Black Power, French Existentialism, and the Expansion of Cultural Democracy in the United States after 1945

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Black Power and existentialism were mutually reinforcing movements in the late 1960s. Stokely Carmichael used French existentialism to shape some Black Power principles, which demonstrated existentialism's continued relevance to racial equality. Existentialism reinforced values, such as moral purpose and self-definition, which supported positive appraisals of Black Power revolt on campuses. Carmichael's adoption of French existentialism illuminates transnational influences on Black Power dating to the 1940s, as well as how important French existentialist texts amplified Black perspectives. The meeting of French existentialism and Black Power assisted increased representation of Black perspectives on campuses, and popular awareness that representation was as important as desegregation to equality.

The Black Power movement sustained hope that racial equality could be achieved in the United States despite the limitations of the integration settlement of 1964 and 1965. As Peniel E. Joseph has shown, its advocates provided a clear vision of the practices that would enact equality.[1] In particular, Black Power contributed to what Joseph, Nikhil Pal Singh and Sarah C. Dunstan argue is an ongoing process of reshaping democracy in the United States so that it is crafted by US citizens of African descent, as well as by those descended from Europe and elsewhere.[2] After 1966, the Black Power advocate Stokely Carmichael contributed to this process of expanding and

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[1] Peniel E. Joseph, *Stokely: A Life* (Philadelphia: Basic Civitas Books, 2014), 191.
[2] Ibid., 159; Nikhil Pal Singh, *Black Is a Country: Race and the Unfinished Struggle for Democracy* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008), 2, 13, 63, 77, 78; Sarah C. Dunstan, *Race, Rights, and Reform: Black Activism in the French Empire and the*

strengthening democracy using French existentialism, among a range of other references, to centre Black perspectives in the political debate. Carmichael cited the self-declared existentialist Jean-Paul Sartre, the oft-labelled existentialist Albert Camus, and influential Black existentialist Frantz Fanon when he addressed university students and the wider public in his Black Power addresses to multiracial audiences.[3] He delivered such addresses in his capacity as chairperson of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) from May 1966 to May 1967, and then as field marshall in the Black Panther Party in June 1967.[4]

In his biography of Carmichael, Peniel E. Joseph has also commented on Carmichael's references to existentialism, which, he argues, signal the precision and philosophical nature of his activism.[5] The main focus of Joseph's expansive work is Carmichael's trajectory. By contrast, this article isolates one aspect of Carmichael's activism: the place of French existentialism in it. By focussing on Carmichael, it adds to work by Lewis R. Gordon on the postwar "cross-fertilization" of the ideas of African American and French existential public intellectuals.[6] It considers the transnational origins of French existentialism's place in postwar discussions about racial equality in the United States and why, therefore, it was not out of the ordinary by the 1960s for Carmichael to reference it. It also considers Carmichael's agency, showing that his endorsement and repetition of certain aspects of existentialism alongside other components was part of an intentional Black Power ideology that he carefully tailored, that he estimated would register with young African American and white audiences, and that emphasized Black self-definition and Black cultural representation. Finally, the article engages with the impact of Black Power on campuses. I show that the direct and clear nature of Carmichael's Black Power ideology aided communication and agreement between some Black and white students about the requirements for racial equality. I also indicate that students' adoption of existential values of self-expression as central to identity formation aided sympathetic responses to Black Power revolt. When *Black Studies* courses were founded, set texts included references to Sartre and Fanon, meaning that French existentialism continued to play a role in the enactment of a democracy in which Black perspectives and experiences were respected and protected into the 1970s.

United States from World War I to the Cold War (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021), 2, 3.

[3] Lewis R. Gordon, ed., *Existence in Black: An Anthology of Black Existential Philosophy* (London: Routledge, 1997), 2.

[4] Joseph, 101, 102, 103; Peniel E. Joseph, *Waiting 'till the Midnight Hour: A Narrative History of Black Power in America* (New York: Henry Holt, 2006), 181, 204, 243.

[5] Joseph, *Stokely*, 159.

[6] Lewis R. Gordon, "Sartre and Black Existentialism," in Jonathan Judaken, ed., *Race after Sartre* (New York: State University of New York Press, 2008), 157–71, 161.

Carmichael's references to French existentialism could be seen as instrumental: a link to a fashionable postwar morality of individual freedom that he made in order to increase the appeal of his arguments. Certainly, George Cotkin and Ronald Aronson have indicated the philosophy's popularity in the US, driven by publications such as *Life* and *Partisan Review*, the latter of which Aronson refers to as a kind of "publicity bureau" for Sartre and Camus after the war.[7] According to one witness, references to existentialism assisted Carmichael's communication of Black Power principles to white attendees of his speeches, who were seemingly more familiar at first with existentialism than with the ideas he was advancing about racial equality.[8] However, Carmichael's references to French existentialism were more than instrumental, as these philosophies of freedom resonated with his own experiences of racism. Existentialists were philosophers of oppression. Sartre in particular based his arguments on Black people's perspectives. Fanon engaged with and influenced Sartre. He was a psychiatrist born in Martinique and as a person of colour experienced racial oppression across the French Empire. Fanon experienced individual and structural racism in France despite his acts of loyalty to the country, including enduring injury from shrapnel while fighting for Allied freedom in the Second World War. Fanon had even committed acts of radical humanity such as counselling traumatised French military torturers during the Algerian War of Independence (1954–62) when his allegiance was to Algerian fighters seeking independence from French control.[9] Thus, when Carmichael engaged with French existentialism, he connected to writers who built perspectives around Black experiences.

I build on Jonathan Judaken and Steve Martinot's work when I consider Sartre's growing place in US discussions about race following Sartre's 1946 play *La putain respecteuse* (*The Respectful Prostitute*), which was staged across the United States in the 1940s.[10] This play engaged with issues raised by the civil rights movement at that time, as Martinot has detailed, issues

[7] Ronald Aronson, "Sartre and the American New Left," in Alfred Betschart and Juliane Werner, eds., *Sartre and the International Impact of Existentialism* (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020), 45–61, 46, 48; George Cotkin, *Existential America* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003), 91–104; Rosie Germain, "A Philosophy to Fit 'the Character of This Historical Period'? Responses to Jean-Paul Sartre in Some British and U.S. Philosophy Departments, *c.*1945–1970," *Intellectual History Review*, 30, 4 (Sept. 2019), 693–735.

[8] Robert Martin interview with St. Clair Drake, 28 July 1969 (transcript), in Ralph Bunche Oral History Collection, Civil Rights Documentation Project, RJB 149, at Howard University Archives.

[9] David Macey, *Frantz Fanon: A Biography*, 2nd edn (London: Verso, 2012), 89, 95, 100, 291, 292.

[10] Steve Martinot, "Skin for Sale: Race and *The Respectful Prostitute*," in Jonathan Judaken, ed., *Race after Sartre* (New York: State University of New York Press, 2008), 55–77.

which, as Lauren du Graf suggests, Sartre partly learnt about through Richard Wright.[11] By the time Carmichael assumed chairmanship of the SNCC in 1966, existentialism had also been connected to issues of racial equality in academic journals designed to increase representation of Black experiences and perspectives, and in the popular Black press, thus making Carmichael's own reference to the philosophy in the context of debate about racial equality unsurprising.[12] Carmichael was more likely to cite existentialism because this philosophy (though not always the French variants) influenced prominent leaders of the civil rights movement. George Cotkin demonstrates that an early proponent of ideas that would later become known as existentialism, Søren Kierkegaard, and existential Zionist Martin Buber, had featured in Martin Luther King's theological training, and subsequently in some of King's own addresses.[13] Existentialism itself had become more established in US society because the principles of freedom and moral purpose popularized in the civil rights movement were also shared by advocates of existentialism, thus helping the philosophy to gain more traction. Founding members of the Students for a Democratic Society (SDS, established 1962), for instance, began their activism in the civil rights movement and went on to reference to existentialism in ways that showed how the principles of moral purpose and freedom that were connected to Black rights were also relevant to other issues, while sustaining a commitment to both.[14] Existentialism may therefore have been in fashion in the late 1960s, but its social significance was far from superficial. Rather, Carmichael's references to existentialism helped him to nudge the national conversation about racial equality beyond ideas of desegregation, and to shape the directions for action that he gave his audiences. As Joseph has shown, it was Carmichael's own estimation upon stepping down

[11] Adam Fairclough, *Better Day Coming: Blacks and Equality, 1890–2000* (New York: Penguin, 2002), 203–71; Flora Bryant Brown, "NAACP Sponsored Sit-Ins by Howard University Students in Washington D.C 1943–1944," *Journal of Negro History*, 85, 4 (Fall, 2000), 274–86; Lauren du Graf, "Existentialism's 'White Problem': Richard Wright and Jean-Paul Sartre's 'The Respectful Prostitute'," *Yale French Studies: Existentialism 70 Years After*, 135–36 (2019), 134–50.

[12] Mercer Cook, "Review of Anthologie de la Nouvelle Poésie Nègre et Malgache de Langue Française: précédée de Orphée Noir by L. Sédar-Senghor," *Journal of Negro History*, 34, 2 (April 1949), 238–40; Hoyt W. Fuller, "World Festival of Negro Arts: Senegal Fete Illustrates Philosophy of Negritude," *Ebony*, July 1966, 101.

[13] George Cotkin, "Punching through the Pasteboard Masks: American Existentialism," in Jonathan Judaken and Robert Bernasconi, eds., *Situating Existentialism: Key Texts in Context* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012), 123–45, 134; Martin Luther King, "Letter from Birmingham Jail," *Ebony*, Aug. 1963, 25.

