

## **Transnational Correspondence: Robert F. Williams, Detroit, and the Bandung Era**

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Can you imagine New York without police brutality? Can you imagine Chicago without gangsters and Los Angeles without dirilects [sic] and winos? Can you imagine Birmingham without racial discrimination and Jackson, Mississippi without terror? . . . .

Can you imagine cops and soldiers without firearms in conspicuous evidence of intimidation? Do you think this is a utopian dream? I can understand your disbelief. I believe that such a place exists on this wicked and cruel earth.

—Robert F. Williams, "China: The Good of the Earth," 1963<sup>1</sup>

[A]ll genuine Bandung revolutionaries must unequivocally support the Revolutionary Afro-American Movement. The Black American radical is a redeemer who must resurrect a colonial people who suffered centuries of spiritual and psychological genocide, and who acknowledges but one history——. slavery.... The Afro-American revolutionary is the humanistic antithesis of the inhuman West.

—Revolutionary Action Movement, *Black America*, 1965<sup>2</sup>

We learned from Detroit to go to the cities.

—General Vo Nguyen Giap to Robert Williams, 1968<sup>3</sup>

The September, 1963, special issue of *Shijie Wenxue* (*World*)

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*Literature*) published in Beijing was dedicated to W. E. B. Du Bois. The lyric poet to China, twice a visitor there, had died in August on the eve of the March on Washington. Working quickly, the editors had compiled an extraordinary gathering of writers and writings in his name. They included Du Bois's own poem "Ghana Calls," written to commemorate his final exile; Sie Ping-hsin's "To Mourn for the Death of Dr. W Du Bois"; Margaret Walker's poem "Sorrowful Land"; and a short story "The Tokolosh" by the South African writer Ronald Segal. Also included were pedagogical texts on black struggle to which 1963 seemed an immediate heir: "Historical Documents of the Struggle for Negroes' Emancipation," including an excerpt from Frederick Douglass's *Narrative*; Han Peh-ping's "Notes on Negroes' Oral Literature in West Africa"; and three articles described as "anecdotes" about Robert F. Williams, the former head of the Monroe, North Carolina, NAACP now living in exile in Cuba after being charged by the FBI with kidnapping during a 1961 uprising in his hometown. In Cuba, incidentally, Williams published favorable articles and editorials about China in the pages of *The Crusader*, his self-started newspaper. In the fall of 1963, Williams and his wife Mabel made their first visit to China and North Vietnam as invited guests of their respective governments. The trip was precipitated by a letter-writing campaign by Williams to Chairman Mao Tse-Tung, urging him to make a statement of support in the escalating crisis for black Americans. After the racist bombing of the 16<sup>th</sup> Street Baptist Church in Birmingham in September, killing four African-American girls, Mao released his "Support for the American Negroes in their Struggle Against Racial Discrimination and for Freedom and Equal Rights." Another statement by Mao, titled "Calling upon People of the World to Unite to Oppose Racial Discrimination by U.S. Imperialism and Support the American Negroes Struggle Against America" prefaced the issue of *Shijie Wenxue*.

Mao's statements of support were welcome, if overdue, news to black radicals in the United States, particularly in the city of Detroit, for whom Robert Williams was likewise both geographically remote yet symbolically present. Williams lived briefly in the city in 1942 and 1948. While there, he was an autoworker and member of UAW 600. His commitment to armed self-defense against racist attacks in North Carolina as early as 1957 had brought him to the attention of Detroit activists well before he was charged in the Monroe uprising in '61. Immediately following that charge, supporters in Detroit formed the Robert Williams Defense Committee. In May of 1962, the Detroit journal *Correspondence*, edited by Chinese-American activist Grace Lee Boggs, published Pamphlet 5, *Monroe, North Carolina...Turning Point in American History*. The pamphlet comprised two speeches in Williams's defense by his attorney Conrad J. Lynn and a foreword by James Boggs, a Detroit worker and husband to Grace, comparing Williams frame-up to the Emmett Till case.

In September, 1963, the same month as the special issue of *World Literature*, Detroit poet Dudley Randall wrote his own

response to the Birmingham bombing, "Ballad of Birmingham," a haunting lament for the four little girls killed in the blast. At the Boggs's invitation, the poem was published in the October *Correspondence*. A month earlier, Boggs had published Randall's more polemical "Roses and Revolution," written in 1948 and published in 1949, the year of the formation of the People's Republic of China. The poem compared a U.S. lynching victim "lying in the swamp with his face blown/off" to all of the war dead, including the victims of the atomic bombs dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki (3). After imagining a "vision of a time when all men walk proudly through the earth/and the bombs and missiles lie at the bottom of the ocean," the poem closes with this political epiphany:

Then washed in the brightness of this vision,  
I saw how in its radiance would grow and be  
nourished and suddenly  
burst into terrible and splendid bloom  
the blood-red flower of revolution. (3)

These synchronous acts of political and cultural translation constitute a singular story of internationalism during the 1940-60s. Black America's call to Asia, and Asia's reciprocal response, reveals the textual and logistical mechanics of what might be called "transnational correspondence." Beginning with the 1955 meeting of decolonizing African and Asian nations in Bandung, Indonesia, until at least the early 1970s, African-American and Asian radicals imagined themselves as antipodal partners in Cultural Revolution, pen pals for world liberation. Motivated by real and imagined affiliations between race and Civil Rights struggles in the U.S., anti-colonial movements in the Third World, the Cuban and Great Chinese Proletarian Cultural Revolutions, and a U.S. imperialist war in Vietnam, such correspondents circulated among and between themselves a conception of political simultaneity and indebtedness meant to inform developments on opposite sides of the earth. Transnational correspondence refers specifically to the attempts by black radicals in the U.S. and liberation leaders in Asia to establish strategic linkages in three areas of international struggle: military strategizing, including guerilla tactics; literary and publishing strategies; and cultural revolution. General Vo Ngyuen Giap's apocryphal quip to Robert Williams ascribing the success of North Vietnamese military operations to the example of Detroit's urban rebellions of 1967 is but one startling metonym for these processes. It captures the real and symbolic role Afro-Asian radicalism had come to play in the U.S. as rumors about an "Operation Giap," an assault by the U.S.-based Revolutionary Action Movement, circulated through black undergrounds and the radical black press of 1966 (see SAGA). It resonates with two oft-circulated declarations by leading exponents of Afro-Asian revolutionary theory of the 1960s: Robert Williams's "America is the Black Man's Battleground" ("Urban" 6), a plaintive insistence that

his comrades carry the war at home during his own Cuban and later Chinese exile; and Detroiters James and Grace Lee Boggs's "The City is the Black Man's Land" (*Racism* 41). Both slogans figured prominently in the efforts of organizations like the Northern Grassroots Leadership Conference, the Freedom Now Party, the Revolutionary Action Movement, the Republic of New Africa, and the Inner City Organizing Committee to implement Chinese, Vietnamese, and Latin American guerilla strategies of military and ideological warfare that insisted upon a geographical base (be it country or city) for the carrying out of revolution.

