

Stokely Carmichael, Black Power and the Age of Political Repression: Why Did America's Ruling Elites Declare War on the Black Movement?

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Author's Note: Stokely Carmichael (1941-1998) changed his name to Kwame Ture during the late 1970s after living in Guinea-Conakry in West Africa for a decade. The name was adopted as a testament to his work with and admiration of the former president of Ghana and co-president of Guinea-Conakry, Kwame Nkrumah and Ahmed Sekou Toure, the former president of Guinea-Conakry. As a historical study this report uses his original name which he was widely known by during the 1960s. In the FBI documents examined within this study he is referred to as Stokely Carmichael. This article is being re-published (from 2006) in commemoration of the fiftieth anniversary of the emergence of the black power movement in 1966.

During the summer of 1966 the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) began to advance its position on black power and self-determination for the African-American people. Since 1960, SNCC had been in the vanguard of the civil rights movement and had maintained grassroots support in southern communities affected by the struggle for equal rights and universal suffrage. In addition, the uncompromising views and actions of SNCC had caused great concern among three American administrations of Eisenhower, Kennedy and Johnson.



However, this concern grew considerably after the election of Stokely Carmichael (later known as Kwame Ture) as chair of SNCC on May 14, 1966. Carmichael had since the spring of 1965 worked in Alabama's black belt building an independent political organization in Lowndes County. This group, known as the Lowndes County Freedom Organization (LCFO), registered thousands of people to vote and selected candidates to run in an election against

the white supremacist dominated Democratic Party in Alabama. The LCFO used the black panther as its symbol and backed-up its independent political line with armed volunteers who guarded meetings and polling places in the county.

Later these organizing activities spread to other parts of the state resulting in the creation of the Black Panther Party of Alabama during the early months of 1966. As a result of Carmichael and other SNCC organizers' work in Lowndes County and other areas of the state, he was a natural candidate to take control as chair of SNCC at its meeting in Kingston Springs, Tennessee near the capital city of Nashville. Yet it would take two elections to place Carmichael in the chair: one which renewed the chairmanship of John Lewis who had held the position since 1962.

Nonetheless, with the intervention of Worth Long, a revote was held citing Lewis' resemblance to Martin Luther King as a national leader. According to Taylor Branch in his book entitled: "At Canaan's Edge: America in the King Years, 1965-1968:

"By dawn on Saturday, May 14, Lewis stood painfully isolated among those who stripped him of reelection. Julian Bond, who avoided the endless staff sessions whenever possible, publicly announced the result from Atlanta as 'just a normal organizational change,' and the shift in student leadership attracted modest press notice. One story found Lewis to be 'obviously shaken by his defeat' at the hands of those who favored 'third party politics for Southern Negroes.' The National Guardian disclosed that Stokely Carmichael had acquired the nickname 'Delta Devil' for his fast-driving getaways in Mississippi. A New York Times profile identified the new chairman as a twenty-four-year-old 'organizer of Alabama's all-Negro 'Black Panther' political party,' and characterized his philosophy on a spectrum reserved for civil rights figures: 'Mr. Carmichael does not advocate violence, but neither does he believe in turning the other cheek.'" (Branch, p. 467)

It would be a tragic set of circumstances in early June of 1966 that would propel Carmichael into the national media spotlight, rivaling Dr. King in regard to notoreity within the civil rights movement. On June 5, James Meredith, who had integrated the University of Mississippi in September of 1962 amid tremendous opposition from segregationist Governor Ross Barnett, began what he called a "March Against Fear" to demonstrate the necessity of black people's ability to walk unscathed through the state of Mississippi.



48. Stokely Carmichael addresses meeting. (Michael X, black activist, second left) London, 1970.

Meredith, who was no stranger to

racial violence in Mississippi, was prevented from registering at Ole Miss in September of 1962. It would take two attempts, where he was blocked personally by the Governor, for the federal government under President John F. Kennedy to send in U.S. Marshals to escort the University's first Negro student to the registrar's office. The U.S. Marshals were met with gunfire outside the campus resulting in thirty-five of them being wounded. Kennedy was compelled to send in the military, prompting a full-blown riot by racists resulting in the deaths of a European journalist and an Ole Miss employee before order was restored. Meredith was registered that day and attended the University of Mississippi during the 1962-63 year, under the protection of the Army, where he completed his senior course work and graduated.

Some four years later little had changed in the overall security situation for African-Americans in the state of Mississippi. This was the state where two years before, 1964, three civil rights workers were kidnapped and brutally murdered at the beginning of the "Freedom Summer" campaign. During the summer of 1964, SNCC, the Congress on Racial Equality, (CORE) and the state National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), under the banner of the Council of Federated Organizations (COFO), led a campaign which registered tens of thousands of black voters and brought about the formation of the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party (MFDP). MFDP went to the Atlantic City Democratic National Convention in an attempt to unseat the official all-white delegation on the basis of their violation of the right of blacks to vote in the state. Although MFDP did not succeed in unseating the Mississippi all-white delegation, it changed the recognition process for state delegations to the DNC.

Meredith's march began on Sunday, June 5 in Memphis, Tennessee right on the border with Mississippi. When he crossed over into Mississippi on Monday, June 6, he was gunned down with a shotgun in the back of the head by a white racist who was a resident of Memphis. A hastily convened gathering of leaders from the main civil rights organizations took place in Memphis. They visited James Meredith at a Memphis hospital and then met to determine what course of action was warranted. Representatives from SNCC, CORE, the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) of Dr. King, Roy Wilkins, Executive Secretary of the NAACP and Whitney Young, Director of the National Urban League (NUL) discussed a plan of continuing the march through the state of Mississippi to the capital of Jackson.

