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BLACK MAN IN THE NEW CHINA

JOHN OLIVER KILLENS

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USCPFA STATEMENT OF PRINCIPLES

GOAL: To build active and lasting friendship based on mutual understanding between the people of the United States and the people of China.

Toward that end we urge the establishment of full diplomatic, trade and cultural relations between the two governments according to the principles agreed upon in the joint U.S.-China communique of February 28, 1972, and that U.S. foreign policy with respect to China be guided by these same principles: respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity; non-aggression; non-interference in the internal affairs of other states; equality and mutual benefit; and peaceful coexistence.

We call for the removal of all barriers to the growing friendship and exchange between our two peoples. We recognize that a major barrier is the U.S. diplomatic recognition of and military presence in Taiwan. In the Joint Communique signed by the governments of the United States and the People's Republic of China, both parties acknowledge that Taiwan is an inseparable part of China and that the Taiwan question is an internal affair of China. We recognize that the People's Republic of China is the sole legal government of China.

Our educational activities include production and distribution of literature, films and photo exhibits; sponsoring speakers and study classes; speaking out against distortions and misconceptions about the People's Republic of China; publishing newsletters and pamphlets; promoting the exchange of visitors as well as technical, cultural and social experiences.

It is our intention in each activity to pay special attention to those subjects of particular interest to the people of the United States.

Everyone is invited to participate in our activities and anyone who agrees with our goal is welcome to join.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR:
John O. Killens visited China in July 1973. He is the author of many novels, including Youngblood, And Then the Thunder Was Heard, *and* Cotillion. *He is currently Writer-in-Residence at Harvard University and has recently completed a novel about Alexander Pushkin.*

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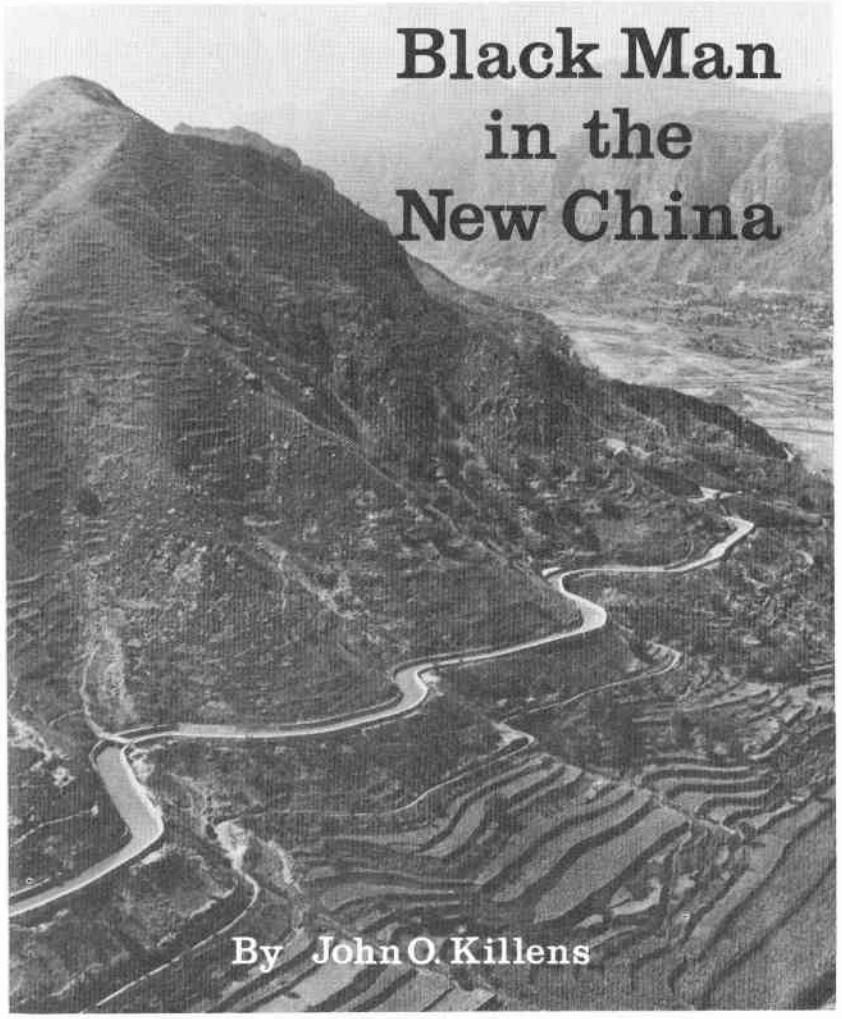


An American I met in China told me that, in order to get a true perspective of where China was before 1949, and the distance the People's Republic has travelled in such a short time, one should come to China by way of India. India, that vast sub-continent, with its teeming starving millions, its superstitions, its class (caste) system, its maharajahs and untouchables, its people being born on the steaming streets and living out their entire shortened lives on

the meanest streets in all the world—millions of people are born, live and die on "these mean streets" (apologies to Piri Thomas) —that is how it was in Shanghai and many of China's major cities B.L. (Before Liberation in 1949).

