Black power in Berkeley: Postmodern constructions in the rhetoric of Stokely Carmichael

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In the speech at Berkeley, Carmichael revealed a potential in discourse that enabled him to develop, from out of the confines of a tactical rhetoric, a strategic rhetoric of blackness. Close analysis of Carmichael's speech, grounded in Burke's paradox of purity, illuminates the internal logic of Black Power, as well as Carmichael's use of reflexivity, reversal, deconstruction and re-construction of dialectical terms and relationships. Contemporary discursive practices addressing issues of civil rights and race are then examined in light of the principles and purposes developed by Carmichael. The results challenge rhetorical scholars and critics to disrupt reliance on dialectical constructions within discourses of race. **Key words:** critical race studies, Black Power rhetoric, Civil Rights rhetoric, dialetical terms, reflexivity, position, racial identity.

Introduction

On Saturday, October 29, 1966, Stokely Carmichael spoke to about 10,000 people in the open air Greek Theater on the campus of the University of California at Berkeley. His speech was part of an all-day conference on black power organized by the Students for a Democratic Society (SDS), a national student organization whose operations centered on anti-war and free speech activities.[1] Andrews and Zarefsky (1992) argue that at Berkeley Carmichael sought to proclaim black power in a way that "rendered whites irrelevant to the attainment of black goals" (101). Assuming this is accurate, the occasion and the audience posed considerable difficulties for Carmichael. The audience was largely white and had experience with student protest movements (which had begun at Berkeley two years earlier), but their interest, commitments and motives were unclear.

According to a Chicago-based SDS newspaper, there were three primary goals for holding the Black Power Conference at Berkeley: to raise money for the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) of which Carmichael was president, to increase support for the idea of black power among radical students, and to create a feeling that would foster "parallel power blocs among radical poor people, students, and working class people" who would join with SNCC in common causes. Yet Berkeley's leading black student organization, the Afro-American Student Union (AASU) refused to participate in the event because SDS organizers failed to extend them an invitation. On October 26, three days before the conference, AASU met to discuss their position on the event. "Carmichael addresses himself primarily to Blacks, and therefore should not speak at the conference which is aimed at whites," said one AASU member during the meeting. AASU leaders sent a letter to Carmichael, explaining the organization's position and requesting that he withdraw from the conference (*Berkeley Barb*, October 7, 1966, 1–2). Carmichael met with SNCC and AASU leaders in San Francisco early on the 29th before going on to Berkeley. In this meeting, he reportedly agreed *not* to speak about black power to the predominantly white audience (*Berkeley Barb*, November 4, 1966, 3). If such an agreement was reached, Carmichael failed to keep it. Speaking from behind a

podium with a sign reading "Black Power and its Challenges," he made it his primary topic.

Berkeley administrators also tried to prohibit Carmichael from speaking. SDS had invited a number of individuals to address the conference including Floyd McKissick of the Congress for Racial Equality (CORE), and Martin Luther King, Jr., and James Bevel of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC), but the invitation to Carmichael was the most controversial. University officials were concerned about violence because of an incident a month earlier when Carmichael spoke at an Atlanta rally and rioting erupted after his departure. William Boyd, Vice Chancellor for student affairs, told SDS members that the use of campus facilities was restricted to educational purposes and that the conference did not qualify as such. In response, SDS members sent a letter to Chancellor Roger Heyns indicating that the "administration's 'authority is limited to regulations concerning time, place, and manner of speech which interfere with the normal functioning of the university. Since there are no classes on Saturday, SDS cannot see how its request in any way interferes with the normal functioning of the university' " (*Berkeley Barb*, October 7, 1966, 1–2). The letter referred to a resolution that the university's Academic Senate had passed the previous year allowing student organizations to meet without having to justify the content of their meetings to the administration.

It was also the eve of the 1966 California gubernatorial election in which Ronald Reagan challenged three-term incumbent Pat Brown. Both men attempted to use the controversy over Carmichael's inclusion in the conference for political gain. To show strong opposition to campus upheaval, Reagan sent a telegram to Carmichael requesting that he not appear at the conference. Brown met with Oakland police to ensure adequate security for the areas around Berkeley in the event of violence and to avoid being perceived as a radical supporter.