Attempts to link political tactics to relevant forms of black cultural work also followed Asia's example. Especially influential in this effort was Mao's 1942 "Talks at the Yen-an Forum on Art and Literature." This seminal essay provided a theoretical template for First World radicals to deploy what black arts theoretician Larry Neal called "useable elements of Third World culture" (1963). It motivated black artists and writers in particular to incorporate Maoist ideas and an internationalist perspective into publications and activities formative of the black arts movement in the U.S. Such incorporation is revealed in the torrent of publications, manifestos, books, magazines, newspapers, poems, pamphlets, and journals that literally circulated from Beijing to Detroit to Havana to Hanoi and beyond. These writings describe black arts as an intellectual and textual diaspora of the 1960s. At the same time, the use of literary texts and the printed word as a vehicle for international solidarity underscored political distinctions and differences difficult to overcome. Efforts to equalize such disparate events as the Watts Rebellion of 1965 and the Algerian struggle against French colonialism were often unresolved or concluded in makeshift ideologies and temporary or transient positionings. This gave the Bandung Era its quixotic revolutionary aura of upstart alliances, improvisatory strategies, and synthetic vocabularies for defining Afro-Asian liberation. One example particularly relevant to this essay is the word "black." In their influential writings to be discussed in detail later, groups such as the Revolutionary Action Movement (RAM) came to re-define the term as one of relational *political* (as opposed to racial) meaning. Their call for a "unity of black nationalist (s)" throughout the world defined *revolutionary black internationalism* as a "philosophy of co-operation...It is the philosophy of a common international cultural heritage and identity among all non-European people, that is African, Asian and South American people all have similar if not the same cultural histories and have a common destiny" (*World Literature* 31). RAM's parallel assertion that the "Afro-American revolutionary" is the humanistic "anti-thesis" of the inhuman West counterposed "counter-revolutionary" white hegemony to its revolutionary other (*ibid* 31). This conception of correspondence was a necessary linchpin for bringing Afro-Asian struggles together. It evoked a strategic anti-essentialism meant to delink binaries of racial and political separation (African and Asian/First World and Third/Orient and Occident). Transnational correspondence also became a

means for dialectical understanding of social relations under capitalism internationally and for exposing links in the chain of post-war imperialism and colonialism. Understanding the paradigm of transnational correspondence thus helps to disclose how black and Asian radicals prolonged and re-made the so-called "Bandung Era" into a distinctly black formula for liberation.

The momentous April, 1955, conference of 29 independence-seeking African and Asian nations in Bandung, Indonesia, intended to foster Afro-Asian unity, concluded with specific but limited concrete gains for both. The conference was organized by heads of state of Burma, India, Indonesia, Ceylon, and Pakistan to commemorate recent and ongoing decolonization efforts in Asia and Africa. India's Jawaharlal Nehru had brokered invitations to the event, which included China but not the Soviet Union. The conference featured numerous speeches by Afro-Asian heads of state, including President Achmad Sukarno of Indonesia and China's Zhou Enlai, and concluded with a consensual resolution condemning colonialism "in whatever form it appears" (Kahin 43). Out of the event had come the formation of the Afro-Asian Journalists Association, a network of newspapers and information exchange; the Afro-Asian Writers Bureau, a sister organization; increased economic and political cooperation between China and developing African nations; extended cooperation between African, Asian, and Latin American anti-colonial movements; and follow-up conferences such as the Havana Tricontinental Conference of 1966, which saw the founding of the Organization of Solidarity of the Peoples of Africa, Asia, and Latin America.

Rewards or consequences for African-Americans were more difficult to discern. Limited African-American participation in and reporting of the event, including that by Richard Wright and Adam Clayton Powell, had been framed mainly in terms of the benefits Afro-Asian solidarity might accrue to democratic capitalism or Soviet communism, and the pitfalls of Cold War alliances for African and Asian nations. As Penny Von Eschen and Mary Dudziak have documented, valiant African-American efforts to maintain strategic alliances with socialist, communist or decolonizing movements in Africa and Asia during the 1950s generally were limited in their success by domestic Cold War restraints and recriminations. In particular, restricting the geographical movement of black radicals by refusing them passports (Paul Robeson and W. E. B. DuBois for example) became a crucial way to prevent the construction of anti-colonial bridges.

Robert Williams's example and activities in North Carolina, Cuba, and China came to bear as significant disturbances to this placid framework. As Timothy Tyson has documented, Williams's role in making prominent the range of acts of white terror against African-American citizens in North Carolina in the late 1950s were timely fodder for both African-American activists and U.S. Cold War opponents attempting to destabilize U.S. self-representation of racial democracy. Chinese, Soviet, and other international papers,

for example, as well as African-American and Left newspapers within the U.S., raced to tell the story of Hanover Thompson and Fuzzy Simpson, two young boys criminally accused for kissing a white girl in Monroe in 1957. When Williams took the local NAACP lead in protesting the case, he and his attorney Conrad Lynn were publicly accused of being Communist by Chester Davis, a former FBI agent turned journalist (Tyson 132-33). Williams's conspicuous role as a public challenger to NAACP leadership, however, endeared him to white and black radicals alike, particularly those disinclined towards anti-communism. It also foreshadowed his role in the signal event which revived and described a more prescient internationalism for black radicals in the Bandung era; namely, Williams's much-publicized frame-up, escape, and exile to Cuba after the 1961 uprisings.

Williams, along with Julian Mayfield, Amiri Baraka and others, had through work with Fair Play for Cuba already helped to make the country at least a symbolic outpost of black internationalist hopes. Williams's exile there in 1961 made Cuba an even more tangible sphere of influence as safe harbor for black militants. It gave increased credibility to the Cuban revolution and socialism as viable allies for black domestic struggle. Likewise, it renewed interest among black revolutionaries in Latin American political struggles, particularly the figure of Che Guevara. Williams's outspoken support for China from Cuba also began to warm black ears to that country's call. (Du Bois's exile to Ghana after his 1959 visit to China was a preamble to this, as understood by the editors of *World Literature*.) Williams insisted that black Americans should side with China in the Cold War Sino-Soviet split of the late 1950s ("Sino-Soviet" 26). He argued that China's challenge to Soviet hegemony was tantamount to his own challenge to American racism. The Chinese Revolution also captured the Bandung spirit of political self-determination and non-alignment that incidentally paralleled his own highly independent relationship to both American Left movements like the Socialist Workers Party and more mainstream African-American civil rights struggle. In 1965, discouraged by events in Cuba, Williams accepted an invitation from the Chinese government to live in Beijing. From 1965 to '69, he continued publication of *The Crusader* from Beijing and gave vociferous support to China's revolution. Throughout this period of exile, Williams came to speak to and personify for black radicals what had been important but abstract—and geographically distant—aspects of the anti-colonial struggle, giving them domestic relevance and *gravitas* they had previously lacked.

Equally important to the larger theme of this essay, Williams recognized his exile, as it was recognized within radical U.S. circles, as an example of political and cultural correspondence. Particularly for radicals with Marxist leanings, his exile came to symbolize the idea of black Americans as colonized or internally exiled figures, an Old Left analysis that would be reconfigured in black nationalist theory of the 1960s. Also significant to this essay, Williams began to circulate his ideas on these questions by creat-

ing a new information exchange for black internationalists. He began weekly broadcasts of "Radio Free Dixie" on short wave from Havana, mixing jazz, diatribes about U.S. racism, and inspirational messages drawn from race struggles at home. "Radio Free Dixie" had a circular discursive logic meant to close the gap between himself and America by drawing parallels between his plight in exile and the movement at home. Political sermons and editorials by Albert Cleage, pastor at Central United Church in Detroit, for example, resounded back to American listeners who simultaneously might attend a Cleage-sponsored lecture in Detroit on "Black Nationalism in Jazz" (Smith 172).

