https://doi.org/10.29162/pv.39.1.64
Original scientific paper
Received on 14 April 2021
Accepted for publication on 9 February 2022

RAYMOND M. SUMMERVILLE

"BLACK POWER" AND BLACK RHETORICAL TRADITION: THE PROVERBIAL LANGUAGE OF STOKELY CARMICHAEL

Abstract: This essay explores some of the proverbs, sayings, and proverbial expressions used by Stokely Carmichael (1941-1998) that are found in writings such as: *Black Power the Politics of Liberation in America* (1967), *Stokely Speaks: From Black Power to Pan-Africanism* (1971), and his autobiography, *Ready for Revolution: The Life and Times of Stokely Carmichael* (2003). In the process of analyzing traditional language used by Carmichael, this essay also: (1) seeks to identify sources from which Carmichael's sayings are derived, (2) examine some of the contexts in which they are used, (3) determine the extent that they illustrate Carmichael's ever-evolving political philosophies and worldview during the Civil Rights Era (1954-1968) and the African Independence Movement (1950-1975) respectively, (4) and it also seeks to categorize Carmichael's proverbs, sayings, and proverbial expressions based on origin, structure, and traits (such as word count and subject matter). (5) Additionally, this essay considers the extent that his proverbial language is used to establish, reinforce, and regulate both personal and professional relationships throughout his entire life.

Keywords: Black studies, Civil Rights Movement [CRM], Diaspora, folklore, human rights, proverbs

1. Introduction

Stokely Standiford Churchill Carmichael [Kwame Ture] (1941-1998) played many important roles during the Civil Rights Era (1954-1968). Carmichael was: a political activist, an effective community organizer, an author, a valuable teacher (who taught voting rights, literacy, and black history in the Deep South), a dynamic public speaker and philosopher, and a ground-breaking revolutionary. Another important talent and aspect of Carmichael's life that often goes unmentioned by scholars is that he was also a master of proverbs or "concise traditional statements of apparent truths with currency among the folk" and proverbial language, and he used this inimitable skill in at least three unique ways (Mieder 2004: 4; Mieder 2019: 264). First, his proverbial mastery helped him to learn and impart important life lessons; meaning that he internalized the proverbial wisdom of others and then shared these axioms liberally throughout his entire life through conversation, and through his speeches and writings. Secondly, his use of proverbial language is as an overt expression of the pride that he had in his black identity, and because Carmichael attributes many of his sayings to black people from all over the world including: Trinidad, Jamaica, West India, Nigeria, Egypt, Ghana, Guinea and also the American Deep South, they simultaneously demonstrate his belief in Pan-Africanism or the notion that all black people around the world share in one common struggle against forces of colonialism and imperialism. Lastly, Carmichael's proverbial language is an important tool that he used to establish, reinforce, and regulate relationships with family, friends, colleagues, students, and audiences.

2. Origins of the "Black Power" Saying

The most important expression that Carmichael is remembered for is "black power." He unveils the expression at the Meredith Mississippi Freedom March (1966). Many who know of Carmichael associate him with this slogan, but many people cannot determine why he is so important to the Civil Rights Movement. Carmichael's own son, Bokar Ture, would not learn much about his famous father's life as a political activist until he went to college and did his own research. In the CNN documentary, *Black in*

America 2 (2008), Bokar Ture explains his predicament. He had no idea that his father had become a symbol of black militancy because like so many survivors of the Civil Rights Era, Carmichael did not discuss it: "He never told me what he did, really. He just told me what was good to do: 'Work for your people'" (Blake 2008). Carmichael's son goes on to explain that he had internalized many of the same misconceptions about the movement as others. He says:

> I had not understood how brutal the movement was. I saw it as a Disney movie—people marching in the sunshine, King speaking, and victory. But it was war. Many of these front-line activists lived under the constant threat of death. Several lost friends. Some were tortured in jail. Several were disowned by their families. Their memories were too painful to share with their children. (Blake 2008)

Fortunately, today Carmichael's connection to the movement is well documented, and by examining some of the material, one can easily determine why, after so many decades have past, the expression "black power" still retains so much of its historical significance.

The saying was first heard at the Meredith Mississippi Freedom March (1966) which began as the Meredith March Against Fear. It was established by James Meredith (b.1933-), the first African-American to be admitted to the University of Mississippi. On the historic day that he was admitted (October 1, 1962), it would take dozens of federal troops to keep the peace. Meredith's admittance would be a small victory in an ongoing war against what Carmichael defines as "institutional racism" or "racism [which] relies on the active and pervasive operation of anti-black attitudes and practices" (Ture and Hamilton 1967: 4). The march came about because Meredith wanted to demonstrate that it was possible for a black man to walk through the Deep South without being afraid of racial violence. Meredith embarked on the two-hundred-twenty-mile trek from Memphis, Tennessee to Jackson, Mississippi alone, aside from some onlookers and a few members of the press. On the second day of his journey Meredith is attacked and badly wounded by an angry shotgun wielding racist. After hearing about the ordeal, the Student Nonviolent

Coordinating Committee (SNCC) decides to continue the march on Meredith's behalf, only this time there are two major changes. First, they rename it the Meredith Mississippi Freedom March. Secondly, as opposed to a single person or a single organization, SNCC would be joined by thousands of black people from a range of different organizations, universities, and church groups, one of the most important attendees being the Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. who starts the march off "by reading a contentious manifesto that describes Mississippi as a living symbol of 'every evil that American Negroes have long endured'" (Joseph 2014: 108). In *Ready for Revolution* (2003) Carmichael recounts the moment that he decides to utter the expression that would gain him international attention: "As I passed Mukasa [Willie Ricks], he said, "Drop it now. The people are ready. Drop it now" (Carmichael and Thelwell 2003: 507). The famous speech is not recorded, but it is recounted by SNCC member Cleve Sellers (1944-) who attended the event. Sellers asserts that after taking the podium Carmichael says:

> This is the twenty-seventh time I have been arrested—and I ain't going to jail no more! "The crowd exploded into cheers and clapping." The only way we gonna stop them white men from whuppin' us is to take over. We been saying freedom for six years and we ain't got nothing. What we gonna start saying now is Black Power! "The Crowd was right with him. They picked up his thoughts immediately." Black Power! "They roared in unison. Willie Ricks (1943-), who is good at orchestrating the emotions of a crowd as anyone I have ever seen, sprang into action. Jumping to the platform with Stokely, he yelled to the crowd," What do you want? Black Power! What do you want? Black Power! What do you want? Black Power!! Black Power!!! Black Power!!!! "Everything that happened afterward was a response to that moment." (Carmichael and Thelwell 2003: 507)

For Carmichael and the other protesters, "Black Power" is a call against his unjust incarceration which takes place only moments before he takes the podium. It is also a call against the constant harassment by police and state troopers who beat marchers, and hit them with tear gas on a number of occasions in efforts to force them to give up the march. By demanding "black power" as op-

posed to the traditional chant of "freedom," he is connecting the civil rights struggle to his broader philosophical notion, Pan-Africanism. Furthermore, Carmichael is making a demand for "political, economic, and cultural self-determination" (Joseph 2014: 115). According to historian, Peniel E. Joseph, "Carmichael's speech on June 16th, 1966, instantly transformed the aesthetics of the black freedom struggle and forever altered the course of the modern civil rights movement" (Joseph 2014: 115).

3. Familial Proverbs and Sayings

"Black Power" is Carmichael's most widely known expression, but it is not the only powerful expression in his vast array of meaningful traditional communicative language. Carmichael uses many proverbs, sayings, and expressions that he learns from a number of different sources. In fact, some proverbs that Carmichael learns are first heard in his own home. As a young child growing up in Trinidad, Carmichael spent the majority of his time with his paternal grandmother, Cecilia Harris Carmichael, and she was full of proverbial wisdom. Of Grandma Cecilia, Carmichael says:

> Grandma Cecilia was the major influence on my young personality, the adult with whom I spent most of my time and with whom I was closest. She was a devout woman. A pillar of Trinity Anglican Church, close friend and adviser to the parish parson, she was entrusted with the baking of the communal wafers each week. My earliest and most enduring ethical instruction came from her. (Carmichael and Thelwell 2003: 24)

Carmichael then shares some of the lessons that he learns from Grandma Cecilia:

> 'Don't ever lie, always speak the truth. Think of others always. Remember the less fortunate. Never waste food. Never waste anything that someone else might need. Waste not, want not.' And so forth. And the 'memory gems' so much a part of any respectable colonial child's training, (Carmichael and Thelwell 2003: 24, 25)

The fundamental lesson about frugality contained in the proverb "Waste not, want not" (Mieder, Kingsbury, and Harder 1991: 641; Speake 2015: 341) is very important to Carmichael, so much

so, that it brings to mind two more important "memory gems" of Grandma Cecilia which he feels are equally significant. Carmichael continues: "If you in the morning throw minutes away, you can't pick them up the course of the day" and "Whatsoever you set your hand to do, do it with all your might" (Carmichael and Thelwell 2003: 25). The possibility that the recollection of one proverb may lead, or even help one to remember others has been considered by other proverb scholars. According to folklorist, Betsy Bowden "…rumination upon one proverb might lead into the depths of personal experience. Thereby a thinker comes to reconstruct other oral or written contexts containing that same sentence: relevant stories, sermons, commentaries, and so on… one proverb can lead to recall of other ones memorized along with it elsewhere and lead ultimately to all of those other proverbs' additional contexts as well" (Bowden 1996: 442). If what Bowden says is correct, then proverbs may have served as important mnemonic devices that helped Carmichael to remember scenes from his eventful life as he constructed his autobiography.

3.1. Fatherly Wisdom

Carmichael's father also liked to share precepts in the form of proverbs. Adolphus Carmichael, a hard-working and skilled carpenter, valued honesty and integrity, and he tried to instill these principles in his son:

> …my father was so scrupulously, resolutely, and unambiguously honest man. 'If you didn't work for it,' he'd say, 'don't look for it. If you didn't sweat for it, don't even think of it.' In all the time we lived together, I never knew him to deviate in the slightest from that principle. (Carmichael and Thelwell 2003: 69)

Another saying that his father liked to use seems so didactic and moralizing that young Carmichael spends ample time ruminating on its' meaning:

> My late father had a much used saying that, because it seemed so unforgiving, puzzled me greatly as a young boy. It occurs to me that… it was about: integrity. 'You can tell the truth every day of your life,' my father would say, 'and if, on the day of your death,

> you tell a lie…that is what will matter'. (Carmichael and Thelwell 2003: 71)

Adolphus Carmichael did not have much formal education, but he did value learning, and he instilled this value in his children as well. His father also did not waste words, and he knew how to deliver extraordinarily strong messages by using brief sayings. In the following passage Carmichael describes his father's often repeated lesson on learning:

> His words were always thoughtful. He was not verbose, but we always knew that whatever our father said in his quiet voice, he truly meant. We never disobeyed him. At dinner he'd always ask each of us, 'Well, what did you learn today?' If someone came up shaky, he'd shake his head. 'You know, the day on which you learned nothing is a wasted day. Enough of those and what've you got? A wasted life. (Carmichael and Thelwell 2003: 77)

3.2. Problem Solving with Proverbs

Even when his father was faced with difficult problems on his job as a carpenter, Adolphus could remedy the issue with an axiom:

> Nothing, and in particular, no problem in carpentry or craftsmanship ever seemed to intimidate him. 'Well now,' he'd say as he studied the problem. 'There's always more'n one way to skin a cat.' Sooner or later he came out with an approach—often not the conventional one—but one that would get the job done, and often more efficiently. (Carmichael and Thelwell 2003: 78)

The proverb, "There is always more than one way to skin a cat" is used by Carmichael to describe his father's unparalleled confidence as a carpenter, and it also effectively describes the thinking process that his father applies when faced with complex issues. (Mieder et al. 1991: 644; Speake 2015: 342) Carmichael learns a number of important values from his father and the proverbs that Adolphus uses helps Carmichael to remember the lessons and the man.

