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Black Power and Mana Motuhake

Introduction

In the decade immediately following the Second World War, the percentage of Māori living in urban areas – as opposed to their mainly rural *tūrangawaewae* (places of belonging) – rose dramatically from approximately 35 per cent to over 60 per cent. The Hunn report of 1961, written for the Department of Māori Affairs, announced the official thinking on this development. The report recognized that the Māori population, long considered moribund, was now growing and urbanizing at a rate that was outstripping extant infrastructures. At the same time, however, the report actively promoted urbanization by encouraging Crown purchase of Māori land to facilitate development programmes, even while acknowledging that employment for Māori would be a future problem. The report proposed in a distinctly colonial-racial language that the ‘integration’ of Māori into predominantly Pākehā (settler European) urban areas had a modernizing effect on those who were ‘complacently living a backward life in primitive conditions.’¹ Complicating but in many ways intensifying this confluence of urbanization, racism and assimilation was the migration of Tangata Pasifika (peoples of Oceania) over the same time period. Old colonial links with Western Samoa, Niue, Tokelau, Tonga and the Cook Islands were used to encourage unskilled and semi-skilled labourers into urban industry, especially around Auckland.²

By the late 1960s Pākehā media and politicians had framed these migrations in terms of a ‘Polynesian problem’. To their minds, the

problem was exemplified by a growing number of youth who seemed unable to integrate into the mainstream structures of urban life and preferred, instead, to hang out on the streets in groups.³ Pākehā thought was occupied with the ways in which this phenomenon could be explained in terms of the pathologies of ‘backward’ Māori and Pasifika cultures. But Māori and Pasifika youth experienced their ‘problem’ in radically different ways: primarily through a sense of dislocation borne of living in urban areas run according to Pākehā rules and mores expressed through visceral and institutional racism. In this conjuncture a set of Māori and Pasifika activist movements arose that confronted the racist and colonial constitution of New Zealand society and state.

This chapter examines the ways in which predominantly young and urban Māori activists compared the radical politics of Black Power in the USA to the struggle for *mana motuhake* (self-determination), a struggle that they sought to radicalize. There now exists a rich literature on the diverse expressions and global determinants of Black Power.⁴ In this and following chapters, I pick up the strands of Black Power that speak specifically to an oppositional aesthetic and ideology, to the practice of community self-sufficiency over dependency, to the redemption of Blackness as a positive mode of being expressed in Black love, and to a movement of spiritual liberation. In Aotearoa NZ the influence of Black Power upon Māori and Pasifika youth upset long-held mainstream assumptions that this particular settler society was exceptional in its enjoyment of racial harmony. However, for Māori youth Black Power also called into question the indigenous provenance of radical oppositional politics: were there no indigenous sources of Black Power? Engaging with these issues, we will witness the contentious ways in which the children of Tāne/Māui attempted to ground with the children of Legba in the public-political arena.

Black Power and New Zealand exceptionalism

By the late 1960s many Pākehā still held to the comforting myth that race relations in Aotearoa NZ, by comparison to the record of other settler colonies, were exceptionally good.⁵ Only a minority of Pākehā who had invested themselves in the race question were critically examining its domestic coordinates. Most had imbibed the exceptionalist narrative and, following a well-established tradition, were looking abroad for a struggle to morally support, which they found principally in the anti-Apartheid movement. At worst, any claims of racial oppression suffered by Māori or Pasifika in Aotearoa NZ were treated at the time with derision. At best, discrimination was considered merely a temporary occurrence due to the arrival in cities of ‘relatively unsophisticated immigrants’.⁶

It was in this climate that popular media started to make regular comparisons between the ‘Polynesian problem’ and the ‘Negro problem’ in the northern cities of the USA. Alarm bells rang over the assassination of Martin Luther King, the demise of the putatively accommodationist and peaceful civil rights movement that he represented, and its replacement by a putatively more violent and confrontational Black Power movement, exemplified in the popular imaginary by the Black Panthers.⁷ Black Power presented itself as an unwelcome and threatening import when refracted through the lens of New Zealand ‘exceptionalism’. And some started to worry that the disaffected and deracinated Polynesian youth might take a lesson from American Blacks and start burning Auckland and Wellington too. ‘We have seen in the USA the kind of violence that can erupt when a depressed minority reaches the point of hopelessness and no return,’ noted a New Zealand Teachers Association report; ‘[w]e do not want to see such outbursts in our own ... country’.⁸

