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Browne

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Vernon

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On
Black
separatism

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The two talks in this pamphlet are taken from the tape of a symposium at the Militant Labor Forum in New York City, December 1, 1967.

PERSONAL EM 211/2

SPEECH

BY ROBERT S. BROWNE

Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I don't really know whether in speaking to this group I should assume that most people have or have not read my article in the current issue of *Ramparts* on "The Case for Black Separatism." Since what I want to say I essentially said in that article, what I think I'll do is in a way summarize the main points of the article and perhaps elaborate on them. And then, maybe give you some of the reactions that I've gotten so far, although since the article has so recently come out, I haven't had too much response yet to it.

First off, if you haven't read the article, let me make something quite clear. I was a little hesitant to write the article in a way, because I knew that I would, from then on, for some time probably, be dubbed as "Oh, he's the guy who wants the separate state." And while I may be the guy who wants the separate state, nevertheless the article is not necessarily a demand for a separate state. The article, if you have read it you'll know, takes off from the resolution on this topic which was passed at the Black Power Conference in Newark last July and which, contrary to what the press said, did not demand a separate state; it demanded a dialogue on the feasibility and the desirability of a separate state. It didn't prejudice the issue; it said this is something that we should talk about and think about, to see if this is a good idea or not.

Of course the press played it up in its most extreme form. I would like, however, to just read the resolution from the Newark conference because it sort of sets the framework for most of what I would like to say. This is the resolution as it was amended from the floor:

- Whereas* the black people in America have been systematically oppressed by their white fellow-countrymen;
- Whereas* there is little prospect that this oppression can be terminated, peacefully or otherwise, within the foreseeable future;
- Whereas* the black people do not wish to be absorbed into the larger

SPEECH

BY ROBERT VERNON

A dialogue on whether separation could be a solution to the white problem in the United States is, in my view, a dialogue that has to take place not so much between black and white as between black people. Or perhaps between black people and Negroes—to find out whether those of us who are still Negroes are going to remain Negroes, or will become black. We are the ones who have to make the decision.

But I have no objection to discussing this and related questions with those whites who, themselves, are in favor of separating from many aspects of this society: from LBJ, from Dean Rusk, from the rat race and from the space race. But before we're in a position to undertake such a discussion, black people first have to get together, sit down, close the door, talk shop, and find out who we are and what we are, and what it is we intend to do with ourselves. And what obstacles face us in the various options that we might choose.

It is a fundamental right of any people to decide their own destiny. It is the right of black people here, and of any other oppressed people anywhere, to decide their own destiny. Remember that there are a few other peoples inside the borders of the United States who may not want to remain permanently within the borders of this country as it is now constituted. Puerto Ricans, Mexicans, and any number of tribes of Indians also have that right of self-determination.

Black people are in a much better position than these others to build up some power, power that can actually shake the structure of this country. But these other peoples, some possessing less actual power and less potential power, have that same right to decide what to do with themselves, whether they want to cut out completely or whether they want to be included in. And that, by the way, opens up another area of dialogue—a dialogue between black people and other oppressed minorities in the United States.

The hostility with which white people greeted the resolution on separatism proposed by the Newark Black Power Conference, which, as Professor Browne pointed out, only calls for a dialogue, which does not actually call for a separate state, is one example of the hostility that the state power which rules over all of us will have toward

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