[14] Tom Hayden, *Re-union: A Memoir* (New York: Random House, 1988), 70–73, 76, 82; Daniel Matlin, "On Fire: The City and American Protest in 1968," in Martin Halliwell and Nick Witham, eds., *Reframing 1968: American Politics, Protest, and Identity* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2018), 107–29, 110, 113.

as chairman of the SNCC in May 1967 that he had managed to "change the milieu of the country in terms of how it views Civil Rights."[15]

Carmichael used existentialism to support three recurring arguments about Black empowerment. These arguments centred on what Richard King referred to as the rise of "cultural particularism" in the US in the late 1960s, which was social recognition of the need to discuss and address issues of specific relevance to Black communities, as opposed to the earlier arguments of colour-blind "universalism" that dominated in discussions about racial equality in the 1950s.[16] First, Carmichael emphasized aspects of self-definition that related to the specific promotion of Black interests in what Sartre called "antiracist racism," aimed at correcting the historic dominance of white interests.[17] Second, Carmichael employed French existentialism to encourage Black people to state the destructive impact of racism and colonialism on Black communities since whites, as Carmichael argued Sartre and Fanon had themselves implied, were unable to do this unaided. Certainly, in his 1961 preface to Fanon's *Les damnés de la terre* (*The Wretched of the Earth*), Sartre had stated that whites were "incapable of ridding … subjective illusions" of themselves as "liberal and humane," so should listen to what Fanon had to say about the consequences of colonialism.[18] Finally, Carmichael employed Camus's argument, made in *L'homme révolté* (*The Rebel*) in 1951, that it was necessary for all oppressed groups to say "no" to mechanisms of dominance. As Carmichael clarified, in a US context this ranged from saying "no" to particular forms of language, through to rejecting models of integration that inferiorized African Americans.[19]

Carmichael played a central role in popularizing the term "Black Power."[20] By 1968, the term "Black Power" had become a freestanding noun with a common understanding that it referred to those actions beyond the criminalization of segregation that would be necessary for racial equality. This definition of Black Power that encompassed Black people's articulation of their needs, social recognition of the specific needs of Black people after slavery and segregation, and public respect for Black cultural identities, achieved

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[15] Carmichael, "Report from the Chairman," 5 May 1967, in Joseph, *Stokely*, 191.

[16] Richard King, *Race, Culture, and the Intellectuals: 1940–1970* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004), 6, 11.

[17] The originating term from Sartre was *racisme antiraciste*, first used in Jean-Paul Sartre, "Orphée noir," in Léopold Sédar Senghor, ed., *Anthologie de la nouvelle poésie nègre et malgache de langue française: Précédée de Orphée noir* (Paris: Quadrige, Presses universitaires de France, 2021; first published 1948), ix–xliv, xiv.

[18] Jean-Paul Sartre, "Preface," in Frantz Fanon, *Wretched of the Earth*, trans. Constance Farrington (London: Penguin, 2001; first published 1963), 12.

[19] Albert Camus, *The Rebel*, transl. Anthony Bower (London: Penguin Classics 2013; first published 1953), 1, 3.   [20] Joseph, *Waiting 'till the Midnight Hour*, 147.

support in a range of contexts, with US universities being the main sites considered here.[21] Carmichael's consistent definitions of Black Power across his public addresses, which included reference to existentialism, were key to the popularization of the concept.

The endorsement of Black Power on campuses had significance beyond the university. In 1960, 45 percent of high-school graduates attended university.[22] This meant that almost half of all twenty-one-year-old voters may have perspectives shaped by culture encountered at university. Over time, the university-educated would make up an increasing proportion of the adult population as more students graduated annually. The increasing demographic of university-educated voters may have influenced Republican President Nixon's endorsement of the Black Power concept that had been popular on campuses prior to and during his 1968 election campaign, in which he committed to bridging the divide between young and old generations in the US.[23]

This study, then, links to several areas of research on racial equality in postwar America and the French Empire. Peniel Joseph shows that soon after Carmichael came to prominence in 1966, he was, contrary to Martin Luther King at that time, depicted as divisive.[24] However, this article's close analysis of Carmichael's public statements reveals that he hoped to build, and successfully enacted, interracial understanding within the US. The arguments into which Carmichael incorporated French existentialism in 1966 and 1967 overlapped with a variety of other movements that preceded him. These affinities assisted him in reaching his goal of appealing to Black and white audiences. For example, Carmichael's definition of Black Power was for specific Black needs to be recognized in interracial spaces. Terry Anderson has shown that there was a prior US government commitment to this; since the 1940s, there has been affirmative-action initiatives that recognized specific forms of discrimination that Black Americans faced and that needed tailored government responses. The attention that Carmichael and Black Power attracted to the same issue of Black people's specific needs accelerated the rollout of affirmative action, ensuring cross-partisan support from Presidents Lyndon Johnson andRichard Nixon.[25]

[21] Ibid., 131, 146, 147; William L. van Deburg, *New Day in Babylon: The Black Power Movement and American Culture, 1965–1975* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 16.

[22] John Aubrey Douglass, *The California Idea and American Higher Education: 1850 to the 1960 Master Plan* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2000), 1.

[23] Terry H. Anderson, *The Pursuit of Fairness: A History of Affirmative Action* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 111; Dean Kotlowski, "Black Power – Nixon Style: The Nixon Administration and Minority Business Enterprise," *Business History Review*, 72, 3 (Autumn 1998), 410–11.   [24] Joseph, *Waiting 'till the Midnight Hour*, 246.

[25] Anderson, 22, 60, 105, 111.

In addition to this harmony with white policymakers, Carmichael's interest in French existentialism, the accessibility of his references to it, and the purposes that he put it to were enhanced by Black activists who preceded him. This includes individuals such as Malcolm X, James Baldwin, Mae Mallory, Claudia Jones, and Alice Childress. Prior to Carmichael launching Black Power in 1966, these activists, as Ashley Farmer and others have shown, made arguments that went beyond a call for desegregation and centred on Black self-expression, and interracial recognition of the "depth" and complexity of Black "suffering" and "anger."[26] As already suggested, mass-circulation magazines aimed at Black audiences, in particular *Ebony* and *Negro Digest*, which were owned by Black publisher and businessman John Johnson, also carried similar ideas to Carmichael's. Jonathan Fenderson and E. James West show how, particularly since the early 1960s, these magazines promoted transnational thinking on race by providing a platform for pan-Africanism.[27] French existentialism was discussed in these magazines in this context and thus Carmichael's references to existentialism were consistent with this cultural environment. St. Clair Drake was particularly important as an African American intellectual who, in the pages of *Ebony* and *Negro Digest*, connected Sartre's *Les temps modernes*, *Présence Africaine*, and new US organizations such as the American Society for African Cultures (AMSAC, established 1957) when he promoted Black pride in the US. Like St. Clair Drake, Richard Wright was also a vector for French existentialism to enter debates about racial equality in the United States, having lived in postwar Paris, where he worked with Sartre, de Beauvoir, and Camus, as well as leaders of pan-Africanism such as Alioune Diop.[28] Wright promoted existential ideas in discussions about race in the US prior to Carmichael's public engagement with it in the 1960s.[29]

Finally, as Dunstan and Hugh Wilford have shown, even the CIA helped to build a culture in the US from the late 1950s that was amenable to the promotion of Black identities and of French existentialism within this framework.

[26] Words in quotation marks are Malcolm X cited in Joseph, *Waiting 'till the Midnight Hour*, 80; Van Deburg, 2, 5, 113; Ashley D. Farmer, *Remaking Black Power: How Black Women Transformed an Era* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2017), 30, 31, 34, 37, 45, 46, 62, 63.

[27] Jonathan Fenderson, *Building the Black Arts Movement: Hoyt Fuller and the Cultural Politics of the 1960s* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2019), 33, 34, 35; E. James West, *Ebony Magazine and Lerone Bennett Jr.: Popular Black History in Postwar America* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2020), 34, 35.

[28] Dunstan, *Race, Rights, and Reform*, 243.

[29] Tommy Shelby, "Freedom in a Godless and Unhappy World: Wright as Outsider," in Glenda Carpio, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Richard Wright* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), 121–38, 121.

We see this where the CIA funded AMSAC, the platform from which St. Clair Drake, with reference to existentialism, discussed Black cultural identities, and from where it was picked up by *Negro Digest*. The CIA feared that without giving the appearance that the US was a country open to transnational Black identities, and where Black American cultures thrived and were respected, newly independent African states would ally with Communist states.[30] Often depicted at the time as a shock, a nuisance, or a disruptive figure, Carmichael, therefore, was actually remarkably consistent with several advances in Black activism, Black cultures, and government approaches to racial inequality that pre-dated his rise to fame.

I begin, then, by detailing the reception of existentialism in US debates about racial equality prior to Carmichael's own adoption of these ideas, clarifying what Carmichael took from these debates when he came to participate in their later manifestations. Following this, I will show what was unique about Carmichael's contribution, which used references to French existentialism to establish a common understanding that permanent Black self-definition – and supportive responses to it – was required for equality. In the first section, I discuss the existential ideas of racism that appealed to Carmichael, and the origins of his own thought more broadly. Second, I focus on the US reception of Sartre's ideas about race in high culture in the 1940s and 1950s. Third, I show how discussion of racial equality and existentialism moved into mass culture in the form of John Johnson's glossy magazines. Then the article moves to the place of existentialism in the rise of Black Power in the mid- to late 1960s. I conclude with a discussion of Black Power's reception on university campuses, and the role of French existentialism here.

THE ANATOMY OF OPPRESSION: SARTRE, FANON, CAMUS, AND CARMICHAEL'S PERSPECTIVES

Carmichael cited works by Sartre, Fanon, and Camus in his addresses. The contexts that these works emerged from remind us that the fight against racism in postwar America was connected to European anti-Semitism in the 1930s, decolonization in Africa, anticommunism, and the philosophical impact of Hegel.

