

**Bearing the Seeds of Struggle:  
*Freedomways* Magazine, Black Leftists,  
and Continuities in the Freedom Movement**

By

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## ABSTRACT

A number of black leftists survived the most repressive years of the early Cold War to participate in the post-war African American civil rights movement. Among them were the editors of *Freedomways* magazine, who brought their activist and organizing experiences in Popular Front coalitions in the 1930s and 1940s to bear on the civil rights upsurge of the 1950s-1970s. As the African American freedom struggle expanded its support of civil rights to encompass anti-Vietnam War, anti-colonial, and anti-poverty initiatives by the mid-1960s, *Freedomways* became an important publication linking several generations of black radicals. In particular, it propagated an influential form of radical integrationism -- deeply-influenced by Popular Front ideology and strategy -- that largely succeeded in transcending the factionalism of the black movement in the 1960s and 1970s. Overall, *Freedomways*' radicalism helps to show important continuities over time in the black freedom struggle.

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

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## **LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS**

BPP –	Black Panther Party
CRC –	Civil Rights Congress
CAA –	Council on African Affairs
CIO –	Congress of Industrial Organizations
CORE –	Congress on Racial Equality
CP –	Communist Party of the United States of America
MFDP –	Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party
NAACP –	National Association for the Advancement of Colored People
NY-NAACP –	New York, National Association for the Advancement of Colored People
NOI –	Nation of Islam
NNC –	National Negro Congress
OAAU –	Organization of Afro-American Unity
PUSH –	People United to Save Humanity
SCLC –	Southern Christian Leadership Conference
SNCC –	Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee
SNYC –	Southern Negro Youth Congress
YMCA –	Young Men’s Christian Association
YWCA –	Young Women’s Christian Association
WPA –	Works Progress Administration



## PROLOGUE AND INTRODUCTION

### “A group of friends”

When I asked the former managing editor of *Freedomways*, Esther Jackson, how she got involved with founding the influential quarterly magazine, her initial response led me to wonder whether I had asked the right question. “We were a group of friends involved with the Southern Negro Youth Congress,” she said.<sup>1</sup> At first this seemed like a strange answer, since the Youth Congress (SNYC) was a left-wing civil rights organization based in Virginia and Alabama that had disbanded in 1949, eleven years before *Freedomways* was first published. What did SNYC have to do with a magazine that began in New York in April of 1961? At the very most, I thought that Jackson would begin her narrative only a few years before *Freedomways*’ first issue, when she was living in New York and corresponding with the veteran Harlem radical couple, Shirley Graham Du Bois and W.E.B. Du Bois about raising funds for a new magazine, getting writing contacts, and soliciting articles. But instead, she took me much further back in her response, to SNYC’s beginning. Through this process, she indicated to me, quite clearly, who had founded the magazine, and more importantly, the crucial historical context for understanding its conception.

Esther Jackson told me how in 1937, her husband James Jackson, along with other SNYC leaders, had successfully helped to organize tobacco workers in Virginia for pay increases and a livable eight-hour workday. “This was considered a major victory for that time,” she said. As C. Alvin Hughes has indicated, the tobacco workers’ struggle

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<sup>1</sup> Esther Jackson, interview by Ian Rocksborough-Smith, Brooklyn, NY, 28 May, 2004.

was the first strike in Virginia since 1905 and it “helped SNYC gain a following among the black working class in the South.”<sup>2</sup> Jackson indicated that this SNYC-initiated union struggle would inspire “all kinds of other groups to protest for the first time in many, many years. And so it was considered a major victory and classes were started and a whole number of events took place.”<sup>3</sup>

SNYC certainly did facilitate a wide range of activities among a broad cross-section of people. It helped reinvigorate the Southern freedom movement, picking up where black Communists had left off in the mid-1930s.<sup>4</sup> Like the Communists, SNYC defended the rights of sharecroppers, black and white coal miners and steelworkers, as well as criminalized black youth. It initiated Right to Vote Campaigns that took the form of popular education programs and drama presentations in churches, as well as local demonstrations against the disenfranchising poll-tax throughout the Southern states. SNYC even opened an office in Birmingham, Alabama in 1938, shortly after its second annual convention, where it became an early opponent of Bull Connor’s infamous police forces and published its own newspaper, *Cavalcade*.<sup>5</sup> Delegates for its founding congress in Virginia in 1937 included reform-minded moderates such as Martin L. Harvey, president of the Christian Youth Council of North America, Myrtle Powell of the white YWCA, and Mordecai Johnson, president of Howard University. The congress also had the support of then-leftist Max Yergan of the black YMCA and the Council on African Affairs, as well as Communists Benjamin Davis, Angelo Herndon, and Edward

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<sup>2</sup> C. Alvin Hughes, “‘We Demand our Rights’: The Southern Negro Youth Congress, 1937-1949,” *Phylon* 48, no. 1 (First Quarter 1987): 44.

<sup>3</sup> Esther Jackson, interview.

<sup>4</sup> Robin D.G. Kelley, *Hammer and Hoe: Alabama Communists During the Great Depression*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1990).

<sup>5</sup> C. Alvin Hughes, “‘We Demand our Rights,’” 46; Robin D.G. Kelley, *Hammer and Hoe*, 197, 202-228.

Strong, who had helped form the National Negro Congress (NNC) in Chicago in 1936.<sup>6</sup> Following the conscription of her husband and other male leaders during World War II, Esther Jackson quit plans to attain a PhD at the University of Chicago and instead carried on the work of SNYC in the Southern states as its executive secretary, pushing for military desegregation and the Double Victory campaign against fascism in Europe and America.<sup>7</sup>

As Jackson continued to speak about SNYC in our interview, it became clear that she was making a very specific historical point. She had indicated the importance of continuity in her own experiences as an activist as well as those of the others who helped conceive *Freedomways* magazine in New York during the early 1960s – namely Augusta and Edward Strong, and Louis and Dorothy Burnham. They had all been key actors in SNYC’s wide-ranging struggles for social justice in the 1930s and 1940s. Edward Strong had been the youth representative of the NNC and had sent out the original call for the inaugural SNYC congress, while Louis Burnham helped run SNYC with Esther Jackson and edited SNYC’s *Cavalcade* with Augusta Strong during WWII.<sup>8</sup> From these experiences, they carried with them the intent of recreating similar Popular Front organizations through their activism in the 1950s and 1960s. From their SNYC experience, they felt that coalition-building was the most effective way to organize against racism and for progressive change in American society. The founders of *Freedomways* had been involved in social movements that “crested in the 1940s” and that were “sparked by the alchemy of laborites, civil rights activists, progressive New Dealers, and black and white radicals, some of whom were associated with the

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<sup>6</sup> C. Alvin Hughes, “We Demand our Rights,” 40.

<sup>7</sup> Robin D.G. Kelley, *Hammer and Hoe*, 221.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 221; C. Alvin Hughes, “We Demand Our Rights,” 39.

Communist Party.”<sup>9</sup> They managed to survive the repression of the Cold War in the late 1940s and early 1950s and carried forth the radical and progressive ideals of these movements - what Robert Korstad called “civil rights unionism” and what Martha Biondi called the “black Popular Front” - into the best known period for civil rights activism, namely the 1950s and 1960s.<sup>10</sup>

After SNYC folded in 1949, the group of friends all moved to New York City. It was there that they would again partake in activities that brought them into contact with others who shared their desire to effect radical change against American racism, despite the repressive Cold War atmosphere. To that end, Esther Jackson, Edward Strong, and Louis Burnham were all involved with the creation of activist and singer Paul Robeson’s *Freedom* newspaper in 1950. Like SNYC before it, the group founding *Freedom* was made up of a significant cross-section of leftists that included Esther Jackson and fellow former SNYC executives, Edward Strong and Louis Burnham, historian Herbert Aptheker, members of the New York Negro Labor Council and members of the Committee for the Negro in Arts such as entertainers Ossie Davis, Ruby Dee, and Harry Belafonte. Historian Lawrence Lamphere suggests that, “*Freedom* paper was basically an attempt by a small group of black activists, most of them Communists, to provide Robeson with a base in Harlem and a means of reaching his public.”<sup>11</sup> Creating this base was no easy task, for during the paper’s existence Robeson had his passport revoked by the federal government and was becoming increasingly marginalized in the

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<sup>9</sup> Jacquelyn Dowd Hall, “The Long Civil Rights Movement and Political Uses of the Past,” *The Journal of American History* 91, no. 4 (March 2005): 1245.

<sup>10</sup> Robert Korstad, *Civil Rights Unionism: Tobacco Workers and the Struggle for Democracy in the Mid-Twentieth-Century South*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003), 1; Martha Biondi, *To Stand and Fight: The Struggle for Civil Rights in Postwar New York City*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003), 6.

<sup>11</sup> Lawrence Lamphere, “Paul Robeson, *Freedom* Newspaper, and the Black Press,” (PhD dissertation, Boston College, May 2003), 125.

public sphere for his left-wing political activities.<sup>12</sup> The content of the paper was firmly set against the Cold War liberal grain of much of the black press during the early 1950s, continuing, for example, to link anticolonial liberation in Africa with social justice in the U.S.<sup>13</sup> Moreover, *Freedom* paralleled the publication of *Monthly Review*, an independent socialist publication that was also formed during the McCarthy era by a cadre of committed leftists. Christopher Phelps suggests that the founders of *Monthly Review* held in common a “shared experience...of the Popular Front.”<sup>14</sup> Like the founders of *Monthly Review*, with their experiences in SNYC and the Popular Front, the editors of *Freedom* were prompted to continue publishing well into the 1950s. Unfortunately, *Freedom* “hit right at the heart of the McCarthy era [1951-55]” and, unlike *Monthly Review*, lasted only five years because of terminal financial difficulties and anti-communist FBI harassment.<sup>15</sup>

According to Esther Jackson, Ed Strong and Louis Burnham had thought of the original idea for *Freedomways* during the mid-50s as a continuation of *Freedom* newspaper and the Freedom Fund that backed it financially.<sup>16</sup> With the approach of the 1960s, when the height of McCarthyist repression was over and black struggles in America were again taking centre stage in the southern states, Burnham and Strong wanted there to be a similar publication to *Freedom* paper which could be, as Jackson

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<sup>12</sup> Penny Von Eschen, *Race Against Empire: Black Americans and Anticolonialism, 1937-1957*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997), 124.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid*, 146.

<sup>14</sup> Christopher Phelps, “Introduction: A Socialist Magazine in the American Century,” *Monthly Review* 51, no. 1 (May 1999): 7.

<sup>15</sup> Lawrence Lamphere, “Paul Robeson, *Freedom* Newspaper, and the Black Press,” 125.

<sup>16</sup> Esther Jackson, interview. According to Esther Jackson, *Freedomways* emerged from the same intellectual and cultural milieu that *Freedom* paper had, but got its name from a case study of a black community in Kent, Virginia. See Hylan Lewis, *Blackways of Kent: Field Studies in the Modern Culture of the South*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1955).

suggested, a "political magazine and also a cultural magazine... which would provide some guidance to civil rights during that period in history."<sup>17</sup> Because of their organizational experiences together in SNYC, Burnham wanted Jackson to take a managing role with the new magazine. Unfortunately, Burnham suffered a heart attack and died in 1960, never to see his dream become a reality. Nonetheless, the idea behind *Freedomways* did not die, since Jackson and those who remained from SNYC were together in New York City and part of a progressive community of activists, artists, and intellectuals that helped to see Burnham's idea to fruition. Like the SNYC cadre, this vibrant community had been active for many decades and was equally inclined to organize broad coalitions of people against American racism.

To understand how and why *Freedomways* came about, then, it is first important to trace how Esther Jackson and the SNYC cadre were also part of a significant generation of black leftists that bridged a crucial gap in the movements against racism in the 1930s and 1940s and those of the 1950s and 1960s. Coming of political age in an era of black Popular Front activism, people such as Jackson and her SNYC friends drew upon their experiences in broad multi-racial political coalitions comprised of radical leftists and progressive liberals, which in turn formed the base for Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO) union drives and progressive New Deal programs such as the Federal Theatre Projects of the Works Progress Administration (WPA) that gave significant space to an oppositional culture in the 1930s and 1940s.<sup>18</sup> Black Americans such as W.E.B. Du Bois and Paul Robeson involved themselves in these coalitions and were especially interested in the Double Victory campaigns against fascism and lynching during World War II. This also brought them into close contact with popular opposition to

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<sup>17</sup> Esther Jackson, interview.

<sup>18</sup> For a motion picture depiction of the cultural front, see *Cradle Will Rock*, DVD, directed by Tim Robbins (New York: Touchstone, 1999).

Western imperial and colonial interventions in Ethiopia and Spain in the 1930s and to India and South Africa during the 1940s.

As Patricia Sullivan has argued, the activities of the Popular Front era created hope for a generation of activists who were imbued with a spirit of radical thought that they felt would transform the world into a better place for everyone regardless of the colour of their skin or the class they were born into.<sup>19</sup> Reclaiming the term “Popular Front” from its rigid ideological association with the Communist Party (CP), Michael Denning describes it as a broad counter-hegemonic force that gave rise to a front of proletarian cultural workers. These workers were entertainers, progressive literary and film producers, and forward-thinking intellectuals who found opportunities through the WPA and the CIO to work on projects that carried forth this spirit of left-oriented radicalism.<sup>20</sup> In the migration of black entertainers such as SNYC People’s Theatre actor Thomas Richardson to New York, Denning indicates “a trajectory that was typical of young radicals of the cultural front.”<sup>21</sup>

It was these kinds of life narratives and radical political trajectories fostered during the Popular Front era that also helped bring southern black organizers such as *Freedomways*’ Esther Jackson to New York after the demise of SNYC. Despite the fact that many blacks who came to Northern cities in the Great Migration found that desegregation did not put an end to racism, Esther Jackson felt that New York City was still “the home of the literary world” and one of the most tolerable places for political

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<sup>19</sup> Patricia Sullivan, *Days of Hope: Race and Democracy in the New Deal Era*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996).

<sup>20</sup> Michael Denning, *The Cultural Front: The Laboring of American Culture in the Twentieth Century*, (New York: Verso, 1996), xviii-xix.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 354. Richardson had been active alongside James and Esther Jackson in union struggles with SNYC before heading north to gain employment in the Harlem Suitcase Theatre, founded by poet Langston Hughes, where he appeared in a production of *Emperor Jones* with Paul Robeson.

radicals to be in the U.S. during the Cold War.<sup>22</sup> "I tell you it was important to have [*Freedomways*] published in New York. It was significant and strategically beneficial to be here, because of all the contacts we could make with young writers and artists. And the whole history of culture in the Harlem community going back through the Harlem Renaissance, it was important to be here."<sup>23</sup> New York city became an ideal venue for the former SNYC activists to continue their Popular Front radicalism and relate it to the growing militancy of the civil rights movement in the 1950s and 1960s.

The SNYC friends made many connections with the elder figures of the Harlem cultural and literary scene, who in turn provided them with opportunities to continue their radical oppositional politics in the vibrant intergenerational literary community of late-1950s and 1960s New York. The famed poet, Langston Hughes, whose leftist affinities have been downplayed by scholars, frequently gave readings at SNYC-sponsored events in Virginia and Alabama during the 1940s, while W.E.B. Du Bois lent his support to the organization and spoke at one of its conventions in 1946.<sup>24</sup> During the 1940s and 1950s, New York became home to Du Bois and his wife Shirley Graham, who moved increasingly to the Left over the course of these decades. For a time, they were active in New York's radical community, befriending and mentoring some of the younger generation of radicals – notably Esther Jackson and the SNYC cadre involved with the

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<sup>22</sup> Between 1910 and the end of World War II, it is estimated that nearly 2 million black Americans migrated from the southern states to northern cities like Chicago, New York, and Philadelphia. See Pete Daniel, "Going Among Strangers: Southern Reactions to World War II," *Journal of American History* 77 (Fall 1990): 69-95.

<sup>23</sup> Esther Jackson, interview.

<sup>24</sup> James Smethurst, "'Don't Say Goodbye to the Porkpie Hat': Langston Hughes, the Left, and the Black Arts Movement," *Callaloo* 25, 4 (2002): 1225; W.E.B. Du Bois, "Behold the Land" (speech, SNYC legislature, Columbia, North Carolina, October 20, 1946), *Freedomways* 4, no. 1 (1964): 8-15; Esther Jackson, interview.



forming of *Freedomways*.<sup>25</sup> As a result of her involvement with key Harlem literary figures like Du Bois and Hughes through SNYC, a major Popular Front organization, Jackson was able to immerse herself in the activities of organizations like John Oliver Killens's Harlem Writers Guild during the 1950s. Through these contacts, she befriended prominent writers such as Lorraine Hansberry, Margaret Burroughs, John Henrik Clarke, Ernest Kaiser, and Julien Mayfield while learning from older writers including Sterling Brown, Louise Thompson, William Patterson, and Zora Neale Hurston. Aside from *Freedomways*, a plethora of other black radical publications also existed in New York City during the 1960s, notably Calvin Hicks's *On Guard*, Tom Dent's *Umbra*, Don Watts's *Liberator*, the African Nationalist Pioneer Movement's *The Street Speaker* and *The Black Challenge*, and the Nation of Islam's *Muhammad Speaks*.<sup>26</sup> Despite the omnipresence of McCarthyism in 1950s America, New York City was still a major haven for black political radicalism because it was home to such a broad and intergenerational literary and cultural scene.

A variety of figures and organizations in New York also indicated that the activities of World War II-era radicals were continuing well into the post-war 1950s and 1960s. Robert Williams, the renegade Monroe, North Carolina NAACP leader, who was suspended from his organization in 1959 for advocating armed black self defence from lynching, spent considerable time meeting and raising funds for his efforts with a wide range of Harlem figures. Such figures included Malcolm X, as well as writers Julien

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<sup>25</sup> Gerald Horne, *Black and Red: W.E.B. Du Bois and the Afro-American Response to the Cold War, 1944-1963*, (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1986); Gerald Horne, *Race Woman: The Lives of Shirley Graham Du Bois*, (New York: New York University Press, 2000).

<sup>26</sup> Peniel E. Joseph, "Dashikis and Democracy: Black Studies, Student Activism, and the Black Power Movement," *Journal of African American Studies* 88, no. 2 (Spring 2003): 186-187.

Mayfield and John Henrik Clarke, who would each go on to write for *Freedomways*.<sup>27</sup>

Martha Biondi and Penny Von Eschen have both shown that organizations such as the National Negro Labor Council (NNLC) and Robeson and Du Bois' anticolonial Council on African Affairs still operated in New York until 1955-6 despite severe internal conflicts and government repression.<sup>28</sup> Moreover, Biondi even suggests that the "Communist Left continued to play a significant role [there] in racial justice struggles well into the 1950s."<sup>29</sup>

A figure who supports her claim was former CP member and merchant marine radical Jack O'Dell, who later headed fundraising in the New York office of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference and became a key writer and editor for *Freedomways* in the mid-1960s. O'Dell first went to New York in the late 1950s to join in the struggle for public housing, after which he helped James Jackson, along with eminent civil rights and union activist A. Philip Randolph and former CP member, lifelong pacifist and civil rights intellectual Bayard Rustin, organize a March on Washington for Integrated Schools in 1959 that brought 25,000 people to the capital. This was an impressive cast of leftists, especially since this event occurred deep into the Cold War, long after all "reds" had supposedly been purged from American progressive movements.

This generation of black leftists from the 1930s and 1940s never ceased their activity even during the height of the Cold War. While their activities in the Southern states may have been circumscribed, the group of friends who formed *Freedomways* depended on a close knit network of people throughout New York whom they knew from this earlier period. As such, the former SNYC activists were able to enter into the Harlem radical milieu of the 1950s and 1960s and gain valuable support when they

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<sup>27</sup> Timothy B. Tyson, *Radio Free Dixie: Robert F. Williams and the Roots of Black Power*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999), 204.

<sup>28</sup> Martha Biondi, *To Stand and Fight*, 267; Penny Von Eschen, *Race Against Empire*, 141.

<sup>29</sup> Martha Biondi, *To Stand and Fight*, 6.

finally decided to create the magazine in 1961. Esther Jackson describes this experience:

After Louis died we were all in such shock that nothing happened for a while. Then Jim [James] Jackson, Shirley Graham Du Bois, Dr. Du Bois, John Oliver Killens, Ruby Dee, Ossie Davis, Lorraine Hansberry and some of us got together. Well we're going to try it out, because this was Louis Burnham's dream. I agreed to work for a year to try to raise funds to find an office, and Dr. Du Bois advising us from his experience with *The Crisis*, *Phylon*, and from all of his books and so forth. He advised us not to get the first issue out until we had enough money in the bank for at least a year or two.<sup>30</sup>

As Jackson's narrative indicates, *Freedomways*' inauguration was greatly informed by the experiences of earlier generations of activists and can be viewed as part of a crucial point of continuity between periods of African American struggle.

*Freedomways* very much represented a continuation of the political legacy set out by the founding cadre from SNYC. This legacy would frequently be viewed by its critics as falling within the ideological sphere of the CP. Along with many other black radicals, *Freedomways* was the subject of ongoing FBI surveillance of "Communist" activity in New York during the 1950s and 1960s. A 1961 memo from an unidentified agent to FBI director J. Edgar Hoover claimed that the CP would "begin publication of a Negro quarterly magazine entitled *Freedomways*" and that the project was receiving substantial start-up funds from the party.<sup>31</sup> Early subscribers and writers for the magazine even had FBI agents visit them to ensure they were aware that the magazine was "Communist."<sup>32</sup> Indeed, beyond the government's red-baiting, there was certainly reason to assume that the CP and *Freedomways* were closely connected. Esther's

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<sup>30</sup> Esther Jackson, interview.

<sup>31</sup> Federal Bureau of Investigation, "Communist Party United States of America – Pamphlets and Publications, Internal Security," file 100-3-86, New York, NY, February 21, 1961, "Freedomways (Magazine)" case file NY 105-160936 Sec. 1, Freedom of Information and Privacy Acts, Records of the Federal Bureau of Investigation, FBI Headquarters, Washington, D.C. (hereafter cited as FM 105-160936 Sec. 1, FOI, FBI, HQ).

<sup>32</sup> Esther Jackson, interview.

husband, James Jackson, had become editor of the party's newspaper, *The Daily Worker*, the Du Boises each held party memberships by the late 1950s, and the magazine's early issues featured articles by Party members William Patterson and Benjamin Davis. There was even initial talk, voiced mainly by Shirley Graham, about making the publication explicitly "Marxist" – she apparently wanted this label to appear in the magazine's banner.

Nonetheless, from the magazine's beginning, and in line with the black Popular Front spirit of the 1930s and 1940s, the editors tried to ensure that they appealed to a much broader audience. Jackson felt that the editors of *Freedomways* "wanted to reach the maximum number of people, and that we could have Marxists write for it, but we wanted it to be broader so that it could reach a wider range of people in the colleges, universities, and trade unions. I think we were correct." The magazine's inaugural editorial declared this position explicitly: "*Freedomways* will explore, without prejudice or gag, and from the viewpoint of the special interests of American Negroes, as well as the general interest of the nation, the new forms of economic, political and social systems now existing or emerging in the world...."<sup>33</sup> For the magazine's founding editors, the ideal of forming the broadest possible coalitions through the black freedom movement existed at the outset.

