

# ***Soul on Ice* excerpts**

Eldridge Cleaver

1968

Eldridge Cleaver is Minister of Information for the Black Panthers.

“... the pressing social problems which are feeding the conflagration raging in America’s soul... can no longer be compromised or swept cleverly under the national rug of self-delusion. The possibility of concealment no longer exists, and the only ones deceived are the deceivers themselves. Those who are victimized by these “social problems”—the Negroes, the aged, unemployed and unemployable, the poor, the miseducated and dissatisfied students, the haters of war and lovers of men—have flung back the rug in outraged rebellion, refusing to be silenced until their grievances are uncompromisingly redressed. America has come alive deep down in its raw guts, and vast contending forces of revolutionary momentum are squaring off in this land for decisive showdowns from which no one can purchase sanctuary.

At the same time, the link between America’s undercover support of colonialism abroad and the bondage of the Negro at home becomes increasingly clearer. Those who are primarily concerned with improving the Negro’s condition recognize, as do proponents of America’s neo-colonial network, that their fight is one and the same. They see the key contradictions of our time...

The world capitalist system has come to a decisive fork in the road, and this is at the heart of our national crisis. The road to the left is the way of reconciliation with the exploited people of the world, the liberation of all peoples, the dismantling of all economic relations based upon the exploitation of man by man, universal disarmament, and the establishment of international rule of law with effective means of endorsement.

The road to the right is refusal to submit to the universal demand for national liberation, economic justice, peace, and popular sovereignty. To walk this last path, the decision-makers must be prepared to unleash worldwide genocide, including the extermination of America’s Negroes. The people within these countries who try to stand against the will of the overwhelming majority of the human race must be willing to forego the last traces of their own liberty and see their governments turn into totalitarian regimes tolerating no dissent. The rage of the American power structure over the exercise of the constitutional right to dissent, to assemble and peacefully petition against Johnson’s war in Vietnam, is only a mild taste of the hemlock the people will be forced to swallow if they allow their country to go down the death-seeking branch of the fork.

The police department and the armed forces are the arms of the power structure, the muscle control and enforcement... The techniques of the enforcers are many: firing squads, gas chambers, electric chairs, torture chambers, the garrote, the guillotine, the frightened rope around your throat... The police do on the domestic level what the armed forces do on the international level: protect the way of life of those in power. The police patrol the city, cordon off communities, blockade neighborhoods, invade homes, search for that which is hidden. The armed forces patrol the world, invade countries and continents, cordon off nations, blockade islands and whole peoples; they will overrun villages, neighborhoods, enter homes, huts, caves, searching for that which is hidden. The policeman and the soldier will violate your person, smoke you out with various gases. Each will shoot you, beat your head and body with sticks and clubs, with rifle butts, run you through with bayonets, shoot holes in your flesh, kill you. They each

have unlimited firepower. They will use all that is necessary to bring you to your knees... If you resist their sticks, they draw their guns. Eventually they will come in tanks, in jets, in ships. They will not rest until you surrender or are killed...

In their rage against the police, against police brutality, the blacks lose sight of the fundamental reality: that the police are only an instrument for the implementation of the policies of those who make the decisions. Police brutality is only one facet of the crystal of terror and oppression. Behind police brutality there is social brutality, economic brutality, and political brutality...

What is true on the international level is also true at home; except that the ace up the sleeve is easier to detect in the international arena. Who would maintain that American soldiers are in Vietnam on their own motion? They were conscripted into the armed forces and taught the wisdom of obeying orders... They have him wired-up tight with the slogans of TV and the World Series... Same for the policeman in Watts. He is not there on his own. They have all been assigned. They have been told what to do and what not to do.

... Both police and armed forces follow orders. Orders. Orders flow from the top down. Up there, behind closed doors, in antechambers, in conference rooms, gavels bang on tables, the tinkling of silver decanters can be heard as ice water is poured by well-fed, conservatively dressed men in horned-rimmed glasses, fashionably dressed American widows with rejuvenated faces and tinted hair, the air permeated with the square humor of Bob Hope jokes. Here all the talking is done, all the thinking, all the deciding. Gray rabbits of men scurry forth from the conference room to spread the decisions throughout the city as News. Carrying out orders is a job, a way of meeting the payments on the house, a way of providing for one's kiddies. In the armed forces it is almost a duty, patriotism. Not to do so is treason.

To complicate matters, there are also rich people and poor people in America. There are Negroes and Whites, Indians, Puerto Ricans, Mexicans, Jews, Chinese, Arabs, Japanese—all with equal rights but unequal possessions. Some are haves and some are have-nots. All have been taught to worship at the shrine of General Motors. The whites are on top in America and they want to stay there, up there. They are also on top in the world, on the international level, and they want to stay up there, too... Everywhere the whites are fighting to prolong their status, to retard the erosion of their position... In America, when everything else fails, they call out the police. On the international level, when everything else fails, they call out the armed forces.

The police are the armed guardians of the social order. The blacks are the chief domestic victims of the American social order... An economy consecrated to the succor of the whites. Blacks are incidental. The war on poverty, that monstrous insult to the rippling muscles in a black man's arms, is an index of how men actually sit down and plot each other's deaths, actually sit down with slide rules and calculate how to hide bread from the hungry. And the black bourgeoisie greedily sopping up what crumbs are tossed into their dark corner.

... One tactic by which the rulers of America have kept the bemused millions of Negroes in optimum subjugation has been a conscious, systematic emasculation of Negro leadership. Through an elaborate system of sanctions, rewards, penalties, and persecutions—with, more often than not, members of the black bourgeoisie acting as hatchet men—any Negro who sought leadership over the black masses and refused to become a tool of the white power structure was either put into prison, killed, hounded out of the country, or blasted into obscurity and isolation in his own land and among his own people. His isolation was assured by publicity boycotts alternated with character assassination in the mass media, and by the fratricidal power plays of Uncle Toms who control the Negro community in behalf of the white power structure. The classic illustrations of this quash-the-black-militant policy are the careers of Marcus Garvey, W.E.B. DuBois, and Paul Robeson. (Editors note: and Huey Newton, H. Rap Brown, Le Roi Jones and others today).

... A young white today cannot help but recoil from the base deeds of his people. On every side, on every continent, he sees racial arrogance, savage brutality toward the conquered and subjugated people, genocide; he sees the human cargo of the slave trade; he sees the systematic extermination of the American Indians... There seems to be no end to the ghastly deeds of which his people are guilty. GUILTY. The slaughter of the Jews by the Germans, the dropping of the atomic bombs on the Japanese people—these deeds weigh heavily upon the prostrate soul and tumultuous consciences of the white youth... The young whites know that the colored people of the world, Afro-Americans included, do not Seek revenge for their suffering. They seek the same things the white rebel wants: an

end to war, an end to exploitation. Black and white, the young rebels are free people, free in a way that Americans have never been before in the history of their country. And they are outraged.

There is in America today a generation of white youth that is truly worthy of a black man's respect and this is a rare event in the foul annals of American history... respect commands itself and it can neither be given nor withheld when it is due. If a man like Malcolm X could change and repudiate racism, if I myself and other former Muslims can change, if young whites can change, then there is hope for America. It was certainly strange to find myself, while steeped in the doctrine that all whites were devils by nature, commanded by the heart to applaud and acknowledge respect for these young whites—despite the fact that they are descendants of the masters and I the descendant of slaves. The sins of the fathers are visited upon the heads of the children, but only if the children continue in the evil deeds of the fathers...”

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