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A new feeling of unity: decolonial Black Power in the Dutch Atlantic (1968-1973)

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Chapter 2:
“We Believe in Loving Our Black Brothers”
Antillean Black Power in the Aftermath of Trinta di Mei

News about the 30 May uprising spread quickly within the Dutch Atlantic and its diaspora. The protesters had not even yet reached the center of Willemstad when a young Black activist in New York heard about the political unrest in his birthplace on the radio. Eager to join his people in their fight against the colonial status quo, he booked the first available flight to Curaçao, found his son a place to stay, and informed his employer that he needed to take time off to take care of some “personal problems.”²⁰⁹ The young man had expected a revolution in his country for years and had repeatedly assured friends and family that “when my people need me man, I’ll be there.”²¹⁰ When the opportunity presented itself, he was ready to live up to that promise. He quickly packed his bags and made his way to the airport, arriving just in time to catch the last flight of the day. Right before his plane took off, Fox sent Prime Minister Ciriaco De la Cruz a telegram announcing his arrival on the island that night. It simply stated: “I’m Benjamin Fox. I’m coming to Curaçao.”²¹¹

Kroon had already known Fox for several years when he received that telegram. The 29-year-old had been working as a systems analyst in the United States and had reached out to Kroon in the past because he wanted to start using his expertise to contribute to the technological advancement of his own country. During his earlier trips to Curaçao, he had met with the Antillean politician to discuss the possibility of setting up a service bureau for computers in Willemstad. In their conversations, however, he had not only expressed his professional intentions but also his ideological plans: to bring Black Power to the Netherlands Antilles. At the time, Fox later attested, the Kroon had “thought it was all a big joke.”²¹² But when Fox’s telegram arrived at

²⁰⁹ “Entrevista ku Benjamin Fox – Black Power,” *Vitò*, October 25, 1969, 3; “B.S. Fox: “Nahr Gaf Advies Niet in Beroep te Gaan,” *Amigoe di Curaçao*, September 30, 1969, 3; Diekmann, 109.

²¹⁰ Quote from “Entrevista ku Benjamin Fox,” 3; “Benjamin Fox Bestudeert Onderdrukkingssysteem,” *Amigoe di Curaçao*, May 23, 1970, 4; Diekmann, 96.

²¹¹ Quote from Ewald Ong-a-Kwie, interview by Gert Oostindie, *Curaçao, 30 Mei 1969: Verhalen over de Revolte* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam UP, 1999), 91; “B.S. Fox,” 3; “Entrevista ku Benjamin Fox,” 3; Diekmann, 108.

²¹² Diekmann, 102-103.

Fort Amsterdam in the midst of the uprising, Kroon must have changed his mind. While thousands of Black Curaçaoans were out in the streets declaring their hate for the island's White elites, the politician suddenly became aware of the threat Fox's ideas posed. He immediately informed his security services about the young man's arrival and ordered the head of security at the Aruban airport (where the plane would be landing because of the uprising) to wait for him.²¹³

As soon as Fox's plane landed in Oranjestad, he was taken into custody and interrogated about his reasons for returning to Curaçao that day. During his conversations with the local police, which lasted over five hours, the officers made it clear that they suspected the Black Power activist of having "stirred up the revolt" from afar.²¹⁴ Fox assured them that he had only gone to Curaçao to check up on his family at home, to make sure they were unharmed. When the officers failed to find any evidence of his involvement, they had to let him go. The following day, he took the first possible flight to Willemstad, joining a number of prominent Aruban politicians who needed to get to the Antillean capital, including Minister of Education Ernesto O. Petronia, whom Fox had also met during one of his earlier travels.²¹⁵ When the plane landed, the immigration police tried again, headed by the Chief of Security himself. This time, they did not even wait until he got off the plane: they stopped the aircraft in the middle of the landing strip, boarded the plane, walked straight up to Fox, and took him in.²¹⁶ "They surprised me with a great welcoming committee: twenty police officers! To get me off that plane!" the young activist later recalled.²¹⁷ Fox again declared that he had not been involved in the uprising. After another four-hour interrogation, he was once again released. His luggage was returned to him, but the money he had brought with him was missing. Fox refused to take back his suitcases

²¹³ "B.S. Fox," 3.