Despite its initially low circulation, black intellectuals, journalists, and political leaders eagerly anticipated *Freedomways*. For the first issue, the magazine could initially only afford advertisements in the *Baltimore African American* and the *Pittsburgh Courier*, and sent out 600 of the 2000 copies of its inaugural run by mail to new subscribers.<sup>34</sup> Foreshadowing its role as a voice for anticolonial radicalism, the

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<sup>33</sup> Freedomways Associates, "It's a Journal!," *Freedomways* 1, no. 1 (1961): 7-9.

<sup>34</sup> Unknown agent to Federal Bureau of Investigation Director, telegram, 8 May 1961, FM 105-160936 Sec. 1, FOI, FBI, HQ.

reception that launched the magazine featured a speech from the first UN Ambassador from the Congo, Thomas Kanza. This reception was booked at the Hotel Martinique and an overflow hall was needed to accommodate the 500 people attending the event.<sup>35</sup> Thus, the magazine had a strong following from its beginnings – a following that would grow as new writers and editors came to the forefront in the burgeoning civil rights activity of the 1960s.

In tracing the actions of *Freedomways*' founding editors and analyzing the content of their magazine, I hope to accomplish two primary tasks. The first task, addressed primarily in chapter one, is to show how the founders of *Freedomways* were an important part of a generation of black leftists who brought the Popular Front politics of the 1930s and 1940s to a younger generation of non-violent direct action activists in the most prominent civil rights organizations of the early 1960s -- namely the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC), the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), the Congress on Racial Equality (CORE), and the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party (MFDP). With these intentions expressed in its pages and in the internationalist activities and movements it sponsored and supported, the magazine helped to sustain crucial and overlooked radical political continuities that significantly influenced civil rights discourse during the 1960s.

Drawing primarily on the magazine's editorial content from the early 1960s, but also from the correspondence of associate editor John Henrik Clarke and interviews conducted with a number of the magazine's central editors, I will show how *Freedomways* carried forth the political legacies of black Popular Front figures like Paul Robeson, W.E.B. Du Bois - and the movements they championed -- well into the 1960s. Such efforts shed additional light on the decidedly anticolonial dimensions of the civil

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<sup>35</sup> Unknown agent to Federal Bureau of Investigation Director, telegram, 15 March 1961, FM 105-160936 Sec. 1, FOI, FBI, HQ.

rights movement, their leftist character, and the clearly global dynamics of black political struggle throughout most of the twentieth century – what Nikhil Pal Singh calls a “black worldliness.”<sup>36</sup>

The other main task of my thesis, addressed in the second chapter, is to show how *Freedomways* reconciled sectarian tensions in the Black Power era of the 1960s, particularly between radicals and moderates, and, albeit to a lesser degree, integrationists and nationalists. In doing so, the magazine continued to indicate connections between the movements of the 1930s and 1940s and the movements of the 1950s, 1960s, and early 1970s that still reinforced a tactical difference between integrationists and militant black nationalists. Because the magazine had an affinity for the “mainstream,” non-violent wing of the freedom movement, it avoided widespread interactions with black nationalist figures such as Malcolm X, whose internationalism increasingly paralleled that of the editors, but whose militant separatism did not sit well with their civil rights allies. As such, the leftists at the magazine had more of an interest in broader movements like SCLC and later, People United to Save Humanity (PUSH), that backed popular electoral and progressive social policy initiatives, women’s liberation, poor people’s campaigns, and non-violent peace marches. Associate editor Jack O’Dell “had great respect for Malcolm X,” but felt Malcolm “had been poorly trained” by NOI into “not cooperating with the civil rights movement,” opposing integration and multiracial cooperation and favoring entrepreneurial separatism over the attainment of radical changes in public policy.<sup>37</sup> To O’Dell, and to most of the editors with *Freedomways*, political integration was more than simply *de jure* desegregation and cultural acquiescence to “white-defined institutions”; it was also, as Jacquelyn Dowd Hall

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<sup>36</sup> Nikhil Pal Singh, “Culture/Wars: Recoding Empire in the Age of Democracy,” *American Quarterly* 50, no. 3 (September 1998): 514.

<sup>37</sup> Jack O’Dell, interview by Ian Rocksborough-Smith, Vancouver, B.C., 11 May, 2004.

has recently put it, “an expansive and radical goal... a process of transforming institutions and building an equitable, democratic, multiracial, and multiethnic society.”<sup>38</sup> It constituted a radical program, rooted firmly in the mainstream politics of black America.

Such a radical program converged with the leftist coalition politics that have worked to unite radical grassroots activists, intellectuals, and artists with more moderate public figures over several decades of struggle. Old guard black leftists, like the editors at *Freedomways*, have stood at the centre of these broad coalitions throughout this time, and found themselves allied and strategically situated to encourage the internationalist and socialist tendencies of the most prominent civil rights leaders. This cooperation brought the editors into ideological harmony with prominent Southern leaders such as Martin Luther King, Jr. Such an alliance does not fit with King’s distorted status as an “American hero” – a depiction that has placed him almost exclusively within the integrationist and non-violent wing of the freedom movement and devalued his radical internationalism, most evident by the mid-late 1960s.<sup>39</sup>

The radicalism that the magazine helped articulate also connected with disparate Harlem-based black literary and cultural traditions that were not exclusively associated to the civil rights mainstream in the Southern U.S. or to the political Left. In advancing an integrationist politics that also maintained an expansive vision for charting radical

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<sup>38</sup> I am borrowing Jacquelyn Dowd Hall’s term, “white-defined institutions,” from her useful discussion of “true integration” in a revised version of her presidential address to the convention of the Organization of American Historians in Boston on March 27, 2004. Jacquelyn Dowd Hall, “The Long Civil Rights Movement,” 1252.

<sup>39</sup> For narratives that frame Martin Luther King, Jr. as a decidedly integrationist, moderate leader and downplay his internationalist and leftist political convictions, see Taylor Branch, *Parting the Waters: America in the King Years – 1954-1963*, (New York: Touchstone, 1988); David J. Garrow, *Bearing the Cross: Martin Luther King and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference*, (New York: William Morrow, 1986); Diane McWhorter, *Carry Me Home: Birmingham, Alabama: The Climactic Battle of the Civil Rights Revolution*, (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2001), 21-24.

unity and democratic transformation across time and space, the magazine enabled a forum for the working out of political differences between generations of moderate and radical black activists. While the working out of such differences was not always successful through these forums, many contributors to the magazine agreed that Popular Front coalitions would provide the most effective means of promoting black unity and gaining public support for the dismantlement of racism in American life. Overall, the radicalism borne by the editors of *Freedomways* from past decades into the 1960s and 1970s helps to further illustrate the “long civil rights era” (1930-1970) which many historians are now using for the periodization of the twentieth century African American struggle for freedom, social justice, and democracy.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> Many historians have now re-periodized the civil rights era from its “classical” phase (1954-1965) to a longer, more complex era (1930-1970), see Jacquelyn Dowd Hall, “Civil Rights and the Political Uses of the Past,” 1235, 1245-1248; Steve Fraser and Gary Gerstle, eds., *The Rise and Fall of the New Deal Order, 1930-1980*, (Princeton, 1989); Van Gosse, “A Movement of Movements: The Definition and Periodization of the New Left,” in *Companion to Post-1945 America*, eds. Agnew and Rosenzweig, 277-302; Nikhil Pal Singh, *Black is a Country: Race and the Unfinished Struggle for Democracy*, (Boston: Harvard University Press, 2004).



## CHAPTER 1

### **“Filling the Gap”: Intergenerational Black Radicalism and the Popular Front Ideals of *Freedomways* Magazine in the Post-War Civil Rights Movement**

In 1965, two years after Paul Robeson returned to the United States from a five-year sojourn abroad induced by vicious red-baiting, *Freedomways*' managing editor Esther Jackson and associate editor Jack O'Dell helped organize a tribute for him at the Hotel Americana near Times Square in New York City.<sup>1</sup> Those attending the tribute represented a significant cross-section of New York's black public figures. Harlem's famous theatrical couple, Ruby Dee and Ossie Davis, were the MCs for the evening. They had been closely involved with *Freedomways* for much of its existence, generously donating their time and money and hosting numerous other events and fundraisers for the magazine; Dee would later become an editor.<sup>2</sup> At the tribute, Davis and Dee introduced high profile speakers such as writers James Baldwin and John Oliver Killens, Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) National Chair John Lewis, and Marxist historian Herbert Aptheker. Progressive white folk singer Pete Seeger also gave a performance. The event's 171 sponsors were a "Who's Who" of New York's black entertainment community during the mid-1960s, including the likes of actress Diana Sands, musicians John Coltrane, Dizzy Gillespie, and Billy Taylor, and comedian Dick

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<sup>1</sup> Esther Jackson and Constance Pohl, eds., *Freedomways Reader: Prophets in Their Own Country*, (Boulder: Westview, 2001), xxix.

<sup>2</sup> Ossie Davis and Ruby Dee, *With Ossie and Ruby: In This Life Together*, (New York: William Morrow, 1998), 476; John Henrik Clarke to Ossie Davis, 4 June 1965, Box 30, Folder 23, John Henrik Clarke Papers, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture Archives and Rare Books Division, New York (hereafter cited as John Henrik Clarke Papers).

Gregory.<sup>3</sup> Among the 2500 people who filled the hotel's Albert Hall that night was a diverse group of New York's black elite, notably actors, musicians, artists, writers and intellectuals. Others, like John Lewis, were intensely involved in the day-to-day tasks of civil rights movement organizing. International sponsors also sent greetings to the Salute, including Jawaharlal Nehru of India, African American exiles in Ghana including Shirley Graham Du Bois and Alphaeus Hunton, and the artists and directors of the Moscow Art Theatre.<sup>4</sup> In short, the *Freedomways* tribute to Robeson included an extraordinary mixture of high profile liberal and leftist personalities, given the Cold War context and the supposedly marginalized position of the guest of honour.<sup>5</sup> It was precisely this heterogeneity, articulated in the pages of the magazine, and featured at public events like the tribute to Robeson, that would demonstrate how prominent radical continuities could mirror the black Popular Front of previous decades and persist into this period of the African American freedom struggle.

The emergence of *Freedomways* in the early 1960s complicates the arguments of many historians who overlook continuities in emphasizing change in the struggle for black liberation in the mid-twentieth Century. Much civil rights literature correctly extends the chronology of the movement back to include the industrial unionism, New Deal activism, and anticolonialism of the 1930s and 1940s with the dominant narrative of anti-racist protest during the 1950s and 1960s. However, this literature does not examine the continuities between the two eras, instead stressing their qualitative differences. Thus, many writers lament the decline of African American left and labour-

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<sup>3</sup> Freedomways Associates, *Freedomways Salute to Paul Robeson - New York City, Thursday, April 22, 1965*, brochure, (New York: Freedomways Associates, 1965).

<sup>4</sup> Freedomways Associates, "Salute to Robeson," *Freedomways* 5, no. 3 (1965): 363-364.

<sup>5</sup> Martin B. Duberman, *Paul Robeson: A Biography*, (New York: Knopf, 1988); Penny Von Eschen, *Race Against Empire: Black Americans and Anticolonialism, 1937-1957*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997), 259.

oriented internationalism in the face of McCarthyist intimidation during the late 1940s and 1950s.<sup>6</sup> Others suggest that internationalist civil rights anti-racism survived the 1950s but was primarily pro-American, pragmatically following the Cold War liberal consensus of anti-communism and anti-leftism, but nonetheless advancing the cause of racial justice in the United States.<sup>7</sup> There is a growing body of literature that shows that radical politics survived from an earlier era and continued through the repressive red baiting of the 1950s to significantly influence the tactics, strategies, and culture of the freedom struggle that emerged from that decade.<sup>8</sup> But unlike much of this literature, which demonstrates the diffuse intellectual, literary, and strategic continuities of these radical politics, a case study of *Freedomways* provides concrete evidence that not only the ideas, but the activists and activism of earlier decades survived the McCarthyism of the 1950s to have a definite impact on the civil rights movement and black political

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<sup>6</sup> Penny Von Eschen, *Race Against Empire*, 273-275; Robert Korstad and Nelson Lichtenstein, "Opportunities Found and Lost: Labor, Radicals, and the Early Civil Rights Movement," *Journal of American History* 75 (December 1988): 801; Adam Fairclough, *Race and Democracy: The Civil Rights Struggle in Louisiana, 1915-1972*, (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1995), xii; Jeff Woods, *Black Struggle Red Scare: Segregation and Anti-Communism in the South, 1948-1968*, (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2004).

<sup>7</sup> Thomas Borstelmann, *The Cold War and the Color Line: American Race Relations in the Global Arena*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001), 369; Mary L. Dudziak, *Cold War Civil Rights: Race and the Image of American Democracy*, (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2000), 27-28; Helen Laville and Scott Lucas, "The American Way: Edith Sampson, the NAACP, and African American Identity in the Cold War," *Diplomatic History* 20, no. 4, (Fall 1996): 567; Brenda Gayle Plummer, *Rising Wind: Black Americans and US Foreign Affairs, 1935-1960*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996); Carol Anderson, *Eyes Off the Prize: The United Nations and the African American Struggle for Human Rights, 1944-1955* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 2.

<sup>8</sup> Charles Payne, *I've Got the Light of Freedom: The Organizing Tradition and the Mississippi Freedom Struggle*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 79-94; Martha Biondi, *To Stand and Fight: The Struggle for Civil Rights in Postwar New York City*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003), 6; Cedric Robinson, *Black Marxism: The Making of the Black Radical Tradition*, (London: Zed Press, 1983), 317; Nikhil Pal Singh, *Black is a Country: Race and the Unfinished Struggle for Democracy*, (Boston: Harvard University Press, 2004); Timothy Tyson, *Radio Free Dixie: Robert F. Williams and the Roots of Black Power*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999); James Smethurst, "Poetry and Sympathy: New York, the Left, and the Rise of Black Arts," in *Left of the Color Line: Race, Radicalism, and Twentieth-Century Literature of the United States*, Bill V. Mullen and James Smethurst, eds., (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003), 259-278.

discourse of the 1960s.<sup>9</sup> These figures carried with them the consensual and non-sectarian organizing strategies of Popular Front anti-racism that had been developed in formations such as the Council on African Affairs (CAA), the National Negro Congress (NNC), the Civil Rights Congress (CRC) and the Southern Negro Youth Congress (SNYC) in the 1930s, 1940s, and 1950s, engaging in constructive dialogues with the militant integrationist and non-violent practitioners of the civil rights mainstream of the late 1950s and 1960s. In effect, the magazine demonstrated the truly intergenerational and protracted nature of the struggle for racial justice and equality in the US through the available channels of what Nikhil Pal Singh calls the black “counter-public sphere”: a counter-hegemonic space that fostered the independent dialogues taking place between many significant black intellectuals, activists and public figures.<sup>10</sup>

As such, *Freedomways*’ celebration of Paul Robeson in the 1960s and the magazine’s remembrance of his eminent colleague, W.E.B. Du Bois --“the two giants of the century” as Esther Jackson called them in a recent interview --<sup>11</sup> can be seen as part of a continuum of activities over several decades that were oriented towards forming effective, popular anti-racist coalitions. In the vanguard of these coalitions was a committed holdover generation of older guard left-wing activists who had been involved with the Popular Front movements of the 1930s and 1940s, aptly analyzed by Penny Von Eschen in her study of black anticolonialism and epitomized by the activities of Robeson and Du Bois’ left-leaning CAA. The CAA was a crucial organization of the

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<sup>9</sup> Cedric J. Robinson, *Black Marxism*; Nikhil Pal Singh, *Black is a Country*; Charles Payne, *I’ve Got the Light of Freedom*; Martha Biondi, *To Stand and Fight*; Timothy Tyson, *Radio Free Dixie*.

<sup>10</sup> Nikhil Pal Singh, *Black is a Country*, 65-69. Singh has borrowed the term “counter-public sphere” from Nancy Fraser’s theory describing a space of withdrawal for subordinated social groups to, as she writes, “invent and circulate counter discourses”; cf. Nancy Fraser, “Re-Thinking the Public Sphere: A Contribution to the Critique of Actually Existing Democracy,” *Social Text* 25, no. 26 (1990): 56-80.

<sup>11</sup> Esther Jackson, interview by Ian Rocksborough-Smith, Brooklyn, NY, 28 May, 2004.

1940s and 1950s whose publication, *New Africa*, linked with liberation movements on that continent and advocated for colonial independence with the concurrent goal of defeating segregation in the U.S.<sup>12</sup> While commonly associated with the sectarianism of the Communist Party, the Popular Front politics from this earlier era also helped an associated front of liberals and leftists, especially cultural workers and intellectuals, to organize together in progressive community coalitions, unions, and government-sponsored public work projects.<sup>13</sup> A number of these people emerged from such experiences to be confronted during the early Cold War with severely repressive McCarthyist red-baiting, regardless of whether they were in the Communist Party of the United States (CP) or not. They maintained a radical anticolonial consciousness throughout this time that made civil rights struggle about more than simply legislative reform. To them, it was always about addressing what Martin Luther King, Jr. would later identify as the troika of injustice: poverty, racism, and militarism.<sup>14</sup>

Thus to many black radicals who lived through the anticolonial culture of the Popular Front coalitions, the Afro-Asian Conference in Bandung, Indonesia in 1955, the first World Conference of Black Writers and Artists, at the Sorbonne in Paris in 1956, and the Cuban revolution of 1959 had as much importance as the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision of 1954 when public school segregation in the United States was overturned. As Peniel Joseph puts it, the late 1950s and 1960s featured “an emerging Third World solidarity that challenged white supremacy at the global level...and exported race and class consciousness through back channels unimpeded by the Cold War’s

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<sup>12</sup> Penny Von Eschen, *Race Against Empire*, 13.

<sup>13</sup> Michael Denning, *The Cultural Front: The Laboring of American Culture in the Twentieth Century*, (New York: Verso, 1996), xviii-xix. In his use of the term “Popular Front,” Denning also wants to reclaim it from its rigid association with Communist Party sectarianism.

<sup>14</sup> Martin Luther King, Jr., “A Time to Break Silence,” *Freedomways* 7, no. 2 (1967): 105.

ideological restrictions."<sup>15</sup> Indeed, *Freedomways* came out of a decade that saw a flourishing of activities in these back channels. Author Richard Wright, while living abroad, wrote about the relevance of anticolonialism to the struggles of black Americans, while many people such as Shirley Graham Du Bois and Alphaeus Hunton were inspired by the emergence of independent nations like Kwame Nkrumah's Ghana and Patrice Lumumba's Congo, and moved to Africa.<sup>16</sup> Publications such as *Presence Africaine* and Robert Williams's *Crusader* re-injected international black political discourse with a renewed commitment to pan-Africanism, while in the U.S (and especially in New York), nationalist publications like the Nation of Islam's *Muhammad Speaks*, *Umbra*, *On Guard*, and Dan Watts's *The Liberator* existed alongside *Freedomways* to continue the broadly-based radicalism that Paul Robeson had been espousing for decades with the CAA and the short-lived *Freedom* newspaper of the early 1950s.

As part of a vibrant literary scene that networked frequently with anticolonial liberation struggles in Africa and elsewhere, and acted as an early advocate of the anti-Vietnam war movement, *Freedomways*' editors provided a forum for invoking the Popular Front ideals of an earlier generation of activists. The magazine emulated the advocacy work done by W.E.B. Du Bois, Robeson, and *Freedomways*' founding editor, Alphaeus Hunton in the 1940s CAA, while many of its other founders and early editors, such as Esther Jackson, Augusta Strong, and Jack O'Dell, drew their inspiration from their experiences in the counter-hegemonic formations of the 1930s, 1940s, and 1950s, including the Southern Negro Youth Congress (SNYC), the National Negro Congress (NNC), and the anti-racist locals of the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO). By making substantial connections between the racialized economic realities of colonial rule

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<sup>15</sup> Peniel E. Joseph, "Dashikis and Democracy," 183.

<sup>16</sup> Kevin Gaines, "African American Expatriates in Ghana and the Black Radical Tradition," *Souls* 1 (Fall 1999): 64-71.

in Africa (and much of the Third World) and racialized poverty in the United States, the magazine continued the work of this older generation of left-wing anti-racist activists.<sup>17</sup>

In this chapter, I will chart the magazine's growing influence as an organ of the black Left during the early 1960s and how it became a major forum for the expression of strategic thinking associated with the black freedom struggle of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century – particularly the articulation of an intergenerational dialogue crucial to a nuanced understanding of this long struggle. Prominent younger activists and writers in their twenties and thirties like SNCC's John Lewis and Diane Nash (Bevel), and SCLC's Martin Luther King, Jr. all had material that appeared in the publication alongside salient strategy pieces by older and less prominent figures such as Jack O'Dell, Robert Browne, John Henrik Clarke, and Ernest Kaiser, who by the early 1960s were in or approaching their 40s and 50s. In addition, a multi-generational group of African Americans living abroad in Africa and elsewhere, including the elderly Shirley Graham and Alphaeus Hunton, as well as younger figures such as Jean Carey Bond, frequently helped solicit and write material for the magazine. They helped build and advocate for international anticolonial networks of solidarity that were a deliberate continuation of those networks sustained by activists in the CAA of the 1940s and 1950s. Finally, in sponsoring numerous high profile community and cultural fundraising events in tribute to the "two giants," the magazine tapped into a broad intergenerational public sphere of support for independent black initiative that sustained it financially and provided a printed medium for these radical Popular Front politics and their continuing influence in the post-World War II Civil Rights movement.

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<sup>17</sup> Penny Von Eschen, *Race Against Empire*, 71.

### **“It was key to show we’re not alone”**

After the magazine’s first seven years of publication, it had reached a per-issue paid circulation rate of over 5,000 – up 3,000 from its original run in 1961.<sup>18</sup> Although this paled in comparison to white-owned and well-financed progressive publications such as *The Nation*, *Freedomways* still had extensive local and national distribution in bookstores throughout the city of New York, Chicago, Detroit, the San Francisco Bay area, Los Angeles, Baltimore, and Philadelphia. At this time, it also had international distribution centres in the West Indies and the Caribbean, Africa, Canada, Australia, and England, as well as many contacts and subscribers throughout Asia and Latin America.<sup>19</sup> Moreover, distribution was especially good in Africa because of the magazine’s many contacts there, from expatriate black Americans such as Shirley Graham and Alphaeus Hunton to African heads of state Kwame Nkrumah, Julius Nyerere, Tom Mboya, and Jomo Kenyatta, to book shop owners, students, activists, and others living throughout the continent.<sup>20</sup> These contacts did not always provide a consistent base, as CIA-backed coups often brought new political elites to power, forcing many to leave their homelands and/or abandon their sojourn. Also, due to a lack of financial resources, it was difficult to set up distribution in places like Nigeria, where the magazine was never able to locate a reliable distributor.<sup>21</sup>

Nonetheless, *Freedomways* was able to establish exchange relationships with other significant black radical publications covering anticolonial activities, notably

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<sup>18</sup> Freedomways Associates, “Statement of Ownership,” *Freedomways* 8, no. 1 (1968): 368.

<sup>19</sup> “Bookstore list,” (1963/4), Box 30, Folder 21, John Henrik Clarke Papers.

