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SWEET BACK

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HE WON'T BLEED ME

A REVOLUTIONARY ANALYSIS OF SWEET SWEETBACK'S BAADASSSSS SONG BY HUEY P. NEWTON, MINISTER OF DEFENSE, THE BLACK PANTHER PARTY, SERVANT OF THE PEOPLE WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY BOBBY SEALE, CHAIRMAN THE BLACK PANTHER PARTY

The feeling that I have now that I am back on the scene with Brother Huey P. Newton is one where I remember the time when Brother Huey was always there to interpret the cultural things and symbolic forms and expressions of the people in different forms of art. This was over three and a half years ago, the last time Brother Huey and I were together.

Now that I am back on the scene I have had the chance to be with many righteous Party members and community people. Together we have shared the experience of going to the theatre to see "Sweet Sweetback" the latest movie on the set. Our Minister of Defense, righteous, beautiful Brother Huey P. Newton was there interpreting all the symbolic meanings of the movie, and showing the essence of the real-life experience of the Black community as it is put together in "Sweet Sweetback."

It seems that it has taken nothing more than the fact that Brother Huey P. Newton is free, and now I find myself free from Jail Number One and out in the larger social prison. But we are with our people in the Black community and Brother Huey P. Newton is now giving forth a profound in-depth analysis, a beautiful revolutionary people's analysis of "Sweet Sweetback." He is grasping for us the people all the symbolic meanings of the movie and explaining them to us.

When we have read the analysis given by Brother Huey we should unite as brothers and sisters in the struggle and go back and see "Sweet Sweetback" but not to be entertained, we should do it because we can be educated and our consciousness and understanding can be increased. I am going to see it again with Brother Huey's analysis as my guide. I hope you will too.
Bobby Seale

The very popular movie produced and directed by Melvin Van Peebles called "Sweet Sweetback's Baadasssss Song" contains many very important messages for the entire Black community. On many levels Van Peebles is attempting to communicate some crucial ideas, and motivate us to a deeper understanding and then action based upon that understanding. He has certainly made effective use of one of the most popular forms of communication--the movie--and he is dealing in revolutionary terms. The only reason this movie is available to us with its many messages is because Black people have given it their highest support. The corporate capitalist would never let such an important message be given to the community if they were not so greedy. They are so anxious to bleed us for more profits that they either ignore or fail to recognize the many ideas in the film, but because we have supported the movie with our attendance we are able to receive its message.

It is the first truly revolutionary Black film made and it is presented to us by a Black man. Many Black people who have seen the film have missed many of its significant points. I have seen the film several times and I have also talked to about 50 - 60 others who have seen it and each time I understand more.

When Van Peebles first presented the film he refused to submit it to the Motion Picture Association to be rated because he knew they were not competent to judge its content. He knew the film was not something which would upset the Black community because of its explicitness. He wanted youth and children to see it because he knew they would understand it. Yet the movie was given an "X" rating over his protests, thus making it impossible for the youth to see. But it has a real message for them, for just like "Moo Moo" one of the youthful characters in the movie, they are our future.

Minister of Defense, Huey P. Newton and Chairman Bobby Seale

Melvin Van Peebles had great difficulty obtaining the funds to make this movie, therefore it is a low-budget movie. In some parts the sound and the lighting are not as good as they might have been if he could have had greater freedom to make the film. I have found that its messages and significance are clearer when I combine viewing the film with listening to the record of the sound track and reading the book. I would urge all of you who want to understand the deep meanings of the movie completely to also buy the record and the book. (NOTE: The book is available in paperback for $1.00, and the record for $5.98. Both may be obtained for $6.00 by sending a check or money order to Lancer Books, 1560 Broadway, New York, N.Y. 10036)

"Sweet Sweetback" blows my mind everytime I talk about it because it is so simple and yet so profound. It shows the robbery which takes place in the Black community and how we are the real victims. Then it shows how the victims must deal with their situation, using many institutions and many approaches. It demonstrates that one of the key routes to our survival and the success of our resistance is unity.

"Sweet Sweetback" does all of this by using many aspects of the community, but in symbolic terms. That is, Van Peebles is showing one thing on the screen but saying something completely different to the audience. In other words he is signifying, and he is signifying some very heavy things. I am going to go through the film and analyze some of the scenes, and then I am going to talk about some of the general ideas put forth in this truly revolutionary movie.

When the movie opens we see the faces of the women; there are young faces and old faces, light faces and dark faces, but in all of them there is a sign of weariness, sadness, but also joy. You soon recognize that the women are in a house of love, a house of prostitution, a house of ill-repute, and of course it is all of these things, depending on what position you are

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HE WON'T BLEED ME

A REVOLUTIONARY ANALYSIS OF SWEET SWEETBACK'S BAADASSSSS SONG

BY HUEY P. NEWTON, MINISTER OF DEFENSE, THE BLACK PANTHER PARTY, SERVANT OF THE PEOPLE

Young boy about to be baptized into manhood

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viewing it from. This is the essence of the whole film, the victim and the oppressor looking at things in a much different way, from a different point of view.

The women are tired, yet they are happy. This is because they are feeding a small boy. As you look at the women you see that they are strong and beautiful Black women, definitely African in ancestry and symbolic of Mother Africa. The size of some of their breasts signifies how Africa is potentially the breadbasket of the world. The women are feeding stew to a small boy who is apparently very hungry, and as he downs it they keep offering him more. These women with their large breasts potentially could feed and nourish the world, and if this is so, certainly they have the potential to raise their liberator, for that is what the small boy is, the future of the women, of Black people, liberation.

They are in a house of prostitution not of their own will, but because of the conditions the oppressor makes for us. They are there to survive, and they sell their love to do so, therefore our love is distorted and corrupted with the sale. When you have nothing else left you give up your body, just as when you are starving you might eat your fingers; but it's the conditions which cause this, not the desire to taste your own blood; you have to survive.

The women standing around the small boy are not saying anything but by continuing to nourish him they are telling him that they can give him more than enough, not only food, but much love. This love is not for sale, so therefore it is uncorrupted, it is pure love, sacred and holy. Even though the boy is weak and has many sores in his face, with the love and nourishment of the women he can become a very strong man. The sores in his face come from malnutrition and poor health, and Van Peebles is signifying the fine line between survival and death. Even though the women can feed him and clear up his malnutrition, they cannot do it freely and totally, because they have to also sell, they have to sell in order to provide.

I have seen small children in the Brownsville section of Brooklyn, in West Oakland, in Chicago, and in Harlem with sores on their bodies like those on the boy's face. That is why we have health and food programs, because we are determined to make them healthy again. The women in the film are doing the same thing. They know he is their future and so they give him love and nourishment that he might become a strong man, but not just a man in the physical sense, but that he might become a liberator.

Next we see the boy is healthy and growing, working as a towel boy in the house of prostitution. Then we see the prostitute making love to him. But this was a scene of pure love and therefore it was a sacred and holy act. Even though it was in a house of prostitution, it was not a distorted or corrupt thing. We see this by the very words the woman uses, because she tells the boy that he ain't at the photographer to get his picture taken; she tells him to move. In the background we hear religious music, signifying what is happening and what will happen later. First there is "Wade in the Water", and we recognize that the boy is being baptized; then there is "This little light of mine, I'm gonna let it shine," signifying what will happen in the future. The music indicates that this is not a sexual scene, this is a very sacred rite, for the boy, who was nourished to health, is now being baptized into manhood. And the act of love, the giving of manhood, is also bestowing upon the boy the characteristics which will deliver him from very difficult situations. People who look upon this as a sex scene miss the point completely; and people who look upon the movie as a sex movie miss the entire message of the film.

What happens is not a distorted act of prostitution even though it takes place in a house of prostitution. The place is profane because of the oppressive conditions, but so are our communities also oppressed. The Black community is often profane because of the dirtiness there, but this is not caused by the people, they are the victims of a very oppressive system. Yet within the heart of the community, just as in the film, the sacred rite of feeding and nourishing the youth goes on; they are brought to their manhood as liberators.

Van Peebles shows this in the film, because when the love scene is completed, the boy is no longer a boy, he has become a man. He doesn't have a climax until he reaches an adult age. Even though we may have sexual intercourse as children, we don't have a climax; it is an introduction which makes it a part of something which is not alien to us. But in the film the climax came at the appropriate time, after he has become a man; that is, he has learned the deep significance of what she was trying to teach him. It wasn't an act or any mechanical sort of thing, but it was the building of his spirit.

