mississippi Mother Burns Bacon" feels a blinding scorn for the black adolescent he murdered (3, pp. 317-322). Brooks does not see all whites as haters of blacks; there are the haters of
blacks and those who are simply indifferent and apathetically permit the haters of blacks to continue persecuting blacks. Such apathy characterizes the wife in "A Bronzeville Mother Loiters in Mississippi. Meanwhile, A Mississippi Mother Burns Bacon," who is more concerned with her husband's feelings toward her than with the child's death (3, pp. 377-407). The tragic deaths and bitter deprivations described in Brooks's poetry are those of black individuals, not of black masses. And those who commit these acts or allow them to be committed are not the white masses, but white individuals who are recognizable and distressingly familiar types. When a poet casts guilt at large masses of people, the reader can often avoid personal feelings of guilt by disassociating himself from the masses. When the guilt is cast on individuals in whom the reader can recognize familiar or even personal traits, these guilt feelings cannot be avoided. Brooks's poetry does not permit the reader to escape personal involvement.

Jones, Giovanni, and Lee are not so moderate as Brooks in handling their hostilities against whites. The resentment shown in their earlier poetry amounts to a fury which must be voiced. They display whites as depraved and immoral in their hatred for blacks and conscienceless in their efforts to maintain cruel levels of poverty and inferiority among blacks. These three poets specify that whites possess animal-like and uncivilized natures. This amounts to an attempt by the
poets to transfer inferior status from blacks to whites. Lee, Jones, and Giovanni endeavor to reverse common biases and thus purge blacks of their feelings of inadequacy. To what extent the seeming hatred for all whites is the poets' own personal feeling cannot, of course, be stated conclusively. However, later work of these three largely omits the anti-white theme in preference for a pro-black message. Their earlier poetry represents a purging of resentments and anger they felt toward whites as well as being a reflection of the spirit of racial animosity generated by social conflicts during the "Searing Sixties" (1, p. 659). The racial clashes of the sixties were frightening, and many Americans wondered where the violence would end. America was very much aware of the racial problem and realized that there was no simple solution. The black poets were making use of an opportunity to express a warning to white America that a solution must be found. For one hundred years, blacks have tried to achieve equality; in the sixties, they found their patience running out. Probably because of the turbulence of this decade, all their hostilities surfaced to create an explosive atmosphere which could not be ignored. In the sixties, the nation witnessed a great deal of violence and became conscious that many deaths of blacks and whites were occurring. Black poetry warns that more of the same could be expected if black needs went unrecognized.

The verbal slaughter of whites in the poetry reduces the need for actual slaughter. Like any words spoken in
anger, the poetry vents the rage of the writers. This is a rage that has been repressed by blacks for centuries and is accompanied by much bitterness. The combination of repressed anger and resentment prevents the understanding and solution of any problem, and it is only after the poets' longing to destroy whites is declared that they can be free of the inner hostilities created by unvoiced frustration. Hostilities are still felt by these poets; recognition of these emotions has not magically eliminated them. But the poets are now free to deal constructively with hostility.

While verbal warfare somewhat mitigates the need for physical warfare, it also points out to the poets the futility of war. Their descriptions of war consist primarily of disruptive tactics which were used during the sixties to create disorder and confusion in America. Looting and pillaging are mentioned repeatedly as strategic actions. The proceeds of looting would furnish weapons which are to be smuggled into black communities for storage. Underground preparations include the construction of firebombs. Small clashes are described in which blacks are victorious. In other instances, concrete destruction is carried out by mysterious means. For example, Lee speaks of the crumbling economic system: "united fruit co. & standard oil were wiped out and white people cried" (12, p. 58); but he does not explain how these companies were destroyed. Most of the actions of war the poets describe are disruptive and would
serve to create distress in the country, but the actions are not realistic means of destroying the nation. It is true that these acts of warfare could be carried out by devoted blacks, whose power could be magnified by dedication. However, the country would be defended by organized forces as dedicated to preserving America as it exists as the angry blacks would be to the destruction of the country. Dedication could not be an adequate adversary for the strength of America. As the poets spell out death for one of the two groups and evaluate their resources, it cannot be anything but apparent to them which of the two groups would be the defeated.

The effects of the violent tactics of the sixties do not encourage this means of bringing about change. Violence led to bloodshed and suffering during that decade, but it brought no significant changes for blacks. It is also evident that emphasis on violence creates disunity among blacks. Differing factions among blacks were established in the 1960's according to attitudes toward war and individual concepts of revolution. Disagreements over the question of violence resulted in certain segments turning against other segments, with each group working in opposition to other blacks with similar goals but different methods of achievement. LeRoi Jones predicted in the interview on the David Susskind Show in 1966 that there would be a revolution in America accomplished by "whatever means necessary." This statement could be interpreted to mean "whatever means available," for war
is not an available or feasible means. A revolution carried out according to the patterns of the French, Chinese, or Russian revolutions is not possible in this country today, and this became apparent to the poets as they wrote. Although the war would involve what these black poets see as righteousness battling evil and corruption, actual warfare will not accomplish a social revolution; and the poetry proves that this is the poets' conclusion. The impulsive turn toward war as a solution is shattered by the poets' own description of racial war in America.

