

BLACK WEEK

A Celebration Of Black Autonomy

by Angelo Lewis

With winter winds merging with blankets of soft snow, the Black Community of the UoffH did its collective thing last week. We had rapped long and hard in rooms of stone fine conversation and had readied a week of rhetoric & music & poetry for people of color to see. . . Our purpose was twofold: namely, to hip the more conservative elements of our community (some may be as brass as to call them "toms") to what the black community was all about, and, secondly, to expose the community to the rhetoric of revolution roaring from the lips of the prophet to the minds of the everyday people.

And roar it did. Even when the snow had turned our faces to cold. Even when Julius Lester got stranded in Virginia & plane fare made us hassle with Leroi Jones. But Tuesday it began. With steak & baked apples and all the finery of American aristocracy. Mom & apple pie to paint our souls snow white.

But the tribal unit was together. We sat & laughed & talked & were beautiful. And Leroi sitting over there exchanging words with his friends. I remember thinking how uptight he looked as he walked amid white faces to the reception. But now the soft stare revealed a change in mood. He sat down, relaxed, & chewed the soulless food. Brothers & sisters united together fully conscious of their blackness. Making me think how much further a lot of black people have to go to get ready. For the guns of liberation.

After dinner he talked. Strolling very casually to the microphone & standing firm & proud. All very logical, all very rational, all very persuasive. Reaffirming the principles which had become evident to all but a few of us. But Leroi's message was intended to pry the ears loose of those blacks amongst us who refused to listen.

The myth of the melting pot must be laid bare is what he said. Image of America as a power play. Like some fucked-over whore divided amongst different ethnic segments amidst the sweat of continuous tricks. The Jews have the media & the education, the Irish have the police, the Italians have the crime, and the WASP has a little bit of everything. The black man has sweated the police state mechanism into motion. With his sweat, with his tears, and with his blood. His majesty denied, degraded & sold into slavery. Subtle slavery even after the abolition of the institution.

And black power is an expression of autonomy. A direct & rational movement to bring power to the people. And the method is nationalism, or community control of independent tribal units.

And yes, we are Africans. We were systematically displaced from our home land & subjected to a hostile culture by a hostile European people. Our culture was ravaged and our women were raped. And yet we supplied this hostile culture with music & dance. And now the mythical great white father asks theoretical participation, but not actual participation.

But we have denied the ethics of white America. This being the entire backlog of Greco-Roman Judeo-Christian ethics. The barbarous brainwave of bullshit that crisscrossed after Moslems & displaced great masses of black people. And our reaction is nationalism, the resolution of the beauty of our blackness & the affirmation that separation is the only logical means of the restoration of dignity. Liberation by ANY means necessary.

& then Leroi read his poetry. This being an expression of the singular grace & beauty that only a black man can possess. Take off the wig, nigger. Take off the wig & be a man. A black, proud, beautiful man. Totally free from the homosexual existential message of television America. And yes you can shove your absurdity up your ass, whitey.

And speaking of whitey, he just kept on clapping. Kick his ass, rape his woman, take his money & then have a nerve to brag about it, and whitey keeps on clapping. Keep on clapping, whitey. And the revolution shall open your ears & cleanse your soul.

& then the play happened. An original, humorous, satirical attack on American institutions entitled "Jello," & after all that's all America is. A decaying structure of corporate capitalism in five different flavors. Dig it. You might as well laugh about America. The quiet before the storm is all it is.

& Wednesday, I read my poetry. A celebration of a black man's art. Reaffirming the role of the black artist as defined by Leroi Jones. Get the people ready & hip them to the rhetoric. Perhaps only black people could really have heard my words. Perhaps only they can understand what ethnic cultural shock is all about.

And at about 9:30, the Elliott Dixon Quintet minus one did its thing. The controversial Mr. Dixon where he feels most at home. Despite all the violent words, his music flows in a river of gentleness. But we are gentle people. We react only when our dignity is attacked. With the pistols that we've been saving in our streets. Yes. Dixon was beautiful. And did you catch that beautiful brother on the piano. A gentle kind of Tynor playing freely on the keys. Dixon, was beautiful. Farting up black sounds into a stoned needle night. Celebrating blackness through a golden reed.

& then, as far as most of us were concerned, the whole thing was over. An establishment nigger had been hired to mellow our message. Off the wall folk-song shit. But maybe I'm being a little harsh. After all the man was black. And the people of color hold majesty within them. Needless to say I didn't catch his gig. But his music, as I have heard it, is distinctly & independently a part of our thing. A part of a worldwide black thing casting sound into the silence.