²¹⁴ Diekmann, 108.

²¹⁵ "E.O. Petronia, Minister van Onderwijs, Minister-President, 1969-1971," Collectie 30 Mei 1969 (KITLV), UBL474, identifier 7, Special Collections, Leiden University, Leiden, the Netherlands.

²¹⁶ Diekmann, 108; "E.O. Petronia, Minister van Onderwijs, Minister-President, 1969-1971"; "Rapporten van W.C.A. van Kappel, Commissaris van Politie, Uitgebracht op 2 en 11 Juni aan de Minister van Justitie, Curaçao, over de Gebeurtenissen op 30 mei," Collectie 30 Mei 1969 (KITLV), UBL474, identifier 51, Special Collections, Leiden University, Leiden, the Netherlands.

²¹⁷ Diekmann, 108.

without his cash and left empty-handed. That same night, he was arrested for sedition at the Hilton Hotel, despite the authorities' lack of evidence.²¹⁸

Rumors about Fox's role in the uprising circulated widely in the weeks following 30 May. Some suspected that he had been "the 'master-brain' behind the revolt," commissioned by some American Black Power organization to start a riot in Curaçao, or that he had strategically indoctrinated *Vitó* editor Stanley Brown to do the job for him.²¹⁹ In the midst of all the unclarity about the sudden outburst of protest, these theories did not only spread around the island but also reached international audiences in the Caribbean, in the United States, and throughout Europe.²²⁰ These news reports were highly speculative and showed that nobody was quite sure about his exact identity or affiliation. Meanwhile, the Curaçaoan police department tried to find incriminating evidence that would confirm their suspicions but were unable to find anything substantial enough to support his arrest. They even told Fox that they would drop the case if he told them "exactly who set Curaçao on fire" or if he left the island within twenty-four hours, but the young activist declined.²²¹ To their delight, however, they did discover that Fox had failed to pay one of his hotel bills from a visit in the previous year. Although this did not support their charges of sedition, it did allow them to keep Fox for fraud instead.²²² The court sentenced him to four months in prison, a disproportionately severe charge for this kind of offense at the time.²²³ "Of

²¹⁸ "Rapporten van W.C.A. van Kappel, Commissaris van Politie"; "B.S. Fox," 3; "Entrevista ku Benjamin Fox," 3; Diekmann, 108; "E Proseso di Benjamin Fox," *RUKU: Algemeen Cultureel Maandblad voor de Nederlandse Antillen* 2.2 (May 1970), 38. All editions of *RUKU* were consulted at the Special Collections of Leiden University, Leiden, the Netherlands.

²¹⁹ Anderson and Dynes, 12; Diekmann, 108; Thomas L. Hughes to Secretary of State, 3; "B.S. Fox," 3; "Benjamin Fox Bestudeert Onderdrukkingssysteem," 4.

²²⁰ Hoefte, 151.

²²¹ Diekmann, 108.

²²² Fox claimed that he had not paid his bills on purpose because of the discrimination he had witnessed during his stay. He provided over twenty different documents to demonstrate his financial stability to support his claims, but when he presented them to the public prosecutor, he allegedly told Fox: "Even I could do that," suggesting that Fox had forged them. Journal *Ruku* later published some of these documents, which included bank statements, paychecks, and a telegram from his employer, and argued that the court made no efforts at all to check their validity, leading them to the conclusion that "the public prosecutor has, as is always the case with prejudiced people, wanted to see nothing which spoke favorably of Fox." See "E Proseso di Benjamin Fox," 44.