The constraints of audience and occasion intersected to form a controversy-laden context for Carmichael's speech. Yet he used it to redefine two audiences–white students, activists and citizens and black students, activists and citizens–and their relationship to each other. As Carmichael (1968) later wrote,

> I have said that most liberal whites react to "black power" with the question, what about me? Rather than saying: Tell me what you want me to do and I'll see if I can do it. . . . One of the most disturbing things about almost all white supporters of the movement has been that they are afraid to go into their own communities–which is where the racism exists–and work to get rid of it. They want to run from Berkeley to tell us what to do in Mississippi; let them look instead at Berkeley. They admonish blacks to be non-violent; let them preach nonviolence in the white community. They come to teach me Negro history; let them go to the suburbs and open up freedom schools for whites. (69)

While Carmichael's writings and speeches are filled with attempts to get whites and blacks to explore their positions in relation to each other and to the power structures of society, the discussion above indicates that the speech at Berkeley is a particularly important artifact for critical investigation based on the following four factors: 1) the immediate audience (primarily white), 2) the location for the speech (an established cultural institution), 3) when the speech occurred (just a few short months after the Greenwood, Mississippi rally where Carmichael declared "Black Power" as a new slogan to replace "Freedom"), and 4) the controversy over to whom and about what Carmichael should, could and would speak (why speak to a primarily white audience about black power if whites are irrelevant to its goals?). Most importantly, the speech at

Berkeley represents one of the first times Carmichael laid out the dialectic of black power and demonstrated its logic for a primarily white audience.[2]

There has been, however, a noticeable lack of attention paid to this speech by critics. For their analysis of Carmichael's rhetoric of Black Power, Scott and Brockriede (1969) chose two speeches, one delivered to a primarily black Detroit audience in July, 1966 and one to a primarily white, college-age, Wisconsin audience in February, 1967. Their analysis demonstrated the rhetorical "reasonableness" of Carmichael's strategies (Scott and Brockriede, 113–121) as well as the role of the press in distorting both his image and his message (122–131). Stewart (1997) examined a variety of Carmichael's speeches (including the Berkeley speech) to determine the rhetorical and political context out of which he emerged (Stewart 1997, 433–437) and his "evolutionary" impact on the civil rights movement (437–443). Other critics focused primarily on Carmichael's style, differentiating it (and him) from more traditional norms of oratory and leadership (Jefferson 1967 and 1968, Taylor 1967, Richardson 1970). Missing from this body of scholarship is close exploration of the inner working of Carmichael's rhetorical texts, particularly the speech at Berkeley. Such analysis 1) provides a better understanding of the internal logic and rhetorical potential of black power for redefining social relationships, 2) illuminates key tensions—such as autonomy versus coalition, freedom for all versus inclusion of some—that continue to characterize civil rights-related discourse, and 3) opens an avenue to examine connections between current scholarly reconceptualizations of race and civil rights and the public, political discourse of an individual engaged in the civil rights movement. In addressing these three points, this essay reveals the complexity, inventiveness, and relevance of Carmichael's efforts to develop, from out of the confines of a tactical rhetoric, a strategic rhetoric of blackness.

The essay is organized into four sections. The first section develops a framework for analysis of the Berkeley speech grounded in the relationship between tactical and strategic rhetoric. Burke's concept of dialectical substance and the paradox of purity are used to illuminate discourse's propensity to center and de-center,[3] a propensity that is at the very heart of racial dialectics and racism. The next section provides a close analysis of the text that demonstrates the extent to which Carmichael used reversal and deconstruction of dialectical terms to create a reflexive discourse devoted to exposing the strategic rhetoric of whiteness and simultaneously claiming the center for blackness. The third section examines scholarly discourse regarding civil rights and race in the context of power relationships in American society, both in terms of social hierarchies and of centering and de-centering discursive practices as they relate to the rhetorical principles and purposes developed by Carmichael. The section ends with a discussion of the problems of reflexivity and de-centering within the critical process and in civil rights-related political action. The conclusion discusses the implications of these findings for understanding discourses of postmodernity in general, and civil rights and racial equality in specific.

Dialectical Terms, Deconstruction, Reversals, and Reconstruction

According to Kenneth Burke (1969), the process of definition is central to human symbol use and meaning making. It is a "magical" process because we define a term or a thing through terms or things that it is not: "Here obviously is a strategic moment, an alchemic moment, wherein momentous miracles of transformation can take place. For here the intrinsic and the extrinsic can change places. To tell what a thing is, you place it

in terms of something else" (24). Dialectical substance, according to Burke, partakes of this paradox whereby we define a thing in terms of things that are extrinsic to it, with the caveat that "the dialectical considers things in terms not of *some* other, but of *the* other" (33). Dialectic becomes oppositional to the extent that we are motivated against some other (agon) or to the extent that the relationship is understood in terms of the negative. So, for instance, in what Burke refers to as the most thoroughgoing dialectical opposition, Being and Not-Being, thinkers are led by "dialectical necessity to affirm that the only ground of Being is Not-Being (for 'Being' is so comprehensive a category that its dialectical opposite, 'Not-Being' is the only term that would be left to designate its ground)" (34).

This aspect of dialectical oppositions is contained within the second of six strategies uncovered by Nakayama and Krizek (1995) in their research on the discourse of whiteness. It surfaces in negative definitions of white as opposed to a positive definition wherein the ground of white is treated as so comprehensive a category that "Unlike other categories [brown, black, yellow, red] one can only be white by not being anything else" (299). It intimates that with every negation there is an affirmation but in the case of whites, the affirmation remains invisible because "Within a discursive system of naming oppression but never the oppressive class, white can only be a negative, an invisible entity" (299). A person engaging in this discourse would define white as " 'not being black, hispanic or the like'."

