J. RUPERT PICOTT *

For our generation there's no such thing as life without trouble. There are only good kinds of trouble and bad kinds of trouble. . . . The good kind of trouble comes from being on the move . . . too many things changing too rapidly.

—JOHN W. GARDNER 1

The aim of those blacks espousing social and economic independence is people-hood, dignity, and participation in the American system on new terms.

—W. H. FERRY 2

BLACK Power will not go away.

The concept is being revised. The focus is being changed. The name now is used interchangeably with Soul Power and Ghetto Power. Noises from rabbis in some quart-


* J. Rupert Picott, Assistant Director, Division of Affiliates and Membership, National Education Association, Washington, D.C.

ters have not produced terminal morbidity for the movement, but rather forced new direction. The action implied and demanded grows stronger and more respectable.

Some have charged that the term "Black Power" is created and certainly nourished by America's radio and television. Its initiators are alleged to be Stokely Carmichael, H. Rap Brown, and Adam Clayton Powell. None, as of the end of spring, was a dominant force in the Civil Rights movement. Carmichael was reported enjoying a honeymoon with his bride, a native South African and world-known singer. Brown was having his "troubles" with the Federal Courts, and Powell, after months on a Caribbean island, was talking of running again for the seat denied to him by the U.S. House of Representatives. Perhaps the rapidly moving pace of everyday living—student riots at Columbia and the Sorbonne universities, the assassinations of Martin Luther King, Jr., and Robert F. Kennedy—also triggered a reexamination.

This second look has revealed that Black Power was conceived as the citizen participation potential of black people in the American way. Although sometimes mouthed by radicals, Black Power as an expression of black cultural identity has wide support in the
Negro community. The newest study by the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders buttresses these contentions and shows also that the large majority of Negroes reject a racially separate society and accept integration as a goal.3

Soul

In a one and one-half hour plea to 50,000 persons assembled in the nation’s capital and to untold millions of other Americans and the world via radio and TV, Ralph David Abernathy issued the call for “Soul Power.” The human mass packed on the steps and on either side of the Reflecting Pool of the famed Lincoln Memorial stretched a half-mile to the Washington Monument and included Negroes, Indians, Mexican-Americans, Puerto Rican Americans, Appalachian whites, suburban whites, Protestants, Jews, and Catholics, rich, poor, and economically “inbetween” in Solidarity Day 1968 of the Poor People’s Campaign. The Reverend Mr. Abernathy described “Soul Power” in repeated, enthusiastic verbal thrusts as the action movement of the spirit, within the context of militant non-violence.

For many years, Soul has been a term of endearment in the Negro community. “Soul brother,” “Soul clothes,” “Soul food,” need no further definition. They refer to choices by Negroes for Negroes. With the addition of “Power” and with acceptance of the term by American Indians, Mexican-Americans, Puerto Rican Americans, and Appalachian poor whites, another action-oriented dynamic has been added to the total U.S. scene.

The present focus of “Soul Power” is upon America’s poor—to secure for the “have-nots” a larger share in the affluent America of the “haves.”

It is interesting to note that proponents of “Soul Power”—certainly Mr. Abernathy—constant refer to the United States as a “World Power”—only in terms of how America is “feeding the universe” or, in the case of Vietnam, “killing.”


Undoubtedly this attempt to legitimize “Soul Power” by comparison with “World Power” is no accident. It is an obvious ploy for acceptability and compares starkly with the fear the banner “Black Power” generates among whites.

As now interpreted, “Soul Power” seems a nomenclature with which the Indian Americans, Spanish-speaking Americans, and Appalachian whites as well as “blacks” can live. It is projected as in the “gray” area, somewhere between Black Power and integration. In the national Poor People’s Campaign, “Soul Power” is the umbrella for loosely fused protest action of blacks, browns, Indians, and poor whites.

Ghetto Power

A new effort, sparked in part by concern of the Negro middle class, is being made to share more intimately in the direction of the Black Power movement. The National Urban League, a biracial organization, has dramatized this approach with an announcement 4 of a $2,000,000 New Trust for Ghetto Power. Whitney M. Young, Jr., the League’s director, said that the organization “draws the line at separatism and violence,” but “buys Black Power and that means, like every other ethnic group in America, that black people organize themselves politically and economically.”

Black

Now the term “Black Power” and “blacks” should not be confused. If Black Power seems somehow provocative, “black” is of the new action breed. Formerly avoided, as witness the designation of the pugilist Joe Louis, as the “Brown Bomber,” black now refers to Negroes of all hues. It hearkens to the viable civilizations that existed in Africa thousands of years before the vaunted legions of Rome swept over them, the Jewish homeland, and the unlettered savages of the English isles.

Black now is the badge of pride. It is

4 At the NUL New Orleans convention, July 29, 1968.
the heady appeal to "self-concept." It is the answer, at last, to tens of hundreds of commencement orations "to believe in yourself" and thus "be somebody." It is the exhortation that boldly demands "proud self-identification." It is to a black person, a reminder that the blood of the fathers runs in the veins.

The conceptualization that "Black is beautiful, baby" is a tremendously important phenomenon in America. It was pushed headlong to the forefront with the surge of the "Black Power" banner. Perhaps no verbalism in modern times has so dramatically changed the emotional self-vision of a whole people.