<sup>20</sup> Kwame Nkrumah, “Africa’s Liberation and Unity,” *Freedomways* 2, no. 4 (1962): 421; Jomo Kenyatta, “Message,” *Freedomways* 2, no. 4 (1962): 358; Sylvanus Olympio, “Message from – President of the Republic of Togo,” *Freedomways* 2, no. 4 (1962): 359; see also Kevin Gaines, “African American Expatriates in Ghana and the Black Radical Tradition,” 64-71.

<sup>21</sup> John Henrik Clarke to E.B. Darlyngton Chuks, Box 30, Folder 29, February 3, 1966, John Henrik Clarke Papers; Jack O’Dell, interview; Esther Jackson, interview.



*Presence Africaine*, headed by exiled Senegalese leaders Leopold Senghor and Aimée Césaire. *Presence Africaine* was published in France and was “an extremely important journal committed to the ideas of radical Pan-Africanism.”<sup>22</sup> The magazine’s editors also communicated with other black periodicals in the U.S. including *The Liberator*, *Muhammad Speaks*, *Umbra*, *The Negro Digest*, and *Black World*, as well as Trotskyist and Communist publications such as *The Militant*, *The Weekly World*, and *The Daily Worker*.<sup>23</sup> In his efforts as associate editor at *Freedomways*, John Henrik Clarke often referred writers to *Negro Digest* and *Liberator* when the magazine had too many submissions on a given topic or in instances when the other editors felt a given submission did not meet the editorial policy. Such referrals indicate the degree of support that existed between diverse movement publications during this era. Overall, the magazine was very successful at establishing extensive local, national, and global networks of communication for its readers and writers.

Since its inception, then, *Freedomways* picked up what remained of the anticolonial black Left of previous decades. As the CAA had done, the magazine was forming its own broad network of people from inside and outside the U.S. who were involved in the burgeoning African and Third World liberation struggles of the mid-Twentieth Century – struggles that were also beginning to have an impact on another generation of newly active black Americans.<sup>24</sup> The establishment of these networks was apparent right from the magazine’s first few issues, when it relied on the contacts of Du Bois, Graham, and Hunton to garner such contributors as former Congolese foreign minister Antoine Gizenga, and Ghanaian president, Kwame Nkrumah, following Congo’s

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<sup>22</sup> Peniel E. Joseph, “Dashikis and Democracy,” 183; Jack O’Dell, interview.

<sup>23</sup> Esther Jackson, interview.

<sup>24</sup> Clayborne Carson, *In Struggle: SNCC and the Black Awakening of the 1960s*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1981), 16.

CIA-orchestrated assassination of Patrice Lumumba in 1961.<sup>25</sup> Other significant contributions through Graham's contacts came from Ceza Nabaraoui of Egypt and Rameshwari Nehru of India, who were leaders in anticolonial women's movements.<sup>26</sup>

Alphaeus Hunton's relationship with the magazine in particular stands as an example of a radical figure who survived the Cold War period to contribute to black political discourse in the 1960s, while also bridging the political and cultural spheres of the Atlantic Ocean. Described by Penny Von Eschen as "one of the most neglected African American intellectuals" of the 1940s and 1950s, Hunton was a former English professor at Howard University and editor of the CAA's *New Africa* before moving to West Africa with his wife Dorothy in 1960 where he would later continue Du Bois' work on the *Encyclopedia Africana* project following the elder man's death in 1963.<sup>27</sup> The Hunttons remained supporters of *Freedomways* throughout the 1960s, corresponding frequently with the editors, informing them of events taking place in Africa, and maintaining honorary status as mentors, enshrined by the persistence of Hunton's name in *Freedomways'* masthead until his death in 1970. While Alphaeus Hunton only published a few articles in the magazine, his symbolism as a figure of the anticolonial African American Left from the 1940s and 1950s remains a significant indication of how these radical politics were sustained with *Freedomways*.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Gerald Horne, *Race Woman: The Lives of Shirley Graham Du Bois*, (New York: New York University Press, 2000), 217-218.

<sup>26</sup> Antoine Gizenga, "Declaration of the Government of the Congo," *Freedomways* 1, no. 2 (1961): 170; Kwame Nkrumah, "Address to the United Nations," *Freedomways* 1, no. 1 (1961): 45-72; Ceza Nabaraoui, "African Women Seek Independence and Peace," *Freedomways* 1, no. 1 (1961): 102-106; Freedomways Associates, "Among our contributors," *Freedomways* 1, no. 3 (1961): 228.

<sup>27</sup> Penny Von Eschen, *Race Against Empire*, 57, 184.

<sup>28</sup> Dorothy Hunton to John Henrik Clarke, December 17, 1963, Box 30, Folder 21, John Henrik Clarke Papers.

Beyond Shirley Graham and Alphaeus Hunton, who were in their 60s, there were two generations of younger black radicals who became well-acquainted with African independence struggles through the magazine's writing networks. The youngest was represented by Jean Carey Bond, who was then in her mid-20s. In 1965, she moved to Ghana for a year with her architect husband, Max Bond, to partake in nation-building efforts. As a member of the youngest generation of activists involved with *Freedomways*, Bond had become well-acquainted with the traditions of black struggle in New York, for she had been involved with the Harlem Writers Guild in the late 1950s and had a familial history of activism: her uncle was the famous Harlem Communist and city councillor Benjamin Davis.<sup>29</sup> Like Shirley Graham, Bond was invaluable for soliciting young Ghanaian writers for *Freedomways*, including poets Kajo Kyei and the American-born writer Hodee Edwards.<sup>30</sup> *Freedomways* editors Ernest Kaiser and John Henrik Clarke, who were in their 40s, also wrote about the treatment of Africa in American public discourse and the growing salience of pan-Africanism and anticolonialism to black Americans.<sup>31</sup> Clarke covered the demonstrations at the United Nations in New York in February, 1961 protesting the murder of Congo's Patrice Lumumba. At these demonstrations he suggested that, "Lumumba became Emmett Till," the Chicago teenager infamously murdered in Mississippi by white racists in 1955. With a long view of the African American struggle over many decades and generations, Clarke felt that the "plight of the Africans still fighting to throw off the yoke of colonialism and the plight

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<sup>29</sup> Jean Carey Bond, interview by Ian Rocksborough-Smith, tape recording, New York, NY, 29 May, 2004.

<sup>30</sup> John Henrik Clarke to Kajo Kyei, August 10, 1965, Box 30, Folder 23, John Henrik Clarke Papers; John Henrik Clarke to Kajo Kyei, June 2, 1965, Box 30, Folder 23, John Henrik Clarke Papers.

<sup>31</sup> Ernest Kaiser, "United States Relations With Africa," *Freedomways* 1, no. 3 (1961): 308-319; John Henrik Clarke, "The New Afro-American Nationalism," *Freedomways* 1, no. 3 (1961): 285-295.

of Afro-Americans, still waiting for a rich, strong and boastful nation to redeem the promise of freedom and citizenship became one and the same” at these demonstrations.<sup>32</sup> From the magazine’s first issues, its intergenerational anticolonialism focused closely on the relationship between African Americans and Africa.

Important literary and artistic contributors to *Freedomways* included many young writers and artists, as well as older, established figures. These contributions indicated how liberation movements in Africa especially helped inspire solidarity between generations, charting continuity in radical anticolonial cultural practise and thought. Poetry inspired by African liberation from both well-established and younger generations of black Americans appeared frequently in the pages of the magazine. Most noteworthy was the work done by New York school teacher, Keith E. Baird (who in his 30s would later become an associate editor with *Freedomways*), the young novelist Walter Lowenfels, and even articles and poetry written from his new home in Ghana by the elder Du Bois himself.<sup>33</sup> Illustrations and art appeared in *Freedomways*’ early issues from artists like Tom Feelings, Elton Fax, and Brumsic Brandon, Jr. whose work reflected the renewed attention given to anticolonialism from a younger generation of African Americans. Black prisoners serving life sentences also had a voice in the magazine, notably Frank Chapman, Jr. whose correspondence with the magazine’s John Henrik Clarke and Jack O’Dell helped get his work on the origins of science in Africa published. Such work demonstrated another important dimension of the intergenerational dialogue on anticolonialismism prevalent during the early 1960s.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> John Henrik Clarke, “The New Afro-American Nationalism,” 285.

<sup>33</sup> W.E.B. Du Bois, “Ghana Calls,” *Freedomways* 2, no. 1 (1962): 71-74; Walter Lowenfels, “Patrice Lumumba Speaks – A Poem,” *Freedomways* 2, no. 1 (1962): 32; Keith E. Baird, “Nemesis,” *Freedomways* 6, no. 2 (1966): 136.

<sup>34</sup> Jack O’Dell, “Writings from Prison,” *Freedomways* 6, no. 3 (1966): 226-227; Frank E. Chapman, Jr., “Science and Africa,” *Freedomways* 6, no. 3 (1966): 235-246.

These kinds of perspectives appeared frequently in the magazine and also indicated how *Freedomways* was a source for a diversity of first-hand commentary from around the world about the liberation of Africa during the 1960s and its bearing on the struggles of African Americans. For instance, in the fall of 1962, the magazine ran a special issue on Africa that was compiled by John Henrik Clarke. The issue featured prominent independence leaders such as Jomo Kenyatta of Kenya, who indicated links between colonial liberation and African American struggle in the U.S. by suggesting that Africans exact "pressures elsewhere in the world until people of African descent and all other human beings are completely free."<sup>35</sup> Sylvanus Olympio of Togo also suggested that the people of his country were "watching with keen interest the determination with which the people of African descent in America [were] struggling to live in dignity and on an equal status with their brothers and sisters of European descent."<sup>36</sup> Finally, correspondents covering African issues at the UN, like Charles Howard, Sr. wrote important articles for the magazine about the Western-influenced dimensions of Lumumba's assassination, the exploits of the CIA to secure the mineral rich region of Congo's Katanga province, and the centrality of South Africa to realizations of Pan-African freedom across the Atlantic.<sup>37</sup> With such first-hand commentary, the magazine could claim the ability to furnish accurate and voluminous information on Africa and much of its diaspora, continuing the important advocacy work done by the CAA in the 1940s and 1950s.

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<sup>35</sup> Jomo Kenyatta, "Message," 358.

<sup>36</sup> Sylvanus Olympio, "Message from – President of the Republic of Togo," 360.

<sup>37</sup> Charles P. Howard, Sr. "Katanga and the Congo Betrayal," *Freedomways* 2, no. 3 (1962): 136-148; Charles P. Howard, Sr. "How the Press Defames Africa," *Freedomways* 2, no. 4 (1962): 361-370; Charles P. Howard, Sr. "The Last Phase of the African Revolution," *Freedomways* 3, no. 2 (1963): 183.

The anticolonialism of *Freedomways*' first few issues also resonated in the black public sphere of the Cold War 1960s. For instance, the magazine's coverage of African liberation movements did not escape the attention of influential intellectuals J. Saunders Redding and J.A. Rogers, who in turn got coverage of the magazine into black newspapers like the *Baltimore Afro-American* and the *Pittsburgh Courier*.<sup>38</sup> With a nod to the persistence of Du Bois' significance in African American public discourse (and to *Freedomways*' important role in this discourse), Redding suggested that the "commentators, observers" and "thinkers" at the magazine, were as "sincere and unafraid and own-mind-knowing" as the elder scholar/activist Du Bois had "always been." An editorial in the *Afro-American* echoed Redding's praise, suggesting that "a quarterly review of the world-wide freedom movement among colored people has appeared on the newsstands... The publication unquestionably can help fill a historical and cultural vacuum and merits the support of freedom lovers everywhere." J.A. Rogers, writing in the *Pittsburgh Courier*, indicated that *Freedomways* had come at the "right time," and like Redding, noted Du Bois' early involvement with the magazine and its significant coverage of African anticolonial struggles.<sup>39</sup> Penny Von Eschen contends that the rise of Cold War liberalism in the late 1940s and 1950s created a situation where the transnational black press could "no longer" editorially challenge U.S. imperialism. However, the fact that *Freedomways* was important to prominent black intellectuals and that this was advertised in major black newspapers gives some indication that left-leaning anticolonial views persisted in the mainstream channels of the black public sphere well into the 1960s.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> Penny Von Eschen, *Race Against Empire*, 120.

<sup>39</sup> Freedomways Associates, "Readers Welcome *Freedomways*," *Freedomways* 1, no. 3 (1961): 224, 226-227.

<sup>40</sup> Penny Von Eschen, *Race Against Empire*, 120.

While the magazine prominently featured the struggles of Africa and its diaspora, it did not limit coverage of other movements that were against colonialism and had a close relationship to black liberation in the US. *Freedomways* featured John Henrik Clarke's experiences on a prominent African American delegation to Cuba with militant former Monroe, North Carolina NAACP leader, Robert Williams. On this trip, Clarke was interested in how the Cuban revolution had blended "people of diverse cultural backgrounds" - a reality he suggested was promised in the U.S., but whose promise "was never kept."<sup>41</sup> Echoing Clarke's internationalism, Esther Jackson spoke of Kath Walker, an aboriginal activist from Australia, whose poetry on the oppression of her people was first published in *Freedomways* in 1963. Of the magazine's diffuse coverage of anticolonial movements, Jackson suggested that it was something "unique" to *Freedomways*. "Wherever we had contacts, we hoped to bring... readers the worldwide struggle of oppressed people. It was key to show that we're not alone," said Jackson.<sup>42</sup> Indeed, *Freedomways* made such internationalism an inextricable part of anti-racist struggle in the US.

The magazine's efforts to link the struggles of African Americans to liberation movements elsewhere were best illustrated with its coverage of the Vietnam war under the Johnson administration during the mid-1960s. A 1965 staff editorial drafted by Jack O'Dell stated the magazine's anti-Vietnam war stance and connected the war to the racist oppression experienced by blacks and other subject peoples over the course of

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<sup>41</sup> John Henrik Clarke, "Journey to the Sierra Maestra," *Freedomways* 1, no. 1 (1961): 33; Nikhil Pal Singh, *Black is a Country*, 186.

<sup>42</sup> Kath Walker, "A Song of Hope," *Freedomways* 3, no. 1 (1963): 93; Esther Jackson, interview.

U.S. history<sup>43</sup> “This is not the first racist war in which the American people have been dragged by their political leaders” he wrote. “This country... is peculiarly shaped, in part, by its history of wars – against the Indian population, Mexico, the Philippines, Cuba, Haiti and the Korean people.” Also touching on the illegal U.S. military intervention in the Dominican Republic, the editorial suggested that the arrogance at play in the Southern states preventing blacks from voting and participating in government was the same one guiding U.S. wars overseas. “This is the link that connects Selma and Saigon,” it concluded: “The very day that 3,500 U.S. troops were landing in Vietnam, the Negro citizens of Selma, Alabama, were being beaten, tear-gassed, and smoke-bombed by Alabama State police for trying to march in peaceful protest against being denied the right to vote.”<sup>44</sup> Though it was an early articulation of the important linkages between black struggles in the U.S. and imperialism in South East Asia, the magazine’s position in 1965 was not an isolated one. In fact, it was very similar to SNCC’s anti-Vietnam war statement from the same year, which was reprinted in *Freedomways*. This statement indicated that prominent civil rights leaders like James Forman and Robert Moses had also firmly opposed the war.<sup>45</sup> Clearly the anti-imperial perspectives of the magazine’s editors – which had remained consistent from the Popular Front period - were now shared by prominent figures in the Southern movement.

In linking the anti-war and civil rights movements, however, the magazine was also consciously reinvigorating a debate that had at times lain dormant, but was sustained by radical figures like Du Bois, Robeson, and their protégés involved with

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<sup>43</sup> Esther Jackson and Constance Pohl eds, *Freedomways Reader*, xxvii, 152; Jack O’Dell, interview. O’Dell’s editorial was also one of the first anti-Vietnam war pieces in a black publication.

<sup>44</sup> [Jack O’Dell], “The War in Vietnam,” *Freedomways* 5, no. 2 (1965): 230.

<sup>45</sup> Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee, “SNCC Statement on Vietnam, January 6, 1966,” *Freedomways* 6, no. 1 (1966): 6-8; Clayborne Carson, *In Struggle*, 183.



*Freedomways*. The magazine was part of a long line of African American publications with national circulation like the *Chicago Defender*, *Pittsburgh Courier*, *Baltimore Afro-American*, *The Crisis*, and *Freedom*, all of which closely monitored anticolonial developments in Africa and much of the "Third World" with an emphasis on the need for radical change in the United States.<sup>46</sup> According to former editor Jack O'Dell, "*Freedomways* picked up the threads of that tradition because the Cold War had placed a damper, especially on being critical of U.S. foreign policy." The U.S. "had set out a set of assumptions – 'America is the leader of the free world and so on' – and you weren't supposed to tamper with that," he said. "And we did, we tampered with it because we knew it wasn't true."<sup>47</sup>

O'Dell's perspective about the opposition to U.S. foreign policy that *Freedomways* sustained resonated in another important anti-Vietnam war article it published. The article was written in 1965 by Robert Browne, an accomplished black journalist who had spent considerable time in South East Asia during the late 1950s and early 1960s and possessed first-hand knowledge of Vietnamese politics. He gave a concise account of how the civil rights movement and the burgeoning anti-Vietnam war movement could find common "moral" ground. This was a trend he found especially noticeable on the "organizational circuit, where many of the groups which have been most vocal in their support of civil rights are the same ones which are most outspoken against the worst aspects of U.S. involvement in Vietnam."<sup>48</sup> Browne was acutely aware of the risks civil rights organizations took by coming out against the war, and suggested that they faced losing financial backing, being labelled "unpatriotic," causing dissension

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<sup>46</sup> Penny Von Eschen, *Race Against Empire*, 259.

<sup>47</sup> Jack O'Dell, interview.

<sup>48</sup> Robert Browne, "The Freedom Movement and the War in Vietnam," *Freedomways* 5, no. 4 (1965): 472.

within a domestically focused civil rights movement, being smeared “Communist,” and the potential dispersal of vital resources and energy. Yet like the many activists who by the mid-1960s were becoming increasingly disillusioned with the lethargic and ineffective concessions the federal government had made to the freedom movement, Browne saw civil rights objectives extending beyond the legal defeat of segregation. Part of this extension was his implicit argument that racism was institutionally omnipresent in the United States and that any real change had to come from a fundamental erasure of the white supremacist underpinnings of American democracy, both in terms of Cold War imperialist foreign policy and its corresponding domestic apartheid that persisted under U.S. capitalist expansion.

By consistently making the connections between anticolonial opposition in the U.S. and abroad, *Freedomways* continued to foster its internationalist Popular Front ideals, enabling it to broaden its network of radical writers throughout the 1960s. Figures such as C.L.R. James and Claudia Jones, who were both deported from the U.S. under the anti-communist McCarran Act, writers Lennox Raphael and Jose Malcioln, and poet Derek Walcott contributed to a special issue on the struggles of blacks in the Caribbean.<sup>49</sup> The magazine also solicited articles from popularly elected leftist leaders like Cheddi Jagan of Guyana and Eric Williams of Trinidad and Tobago.<sup>50</sup> Perhaps inspired by the issue, a letter was sent to the magazine from Jamaica, but addressed to the disbanded CAA. In reply, John Henrik Clarke suggested that *Freedomways* might be a suitable alternative, as it is “the major publication in this

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<sup>49</sup> *Freedomways* 4, no. 3, (1964): 293-455.

<sup>50</sup> Cheddi Jagan, “The USA and South America,” *Freedomways* 8, no. 4 (1968): 24-40; Eric Williams, “Trinidad and Tobago: International Perspectives,” *Freedomways* 4, no. 3, (1964): 331-340.

country dealing with African and Afro-American affairs.”<sup>51</sup> In networking with African leaders, and covering the events of anticolonial struggles around the world, by the mid-1960s *Freedomways* was still engaged in the same kind of radical advocacy and solidarity work that Robeson, Du Bois, and Alphaeus Hunton had been doing with the CAA. Moreover, the anticolonialism prevalent in the magazine also resonated with a younger generation of African American activists and intellectuals who now widely supported struggles in Cuba, Latin America, Asia, and Africa as they were similarly intent on liberation in the U.S.

### **“The Two Giants”**

It was in the context of this renewed internationalism in African American popular discourse that *Freedomways* held its 1965 salute for Paul Robeson, as well as many other functions at prominent New York venues, including Carnegie Hall, the Village Gate, and Harlem’s Hotel Theresa. These gatherings, which doubled as fundraisers for the magazine, featured prominent musicians, entertainers, writers, intellectuals, and activists who were involved in a number of important organizations from the Association of Artists for Freedom, to prominent civil rights organizations like SNCC, CORE, and SCLC, to the NAACP and the Urban League. Also, the events often featured distinguished international representatives from Africa, the Caribbean, the Soviet Union, and India and effectively became demonstrations of significant public support for *Freedomways* magazine.<sup>52</sup>

With its large and notable list of attendees, the magazine’s Robeson tribute was a case in point for the range of opinions articulated at these public gatherings and

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<sup>51</sup> John Henrik Clarke to Trevor Bogle, December 17, 1964, Box 30, Folder 21, John Henrik Clarke Papers.

<sup>52</sup> Esther Jackson, interview.

indicated contending perspectives on the singer's political legacy. The Salute (or tribute) featured prominent businessmen such as Harlem's Hope Stevens, who spoke of the internationalist, anticolonial connections that Robeson consistently made through activism. Yet as a gesture to accommodating the prevalent Cold War liberal discourse within the civil rights movement, Stevens added that "[t]he songs that Paul used as the vehicles of protest and incitement... have now become recognized as the spiritual weapons of struggle in America and have even been adopted by the President of the United States."<sup>53</sup> In contrast to Stevens, SNCC chair John Lewis spoke at the tribute of his organization's role as spiritual heir to Robeson because, like the singer, SNCC rejected "gradualism and moderation," called for "nationwide protests and massive organizing of ordinary people," had "met African leaders," and had "made enemies" of some of their liberal supporters.<sup>54</sup>

For Lewis, the freedom movement in the United States during the mid-1960s was facing a confrontation with the American state similar to what Robeson and many other radical leftists faced in the peace movements of the 1940s and 1950s when they had their passports revoked, were thrown in prison, and were expelled from unions for not going along with the Cold War liberal program. Where once union radicalism had been the target of Cold War liberals, democratic grassroots initiatives like the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party (MFDP) now found themselves similarly circumscribed by liberal opposition. Indeed, internationalist activist organizations like SNCC took up where the CAA had left off, alienating many liberal supporters by making anti-Vietnam war statements and becoming increasingly militant in their stance against racist violence

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<sup>53</sup> Hope Stevens, "Paul Robeson – Democracy's Most Powerful Voice" (speech, Salute to Paul Robeson, New York, NY, April 22, 1965), *Freedomways* 5, no.3 (1965): 366-367.

<sup>54</sup> John Lewis, "Paul Robeson – Inspirer of Youth," (speech, Salute to Paul Robeson, New York, NY, April 22, 1965), *Freedomways* 5, no. 3 (1965): 370.

at home and overseas.<sup>55</sup> Despite the fact that the *Freedomways* tribute would be the ailing Robeson's last major public appearance, SNCC's support for him at the tribute indicated that the singer's Popular Front legacy continued with another generation of active thinkers as a radical critique of American liberal discourse in the 1960s.