Sartre, Fanon, and Camus participated in a movement to decolonize culture in postwar Europe, America, and Africa. Features of this process included reflection on the mechanisms of oppression and its overthrow, and the representation of Black perspectives. The philosophers' involvement in this

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[30] Dunstan, 244, 245, 259, 263, 264; Hugh Wilford, *The Mighty Wurlitzer: How the CIA Played America* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008), 204, 209.

process stemmed from resistance to anti-Semitism, the restructuring of the French Empire, and French audiences for US culture that included African American writing on racism. Sartre's early thought about the origins of racism was forged in reaction to racist assaults on Leon Blum, France's inter-war Popular Front president who was Jewish, and some of Sartre's ideas were expressed in his 1946 text *Anti-Semite and Jew*. Here, Sartre argued that racism stemmed from sadistic human tendencies to deny responsibility to create self, and to be defined instead by hatred of others.[31]

Dunstan has shown that just as French intellectuals reckoned with anti-Semitism, in 1946 the French Empire was democratized. The empire was renamed the French Union, and reorganized into a group of 'French' nations across the globe that would supposedly all now be seen as equal to each other, rather than existing in a hierarchy of race and culture constructed by French whites.[32] *Présence Africaine*, established by Senegalise writer Alioune Diop in 1947, was initially a cultural expression of such optimism for mutual cultural respect across the "French Union" and aimed to present Black cultural perspectives in pursuit of this. Sartre, Camus, and Senegalese politician Léopold Sédar Senghor were on the editorial board of this magazine.[33] Indeed, Sartre was intellectually close enough to Senghor in 1948 to write *Orphée noir* (*Black Orpheus*), the introduction to his edited book of poems by Black and Madagscan writers. There, Sartre instructed white people to read the poems to disrupt their delusions of themselves as virtuous and, rather, to see themselves as those they have oppressed do: as "spidery" and "cunning," and France as "a back-country unfit to live in."[34] Sartre lamented that white racism had obliged Black people to identify with their race in order to counteract damaging stereotypes, as happened with Senghor's positive reconstitution of blackness in his poems about Black women's beauty.[35] Nevertheless, Sartre deemed such Black self-definition as essential to over-throw oppression, and labelled it "antiracist racism." This term was picked up by Carmichael.

The impact of US culture on France also contributed to cross-national cultural decolonization. In 1944, Richard Wright's *Big Boy Leaves Home* was published in

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[31] Jonathan Judaken, "Sartre on Racism," in Judaken, ed., *Race after Sartre* (New York: State University of New York Press, 2008), 23–47.
[32] Sarah C. Dunstan, "'La langue de nos maitres': Linguistic Hierarchies, Dialect, and Canon Decolonization during and after the *Présence Africaine* Conference of 1956," *Journal of Modern History*, 93, 4 (Dec. 2021), 861–95.
[33] Dunstan, *Race, Rights, and Reform*, 242.
[34] Jean-Paul Sartre and John MacCombie, "Black Orpheus," *Massachusetts Review*, 6, 1 (1964), 13–52, 14.
[35] Author's translation of Léopold Sédar Senghor, "Femme noire," in Senghor, *Anthologie de la nouvelle poésie nègre et malgache*, 151.

L'Arbalète, a French cultural journal edited by Marc Barbezat that Sartre read in detail. Wright's short story was about southern segregation, false constructions of Black male sexual aggression by whites, and lynching.[36] Sartre's *La putain respectueuse*, published in France in 1946 and translated into English in 1948, aligned with Wright's narrative, having likely been influenced by it. Sartre's play told the story of a white sex worker in the South who falsely accused of rape the two Black men who had saved her from white attackers on a train.

Sartre participated in an increased interrogation of racism and representation of Black perspectives in transnational literary contexts in the 1940s. However, in mainstream academic discussions at Lyon, where, in the 1940s, Frantz Fanon completed his medical training in psychiatry, he encountered no material on the psychological impact of racism on those who were targeted by it. When completing his final-year dissertation on racism, Fanon therefore drew on Sartre's *Les temps modernes*, *Présence Africaine*, and *Esprit*.[37] This dissertation, rejected by the university as unsuitable for psychological research, was published by Editions de Seuil in 1952 as *Peau noire, masques blancs* (*Black Skin White Masks*). Fanon combined work by Black authors, and theorists of race, to discuss the psychological impact of racism on its targets. Referring to *Anti-Semite and Jew*, Fanon described the suffocating grip of racism once it was established, which made it so difficult to dismantle. Fanon explained that racism was a strategy used by oppressive racial groups to impose and sustain dominance by constructing lies about other races.[38] These lies were purposefully deployed to limit the access of the oppressed to jobs and social respect. Fanon noted that racist ideology further restricted freedom when some Black targets of it internalized white as virtuous, yet as something they could never attain. This meant that, in addition to social alienation, they were in a permanent state of self-rejection.[39]

Fanon used Sartre's concept of "authenticity" in *Being and Nothingness* to argue that release from such self-hate could only be reached from a true understanding of its roots in the racism of others.[40] During the Algerian War, Fanon built on this earlier psychological profile of the impact of racism with his manifesto for racial freedom, *The Wretched of the Earth*, for which Sartre wrote the introduction.[41] Here, Fanon recommended that oppressed peoples use culture, and, if necessary, violence, to create selves that broke free from cultural and political oppression by colonists.[42] Carmichael bolstered his own arguments

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[36] Du Graf, "Existentialism's 'White Problem'."
[37] Macey, *Frantz Fanon*, 152, 153, 154.
[38] Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin White Masks*, trans. Charles Lam Markmann (London: Pluto Press, 2008), 140.   [39] Ibid., 31–34.   [40] Ibid., 28, 30, 32, 33; Macey, 174
[41] Macey, 449, 450.
[42] Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, trans. Constance Farrington (London: Penguin, 2001; first published 1963), 27, 44, 48, 168, 170, 178.

about the vital importance of Black self-definition, creation, and celebration, through reference to Sartre and Fanon.

Camus's ideas were equally relevant to Carmichael and were rooted in anticommunism, literary absurdism, and, like Sartre, Hegel. Carmichael cited Camus's 1951 work *The Rebel*. In this work, Camus built on absurdist literary interests to characterize life as a perpetual struggle between tyranny and freedom in which one must always fight for the latter. Camus celebrated the overthrow of Russian autocracy with Communism, but feared the potential for the newly liberated to become tyrants. Camus reminded the reader, through reference to what has become known as the master–slave dialectic in Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit* (1807), that the action required to overthrow oppression was for the oppressed, or the "slave," to say "No" to the "master," and to define self, thus showing that "there are certain things in him [the enslaved] 'that are worthwhile …' and must be taken into consideration."[43]

While Sartre, Fanon, and Camus were united in the fight against oppression, they were not always in agreement with each other. Published disagreements included Sartre accusing Camus of selling out formerly colonized peoples who had embraced Communism.[44] Fanon also flagged up the dangers of Sartre's overreliance on Hegel. As Fanon noted, Sartre's application of Hegel's concepts resulted in Sartre veering towards the promotion of race erasure. This was evidenced when Sartre used Hegel's framework to predict a race-free end point once the dominant white cultural "thesis" was challenged by the Black antithesis or "moment of negativity," finally resulting in a colourless social "synthesis."[45] As a philosophy major, Carmichael understood the type of critical, nuanced debate that occurred between philosophers, but his continued focus on their specific proposed methods for challenging oppression, similarly to Fanon's continued interest in Sartre, reflects his priority: to create a working guide for democratic action in his public addresses.[46]

Carmichael's experiences while he was at Howard University from 1960 to 1964 were a turbine for his activism. When at this historically Black university, Carmichael encountered Black perspectives in an educational establishment for the first time. He was exposed to Black southern dialect through the poetry of English faculty member Sterling Brown; current Black literature via Toni

[43] Camus, *The Rebel*, 1, 2, 3, 9; Philip Thody, *Albert Camus: 1913–1960* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1961), 7–21.

[44] Ronald Aronson, *Camus and Sartre: The Story of a Friendship and the Quarrel That Ended It* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004); Olivier Todd, *Albert Camus: A Life* (London: Vintage, 1998), 309.

[45] Words in quotation marks are Sartre in *Black Orpheus* paraphrasing Hegel, as cited in Fanon, *Black Skin White Masks*, 101, 102.

[46] Stokely Carmichael [Kwame Ture] with Ekwueme Michael Thelwell, *Ready for Revolution: The Life and Struggles of Stokely Carmichael* (New York: Scribner, 2005), 248.

Morrison, who also taught English literature; and Black historical perspectives through resident historian Rayford Logan.[47] Carmichael had not learnt about Black perspectives in the integrated school in the Bronx that he had attended from the age of eleven after arriving in the United States from Trinidad in 1952. Even when he was in Trinidad, Carmichael wasn't taught about Black people's experiences on the British curriculum there, in which he learnt, for instance, about snow and daffodils rather than the flora and fauna of Trinidad.[48] As well as learning firsthand the difference that respect for Black experiences made to his sense of self, Carmichael faced the racism of the US political and legal system while he was at Howard. He was imprisoned for taking part in the 1961 Freedom Rides in which Black and white students exerted their constitutional right to use integrated public facilities while on interstate travel. The activists were imprisoned despite being attacked by white racists who left some protesters for dead, and with permanent disabilities. This, alongside many other instances of white violence, heightened the value that Carmichael placed on Black people correctly apportioning blame on white oppressors as a part of their emancipation, and saying "no" to oppressive systems.[49]

Finally, Carmichael witnessed continued white control of Black communities after the 1964 Civil Rights Act, which was supposed to bring equality by outlawing discrimination and segregation. One month after the Act was passed, at the annual Democratic Party convention, Carmichael witnessed how the Democratic Party allowed its Mississippi contingent to be seated even though it remained segregated.[50] The Democrats limited an integrated alternative, the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party (MFDP), to seating only two "at-large," unofficial, delegates. The Democrats prevented Fannie Lou Hamer, a respected Black southern activist whom many in the MFDP wanted to seat, from sitting. In 1962, Hamer had attempted to register to vote and was sacked by her disgruntled white employer, and lost her home as a consequence.[51] Democrats feared that Hamer's southern dialect, and public statements about her experiences of white violence, would offend white sensibilities.[52] These experiences, among others, ordered Carmichael's priorities. For Carmichael, Black self-definition and interracial respect for this came out as a top requirement for equality. He bound reference to Sartre, Fanon, and Camus to these ideas that had emerged from his experiences in the early 1960s and before.