4. Political Proverbial Language

Carmichael also uses the proverbs and sayings of several famous political leaders. According to paremiologist Wolfgang Mieder: "All political leaders are faced with addressing heterogenous audiences, and they must find a common denominator in their rhetoric that will be grasped and appreciated by the largest possible number of people both here in the United States and throughout the world" (Mieder 2019: 58). Based on this information, it is no surprise that Carmichael frequents proverbs and sayings from such an eclectic mixture of leadership. He employs the proverbial language of leaders such as: Elijah Muhammad (1897-1975), Malcolm X (1925-1965), the Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. (1929-1968), President John F. Kennedy (1917-1963), Oliver Wendell Holmes (1841-1935), Rabbi Hillel (110 BC- 10 AD), African President(s) Sékou Turé (1922-1984), and Dr. Kwame Nkrumah (1909-1972), and Italian diplomat, Niccolò Machiavelli (1469-1527). In some cases, he frequents the proverbial language of leaders as an ode to their leadership qualities, their valuable political instruction, and even their friendship, such as in the case of Dr. King. In many instances, proverbs from important leaders provide some keen insight into issues that may plague black communities.

4.1. The Proverbial Wisdom of Malcolm X

Malcolm X was one leader who was known for imparting such words of wisdom on anyone who would listen. Carmichael recounts an anecdote that illustrates a moment when Malcolm X offers an important point of cultural criticism to some black youth who appear to be wasting their lives hanging out on street corners. The insightful cultural criticism that Malcolm X shares is then punctuated by a proverb from Malcolm X's mentor, religious leader Elijah Muhammad:

> According to the story, Malcolm was driving along and saw a group of young brothers shooting craps on a sidewalk. He stopped the car and approached the game. He either seized or put his foot on the dice. Of course, the players started to get into they bags. Malcolm froze them with that look he had. My young brothers, you know what this building is? He asked. Yeah, I thought so. You

> don't know, do you? This is the Schomburg Collection. It's got damn near everything ever written by or about black people. And what you doing? Instead of being inside learning about yourself, your people, and our history, you out here in darkness shooting dice. That's what's wrong with us, why Mr. Muhammad says: "If you want to hide something from the black man, put it in a library." (Carmichael and Thelwell 2003: 105)

The famous saying of Elijah Muhammad, "If you want to hide something from the black man, put it in a library" has become so well-known that it is indeed regarded as a proverb. In this case the anecdote that comes along with it appears to be just as legendary as the proverbial wisdom being shared. Carmichael was not there to watch this fascinating scene unfold, but simply hearing the story from others and remembering the saying was enough to encourage young Carmichael to frequent the library as often as he could: "Now, I was not among those crapshooters. But the story impressed on me the importance of the Schomburg and I began to spend many a profitable hour there" (Carmichael and Thelwell 2003: 105).

Another anecdote involving Malcolm X appears at a point in the narrative when Carmichael discusses a march that is staged by SNCC in order to bring the senseless murder of SNCC Summer Project volunteer, Louis Allen, to the attention of U.S. Attorney General Bobby Kennedy (1925-1968). SNCC planned to march from the Howard campus to the Justice Department carrying a coffin and deposit the coffin on Kennedy's desk. As SNCC and just over a thousand students are in route to their destination, they notice Malcolm X watching so they invite him to join the march. After Malcolm X respectfully declines their offer, a SNCC member asks Malcolm X what he thinks about the march. Malcolm X then shares an analogy with them that is punctuated by a proverb:

> Now, if I see a long line of cats and mice all marching toward the same hole. If the cats ask me "how we doing?" I gotta say it sure look like you doing fine, right. But now, if the mice ask me…well, now, you know I gotta give 'em a different answer." (Carmichael and Thelwell 2003: 356)

After hearing this brief analogy the SNCC members aren't quite as confident about their mission. If Malcolm X's brief anecdote injures their pride, the proverb that Malcolm X shares with them next does not do them much good either. Malcolm X then says: "Remember now, just because you see a man throwing worms into the river, don't necessarily mean he a friend to the fish" (Carmichael and Thelwell 2003: 356). In employing the proverb, Malcolm X is basically warning them to proceed with caution because politicians often have ulterior motives. The marchers are not discouraged enough to abandon their mission, but due to Malcolm X's parable and proverb, one must imagine that they proceeded on that afternoon with much more discretion.

In October of 1969 Carmichael writes a speech that is delivered on his behalf by Howard Fuller, for the opening ceremony of Malcolm X Liberation University in Durham, N.C. In the speech Carmichael asserts that the African race will never be strong unless they educate their own people. For Carmichael, the suppression of black thought is at the heart of what he believes is an ensuing race war evidenced by the widespread racial violence that overtook much of the country in the 1960s. He employs a proverb from Malcolm X to make his point:

> When we begin to move militarily on all fronts, it will be an all-out race war, Africa versus Europe. This may not seem pleasant to some of our brothers and sisters, but it is a question of who is going to survive—them or us. I think that the natural law of survival will answer that, even for those of us who recoil and do not want to face what is coming. I am reminded of what Brother Malcolm said in Chicago, way back in 1962: "What's good news for some is bad news for others." (Stokely 1971: 179)

The proverb from Malcolm X "What's good news for some is bad news for others" is used to try to instill a sense of militancy in his audience. He wants them to feel motivated to take control of their own destiny by making Malcolm X Liberation University a successful enterprise. Carmichael seems to believe that if black people do not educate themselves, they will ultimately be wiped out. In this instance the proverb underscores Carmichael's "us or them" attitude.

Another Malcolm X saying appears in *Stokely Speaks* in chapter fourteen which is entitled "Pan Africanism." In this chapter Carmichael explains some of Kwame Nkrumah's philosophical tenets. He argues that Nkrumah embodies Pan-Africanism and that his leadership in Ghana was deposed by colonial forces for this very reason:

> I know you would not understand this because you haven't been allowed to read books by Kwame Nkrumah. There must be a reason for that. They called him a traitor, they called him a tyrant, they called him everything that is bad in the world, but Brother Malcolm X told you when they say something bad about a man then that's the man you should run to. The white boy seeks to destroy the leaders in our movement. (Carmichael 1971: 216)

The Malcolm X saying "when they say something bad about a man, then that's the man you should run to" is used to explain the nature of the political coup in Ghana that displaced Kwame Nkrumah. According to Carmichael, Nkrumah was deposed for refusing to be an ally of colonial forces that sought to exploit African natural resources. The Malcolm X saying also calls attention to the fact that political slander was the primary tool that they used to facilitate the overthrowing of the Ghanaian government.

4.2. Political Sayings Adorning the Halls and Dorms of Bronx Science and Howard University

At another point in Carmichael's narrative, he says that young activists of his day liked powerful proverbs and sayings that spoke to the spirit of the civil rights revolution that was ensuing. He describes the scene on the campus of Howard University in 1960 when he arrived there as a freshman:

> One thing that reflects the spirit of the times among that generation of activist youth—white and black—is the recurrence of certain favorite quotations, ideas that spoke to collective human responsibility. These quotes were prevalent during my high school and early college years. Later in the decade these would be replaced by more overtly revolutionary slogans from people like Che, Malcolm, and Uncle Ho. But when I was a freshman, a lot of the people I knew would have some combination of these high-minded quotes up

> somewhere in their room. I remember three of these quotations. (Carmichael and Thelwell 2003: 144)

The three quotes that Carmichael largely remembers gracing the walls of Bronx Science and Howard University dorm rooms must have definitely made a huge impression on him in order for him to remember them so many decades later. He says:

> One was from Dr. King's *Stride Toward Freedom* to the effect that "If a man hasn't discovered something that he will die for, he isn't fit to live." The second was from the white jurist Oliver Wendell Holmes: "As life is action and passion, it is required of a man that he should share the passion and action of his time at peril being judged not to have lived." But the most common one—which I would later occasionally use to end speeches—was Rabbi Hillel's famous quote: If I am not for myself, who is for me? And when I am for myself what am I? And if not now, when? (Carmichael and Thelwell 2003: 144)

In many ways these sayings collectively describe Carmichael's attitude as he took part in the activism that the Non-Violent Action Group (NAG) and the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) became known for.

4.3. Proverbs in Response to Middle-Eastern Politics

On another occasion Carmichael employs a proverb from King to justify SNCC taking a position on the 1967 Arab-Israeli War. Many people including the media felt that to take a position on the situation in the Middle East was not SNCC's role and that they should stay silent on the issue. Carmichael employs a proverb from King in order to rationalize the need for the group to be vocal against Zionism. He says:

> So obviously, there would be a price to pay. It would have come down to priorities. But as Dr. King said, 'There comes a time when silence is tantamount to consent.' But in any event that discussion never took place. Had the process not been short-circuited, I'm sure the overwhelming sentiment would have been to make a statement, a moral statement, on justice for the Palestinian people while trying hard not to offend or alienate our Jewish friends on a personal level. (Carmichael and Thelwell 2003: 561)

Carmichael contends that he is neither anti-Semitic nor anti-Judaic, but like many others, Carmichael believes that Zionism should be equated with colonialism, and that it is imperative for any political organization committed to social justice to speak out against it. Carmichael also references an anti-Zionist saying from G. Neuberger that he first heard in 1976 while attending an international conference in Libya: "If one is a good Jew, one cannot be a Zionist. If one is Zionist, one cannot be a good Jew" (Carmichael and Thelwell 2003: 562). Carmichael asserts that while Neuberger's words are not absolute truth they do speak to the pain and destruction from war that has been caused in-part by Zionist thinking in the Middle-East.

4.4. The Political Proverbial Rhetoric of John F. Kennedy

Carmichael often referenced the words of President John F. Kennedy. Like many black Americans Carmichael was very skeptical about the effectiveness of both of the major political parties in the United States, but one may assume that he must have seen wisdom in some of Kennedy's language, or perhaps he noticed an air of authenticity in Kennedy's statements because he references him on several occasions. At one point Carmichael says:

> In January of 1960—I was still in high school then—the administration in Washington changed. Democrats replaced Republicans. A "vigorous, progressive, young' president, so they told us, took over. He proclaimed a new challenge of energetic and progressive activism when Americans should 'ask not what your country can do for you; ask what you can do for your country.' It was a great speech…until you really studied what he was saying. But many of us heard what we wanted to hear. And some of us believed him. So, soon indeed, we would test the sincerity of those words about defending freedom and paying any price. (Carmichael and Thelwell 2003: 177).

Each time that Carmichael references Kennedy's language, it is indeed as if he is testing the limits of Kennedy's political stances. For instance, when he discusses Kennedy's reluctance to enforce laws banning segregation in facilities used for interstate travel such as gas stations and rest stops, he invokes another Kennedy statement that has also grown to become proverbial: "The new

Kennedy administration had come into office mouthing rhetoric about the national government's responsibility toward the constitutional rights of all Americans. CORE's plan would test their sincerity and their resolve, for in JFK's famous phrase, was not 'sincerity always subject to proof?'" (Carmichael and Thelwell 2003: 179)

The Congress of Racial Equality (CORE) plan that Carmichael discusses would be known as the 1961 Freedom Rides. The Freedom Riders were a group of integrated students and civil rights activists that challenged laws which banned integrated facilities for interstate travel in the South. To force systemic change, they simply boarded busses and traveled along highways in the South where segregation was most vehemently enforced. They also stopped at illegally segregated establishments. While their efforts gained them international attention, they also suffered many indignities and abuses. They were often attacked by racist whites and Ku Klux Klan members who were eager to: impart physical and verbal abuse, throw fire-bombs, and pummel Freedom Riders with sticks and bottles as they exited busses. In Jackson, Mississippi Carmichael and eight other riders were arrested and sent to the infamous Parchman Prison Farm in Sunflower County where they remained jailed for forty-nine days. They also suffered verbal and physical abuse at the hands of prison guards. Carmichael was a nineteen-year-old freshman at Howard when this happened, and while it was his first time being arrested in the name of the movement, it would certainly not be his last. Carmichael would be arrested dozens of times before his life as a political activist would end.

Carmichael also invokes Kennedy's famous plea to the nation as he describes the process of organizing the Freedom Rides. He helped the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE) organize the integrated group of college students from around the country to participate in Freedom Rides to desegregate all public facilities along Route 40, which was the main interstate out of D.C. They received such an overwhelming turnout of white supporters at a Baltimore church that Carmichael is certain that Kennedy's famous maxim is a motivating factor: "Students from schools across the Northeast—Brandeis, Harvard, Yale, Cornell, New York University, and Johns Hopkins—answered CORE's call.

When we and the Morgan State students arrived, the church was already half filled with white students (good ol' CPT?). I suspect many of these white students were youthful 'New Frontiersmen,' inspired by JFK's injunction to 'ask what you can do for your country' and eager to put an end to their president's international embarrassments" (Carmichael and Thelwell 2003: 164-165). Carmichael believes that progressive white students, inspired largely by Kennedy's language, sought to dedicate themselves to redeeming their country's tarnished image through activism.

