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**Where Black Power Meets Progressive Politics  
By Charles J. Evans  
BlackCommentator.com Guest Commentator**

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"Most of the black politicians around the country today are not examples of Black Power. The power must be that of the community, and emanate from there. The black politicians must start from there. The black politicians must stop being representatives of "downtown" machines, whatever the cost might be in terms of lost patronage or holiday handouts."

-Kwame Ture and Charles Hamilton from Black Power

Friday, June 27th, marks the 67th birthday of Kwame Ture (formerly known as Stokely Carmichael), who joined our ancestors on November 15th, 1998 following complications related to prostate cancer. Ture was an organizer, an activist, a leader, and a Pan Africanist in the truest sense of the words. At a time when our people were forging a path between civil rights and Black Power, Ture stepped into a spotlight that could just as easily be described as cross hairs. However, despite his participation in the Mississippi Freedom Rides, leadership position in the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), connections with the Black Panthers, and advocacy for the creation

of African Liberation Day, for far too many brothers and sisters he remains a footnote to an era. In a political season where an "African in America" stands poised to become president, Ture's work with Charles Hamilton, [Black Power The Politics of Liberation in America](#), serves as a tool of analysis not only for where we have been politically, but where we must ultimately go.

During an author lead discussion of the book, [Waiting 'Til the Midnight Hour: A Narrative History of Black Power in America](#), by Peniel E. Joseph, the comment was made that the progress of Barack Obama in this year's democratic primary is evidence of Black Power, even if Mr. Obama does not realize it as such. Obama is a deft politician, a clearly capable leader, and perhaps the great political change agent he fashions himself. This said, there are some very clear strides that he has made to diverge from some of the key values of Black Power that may not be the actions of a "sell-out", but fall short of the ambitions of a true Pan Africanist.

"Black Power is the coming together of black people to fight for their liberation by any means necessary."

-Kwame Ture

To even begin to consider Black Power and its political implications to Obama's campaign, we must consider its origins. Without going into the great detail it certainly demands, "Black Power" is the phrase coined by Kwame Ture (then known as Stokely Carmichael) during protests of the violent backlash against integration of the University of Mississippi. While participating in the protests, a young Carmichael walked and talked with the venerable Dr. King. It was during this interaction, that at least in the public's eye, Carmichael began to draw stark contrasts between himself and King. His strident call of "Black Power" at once invigorated some in the crowd while also intimidating others. Even Dr. King seemed a bit uneasy at the brash, young activist's words and although he understood the root of the call to action, Dr. King questioned its viability in coalition building. Over his career as a political activist, socialist advocate, and Pan Africanist, Carmichael, turned Ture, revisited Black Power and attempted to define it in an ever-changing world. To bring Black Power to masses, Ture and Charles Hamilton co-wrote [Black Power The Politics of Liberation in America](#) in 1967. In this book, Ture and Hamilton expressed not only what Black Power was, but also how it would be integrated into the politics of their day and beyond.

"The goal of black self-determination and black self-identity-Black Power-is full participation in the decision-making processes affecting the lives of black people, and recognition of the virtues in themselves as black people."

- Kwame Ture and Charles Hamilton from Black Power

Ture never saw Black Power merely as the corollary to White Power, nor did he see it as something with the potential to become as oppressive as the latter. The core of Black Power is the creation of a racial solidarity between people of African descent the world over. Ture and Hamilton conceptualized that for any group to have power, it must first have true unity since this was the foundation of true political action. But what would true political action of a unified black base look like? From a historical perspective, it could possibly resemble the Lowndes County Freedom Organization, assembled by Ture

through the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee. This party was formed for the purpose of giving newly registered black voters in Alabama an alternative to the traditional democratic dichotomy. Today, this blueprint for political Black Power may take the form of concerted activism to designate and elect candidates at the city, state, congressional, and senatorial levels of this country. This raises another important aspect of Black Power and the candidates it would endorse. These representatives would be men and women who did not just look like the people; they would think like the people, have the same values of the people, and have arrived at the same conclusions for addressing the challenges of the people.

In this way, Obama is most unlike the politicians imagined by Ture, Hamilton, and many others. For, while Obama is most certainly one of "us", his campaign's emphasis on not making race an issue and stridently stating that there is no black America or white America but one America, is as insulting to brothers and sisters in Jena, Louisiana, Cincinnati, Ohio, Southeast Washington, DC and the Southside of Chicago, as it is blindly hopeful for the majority population. From the beginning of his campaign, the "blackness" of Obama has been questioned by everyone from barbershop debaters to political pundits. Most often, this specious argument is based in an assessment of how much Obama's experience and upbringing mirrors that of the typical (whatever that really means) African-American experience. While there are blacks and whites who believe blackness is defined by the poverty you were born into, hood you came from, collard greens you eat or saxophone riffs you play, for many of us, blackness is considered in a much deeper and more visceral sense. We are a communal people, we are the people who have always considered the group over the individual, and we hold our leaders to such a standard. Maybe this is why there are some very politically astute blacks who question the commitment of Obama to our people?

Perhaps it is unfair to hold Obama to the standard set by giants like Ture, King, and Malcolm X. He is, after all, a politician; and politics is nothing if not "majority rule". However, if Obama does win the presidency, consider how little representation of people who at least look like us would be in the senate, congress, mayor's offices, etc. This absence of representation of the people, our people, means that Black Power still has a ways to go and that we cannot, at least at this point, depend on our politicians to lead the way.

What Ture understood, which many of us still do not, is that the power of our people comes from our collective action. Our participation in politics, when it is aligned with our cultural thrust, ensures that our agenda supports the community. Perhaps this year more than ever, while we witness what is already a historical political run by Mr. Obama, the time has come to give Kwame Ture the respect he deserves. As Ture said in his last address before his passing, "We know that one of the greatest crimes an individual can commit is that of being ungrateful." Let us make a commitment that on this June 27th, we honor the memory and mission of Kwame Ture.


**BlackCommentator.com** Guest Commentator, Charles J. Evans, is an African in America who believes that the road to our future has already been laid before us by our Ancestors; we just have to follow it. Click [here](#) to reach Mr. Evans.

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