Pākehā and Māori commentators alike tended to look for the flashpoint of Black Power radicalism among the unemployed and out-of-school youth who, congregating in groups, were apprehended

– in a somewhat sensationalist fashion – through the optic of American gangs.⁹ ‘Gang behaviour’, affirmed the Polynesian Institute, ‘shows manifestations in line with the distinct parallels of ... American urban development.’¹⁰ Five years later, *Te Roopu o te Matakite*, an activist group that organized the pioneering Māori Land March of 1975, warned against the continued deracination of urban youth who would become ‘... a landless brown proletariat with no dignity, no *mana* [authority], and no stake in society. Like the Blacks in America, they will stand outside society and aggress against it.’¹¹

Many Pākehā commentators parsed the gang problem through the narrative of New Zealand exceptionalism. For instance, Phil Amos, a Labour MP who had visited civil rights groups in the USA, was adamant that ‘we have nothing to learn [from Americans] on how to live in society as a whole.’¹² One popular magazine took comfort in colonial stereotypes, suggesting that ‘the easy-going temperament of the Polynesian may be all that will save Auckland from some future Watts-type explosion.’¹³ Such responses weighted the onus of urban conflagration less on Pākehā racism and more on the pathologies of the Māori and Pasifika youth. But they were wilfully ignorant of the fact that the loose groups of Māori and Pasifika youth who comprised ‘racial gangs’ had in fact chosen their names – i.e. Nigs, Junior Nigs and Spades – from the racist expletives provided to them by Pākehā. Taura Eruera, a young Māori student activist, sought to dispel the comforting myths of exceptionalism and Polynesian pathology. Returning from a seventy-day study tour of minority communities in the USA, Eruera suggested that,

we are always quick to assure ourselves that, compared to the USA, South Africa and Australia ... race relations in New Zealand are fine. As a comparative study this is true. But when we ... use this comparison as the basis for categorically stating that race relations in New Zealand are fine, we are kidding ourselves.¹⁴

In fact, Black Power rhetoric and thought had begun to infiltrate the prisons and education systems of Aotearoa NZ. And some even found it instructive for their own situation.

In the early 1970s racism was already part of the institutional bedrock of the New Zealand criminal justice system. Convictions of Māori were substantially higher than those of Pākehā, and Māori child offenders were twice more likely to receive prison sentences than Pākehā.¹⁵ Similar to Black prison populations in North America, Black Power texts reached a captive audience. A newsletter written by prisoners and organized by a famous Pākehā non-conformist, Tim Shadbolt, devoted several pages examining the Black Panthers and Black Power. Following this exposition was an article written by an inmate agitating to ‘stand firm and bit [sic] back at the pigs, as our coloured brothers in America are doing’.¹⁶ Tellingly, the president of the King Cobras, a Pasifika gang, came out of prison brandishing Black Panther Bobby Seale’s book, *Seize the Time*.¹⁷

Black Power literature was also picked up in some secondary schools. For instance, at Hilary College in Ōtara, a South Auckland suburb, some teachers began to tune their students into the contemporary global struggle against racism and imperialism from the Vietcong to the Sandanistas.¹⁸ Continental and Diaspora African writers were also introduced, the history of Atlantic slavery was discussed, and some students began to follow Black Power politics with great interest.¹⁹

Similarly, interest in Black Power began to grow among university students, especially in the context of the passing of the Maori Affairs Amendment Act of 1967 that effectively made easier the compulsory acquisition and sale of putatively ‘un-economic’ Māori land held in freehold. Also in 1967, Jim Flynn, an American professor of political science and, at the time, chairperson for the USA civil rights organization, the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE), spoke to the Federation of Māori Students conference at Victoria University of Wellington. The topic of Flynn’s speech was a comparative analysis of race and class in the USA and Aotearoa NZ undertaken by a non-New Zealander.²⁰ At Auckland University, another political science professor, Bob Chapman, introduced his Masters students to Black Power politics with some help from Flynn’s essays.