At another point in Carmichael's narrative, he uses Kennedy's famous saying about serving the country again, but this time it is to express pure skepticism concerning the government's intentions when the Freedom Riders are invited to meet with attorney general Bobby Kennedy (1925-1968):

> Even while some of us were still penned up in Parchman, Bobby Kennedy's emissaries had begun sending out feelers to the student movement? Git outta here. What was he up to? Was he now talking to 'extremist on both sides'? Maybe it was 'ask not what your country can do you for you; ask what you can do…' time, huh? I wasn't about to cut him any slack at all, Jack. On Parchman death row, we had talked about him like a dog. Hey, wasn't it because of their failure to enforce their own laws that we were sitting in that hellhole in the first place? And for what, buying a ticket and riding a bus? C'mon. Gimme an ever –loving break, bro. That hadn't been everyone's reaction, but it was most people's and it sure was mine. (Carmichael and Thelwell 2003: 218)

The notion of continuing the Freedom Rides is abandoned after SNCC meets with the Kennedy administration. They are promised funding and support if they stop and take up the cause of voter registration instead, which they agree to do. Subsequently, SNCC would remain committed to the cause of voter registration for the entire duration of the Civil Rights Movement. In the summer of 1964 many SNCC members embark on the Mississippi Summer Project which is designed to help disenfranchised Mississippians and impoverished sharecroppers (many of whom were illiterate) to register to vote, but first SNCC conducts interviews to determine if volunteers are mentally and physically fit to serve. They only want intelligent volunteers who know

exactly what they are getting into, due to the physical dangers, including the possibility of death, which southern racism poses in the Mississippi Delta. Carmichael says:

> We ended up with an impressive group of young Americans at their most idealistic. Interesting people, serious people, political activists, Peace Corps volunteers, seminarians. No pun intended, but in 1964 the country's 'best and brightest' were headed for Mississippi, not Southeast Asia, and were genuinely to 'ask not what your country can do for you; ask what you can do for your country.' Y'all remember that? (Carmichael and Thelwell 2003: 359)

This time there is a tinge of irony and sarcasm in Carmichael's words as he again invokes Kennedy's famous saying. While the U.S. government was recruiting scores of young black and white men to fight against the spread of communism in the Vietnam War (1969-1973), SNCC was recruiting young people of all races to fight against racism and social and economic injustice here in the United States.

4.5. The Political Proverbial Rhetoric of Niccolò Machiavelli

In *Stokely Speaks*, chapter seven entitled "Dialectics of Liberation," he describes the negative impact that colonization had on Zimbabwe, and he employs an important saying from Italian diplomat, Niccolò Machiavelli (1469-1527) in the process:

> If a few settlers left England to go to Zimbabwe, there was no reason for them to rename that country Rhodesia, after themselves, and then force everybody to speak their language. If they'd had respect for the cultures of other people, they would have spoken the language of those people and adopted their religions. But the West was powerful—that's the word nobody wants to talk about, power. It was only power that made people bow their heads to the West. They didn't bow because they liked Jesus Christ or because they liked white folks. Machiavelli said a long time ago that "people obey masters for one of two reasons. Either they love them, or they fear them." I often ask myself whether the West believes the Third World obeys them out of love." (Carmichael 1971: 81-83)

The Machiavellian saying: "People obey masters for one of two reasons. Either they love them, or they fear them" is employed

to help his audience to conceptualize the effects that colonialism and imperialism has on the African psyche. Carmichael wants black people to see the negative consequences of European exploits on other continents and he wants to identify them as causes for many of the world's problems.

4.6. The Political Proverbial Rhetoric of Kwame Nkrumah and Sékou Touré

Carmichael also uses proverbs and sayings from his mentor, Dr. Kwame Nkrumah (1909-1972) who was the president of Ghana. In 1969 Carmichael would expatriate to Africa where he learns more about political organizing as a personal assistant to Nkrumah who was named co-president of Guinea by President Sékou Touré (1922-1984) after Nkrumah was deposed by a U.S. backed coup in Ghana. Sékou Touré worked tirelessly to make a return to power in Ghana possible for Nkrumah, but this vision would never fully materialize. Nkrumah (also known affectionately as Osagyefo, redeemer of his native land) is most famous for his ideas concerning the liberation of the African continent which he expresses in his *Handbook of Revolutionary Warfare* (1968). To advance his vision of a unified African continent, free of colonial and imperial exploitation, Nkrumah and Sékou Touré launched the All-African People's Revolution Party (AAPRP) which had memberships from 62 African countries. As an ode to the African leaders, Carmichael changed his name to Kwame Ture. Carmichael's move to Africa ultimately helps him to expand his mentor's philosophy of Pan-Africanism, the notion that all black people around the world, as members of the black Diaspora, have a responsibility to share in the struggle to unify and liberate the African continent from colonial powers.

Nkrumah's prolific use of proverbs may reflect an increased value placed on proverbs in African societies. According to paremiologist and folklorist, Anand Prahlad: "proverbs have traditionally played a much more central role in the everyday speech of Africans than in that of African-Americans. All researchers of African proverbs seem to agree on the absolute proliferation of items throughout individual [African] societies" (Prahlad 1996: location 426). Additionally, proverbs are commonly employed in Africa as "verbal art and are used in all manner of situations as a

means of amusement, in educating the young, to sanction institutionalized behavior, as a method of gaining favor in court, in performing religious rituals and association ceremonies, and to give and add color to ordinary conversations" (Messenger 1959: 1; Prahlad 1996: location 426). Based on research, Nkrumah, in sharing proverbs, is also passing down his knowledge of an ancient African oral tradition which has many different purposes.

At one point in his narrative Carmichael discusses the impact that broken promises had on newly freed African-Americans during the Reconstruction Era (1865-1877) and he invokes a saying from Nkrumah in the process:

> And we should not lightly dismiss that forty acres and a mule either. Later Kwame Nkrumah would tell me, "All liberation begins with land." Working in the Delta, we began to see clearly how the withholding of those forty acres had been no trivial blow. In fact, almost exactly a hundred years later, the lasting, visible, painful consequences of that betrayal were still indelibly etched in our people's condition. Of the many, many betrayals and disappointments Africans had suffered at the hands of this republic, I began to see how Congress's failure to make good on its promise of those forty acres to the freedmen was arguably the most far reaching and injurious. No doubt about it. (Carmichael and Thelwell 2003: 288).

Nkrumah's axiom that "All liberation begins with land" is used to explain why it was necessary for SNCC volunteers to travel to the Mississippi Delta in the first place. They were there to help liberate Mississippi's poor black population by teaching them how to procure political power through the voting process, but as Carmichael asserts, black Mississippians would have already had some political and economic independence if freedmen had been afforded the forty acres and a mule promised to them by Union General William Tecumseh Sherman at the end of the Civil War in 1865. The order is known as Special Field Order No.15, and it was quickly reversed after Lincoln's assassination.

Carmichael also describes the impact that the killing of one his closest friends, SNCC volunteer Jonathan Daniels had on him and the movement. Daniels had been working alongside Carmichael and other SNCC members as an organizer and instructor in Freedom Schools which were designed to teach Mississip-

pi's uneducated poor, literacy, civics, black history, and voting rights. Daniels was a dedicated Episcopal seminarian who was murdered in cold blood by an enraged shotgun wielding racist as he shielded another SNCC volunteer, seventeen-year-old Ruby Sales from gunfire. Afterwards Daniels become a martyr of the Civil Rights Movement. His murder caused Carmichael and other SNCC members to reconsider the role of white volunteers in the movement because they were targeted more intensely by Southern white racists. In reference to Daniels's killing, he says: ''The Osagyefo [Kwame Nkrumah] used to tell me, 'The only people who never make mistakes are people who never do anything.'" I've made mistakes and I'm sure I'll make some more 'cause I'm not finished working. We made a mistake with Jonathan. One that I always remember with regret" (Carmichael and Thelwell 2003: 470-471; Speake 2015: 166). Carmichael shared responsibility for Daniels's murder with the rest of the SNCC organization who felt that they should have done more to keep Daniels out of harm's way, but as Carmichael explains, Daniels's murder "backfired" on the angry racists who wanted to scare SNCC into abandoning their organizing efforts in Lowndes County:

> Organizing the [Lowndes County Freedom Organization] became much easier after that. Now all of the people could see that the Democratic Party—'Hey them ain't nothing but some night-riding, cross-burning, no-count, low-life snakes'—was not for them. Could be that I channeled my anger into work, but I became tireless, almost driven. I was determined that this evil system had to be destroyed, and that only the people themselves could do it. (Carmichael and Thelwell 2003: 471)

Due to Daniels's murder, the people were able to see a clear need for new political representation, and Carmichael became even more determined to help them bring this dream to fruition. From these examples one can see how the sayings of Kwame Nkrumah help Carmichael to formulate a new perspective by which he is able to view his experiences as a political organizer in the Deep South.

After becoming a full-fledged Pan-African revolutionary, Carmichael returns to America from Africa only to have his passport seized by the U.S. government. While sidelined in the

U.S. he is determined to continue his mission of organizing for the political organizations, United Front, and the All-African People's Revolution Party (AAPRP). To explain his rationale for continuing his work he employs another saying from his mentor Nkrumah:

> I didn't have time to worry about the government's little games. I mean, what was this passport seizure supposed to do? Intimidate me? Demonstrate their power and control over me? American *baasskap*? What? All it meant is that I wouldn't be returning to Guinea as quickly as I had planned, that's all. Hey, I had plenty to occupy me in America. Until the passport situation was resolved with the lawyers, I'd just keep on working…Nkrumah always said, 'A revolutionary makes a positive out of a negative.' (Carmichael and Thelwell 2003: 640)

The Nkrumahism, "A revolutionary makes a positive out of a negative" is a mantra that Carmichael would live by his entire life. He was always willing to work with limited resources, and he frequently took advantage of opportunities to organize, and to deliver political speeches on behalf of the Party in any place that he visited.

In one of their first meetings Nkrumah explains to Carmichael that the two greatest threats to the All-African People's Revolution Party (AAPRP) are a lack of consciousness and a lack of unity. Nkrumah asserts that people need to be aware that "the Afro-American struggle is inextricably linked to the struggle in Africa and vice versa" and that this is the primary reason that capitalist forces such as the media profit by keeping black people "confused and divided" (Carmichael and Thelwell 2003: 674-675). Carmichael punctuates this message with another one of Nkrumah's universal apothegms: "There is another maxim the Osagyefo [Nkrumah] was fond of: action without thought is blind; thought without action is empty" (Mieder, Kingsbury, and Harder 1991: 6; Carmichael and Thelwell 2003: 675). This proverb speaks to the need for black activists to be organized and united, and to be fully aware of the organization's purpose. As Carmichael asserts, without organization "we leave ourselves open to the oppressors' tactic of 'divide and conquer' or 'divide

and rule'" (Mieder et al. 1991: 112; Carmichael and Thelwell 2003: 678).

When Carmichael expresses his desire to help Nkrumah return to power in Ghana, Nkrumah tells him that an effective political organizer sometimes needs to demonstrate patience. Nkrumah communicates this message to Carmichael using a brief story which he then accentuates with a saying that Carmichael presumably remembers for the rest of his life:

> But y'know, you do remind me of a man standing on the shore watching a boat approach. Now he *knows* the boat is coming. He can clearly see it coming. But he is impatient. He must wade out to meet it. Which in no way speeds up the boat's arrival. At best, the man is soaked; at worst, he drowns. The boat's progress is not affected in the slightest. All impatience is selfishness and egotism. Remember that. (Carmichael and Thelwell 2003: 691)

Carmichael repeats the saying: "All impatience is selfishness and egotism" again as he ruminates over Nkrumah's untimely death from cancer, his own bout with cancer, and how the possibility of death would ultimately affect the Pan-African movement:

> And, you know, a lot of my attitude toward the cancer comes from his influence. Let me reflect carefully because I've never said this publicly…But when I look at all his movements, I really think that Nkrumah knew—long before we did—that the cancer he had would not allow him to return to Ghana. But he was confident that the African revolution would triumph, whether he was here or not. (Carmichael and Thelwell 2003: 694).