Burke's examination of dialectical terms, however, moves beyond the aspect of negative definition. As Burke points out, dialectical relationships may also be reversed such that the ultimate abstract is taken as a source, a first, and steps leading to it are understood instead as steps emanating from it. There are other possibilities as well, according to Burke, including "terms that are contextual to each other" being treated as familially related, and "actualities . . . derived from potentialities that are in a different realm than the actualities" (35). But because dialectical pairs are in contrasted orders, with one "a transcendence of the other," one overt and the other covert, there exists the paradox of purity or the absolute, where the pure or absolute of one term is the other: "Pure Personality would be the same as No Personality" (35).

With the paradox of purity concept, Burke implies that there are two kinds of oppositional dialectical terms, those that are somewhat "equal" in their opposition such as before/after, truth/falsehood, beauty/ugliness, and those that are asymmetrical, with one term of the pair transcending or rising above the other. What Burke is referring to is the propensity of discourse based upon dialectical abstractions such as Being/Not Being, Thing/Not Thing, to establish the first term of each pair as a higher classification, a classification that is "categorically different" from the second term, due to its relative purity, absolutism or negativity. In the racial discourse of the United States, this propensity is enacted within the dialectical pair White/Not White. White is construed as a social category of relative purity such that while all human beings are understood as members of the class of Being, White members are understood as being categorically different from Not White members of this class. While discourse infused by this paradox will tend to "hide" the pure or "higher" class term (as Nakayama and Krizek point out), *the "lower" class term will also tend to be invisible to the "higher" class term* (hence the claim by scholars interested in social position that individuals at the upper reaches of social hierarchies know very little about the lives and dreams of those "below" them). The fact

that invisibility works in *both* ways indicates the extent to which discourse that examines social positions is crucial to unpacking or deconstructing power relations in a society.

Ironically, however, the paradox of purity is also evident in the dialectical opposition of Black/Not black. Black is placed into a "higher," "transcendent," category not of purity *but of negativity* and other members of the class (Not Black) are understood to be categorically different from Beings that are Black and who are, therefore, transcendently negative. This inversion of the paradox of purity is evident in discourse that disparages African and other black Americans by comparing them to ethnic groups (Japanese, Irish, Italian, etc.) who have "successfully" assimilated into the racial culture of the United States.

How can beings that use symbols deal with the vagaries of the paradox of purity? Along these lines, Nakayama and Krizek's goal, to map the strategic rhetoric of whiteness from a critical standpoint of reflexivity, is somewhat similar to Burke's goal of using critical reflexivity to understand how words can impose knowledge on us, how things are the signs of words instead of vice versa. Nakayama and Krizeck rely on Certeau's distinction between strategies and tactics. For Certeau, rhetorical strategies are possible only for subjects with will, power, and the capacity to postulate "a *place* that can be delimited as its *own* and serve as the base from which relations with an *exteriority* composed of targets or threats (customers, competitors, enemies, the country surrounding the city, objectives and objects of research, etc.) can be managed" (295). Rhetorical tactics, on the other hand, are the province of subjects who must "play on and with a terrain imposed on [them] and organized by the law of a foreign power," without the necessary conditions for autonomy, namely: the means to keep to themselves "at a distance, in a position of withdrawal, foresight, and self-collection" (295).

Burke, in turn, relies on his concept of the comic frame to provide a critical means for discovering and highlighting transformative possibilities in discourse, and in so doing, holds open the possibility of moving from tactical to strategic rhetoric and vice versa. As Madsen (1993) points out, a critic operating within a comic (rather than tragic) frame recognizes that an absolutist frame is too rigid to allow for cooperative societal action (171). Instead, a comic critic "considers human life as a project in composition, hence it is always subject to revision and correction, depending on the findings of the critic" (Reuckert, 11). The comic frame is thus based on discovering, considering, and inventing multiple possibilities and interpretations. It leads a critic to revel in the playful, trickster elements of language and symbol use, elements that tend to disrupt expectations and norms.

Because the comic frame "strives for the creation of argumentative space in the middle ground between opposites" and invites "observation of ourselves while maintaining the possibility for action" (Madsen, 171), reversal and deconstruction of oppositions are powerful tools for both speakers and critics. They are tactics because of their derivative nature: it is possible to reverse and deconstruct only if paired terms and constructed meanings already exist. But the process of reconstruction, and, in fact, of multiple reconstructions, provides a space to move from the negative purity of Black/Not Black, as well as the one-up-one-down of White/Not White, to other, potentially non-dialectical, frames.