One aspiring student of Chapman, Helen Clark, who would later become New Zealand Prime Minister and subsequently Administrator

of the United Nations Development Programme, wrote a comparative essay for Chapman on the Black Muslims and the Jamaican Pan-Africanist, Marcus Garvey.²¹ Atareta Poananga also attended Chapman's classes and became a great admirer of Malcolm X. She would later become (in)famous when, working for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, she circulated a letter around the diplomatic core that chastised some of its Māori members by reference to Malcolm X's house/field negro analogy.²² Syd Jackson was another Māori student of Chapman and read Eldridge Cleaver and Stokely Carmichael (whom he later met in person in Libya); he also studied African independence movements and sought to link their dynamics to the colonization of Oceania.²³

The reception of Black Power by Māori and Pasifika youth radically undermined the exceptionalist narrative that outlawed any potential connection between anti-Black racism and anti-Polynesian racism. Some youth even started to consider that Black Power *was* relevant to Aotearoa NZ because white supremacy was a global system. A question thus crystallized: in what ways might and to what extent could Black Power express an indigenous articulation of radical, oppositional politics? This question was addressed most acutely by predominantly tertiary educated young Māori who congealed as a diverse group called Ngā Tamatoa.

Te Aute Old Boys versus young warriors

At this point we need to undertake a brief *whakapapa* of Māori student activism; specifically, we must retrieve the constitutive friction between reformist and radical strategies of pursuing *mana motuhake*. For this purpose, an important point of departure can be found in Te Aute College in Hawke's Bay, opened in 1854 by Samuel Williams, son of Henry Williams and head of the Church Missionary Society in Aotearoa NZ. Apirana Ngata was the college's most famous student who became

the first Māori to complete a university degree in 1893, and indeed, the key scholar who pushed for Māori studies in university.²⁴ Ngata subsequently became the model Māori who worked in and through the institutions of settler colonialism in order to defend and forward *mana motuhake*, especially through the legal and economic consolidation of land holdings. Ngata's famous poem captures his strategy for attaining radical ends through reformist means:

E tipu e rea i ngā rā o tōu ao
 Ko tō ringaringa ki ngā rākau a te Pākehā
 Hei orange mō tō tinana
 Ko tō ngākau ki ngā taonga a ō tīpuna
 Hei tikitiki mō tō māhuna
 Ko tō wairua ki te Atua
 Nāna nei ngā mea katoa

 Grow child in the days of your world
 Grasp with your hand the tools of the Pākehā
 As a means to support your body
 Keep in your heart the knowledge of your ancestors
 As a topknot for your head
 And turn your spirit to the lord
 From whom all things come.²⁵

Ngata returned to Te Aute in 1897 to help in the formation of an Old Boys Association. Those who joined understood themselves to be working for a physical, mental and spiritual Māori renaissance along the lines laid out by Ngata, that is, to imitate the material achievements of Pākehā civilization but on Māori terms.²⁶ Eventually, members of the association would seek to make direct political interventions through the vehicle of the Young Māori Party.²⁷

There was an inter-generational dynamic to Ngata's renaissance project, for at times the young educated Māori would find themselves in opposition to the practices of their elders. The Old Boys Association therefore directed young people to rethink and reassess – sometimes contentiously – the existing strategies for initiating a Māori renaissance.

In formal terms there were long gaps between these inter-generational discussions. A Young Māori Leaders Conference took place in 1939, and another only in 1959. In the latter conference, the youth took on a more pronounced role in setting out the issues of the day, which even at this time were dominated by the gathering pace of rural to urban migration.²⁸ Questions of leadership and the transmission of knowledge were also raised.²⁹ Nevertheless, Ngata's dictum remained by and large unchallenged: preserve the basic values of Māori culture – especially *aroha* and *manaakitanga* (affection and hospitality) – through a working understanding of Pākehā society.³⁰ All this would be challenged in the next conference that took place at Auckland University in 1970.