At this point Carmichael reminds the reader of Nkrumah's wise words and the meaning behind them:

> I told you his example of the boat approaching and me wanting to plunge in and him saying, 'All impatience is selfishness and egotism'? His attitude was, look, this is a struggle. The enemy will do anything in his power to target generals. If you are out front, you must expect to be attacked. Survival is not guaranteed, but whatever happens to you personally, the struggle will go on. I think about his attitude often. (Carmichael and Thelwell 2003: 694)

Ultimately Nkrumah's saying "All impatience is selfishness and egotism" does at least three things for Carmichael: (1) It helps Carmichael to understand more fully his place as a leader in the Pan-African struggle. (2) It demonstrates an appropriate attitude to have as a political organizer, and (3) it provides Carmichael with an effective model for coping with his own bout with cancer.

A number of proverbs and sayings that Carmichael uses come from Nkrumah, but his other political mentor, Sékou Touré does not seem to communicate using aphorisms. A language barrier more than likely prevented Carmichael from communicating with Sékou Touré on the same level as Nkrumah. Touré primarily spoke French while Carmichael did not, but they were still able to understand one another to some extent through the use of common political terms such as Marxism, socialism, etc. because they are essentially the same in any language. Despite the language barrier, Carmichael incorporates one important saying into his narrative which he uses to characterize the political philosophy of Touré. Carmichael says: "Culture is politics; politics is culture" (Carmichael and Thelwell 2003: 702). He then says that he really began to understand what this saying meant when he moved to Guinea and witnessed the philosophy in action firsthand and saw that Guinean President Sékou Touré valued African culture, so much so, that culture and politics became intrinsically connected in Guinea:

> …the party clearly understood that the traditional culture was a key element from which to mold an African character to the revolution. So they took concrete steps to preserve, develop, and institutionalize nationally many, many traditional forms. So they supported dance groups and schools, musicians, artists, and the famous griots and so on. But not just the arts, also the ethics and values of traditional culture, an *African* sensibility that I called African humanism. (Carmichael and Thelwell 2003:702)

4.7. Pan-African Political Proverbial Rhetoric

At another point in *Stokely Speaks*, Carmichael is explaining the rationale behind Pan-Africanism:

> We must understand the concept that for us the question of community is not geography, it is a question of us black people, wherever we are. We have to consciously become a part of the 900 million black people that are separated over this world. We are separated by *them*. We are blood of the same blood and flesh of the same flesh. We do not know who is our sister, who is our brother, or where we came from. They took us from Africa and they put thousands of miles of water between us, but they forgot—blood is thicker than water. (Stokely 1971: 128)

Carmichael employs the Biblical proverbial expression "blood of the same blood and flesh of the same flesh," and then reinforces his message of black unity with the proverb "blood is thicker than water." (Mieder et al. 1991: 57; Speake 2015: 31) The imagery invoked by Carmichael's proverbial language is striking. Together they imply that one's ties of kinship are far more important than any physical distance. In the minds of readers, the thousands of miles of water separating African-Americans from Africa may become obsolete when one considers the wisdom contained in the adage.

5. Proverbial Wisdom from Fellow NAG and SNCC Members

Carmichael also uses a number of proverbs and sayings that he attributes to other activists and members of the Non-Violent Action Group (NAG) and the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee (SNNC) including: Junebug Jabbo Jones, Hartman Turnbow (1905-1988), Joyce Ladner (b. 1943-), Bill Mahoney, Courtland Cox, Chuck McDew (1938-2018), and Gloria Richardson (b.1922-). Carmichael includes them in his narrative because they are talented organizers who were important to the movement. Furthermore, remembering the proverbs and sayings that certain SNCC members shared from time-to-time may have also helped Carmichael to "reconstruct other oral and written contexts" that may be relative to the narrative (Bowden 1996: 442).

One important proverb that effectively characterizes the mindset of the Non-Violent Action Group (NAG) in the 1960s is "A free black mind is a concealed weapon" (Carmichael and Thelwell 2003: 254). This saying which became proverbial within the group over time, basically describes the value that (NAG) members place on learning and knowledge: "So our generation never expected to find much that represented what Dr. Du Bois had called 'our spiritual strivings' in the American media. The exclusion of racial minorities generally, and militant and intelligent black voices in particular, was near total. We used to say in NAG, 'A free black mind is a concealed weapon.' And someone would always add, 'Yeah, an' the media going make darn sure it *stay* concealed too'" (Carmichael and Thelwell 2003: 254). The SNCC proverb is similar to the proverb "A little learning is a dangerous thing" (Mieder et al. 1991: 367). By sharing the proverb "A free black mind is a concealed weapon" they are reminding themselves that their education is viewed largely as a threat to white establishments, many of which still support institutional racism despite the growing movement. Ultimately the proverb helps them to motivate one another to succeed.

Another proverb shared by the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) also shares a similar message. At one point in Carmichael's narrative, he describes a moment when SNCC spent time debating whether they should speak out about growing tensions in the Middle East: "One of SNCC's mantras was 'Knowledge is power.' So, as we learned, we shared our political education with other field secretaries. We discovered that many SNCC people already harbored serious doubts about the media's official version of events in that region of the world" (Carmichael and Thelwell 2003: 559). In this case the proverb "Knowledge is power" (Mieder et al. 1991: 354; Speake 2015: 174) describes the mutual distrust held by most SNCC members concerning the media. Instead of taking the media's information at face value, they instead decide to find out what is happening in the Middle East for themselves before sharing the information with other colleagues. In sharing their research, they are also sharing the power to influence global politics.

Several sayings in Carmichael's narrative are attributed to Junebug Jabbo Jones. Jones is an African-American southern

fictional character that was created and performed by SNCC member, John M. O'Neal (1940-2019) who worked as SNCC's field secretary and coordinator of the Freedom Schools. O'Neal was also a very talented actor and playwright who created and performed as the Jones character. One may say that O'Neal's character *grew out of* and also *with* the movement. (SNCC Legacy Project) SNCC worked with many poor sharecroppers that lacked the same educational opportunities as many of the SNCC volunteers (many of whom attended prestigious universities). O'Neal created Jones as a way of capturing and expressing the straightforward folk wisdom that sharecroppers demonstrated despite their lack of any formal education. One may only imagine how many late night SNCC meetings were enlightened by insights that SNCC members would attribute to this southern folk persona. The character became so popular that O'Neal would go on to found Junebug Productions, Inc. after his work with SNCC was done.

One of the very first sayings that Carmichael attributes to Jones appears as he is describing the social and political climate at Howard University in the 1960s:

> Howard presented me with every dialectic existing in the African community. At Howard, on any given day, one might meet every black thing…and its opposite. The place was a veritable tissue of contradiction, embodying the best and the absolute worst values of the African-American tradition. As Junebug Jabbo Jones (may his tribe increase) loved to say, "Effen yo' doan unnerstan' the principle of eternal contradiction, yo' sho ain't gonna unnerstan' diddly about Howard University. Nor about black life in these United States neither." (Carmichael and Thelwell 2003: 113)

Jones's saying means that as a freshman at Howard Carmichael quickly learned that he was going to have to "take the good with the bad." For instance, one the one hand, there were black students at Howard who were extremely class conscious—only wanting to learn to increase their personal wealth. Additionally, some student organizations still practiced colorism, or the notion that lighter skin, in and of itself, carries a higher degree of prestige, therefore barring darker skinned people from joining their groups. On the other hand, there were also many students like

Carmichael, who displayed higher levels of social consciousness and wanted to learn to help improve social and economic conditions for all black people and not just for themselves. Carmichael's proverbial expression "every black thing…and its opposite" signals to the reader in advance that Junebug Jabbo Jones's "principle of eternal contradiction" is applicable at Howard.

Carmichael also explains what SNCC members learn from Howard professor, Herbert Reed, about conducting themselves as young student activists in the Non-Violent Action Group (NAG) and the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC). After describing some necessary personality traits such as always being goal oriented, polite, and knowledgeable, Carmichael asserts that Reed told them that a good activist should also maintain a good sense of humor. He accentuates his last point concerning humor with another saying from Junebug Jabbo Jones. As Junebug Jabbo Jones (may his tribe increase) says: "What us Africans need most is a lot of patience and a sense of irony" (Carmichael 2003: 149). Carmichael goes on to explain that he and his SNCC comrades would quickly learn that these attributes would only be beneficial at Howard and would not work with "armed barbarians or irrationally savage racists. Or with an inflexible government establishment whose 'interests,' as they understand them, give a low priority to justice for your people or the alleged guarantees of the Constitution. We would have to find that out to our great sorrow" (Carmichael and Thelwell 2003: 149).

Carmichael also describes the process by which he became SNCC chairman. He says that when SNCC members initially voted, John Lewis (1940-2020) (who would later become a U.S. congressman) actually won the election, but many members who knew and liked Carmichael wanted him to replace Lewis (whom they felt had become increasingly focused on his own political ambitions), so they forced a recount, and to Lewis's dismay Carmichael won the election. In a side note, the editor, former SNCC activist, Ekwueme Michael Thelwell (b. 1939-) describes the debate that took place between himself and Carmichael concerning the issue of including Lewis's sentiments regarding the election in Carmichael's autobiography. They are ambivalent on the issue. To negotiate, Carmichael employs another popular saying

from Junebug Jabbo Jones. Carmichael says: "Okay, Thelwell. We'll hold that one. Leave it the way it is for now. Junebug used to say, 'Inside every Negro there lurks a potential black man.' Let me think about it. Later when we get to that chapter in the book, we can fight about it…" (Carmichael 2003: 483). The saying "Inside every Negro there lurks a potential black man" insinuates that Carmichael believes that whether Lewis ever expressed any negative sentiments or not, he may still deserve the benefit of the doubt. Carmichael and Thelwell never got the opportunity to "fight about it," but Thelwell's editor's note gives readers a glimpse into their writing process and their mindset.

Carmichael also uses a variation of this saying in *Stokely Speaks: From Black Power to Pan-Africanism* (1971) except in this instance it is not attributed to Jones. In Chapter eleven, "A New World to Build," he says: "There's another concept we're trying to put out around the country: every Negro is a potential black man. This concept is not only necessary, it is revolutionary…" (Carmichael 1971: 148-149). Here Carmichael is using the saying to characterize a potential epiphanic moment which may happen when a black person becomes a revolutionary thinker who fully acknowledges and embraces his African roots. Later in the same chapter Carmichael presents the proverb as one of three important concepts that black people must learn in order to resist the culturally divisive forces of colonialism:

> We must have an undying love. We must have an undying love for our people. (2) Every Negro is a potential black man. (3) For black people the question of community is not simply a question of geographical boundaries but a question of our people and where we are. (Carmichael 1971: 153)

Presented as one of three important tenets, the proverb emphasizes the need to abolish self-hatred in black communities in America. It also highlights the need to reconsider the physical and mental boundaries that are traditionally imposed to demarcate blackness.

Carmichael also describes the effect that his freshman English teacher, Toni Morrison had on him as a student at Howard. Years later Morrison would become a Nobel laureate, and as an editor at Random House she would also edit two of Carmi-

chael's books, *Black Power* (1967) and *Stokely Speaks* (1971). After emphasizing the fact that Morrison was an extremely rare combination of literary talent and good looks, Carmichael uses a saying from SNCC member, Chuck McDew to call attention to the assumed luck that the hiring committee at Howard must have had in finding such a genius as Morrison:

> Ms. Toni Morrison was clearly one of the committee's more inspired choices. Brother Chuck McDew sometimes says, 'Even a blind pig will pick up a fat acorn evrah now'n den.' I hear that Sister Morrison is on record as remembering me as 'something of a rascal in class.' Perhaps, no doubt. But they say what goes round comes round. Ms. M., don't look now, but your 'rascal' just called you the blind committee's 'fat acorn.' Only metaphorically, of course. (Carmichael and Thelwell 2003: 130)

Carmichael follows up McDew's saying with an age-old aphorism of his own when he says "what goes round comes round." The playful banter that Carmichael sustains through proverbs and sayings illustrates the warm-hearted sentiments that Morrison and Carmichael held for one another.

Another important proverb that Carmichael includes comes from SNCC member, Hartman Turnbow as he recalls describing to Turnbow, the brutality that some of the Freedom Riders are faced with as they travel through Mississippi: "The one day I told Mr. Hartman Turnbow how three generations of movement women—Mrs. Hamer, Annelle Ponder, and June Johnson (my little sister)—had been beaten in the Winona jail, his face grew overcast, his voice thoughtful. Y'know son," he mused, "water seek de low places but power seek de weak places" (Carmichael and Thelwell 2003: 287). Turnbow's response is meant to both console Carmichael and to help him understand the nature of the political struggle that had consumed much of the Deep South. Furthermore, the proverb is Turnbow's way of communicating to Carmichael that SNCC had become immersed in a battle for power, and much like low –lying water on the Mississippi, Delta plains, racist whites sought to absorb and overtake any political influence that SNCC or any poor sharecropper could ever hope to obtain.