The leadership of the NAACP and the NUL decided against endorsement or participation in the march continuation plans because of the refusal of all parties to commit to non-violence as a principle. The concept of non-violence was under review within both SNCC and CORE. The dominant tendencies within both SNCC and CORE were calling for self-defense and black leadership within the civil rights movement. Consequently, when the march continued in Mississippi, only the leadership of SCLC under Dr. King, CORE under Floyd McKissick and Stokely Carmichael of SNCC were participants. When Carmichael came to the rescue of Dr. King who was pushed by Mississippi Highway Patrolmen, the SNCC chairperson declared that the purpose of the march was to expose the official structures of the state as racist and that the demonstration should be a clear expression of the black community.

During the course of the Meredith March the ideological and political differences arising within the civil rights movement became apparent. SCLC had remained committed to non-violence as both a principle and a tactic within the struggle for racial equality. SNCC, under the leadership of Carmichael and other supporters, began to redefine the overall struggle for Africans in America as one aimed at the acquisition of political power and self-determination. By the time the march reached Greenwood, Mississippi, a SNCC stronghold

since 1962, Willie Ricks, a field organizer for SNCC, who had went ahead of the proposed march route to build support for SNCC's efforts to shift the dominant focus of the civil rights movement from an emphasis on racial integration and equality to a strong push for self-determination, advised a skeptical Carmichael that it was time to raise the slogan calling for "Black Power."

Carmichael, who in later years admitted that he did not believe Ricks was giving an adequate representation of the political mood in Mississippi, was stunned at the enthusiastic response that the shouts for Black Power received. Setting the stage for this historic development was the arrest of Carmichael on the grounds of the Stone Street School when the marchers, then consisting of several hundred people, attempted erect tents for the demonstrators to camp overnight. Carmichael spent six hours in jail in Greenwood for attempting to erect a tent without a permit and was later bailed out in time for the nightly rally held by the marchers. The city had reversed its position to allow the school grounds to be utilized by the demonstrators. When Carmichael was brought to the stage by Willie Ricks he was urged to "drop it now" meaning the Black Power slogan that "the people are ready."

When the SNCC chairperson climbed to the stage and faced the angry and discontented crowd of some six hundred people he stated that: "This is the 27th time I have been arrested and I ain't going to jail no more!" He later made statements calling for Africans in America to refuse induction into the United States military to fight in Vietnam and instead join the fight for black power in Greenwood.

"We want black power! That's right. That's what we want, black power. We don't have to be ashamed of it. We have stayed here. We have begged the president. We've begged the federal government—that's all we've been doing, begging and begging. It's time we stand up and take over. Every courthouse in Mississippi ought to be burned down tomorrow to get rid of the dirt and the mess. From now on, when they ask you what you want, you know what to tell 'em. What do you want?" The crowd shouted back "Black Power". Willie Ricks jumped to the stage and lead the chorus of chants saying: "We Want Black Power!"

Although this represented a historical milestone in the civil rights struggle, others within the march, including Dr. King, were not prepared to pick up or endorse the slogan. Others continued to chant "Freedom Now" which had been the dominant slogan within the movement since the mass mobilizations of 1963 that culminated with the monumental marches in Detroit and Washington, D.C. that summer. The march continued towards the capital of Jackson stopping off in Philadelphia, Mississippi where the three civil rights workers: Goodman, Schwerner and Chaney were kidnapped and murdered two years before. There were clashes in Philadelphia with the police and white mobs on June 21 during a rally and prayer service that was held in broad daylight. Some of the same police officers that were indicted and faced federal conspiracy charges related to the murders were instrumental in denying the marchers the right to peacefully assemble in Philadelphia.

Later in Canton, Mississippi, when the marchers attempted to erect tents on the school grounds of the segregated McNeal Elementary School, the same Highway Patrolmen who were supposed to be protecting the marchers, put on gas masks and took out clubs to force them off the premises with brute force. Both SCLC, CORE and SNCC members were assaulted during the melee. Carmichael was knocked unconscious by teargas canisters and was filmed being carried into a local church by Willie Ricks obviously overwhelmed by police

violence. Dr. King's request to the Johnson administration for federal protection was met with no effective response since the president had supposedly negotiated with the Mississippi Governor Paul Johnson to provide safe passage for the demonstration.

On Sunday, June 26, the marchers, having grown to 15,000, reached the capital of Jackson. Hundreds of highway patrolmen prevented the crowd from entering the front lawn of the state house directing them to the back where a mass rally was held. This event culminated the last major march of the civil rights movement. The three weeks of action from Memphis to Jackson marked a turning point in the African-American struggle against racism illustrating the growing debate within the movement over the character and direction of the efforts aimed at black liberation. These developments also resulted in an intensification of efforts by the federal government to restrain and crush this movement which had transformed the political landscape of the country over the previous decade.

Occurring simultaneously with the Mississippi "March Against Fear" and the rise of "Black Power" as a political slogan, was the escalation of the racial tensions in northern cities in the United States. Martin Luther King had moved into a tenement housing complex in Chicago earlier in 1966 as part of a SCLC campaign against segregated and inferior living conditions for African-Americans in that city. With the passage of the Voting Rights Act of 1965, SCLC had grappled with the necessity of directing more attention to the mounting urban crisis taking place in northern and western cities. The August 1965 rebellions in the Watts section of Los Angeles represented a new mood of anger and militancy among the poor and working class sections of the African-American communities throughout the country. Rebellions erupted during the spring of 1966 in Cleveland's Hough Section as well as other areas of the country. Consequently, there was a more aggressive focus placed on neutralizing the civil rights and black power movements by the White House through the efforts of the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI).

Stokely Carmichael, SNCC and the FBI's COINTELPRO Project

The FBI's Counterintelligence Program was formed on March 8, 1956 at a meeting of the National Security Council during the administration of Dwight D. Eisenhower in an effort to monitor and curtail the activities of the Communist Party, USA and other left-wing organizations in the country. However, after the impact of McCarthyism and the overall repressive atmosphere prevailing in the the United States during the post World War II period, the supposed threat of the Communist left was well contained by the late 1950s. Organizations such as the Civil Rights Congress (CRC) and the Council on African Affairs (CAA) had been liquidated under extreme pressure by the FBI, the United States Congress and the corporate media. Despite the imprisonment of left-wing leaders, radicals and the forced closure of progressive popular organizations, the FBI was still concerned about the influence of left-wing ideas and programs within the burgeoning civil rights movement.

Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. had been a prime target of the FBI under the direction of J. Edgar Hoover, who hated the civil rights movement with a passion. In 1964, the Bureau attempted to blackmail King into committing suicide after tapes of wiretaps had been sent to the press and his wife allegedly proving infidelity and immorality by the leading civil rights figure in the country. Despite these efforts King had been able to receive the Nobel Peace Prize in late 1964 and to lead a successful voting rights campaign in Selma during early 1965 that created the conditions for the passage of the Voting Rights Act of 1965.

With the adoption of black power by SNCC and the shifting mood of youth within the African-

American community, the FBI began to focus more attention on Stokely Carmichael and the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee. This attention was strongly encouraged by President Lyndon B. Johnson who was alarmed by the statements and activities of Carmichael in the aftermath of the Mississippi March. In a United States Government Memorandum dated June 20, 1966 "from Mr. M.A. Jones to Mr. Wick on the subject of: Stokely Carmichael Chairman of the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) Interview on the 'Face the Nation' 6-19-66, Sunday," the document indicates that the FBI was concerned about responses of the SNCC chairperson to questions asked by journalist on the nationally televised news program which reached millions of people across the nation.

The document reads in part that:

"Carmichael, for the most part, was questioned concerning recent inflammatory-type statements he made while participating in the 'Mississippi March.' He was specifically asked what he meant by 'black power,' and answered that he meant that the Negroes in various localities in the South, such as Lowndes County, Alabama, should be in control since they greatly outnumber the whites. When pressed as to how the Negroes should obtain control, Carmichael at first stated it should be by organizing themselves politically and registering to vote. However, in response to an inquiry as to whether he would use violence in obtaining control legally, they would have to obtain it in other ways. When pressed further, he stated that if all legal means were exhausted, then violence would be justified."

The memo continues to report on the appearance by Carmichael on the "Face the Nation" program on June 19, 1966, just two days after the raising of the black power slogan in Greenwood, Mississippi, by attempting to point out contradictions in the SNCC chair's position related to non-violence. This document says that:

"It was pointed out to him that the use of violence would be contrary to the actions implied in the name of the organization which he represents. Carmichael replied that 'nonviolence' is a 'tactic' of SNCC as an organization, but is not necessarily his, or the tactics of other individual members of SNCC."

In the next paragraph the memo addresses SNCC position on the draft and the ongoing war in Vietnam:

"He was asked about a statement he had previously made that the Negro should not be fighting in Vietnam. He replied by stating that the black people should not be fighting in Vietnam for another people's freedom when they (Negroes) do not have such freedoms at home. He declined to state that he would urge a mass desertion by Negro troops, but felt that this question would have to be decided by each individual."

Carmichael, according to the memo, was then questioned about statements made relating to the destruction of public offices in the state of Mississippi. The document continues by saying: "In connection with his statement that all court houses in Mississippi should be burned down, Carmichael stated he meant this 'literally' and not 'figuratively.' By this he claimed he meant that the old 'red neck sheriffs' in Mississippi should be cleaned out." In actuality the statement was just the reverse with Carmichael stating that the threat was figurative and not literal. However, this remains distorted in the Government document of

June 19, 1966.

In the final paragraph of this government memorandum it points out that:

“The interview closed by Carmichael giving the reasons why he and SNCC representatives did not attend the recent White House conference on civil rights. He mentioned the following as some of his reasons: 1. Racism was being conducted by the whites in America and not the blacks and so there was no reason for Negroes to attend this conference. 2. President Johnson’s image was at it(s) lowest ebb and he, Carmichael, felt the President was just using them (Negroes). In reply to an inquiry concerning this last statement, Carmichael noted that this White House conference was a ‘phoney.’”

The White House conference on civil rights referred to in the government memorandum was held at the aegis of President Lyndon B. Johnson and according to records of the event cited by Taylor Branch in “At Canaan’s Edge”, was attended by 2,400 delegates. SNCC members had picketed the event decrying the character of the civil rights leadership that would attend such an event at this period in history. Despite SNCC’s minority position in relationship to other civil rights groups that did attend, the boycott of this event by the organization caused considerable discomfort among members of the corporate press as reflected in the “Face the Nation” interview with Stokely Carmichael.

President Johnson was concerned about the impact of the statements made by Carmichael during the summer of 1966. In a request for background information on Carmichael by the United States Secret Service on July 6, 1966, the FBI on July 13 sent out an eight page report giving detailed background information on the political history of the SNCC chairperson. In the document entitled: “Stokely Carmichael Born: June 29, 1941 Trinidad, West Indies” it opens by stating that: “No investigation has been conducted by the FBI pertinent to your inquiry concerning the captioned individual. However, a review of the files of this Bureau reveals the following information which appears to relate to the subject of your inquiry.”

The document continues by compiling a chronology of the activities of Carmichael related to civil rights issues. It points out that in 1961 “Carmichael was arrested for trespassing by the Jackson, Mississippi Police Department during the ‘Freedom Ride’ type demonstrations. He was subsequently convicted and sentenced to four months in jail, which was suspended and fined \$200.” It then goes on to describe the arrest of Carmichael that same year for “trespassing during an attempt to integrate Baltimore, Maryland restaurants with several other individuals.” The document cites the March 17, 1962 issue of the Washington Post on Page 2 which reports through an article entitled: ‘Three Evicted at R. Kennedy Office After Sit-In to Push U.S. Action,’ that one of the people removed was Stokely Carmichael. In another incident in 1962, the document reveals that records of the Bureau of Special Services (BOSS) of the New York Police Department “reflect that Stokely Carmichael, a staff member of SNCC, was arrested on June 24, 1962 and charged with being loud and boisterous during a labor dispute at Beth Israel Hospital, New York City, which was picketed by Local 1199, Hospital Employees Union.”