The 1970 conference addressed familiar problems of ongoing land alienation and the increasing urbanization of young Māori. Yet the disquiet and distance of the youth had reached new levels. Out of 100 delegates, 50 of which were actively participating, only 13 sat at the elders' table; and a 'sizeable number' of radical students shared the space with gang members and workers.³¹ Perhaps the key point of inter-generational difference was the deracinating effect of urban living especially in terms of an intimate knowledge of Māori practices and Te Reo (language).³² One group consisting of Syd Jackson (Chapman's student), Hana Te Hemara and Danny Harris (a former member of the Stormtrooper gang) criticized *kaumātua* (elders) for standing over the activities of the youth. Amplifying the complaints of the 1959 conference, Jackson et al. argued that what was really required of *kaumātua* was less active leadership and more transmission of language and culture to the urban youth.³³

At the conclusion of the conference some of the Māori youth decided to create their own organization outside of the Te Aute tradition. With a membership open 'to Polynesians under 30',³⁴ Ngā Tamatoa functioned, in the main, as a pressure group consisting of educated urban Māori.³⁵ While Ngā Tamatoa cast their net of interests wide, it is fair to say that their predominant concern was the dislocation felt by a young generation many of whose families had memories and

experiences of living in their *tūrangawaewae* (place of belonging) but who lacked that cultural immersion themselves. The challenge, in this environment, was to avoid becoming what Danny Harris described as an ‘educated brown-Pākehā’.³⁶ Ngā Tamatoa tackled discriminatory legislation and also contributed to community services such as prison visits and food co-ops.³⁷ However, their prime aim was to build a bridge back to culture for dislocated youth by agitating for the teaching of Te Reo (Māori language) in primary and secondary schools.³⁸

In the last chapter I noted that Māui’s irreverence at any given order is not necessarily a modernist one. That is, Māui does not desire to destroy a traditional order, but rather seeks to wilfully rearrange its constituents in the pursuit of restitutive justice. In fact, if we dispense with the ‘fatal impact’ thesis it is not so clear where conservative reform ends and oppositional radicalism begins. And for those young Māori who claimed the radical banner, their elders would sometimes remind them that they were actually seeking to conserve their heritages by regenerating them in the present context.³⁹ In fact, these sentiments are evident in the selection of the name Ngā Tamatoa (the young warriors) itself, due to its ‘indigenous appeal’⁴⁰ being also the title of the Māori battalion that had fought in the Second World War. Likewise, their motto, ‘Tama tū tama ora / Tama noho tama mate’ (stand up and live or lay down and die), captured the radical energy of Black Power but through a traditional *whakataukī* (proverb).⁴¹

While Ngata had sought to balance Pākehā means with Māori ends, the young warriors now saw their fluency in the Pākehā world as destructive and disabling of Māori ends: ‘The Māori just wants to be what he was and is, a Māori! He doesn’t want to be a brown skinned New Zealander. He is proud of his ancestors, and ancestral background, and he is proud of his customs and traditions.’⁴² In radicalizing the Te Aute strategy Ngā Tamatoa sought to reclaim another political *whakapapa* of *mana motuhake*. Specifically, they aimed to reconstitute the student tradition along the lines of the often oppositional resistances practised by ancestors such as Hone Heke, King Pōtatau and Te Kooti.⁴³ Indeed, the personal *whakapapa* of some of the new warriors included these

traditions. For instance, Hana Te Hemara's grandmother was a member of the old Kotahitanga (unity) movement, and she grew up surrounded by a critique of 'white greed and white aggression'.⁴⁴ To this end, Ngā Tamatoa made their key battleground Te Tiriti o Waitangi (the Treaty). But instead of using the Te Aute Old Boys strategy of tactful debating with their 'partners', Ngā Tamatoa set out to publically disrupt the national celebrations at Waitangi in 1971. In doing so they claimed that the method of 'courteous' engagement with the question of Te Tiriti (The Treaty) had been 'largely unsuccessful', and Māori patience was not 'limitless'.⁴⁵

The response by elders was mixed. Pat Hohepa, an attendee of both the 1959 and 1970 leader conferences, described Ngā Tamatoa as the 'real Māori'.⁴⁶ And Hone Kaa, Anglican theologian and activist, later reflected that while Ngā Tamatoa were 'totally un-Māori', 'city Māori' and 'the children of policies of integration', they nevertheless 'became my teachers and the revisers of my history'.⁴⁷ This being said, Ngā Tamatoa's strategy of radical opposition drove a wedge between them and the majority of their elders. Witness, for example, the 1975 Land March to Parliament that started from Te Hāpua at the tip of the North Island. While Ngā Tamatoa, especially their female members,⁴⁸ had done much of the organizing for the march, the public face of the endeavour was respected *kuia* (elder woman) Whina Cooper. As the march arrived at parliament, members of Ngā Tamatoa, inspired by their aboriginal Black Power brethren and sistren across the Tasman Sea, erected a tent embassy in the grounds and refused to leave until substantive policy changes towards land governance had begun. Cooper distanced herself from these actions. Writing about Ngā Tamatoa to Matiu Rata, Minister of Māori Affairs, Cooper complained that 'they are an embarrassment to not only our Maori people but the government of today in that they have not the courtesy to wait for your reply'.⁴⁹

An indigenous Black Power?