[47] Ibid., 124, 129.   [48] Ibid., 35, 37.

[49] Ibid., 184, 191, 375, 379; John Meacham, *His Truth Is Marching On: John Lewis and the Power of Hope* (New York: Random House 2020), 107.

[50] Gary Gerstle, *American Crucible: Race and Nation in the Twentieth Century* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), 285–86.

[51] Carmichael, *Ready for Revolution*, 315.

[52] Gerstle, 286–93; Carmichael, *Ready for Revolution*, 315, 406, 410.

SARTRE AND RACE IN US HIGH CULTURE IN THE 1940S

Black Power is often associated with Carmichael and the context of discussion about race after 1966. However, historians of Black Power have located many of its motivating ideas in US culture and society in the preceding decades.[53] Here I discuss how some of Sartre's texts cited in, or chiming with, Carmichael's Black Power addresses in the late 1960s were initially received in the 1940s and the 1950s. There were, however, changes in the way race was discussed across these periods, and respondents to Sartre in the 1940s and 1950s could oppose his representation of Black perspectives in ways that would be less common by the late 1960s. In the immediate postwar years, some criticism of Sartre was an attempt to restrict Black self-expression, and to protect whites from having their social privilege exposed. Others were critical because they felt that Sartre undermined the goals of integration, or at times misrepresented Black experiences. Nevertheless, this early reception of Sartre shows that high value was placed on the representation of Black experiences and perspectives in sites of high culture in the 1940s and 1950s, such as in the theatre and in academic journals. Carmichael would benefit from this environment by the 1960s.

Richard Wright assisted in Sartre's entry into cultural debates in the US in the 1940s through his role in Franco-American cultural exchange at a time of heightened internationalism after the war. This internationalism would involve other cultural figures such as jazz musician Miles Davis, who recorded the soundtrack for Louis Malle's seminal French film *Ascenseur pour l'échafaud* (*Elevator to the Gallows*) in 1958.[54] Wright himself had moved to Paris in May 1946 and advised Sartre on African American writers, such as St. Clair Drake, suitable to be published in *Les temps modernes* that year.[55] Wright also facilitated the translation of Sartre's *The Respectful Prostitute*, writing an introduction for it and securing its place in Dorothy Norman's American literary journal *Twice a Year* in its final edition, which he coedited in January 1948.[56] In his preface, Wright emphasized the clarity of perspective on racial inequality that Sartre offered as an outsider, and thus that Americans should be "thankful for the eyes" of Sartre, who is "helping us to see ourselves." Residents of the US may otherwise remain in the "swamp" of "our own myths and folklores."[57] Later that year, when,

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[53] Joseph, *Waiting 'till the Midnight Hour*, 1–131.

[54] Joel Dinerstein, *The Origins of Cool in Postwar America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2017), 3.   [55] Dunstan, *Race, Rights, and Reform*, 183.

[56] Hazel Rowley, *Richard Wright: The Life and Times* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 2001), 327, 328, 345; Dunstan, *Race, Rights, and Reform*, 184.

[57] Richard Wright, drafts for introduction to *The Respectful Prostitute*, 1948, Richard Wright Papers, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University, Box 88, Folder 196.

thanks to Wright's assistance with translation, the play was performed, organs of Black opinion such as the *Chicago Defender* similarly leveraged Sartre's international profile and praised his "courageous" inclusion of the horrors of lynching in his play. The Chicago journalist noted that Sartre added "world moral pressure" that "might be the only means of shaming the US into abandoning this evil practice."[58]

The support of influential public figures such as Richard Wright and *Chicago Defender* journalists was important in offsetting more muted praise, or rejection, of Sartre's transparent discussion of race hate and violence, and the practices that upheld white dominance. Parisian officials, for instance, were fearful of losing Marshall aid and in 1946 attempted to discredit Sartre and his play as a "major defamation against the great American democracy."[59] At this time in the United States, some Senators spread race hate in the Senate with impunity and attempted to censor Black perspectives, including Wright's, on the supposed grounds that it would increase race hate.[60] This latter, likely disingenuous, reasoning prevailed for several months in Chicago in 1948 when the New Stages drama company was banned from performing *The Respectful Prostitute*, following 318 performances in New York City. Chicago censors explained that the play would "disturb racial relationships" or cause "protests from Negro leaders."[61] After protest by the American Civil Liberties Union and others the ban was removed.[62] However, the principle that there were correct ways to discuss racial equality could shape responses to Sartre in ways that limited endorsement of his representation of the realities of Black experiences. In the 1950s, even avant-garde publisher Grove Press, who would first publish Frantz Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth* in translation in the US in 1965, censored Simone de Beauvoir's 1947 travel journal from her trip to the United States by deleting parts that emphasized Black hostility to whites and criticisms of white stereotyping of African American religious practices as emotional.[63]

The emerging public consensus on racial integration persuaded many individuals to publicly endorse interracial unity and harmony, even if their

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[58] *Chicago Defender*, 28 Dec. 1948, 14.
[59] "Attacks Sartre's Play," *New York Times*, 20 Nov. 1946, 48.   [60] Rowley, 319.
[61] J. P. Stanley, "Sartre Play Ban to Be Protested," *New York Times*, 9 Dec. 1948, 49; Louis Calta, "Revocation of Ban Urged for Chicago," *New York Times*, 11 Dec. 1948, 12.
[62] "Ban Off, Sartre Play Will Open in Chicago," *New York Times*, 20 April 1949, 31.
[63] Robert Bernasconi, "Richard Wright as Educator: The Progressive Structure of Simone de Beauvoir's Account of Racial Hatred in the United States," *Yale French Studies: Existentialism 70 Years After*, 135/36 (2019), 151–68, 166, 167; Kathryn Batchelor, "The Translation of Les Damnes de la Terre into English: Exploring Irish Connections," in Kathryn Batchelor and Sue-Ann Harding, eds., *Translating Frantz Fanon across Continents and Languages* (Abingdon: Routledge), 40–75, 51.

behaviour implied that the reality was more challenging.[64] Natalie Priest, the female lead in a 1950 New York production of *The Respectful Prostitute*, provides an instructive example. Her performance contributed to efforts to represent the reality of anti-Black violence, and she praised the mixed-race cast that, on alternate days, included Black actors Ken Renard and John Marriot as the character Sartre called "the Negro." Nevertheless, Priest, likely influenced by the conventions of the day, went on to criticize Sartre's depiction of white violence as a "hell of a note … of hopelessness and despair" that she felt did a "disservice to the … unity of Negro and whites."[65] When Howard University academic and future US ambassador to Niger Mercer Cook reviewed Sartre's *Black Orpheus* in 1949 he similarly endorsed the piece, calling for its translation into English.[66] However, he avoided Sartre's sustained evisceration of white cultural imperialism, instead noting that it was "penetrating" and that the poetry it prefaced harmonized with (or integrated into) the white French canon and "infused new life into the … poetry of France."[67] Cook would declare his political commitment to integration in 1957 in defense of the "legal victories … of the NAACP" against the French author Daniel Guérin's scepticism that the Supreme Court was moving towards integration with the slowness "de la tortue" (of a tortoise).[68] The consensus around integration could therefore mute enthusiasm for Sartre or flatten the response to his work.

In other respects, however, Sartre could receive criticism for not going far enough in his presentation of Black perspectives. These responses reveal a wellspring for thought that supported ideas beyond Sartre's own notions on some issues and anticipated Carmichael's work in the 1960s. This wellspring stemmed from the experiences of Black academics in the early twentieth century in integrated but culturally white institutions in the US, and the contrasting resources that international experiences, historically Black universities, and Black cultural organs provided them for thinking about Black identities. Mercer Cook studied French in the 1920s as an undergraduate at Amherst,

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[64] Brenda Plummer, *In Search of Power: African Americans in the Era of Decolonization, 1956–1974* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 25; Singh, *Black Is a Country*, 67; Anderson, *The Pursuit of Fairness*, 22, 39.

[65] *New York Amsterdam News*, 11 Feb. 1950, 16.

[66] Ruth Stutts Njiiri, "Interview with Ambassador Mercer Cook," the Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training Foreign Affairs Oral History Project, Ralph J. Bunch Legacy: Minority Officers, interview, 24 June 1981, Library of Congress, p. 1, retrieved from the Library of Congress, at http://hdl.loc.gov/loc.mss/mfdip.2010c0001 (last accessed 19 July 2024).

[67] Cook, "Review of Anthologie de la Nouvelle Poésie Nègre et Malgache," 239.

[68] Mercer Cook, "Les relations raciales aux États-Unis vue par les voyageurs français depuis la deuxième guerre mondiale," *Présence Africaine*, 14–15 (June–September 1957), 119–28, 125.

an integrated college, where the absence of Black authors on his course drove him to publish and promote books about and by Black francophone people for US students of French.[69] He published his review of Sartre's *Black Orpheus* in the *Journal of Negro History*, which itself was created in 1916 by Harvard graduate Carter Woodson in response to limited representation of Black people in academic publications.[70] Cook wrote this review while a lecturer at Howard University. Here, he called for Sartre to pay more attention to the indebtedness of Negritude poets in Senghor's collection to African American writers, thus promoting the evident international impact of African American writers. Where Sartre concentrated on aspects of collective Black experiences of oppression, which Cook also acknowledged, he also prevented this from lapsing into racist assumptions of a homogeneous Black identity by calling for attention to the "widely diversified" backgrounds of the poets. In addition, he emphasized the variousness of form and topic in their work, which ranged from humour, to landscape, to violence.[71] Conditions in higher education in the US supported Mercer Cook's attempt to increase awareness of the complexity of Black identities, as well as of achievements of Black intellectual figures. However, this discussion was still limited to cultural settings. In politics the main focus was on desegregation rather than Black cultural identities.