Well, we did not come to China via India, but we did come by a route which allowed us sufficient perspective to make some very dramatic comparisons.

We flew from New York via Japan Airlines over the great white glaciers to Anchorage, Alaska, where we deplaned for about an hour. Off in the distance we could see the skyline of the city, a town that had the frontier-western look about it, as did the white inhabitants out at the airport. White westerners seemed very much in control, much to the disadvantage and misfortune of the indigenous people. Back on the airplane and on to Tokyo where we spent the night in a very posh and American-modernistic-type hotel. It should not have surprised me the way this vast, fabulous city (second largest in the world) is becoming more and more like New York, its American counterpart, but I still was not quite ready for the drastic change that had taken place. It had been only three years since I had last visited Tokyo. There were the gaudy neon signs which reminded one of Times Square in New York and Sunset Strip in Hollywood, the only difference being that the signs were done in Japanese characters. And to hear that beautiful Japanese women were having their eyes operated on in order to eliminate the Eastern look was terrible news indeed.

The next morning we caught the bus and rode through the bustling city to the airport, there to catch an airplane for a four-hour flight to Hong Kong, that sinful city of long ago and far away, that since a boy I'd dreamed of experiencing. Strange, "exotic," different *Hong Kong!* The sound of the word does something to your heartbeat, your expectations. Hong Kong! Tashkent! Timbuktu! Zanzibar! Places I had visited many times in my boyhood dreams. All this, yet I was not prepared for the reality of Hong Kong. We arrived early afternoon. It was the monsoon season and it was raining and monsooning all over the place. We were a delegation of teachers, 22 in all, 17 white and five Black, organized by the Guardian Newspaper. At the hotel we were welcomed by the desk clerk with: "Check all of your cameras and other valuables here at the desk. We will not be responsible for thieves who will break into your rooms and steal your valuables." Okay. Thank you very much for your deep

concern for our welfare. A Chinese bellman helped with my bags to the room assigned to me. As we entered the room and I went to the window to raise it, the bellman shouted to me, excitedly, "No! No! No! Do not unlock the windows. Thieves will break into the window in the middle of the night!" I thought to myself, "I know that the Chinese have the reputation of being some of the greatest acrobats in the world, but, after all, we are on the 8th floor!" Nevertheless, I took my Chinese brother's word for it, and I did not unlock the window. There was air-conditioning in the hotel, anyhow.

We walked the steaming, teeming streets of Hong Kong that afternoon on into the evening; the streets were wet and slimy underneath our feet. They say this is the wickedest city of the Eastern world, the narcotic center of the Orient. British Crown Colony in the Southeast corner of the Chinese mainland, leased to the British for 99 years during the last century at the end of a Chinese rebellion against the British opium trade, which had so many of the people half asleep and others nodding, continuously. The British brought his or her majesty's gun boats into the China Sea to put down the rebellion. When the smoke cleared away, Hong Kong belonged to Britain. That is the way things were in those good ol' days of British Empire.

> *I remembered the words of W. E. B. DuBois on his 91st birthday, when he called upon the people of Africa and all oppressed peoples to look to China, whose non-white people had been the wretched, yes, the despised of the earth. . . . If they had overcome, why not every man?*

Poverty and contradiction are in the air you breathe. On the one hand, the screaming evidence of opulence, the ostentatious display of fantastic wealth, modernistic high-rise apartments, vast villa-type estates; on the other hand, filthy shacks and filthier beggars. Coming home late that night from the famous Juno Revolving Restaurant, four of us decided to forego the use of the available taxis and to walk back to the hotel through the streets of this mysterious city. Chinese, men and women, boys and girls, of all ages thronged the wet and slimy streets. Babies in their mother's arms. An old bent-over beggar-woman will hold out her hand to you and will follow you for a block, or further, tapping

you on the shoulder till she gets some response from you one way or the other. It is a funny, creepy feeling. The smell and taste of poverty slaps you in the face, assaults your mouth and nostrils. One needs very little imagination to experience the smell of opium exuding from the alleys and dark corridors.

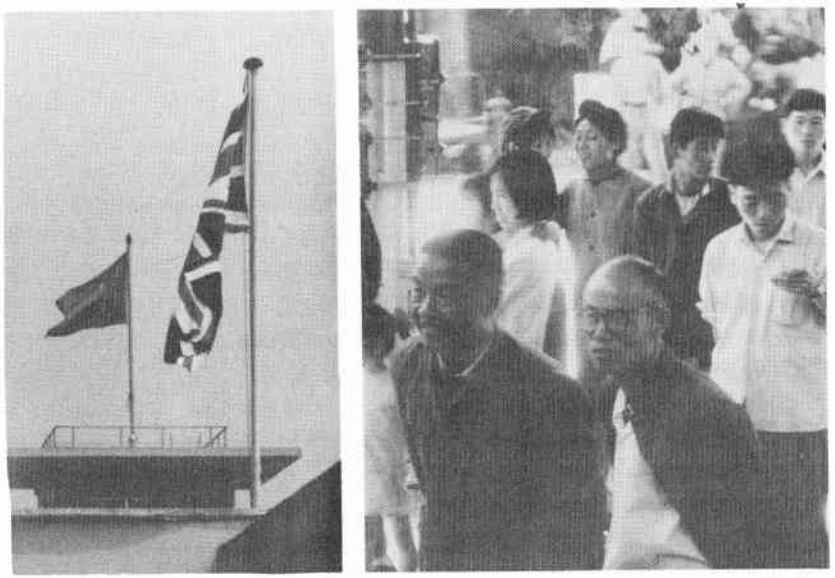
The next morning we caught a train and headed northward through the rice-paddied countryside. Again the sharp contrast between the vast manorial estates and the shacks huddled helplessly and deep in the muddy monsooned paddies. I thought, with such helplessness and hopelessness, "Who wouldn't escape into those sleepy dreams of opiate fantasy?"

