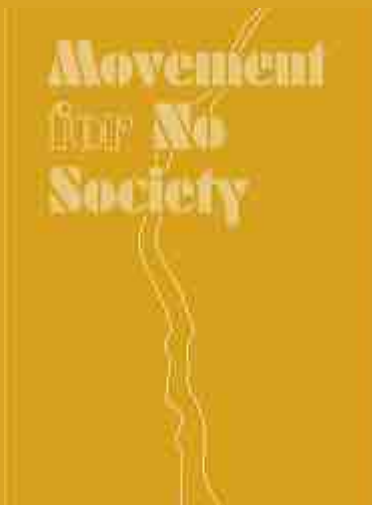


WE ALL FLOAT DOWN HERE: RAM's "floating tactics" & the Long Hot Summer of 1967 is a chapter from *Movement for No Society*, a book of insurrectionary history and theory from Philadelphia.



This chapter explores the Black Power era, the 1960s Long Hot Summers of riots, the inception of the Black Panther Party, and the origin of "black bloc tactics" through the Philadelphia-based group Revolutionary Action Movement.



We All Float Down Here:

RAM's "Floating Tactics" and
the Long Hot Summer of 1967



matter how we choose to understand their relationship, it is certain that the growth of the BLA led to tension and eventually a break with the central leadership. Elements in the Party sympathetic to the BLA produced a publication called *Right On!* that competed with the central committee's *Black Panther* newspaper. Articles in *Right On!* consistently critiqued the leadership, especially on the question of conflict, and argued that the riots had already set the conditions for the conflict whether BPP leaders like Newton agreed or not. The tipping point came when the leadership implemented a stationary defensive strategy, which proved incompatible with the increase of mobile groups.

In some cases, the development of armed self-defense had proved to be a significant development in Black liberation struggles, leading to daring and innovative escalations, such as the defense of the Los Angeles office against a siege by the newly formed SWAT. The success of the L.A. office's resistance was due in large part to the paramilitary measures taken by the Panthers under the guidance of ji Jaga: sandbagging, trenches, and gun towers. These provisions allowed the Panthers to protect the office even when a bomb was dropped on the roof, much like the one a decade later in Philadelphia that destroyed the MOVE house and burned 65 neighboring houses. However, prominent members of the BPP like Assata Shakur diagnosed the strategy of defending stationary positions as deeply flawed. Many groups agreed with Shakur, remaining on the offensive despite the executive mandate that made the defense of Panther institutions official policy.

By the early 1970s, the BLA floated away from the institutions of the Black Panthers. Key figures in the development of the BLA, like ji Jaga, had consistently managed to navigate the wider networks of the Black liberation struggles and avoid the restraints of the hierarchical leadership. Although he had a leadership role in the L.A. chapter, ji Jaga maintained political connections outside of the Party that included future BLA members like his close friend Mutulu Shakur. Ji Jaga's eventual expulsion from the Panthers inaugurated a series of expulsions within the Party. In this context, ji Jaga and others were quick to realize that future struggles would emerge from their more heterogeneous networks rather than the central committee. The Panther leadership's focus on protecting Party offices served the purpose of institutional self-preservation, but only at the expense of the members called to defend it. In the end, the Panthers prioritized an aboveground presence that reinforced and reproduced the hierarchical command structure over and above attacking the power structures of State and Capital. The next chapter takes a closer look at individuals in Philadelphia who prioritized the continued assault on State and Capital, went underground, and made connections with likeminded individuals within the BLA.



Within a brief few years, this volatile combination of underground network and aboveground party ruptured, giving way to the decentralized Black Liberation Army (BLA). In both RAM and the BPP, the BLA existed principally as a speculative future, an organization they were building in preparation for the coming revolution. The existence of the BLA as a formal organization was always debatable until the emergence of groups referring to themselves as such in 1971. The Black Panther Party, like RAM and the BLF, experienced a split over the question of central leadership. Once the party split, BLA communiques proliferated, as if they sprouted fully-formed overnight. However, the groundwork was already prepared by BPP members like Geronimo ji Jaga who spent the late 60s training BPP chapters in military tactics. Considering his strained relations with the central committee, ji Jaga's actions are best understood as continuous with the underground activity seen in the riots rather than properly Black Panther-inspired. Many members of the BLA were undoubtedly indebted to their experiences of the riots, as well as their contact with more-or-less informal groups trained in arms by gangs like the Slausons or political organizations like RAM. Despite this ongoing clandestine organizing, Assata Shakur describes the BLA in 1970 as barely an "organization." It seems ji Jaga and others were more focused on training people for actions than attempting to produce a formal organization.

The BLA drew on the membership and organizing of the BPP, but its structure reflected the areas the BPP could not contain. Shakur does not acknowledge that the BLA emanated from the BPP; rather, she claims that "the idea of a Black Liberation Army emerged from conditions in Black communities" (169). Furthermore, she argues that "There is, and always will be, until every Black man, woman, and child is free, a Black Liberation Army" (52), which suggests that whatever the BLA was (or is), it was not a traditional organization. Although Shakur attempted to provide the group with leadership and ideology, she had to acknowledge the unexpected conditions of this kind of group. In her autobiography, she remembers that the BLA

was not a centralized, organized group with a common leadership and chain of command. Instead, there were various organizations and collectives working out of different cities, and in some of the larger cities there were often several groups working independently of each other ... It became evident, almost from the beginning, that consolidation was not a good idea. There were too many security problems, and different groups had different ideologies, different levels of political consciousness and different ideas about how armed struggle in amerika should be waged (241-2).

Simply put, Shakur acknowledged that her presumptions about the underground were a "fantasy" and the reality was much less structured.