²²³ "B.S. Fox," 3; "Entrevista ku Benjamin Fox," 3; "E Proseso di Benjamin Fox," 38-45; Diekmann, 108-109.

course I know that I never really did time for fraud,” Fox later reflected. “I did time for my ideas, my opinion.”²²⁴ The Police Commissioner would later confirm this, admitting that Fox was arrested only because of the threat he posed.²²⁵

Scholars who have written about Fox in the past have always done so in relation to his suspected involvement in the 30 May uprising and have rightfully concluded that he had not played an active role in the events of that day.²²⁶ Likewise, those who have shown an interest in Black Power in the Netherlands Antilles have always done so only in relation to 30 May, predominantly to question whether or not the uprising itself was an expression of Black Power. To this, too, the answer has been resoundingly negative.²²⁷ Quite surprisingly, however, none of these scholars have paid much attention to Fox’s later campaign for Black Power in the Netherlands Antilles, which emerged not prior to but after the uprising. Following his release from Koraal Specht in September 1969, Fox established the Antillean Black Power (ABP) organization, which would be active for approximately a year and far surpassed the earlier Black Panthers of Curaçao in both its popularity and visibility. Rather than asking if 30 May itself was an act of Black Power, then, it would be much more constructive to ask how the 30 May uprising gave rise to Black Power in the Netherlands Antilles. Answering this question would also get to the core of why and how Fox established the ABP.

By looking at the background, ideology, activism, and connections of the Antillean Black Power organization, this chapter argues that the momentum and anticolonial networks of the 30 May movement allowed Fox to bring a new sense of cultural nationalism to the Netherlands Antilles. This cultural nationalism was centered not around the idea of an Afro-Antillean, but of a diasporic African identity, drawing from local as well as global Black traditions and cultures. Building on his Black Power training in the United States, Fox argued that cultural awareness held the key to Black liberation, as those of African descent could never effectively resist White oppression if they did not believe they were worth fighting for, and to get to that level

²²⁴ Diekmann, 109.

²²⁵ “Statius Muller, hoofd Veiligheidsdienst N.A.”

²²⁶ Oostindie, “Black Power,” 250; Oostindie, “Woedend Vuur,” 19; Marius Wessels, “Logboek van een Revolte van Vuur,” in *Dromen en Litteratuur: Dertig Jaar na de Curaçaose Revolte, 30 Mei 1969*, ed. Gert Oostindie (Amsterdam: Amsterdam UP, 1999), 69; Hoefte, 151; Anderson and Dynes, 12.

²²⁷ Anderson and Dynes, 145; Oostindie, “Black Power,” 248.

of self-respect, they had to decolonize their sense of self and their ways of thinking. This made the Antillean Black Power organization unique in comparison to all other Black Power groups in the Dutch Atlantic, including the Black Panthers of Curaçao, whose revolutionary nationalism prioritized political and social action over cultural pride – though they did acknowledge its importance. The organization was also different from its predecessor in that it was established by someone who had been involved in the Black Power movement in the United States rather than just adopting its framework for its own activism.

This chapter is divided into five sections, each of which explores a different aspect of the Antillean Black Power organization. The first section introduces Fox as an actor, explaining where the young activist came from and how he had become involved in the Black Power movement in the United States. The second and third sections explore how this background informed Fox's understanding of Black Power and how he put these ideas into practice in the Netherlands Antilles. The fourth section analyzes Antillean Black Power's relations to the nationalist movement of Curaçao, which at that point consisted predominantly of *Vitó* and the Workers' Liberation Front (Frente Obrero Liberashon, FOL). Finally, the chapter discusses the demise of Fox's organization, explaining how internal conflicts in the movement, predominantly between Brown and Fox, led the Black Power leader to withdraw from the revolutionary scene, which ended up creating a significant schism in the island's anticolonial movement.

An Antillean in New York

Benjamin S. Fox was born to a Trinidadian father and a Curaçaoan mother in Valentijn, Curaçao, on 3 April 1941. After his parents got divorced in 1948, his father migrated to the United States while Fox stayed on the island with his mother.²²⁸ In his younger years, Fox studied at the St. Thomascollege in Otro Banda, a Catholic all-boys school run by European friars.²²⁹ When he was fifteen years old, he was sent to the Netherlands to complete his secondary education at a prestigious school in Huis ter

²²⁸ Diekmann, 94. Dates confirmed through Marriage certificate, Benjamin Ricford Fox and Lucia Marina Martis, June 18, 1938, Burgerlijke Standregister, certificate no. 86, Archivo Nashonal, Willemstad, Curaçao.