*Freedomways* had sustained this critique in a similar way several months before the Robeson tribute. The 1965 winter issue was a memorial for W.E.B. Du Bois, which the editors celebrated at a benefit evening to raise funds for the magazine. In this issue, the editors not only enshrined Du Bois' image as a "godfather" whose intellectual and activist pursuits informed and inspired the magazine's inauguration in 1961, but they also connected Du Bois' struggles against white supremacy to the work many in the African diaspora did to radically reconstruct the colonial world.<sup>56</sup> The issue featured mostly left-wing contributors like Paul Robeson, Ghanaian president Kwame Nkrumah, playwright Lorraine Hansberry, Harlem poet Langston Hughes, exiled Caribbean communist C.L.R. James, progressive actress Ruby Dee, historian John Hope Franklin, and a message of congratulations for the magazine's first five from Shirley Graham herself. Through this special issue, *Freedomways* tried to show that Du Bois' legacy was celebrated by a broad coalition of figures. Therefore the magazine included select messages from centrist NAACP head Roy Wilkins and moderate white intellectuals like Conor Cruise O'Brien. The Du Bois special issue would become one of *Freedomways'*

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<sup>55</sup> Charles M. Payne, *I've Got the Light of Freedom*, 340; Clayborne Carson, *In Struggle*, 183.

<sup>56</sup> Quoted in Gerald Horne, *Race Woman*, 222-223; *Freedomways* 5, no. 1 (1965). Du Bois contributed several articles to *Freedomways* in its inaugural year and his writing appeared frequently and posthumously in later issues and in a tribute anthology.

most successful publications, selling over 15,000 copies. It was even re-printed as a book in 1970 with some revision and additional content.<sup>57</sup>

The issue's contributors spoke of Du Bois' aspirations – namely his single-minded commitment to fighting racial injustice in America and his unyielding connection to the international dimensions of the black freedom struggle – and their perspectives came mostly from the left of the political spectrum. The leftist tone of this issue was typified by Esther Jackson's husband and CP leader James Jackson's article on Du Bois' belated commitment to the Communist Party at the age of 93 and how Du Bois' work fit into a legacy of Marxist internationalism.<sup>58</sup> Jackson recalled “conversations with Dr. Du Bois going back for better than two decades on questions of Marxist approaches to problems of race nationality” and that “the Du Bois logic was essentially the Marxian dialectical process of reasoning.” Robeson spoke of his own involvement with Du Bois in the Council on African Affairs and then, after the war, at the Peace Information Centre in the late 1940s and early 1950s -- endeavours that would attract severe government red-baiting and the revocation of both Du Bois' and Robeson's passports.<sup>59</sup> Carlton Goodlett, editor at the San Francisco-based *Sun Reporter*, along with Carl Bloice, publications director of the W.E.B. Du Bois Clubs, wrote of Du Bois' commitment to the first Pan-African Congress held in 1900 through to his involvement with the Organization of African Unity in 1963 shortly before his death.<sup>60</sup> Community historian Richard Moore, a former Communist member of the radical African Blood Brotherhood during the 1920s

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<sup>57</sup> See John Henrik Clarke, Esther Jackson, Ernest Kaiser, and Jack O'Dell eds., *Black Titan W.E.B. Du Bois: An Anthology by the Editors of Freedomways*, (Boston: Freedomways Associates, 1970); Esther Jackson, interview.

<sup>58</sup> James Jackson, “James E. Jackson,” *Freedomways* 5, no. 1 (1965): 21.

<sup>59</sup> Paul Robeson, “Paul Robeson,” *Freedomways* 5, no. 1 (1965): 37,39.

<sup>60</sup> Carlton B. Goodlett and Carl Bloice, “W.E.B. Du Bois – Apostle of World Peace,” in *Freedomways* 5, no. 1 (1965): 188-194.

and owner of the Frederick Douglass bookstore in Harlem, indicated the significance of Du Bois' Pan Africanism and his "concept of race," rooted in a "social heritage of slavery... [that] binds together not simply the children of Africa, but extends through yellow Asia and into the South Seas."<sup>61</sup> An exceptional non-leftist in the issue was the aforementioned Wilkins, whose Cold War NAACP did not acknowledge connections between peace, colonial liberation, and radicalism in the struggles of blacks in the U.S. Nonetheless, Wilkins heralded Du Bois' anticolonial efforts in light of his founding role in the NAACP. He acknowledged Du Bois as a "crusader for human rights...an early foe of colonialism, an uncompromising champion of African nationalism, and an ardent advocate of the spiritual unity of peoples of African descent the world over."<sup>62</sup> The anticolonialism that would provide the basis for Du Bois' anti-racism echoed in every one of the perspectives of the contributors to his memorial issue -- a consensual legacy that the magazine helped facilitate by making the black Popular Front combination of liberals and leftists relevant to the political discourse of the 1960s.

Thus, through the celebratory efforts of *Freedomways* magazine, the Popular Front legacies of figures like Robeson and Du Bois were concretely sustained into the 1960s. Esther Jackson said that "they exerted great influence on the editorship and readership" of *Freedomways* magazine. In particular, Jackson recalled an interview she and fellow editor Jack O'Dell had conducted with Robeson in 1964, where Robeson had expressed his unyielding desire to partake in the organizing activities taking place within the freedom movement throughout the country. "It was like his life wasn't significant if he wasn't out with these young people...demonstrating, getting arrested," said Jackson. But

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<sup>61</sup> Richard B. Moore, "Du Bois and Pan Africa," *Freedomways* 5, no. 1 (1965): 168.

<sup>62</sup> Roy Wilkins, "Roy Wilkins," *Freedomways* 5, no. 1 (1965): 10; Clayborne Carson, *In Struggle*, 220.

his spirit, she added, was with the movement.<sup>63</sup> If the reception to the Du Bois and Robeson tributes that *Freedomways* organized in 1965 was any indication, their legacies resonated with many throughout the 1960s.

### **“Filling the gap”**

Like the SNCC activists who spoke of Paul Robeson’s influence on them, other important civil rights leaders viewed the legacy of the “Two Giants” in a similar light. Such a view was particularly held by former Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) staffer Jack O’Dell, who by 1963 had become a contributing editor for *Freedomways* after being red-baited out of Martin Luther King, Jr.’s organization.<sup>64</sup> Even more than Du Bois and Robeson, O’Dell substantively bridged the gap between the Popular Front anti-racist movements of the 1930s and 1940s and the movements that emerged from the 1950s and 1960s because of his involvement as a Communist union organizer during the 1940s, and his later work as head of fundraising and southern voter registration in SCLC. His decision to join *Freedomways* was largely due to his prior association with Esther and James Jackson through SNYC, the CP, and Robeson’s *Freedom* paper during the 1940s and 1950s. O’Dell would have a tremendous impact on the magazine, penning over sixty per cent of the staff editorials, writing twenty key strategy pieces over the twenty-five years of the magazine’s existence, and playing a central role in soliciting material from activists for publication.<sup>65</sup> His work with

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<sup>63</sup> Esther Jackson, interview.

<sup>64</sup> Diane McWhorter, *Carry Me Home: Birmingham, Alabama – The Climactic Battle of the Civil Rights Revolution*, (New York: Touchstone, 2002) 62, 469; David J. Garrow, “The FBI and Martin Luther King,” *The Atlantic Monthly*, (July/August 2002): 80-88; Taylor Branch, *Parting the Waters: America in the King Years – 1954-1963*, (New York: Touchstone, 1988), 837. O’Dell continued to work clandestinely with SCLC for several years after officially leaving the organization.

<sup>65</sup> Jack O’Dell, interview.



*Freedomways* was especially significant because of his ongoing connections with the most prominent elements of the civil rights movement throughout the 1960s.

O'Dell's contribution to the Du Bois memorial issue is an excellent example of how *Freedomways* framed Du Bois' historical legacy to draw important generational links between past and present movement praxis and activity. O'Dell wrote about how he used Du Bois' masterwork, *Black Reconstruction*, while organizing voter registration drives in the South. He indicated how the study of the "first" Reconstruction period in America was crucial to developing an "adequate theory of social change to guide the practical activities of the Movement" in the "second" period because it was "deeply rooted in the scientific disciplines of economics, government, political behavior, as well as the science of organization." To O'Dell, Du Bois' path-breaking study of the period when numerous black officials were elected to public office provided an "indispensable weapon" and a "motivational tool for more effective practical work." O'Dell further recounted how, through staff training work with SCLC, he dispensed copies of *Black Reconstruction* to scores of young campus and adult community leaders and activists, "most of whom had never heard of W.E.B. Du Bois" but "who were eager to know more" after being introduced to the book. "If there is any frame of reference for the black community in the South to measure its progress by, it is the levels of political power achieved during Reconstruction" wrote O'Dell. "Qualitatively speaking, anything short of those levels amounts to 'tokenism.'"<sup>66</sup> As a figure who bridged the Popular Front era of the 1930s and 1940s with the militant integrationism of the 1960s, O'Dell's earlier acquaintance with Du Bois' work enabled him to see links between the scholarly and activist spheres that the eminent scholar made a career of joining, and the important

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<sup>66</sup> Jack O'Dell, "Du Bois and the Social Evolution of the Black South," *Freedomways* 5, no. 1 (1965): 164.

historical analogies between past and present black struggle in the U.S. that these links helped to illustrate.

O'Dell wrote many important articles for *Freedomways* in the mid-1960s that revealed the nuances of these continuities at important junctions when the civil rights movement was experiencing significant changes in its trajectory, either to militant separatism or to moderate accommodation of provisional civil rights concessions. Foreshadowing his efforts to explore the contemporary significance of *Black Reconstruction* and the need for black public power, O'Dell's two-part article for *Freedomways* was part of a series on the South in 1963 and 1964. He wrote these articles when the civil rights dimensions of black struggle were stalling due to the intransigence of the Democratic National Committee, the inertia of government response to widespread repression of voter mobilization in the South, and the concomitant tidal wave of white supremacist terror and reaction. In this article, he traced a racial absolutism and "totalitarian pattern of institutional development in the United States," from the implementation of slavery to the re-entrenchment of economic injustice and coded white privilege during the 1960s.<sup>67</sup>

O'Dell's perception of American racism shows that it was a fundamental precept of American "democracy," similar to the dialectical forces of national inclusion and exclusion that historian Nikhil Pal Singh has recently noted.<sup>68</sup> Thus, according to O'Dell, while blacks and other people of colour endured the perpetually-changing vagaries of legal and extra-legal repression, discrimination, and violence, they were also in an advance guard position to promote substantive social change in the United States. In essence, through their experience with racism, marginalized groups could see through

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<sup>67</sup> Jack O'Dell, "Foundations of Racism in American Life, Part III," *Freedomways* 4, no. 4, (1964): 514.

<sup>68</sup> Nikhil Pal Singh, *Black is a Country*, 36-37.

the exceptionalist rhetoric of American liberal discourse that frequently masked the ongoing, day-to-day racialized inequities they had to face. As O'Dell contended, the "harsh economic realities" still confronted by the black community after gaining civil rights legislation contributed decisively to an increasing militancy "bearing within it the seeds of a much needed reconstruction of American political life."<sup>69</sup> In this article, O'Dell also related an exchange he had with James Baldwin at the *Freedomways*-sponsored opening of his play, *Blues for Mr. Charlie*. O'Dell wanted to know Baldwin's perception of the play's broader impact. The writer's reply was in line with O'Dell's strategic assertions that *Blues for Mr. Charlie* could "alert the country to the fact that, in spite of all that has been done to us, we, who have been described so often, are now describing the country."<sup>70</sup> To O'Dell, this was precisely what *Freedomways* was doing, and why he felt compelled to contribute to the magazine. African Americans "were better informed than most Americans." "The question," he said, "was [how] to cultivate the written word, because the written word has longevity."<sup>71</sup>

When O'Dell joined *Freedomways* in 1963, he felt it "should strive to be the magazine that the movement turns to to express itself and to draw from expressions of others that are in it as a way of keeping the perspective." For him, "a whole range of the new generation of activists [were] represented" in special issues of the magazine on the South, while at the same time the magazine invoked the legacies of past activists like Du Bois and Robeson, filling, in effect, a continuity gap in conventional understandings of the civil rights movement. "[F]illing the gap was one of the major purposes of *Freedomways*, and creating a vehicle of articulation of what the current situation was

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<sup>69</sup> Jack O'Dell, "Foundations of Racism in American Life," 514.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, 535.

<sup>71</sup> Jack O'Dell, interview.

about” by having younger activists from the civil rights mainstream write for the magazine.<sup>72</sup> O’Dell also indicated that “[t]he two decades preceding the founding of *Freedomways* in 1961 prepared the way for the popular uprising against racist practices to come. Those years of practical experience in activism also bore the seeds of the idea for such a journal.”<sup>73</sup> Jean Carey Bond echoed O’Dell’s assertion and suggested that “many of the people... older than [her]... who were involved with the National Negro Congress [of the 1930s and 1940s] or who were part of... black progressive artistic circles... really had a lot of contact with the young people, who then went on to become involved with the civil rights movement.”<sup>74</sup> Representing a diversity of perspectives, from holdover Marxist integrationists, to accomplished entertainers and writers, to evolving black nationalists, a significant number of people brought their experiences from the Popular Front and early Cold War eras to bear on the militant integrationism of the 1960s.

The effort of “filling the gap” was especially evident in the magazine’s earlier issues which served to challenge not only generational divisions, but also geographic divisions in the civil rights movement frequently stated in the historical literature to have existed between activists in Northern and Southern states.<sup>75</sup> This was due in particular to the efforts of New York-based writers like Joanne Grant and Augusta Strong. Grant was also an associate editor of James Aronson’s radical paper, *The National Guardian*, a paper that had survived the Cold War repression of the early 1950s. She frequently covered the non-violent student struggles of the early 1960s and suggested in 1962 that

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<sup>72</sup> Ibid.

<sup>73</sup> Jack O’Dell, “Origins of *Freedomways*,” in Esther Jackson and Constance Pohl eds., *Freedomways Reader*, 1.

<sup>74</sup> Jean Carey Bond, interview.

<sup>75</sup> Charles Payne, *I’ve Got the Light of Freedom*, 385.

it was time to “speak of the heroes of the South” and that African Americans “are in debt” to the young people leading protests there. For her part, Strong was a Cold War survivor who had been with the magazine since its beginnings and had been active in Southern states with SNYC during the 1940s. She drew important connections between the “militant, politically-oriented youth movement among Negroes in the South” of the first SNYC and the militant integrationism of the SNCC and SCLC during the early 1960s.<sup>76</sup>

The magazine’s solid base of Southern and Northern Cold War survivors was bolstered by support from a diffuse community of black literary figures, artists, and intelligentsia in New York who had been active in earlier decades, going as far back as the Harlem Renaissance period of the 1920s. Prolific intellectuals such as poets Sterling Brown and Langston Hughes, historian Richard Moore, philosopher Eugene Holmes, and writers Louise Thompson Patterson, William Patterson, Loften Mitchell, Eugene Gordon, Zora Neale Hurston, and Sylvester Leaks all wrote for the magazine, while accomplished black artists like Tom Feelings, Paul Lawrence Dunbar, Charles White, Romare Bearden, and Elizabeth Catlett all had their artwork reprinted by it.<sup>77</sup> Thus, in the spirit of earlier Popular Front attempts to build broad coalitions of people in both the North and the South, the magazine drew on the support of a heterogeneous community of public figures who by the 1960s were still part of a vibrant Harlem radical tradition. At the same time, many *Freedomways* writers like Strong and Grant and those from the Popular Front generation of black leftists, who were in their 40s by the 1960s, were also

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<sup>76</sup> Joanne Grant, “The Time is Always Now,” *Freedomways* 2, no. 2, (1962): 150-155; Joanne Grant, “The Negro Movement – New Heights,” *Freedomways* 3, no. 2 (1963): 163-168; Augusta Strong, “Southern Youths Proud Heritage,” *Freedomways* 4, no. 1, (1964): 35-51; Gerald Horne, *Race Woman*, 161.

<sup>77</sup> Esther Jackson, interview.

becoming increasingly allied to the integrationist mainstream of the civil rights movement.

The stated editorial mandate of the magazine demanded an “open forum for the expression of ideas” on the black freedom struggle which, for many of the former Communists and black radicals at *Freedomways*, meant opening dialogues with a broad cross-section of people including moderate integrationist elites, younger civil rights leaders, and progressive white leftists. This was accomplished by airing the views of moderate figures such as the Urban League’s Whitney Young, the NAACP’s Roy Wilkins, and, with an eye to the South, the Tuskegee Institute’s Charles Gomillion.<sup>78</sup> The magazine also associated with a significant number of white leftists like Herbert Aptheker, Pete Seeger, and John L. Devine who, for the most part, did not shy away from supporting the trajectory of the civil rights movement in the 1960s.<sup>79</sup> Furthermore, the editors of the magazine featured important perspectives on integrationist militancy by prominent Brooklyn preacher Milton Galamison and SNCC communications director, Julian Bond.<sup>80</sup> Paralleling Jack O’Dell’s efforts to convey the lessons of Du Bois’ *Black Reconstruction*, Galamison suggested in a televised debate with Malcolm X published by *Freedomways* in 1963 that “[t]here is nothing in America which does not belong to me. There is no public office, however high; no employment opportunity, however interracial, which is not a part of my heritage as a citizen of these United States.” Galamison offered a further admonition that “integration must work because nothing else can” and

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<sup>78</sup> Freedomways Associates, “It’s a Journal,” *Freedomways* 1, no. 1, (1961): 9; Whitney M. Young, Jr. “What Price Prejudice?” *Freedomways* 2, no. 3 (1962): 237-242; Charles G. Gomillion, “The Tuskegee Voting Story,” *Freedomways* 2, no. 3 (1962): 231-236.

<sup>79</sup> John Devine was a long-time trade unionist from Philadelphia who became *Freedomways*’ only white editor in 1963 when he took the place of arts editor, Margaret Burroughs after her move to Chicago.

<sup>80</sup> Milton Galamison, “Integration Must Work,” *Freedomways* 3, no. 2 (1963): 215; Horace Julian Bond, “Non-Violence: An Interpretation,” *Freedomways* 3, no. 2 (1963): 159-163.

his further call for a “common front against bigotry” best illustrated how Popular Front ideals and militant integration coalesced in the editorial policy of *Freedomways*. Thus, throughout the 1960s, the magazine’s editorial policy was clearly in line with the mainstream of the civil rights movement which sought to redress inequality in U.S. society through better access to employment, social programs, and public political power. At the same time, the magazine’s editors went beyond the mainstream of the civil rights movement in advocating a more radical integrationism that took into account anticolonial struggles and sought an associated transformation of American society.

*Freedomways* had emerged in the early 1960s as a crucial bridge between several generations of black radicals. The magazine communicated and linked the anticolonial, internationalist, and anti-racism experiences of old guard leftists with a younger generation of activists, organizers, and writers. In drawing direct inspiration from the political legacies of elderly figures like W.E.B. Du Bois, Paul Robeson, Shirley Graham, and Alphaeus Hunton, the middle-aged editors at *Freedomways* were able to emulate the broadly-based Popular Front activities of organizations such as the CAA, NNC, and SNYC. Despite having suffered the persecution of anti-communist Cold War hysteria and FBI surveillance, in the 1960s, the magazine’s main editors (Esther Jackson, Jack O’Dell, John Henrik Clarke, and Ernest Kaiser) occupied an experienced vanguard position that enabled them to facilitate the continuance of Popular Front activities through their written and editorial work with the magazine and the commemorative events they helped to foster. As such, *Freedomways* editors could assume an intermediary role between the Du Bois and Robeson generation and younger activists like John Lewis and Julian Bond of SNCC – in effect, creating a dialogue that reconciled the leftist ideals of past decades with the non-violent strategies of the 1960s. *Freedomways* also unequivocally connected the international dimensions of struggles against colonialism at home and abroad, which were a hallmark of the Popular Front

activities of the 1930s and 1940s and became equally salient to black radicals in the 1960s with the liberation of Africa and growing opposition to the U.S.-led war in Vietnam.

By fostering networks between generations of radical writers living in Africa, its diaspora, and elsewhere in the world, *Freedomways* helped contribute to the resurgence of radical left-leaning anticolonialism and anti-racism within the black public sphere as sit-ins in Greensboro, fire-hoses in Birmingham, and Marches on Washington for civil rights dominated the national headlines of the early 1960s. In essence, the magazine's existence served to illustrate the concrete continuities, in terms of people and their decades of activism, that linked the major eras of twentieth century black struggle in the U.S., and how these influences shaped the left-wing of the post-war Civil Rights movement. With its Popular Front ideals and its editorial trajectory mostly in line with the integrationist and non-violent elements of the civil rights movement, *Freedomways* was forced to contend with the many prevalent forms of black nationalism that also highlighted black radicalism during the insurgent 1960s and which often stood in stark opposition to the civil rights mainstream to which the editors were allied. While the magazine shared the anticolonial perspectives of many black nationalists and worked to radicalize the integrationist mainstream through Popular Front coalitions, it continued to favour the non-violent tactics of the Southern freedom movement.



## CHAPTER 2

### **“We Were All in the Same Current”: The Radical Integrationism of *Freedomways* Magazine in the Era of Black Power**

Throughout the mid to late 1960s, *Freedomways* continued to articulate a position in line with the integrationist and increasingly internationalist perspectives of prominent civil rights organizations. In doing so, the magazine gave greater voice to prominent groups like the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), the Congress on Racial Equality (CORE), the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC), and the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party (MFDP), which were primarily active in the southern states. After the passage of civil rights legislation in 1964 and 1965,<sup>1</sup> these groups were becoming increasingly frustrated by the government's reluctance to enforce this legislation, its inadequacy in dealing with racialized poverty in urban areas, and its role financing the war in South- East Asia rather than funding vital social services to aid poor people.<sup>2</sup> Such issues were nothing new to the black leftists at *Freedomways* who had been involved in the anti-racist labour-oriented movements of the 1930s and 1940s that also sought voting rights, equal employment, and education, and opposed imperial ventures abroad.<sup>3</sup> In favourably covering prominent civil rights

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<sup>1</sup> This legislation constitutionally guaranteed the desegregation of public places and ensured voting rights for African Americans.

<sup>2</sup> For SNCC and CORE, frustration with the slow implementation of civil rights reforms also led to later divisions with the more moderate elements of civil rights organizations like SCLC and the NAACP. See Clayborne Carson, *In Struggle: SNCC and the Black Awakening of the 1960s*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1981); August Meier and Elliot Rudwick, *CORE: A Study in the Civil Rights Movement*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1973).

<sup>3</sup> Robert Korstad and Nelson Lichtenstein, "Opportunities Found and Lost: Labor, Radicals, and the Early Civil Rights Movement," *Journal of American History* 75 (December 1988): 801; Penny Von Eschen, *Race Against Empire: Black Americans and Anticolonialism, 1937-1957*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997).

groups, *Freedomways*' editors facilitated an ideological convergence between themselves and many mainstream figures involved in the African American freedom struggle.