Apparently the FBI had access to student records at Howard University, Carmichael’s alma mater, because the document supplied to the Secret Service stated that “A review of a file maintained by the Dean of Students, Howard University, Washington, D.C., contained a recommendation for a ‘senior class humanity award,’ which stated in part that Carmichael had worked in voter registration in the State of Mississippi, ‘enduring many hardships for his

people.' He was a member of the Cultural Committee for Mississippi Negroes. The recommendations also indicated that he was active in racial demonstrations in Georgia; North Carolina; Danville, Virginia; and Baltimore, Maryland."

Even going back to his high school days at the Bronx High School of Science where Carmichael graduated from in 1960, the FBI within this same document directed to the Secret Service, explained that

"On September 24, 1963, confidential sources who have furnished reliable information in the past advised that among those individuals at the Bronx High School of Science, Bronx, New York, who in their opinion had been 'devoted to left-wing activities' was one Stokely Carmichael...."

At this point in the document there is a redaction, meaning the name or source of the information is blacked-out. The document continues by stating that: "According to these sources, Carmichael, a Negro, was a close friend to [redaction] of the former General-Secretary of the Communist Party, USA, Eugene Dennis, now deceased."

This document then makes mention of another series of arrests of Carmichael for civil rights activity beginning on May 12, 1964 in Cambridge, Maryland during a demonstration in that city. Later there is a reference to a May 24 arrest of Carmichael along with other SNCC members by the Maryland State Police on traffic charges. Also there is mention of an August 4 arrest of Carmichael in Bolivar County, Mississippi on charges of "distributing handbills without a permit." According to the same document "On October 14, 1965, Stokely Carmichael was arrested by the Fort Deposit, Alabama Police Department on charges of leaving the scene of an accident and reckless driving. The disposition of these charges is not known."

During 1966 the FBI document refers to a Chicago Sun-Times article of January 13 that "indicated that Stokely Carmichael of SNCC would be a featured speaker at a convention of the Committee for Independent Political Action at McCormack Place in Chicago, Illinois." Directing the Secret Service to additional documents on the background of the organization which had invited Carmichael to speak in Chicago, the document says that: "You are requested to refer to memoranda dated January 14 and 17, 1966, at Chicago, Illinois, captioned 'Committee for Independent Political Action' Security Matter-Miscellaneous, Information Concerning,' containing background information regarding this Committee, which were sent to your agency on January 24, 1966."

As it relates to SNCC's activities surrounding the American involvement in Vietnam, the FBI document directed to the Secret Service reports that

"On February 3, 1966 [redaction] Industrial Security, Plant Protection, United Technology Company (UTC), Sunnyvale, California, advised Agents of the FBI on that date that one busload and 35 carloads, comprising approximately 130 people appeared at the Coyote Plant of UTC with signs and leaflets. [redaction] noted the demonstration was spearheaded by the Stanford Committee for Peace in Viet Nam. At the demonstration, one Stokely Carmichael, who identified himself as an organizer for the Black Panther Party of Alabama, gave a short speech. He related that he belonged to the society of men and to no-one else. He went on to say that he did not love America or 'uniformed America.'"

The FBI document then goes on to quote extensively from an article published in the daily "Independent Journal" on February 5, 1966. This newspaper, which was based in San Rafael, California, claimed that Carmichael made a series of statements related to violence and social change. The FBI report cites the paper as quoting Carmichael saying:

"Our country does not run on reason; it is run on violence. That's the reality of how things are done here. It is to my benefit to get the Negro out on the streets to stop the machine which is keeping me from my rights. Whether they do it by marching or singing or dancing or fighting is irrelevant."

In the next paragraph it cites another quote from the "Independent Journal" where Carmichael said that

"Being non-violent is a personal thing; I might be non-violent but I wouldn't try to push that on to people I am trying to organize. If the people were out there, ready to fight for their rights, I certainly wouldn't say that they should all be very nice and not hurt anybody. I'd tell them to get what they deserve."

The document continues on this theme by recording additional quotes from Carmichael in the newspaper:

"When asked would he try to prevent the civil rights movement from breaking out into widespread violence, Carmichael retorted, 'Of course not. This nonviolence bit is just a philanthropic hang-up. I don't see why people keep thinking about that. The violence is inevitable. I don't try to stop the fight. I try to prepare the people I am organizing so that when the fight comes they will be able to win it.'"

In relationship to the work of the Black Panther Party the FBI document directed to the Secret Service continues by pointing out that: "Our files also reflect that Carmichael is the founder and director of the Black Panther Party." In the next paragraph they point the Secret Service to four additional documents related to this subject:

"Attached are four memoranda dated March 7, 1966, at Mobile, Alabama, captioned 'Black Panther Party, Lowndes County Freedom Organization,' May 6, 1966, at Birmingham, Alabama, captioned 'Black Panther Party, Greene County, Alabama,' May 6, 1966, Mobile, Alabama, captioned 'Black Panther Party,' and May 11, 1966, at Birmingham, Alabama, captioned 'Lowndes County Freedom Organization, Black Panther Party Mass Meeting May 3, 1966,' containing background information regarding the Black Panther Party."

The following paragraph in this document makes reference to plans for additional organizing during this same period outside of the state of Alabama: "On May 23, 1966, a confidential source who has furnished reliable information in the past advised that Stokely Carmichael has stated that he will soon start a Black Panther Political Party movement in Southwest Georgia, similar to the one which was operated by SNCC in Lowndes County, Alabama, which urged Negroes to stay away from the polls particularly during the recent Alabama Democratic Primary."

On Citizenship and the Draft

During the summer and fall of 1966 the United States Government through the White House, the FBI and elements within the Congress sought ways of neutralizing Carmichael and the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee. It was made mention by news commentators that Carmichael was born outside the United States in the Caribbean nation of Trinidad. Immediately officials sought information on his immigration status to determine if he was a legal resident or citizen of the country. Some of this interest was sparked by letters sent to the FBI by members of the legislative branch of government as well as private citizens incensed by the statements and activities of SNCC.