The proverb "water seek de low places, but power seek de weak places" communicates such an important lesson to young Carmichael that he refers to it a number of times. At another point in the narrative, he explains some of the complicated logistics behind SNCC's voter registration drive:

> Now the bad part. SNCC was entering its third year in voter registration and had staked out the hard places. Those "black belt" counties in the Delta of Mississippi, Arkansas, Alabama, and southwest Georgia. We had agreed that CORE could have Louisiana. We were working where Africans were in the majority and the vote could theoretically make a real difference. Which is why the repression was so desperate. As Mr. Turnbow said when I explained this, 'Power seek tha *weak* places, water seek tha *low* places, but SNCC done seek the *hard* places, seem like t'me. (Carmichael and Thelwell 2003: 326)

In this instance, Carmichael extends the proverb by adding his own phrase to the end "but SNCC done seek the *hard* places, seem like t'me" (Carmichael and Thelwell 2003: 326). Carmichael's addition is used to emphasize the extent that SNCC had to contend against racial terrorism. The Kennedy administration made promises of funding and support in order to convince SNCC to abandon the Freedom Rides in favor of voter registration drives, and now that they faced even worse threats of terrorism in the Deep South: "…the federal government—the Justice Department, the FBI, those Kennedy liberals who had promised so much—where were they? Nowhere to be found" (Carmichael and Thelwell 2003: 326).

Carmichael would include this proverb at another point in *Ready for Revolution* as an epigraph to chapter twenty-two. The epigraph is attributed to Hartman Turnbow, Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party leader, and reads: "We gotta make this our Mississippi, Jes' as water seek the low places, Power seek the weak places" Carmichael and Thelwell 2003: 501). In this instance, the addition of the phrase "We gotta make this our Mississippi" causes the proverb to read more as a rallying call for African-American people to unite for the common cause of political independence.

Carmichael also describes a family like atmosphere that existed among members of the Non-Violent Action Group (NAG) and Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC). The long meetings that they would have were often made longer by disagreements, but as Carmichael explains, the disagreements were a necessary part of their growing process: "But similarities in fundamental attitudes notwithstanding, we were in no way intellectual clones of each other. Folks were stubbornly independent; therefore arguments and disagreements could be fierce, passionate and unending" (Carmichael and Thelwell 2003: 145). He then includes a popular saying from SNCC member Joyce Ladner that effectively describes the intellectual climate of the group: "As Joyce Ladner famously said, 'SNCC folk would argue with a street sign'" (Carmichael and Thelwell 2003:145). He then adds: "Well, NAG folk would argue with the sign *post*. But the strident rhetoric never managed to conceal a deep mutual respect" (Carmichael and Thelwell 2003:145). Ladner's humorous saying and Carmichael's snappy retort depicts an atmosphere that is mentally challenging on the surface, but also fueled by a strong family-like bond.

Another saying that Carmichael uses comes from SNCC member Bill Mahoney. As Carmichael explains, the process of challenging Howard's administration through organizations like the Non-Violent Action Group (NAG) and the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) was a great learning experience that taught him and other members how to negotiate "from a position of no real power" (Carmichael and Thelwell 2003: 147). Additionally, the minor battles that they engaged in with administration would effectively prepare them for far more challenging obstacles. Carmichael uses a saying from Bill Mahoney to emphasize this point: "As Bill Mahoney would sometimes say, 'Today the administration, tomorrow the state'" (Carmichael and Thelwell 2003: 147). It is a brief saying that fully describes the future oriented attitudes of both organizations.

SNCC member, Courtland Cox, a fellow Trinidadian from New York, would also popularize a saying. Carmichael describes him as "Another big dude… who was always thoughtful, deliberate, and given to aphorisms" (Carmichael and Thelwell 2003:158). The saying that he attributes to Cox reads: "Black-

ness is necessary. But it is not sufficient" (Carmichael and Thelwell 2003: 158-159). It is a powerful statement that speaks to the perceived connection between racial identity and political organizing. Some people mistakenly believe that simply being black qualifies them to speak on behalf of all black people, but as Cox's aphorism asserts, blackness is "not sufficient." One must also be willing to gain knowledge from books and other sources about the history of the black experience.

Another important saying comes from Howard Alumna, Gloria Richardson (b.1922-) who led the Cambridge Nonviolent Action Committee (CNAC). Richardson uses a saying as a way of conceptualizing the ramped racial violence that occurred during the Cambridge Movement (1961-1964). In the spring of 1963, Cambridge Maryland had become a virtual powder keg due to a combination of conservatives who were growing increasingly intolerant of black political organizing in the area and black community members who were quick to retaliate. Racial tensions reached a boiling point on July 14th when racist whites began driving through black neighborhoods firing liberally into black people's homes. Blacks retaliated with an "organized defense." And subsequently, "sustained fire was returned from various points, off roofs, out of windows, behind cars and trees, etc. That exchange lasted more than an hour" (Carmichael and Thelwell 2003: 339). At a meeting, Gloria Richardson would denounce the violence, but she would not denounce black people who were defending their own lives. Richardson employs a saying to make her point: "When you are attacked by a rabid dog… you don't run or throw away the walking stick you have in your hand" (Carmichael and Thelwell 2003: 339-340). This saying was not well received by the press and all of the black and white leaders who were proponents of non-violence, but Richardson had established herself as one of few militant black females in the movement that could get the Kennedy Administration's attention. Subsequently, Richardson and (CNAC) would have several private meetings with Attorney General, Robert F. Kennedy. Ultimately, her efforts led to her being one of the signatories of the Treaty of Cambridge which desegregated all public facilities and implemented provisions to improve equities in housing and education.

6. West Indian and African Proverbial Wisdom

Many proverbs and sayings that Carmichael includes in his narrative are attributed to West Indians, Africans, or various African tribes. Some of them involve animals thus reflecting his experiences with agrarian lifestyles that many black people live around the world. Through these sayings Carmichael makes a number of important points concerning life, truth, and human nature.

One African proverb appears at a point in the narrative when Carmichael says he and a group of friends at Bronx Science were discussing the Pythagorean Theorem when they are suddenly approached by a man whom Carmichael describes as a "hobo-looking old dude" (Carmichael and Thelwell 2003:109). The man tells them that the Pythagorean Theorem was not discovered by Pythagoras the Greek, as most people believe. He tells them that the famous formula was instead discovered by Africans in Egypt. Carmichael and his friends initially dismiss the old man as crazy, but after he checks the facts for himself in the library, he realizes that what the man tells him is indeed the truth and he uses two proverbs (one of which is African) and a proverbial expression to communicate this learning experience to readers.

The first mistake that Carmichael says he made is to dismiss the man simply because of his unruly appearance: "Thou seest that man's fall, but thou knowest not his wrassling" (Carmichael and Thelwell 2003: 109). This universal proverb that Carmichael does not attribute to any particular person basically means that it is wise not to judge people based on their outward appearances because one has no way of knowing what an individual may have been through. Carmichael goes on to say: "That lesson would be reinforced time and again when as a young man I was organizing sharecroppers in the rural South. Especially with our elders. Knowledge and sometimes wisdom can come from the most unlikely of sources. The stone that the builders rejected…" (Cambridge and Thelwell 2003: 109). The proverbial expression "the stone that the builders rejected" further speaks to the notion that one does not have to be formally educated to learn. Knowledge may also be gained through unconventional means. Carmichael then employs an African proverb to accentuate this important message: "And of course, in Africa, in the villages, the same thing. A proverb I heard stayed with me: 'Truth is like a goatskin

bag: each man carries his own' (Carmichael and Thelwell 2003: 109).

At another point in the narrative Carmichael is discussing the overwhelming amount of support that he received after being elected SNCC Chairman. Dr. King congratulates him and tells him that he always believed that Carmichael would eventually be called upon to lead the organization. Contrarily, his former teacher and Congress of Racial Equality (CORE) co-founder, James Farmer expresses a more ambivalent attitude towards Carmichael's new role. In fact, he warns Carmichael of some of the perils of leadership. Farmer asks Carmichael if he was familiar with the "West Indian proverb about the high-climbing monkey?" (Carmichael and Thelwell 2003: 485). Carmichael responds: "My grandmother used to say it all the time." (Carmichael and Thelwell 2003: 485; Speak 2015: 151). An editor's side note reveals the West Indian proverb that Farmer is referring to: "The higher the monkey climb, the more he expose he behind." Referencing the proverb is Farmer's way of warning him that as the new leader of SNCC, Carmichael will be under much more scrutiny and observation than he ever was as a regular member. In addition to the West Indian proverb, Farmer also tells him that he must grow "some calluses on [his] soul" (Carmichael and Thelwell 2003: 485) which is a proverbial expression meaning that he would have to maintain a mature attitude when faced with an abundance of criticism. Farmer then leaves Carmichael with another proverb. He asks Carmichael if he recalls the saying "uneasy lies the head" which is derived from Shakespeare's *King Henry IV*. (Mieder et al. 1991: 128) The line reads: "Uneasy lies the head that wears the crown." A Shakespearean at heart, Carmichael would sometimes sit-in on Shakespeare lectures at Howard, so one may assume that he is well-versed. Carmichael responds by saying: "that [doesn't] apply since SNCC didn't have no crowns no how." In using the proverb reference, Farmer is more than likely testing his former student, and if that is indeed the case, Carmichael passed with flying colors in reminding the civil rights veteran of SNCC's primary purpose which is to organize communities, so that they could eventually lead themselves. (Carmichael and Thelwell 2003: 485)

At another point in the narrative Carmichael describes a time when he returned home to visit his mother after being away for an extended amount of time. His mother tries to convince him to stay awhile, and after much pleading, he finally concedes to her wishes. He uses an African proverb to justify his decision to take a much-needed break from organizing. He says: "As we say in Africa, 'Why is man better than animals? Because we have kinfolk'" (Carmichael and Thelwell 2003: 731). A variation of this proverb also appears in another section as a caption that accompanies a 1989 photo of Carmichael surrounded by his nieces and nephews. The caption reads: "*'Why are humans better than animals? Because we have kinsmen.'* Igbo proverb" (Carmichael and Thelwell 2003).

As Carmichael explains the effect that his political saying, "Black Power" had on the media, he says that it is always misinterpreted and attacked by political leaders that do not have a full grasp of its meaning. While Carmichael intends for the slogan to be a rallying cry for black political, social, and economic independence, many press outlets and politicians misinterpret the call as an overt expression of racial hatred. According to Carmichael: "one famous public intellectual, James Wechsler of the *New York Post*, worried that we 'were killing the dream'… that 'the cause of Civil Rights was floundering'… 'the visions of the freedom movement are imperiled'…'some deeply dedicated *[but obviously confused]* men are setting the stage for the destruction of the noblest cause of our time.'" (Carmichael and Thelwell 2003: 525). So many people felt offended or threatened by his new "Black Power" mantra that Carmichael had no way of knowing who to attack and employs a proverb to describe the situation. The narrative reads: "West Indian proverb: 'When you throw a stone into a pigsty, the one that bawl is the one you lick'" (Carmichael and Thelwell: 2003 525). The proverb basically describes his attitude towards all the political backlash that he receives. Carmichael clearly believes that the most outspoken opponents are also the enemies who are determined to impede the progress of the movement, and those are the ones that he doesn't mind insulting with his mantra.

At another point in the narrative Carmichael describes the effect that being SNCC Chairman had on him. While he explains

that it did not have a negative effect on his personality or attitude towards the movement, it did pull him away from all of the things that he really enjoyed most, such as political organizing, and taking part in all of the "day-to-day running of the organization" which ultimately had to be left for others to accomplish because of his heavy speaking and touring schedule (Carmichael and Thelwell 2003: 540). To explain his complicated predicament, Carmichael employs an African proverb which sounds much like Junebug Jabbo Jones's theory of contradiction:

> Where one thing stands, something else will stand beside it. That's an African proverb I've always liked. This ancestral wisdom deals with duality and contradiction, complexity. Nothing is ever entirely one thing or even simply what it seems. Another, different thing will stand beside it and behind it. A particular thing will often include its opposite. (Carmichael and Thelwell 2003: 540)

The African proverb "Where one thing stands, something else will stand beside it" speaks to the convoluted nature of Carmichael's issue. Most people assumed that the world-wide attention that Carmichael received as SNCC chairman was what he wanted, but the proverb illustrates that he also had a strong passion to go back to the job that he loved most which was political organizing. Carmichael would eventually return to political organizing after his chairmanship ended, but he never truly gave up one set of duties for the other.