²²⁹ Diekmann, 94-95. More information on the St. Thomascollege can be found in Norbert Hendrikse, "St. Thomascollege, een Monument," *Antilliaans Dagblad*, July 14, 2009.

Heide, near the city of Utrecht. In an interview with Dutch author Miep Diekmann in *Een Doekje voor het Bloeden* (1970), Fox stated that his move away from Curaçao had been incredibly difficult, but equally as enlightening. He explained that his relocation from the Caribbean colony to the metropole made him painfully aware of the colonial and racial problems in the Netherlands Antilles. At the St. Thomascollege, he was taught that the White man was superior, like “a god, who I had to bow down for, and who I had to agree with till death.”²³⁰ But when he arrived in the Netherlands, he realized that this sense of superiority was completely self-imposed. Disillusioned with the racial status quo, Fox recollected he spent his schoolyears rebelling against any White authority he encountered. When he graduated in 1959, the dean decided to send him to his father in New York, “where they could get [him] under control.”²³¹

Despite his reluctance to move across the world again, Fox’s reunion with his father would end up being absolutely essential to his intellectual development. After settling in New York ten years earlier, his father had become active in the Black cultural scene of the city, where he had gained a sense of racial pride that he had never known in Trinidad or Curaçao. When his 18-year-old son came to live with him, he encouraged him to do the same. As Fox himself described it, his father gave him “the powerful, moral stimulation to immerse [him]self into Negro culture.”²³² Considering the Black cultural revival in this period, there probably could not have been a better time to embark on such a journey. In the early 1960s, Fox started his bachelor’s in Systems Analysis and Computer Science at Hunter College.²³³ Like many other American universities in this period, students at Hunter were deeply involved in the Civil Rights movement and were actively demanding their institution to become more diverse and inclusive, though it is unclear if Fox was involved in any of this.²³⁴ In his

²³⁰ Diekmann, 95.

²³¹ “E Proseso di Benjamin Fox,” 41; Diekmann, 94.

²³² Diekmann, 97.

²³³ “E Proseso di Benjamin Fox,” 41.

²³⁴ For more information on antiracist activism at Hunter in this period, see Charles Tien, “The American College Experience: A View from the City University of New York, Hunter College,” in *Higher Education and Equality of Opportunity: Cross-National Perspectives*, eds. Fred Lazin, Matt Evans, and N. Jayaram (Plymouth: Lexington Books, 2010), 90-91; Manning Marable, “Black Studies and the Racial Mountain,” in *Souls: Critical Journal of Black Politics & Culture* 2.3 (2009), 24.

spare time, Fox also started to explore Black life in New York and began to read up on African American history and culture. By the time he graduated, he was so deeply immersed in the movement that he believed his awareness had even surpassed that of his father. “He has remained a Negro,” Fox told Diekmann, “while I have become Black. That is a big difference.”²³⁵

The most significant turning point in Fox’s journey was his alleged friendship with actor P. Jay Sidney – “or even better, ‘God’, as we call him in the States.”²³⁶ Sidney had been one of the few Black Americans on screen since the earliest days of television and had famously led a “one-man crusade to get African Americans fair representation in television programs *and* commercials,” as historian Donald Bogle has described it.²³⁷ Alongside comedian Dick Gregory and actors Sidney Poitier and Ossie Davis, Sidney had testified about racial inequality in the television industry before the House Committee on Labor and Education in 1962, exposing a “discrimination that is almost all-pervading, that is calculated and continuing.”²³⁸ Fox claimed he first met Sidney in the streets of Manhattan during one of his protests against the advertising of the Lever Brothers in the early sixties. He was fascinated by the actor’s protest and, after some initial conversations, decided to join his struggle.

As they developed an intimate friendship – one that Fox described as “like father and son” – Fox became actively involved in a number of projects that Sidney had been working on. One of these, which Fox referred to as the ‘Black Forum’, was a grassroots initiative that encouraged New Yorkers to boycott local businesses that discriminated against Black customers. Over time, they also set up an educational program where they taught Black communities in the city about racial oppression and how to resist it in everyday life. Fox was active in the organization for at least two

²³⁵ Diekmann, 97.