In a letter sent to FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover, dated August 21, 1966, the question of Carmichael's immigration status is raised. The name of the person who wrote the letter is redacted, however, its origin was from Arlington, Virginia. It is not clear from the document whether this person was affiliated with the United States Government. The letter states that:

"Just finished viewing the special program of Meet the Press, on which were interviewed six civil rights leaders. Was shocked at the remarks of Stokely Carmichael. I considered it a threat of insurrection. Does this man have his American naturalization papers—or is he a subject of Trinidad? I consider him very dangerous, and if he is not an American should be deported."

Another letter found in the FBI files was written by a Mr. Tyn Cobb, Jr. of Orlando, Florida on August 22, 1966. It was sent to FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover and also makes a request that Carmichael's immigration status as well as his selective service standing be investigated by the Bureau. The letter says:

"Dear Mr. Hoover, Enclosed is copy of letter and night letter I sent Mr. Spivak, also 2nd letter I have written him. I believe if Stokely Carmichael was checked out, it would be found he is not a naturalized citizen and that he has not registered for the draft. I wish you could get a play back on his statements on the N.B.C. Broadcast at 3:30 last Sunday. What he said was enough, in my opinion, to have him deported. Respectfully yours, Tyn Cobb, Jr."

Also included in this FBI file was a copy of the letter written by Mr. Tyn Cobb, Jr., dated August 16, 1966, to the moderator, Mr. Lawrence E. Spivak, of "Meet the Press" television show aired on the National Broadcasting Corporation Television Network (NBC). The letters states that:

"When you introduce Stokely Carmichael next Sunday, would it not be a good idea to tell the American public that he was born in Trinidad 25 years ago, and emigrated to the United States 14 years ago? He is not a native born American, but a foreign emigrant and should be labeled as such. His tirades against our government should lead to his deportation. Sincerely yours, Tyn Cobb, Jr."

In a response to Mr. Cobb, FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover wrote the following on August 26, 1966:

"Your letter of August 22, with enclosures, has been received and the interest

that prompted you to write is appreciated. You may like to know that matters involving naturalization and deportation do not fall within the investigative jurisdiction of the FBI. I have taken the liberty of forwarding a copy of your communication and enclosures to The Commissioner, Immigration and Naturalization Service, U.S. Department of Justice, 119 D Street, Northeast, Washington, D.C. Sincerely yours, J. Edgar Hoover."

A note attached to the letter to Mr. Cobb from Hoover states that:

"Bufiles disclose prior limited correspondence with Cobb, last outgoing 8-3-66, at which time he was addressed as above. He has been a member of the Florida State Legislature. Stokely Carmichael and Lawrence E. Spivak are well known to the Bureau. A copy of incoming sent to Immigration and Naturalization Service by routing slip."

In a follow-up to this obsession with Carmichael's immigration status, the Special Agent in Charge (SAC) of the FBI's Washington Field Office wrote to Director Hoover on August 25, 1966 on the subject of "COMINFIL SNCC," meaning communist infiltration of the organization, "Stokely Carmichael IS," meaning internal security, where the results of the investigation into this issue was discussed. The document states that: "'The New York Times' newspaper, issue of 8/5/66, in an article captioned 'Black Power Prophet Stokely Carmichael, set forth that Carmichael is an American citizen by derivation, both his parents having been naturalized. His father, Adolphus, reportedly died in 1962 and his [redaction] in the Bronx, New York.'" The redaction presumably relates to his mother's name and address at the time in New York City. The following paragraph in this same document states that: "Information from [redaction] Metropolitan Police Department, Washington, D.C. disclosed Carmichael is registered with the Selective Service Board, 1910 Arthur Avenue, Bronx, New York."

Later in a United States Government Memorandum dated September 19, 1966, Mr. Sterling B. Donahoe wrote to Mr. DeLoach of the FBI on the subject of "Stokely Carmichael Internal Security Selective Service Act." The Memorandum begins by stating that:

"The President has previously expressed an interest in the activities of Stokely Carmichael and the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, the organization in which he is active. Mrs. Mildred Stegall called from the White House at 10:40 a.m. this morning. She advised that it had been noted there that Carmichael was originally classified 1-A under Selective Service in December, 1964. In January, 1965, he was reclassified 4-F, apparently because he was not qualified physically. In February, 1966, he was reclassified 1-Y, which Mrs. Stegall understood to be that he would be qualified in the event of war."

The next paragraph in this Memorandum further illustrates the degree to which the highest levels of the Johnson administration were concerned about the activities of SNCC's chairperson:

"Mrs. Stegall said the White House was interested in determining precisely what the Selective Service status of Carmichael is and what were the facts which prompted the various changes in classification. She emphasized that under no circumstances was it desired that it be known the White House is

interested and this should be handled most discreetly.”

It the next section of this Memorandum from the United States Government, under a section entitled “Action”, it states that:

“Our files should be reviewed to see if these data are already available. If not, the Special Investigative Division should endeavor to secure this information promptly as a normal Selective Service inquiry. In view of the need for discretion, the interest of the White House should not be disclosed in any instructions to the field.”

During this same time period Congressman L. Mendel Rivers (D-S.C.), who was serving at the time as the Chairman of the House Armed Services Committee, wrote on more than one occasion to then United States Attorney General Nicholas B. Katzenbach demanding that he prosecute Carmichael for selective service avoidance and sedition. In a United States Government Memorandum dated September 19, 1966 from M.A. Jones to Mr. Wick on the subject: “Stokely Carmichael, Sedition; Controversy Between Congressman L. Mendel Rivers and Attorney General Nicholas B. Katzenbach”, Mr. Jones attempts to give some background information on why Rivers was perturbed by the Attorney General for not indicting Carmichael on federal charges, even though there was no legal basis for such an attempt at prosecution.

The Memorandum states in part that:

“On 9-16-66, Ralph Marshall, Professional Staff Member of the House Armed Services Committee, contact SA (special agent) [redaction] and advised that Congressman Rivers, who is Chairman of the House Armed Services Committee, currently is engaged in an exchange of communications with the Attorney General regarding possible prosecution of Stokely Carmichael for his recent remarks which the Congressman considers in violation of Section 12 of the Universal Military Training and Service Act (which in short, prohibits counseling of evasion or refusal of any provisions of the act, as well as hindering or interfering with administration of act.)