The black poets see that they cannot expect salvation for their race to be accomplished by war, just as they indicate in their poetry that they cannot expect salvation through political negotiation. They have lost faith in warfare and politics, just as they lost faith in religion to provide them security and happiness.

As these poets conduct a verbal war against white America and the futility of physical war becomes obvious, their search for a solution turns elsewhere. How can they assist their people to establish a worthy life for themselves while maintaining pride in blackness? It is to this goal that the concept of Negritude has made its greatest contribution. Although the term "Negritude" has fallen from popularity recently, the concept remains important. Black poets still identify with Africa, and the sense of African tradition is growing. Black poets are seeking to heighten this identity
with all black people of the world. Such racial unification will eliminate the loss of cultural unity which sociologist C. Eric Lincoln designates as the greatest threat to the black man's self respect (13, p. 219).

The poets are moving in the direction of giving a new meaning to the black revolution. Lee's latest book of poetry, *Directionscore*, published in 1971, and Jones's latest poetic work, *It's Nation Time*, published in 1970, do not mention war, violence, or the death of the white man. Both books instruct blacks in self-development and group accomplishment. Jones and Lee apparently did not feel at the time these two latest books were written that white values have to be destroyed in order for black values to survive. Jones and Lee are trying to convince blacks to accept a system of values which will create unity among blacks by giving them a common goal. The goal toward which the value system strives is the development of the full potential of all blacks. Jones's *Kawaida* outlines the goals he wants blacks to devote themselves to: unity, independence, concern for other blacks, economic separatism from whites, community development, faith in each other (9, pp. 133-134). In *It's Nation Time*, Jones ridicules the apathetic black who waits for assistance to be offered him: "doctor nigger, please do somethin on we/lawyer nigger, please pass some laws about us/ . . ./reverend, pray for color peeples" (8, pp. 8-9). He advises blacks to "Stretch out Expand" and "Dance on to freedom" (8, pp. 15-16).
Lee has not set out his concept of a black value system as explicitly as Jones, but he describes his goals for blacks throughout *Directionscore*. He states that blacks are "goin ta be cleaner/goin ta be stronger/goin ta be wiser" than before (11, p. 202). He aims at eradicating the qualities of laziness, apathy, and lack of faith in oneself and criticizes the "cool" black, as he has done in earlier work: "can u think as well as u talk,/can u read as well as u drink,/ can u teach as well as u dress" (11, p. 200). He advises blacks to "make everyday the weekend/& work like u party" (11, p. 206).

The phrase "black values" has been used frequently since 1960 by poets and critics; but like the word "revolution," the actual meaning of "black values" was not clear before 1969. Since 1969, when Jones published his concept of a black value system in *Raise Race Rays Raze*, and since the publication of *Directionscore* in 1971, there is a clearer idea of the black value system. There is not, of course, one set of values to which all blacks agree to adhere. There is no single value system that applies to all blacks, just as there is not a white value system that applies to all whites. There are many value systems and many value conflicts among blacks. An example of such differences arose when Don Lee stated that the black college rejected him as writer-in-residence because his style of writing was not "white" (14, p. 74).
What Jones and Lee intend to do is to describe a group of values by which they might unite the majority of blacks.

The value system is a black one primarily because it was written by black poets addressing black readers. There is little of the value system which would appeal only to blacks. Most of the goals they stress would be worthy achievements for any society. Economic separatism is the major point which emphasizes withdrawal from or rejection of whites. As these two poets become convinced of the futility of war to bring a better life to blacks, they express confidence in the black man to bring a better life to himself by individual and group efforts.

A change of tone such as Jones and Lee exhibit can be seen in Nikki Giovanni's work as well. Her first two books of poetry, Black Feeling Black Talk and Black Judgement, consist almost completely of militant words designed to create and encourage feelings of enmity between the races. Her third volume, Re:Creation, is somewhat softer in tone than the first two. Re:Creation expresses less bitterness and spiteful rage than Black Feeling Black Talk or Black Judgement. Her anger is tempered with humor and irony.

Gwendolyn Brooks does not exhibit such deep animosity as the younger poets. Perhaps her age and experience make her less susceptible to the recent militant atmosphere. Although her latest book of poetry, Riot, does include many descriptions of racial combat, she does not voice a desire
for the death of whites. She is aware of the need for self-examination in America, but she does not express this need in terms of hatred.

From the definitions of revolution given by LeRoi Jones and Malcolm X, one can see that the revolution represents a route toward black fulfillment. From the poetry of Brooks, Giovanni, Lee, and Jones, one can conclude that revolution and war are not synonymous terms to the poets. Giovanni writes:

i used to dream militant
dreams of taking
over America to show
these white folks how it should be
done
i used to dream radical dreams . . .
then I awoke and dug
that if I dreamed natural
dreams of being a natural
woman doing what a woman
does when she's natural
I would have a revolution (6, p. 20).