A special *Freedomways* issue in 1964 typified the magazine's increased coverage of the Southern movement and highlighted the convergence of figures and ideas from the black Popular Front with the 1960s civil rights mainstream. The cover featured a picture of two placards from an anonymous street picket in the Southern states which read "All Men are Created Equal" and "Negroes Die in War but Can't Eat at Shell's [gas station]"; in juxtaposing these, *Freedomways* indicated how it wanted to link the ideals of achieving domestic equality to the issues surrounding U.S. foreign policy and draw out the relevance of these connections to the activities of the Southern movement. This issue also featured prominent organizers like Septima Clarke, from the Citizenship Schools in the Mississippi Delta region), Slater King, a mayoral candidate in Albany, Georgia, and Fred Shuttlesworth, a key leader in the Birmingham, Alabama desegregation campaigns, alongside a piece from former Southern Negro Youth Congress (SNYC) leader Augusta Strong, and a reprint of a speech by W.E.B. Du Bois given at a SNYC conference in 1946.<sup>4</sup> Such attempts to place the political figures of past and present social movements in the same context of struggle in the Southern states were a key feature of the magazine. By the mid-1960s, *Freedomways* had realized this strategy of bridging generations and connecting its Popular Front ideals to the non-violent direct action movements of the 1960s.

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<sup>4</sup> Charles Payne, *I've Got the Light of Freedom: The Organizing Tradition and the Mississippi Freedom Struggle*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 77-74; Septima P. Clark, "Literacy and Liberation," *Freedomways* 4, no. 1 (1964): 113-125; Slater King, "The Bloody Battleground of Albany," *Freedomways* 4, no. 1 (1964): 93-102; Fred L. Shuttlesworth, "Birmingham Shall Be Free Some Day," *Freedomways* 4, no. 1 (1964): 16-20; W.E.B. Du Bois, "Behold the Land" (speech, closing of the SNYC legislature, Columbia North Carolina, October 20, 1946), *Freedomways* 4, no. 1 (1964): 8-15.

The intergenerational connections made between the civil rights mainstream and the black Popular Front veterans involved with *Freedomways* represented only one contribution to the diffuse discussions taking place between black activists in the 1960s. Intense debates about the strategies, tactics, and goals of the black freedom struggle more generally were what highlighted the major social movements of this decade. Traditionally, appraisals of these debates have pitted resurgent forms of militant black nationalism against the mainstream integrationism of civil rights leaders.<sup>5</sup> More recently, scholars have questioned this binary. Many argue that the civil rights struggle needs to be explained in terms of its interconnections to the development of Black Power radicalism and to cultural nationalism. They also argue that the political differences between older moderates and younger radicals, Northern and Southern organizers have been exaggerated.<sup>6</sup>

In the spirit of this new scholarship, I will examine how *Freedomways* challenged traditional movement dichotomies throughout the 1960s, though I will also argue that it did not fully transcend them. In understanding the limited but important challenges

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<sup>5</sup> Manning Marable, *Race, Reform, and Rebellion: The Second Reconstruction in Black America, 1945-1990*, (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1991), 113; Clayborne Carson, *In Struggle: SNCC and the Black Awakening of the 1960s*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1981), 215-304; Taylor Branch, *Parting the Waters: America in the King Years, 1954-63*, (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1988), 875; Dianne McWhorter, *Carry Me Home: Birmingham, Alabama: The Climactic Battle of the Civil Rights Revolution*, (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2001), 419, 489, 562.

<sup>6</sup> Tim Tyson, *Radio Free Dixie: Robert F. Williams and the Roots of Black Power*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999), 307-308; Nikhil Pal Singh, *Black is a Country: Race and the Unfinished Struggle for Democracy*, (Boston: Harvard University Press, 2004), 5; Robert Self, "To Plan Our Liberation: Black Power and the Politics of Place in Oakland, California, 1965-1977," *Journal of Urban History* 26 (Sept. 2000): 759-92; Charles E. Jones, ed., *The Black Panther Party (Reconsidered)*, (Baltimore: Black Classic Press, 1998); Komozi Woodard, *A Nation Within a Nation: Amiri Baraka (LeRoi Jones) and Black Power Politics*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999); Kathleen Cleaver and George Katsiaficas, eds., *Liberation, Imagination, and the Black Panther Party: A New Look at the Panthers and Their Legacy* (New York: Routledge, 2001); Peniel E. Joseph, "Black Liberation Without Apology: Reconceptualizing the Black Power Movement," *Black Scholar* 31 (Fall-Winter 2001): 2-19; Jeanne Theoharis, Komozi Woodard, and Mathew Countryman, eds., *Freedom North: Black Freedom Struggles Outside the South, 1940-1980*, (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003).

mounted by the editors of *Freedomways* in negotiating the tensions between divergent strands of black political thought, we benefit from a scholarship which blurs the integrationist and nationalist binary, without imagining black politics as a homogenous bloc; these tensions, while sometimes surmountable, were real, and manifested in actual editorial decisions which served to circumscribe debate in the pages of the publication. An examination of *Freedomways* magazine is particularly significant in understanding the mixed success of attempts to build black political unity in the late 1960s; for example, the magazine's editors remained tactically aligned with the non-violent integrationism of the civil rights mainstream and, for the most part, did not agree with – or provide editorial space commensurate with the relative significance of – black nationalists who ascribed to militant separatism. At the same time, they were also inclined to support and publish discussions of radical issues of black cultural and social justice during the Black Power era of the late 1960s and early 1970s, which allowed for the inclusion of nationalist discourse otherwise overlooked in the magazine. In doing so, the editors did not submit to an integrationism that acquiesced to the tokenism offered by white institutions. Rather, they sought to achieve a middle ground that consistently pushed the civil rights mainstream to adopt a more expansive, anti-imperialist, anti-capitalist, and anti-racist perspective while fundamentally transforming American society by building broad Popular Front-style coalitions.

I will call the middle ground that the editors of *Freedomways* established a politics of radical integrationism. Such a middle ground enabled the magazine to partake in what cultural studies scholar James Smethurst viewed as an “uneasy alliance” of left-nationalists, leftists, and civil rights liberals who were part of the milieu of writers

around which the magazine coalesced.<sup>7</sup> Indeed, the magazine's radical integrationism negotiated a non-sectarian tight rope throughout the 1960s and into the 1970s because it offered a form of black radicalism that reconciled issues of cultural autonomy and leftist radicalism with mainstream initiatives in the electoral and legislative spheres.

This tight rope was difficult for the magazine to negotiate, especially when it came to recognizing tactical diversity in the black freedom movement. As noted above, throughout much of the 1960s and into the 1970s the editors worked as radical allies within the integrationist mainstream of the black freedom struggle and, in doing so, circumscribed the insurgent perspectives of many militant nationalists. While the editors did not oppose the ideals of such figures, they mostly disagreed with their tactics, which did not conform to a non-violent program that sought to bring together the broadest possible political forces. Indeed, the magazine offered little coverage of figures such as Malcolm X and those later inspired by his nationalism despite the anticolonialism they held in common with the magazine's editors.<sup>8</sup> *Freedomways* omitted coverage of groups such as the Black Panthers despite their importance to black radical discourse during this period.<sup>9</sup> As a result, the magazine did not realize its inaugural editorial ideal which sought to create an "open forum for the free expression of ideas" on the black freedom struggle.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> James Smethurst, "Poetry and Sympathy: New York, the Left, and the Rise of Black Arts," in *Left of the Color Line : Race, Radicalism, and Twentieth-Century Literature of the United States*, Bill V. Mullen and James Smethurst, eds., (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003), 266.

<sup>8</sup> For a discussion of how Malcolm X's anticolonial ideals inspired various cultural nationalist and Black Power organizations, see Scot Brown, "The US Organization, Black Power Vanguard Politics, and the United Front Ideal: Los Angeles and Beyond," *The Black Scholar* 31, no.3-4 (2001): 23-26.

<sup>9</sup> Nikhil Pal Singh, *Black is a Country*, 202-205.

<sup>10</sup> Freedomways Associates, "It's a Journal!," *Freedomways* 1, no. 1 (1961): 9.

In light of these omissions, a number of critiques levied from both inside and outside the magazine's staff also indicated the difficulties *Freedomways* had with negotiating a middle ground between old guard leftists, as the editors were, left-nationalists, and prominent civil rights leaders. With the rise of Black Power radicalism by the mid-1960s, left-nationalists such as editors John Henrik Clarke and Shirley Graham Du Bois, as well as Harlem-based writer Harold Cruse, had fallen out with the old black Left<sup>11</sup> and viewed the alliances that the editors had made with movement moderates as a tactical problem rather than a benefit. Conversely, most of *Freedomways'* editors tended to view many mainstream leaders as ideological works in progress, but valuable political allies. Such tensions further indicated the convergence between civil rights figures (such as Martin Luther King, Jr.) and the old guard leftists at the magazine who were open to building multiracial coalitions with liberals similar to those that had been established during the Popular Front period. Moreover, the magazine's critics demonstrated how left-nationalists and old guard leftists complicated the tactical discussions of the Black Power era and, in so doing, revealed the tenuous nature of the magazine's non-sectarian radical integrationism.

Nonetheless, despite some difficulties, the magazine's editors still managed to cross the sectarian tight rope of the 1960s. Indeed, *Freedomways'* critics overlooked how the editors were able to do this through their involvement in the Harlem literary scene. While it could not fully transcend the differences between militant nationalists and moderate civil rights leaders, *Freedomways'* radical integrationism was most viable as part of a broader cultural front that still worked to challenge movement dichotomies through extensive coalition building. This cultural front was comprised of an intergenerational community of activists, artists, writers, and public thinkers who may

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<sup>11</sup> For a discussion of the tensions between old left-nationalists and old-guard leftists, see James Smethurst, "Poetry and Sympathy," 266.

have often disagreed ideologically, but shared a common bond when it came to asserting black autonomy through cultural production. Such bonds worked to enable cooperation between radicals and moderates, liberals and leftists, and to some extent, nationalists and integrationists. Such instances of cooperation produced a unity that revealed the potential of non-sectarian movement organizing. As historian Martha Biondi has suggested, the diverse community of writers who contributed to *Freedomways* provided a fairly broad articulation of the “Harlem radical tradition.”<sup>12</sup> This tradition included the leftist political culture of the 1930s and 1940s, while also encompassing the rise of black nationalism through the Garveyites of the 1920s and their ideological successors, the populist Nation of Islam of the 1950s and 1960s. This tradition made Harlem a major centre of political, cultural, and literary black radicalism over many decades.

A close reading of *Freedomways* issues from the 1960s and early 1970s shows that the magazine helped carry on this tradition. While the integrationist leanings of the editors led them mostly to oppose Black Power militants on a tactical basis, their firm commitment to broad cultural front coalitions opened the magazine’s pages to writers who were sympathetic to (or were themselves) nationalists. Also, the magazine published a few short book reviews and secondary commentary in the early 1960s on black nationalism and these articles stand as notable exceptions to their omissions. This content was due in large part to the efforts of John Henrik Clarke, the only self-described nationalist among the editors. Clarke’s continued association with the magazine throughout the 1960s and 1970s and his ability to furnish material from writers spoke to the sense of unity that existed in Harlem’s literary scene. Moreover, the magazine published numerous young black writers and intellectuals involved with various New

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<sup>12</sup> Martha Biondi, *To Stand and Fight: The Struggle for Civil Rights in Postwar New York City*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003), 275.

York-based nationalist publications such as the left-leaning *Liberator*, the literary *Umbra*, and the Nation of Islam's *Muhammad Speaks*. *Freedomways*' editors also made a tactical rapprochement with militant nationalism by sympathetically covering the urban rebellions of the mid-late 1960s and avoiding direct criticism of black militants involved in these struggles. This non-sectarianism helped the magazine contribute significantly to the black radical discourse of the 1960s and early 1970s, even among its purported antagonists.

In other words, what remains most significant about the magazine's allegiance to the mainstream of the civil rights movement and its concomitant neglect of black nationalism is not what it says about the disunity of African American politics during the mid-1960s. Rather, its allegiances suggest more about the legacy of Popular Front black leftists of the 1930s, 1940s and 1950s and the radical integrationism that they helped develop in the last half of the long civil rights era of 1930-1970.<sup>13</sup> Tracing the influence of old guard black leftists and how their coalition style of politics persisted with prominent elements of the African American freedom struggle into the Black Power era helps provide a fuller understanding of the ideological continuities that shaped these movements as well as the tactical disagreements that frequently complicated them. Moreover, the middle ground of *Freedomways*' radical integrationism simultaneously disrupts the notion that the civil rights struggle devolved into sectarianism, but cautions against completely overlooking traditional schisms between black radicals.

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<sup>13</sup> According to Nikhil Pal Singh, this era is central to understanding the 20<sup>th</sup> Century history of the black freedom struggle and the unfinished struggle for democracy in America because of the dynamic social movements that were active over these decades. Nikhil Pal Singh, *Black is a Country*, 6, 8, 12, 52, 57, 214.



## **“The most comprehensive coverage of the freedom movement”**

The convergence of Popular Front ideals and non-violent, integrationist perspectives from the Southern movement became especially apparent when the magazine published its two special issues on the South in the winter of 1964 and the spring of 1965. These issues came out when momentum in the movement had shifted from the South to a national focus to address the thwarted actions of the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party (MFDP) at the Democratic National Convention in Atlantic City to promote grassroots representation in the Party, and when urban rebellions had begun in cities across the U.S.<sup>14</sup> Thanks largely to the contacts of former SCLC staffer-turned-*Freedomways*-editor Jack O'Dell,<sup>15</sup> the first issue on the South provided the magazine's most thorough coverage of activists directly involved in Southern movement organizing, including contributions from figures who had been involved in the civil rights struggles of earlier decades. The staff editorial of the 1964 issue, written by Jack O'Dell, even promised the “most comprehensive coverage of the Freedom Movement in the South ever to appear in a single issue of an American magazine.”<sup>16</sup>

It delivered on this promise by featuring many prominent as well as less prominent non-violent direct action leaders involved in the Southern movement, affirming the centrality of major organizations like King's SCLC, as well as SNCC and CORE, to the movement's success. Such leaders included the Rev. Fred Shuttlesworth of Birmingham, who wrote about the major demonstrations in his city “led by the illustrious

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<sup>14</sup> A second issue on the Southern movement was published in the Spring of 1965.

<sup>15</sup> Esther Jackson, interview by Ian Rocksborough-Smith, Brooklyn, NY, 28 May, 2004; Jack O'Dell to John Henrik Clarke, January 15, 1965, Box 30, Folder 22, John Henrik Clarke Papers, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, Archives and Rare Books Division, New York (hereafter cited as John Henrik Clarke Papers).

<sup>16</sup> *Freedomways* Associates, “About this issue,” *Freedomways* 4, no. 1 (1964): 5; Esther Jackson, interview by Della Scott, “An Interview with Esther Jackson,” *Abafazi* 9, no.1 (1998): 2-9.

Dr. Martin Luther King.”<sup>17</sup> Other younger leaders included Benjamin Van Clark, a twenty-year-old student who had been involved in the desegregation movement in Savannah, Georgia and was chairman of the Youth Division of the Chatham County Crusade for Voters. Van Clark expressed his gratitude for the help provided by SCLC in the movement’s activities and in supporting its jailed local leader, Hosea Williams.<sup>18</sup> SNCC field workers Eric Rainey, Louie Nasper, and Ivanhoe Donaldson wrote of their experiences canvassing and demonstrating in Southern states with the aid of prominent SNCC leaders like Robert Moses and Charles Cobb.<sup>19</sup> Their reports frequently referenced the effective use of non-violent tactics in the face of racist police chiefs and Southern white intransigence and created narratives that largely corresponded with traditional perceptions of the movement’s activities.

Also featured in this issue were less-widely remembered activists whose political commentary worked to challenge many of the conventional themes associated with the non-violent direct action aspects of the movement. They questioned the movement’s lack of connection to union activism from past decades, its relegation to the Southern U.S, and its exclusive focus on integrationism. Such figures included Septima Clarke, who worked on voter education programs for SCLC in Mississippi, and Slater King from the movement in Albany, Georgia. Clarke spoke of how the programs for voter education that she directed were inspired by her work in the Highlander Folk school in Tennessee, which from the 1930s to the 1950s was a bastion of union radicalism, art, and

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<sup>17</sup> Fred L. Shuttlesworth, “Birmingham Shall Be Free Some Day,” *Freedomways* 4, no. 1 (1964): 19.

<sup>18</sup> Benjamin Van Clark, “Siege at Savannah,” *Freedomways* 4, no. 1 (1964): 133.

<sup>19</sup> Eric Rainey, Louie Nasper, and Ivanhoe Donaldson, “Notes From Southern Diaries,” *Freedomways* 4, no. 1 (1964): 137-142.

culture and served as a base for working class solidarity in the Southern states.<sup>20</sup> Slater King indicated that the Albany movement had heard speakers “with opinions ranging from Dr. Connie X Cross, representative of the Black Muslims, to Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., representing the integrationists.” Like the coalition-style politics of past decades that brought moderate liberals and radical leftists together, Slater King noted that the movement had still not “brought a wide enough spectrum of speakers” together, adding that Northern socialists like Norman Thomas, Communists like Benjamin Davis, and Black Muslims like Malcolm X should have been invited South to speak.<sup>21</sup> The inclusion of figures such as Clarke and Slater King helped show how *Freedomways*’ editors wanted to make the coalition-building efforts of earlier decades relevant to the mobilizations of the 1960s.

The importance of linking the social movements of earlier decades to the direct action struggles of the 1960s was clearly a theme that the editors wanted to convey in this special issue on the movement in the Southern states. The issue also featured contributions from veteran activists like Birmingham coal miner Henry O. Mayfield, who had been a CIO union organizer in the 1930s and 1940s and had been arrested alongside Esther Jackson, other SNYC activists, and numerous black and white coal miners. The magazine published an article Mayfield wrote in 1963, shortly before his death, in which he mentioned his efforts to promote voter registration within the union movement through to the 1960s. Making the important connection to the new direct action movement, Mayfield stated that “the labor movement,” like it had in the past, must again “fight” for the “peace, jobs, and freedom” that was now the slogan of the famous

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<sup>20</sup> Septima Clarke, “Literary and Liberation,” *Freedomways* 4, no. 1 (1964): 113-115; Robin D.G. Kelley, *Hammer and Hoe: Alabama Communists During the Great Depression*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1990). 120-121, 150-151.

<sup>21</sup> Slater King, “The Bloody Battleground of Albany,” 97.

March on Washington in August of 1963.<sup>22</sup> Though SNYC had disbanded in 1949, *Freedomways* staff writer Augusta Strong wrote in this same issue of how “the seed it planted did not fall on barren ground.” “What has happened since, in the last several years especially,” she wrote of the non-violent direct actions in places like Birmingham, “is ample testimony.”<sup>23</sup> Finally, as a way of framing the issue and illustrating the Popular Front continuities of the freedom struggle, *Freedomways* republished Du Bois’ famous speech delivered at the closing session of SNYC’s Southern Youth Legislature in Columbia, South Carolina, 1946. The speech, which editors O’Dell, Esther Jackson, and Augusta Strong had all witnessed, outlined the basic social, political, and economic life of the South and charted a united program of emancipation for black and white southern labour, while also outlining how the twin issues of racism and poverty could be addressed.<sup>24</sup>

Also imbued with the spirit of Du Bois’ anticolonialism from the Popular Front period, the magazine’s second issue on the Southern struggle worked to challenge the movement’s implicitly domestic focus. For instance, it followed the efforts of the MFDP to influence the mainstream of the national Democratic Party and demonstrated the black Popular Front strategy of building anticolonial internationalism with a view for democratic change in the U.S. In a feature interview with Fannie Lou Hamer, vice-president of the MFDP, Jack O’Dell asked about a trip that she and ten other SNCC activists had taken to Ghana, where they had been guests of the nearly decade-old independent government of Kwame Nkrumah.<sup>25</sup> White reaction at home in Mississippi to

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<sup>22</sup> Henry O. Mayfield, “Memoirs of a Birmingham Coal Miner,” *Freedomways* 4, no. 1 (1964): 51-56; Esther Jackson, interview.

<sup>23</sup> Augusta Strong, “Southern Youth’s Proud Heritage,” *Freedomways* 4, no. 1 (1964): 50.

<sup>24</sup> W.E.B. Du Bois, “Behold the Land,” 8-15.

<sup>25</sup> Jack O’Dell to Bob Moses, February 9, 1965, Box 30, Folder 24, John Henrik Clarke Papers.

Hamer's trip was typified by the comments of her town's mayor who, she said, wanted her tarred, feathered, and sent "back to Africa." In defiance, she added that the support she had received from local people involved with the movement made her even more determined to see out the struggle against American racism. "I saw how the government was run [in Ghana] and I saw where black people were running the banks" she said. "It shows what black people can do if we only get the chance in America."<sup>26</sup> Her interview indicated how movement activists could easily link anticolonialism to civil rights.

*Freedomways* continued to provide this kind of content throughout its existence, particularly at the end of the 1960s, when the anti-Vietnam war movement had fully emerged. Its extensive Vietnam war coverage, begun in the spring of 1965, featured the anti-war commentary of numerous prominent African Americans. In the spring of 1967, the magazine's cover and lead editorial focused on the heavyweight boxing champion Muhammad Ali and his refusal to enlist in the army draft. Diane Nash (Bevel), a well-known non-violent direct action leader who had been in the sit-in campaigns in Nashville, Tennessee in the early 1960s, also had a piece in the issue about an all-female delegation with whom she went to North Vietnam. On this trip, she met Ho Chi Minh and saw how African Americans and the Vietnamese were both targets of American racist violence.<sup>27</sup> The issue also featured one of the first reprints of Martin Luther King, Jr.'s immensely significant 1967 Riverside Church speech from New York in which he criticized those who opposed connecting civil rights to the peace movement. King opposed the war because he felt that "America would never invest the necessary funds or energies in rehabilitation of its poor so long as adventures like Vietnam continued to

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<sup>26</sup> Jack Minnis, "The Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party: A New Declaration of Independence," *Freedomways* 5, no. 2 (1965): 264-279; Jack O'Dell, "Life in Mississippi: An Interview with Mrs. Fannie Lou Hamer," *Freedomways* 5, no. 2 (1965): 231-242.

<sup>27</sup> Diane Bevel, "Journey to North Vietnam," *Freedomways* 7, no. 2, (1967): 118-128.

draw men and skills and money like some demonic destructive suction tube.” In this landmark speech, King emphasized his assertion that the United States was the “greatest purveyor of violence in the world.”<sup>28</sup> Esther Jackson felt it “was the breakthrough on the war in Vietnam,” adding that “some people said it put a nail in his coffin” since King was assassinated exactly a year later.<sup>29</sup>

With its extensive support for the Southern movement and its consistent linking of civil rights to anticolonialism and the ideals of past movements for social justice, the magazine gained increased popularity and influence. For instance, numerous copies were distributed and used by SNCC, CORE, and SCLC activists in voter education projects throughout the Southern states. The special issues on the Southern movement, as well as *Freedomways*' numerous other special issues, notably on Africa (1962), Harlem (1963), the Caribbean (1964), Du Bois (1965), and Native Americans (1969), had the highest circulation for the magazine, ranging from 10,000 to 15,000 copies for each. These were widely distributed across the U.S. and around the world in bookstores and through subscribers. *Freedomways* subscriptions were held by 300 libraries in the U.S., as well as in 15 other countries. In New York alone, 65 public schools had become regular subscribers.<sup>30</sup> By 1969, a range of major universities including Yale, Harvard, Tuskegee, Johns Hopkins, Stanford, and Howard, as well as the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris held complete sets of the magazine.<sup>31</sup> In 1967, its paid circulation was over 5,000 per issue and by the mid-1970s, this number was closer to 8,000 per issue. With its comprehensive appraisal of the Southern movement and its growing distribution in

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<sup>28</sup> Martin Luther King, Jr., “A Time to Break Silence” (speech given at Riverside Church, New York, NY, April 4, 1967), *Freedomways* 7, no. 2 (1967): 105.