But from the perspective of some in the BLA, it was precisely this decentralized network that formed the basis of struggle within which the BPP was only one aspect. As Zayd Shakur put it, "THE BLACK LIBERATION ARMY, to which the Black Panther Party belongs" (qtd. in Faraj 153). It is ultimately too difficult to determine the nature of the relationship between the BPP and BLA since so much of the history of the BLA must out of legal necessity remain secret. No

In our present moment, street fighting and anti-capitalist action are often synonymous with what *Viewpoint's* Salar Mohandesi has called the "floating tactic" of the black bloc; the recent brawls with fascists and attacks on yuppie property in Philadelphia are no exception. By now, it should be obvious that the black bloc is a tactic—involving wearing all black and masking up—and *not an organization*. While it would be misleading to reduce the black bloc to donning black clothes, the outfit is the innovation that gives this specific configuration of tactics its name. Like many before him, Mohandesi traces the black bloc to the squatters of 1980s Germany, arguing that it was primarily a self-defense tactic tied to the institution of the social center. But when the black bloc became unmoored from that institution whose defense gave it meaning, he argues, it became a "floating tactic" doomed to repetition without a specific purpose to anchor it. While Mohandesi's "floating tactic" points us to an important distinction between the black bloc and fixed sites or institutions, he does not fully grasp *why it floats*. What we need to consider in reevaluating this tactic is why floating through the streets and other sites of circulation has proven to be one of its primary strengths. In order to understand the circulation of street fighting, we must go back further, before the prevalence of black uniforms.

We can trace the hallmarks of this street fighting, including mobile crowds, window breaking, projectiles, back much further, but the best place to turn is likely the riots in the United States fifty years ago, commonly known as the "long hot summer of 1967." To his credit, Mohandesi recently revisited this question in light of Antifa actions and explored earlier antifascist actions in France's Mai 68. While locating the development of these tactics in anti-racist struggles is a step in the right direction, we should view the focus on Europe with skepticism: not only does this focus reproduce a Eurocentric history of struggle, it also follows a dubious pattern of associating disruption with foreign invasion and outside agitation that anarchists are all too familiar with. The period of uprisings known as the "long hot summer" of 1967 not only witnessed some of the most explosive urban riots in American history, it also marked a major turning point in organization. Significantly, the street fighting we see happening in Philadelphia currently can trace its repertoire of tactics to events close to home. If the outside agitator is a mythic whirlpool we need to avoid, we should also be careful not to crash on the rocks of American exceptionalism. American history has demonstrated an almost inexhaustible ability to recuperate uprisings as examples of American freedom of expression. But these summer riots were never a dramatic outburst by the "unheard"; they were part of a struggle for Black liberation. This struggle should be understood as a movement to abolish "America," an entity constituted by racist oppression. Finally, it is important to resist the tendency to reduce Black liberation struggles or any struggle for liberation to leadership of "The Movement": legitimate, representative, and most importantly, identifiable.

These floating tactics are not always recognized by social movements, nor even necessarily identifiable as anarchist. Attacks against the State and property circulate in both anarchist space and broader liberation struggles. The history I will discuss below should draw our attention to the similarities between recent actions clustered under the heading of “Antifa” and prior events known by the names of cities (like “Ferguson” or “Baltimore”), which are often included under the banner of Black Lives Matter (BLM). Since the events adopted by or ascribed to BLM were both large-scale and highly mediated, the similarities with anarchist actions often get lost in the framing and focus. For example, BLM is often credited for a massification of traditional protest tactics, but these protests were also remarkable for popularizing the blockage of highways by mobile crowds. Moreover, the events in Ferguson took the form of vigils and marches in some instances, while in others highly mobile crowds outmaneuvered the police, surrounded police cars, confronted riot cops with bottles and broken bricks, and lit fires. In Ferguson, Baltimore, and elsewhere, some participants (often masked) opened up the space for smashing windows, widespread looting, and burning down stores. In Baltimore, one person in a gas mask even cut the firehoses being used to put out the flames. Although popular discourse contrasts these actions with the “organized” or “peaceful” protests, this activity could be better understood as adjacent to each other. Insisting on the division between two types of actions only serves to further the view that the more anarchic riot is an ahistorical, spontaneous reaction. Riots have a history. The overall composition of recent events strongly suggests that the Ferguson and Baltimore riots and the so-called black bloc tactics have a shared history in the riots of the long hot summer of 1967.

In this chapter, we turn to the Black liberation organization known as Revolutionary Action Movement (RAM) to examine their role in developing the street fighting tactics used during the 1960s riots. We turn to RAM not to valorize their leadership in these events, but to explore a homegrown manifestation of an insurrectionary tendency in America. As we will see, the historical documents of RAM provide a fascinating template for subsequent actions, but from the beginning these “floating tactics” have already exceeded the bounds of the identifiable organization. Still, we should call into question the narrative of spontaneity and disorganization that often accompanies histories of riots. Riots do not emerge from nothing. At least three factors contributed in 1967: 1) the pattern of racist police attacks on Black people that invariably catalyzed events, 2) the crisis in Capital emerging in this period, including the rising specter of deindustrialization and the falling rate of profit in manufacturing—that, as Joshua Clover points out, shifted the focus from wage-based struggles in the workplace to sites of circulation, that is, from the factory to the streets—and 3) the renewed focus on cities as sites of struggle for Black liberation. Traditionally, Black liberation struggles are periodized by associating nonviolence with the rural South in the early 50s and violence with Black Power in the urban North in the 1960s, even though these struggles and tactics overlap. Here, we are less interested in the distinction commonly drawn between nonviolence and violence than a distinction within “violence” itself: roughly, the shift from stationary “self defense” to mobile offense. The history of RAM provides us with an instance where Black liberation struggles intentionally organized a mobile offensive in response to their conditions and in spite of its potential to exceed their leadership.