Burke's approach rests in the capacity of the comic critic (in the broadest Burkean sense wherein all symbol-using beings are critics) to "learn double, to recognize and use irony and ambivalence, read symbols, and *recognize the deceptions of literal mindedness*" (11,

emphasis mine). Burke envisions the comic critic as analytical and therefore involved in taking apart or deconstructing constructed meanings, contexts, and identities, but also as emphasizing cooperative action through continuous altering of frames and thereby mandating reconstruction. As Rueckert summarizes, "the comic critic must be analytical (rather than, say, purely evaluative) so that he can speculatively reassemble in a new way what he has taken apart as he works with the documents (texts) left by other people's perspectives" (72).

The framework for this analysis of Carmichael's Berkeley speech thus centers on three rhetorical forms or tactics discussed above: 1) description and reversal of dialectical relationships, 2) deconstruction of dialectical terms, and 3) reconstruction of relationships and terms into an altered symbolic framework. The questions guiding the analysis are: What terms are identified and treated dialectically by Carmichael? Are dialectical relationships constituted in terms of the negative or the transcendent? What kind of reversals are created and how? What terms and relationships are deconstructed and how? What are the internal dynamics of the reconstruction? Where is evidence of tactical rhetoric and where (and how), if at all, the emergence of strategic rhetoric? Addressing these questions enables evaluation of both the reflexive qualities of Carmichael's discourse and the potential for moving from tactical to strategic forms of rhetoric.

Analysis

The speech itself was average in length, running between 4500 and 5000 words. Carmichael begins the speech with greetings to those in attendance and a pointed comment to members of the press, his "self-appointed white critics." He then refers to several philosophers to begin the argument that American society is racist and that this very racism prevents whites from effective self-condemnation (Andrews and Zarefsky 1992, 101). Instead, the "only thing white people can do *is stop denying black people their freedom*" (102). The ensuing sections of the speech move back and forth between illustrations of essential, systematic racism within society and descriptions of the kind of action and attitudes blacks–and whites who wish to be allies–must take on to move beyond and apart from prevailing social structures. Specifically, Carmichael argues that black people must engage in a psychological struggle for control of their own self-concept as well as systematic questioning of the values of society as a whole. White people, in turn, must work within their own communities to tear down racist institutions.

While the overarching organization of the speech is quite loose, there are five key pairs of dialectical terms within the speech that ground its internal logic: rich and poor, violence and nonviolence, integration and freedom, moral and political, black and white. Rich and poor is a universal dialectical pair, applicable to all societies but explored within the idiosyncratic value system that characterizes United States culture. Represented as the basis of social hierarchies, it becomes the ground for the other dialectical relationships. The next three pairs build upon one another; the fourth pair, moral and political, functions as the summative dialectic for understanding the need for and aim of black power. The black and white pair is set up such that it frames and is framed by the first four. The black and white pair is also the most asymmetrical of these pairings. Carmichael establishes the dialectic initially for each pair in terms of the negative, naming one in light of what the other is not. But the term he selects to name via the negative is not consistent with current norms regarding which term is preferable or positive. This is where the reversal comes in. For instance, consider the dialectical pair

rich and poor. Carmichael begins with the term "poor" rather than "rich" and defines it by what it is not: "A man is poor for one reason and one reason only—he does not have money. If you want to get rid of poverty, you give people money" (103). Thus, poverty (poorness) is defined by what it does *not* include (having money) rather than by what it does include.

Once the opposition is established from the perspective of poor rather than rich, Carmichael re-articulates the relationship: "And you ought not to tell me about people who don't work, and that you can't give people money if they don't work because if that were true, you'd have to start stopping Rockefeller, Kennedy, Lyndon Baines Johnson, Lady Bird Johnson, the whole of Standard Oil, the Gulf Corporation, all of them, including probably a large number of the board of trustees of this university" (103). Carmichael plays out the implications of being poor and being rich in terms of what leads to one or the other and thereby demonstrates how the two terms may move from rhetorical oppositions to two forms of the same stem. In this country we strongly believe in work as the way to get money. The logical conclusion of this belief is that people who are poor must not be working hard enough. Yet, as Carmichael clearly points out, being very rich may also mean not working. And, to complicate the relationship further, those who work the hardest physically are often the lowest paid:

> We were told that if we worked hard we would succeed, and if that were true we would own this country lock, stock, and barrel. We have picked the cotton for nothing; we are the maids in the kitchen of liberal white people; we are the janitors, the porters, the elevator men; we sweep up your college floors. We are the hardest working and the lowest paid.   (105)

What was initially posed as a symmetrical, oppositional dialectic is demonstrated to be a relationship of far greater complexity. From Carmichael's perspective we must either accept that pure wealth is the same as pure poverty or admit that hard work does *not* necessarily guarantee making money (or enhancing one's position within social hierarchies).