Yet events in cultural settings in the 1940s and 1950s were consequential for Carmichael. These decades were a time of flux and mixed public opinion about how to discuss and achieve racial equality, and the outcomes of connected controversies reflect two things. First, that by the late 1950s the scales were weighted in favour of sympathy to Sartre in elite cultural debate about racial equality. Second, there was growing support for Black self-expression in cultural settings. After all, Sartre's play was ultimately staged in Chicago following the attempt to ban it. Natalie Priest performed in a later version of it even though she expressed her reservations, and it promoted discussion of the complexity of Black experiences by academics at Howard, where Carmichael would later study. As I will show, Richard Wright's continued role in facilitating transnational connections, established in the 1940s, was integral to getting Sartre's ideas about Black self-definition into mass-circulation magazines aimed at Black readers in the early 1960s.[72] This is where some of

[69] Felix Germain, "Mercer Cook and the Origins of Black French Studies," *French Politics, Culture, and Society*, 31, 1 (Spring 2016), 66–85; Aedin Ni Loingsigh, "Translation and the Professional Selves of Mercer Cook," *Bulletin of SOAS*, 81, 3 (2018), 459–74.

[70] R.W.L., "Carter Godwin Woodson," *Journal of Negro History*, 35, 3, (1950), 344–48, 345.

[71] Cook, "Review of Anthologie de la Nouvelle Poésie Nègre et Malgache,"

[72] Dunstan, *Race, Rights, and Reform*, 242–44, 245, 259, 260, 261; Singh, 8, 13; Wilford, *The Mighty Wurlitzer*, 204, 209.

Carmichael's supporters, and perhaps even Carmichael himself, may have first encountered them.

BUILDING TRUST FOR FRENCH EXISTENTIALISM IN BLACK COMMUNITIES

The intellectual labour of Black intellectuals and journalists who worked for [...] (1945) underpinned Carmichael's [....] after 1966. In *Ebony* in 1965, even the term "Black Power" was used by journalist Lerone Bennett Jr. in a series he ran on the creation of democracy by Black Reconstruction politicians.[73] References to existentialism in relation to Black self-definition featured in *Negro Digest* in the mid-1960s under editor Hoyt Fuller's direction, and later in *Ebony* in Fuller's journalism, both prior to Carmichael making the same connection.[74] Anything that was endorsed in Johnson's magazines was significant for Carmichael because their high circulation guaranteed public traction, thus making his ideas more likely to be accepted if they were similar. In 1947, *Ebony* had the highest circulation of any Black publication in the US. *Negro Digest*, meanwhile, was the only Black literary and arts publication available on national newsstands in 1965. It was trusted by Black communities, and influenced the editorial direction of *Ebony*.[75]

These magazines' support for Black self-definition in the early 1960s stemmed from three factors. First, in the 1950s, Johnson and his journalists visited newly independent states in Africa such as Ghana. These visits allowed them to explore unique identity links between Black Americans and Africa, which had been obscured previously by white normativity. Second, John Johnson and fellow journalists lost faith in the power of integration alone to secure racial equality, especially after events such as the 1965 Watts riots. Finally, *Negro Digest* had no mass-product advertisers – white or Black – other than for John Johnson's other products. Editors could therefore run an editorial line focussing on Black self-definition, which might have been less likely with advertisers aiming to associate their product with a magazine

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[73] West, *Ebony Magazine and Lerone Bennett Jr.*, 58.
[74] Fact sheet, "What Is This Thing Called Negritude," on back cover of *Negro Digest*, March 1965; "'The Wretched of the Earth': Jean-Paul Sartre's Moving Preface to a Profoundly Significant Book," *Negro Digest*, July 1965, 80–96, 80; Fuller, "World Festival of Negro Arts, 101.
[75] John Johnson, *Succeeding against the Odds: The Autobiography of a Great American Businessman* (New York: Amistad Press, 1989), 166, 267; Fenderson, *Building the Black Arts Movement*, 4, 28, 40, 44; West, 47, 71.

that did not alienate white or Black opinion by going too far beyond integration.[76] The following section considers two instances when, as a result of this editorial shift, existentialism and Black self-definition featured in these magazines before Carmichael himself made similar arguments.

St. Clair Drake cited Sartre's term "antiracist racism," first used in *Black Orpheus* (1948), in an article in *Negro Digest* in June 1964.[77] This quotation from Sartre was repeated in later printed extracts of the article in *Negro Digest* and *Ebony*.[78] Drake focussed on "Negritude," which he located in the postwar years, and from which, fittingly, he sourced Sartre's term. Drake therefore connected the 1960s with the 1940s and helped to move discussion of Black self-definition out of high culture and into mass culture. Another connection with the 1940s was Richard Wright, whose role in transnational cultural exchange persisted into the 1950s when he influenced the formation of AMSAC, from where Drake, as an executive member of the board, initially delivered this 1964 article on Negritude in the form of the annual public address. Wright secured African American attendance at *Présence Africaine's* 1956 Paris-based First International Congress of Black Writers and Artists, and this conference inspired the foundation of AMSAC in 1957. AMSAC was funded by the CIA under their objective of promoting, overseas, a positive image of race relations and successful integration.[79] Drake's article contributed to racial equality but not as the CIA intended, since Drake's arguments implied the limitations of integration, which by contrast the CIA sought to idealize. It also informed the activism of Carmichael in 1966 and 1967, who by that time was seen as an enemy of the state.[80]

Drake's promotion of Black cultural identities was outside mainstream political discourse on integration. Nevertheless, he provided some specific context for the term "antiracist racism" that reflects how continued the prevalence of integration as a goal could drive hesitation around, or extensive justification of, Black self-definition, especially before the 1964 Civil Rights Act was passed in July. Thus Drake argued that the act of "antiracist racism" was not racist. Indeed, it was rather the product of a group of interracial thinkers in postwar France. These were led by "French Negro intellectuals," but "[s]ome of its best contributions have come from [white] men like Jean

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[76] West, 22, 23, 37–39; Fenderson, *Building the Black Arts Movement*, 27, 31, 34.

[77] St. Clair Drake, "The Meaning of 'Negritude': The Negro's Stake in Africa," *Negro Digest*, June 1964, 35. [78] "What Is This Thing Called Negritude"; Fuller, 101.

[79] Dunstan, *Race, Rights, and Reform*, 183, 242, 244, 245, 259, 263, 264; Drake, "The Meaning of 'Negritude'," 48; Wilford, 202, 204, 209.

[80] Joseph, *Waiting 'till the Midnight Hour*, 187, 188; Joseph, *Stokely*, 164.

Paul Sartre and André Gide and Albert Camus."[81] Drake specified that the term referred to a positive act for humanity that was a necessary corrective to the racism that led to "Black subordination to white people during the four hundred years of slave trade … and the subsequent structuring of caste relations." Drake continued by stating that antiracist racism "was not viewed as an evil thing but as a quest for dignity, a yearning for respect, an assertion of worth."[82] Finally, Drake argued that while identification with shared Black experiences and celebration of Black identities was key to antiracist racism, people of African descent, like anyone else, drew aspects of their identities from other communities they belonged to through work, leisure, or elsewhere.[83]

In this article, Drake contextualized France as a site of forward thinking about race, and Sartre in particular as a member of an interracial group that was interested in racial identity and inequality. Drake's reference to Sartre got further coverage in the context of greater interest in newly independent countries that were formerly colonized by France. Fuller referenced Drake's article and Sartre's term in it in his 1966 reportage from the recently independent Senegal.[84] The Algerian War was part of another independence movement within the French Empire that, alongside Senegal, gained coverage in Johnson's magazines. As with Senegal, Sartre's philosophy was connected to Algeria. Hoyt Fuller published Sartre's full introduction to Fanon's guide to racial liberation that was forged during the Algerian War in *Negro Digest* in 1965.[85] This strengthened the connection that St. Clair Drake had made the year before between Parisian thinkers and decolonization.

When Fuller published Sartre's introduction, he set an example of Black activists citing white authors in addresses about race to Black audiences. Fuller showed that white understanding of the extent of inequality and oppression, and respect for African Americans, that resulted from Black self-definition validated it. Certainly, in his preface, Sartre cited Fanon's point that Black rage was a driver for the critical moment of self-creation through which Black peoples rejected the identity of the inferior that white peoples had imposed on them. Sartre says, "When his rage boils over, he rediscovers his lost innocence and he comes to know himself in that he himself creates his self … The rebel's weapon is the proof of his humanity."[86] Sartre reinforced this when he noted that it was only by encountering the true rage, pain and perspectives resulting from colonialism that white people could really know themselves. Thus Sartre urged readers to "get to know yourselves

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[81] Drake, "The Meaning of 'Negritude'", 34, 35.   [82] Ibid., 35.   [83] Ibid., 33.
[84] "What Is This Thing Called Negritude"; Fuller, 101.
[85] "Jean-Paul Sartre's Moving Preface," 80.   [86] Ibid., 90.

seen in the light of truth objectively. Our victims know us by their scars and by their chains, and it is this that makes their evidence irrefutable."[87]

When Carmichael cited *Black Orpheus* and *The Wretched of the Earth* – the same texts that featured in Johnson's publications – he went further than Johnson's journalists in some respects, and took a step back in his interpretation in others. Carmichael advanced beyond Drake when he packaged Negritude as a distinct and necessary stage to freedom. Carmichael directly positioned Black self-definition as a necessary component for racial equality that was overlooked in existing models of integration that seemed more concerned with allowing Black people to access white institutions and thus to become culturally white. Carmichael argued that "the essential difference between integration as it is currently practiced and the concept of Black Power" was the Black Power commitment to preserve "the cultural personality of the black community."[88] Earlier, St. Clair Drake had made this point only indirectly when he noted that eradication of "all evidences of African culture" was occurring in Brazil, and that in the US some groups favoured the "disappearance of Negroes as a group"; thus he was "for accepting our negritude."[89] On the other hand, Carmichael retreated from Sartre and Fanon's endorsement of violence in the pursuit of racial equality. Instead, Carmichael positioned his model of Black Power as the last opportunity to avoid such an eventuality in the United States.[90]