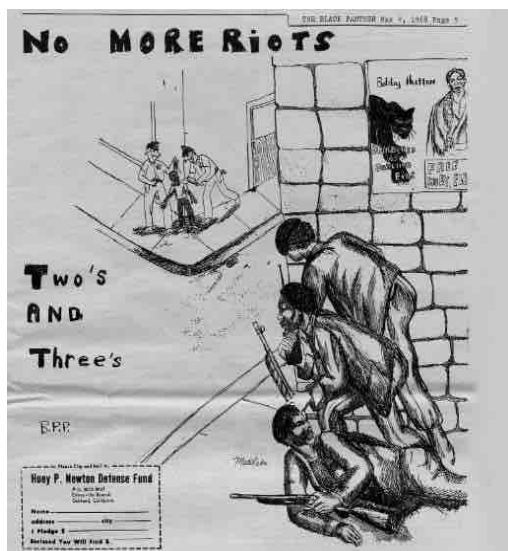
No single cadre is solely responsible for the historical phenomenon known as the Black Panthers. The iconic image of the Oakland leadership looms so large in the legacy of the Panthers that it distorts our understanding of their rise. By visualizing the early development of the Black Panther Party without focusing on the Oakland leadership, a different picture emerges entirely. If we begin with the contributions of RAM, we can decenter the traditional focus on the Oakland cadre led by Huey Newton. Newton’s Black Panther Party for Self Defense (BPPSD) is the often-cited exception to what Robin Kelley has called “a general conspiracy of silence against the most radical elements of the black freedom movement” (62). That historians break their silence when discussing the history of the BPPSD is certainly due in part to their focus on self-defense, obscuring their affinity with guerrilla offensives. Since the history of the Panthers has become dominated by the Oakland cadre, it is necessary to point out the “self-defense” modifier in their name serves as a reminder that they were not the only group claiming the Black Panther title. Although when the Oakland chapter grew into a national organization they dropped this modifier, they initially distinguished themselves from other organization by their focus on self-defense and, specifically, their patrols. However, even with the patrols, we should resist the “great man” narrative that suggests these tactics were the invention of the cadre leadership. As Joshua Bloom and Waldo E. Martin point out in their history of the Black Panthers, *The Movement* reported on the activities of the Community Alert Patrol (CAP) in Watts several months before the BPPSD patrols began. Members of CAP “Brother Lennie” and “Brother Crook” spent the year after the Watts riots attempting to prevent another incident of police brutality by patrolling the neighborhood in a car with the Black Panther logo on the side (Bloom and Martin 41).

The fact that this logo first appeared in Lowndes County, Alabama has become well known in recent years. What seems to be less acknowledged is that chapters of the Black Panther Party had already begun to pop up across the country through a network of Black Power militants even before the formation of the best-known chapter in Oakland. The Black Panther Party first appeared outside Alabama as the name of a front group with murky connections to other established Black Power groups. At a SNCC rally in August 1966 featuring speeches by Stokely Carmichael and RAM’s Muhammad Ahmad, Ahmad was introduced as head of the Harlem Branch of the Black Panther Party. Curiously, this rally took place three months before the Black Power conference in Berkeley that is commonly cited as the event that spread the concept of a Black Panther Party outside of Lowndes County. At the August rally, the speakers were less interested in recruiting for party membership than advocating self-defense and the decentralized tactics of the riots. Ahmad went so far as to argue that the United States “could be brought down to its knees with a rag and some gasoline and a bottle” (qtd. in Bloom and Martin, 43). Bloom and Martin acknowledge that some scholars even argue that the Oakland chapter was initially a chapter in this SNCC network. Considering the SNCC-Panther championing of rioters’ autonomous action, it would be misleading to replace Newton with Ahmad or Carmichael as the originator of the Panthers. In these initial stages, the Black Panther is best understood as a unifying symbol that provides legibility, affinity, and inspiration to a burgeoning network consisting of relatively autonomous small groups. Despite the tendency of historical narrative to focus on a particular leadership, the Panthers provides an example of decentralized organizing indebted to the underground networks.



BLACK PANTHERS LIBERATION ARMY

Within the networks of rioters, there was space for reflection on organization, adapting lessons for different contexts and plans to act more effectively. Famously, the Black Panthers tried to go beyond the riots altogether. The Panther leadership understood the riots as an important response to the police, but in the aftermath of the long hot summer of 1967 they developed a critique of mass action that favored small groups of guerrillas. Yet the turn to small group organizing within the Panthers is best understood as an outgrowth of the riots, since it drew on the formats made popular by the riot: small bands of looters and snipers. There is an implicit tension between the Panther leadership's claim to represent a broad base and their advocacy for the small group form, especially since small autonomous groups were generally understood as an alternative to top-down command structure. However, this dynamic should not be understood as a contradiction in the Black Panthers but rather as a sign of the heterogeneity of their organization. While certainly some members held self-contradictory views, the Black Panthers' antithetical positions make more sense when we take into account the distinct political tendencies within their networks. What is often ignored in histories of the Black Panthers is their emergence from a relatively decentralized milieu and how their organizational structure left the door open to a return to decentralization.



This chapter provides a history of RAM from an insurrectionary perspective that situates them within the broader, informal networks struggling against white supremacy in the 1960s. RAM was a Black liberation organization in the 1960s with a large network and a headquarters in Philadelphia. As a Philadelphia-based group, RAM can help us trace the chthonic channels connecting the insurrectionary currents of the 1960s to the anarchist actions happening in the city today (see the timeline at the end of this book). Equally, our perspective, which privileges decentralization over hierarchy, can aid in retelling this history without making RAM's Philadelphia-based leadership the authors or protagonists of these events. It might seem strange then to rely on a formal organization like RAM at all to tell this history but, since formal groups keep better records, they often become the main medium through which we can access a history of informal and decentralized action. By concentrating on RAM, we can at least begin to complicate the history that (when it refers to them at all) relegates RAM to a catalyst and antagonist of the better-known Oakland-based Black Panther Party. From the point of view of public record, the Black Panthers were at the center of the radical forces known as Black Power, but what if we were able to view this period from the point of view of the underground? Then, perhaps, even RAM would appear too popular, too public, too formal and structured. Ultimately, focusing on RAM has three main benefits for unearthing an insurrectionary history in Philadelphia: 1) dislocating the Eurocentric history of insurrectionism, 2) decentering the Black Panthers from the narrative of Black Power, and 3) since it is dangerous and nearly impossible to investigate the networks that directly led to rioting, RAM provides us with a relatively public access point to explore this period without accidentally conducting volunteer police work.

WHAT WAS REVOLUTIONARY ACTION MOVEMENT?

The basic story of RAM follows the expected conventions of student activists: RAM formed as an off-campus chapter of Students for a Democratic Society in Cleveland, Ohio in 1962. They grew out of a group called Challenge and took the name Reform Action Movement in order to run for student government at Central State College. After winning student elections, some members left for other communities to organize. Muhammad Ahmad (known at the time as Max Stanford) and Wanda Marshall returned to Philadelphia, where they openly organized a chapter of Revolutionary Action Movement. During this period, Marshall and Ahmad met with Malcolm X to discuss the possibility of joining the Nation of Islam, but Malcolm advised them to build an independent organization. Based in Philadelphia, the RAM leadership set out to build a national organization through regular travel.