The dialectical relationship of violence and nonviolence is confounded by moving from a definition of the terms (violence is depicted as power over other people, generally expressed in physical terms, and nonviolence as lack of power based on one's position within social hierarchies) to a reversal of the dialectical relationship. Carmichael exposes the tactical nature of nonviolence by exploring its usefulness for those in power. This reversal demonstrates what Carmichael refers to as a double standard linked to violence:

> I was always surprised at Quakers who came to Alabama and counseled me to be nonviolent, but didn't have the guts to tell James Clark [sheriff of Selma, Alabama] to be nonviolent. That's where nonviolence needs to be preached—to Jim Clark, not to black people. White people should conduct their nonviolent schools in Cicero where they are needed, not among black people in Mississippi. Six-foot two men kick little black children in Grenada—can you conduct nonviolent schools there. . . . The only time I hear people talk about nonviolence is when black people move to defend themselves against white people. Black people cut themselves every night in the ghetto—nobody talks about nonviolence. White people beat up black people every day—nobody talks about nonviolence. But as soon as black people start to move, the double standard comes into play.   (106–107)

bell hooks (1995) takes this reversal a step further by discussing rage as a potential cause of violence. From her perspective, violence is best understood not as an extreme demonstration of power over another but rather as an inappropriately expressed form of rage, a kind of tactic enacted by those who are dominated and who have no other way to

process the frustration of that dominance. As she writes in her book, *Killing Race: Ending Racism:* "Many African Americans feel uncontrollable rage when we encounter white supremacist aggression. That rage is not pathological. It is an appropriate response to injustice. However, if not processed constructively, it can lead to pathological behavior—but so can any rage, irrespective of the cause that serves as a catalyst" (26).

The paired terms "integration and freedom" and "moral and political" are less clearly symmetrical in their opposition, at least in their denotative meanings. In the case of integration and freedom, Carmichael creates the dialectic by arguing that integration is "a thalidomide drug," and "an insidious subterfuge for the maintenance of white supremacy" (102). By contrast, freedom is something that cannot be bestowed on someone by someone else. Rather, the only thing enslavers can do is to stop denying persons their freedom. Integration is in the category of obstacles to freedom (and is thereby dialectically opposed to freedom) because it supports white supremacy, or at least the assumption that freedom can be given by a powerful group (mostly white politicians) to a less powerful group (black citizens). Upon creating this dialectical opposition, Carmichael uses reversal to further interrogate the prevailing assumptions behind integration: "Well if you believe in integration, you can come live in Watts, send your children to the ghetto schools. . . . If you believe in integration then we're going to start adopting us some white people to live in our neighborhoods" (103). The creation of a dialectical opposition between integration and freedom, and the reversal of assumptions underlying integration, provide the basis for Carmichael's reversal of the prevailing principles behind civil rights legislation. He elaborates:

> I maintain that every civil rights bill in this country was passed for white people, not for black people. For example, I am black. I know that. I also know that while I am black, I am a human being. Therefore I have the right to go into any public place. White people didn't know that. Every time I tried to go into a public place they stopped me. So some boys had to write a bill to tell that white man, "He's a human being; don't stop him." That bill was for the white man, not for me. I knew I could vote all the time and that it wasn't a privilege but a right. . . . That bill was for white people. I know I can live any place I want to live. . . . You need a civil rights bill, not me. The failure of the civil rights bill isn't because of Black Power or because of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee or because of the rebellions that are occurring in the major cities. That failure is due to the white's incapacity to deal with their own problems inside their own community. (102)

By arguing that legislation is always for those enacting it, Carmichael deconstructs the assumption that legislation is enacted for "others" and refutes related arguments against legislation that protects or gives advantage to "special interest groups." It is not marginalized people who need additional legislation of their behavior; rather it is those in power who require legislation to change their behaviors.

The ironic complexity revealed in the relationships between rich and poor, violence and nonviolence, and integration and freedom provide the basis for the opposition Carmichael establishes between the terms "moral" and "political." He begins by characterizing the role of the "other" as one who is outside the center. Being outside the center enables one to be more "objective" than anyone who occupies the center, a direct inversion of the center/objective, margins/subjective relationship that forms the basis of discourses of whiteness according to Nakayama and Krizek. Drawing upon Camus, Sartre, Fanon, and an analogy to Nazis war criminals, Carmichael argues that "a man [human being] cannot condemn himself [herself]" because he (she) would also have to inflict punishment upon himself (herself), something individuals are loath to do. Instead,

those who have been oppressed must be the ones to condemn. Carmichael states this conclusion in two ways: "SNCC says that white America cannot condemn herself for her criminal acts against black America. So black people have done it–you stand condemned" (102); and, "We must question the values of this society, and I maintain that black people are the best people to do that since we have been excluded from that society" (105).