The Memorandum later states that:

“The Attorney General’s response of 8-22-66 avoided any definite answer to the Congressman’s question, and the Congressman on 8-25-66 again wrote the Attorney General seeking some specific statement. According to Marshall, no reply has been received to this last letter. He stated the Congressman is ‘deeply concerned’ over this entire situation and currently has members of the Committee legal staff conducting research on various court decisions relating to Selective Service and related laws for use in challenging the Attorney General’s inaction concerning Carmichael. He said the Congressman is seriously considering calling the Attorney General before the Armed Services Committee for testimony regarding this matter.”

In the next paragraph the Memorandum goes on to say that: “Mr. Marshall stated it would be most helpful to the Committee if they could obtain a transcript of Carmichael’s speech in Cleveland, Ohio, on 8-5-66. A copy of the transcript was furnished to him.” Then under the heading of “Recommendation” the Memorandum states:

“For information. We have furnished the Department with all material we obtained concerning possible Selective Service violation but they have declined to prosecute. Possible sedition violation has also been furnished to the Department. To date, Department has not indicated to us their opinion regarding this.”

Atlanta: Anti-Draft Actions and Urban Rebellion

What concerned the various sectors of the United States ruling elites in regard to SNCC's position against the draft and the war in Viet Nam was that the organization was actively challenging the notion that Africans in America should fight in unjust wars overseas. In January of 1966, SNCC issued a detailed statement opposing the war in Viet Nam. In August of the same year there were picket lines set up outside a selective service induction center in Atlanta, Georgia by members of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee. The demonstrations resulted in the arrest of numerous activists and drew the attention of the FBI.

In a confidential FBI report issued on September 7, 1966 entitled: “Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee Stokely Carmichael”, the Bureau sought to provide a summary of recent activities of SNCC and its chairperson. Under the beginning section of the report entitled: “Picketing Activities Atlanta, Georgia,” it states that:

“Since August 17, 1966, a small group of Negroes, the majority of whom are members of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, have been picketing the Twelfth Corps Headquarters, Northeast, Atlanta, Georgia, protesting United States action in Vietnam and United States Negroes fighting in Vietnam. A number of these individuals have been arrested by the Atlanta Police Department and charged with various offenses ranging from disorderly conduct to assault and battery. The activities of these individuals in connection with their picketing of the Twelfth Corps Headquarters are also under investigation by the Federal Bureau of Investigation relative to destruction of Government property and possible violations of the Selective Service Act of 1948.”

The confidential report of the FBI continues by making reference to a speech made by Carmichael on September 3, 1966 and a rebellion which erupted on September 6 in Atlanta. According to the FBI report:

“A confidential source advised that the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee sponsored a rally in a predominantly Negro neighborhood in Atlanta, Georgia, on September 3, 1966. Stokely Carmichael made a short speech at the rally. He attacked the Atlanta Police Department on police brutality matters. According to the source, Carmichael stated Negroes should form vigilante groups to observe police and should any acts of police brutality be observed, a committee should be formed among the Negro element to follow such matters.”

After the arrest of the pickets at the Twelfth Corps Headquarters, a delegation of SNCC members including Carmichael went to the Atlanta City Hall to demand a meeting with Mayor Ivan Allen. The SNCC members asked that the Mayor release the people arrested at the induction center. The Mayor replied that it was a federal matter and was beyond the control of the city of Atlanta. Carmichael was reported to have insisted that the city do

something to affect the release of the demonstrators. Nonetheless, the Mayor abruptly ended the meeting by suggesting that the delegation become registered voters in the city. SNCC later held a street rally that same day, September 6, in emergency response to the police shooting of an African-American youth who was supposedly a suspect in a car theft.

Mayor Ivan Allen, who went to the scene of the rally in an attempt to calm the growing angry crowd, was pelted with rocks and bottles while standing on top of a police car. When the crowd began to rock the police vehicle the Mayor fell off after the roof buckled under pressure. The crowd grew rapidly and began to fight police in the surrounding neighborhood of Summerhill. The Mayor sent in a thousand police officers utilizing teargas and other forms of force to quell the rebellion in Atlanta. Allen immediately blamed SNCC for the unrest in Atlanta's Summerhill District. Carmichael had issued an appeal over radio station WAOK asking that people come to the sight of the shooting of the youth by the police. The first two people arrested on the scene were SNCC members Bill Ware and Robert Walton for inviting people to broadcast their eyewitness accounts of the shooting by the Atlanta police over a loudspeaker.

Two days later Carmichael was arrested and charged with incitement to riot. On that same day another disturbance erupted in the Boulevard Section of the city after a black youth was shot to death on his porch by a white parolee, who was later sentenced to life in prison the following year. Hosea Williams of SCLC then attempted to organize a demonstration in the city after the arrest of numerous SNCC members, however, he was detained himself for leading a peaceful procession in the area where the youth was gunned down on his porch. The disturbances in Atlanta gained nationwide coverage with the scene of Mayor Allen being pushed off the hood of a police car repeatedly shown over national television. Atlanta, a southern city that attempted to cultivate an image of being moderate and business-oriented, was exposed as a bastion of racism and police brutality as well as intolerance to peaceful protest and other forms of dissent.

In the same confidential FBI report mentioned above that was issued on September 7, 1966, the bureau provides its own interpretation of the events on September 6 in Atlanta. The report states that:

"The Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee scheduled a rally at Capital and Ordman Streets, Atlanta, Georgia, on the afternoon of September 6, 1966, in protest of the arrest and shooting of a Negro male for auto theft earlier in the day. During the rally several unidentified Negroes talked to the group in a haranguing manner. Members of the group started throwing rocks and bottles at police officers and white spectators. Ivan Allen, Jr., Mayor of Atlanta, was unsuccessful in quelling the disturbance. Several acts of violence occurred resulting in the arrest of seventy-two people by the Atlanta Police Department; however, specific charges are not known."