From Cuba, Williams also began publishing his own newspaper, *The Crusader*, and sending it back to the U.S. The paper derived its name from the newspaper of the African Blood Brotherhood (ABB), the post-World War I collective of African-American and West Indian Marxists. The ABB drew part of its membership from ex-Garveyites, and comprised the first internationalist black publishing collective in U.S. history. Williams's *Crusader*, available by subscription in the U.S. and distributed with the help of friends in the U.S. and Canada, initially gave uncritically supportive coverage to the Cuban Revolution and Castro. The early *Crusaders* also insisted, without always supporting its claims, that Cuban support for black struggle was implicit in its socialist revolution and its emancipation from four centuries of Western slavery. The paper was read by Civil Rights advocates and radicals of a broad stripe—the *Amsterdam News*, John Killens, the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), Monthly Review Press, and Max Roach were among those listed at one time on Williams's subscription list ("Subscription List")—and was frequently excerpted in other black and left publications back in the U.S.

The impact of Williams's media entrepreneurship as well as his symbolic significance to radicals at home was nowhere more keen than in Detroit. General Baker, later a founder of the League of Revolutionary Black Workers, entered Detroit's black left through participation in the Detroit Robert Williams Defense Committee in 1962. He recalls reading *The Crusader* and hearing "Radio Free Dixie" while attending Wayne State University, where he helped to form UHURU, one of Detroit's first black nationalist collectives. About those years, recalls Baker, "There was a lot of talk about the 1955 Bandung Conference, you know, the nonaligned nations" (qtd in Mast 306). In 1963, Baker was one of 84 Michiganders, 11 of them African-American, who would visit Cuba in part motivated by a desire to visit with Williams. Those from Detroit included Luke Tripp, Charles Simmons, Charles Johnson, and John Watson, all to become members of UHURU and the Detroit League. By 1964, Grace and James Lee Boggs, Richard and Milton Henry, Albert Cleage, Jr., and Dan Georgakas had also either already met with Williams, taken public stands in support of him, read his work, or were basing their own political strategies or thoughts in part on his ideas or example. In addition, other radicals with Detroit affiliations, including Malcolm X, Max Stanford, and Don

Freeman, were developing theories of black nationalism or political liberation heavily influenced by events in Cuba and China, especially after Williams's exile. In a kind of international symbiosis, these radicals made and re-made events there, as they did William's image, in the name of their own grassroots struggle. Simultaneously, their grassroots struggles became easier to imagine as international events via their real, symbolic, and textual attachment to Williams's exile.

For example, on November 9-10, 1963, the Northern Grass Roots Leadership Conference held its first meeting in King Solomon Baptist Church's sanctuary in Detroit (Smith 114). The Conference was occasioned after a split between factions attending the Northern Negro Leadership Conference, arranged by the Detroit Council of Human Rights, in response to events of August and September 1963. Radicals attending the NNLC walked out when the conference refused to discuss two issues: black self-defense and the formation of an all-black political party. The former issue was especially identified with Williams—his self-defense manifesto, *Negroes with Guns*, had been published the previous year. Among the dissidents to split with the Council of Human Rights were Albert Cleage, Grace Boggs, James Boggs, Milton Henry, and Richard Henry. The latter, a brilliant young political entrepreneur, along with his brother, would in 1964 become prominent publishers and organizers of *Now!*, the magazine of the Freedom Now Party. As reported in the November 1963 issue of *Correspondence*, under Grace Boggs editorship at the time, the dissident group from NNLC formed GOAL (Group on Advanced Leadership), a black nationalist organization. GOAL immediately passed a series of resolutions. They included solidarity with colored people across the world, support for black self-defense, the formation of the Freedom Now Party, support for the newly formed International-All Trade Union of the World, and a demand for political asylum for Mae Mallory and Robert Williams—Mallory had been arrested with Williams during the Monroe uprising and was awaiting trial in Ohio (*Correspondence* 1). Boggs, who had written the introduction to the Williams *Correspondence* pamphlet one year earlier, was appointed conference chairman. Malcolm X, who like Williams had given early public support to Castro at speeches in Harlem, spoke in support of both Freedom Now and self-defense resolutions in his well-known speech titled "Message to the Grass Roots" (*Speaks* 14). An intellectual bridge between Malcolm and Williams was provided by GOAL President Richard Henry, whose background paper for the conference was titled "Violence and Non-Violence: The Theory of Proportioned Guerilla War" (*Correspondence* 2). The essay analogized local urban strategies for revolution with guerilla campaigns in South Asia and Africa, a recurring subject of Williams's writings from Cuba, and Malcolm's speeches in the U.S. Another GOAL background paper was prepared by Harold Cruse, then a staff writer for Daniel Watts's important New York paper *The Liberator*. Cruse's 1962 essay "Revolutionary Nationalism and the Afro-American" had already

established him as a major influence on young black radicals like Max Stanford and Don Freeman. Reflecting his own previous readings of Marxist-Leninist-Maoism, and the influence of Fanon, Cruse's essay for the Grassroots Conference attacked the "cultural situation" in the U.S. and insisted that "no one in America today is able to make culture a political question but the Negro. Hence the Negro's political and economic revolution must be a cultural revolution at the same time" (qtd. in *Correspondence* 2).

As these disparate activities suggest, for black radicals seeking to synthesize and locate local black struggles in an international context, the Detroit Grassroots Conference was a kind of second, domestic Bandung. The conference moved the question of black struggle from one of civil rights to taking black power and broadened geographical consideration of black struggle from North-South to include hemispheric struggles. It raised more seriously than ever before the question of the relationship between black politics and culture, and the relationship of each to international forms of struggle. For perhaps the first time within the newly emerging black left, it also clearly demarcated a "reformist" versus "revolutionary" line. At the same time, organizers pledged allegiance to neither the Communist Party-USA nor Soviet-model socialism, while distancing themselves from black and white reformist struggles or capitalist democracy. The position intentionally mirrored China's (and the Third World's) own relationship to conventional Cold War international alignments.

Indeed by the end of 1963, it seemed as if 100 black flowers were in bloom. Of them, none was more demonstrative of the new transnational correspondence sought by Afro-Asian radicals in Detroit and other northern U.S. cities than the Revolutionary Action Movement. Though Robin Kelley and Thomas Blair have written more extensively about RAM than any other U.S. scholars, the full history of the organization has yet to be disclosed. The most complete published account of RAM exists as Maxwell C. Stanford's (a.k.a. Muhammed Ahmed) 1986 M.A. Thesis, "Revolutionary Action Movement (RAM): A Case Study of An Urban Revolutionary Movement in Western Capitalist Society." RAM initially drew together young radicals from SNCC, Marxist organizations, and black student leaders at Central State University in Ohio. According to Stanford, the idea for RAM first began to develop in 1961 when news of Williams's flight into exile reached movement circles. Stanford, Don Freeman—a student at Case Western Reserve College—and several black colleagues organized an off-campus chapter of Students for a Democratic Society called Challenge at Central State. Drawing largely from the writings of Williams and Harold Cruse, Freeman and Stanford decided to organize RAM (Revolutionary Action Movement) and to initiate direct action protest in an effort to create a black working class nationalist movement (*RAM*). RAM's development was assisted by Mrs. Ethel Johnson, a co-worker of Williams's in Monroe who had moved to Philadelphia. Stanford says she helped organize RAM and become a member of its central committees, training young

RAM members. She was assisted by Queen Mother Audley Moore, a former Communist who organized the African-American Party of National Liberation in 1963. The party formed a provisional government with Williams elected premier in exile (RAM). Stanford also visited Williams in Cuba in 1963, where he intersected briefly with General Baker and the Michigan contingent. By the end of 1963, Stanford had recruited several hundred members into RAM.