So he grows a moustache while he is having sexual intercourse with her, from about 10 years old he ends up about 25. But as soon as he reaches a climax, that is, as soon as he becomes a man, then he is ready to go out and fight. This is symbolized by his putting on his hat, because when you put on your hat, it symbolizes that you are fixing to go somewhere.

The whole film is centered around movement, his putting on the hat to go, and his running and running. I think this shows the alienation he feels in his position. He is constantly in movement or "in the process". When you are in process you are always going or preparing to go. These symbols are used very well.

The oppressor would not view the love scene in the same way, because his whole introduction to sex is from a perverted perspective, divorced from his whole being. That is why he rated the film "X", because what he saw was a sex movie. We know that it is much more than that. He is introduced to sex as something outside of himself, while it is hard for us to remember our first sexual experience. It is not something outside of us. It grows in

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SWEET SWEETBACK

Beatle watches police at freak show discuss scapegoat arrest

us as any other part of our personality, and it is very integrated just as our arms, our hand or our breathing. This is why it was very necessary to have this young boy having this relationship in a place that is viewed from the outside as dirty and profane, because our community is also considered dirty and profane.

But we do love and we have holy experiences at the same time that we are being stripped of everything else. Then we sell that holiness in order to survive; but it's not holiness anymore, it's transformed by the sale. But nevertheless, the holiness is a part of us, so it serves us. But at the same time the holiness serves us, it remains as dirtiness to the outsider, because he is the cause of the profane conditions of the victims, and also because what he is getting is not love, but the sale of the prostitute.

To the boy she was not a prostitute because there was no money passed, instead she introduced him to the thing that would give him his fullness as a person and his survival in the end. She introduced it to him as a boy because it is said: "Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it." (Proverbs 22:6) Of course he won't depart from it, if it becomes an integral part of his personality, because to depart from it is to depart from himself. The women were giving the boy more than simply a survival thing because he was their hope, and this is why they feel happy about the sacrifice they are making. You can see it on their faces when they are feeding him, or at the point of orgasm when the woman tells him that he has a sweet back, and that is where he gets his name. Not only is he baptized into his fullness as a man, he gets his name and his identity in this sacred rite.

Every time after that when Sweetback engages in sex with a sister, it is always an act of survival, and a step towards his liberation. That is why it is important not to view the movie as a sex film or the sexual scenes as actual sex acts. Van Peebles is righteously signifying to us all. The first scene was far from anything sexual, that is why the holy music during the scene. It is only dealing with sexual symbols, the real meaning is far away from anything sexual, and so deep that you have to call it religious.

When Sweetback puts on his hat he does not leave the house, he does not leave the victim's ghettoes, he graduates and starts to perform there in a freak show. He would simulate sexual intercourse before an audience that paid to observe this scene. He starts out playing the part of a dyke, with false breasts and a beard, but then his fairy godmother comes along, he gets his wish and becomes a man before the audience, taking off his beard and showing his penis--it looks like a missile and shocks the audience.

While this is going on, the cops are harassing Beatle, the owner of the cat house. He has been paying them off and doesn't want to be bothered, but they want one of his men as a scapegoat arrest. The cops break off their harassment from time to time and go over to observe the freak show, even though they have seen it many times.

Sweetback is now having sexual intercourse with the sister, but there is no holy music because it is not love; it is a performance given in order to survive. He is selling himself to the audience and the cops who are the real freaks. Dylan's "Ballad of The Thin Man" would apply here, because in the song the freaks go to see the geek who offers them a bone and they don't know why. But you see the audience or the freaks--including the cops--don't have to be there. They cause the conditions which make it necessary for people to go to these lengths to survive, and then they pay to see the performance the people put on. They are the real freaks and the people go through the act with real hostility and hatred for the people who cause them to be there in the first place.

There are also Blacks in the audience, and this is a stroke of genius by Van Peebles, because it symbolizes the total blindness of the audience of freaks. They are laughing at a situation, when they are in fact getting their heads cut off. That's like Dylan's sword swallower, who in the end will thank the audience for the loan, because they were really there, only they did not know it. The scene shows how far the oppressor will go, because when it is asked if anyone in the audience wants to challenge Sweetback, this white boy couldn't hold his girlfriend down. The announcer would not let her go out there, because the police were watching.

The police, as I said, are taking payoffs and letting the house exist, and this is an indictment of them. Not only do they cause the conditions, they then pay to go see it, because it is amusing to them. But the freak show is not put on by freaks but by victims. The victim does what he has to do to survive because of his crippled and victimized position. The freak pays him for his laughter and the victim accepts the pay, but with vengeance in mind.

I think that it is ironic and also very symbolic that even while I am writing this, I can look out of my window and see the Oakland Auditorium where the Oakland Police Officers Assoc. is holding its annual circus. I don't see any Blacks going in. We are realizing more and more that it has always been a circus. They have tried to make a circus of our circumstances and our communities, but our awareness is growing and we are moving toward dealing with the situation in a very decisive manner, just like Sweet Sweetback did.

In the film and in the community the oppressor keeps demanding more and more from the victims--that is why they want one of Beatle's men. But this is also why the victim with the lowest levels of awareness will be brought into consciousness and revolutionized because he is doing what he is doing in order to survive, but eventually his very survival is at stake. The oppressor won't even let your acts of survival continue, he tries to totally crush you, so that survival becomes a very revolutionary act. At the point of life and death, all of the hatred for the oppressor is unleashed for survival purposes.

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D BLACK PANTHER INTERCOMMUNAL NEWS SERVICE, JUNE 19, 1971

HE WON'T BLEED ME

A REVOLUTIONARY ANALYSIS OF SWEET SWEETBACK'S BAADASSSSS SONG

BY HUEY P. NEWTON,
MINISTER OF DEFENSE, THE BLACK PANTHER PARTY, SERVANT OF THE PEOPLE

Moo Moo

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The police in the film really don't want Sweetback. All they want to do is use him for a cover, because they are going after Moo Moo, the young revolutionary. Sweetback goes along with them because of his low level of consciousness. This is no hard task because when an individual victim acts without awareness of the situation, he is just like the organism that wants to survive. THE UNITY COMES OUT OF CONSCIOUSNESS.

For a short while Moo Moo and Sweetback are handcuffed together, but when the police start to beat the life out of Moo Moo, they separate them and tell Sweetback to stand aside. Sweetback attempts to look away from their beating of Moo Moo.

This shows the arrogance of the aggressor, thinking that he has all the control--his Jehovah complex. He thinks that he has his victims so completely in line, that this freak show performer who is paying them so that he can survive, will have no feelings for another victim.

Sweetback attempts to look away while the police are beating Moo Moo. Just the turning away is showing how much of the time the masses attempt to dismiss the atrocities of the oppressor, even when attempts are made to communicate to them. They will pretend that they are too busy with other things because they are trying to survive; but they fail to realize that their real survival depends upon their social consciousness and therefore unity. The oppressor will demand more and more of them until they will perish without that unity.

At its lowest level, survival is just the organism getting by as an individual person or as an individual family. What they must realize is that the oppressor will not allow that, he will keep demanding more--high unemployment, poor housing, poor health and poor education, and more taxes--until their very death. So they attempt to look away; but because of compassion and their identity with the whole situation, they cannot completely turn their backs, and this is what causes the neurosis of some Blacks.

But through Sweetback, Melvin Van Peebles is righteously signifying, and teaching the people what must really be done to survive. When Sweetback realizes that he cannot turn his back, he takes the handcuffs, the chains which have been used to hold him in slavery and he starts to kick ass. Using his handcuffs as a weapon against the oppressor rather than as the tool of submission, he downs both of the policemen, almost cutting off their heads.

This is a very bloody scene, but it was very important that they showed the blood all the way up his arm. It makes me think of the statement by Frantz Fanon in his book The Wretched of The Earth where he says that the peasant creeps into the settler's room at night and cracks the settler's head open. Then the blood spurts across his face, and it is the only baptism he ever remembered.

The Black audiences really respond to this scene, because it is another baptism; but instead of wading in the water as Sweetback did earlier, this is a baptism in the blood. As each blow went down, you could hear the tension being released in the audience, because right at that moment it was a climax for the audience.