Characteristically, the insurrectionary tendency within RAM was never rooted to a specific location but began by floating out. One of the most significant trips for the development of this tendency was, curiously, the 1963 Progressive Labor sponsored trips to Cuba. While RAM members were in Cuba, they connected with other militants from across the US and started to develop an underground network. This is where RAM met Robert F. Williams, who would become a figurehead of sorts for the fledgling organization. Williams was infamous

for using his tenure with the NAACP to organize armed self-defense against the KKK in North Carolina and, at the time, was in exile in Cuba, having fled kidnapping charges in 1961. While in Cuba, RAM members also established ties with militants from Detroit's Black liberation group Uhuru and San Francisco's Afro-American Association. They agreed to help RAM build a national organization, which was called the Black Liberation Front of the USA. Additionally, RAM formed ties with international groups, including affiliates of the Front de libération du Québec, who would play an important role in events discussed later. Returning to the US, RAM was positioned to play an influential part in the mid-60s development of Black liberation struggles.

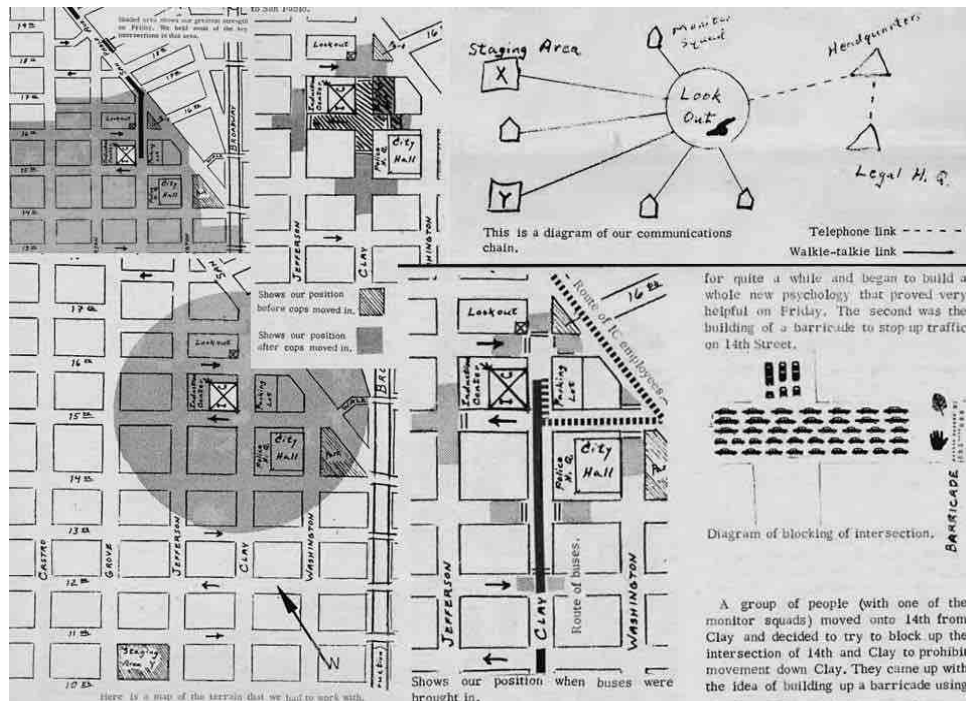
- 1961 Robert F. Williams flees United States
- Challenge, SDS chapter established (Fall)
- 1962 Reform/Revolutionary Action Movement established in Cleveland
- Robert F. Williams, *Negroes with Guns*
- Marshall and Ahmad meet Malcolm X (Thanksgiving Break)
- 1963 Revolutionary Action Movement study/action group established Philadelphia (January)
- PL sponsored trip to Cuba (July)
- 1964 Robert F. Williams, *Crusader* (February)
- Roland Snellings, "The Long Hot Summer" (June)
- Malcolm X announced founding of OAUU (June)
- Harlem riot (July) Philadelphia riot (August)
- Black America* issue 1 (Fall)
- Deacons for Defense and Justice established in Louisiana (November)
- 1965 BLF arrests (early February)
- Malcolm X killed (February 21)
- Watts Riots (August)
- Lowndes County Freedom Organization aka the Black Panther Party founded in Alabama
- 1966 Hough riot, Cleveland, Ohio (July)

The experiments in street tactics continued to circulate in the following years, exposing limitations but also possibilities. For the anarchists, Berkeley continued to be a site of growth with the emergence of "revolutionary gangs," families, and communes. The Berkeley Commune, made up of informally organized affinity groups, celebrated May '68 with riots on Telegraph Avenue. Anarchistic tendencies emerged within the formal Black Power organizations as well, leading to fragmentation and rifts that produced the Black Liberation Army (discussed below). Not confined to specific groups, the riot has remained a common occurrence in American streets, notably in the massive Los Angeles riot in 1992 that witnessed days of street fighting, looting, and over 900 structure fires. In retrospect, the L.A. riot marks a high point in a cycle of struggle that includes the Oscar Grant riots in 2009, as well as those in Ferguson and Baltimore. Yet the aptitude and general knowhow of the L.A. rioters suggests an intellectual lineage back to 1967. Similar conclusions should be made about the recent responses to the growth of fascism in the USA, often attributed to Antifa but clearly more generalized in many cases, like the street fights in San Jose in 2016. In these moments, we can see that street fighting does float, but it is not, as *Viewpoint's* Salar Mohandesi suggests, because it is a tactic "cut adrift" from a familiar shore in a social movement. Street fighting was never bound to the role of defending social movement institutions. It floats away from institutions and movement leadership to new locations, floating *through* the actions of rioters.





The Movement's coverage of the STDW protests described the actions of mobile, decentralized participants in a way that conveyed the reproducibility of their tactics. Images of overturned cars as barricades and protesters confronting the police illustrate possibilities for the reader, while the captions point out important details, such as helmets and shields. The articles detail the repertoire of possible actions from spray paint to projectiles, while multiple maps guide the reader through the street, illustrating communications across groups and methods for blocking flows of traffic, like using newspaper boxes used as makeshift barricades. The maps illustrate the movement of groups through the streets, and their confrontations with the police. These pages of *The Movement* present a virtual manual of the floating tactics used in street fighting, containing many of the familiar features we see today.