In the aftermath of the demonstrations and rebellion in Atlanta, an FBI document reveals that a message was sent from the Director's office to the Special Agent-In-Charge (SAC) in Atlanta under the heading of "Stokely Carmichael, IS-C" (possibly internal security communist). The document dated September 16, 1966 states that:

"In view of the antigovernment stand over the Vietnam situation and other issues by Stokely Carmichael together with his recent numerous inflammatory statements, you are requested to submit by return mail FD 122,

recommending Carmichael for the Security Index. This form should be accompanied by a succinct summary of subject's activities, and you should immediately begin preparations of a summary report."

Chicago: Housing Struggles and Urban Rebellion

After the Mississippi March in June of 1966, SCLC continued its focus on the campaign to expose poverty, racial discrimination and segregated housing patterns in the city of Chicago. On July 10 a huge rally was held at Soldier Field where Dr. King as well as Floyd McKissick, the executive secretary of CORE, spoke to a crowd of thousands of African-Americans and whites. The crowd later marched to the Chicago City Hall where King taped a list of fourteen demands on the door. Prior to the demonstration on July 10, Mayor Richard Daley had pledged to repair 102,000 apartments and over 9,000 buildings that had been cited for housing code violations. The Mayor also agreed to negotiate with King and other community leaders involving the demands put forward on July 10. After a meeting on July 11, Daley rebuffed suggestions that aggressive action be taken to breakdown employment and housing discrimination in Chicago.

That same evening, July 11, a series of events would lead to the eruption of another urban rebellion. On the west side of the city a group of children attempting to cool off in the sweltering heat by opening fire hydrants, were targeted by a ice cream truck operator who accused them of robbing his vehicle. When police intervened and shut off the hydrants, an argument ensued with adults pointing out that the swimming pools in the surrounding areas were not open to African-Americans and that the tolerance of the use of fire hydrants had been a long tradition in the city. Eventually Donald Henry, a local resident was arrested while appealing to the crowd saying: "Why don't you do something about it?" Soon the crowd of youth became incensed and began to throw rocks at the thirty or more police cars that were summoned to the scene. The violence soon spread with the breaking of windows and the pelting of the police with rocks and bottles.

Dr. King, who was scheduled to speak to a rally at the Shiloh Baptist Church, later went to the 12th District police station to negotiate the release of some of the youth arrested in the initial hours of the rebellion. King later stated amid the surrounding sounds of the rebellion at Shiloh that "those who will make this peaceful revolution impossible will make a violent revolution inevitable. We have stood up for nonviolence with all our hearts...I need some help. I need some victories. I need some concessions." Many young people at the rally stormed out into the streets in frustration and joined the violence against property and the police. All that evening members of the Chicago Freedom Movement coalition roamed the streets attempting to persuade the youth to go home and end the disturbances.

After a day of relative calm on July 12, that Wednesday, the 13th, saw the beginning of a new round of property destruction and clashes with police. Later snipers began to fire on police along Madison avenue while more widespread looting continued to cover larger areas of territory on the city's west side. By Thursday night, July 14th, the rebellion had extended into the Lawndale and Garfield Park areas of Chicago. Looting came right to the streets outside King's residence on Hamlin Avenue as his own children heard and witnessed the breaking of glass and the looting that swept the neighborhood's business district. It was announced on Friday, July 15th, that two people had died as result of the rebellion, one being a fourteen-year-old pregnant girl and the other a visiting man from Mississippi who was shot in the back. Daley began to blame the rebellion on the civil rights movement and the presence of Dr. King in the city. He then requested the assistance of the National Guard

which dispatched four thousand troops into the city by late Friday evening in an attempt to quell the rebellion.

In the aftermath of the rebellion in Chicago, the coalition built up around the SCLC campaign began to hold demonstrations at real estate offices on the city's southwest side which were accused of blatant housing discrimination. These demonstrations brought thousands of white residents into the streets to attack the marchers as well as the police who attempted to prevent serious injury and fatalities. On August 5, Dr. King joined the marchers in an attempt to walk through Gage Park. The demonstration was met by five thousand white youth and adults who carried Confederate flags and Nazi emblems with the slogan "white power" emblazoned on them. The crowds of white racists chanted: "We Want King", and when the SCLC leader did arrive and emerged from a vehicle, he was immediately struck in the head with a brick amid the surrounding explosions of cherry bombs. Later a knife was flung at King which struck a white heckler missing its initial target. Mayor Daley decried the street riots by the white residents, many of whom were of Italian, Lithuanian and Polish origin. Daley felt that the whites should ignore the marchers and allow them to dissipate their energy.

King spoke later that evening at the New Friendship Baptist Church where he attempted to console the shocked and injured rally participants who had risked their lives in the march through Gage Park. In a press conference after the rally King stated that: "I have never in my life seen such hate. Not in Mississippi or Alabama. This is a terrible thing." The marches continued for the next few days when the city officials requested a moratorium on demonstrations to allow a cooling off period. The Mayor's office would eventually win a court injunction to limit the marches to one per day. These developments set off a fierce debate among movement leaders in Chicago, some of whom felt that they should defy the injunction. At the same time negotiations continued between the Chicago Freedom Movement, the Chicago Real Estate Board and the Daley administration. By Friday, August 26, a deal had been reached to bring reforms to the housing industry in Chicago. The "Open Housing Summit Agreement" was a source of further controversy because it led to the departure of Dr. King from the city while other community leaders, including the young Jesse Jackson of SCLC, along with CORE and SNCC, vowed to remain and continue demonstrations in segregated neighborhoods and the suburban enclave of Cicero.