After riding about an hour through the humid and despairing countryside, the train came to a stop, and we alighted. We took our baggage and walked less than 50 feet toward a bridge in the middle of which stood, completely relaxed, a couple of young men, about 19 years of age, rifles in hand, dressed in green uniforms with a red star on their caps. There was a banner stretched across the bridge which told us: "WELCOME TO THE PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF CHINA."

As we crossed over into the People's Republic, one of the women in our delegation began to flood her eyes with tears. It is difficult to describe my own feelings at that historic moment. To have one foot in British Hong Kong and one foot in the People's Republic sent a chill up my spine which I consciously fought against. China! "The Sleeping Giant!! . . . "You don't have a Chinaman's chance." . . . My grandmother's admonition to us children: "Eat everything on your plate. It's a sin to waste your food. Think of the starving people of China." All the memories rushed in upon me. And then—the revolution of 1949. I remembered the words of W. E. B. DuBois on his 91st birthday, when he called upon the people of Africa and all oppressed peoples to look to China, whose non-white people had been the wretched, yes, the despised of the earth. What would it be like? Was I building myself up for one more great big disappointment?

Could Afro-Americans gather hope and inspiration from this experiment? From these people who had known the yoke of semi-colonialism, the white death of Western racism, had slept for more than a century nodding in narcotic dreams of hopelessness? If they had overcome, why not every man? If? If? *If!*

We went to the Reception Center nearby and changed our dollars into *yuan,* went swiftly through Immigration and Customs. There was a large mural on the wall with Chairman Mao surrounded by Africans, Arabs and an assortment of "Third World" peoples. (I prefer to call us "First World" people. I mean, why should we gratuitously give ourselves third-class citizenship in this crazy world? Even the white geologists and anthropologists admit that the first great civilizations came out of Africa and Asia.) This kind of poster we were going to witness all over China, especially in the industrial cities of Manchuria. Always there were the large billboards with pictures of the Chinese in a friendly relationship with Africans and other First World people.



British and Chinese flags fly above Hong Kong-PRC border station; Chinese well-wishers at a departing train, Canton (Kwangchow)

An hour later, we boarded another train and headed further north to a city in the Chinese tropics by the name of Kwangchow, which the Europeans for some strange reason insist on calling Canton. It is a beautiful city deep amongst majestic palm trees and

exuding the pungent aroma of flowers of all colors and descriptions. China is a vast country. From the hot and humid tropics to Tibet and the frozen Himalayas which have been called the "roof of the world." Awesome Mount Everest stands at the edge of China.

We were in for yet another cultural shock. At the hotel in Kwangchow where we were stopping for a few days, we were assigned rooms. As we stood bewildered at the desk, one of the people in our delegation remarked that we had been assigned to rooms but had not been given keys. Where were the keys? Where, indeed? Our interpreter and guide explained to us with infinite patience that keys were not necessary in the People's Republic. "Nothing will be stolen from you." Most of us having come from Fun City (New York) and via wicked Hong Kong, one can just imagine our cultural shock. And how could this be? We had just left Hong Kong, less than a hundred miles from this place, where thievery was a national pastime, and most of the people were Chinese. At least they had been Chinese until his or her majesty had bestowed upon them the benevolence of Christianity and Western civilization. Nevertheless, it was true. You could leave the door unlocked or leave the door wide open, leave the equivalent of a couple of hundred dollars (I did it many times) on your desk or in the middle of the bed, and stay away all day long and return and find every cent intact. It was a mind-blowing experience.

Land reform was the key to the revolution. Take the land from the cruel greedy landlords and divide it among the lowly and impoverished peasants. Just imagine where Black Americans would be had we gotten those 40 acres and that mule!

While in Kwangchow, we visited a commune which is probably the essence of the Socialistic System in the People's Republic. I believe it is fair to say that the success or failure of the people's experiment rests almost entirely on the success or failure of the People's Communes. I believe it is succeeding. What is a People's Commune?

Before Liberation, the vast majority of the Chinese people belonged to the landless peasantry. Land reform was the key to the Revolution. Take the land from the cruel greedy landlords and

divide it among the lowly and impoverished peasants. Just imagine where Black Americans would be had we gotten those 40 acres and that mule! Then came the problems. How shall the peasants be organized? How shall the farm land be made more productive and of service to the entire people, workers as well as peasants?