The attempts, at the turn of the 1970s, to retrieve a political *whakapapa* of *mana motuhake* impelled activists to ground with Black Power. I would argue that there are two reasons for this. First, Black Power in North America was predominantly the language of the youth living in racially fractured and majority white urban environments; many of them were one generation displaced from the rural South, the actual seedbed of the Black Power movement.⁵⁰ This urban context also seems to have partly muted the ideological impact of First Nations struggles on Māori activists, despite the two peoples enjoying personal exchanges at the time.⁵¹ In a generational sense, then, young African-American radicals spoke more directly to the situation of Māori youth than many of the latter's *kaumātua* (elders).

But second, as I have noted, Black Power had entered into the public psyche of Aotearoa NZ specifically as a radical challenge to the exceptionalist narrative. In this respect, Black Power could easily be dismissed as foreign fanaticism influencing the pliable mind of Māori youth. Through this mainstream presumption it was all too easy to argue, by extension, that the idea of an oppositional politics *per se* was not indigenous but rather an inauthentic 'foreign' invention/invasion. For these reasons the grounding was necessarily contentious.

In fact, one group of Māori activists were directly concerned with addressing such assumptions and for this reason they sought to dismiss the idea that radical Māori were copying radical African Americans: 'the argument that Maori activism does not spring from "some original indigenous impulse" is quite untenable.'⁵² Citing the prophets Te Kooti, Rua Kenana, Te Whiti and T. W. Rātana, this group argued that radical Māori activism had a *whakapapa* that pre-dated 'European pressure-propagandist groups and twentieth century black activists'.⁵³ In other words, there was no need to import Black Power because oppositional strategies of *mana motuhake* already existed in the Māori past. These misgivings were no doubt inflamed by mainstream media, who had

started to remix Black Power as 'Brown Power'. In 1968 John Rangihau, respected Tūhoe leader and academic, proposed a definition of Brown Power as, simply, the enactment of Māori culture itself.⁵⁴ But three years later, the Victoria University Students Christian Movement felt it important enough to hold their annual conference on the theme of Brown Power. Taura Eruera, chairperson of Ngā Tamatoa, attended and admonished those who spoke of Brown Power: 'these terms mean absolutely nothing to me ... the reports given haven't taken the time to understand Maori values or causes and a chain of sensationalism has begun'.⁵⁵

Comparative questions as to the provenance, authenticity and applicability of Black Power in Aotearoa NZ were vociferously debated at the 1970 conference that gave birth to Ngā Tamatoa. Elders tended to ignore the question of Black Power altogether, having grown up 'in the marae situation whereas the young were reared in the city'.⁵⁶ And none of the delegates linked Black Power to the kind of *mana motuhake* that was practised on the *marae* (traditional meeting place). In other words, Black Power was effectively identified as an issue specific to urban Māori. Taura Eruera addressed the question of provenance directly, arguing that Black Power was inapplicable to the New Zealand situation where 'Māori have their culture and pride and knowledge of origins'.⁵⁷ But in contrast, several participants including Syd Jackson and Hana Te Hemara argued that Black Power could develop 'from conditions in New Zealand rather than from copying the movement in the USA' and that, as an ideology, it gave 'a sense of belonging' by helping to overcome 'the sense of alienation that develops in urban life'.⁵⁸

