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**H-Diplo Forum on Sean L. Malloy. "Uptight in Babylon: Eldridge Cleaver's Cold War."**

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**Review by Gerald Horne**, University of Houston

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One of the more fertile fields of scholarship of late has involved delving into the multi-faceted engagement of African-Americans with the international community. Though it was once felt by many scholars that slavery and Jim Crow and their progeny were so all-encompassing and suffocating that this often persecuted minority was not able to mount a global offensive, diligent research of late has revealed that the opposite has been the case: indeed, it is fair to suggest that other than their own militant struggles, African-Americans' worldwide alliances were the decisive factor in helping to lift the veil of oppression.

Sean L. Malloy in this smoothly written article adds another layer of complexity to this story by delving into the varied activities of the Black Panther Party (BPP), which emerged in the 1960s, and one of their key leaders, Eldridge Cleaver. Emerging from prison in the San Francisco Bay Area, Cleaver rapidly gained renown as a writer and commentator. This locale was critical, for, as the example of the militant stevedores' union exemplifies, Northern California has for some time been a seedbed for progressivism.

Quite properly, the author focuses on Cleaver's articulation of the notion that African-Americans were an 'internal colony' worthy of scrutiny by the United Nations. This approach, as the author suggests, derived in part from ideas put forward by the now-departed Communist International, backed by U.S. Communists—though after the latter dropped this line in the 1950s, it did not disappear as the Black Panther Party (BPP), the

Nation of Islam, and others enmeshed in the emerging 'Black Power' consensus adopted this approach, casting doubt on the commonly-held assumption that this thesis was wholly manufactured by a Moscow cadre totally out of touch with U.S. realities.

The author posits that Cleaver and the BPP leaned toward internationalism in a manner that diverged from the more staid approach of the mainstream NAACP. After all, this former prisoner spent a considerable amount of time in Havana and Algiers and Paris and Pyongyang, seeking to drum up support for the anti-racist cause in the U.S. Cleaver also sought assistance in Congo-Brazzaville at a time when the regime there was pursuing a socialist orientation. Though understandably the author does not digress in this direction, it is worth mentioning here that in this regard, the posture of Cleaver and the BPP was consistent with that of Frederick Douglass, who spent a considerable amount of time in London at a time when Britain was frequently at odds—and sharply—with Washington.

Justifiably, the author contrasts the varying postures of Cleaver's BPP and the Nation of Islam and, unlike most, he alludes to the 1930s ties of the latter with Tokyo. Comprehensibly, he seeks to distinguish the approaches of these two entities, though if one were to read the official journals of both during this tumultuous era, one would detect many similarities and quite a bit of overlap in the direction of a mutual radical, anti-imperialist direction, a tendency facilitated by the reality that journalists of the left—including this reviewer—toiled for both publications.

This incisive article also mentions—albeit in passing—the fascination of Cleaver and the BPP with the concept of the 'gangster,' which proved to be instrumental in the undoing of the organization. No doubt space constraints prevented the author from exploring further the point that the attack on working class organizations and culture as a result of the Red Scare inexorably lubricated the path for the rise of the lumpen proletariat—or 'gangsters'—a tendency that has been trans-national and is still with us, as today's popular culture suggests.

The core of this article—and the "core of Cleaver's analysis," according to the author—"was the conviction that 'the exploitation of the Negro at home is intimately related to the exploitation of peoples throughout Latin America, Asia and Africa'" (544). This postulate undergirded the 'internal colony' thesis. Unlike many scholars, the author treats this unconventional idea with respectful seriousness, which is warranted: after all, as the fiftieth anniversary of Martin Luther King's 'I Have a Dream' speech is marked this year, lost in the self-congratulation has been the point that a critical turning point in the anti-Jim Crow movement had taken place in May 1963 at the founding meeting of the then Organization of African Unity in Ethiopia. There newly emergent African leaders denounced the violence then unfolding in Birmingham, Alabama and placed tremendous pressure on Washington to retreat from the more egregious aspects of Jim Crow at a time when competing for 'hearts and minds' globally with Moscow was seen as a priority. In other words, it was not coincidental that African-Americans were able to escape the brutal snares of Jim Crow at a time when Africa itself was loosening the bonds of colonialism.

Strikingly, Cleaver called for “U.N. Membership for Afro-America” (546), which was not only a further attempt to internationalize the Negro’s cause but also reflected a lack of confidence in the ability of the U.S. authorities to rectify the immense wrongs that had been perpetuated in the name of slavery and Jim Crow. “Black Americans,” Cleaver suggested, were neither a nation state in the traditional sense (since they were dispersed and lacked land) nor full citizens of the United States (an impossibility given that the United States was founded and maintained by a system of white supremacy).” Hence, his “projection of sovereignty, an embryonic sovereignty”, and ultimately a “U.N. supervised plebiscite throughout the [Negro] colony.” (533)

Again, this conception was not necessarily new insofar as the Negro Communist leader, William Patterson—ably assisted by the artist and activist, Paul Robeson—had brought a formal indictment of the U.S. at the United Nations in 1951, charging Washington with ‘genocide’ against people of African descent and demanding the appropriate punishment of U.S. leaders for gross misdeeds.