Get together brother & sisters. The seeds of liberation have been planted on your streets. The rhetoric of revolution has opened your virgin ears & made you listen. Electric savage on the red calm of the Atlantic dawn. Autonomous & totally free.



"Leroi Jones,

On Our Ears"

by Jim O'Dell

Hand over lips and mouth, hub a hub so cool in the corner of the room, waiting for LeRoI Jones, these bodyguards are so confident, so assured, so suave that they bring a vote of danger and a sense of witnessing great power to the evening. People in the audience, turning and greeting friends like in church, hello with the eyes, paired hands, sounds of skin slapping skin, shine of black leather on black backs -- it is like a service in a church of the street, Dean Sweeney in the corner, looking concerned, fatherly, talking kindly, with the black receptionist. And the afros, afros all over the audience and in the aisles, worn as in a celebration -- proudly. People combing their hair out before coming into the room, afro wigs on some women. Then a hush, silence, as a door in the back of the room opens, some tall blacks in darkiki's and skull-caps come out, not LeRoI Jones -- back to the crowd; it's late starting, of course, people enjoying the scene, their friends, their people. Crowd a mixture of well dressed, wealthy blacks, a spot of perfume, maroon Bellevue Square warm-up jackets, lots of young blacks leaning back, quiet in their chairs.

The body-guards at the door snap alert and all-seeing, and LeRoI Jones, in black tunic, comes in, followed by more brothers very cool in shades. Jones walks up to the lectern, looks into the dark of the hall, nods, and starts his talk. From the very beginning he makes it clear that he is talking directly to the blacks, and that any others curious enough to listen will be tolerated. He says that he is a nationalist, with his own nation, like a Mafia, like a Zionist group, looks out at the audience for a little while, probably digging the college hair and colour, the stoned eyes are not hard to see. "The radical white boy wants to smoke pot, and take off his clothes, and then say he is 'liberated'." Laugh. Yeah. To the young white students this is the only thing that will be thrown out at them but at least it recognizes them. To the young blacks he says that change just for the sake of change is bullshit, and says they must live their own heritage and avoid white culture. "Do you understand the difference between Lawrence Welk and James Brown, my man?" Laughter. "You're not Kafka, you're not Scott Fitzgerald, you're outside this white crap." "Vietnam is America's greatest art object." Talks about racial balance of power in world, nationalism, and the fight for the survival of the race. Asks the black to bring all this back home, or else go and live with the whites. Build the strength, keep the blood, raise the level of the black consciousness, bring skills and resources to the community, and, above all, control the 'living space.'

Then he halts, coughs, looks again at the audience, again looking to the young blacks. Says they have to make it as a group, have to succeed as an organization, as a family, instead of as individuals. The black individual won't make it in this society, so forget that dream, brother, put it into the blood. There is no difference among blacks, it is all unity, and it is all NATIONALISM. Artists make symbols for the rare, develop black art, black culture, separate it from the white culture.

Who will survive America? "No Americans, few blacks, no crackers." Laughter. I don't laugh.

Starts to read his poetry. Immediately I'm into his sound, into the rolling of A's and their progression into a scream -- chaaaaaaange. The reactions are laugh-

ter, and stunned senses -- this poetry isn't wrought with poetic images, only with the image of the black man in pain, wailing, angry, separate, chaaaaaange. He wails his poems, they're all sound, voice, inflection, most of the nuances and spikes lost on the white part of the audience, loved by the black audience.

And then the play, "Jello." White-face fairy Jack Benny, sways, flip-flaps across the stage, whiteface, bats his eyes, plays with his white-face hair. And Rochester "Ooh, Rochester, you look DIFFER-ent." -- black cap, black turtle-neck, black suit, black shoes. Black Rochester. He takes his faggot boss's wallet, slaps him around, Jack Benny digs it, wants more, so Rochester takes all his MONEY from the safe, and slams Jack Benny again. In comes white-face Dennis Day, queen, and Rochester Toms it a little, then takes his bread. This goes on to laughter, constant, like in a Marx Brothers movie.

It didn't take long to see that the play, for the whites was in the audience, not on stage. It was too much like a crowd at the Marx Brothers to be at all comfortable. Squirms. Is this the way blacks have felt, watching Hollywood masturbating? Am I watching and experiencing the play as the black man experiences "Gone With the Wind" -- foreign, not funny, but hilarious. It hurts to laugh.

This puts me on my ear. The evening is over, leave, don't talk now.