On the title page of Directionscore, Lee states: "a smile at the right time can be the most revolutionary act that one can commit" (11, p. 197).

Although there is still discussion of racial war among blacks, and warlike actions are still being taken in the cities of America, among these poets, who are social and intellectual leaders, the word "revolution" has acquired a new, concrete meaning. The new black poet is using his art to further a revolution based on constructive development of black potential. Instead of unification based on enmity of
whites, the writers are seeking to create a spirit of unified advancement rooted in African culture. LeRoi Jones outlines his black value system in his essays in the Swahili language. Don Lee assigns to his poetic characters Swahili names which denote constructive human qualities: Mwilu, likes black; Musyoka, one who always returns; Musomi, scholarly; Kitheka, wanderer of the forest; Amana, peacefulness; Kimanthi, one who searches for freedom, wealth, and love (11, p. 208).

Black poets have assigned themselves the social responsibility of helping blacks achieve greater economic and social stability and greater identity with their African heritage. These writers feel that they must act as statesmen, legislators, moralists, and prophets as well as leaders of black people and black arts. The current mood in black poetry of social revolution based on constructive problem-solving and individual development is somewhat new. It has been only four years since LeRoi Jones published his value system in Raise Race Rays Raze, and only two years since Lee set out his goals for blacks in Directionscore. Giovanni has not had a book of poetry published since 1970, so the critic must look to her latest book, Re:Creation, and note the change to a less hate-filled tone to judge her coming moods. These poets are writing in positive terms about their self-assumed moral responsibilities. They are not prematurely anticipating the problems presented by white opposition, although it is evident that they are aware that prejudice will continue to exist.
For example, when Lee states that blacks will become "some-thin' u ain't suppose to be" (11, p. 200), it is clear that he believes whites will maintain their expectation of low black achievement. The white man and the critic cannot assume that LeRoi Jones is ignorant of the principles of competitive economics when he expresses the need for black economic separatism in his black value system (9, pp. 133-134). Instead of focusing on the problems which might occur, the poets emphasize the possibilities of black growth which could result from self-development. They are suggesting that at this time the most advantageous action blacks can take is to strive to better themselves and their world, while, for the present, ignoring white opposition insofar as possible. Their responsibility has become the elevation of blacks, not the destruction of whites.

All the factors behind the change of tone in the works of black poets are difficult to outline. The greatest factor by far is the purging influence of the verbal war against white America. Possibly as the poets wrote about and evaluated their grievances against whites, they could see the problems more objectively. Certainly, many of the problems they discuss are not exclusively black problems. Poverty afflicts blacks and whites in this country, and poverty is not an easy burden to escape. Many inadequately educated individuals suffer from lack of opportunity as well. The poets show many times that they believe the greatest threats
to the black man are the image whites have of him and the image he has of himself. The President's Commission on Civil Disorders referred to the image whites have of blacks as "the insidious and pervasive white senses of the inferiority of black men" (15, p. vii). Giovanni and Lee refer to the image the black man has of himself as the "nigger mind" (5, p. 20; 10, p. 20). These problems associated with blackness are not as easily eliminated as poverty or lack of opportunity because of educational handicaps. The poets have freed themselves of some of the hidden hostility they feel because of the blanket prejudice of some whites for blacks. The next step is to change the image blacks have of themselves as non-achievers and the image whites have of blacks.

Because of the social responsibilities which black poets have assumed, the readers and critics, particularly white ones, must also assume responsibilities. It is the duty of readers and critics to be aware of the aims and goals of black writers. It is a mistake for the critic to judge black poetry solely on its artistic merit, for as Dudley Randall points out, the black poets of today care little if their work survives, but it must be effective today (4, p. 112). Evaluating the works of black poets would be difficult or impossible for white critics since the poets' primary purpose in writing is to communicate with black people. A white reader would not be able to judge the effect of the poets' work on black readers. On the other hand, interpretive criticism by whites might
improve communications between the races because it would represent an effort on the part of the white critic to understand blacks as well as providing some measurement of white reaction to blacks.

Don Lee clarifies the aims of black poets in the 1970's:

... black poetry will not, necessarily, teach the people how to die, but will teach the people how to live. We must live, we must show those who control the world how to live. Redefine man and put man in his proper perspective in relation to other men and the world (2, p. 11).

These goals do not express an obligation to blacks only. Lee speaks of a desire to improve all people. Only by freeing themselves of warlike emotions generated by years of inferior treatment and examining their own ideas regarding social problems, could the black poets arrive at their current idea of a social revolution based on positive feelings. The role of war in black poetry of the 1960's was to negate the need for physical violence and, in this way, expose other possibilities for a social revolution.


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