

# Kwame Ture in Retrospect: Firebrand 1970



**Kwame Ture** (1941–1998) began working with the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) in 1960, in 1964 he received a B.S. degree in Philosophy from Howard University (Washington, DC), and he became chairman of SNCC in 1966. His "Black Power" speech reignited the movement of that name, and in 1967 he and Charles V. Hamilton wrote the book *Black Power*. In 1968 and 1969, he served as the honorary Prime Minister of the Black Panther Party and also became a student of, and aide to former president Kwame Nkrumah (1909-19772) of Ghana and President Sekou Toure (1922-1984) in the Republic of Guinea, helping to organize the All-African People's Revolutionary Party. For more than 30 years, Ture led the All-African People's Revolutionary Party and devoted the rest of his life to revolutionary Pan African nationalism. In 1998, at the age of 57, he joined the ancestors due to complications from prostate cancer. In 1971 he received an honorary doctorate from Shaw University, and in 1999, Howard University posthumously awarded him an honorary Ph.D.



The following is from a U.S. Congress, Senate, Committee on the Judiciary hearing titled the *Testimony of Stokely Carmichael.*, held at the United States Senate during the 91st Congress, 2d Session, on March 25, 1970, produced in Washington, D.C., and published by the Government Printing Office in 1970.



*Politically, we want Black people inside the United States to be free of oppression. We also want the peoples of the Third World to be free from oppression particularly Africa, Asia, and Latin America. We see that our freedom, our liberation, depends on these people and vice versa, their liberation depends on us, so we must wage the same struggle.*

--- Stokely Carmichael, March 25, 1970

Martin Luther King, Jr. and Stokely Carmichael in the 'March Against Fear', June 1966, Mississippi.

Mr. Sourwine. You were born in Trinidad?

Mr. Carmichael. That is correct, Sir.

Mr. Sourwine. When, Sir?

Mr. Carmichael. June 1941, according to the records, and my mother.

Mr. Sourwine. You are a naturalized citizen of the United States?

Mr. Carmichael. I Am.

Mr. Sourwine. Naturalized in New York City in 1954?

Mr. Carmichael. Yes.

Mr. Sourwine. And you are a graduate of Howard University?

Mr. Carmichael. That is correct.

Mr. Sourwine. What was your degree?

Mr. Carmichael. I received a B.A. majoring in philosophy. I did work in political science, and I did work in sociology. I carried a double major and a minor in history. And I was an honor student.

Mr. Sourwine. Thank you. Do you have any graduate degrees?

Mr. Carmichael. Not officially.

Mr. Sourwine. You are not a man of independent wealth, are you?

Mr. Carmichael. I would rather take the first and the fifth on that.

Mr. Sourwine. I am sorry, I meant nothing by that question except to lead up to this one. Did you work your way through school? You made your own way through school by your own efforts, did you not?

Mr. Carmichael. I received several scholarships.

Mr. Sourwine. You earned your scholarships?

Mr. Carmichael. Yes.

Mr. Sourwine. That is all I am trying to get on the record. . . .

Mr. Sourwine. Are you currently connected with the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee?

Mr. Carmichael. I would plead the fifth on that.

Mr. Sourwine. Will you tell us if you were ever connected with the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee?

Mr. Carmichael. Yes, I was.

Mr. Sourwine. In what position, sir?

Mr. Carmichael. In different capacities. I served as field organizer, particularly in Mississippi and Sunflower County, where Senator James O. Eastland is from. My job then was to organize my people, Africans living in the United States here who were constitutionally denied the right to vote, even though they had the basic right to vote, to organize them and try to bring them into a broadening political modernization so that they would be entitled to the right to vote.

Mr. Sourwine. Did you ever become a principal officer of SNCC.

Mr. Carmichael. Yes, I did. And I moved up and became chairman of the organization.

Mr. Sourwine. You would, then, be in a position to know whether that organization was at any time infiltrated by members of the Communist Party, U.S.A.?

Mr. Carmichael. Well, it would depend. Is there some way that I can identify—

Mr. Sourwine. I am not holding you responsible for knowing all about everybody who ever joined SNCC.

Mr. Chairman, may I strike the last question? Let me ask a more direct question.

During the time that you were the head of SNCC, and prior thereto, did you ever have any personal knowledge of an attempt to infiltrate the organization by the Communist Party, U.S.A.?

Mr. Carmichael. I will plead the fifth on that.

Mr. Sourwine. You have been called the organizer of the Black Panther organization, is that correct?

Mr. Carmichael. I will plead the fifth on that.

Mr. Sourwine. Have you had any connection with the Black Panther organization?