Towards the end of his career when Carmichael receives student papers about the Freedom Movement sent to him by the son of famed sociologist, Dr.W.E.B. Du Bois (1868-1963), David Du Bois, Carmichael sends him a thank you letter that describes the experience as humbling. Carmichael is "humbled" by Du Bois's student's interests in the Freedom Movement, and he is also "humbled" by the honesty that the students express in their papers. Carmichael then uses two proverbs, one which is a favorite of his famous friend and mentor Dr. King, and the other he attributes to Egyptians: "But we were humbled to see the honesty of your students in facing contradictions which challenge life-long opinions. That made Martin Luther King come alive with his oft-repeated 'truth crushed to the earth shall rise again.' Or as the Egyptians say, 'struggle is like a rubber ball: the

harder it is smashed into the dirt, the higher it rebounds into the sky'" (Mieder et al. 1991: 616; Carmichael and Thelwell 2003: 595-596; Mieder 2010: 512). Carmichael includes these powerful proverbs as a way of saying that the students are now also a major part of the Freedom Movement, and their work is simply a manifestation of this bond.

As a citizen of Guinea, Carmichael explains an ordeal that he experiences when his passport nearly expires. After the death of Guinean President Sékou Touré, Carmichael feared that he would be denied a new passport by the new regime and therefore would no longer be allowed to travel. He says that he was able to obtain a new one from the minister of the interior before it expired by being creative. Since he recognized the minister from when the minister was just a low-level officer, he was able to use his knowledge of the man's love for American hip-hop and attractive women to convince him to expedite the handling of his passport. Previously the young man had asked Carmichael to critique the English used in a rap song he had written. The minister remembers Carmichael's favor, and after a few laughs and some small talk Carmichael receives his new passport, thereby reducing a process that usually takes several months to only thirty minutes. As Carmichael leaves the minister's office, he promises to send many attractive women to his office in return. Carmichael says: "He was still laughing as I left his office that day" (Carmichael and Thelwell 2003: 724). In addition to this humorous anecdote, Carmichael informs the reader that the same minister was later executed for plotting a government take-over. Carmichael uses an African proverb to describe the young minister's revolutionary spirit. He says: "As the Ashanti proverb says, 'A log may lie in the river for ten years, but it will never become a crocodile" (Carmichael and Thelwell 2003: 723-24). He also adds: "He once was a most impressive young warrior and he taught me a lot. Peace be unto him" (Carmichael and Thelwell 2003: 724). The anecdote and the Ashanti proverb work together to express the notion that if one believes that one is destined to be a revolutionary then that is what one will ultimately become regardless of any other title that may be bestowed upon them.

At another point in the narrative Carmichael describes his strategy for cancer treatment. While he always allowed trusted

medical professionals to treat him, he also tried several experimental treatments. He describes his reaction after being exposed to some of these alternative remedies: "I was surprised both at the extent and the variety of these enterprises. It was collectively an underground mini-industry, at least some of which seemed transparently fraudulent, the contemporary equivalents of snake oil salesman preying on frightened people at their most vulnerable. An exploitation of the drowning-man-and-the-straw syndrome, the profit motive at its absolutely most despicable" (Carmichael and Thelwell 2003: 769). The proverbial expression "the drowning-man-and-the straw" is a reference to the proverb "A drowning man will clutch at a straw." (Mieder et al. 1991: 169; Speake 2015: 84) While this may not be attributed to a specific group it helps to prepare the reader for another proverb which Carmichael does attribute to African people:

> But the few that, although unorthodox, appeared to be serious scientific initiatives with some potential to benefit somebody came surrounded by a flotilla of the obviously fraudulent. And how to distinguish between them? The task of sorting out and sifting through fell to Dr. Justice, assisted by Eric, Winky, and my sister Nagib. As our proverb says, 'Hungry belly make monkey eat red pepper.' Well, necessity has made me an expert on experimental cancer treatment. (Carmichael and Thelwell 2003: 769)

In this instance, Carmichael's use of a proverb and a proverbial expression calls attention to the troubling situation that he was forced into by the insidious disease, cancer, and as the proverb illustrates desperate times call for desperate measures. Due to the expert care that Carmichael receives after his initial diagnoses, he lives another two years. He succumbs to the disease in 1998.

7. Proverbs and Sayings Reflecting Various Branches of Learning

Carmichael also uses several proverbs and sayings that reflect various disciplines or fields of study such as: philosophy, history, English, political science, and engineering. At one point in the narrative he says: "That Greek philosopher Heracleitus was wrong in our case: Africans in America seem always to be cross-

ing and recrossing the same river" (Carmichael and Thelwell 2003: 204). While Carmichael's statement may not be a proverb, it is a reference to a saying that was popularized by Heracleitus who was known for his writings about paradox and incoherence which he argues arises naturally alongside constant change. Heracleitus's original statement reads "No man ever steps in the same river twice, for its not the same river and he's not the same man." Heracleitus' saying aptly applies to Carmichael who entered Howard as a pre-med student, but quickly discovered his passion for philosophy after becoming involved with the movement. Carmichael's reference to it: "Africans in America seem always to be crossing and recrossing the same river" is but one of many examples of Carmichael applying his fervor for philosophical insight to the civil rights struggle.

Another saying that Carmichael incorporates into his narrative which also illustrates his enthusiasm for philosophy appears at a point in the narrative when he describes a need for black people in the Deep South to have their own political parties which would enable them to elect their own candidates on the local and state levels. Recognizing the limited success of the newly established Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party (MFDP), Carmichael explains that another party is necessary: "The MFDP was one model, but we needed at least a second one. As someone famous said, 'Let a thousand flowers bloom and a thousand schools of thought contend'" (Carmichael and Thelwell 2003: 438). In this case Carmichael's philosophical aphorism is used to describe a pivotal moment in the movement that would result in the founding of the Lowndes County Freedom Organization (LCFO).

Black Power: The Politics of Liberation in America (1967) includes a proverb that may serve as an explanation for why the MFDP may not have been successful in accomplishing its mission of unseating the racist Democratic Party at the 1964 Democratic National Convention. The passage reads: "Law is the agent of those in political power; it is the product of those powerful enough to define right and wrong and to have that definition legitimized by 'law.' This is not to say that 'might makes right,' but it is to say that might makes law. The MFDP was operating from a base of powerlessness; thus, they could be declared 'illegal'"

(Ture and Hamilton: 1967). The proverb "Might makes right" is used in this instance to emphasize the reason why the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party (MFDP) was not strong enough to unseat the traditional all white racist Democratic Party. According to paremiologist, Wolfgang Mieder, "might makes right" is one of the most highly cited proverbs of the English tradition, appearing in the works of figures such as Abraham Lincoln, Frederick Douglass, Martin Luther King, William Shakespeare, and others. (Mieder 2019: 269) The proverb means that in the game of politics, it is always the stronger party that wins. This fact is accentuated even further by the anti-proverb "might makes law" which proceeds it. Anti-proverbs are defined as "those reactions to common proverbs…which are humorous, ironic, or satirical modifications that contain new insights and generalizations, with the possibility of becoming new proverbs" (Mieder 2019: 15). If the proverb "might makes right" represents any specific field, in this instance, it is unquestionably the field of political science. (Mieder et al. 1991: 510; Speake 2015: 207)

At another point in the narrative Carmichael seems to have a war of words with a reporter or better yet, a war of proverbs. The reporter says to Carmichael: "You know, Mr. Ture, they say journalism is the first draft of history" (Carmichael and Thelwell 2003: 501). Carmichael, unimpressed responds: "Napoléon had something to say about that." (Carmichael and Thelwell 2003: 501). The reporter having no clue as to what Napoléon says about history is mocked even further by Carmichael who then says: "You mean you don't know? C'mon, I thought you guys knew everything. [Napoléon] said history is nothing but lies commonly agreed upon. You saying you the first draft of that?" (Carmichael and Thelwell 2003: 501) The reporter who is beginning to feel insulted asks Carmichael if he is accusing him of being a liar. Carmichael responds by saying: "Oh no, but I may be calling you a historian." This brief exchange illustrates Carmichael's penchant for philosophical thinking and his ability to view academic disciplines from a macroscopic perspective. Carmichael is primarily concerned with learning how different schools of thought function and how that knowledge can be applied to the movement.

Perhaps the previous exchange with the reporter inspires Carmichael to include a similar saying in a speech that he delivers at the University of California, Berkeley, October 1966. In the introduction of the speech Carmichael says: "Incidentally, for my friends and members of the press, my self-appointed white critics, I was reading Mr. Bernard Shaw two days ago, and I came across a very important quote that I think is most apropos to you. He says, 'All criticism is an autobiography.' Dig yourself. OK" (Carmichael 1971: 45). The saying which he employs in the Berkeley address may be interpreted as an invitation to the media to continue to criticize him and his ideas. He is telling the media outlets that are present, that the negative press that they generate is only contributing to his legacy as a black revolutionary. The saying may also help to defer any negative criticism that he may receive for that particular speech.

More proverbs and proverbial language concerning Carmichael's philosophical views on history appear in *Stokely Speaks: From Black Power to Pan-Africanism* (1971). In chapter four, *Toward Black Liberation*, Carmichael describes the failures of Reconstruction: "We have repeatedly seen that political alliances based on appeals to conscience and decency are chancy things, simply because institutions and political organizations have no consciences outside their own special interests. The political and social rights of Negroes have been and always will be negotiable and expendable the moment they conflict with the interests of our 'allies.' If we do not learn from history, we are doomed to repeat it, and that is precisely the lesson of the Reconstruction" (Carmichael 1971: 37). The use of the proverb: "If we do not learn from history, we are doomed to repeat it" speaks to a history of failed promises that the U.S. government has made to black people since the end of the Civil War. Carmichael uses the aphorism to illustrate the fact that it is one's own responsibility to learn about these unfortunate historical occurrences to prevent them from happening again.

Carmichael echoes the very same point in chapter fifteen "From Black Power Back to Pan-Africanism." He explains that black people should learn about the history of Africa that predates the Trans-Atlantic slave trade:

> This parochial thinking must cease. Our starting point in history must precede the period of colonialism and slavery; it must precede the Arabic and European invasions. This is not to say we want to rest on the past glory of African civilization, which contributed immensely to world civilization; but in order to map out the future we *must* clearly understand the past. More importantly, this interpretation allows us to view the effects these events had on us. (Carmichael 1971: 222)

The saying "in order to map out the future we *must* clearly understand the past" is nearly identical in meaning to the proverb "If we do not learn from history, we are doomed to repeat it." The main difference is that the former does not attempt to foresee or predict any of the negative consequences that may result from ignoring history. Carmichael's use of the proverb and the saying is indicative of his belief that all revolution begins with education.

Another saying that Carmichael uses a number of times is attributed to the field of engineering. As Carmichael describes some fundamental differences between the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) and the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), he asserts that SCLC was in some ways pigeonholed because they continued to depend on marches and government support even when federal support was unlikely and even when marches were viewed as being detrimental to the physical and mental well-being of all of its members who were often attacked by racist conservative groups and state troopers. Carmichael uses a proverb to explain the rationale behind this kind of thinking: "You know there is a saying among engineers: "If all you have is a hammer, the whole world will look like a nail to you" (Carmichael and Thelwell 2003: 446; Speake 2015: 142). He repeats this proverb again as he ponders how Dr. King, after leading successful marches in Selma, will alter his political tactics as he prepares to mobilize SCLC to take on northern territories beginning with Chicago. As Carmichael explains, Chicago will require new tactics and it will also pose new dangers. He emphasizes this point to readers using the very same proverb:

> The sheer scale of the city, its ethnic neighborhoods, its politics, the infamous Daley machine, the entrenched industrial capitalism.