Formation of the Harlem Black Panther Party (c. July)

Oakland Black Panther Party (BPPSD) (c. October)

1967 Series of arrests of RAM leadership (June)

Long hot summer of riots in Newark, Detroit, etc

STDW protests (October)

1968 Shootouts among Black Guards in West Philadelphia (October)

Followed by mass arrests

RAM dissolves (October) into other groups
(Black Liberation Party, DRUM, RNA, etc.)

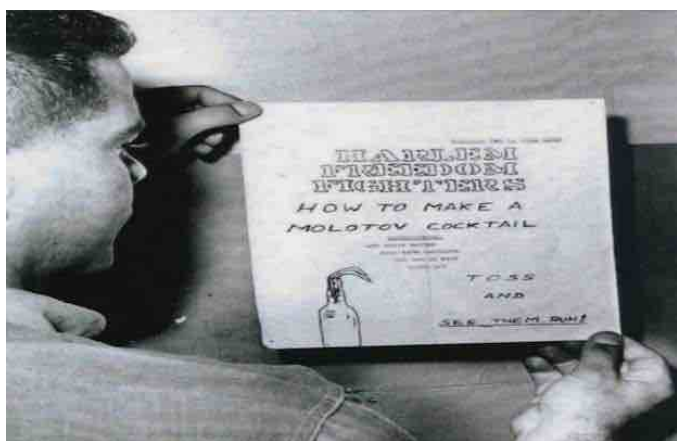
Over the next year, RAM developed their political connections through continued travel and a large print culture. RAM maintained a headquarters in Philadelphia and advanced their political analysis in their publications *Black America*, a bimonthly publication, and *RAM Speaks*, a weekly newsletter. On the other side of the country, members of San Francisco's Afro-American Association created *Soulbook*, an influential publication that put members in contact with older generations of the Black Left. The Philly cadre, too, began connecting with local mentors, including Ethel Johnson, who had organized with Robert F. Williams in North Carolina, and Queen Mother Moore who held monthly meetings that "practically served as a school for a new generation of young black radicals" (Kelley 78) in her West Philadelphia home. Through these mentors, RAM developed their political analysis, but they also turned to their experiences on the street.

RAM became one of the first groups to advocate for the significance of youth and street gangs taking part in the riots. When a white cop shot an epileptic Black man in 1963 in Philadelphia, a small riot erupted in response. Witnessing this event led RAM to rethink their organizational structure and to reevaluate the potential of spontaneous urban uprisings. There were some theoretical precedents to RAM's insights: their comrades in Detroit who were affiliated with the Johnson-Forrest tendency were theorizing the possibilities of non-worker-based revolutionary struggle. Additionally, Robert F. Williams was speculating about the possibilities of widespread rioting. Around the same time, Malcolm X began to speak of similar possibilities in terms of guerrilla warfare, echoing the sentiments of RAM. But it was largely RAM's direct experiences in Philly that led to their sympathy for urban conflict. In the summer of 1964, a series of riots swept across Philadelphia, New York, and elsewhere, marking the first of many large-scale urban uprisings within the "Civil Rights period" (i.e. since 1943). Just before the riots, Malcolm X broke with the Nation of Islam and founded the Organization of Afro-American Unity (OAAU), a secular Black liberation group with ties to RAM. Although Malcolm spent the following months traveling internationally, the networks around OAAU helped push toward broader militant action. Famously,

the crowds in the Harlem riots chanted “We want Malcolm,” and Ahmad indicates that the paramilitary wing of Malcolm X’s fledgling organization, including RAM, responded by joining them in the action (Stanford 103).

Malcolm X was an inspirational figure for armed struggle and insurrection in the 1960s, but he remained primarily a figurehead in the riots because he travelled regularly until his assassination in 1965. In contrast, RAM actively participated in the events of the summer of ’64, which helped them prepare for the subsequent long hot summers. In his history of RAM, the scholar Robin Kelley makes the dubious claim that RAM was an entirely theoretical outfit dedicated to writing about political violence but not acting on it. While it is not my intention to implicate RAM further in illegal activities, the historical record as well as Ahmad’s fieldwork refutes Kelley’s claim. It is difficult to imagine that no RAM member was drawn into the events exploding across their neighborhoods in the mid-60s. However, Ahmad reminds us that the riots were not organized by black revolutionaries, even if they consistently participated.

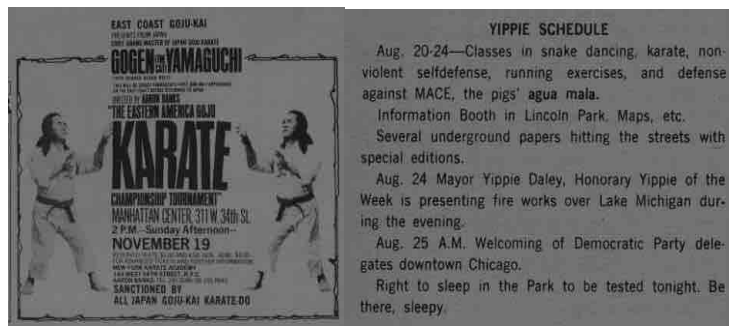
BLUEPRINTS FOR THE SUMMER



As a formal organization, one of RAM’s most significant contributions was the distribution of a strategic vision for urban rebellion. The main way they distributed this vision was through a set of interrelated print publications. These publications supplemented their political actions and organizing with a clear articulation of their revolutionary ambitions and speculations on how to escalate the struggle. What is interesting for our purposes is how RAM’s innovative vision of insurrectionary struggle was adapted to American cities. Rather than building on the Leninist or Maoist revolutionary models that so many Marxists continued to roleplay, RAM developed on the lessons learned from the rioting Philly youth. Additionally, they drew from Robert F. Williams’ exceptional and visionary analysis outlined in his newspaper *The Crusader*. As early as 1964, Williams was fantasizing about mobile groups without central organization that could intervene in capitalist circulation of goods: “All transportation will grind to a complete standstill. Stores will be destroyed and looted... Essential pipe lines will be severed and blown up and all manner of sabotage will occur...The economy will fall into a state of chaos.” The blockage of circulation that Williams envisioned would be