In February 1964, four months after the NNLC, Williams published the essay "Revolution Without Violence?" in *The Crusader*. The essay criticized nonviolence as a civil rights strategy. It cited the "noble patriots of Concord, Lexington, Valley Forge" and Harper's Ferry as examples of "righteous violence" appropriate to combating attacks on black martyrs like William Moore, Medger Evers and the children of Birmingham. Williams then described a concept of "lightning campaigns conducted in highly sensitive urban communities with the paralysis reaching the small community and spreading to the farm area" ("Revolution" 5). The same issue included a report on China and an excerpt from Mao's statement in support of black liberation. Williams's essay inspired Stanford and Freeman to call for an all-black student conference to discuss armed self-defense and black nationalism in the south. Stanford went to Detroit to raise money for the conference, where he met with James and Grace Lee Boggs and discussed Williams's essay. Boggs also asked Stanford to write an essay on RAM that was later printed in *Correspondence*. From there Stanford went south to recruit SNCC field workers to attend the conference, held May 1-4, 1964, at Fisk University. The Afro-American Student Conference on Black Nationalism was, in Stanford's words, "the ideological catalyst that eventually shifted the civil rights movement into the Black Power movement" (Stanford). The conference was titled "The Black Revolution's Relationship to the Bandung World." According to Stanford, the conferees agreed to "translate" nationalist ideology into effective action (Stanford). Their "strategy of chaos," in the words of Detroit's Cleage, included controlling black neighborhoods, training and disciplining young cadres, and making young black radicals the vanguard of revolution (qtd. in Stanford). The conference also adopted thirteen points of implementation, mostly aimed at internationalizing black struggle. It "united" with African, Asian, and Latin American Revolutions and sought to gain their financial support; it adopted Williams as leader-in-exile; it described its philosophy as "Pan-African Socialism"; it called for the creation of a national public organ, *Black America*; finally, as Du Bois, William Patterson and Paul Robeson had done ten years earlier, RAM charged genocide against U.S. imperialism (Stanford).

From 1964 to about 1968, RAM existed as groupings of "cells" primarily in Oakland, Detroit, Philadelphia, Cleveland, and New York. Circumspectness then and now about the nature and structure of its work, or its degree of cohesion, makes it difficult to make definitive statements about its success or effectiveness. What can be traced is a fairly close symbiotic relationship between

Williams's program-in-exile and RAM's internal response to U.S. political events. RAM functioned as a kind of translator, or at times transcriber, of Williams's ideas about race and revolution. For example, it frequently reprinted parts or all of essays by Williams first published in *The Crusader* in its journal *Black Power*. These included his "U.S.A: The Potential of a Minority Revolution" and an excerpt from "On Black Self-Defense," published in a compendium of writings titled "Roots of Revolutionary Nationalism" in the Fall 1964 issue (*Black Power*, 9). The same issue also included "Greetings to Our Militant Vietnamese Brothers" by Max Stanford. Reminiscent of Ho Chi Minh and Frederick Douglass, the essay used the occasion of American independence—July 4—to congratulate the Vietnamese Front of National Liberation for their victories against U.S. imperialism. "We hope that our solidarity will encourage our brothers in South Vietnam and the world over to intensify their revolutionary efforts so that in the near future, all of us will be able to meet and lay the basis for a new world society in which all forms of colonialism and exploitations" will be abolished ("Greetings" 21).

Williams, who received at least some issues of *Black America* in both Cuba and China, embodied RAM's ersatz wish of an Afro-Asian communion when he appeared in Hanoi from November 25 to 29 at the International Conference for Solidarity with the People of Vietnam Against U.S. Imperialist Aggression and for the Defense of Peace. Sixty-four delegations and 169 representatives from fifty countries attended the conference. Also present were representatives from the Association of Afro-Asian Writers, the Japan Afro-Asian Solidarity Committee, the Association of Afro-Asian Journalists, and the Organization of Afro-Asian People's Solidarity, each spawned in the wake of Bandung. Williams identified himself as "chairman-in-exile" of RAM when his turn came to speak, describing the organization as a "united liberation front" (*International* 178). He cast support for "the right of all oppressed people to meet violence with violence" (*Ibid*) and compared U.S. imperialism in Vietnam to the Birmingham church bombings. In symbolic reciprocity, Tran Van Thanh, Head of the Delegation of the South Vietnam National Front for Liberation, spoke in support of struggles against racial discrimination in South Africa and the U.S. (*Ibid* 85). The conference ended with statements against U.S. and Belgian aggression in the Congo, and an "Appeal to the American People" to protest U.S. efforts to widen the war in Vietnam (*Ibid* 428).

Ten months later, the Watts rebellion in Los Angeles provided RAM and Williams an uncanny sequel to their theoretical aspirations at Hanoi. The August, 1965, issue of *Black America* featured a cover dedicated to the rebellion and reprinted two Williams essays: the brief "Urban Guerilla Warfare" and the much longer "USA: The Potential of a Minority Revolution." The latter, very influential on RAM thinking, argued that the "lesson of Monroe" teaches that effective self-defense requires massive organization with central coordination. The essay prescribes acts of sabotage that

black “freedom fighters” might undertake: deploying gasoline fire bombs, using hand grenades, choking gas tanks with sand or sugar, and using long nails driven through boards to slow traffic. Reinforcing his “America is the Black Man’s Battleground” thesis, Williams describes “the complex of cities” like New York, Detroit and Chicago as “convenient for revolutionary nationalists” (8). It also describes warfare techniques for the Black Belt area of the south—Louisiana, Mississippi, Georgia, and South Carolina. It predicted that “[t]he Southern front would shift quickly from guerilla to mobile warfare” (9). The article was followed by a two-page “Notes on the Philosophy of Self-Defense Warfare,” more than a half-dozen quotations from Mao on war and guerilla warfare. The section ended with a single paragraph titled “RAM Philosophy,” which states,

RAM philosophy may be described as revolutionary nationalism, black nationalism or just plain blackism. It is that black people of the world (darker races, black, yellow, brown, red, oppressed peoples) are all enslaved by the same forces. RAM’s philosophy is one of the world black revolution or world revolution of oppressed peoples rising up against their former slavemasters. Our movement is a movement of black people who are coordinating their efforts to create a “new world” free from exploitation and oppression of man to man (“Notes” 12).

The challenge of such political bravado, of course was to delineate between rhetoric and action. Though Williams himself was careful to argue that racial justice, not government overthrow, was the endpoint of his analysis, its front-line view of Watts inflamed RAM’s analysis. “The events in L.A. show we are at war with the United States government,” they wrote in *Black America*.

This shows we are still slaves, i.e. colonial subjects, not citizens denied our rights. . . . As to the international ramifications of this revolt, it further exposes the U.S. as a racist colonialist prison for black people to the Bandung (colored) peoples of the world and shows that the African enslaved in America is not a satisfied “Uncle Tom” waiting to integrate with the racist imperialist beast society, and this shows that we are victims of domestic (internal) colonialism (“National” 3-4).