<sup>29</sup> Esther Jackson, interview.

<sup>30</sup> John Henrik Clarke to Mildred Hennessey, February 21, 1967, Box 30, Folder 27, John Henrik Clarke Papers.

<sup>31</sup> *Freedomways* 9, no. 1 (1969): 17.

the U.S. and internationally, *Freedomways* had gained enough of a profile to have a significant impact on the tenor of black politics in the public sphere.

### **“A superfluous trimming for the integration movement”?**

With its growing influence and proximity to prominent figures involved in the black freedom struggle, *Freedomways*' triumphant portrayal of Martin Luther King's shift to an anti-war stance in 1967 was not a portrayal the magazine saw fit to bestow upon Malcolm X earlier in 1965 when the popular Muslim radical was assassinated. While the magazine demonstrated the radical continuities of the Southern movement, it chose not to consider the significance of Malcolm X's recent break with the Nation of Islam (NOI) and his increasingly internationalist and left-wing political inclinations.<sup>32</sup> Though the magazine shared an interest in urban rebellions, imperialist wars, black unity, and African freedom with high profile militant nationalists such as Malcolm, these nationalists received little or no attention in *Freedomways* because of the editors' tactical alliance with the non-violent and integrationist mainstream of the freedom movement. This alliance stemmed from the editors' focus on who they saw as direct descendants of their Popular-Front inspired political experiences; there was little room in *Freedomways*' pages for perspectives like that of Malcolm X, who did not abide by the tactics of non-violent resistance that the editors shared with figures such as Martin Luther King, Jr.

The editors' tactical disagreement with Malcolm X led them to overlook his radical shift away from a strict adherence to racial separatism and militant nationalism. Shifting to what some have described as a “revolutionary” socialist internationalism by 1964 and 1965, Malcolm and his organization, the Organization of African American

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<sup>32</sup> According to Nikhil Pal Singh, Malcolm X's internationalism was evident in 1963 when (as a member of NOI) he responded ironically to a reporter's query about the Kennedy assassination, saying that “the chickens were coming home to roost” – implying the U.S. had gotten its due after intervening in the Congo to abet the assassination of Patrice Lumumba in 1961. Nikhil Pal Singh, *Black is a Country*, 173, 187-188.

Unity (OAAU), also continued the work of black leftists like Paul Robeson and William Patterson in the 1950s by petitioning the UN and reaching out to other black movements, progressive whites, and radical organizations to work on voting rights issues and black community control issues.<sup>33</sup> Malcolm X's ideals of building anticolonial coalitions would also inspire the activities of numerous other black radical formations in the late 1960s, from the Black Panthers to their rivals in the US organization.<sup>34</sup> His dynamic and progressively leftist political legacy represented a missed opportunity for cooperation with the radical integrationists at *Freedomways*.

Correspondence between *Freedomways* editor John Henrik Clarke and Malcolm X implied that Malcolm may have supported the magazine at its inception in 1961.<sup>35</sup> However Malcolm's omission from the Harlem special issue of 1963 is indicative of a political rift between his militant Muslim populism and the Popular Front ideals of *Freedomways*, which remained more in line with the integrationism of the civil rights mainstream. The most telling example of *Freedomways*' avoidance of Malcolm X came during a televised debate between him and Rev. Milton Galamison on the relative merits of civil rights integration in 1963. While it would have been logical to print transcripts from both figures, the magazine chose only to publish the opening statement from the civil rights preacher, who expressed his full support for integration.<sup>36</sup> This omission revealed how the magazine was not openly "reviewing" the freedom movement; it tactically favoured one part of it.

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<sup>33</sup> John Simon, "The Achievement of Malcolm X," *Monthly Review* 56, no. 9 (2005): 29.

<sup>34</sup> Scot Brown, "The US Organization," 23, 26-28.

<sup>35</sup> John Henrik Clarke to Malcolm X, May 6, 1963, Box 30, Folder 1, John Henrik Clarke Papers.

<sup>36</sup> Freedomways Associates, "Integration Must Work – Nothing Else Can," *Freedomways* 3, no. 2 (1963): 215-221.



Critics of *Freedomways* from both within and without its editorial staff also noted the magazine's neglect of Malcolm X and black nationalism, and how such neglect made it difficult for the magazine to avoid contributing to movement tensions. These identified the convergence between old guard leftists and the non-violent activists involved with the Southern movement in its pages and pointed to tensions beyond the integrationist and nationalist binary – notably between left-nationalists, who were formerly part of the old guard black Left, and those, including the editors of *Freedomways*, who remained associated with the CP and former-CP members. These critics raised some very legitimate concerns about the magazine's relationship to movement liberals and to the old guard Left, whom they felt compromised the magazine's integrity as a radical black publication.

One of these critics was founding editor Shirley Graham Du Bois. By 1961, she had gone into exile in Ghana with W.E.B. Du Bois, and by the mid-1960s, she became increasingly nationalist in orientation and left the CP to side with “coloured” Beijing against “white” Moscow: she had effectively become a left-nationalist.<sup>37</sup> After playing a key role during the magazine's formative years, Graham did not write another article in the magazine until the early 1970s, beyond a small contribution to the Du Bois memorial issue in 1965 and a commentary she wrote about the situation following the Ghanaian coup that removed Nkrumah in 1966. In the mid-1960s, Graham complained that the magazine's editors were “wholly on the side of Martin Luther King,” too closely associated to the Communist Party and to Soviet influence, and admonished the magazine for its inclusion of liberal civil rights leader Roy Wilkins in W.E.B. Du Bois' memorial issue.<sup>38</sup> Such a contention revealed how the Popular Front-inspired radical

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<sup>37</sup> Gerald Horne, *Race Woman: The Lives of Shirley Graham Du Bois*, (New York: New York University Press, 2000), 219-221.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*

integrationism of the magazine was problematic for Graham because it brought the magazine into contact with moderate liberals such as Wilkins. Graham's critique complicated the differences between integrationists and nationalists since for her, the debate was also between black leftists and their relationship to liberalism in the civil rights movement.

Associate editor John Henrik Clarke shared a view of the magazine similar to Graham, a view that stemmed from his own frustration with getting black nationalists covered in its pages. Like most of *Freedomways*' editors, Clarke had been an old guard leftist, and had been involved with John Oliver Killens and the "Left-influenced" Harlem Writers Guild in the 1950s.<sup>39</sup> Unlike many of the editors, however, Clarke was also a devoted and self-described left-nationalist who had a close association to Malcolm X through an advising role to the OAAU in the mid-1960s, and like Graham, had moved away from the old Left during this decade.<sup>40</sup> He compiled speeches made by the Muslim radical during the mid-1960s that profiled Malcolm's transformation into a revolutionary international figure. The magazine would not reprint these speeches and Clarke had to publish them elsewhere.<sup>41</sup> At the same time, Communist Party members Benjamin Davis, Louise, and William Patterson and former Communists Esther Jackson, Jack O'Dell, and Augusta Strong wrote and edited for the magazine alongside younger civil

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<sup>39</sup> James Smethurst, "Poetry and Sympathy," 263.

<sup>40</sup> John Henrik Clarke to Shirley Graham, January 28, 1965, Box 30, Folder 24, John Henrik Clarke Papers; John Henrik Clarke to Shirley Graham, May 27, 1965, Box 30, Folder 24, John Henrik Clarke Papers; Gerald Horne, *Race Woman*, 219-220.

<sup>41</sup> John Henrik Clarke to Earl Grant, June 17, 1965, Box 30, Folder 23, John Henrik Clarke Papers; John Henrik Clarke, Earl Grant, and A. Peter Bailey eds., *Malcolm X; the Man and His Times*, (New York: Macmillan, 1969).

rights leaders such as John Lewis, Julian Bond, and Diane Nash (Bevel).<sup>42</sup> This fuelled Clarke's frustration with the other editors because it linked the old guard black Left with the non-violent direct action Southern movement but excluded important New York-based nationalists such as Malcolm X, who by the mid-1960s was moving increasingly to the Left.<sup>43</sup> Thus, Clarke viewed the magazine as a "house organ of the Southern Movement" that was unable to grasp the full dynamics of black radicalism in Northern urban struggles because of its tactical commitment to integration and non-violent activism.<sup>44</sup>

Echoing both the critiques of Clarke and Graham was Harlem cultural critic Harold Cruse, whose monumental *The Crisis of the Negro Intellectual* – a scathing condemnation of the African American intelligentsia from the 1920s to the 1960s - dedicated two full sections to *Freedomways*.<sup>45</sup> Historian Tim Tyson suggests that Cruse "considered himself an authority on which developments in African American politics were truly 'revolutionary' in their approach," adding in retrospect, that "his acerbic observations [in *The Crisis of the Negro Intellectual*] seem more divisive than instructive."<sup>46</sup> Indeed, Cruse's diatribe against the magazine was certainly an exercise in hyperbole: at one point, he described the magazine's content as "superficial, routine and unoriginal," and in another, described the motives behind its creation as a last ditch effort

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<sup>42</sup> John Henrik Clarke to Robert Muller, June 26, 1965, Box 30, Folder 23, John Henrik Clarke Papers; Benjamin Davis, "The McCarran Act and the Negro Freedom Movement," *Freedomways* 3, no. 2 (1963): 198-201.

<sup>43</sup> Manning Marable, *Race, Reform, and Rebellion*, 89.

<sup>44</sup> John Henrik Clarke quoted in Gerald Horne, *Race Woman*, 219-220.

<sup>45</sup> Harold Cruse, *The Crisis of the Negro Intellectual*, (New York: William and Morrow, 1967), 240-346.

<sup>46</sup> Timothy Tyson, *Radio Free Dixie*, 204.

on the part of the old Left editors of *Freedomways* to “harvest” the new spirit of direct action in the 1960s.<sup>47</sup>

Nonetheless, Cruse’s critique is incisive at points and gets to the heart of the apparent contradiction in the magazine’s editorial policy concerning black nationalism. A former Communist himself, Cruse noted how *Freedomways* was built on the ashes of Robeson’s *Freedom* paper.<sup>48</sup> He made a case for how the “old” black Left, represented by figures such as Paul Robeson, John Oliver Killens, Esther and James Jackson, and even Shirley Graham) emerged from its shattered Cold War past to form the magazine only to become tied to what he called the “integrationist elite.”<sup>49</sup> To Cruse, this “integrationist elite” included the prominent literary, intellectual, and public figures around which the magazine coalesced as well as the mainstream of the civil rights movement from Martin Luther King, Jr. to Roy Wilkins and Whitney Young.<sup>50</sup> He felt that the magazine had to be categorized as either strictly in-line with the integrationist or the nationalist tendencies of the black liberation movement, but could not be exemplary of both:

...when the Left launched *Freedomways*, the pertinent racial question was immediately raised – *Is it a Negro magazine – or an interracial magazine?* If intended as the former, then it would have had to incline toward a nationalist position. As neither one, however, *Freedomways* has become a superfluous trimming for the integration movement.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> Harold Cruse, *The Crisis of the Negro Intellectual*, 244, 249.

<sup>48</sup> James Smethurst, “Poetry and Sympathy,” 269.

<sup>49</sup> At the outset of the 1960s, Graham was still associated with the Communist Party. However, when she expressed her differences with the magazine in 1966, Gerald Horne contends that she was also “drifting away from the Communists” and that “the non-Communist Left and left nationalists were not altogether accepting of her either.” Gerald Horne, *Race Woman*, 220-221.

<sup>50</sup> Harold Cruse, *The Crisis of the Negro Intellectual*, 248.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, 246.

Based on *Freedomways'* neglect of black nationalism, critics such as Cruse viewed the magazine as a subordinate ally to the integrationist wing of the black freedom movement, its radicalism had been diluted because, just like the old guard black Left, it associated with liberal moderates and white leftists. To him, *Freedomways'* editors were unable to think critically about integrationism because they suffered from an identity crisis. Was it a black magazine or an interracial one? If it was a black magazine, then it had to be politically aligned with nationalist movements. Since it was not aligned with these movements, it was clearly integrationist.

Such conclusions concealed as much as they revealed about the nature of the magazine's relationship to black nationalism. On one hand, Cruse's critique of the magazine, like Graham and Clarke's, correctly connected the legacy of the old black Left to the civil rights mainstream and illustrated the tactical limitations of the magazine's radical integrationism. They cautioned against ignoring important and very real political schisms from the civil rights and Black Power era and the dangers of associating too closely with liberals and moderates. On the other hand, these critics overlooked an important distinction for the magazine – namely the significance of *Freedomways'* radical integrationism to issues of black cultural autonomy. Because they were so engaged in debating the tactical conflicts that characterized the schisms between black nationalists and civil rights moderates, the critics failed to see how the magazine could represent both integrationist and nationalist perspectives through its participation in Harlem's literary and artistic scene.

### **“The premier Mecca of black America”**

*Freedomways'* radical integrationism needs to be understood for its role in helping to produce a broad and vibrant African American cultural front that featured numerous efforts to build coalitions with communities of artists, writers, activists, and

other public figures including nationalists. Such efforts revealed many similar ideological commitments to oppose colonialism, war, poverty and racism, despite very real tactical differences between those involved. Throughout the 1960s and 1970s, the magazine contributed to this cultural front with its presence on the Harlem literary scene.

*Freedomways'* presence on this cultural scene had a non-sectarian tendency that opened its pages to black radicals, particularly writers and artists who were opposed to the integrationist mainstream of the civil rights movement. When viewed as an integral part of a broader, autonomous cultural front, the magazine challenged some of the differences between black nationalists and civil rights leaders.

Indeed, there were many initiatives from this time that indicated the potential for building bridges across traditional divides such as that existing between moderate integrationism and radical separatism. For instance, around the same time that *Freedomways* hosted tributes for Du Bois and Robeson that brought out notable public figures and activists from across the political spectrum, Black Power conferences in Philadelphia, Newark, and Chicago (1968-9) and the Congress of African Peoples in Atlanta (1970) attracted thousands of delegates including cultural nationalist figures such as Ron Karenga, Black Power advocates such as Stokely Carmichael, and mainstream civil rights leaders such as Jesse Jackson.<sup>52</sup> Thus, Popular Front-style coalitions continued to flourish into the supposedly fractious late 1960s.

While the editors maintained their overall allegiance to the mainstream integrationism of the freedom movement throughout this period, they did not denounce black nationalism. For instance, *Freedomways'* editors never criticized Black Power in the manner that Roy Wilkins of the NAACP did when he called it "reverse Hitler, reverse Ku-Klux-Klan" and dismissed it as an "uncritical" slogan that would lead to "black

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<sup>52</sup> Komozi Woodard, *A Nation Within a Nation*, 2,3,107.

death.”<sup>53</sup> Nor did the magazine share Urban League president Whitney Young’s desire to dissociate the civil rights movement from groups such as SNCC that adopted the Black Power slogan and tied domestic American issues to the war in Vietnam in the late 1960s.<sup>54</sup> Rather the magazine sought to publicize the views of black public figures who were critical of militant nationalism but who still wanted to build coalitions with political radicals. For example, the magazine aired the views of black congressman Ron Dellums, who in 1972 indicated that the central tactical question for African Americans was not whether they “integrate or separate” but whether they could “unify without uniformity.”<sup>55</sup>

In fact, due to the efforts of John Henrik Clarke and a number of writers with nationalist inclinations, *Freedomways* covered some nationalist activity beyond the integrationist mainstream and the old guard black Left. This kind of coverage began in the early 1960s with the efforts of Clarke and writers such as Nigerian E.U. Essien-Udom. When given the opportunity, Clarke and Essien-Udom wrote about the activities of nationalists in book reviews and smaller secondary comment pieces.<sup>56</sup> Both of these figures were pioneers in the field of African and African American studies at this time. Essien-Udom published a foundational text about black nationalism; Clarke taught history for many years at Hunter College in New York while he worked as an associate

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<sup>53</sup> Roy Wilkins quoted in Manning Marable, *Race, Reform, and Rebellion*, 95.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, 95.

<sup>55</sup> Ronald V. Dellums, “The Coalition’s the Thing,” *Freedomways* 12, no. 1 (1972): 10.

<sup>56</sup> John Henrik Clarke, review of *The Autobiography of Malcolm X* by Malcolm X and Alex Haley, *Freedomways* 6, no. 1 1966: 48-52; John Henrik Clarke, “The New Afro-American Nationalism,” *Freedomways* 1, no. 3 (1961): 285-295; E.U. Essien-Udom, “The Relationship of Afro-Americans to African Nationalism,” *Freedomways* 2, no. 1 (1962): 393.

editor with *Freedomways*.<sup>57</sup> Together, they paved the way for the magazine to challenge movement dichotomies later in the decade. Also, Clarke's review of *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*, Patricia McInay's poem about Malcolm's split with NOI in the mid-1960s, and Nikki Giovanni's 1970 review of Clarke's edited volume of Malcolm's speeches stand out as important exceptions to the magazine's neglect of the famous Muslim preacher.<sup>58</sup> Though Clarke remained concerned with the magazine's tactical reluctance to cover black nationalism, he was extremely valuable to the editors. Because of his influential academic profile in the Harlem literary scene, *Freedomways* was in a position to prove to nationalists that it could follow a policy of ideological non-sectarianism by the end of the 1960s.

To best illustrate how the magazine promoted this non-sectarianism, it is useful to demonstrate how it remained closely engaged with the Harlem radical tradition throughout this whole period.<sup>59</sup> The vibrant and diverse Harlem scene was as much a home for black nationalists as it was for old guard leftists like the editors at *Freedomways*. Beginning in 1963, and with the assistance of Clarke, the magazine published a special issue on the Harlem community.<sup>60</sup> Like the Du Bois special issue, the issue on Harlem was later reprinted as a book, and featured 31 writers, scholars, and artists, a "who's who" of the community's literary circles. It included figures such as

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<sup>57</sup> E.U. Essien-Udom, *Black Nationalism: A Search for an Identity in America*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1962); Herb Boyd, ed., *The Harlem Reader: A Celebration of New York's Most Famous Neighborhood, from the Renaissance Years to the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*, (New York: Three Rivers Press, 2003), 27.

<sup>58</sup> John Henrik Clarke, review of *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*, 48-52; Patricia McInay, "Two for Malcolm," *Freedomways* 6, no. 2, (1966): 135; Komozi Woodard, *A Nation Within a Nation*, 39; Nikki Giovanni, review of *Malcolm X – The Man and His Times* by John Henrik Clarke, *Freedomways* 10, no. 1 (1970): 84-87.

<sup>59</sup> This remained the case despite the fact that the magazine's offices were located in lower Manhattan.

<sup>60</sup> *Freedomways: Harlem, A Community in Transition* 6, no. 1 (1962): 261-461; *Freedomways* 2, no. 4 (1962): 357-515; Esther Jackson, interview.



Loften Mitchell, Loyle Hairston, James Baldwin, Eugene Holmes, Leonard Holt, Langston Hughes, Sterling Brown, Kenneth B. Clark, Gertrude Elise–Ayer, and J.A. Rogers.<sup>61</sup> With the notable exceptions of Mitchell, Hairston, and Baldwin, many of these writers represented an older generation that further indicated how the magazine helped continue the Harlem radical tradition of past decades through to the 1960s. This radical tradition was not simply rooted in the political Left, nor the civil rights mainstream, but rather in the struggles of generations of diverse public thinkers and activists who expressed democratic visions for black America from one of its most important communities. As Jack O'Dell indicated, there “was a physical presence of prominent African Americans [in Harlem] that represented something to the race... They were your neighbours... It was the premier mecca of black America.”<sup>62</sup>

Furthermore, throughout the 1960s and 1970s, *Freedomways* received frequent contributions from younger writers and artists who were involved in publications and literary movements closely associated with radical nationalist organizations. Such writers included Sylvester Leaks, who wrote regularly for *Muhammad Speaks*, and L.P. Beveridge and Elton Fax who were each editors at *Liberator*.<sup>63</sup> Other people who frequently contributed to *Freedomways* included artistic and literary figures like *Umbra*'s Tom Dent, Rolland Snellings, Lennox Raphael, and David Henderson, as well as other young radical writers and often nationalist writers such as John Henry Jones, Larry Neal, Mari Evans, Haki Madhubuti, and Askia Touré, *On Guard*'s Calvin Hicks, jazz musician

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<sup>61</sup> *Freedomways* Press Release, July 15, 1963, Box 30, Folder 1, John Henrik Clarke Papers; John Henrik Clarke, *Harlem: a Community in Transition*, (New York: Citadel Press, 1964).

<sup>62</sup> Jack O'Dell, interview by Ian Rocksborough-Smith, Vancouver, B.C., 11 May, 2004.

<sup>63</sup> According to Peniel Joseph, *Muhammad Speaks* was founded by Malcolm X and was “read religiously by a variety of students, activists, and intellectuals” who appreciated the paper’s broad international and anticolonial perspective. Dan Watts’s *Liberator* also provided space for many black nationalist writers and political activists including cultural critic Harold Cruse, Harlem activist Bill Epton and journalist William Worthy – all of whom contributed to black radical discourse in the late 1960s. Peniel Joseph, “Dashikis and Democracy,” 186-187.

Max Roach, and Alice Walker, whose early short stories were featured prominently by the magazine. Staff contributor and poet/actor Jim Williams even helped found a Freedom School affiliated to Malcolm X's OAAU.<sup>64</sup> A number of these people helped anticipate and took part in the Black Arts Movement of the late 1960s and 1970s. While it has been viewed as the intellectual adjunct of militant black nationalism, this movement was actually one of the most important literary movements of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century and a precursor of post-colonial studies. Like *Freedomways*, it helped black Marxist and nationalist intellectuals cooperate through their writing during the Black Power era.<sup>65</sup>

Thus, the magazine was well-acquainted with black nationalism through the cultural front of the Harlem radical tradition and through figures involved with movements such as the Black Arts movement that emerged from this tradition. In addition to challenging traditional tensions between nationalists and integrationists, writers with the magazine frequently discussed the connections and differences between nationalism and leftism. According to cultural studies scholar James Smethurst, the "dominant ideology" of writers and artists associated with *Freedomways* as the 1960s wore on was, to quote John Oliver Killens characterization of the late Lorraine Hansberry, "[b]lack nationalist with a socialist perspective."<sup>66</sup> Black Arts poet Nikki Giovanni challenged this characterization with a very nationalist tone in her review of John Henrik Clarke's edited volume on Malcolm X. She suggested that the African American struggle was not a "class struggle" but that it was a question of "white people running the world and Black

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<sup>64</sup> Jack O'Dell, interview.

<sup>65</sup> Tom Dent, "Umbra Days," *Black American Literature Forum* 14, no. 3 (Autumn 1980): 105-108; *Freedomways* 6, no. 1 (1966): 37; *Freedomways* 4, no. 2 (1964): 280-281; James Smethurst, *The Black Arts Movement: Literary Nationalism in the 1960s and 1970s*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005); James Smethurst, "Poetry and Sympathy: New York, the Left, and the Rise of Black Arts," in *Left of the Color Line: Race, Radicalism, and Twentieth-Century Literature of the United States*, Bill V. Mullen and James Smethurst, eds., (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003), 260.