Patterson was jailed for his gumption; Robeson was subverted; and Cleaver fared little better. This was partially a self-inflicted wound in that the BPP chose to align with China at a time when this most populous of nations was forging an entente with Washington against the interests of the Soviet Union that had supported Patterson and Robeson. This entente effectuated by Mao Zedong and Richard M. Nixon left confusion in its wake among many forces on the left, the BPP not least.

This maneuver facilitated the destabilization of Cleaver and the BPP, though given the payoff to China—massive foreign direct investment from the U.S. that has created a seemingly unstoppable juggernaut—in retrospect this gambit may have been as wise as Paris’ backing of anti-colonial rebels in North America in the late eighteenth century that created yet another superpower or London’s entente with Tokyo at the beginning of the twentieth century, which backfired disastrously as of December 1941.

Cleaver ended disastrously too, which the author details. Chastened, he returned to the U.S. from exile in the mid-1970s and became involved with conservative evangelical Christianity as he embraced his former nemesis, Ronald Wilson Reagan. Then by the 1990s he drifted to the left again, denouncing the first Gulf War before passing away in 1998 — appropriately on May 1, the international workers’ holiday.

The author’s research is grounded heavily in the Cleaver Papers at Berkeley (those of his former comrade and BPP founder, Huey P. Newton, are at Stanford and are much more voluminous—and revealing: these the author also consulted). Needless to say, the FBI and no doubt the CIA and related intelligence agencies hold numerous files on Cleaver and the BPP, not to mention related agencies in Beijing, Havana, Paris, Brazzaville, Algiers, Hanoi,

Pyongyang—to name a few. Such scattered archives demand—as in other sub-fields—an international division of labor among scholars.

Already there is a thriving literature on the BPP and most assuredly this article by Sean L. Malloy makes a significant contribution to this growing enterprise.

**Gerald Horne**, Moores Professor of History & African American Studies at the University of Houston is author, most recently, of *Black Revolutionary: William Patterson and the Globalization of the African American Freedom Struggle*, University of Illinois Press, 2013. His next book--*The Counter-Revolution of 1776: Slave Resistance and the Origins of the United States of America*--will be published by New York University Press in March 2014.

Sean Malloy's essay offers a deeply researched and compelling analysis of Black Panther Party leader Eldridge Cleaver as an international political figure. The article examines Cleaver's rise as a Black Power spokesperson, his utilization of the internal colonialism model to characterize the status of African Americans in the U.S., his rhetorical and 'vernacular' use of third-world politics to develop political analyses and connections with people of color in the U.S., as well as his experiences engaging in direct diplomacy in Cuba, Africa, and Asia during the late 1960s and early 1970s. Malloy argues that Cleaver had a more expansive internationalist political vision compared to other Black Panther Party leaders like Huey Newton and Bobby Seale who might have referenced global third-world politics but were more intently focused on local racial conditions in the U.S. Cleaver's internationalism became less abstract when he lived in exile from the U.S. and traveled as a 'diplomat' to Third World decolonizing nations, particularly those in socialist Asia. These experiences in turn shaped Cleaver's political strategy and interest in guerilla-style uprisings and violence. Malloy's essay concludes by examining the ironies of Cleaver's deep engagement with cold-war politics and his 'Asia strategy.' By focusing on the international arena, Cleaver increasingly lost touch politically with U.S. domestic race relations. However, Cleaver's global standing as a revolutionary also became more tenuous after the 1972 U.S.-People's Republic of China détente. In essence, Cleaver lost his political base, both in the U.S. and abroad. Eventually, he stopped espousing radical rhetoric, reentered the U.S., and embraced both religious and political conservatism.

This story of Cleaver's rise and fall as a radical black power thinker and spokesperson is well-written and researched. Malloy delved heavily into primary archival and published sources and also consulted a range of secondary sources. The article offers a political and intellectual biography of Cleaver while also contextualizing him as part of a broader organization and social movement. Malloy also examines Cleaver's politics in relation to a longer history of black internationalism. The publication of this essay in *Diplomatic History* is a reflection of how much the fields of diplomatic history and African American history have evolved to engage with one another. Malloy moves deftly between these fields, demonstrating how a black radical can also engage in and redefine international diplomacy.

The article overall is a fascinating read. I did wonder at times whether the contrast between Newton and Cleaver as representatives of a local versus global strategy might be overdrawn. After all, Newton insisted on visiting China before Nixon's arrival there. Also, according to Elaine Brown, the only female chair of the Black Panthers, Newton drew comparisons between China's entry into the United Nations with his strategy of the Black Panther Party entering local electoral politics. In other words, a local emphasis on political integration could be connected to an international vision. Furthermore, the focus on male Black Panther leaders as thinkers and spokespersons of political strategy is interesting, since Elaine Brown traveled with Cleaver as well as Newton in their overseas diplomatic journeys. Despite these critiques, Malloy should be commended for his nuanced and

fascinating study. Similarly, *Diplomatic History* should also be commended for charting new historiographical territory by publishing scholarship that engages deeply with race and redefines our understanding of diplomacy.

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