RAM also underscored the high percentage of ghetto youth in the Watts’ uprising:

We see youth all over the world leading the revolutions of our people. In the Angolan liberation army the soldier’s age range is 17-20; in the

Congo's guerilla force called "Youth" the age range is 14-20; in the Viet Cong the age range is 14-19; in Kenya the Mau Mau was started by roving bands of youth. In Cuba Castro's forces were very young. (Ibid 5)

RAM's analysis of the events in Watts was consistent with its programmatic conceptualization of race, revolution, nationalism, propaganda, and paramilitary planning. The fullest demonstration of these ideas lies in its essay "The World Black Revolution," first published in 1965. The thirty-page pamphlet, with a cover photograph of Mao and Robert Williams, is perhaps the most complex and synthetic document on black liberation of the Bandung Era. Its primary theoretical and political aim was to find a new conception of world revolution to replace Marxism, and a new revolutionary agent in history to replace the industrial proletariat. Methodically, if eclectically, the essay pursues this end. Opening with an echo of the *Communist Manifesto*—"All over Africa, Asia, South, Afro, and Central America a revolution is haunting and sweeping" ("World" 3)—the essay proclaims that "[T]he principle contradiction in the world is between imperialism, particularly U.S. imperialism and the colonies, between the haves and the have nots" (Ibid). Du Bois's "color line" thesis and Lin Piao's writings on imperialism are cited to argue that caste, not class, is the primary source of this contradiction (Ibid 4; 6). The Indian Marxist, M. N. Roy, is credited with disproving Lenin's imperialism thesis by claiming that the colonies, not the European working-class, are the proper vanguard of world revolution (Ibid 4). Historical evidence is most compelling in China's 1949 liberation, the event that, for RAM and most anti-colonialists, represented the dawning of the Bandung Era. History, then, has come full circle after Watts: it is now the "black underclass," understood as the corresponding colored nations across the globe, who must carry the world black revolution forward (Ibid 6). The essay's cultural perspective is Afrocentric—"God is not white but Black, Jesus was a Black African organizing other Black Africans" (Ibid 7)—reflecting the possible influence of Cleage's liberation Christianity. The essay also recalls Du Bois's writings on African socialism, suggesting the reorganization of society along "communalist" lines (Ibid 14). Other influences include Mao, Nkrumah, Fanon, and Malcolm X's 1963 Grassroots Conference speech, cited directly in the text: "All the revolutions going on in Asia and Africa today are based on Black Nationalism . . . If you're afraid of Black Nationalism, you're afraid of revolution and if you love revolution, you love Black Nationalism, you love revolution" (Ibid 18).

The last third of RAM's essay proposes to demonstrate the three most significant influences on the black struggle for national liberation and "the internationalizing of its intelligentsia and broad masses" (Ibid 20): Robert Williams, Malcolm X, and Elijah Muhammad. Despite this claim, almost all of the citations in the essay that follow are credited to Williams. The essay excerpts

lengthy passages from his *Crusader* articles “Revolution Without Violence?” “The Potential of a Minority Revolution—Pt 1,” and “The Potential of a Minority Revolution—Pt 2.” Other citations are given to Mao’s “Statement in Support of Black American,” and two essays by James Boggs, “Black Power: A Scientific Concept Whose Time Has Come” and “Integration and Democracy: Two Myths That Have Failed,” the latter originally published in the Fall 1964 *Black America* (Ibid 4-5). The essay concludes by calling for a black secretariat (intelligentsia) that can help form the guidelines for all black revolutionary internationalists to be organized in a “central international revolutionary action movement” (Ibid 32; emphasis mine). “This movement in order to be successful would have to organize a People’s liberation army on a world scale to complete the world black revolution and to thoroughly [sic] defeat and annihilate [sic] all vestiges [sic] of counter-revolution” (32).

It is tempting to dismiss the autodidactic ambitions of RAM, and—to an extent—Williams, particularly since it is difficult to know how much the latter sanctioned the interpretation of his ideas by the former. Yet their contingent relationship is itself an important indicator of the quest between distant allies to articulate proximity and likeness in what they perceive as revolutionary situations. In coming to understand this dilemma for themselves, African-American radicals after 1965, and what can be determined their Asian counterparts began to look for even greater specificity in the objective conditions underlying their search for political correspondence. In Detroit, the deepening economic problems in the city, the intensification of U.S. war efforts in Vietnam, and the outbreak of China’s Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution in 1966 inspired new organizational approaches to questions of politics and culture. Veterans of the Grassroots Leadership Conference of 1963, for example, founded the Inner City Organizing Committee (ICOC) in the Fall of 1966. The ICOC adopted a founding Constitution on October 2, which likened the conditions of Detroit residents to the “dispossessed of the earth” (“Inner” 1). The ICOC sought to provide black Detroiters with a “consciousness of . . . history and social identity” and to “encourage cultural activities” intended to carry out the “complete and human reorganization of human life” (Ibid 3). The echoes of what RAM had called in 1965 “Bandung Humanism” were not accidental. James Boggs, a founder of the ICOC, was a key advisor and contributor to RAM in Detroit, and, according to Max Stanford, served briefly as “ideological chairman.” Bandung Humanism was a theory of self and social transformation borrowing from Mao the notion that “human nature” was a bourgeois fallacy to be dispatched by a total transformation of society: “Genuine love of mankind will be born only when class distinctions have been eliminated throughout the world” (260). In 1965, after its second Afro-American Student Movement Conference, RAM laid out its fullest conception of this idea in the essay “The Relationship of Revolutionary Afro-American Movement to the Bandung Revolution.” The essay was a kind of companion piece to “The World Black Revolution.” It defined

*Bandung Humanism* as a “revolutionary revision of Western or traditional Marxism to relate revolutionary ideology adequately to the unprecedented political, socio-economic, technological, psycho-cultural developments occurring in the post World War II era” (11). The essay described Bandung Humanism, or its synonym, “Revolutionary Black Internationalism,” as the synthesis of the conflict between the “Yanqui” imperialist thesis and the anti-imperialist humanist Bandung antithesis. The precondition for the latter is a “socialist ‘classless’ world democracy” intent on destroying oppression of all forms (ibid). The prophetic mission of Bandung Humanism, the essay argued, was implicit in the modernist music of Bird, Miles and John Coltrane. “The task of the Revolutionary Afro-American Movement,” it wrote, “is to express via political action the dynamism embodied in Afro-American music” (ibid).

The Detroit Inner City Organizing Committee’s call for a cultural reorganization of black life also had roots in both the work of the Facing Reality Group, which had written and published numerous essays on American culture in *Correspondence*, as well as the example of Detroit’s evolving black literary culture. The January, 1963, issue of *Correspondence*, for example, included a “Special Emancipation Supplement on Black Art” (Smethurst 7). At least twelve of Dudley Randall’s early poems were published in *Correspondence*. Many had come out of writers’ workshops at Boone House founded by former Chicago-poet Margaret Danner. Other participants at Boone House included Naomi Madgett (whom Randall would also later publish with Broadside), Oliver LaGrond, Ed Simplins, Harold Lawrence, James Thompson, and Woodie King (Thompson 26). In 1962, Detroit’s Rosey E. Pool, a Dutch-born Leftist, published the anthology *Beyond the Blues: New Poems by American Negroes* with The Hand and Flower Press in England. *Beyond the Blues* was an exceptional collection of poetry in several ways: it included work by important precursive poets, many with ties to the Old Left or Communist Party, including Margaret Walker, Langston Hughes, Claude McKay, Sterling Brown, Robert Hayden, Waring Cuney, Countee Cullen, Arna Bontemps, Gwendolyn Brooks, and Owen Dodson; at the same time the book was the first anthology to gather poets who would become by the end of the 1960s emblematic of the black arts Movement nationally: Mari Evans, Dudley Randall, Calvin Hernton, Ted Joans, Madgett, Audre Lorde, and Leroi Jones (a.k.a. Amiri Baraka). Poole’s anthology preceded and anticipated the explosion of literary anthologies during the Black Arts Movement nationally (for example, Langston Hughes’s 1964 *New Negro Poets U.S.A.*; John Henrik Clarke’s 1964 *Harlem U.S.A.*; Abraham Chapman’s 1968 *Black Voices*; Larry Neal and Amiri Baraka’s 1970 *Black Fire*; and Toni Cade’s 1970 *The Black Woman*). It also signaled the connection between writing as collective enterprise and publishing, something foreshadowed by 1930s organizations like the Communist Party’s John Reed Clubs and journals and Richard Wright’s South Side Writers’ Group.