One of the few criticisms I have of this film is that there is no religious music behind this scene. This is no more a scene of violence than the earlier baptism was one of sex; it was a growing into manhood. Sweetback grew into a man when he was in bed with that woman and he also grew to be a man when he busted the heads of his oppressors there. When he was with the woman, it was like a holy union, and when he takes the heads of his oppressors, it is like taking the sacrament for the first time. In the first baptism he did not become a whole man because he went into that freak show, but when he is baptized in the blood, he righteously moves on to a higher level, because the next time he is with the police with handcuffs on, he gets away, and the time after than when he is with the police with handcuffs on in that pool hall, he knows what he must do and he does it.

Like I said before, Van Peebles is righteously signifying, because he engages the audience in a climax in the scene when Sweetback downs the police. What he does is equate the most ecstatic moments in the film with the actions he is encouraging the people to engage in, so he is advocating a bloody overthrow, because the victims want to survive.

The next point that Van Peebles develops in the film is the need of the Black community for greater unity, and how the lack of unity will only deliver us into the hands of our oppressors. What happens? Sweetback helps Moo Moo get up, but then Sweetback goes his own way and makes it back to the cat house and there he encounters Beatle. Beatle starts to give him advice, but everybody recognizes that Beatle is not really responding to Sweetback's situation. Van Peebles gets this point across beautifully. While he is giving this advice, Beatle is sitting on the toilet. He wipes himself, gets up, and without washing his hands, he takes a towel and wipes his face. This is signifying that what is coming out of Beatle's mouth is the same thing that is coming out the other end--shit and nothing else. Notice that Sweetback never says a word to Beatle, but he does not have to, because Beatle is deaf--he cannot hear what is being said anyway.

When he leaves Beatle the camera shows Sweetback with a terrifying look on his face. He has realized that those he knows best have such a low level of awareness that he cannot expect aid from them. He realizes that the lack of unity is a very hurting thing, and when he walks out of Beatle's place, he walks right into the hands of the police, who pretend to be nice until they realize that he is not playing the part of the meek victim. Then they work him over thoroughly.

Sweetback is saved by that same community unity he failed to find with Beatle. The people rescue him by pretending to be in need of money, and

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SWEET SWEETBACK

therefore they offer to wash the car of the police. Instead they are engaging in a very revolutionary act and they save the brother from the oppressor, while at the same time delivering a deadly blow to the police. What Sweetback has done for Moo Moo is repeated for him by the community.

Sweetback is on his own now, but he is locked into a pair of handcuffs. How does he get them off? Through unity. He goes to a woman who he has been with before, and she tells him to beg. This is obviously not the first time this has happened, but Sweetback cannot beg anymore because he has been transformed by the baptism in blood. He needs her at this moment, but sexuality cannot be based on war any longer, it has to be based on love and unity. He makes love to her and after that the handcuffs are off. This signifies that it is the unity between the Black man and the Black woman which is able to liberate them both.

In his first baptism Sweetback acquired the ability to love, but he could only truly love and unify with the woman, when he had done away with the people who made his woman the oppressor's woman and himself the oppressor's man. Then they could really have the unity which is symbolic of the liberating love of the Black man and woman.

Sweetback is on his own again, but this time without the handcuffs. In the meantime the film takes us back to the cat house and his old boss Beatle. Beatle is being hassled by the police who want to know where to find Sweetback. Beatle doesn't really know, but if he did, he would have told them, because Beatle has no consciousness, he is deaf. And to prove how true this is, the police finally deafen him.

Sweetback moves through the community, looking for the assistance he needs to get away. He doesn't get all that he needs, but he gets all that each can give. At the church he gets a Black Ave Maria and the power sign. The minister recognizes that his religion is a hype, because he tells Sweetback that Moo Moo is giving the people the real religion.

At the gambling den he gets little apparent sympathy. The manager keeps telling him he is a dead man, and he really does not need money. In this scene Van Peebles is again showing the community of the victimized, just like the performers in the freak show, because the manager explains to Sweetback that he cannot make any money on his operation. By the time he gets finished paying off everybody who is exploiting him, he pays a dollar and a dime for every dollar he makes. This is another example of the oppressor demanding more and more

Unity between the Black man and woman can liberate both of them

of the victims.

But the gambler does what he can--he gives Sweetback a ride. There is some unity, but not enough; and during the ride Sweetback spots Moo Moo, the man he left behind, and they are reunited. This is as it should be, because Sweetback is leaving the community with the person who was the beginning of all this, Moo Moo. They are two unlike characters, but yet they are linked together.

Moo Moo symbolizes the revolutionary who is trying to free the people, his whole program is pointed toward people like Sweetback, community people who are very unaware, yet they are trying to survive. Sweetback then symbolizes the most unconscious persons in the community, people who are sometimes viewed as more worthless than the pimp. Sweetback is not a pimp and would not do as much as a pimp would; he is much less aggressive. A pimp will work at putting girls on the block, watching them, collecting money, beating them and controlling them. He may also steal and deal in dope and so forth. Sweetback won't do any of this and yet the women love him, because he's got such a sweet sweet back. He will just stay home and the women will bring him everything he needs. He accepts their goods, but he doesn't care what they do. So the sweetback is actually more worthless than the pimp on one level, because he won't take the chances that a pimp would to survive. He has submitted more, almost to the point where he is a vegetable and is just taken care of. So the fact that Sweetback would not stand any more victimization, that he identified with Moo Moo as being one of the victims, and the fact that Moo Moo's revolutionary program is pointed to the lowest level of consciousness in the community means that even though they are unlike characters, even though Moo Moo is young and Sweetback is older, it is not unlikely that they would be bound together because they are, in fact.

When the gamblers get Sweetback and Moo Moo to the edge of town, they tell Sweetback to buy himself a last supper because he is a dead man. Their level of consciousness is so low that they will help him to a point, but they still believe that ultimately the oppressor will triumph and Sweetback will die.

Sweetback and Moo Moo are determined to survive, however, and they begin their journey. The encounter with the motorcycle gang shows a number of things. First of all it is a triumph of the soul force (which the women gave Sweetback in the first scene) over all the mechanical developments of the oppressor. When he is challenged to a wrestling duel, the gang leader picks up a motorcycle to show brute strength. Then with the knife the gang leader shows how effectively they have mastered this weapon. When the gang leader reveals herself to be a woman, Sweetback knows that she is no match for the weapon he chooses. The gang promises to do them in after she does him in, but in the end "the Pres" is laid out on the ground in complete submission. The Black women showed him the way to liberation and he used his knowledge effectively.

Van Peebles is also signifying other things in the motorcycle gang scene. First of all there is the symbol of the strength of the white woman over the white man--and they don't even know it. Then there is the symbol of the Aryan--the superior race. The president of the gang is big and robust, the image of white superiority. The only criticism I have here is that her hair should have been blonde rather than reddish, but the idea gets across. The idea also comes across that the

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HE WON'T BLEED ME

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BY HUEY P. NEWTON, MINISTER OF DEFENSE, THE BLACK PANTHER PARTY, SERVANT OF THE PEOPLE

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people have the ability to triumph over all these symbols of oppression. Unity will save us.

I should point out that in his duel with the Aryan someone has stuck a derby hat and a silly little tie on Sweetback. It is like a performance, a minstrel show or a cakewalk thing. But Sweetback takes off the derby hat and in that way he tells the others that this is no performance, this is dealing for survival. He deals and he survives, much to their disappointment, and they roar off on their motorcycles, leaving their conquered leader on the floor.

Some of the gang betray Moo Moo and Sweetback telling them that since Sweetback has won the duel, they will take care of him and Moo Moo by giving them shelter in a mountain cabin; they instead send the police. This cabin contains a pool hall and when the police arrive, Moo Moo and Sweetback are playing pool. When the police enter, Sweetback offers his hands for the cuffs but then moves, using them to down one policeman. But he is without a weapon to deal with the other one and Moo Moo has been shot. Sweetback uses familiar survival techniques, however, because he deals with what he has available to him. The pool cue becomes a spear and he staves the policeman through the chest, and then drills him all the way to the hilt of the cue. It is not technology that saves him, it is his ability to use the familiar features of the Black community. There is another important message.