The STDW protests at the Oakland Induction Center provide an opportunity to study the evolving repertoire of street fighting tactics that is worth examining closely if not simply because of the extensive coverage it received in the Underground Press. One paper, *The Movement*, dedicated an entire issue to reflecting on the events. As a newsletter affiliated with both Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) and Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), *The Movement* acted as an intellectual bridge between Black Power militants and the student movement in a period in which they attempted to create alliances for anti-war protests. Since SNCC had excised its white membership earlier in the year as part of their shift to a Black Power strategy, *The Movement*, with its white editors was less connected to SNCC. However, SNCC had always been a decentralized organization with autonomous “projects” instead of chapters and *The Movement* continued to publish under the modified subheading “affiliated with SNCC and SDS” (Cannon). While the exact relationship between SNCC, SDS and *The Movement* is complicated, it is worth pointing out that the STDW protests in Oakland were widely viewed as attempts by Berkeley students and other non-black activists to win the respect of Black Power groups. While the outcome looked quite different than the strategies that became popular among groups like the Black Panthers (discussed below), the STDW demonstrations were visibly indebted to the riots of the long hot summer. To be clear, these primarily white protesters are not the best historical example of the influence of those riots, but the disproportionate coverage in the press (in part, no doubt, because of their whiteness) clearly records a legible set of tactics. Like RAM’s publications, participants in the STDW used the pages of *The Movement* to essentially create manuals for small group direct action.





In the late 1960s, militants from varying backgrounds sought out models for small group organizing that could operate within mass mobilizations. Models inspired by the riots were particularly important for The Stop the Draft Week demonstrations (STDW) in October 1967. The STDW organizers were drawn to the potential synthesis of the riots and their ongoing anti-war protest marches. Their marches were public events composed predominantly of students, often middle-class and white, who were unlikely to adopt the most combative tactics of the riots, such as clandestine sniping. Still, they drew on central tenets gleaned from the riot: small groups, mobility, confrontation, and autonomy from leadership. But since open armed struggle was taken off the table by these student groups, less-specialized tactics were needed. The first sign of the spread of these tactics might be the prevalence of karate lessons advertised in the Underground Press. These advertisements sometimes explicitly linked this training with fighting the police and were in fact listed along with instructions for Molotov cocktails as prohibited in new riot laws the following year. Small bands of karate-trained militants would conceivably act the part of guerrilla foci without the Cristobal Carbine rifle

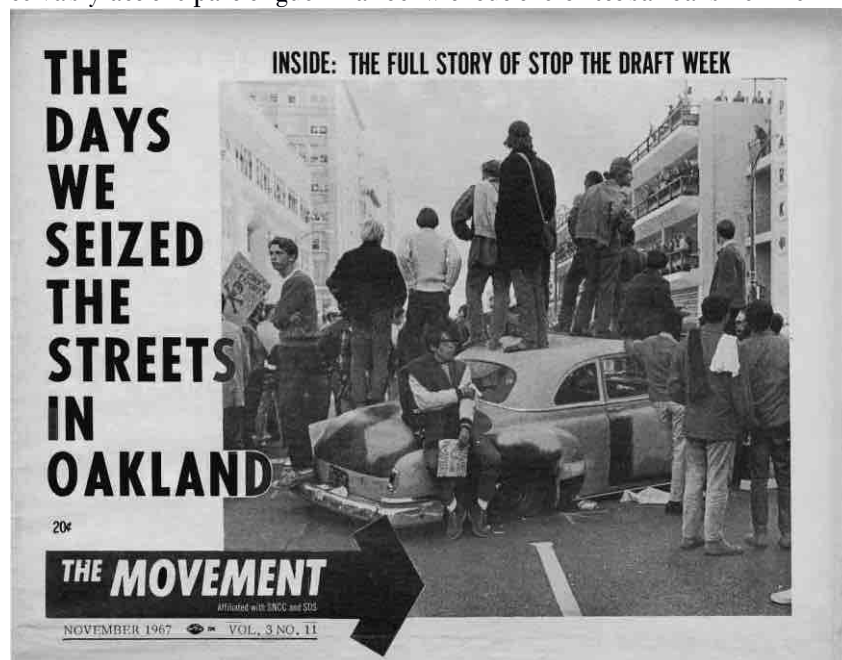
facilitated by a new “concept of revolution [that] defies military science and tactics” of traditional leadership, with its “lightning campaigns.” According to the House of Unamerican Activities, RAM made similar use of writing in various forms, such as posters attacking the police, flyers instructing in the production of Molotov cocktails, graffiti calling for the creation of armed groups, and print publications. Through their written work, Williams and RAM promoted a vision of insurrection that, according to Muhammad Ahmad, led to affiliated groups virtually competing to create the largest riot.

Although Williams was insistent that his writing was not a blueprint for revolution, he foresaw many of the tactics that would come into practice in the summer of '64. With the limits of pacifist Civil Rights struggle clearly in sight, Williams advocated a shift to urban guerrilla warfare in “Potential of a Minority Revolution,” an article which drew together potential tactics into a strategic vision. While this vision is sometimes more wish fulfillment than grounded strategy, the tactics he describes are accessible and generalizable:

The weapons of defense employed by Afroamerican freedom fighters must consist of a poor man's arsenal. Gasoline fire bombs (Molotov cocktails), lye or acid bombs (made by injecting lye or acid in the metal end of light bulbs) can be used extensively. During the night hours such weapons, thrown from roof tops, will make the streets impossible for racist cops to patrol. Hand grenades, bazookas, lights mortars, rocket launchers, machine guns and ammunition can be bought clandestinely from servicemen, anxious to make a fast dollar. Freedom fighters in military camps can be contacted to give instructions on usage. Extensive sabotage is possible. Gas tank on public vehicles can be choked up with sand. Sugar is also highly effective in gasoline lines. Long nails driven through boards and tacks with large heads are effective to slow the movement of traffic on congested roads at night. This can cause havoc on turn-pikes. De-railing of train causes panic. Explosive booby traps on police telephone boxes can be employed. High powered sniper rifles are readily available. Armor piercing bullets will penetrate oil storage tanks from a distance. Phosphorus matches (kitchen matches) placed in air conditioning systems will cause delayed explosions which will destroy expensive buildings. Flame throwers can be manufactured at home. Combat experienced ex-service men can easily solve that problem. (*Crusader* 5.1 5)

This description may be simply speculation but the attention to detail could also be interpreted as instructions. In advance of the summer, RAM distributed this newspaper throughout their networks and, moreover, wrote similar tracts of their own that further developed Williams' thoughts.