Carmichael's fundamental statement of the nature of Black Power is based on this dialectical opposition between the moral and the political. According to him, nonviolence, integration, and morality, the tactics of the civil rights movement, have perpetuated a lack of political awareness: "we have been unable to grasp it [political awareness] because we've always been moving in the field of morality and love while people have been politically jiving with our lives" (105). President Johnson, Robert Kennedy and other liberal allies are represented as moving politically rather than morally; as a result, "talking morality to them is useless" (105). Using reversal, Carmichael constructs his political vision and moves from the tactical to the strategic. For black people, the vision includes a "political sophistication that doesn't parrot" (105), establishing real (as opposed to psychological) links with black people around the world (106), and fighting a psychological battle "on the right for black people to define themselves as they see fit and organize themselves as they see fit" (107). White people, especially those who would be allies, are challenged to take on a new position that involves working to change themselves and those around them instead of working from the center to help those at the margins: "Will white people have the courage to go into white communities and start organizing them? . . . Are white people who call themselves activists ready to move into the white communities . . . building new political institutions to destroy the old ones that we have. . . ?" (106–107). In this speech, the test of alliance is centered in getting others who occupy similar political positions to acknowledge it and to begin working together to change existing social hierarchies.

The overarching relationship that both frames and is framed by these dialectical pairs is that between the terms black and white. Carmichael recognizes that white people associate Black Power with violence because of "the lie" which says, "anything black is bad," and because of their own "inability to deal with blackness" (106). Here Carmichael is drawing attention to the paradox of purity at the heart of America's racial drama, to its rhetorically strategic use which dictates that *any* blackness is bad (recall the complicated rules that suggested that as little as $1/64^{th}$ of "colored" ancestry was enough to make a person "black"). But the paradox is so insidious because even as it makes "black" the "higher" class, or the visible class, the dialectic infuses "black" with absolute negativity such that "black" is categorically different from "not black," that the rules for "black" are different than the rules for "not black." Carmichael's solution to the paradox, his attempt to move from tactical to strategic rhetoric, lies in locating this problem within whites and encouraging blacks to no longer be concerned with it, to no longer see themselves as either 1) derivative of whites and whiteness or 2) a transcendent class of absolute negativity, but as independent of the dialectic, and of its insidious paradox of purity. He closes his speech by proclaiming this attitude:

> We're tired of trying to prove things to white people. We are tired of trying to explain to white people that we're not going to hurt them. We are concerned with getting things we want, the things we have to have to be able to function. The question is, will white people overcome their racism and allow for that to happen in this country? If not, we have no choice but to say very clearly, "Move over, or we're going to move over you." (107)

Popular press response to the speech was generally negative toward Carmichael and scornful of white audience members who appeared to have been influenced by, or who were at least tolerant of, the speech. *The Washington Post* printed an editorial arguing that "Carmichael's litany should have insulted the intellect of Berkeley, where bearded and beardless alike regard themselves as thinkers of new thought. Instead, the crowd lapped it up" (October 31, 1966, A8). In stark contrast, the alternative press praised Carmichael's content, delivery, and style and sought to engage his message:

> Stoke is a dramatic speaker but not in the tradition[al] oratory. He uses some change of pace, some dry humor, some rhythmic repetition suggestive of poetry. But what grips his audience and frightens the phonies is his plain stark statement of exactly how this country's acts and pretensions look to a black man who refused to yield one inch to opportunism. (*Berkeley Barb*, November 4, 1966, 3)

In the language of developmental psychologist Beverly Daniel Tatum (1997), both responses reflect identifiable stages (*contact* in the former response and *reintegration* in the latter) in the development of a white racial identity within individuals. She writes: "There is a lot of silence about race in White communities, and as a consequence Whites tend to think of racial identity as something that other people have, not something that is salient for them. But when, for whatever reason, the silence is broken, a process of racial identity development for Whites begins to unfold" (94). Carmichael's speech at Berkeley "broke the silence about race" for both the immediate and the national audience. But whether it moved the mostly white audience members toward the development of healthy racial identities (the comic goal) or to a commitment to give their lives in revolution (the tragic goal) is less certain.

Power Relations, Reflexivity and De-centering

Scholarly discourse addressing civil rights and race relations in the United States has taken a significant turn in recent years. In areas as diverse as rhetorical and cultural studies, developmental psychology, legal studies, and pastoral ministry, books and articles are exploring what it means and has meant to be white in the social milieu of the United States. Such works focus variously on the rhetoric of whiteness (see, for instance, Nakayama and Krizek 1995), racial identity development in whites, blacks and other people of color (see Tatum 1997), white privilege and position (see Bell 1992), and Christian perspectives on dismantling racism (see Barndt 1991; Stroupe and Fleming 1995). The authors indicated above all start from the premise that whites are systematically privileged in our society, whether or not they are actively conscious of and/or pursuing such privilege. In order to dismantle racism and obtain civil rights for all, those at the top of the social hierarchies need to become conscious of and acknowledge their own position(s) and the negative impacts of those positions on themselves, those that are oppressed, and the society as a whole.