This communal cultural ethos reached its apotheosis in Randall’s

founding of Broadside Press in 1965; Randall described the goal of Broadside as bringing “poetry to the people” (qtd. in Thompson 28). His first two Broadside, “Ballad of Birmingham” and “Dressed All in Pink” sold for less than 50 cents and were published with twelve dollars paid out of Randall’s pocket (ibid). Randall’s first collection of Broadside, “Poems of the Negro Revolt,” included work by Robert Hayden, Margaret Walker, Melvin Tolson, and Gwendolyn Brooks. Though he claimed retrospectively, and even in his time, to eschew verse that sacrificed form for politics, and continuously published formally complex, experimental verse, strong political themes and social protest are the hallmark of most all Broadside Poetry published between 1965 and 1970. The most significant contribution of Broadside to Detroit’s new cultural politics was its tribute book, *For Malcolm: Poems on the Life and the Death of Malcolm X*, co-edited with Margaret G. Burroughs. Burroughs, a veteran of Chicago’s Old Left and founder of the DuSable Museum in Chicago, had persuaded Randall to visit the Soviet Union with her in 1966. It was there that Randall encountered the Broadside format he was to imitate. James Patterson, a black Russian they met on their visit, would contribute “Ballada o Neizvestnosti” (“Ballad to the Anonymous”) to the Malcolm X anthology. Still other Detroit contributors included ex-Chicagoan and Boone House founder Margaret Danner, collaborator with Randall on the book *Poem/Counterpoem*; Robert Hayden; and a score of writers Randall had already published: Etheridge Knight, Mari Evans, Gwendolyn Brooks, and Sonia Sanchez.

The black arts movement, as it developed in Detroit and other parts of the U.S., also reflected the influence of the writings of Mao Tse-Tung on 1960s black radicals. Mao’s writings were a staple of Detroit radical study groups as early as 1963. Dan Georgakas, for example, recalls that support for China’s revolution and reading of Maoist writings was an article of faith among Detroit radicals, even those who didn’t subscribe to Maoist thought (qtd. in Mast 290). The Boggs’s frequently cited Mao’s essays, particularly “On Contradiction,” in their written work and in Detroit study circles. An even more widely studied and debated essay was Mao’s “Talks at the Yen’an Forum,” a speech delivered on May 23, 1942, during the national war with Japan. There, Mao raised two questions fundamental to national cultural struggles directly relevant to participants in the U.S. black arts movement. The first, “For whom are our art and literature intended?” (247), was fundamental to efforts of black arts entrepreneurs like Amiri Baraka in New Jersey and Woodie King in Detroit to develop independent black theater companies for the staging of black-authored plays, as well as for publishers like Randall aspiring to black-owned publishing ventures. Mao’s second question, “How to serve,” was fundamentally one of aesthetics: “Should we devote ourselves to elevation or to popularisation?” (252). Mao’s Yen’an essay argued for both: “What we demand is unity of politics and art,” wrote Mao, “of content and form, and of the revolutionary political content and the highest

possible degree of perfection in artistic form. . . .We must carry on a two-front struggle in art and literature" (259). Writers and artists, he argued, were to comprise a companion cultural "front" to the first-line military front in the war with Japan. Revolutionary art and literature was then to be judged "on the basis of actual life and help the masses to push history forward" (254).

Examples of black translation and interpretation of Mao's "Yenan" theory for U.S. black arts are evident across the spectrum of 1960s black writings and speeches on culture. To begin with one remote example, in 1967, Robert Williams spoke in Beijing to commemorate the twenty-fifth anniversary of Mao's Yenan talk. Williams noted the capacity of the U.S. to use the "medium of seductive culture" in order to enact ideological war against black Americans ("Yenan" 1). As would Larry Neal, Sonia Sanchez, Amiri Baraka, and other founders of U.S. black arts, he attacked denigrating and racist images of blacks in radio and television and argued that black writers must create a "new revolutionary approach to propaganda" (3). He cited as example "progressive new protest jazz," "bold new works . . . in mushrooming community art galleries," and all-black "People's Theater," such as Frank Greenwood's Los Angeles staging of "If We Must Live," an adaptation of events of the Monroe rebellion titled after Claude McKay's 1919 sonnet (Ibid). Williams's also gave a Bandung cast to U.S. black arts: He urged black writers in the U.S. to "work directly with the Afro-Asian writers association" in order to understand the "mores, customs, traditions and history of the oppressed peoples of the world" (Ibid). The intent of black and Afro-Asian Art, Williams wrote, was to "serve to stimulate revolutionary zeal" and to become the "trigger mechanism to detonate the explosion of rebellion" (Ibid).

This same Yenan spirit can be seen in two important black arts conferences of 1966 and 1967 held in Detroit. The 1966 Black Arts Conference was organized by the Inner City Organizing Committee, under the direction of Albert Cleage, and Forum 66, a forum on black culture at the Dexter Avenue bookstore hosted by Edward Vaughn (Smith 175). The Convention was held from June 25 to 26 at Cleage's Central United Church to coincide with the 1966 Black Writers Conference at Fisk University, also attended by Dudley Randall. It included panel discussions of literature, featuring a presentation by Randall, and a panel on community activism led by Grace Lee Boggs (Ibid). The conference agenda included an appeal to create new jobs, community control of black schools, the end of a military draft until black service equaled its population proportion, and a training program for youth leaders ("Inner City " 1). James and Grace Boggs, who helped to draft it, attempted to link the political platform for the conference to the creation of "new social values" that might form the basis of a revolutionary national culture:

A people building a national movement needs the conviction that history is on their side and ulti-

mate victory is certain because as a people they have an inherent dignity which no amount of brutalization and degradation can destroy. It is not oppression which destroys people. It is the acceptance of oppression.

A people building a national movement also needs the conviction that they are creating new social values among themselves. When an individual joins the movement, he must know that he is not doing it just for his own selfish ends but that he has put individualism behind him in order to join a new brotherhood dedicated to changing the world (Ibid).

The Boggs' dialectical analysis of the relationship between personal values and political practice reflected another theme of Mao's Yenan address, namely the relationship between the philosophic (ideal) and the mechanical: "Idealists stress motive and ignore effect," wrote Mao, "while mechanical materialists stress effect and ignore motive; in contradistinction from either, we dialectical materialists insist on the unity of motive and effect" (258). In cultural terms, Mao's dialectics insisted that the artist understand his labor as part of national political struggle. Each of these aspect of "two-front struggle" was sharply in evidence one year later, from June 29 to July 2, when Forum 66 hosted Detroit's 1967 Black Arts Conference, again at Cleage's Central United. The conference featured a literature workshop with Randall, Nikki Giovanni, and John O. Killens. Liberator editor Daniel Watts was a featured speaker (Smith 191). Organizers of the conference described it as the nexus of a cultural and political rebirth: "The Black Arts Conference," they wrote, "meets in Detroit at a historical crossroads in the development of the black liberation struggle in America. For the first time in the history of this continent the cry of black power now echoes nationally from South to North, from East to West and back again" ("Black Arts" 1). It continued,

At this historical juncture, it is a matter of life and death that we reject the road of black idealism, based on sentiment and self-agitation, and embark resolutely on the road of black realism, projecting a vision of black power and analyzing scientifically where, how and when it can be achieved.