First there were the mutual-aid teams which consisted of a few dozen households. The means of production, such as land, draft animals and farm tools were privately owned. Members of the mutual-aid teams helped each other cultivate the land and harvest the crops, trading labor in exchange for labor. In the second stage, the co-ops were larger than the mutual-aid teams. Land and other means of production were pooled together and used and managed by the collective co-ops. Compensation was based on how much each had put into the pool. The next stage, a fully socialist co-op, usually consisted of around 200 households. Land tools and other means of production were owned collectively. Compensation was based, as in the second stage, on the socialist principle of: "From each according to his ability; to each according to his labor."

The "Commune" is a large federation of socialist co-ops, often encompassing households of entire townships. The managers of the Communes also participate in the governing of the township. But what is the difference, if any, between the socialist co-op and the People's Commune, besides the factor of size?

While the co-op engages principally in agriculture, the People's Commune both organizes the economy and governs the locality, the township. It is the basic unit of China's socialist society and of working-class power in the countryside. Not only does the Commune participate in farming but it also establishes the medical centers, assumes responsibility for education and culture, and organizes the militia. It establishes the link between the workers of the city and the peasants of the rural districts, the cultural workers, the intellectuals and the soldiers. It is based on the theory and practice of self-reliance. Can Afro-Americans learn from this example? Self reliance? Workers at the Commune we visited had constructed their own light industry factories, which made their own farm tools. Commune members were building irrigation systems, constructing dams and dikes and reservoirs with their minds and muscles, even as we watched. We visited the medical center, maternity ward, the dental clinic.

We visited people in their homes at the Commune. The old lady spoke a musical Cantonese. At first I thought she was surely

singing. Our interpreter said she was 65. With her bent shoulders and wrinkled face, she looked her age, except for the youthful glow that shone in her eyes and the young music in her voice. It was the eyes and voice of hope brought on by Liberation. "Before Liberation, we lived like dogs in a one-room mud hut." This is a three-room house made of brick. We were seated around a green linoleum-covered table with peanuts which have been raised on the Commune. Clean. Nothing fancy. There is a picture on the wall of the Chairman, along with pictures of the woman's family. This is the sitting room, the room for entertaining visitors. There are two small bedrooms, one for the children, the other for the parents. The kitchen is a separate building across the yard from the house. There are well-fed chickens in the yard. This Commune embraces 12,000 households and houses 65,000 people who are divided into 25 work brigades. According to most standards, especially Western and American, the people are still poor. But that the Revolution has enriched their lives, there can be no denying. It has enriched their lives with hope and dignity, as well as materially, economically. They no longer live like dogs. "Before Liberation, I was illiterate," the old lady said. "But now I can read a newspaper, my son is in the People's Liberation Army, my little girl is in the Middle School. The landlords are gone and can no longer take my daughters into servitude."

The next day we visited the Teachers College on the outskirts of Kwangchow. Every student in the People's Republic who attends college or the university is required each school term to do two months of work on a farm or at a factory. In this way, the student develops a healthy respect for honest labor and the peasantry. Elitism is discouraged. We were out on the campus grounds watching a pig (not a policeman, a *bona fide* swine) being ministered to with acupuncture. He suffered with diarrhea. A young Chinese woman, nineteenish, came up to me and asked: "Are you an Afro-American?" I said, "Yes." She told me, "I am getting my degree in English." She was a very pretty woman, self-assured without arrogance, with olive-smooth and silky skin and deep, dark, slanting eyes. "You speak very good English," I told her, honestly. "Oh—not so good—" she told me. "Believe me," I assured her, "you speak much better English than much English I am accustomed to hearing back in the States."

She said to me, "In our class, we are studying a novel that has been translated from English into Chinese about Black soldiers in

World War II. And in this novel, a Black soldier is at a bus station in Georgia, trying to catch a bus back to his camp. But he cannot get aboard the bus, as long as there are white soldiers boarding the bus, which makes the Black soldier very angry. He gets into altercations with the police and they take him down to the police station and they give him a terrible beating."

"A young Chinese woman, nineteenish, came up to me and asked: 'Are you an Afro-American?' "

While she was telling the story, I was having a weird feeling that I had either read this story before or had heard of the incident. I asked, "What was the title of the book?" She said, "The title of the book is *And Then the Thunder Was Heard."*

I said, "You don't mean *And Then We Heard the Thunder?"*

She said, "Yes . . . of course! That's it. Have you also read the novel?"

"Yes," I admitted, "I have also read the novel. I also wrote the novel."

She stared at me as if she was not sure that she had heard me properly. Maybe I was putting her on. And I thought, "Maybe she's putting me on."

"Is it true?" her eyes seemed to be asking me. I shook my head, pleasantly embarrassed. Yes, it was true.

"You're John Keerins! You're Keerins," she shouted softly, her face glowing with excitement. I was equally excited.

"Yes," I answered. "I'm afraid I'm John Killens."