The rest of the scenes show the unity of the community and its creativity in dealing with survival situations. Sweetback sends Moo Moo on a motorcycle because he is the future. Then he makes it on his feet, by himself. He makes his plea to his feet to do their thing and they never fail him. All he has is his feet and one knife, and he gets by.

In the meantime the police are in the conference room and the commissioner tells them he wants the cop killers and niggers. Then he calls the Black policemen aside to apologize. They never say a word during the movie, but in their faces you see that they are dead. They are dead, because they are separated from the community of victims of which they are a part.

The police vamp on the entire community. They raid a motel and rip out the eyes of a brother. When they realize that he is not Sweetback their reply is "So What?" Melvin Van Peebles is making it plain that we are all Sweetbacks and we are all united in this victimization. At one point they bring Beatle to the morgue to identify a body as Sweetback; they run their games again with some speech about democracy and communism. They use their idea of bourgeois democracy against the community; but Beatle is a deaf man, and has been deaf for a long time. In some respects he is also a blind man, because even though he operates a cat house and survives, he cannot read. They are the cause of his problems, he cannot hear, he cannot see, yet they want him to be a "responsible citizen" and help them. We see that Beatle has been subjected to the Biblical dictum: "Wherefore if thy hand or thy foot offend thee, cut them off and cast them from thee: it is better for thee to enter into life halt or maimed, rather than having two hand or two feet to be cast into everlasting fire. And if thine eye offend thee, pluck it out, and cast it from thee: it is better for thee to enter into life with one eye, rather than having two eyes to be cast into hell fire." (Matthew 18: 8-9)

Van Peebles is continuing to signify and send out messages to the Black community. When Beatle sees that the corpse in the morgue is not Sweetback, he breaks up with joy. He gains his hearing in a sense, and also his sight. "For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: and whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it" (Matthew 16:25) We see the message very clearly because the camera immediately switches to a shoe shine stand where the brother is shining the man's shoes with his ass, and he is really telling the man, for Beatle, what he can do.

So the police go through the community searching for Sweetback, and the people stand as one. They don't know anything. The message here to the community is to "stop snitching", there is need for unity, not for revealing our secrets. When I was in the penitentiary I learned the worse crime one inmate can accuse another of is snitching. Van Peebles shows how the community can avoid this and save themselves from their oppressors.

In the meantime we see Sweetback making it through the edges of the city and heading for the desert. He has none of the high-powered technology of the oppressor, but he does have his feet. In one scene we see him going by a large factory, it looks like a chemical plant or something like that. Here you see the drama being symbolized to its fullest, Sweetback with his feet, making it on by the man's highest manifestation of technological skill, and you realize that this is the drama develop-

Police will deafen

Police rip out Black man's eyes in

Sweetback has downed two

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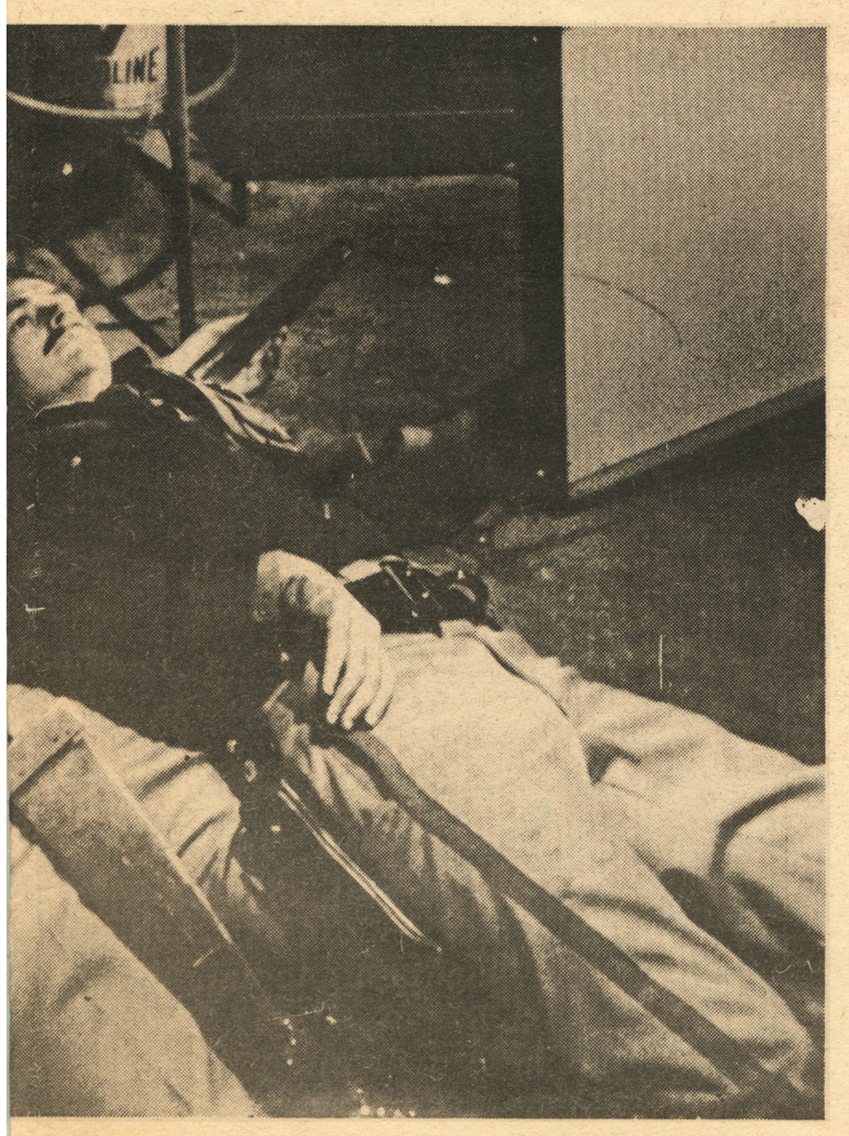
en Beatle to find Sweetback

in continued search for Sweetback



wo more po

ing, the soul-force of the people against the technology of the oppressor. The only question is which will win? The answer is given by Sweetback in his plea to his feet, he says:

Come on feet
cruise for me
come on legs
come on run
come on feet
do your thing
who put the bad mouth on me
anyway the way I pick em up
and put em down
even if it got
my name on it
won't catch me now.

There is Sweetback's answer to the oppressor's technology, even if the bullet has his name on it, it won't catch him now. Why? Because Sweetback has feet, and they will save him.

This is also the beginning of the dialogue between the running Sweetback and the colored angels. As soon as he hits the desert where the situation is really going to be bad, the colored angels come in and try to discourage him, but he has feet, he has heart, and he has courage, and in the dialogue he resists their discouragement as much as he resists the technology of the police who are always searching.

Now I would like to discuss the movie from a different angle, instead of a scene-by-scene analysis I want to talk about some of the important ideas signified in various scenes. Some of these ideas have been mentioned already, but I think that it is important to re-state them because Melvin Van Peebles uses them so effectively and he is trying to advance our awareness and understanding, so we repeat for added emphasis.

The first key idea or concept which I think the movie presents to us is the need for unity among all the members and institutions within the community of victims. We see the idea of unity between the young and the old beautifully expressed in the love and care which the women give to the young boy, and also in the concern Sweetback expresses for Moo Moo after he realizes that he is truly unified with Moo Moo. You will recall that Sweetback has an actual dialogue at only six points in the movie, three of these points are in relationship to Moo Moo. So the revolutionary and the righteous street brother see their functional unity. When Sweetback first downs the cops and saves Moo Moo, Moo Moo then asks Sweetback where are we going? What does Sweetback say? "Where did you get that 'we' shit?" This indicates that Sweetback does not understand his need for unity with Moo Moo. Yet after his encounter with Beatle, Sweetback realizes that he cannot depend on his boss, the guy he should have been able to depend on, but Moo Moo was somewhere out there being hunted and so was Sweetback--and they were united.

Then when the gamblers are giving Sweetback a ride to the edge of town he spots Moo Moo and he tells his comrades to stop. This is the second time he speaks about the revolutionary. Now when Moo Moo gets in the car he tells the brothers who he is, but they still don't see their need for unity, because to them he is not Moo Moo, he is the guy who got their partner into trouble. They blame the victim rather than those who victimize him, but this is because of their low level of awareness. Sweetback did that earlier, but he was revolutionized by his awareness of the true situation. Our unity will come out of consciousness, and this is the point of the movie, to raise the consciousness of the Black community.