Power means state power or that control of the political apparatus of a given government unit (be it the nation, the state, the county or the city) which guarantees control of economic, military (i.e. army, national guard, police or sheriff) and informational resources. For black people in America the struggle for this power begins at the county level in the South and the big city level in

the North, where we have or will soon have a majority, giving us the legitimacy not only of social need and social force but also of historical right (Ibid).

The 1967 Black Arts Conference called for three things: a vision of a new society initiated by black political rule, mass community organizations, and a cadre organization dedicated to the realization of black political power and conscious of the necessity to defend itself and the community “in these years of the gun” (Boggs, Box 19, Folder 4). Two points significant to this essay merit attention here. First, the conference’s numerous direct echoes of Maoism, including Mao’s Yenan plea that “man’s social life” constitutes the true subject for art—discloses the ways that BAC organizers saw the role of the black artists to “create art and literature that can awaken and arouse the masses and impel them to unite and struggle to change their environment” (Mao 254). Second, the agenda confirms the degree to which Detroit’s black arts movement was perhaps more than in any other American city wedded to questions of political economy and political praxis. Indeed, only twenty-one days after the 1967 BAC, the “Year of the Gun” exploded in Detroit: 43 people were killed and millions of dollars of damage incurred during one of the most extensive urban rebellions in U.S. history. Just as organizers like James and Grace Boggs were falsely accused in Detroit of starting the riots (they were traveling in California when the riots broke out) so it would be ridiculous to “blame” the organizers of the 1967 BAC for the Detroit rebellion. Rather, the 1967 BAC, like its predecessor, disclosed still another form of transnational correspondence central to Detroit’s Bandung Era, this one the search for a political aesthetic worthy of capturing and altering the objective conditions of urban crisis.

In fact, the Detroit rebellions of July, 1967, only deepened the relationship between the political and the cultural in Detroit. In September, 1967, John Watson and other members of the black nationalist group UHURU assumed the editorship of the *Inner City Voice*, a new monthly newspaper. According to Dan Georgakas, it was while studying with Facing Reality veteran Marty Glaberman that John Watson and other UHURU members had read Lenin’s pamphlets and come to appreciate the importance of a revolutionary press (qtd. in Mast 292). The paper itself echoed the name of the Inner City Organizing Committee and granted ICOC founding member James Boggs his own column in the paper, “Birth of a Nation.” The *ICV* quickly became paradigmatic of the quest by Detroit radicals to place African-American liberation struggle at the center of an internationalist cultural politics rooted in local conditions. James Boggs’s October 20, 1967, column compared the 1967 rebellion in Detroit to the Santo Domingo revolt in Haiti, and the crackdown of Detroit police to French and British colonial rule (“Birth, 3). The article “Robert Williams Challenges U.S. Ban” reports on Williams’s own *Crusader* article written from Beijing protesting the U.S. postal service’s recent decision to stop circulat-

ing the paper, labeling it subversive (in subsequent issues the *ICV* frequently printed columns from *The Crusaders* it still received as a service to others whose subscriptions were interrupted) ("Inner City Voice" 2). The same issue also included Charles Johnson's review of Frantz Fanon's *Black Skins, White Masks*, and reported on the frame-up of 16 members of RAM charged with plotting to kill Roy Wilkins and Whitney Young. The story was co-authored by Charles Johnson and Dan Georgakas, who had met Baker and other *ICV* founding members through the Robert Williams Defense Committee in 1962. The following issue of the paper, November 16, featured the first of Stu House's "Third World Report" columns criticizing "radical-turned-Uncle-Tom" Eric Williams, president of Trinidad, for refusing to allow Stokeley Carmichael to speak there. In that same issue, the paper reported on Carmichael's recent speech in Algeria, and a rally in Brazzaville, Congo, against U.S. imperialism in Africa and Vietnam; carried an informational article on Che Guevara; and included an inspirational photo of China's Red Guard, meant to support and encourage efforts of RAM to recruit Detroit youth to its "Black Guard," a disciplined cadre of potential revolutionaries.

James Boggs articulates the editorial intent of *ICV*'s coverage in a February 29, 1968, column titled "The International." "The new International for the world black revolution," wrote Boggs, "has been in the process of birth ever since the Bandung conference of 1954 . . . But since the vast majority of Bandung nations were more anxious to be neutralists than revolutionists in the conflict between Russia and the United States, they could not be the nucleus of the new International. Instead they became vulnerable to the fragmentation by the counter-revolution in the form of neo-colonialism and foreign aid" ("Birth," 6). Boggs in turn declared the National Liberation Front in Vietnam as the forerunner of a new revolutionary vision, and argued for China's proletarian revolution as the center of the a new International from which might emerge "the highest development of the colonial peoples in their struggle against colonialism and to build a new society" (Ibid). The *ICV* also carried ads inviting membership in a new organization, COBRA (COalition of Black Revolutionary Artists). Given that the March, 1968, issue of *ICV* reports on plans for a "People's War" in Detroit meant to prepare black readers for the invasion of a white army, the paper leaves little doubt that it imagined the Motor City as the Western world's corresponding center to Asia's black revolution.

At the same time, the paper became an important outlet for supporting Detroit's national black arts profile. It published Newark Black Arts poet LeRoi Jones's seminal poem "Black Art" in its December 15, 1967, issue. Detroit Black Arts poet Gloria House contributed poems to the paper, as did RAM member Rolland Snelling (Askia Touré). The paper also published favorable articles or reviews of novelist John O. Killens (later to live in China); Piri Thomas, author of *Down These Mean Streets*; and the visual artist Glanton Dowell. Even Williams was symbolically adopted by the *ICV* into Detroit's black arts movement. The December 1967 issue

of *The Crusader* had featured one of Williams's occasional forays into poetry, the acidly witty "The Nationalist Anthem," which opens with this signifying stanza:

Oh, say can you see by the devil's dim light  
 What so proudly he hailed at his twilight's last  
 gleaming?  
 Whose blood stripes and deep scars, thru our per-  
 ilous fight  
 O'er the ramparts they watched so arrogantly  
 dreaming

"The Nationalist Anthem" set to rhyme the prevailing RAM theme that "white" or reactionary nationalism must be stridently opposed by its progressive black opposite or antithesis. The poem was subsequently reprinted, along with Williams's parodic poem "America the Bruteful," in the September 9, 1969, issue of *Sauti*, the single-issue of the *Voice* to appear under this temporary name ("Sauti," 13). The especially long journey of Williams's poetry from Beijing to Detroit was mirrored in the reverse routes taken by African-American writing into the Asian radical press overseas. For example, the March 6, 1968, issue of *Red Flag*, the paper of the Ceylon Communist Party, reprinted Williams's December 1967 *Crusader* essay "Why I Propose to Return to Racist America." The March 1968 issue also published the revolutionary poet Sonia Sanchez's protest poem "Buy American." Sanchez had already published poems with Randall's Broadside Press. "Buy American" was an equally acid parody of twentieth-century Americanism:

buy american cars  
 all you unamerican  
 looking negroes  
 buy now and  
 save yourselves  
 the frustration of  
 calling taxis  
 that never stop  
 for you men  
 moving in darkness.  
 so buy now  
 and pay later  
 for the pleasure  
 of riding to your  
 own ghettos  
 where all white  
 taximen never go  
 buy now  
 and defeat  
 bigotry  
 in america.