Mass-circulation magazines had therefore not only normalized the place of Sartre, Fanon, and existentialism in Black visualizations of equality, but had positioned Carmichael to some Black audiences as a moderate by comparison. Given the popularity of these magazines in Black communities, this helps to explain Carmichael's popularity and support among many Black Americans, even though his strategies and arguments seemed to come as a shock to some white communities.[91]

BLACK POWER AND THE BRIDGE FROM CULTURE TO POLITICS

Many arguments and terms that Carmichael used in his public addresses after May 1966 had already been mentioned in John Johnson's popular-cultural magazines. This ranged from the term "Black Power" through to the use of Sartre's phrase "antiracist racism" in the context of discussion about Black

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[87] Ibid., 85.
[88] Stokely Carmichael, "Toward Black Liberation," *Massachusetts Review*, 7, 4 (Autumn 1966), 639–51, 647, 648.   [89] Drake, "The Meaning of 'Negritude'," 47, 48.
[90] Stokely Carmichael and Charles Hamilton, *Black Power: The Politics of Liberation* (New York: Vintage, 1992; first published 1967), xi.
[91] Van Deburg, *New Day in Babylon*, 17–19, 159.

self-definition. Carmichael's arguments about Black leadership and community building, as opposed to contemporary arguments that equated Black freedom with entry into white institutions, were also made before him by postwar political groups such as the Nation of Islam (NOI) and the Universal Association of Ethiopian Women (UAEW).[92] Despite these connections with politics and culture in prior decades, Carmichael offered something new. Carmichael drew these different strands together under the auspices of the term "Black Power." Under Carmichael's stewardship, this term summed up what had been disparate practices, processes, and complex modes of challenging oppression, showing how all were part of a distinct political exercise of speaking out, defining, and expressing authentic Black selves that was necessary for US democracy.

Key to Carmichael's success in spreading this concrete concept of Black Power was repetition of it. Carmichael's Black Power ideology was consistent – almost identical – across five key addresses from 1966 to 1967. The addresses about Black Power that I will now discuss include an article in the *Massachusetts Review* (September 1966); public addresses to an interracial audience at Berkeley University (October 1966), to a Black audience at the historically Black university Morgan State (January 1967), and to a mixed-race crowd at Vanderbilt University (April 1967); and finally in the book *Black Power* (August 1967) that he coauthored with the political scientist Charles Hamilton.[93] Carmichael increased his reach by varying the medium of his addresses, and repeating them across the country, but the audience for each address alone was significant. The spectators at Berkeley were estimated at 10,000 and at Vanderbilt at 4,000, and the *Black Power* book hit the bestseller lists with a circulation of 165,836 in 1968.[94] Existentialism featured in

[92] Keisha N. Blain, *Set the World on Fire: Black Nationalist Women and the Global Struggle for Freedom* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2018), 188, 191.

[93] Carmichael, "Toward Black Liberation"; Stokely Carmichael [Kwame Ture], "Berkeley Speech," Oct. 1966, in Ethel N. Minor ed., *Stokely Speaks: From Black Power to Pan-Africanism* (Chicago: Chicago Review Press, 2007; first published 1971), 45–61; Carmichael [Kwame Ture], "At Morgan State," 28 Jan. 1967, in ibid., 61–77; transcript of Carmichael's speech at Vanderbilt Impact Symposium, 8 April 1967, in James Geddes Stahlman Papers, V-29, Folder 2, Vanderbilt University Archives; Carmichael and Hamilton, *Black Power.*

[94] President of Morgan State Martin Jenkins complained of the popular appeal of Black Power following a 1967 speech by Carmichael. Fabio Rojas, *From Black Power to Black Studies: How a Radical Social Movement Became an Academic Discipline* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2010), 141. At a 1968 speech by Carmichael at Howard, Bebura estimated 1,900 attendees. Sanders Bebura, "Stokely: Education before Destruction," *Howard Hilltop*, 51, 9 (19 Nov. 1968), 1; "The People's Choice," *New York Times*, 16 Feb. 1969, 184.

the last of these four addresses, invoked when Carmichael defined Black self-definition and how to enact it.

The first of two central, repeated points in Carmichael's public statements was that integration had been equated with democracy and equality in civil rights activism in the recent past, but that integration as it stood was an inadequate tool for achieving these ends. Carmichael showed that the working concept of integration was shaped for, and worded to defend, white interests and was modelled on white cultural traditions. As Carmichael argued, the celebrated idea of integration as removal of barriers for Black people to access all public spaces was a basic goal that didn't go further than educating, or forcing, white people to be less racist in public practice. Carmichael summed up integration as informing whites that "while I am black I am a human being. Therefore I have the right to go into any public place."[95] Carmichael showed that if society believed that equality stopped at the basic principle of making segregation illegal, white oppression, privilege, and dominance would outlive integration. White cultural normativity, for instance, would continue. Carmichael pointed to norms relevant to the middle-class white students that had been transplanted into the historically Black university Morgan State, and were responsible for the financially crippling tradition there of Black students spending five hundred dollars on ball gown dresses. For many Black students, Carmichael noted when speaking at the institution, this sum represented a parent's annual wages. Black students and their families were therefore disadvantaged by white standards.[96]

In all addresses, Carmichael argued that desegregation would leave unaddressed further disadvantages disproportionately experienced by Black people that were caused by a history of racism. These disadvantages ranged from rat infestations, to high infant mortality rates, limited access to fresh meat, white expectations that Black communities need white leadership, ghettoes, and low graduate wages.[97] Carmichael showed that even in a politically integrated society, the white press would not represent these realities of life for Black communities because it was culturally segregated and therefore represented things from white perspectives that normalized racism, partly by pathologizing Black communities. Carmichael experienced media bias directly at Vanderbilt. Before speaking there, the *Nashville Banner* misrepresented his intention to transparently discuss Black experiences as an "intent … to overthrow authority and to cultivate the anarchy of mob-rule." Carmichael argued

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[95] Carmichael, "Berkeley Speech," 47.   [96] Carmichael, "At Morgan State," 64
[97] Carmichael, "Toward Black Liberation," 648; Carmichael, speech at Vanderbilt Impact Symposium, 7, 8; Carmichael, "At Morgan State," 72; Carmichael, "Berkeley Speech," 52; Carmichael and Hamilton, *Black Power*, 19.

that, given the "enveloping racism" that limited their vision, "the honkies of THE BANNER … will not even begin to comprehend the lecture that I am about to give," which was "in-tel-lec-tual."[98]

In all his addresses, Carmichael therefore showed that integration, in its popular sense of desegregation in public spaces, would not achieve democracy. Carmichael argued that persistent Black self-definition and white respect for this was required for full democracy to be achieved. In another way of putting this, Carmichael argued that whites had failed to realize democracy, and that Black people were the salvation of the United States. At Berkeley, Carmichael emphasized that "white people who are the majority, and who are responsible for making democracy work … have failed miserably on this point. They have never made democracy work."[99] Speaking to the theme of democracy in the *Massachusetts Review*, Carmichael argued that African Americans could be a "redemptive force in a society degenerating into a form of totalitarianism."[100] Provision of concrete advice on how to understand and enact Black self-definition in the pursuit of democracy was therefore as central to Carmichael's public statements as his illustration of the limited potential of integration to secure equality. Carmichael argued that one of the first steps in creating an inclusive democracy was for the oppressed to accurately apportion blame and responsibility for their mistreatment because the perpetrator would not be able to identify it, or would be unlikely to publicize their guilt. Many of Carmichael's speeches apportioned blame to whites. When speaking at Berkeley, he made this point through specific reference to Sartre, Camus, and, later in the piece, Fanon, arguing,

We in SNCC tend to agree with Camus and Sarte [*sic*] that a man cannot condemn himself … In a much larger view, SNCC says that white America cannot condemn herself. And since we are liberal we have done it. You stand condemned.[101]

A second enactment of Black self-definition, once oppression was identified and blame for it apportioned, was to resist and, as Camus laid out in *The Rebel*, to firmly say "no." At Morgan State, Carmichael stated, "I think it is what Camus talks about. He says that when a slave says no, he begins to exist."[102] Once they have publicly refused to accept oppression by saying "no," Carmichael argued, "the first need of a free people is to be able to define their own terms and have those terms recognized by their oppressors";

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[98] Carmichael, speech at Vanderbilt Impact Symposium, 3.
[99] Carmichael, "Berkeley Speech," 48.
[100] Carmichael, "Toward Black Liberation," 639
[101] Audio recording of Stokely Carmichael's Berkeley Speech, 29 Oct. 1966, at https://americanradioworks.publicradio.org/features/blackspeech/scarmichael.html (last accessed 17 July 2024).   [102] Carmichael, "At Morgan State," 65.

this would involve banishing the white-constructed, derogatory term "negro."[103] When speaking at Vanderbilt Carmichael linked this argument about Black control of vocabulary and narrative used to discuss Black communities to Camus. Carmichael cited *The Rebel* when he stated, "A certain existentialist [*sic*] philosopher talked a great deal about this when he talked about the need for the slave to define himself rather than to accept the definition of his master."[104] The final prong of Black self-definition was to prioritize Black leadership and community building. Barriers to Black political power were imposed by white racism in the past, and Carmichael referred to the corrective preferences for Black leaders as a positive kind of "racism," or colour sensitivity, using Sartre's term in the process. In doing so, Carmichael aimed to explain as logical that which appeared to some audiences as incoherent: addressing damage caused by racial preference for whites with another form of racial preference, for Blacks. At Berkeley, Carmichael argued that "black people must be in positions of power, doing and articulating for themselves … [this] is moving on healthy ground: it is becoming what the philosopher Sartre says, an 'antiracist racist' … this country can't understand that. What we have in SNCC is antiracist racism."[105]

