

THE BLACK POWER MOVEMENT

Part 3: Papers of the Revolutionary Action Movement, 1963–1996

RAM fused Robert F. Williams and Malcolm X with Marxist revolutionary thought

The Revolutionary Action Movement (RAM) was the only secular political organization that Malcolm X joined before his fateful trip to Mecca in 1964. Early in 1963, Malcolm took the young Philadelphia militant Max Stanford under his wing. During the last few years of Malcolm's life, few persons were as closely associated with him as was the young Max Stanford. Stanford was a student militant who had influenced both the National Student Youth movement and the Students for a Democratic Society in the early 1960s with a vision of radical black nationalism. Stanford fused the thought of Robert F. Williams on armed self defense with the philosophy of Malcolm X on black self-determination. To these tenets, Stanford added a sophisticated Marxian revolutionary philosophy, which he derived from a close personal association with the legendary Queen Mother Audley Moore. Malcolm put his blessings on Stanford's Revolutionary Action Movement by becoming an officer of the organization. RAM in turn served as the leading organized proponent of the visions of Malcolm X, Robert F. Williams, and Queen Mother Moore.

RAM guides SNCC, CORE, and "Black Arts Movement" leaders toward Revolutionary Black Nationalism

Stanford organized RAM as an "underground" movement, with the objective of building a revolutionary cadre among dispossessed urban ghetto dwellers. To this end, RAM infiltrated civil rights organizations and encouraged a shift toward Marxism and revolutionary black nationalism. RAM members were pivotal in influencing the adoption of Black Power by erstwhile integrationists in the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) and the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE) in the mid 1960s. RAM stridently opposed the conciliatory philosophy of Martin Luther King, Jr. and the NAACP hierarchy. Instead it inspired a new generation of black militants with the philosophy of the

exiled Robert F. Williams and the as yet marginal Malcolm X. Leaders of the Black Arts Movement such as Larry Neal, Sonia Sanchez, and LeRoi Jones were either members of RAM or profoundly influenced by RAM.

RAM founds the Black Panther Party

RAM early focused on students, ghetto youths, and the oppressed in urban communities, including prisoners and ex-convicts. One student who was influenced by the RAM cadre in San Francisco Bay area was Huey P. Newton. Even before Newton founded the Oakland chapter of the Black Panther Party, Stanford organized a Black Panther Party chapter in New York City. RAM activists helped build Black Panther chapters throughout the country. The subsequent counterpoint between RAM and the Black Panthers is one of the most fascinating strategic debates in the modern African American freedom struggle. While both groups targeted dispossessed urban ghetto dwellers, RAM disagreed with the Panther's penchant for public posturing and insisted that it was necessary to function as an underground, secret organization.

RAM is targeted by J. Edgar Hoover over role in ghetto rebellions of the 1960s

RAM embraced a form of counter-revisionist Marxism that drew heavily upon the thought of Mao Tse-tung. RAM leaders felt that urban ghettos were ripe for revolutionary violence. As race riots spread across America in the summers between 1964 and 1968 RAM mobilized local cells to politicize the actions as urban rebellions. This finally brought the extent of RAM's national organization into the purview of the FBI and the Cointelpro program. Stanford and a dozen other RAM leaders were arrested in 1967 on never-substantiated charges of plotting to assassinate Roy Wilkins, Whitney M. Young, and other mainstream civil right leaders. FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover personally testified before Congress on RAM's ubiquitous role in the urban rebellions. In 1968, Stanford dissolved the formal organization of RAM and instructed all cadre members to go underground.

(Over, please)

Legacy of RAM extends for decades

Stanford himself jumped bail after being brutalized in a New York City jail. From his “underground” status, he strongly influenced local revolutionary movements until his recapture in 1973. Among the most important of his contributions were his assistance to Amiri Baraka and the Newark, New Jersey, movement, his support for members of the Black Liberation Army under Assata Shakur, and his encouragement of the League of Revolutionary Black Workers in Detroit. He was influential in efforts to encourage Robert F. Williams to assume a nationally prominent leadership role upon Williams return from exile in China. Stanford helped found the African Liberation Support Committee and promoted the concept of “reparations” to descendants of American slavery. And he remained an important voice of criticism of Black Panther strategies of the 1970s. He established the African Peoples Party in the early 1970s in an effort to keep the flame of revolutionary nationalism alive. While underground he embraced Islam and since the early 1970s, he has been known as Muhammad Ahmad. Since the 1970s, he has been one of the leading historians and theoreticians of revolutionary black nationalism.

Components of the Collection

- **Writings and correspondence of Muhammad Ahmad (Max Stanford)** Because RAM was essentially an “underground” network of cadre cells, many of Ahmad’s influential writings on revolutionary theory and practice were never published in any formal sense. This edition brings together the essential published and unpublished writings from the early 1960s to the 1990s. There are also drafts of his several historical essays about the movement, oral histories with movement veterans and correspondence with members of the RAM cadre.

- **RAM internal documents.** The collection includes many internal rules, guidelines, communique’s, pamphlets, flyers and other organizational documents of RAM from the 1960s.
- **Records on Allied Organizations.** There are records documenting the connection between RAM and several organizations it worked through, including African Peoples Party, Black Liberation Army, Black Panther Party, Black United Front, Black Workers Congress, Institute of Black Studies, League of Revolutionary Black Workers, Republic of New Africa, and Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee.
- **Publications.** The collection includes rare serials produced by RAM and its local cadres including “Black America,” “Soulbook,” “Unity and Stuggle” [issues not contained in *Part 1 of The Black Power Movement* series] “Black Vanguard,” “Crossroads,” and “Jihad News.”
- **Government Documents.** Including FBI file on Max Stanford, evidence submissions in the assassination plot trial in New York, and testimony about RAM’s role in the urban rebellions.
- **Subject Files.** The subject files cover key leaders associated with RAM including Malcolm X, Robert F. Williams, Amiri Baraka, and Assata Shakur, as well as on subjects such as the Black Power Conferences, the reparations movement, U.S. intelligence agencies, political prisoners, and more.

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Source note: Material in this collection is drawn from the private holdings of RAM leaders.



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