*Red Flag's* unique but not isolated positioning of African-American literature as a companion to Ceylonese liberation struggles helps to disclose how Afro-Asian revolutionaries of the 1960s re-envisioned not only second Bandungs but second Yenans, where culture could serve the long international march to freedom. *Red Flag*, *World Literature*, *Correspondence*, *The Crusader*, Broadside Press, *Black America*, and *The Inner City Voice* constituted the informal, discrete, yet global association of Afro-Asian writers Robert Williams had called for in his 1967 anniversary speech on Yenans. Where African-American writers could not and did not participate in the Afro-Asian Writers's associations that emerged in the wake of the 1955 Bandung meeting, these publications nonetheless functioned as the best available means for imagining a world literature that would, at the very least, be faithful to the Bandung spirit.

What can be learned about the vectors of Afro-Asian radicalism from Detroit in the Bandung Era? Transnational correspondence became an effective if contingent means for expanding the geographic and temporal moment of 1955 into an ongoing set of textual and political practices. It established new international linkages for the distribution of ideas, new cultural forms and ventures, particularly in publishing, and gave black literary culture an international stage of expression. It was also responsible for a powerful reconfiguration of what comprised "local" struggle, even as it made onerous, complex, and direct the charge made famous by the Situationists to "act locally, think globally." That said, the ideological pressures brought to bear by corresponding transnationalism produced weak links in the chain of Bandung-era internationalism, particularly as it faced the logistics of political response. Maoist ethics, a bedrock of "Bandung Humanism," took on a pedantic and at times fundamentalist cast when translated into discourses of black struggle. What RAM called the "psycho-cultural" dimension of Bandung Humanism was more cogently argued and applied in Fanon's *Black Skin, White Masks* than in any theoretical statement of U.S. black liberation during the Bandung Era. Afro-Asianism also rebuffed racist essentialism and colonial dominion at the same time as it often relied on fixed, contradictory and often rudimentary ideas about race. The same might indeed be said of geographical place: ideological re-mappings of the anti-colonial world oftentimes partook of facile correspondence between politically and geographically distant points and radically different objective conditions for revolutionary struggle. Working with limited information, and handicapped by surveillance, arrest, and repression, efforts to find simultaneity and similarity often obliterated crucial economic questions of uneven economic development, varying forms of statehood, means of production, and ideological conditions. Too, the presumption that military strategies and scenarios could be retrofitted merely by analogizing place was at odds with fundamental tenets of warfare, not least of which being the willingness to fight, for whom, and for how long.

Thus perhaps a more lasting legacy of transnational correspondence lies in its contribution to the evolution of what might be called “new Afro-Asian cultural politics.” This legacy is best understood as an aspect of black cultural nationalism, whose contours were re-fashioned during the 1970s in the wake of the Bandung Era when artists and writers like Amiri Baraka turned to deeper analysis of Maoism. Revolutionary Afro-Asian cultural politics sought strategic linkages in the interstices between national self-determination, black liberation theory, and a black aesthetic. Herb Boyd, who studied Marxist theory with the Boggs’s while working at the Jazz Research Institute at Wayne State, recalls his own shuttling between radical study groups and the musical avant-garde as a means of moving between and thereby erasing the distance between political and cultural work. “We thought there was no division among politics, economics, and culture,” remembers Boyd in *Detroit Lives*, “and we were trying to bring them all together. Similarly, we thought there should be no division between the academy and the community. We tried to knock the barriers down. . . . Maybe the bridge would be Malcolm X to some degree and John Coltrane to another degree. Political and cultural change fed each other. But there is a lot of hit and miss. It’s like jazz. We were improvising” (qtd. in Mast 80). Boyd’s hit and miss search for correspondence recalls how still other Afro-Asian revolutionaries of the Bandung Era perceived John Coltrane’s turn to Asian music and Malcolm’s Haj as connected, not discrete, points on the map of 1960s struggle. This legacy of liberation survives into our time as a key remnant of the Bandung Era. Contemporary Asian-American musician Fred Ho, for example, joined I Wor Kuen in the early 1970s, an Asian-Pacific-American analogue to the Black Panther Party. From out of his work has come a Third World aesthetic in his Afro-Asian Music Ensemble recordings and writings on Afro-Asian history. Black Louisiana poet Kalamu ya Salaam, influenced by the anti-colonial writings of Amílcar Cabral, the work of the Republic of New Africa, and his membership in the Congress of Afrikan Peoples, traveled to China in 1977 to promote all-black cultural institutions while acknowledging China’s support for black liberation struggles (interview). Today, Ho and Salaam’s Afro-Asian Arts Dialogue, a performance and educational outreach program, attempts to preserve the spirit of 1960s black arts as well as the Bandung Humanist spirit of organizations like RAM. Still other vectors of the radical descending from the Bandung Era include the important recent academic work on the subject of Afro-Asian politics and culture by scholars like Vijay Prashad, renewed interest among Afro-Asian musicians and cultural workers in contact zones between hip hop and martial arts, and reconsiderations of both multiculturalist paradigms and “hybridity” theory in light of more radical Third World anti-imperialist politics fostered out of a dialectical, rather than identitarian understanding of cross-ethnic affiliations.<sup>4</sup> These contemporary moments suggest a circular and recursive power to Bandung Era innovations and discoveries. They acquire special luster and significance as a rhetoric of globalization

comes to stand in for many of the terms the Bandung Era made household names—imperialism, internationalism, and solidarity most prominent among them. To this list we might tentatively add transnational correspondence. It is up to those interested in confirming or discharging new vectors of the radical to continually test these terms, to complicate and improve our understanding of them, and to find other correspondences between the world from which they emerged and our own.

*The author is grateful for permission to quote from the Robert F. Williams Papers, Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan.*

## Notes

<sup>1</sup>See Robert F. Williams. "China: The Good of the Earth."

<sup>2</sup>See Mahdi.

<sup>3</sup>See Ahmed, "Revolutionary Action Movement (RAM): A Case Study of an Urban Revolutionary Movement in Western Capitalist Society." M.A. Thesis. Atlanta University, 1986.

<sup>4</sup>Prashad's important books on this topic include *The Karma of Brown Folk* (University of Minnesota Press, 2000), a call to U.S. *desis* to combat American racism, particularly against Blacks, and *Everybody Was Kung Fu Fighting: Afro-Asia and the Myth of Cultural Purity* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2001). The latter traces the historical overlaps and interconnections between Blacks and Asians in making and resisting the New World. Prashad's attack on essentialist thinking on race is critical to his assault on liberal multiculturalist appropriations (and erasures) of 'difference' in the service of diversity management. On efforts by Afro-Asian cultural workers, activists and scholars to find and make common ground in the arts, especially music, see *Sounding Off! Music as Subversion/Resistance/Revolution*, Ed. Ron Sakolsky & Fred Wei-Han Ho (New York: Autonomedia, 1995), especially Fred Ho's essay "'Jazz,' Kreolization and Revolutionary Music for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century" (133-146). For good historical accounts of other forms of Afro-Asian organizing during the Bandung Era see also *Legacy to Liberation: Politics and Culture of Revolutionary Asian Pacific America*, Edited by Fred Ho with Carlolyn Antonio, Diane Fujino and Steve Yip, (San Francisco, AK Press, 2000) particularly interviews with Alex Hing, founder of the Red Guard Party and I Wor Kuen, and Richard Aoki.

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## **ABSTRACT:**

Japan's radical student generation was characterized by a profoundly ironic edge, an edge that often turned against that generation. Examining the role of translated European texts, the reception of the youth movement by older generations in Japan, and stubborn survivors such as avant-garde impresario Shuji Terayama, it is discovered that this irony was due to the persistence of romanticism in a decidedly post-romantic age.