One way to become cognizant of one's possible position(s), according to Nakayama and Krizek (1995) is, as discussed earlier, to map the strategic rhetoric of whiteness from a critical standpoint of reflexivity. Nakayama and Krizek list individuals and groups who examine discursive practices of centering and de-centering, thereby exploring their positions within social hierarchies and demonstrating reflexivity. Many of those listed, however, are academics and intellectuals. Missing are rhetors who demonstrate (or have demonstrated) reflexivity in public, political discourse directed to fellow citizens.

As the analysis above indicates, Stokely Carmichael is one such rhetor. He became involved in the civil rights movement in his senior year at the Bronx High School of Science. His first foray into student demonstration was picketing at a Woolworth's store in New York. From his freshman year at Howard University in 1960, to his involvement with the Freedom Rides in 1961, to his work with the Lowndes County Freedom Organization and finally, to his selection as chairman of the SNCC (Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee) in May of 1966, Carmichael developed and refined his approach to civil rights and racial equality.[4] Initially he worked within the mainstream of the movement, fighting primarily for integration into existing political and cultural institutions. But as his involvement continued, he became more and more aware of the intractable nature of existing social hierarchies and began arguing for a separate black political structure as well as the use of violence in self-defense. In his view, it was a mistake to assume that a "politically and economically secure group can collaborate with a politically and economically insecure group" since "[a]t bottom, those [secure] groups accept the American system and want only–if at all–to make peripheral, marginal reforms in it" (Carmichael and Hamilton, 1969, 61).

Yet in his speech at Berkeley, Carmichael tried to show potential white allies the insidiousness of the underlying dialectic of racism wherein both the "pure" transcendence of White/Not White and the "pure" negativity of Black/Not Black consign people of color to ever derivative positions within social hierarchies. If he could get whites to be reflexive about their own positions within society, then he could open up possibilities that would change the world around him, that would ultimately pull people together rather than splitting them apart. While we often look to scholarly research for the development of theoretical principles, it is important to note that in speeches reside rhetorical purposes and principles that can inform theory. And as current scholarship indicates, the manner in which Carmichael questioned assumed relationships and identities has become a kind of blueprint for contemporary approaches to issues of civil rights and racial equality.

Carmichael challenged reporters to adopt this kind of reflexivity when he quoted Bernard Shaw to members of the press (who he described as "my self-appointed white critics") at the beginning of the Berkeley speech: " 'All criticism is an autobiography'. Dig yourself" (102). The inescapably autobiographical aspects of criticism can productively lead you and I to face questions regarding our own positions within social hierarchies. Under which circumstances would we wish/choose to be discursively marginalized (and/or socially disempowered)? And if there are no such circumstances, how inclusive can the center be? Or must there be a center and must it be occupied? These questions present a problem that, while situated in the discourses of race within this essay, is peculiarly postmodern in character.[5] Stokely Carmichael's response was to examine and develop a clear understanding of the rhetorical complexities and impact of dialectical constructions embedded within the discourse and life of a culture. He used deconstruction and reversal to demonstrate the extent to which dialectical discourse is central to racism. By positing a competing dialectic of black power he starkly revealed the perniciousness of dialectical constructions of race *and* provided a way to move beyond such constructions to an exploration of racial identity and social position, a move from tactical to strategic rhetoric. The fact that he did not entirely succeed, that his message was often distorted in the press, that we continue to live in a society with racism and unequal power relationships does not mean that his method was wrong. Instead, he

hit upon an understanding of rhetorical process that anticipated current thinking about race, civil rights and social change. Tatum's discussion of racial identity development is one example of this perspective and clearly echoes Carmichael's discourse. She writes:

> The messages we receive about assumed superiority or inferiority shape our perceptions of reality and influence our interactions with others. While the task for people of color is to resist negative societal messages and develop an empowered sense of self in the face of a racist society, ... the task for Whites is to develop a positive White identity based in reality, not on assumed superiority. In order to do that each person must become aware of his or her Whiteness, accept it as personally and socially significant, and learn to feel good about it, not in the sense of a Klan member's "White pride," but in the context of a commitment to a just society.   (94 & 95)

Conclusions and Implications

Stokely Carmichael has been characterized as a radical black power separatist but this analysis indicates that he offered another option in his Berkeley address. He did not appeal to white audiences for assistance or civic hand-outs but instead attempted to tell them what they needed to do to correct *themselves* and their civic culture. In other words, he assumed the will and power, the position of withdrawal and objectivity to analyze the situation and tell white people how to handle it. In so doing, he challenged black people to move from a derivative to a strategic rhetorical position.