<sup>66</sup> James Smethurst, "Poetry and Sympathy," 267-268.

people populating it.”<sup>67</sup> Conversely, Jim Williams gave a Marxist view of black struggle in his article about African American theatre. For him, theatre was “a powerful part of the superstructure of ideology.” Moreover, he noted the “importance of the political-economic system upon which the culture rests.”<sup>68</sup> Moreover, *Freedomways* editor Ernest Kaiser was widely recognized in the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s for his socialist politics as well as his annotated bibliographies concerning new African American literature.<sup>69</sup> The magazine was clearly an important outlet for discussing crucial issues that related to black politics and culture. While for the most part the editors at *Freedomways* were not nationalists, they were prepared to publish articles that discussed a full spectrum of political ideas from the cultural front.

### **“The Coalition’s the Thing”**

The spectrum of political ideas discussed through the cultural front drew particular inspiration from the urban rebellions of the mid-1960s, and *Freedomways*’ pages provided no exception. For instance, the magazine gave extensive coverage to the urban rebellions that started in the mid-1960s and spread to over 257 cities across the U.S. in response to the ineffectiveness of voting rights reforms, white backlash, and increased urban poverty.<sup>70</sup> The editors also condemned racist police actions in the riots

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<sup>67</sup> Nikki Giovanni, review of *Malcolm X – The Man and His Times*, 85-86.

<sup>68</sup> Jim Williams, “Pieces on Black Theatre and the Black Theatre Worker,” *Freedomways* 9, no. 2 (1969): 146-154.

<sup>69</sup> Tom Dent to John Henrik Clarke, 4 June, 1967, Box 30, Folder 28, John Henrik Clarke Papers; Kalamu ya Salaam, *Magic of Juju: An Appreciation of the Black Arts Movement*, (New York: Third World Press, 2001), 62.

<sup>70</sup> Komozi Woodard, *Nation Within a Nation*, 71; John Henrik Clarke, “Introduction,” *Freedomways* 7, no. 1 (1967): 34; John Henry Jones, “Revolt in the Ghettos,” *Freedomways* 7, no. 1 (1967): 35-41; John Pittman, “Negroes Challenge the Jackboot in San Francisco,” *Freedomways* 7, no. 1 (1967): 42-53; Donald Wheeldin, “The Situation in Watts Today,” *Freedomways* 7, no. 1 (1967): 54-59; Joseph Boskin, “Historical Roots of the Riots,” *Freedomways* 7, no. 1 (1967): 60-63.

and openly opposed the incarceration of black cultural nationalist and Black Arts Movement founder Le Roi Jones (Amiri Baraka) when he was arrested in the wake of the Newark riot in 1967.<sup>71</sup> They were clearly influenced by the urban uprisings and recognized that many segments of the black freedom movement had moved beyond non-violent tactics out of necessity. Although the editors were not prepared to openly sanction such tactics, by the mid-late 1960s, they considered these rebellions important enough to cover in a manner that indicated an ideological and even tactical rapprochement with militant nationalists.

In this sense, the editors distinguished their radical integrationism from the integrationism of many moderate black leaders. Editor Jack O'Dell noted the "cautious" elitism of moderate organizations such as the Urban League and critiqued their efforts to distance themselves from urban rebellions. Referring to Urban League director Whitney Young's aversion to Black Power radicalism, O'Dell suggested that "no useful purpose is served by Negro civil rights leaders straining to disassociate themselves from the forces of the ghetto rebellion," adding that "if the method of resistance is no longer exclusively non-violent, it is because violence is the language of Americans and they, the colonized [of the urban ghettos], wish to be heard."<sup>72</sup> Such a positive appraisal of the urban rebellions marked a change for the editors from their earlier aversion to militant tactics. In many ways, such a perspective recognized, as did many black nationalists, that non-violence had its limits, that many mainstream civil rights leaders were out of touch with the overall direction of the freedom movement, and that the urban poor were justified in their frustration with the limits of civil rights reform and their marginality as "colonized" citizens. As such, O'Dell's analysis of poor African Americans being internally colonized

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<sup>71</sup> Freedomways Associates, "In Defense of LeRoi Jones," *Freedomways* 8, no. 1 (1968), 6.

<sup>72</sup> Jack O'Dell, "Colonialism and the Negro-American Experience," *Freedomways* 6, no. 4 (1966): 296-308.

and resistant to American racism paralleled the views of Black Power activists whose anticolonialism was similar to that expressed in *Freedomways*.<sup>73</sup> Indeed, editors like O'Dell shared the perspective of Black Panthers such as Huey P. Newton who opposed American nationalism on the basis that the country constituted "an empire," was based on slavery, and continued to marginalize native peoples and lands.<sup>74</sup>

At the same time, O'Dell and the editors of *Freedomways* did not wish the state to be overthrown and destroyed as many Panthers advocated. Instead, similar to the activists of the Popular Front and New Deal periods, the editors at *Freedomways* felt that a radically reformed state still provided part of the means for achieving freedom and equality for all Americans, and for black Americans particularly. Of course, the other part of this equation was the social movements, which, O'Dell wrote, provided broad forms of resistance "among large sections of American people" from the oppressed in ghettos, to the National Mobilization to End the War in Vietnam, to the "growing subculture" of "[h]ippies." In combining these dialectical forces and building popular movements that supported radical electoral agendas rather than risky urban street battles, O'Dell felt that the political process in the United States could be significantly and effectively influenced.<sup>75</sup> Thus, despite having similar anticolonial perspectives to Black Power activists, *Freedomways* was reluctant to directly endorse the "indigenous militancy" that the urban rebellions created. As such, the magazine did not want to highlight the activities and tactics of prominent movements like the Black Panthers in New York, and Chicago, the Black Panther Party (BPP) in Oakland, and their rivals in Ron Karenga's

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<sup>73</sup> Jack O'Dell, "A Special Variety of Colonialism," *Freedomways* 7, no. 1 (1967): 7-14.

<sup>74</sup> Huey P. Newton quoted in Nikhil Pal Singh, *Black is a Country*, 197.

<sup>75</sup> Jack O'Dell, "The July Rebellions and the Military State," *Freedomways* 7, no. 4 (1967): 288-301.

Los Angeles and San Francisco-based US Organization – movements that grew out of such “indigenous militancy.”<sup>76</sup>

While *Freedomways* largely omitted the voices of these nationalist groups in its coverage of urban rebellions, the magazine’s editorial priorities remained focused on mainstream civil rights leaders. By the late 1960s, such leaders now addressed broader issues like the war in Vietnam and federal funding for urban poverty in an effort to continue mobilizing popular support for the black freedom struggle. Turning this shift to their advantage, the editors worked to radicalize moderate positions within this leadership, and to indirectly critique more militant elements, such as the Panthers, who were outside of it. Such a strategy was clearly illustrated by the magazine’s support of the youth wing of the NAACP in New York, which in 1967 adopted an anti-Vietnam war position that was against the policies of the organization’s national leadership. The editorial spoke revealingly about not letting “one’s ‘militancy’ become an obstacle to working with others whose political consciousness has not yet developed.” The editors used the NY-NAACP Youth as a counter-example to both “the narrow provincial attitudes of most...NAACP elders” and the militancy of some black nationalist leaders, like H. Rap Brown of SNCC, who proclaimed in 1968 that “the Civil Rights Movement is dead.”<sup>77</sup>

A similar middle ground between militancy and moderation was charted in a later issue by Leroy Clark, a lawyer with the NAACP. Clark admonished both black professionals who benefited from token representation in “stop-gap” government anti-poverty programs and younger nationalist groups that relied “solely on ‘verbal’ militancy,” which he felt would make them as “irrelevant and exploitative as the old-time, charlatan,

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<sup>76</sup> Nikhil Pal Singh, *Black is a Country*, 194.

<sup>77</sup> Freedomways Associates, “Rescuing the NAACP,” *Freedomways* 7, no. 4 (1967): 285-286.

jackleg preacher.”<sup>78</sup> Alternatively, Clark proposed a “détente” and “symbiotic relationship” between “militants and professionals in which they draw upon one another for the unique talents which each has” – a symbiosis he felt was needed in order to address the issue of unity in black political discourse during the late 1960s. In working to encourage radicalism among the mainstream elements of the movement, *Freedomways* worked to bridge the traditional divide in black leadership between those advocating reformism, gradualism, and moderation and those who advocated radical protest. Thus, the magazine’s editors felt that the gradualism of the NAACP and the Urban League had to be reconciled with the non-violent protests of SCLC and SNCC in the early 1960s, and the militant nationalism of the Black Panthers by the late 1960s. While doing so, the magazine primarily represented the perspectives of activists willing to move away from moderation, rather than radical nationalist figures like Malcolm X, and later the Panthers, who were considering work in coalitions with political moderates by the mid-to-late 1960s.

With its close relations to mainstream civil rights figures, critics might argue that *Freedomways* was simply engaged in a larger debate among elites about the direction of black leadership and that the magazine was involved in discussions that had little to do with fostering popular grassroots democracy. This would certainly accord with Harold Cruse’s view that the magazine, and what remained of the old guard black Left, was simply trying to “cash-in” on the new wave of youthful black leadership in the freedom struggle. Indeed, recent studies have shown that a class of university-educated professionals had emerged by the end of this decade to compete with each other as representatives of newly created government programs, academic positions, and public

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<sup>78</sup> Leroy Clark, “Leadership Crisis: A New Look at the ‘Black Bourgeoisie,’” *Freedomways* 8, no. 3 (1968): 221, 224.

offices – positions opened up as a direct result of the freedom struggle’s upsurge.<sup>79</sup> A significant number from this group adopted militant rhetoric but, in action, assumed the “conservative managerial” and “brokerage style” of leadership associated with traditional black elites and their distance from the majority of African Americans when it came to implementing programs for radical social justice and grassroots democracy.<sup>80</sup> As Peniel Joseph has argued, many of these elites became “seemingly disconnected from organic vehicles of political organization.”<sup>81</sup> The editors at *Freedomways* could have become disconnected from movement activity as some black mayors did by the mid-1970s when they adopted pro-business platforms, opposed civic worker strikes, and became detached from the grassroots base that got them elected.<sup>82</sup> Yet the magazine did not follow this trajectory.

As old-guard leftists, the editors remained grounded in their Popular Front ideals. Just as Joy James has argued that radical black intellectuals have significantly contributed to public discourse, *Freedomways*’ editors were able to transcend elite debates because they connected their radical rhetoric directly to the radical praxis of organizers in the civil rights movement, the anti-Vietnam war, and the anti-poverty

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<sup>79</sup> Joy James, *Transcending the Talented Tenth: Black Leaders and American Intellectualism*, (New York: Routledge, 1997); Adolph Reed, Jr., *Stirrings in the Jug: Black Politics in the Post-Segregation Era* (Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 1999).

<sup>80</sup> Adolph Reed, Jr., *Stirrings in the Jug*, 18; Joy James, *Transcending the Talented Tenth*, 10.

<sup>81</sup> Peniel E. Joseph, “The Post Civil Rights Era,” *New Politics* 5, no. 4 (1996): 53.

<sup>82</sup> Maynard Jackson became the first black mayor of Atlanta in 1973 and in 1977, he opposed an overwhelmingly black civic workers strike. According to Adolph Reed, Jr., such actions are examples of an “acceptance” on the part of black elites of “overarching programmatic frameworks and priorities for governance and administration...defined by the pro-growth, pro-business interests that reproduce entrenched patterns of racialized inequality. These commitments constrain elite responsiveness to ‘grassroots’ concerns and initiatives....” Adolph Reed, Jr., *Stirrings in the Jug*, 5.



movements of the late 1960s and early 1970s.<sup>83</sup> By engaging the theory and actions of black leaders in these movements with the ideals of working class solidarity and anticolonial internationalism, *Freedomways* illustrated a consistent counter-narrative to the ideological conventions of Cold War racial liberalism that dominated U.S. public discourse from the 1930s through to the 1970s.<sup>84</sup> As has been noted, such conventions have contributed to depictions of the 1960s that obscure the complex radical trajectories of black leaders and truncate the movements they were a part of to account only for momentary sit-ins, bus boycotts, and freedom rides that culminated in a redemptive March on Washington in 1963 and the eventual defeat of *de jure* Jim Crow segregation in the Southern States.<sup>85</sup> Along with many prominent black public figures, the editors of *Freedomways* indicated that civil rights were only one part of a much larger movement for democratic transformation and international anticolonial liberation.

Thus, from the late 1960s, through to the early 1970s, the magazine continued to make a habit of covering prominent black leaders such as King's successor, Ralph Abernathy, and later Jesse Jackson, both of whom were part of broadly-based civil rights organizations like SCLC and People United to Save Humanity (PUSH). In covering such figures, the magazine was explicit in its support of the movements to which they were associated, movements that often took the form of Popular Front-style political coalitions against poverty and war spending.

Among many things, these coalitions encouraged intercultural solidarity and racial justice, direct action anti-poverty campaigns, black workers' movements, anti-

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<sup>83</sup> I am borrowing Joy James's method of showing how radical black intellectuals have significantly contributed to public discourse by transcending debates among elites; cf. Joy James *Transcending the Talented Tenth*, 17.

<sup>84</sup> For a discussion of how racial liberalism has defined U.S. public discourse over most of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, see Nikhil Pal Singh, *Black is a Country*, 15-57.

<sup>85</sup> Kevin Gaines, *Uplifting the Race: Black Leadership, Politics, and Culture in the Twentieth Century*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996), xii.

Vietnam war “Freedom budgets,” and grassroots electoral activism.<sup>86</sup> To the editors of *Freedomways*, this activity represented a culmination of their Popular Front political ideals. In 1969, *Freedomways* covered the Charleston hospital workers strike – a union struggle that Abernathy and SCLC were closely involved with and that Abernathy felt was the “second chapter of the Poor People’s Campaign” that had been led by King prior to his assassination.<sup>87</sup> Abernathy also later pledged SCLC’s support for building the international peace movement in a later issue of *Freedomways*. He felt that SCLC’s involvement had “led to more communications and visits among the people involved” and had contributed to “an emerging international consciousness in a movement to end war, racism and poverty.”<sup>88</sup> The magazine also gave significant support to Jesse Jackson and SCLC’s “Operation Breadbasket” in Chicago during the late 1960s and again to Jackson when he left SCLC and formed People United to Save Humanity (PUSH) in 1971. PUSH was formed under the principle that “ethnic communities... have experienced racist oppression in American [and] are entitled to a proportionate share of the jobs and income which their percentage of the population... justifies.” In an appeal to a labour convention in Florida, Jackson criticized the departure of organized labour from the movement against racial injustice with the onset of the Cold War. Yet like the Popular Front and Congress of Industrial Organization (CIO) coalitions of the 1930s and 1940s had done, he implored the black freedom movement to “win back” the support of

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<sup>86</sup> Freedomways Associates, “Abolish the Draft! Enact the ‘Freedom Budget!’”, *Freedomways* 6, no. 4 (1966): 293-296.

<sup>87</sup> “Charleston – Battleground for the Dignity of the Poor,” *Freedomways* 9, no. 2 (1969): 101-103; Jack O’Dell, “Charleston’s Legacy to the Poor People’s Campaign,” *Freedomways* 9, no. 3 (1969): 197-211.

<sup>88</sup> Ralph Abernathy, “Some International Dimensions of the Peace Movement,” *Freedomways* 11, no. 3 (1971): 237-238.

“blue collar [white] workers” who had instead supported “law and order” candidates, including Richard Nixon, in the 1968 federal elections.<sup>89</sup>

As far as most *Freedomways* editors were concerned, such coalitions were the latest in a radical procession of non-violent civil rights initiatives since the early to mid-1960s inspired by the Popular Front anti-racism of the 1930s and 1940s. A staff editorial about an SCLC-organized day of action commemorating Martin Luther King's assassination on 4 April is illustrative of this continuum. In commemorating King, the magazine noted how SCLC was helping with the “resurgence” of mass movement mobilizations against “poverty, racism, and militarism.” These were the main issues King highlighted when he came out against the Vietnam war in 1967 and were the main issues for the editors involved in the broad movements of the 1930s and 1940s. It was also on the basis of these issues that the magazine shared its radically integrationist orientation with figures such as King. Indeed, the editors were pleased that SCLC had organized the cooperation of a “cross-section” of different groups in its commemoration of King. The commemoration had included “the NAACP, Urban League, sections of the Labor Movement, the National Education Association (NEA), Quaker groups and representatives of Mexican-American organizations.” The non-sectarian basis of such a coalition challenged traditional movement tensions in the 1960s and 1970s, and charted a way forward for the black freedom struggle in the U.S. under the banner of King's ultimately radicalized integrationism.

These coalitions still operated under the non-violent principles of the civil rights mainstream, a fact that was not lost on the editors of *Freedomways* and that was especially evident with their firm belief in the ballot over the bullet. They hailed the coalition of “liberal progressive forces” that defeated Barry Goldwater in 1964 and

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<sup>89</sup> *Freedomways* Associates, “April ‘Days of Confrontation,’” *Freedomways* 9, no. 1 (1969): 5; Jesse L. Jackson, “Three Challenges to Organized Labor,” *Freedomways* 12, no. 4 (1972): 311, 314.

warned voters in 1968 that the “freedom goals” of the black community “will not be helped by following a policy of withdrawing from mainstream political activity as some advise.”<sup>90</sup> Despite their sympathetic coverage of urban rebellions and limited rapprochement with militant nationalism, the editors continued to prioritize such “mainstream” political activity. The editors’ sustained commitment to non-violent tactics throughout the 1960s and 1970s were certainly a factor that contributed to the omission of groups like the Black Panthers, who by 1968 were being viciously persecuted by the FBI in a quasi-military operation that received no significant coverage in *Freedomways*.<sup>91</sup>

The magazine’s focus on “mainstream” politics did not mean the editors had given in to assimilation. Rather, they were fully committed to the cultural tenets of radical integrationism. Like many activists from this era, the editors felt that only the “independently bold intervention of the black community into the political affairs” of the country would “push” it towards the freedom goals of African Americans.<sup>92</sup> For them, injecting radical politics into grassroots electoral campaigns took precedence over waging protracted street warfare with police because elections provided the most practical and, in their minds, realistic and effective means of realizing their visions of social justice and democracy for the black community.

By the late 1960s, the magazine could point to successes in the electoral arena. Between 1965 and 1972, the number of elected or appointed black public officials in the

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<sup>90</sup> Freedomways Associates, “The Elections – Mandate for Action,” *Freedomways* 4, no. 4 (1964): 463-464; Freedomways Associates, “1968: A Year of Upsets and ‘Impossible’ Victories,” *Freedomways* 8, no. 3 (1968): 205.

<sup>91</sup> See Ward Churchill and Jim Vander Wall, *Agents of Repression: The FBI's Secret Wars Against the Black Panther Party and the American Indian Movement*, (Cambridge: South End Press, 1988).

<sup>92</sup> Freedomways Associates, “The Elections – Mandate for Action,” 205.

United States rose from 400 and no mayors, to over 2000 and over 80 mayors.<sup>93</sup>

Recognizing this progress, the magazine's editors certainly saw electoral politics as an imperative for political action by the late 1960s as they gave significant support and coverage to many African Americans gaining political office. The magazine keenly supported the efforts of Shirley Chisholm in her successful bid to be the first black woman elected to congress in 1968, and aired her views during her ground-breaking 1972 campaign for the presidency.<sup>94</sup> The magazine also gave significant support and coverage to black mayors like Richard Hatcher of Gary, Carl Stokes of Cleveland, and Coleman Young of Detroit as well as congressmen Adam Clayton Powell, Jr. and Ronald Dellums.

Through the pages of the magazine, a number of these public officials demonstrated connections to black radical traditions that persisted from the Popular Front period through to the radical coalitions of the late 1960s and early 1970s. At a *Freedomways*-sponsored celebration of W.E.B. Du Bois in 1969, Richard Hatcher linked a "long, black line of martyrdom," from Du Bois through "Malcolm X, Medgar Evers and Dr. King," whose arms were figuratively linked together with all peoples who migrated to the "village of America" and found "not democracy, but hypocrisy." Hatcher also voiced his support for black community power to combat inequality and poverty. He cautioned that this could not only come through the local level, but needed to germinate from "the eventual coming together of the demands for power by people of many sorts."<sup>95</sup> In a

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<sup>93</sup> Jesse L. Jackson, "Three Challenges to Labor," 310; Carl Stokes, "Black Political Action in 1972," *Freedomways* 12, no. 4 (1972): 387-388.

<sup>94</sup> *Freedomways* Associates, "1968: A Year of Upsets and 'Impossible' Victories," 208; Shirley Chisholm, "All We Are Saying Is," (speech, National Press Club, Washington, D.C., April 20, 1972), *Freedomways* 12, no. 2 (1972): 118-123.

<sup>95</sup> Richard G. Hatcher, "The Age of a New Humanity," (speech, closing of the Du Bois Centennial Year sponsored by *Freedomways* at Town Hall, New York, NY, February 22, 1969), *Freedomways* 9, no. 2 (1969): 106.

similar speech entitled "The Coalition's the Thing," given at a *Freedomways*-sponsored Du Bois commemoration in 1972, congressman Ron Dellums stated that he felt that King's political legacy was against "expedient liberalism" and "was talking about the ultimate coming together of human beings" in political coalition across ethnic and political divides. Dellums noted how King had not been assassinated "when he led a quarter of a million civil rights troops in a March on Washington..." because this "didn't shake the foundations" of the country. Rather, according to Dellums, King was killed because of his involvement in a multiracial, broadly-based poor people's campaign where "he put a black man from Mississippi, a brown man from Arizona, a red man from Oklahoma and a white boy from Georgia on the same podium, castigating the economics of the country."<sup>96</sup> The practice of building broad coalitions -- a tactic tried and tested in the movements that Du Bois and Robeson had been involved with in the 1930s and 1940s -- was clearly the objective for many black public officials by the late 1960s and early 1970s.

These public figures recognized the importance of political radicalism to their predecessors in the movement for black liberation and the leadership they had taken in forming such coalitions to address the fundamental issues of poverty, war, colonialism, and social injustice that were the basis for racism in American life. Moreover, in providing the setting for black leaders to think strategically and historically about the legacies of black political radicalism, the magazine in turn helped to push mainstream figures in a more expansively democratic direction.

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<sup>96</sup> Ronald V. Dellums, "The Coalition's the Thing," (speech, Third Annual Du Bois Cultural Evening sponsored by *Freedomways* at Carnegie Hall, New York, NY, January 30, 1972), *Freedomways* 12, no. 1 (1972): 10, 13.

## **“The current in which we all were struggling”**

*Freedomways* often facilitated such expressions by sponsoring public commemorations of W.E.B. Du Bois. These evenings drew a very disparate crowd of black public figures and their assembly further challenged the notion that radicals and moderates involved in the freedom struggle could not work together in common cause. Such an occasion was organized in 1968, a month before King’s assassination. At this event, the magazine launched its Du Bois Centennial celebration, a year-long series of cultural events that the magazine had been building since the Du Bois memorial issue was first published in 1965.