In *Black America*, RAM set out possible actions for urban struggle in terms similar to Williams'. In June of 1964, Askia Touré (aka Roland Snellings) described these possibilities as a coming “long hot summer” that would move past the “bourgeois reformism” toward “a new kind of freedom fighter.” He saw the signs of a coming insurrection in recent “waves of indiscriminate terrorism in the northern cities.” Building on Touré, Muhammad Ahmad located potential weak points to target in cities, arguing that





Charlie's system runs like an IBM machine. But an IBM machine has a weakness, and that weakness is its complexity. Put something in the wrong place in an IBM machine and it's finished for a long time. And so it is with this racist, imperialist system. Without mass communications and rapid transportation, this system is through. The millionaires who control this country would be isolated from their flunkies who do their dirty work. When war breaks out in this country, if the action is directed toward taking over institutions of power and complete annihilation of the racist capitalist oligarchy, then the black revolution will be successful . . . The revolution "will strike at night and spare none." Mass riots will occur in the day with the Afroamericans blocking traffic, burning buildings, etc. Thousands of Afroamericans will be in the street fighting—for they will know that this is it. The cry will be "It's On!" This will be the Afro-American's battle. for human survival. Thousands of our people will get shot down, but thousands more will be there to fight on. The black revolution will use sabotage in the cities—knocking out the electrical power—first, then transportation, and guerrilla warfare in the countryside in the South. With the cities powerless, the oppressor will be helpless. Turner's philosophy of "strike by night and spare none" is very important because it shows us that Turner knew the psychology of White America, and that we had leadership with guerrilla instinct. (*Black America* 1.1 2).

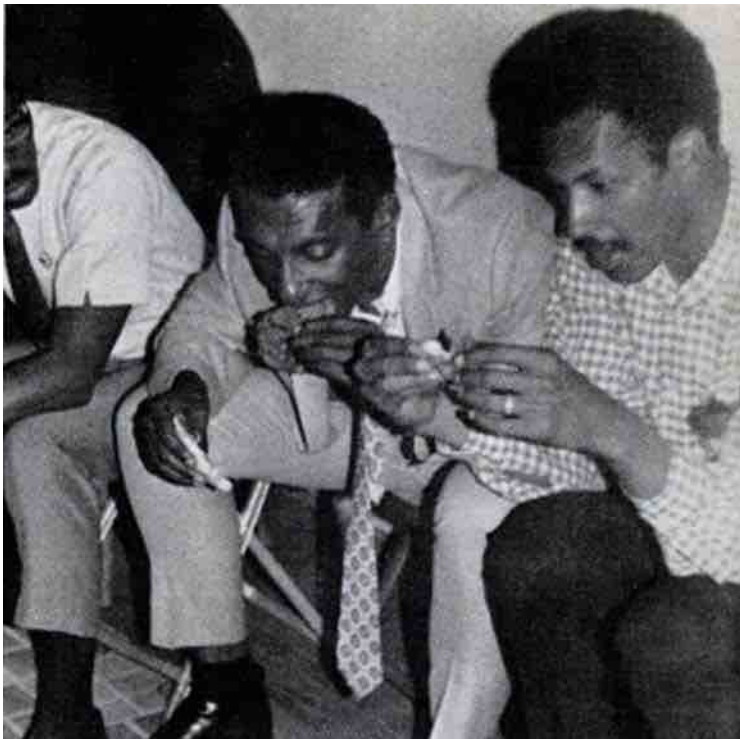
As we can see, the strategy privileged disrupting sites of circulation (of commodities, traffic, electricity, communication). Moreover, RAM emphasized the destructive possibility of uprisings rather than taking over and holding space. They took from the guerrilla the idea of prioritizing mobility over conserving or protecting space. RAM analysis can account for the rioters' penchant for "burning down their own community." In the months following this publication, thousands of people would take part in similar actions in American cities, most notably in Watts in 1965.

what the local news referred to as "the first integrated looting in history" (qtd. in Van Newkirk, 8). As a result, his account verges on useless ethnocentrism that only serves to re-center the white anarchist's protagonism. Although Van Newkirk places too much stock in the participation of white looters, his account of the events does remind us that the rioters were not all affiliated with hierarchical organizations or even any organization.



What remains essential in the anarchist reception of the riots is the Black insurrection "against the tyranny of white property" (Van Newkirk, 6). The anarchists distributed their succinct analysis of the events in real time through leaflets that simply read "Summer Plunder Festival: get the big stuff and don't get caught" (8). Van Newkirk's post-riot reflections can only add to this already clear objective by a) analyzing the economic implications of the riot and b) distributing a model for the future. For the former, Van Newkirk's situationist-inflected analysis focuses on how the riot can extend beyond reacting to police violence and become an attack on property. There is a false distinction here: while we can appreciate the '60s anarchists' ability to recognize the interrelation between police repression and the regime of property, it is dubious to prioritize opposition to one over the other as more "insurrectionary." The attack on police is already an attack on property, just as the riot in the street, as RAM described, is already a disruption of Capital. This is why window-breaking sometimes includes looting but other times does not, contrary to critics like the Young Lords who quipped about the Weatherman's Days of Rage: "who ever heard of breaking windows and not taking anything?" (qtd. in Varon 85). Many would soon hear about these types of actions since the anarchists had a substantial influence in the Underground Press, a network of independent newspapers, which supplied a forum relatively unmediated by the activist leadership. In the Underground Press, the anarchists helped distribute ideas for future actions.