Pat Hohepa had brought some Stormtroopers – a local Māori gang – to the 1970 conference who, when it came to voting, differentiated themselves from other participants by 'raised clenched fists – the American black power symbol'.⁵⁹ This was a crucial gesture which suggested that the apprehension of Black Power among those on the 'front line' was visceral and affective, and not just intellectual or comparative. Reflecting on its affective impact, one delegate reported

that 'Black Power is to stop white power. Mention Black Power to Pākehā and they won't accept it. I mentioned it to one Pākehā and he said he would kill me.'⁶⁰ In this respect, the strategic importance of Black Power was generally acknowledged at the conference, with one delegate stating that 'Black Power will stop us being manipulated.'⁶¹ After all, Black Power expressed a communal demand for self-liberation that did not ask for the permission of the oppressor to be pursued. And this illocutory effect was well recognized by those who would deploy Black Power rhetoric throughout the 1970s and even beyond.⁶² Failure to address these demands could also be proffered as a threat – as Syd Jackson impressed upon the Race Relations Council annual conference in 1972.⁶³

The more the government exhibited intransigence and active hostility towards social justice agendas as the 1970s wore on, the more activists sensed the possibility that society was heading towards a violent confrontation. The continued presence and growth of gangs – deracinated youth following an autonomous and mercurial leadership – testified to such a possibility. The 1977 Young Māori Leaders Conference focused expressly on these issues.⁶⁴ By 1979, Ranginui Walker, a leading Māori commentator, warned that 'Māori are now traversing the ground covered by Blacks in American more than a decade ago.' For Walker, the fatal shooting of a teenage boy, Daniel Houpapa, during a confrontation between police and the Mighty Mongrel Mob gang in 1976 had 'its American parallel with the Black Panthers.'⁶⁵ MP Mike Moore, later to become Director-General of the World Trade Organization, forcefully echoed these sentiments in a speech entitled the 'Time Bomb.'⁶⁶

In this respect, perhaps the most important strategic difference between Ngā Tamatoa and their American Black Power counterparts was the abrogation of armed struggle. Some members of Ngā Tamatoa did occasionally express a desire to pick up arms, as the Oakland Panthers had already done: 'If Pākehā want war', warned Syd Jackson, 'we will pick up guns like our ancestors in Taranaki.'⁶⁷ Nevertheless, Ngā Tamatoa never seriously organized around armed insurrection,

although one of their members, Vern Winitana, was accused of training gang members into shock troops at his karate classes.⁶⁸ But the key question was whether the gangs might become progressively politicized as social and economic conditions worsened. This possibility had always been in the minds of activists. For example, Syd Jackson suggested that gangs might ‘work through the whole politicization bit and that’s where the guts of the street movement will come from.’⁶⁹ Other young warriors argued that ‘a lot of pseudo-criminal behaviour in the streets is [actually] a form of civil disturbance.’⁷⁰

One gang even seemed to be experiencing such a political awakening. In 1970, Reitu Harris formed the Black Bulls, whose initial activities were to look after young Māori who had arrived in Wellington from the rural areas after the Department of Māori Affairs had closed its youth hostels.⁷¹ On one occasion the Bulls went to confront another gang – the Mighty Mongrel Mob – over an attempted rape, and when the latter performed a *haka* (a posture dance) finishing with the taunt ‘and who are you?’ Harris replied on the spur of the moment, ‘we are the Black Power.’⁷² Later, Harris would explain that the name change was part inspired by the resistance movement in South Africa.⁷³ The inspiration is important to note, as will become clear soon enough.

Conclusion

I stated in the last chapter that knowledge cultivation is a circulatory process that necessarily interacts with a wider biotope, enfolding matter from other inhabitations. I also argued that the attempt to redeem the past does not only involve a binding together of the living and the ancestors but can also impel the binding together of different (post)colonized peoples in a project of restitutive justice – *tātou tātou*. Ngā Tamatoa practised this kind of knowledge cultivation. They broke from the Te Aute Old Boys strategy of partial accommodation with white power by reclaiming an oppositional strategy with an

indigenous pedigree. And their retrieval and cultivation of an oppositional *whakapapa* of *mana motuhake* necessitated a grounding with Black Power.

In this chapter, then, we have witnessed the children of Tāne/Māui and Legba meeting in the public-political realm. They have met primarily via sociological-anthropological categories of difference, comparative analyses, and in the shadows cast by sensationalist mainstream apprehensions of the coming Black apocalypse. This meeting has therefore been contentious and the binding together of Black Power and *mana motuhake* has been somewhat weak. Yet it seems that at least with some of the youth the grounding has been deeper and the binding stronger than colonial media would allow or presume. So let us now follow these inclinations and, while staying in the same time period, shift our analysis from comparisons with Black Power to identifications with Blackness.