"Afraid? Afraid? What are you afraid of?"

"It's just a manner of speaking," I told her. "Actually, I am very delighted to be John Killens, especially at this particular moment." The incident gave me an eerie feeling. For here I was halfway around the world, and there are upwards of 30 million Afro-Americans in this world and 800,000,000 Chinese people. And you could get all kinds of odds in decadent Las Vegas against this coincidence occurring. But after I got to Peking I met with Chinese publishers and found that they had also published my novel *Youngblood,* as well as *Black Man's Burden.* They had published many of the books of Dr. W. E. B. DuBois. They had also published Langston Hughes, Paul Robeson, Robert Williams and other Afro-American writers. I gave them four of my books, *'Sippi, Great Gittin' Up Morning, Black Man's Burden* and *Cotillion.* At the meeting, they asked me to recommend other Black writers, for they were tremendously interested in the Black movement and in how the art and literature of Black folks reflected that movement. I, of course, obliged them with a long list of Black writers.

On to Peking, which was a city of many mind-blowing experiences. The kindergarten, full of children, brimming with life and vitality, knowing who they are and that the country belonged to them. They applauded us as we entered each room, and we applauded them in return. In the art class they were drawing pictures of workers and farmers and engineers. "What are you going to be when you grow up?" . . . "I am going to be a bus driver—to serve the people." . . . "I am going to be a doctor . . . to serve the people." . . . "I am going to be a writer . . . to write about the people's struggle against imperialism." I could not believe it! All of these four- to seven-year-olds were against

imperialism, were going to serve the people! What did it mean? They performed for us, danced their national dances. No one tried to upstage anybody or to steal the center of the stage. But then, I thought, they were probably told to be on their best behavior for the Americans. However, when we went out on the playground, I knew that I had allowed my "healthy" American skepticism to make me disbelieve what my eyes beheld. I had eyes to see but would not see. Because, one thing is sure, you cannot stage a playground. And there were hundreds of little children playing in harmony with one another. Not a single fight. Nobody was saying, "This is my ball!" or being brattish, greedy, selfish, neurotically individualistic.

The next day, we went by bus about 50 miles north of Peking to the Great Wall of China, one of the wonders of the world. The Great Wall is a formidable sight, awe-inspiring as it snakes its way through the hills and mountains 3000 miles the breadth of China. It was constructed 2,500 years ago, long before the Age of the Machine.

Before going to China I had read of the problem China was having with flies, and that the Chairman had given each Chinese citizen a quota of killing ten flies each. I could just imagine eight hundred million Chinese people making war, with flyswatters, against the flies. The poor flies did not have a chance. It was unfair, a clear-cut case of overmatching. All in all we spent about six or seven days in Peking, and I did not see a single fly!

There was one thought that was constantly on my mind after the first few days in the People's Republic. And that was how far the people had come in such a short space of time. I remembered James Weldon Johnson's inspiring lyric of the Black National Anthem:

WE HAVE COME
OVER THE PATH
THAT WITH TEARS HAVE BEEN WATERED.

I also remembered the words of Martin Luther King: "We have come a long way, but we still have a long way to go." And just before his assassination: "We have reached the mountain top, but we have not yet reached the Promised Land."

Notwithstanding, throughout the trip, a couple of questions bothered me. Our Chinese guides were very hospitable and bent over backwards to satisfy our every desire, some of which were rather whimsical and on the kinky side. "Where do you wish to go

today? We'll see if we can arrange it." And usually it was arranged, though some of the requests were difficult to bring off. Some of us wanted to visit the prisons. For whatever reason, it never happened. Also in Fuison, a city to the north, we visited the coal mines. The outlying countryside was covered with the usual soot associated with coal towns. It was the first evidence we witnessed of industry-caused air pollution. How will this socialist state deal with this obvious contradiction?

Otherwise, traveling through the Chinese countryside, I was reminded of my trip in a landrover, 12,000 miles around Africa; the forever changing landscape, the streams, the rain forest, the rivers, the mountains off in the distance, the sleepy smell of woodsmoke in the evening and, of course, the very special Chinese look of the endless stretch of rice paddies, with the men and women in their pagoda-shaped hats bent knee-deep in the swampy paddies and, more than anything else, the African feeling of vastness, of an earth stretching far and wide forever. This was China. For China was the land and the people of the land. And most of all the peasant.

In Peking we visited a Street Committee, the basic organizational unit of the city. From the Mayorality to the Street Committee, Peking is structured for "Service to the People." Just as the signs all over Hong Kong called on the people to "Fight Crime," the signs all over the People's Republic called on one and all to "Serve the People." The Street Committee is in charge of five factories of light industry. The Street Committees are, for the most part, volunteer workers elected by the residents of the neighborhood. The Committee is responsible for education, ideological study groups, culture, attending the cinema, recreation, etc. Each Street Committee has at least one medical center run by "barefoot doctors," paramedical people who have been trained to perform acupuncture and to practice preventive medicine. Fifty percent of all doctors in China are women.