Carmichael's second option entailed pushing the case for autonomy and freedom to its limits. This trajectory began to dominate Carmichael's post-Berkeley discourse and cemented his reputation as a militant separatist. In 1969, just three years after the speech at Berkeley he wrote:

> If we recognize and accept the truths Brother Malcolm was trying to tell us, it will be clear to us that to survive as a people we will go to war with America and Europe. Since they will do all in their power to protect their interest, this means they must oppress us and keep us in a semi-human state. We, in turn, will never be a strong, proud, free people unless we liberate Africa and take from America what America is trying to protect. Right now we are in a cold war with America and Europe. When we begin to move militarily on all fronts, it will be an all-out race war, Africa versus Europe.   (Carmichael 1971)

Thus, rather than continuing to emphasize a comic mode of strategic cooperation, Carmichael increasingly emphasized the tragic, cosmic trajectory of revolution. Ironically, the rhetoric of revolution is derivative when propelled by a strong sense of resignation regarding the possibility of significant change without force. As William Raspberry (1998) pointed out in a recent essay, saying nothing has changed because discrimination continues to exist in many areas keeps people in a reactive rather than strategic mode. "It's hard to get an intelligent sense of priorities about what to do next," Raspberry writes, "when you are convinced that the net effect of all you've done to date is nothing's changed" (9A). And in moments like these, when rhetorical invention fails, force may come to seem the only true option.

In his speech at Berkeley, Carmichael used rhetorical techniques of reflexivity, reversal, and deconstruction and reconstruction of dialectical relationships–techniques often associated with postmodern critical discourse–to move from a tactical to a strategic rhetoric of racial identity and social position. The speech challenges us as critics to disrupt reliance on dialectical constructions within discourse, deconstructing dialectical terms and relationships and then reconstructing in multiple ways. Such an approach is instructive for discourses of race and civil rights and is seen in current scholarship that

focuses on position. Ultimately, rejecting the absolute transcendence of whiteness OR blackness is essential to the development of a discourse of shared human substance.

Notes

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[1] Information about the context of the speech and the responses to it both before and after the event are taken from the *New York Times*, "Carmichael Asks Draft's Defiance," October 30, 1966, 6; the *Washington Post*, "Crowd Laps Up Carmichael's Insults," October 31, 1966, A8; and several *Berkeley Barb* articles including "National Leader in First Appearance Here," September 30, 1966, 6; "Black Power Meets Here 'For Sure'," October 7, 1966, 1–2; "Stokeley Likely," October 28, 1966, 1; "Like It or Not, He Tells It Like It Is," November 4, 1966, 3; and "Stokely Meets His Own in Berkeley," November 25, 1966, 3. My thanks to T.J. Hill for his invaluable assistance in gathering this information.

[2] Stewart (1997) argues that Carmichael's June 17, 1966 speech to a rally in Greenwood, Mississippi during the march across Mississippi was a turning point in the civil rights movement because it represented a confluence of the right time, place and person to declare Black Power and to launch major evolutionary changes in the movement (433–434). Andrews and Zarefsky (1992) describe the Berkeley speech as the forerunner of what became Carmichael's standard speech for explaining Black Power to primarily white audiences.

[3] The terms "centering" and "de-centering" are spatial metaphors as well as theoretical constructs that help to explain the way in which symbol use within a culture privileges, designates as important, as central (centers) some social groups while pushing to the margins, ignoring, denegrating (de-centering) others. As Jackson (1999) notes in his recent essay, "Spatialization is a metaphorical construct that reminds us that social beings occupy certain life-spaces.... Naturally, this social and political assignment of spatialization has slippage in that it fails to account for both those who do not intend to *return* to their "assigned homes" once they have left, and those who have never lived in these spaces (39). As part of his work, Jackson confronts the question, "How do historically situated and communicated identities manifest themselves in everyday life?" and looks to "reversal or oppositional interpretations" as the answer. As this analysis demonstrates, Stokely Carmichael provides a blueprint for the use of such oppositional interpretations in his own strategic reversals within the Berkeley speech.

[4] I am indebted to T.J. Hill for his assistance in gathering biographical data about Stokely Carmichael for this paper. Sources for this information include: Mortiz, Charles, ed. (1970), *Current biography: 1970*, (New York: Wilson Company), 67; Haskins, James (1972). *Profiles in Black Power.* (New York: Doubleday and Co.), 185–6; D'emillio, Jojn (1979). *The Civil Rights Struggle: Leaders in Profile.* (New York Facts on File), 37; Burke, Joan Martin (1974). *Civil Rights: A Current Guide to the People, Organizations and Events, 2nd edition.* (New York: R.R. Bowker Co.) 24.

[5] Steven Goldzwig has drawn my attention to the parallels between the sophistic and the postmodern regarding these issues based on the argument that contemporary concerns with identity, power relations, and notions of community were central to the sophistic era as well. In an unpublished response to an initial draft of this paper at the Speech Communication Association annual conference in 1996, Goldzwig wrote: "They [the Sophists] could be considered reflexive, paradoxical, disdainful of meta-narratives, and disruptors of the normal. As ideological gadflies, they were guarantors of mischief. Teetering on the madness of the marginal, they set for themselves and displaced others a sense of the recovery of the center–or perhaps merely a re-centering. And that re-centering was established by a diversity of thought rather than by unanimity."

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