The movie also demonstrates the functional unity between the present and the future. Once again we see this in the women giving nourishment and love tothe boy who is their future--their liberator. If they did not feed him now and give him the strength to survive until his revolutionary consciousness is aroused, then he will not be able to liberate them. So pending the revolution they must do all they can to help him survive.

We also see the unity between the present and the future when Sweetback visits the church. He gets no help but he gets a little more understanding of the true nature of his contribution to the community. The minister tells him that what he did for Moo Moo was the correct thing. He says: "You saved the plant that they were planning to nip in the bud. That's why the Man's down on you." Then later when Sweetback has another chance to escape, but without Moo Moo, he tells the Black motorcyclist to take the young brother instead. The motorcyclist asks Sweetback if he knows what he is doing and he replies: "He's our future, Brer. Take him."

The movie also demonstrates the value of unity among the entire Black community. This is shown at the very beginning when the movie titles appear indicating that the movie is starring THE BLACK COMMUNITY. There is no hero, there is no one outstanding individual, there is the community. At the end there are some names of participants, but it does not even tell what roles they played. This is all an attempt to play down the individualistic approach to our survival in favor of an expression of unity among the entire community.

This unity is also demonstrated by the fact that Sweetback has almost no dialogue in the entire movie. He says hardly anything at all. Why? Because the movie is not starring Sweetback, it is starring the Black community. Most of the audiences at the movie are Black and they talk to the screen. They supply the dialogues, because all of us are Sweetback, we are all in the same predicament of being victims.

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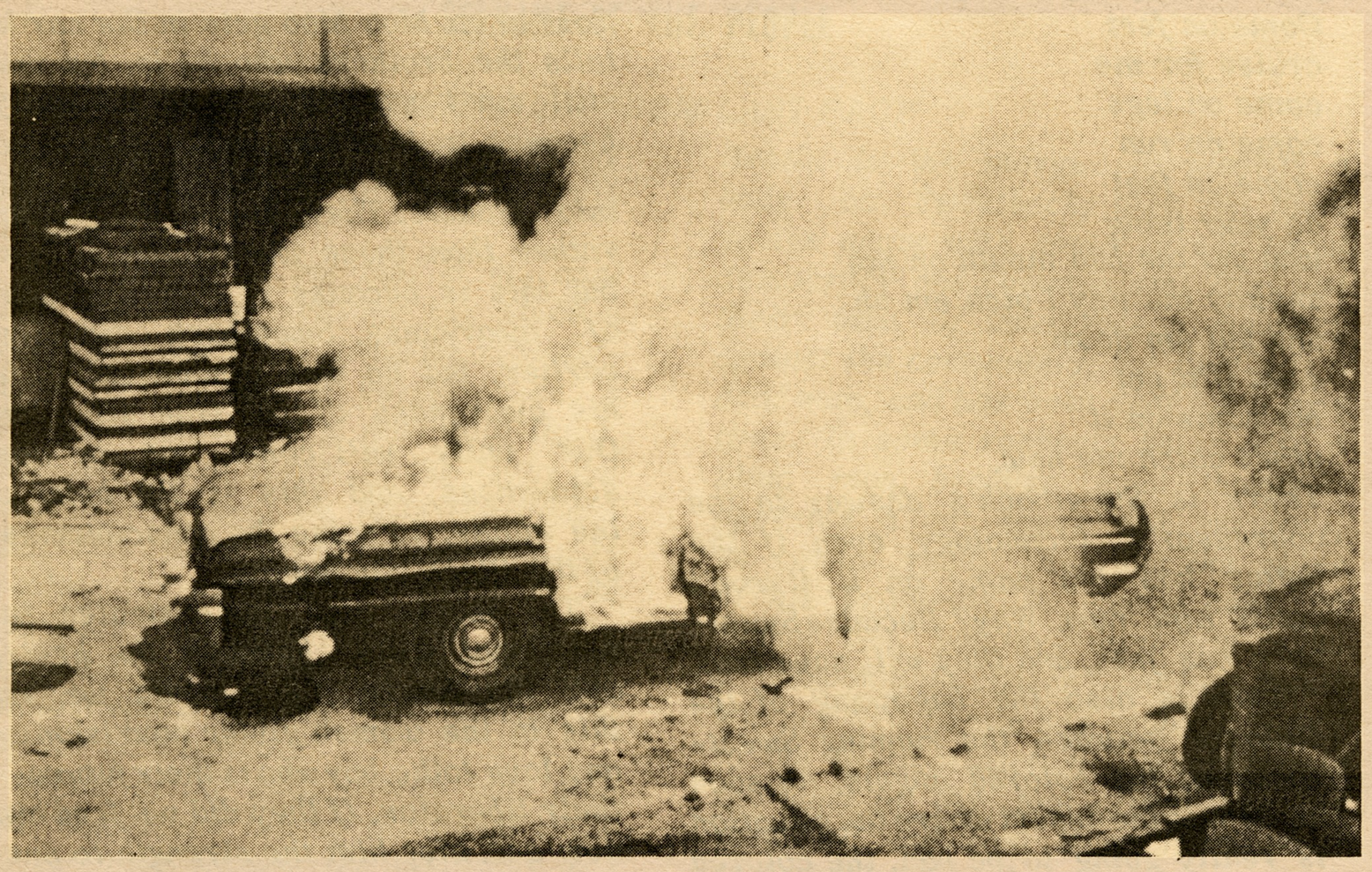
HE WON'T BLEED ME

A REVOLUTIONARY ANALYSIS OF SWEET SWEETBACK'S BAADASSSSS SONG

BY HUEY P. NEWTON, MINISTER OF DEFENSE, THE BLACK PANTHER PARTY, SERVANT OF THE PEOPLE



In unity, the community burned a police car to help Sweetback

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This is clearly seen when Sweetback comes back to Beatle for help. Sweetback says nothing, but Beatle lets it come out of both ends. The audience replies to Beatle for Sweetback, and they supply the dialogue. This happens throughout the film. So the thing to do is not just see the film, but also to recognize how you the viewer are also an actor in the film, because you are as much a victim of this oppressive system as Sweetback.

The unity of the community is shown throughout the film and we should get the message the brother is signifying to us. When the community sets the police car afire and saves Sweetback, that is an expression of unity. When they deny ever having seen him in order to permit him to escape, that is an expression of unity. When they raid the motel and rip the brother's eye out, they say "So what?" when told this is not Sweetback. But it is Sweetback in a sense, because the brother is another victim, like all of us are. When Beatle is rolled up to the morgue and realizes that the body they show him is not Sweetback, he sees his unity as a victim with his brother he failed to help who is also a victim. And Beatle cracks up laughing--they are unified. And in the next scene at the shoeshine stand Van Peebles signifies to the man that he can kiss his ass.

Another expression of unity in the film is the power symbol. When the minister tells Sweetback the significance of the job he has done for Moo Moo, he then says a Black Ave Maria for him, but ends up giving him the power sign--unity. Then when Moo Moo gets on the motorcycle to escape and then leave Sweetback, this is different from their first parting. They give each other a soul shake, so that even though they go separate ways they are unified.

Finally the film demonstrates the importance of unity and love between Black men and women. This is shown again in the scene where the woman makes love to the young boy but in fact baptizes him into his true manhood. Then again when the woman makes love to Sweetback and then gets the handcuffs off him, we see that these are not sex scenes, they are love scenes in a very holy and righteous context. The second woman wants Sweetback to beg, but he can beg no longer because he has been transformed. His baptism in the blood transformed him--he has ripped off his oppressors and he is truly a man; he can never beg again, and he does not.

For a long time the Black community has been a collection of people who survive together in one place, but unity is essential for liberation as well as survival. When we have this unity, the faith of one becomes the faith of another as in the case of Sweetback and Moo Moo. When we have our consciousness increased to the point that we understand this, we will have our unity. But we must understand that the victimizers will always try to prevent this unity.