Mr. Carmichael. I will plead the fifth on that.

Mr. Sourwine. Are you in a position to tell us anything about the source of funds used by the Black Panther organization?

Mr. Carmichael. I will plead the fifth on that. . . .

Mr. Sourwine. Mr. Carmichael, this news story on which you have declined to comment indicates that you did participate in the signing of a so-called protocol of cooperation with one Juan Mari Bras, the head of the Movement for Independence of Puerto Rico.

Mr. Carmichael. I don't—

Mr. Sourwine. I am not arguing with you, believe me; I do not say that by way of argument. Do you care to tell us whether it is true that this protocol stated that the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee and the MPI were united “in the vanguard of a common struggle against U.S. imperialism.”?

Mr. Carmichael. The protocol speaks for itself. But I would say that I never take newspaper articles as authorities, because myself having been in public, I know how they misquote either maliciously, or it is sometimes impossible for a journalist to get all of it, and it puts down what he thinks is said. I have heard statements over the radio or television by journalists, and I am sometimes shocked as to what they say I have said. So I never accept newspaper articles as authorities. . . .

Mr. Sourwine. During the recess, Mr. Chairman, I gave Mr. Carmichael a document of some 14 single-spaced typewritten pages. Did you have an opportunity to complete it?

Mr. Carmichael. No, I did not.

Mr. Sourwine. This purports to be, Mr. Carmichael, a copy of a broadcast report with respect to statements made by you in the course of an interview given by you in Havana, Cuba, to one Mario Menendez, editor of the Mexican magazine *Sucesos*. Do you recall having given such an interview?

Mr. Carmichael. I plead the fifth.

Mr. Sourwine. From the portion of this document that you were able to read, are there any comments that you care to make with respect to it?

Mr. Carmichael. None whatsoever.

Mr. Sourwine. Do you want to have it back to complete reading of it?

Mr. Carmichael. No.

Mr. Sourwine. Without objection, I ask for the admission of the document. . . .

Excerpts of undated recorded interview given by Stokely Carmichael to Mario Menendez, Editor of the Mexican magazine *Sucesos*, during Carmichael's stay in Havana

**Question.** What is the students nonviolent coordinating committee?

**Answer.** The Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee is the organization for which I work and a group of young Black people in the United States who decided to come together to fight racial and economic exploitation.

**Question.** When and why was it founded?

**Answer.** The Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee was founded in 1960 by a group of young Black students who felt the need to come together and actively fight against racial segregation in the United States. They came together because they felt the older organizations were not doing an effective job and were not actively participating. Most of them were taking their troubles to the courts and we felt that you could not take a problem of injustice by some white people to Black people to the courts if those courts were again all white. You were taking an unjust problem to the people who themselves were unjust.

It could not be solved that way. The only way to solve it was in the streets. We used the name nonviolent because at that time Martin Luther King was the central figure of the Black struggle and he was still preaching nonviolence, and anyone who talked about violence at that time was considered treasonable—amounting—to treason, so we decided that we would use the name nonviolent, but in the meantime we knew our struggle was not about to be nonviolent, but we would just wait until the time was right for the actual (word indistinct) name. We came together, we would coordinate activities between the students wherever we would have a nonviolent demonstration.

But after one year many of us decided that demonstrations were not the answer. The only answer was organizing our people. So we moved into the worst State, Mississippi, and began to organize our people to fight, and we're now at the front where we are encouraging people to pick up arms and fight back.

**Question.** What are the political, social, and economic goals pursued by your organization?

**Answer.** Politically, we want Black people inside the United States to be free of oppression. We also want the peoples of the Third World to be free from oppression particularly Africa, Asia, and Latin America. We see that our freedom, our liberation, depends on these people and vice versa, their liberation depends on us, so we must wage the same struggle.

Politically speaking (words indistinct) inside the United States we want the right to politically control the communities in which we live. Inside the United States we cannot do that. The communities in which we live, which they call ghettos, are politically controlled by whites. So in a real sense, we're colonials inside the United States, just like colonials in Latin American countries, or I would say probably all the Latin American countries, with the exception of Cuba, are controlled politically from the outside by the United States. They are now colonies on the outside. But politically, we would seek to free those colonies of any political intervention from the outside.

Economically speaking, we want our people to be able to enjoy a life and to get all the things they need to have a decent life without having to struggle as hard as they now do because they're economically exploited by the imperialist power structure of the United States, just as the colonies outside are economically able to divide those resources among the people of the—backward—communities. We do not want to set up, for example, a Black capitalist system. We want to economically destroy capitalism because capitalism goes hand in hand with racism and exploitation. Wherever capitalism has gone, those two characteristics are sure to follow, racism and exploitation, so we must destroy the capitalistic system which enslaves us on the inside and the people of the Third World, on the outside.

