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ASSOCIATED STUDENTS
UNIVERSITY OF OREGON



OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENT

February 23, 1967

J. Kieffer
Assistant to the President
University of Oregon

Dear Mr. Kieffer:

In our meeting with Mr. Flemming last Saturday, you and I touched on the subject of Stokley Carmichael. Something you said made me decide to sit down and write this letter. There is something telling about a situation in which three white Americans ponder for a few moments the meaning of Stokley's impact...and then move on to discuss seating arrangements in a shiny new football stadium. I do not mean this cynically.

You said that Stokley Carmichael and Black Power harm the Civil Rights Movement and drive white men, who would otherwise help, to inactivity and even resistance. You said that Black Power was blind reaction. You have identified what is undoubtedly a very real result of the Negro's new military. I renew, however, the questions I asked you Saturday, why Stokley, why Black Power, why now?

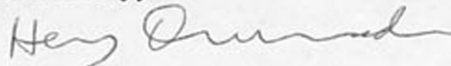
I do not desire to ^{disagree} agree with you. I do not want to make you realize that your reaction to Black Power is a luxury that white men and this country will not be able to afford in my generation. You say that Black Power is extremism and declare that progress is never made when extremists on both sides dominate. If that is so then it will take genuine compassion and understanding to bring those opposing extremes together. It will require the ability to feel the frustration and fears that are stamped into the soul of both the Black Students Association and the Suburban Backlash Bridge Club. For you, who should play a uniting role, to shrink from Black Power because it appears to have upset our white, liberal, progressive Civil Rights applectart, is the height of folly. Your reaction is a luxury because it cuts you off from the understanding and compassion you need to continue to bridge the gap between the extremes. Stretch man! It isn't that grand Civil Right March to equality that we all wanted to be part of and which was so clearly "Good!" ^{isn't} ~~is~~ not going to be. It was intellectually easy. It was a "good" cause, we were good guys, and we were slowly winning. An epic struggle. It is now not so intellectually easy. To allow ourselves to despair, to point at Black Power and say "it's your fault" will not bring the races close together. To understand Stokley and to bridge the gap between those whites who are apathetic or afraid might.

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I am not an expert on Black Power. I can not feel what it must be to be a Negro. I do know that the phenomenon has something to do with unwillingness of Negroes now in their teens and twenties to accept a lifetime of discrimination and denied dignity. They do not want to "win" their place in white society. They want to be proud human beings now and if white society will not give it to them now they are going to be proud of their blackness now. Is it any wonder that the black man has, at last, rejected white society. How could a young black man with a tiny black baby, bear the thought of a lifetime of struggle for that little baby? How much easier it is for him to tell that little baby to be proud he is black than to tell him he is "different" and that some day he will be accepted. You say it is blind reaction. You may be right, but it doesn't matter. It is human and understandable (even for a white man) and it is real. Do not lament the old Civil Rights Movement. Understand Black Power and adjust to its reality.

One more thought. Black Power has not pre-empted moderates. It has re-defined their role. There is nothing sacred about the old liberal moderates position before Stokely Carmichael. What was moderate three years ago is not necessarily so today. And words like extremist and moderate are relative terms. To a Negro, with his blackness with him every moment, Black Power may not be extreme at all. To Mr. Kieffer and to Henry Drummonds, white and washed, it may be. It doesn't matter who is "right". What matters is that we keep trying to understand, to stretch, and to bridge the gap. If this country is torn apart in my lifetime it will not be because of Black Power. It will be because men like you and I had allowed ourselves too many luxuries, intellectual and otherwise, and because we failed to understand the challenge Black Power creates for our liberal, progressive, enlightened, white selves.

Sincerely,



Henry Drummonds, President
Associated Students

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