Carmichael argued that Black self-definition was key for democracy because you can't move forward beyond racism without discussing and acknowledging its nature, and its impact, and correcting the problems identified in this process. None of this is possible without Black self-expression. Carmichael drew Frantz Fanon into this argument that Black self-definition offered the "last reasonable opportunity" for communication and dialogue to achieve human unity, and before "guerrilla warfare" became the mode of last resort for Black communities seeking respect.[106] In *Black Power*, Carmichael and Hamilton closed the introduction to the book not with reference to Fanon's endorsement of violence, but with Fanon's vision of nations that had overcome European oppression. To Fanon, as the authors quoted, this was a future that "will have regard to the sometimes prodigious theses which Europe has put forward, but which will also not forget Europe's crimes," and that will involve going "forward all the time … in the company of all men."[107]

Fanon and Carmichael are often identified with separatism and violence. Certainly, both advanced connected ideas, with Fanon suggesting that it may be necessary, and Carmichael specifying that violence was necessary in self-defence, thus marking a rift from the absolute philosophy of nonviolence

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[103] Ibid., 65.   [104] Carmichael, speech at Vanderbilt Impact Symposium, 2.
[105] Carmichael, "Berkeley Speech," 52.   [106] Carmichael and Hamilton, *Black Power*, xi.
[107] Ibid., xix, xx.

that characterized the civil rights movement.[108] However, evidence from Carmichael's addresses in 1966 and 1967, and the detail of reference to existentialism in them, show that Carmichael advanced Black Power in pursuit of communication. Carmichael repeatedly emphasized that forceful assertion of Black needs and identities did not inevitably lead to violence, but was essential to the interracial dialogue that would enact democracy. The final section of this paper will consider the extent to which the Black Power movement helped to coordinate democratic practices such as dialogue that led to greater understanding about racial inequality in some university settings in the United States, and the role of existentialism in this.

ENACTING BLACK POWER ON CAMPUSES

Black Power supported a significant cultural shift in the ways in which Black identities were understood and expressed in higher education in the late 1960s. Existentialism supported this impact of Black Power by informing some of its principles, as well as through its popularity outside the realm of debate about race, which, because it promoted self-creation, strengthened Black Power's impact. Black Power shaped dialogue about race by encouraging the presentation of Black people's perspectives in political organizations led by recent college graduates, such as the Black Panthers. It also influenced public conversations among Black students who prioritized Black leadership, self-respect, and pride, and who educated white students about the importance of these principles in newly integrated universities in the process. Student promotion of Black Power principles also set the agenda for what white leaders would discuss in relation to student welfare, even if these leaders attempted to discredit Black Power. Instances of Black Power-inspired revolt in ghettoes offered white students the opportunity to celebrate the self-creation and self-assertion of Black individuals, as well as of all communities. This entrenched allegiance to existential principles, as well as to Black Power specifically, validated the principle and sustained critiques of media bias on campuses. Finally, Black Power played a key role in semipermanent organizational reforms in universities that protected a space for Black self-definition and representation in the form of *Black Studies* courses.

Carmichael influenced college students in a range of ways. The Black Panther Party, founded by recent college graduates Huey Newton and Bobby Seale in 1966, used the term "Black Power," helping to keep it in

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[108] Gene Roberts, "The Story of Snick: From 'Freedom High' to 'Black Power'," *New York Times*, 25 Sept. 1966, 242–43, 288–93.

discussion into the 1970s.[109] They also drew on existential concepts of choice when explaining their ideology.[110] This overlap in interest in existentialism is not surprising, as leaders in the organization engaged with the same cultural organs as Carmichael, such as John Johnson's publications. Carmichael was also an inspiration for Newton and Seale to found the group, and they counted Carmichael as one of their members from June 1967 until July 1969; thus their movements overlapped.[111] The Panthers connected Black Power with prominent displays of Black interests and perspectives, exposing aspects of ongoing discrimination, in particular monitoring police to highlight their harassment of Black Americans.[112] The group started in California, but the impact of Carmichael's Black Power ideology on Black students was geographically dispersed. By 1968, Black students had endorsed Carmichael and Black Power from Washington, DC to Wisconsin. Carmichael's tireless repetition of a consistent Black Power ideology was noted by his supporters, whether in the form of annoyance with his repeated references to Camus, a point made by Howard student Adrienne Manns, who felt it would alienate normal people, or as an awestruck observation of Carmichael's persistence by University of Wisconsin–Milwaukee student, and future deputy editor of the *Washington Post*, Milton Coleman.[113]

Indeed, familiarity with the term "Black Power" was nationwide by 1968, having been repeated by Carmichael for nearly two years. Students at the University of Alabama worked through the ideology of Black Power in September 1966, at which point the term was new, but returned to it in 1968. Alabama University only became integrated in 1963 when Vivian Malone and James Hood were the first full-time Black students to be accepted, and Black Power proved useful in adjusting to greater equality of access.[114] In 1966, students at Alabama considered Carmichael's use of the term as the new

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[109] *Black Panther Community News Service*, 25 April 1967, 3, 4.

[110] "Interview with Bobby Seale," interviewer Robert Wright, 14 Nov. 1968, p. 13, in Ralph Bunche Oral History Collection, Civil Rights Documentation Project, RJB 346, Howard University Archives.

[111] Huey Newton (with the assistance of J. Herman Blake), *Revolutionary Suicide* (New York: Penguin, 2009; first published 1973), 165; Joshua Bloom and Waldo E. Martin, *Black against Empire: The History and Politics of the Black Panther Party* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2016), 3; Donna Jean Murch, *Living for the City: Migration, Education and the Rise of the Black Panther Party in Oakland, California* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010), 215.   [112] Bloom and Martin, 39, 45.

[113] "Interview with Adrienne Manns," interviewer H. O. Lewis, 9 Aug. 1968, p. 9, in Ralph Bunche Oral History Collection, Civil Rights Documentation Project, RJB 267, Howard University Archives; "Interview with Milton Coleman," interviewer Helen Hall, 14 Feb. 1968, in Ralph Bunche Oral History Collection, Civil Rights Documentation Project, RJB 149, Howard University Archives.

[114] Bailey Thomson, "Whites Accept UA's Black Students," *Crimson White*, 29 Feb. 1968, 1.

chairman of the SNCC and shared their understanding that it drew attention to aspects of equality that went beyond "integrated lunch counters," to include the unapologetic articulation of needs rather than a "begging posture" to whites.[115] By 1968, the term "Black Power" was used by Black students, but by this time Carmichael was not referenced alongside it as it had become a free-standing noun. Nevertheless, across three issues in a special feature on Black students' experiences in the university written by the white student journalist Bailey Thompson, students used the term in ways that were consonant with Carmichael's ideology and likely derived from it.

Some linked Black Power to Black Pride. As Patricia Shippman argued, the "good of a 'black power' movement is that it enables one to find real beauty in his race. 'I am black and proud of it.'"[116] Others linked Black Power with pointing out oppression, with one unnamed Black student commenting that Black Power pointed to the virtue of Black leadership, and that "Black Power is not a ruling type of power." Rather, "It's being able to come up with some rational answers to problems without being told how to solve them."[117] One further understanding of Black Power was that it was about asserting self-worth through taking leadership and the initiative. David Sullivan explained, "it's a psychological term. People can't just give you jobs. You've got to take some personal pride." In all these examples, the term "Black Power" was used by Black students to counteract the demoralizing personal impact of racial hate, providing faith that the challenge was worth it. This was vital given that in 1966 over half of the student body (54 percent) at the University of Alabama was still against integration.[118]

The presentation of Black perspectives also shaped the way in which some white students at the university thought about racial equality. Thompson, for instance, built his own view out of Black perspectives that featured in the student paper. At the end of the final part of the feature, Thompson stated that the term "Black Power" was being used constructively to correct for the limitations of integration. Speaking of Black students interviewed, he argued that "they adhere to Black Power as a means of precipitating a more effectual change in conditions and status of the black man," as "the changes have been comparatively slow."[119] Black students' use of Black Power ideology also set the agenda for discussion, forcing white leaders at the university to address the issues they raised. These leaders dismissed Black Power, failing to listen to students' call for Black leadership, and the celebration of Black

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[115] "A Different SNCC Faces Rights Fight," *Crimson White*, 12 Sept. 1966, 5.
[116] Bailey Thomson, "UA Negroes Seek Education, Not Mixing Races," *Crimson White*, 22 Feb. 1968, 1. [117] Bailey Thomson, "Whites Accept UA's Black Students." [118] Ibid.
[119] Ibid.

identities and communities. In Thompson's feature, the white president of the student government, Don Siegelman, noted that Black fraternities, which students had requested, were undesirable and "getting back to the idea of black power," when "the only way for the Negro to get along in our society in the future is integration of the two races."[120] The dean of men, John L. Blackburn, in response to some Black students' criticisms of social groups based around white cultural mores, argued, "If a negro student perceived college as a social experience, he should attend a Negro school."[121] Nevertheless, in this three-part feature, sympathy to the term "Black Power," and to its principles, outnumbered criticisms of it, and it was clearly a source of solace and reassurance for marginalized students. Evidently, white figures who were opposed to Black Power principles had political power, but, in this instance, sympathizers with Black Power had greater cultural power since they were more numerous than its opponents. This cultural power had impact because it forced those resistant university leaders to talk about the limits to what integration could achieve, thus increasing exposure of this issue, even though, at that time, they dismissed such concerns.

Black Power was evidently a general cultural reference point invoked in discussions about racial equality in higher education. Black Power was also enacted in urban protests, such as those happening across cities in the summer of 1967 which government leaders linked to Carmichael's public addresses, with one early cause identified as his April 1967 speech at Vanderbilt.[122] On integrated campuses the revolts prompted reflection about the nature and function of revolt, and ultimately a defence of it. This defence of revolt was evident in several articles belonging to a feature on revolt in the 22 September 1967 edition of the student paper for University of Wisconsin–Milwaukee. In this edition, for instance, student journalist Tom Watts defended Carmichael. Watts referred to Carmichael as a "scapegoat," the blaming of whom distracted attention away from the neglect of Black communities that protesters had sought to draw attention to.[123] Due to its popularity, existentialism was also used to contextualize revolt as vital to human freedom, which was consonant with Carmichael's own adoption of the philosophy.[124] Thus Tom Rose positioned revolt in general as key to healthy identities, and cited the "the existentialist psychoanalyst" Rollo May. Rose noted that May defended revolt on the grounds that, in May's

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[120] Bailey Thomson "Black Students Face Recreational Dilemma at UA," *Crimson White*, 26 Feb. 1968, 1.   [121] Ibid.

