

Rock & Roll Dope

John Sinclair

1968

“If we want to do much more fucking, we’re going to have to start fighting. If we want to be able to live we have to start fighting and not let ourselves be fucked around any longer by this shitpile society. We are the only hope in a crumbling world of lies and deception. Young people look to us—the dropouts, the radicals, the freaks—for information only we can provide. The Black Panthers are our brothers and sisters and point the way for action. We see their situation and realize it is ours too. Our music and our lives are the same. One is not possible without the other. The Music must go on.”

—a brother from New York Newsreel, at the New Media Conference in Madison

After a long Thanksgiving weekend of working in Detroit I was able to fly over to Madison, Wisconsin for the New Media Conference there which ended Sunday, December 1st with a communal group-grope dance-chant scene initiated by the combined New York-San Francisco-Chicago Newsreel tribe, and a world premier screening of the rough footage for the MC5 movie accompanied by the unmixed tape of the MC5’s first Elektra album, recorded at Detroit’s Grande Ballroom October 30–31. Unfortunately, these were the only cultural exhibits on the conference, which was marked by too much talking and not enough toking.

There were scores of media maniacs from all over the country there in Madison for the conference, hanging out and rapping and smoking dope together in apartments and communes where Madison brothers and sisters were putting people up for the weekend. A lot of important shit went down in these situations, where people who had been reading and seeing and hearing about each other’s cultural activity were able to meet face-to-face and start planning alliances and networks and conspiracies that will have a great effect on the future of America.

But the formal meetings at the conference itself were just the opposite. My woman called me from Madison before I left to report that the general meetings and workshops had degenerated into petty hassles and weird intellectual posturings.

There was a lot of talk about “co-optation” of revolutionary activity by the established power structure, and a long debate took place over Eldridge Cleaver’s brilliant *Playboy* interview (in the December issue.) One contingent posted signs claiming “the duty of the revolutionary media is to destroy media” and other weird shit like that.

It seemed very strange to me that people had traveled all the way across America in the cold to meet in Madison and argue with each other, but I just determined to stay out of these situations and see what I could get into with all these people on a more positive level.

Steve Harnadek and I were picked up at the Milwaukee airport (we couldn’t get a flight to Madison because of the Thanksgiving tourist scene) at 2:30 am by Gary Ballsieper of the Milwaukee paper *Kaleidoscope*, his woman and my wife. They took us to the *Kaleidoscope* office in Milwaukee where we met editor John Kois and some of the staff. They were in the process of laying out their next issue and told me they were running our White Panther statement and wanted to organize a Panther scene of their own in Milwaukee. The police-honkie harassment was getting too weird for them.

Kois’ car had had all the windows systematically shot out in the last few weeks, it was set afire in front of the paper’s office one night, and their headquarters had been under surveillance by police and honkie patrols. On Wednes-

day Kois was convicted on two counts of publishing obscenity in his paper and sentenced to 2 years' probation and a \$2000 fine. Kaleidoscope appealed, and Kois is out on bond. Rumor has it that he was offered a dismissal if he were to stop publishing the *Kaleidoscope* or at least to lighten up on the anti-administration news, but he refused.

As Gary drove us through Wisconsin in the middle of the night he asked me many questions about the White Panther statement and about our activity in the Detroit area. He knew all about the MC5 and was anxious to hear more news of our activities. I told him that we had organized and formally declared ourselves as Panthers because we were tired of getting fucked with by the police and the honkies, and that the White Panther symbol would serve to unite many young people around a common image, one they could really relate to. The program had been drawn up because we wanted to set down once and for all what we are working for, and because we wanted to help educate our people and establish a context in which their individual actions could be seen as truly revolutionary activity. If people just see you doing something far out, they will relate to it on that level and will possibly be moved by it to act in one way or another; but if they can experience your message as part of a total ongoing program then every individual act will take on a new dimension because it can be related to a total context in which all activity is unified and relates to all other activity. Everything is everything, is what I mean to say.