> *"Before liberation, there was no hope. There was only death and degradation. Now there is hope. We know that we can change the world. Our destiny belongs to us."*

We visited the home of a 60-year-old man in a compound of the Street Committee. He told us the following story. "Before Liberation, it was the 'bitter times.' My father and two brothers, all four of us worked as rickshaw boys. No matter how old you were you were a rickshaw 'boy.' My father and my brothers, they all starved to death. At Liberation, I was the only survivor. They used to make us race with each other down the street as if we were horses. Sometimes we would deliver a passenger to a place, and he would say he would be right back, then disappear into the courtyard, and we would never see him again. Things were bad. People died on the streets every day, as if it were a natural thing. I was illiterate. Now, since Liberation, I am a railroad worker. I can read. My children are in Middle School and one goes to the university. Before Liberation I would never have dreamed of any of this happening. Before Liberation, there was no hope. There was only death and degradation. Now there is hope. We know that we can change the world. Our destiny belongs to us."

If they could, from the very lower depths, come so far so fast then why not African-Americans? Why not us? Why not every man? It made me believe in the old slave-song fragment that became the theme song of the Movement in the late Fifties and early Sixties: WE SHALL OVERCOME.

Let us listen for a moment to Edgar Snow's description of

Shanghai, the world's largest city, before and after Liberation. For Shanghai was but a glaring, exaggerated example of what was happening all over China in its overcrowded cities. Snow lived in Shanghai before Liberation and came back for a brief visit afterwards. He describes it thusly:

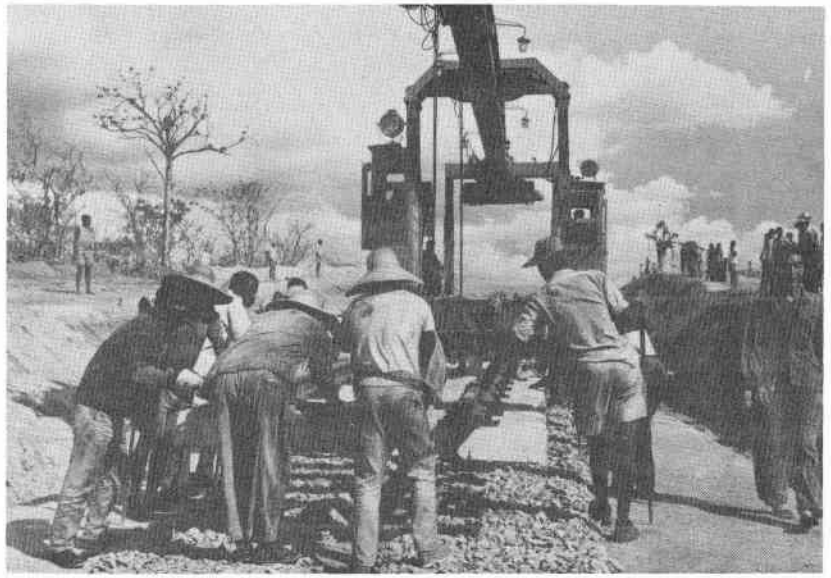
"Gone the glitter and glamour, the pompous wealth beside naked starvation . . . gone the island of Western capitalism flourishing in the vast slum that was Shanghai."

"Goodbye to all that: the well-dressed Chinese in their chauffeured cars behind bullet-proof glass; the gangsters, the shakedowns, the kidnappers; the exclusive foreign clubs . . . the white-coated Chinese 'boys' obsequiously waiting to be tipped . . . Goodbye to all that night life . . . the hundred dance halls, and thousands of taxi dolls; the opium dens and gambling halls . . . the sailors in their smelly bars and friendly brothels on Szechuan Road: the myriad short-time whores and pimps darting in and out of alleyways; the displays of signs of foreign business . . . the beggars on every downtown block and the scabby infants urinating or defecating on the curbs while mendicant mothers absently scratched for lice . . . the block-long funerals, the white-clad professional mourners weeping false tears . . . the day's toll of unwanted infants and suicides floating in the canals . . . gone the wickedest and the most colorful city of the old Orient: Goodbye to all that." And I might add: "Good riddance!"

As I stated before, another thing that interested me was the obvious interest of the people of the People's Republic in the First World people, as manifested by Black literature in the University curriculum and the billboards all over the industrial cities of Manchuria. There was this one billboard outside of Fushun, the great northeastern coal town. It is an especially beautiful one, of a Black woman with a lovely Black babe in her arms, with a Chinese and Black doctor standing smilingly and lovingly by her side. Underneath the picture there are Chinese characters which, translated into English, say: LONG LIVE AFRICAN-CHINESE FRIENDSHIP.