Another idea the film gets across is the different point of view between the victim and the victimizer. The victimizers cannot accept the reality and truth of the view of the victims, and therefore they say that the victims are always wrong in their view of reality. Indeed, they even go so far as to signify that the victims cannot control and direct their own lives. This is seen first of all in the fact that the film is labeled with an "X" rating. This is an act of the victimizers, trying to control what we shall see, and more than that, trying to say that the ways in which we are forced to survive are profane and dirty. They say that we are like freaks in a show; but we understand that in fact the freaks are those who force us to live in wretched conditions, they may be profane conditions to the oppressors, but we know how to make our conditions a survival situation and we do not see ourselves as profane. The oppressors see Sweetback as a sex film, but if we truly understand ourselves and unify with Sweetback, we will see that the film advocates a bloody overthrow of the oppressor. Melvin Van Peebles is righteously signifying.

The view of the victims is seen in many ways. One of them is in the understanding of Moo Moo and Sweetback. They both know that they are victims, although Moo Moo has not really gotten his complete program together for the community. Yet they seek the same goals of freedom and liberation, and they recognize that sometimes you have to use stern stuff to accomplish your goals. They also recognize that even though the community may not support you entirely, they will support you to a point and that you must go as far as the community will go, and then move out on your own, leading the people to a higher level of consciousness. Sweetback relies on the community much more than Moo Moo, because he understands that revolution is a process, going from A to B to C and so forth, rather than trying to get the people to jump from A to Z.

The oppressor does not understand this, he does not understand the strength of the will of the people. When the two policemen catch Sweetback after he leaves Beatle's place, they are friendly because they cannot accept the idea that the community will free itself. So they ask Sweetback how many people were in the ambush? How did they work it? The oppressors cannot accept the idea that the oppressed could do this without a lot of planning, without a large number of people. It was Sweetback and Moo Moo, but to the victimizer it had to be more than that. A difference in point of view, a point of view which is too often used to control us, but we must make our own point of view prevail.

Another difference in point of view is seen with the chains which are used on Sweetback twice in the film. To the oppressor they are the chains which keep us in a submissive position, but each time for Sweetback, the oppressed, they become tools of liberation. We will be even stronger when we learn how to turn the oppressor's tools against him, rather than submitting to them.

Another idea which Melvin Van

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SWEET SWEETBACK

'I will say a Black Ave Maria for you."

Peebles puts across is the uselessness of cultist behavior in our struggle for survival and liberation. In earlier issues of the paper I have talked about the revolutionary cultist, the cultural cultist, and the religious cultist. Van Peebles strikes some heavy blows at the religious and cultural cultists. For example, the minister understands that he is not moving the people toward their true liberation. He tells Sweetback that what he is doing is giving the people a hype, which gives them a little happiness, but he then goes on to say that Moo Moo and the younger guys are laying down the real religion. So this is a blow against those religions in the Black community which do not help people deal with the conditions which drive them to their knees, but instead want to keep the people on their knees.

The strongest blow against cultist behavior, however, is saved for the cultural cultists. We see this in the African garb which the minister is wearing. This is signifying that a lot of cultural nationalism and the meaningless religions in the community are deceiving the people in the same ways.

In another way the film makes this point more strongly and also indicates the true way to liberation. When Sweetback arrives at the gambler's den, the men around the table are engaged in a conversation. The manager has complained to Sweetback that he cannot even make any money on this operation because he is paying off so many others. Cultural cultists offer many empty solutions to our oppression, and this scene hits at these solutions.

After the manager's speech one gambler says: "And Africa shall stretch forth her arms," and then another replies "Yeah, and bring back a bloody stump." Now we have to understand the true issue in order to see this as a blow at cultural nationalists, who are cultural cultists--with African clothes, bones, and other things, but no way to liberate the people. Cultural cultists, who try to claim that they have the way, often use this scripture to support their ideas: "Princes shall come out of Egypt; Ethiopia shall soon stretch out her hands unto God." (Psalms 68:31) You can see that what Van Peebles is signifying is that those who use such meaningless arguments to mislead the people have nothing to offer because when they stretch forth their arms, they will draw back a bloody stump. Still, however, Van Peebles does show us how a bloody stump may not be a meaningless thing, if we get out of that cultist bag. How does he do this? He shows the blood on Sweetback's arms each time he downs the cops. In his first baptism by blood, there is blood all the way up to his elbow. And later when he downs the cops in the poolroom, there is blood up to his elbow again. That is the true route to liberation, stern action when the situation demands that you seize the time, and turn away from cultist behavior.

There is another key idea which comes through repeatedly, and that is the ability of the people to survive even under the harshest conditions. We do this by using the means available to us and never worrying about the fact that we don't have all the technology that the oppressor has. You will recall that Sweetback was in chains and in the back of the police car when the people "washed" it with gasoline. What did the Brother do? He made it out of the car and then walked right through the police and firemen who were arriving to try and deal with the situation. He walked right through them--he did not panic and run, he just calmly turned a situation of oppression to his advantage.

Later on when Sweetback and Moo Moo had separated for the final time, the Brother was faced with a very difficult situation, and he had very little to carry him through. But when the colored angels began to get down on him, he told them "I got feet." This was again symbolizing survival. It was not simply that he had feet, however, he also had the ability to use the technology of the oppressor in his own interest. He did not become discouraged because he had no car. Van Peebles could have had him steal a car, but instead he had Sweetback use the basic skills of survival, with nothing but the things he had learned for surviving the oppressor for so many years on the block. He doesn't have a car, but he rides--on the top of a truck, inside the back of another truck, on a freight train, he uses the oppressor's technology, but in his own interest.

He also survives by using the system against itself. He meets another traveler and pays him to change clothes and run when he is chased. This throws the police off his trail and helps him survive, but it also means that he ends up with clothes which are much more suitable for his long run across the desert. Later in the film, when he is near the border and the dogs are after him, the two men--the owner of the of the dogs and the police--get into a fight among themselves about whether the dogs will be untied. This is all to Sweetback's advantage, turning the oppressors against each other, and he makes his escape.

In another way he survives the way that the Black community has always survived, by using the resources at his command even though they are not the resources others would use. Survival forces some very harsh decisions on us. When his wound is causing him to suffer, he urinates upon the earth and uses his own urine to make a mudpack which he applies to the wound--it produces a rapid healing. These are the kinds of home remedies we have long had to use because we could not get proper medical attention. Later, we see him bathing his face in a pool of muddy water. It sustains him. When I saw it I thought of that song which says "I'd rather drink muddy water, and sleep in a hollowed out log, than stay here and be treated like a dirty dog."

These are survival techniques all the audience can identify with because they realize they are necessary. They don't identify with the time he catches that lizard and downs it, raw. But this is no different from the times when we had to eat the chitterlings, hog maws, and other foods, not because we wanted to, but because that was all we had to eat. We may deny it, we may not identify with it, but it carried

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HE WON'T BLEED ME

A REVOLUTIONARY ANALYSIS OF SWEET SWEETBACK'S BAADASSSSS SONG

BY HUEY P. NEWTON, MINISTER OF DEFENSE, THE BLACK PANTHER PARTY, SERVANT OF THE PEOPLE

The very chains of the oppressor can become the tools of liberation

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us through. And the point we should understand is that if you do not submit to the oppressor, you may be forced to make some harsh decisions, eat some undesirable foods, but this is better than being well-fed in some social prison.

Sweetback has only one tool with him, his knife, and he uses it very effectively. It reminds me of that point in The Wretched of the Earth where Fanon says that if you don't have a gun, then a knife will do. He uses his knife to escape at the rock concert, by pretending to be making love to the girl in the bushes. He uses the knife against the lizard. And then when he hears the dogs coming after him, he again pulls it out and he uses it--he really deals. But we should know it would be this way, because earlier in the pool room when he was facing the policeman with a gun what did Sweetback have? A tool the community knows how to use very effectively, a pool cue. But he did not use it to down pool balls, he turned it into a spear and downed the oppressor. You don't need a gun, what you need is the consciousness of what it will take to survive and prevail in any given situation--and then act accordingly.