Socially, I guess we want what most people want out of life, where we could have people who are happy and who are free and who can live a life (? better) than they now live and who could make the decisions and participate in decisions that affect their lives, and that they would never feel ashamed of the color of their skin or ashamed of their culture. In order for capitalism to exist it must make the people they conquer, make them feel ashamed of themselves, ashamed of their culture. And what we want to do is to make our people not ashamed (word indistinct) so that they can feel that they're equal to anybody else, psychologically, physically, and morally.

**Question.** What are the relations between the colored people of the North and the South, especially, and in the whole Unites States of America?

**Answer.** The Black people who are living in the North are first generation people; that is to say, it is the first generation of Black people that have been born in the North. Most of the people in the North migrated from the South right after World War II. They migrated from the South because racial discrimination was the (worst) and most brutal in the South and they were told that in the North, people didn't care about the color of your skin. It didn't matter. You could get an opportunity and good job if you just worked hard.

And we believed that nonsense and packed up our bags and went North. But what we found when we got North was that life was the same. So the (word indistinct) that we found in the North was that there's nowhere in the United States where you can go under the capitalistic system and enjoy a decent way of life. So that you have now people who do not have hope in any of the legal systems (words indistinct). So that the relationship has become very strong because the people from the South no longer look to the North as an escape, and we now see that the only way that we're going to get out of this capitalistic system, and get our liberation is to join hands and see ourselves as one people.

What you have now across the United States is a feeling of solidarity among Black people wherever we are, and our saying is that when they touch one, they have to touch all. That saying is more than a slogan, because it now has meaning. Every time a racist police dog shoots one of us they have to fight the entire city, and now it is not only one city, they have to fight entire cities, so the Black feeling of solidarity is very, very near.

**Question.** Some persons think the Negroes in the United States only think of the fight as a racial conflict against the whites instead of interpreting the case as a class struggle. What do you have to say on this matter?

**Answer.** Well, that's very, very important, because inside the United States the racism is so strong it is almost impossible to get white people to struggle with them, and there are many reasons for that. Most of the poor whites, the white working class in the United States, when they organize, their fight is never a fight for the redistribution of land. Their fight is a fight for more money. All they want is more money. They do not have any concept of the distribution of wealth because they are so capitalistic in their own approach. So what happens is that the ruling class of America then begins to exploit other countries in the third world and make more money. When they get more of those profits, they share those profits with the white working class.

But the ruling class never cuts down on its profits. It makes more, as a matter of fact. Once it begins to share its profits with the working class, the working class becomes part and parcel of the capitalistic system and they enjoy blood money. They enjoy the money that is exploiting other people, so that they are then incapable of fighting the very system, because they become a part of it by accepting the blood money. So it's hard to develop a white working class revolutionary consciousness. What you have then is white people who are fighting to save their money. . . .

And finally, I think that what people outside the United States recognize is that unlike any other people, we were the only people who were made slaves inside the continent of the people who were exploiting us. Other people were slaves in their own countries, so that when they fought they could develop a nationalistic concept as a point of unity to come together. We were brought inside the United States, which is the most vicious thing that the United States could have done. So we cannot develop a nationalistic concept. Our concept must be around our color, because it was our color around which they decided to make us slaves. . . .

**Question.** What sort or type of fight will develop in the United States against the imperialist policy? Do you think that the armed way is [the] only way left for the North American people . . . to obtain the government? What is your opinion (replacing) the revolutionary violence with the reactionary violence?

**Answer.** When we say that we insist, we say very clearly, that the only solution is Black revolution and that we're not concerned with peaceful coexistence, armed struggle is the only way, not only for us but for all oppressed people around the world for a number of reasons. People who talk about peaceful coexistence are talking about maintaining the status quo because the only way that you can disrupt an imperialistic system is when you disrupt it by force. You do not disrupt it with talk. That has been crystal clear to us. It has been crystal clear to us, especially, because for 400 years the majority of African-Americans inside the United States have been talking, talking, and talking. And the reason is because when you talk, you play the imperialist game. They invented the game of talk, and when you talk, you talk in their language.