Running true to form, I, the Skeptical Afro-American, wanted to know: How do these wonderful sentiments translate into reality? How has theory been put into actual practice? Well, we met African students who spoke highly of the education they were receiving in the People's Republic. One of the Black women of our delegation and I had dinner with an engineer who worked and

lived with his family in China. He was from Zambia and he was very enthusiastic about the reality of Chinese-African friendship. He told us of the railroad that China was helping to construct from Zambia to Dar es Salaam in Tanzania. The Chinese not only made a large loan to the two African nations for the construction of the Tanzania-Zambia railway; not only did they send engineers and technical personnel to train African technicians, to help construct the railway system; but they also sent men who participated in the actual sweat of its construction. The Chinese do not merely supervise, they do not feel themselves too good to work, to sweat along with their African brothers. With the total length of 1,900 kilometers, the railroad starts in Dar es Salaam and runs across the southwestern part of Tanzania to the world-famous "copper belt" in Zambia. It establishes for Zambia an outlet to the sea at Dar es Salaam.



African and Chinese workers lay track for the TanZam railway.

According to the Chinese publication *China Reconstructs,* President Kenneth Kaunda of Zambia (while inspecting the construction of a Zambia transmitter project on the Kafue Bridge, under construction by Zambian and Chinese workers, on the Lusaka-Kaoma Highway in February, 1972) said in a speech at a work site rally that Chinese technical and engineering personnel had taught Zambian workers, without reservations, to make machine parts.

. . . "This is indeed fraternal friendship." He added further: "The friendly relations between the two countries are very deep. This shows that we are going to cooperate more and more against exploitation, imperialism and against colonial influence which deny human development. . . . Although we are thousands of miles apart, our two countries both stand for equality between all people."

At a farewell banquet in Peking, given by the Tanzanian and Zambian governments, Amir Habib Jamal, Minister of Finance of Tanzania, praised the technical staff sent by the Chinese government who "worked arduously day and night under a wide range of difficult conditions. Your massive assistance to the cause of developing countries, while engaged on much needed construction at home, is a clear demonstration of the commitment of the Chinese people to international solidarity in the struggle for the construction of a just and peaceful world order in which imperialism, fascism and colonialism will have been abolished forever . . . In assisting us to achieve our cherished aim of close communication with each other, thus serving the needs of our national economy, the government and the people of the People's Republic of China are making a positive and significant contribution towards the total liberation of Africa."

There is a magazine published monthly in Peking, the *Afro-Asian Journalist.* On April 23, 1971, the Afro-Asian Journalists Association held a meeting in Peking. Mr. Djawoto, African Secretary General of the A.A.J.A., said: "Our association was founded eight years ago with the aim of making its contribution to the struggle of the world's peoples against all forms of colonialism, racial discrimination and foreign economic exploitation, to the consolidation of their militant struggle against their common enemies."

Evidence of Afro-Asian friendship is unavoidable in China, especially in Peking. There seems to be a steady stream of delegates from Africa arriving in Peking from the Congo Republic, Somalia, Sudan, Zambia, Tanzania. While we were there, the President of the Congo Republic paid a visit, and the Chinese people turned out to greet him and his entourage as if it were a national holiday. Thousands lined the boulevards, with flowers. Children dancing in the street, shouting, "Long live the Congolese!" It was quite different from the welcome accorded Richard Nixon of the U.S.A.

In November 1971, there was the gala opening of the Afro-Asian Table Tennis Friendship Invitational Tournament in the Capital Gymnasium, Peking's largest. The represented nations included Afghanistan, Algeria, Arab Republic of Yemen, Cambodia, Ceylon, Dahomey, Egypt, Ethiopia, the Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, India, Uganda, Sierre Leone, Tanzania, Togo, Zambia and China.

Pan-Africanist, teacher, and socialist writer W. E. B. DuBois and his wife Shirley Graham DuBois meet with Chairman Mao Tsetung, October 1, 1962.

Whatever the motivation, one thing is clear: the Chinese are working hard at establishing close ties and friendly relationships with the emerging nations of Africa, a relationship based on mutual respect and equality. Perhaps the Chinese come by this more easily than the Western nations, good intentions notwithstanding, because the Chinese people, like people of color all over the world, have felt the yoke of Western colonialism and white racism. Americans cannot hope to achieve this kind of fellowship with African nations so long as it denies full humanity and equality to the sons and daughters of Africa here at home. Maybe this is what W. E. B. DuBois referred to when he celebrated his 91st birthday in China. He spoke at a state banquet given by the government in his honor. And he said:

> China after long centuries has arisen to her feet and leapt forward. Africa arise, and stand straight, speak and think! Act! Turn from the

West and your slavery and humiliation for the last 500 years and face the rising sun. Behold a people, the most populous nation on this ancient earth which has burst its shackles, not by boasting and strutting, not by lying about its history and its conquests, but by patience and long-suffering, by hard, back-breaking labor and with bowed head and blind struggle, moved up and on toward the crimson sky.

She aims to 'make men holy; to make men free.' But what men? Not simply the rich, but not excluding the rich; not simply the learned, but led by knowledge to the end that no man shall be poor, nor sick, nor ignorant; that the humblest worker as well as the sons of emperors shall be fed and taught and healed and that there emerge on earth a single unified people, free, well and educated. Speak, China, and tell your truth to Africa and the world. What people have been despised as you have? Who more than you have been rejected of men? Recall when lordly Britishers threw the rickshaw money on the ground to avoid touching a filthy hand. Forget not the time when in Shanghai no 'Chinaman' dared set foot in a park which he paid for. Tell this to Africa, for today Africa stands on new feet, with new eyesight, with new brains and asks: Where am I and why?