So what I have done is given you a scene-by-scene analysis of the movie, then an analysis of some of the major ideas and concepts which the movie puts forth. Now I will show how the movie also raises the consciousness of the community by analyzing it in terms of some aspects of the ideology of the Black Panther Party. We see ideology as a systematic way of thinking about phenomena, not as some set of abstract conclusions. Our approach is one that uses dialectical materialism, which holds that contradictions are the ruling principle of the universe. Everywhere, in all of life, the social forces, the natural forces, and the biological and physical forces, we can find contradictions. What we mean is that in every phenomenon there is a contradiction between opposing forces which struggle to gain domination over each other. We call this the thesis and antithesis, or the unity of the opposites. Because these opposites are both unified and constantly in struggle with one another, they give motion to the matter composing the phenomenon. So we say that matter is constantly in motion, or constantly in a state of transformation. The transformation takes place in a dialectical manner, with the thesis struggling against the antithesis; these are the contradictions. The struggle is resolved in a synthesis, which contains elements of the old contradictions, but is at a higher level, and then a new set of contradictions arises.

The essence of the ideology of the Black Panther Party is that we recognize that matter is constantly in transformation in a dialectical manner. But when we understand this and understand the forces in operation, we can control them and direct them in a manner which is beneficial for the community. Therefore what we want to do is understand the contradictions within every aspect of the Black community and move on them by trying to increase the positive side of each contradiction until it comes to dominate the negative side. This is how we define power--the ability to define phenomena and make them act in a desired manner.

If you understand where the Panther is coming from, you will understand that Sweet Sweetback is a beautiful exemplification of Black Power, for what he does is decide how he wants things to come out and then he makes them act in a desired manner. The movie is also an exemplification of the dialectical analysis and the constant transformation of phenomena. I don't know whether Melvin Van Peebles was aware of this when he made the movie, but it does have these features, and probably so because the Panther ideology is an extremely effective approach to all phenomena. It gives us lots of insight and understanding.

For example, we say that all phenomena contain contradictions with positive and negative qualities. To control the situation, then, what you must do is increase the positive qualities of any phenomenon until they dominate the negative qualities. Sweetback does this on a number of occasions. Take for example the chains. The handcuffs are definitely negative when they are used to keep him in submission; but when Sweetback realizes that he can ignore the beating of Moo Moo no longer, what is he to use for a weapon? Then the same chains which were used to bind become tools of liberation--their positive qualities are used to overcome their negative qualities. He did this again when he was caught by the police in the pool room--he offered his hands for the chains. Not because he wanted them, but because he realized that this would put the police off their guard, and also give him another weapon to use against them. We see this again, when the police are using helicopters, cars and guns and the radio to track down Sweetback. What does he use? Their technology; but in a positive way--he hitches rides on trucks and trains, and they help to deliver him from the jaws of the monsters who are using the most advanced technology to try and capture him. If we understand dialectical materialism, we will understand more about how to look at both the positive and negative qualities of phenomena so that we can control our destiny.

The film also shows the positive and negative features of community institutions. In other articles I have said that the Black Panther Party was wrong in its blanket condemnations of community institutions, instead of analyzing their qualities. The movie shows the positive and negative features of the church, for example. The minister is saying to Sweetback that he has nothing to offer the community, he can only give the people a hype which will bring them a little bit of happiness in their misery, and he cannot offer Sweetback a hide-out because the police--("the Man") knows everything. This shows his negative and reactionary side. At the same time we see his positive and progressive side, because he is operating a withdrawal center where people addicted to drugs can come and dry out. There is no blanket condemnation, he shows the church making a real contribution to the survival of the community. What

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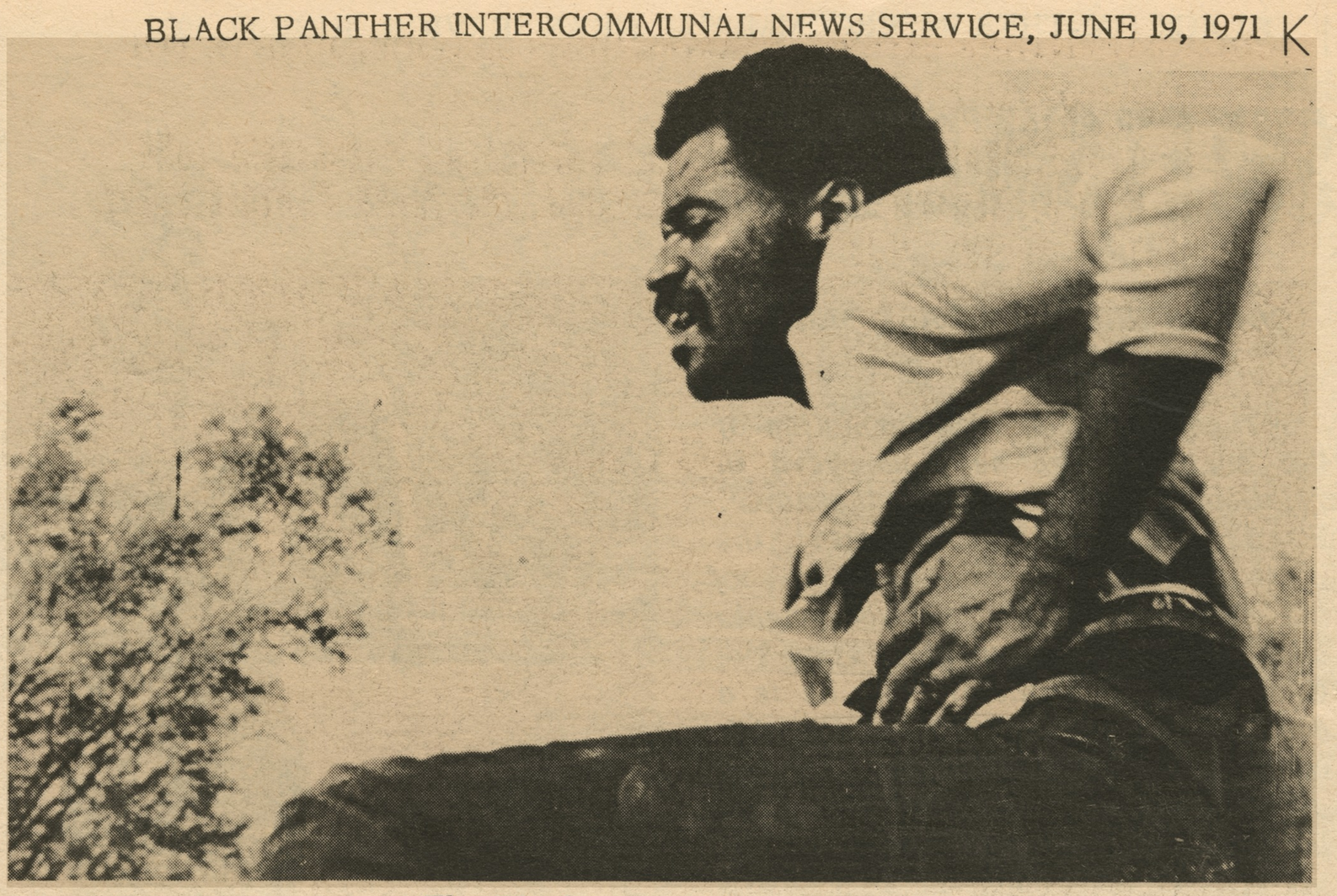
SWEET SWEETBACK

needs to happen is for people with a higher level of consciousness to increase the positive contribution the church makes until the positive becomes the most important feature of the church, then it will be able to do more for the people.

The same is true in the case of the gambler. He cannot offer Sweetback any money, he is exploiting and he is also exploited, and when the Brother really needs help he has no money to give him. What's more, the advice he gives is worthless because he says that Sweetback is dead and tells him to get himself a last supper. But there is also a positive quality to the gambler, because he will give Sweetback and Moo Moo a ride for part of the way. Actually he can give them a ride all the way to the border, but he will only give them a ride to the edge of town where they run into the motorcycle gang. But the point is made very well, that you have to work with the people as far as they will go, and not jump too far ahead by forcing them to do things they do not want to do at that particular level of consciousness. So he carries the positive qualities of the gambler as far as they will go, and then strikes out again. This is taking your revolution from point A to point B, rather than trying to jump from A to Z in one step. We have to find out what the people will do and get them to do that much.