We arrived in Madison at 6 a.m. and went to the place where Alan Gotkin of the *Fifth Estate* was sleeping. We woke him up for morning tokes and he and I went down the street to where Pun and Genie were staying with Jerry Rubin and a bunch of other people.

People started waking up one by one and toking down with us—T.F. Forcade of *Orpheus* magazine in Phoenix, Lennox Raphael of *EVO*, Jim Fouratt of New York Communication Company, Jonathan of New York Newsreel, a really groovy chick named Wren, Rubin and Nancy—we all went out to eat and make the first meeting of the day.

We each talked about our own activities and how everyone's work related to everyone else's work, and how we should all get it together so we could represent some kind of strong revolutionary force in this weirdo country. I pointed out that if 200 families in America could control the economy of 200,000,000 people, than 200 together "families" or tribes of freeks, radicals and other dope-oriented maniacs could just as easily take it away from them and give it all back to the people as a whole, if we worked as hard at revolutionary change as the Rockefellers and Kennedys and Harrimans and Duponts et al work at making money and extending their financial empires. But we have to have the full-time commitment to revolution that these people have to capitalism, and we have to set up an interlocking system of alliances and mergers that will give us the combined strength that the rich white folks have. Then we can just turn them out, because we're a lot heavier and a lot more together than they are.

As William Burroughs pointed out in *The Soft Machine*, the ruling class doesn't know what they're doing anymore—they're just pushing the buttons and hoping things will keep working. They don't understand how their system works any more than I understand the workings of a Marshall amplifier—they just plug it in and hope it works. If it doesn't they have to call in the repairman—just like S.I. Hayakawa at San Francisco State College. The powers called in the expert semanticist to cool out the hard brothers and sisters at SF State, and when they "wouldn't listen to reason" and tried to beat the Tom's ass, he tried to destroy their public address system. But you see, our scene is tighter than that, and if you destroy our machines we'll just build new ones, organizing as we go by getting people to relate to the honkies' panic. That's why the massacre in Chicago this summer was ultimately the most successful ruse the Movement has pulled, because freeks were able to organize media people around gut issues like getting beat over the head.

The Violence Commission report that came out last week bears witness to our success. Now we've got the pigs investigating each other. And you can't call that "co-optation" any way you look at it, because WE co-opted THEIR media and used it against them.

Huey P. Newton said once that "the spirit of the people will be stronger than the pig's technology;" the White Panthers say that the spirit of the people combined with the strength of the pigs' usurped technology turned against them will enable us to turn the pigs out to pasture!

The other main things we talked about when we got with other brothers and sisters throughout the day were organizing a national White Panther Party and taking our jobs as revolutionary media people more seriously.

Too many underground papers and other radical media are too sloppily produced and consequently don't have the maximum effect on their communities. Newspapers should look upon themselves as the vanguard of the revolution and should present a positive cultural and social program to their communities. Just reporting the alleged

“news” isn’t enough—we have to create news and get our own undiluted message out to our people so they can act on it. Burroughs said in an interview once that “Yes, I Am very serious when I talk about using the techniques of the mass media. What I aim to do is create an image and sound track that will move people, not to buy a Coca-Cola, but to expand their consciousness.” That is our task.

The National White Panther movement is in the process of being formed right now. It is extremely important for urban Panther groups to organize themselves around some form of popular cultural activity like a rock and roll band, a Newsreel project, guerrilla theatre groups, etc. This will give them access to the mass media and to mass audiences of pre-revolutionary white youth who are just waiting to get totally turned on. High school groups can organize around newspapers and posters and bands and present a united front in their dealings with administrators and other old fuckers. I’ll try to get more into this next time but right now I’ve got to split for St. Thomas Aquinas High School.

People who are interested in getting their shit together around here in terms of forming Panther guerrilla units should contact our national office at (313) 769-2017 and we’ll do what we can to help. It’s time to get down and testify! It’s time to turn on! Up against the ceiling, motherfucker!

fifth Estate

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