In fact, RAM's approach to the 1967 riots already followed Donald Freeman and the BLF's model of a loose coalition more than a hierarchical cell structure. Thus, despite the BLF's faltering under state repression, the tendency toward decentralization won out in the split since the hierarchical faction of RAM still had to reckon with the ungovernability of the rioters. In the months leading up to the riots, RAM visited Detroit and called on militants to prepare for armed confrontation. Instead of recruiting for their organization, RAM emphasized a decentralized network of prepared participants. By this time, they were also heavily connected to the Black Power networks and forming coalitions with powerful groups like Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC). In August of 1966, a month after the Cleveland riot, RAM formed a chapter of the Black Panther Party in Harlem in collaboration with SNCC. There is evidence of Black Panther presence in the Detroit riots, and at least one member of RAM stayed on to organize militias. Yet, for the most part, the events of the summer of 1967 took place without the direction of RAM leadership



The decentralization of the riots meant that participants came from differing ideological and political backgrounds, including anarchism. Like RAM, the anarchist milieu developed their own lessons from their experiences participating in the riots. In an article by Detroit anarchist Allan Van Newkirk, a "Burn Baby Burn" banner with an accompanying Black Panther hung above the headquarters for several of the local anarchist publications during the riots. Van Newkirk contextualized the riots in an insurrectionary and pro-situationist framework as a broader attack on the representational politics of leadership and property. Van Newkirk seems particularly interested in the cross-racial alliances forged in the streets, pointing to the participation of white anarchists in

BURN BABY BURN



The riots demonstrated the viability of much of RAM's strategic vision but, at the same time, these events exposed the limit of RAM's control of events. RAM's presence in the Watts riot was strong. One RAM member recounted a story where he was graffitiing during the Watts riot only to be approached by an unfamiliar RAM cadre (Stanford 67). However, when RAM reflected on the riots, they recognized how these events exceeded the direction of any leadership.

The writing of their mentor Robert F. Williams exemplified this potential contradiction in RAM's strategy by simultaneously arguing for central leadership and promoting autonomous small groups who didn't need to follow a blueprint. Williams wrote two follow-up articles to the "Potential of Minority Revolution," the first following the Watts riots of 1965 and the second following the string of riots in Detroit, Newark, and elsewhere in the long hot summer of 1967. In 1965, he argued for the need to develop "fire teams," which he defined as small groups operating autonomously and secretly to perform acts of sabotage. These groups of three or four people would not have any connection with the Civil Rights movement or even with each other and would instead focus on setting strategic fires (forest fires, wastepaper baskets, air conditioning systems) and otherwise sabotaging circulation (placing tacks on road during rush-hour traffic) (*Crusader* 7.1 5). But, in 1967, Williams argued for an insurrection with "central planning and a national supreme command," while still maintaining the importance of the small bands of autonomous guerrillas able to "constantly shift its position when sniping to avoid detection" (*Crusader* 9.2 1-7). In theory, RAM needed to account for the difference between their leadership and the need for decentralized maneuvers in mass actions. On the ground, RAM needed to come to terms with their relationship to hierarchy within their own organization.

As RAM developed through their experiences, different tendencies emerged, as did divisions over the question of hierarchical structure. The official

leadership had its headquarters in Philadelphia, but as a national organization with loose communication, there were factions and leadership elsewhere. By 1965, RAM had faced important splits in which one side, headquartered in Philadelphia, took up democratic centralism, while the other attempted to develop a loose network of cells, retaining the name Black Liberation Front (BLF). Though RAM was at this point characterized by central leadership, they continued to emphasize spreading generalizable tactics to Black youth in impoverished neighborhoods. It might be more helpful, then, to view the structure of their organization as dispersed and decentralized with factions competing to represent it.



Reflecting on the events in Watts, RAM insisted the newspapers were wrong to describe the riots as leaderless since the youth, in fact, had led the riots. Their print response to the Watts riot, a journal called *War Cry*, reproduced Williams' analysis of the riots and Ahmad's articles from *Black America*. This ambiguous category of "youth" is maintained over any specific organizational structures as the journal pinpoints gangs as the "most dynamic force" that could be trained to fight "Charlie" (aka whitey). While RAM split over democratic centralism, they were perfectly willing to engage in informal organizing as long as fomenting an uprising remained the priority. The decentralization of their network ensured that the riots went on with or without the direct participation of a particular cell or grouping. Just months before the Watts riot, members of the BLF were arrested for conspiring to blow up the Statue of Liberty with the aid of the Front de libération du Québec, who they had made contact with in Cuba in 1963. The arrests of the BLF foreshadowed the repression that befell RAM in 1967, which followed a similar pattern of preemptive strike before the riots took place.

In the interval between the Watts riot and the long hot summer of 1967, RAM experimented with tactics that could be used in different cities and without their direction. The Watts riot became a standard to emulate for many of the Black Liberation groups of the 1960s. While earlier riots in Philly and NYC were important to RAM's development, the scale of Watts shifted the emphasis in Black liberation struggles from the sit-ins in Southern towns to the mobile tactics in larger cities. Not surprisingly, RAM set out to recreate the Watts riot in other cities. The Ohio RAM members recounted that their attempt to create another Watts in Cleveland in 1966 was a chance to "test urban guerrilla warfare" and they formed a group calling itself the Black Nationalist Army that fought police "door-to-door" in Hough, Cleveland (Stanford 67-68). The grand jury convened to investigate the Cleveland riot claimed that RAM used their headquarters in Hough,

called the Jomo "Freedom" Kenyatta House (or JFK house), as a training ground for riots, including drills for snipers (Stanford 64). From the point of view of the State, RAM was virtually franchising Watts to other communities. However, the resulting pattern of arrests and police repression made their role less than straightforward.



The long hot summer of 1967 saw the most explosive and widespread riots in American history, but the RAM leadership viewed it from prison. These preemptive arrests are likely the basis for Kelley's claim that RAM did not participate in the riots, although I suspect his motives have more to do with respectability politics. The FBI confirmed that they believed RAM was neutralized during this period. But is it correct to say RAM did not participate in the riots because their leadership had been jailed? The onus on leadership only makes sense from the point of view of mainstream history that follows the logic of representation. This is the same logic that led to the arrests, which had a great impact on RAM but failed to prevent the riots. Before their arrest, the mainstream press began a series of exposés, claiming RAM was "plotting a war on whitey," and blaming a failure of leadership among Civil Rights groups that opened the door to "extremists." The publication of these articles spurred police raids on RAM leadership in Philadelphia and New York City in June, which led to charges of conspiracy to riot, to poison police officers, and to assassinate moderate Civil Rights leaders. While most of these charges reek of a governmental counterinsurgency strategy, RAM's involvement in preparing and training for the riots seems indisputable. By the time the riots happened, though, the events had taken on a more anti-authoritarian character.