The progression of the people as their consciousness increases is shown in the case of Beatle. At first Beatle is an individual surviving at a basic level, running a cat house and then giving up one of his men in order to continue to operate. Then Beatle offers advice which is nothing more than a pile of dung. Next we see Beatle going through the revolutionizing process, because if he knew where Sweetback was, he would have told on him. But because he was deaf before and because he cannot cooperate with the police, they actually deafen him--the conditions revolutionize him. When we next see Beatle it is in the morgue scene and he cracks up as he realizes that Sweetback has escaped - they are unified. Beatle has seen that he also is a victim and there can be no cooperation with the oppressor because they will bleed you to death; if you want to live you have to resist. And the shoe shine man uses his ass on the shoes of his oppressor.

There is also a progression within the community. They rescue Sweetback, and aid him as much as they can in his escape, then they become deaf to their oppressors. That is a way of hearing the plea of Sweetback to his feet and giving him enough lead time to let his feet do their job.



The Black community must survive

The community's progression is also shown in the transformation of the colored angels. We hear the voices of the community as the police search for Sweetback, but when he reaches the desert we hear the voices of the angels in a dialogue with Sweetback. On the record Melvin Van Peebles refers to this as an opera (an opera is merely a story told in song), and the dialogue between Sweetback and the angels is really Sweet Sweetback's BaadAsssss Song. In the book Van Peebles refers to the angels first as colored angels, then he refers to them as Black angels. On the record he refers to them as Reggin (spell it backwards) angels. The point is that the angels are against the interests of Sweetback, but they are transformed, because their interests are in fact the same as his. This is the dialogue with the angels, the baadasssss song:

If you cant beat em join em
Thats what they say
You talkin bout yesterday
You cant go on like that Sweetback
Not long as your face is Black
Yeah I'm Black and I'm keepin on
Keepin on the same ole way
They bopped your mama
They bopped your papa
Wont bop me
They bopped your sister
They bopped your brother
They wont bop me
THEY BURNED OUR MAMAS
THEY BEAT OUR PAPAS
THEY TRICKED OUR SISTERS
THEY CHAINED OUR BROTHERS
WONT BLEED ME
WONT BLEED ME
WONT BLEED ME
They bled your mama
They bled your papa
But he wont bleed me

Use your Black ass from sun to sun
Niggers scared and pretend they don't see
Deep down dirty dog scared
Just like you Sweetback

Just like I used to be
Work your Black behind to the gums
And you supposed to thomas tell he done
You got to thomas Sweetback

They bled your brother
They bled your sister
Yeah but they wont bleed me

Progress Sweetback
Thats what he wants you to believe
No progress Sweetback
He aint stopped clubbing us for 400 years
And he dont intend to for a million
He sure treat us bad Sweetback
We can make him do us better

Chicken aint nothing but a bird
White man aint nothing but a turd
Nigger aint shit

Get my hands on a trigger
You talkin revolution Sweetback
I wanta get off these knees
You talkin revolution Sweetback

You cant make it on wings
Wheels or steel Sweetback
We got feet
You cant get away on wings
wheels or steel Sweetback
Niggers got feet

He bled your brother
He bled your sister
Your brother and your sister too
How come it took me so long to see
How he get us to use each other
Niggers scared
We got to get it together if he kicks a brother
It gotta be like he kickin your mother
They hype you into sopping the
Marrow out your own bones
Justice is blind
Yeah and white too
Justice is blind
The way she acts she gotta be
The man is jive
Not too jive to have his game
Uptight in your kinky bean

Stand tall Sweetback he
Aint gonna let you
I'm standing tall anyway
The man know everything Sweetback
The man know everything
Then he ought to know Im
Tired of him fuckin with me

Use your feet baby
Run motherfucka
Run Sweetback
He wont bleed me

With regret, we would like to correct a printing error in the centerfold of the last issue of our paper (Vol. VI, No. 20, dated June 12, 1971) in which the author's name of the poem "It's Called Tenth and Greenwich" was deleted. It was written by Melvin Van Peebles.

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SWEET SWEETBACK

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Niggers got feet

We can see the transformation of the angels if we see the opera in relationship to the scenes in the movie. When he arrives at the desert, the most difficult and lonesome part of his whole trip, the colored angels chastise and ridicule him. They believe, like the gambler, that he is a dead man and it will only be a matter of time until he is caught. So they signify, about how the Man bopped his brother and sister, how he bled his momma and poppa, and how he will get Sweetback. But Sweetback is determined because he knows they won't bop him, they won't bleed him. Why? "I got feet". All he is signifying is that I can deal, and I can survive.

When he uses his urine mixed with mud to make the pack which heals his wounds, the angels begin to change. They see too that he will survive, so they start to become Black. They recognize that they too are like Sweetback, and they point out that they have been treated bad too, but they have been acting like Uncle Toms. Sweetback is going to get his finger on a trigger, get off his knees, and fight a revolution. So when he makes the mudpack, the Black angels begin to tell him to run, they want him to deal, now, they don't want him to Tom. They too have been transformed, because Sweetback has increased their positive qualities by showing them it is not necessary to submit all the time. At some point you have got to get off your knees.

Their transformation continues because when the police looses the hound dogs (slave dogs) after Sweetback and he draws his knife, the Black angels begin to sing "This little light of mine, I'm going to let it shine." This is the first time we have heard this song since Sweetback's baptism into his manhood. The growth he experienced the first time this song was sung, the way he learned from those women in the house of prostitution, is going to serve him again. They gave him love and strength because he was their future, their liberator, and now their training is going to serve him, now that he is older. The angels are transformed, and Sweetback survives. This brings us to the end of the movie, and the negation of the negation. At the beginning the community of oppressed was in contradiction with the oppressors. The oppressed were trying to survive, but the oppressors would not permit that, they wanted more. They wanted to bleed them to death and completely dominate them. They wanted to dominate by dividing the community, Sweetback against Moo Moo, Beatle against Sweetback. But this continued oppression led the people to realize that their salvation would only come through unity, and unity would only come through heightened levels of consciousness. So they unify and Sweetback revolts against the oppressors and makes good his escape. Many do not believe he will make it, their consciousness is not as high as his. He is reaching for the stars--making it to the border--but they will only take him to the edge of town.

Sweetback has his high level of consciousness, that is to say, he is a Sweet Sweetback because he has come to understand that freedom, liberation, and the ability to love requires that first of all you have to recapture the holy grail, you have to restore your dignity and manhood by destroying the one who took it from you. When you do that, even if you do not completely escape, you are a dangerous man, because after that the oppressor knows that you will no longer be submissive. Therefore ripping off your oppressor is the first step toward freedom and love.

This understanding did not come easily to Sweetback. He attempted to look away from Moo Moo, and then after rescuing him, he attempted to make it on his own, only to be misled by Beatle. This put him in the situation of a revolutionary, in the sense that he knew then that he could not find a place of refuge within the system without a whole transformation of the conditions of oppression.

I say this because many people think that revolutionaries are made out of some kinds of abstract predicaments. This is not so, they are transformed by a particular set of situations that are sometimes unique to each individual. What brings one person into his revolutionary consciousness is different from what will bring another, but when we reach that point, we realize that we are all unified as victims. That is what happened to Sweetback, Moo Moo, Beatle, the angels and the community in the film. That is why the film stars the Black community--all of us. We must understand our unity and also how we must heighten our consciousness.

So like I said, we have the negation of the negation. The oppressor who wanted to exploit Sweetback and Beatle, ends up beaten by them because they will take his stuff no longer--the negation of the negation. The contradiction between the community, as represented by Sweetback, and the oppressor, as represented by the dogs, has been resolved.

However each synthesis leads to new contradictions. Right until the end Melvin Van Peebles is signifying and conveying a message to us. What is the new contradiction? Sweetback has killed two dogs, but one is still there, refreshing himself in the water mingled with the blood of the other dogs. If Sweetback got two dogs, who is going to get the other? That is the dog we must down. So the movie ends with the words "Watch Out". This has a dual meaning. It is telling all the many Sweetbacks across the land to watch out for that third dog and be prepared to deal when he shows up. It also says to the oppressor to watch out for the Sweetbacks across the land, because they are coming to collect some dues. Righteously signifying.

When Bobby and I started the Black Panther Party, we wanted to build the Black community, the love, the sacredness, and the unity we need so desperately. This is still our goal and we try to help the community survive by administering our many survival programs. Sweet Sweetback helps to put forth the ideas of what we must do to build that community. We need to see it often and learn from it.

ALL POWER TO THE PEOPLE

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