> How responsive would these be to SCLC's nonviolent, mass mobilization marches and cries for integration. I wasn't sure. A brother in engineering once told me. "If the only tool you have is a hammer, then the whole world will look like a nail. I wished Dr. King well, but I wondered what tactical changes he was preparing for his first Northern campaign. I had my doubts. (Carmichael and Thelwell 2003: 538; Speake 2015: 142)

This proverb which he attributes to the engineering field is used to explain to the reader that SNCC's purpose was to provide black people with other viable alternatives that were not being offered by SCLC or other conservative groups. As the proverb implies, a single political organization will never be adequate in all situations.

8. Proverbs and Sayings About Motion and Progress

There are also several proverbs and sayings that equate physical movement with personal growth and development. They are implemented for at least a couple of different reasons. First, they help to characterize the learning process—seeming most appropriate at various points in the narrative when people are faced with difficult learning situations. Secondly, proverbs and sayings regarding motion and movement are used at times to discuss the progress of African people.

One proverb that Carmichael uses that equates movement with learning is "All motion is not progress." The first time that he employs this proverb he is remembering the annual Carnival celebration in his native homeland of Trinidad, and how much he enjoyed the Calypso music of steel bands, and the float and costume competitions. As a young child, he and his family would view the float building process and enjoy bickering over which costume would take home the year's grand prize. Carmichael says that the event has now become marred by capitalism:

> Today, so I'm told, the steel bands come lavishly attired and equipped courtesy of their multinational corporate sponsors, the marriages of capitalism and local culture. The Shell Oil Invaders and Mobil Corp's Casa Blanca? Somehow it doesn't ring quite right, given the militant history out of which the bands evolved. All motion is not Progress. (Carmichael and Thelwell 2003: 41)

The oil manufacturers are products of European colonial forces that sought to exploit the island's people and their natural resources. The steel bands evolved as a form of subversion. When colonists forbade native workers from playing drums, they resorted to secretly designing their own instruments from discarded oil containers. Over the years, the drum making process evolved into the specialized sounds that can be heard from Calypso bands today. In this instance, the proverb "All motion is not progress" describes the irony demonstrated in the fact that a loved Carnival tradition which was designed to subvert colonial forces, is now, through corporate sponsorship, being used to promote them.

Carmichael uses the proverb again in describing the impact of the landmark Brown vs. Topeka Kansas Board of Education (1952-1954) decision on the Deep South. On the one hand, many African-Americans celebrated the fact that segregation would finally be outlawed, and they looked forward to more opportunities to receive equal education. On the other hand, due to racist backlash, (which often appeared in the form of Ku Klux Klan activity, lynching, and mob violence) celebrations surrounding the landmark Brown case would be short lived. Carmichael asserts that the worst part about the deteriorating racial climate was the government's subdued response: "From the rest of the nation and the national government, silence. Things were in fact worse. All motion is not progress" (Carmichael and Thelwell 2003:175).

In describing the influence that exploitation had on black people in the film industry, Carmichael contends that there were a number of positive and powerful images of blackness in Hollywood in the early 1960s. He names important black figures such as: Harry Belafonte, Yaphet Kotto, William Marshall, Woody Strode, Ivan Dixon, and former NFL running back Jim Brown. (Carmichael and Thelwell 2003: 267) He goes on to say that these positive images were quickly overshadowed by stereotypical imagery that became pervasive during the blaxploitation era of the early 1970s. He says: "The …wave of blaxploitation films showed us graphically that not all motion is progress. Particularly for black folks in Hollywood" (Carmichael and Thelwell 2003: 267). In this instance, Carmichael uses the proverb "All motion is not progress" to pinpoint moments in history that are marked by moral regression.

Carmichael also describes the impact that his "black power" slogan had on the Civil Rights Movement. He explains that the movement was transforming in the 1960s and would have continued to evolve with or without a popular political slogan which could never create change in and of itself. In making this clear to the reader he employs the proverb again:

> Yeah, the movement was changing. Had to change. Struggle is, after all, a dynamic, complicated, and organic process. And not all motion is progress. But, c'mon, gimme a break. We certainly did not change the entire direction of the black movement or the attitudes of black America merely by combining two simple words at a rally in Greenwood, Mississippi. That's silly and absurd, even for the American media. (Carmichael and Thelwell 2003: 524)

Even though Carmichael's black power saying did not change the movement on its own, it still marks a major turning point in American history. When Carmichael unveils the saying near the tail end of the Meredith Mississippi Freedom March (1966) it basically illustrates that the abuse that marchers suffered at the hands of state troopers only strengthened their resolve. As Carmichael points out "All motion is not progress," but many black people were satisfied with the direction that the movement was heading in following that important march.

A motion-oriented proverbial expression that Carmichael uses is "lift as you climb." It is an expression that speaks to a sense of unity in the African-American community. Carmichael discusses the strong legacy of activism and scholarship that he encountered as a 19- year-old freshman at Howard University in 1960: "In D.C. I was truly in touch for the first time with all aspects of the culture of Africans from the South. While at school I was also being exposed in a systematic and critical way to our intellectual tradition and the history of the struggle of those 'many thousands gone,' who as they proudly said always 'lifted as they climbed.' All of which could not help but have a serious effect on any young person searching for an honorable role for himself and his people in the world" (Carmichael and Thelwell 2003: 133). Carmichael is saying that learning about black culture at Howard was instrumental in shaping his own identity as an ac-

tivist and black revolutionary thinker and he is also saying that it is a value that he intends to pass on to others.

At another point in Carmichael's narrative, he discusses his reaction to the book, *The Rage of A Privileged Class*. He describes the tone of the book as being completely out of touch with the Civil Rights Movement. He explains that the book's subject is "the anger, frustration, alienation, and despair prevalent among Africans born in America, who although 'supremely qualified' found themselves underappreciated, rarely promoted, and insufficiently rewarded in the American corporate world" (Carmichael and Thelwell 2003: 770). He goes on to discuss some of the sentiments of disappointment expressed by the book's author: "'We accepted *all* their terms,' they wail, 'and *did everything they required* of us: the 'right' schools, the 'right' degrees, the 'right' résumés, so why now do we feel so alienated, underutilized, and isolated?" (Carmichael and Thelwell 2003: 770). Carmichael then explains that what this person is interpreting as racism may simply be a symptom of capitalism which is experienced by many people in the corporate world: "In all likelihood, I thought, a great many of their white colleagues in offices next door who could not claim an ethnic or culturally determined 'glass ceiling' were probably equally victim to the very same ennui and disaffection and for much the same reasons: the craven abandonment of their community and culture in thoughtless pursuit of the sterility of the corporate American dream, cum nightmare, and for *acceptance* and status in that predatory culture" (Carmichael and Thelwell 2003: 770). Here Carmichael is defining what he considers to be a common attitude found among the black bourgeoisie. He says that it is an unwarranted feeling of entitlement that is not at all connected to civil rights struggles. He then poses the question: "Whatever happened to 'lifting as ye Climb?'" (Carmichael and Thelwell 2003: 770). Carmichael uses the proverbial expression "lift as ye climb" here to draw a stark comparison between the effects of capitalism and the effects of racism. He makes it very clear to the reader that they are two very distinct entities.

Another motion-oriented proverbial expression appears as he describes the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) at its inception. He asserts that Ms. Ella Josephine Bak-

er (1903-1986) at the Southwide Youth Leadership Conference at Shaw University in Raleigh, N.C. (1960) convinced sit-in movement attendees that their new organization could be independent and operated solely by students. Despite this declaration, there were still many questions left unanswered after the initial meeting. Questions concerning structure, location, and funding continued to arise. Carmichael employs a variation of the proverbial expression "to learn to fly on the way down" to explain their unique predicament: "as Chuck Jones put it, we had to learn to fly before hitting the ground, we also had to decide the style and trajectory of that flight: Just what kind of bird were we, buzzards or falcons?" (Carmichael and Thelwell 2003: 299).

After SNCC is established, they still found themselves at times facing situations for which they had no preparation or planning. As they were organizing their major voter registration drive in the Mississippi Delta (known as Freedom Summer), they were faced with issues such as communities of black people who were too terrified to participate due to racial violence. Carmichael explains that it was "another one of those critical moments of decision in which we had no clear guidelines or precedents or guarantees. Another one of those 'learning to fly on the way down' situations" (Carmichael and Thelwell 2003: 354). "Learning to fly on the way down" simply means that they were forced to make decisions without having any idea of what the results may be.

Carmichael would describe the Black Panther Party (BPP) in the same way. After Eldridge Cleaver and Huey P. Newton gained Carmichael's permission to use the popular panther symbol from Carmichael's Lowndes County Freedom Organization (LCFO), the California based group spread and grew exponentially across the nation, but as an organization they faced some serious drawbacks. None of the Panther members were well educated, they had no previous political leadership experience, and Carmichael declined their invitation to play any significant role aside from allowing them to use him as a figurehead symbol as their Honorary Prime Minister. As he explains, the BPP also suffered from a lack of organization and a lack of leadership:

> And the Panthers, what was their interest? At the time they were beginning to have high media visibility, albeit of a dubious kind,

> and a growing national image. As a consequence, the Black Panther Party was spreading rapidly among Northern African youth who'd grown up listening to Malcolm, seeing SNCC on TV, and feeling deprived of their opportunity to be involved in the kind of struggle SNCC and Dr. King had waged in the South. But the Panther leader lacked real political experience. This was an organization literally with no history and no precedent in American politics. (Carmichael and Thelwell 2003:661)

Carmichael contends that the Black Panther Party suffers from many of the same ailments that SNCC suffered from in its early days. He then says: "they found themselves in midair, 'learning to fly on the way down'" (Carmichael and Thelwell 2003:661). Due to some of the inefficiencies that Carmichael identifies, the organization struggled for a while and then eventually dissipated.

A similar moment occurs during Freedom Summer after SNCC activists; Mickey Schwerner, James Chaney, and Andy Goodman are murdered by the Ku Klux Klan. Days after they are discovered missing, the charred frame of their vehicle is found. Carmichael accompanied by two other SNCC members embark on a mission to find their friends. Having no clear plan in place for navigating the Mississippi Delta swamps, forest, and farmlands, Carmichael remains optimistic that they can solicit some help from Native Choctaw hunters: "We hoped maybe we could blend in with them on the reservation and take advantage of their knowledge of the terrain. Admittedly not a fully formulated plan, but we were again learning to fly on the way down" (Carmichael and Thelwell 2003: 375). Carmichael and his friends never employ the services of the Choctaw, and they are not successful in locating their friends. However, weeks later, after authorities receive tips from a Ku Klux Klan informer, the remains of Schwerner, Chaney, and Goodman are discovered buried underneath tons of dirt on a farm in Mississippi. Carmichael in explaining what would be described as one of the lowest points of the Freedom Movement, employs the proverbial expression, "learning to fly on the way down" to explain the feeling of being thrown into such a desperate situation for which there would be no clear guide for escaping.

At another point in the narrative Carmichael describes the experience of convincing his mentor, Kwame Nkrumah that

Nkrumah's Pan-African organization, the All-African People's Revolution Party (AAPRP) should be endorsed heavily throughout the United States as well as Africa. Carmichael is honored when Nkrumah finally agrees to allow him to oversee expanding the Party. Their goal is to spread the belief that: "All African-descended people living in 113 countries on the continent and in the diaspora…share history, culture, and common enemies—racism, imperialism, neocolonialism, and capitalist exploitation" (Carmichael and Thelwell 2003: 675). Furthermore, they teach the notion that it is the entire diaspora who endures "disunity, disorganization, and ideological confusion" (Carmichael and Thelwell 2003:675). While Carmichael realizes that the job of organizing for the Party will be no easy task, he expresses optimism, and he captures his sense of hopefulness with a proverb:

> Of course, this is ambitious, a vast ongoing enterprise. A general vision, direction, and commitment. The cumulative work of many lifetimes, an incremental and continuing struggle. We understood that clearly. But we were young and, as they say, 'a journey of a thousand miles begins with the first step.' (Carmichael and Thelwell 2003: 675)

The proverb: "a journey of a thousand miles begins with the first step" equates physical travel with personal growth and it also illustrates that from a mental standpoint, Carmichael is very well prepared for the difficult task of trying to convince black people around the globe that they share one common plight. (Mieder et al. 1991: 594; Speake 2015: 166) The proverb also conveys a sense of accomplishment in even beginning a project of this magnitude. The All-African People's Revolution Party (AAPRP) will provide future generations of revolutionaries with a stable foundation on which they may continue to build.