But now we have a new game. It's called guerrilla warfare. They cannot play our game and if you want to win a game, you've got to make the rules. If somebody else makes the rules, they'll always win. The imperialists have made the rules of talk, so when you sit down to talk with them you can't possibly win. They'll always find a reason why they can't do this now, or why they can't do it then, and they'll seem very rational and you will sit there and try to reason with them, on their grounds, in their terms, but they can't do that. In the first place, they have no right to oppress people, so there's no need to talk about oppression. They have absolutely no right to oppress and to exploit anybody else, so to begin to talk about freeing yourself from exploitation and oppression from the people who oppress you, gets to be ridiculous. It's like a slave sitting down with a master and talking to his master about when his master is going to let him go free. That's nonsense. The master has no business enslaving him. So all the slave has to do is get up and kill the master if the master refuses to stop enslaving him. That is the only solution.

So it is crystal clear, as far as we're concerned, armed struggle; that is all [there is] no time for talk. We have talked and talked and talked and talked for too long. You must disrupt the system by any means necessary. . . .

It is crystal clear that the West has developed the best system of weapons that they have, but there is one thing. Weapons can never defeat the will of men to fight and that is precisely where the world is today. The oppressed people have the will to fight and they're fighting the people who oppress them, and they have weapons. A good example of that would be Vietnam where the United States, with all of its weapons, cannot defeat a little nation as small as Vietnam because they have the will to fight and they're willing to fight to the death rather than to let the United States enslave them. That is very important. . . .

**Question.** What do you think of guerrilla warfare in the American continent to obtain its liberation? What do you think of this sort of fight being developed by the colored people in the country and cities of the United States of America?

**Answer.** Urban guerrilla warfare is the one way we will beat the United States because they cannot use bombs on us, because we are inside their country. They will have to fight us hand-to-hand combat. We will win, we will win.

The counterpart of that will be in the south, in the country, where we know the land, where we know the terrain, where we have worked it for years, where the white man is in (word indistinct) with sweat from us. He has enjoyed us walking all over the country. Well, we've walked over it so much so that when we take to the hills there, he doesn't know it. He will be unable to find us. We will (?hit him) again, we will be able to beat him again in guerrilla warfare. The only way that you can bring men to their knees is through guerrilla warfare because guerrilla warfare is the one warfare they cannot fight with their big guns and their big bombs. And that is the one place you beat them because they do not have any guts.

**Question.** What do you think of solidarity between all countries that fight for their liberation?

**Answer.** It is the only answer. I think that what we do not recognize, or we have not recognized in the past, is that capitalism has become international, and that we are fighting international capitalism. In order to fight international capitalism, you must wage an international fight. What has happened in the past, for example, is that if one nation was struggling everybody wished that nation good luck, but nobody (?served) as part of that same fight. Although they could see that the same countries were oppressing their countries they still didn't make the connection in their minds that that was their common enemy.

What we've done today is that we have made the connection in our minds. We do see a common enemy. So that it is crystal clear to us that we're fighting an international structure that enslaves us all, and the only way we can beat it is to internationalize our struggle. So you have an international power fighting an international power. That is the only way we can win because if we do what Che [Ernesto "Che" Guevara] says we should do, that is, to create two, three, many Vietnams, we will have them fighting on all fronts at the same time, and they cannot win. . . .

But more importantly is that once we have seized power—as we will—the question is to begin to develop an international system that will not give vent to capitalism, where we can trade with each other based on our needs, on what we need and on what each country has, rather than fight to control the world market where we would set prices for goods by profits and not by needs of humanity. And that is the concept that we must begin to talk more and more about, because we will find out that as we seize power unless we have the spirit, the will, and the intelligence of the leaders in Cuba, most of us will end up the way all other countries that have coups or that seize power end up, they will accept the entire bureaucratic structure that the imperialists have imposed on their countries and will not be able to fight that. So we must begin to do that. . . .

**Question.** The fight you are developing in the United States signifies for people, for outsiders, that you have signed your death sentence. What do you think, or have to say, about that?

**Answer.** Brother Malcolm [El Hajj Malik El Shabazz, Malcolm X] used to tell us that there were several types of death. I think a dehumanized people who do not fight back are a dead people. That is what the West has been able to do to most of us. . . . Dehumanized us to the point where we would not even fight back. Once you've begun to fight back, you are alive, you are alive, and bullets won't kill you. If you do not fight back, you're dead, you are dead, and all the money in the world can't bring you alive. So we're alive today, and we're alive all over the world. All of your Black people are coming alive because they're fighting back. They're fighting for their humanity. They're doing the type of thing that Fidel [Fidel Castro, Fidel Alejandro Castro Ruz] talks about, when you become alive and you want to live so much that you fight to live.

You fight to live. See, when you're dead, when you don't rebel, you're not fighting to live, you're already dead. Well, we are alive and we love life so much that we're willing to die for it. So, we're alive. Death can't stop us.