The collateral question to "Black Power" so frequently asked by whites, "Do you say Negro or colored?" has suddenly become mute. The appellations, "black" or "Afro-American," are gaining in popularity. To a small segment, perhaps militants, "Negro" is of white derivation and recalls slavery. It should be added that in some quarters a planned effort to drop "Negro" and "colored" is under way. It is probably too early to judge whether this is significant. It should be noted also that the names of many pioneer American organizations include the words "Negro" or "colored." Among these are the Association for the Study of Negro Life and History and the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People.

"Black" is certainly now a term of respectability and, as the cry of "black" becomes more incessant, more insistent, it is often accompanied by the spectre of separatism. Some groups talk of completely separate communities and some students echo the chant. The black students at Northwestern demand and get a separate dormitory or at Harvard a separate table for eating. (A federal suit has now been filed to stop the procedure—segregation in reverse, it is charged.) Black athletes threaten to boycott the Olympics. American Indians and Appalachian whites voice this same estrangement from the mainstream of the nation's culture.

In part, this maneuver is an outright rejection of desegregation as a means for gaining full participation in the American way. In part, it is the impatience of youth with the impotence of elders in securing a "place in the American Sun." In part, it is a sudden loss of faith in desegregation because of a new assessment of the lack of recognition of blacks in the democracy where, according to Mr. Jefferson of Charlottesville, "Every man is born equal."

Now it certainly is true that progress in desegregation has been painfully slow or nonexistent for most blacks since America's founding three hundred and more years ago. After fourteen years of a U.S. Supreme Court decision calling for integration of the schools, there is now more segregation than before. After numerous presidential edicts banning segregation in U.S. employment, almost all of the jobs at the top of the management in business, industry, education, and trade unions are still rigidly held by whites. Indeed, the executive suite too often is foreign territory to non-whites and certain poor whites.

The U.S. government itself is one of the chief offenders in denial of executive positions to Negroes, Indians, Puerto Ricans, and Mexican-Americans. Julius Hobson, an advocate of civil rights in the District of Columbia,\(^5\) charges that "Uncle Sam is a bigot." Even where the business or position deals almost exclusively with Negroes, Indians, Puerto Ricans, Mexican-Americans, Appalachian poor whites, the executive frequently, it is contended, is a middle-class white who at the end of the day returns to his home in white suburbia.

Some of the turning to the "Black Power" concept followed the remembered 1963 March on Washington in which an estimated 200,000 Americans stood also at the Lincoln Memorial and asked for a better day in U.S. human relations treatment of citizens "at home." The fact that passage of the U.S. Civil Rights Act which followed was not immediately and fully implemented was a bitter disillusionment for many.

Too often, in our own profession, where once-separate school systems have integrated, black teachers and black administra-

tors have been forced out or reduced in status. Where today, among America's 18,000 school administrators, is a Negro superintendent of a major school system, North, South, East, or West? Or among 50 state school systems where is a Negro chief state school officer? Where are Negro college presidents except in institutions still predominantly enrolling blacks? Where are most of the black school principals of formerly all-Negro, now desegregated, public secondary and elementary schools?

"Hand-Joining"

The National Poor People's Campaign joined, if only on a tenuous basis, American Indians, Puerto Rican Americans, Mexican-Americans, Appalachian poor whites, although the movement is directed by blacks. This black-white combination of protest forces is one of the most hopeful signs of the past two hundred years.

If the poor are really beginning to learn the lesson of effective protest through joint action, despite ethnic origin, then a truly new America, politically and otherwise, for all Americans is possible. The impact of this example of the application of a practical working relationship of the poor on the educated, near-educated, and other minorities, racial and otherwise, is incalculable.

There is another case in point. The tabloid, Washington Daily News, that still identifies news stories by white and Negro designations, reported that 70 percent of the participants in the June 19 National Solidarity Day March of the Poor People's Campaign were white.

This alignment is a significant bid for "participatory democracy" by whites and Negroes alike, yet it is far short of the suggested U.S. Supreme Court integrated action format. The alliance rests on a sustained joint protest of blacks, whites, and American Indians. These ethnic groups can and do operate under a unity banner, but are free to move independently as separate racial forces. This developing working relationship is of the integration pattern, and may eventually lead more substantively to full human acceptance.

For the present, however, ethnic differences are recognized and lived with.

For Education

What all this means for the teaching profession is manifold. The challenge posed is a direct confrontation to the American school system—the abode of the middle-class curriculum manned by middle-class teachers and designed to perpetuate middle-class values—to broaden its concept and operation to include all of America's children.

The purpose of the school must now dramatically focus on people. To do so, a new breed of teachers must emerge who will really understand all children, empathize with their aspirations, and accept their behavior patterns as groups emerge.

The changed school must begin with people where they are and build upon this base for the unknown civilization of the 1970's. Along the way, the school must for the first time since the period of Agrarian America become genuinely relevant to the society and needs of today.

In summary, Power (Soul, Black, or Ghetto) is in the tradition of "we shall overcome." It seems a spur to movement reminiscent of rallying chants of people's great revolutions of the past. If so, in the argot of a future day, Soul Power-Black Power-Ghetto Power may "direct the scene, man . . . may direct the scene."

Each time a man stands up for an ideal, or acts to improve the lot of others, or strikes out against injustice, he sends forth a tiny ripple of hope, and crossing each other from a million different centers of energy and daring, these ripples build a current that can sweep down the mightiest walls of oppression and resistance.

The future does not belong to those who are content with today, apathetic toward common problems and their fellow man alike, timid, and fearful in the face of new ideas and bold projects. Rather it will belong to those who can blend vision, reason and courage in a personal commitment to the ideals and great enterprises of American Society.