9. Conclusion

Carmichael uses an expansive variety of proverbs, sayings, and proverbial expressions. Collectively they illustrate his philosophical growth, and they also demonstrate some of the various ideological revolutions that he experiences throughout his lifetime. While this study is not meant to include every proverb or

saying that was ever uttered or written by Carmichael, it does provide one with a sizable sample of the kind of proverbial language that was a part of Carmichael's verbal repertoire.

The important role of proverbial language in civil rights struggles may not be overstated. As Carmichael asserts, activism and political organizing required multitudes of people to think and act as one, and the movement's many proverbs, sayings, proverbial expressions, and mantras helped unification become possible. Whether embracing a humorous saying from Junebug Jabbo Jones or sharing a powerful saying such as "Black Power," they helped people to bond, and the insight contained in the messages gave people a shared sense of purpose. Proverbs, proverbial expressions, and sayings were also a way of sharing political strategy and worldview while providing Non-Violent Action Group (NAG) members and Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) members with a clear goal and vision for moving forward.

Carmichael's penchant for proverbial language leads one to pose some important questions. Could Carmichael have become such a master of proverbial language if he had not become so accustomed to proverbial language as a child? Likewise, could Carmichael have been such an effective political organizer without applying this unique skill so liberally? Evidence revealed in this essay points one towards the negative in both cases. As Carmichael demonstrates, proverbs, sayings, and proverbial expressions can become so engrained in the human psyche that they may influence countless other aspects of human interaction including memory, interpersonal relationships, and even an individual's and entire people's world view.

References

Abrahams, Roger. "British West Indian Proverbs and Proverb Collections". *Proverbium*, vol. 10, 1968, pp. 239-243.

Amistad Research Center. "Theater Legend and Friend Remembered." *Tulane University*, http://www.amistadresearchcenter.org. retrieved on 12 July 2020.

Arora, Shirley L. "The Perception of Proverbiality." *Proverbium*, vol. 1, 1984, pp. 1-38.

Blake, John. *Children of the Movement*. Chicago: Lawrence Hill Books, 2004.

-------- "Black in America 2." CNN, 4 July 2020, https://www.cnn.com/2008/US/04/04/mlk.children.movement/index.html, retrieved on 27 July 2020.

Bowden, Betsy. "A Modest Proposal, Relating Four Millennia of Proverb Collections to Chemistry Within the Human Brain." *The Journal of American Folklore*, vol. 109, 1996, pp. 440-449.

Carmichael, Stokely. *Stokely Speaks: From Black Power to Pan-Africanism*. Chicago: Lawrence Hill, 1971.

Carmichael, Stokely and E. Michael Thelwell. *Ready for Revolution: The Life and Struggles of Stokely Carmichael*. New York: Scribner, 2003.

Doyle, Charles Clay. *Doing Proverbs and Other Kinds of Folklore*. Burlington: The University of Vermont, 2012.

Doyle, Charles Clay, Wolfgang Mieder, and Fred R. Shapiro. *The Dictionary of Modern Proverbs*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2012.

Dundes, Alan. "On the Structure of the Proverb." *The Wisdom of Many: Essays on the proverb*, edited by Wolfgang Mieder, and Alan Dundes, Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1994, pp. 43-64.

Fabian, Johannes. *Power and Performance: Explorations Through Proverbial Wisdom and Theatre in Shaba*, *Zaire,* Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1990.

Finnegan, Ruth. "Proverbs in Africa." *The Wisdom of Many: Essays on the Proverb,* edited by Wolfgang Mieder, and Alan Dundes. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1994, pp. 10-42.

Gates, Henry Louis Jr. *Stony the Road: Reconstruction, White Supremacy, and the Rise of Jim Crow*. New York: Penguin Press, 2019.

Ibekwe, Patrick. *Wit and Wisdom of Africa: Proverbs from Africa and the Caribbean*. Trenton: Africa World Press, Inc, 1998.

"John M. O'Neal." *SNCC Digital Gateway*, SNCC Legacy Project and Duke University, http://www.sncclegacyproject.org. retrieved on 12 July 2020.

Joseph, Peniel E. *Waiting 'Til the Midnight Hour: A Narrative History of Black Power in America*. New York: Henry Holt, 2006.

-------- *Stokely: A Life*. New York: Basic Civitas Books, 2014.

Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, Barbara. "Toward a Theory of Proverb Meaning." *The Wisdom of Many: Essays on the Proverb,* edited by Wolfgang Mieder, and Alan Dundes. Madison: Wisconsin University Press, 1994, pp. 111-121.

Messenger, John C. "The Role of Proverbs in A Nigerian Judicial System." *Southwestern Journal of Anthropology*, vol. 15, no. 1, 1959, pp. 64-73.

Mieder, Wolfgang. *American Proverbs: A Study of Texts and Contexts*. New York: Peter Lang Publishing, 1989.

-------- *Proverbs Are Never Out of Season: Popular Wisdom in the Modern Age*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1993.

-------- *The Politics of Proverbs: Traditional Wisdom to Proverbial Stereotypes*. New York: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1997.

-------- *"No Struggle, No Progress": Frederick Douglas and His Proverbial Rhetoric for Civil Rights*. New York: Peter Lang, 2001.

-------- *Proverbs: A Handbook*. Westport: Greenwood Press, 2004.

-------- ""The Proof of the Proverb Is in the Probing": Alan Dundes as Pioneering Paremiologist". *Western States Folklore Society*, vol. 65, no. 3, 2006, pp. 217-262.

-------- *"Yes We Can": Obama's Proverbial Rhetoric*. New York: Peter Lang, 2009.

-------- *"Making A Way Out of No Way": Martin Luther King's Sermonic Proverbial Rhetoric*. New York: Peter Lang, 2010.

-------- "'Keep Your Eyes on the Prize': Congressman John Lewis's Proverbial Odyssey for Civil Rights." *Proverbium*, vol. 31, 2014, pp. 331-393.

-------- "'The Dynamic Qualities of Proverbs in Performance': Roger Abrahams' Pioneering Contributions to Paremiology". *Western Folklore*, vol. 75, 2016, pp. 397-420.

-------- *"Right Makes Might": Proverbs and the American Worldview*. Indiana University Press, 2019.

Nkrumah, Kwame. *The Axioms of Kwame Nkrumah: Freedom Fighter's Edition*. International Publishers, 1967.

Prahlad, Anand Sw. *African-American Proverbs in Context*. E-book ed., Jackson: University of Mississippi Press, 1996.

-------- *Reggae Wisdom: Proverbs in Jamaican Music*. Jackson: University of Mississippi Press, 2001.

Seitel, Peter. "Proverbs A Social Use of Metaphor". *The Wisdom Of Many: Essays on the Proverb*, edited by Wolfgang Mieder and Alan Dundes, Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1994, pp. 122-139.

Simpson, John. *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of English Proverbs*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1982.

Speake, Jennifer. *Oxford Dictionary of Proverbs*. 6th ed., New York: Oxford University Press, 2015.

Taylor, Archer. *The Proverb*. 1931. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1985.

Taylor, Archer. "The Wisdom of Many and the Wit of One." *The Wisdom of Many: Essays on the Proverb,* edited by Wolfgang Mieder, and Alan Dundes. Madison: Wisconsin University Press, 1994, pp. 3-9.

Ture, Kwame, and Charles Hamilton. *Black Power the Politics of Liberation in America*. New York: Vintage Books, 1967.

Whiting, Bartlett Jere. "The Nature of the Proverb." *Harvard Studies and Notes in Philology and Literature*, vol. 14, 1932, pp. 273-307.

-------- Modern *Proverbs and Proverbial Sayings*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989.

"Willie Ricks." *SNCC Digital Gateway*, SNCC Legacy Project and Duke University, http://SNCCdigital.org, retrieved on 12 July 2020.

Wilson, F.P. *Oxford Dictionary of English Proverbs*. 3rd ed., New York: Oxford University Press, 1970.

Index of Proverbs, Sayings, and Proverbial Expressions

(In the order in which they appear)

(1) *Black power!*

(2) *Waste not, want not.*

(3) *If you in the morning throw minutes away, you can't pick them up the course of the day.*

(4) *Whatsoever you set your hand to do, do it with all your might.*

(5) *If you didn't work for it, don't look for it.*

(6) *If you didn't sweat for it, don't even think of it.*

(7) *You can tell the truth every day of your life, and if, on the day of your death, you tell a lie…that is what will matter.*

(8) *You know, the day on which you learned nothing is a wasted day. Enough of those and what've you got? A wasted life.*

(9) *There is always more than one way to skin a cat.*

(10) *If you want to hide something from the black man, put it in a library.*

(11) *Just because you see a man throwing worms into the river, don't necessarily mean he a friend to the fish.*

(12) *What's good news for some is bad news for others.*

(13) *When they say something bad about a man then that's the man you should run to.*

(14) *If a man hasn't discovered something that he will die for, he isn't fit to live.*

(15) *As life is action and passion, it is required of a man that he should share the passion and action of his time at peril being judged not to have lived.*

(16) *If I am not for myself, who is for me? And when I am for myself what am I? And if not now, when?*

(17) *There comes a time when silence is tantamount to consent.*

(18) *If one is a good Jew, one cannot be a Zionist. If one is Zionist, one cannot be a good Jew.*

(19) *Ask not what your country can do for you; ask what you can do for your country.*

(20) *Was not sincerity always subject to proof.*

(21) *People obey masters for one of two reasons. Either they love them, or they fear them.*

(22) *All liberation begins with land.*

(23) *The only people who never make mistakes are people who never do anything.*

(24) *A revolutionary makes a positive out of a negative.*

(25) *Action without thought is blind, thought without action is empty.*

(26) *Divide and conquer!*

(27) *All impatience is selfishness and egotism.*

(28) *Blood of the same blood and flesh of the same flesh.*

(29) *Culture is politics; politics is culture.*

(30) *Blood is thicker than water.*

(31) *A free black mind is a concealed weapon.*

(32) *A little learning is a dangerous thing.*

(33) *Knowledge is power.*

(34) *Every black thing…and its opposite.*

(35) *Effen yo' doan unnerstan' the principle of eternal contradiction, yo' sho ain't gonna unnerstan' diddly about Howard University. Nor about black life in these United States neither.*

(36) *What us Africans need most is a lot of patience and a sense of irony.*

(37) *Inside every Negro there lurks a potential black man.*

(38) *Even a blind pig will pick up a fat acorn evrah now'n den.*

(39) *What goes round comes round.*

(40) *Water seek de low places but power seek de weak places.*

(41) *SNCC folk would argue with a street sign.*

(42) *Today the administration, tomorrow the state.*

(43) *Blackness is necessary, but it is not sufficient.*

(44) *When you are attacked by a rabid dog…you don't run or throw away the walking stick you have in your hand.*

(45) *Thou seest that man's fall, but though knowest not his wrassling.*

(46) *The stone that the builders rejected.*

(47) *Truth is like a goatskin bag: each man carries his own.*

(48) *The higher the monkey climb, the more he expose he behind.*

(49) *Uneasy lies the head that wears the crown.*

(50) *Why is man better than animals? Because we have kinfolk.*

(51) *When you throw a stone into a pigsty, the one that bawl is the one you lick.*

(52) *Where one thing stands, something else will stand beside it.*

(53) *Truth crushed to the earth shall rise again.*

(54) *Struggle is like a rubber ball: the harder it is smashed into the dirt, the higher it rebounds into the sky.*

(55) *A log may lie in the river for ten years, but it will never become a crocodile.*

(56) *A drowning man will clutch at a straw.*

(57) *Hungry belly make monkey eat red pepper.*

(58) *No man ever steps in the same river twice, for its not the same river and he's not the same man.*

(59) *Let a thousand flowers bloom and a thousand schools of thought contend.*

(60) *Might makes right.*

(61) *If we do not learn from history, we are doomed to repeat it.*

(62) *In order to map out the future we must clearly understand the past.*

(63) *Journalism is the first draft of history.*

(64) *History is nothing but lies commonly agreed upon.*

(65) *All criticism is an autobiography.*

(66) *If all you have is a hammer, the whole world will look like a nail to you.*

(67) *All motion is not progress.*

(68) *Lifting as you climb.*

(69) *Learning to fly on the way down.*

(70) *A journey of a thousand miles begins with the first step.*

Dr. Raymond M. Summerville
Department of English: Literature, Teaching, Pre-Law, and Creative Writing
Fayetteville State University
1200 Murchison Road
Fayetteville, North Carolina
USA
28301-4252
E-mail: raymondmjs@gmail.com