[122] Kerner commission, *Report of the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders* (Washington, DC: US Government Printing Office, March 1968), 21.

[123] Tom Watts, "Riots Feed Roots of Hate," *UWM Post*, 22 Sept. 1967, 3.

[124] Tom Hayden, *Re-union: A Memoir* (New York: Random House, 1988), 76.

words, the "freedom to say no is what gives substance and power to one's experience of identity … this makes the possibility of being a rebel, of experiencing anger and engaging in revolt potentially constructive experiences."[125] Carmichael's protest and the popularity of existentialism in wider culture assisted a powerful defence of Black self-creation and definition, and of the importance of living by these principles. Indeed, respect for Black Power principles was strong enough to be used to sustain criticisms of media bias that had been frequent in the early 1960s in, for instance, the free-speech movement.[126] Students identified white bias in the media and held it to account. This informed a public rupture with established cultural authority that was necessary for increased student trust in alternative information and narratives such as those provided by Black Power. The tendency of the press to malign Black communities was underlined by James Steir, who argued in his article that, in an attempt to position Black militancy as undemocratic, white Americans demonized any militancy. Steir therefore implied that they falsified the past and erased from the narrative those examples of white militancy that had been key to the foundation of the democratic US nation-state.[127]

Newspapers, whether student or national, are constantly in flux and unstable, meaning that maintaining them as inclusive spaces requires constant struggle and commitment to representation of a range of perspectives, especially if this is not already a cultural norm. Permanent sites of recognition of Black perspectives that were established in other centres of culture helped to normalize the recognition of Black perspectives. Black Power contributed to the development of such centres as it was cited by many founders of *Black Studies* courses and organizations in integrated and historically Black universities after 1968.[128] *Black Studies* courses were offered by 9 percent of higher education institutions at the turn of the twenty-first century.[129] Once *Black Studies* programmes were established, existentialism was still cited to underline the severity of oppression, and the depth of anger and rage of oppressed Black peoples. This is what happened when Mercer Cook's 1969 reflections on Sartre in his *The Militant Black Writer* were included on a *Black Studies* course at Amherst in 1976.[130] Cook had

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[125] Tom Rose, "Silence Is a crime," *UWM Post*, 22 Sept. 1967, 3.
[126] Robert Cohen, *Freedom's Orator: Mario Savio and the Radical Legacy of the 1960s* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 134.
[127] James J. Steir, "The Right to Rebel," *UWM Post*, 22 Sept. 1967, 3.
[128] Rojas, *From Black Power to Black Studies*, 51, 57, 58, 77, 86, 102, 110, 170; Bloom and Martin, *Black against Empire*, 80, 81; "Black Power Trends Examined," *Chicago Maroon*, 30 Jan. 1968, 1, 11. [129] Rojas, 170.
[130] Amherst College Catalog, 1976/1977, 97, Amherst College Archives and Special Collections, Amherst College Digital Collections, at https://acdc.amherst.edu/view/asc:452139 (last accessed 17 July 2024).

worked on increasing Black representation since the 1920s, and engaged with Sartre in this process by the 1940s. He continued to engage with Sartre to make these points. Black Power enabled Cook to engage fully with detail about oppression and rage in Sartre's 1948 *Black Orpheus* that he had side-stepped when he reviewed it that year. By 1969, Cook had detailed Sartre's definition of oppression and called for white people to listen and change in response to Black perspectives. Thus, in the 1969 text set at Amherst, Cook quoted Sartre:

What did you expect when you removed the gag that closed those black mouths? That they would sing your praises? Those heads that our fathers pressed to the ground, did you expect to read adoration in their eyes when they could look up?[131]

This quote spoke to the natural and necessary articulation of Black perspectives in order to address racial injustice in addition to the lifting of legal constraints on Black peoples. Cook went on to cite Fanon and his endorsement of the "fighting literature" of colonized peoples.[132]

Black Power and existentialism were entangled right from the origins of Black Power in the cultural discussions from the 1940s to the early 1960s, its emergence in student debate in the late 1960s, and through to Black Power's legacy in *Black Studies* courses. This entanglement was an important factor in raising public support for the inherent good of self-creation and self-definition, both for Black peoples and for all communities.

CONCLUSION

Stokely Carmichael was a remarkable individual who used French existentialism to support communication within Black communities, as well as inter-racially. Carmichael provided leadership and care to young Black people in what he called "the ghetto," at Alabama University, and also at historically Black universities such as Morgan State. At the latter, Carmichael reassured students that it was acceptable to abide by the norms and needs of their families and Black communities, rather than imitating white cultural traditions that could cripple their finances and spirit. As a result of Carmichael's tireless communication in public addresses, the balance of public discourse in universities tilted towards Black Power principles that integration was not enough, and that Black self-definition and the expression of needs, identity, rage, anger, and white responsiveness to this was key to the full functioning of democracy. Part of Carmichael's determination to communicate Black Power

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[131] Mercer Cook and Stephen E. Henderson, eds., *The Militant Black Writer in Africa and the United States* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1969), 3.   [132] Ibid., 21.

ideology to different communities came from his personal experiences of racism and white violence – whether in the context of the 1961 Freedom Rides, walking through mosquito-ridden swamps in nighttime Mississippi to find murdered civil rights activists in 1964, or, sadly, in the countless other instances where racist communities sought to crush Black autonomy.[133]

Carmichael's role in helping US citizens to start to overcome the national traumas of oppression, and move towards an open society of unity and mutual respect, may be surprising. Press coverage of him at the time could be hostile, and he was depicted as a source of division and trouble rather than as a force for democratic advancement.[134] Nevertheless, the evidence in this article points to the different reality that Carmichael supported constructive dialogue and conversation from which interracial respect and understanding grew. Students at the University of Wisconsin–Milwaukee came to understand the needs of Black communities as a result of protests that were underpinned by Carmichael's Black Power ideology. Universities elsewhere provided, for the first time, protected spaces for Black perspectives in the form of *Black Studies* courses, and Black Power had played an important role in the foundation of several of these. At the University of Alabama, those voices that resisted oppression and used Black Power to do so overpowered, in number, the voices of white leaders who sought to impose restrictive notions of integration that denied white bias and limited Black self-expression. In terms of successful cultural resistance to oppression, Carmichael's impact in the late 1960s therefore accelerated the patterns established in the 1940s, when attempts to ban Sartre's play on lynching were overturned in Chicago.

Existentialism provided useful tools for Carmichael's communication because several existential texts were built on Black perspectives. These texts had come into being, and had been promoted in the United States, because of cultural interactions between activist writers from intellectual communities in Paris, in the US, and across the French Empire. Alioune Diop's literary journal *Présence Africaine* was key here, but so was Dorothy Norman's *Twice a Year*, and Marc Barbezat's *L'Arbalète*. Existentialists were also popular in mass-circulation magazines for Black audiences where ties between the philosophy and antiracism were strengthened. Equally, existentialists designed philosophies to consider the perspectives of the oppressed, and to address how to maximize individual freedom and the human moral obligation of societies to secure this. The philosophy was generally popular on campuses, and a part of an emerging way of viewing the world that prioritized self-creation.

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[133] Carmichael with Thelwell, *Ready for Revolution*, 184, 191, 375, 377.
[134] Roberts, "The Story of Snick."

The importance of existentialism to Carmichael's project underlines the fact that, although he was a transformative individual, his success was facilitated by a range of other factors that created a moment of opportunity that he grasped. Carmichael came to prominence as the chairman of the SNCC; by 1966, the pedigree of this organization would grant its leaders media access and large audiences.[135] As most of Carmichael's arguments, including references to existentialism in the context of debate about racial equality, were in circulation before he made them in 1966 and 1967, it is likely that something else had to change in order for someone like Carmichael to successfully make these ideas the stuff of a new political movement. The passing of civil rights legislation in 1964 and 1965 provided just such a space for Carmichael's Black Power ideology to take hold. Nevertheless, it was Carmichael who took this role. He communicated arguments about Black self-definition prevalent in Black cultural settings to both Black and white audiences, and created a path forward after desegregation. This path was needed, as there was no guarantee that other leaders would have emerged to have communicated the vital political significance of Black self-definition to Black and white audiences. Indeed, white leaders may have prevailed with a one-dimensional notion of equality that equated it with access to all public areas from where Black people had formerly been prohibited, sidelining ideas of Black self-definition in the process, as occured at Alabama. Finally, as indicated at University of Wisconsin–Milwaukee, it was Carmichael's Black Power activism that helped students to identify Black self-definition as an organic part of the general human right to self-create, an idea that existentialism had embedded on campuses.

Overall, this study demonstrates the power of culture – from books to public addresses, press coverage, and conversation – to support the struggle for democracy. Culture helped to support resistance to a misguided and limited definition of equality linked only to desegregation. This resistance was possible because culture provided terms, such as "Black Power" and all its associations, which supported new ways of thinking. From new thoughts about identity and freedom came new actions, modelled tirelessly by Carmichael, then enacted by students across the country when they publicly celebrated Black pride and self-creation. This Black Power cultural shift centred on Black self-definition and the respect of Black and white communities for this. Nikhil Pal Singh has shown that this idea was promoted by Du Bois in the 1930s, but marginalized.[136] By 1966, the passage of integration policy, transnational literary journals, the popular Black press, historically

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[135] Farmer, *Remaking Black Power*, 51, 53.
[136] Singh, *Black Is a Country*, 3, 4, 63, 78, 79.

Black universities, Carmichael's leadership, and existentialism's popular reception ensured that this was the time for the idea of "Black Power" to arrive. US democracy is stronger as a result.

AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY

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