I believe DuBois, "Father of Pan-Africanism," was calling on Africa to follow the path of national liberation with a socialist perspective. He certainly was a man who believed in socialism and Black nationalism and saw no contradiction in these two paths to liberation. It was for him the same highway.

One of my main interests in going to China was to learn something about the cultural revolution. Why did it apparently have such a tremendous success, while our own Black cultural revolution, that bloomed so brightly during the Sixties, seems to be dying on the vine? *First of all,* if I understood the Chinese people's answers to my questions, their position is that a revolution never ceases, especially the cultural aspect of it. It could very well last a thousand years. The moment it ceases, the tendency is for a *bourgeois* conservatism to set in. *The second point* was that there need be no conflict between—as some of us argued in the Sixties—a cultural revolution and an activist revolution. They should go hand in hand, one complementing the other. To paraphrase Chairman

Mao: "An uncultured army is a dull-witted army, and a dull-witted army can never win a revolution." The Chinese also maintain that a revolution cannot be arranged. The people's minds must be prepared so that when the moment comes they will be ready for it. A true revolution cannot be imported. It must be indigenous. *The third lesson* was the Chinese fundamental emphasis on Self-Reliance. Economic, political, cultural, ideological. Total self-reliance.

But what of our glorious cultural revolution of the smoking Sixties? Well, there was the uneasiness I always felt about the Movement in the Sixties. With all its tremendous militance and its swaggering, its loud proclamation that "Black is beautiful," I continually heard disturbing echoes in our pyrotechnic rhetoric that suggested to me that so many of us did not really believe in the beauty of our Blackness. I kept hearing among the most militant of us, references to ourselves as "niggers." No matter how you try to clean it up with terms like "affection" and "hip" and "defiance," and brotherliness, I always found it dangerous and strange that we found it necessary to clean up the Anglo-Saxon designation of all the non-Caucasian peoples of the earth. I know that no revolutionary people in charge of their own destiny looked at themselves through the eyes of the oppressor.

Because, "A nigger ain't shit!" Right? We've heard them all before: "Ain't that just like a nigger?" . . . "Niggers ain't gon' stick together." . . . "Niggers ain't gon' do this." . . . "Niggers ain't gon' do that" . . . "Niggers ain't gon' do the other" . . . "Niggers ain't!" In the entire history of revolutions, I know of no liberated people who call themselves with the designation of the oppressors. Believe me, Sisters and Brothers, there are no "chinks" in China. There are no "spicks" in Cuba.

Another comparison between the two cultural revolutions can be seen in the two approaches to the woman question. In some very vital and militant factions of the Black cultural revolution, women were required to metaphorically "sit in the back of the bus." Some ceremonial rites had Black women walking three paces behind their men. But the liberation movement must be for the liberation of all the people, of 30 million Black people, not one-half that many. This is backward thinking and divisive. Many women voted with their feet and went into Women's Lib. And some of the brothers seemed upset and surprised. We drove them to it. We need all the troops we can muster. We are already out-

numbered. Any group joining a liberation movement has an obligation to ask, "What's in it for me? How is it going to help my situation?" The Chinese say, "Women hold up one-half of the world."

And finally (and for me this was most important), the people and the people's planners must have a long-range point of view, must be prepared for a battle of attrition, like the 30-years war waged by the Vietnamese for national liberation against the greatest amassment of white racist capitalist power the world has ever known. The Vietnamese struggle, incidentally, was a nationalist and a socialist movement. And they won. They took it all. And they must have a faith that they can win in the long run, which means that they must take the struggle to the people and have faith in their intelligence and their will to struggle. Anything short of this is adventurism. I do not mean that the "leaders" should romanticize the masses. I do mean that, as Chancellor Williams teaches us, the "leaders" should see themselves as servants, serving the interest of the masses, not as deities to be worshipped and to exploit the aspirations of the people. Repeat: The leaders must see themselves as servants of the people. And, of course, as I have often stated, we need some Black long-distance runners, some who cannot only win the sprints, which is admirable, and to whom all praises are due, but some who can go all the way and win the longest, greatest race of all, the whole damn human race. Which will simply mean we will ultimately win and love ourselves, because we *are* the human race. We must be prepared to sacrifice for generations yet unborn.

Chairman Mao tells the story of the "Foolish old man and the mountain." I paraphrase it for you now: It seems the old man built himself a house, and after it was constructed, he realized that he had built it next to a very high mountain which completely cut out the sunlight from ever reaching it. One day he and his two sons got outside and began to dig away at the mountain. People laughed at him. "You're a fool, old man. Don't you know you can't move that mountain?" He replied, "My sons will dig away at it, and their sons will dig, as will their sons' sons, and so on. And one thing for sure, the mountain isn't going to get any larger. But eventually, if every generation keeps digging, this mountain has to come down." Dig? We need some Black long-distance runners.

Dig also that the Chairman was not for gradualism.

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