Starting in 1965, Norma Rogers, the magazine’s special projects director, organized annual Du Bois commemorations as fundraisers for the magazine. These events brought together many of the same people that came out for the Robeson tribute in 1965, plus many other people who were attracted by the magazine’s growing profile in the 1960s.<sup>97</sup> Such events functioned as fundraisers and were designed to “honor the life and works of Dr. W.E.B. Du Bois.”<sup>98</sup> They often featured plays put on by the Afro-American Folkloric Troupe from San Francisco, comedy acts by people such as Dick Gregory, and jazz performances by the likes of John Coltrane, Dizzy Gillespie, and black folk singer Len Chandler. As with the Robeson tribute three years earlier, Ossie Davis hosted the Du Bois event and Pete Seeger gave a performance. Prominent figures such as actor/director Cynthia Belgrave, singer Harry Belafonte, and Muhammad Ali were also present. In a letter requesting the sponsorship of Manhattan Burrough president Percy Sutton, John Henrik Clarke mentioned the prominent international figures as well as “Americans outstanding in the political, cultural and civil rights fields” who were

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<sup>97</sup> Esther Jackson, interview.

<sup>98</sup> Form letter, *Freedomways* magazine, January 21, 1966, Box 30, Folder 25, John Henrik Clarke Papers; Esther Jackson, interview.

already sponsoring the event. International figures included anticolonial leaders Leopold Senghor of Senegal and Edward Blyden III of Sierra Leone, Puerto Rican conductor Pablo Casals and Chilean poet Pablo Neruda, while African American leaders included Julian Bond from SNCC, Roy Wilkins from the NAACP, and Amiri Baraka (Le Roi Jones), then with the Black Convention movement. Newly-elected black public officials such as Cleveland's mayor Carl Stokes and Congressman Charles Diggs were also present that evening.<sup>99</sup> The Du Bois Centennial celebration helped sustain united expressions of black radicalism that made it difficult to distinguish between militants and moderates, separatists and integrationists.

Helping to blur these distinctions that evening was none other than Martin Luther King, Jr. At the Centennial celebration, King gave the keynote address. Like *Freedomways* magazine did throughout the 1960s, King used Du Bois' radical legacy to frame his own position against U.S.-led wars in Asia and throughout the world and poverty in America. Most importantly, King pointed to Du Bois' capacity as an activist/scholar who transcended both the class prejudice of intellectual elitism and the unorganized militancy of radical posturing. "The educated Negro who is not really part of us and the angry militant who fails to organize us, have nothing in common with Dr. Du Bois," said King. "He exemplified Black power in achievement and he organized Black Power in action. It was not an abstract slogan to him."<sup>100</sup> This statement also epitomized the specificity of *Freedomways*' radical integrationism throughout the 1960s and its overall appeal to the African American community. In an era rife with sectarian conflict

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<sup>99</sup> Du Bois Centennial Celebration Poster, February 23, 1968, Box 30, Folder 30, John Henrik Clarke Papers; John Henrik Clarke to Ossie Davis, September 22, 1967, Box 30, Folder 29, John Henrik Clarke Papers; John Henrik Clarke to Percy Sutton, February 7, 1968, Box 30, Folder 29, John Henrik Clarke Papers; Carl Stokes was the first African American to be elected mayor of a major U.S. city.

<sup>100</sup> Martin Luther King, Jr., "Honoring Dr. Du Bois," (speech, *Freedomways* Du Bois Centennial evening, Carnegie Hall, New York, NY, February 23, 1968), *Freedomways* 8, no. 2 (1968): 110.



and political repression, substantive social change -- as King saw it -- could only occur by connecting the spheres of intellectuals and militant radicalism through effective organization and action as Du Bois had done. To King and the editors at *Freedomways*, Du Bois' legacy ultimately defined what it meant to be an effective political radical. Moreover, King indicated that it took independent initiatives, like *Freedomways* magazine, to provide the venue, the medium, and the popular format to express such radical unity.

The Du Bois Centennial essentially marked a significant convergence of major public figures, shedding light on the overlooked commonalities and continuities of radical thought and practise that informed black politics during the 1960s. This is not to suggest that there were not political tensions between many black radicals from this era. There was quite a difference between the "Black Power" slogans of Angela Davis and Stokely Carmichael, the militant pacifism of King, the Muslim activism of the late Malcolm X, and the cultural nationalism of Amiri Baraka. And yet, as James Baldwin expressed in a letter read out at the Du Bois Centennial condemning the jailed Carmichael's persecution -- a letter that was refused publication in both the *London Times* and the *New York Times* -- African Americans shared in the struggles against the political realities of racism within a structurally racialized society. Black Power broadly defined had always been an imperative:

The current in which we all were struggling threw Stokely and me together from time to time -- it threw many people together, including finally Martin Luther King and Malcolm X. America sometimes resembles, at least from the point of view of the black man, an exceedingly monotonous minstrel show; the same dances, same music, same jokes. One has done (or been) the show so long that one can do it in one's sleep. So it was not in the least surprising for me to encounter (one more time) the American surprise when Stokely -- as Americans allow themselves the luxury of supposing -- coined the phrase, "black power." He didn't coin it. He simply dug it up again from where it's been lying since the first slaves

hit the gangplank. I have never known a Negro in all my life who was not obsessed with black power.<sup>101</sup>

It was this current of struggle that voluntarily brought together these disparate figures at the Du Bois Centennial, indicating the common cause many had in fighting American racism and imperialism and the continuities in radical thought that frequently informed black politics at this time.

In helping to disseminate such high profile expressions, it would be fair to suggest that *Freedomways* had reached a prominence by the mid-late 1960s that made it an influential organ in the efforts to link movements against war, poverty, and injustice in the United States and around the world. Nonetheless, Jack O'Dell cautions that it would be incorrect to "assign *Freedomways* more than its due." There were many other magazines such as *The Liberator* and *Muhammad Speaks* and white socialist journals like *Monthly Review* that made radical anticolonialism an integral part of their editorial policies. There were also many literary publications with a variety of political slants such as *The Negro Digest*, *Phylon*, *Umbra*, *The Black Scholar*, *Black World*, *Cricket*, *Journal of Black Poetry*, *Black Dialogue*, *Black America*, *Black Vanguard* and *Ebony* that covered African American arts and cultural issues by the late 1960s. *Freedomways* was only one publication among many that emerged from the period of civil rights upsurge and the ongoing Harlem radical tradition.

The coalitions fostered by the magazine, however, indicated the complexities of black struggle during the 1960s and the significant, though often limited, attempts to create unity between political actors. These complexities were illustrated by the very real tensions that existed between mainstream civil rights leaders, their radical integrationist allies at *Freedomways*, left-nationalist writers, and militant black

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<sup>101</sup> James Baldwin, "A Letter to Americans," *Freedomways* 8, no. 2 (1968): 112-113. This letter was also refused publication in both the *London Times* and the *New York Times*.

nationalists who rarely had their voices represented in the magazine. The public gatherings in tribute to Du Bois put on by *Freedomways*, as well as many of the Harlem radicals who wrote for it, still challenged the sectarianism of the Black Power era. By bringing together figures from across the political spectrum through its participation in the Harlem cultural front, the magazine helped nationalists and integrationists to participate in activities with a common radical cause. The magazine also helped facilitate opposition to racial injustice and support for anti-poverty and anti-imperialism among prominent black public figures (such as Martin Luther King, Jr.) and moderate civil rights groups (such as the NY-NAACP), while advancing an engaged and constructive critique of the mainstream of the civil rights movement. In light of such evidence, it becomes more difficult to make rigid distinctions between who was radical and who was moderate, who was for Black Power and who was for civil rights, without first considering the wider struggles influencing their activity.<sup>102</sup>

Such a view was echoed by Jack O'Dell in 1969 when he published an article that addressed the political legacies of both Malcolm X and King. O'Dell wrote that, "[i]n recognizing the existence of both the integrationist and nationalist trends in the Freedom Movement, many well-meaning people enamored of their rather sudden new discovery of the 'militant' black American often tend to adopt a distorted view of the Movement." He added that despite many efforts to show differences in terms of tactics and ideology, important similarities did exist between Malcolm X and Martin Luther King, Jr. O'Dell acknowledged that they both wanted to instill cultural and historical pride in black people and attack the racist ethic of American society. Both had embraced forms of anti-imperialism that "held a perspective for America which went beyond the... capitalist social system." Indeed, O'Dell's comparison of the two famous black leaders could not

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<sup>102</sup> Nikhil Pal Singh, *Black is a Country*, 5; Timothy Tyson, *Radio Free Dixie*, 3.

have been made without first considering their complex political trajectories, and, more importantly, the diverse intellectual and activist movements of which they were a part.<sup>103</sup>

*Freedomways* stands as a valuable source from which to reinterpret the civil rights and Black Power eras. The magazine certainly had internal contradictions due to its frequent omission of militant black nationalism and its “open” editorial policy. Under close scrutiny, the editors’ tactical allegiance remained with the mainstream of the Southern movement who favoured non-violent struggle. As *Freedomways*’ critics Shirley Graham Du Bois, John Henrik Clarke, and Harold Cruse indicated, such allegiances also clearly reinforced tensions between left-nationalists such as themselves and the old guard leftists, further complicating traditional movement schisms beyond the integrationist and nationalist binary. At the same time, *Freedomways*’ proximity to a broad spectrum of public figures involved with the Harlem radical tradition helped it to continue the decades-old effort of the old black Left to connect racism, empire, and capitalism through the cultural front of the black freedom movement. To O’Dell, “*Freedomways* represented a crystallized expression for the period of the civil rights upsurge of a tradition of progressive thought and involvement that the black American community had been associated with over generations.” For after all, it was African Americans who, “at the height of the civil rights movement articulated that America was a racist society” and that racism was at both the institutional and constitutional core of the country’s slaveholding history and history of Native conquest.<sup>104</sup> As an institution, *Freedomways* articulated some of the clearest refrains to combat this reality during the 1960s, helping to illustrate the continuities of Harlem radicalism and the transformative potential that such radicalism had on American society more generally. The

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<sup>103</sup> Jack O’Dell, “Climbin’ Jacob’s Ladder: The Life and Times of the Freedom Movement,” *Freedomways* 9, no. 1 (1969): 21.

<sup>104</sup> Jack O’Dell, interview.

convergence of prominent figures in the magazine showed that more than a marginalized few challenged the traditional civil rights trajectories that depicted isolated victories for the movement in the early 1960s followed by a divisive decline in the movement by the mid-to-late 1960s.

Instead, the activities surrounding an influential magazine like *Freedomways* illustrate the dynamic, multi-faceted trajectories of the most progressive social visions from this era and the sometimes lopsided search for unity-through-coalition that these visions espoused. The broad interests associated with the magazine shed light on the possibilities for radical politics that were still present as the black liberation struggle in the United States confronted the challenges of gaining institutional legitimacy and maintaining popular support in the face of increased repression well into the 1970s and beyond.

## CONCLUSION

*Freedomways'* use of the two giants W.E.B. Du Bois and Paul Robeson to draw out important continuities in the African American freedom movement was strategic. In remembering the two giants, the editors affirmed their commitment to the radicalism that these figures espoused in the early half of the Twentieth Century and made it relevant to the ongoing and multi-faceted struggles against American racism that took place during the civil rights and Black Power upsurges of the 1960s and 1970s. Du Bois' radicalism clearly resonated in Esther Jackson's recollection of his death on the eve of the March on Washington in 1963 – a march that purportedly served as a climax before a fractious declension of the civil rights struggle. Journalist Taylor Branch has portrayed the march as a redemptive moment in American history, when Martin Luther, Jr. King declared he had a “dream” for integration, interracial harmony, and liberal democracy, and was later depicted as a kind of “founding father” for the country.<sup>1</sup> Du Bois' passing was announced at the march by actor Ossie Davis and NAACP chair Roy Wilkins in front of 250,000 people at the Washington monument. In this announcement, Wilkins downplayed Du Bois' communist “apostasy” and emphasized his significance to American liberalism and the black intelligentsia.<sup>2</sup> However, to Jackson and to a *Freedomways* editorial that commemorated the march, this announcement was a symbolically significant footnote to an event that was “not merely” about petitioning the

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<sup>1</sup> Taylor Branch, *Parting the Waters: America in the King Years – 1954-1963*, (New York: Touchstone, 1988), 878.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 887.

government; its slogan was in fact quite radical and called for "FREEDOM NOW!"<sup>3</sup> To her, the march was about reclaiming a legacy of black radicalism far deeper and more complex than the demand for desegregating lunch-counters and gaining voting rights in the Southern US.

The magazine's remembrance of figures like Robeson and Du Bois into the 1960s indicated that not only the ideas, but many of the activists continued their own radicalism from earlier anti-racist organizations like the SNYC in the 1930s and 1940s and *Freedom* paper during the 1950s. This activism was also part of an intergenerational strategy by black leftists to ensure that their politics were sustained through the civil rights agenda to allow for anti-poverty, anti-war and, in many cases, anti-capitalist initiatives. As such, the actions of people involved with *Freedomways* belie the depictions of some of the major shifts in movement activity which divide the civil rights unionism of the 1930s and 1940s both from the classical phase of the 1950s and early 1960s and from the divisive late 1960s and early 1970s Black Power era. Over most of the twentieth century, a more important historical continuity needs to be traced, one that reflects how black radicalism consistently challenged the racist contours of American nationhood, both in terms of domestic and foreign policy. This challenge often transcended minimal demands for civil rights and instead had many more global reverberations.

My study of *Freedomways* serves to chart the trajectory of this challenge to American racism and adds to the growing literature on the relationship between African American internationalism, left radicalism, and the black freedom movement. Recent studies have approached the civil rights struggle by taking an explicitly global approach, and applying it directly to a re-examination of the political and intellectual trajectory of

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<sup>3</sup> "March on Washington," *Freedomways* 3, no. 4 (1963): 469-470; Esther Cooper Jackson, interview by Ian Rocksborough-Smith, Brooklyn, NY, 28 May, 2004

black social movements in the mid-1960s. Such work -- both scholarly and popular in approach -- has emerged to complicate traditional movement dichotomies from the 1960s and, in so doing, re-conceptualize movement chronologies.<sup>4</sup> This literature has paved the way for new, broader understandings of the civil rights and Black Power eras which take into account the significant contributions of less well-known personalities and figures over several decades and generations of struggle. Because of their radical internationalist persuasions and the challenges they faced as leftists during the Cold War, these figures missed being counted in the conventional narratives, which largely reify a fractious devolution of the freedom movement in the mid-1960s and early 1970s.

Building on Cedric Robinson's notion of a collective "black radical tradition," as well as Timothy Tyson's "indigenous current of black militancy," writers such as Nikhil Pal Singh suggest that "as in previous decades, anonymous organizers and the local black people they served would often prove to be possessed of both a worldliness, and a recalcitrance that outstripped national black leaders and ideologues." To Singh, it is "a passion for justice that was sometimes called Marxist, sometimes black nationalist, and sometimes anticolonial, and was sometimes waged in the name of democratic rights."<sup>5</sup> A case study of the prominent intellectual and political community fostered by the editors

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<sup>4</sup> Peniel E. Joseph, "Black Liberation Without Apology: Reconceptualizing the Black Power Movement," *The Black Scholar* 31, no. 3-4 (2001): 2-19; Mike Marqusee, *Redemption Song: Muhammad Ali and the Spirit of the Sixties*, (New York: Verso, 1999), 310; Nikhil Pal Singh, *Black is a Country: Race and the Unfinished Struggle for Democracy*, (Boston: Harvard University Press, 2004), 285; Jacquelyn Dowd Hall, "Civil Rights and the Political Uses of the Past," *The Journal of American History* 91, no. 4 (March 2005): 1233-1263; Robin D.G. Kelley, "How the West Was One: The African Diaspora and the Re-Mapping of U.S. History," in *Rethinking American History in a Global Age*, ed. Thomas Bender, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 123-147; Robin D.G. Kelley, "'But a Local Phase of a World Problem': Black History's Global Vision, 1883-1950," *Journal of American History* 86, no. 3 (December 1999): 1045-1077.

<sup>5</sup> Cedric J. Robinson, *Black Marxism: The Making of the Black Radical Tradition*, (London: Zed Press, 1983), 317; Timothy B. Tyson, *Radio Free Dixie: Robert F. Williams and the Roots of Black Power*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999), 51; Nikhil Pal Singh, *Black is a Country*, 184.



at *Freedomways* from the mid-1960s to the early 1970s provides a good site from which to understand the articulation of this “worldliness,” its highly intergenerational manifestations, and its complication of the divisions in black politics that existed between radical and moderate figures and their more anonymous grassroots supporters.

Tactically, *Freedomways* remained closer to the core leadership of the civil rights movement. This affiliation reinforced traditional schisms between militant black nationalists and integrationists. Although the magazine articulated similar anticolonial views to numerous black nationalists such as Malcolm X and later the Black Panthers, these radicals were mostly omitted from the magazine during the 1960s and early 1970s because they maintained a militantly separatist line rather than an integrationist one and saw the state as an obstacle to rather than an object of political struggle. The paradox created by these omissions was registered by people within and outside the *Freedomways* editorial circle, notably editors Shirley Graham Du Bois and John Henrik Clarke, as well as the cultural critic Harold Cruse, who never wrote for the magazine. The magazine’s critics further substantiated the important interconnections between the civil rights mainstream and the Popular Front Left. Moreover, as left-nationalists, their critiques were important for considering how the magazine complicated the divide between black integrationists and separatist nationalists and simultaneously experienced difficulties in abating tensions in black politics.

Nonetheless, critics of the magazine overlooked its important critique of mainstream moderates and its recognition of black cultural radicalism. *Freedomways* not only became an important site for generational links between past and present black radicalism, but revealed in its pages and at its public events how such radicalism was brought to the “mainstream” of the movement to create a form of integrationism that worked to push moderates involved in the black freedom movement further to the Left. As they had done for the movements of the 1930s and 1940s, the magazine’s editors

worked to again connect U.S. foreign policy to the conditions faced by blacks and other people of colour in the Americas. By the 1960s, however, they did this within the black literary and cultural community that flourished in Harlem. This was particularly true with the escalation of the Vietnam war in the late 1960s and the urban insurgency and liberation struggles taking place in the U.S. and throughout the world. By consistently making connections between such movements, and fostering important discussions among prominent activists and public figures from the U.S., Africa, and elsewhere, the editors at *Freedomways* played an essential role in bridging the divide between the civil rights mainstream and the more radical articulations of international black political and cultural autonomy that had existed for decades but quantitatively expanded throughout the 1960s and early 1970s.<sup>6</sup>

While the magazine remained allied to the civil rights movement, this did not imply its editors were subordinates to the integrationist “mainstream” as critics of *Freedomways* have suggested. Rather, the magazine was created by an older, middle-aged generation of lesser-known black radicals such as Esther and James Jackson, Augusta Strong, Jack O’Dell, John Henrik Clarke, Norma Rogers, and Ernest Kaiser, all of whom eventually wrote or edited for it. As old guard leftists from the Popular Fronts of the 1930s and 1940s, the editors and staff of the magazine were in a position to radically influence, represent, and interact with prominent younger leaders in the civil rights movement. In effect, they created a generational bridge that connected the radicalism of past movements to the civil rights insurgency and radical integrationism of the 1960s – a concrete connection that needs to be traced in order to understand the important radical continuities that highlighted the post-war civil rights era of the black freedom movement.

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<sup>6</sup> Nikhil Pal Singh, *Black is a Country*, 194.

The editors of *Freedomways* ensured that the coalition ideals they carried with them from the Popular Front period were compatible with the non-violent initiatives of civil rights integrationists, particularly the voting rights campaigns of SCLC that shifted to anti-war, anti-poverty, economic rights, and electoral activism by the mid-late 1960s. With the development of such a compatibility, the editors helped foster a politics of radical integrationism that remained concerned with black political and cultural autonomy and internationalism, but that equally sought a fundamental transformation of the U.S. into a more equitable society for all. Thus, *Freedomways* editors saw fit to solicit articles from the major civil rights organizations (notably SNCC, SCLC, CORE, and MFDP) alongside speeches and articles by W.E.B. Du Bois and lesser-known black trade unionists and radicals like Augusta Strong and Henry O. Mayfield who helped spearhead the civil rights unionism of the 1930s and 1940s.

It was also through this mode of connecting generations and struggles that the editors sponsored popular tributes to the two giants, Du Bois and Robeson, attracting figures as diverse as Martin Luther King, Jr., Amiri Baraka, Ossie Davis and Ruby Dee, Diana Sands, Cynthia Belgrave, Roy Wilkins, James Baldwin and Muhammad Ali. Such events had the unmistakable effect of bringing the movements of past decades together with those of the 1960s for they enabled figures like King to be critical of the Vietnam War while also retrospectively considering the socialist anticolonialism of Du Bois and the movements he championed, notably the Council on African Affairs. Moreover, such events blurred traditional political schisms in the black freedom struggle and struck a middle ground between moderates and militants because they brought diverse figures together to discuss the legacies and significance of older radicals like Du Bois.

The fact that nationalists and integrationists disagreed on the means to black liberation did not mean that everything they did had to be categorized through this binary. Like many of their mainstream civil rights allies, the editors of *Freedomways*

remained critical of unorganized street militancy and preferred the ballot over the bullet – just as many young black militants, for their part, felt that the civil rights movement had run its course. Nonetheless, when it came to participating in Du Bois memorial tributes among other things, many activists -- whether integrationist or nationalist in orientation -- were willing to put aside their differences to reveal the potential of black coalition politics. At these events and through the magazine's pages, a diversity of public figures convened to discuss pressing issues of poverty, racism, and militarism that have been pertinent throughout the long civil rights era of 1930-1970.

From their base in New York, the editors of *Freedomways* were well situated to continue these non-sectarian coalitions within a broad and flourishing cultural front of black activism. It was in this city that the editors survived the vagaries of the Cold War and constructively partook in the continuation of the Harlem radical tradition. Prominent black entertainers and artists such as Ruby Dee, Ossie Davis, and Harry Belafonte were consistently involved with the publication of *Freedomways* for most of its twenty-five year existence while others such as Cynthia Belgrave, Romare Bearden, Charles White, Tom Feelings, Paul Lawrence Dunbar, and Elizabeth Catlett lent their help to fundraising efforts or had their work featured by the editors. Progressive musicians like John Coltrane and Pete Seeger were always willing to perform at the magazine's fundraising nights. Moreover, up-and-coming writers like James Baldwin, Alice Walker, playwright Lorraine Hansberry, Jean Carey Bond, members of *Umbra*, and writers who published in other, more nationalist publications like *Liberator*, *Muhammad Speaks*, and *Negro Digest*, also appeared in *Freedomways* alongside older figures from the Harlem Renaissance, such as John Oliver Killens, Richard Moore, and Zora Neale Hurston. This broad and significant cross-section of prominent literary and artistic figures from New York and elsewhere would find their radicalism prominently showcased by the old guard black leftists who made up the staff at the magazine.

Despite, and perhaps more accurately, because of its proximity to such a diverse cultural front of black public figures, a closer look at *Freedomways* during this period reveals how the editors used their leftist politics to engage in influential radical critiques of American society that were almost as sympathetic to the urban rebellions taking place in cities across the country as they were to the anticolonial movements taking place in Africa, Asia, and Latin America. *Freedomways* stands not only to challenge normative dichotomies from the African American freedom movement, but, in straddling the Popular Front and the civil rights and Black Power eras, reveals important historical continuities between generations of grassroots activists who would bear the seeds of the freedom struggle well into the 1970s and beyond.

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