Carmichael visited Chicago during the summer of 1966 to carry out speaking engagements as well as a much publicized meeting with Nation of Islam leader Elijah Muhammad. In an FBI Memorandum dated August 19, 1966, from Mr. W.C. Sullivan to F.J. Baumgardner, entitled: "Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) Stokely Carmichael Internal Security", it states that:

"Carmichael met with Elijah Muhammad on August 7, 1966. Although items discussed are unknown, a source stated Carmichael will not obtain any cooperation from Muhammad. The source stated Muhammad is always the dominant figure and the only way Carmichael can cooperate with him is to become a member of the Nation of Islam and be subservient to Muhammad. Carmichael refused to do this, although they parted amicably. Carmichael, however, through Nation of Islam officials in Atlanta on the approval of Muhammad, will be invited to attend a Nation of Islam rally in Chicago on August 28, 1966."

The FBI document continues under a section interestingly entitled "Recommendations"

saying:

“That copies of the enclosure be forwarded by routing slips to the Honorable Marvin Watson, Special Assistant to the President; Mr. John Stewart, Legislative Assistant to the Vice-President; the Attorney General; the Deputy Attorney General, and Assistant Attorneys General, Yeagley, Doar and Vinson. Also that copies be forwarded to Secret Service and the Departments of the Army, Navy and Air Force.”

Consequently, this document clearly indicates that the prospects of a broader dialogue among black groups in the United States during this period in 1966 raised the concern of the highest levels of the government. Additional attention was also paid to the potential of a national summit of African-American leaders in Washington, D.C. in September of 1966. The summit idea never materialized although Harlem Congressman Adam Clayton Powell convened a meeting to discuss issues of mutual concern on September 3.

In a letter written by someone, whose name has been redacted in the FBI documents, from Chicago, Illinois on August 2, 1966, that was directed to “J. Edgar Hoover; Atty. Gen. Nicholas Katzenbach, Senator Abraham Ribicoff and Rep. James Martin”, this angry individual states that:

“Enclosed is a letter sent to the respective men mentioned in regards to the Housing Bill now in Washington. In addition, I would like to state, that Stokely Carmichael, head of SNCC was born in Trinidad, West Indies, and as far as I know, he is a non-American. The FBI should have a complete investigation on him and his activities, because as a Peace Corps Trainee in 1963 at the University of Maine, we studied the West Indies Culture. This area is a stepping stone for the communist to infiltrate into the Western Hemisphere, to promote unrest here in the states.”

The letter continues by advancing other racist and distorted views on Carmichael:

“He has made statements in the Chicago Sun-Times that are unbecoming, such as; ‘We don’t have to obey any law we didn’t participate in making.’ ‘We want the cities,’ in regard to the Chicago teenage gangs, he said, ‘You are cutting up the wrong people on weekends, you should cut up the white people.’ These statements are towards an insurrection, and a complete revolution and civil war, which the communist would very well welcome. How in the world can the FBI allow a person who comes from another part of the world, a non-American, to be head of this organization, travel thru the states on lecture tours and make derogatory remarks to the populace, and stir their emotions to a point of an inevitable riot and possible civil war. It is beyond my comprehension that these people are allowed to conduct themselves as they are. “

In conclusion, the writer goes on to stress that: “Furthermore, Rep. Adam Clayton Powell and other leaders endorse Stokely Carmichael. I and many more law-abiding free Americans are very concerned, and something should be done to curb activities such as this. It is imperative that a complete investigation be conducted by the FBI or other persons in relation to Stokely Carmichael of the West Indies. The pendulum is swinging too far in the wrong direction. Your’s truly [redacted] Chicago, Illinois, 60617.”

Conclusion

These assorted documents found in the FBI files of Stokely Carmichael from 1966 provide a glimpse of the degree to which the federal government under the Lyndon B. Johnson administration sought to curtail and liquidate the advancing civil rights and black power movements of the time period. Despite the passage by Congress under pressure of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, the Voting Rights Act of 1965, the ruling elites in the United States were only attempting to create the conditions to effectively silence the self-directed struggle of the African-American people and their allies. A fair housing bill put forward in 1966 failed in the aftermath of the rise of black power and a the summer campaign in Chicago which illustrated the hardening views by working class and middle class whites committed to preserving the ethnic purity of their neighborhoods.

Pressures mounted against SNCC throughout 1966 resulting from its positions on black power, the draft, self-defense, urban rebellion and the escalating war in Viet Nam. With the release of selected FBI documents of Stokely Carmichael since his death in 1998, the unclassified records of American intelligence and the White House have provided clearer insights into the role of not only the FBI's Counter-intelligence Program COINTELPRO, but the direct involvement of the Johnson administration and the United States Military in efforts aimed at the destruction of the civil rights and black power movements that were in strong evidence during 1966.

Editor's Note: The FBI documents utilized in this article can be found on the Bureau's web site: <https://vault.fbi.gov/Stokely%20Carmichael> . The files have been divided into five parts and are published without comment or interpretation. These documents by no means represent the totality of FBI and other government agencies' surveillance activities directed at Stokely Carmichael and the Student Nonviolent Coordinating (SNCC). However, the examination of these records illuminate the thinking of the Johnson administration, the Department of Justice, the Secret Service, local police agencies and municipal and county governments in regard their efforts designed to stifle and eliminate the civil rights and black power movements of the time period.

In response to reading this report Michal Ravnitzky, an attorney and investigator, wrote on the Pan-African News Wire website that:

"The FBI has described approximately 19,000 pages of investigative files on 1960s Black Panther leader Stokely Carmichael, later known as Kwame Ture. Ture died at the age of 57 in November, 1998. Before he died, Ture was in the process of requesting his FBI files, a lengthy process that had not been completed by the time he had died. Since then, for reasons too lengthy to describe here, most of the files have been reviewed for release by the FBI."

Ravnitzky continues saying:

"There are three FBI HQ main files. The largest main file relates to Racial Matters: -Internal Security investigation, comprising 92 volumes: 18,400 pages. There are also four Sub-A volumes containing 558 pages of public source documents (such as newspaper clippings). A second main file reflects a Civil Rights violation and contains about 60 pages. A third file concerned a draft violation, but it was destroyed by the FBI in November 1997. There are also other files at FBI Field Offices."

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