²³⁶ Diekmann, 98. In Fox’s interview with Diekman, P. Jay Sidney is misspelled as ‘P.G. Sidney’.

²³⁷ Donald Bogle, *Primetime Blues: African Americans on Network Television* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2001), 288; Kathleen A. Tarr, “Bias and the Business of Show Employment Discrimination in the “Entertainment” Industry,” *University of Stanford Law Review* 51 (October 2016): 8; Kathleen Fearn-Banks, *The A to Z of African American Television* (Plymouth: Scarecrow Press, 2006), 493.

²³⁸ P. Jay Sidney as quoted in Emily Nussbaum, “American Intouchable: The Actor Who Fought to Integrate Early TV,” *The New Yorker*, December 7, 2015. More details on their testimonies can be found in Mary Ann Watson, *The Expanding Vista: American Television in the Kennedy Years* (Durham: Duke UP, 1994), 98-99.

years.²³⁹ Sidney, himself a seasoned activist, mentored Fox this entire time and encouraged him to use the frustrations that he had held since his teenage years for a greater purpose. “[P. Jay] taught me to stand on my own two legs, to walk straight ahead. He taught me to stop crying on the shoulders of others,” Fox later recalled.²⁴⁰ Unfortunately, it is difficult to confirm how much of this story was true, as there were many Black Power groups who used the name Black Forum in New York and none of them point directly to Fox. Considering the nature and abundance of such projects, however, it is likely that Fox would have been involved in something like this.

At the same time that Fox started to become active in the city’s Black Power movement, he also began to return to Curaçao on a regular basis. After his first visit to his mother in Buena Vista in 1964, he began traveling to the island multiple times a year, building an extensive network along the way. By 1967, the young activist started to seriously consider moving back home, despite his recent marriage to an American woman and the birth of his first son. It was also around this time that Fox started discussing the possibility of setting up a computer service in the Netherlands Antilles with Ciro Kroon, as discussed in the introduction to this chapter. As he would later state, this was as much a personal choice as a professional one, because he “wanted [his] own people to know, to understand [that] those boys, those who we send abroad, they damn well want to come back, want to help.”²⁴¹ Upon his return to New York after his meeting with Kroon, he established two businesses in preparation of his future career on the island: the Curaçao Data Company and the Curaçao Travel Bureau, both of which he registered at his apartment in Queens.²⁴²

It was also during his 1967 visit that Fox first met *Vitó* editor-in-chief Stanley Brown, who would establish the Black Panthers of Curaçao in the following year. The two had a number of things in common. Fox and Brown were from similar Curaçaoan neighborhoods, where they had grown up in bilingual families, as both of their fathers were from the British West Indies. Both of them had left the island to study abroad,

²³⁹ “Fox Gaat Blad over Black Power uitgeven,” *Amigoe di Curaçao*, October 16, 1969, 3; Diekmann, 98; “B.S. Fox,” 3.

²⁴⁰ Diekmann, 98-99.

²⁴¹ Diekmann, 103.

²⁴² “B.S. Fox,” 3.

which had shaped both of their views on Dutch colonialism. They also shared an interest in Black Power, though only Fox had been involved in the movement at the time. According to Fox, Brown and himself started to make plans for a Black revolution in the Antilles, but had to put their plans on the back burner whenever he returned to New York.²⁴³ In between his visits to the island, Fox sent Brown and his colleagues at *Vitó* materials on the movement from the US, while Brown kept Fox up-to-date on the situation in Curaçao.²⁴⁴ As Fox would later find out, national security services were already monitoring their exchanges at this time, listening to their conversations on the phone and sometimes even confiscating letters and other documents.²⁴⁵ This, too, would be confirmed by the head of the Antillean security agency in reports to the 30 May investigation committee.²⁴⁶

Total Liberation for the Afro-Antillean

Fox's time in New York shaped much of his understanding of Black Power. As previously explained, Black Power meant different things to different people, depending not only on the individual but also on their environment. In the specific context of New York, Black Power was, in many ways, a continuation of an already flourishing tradition of Black nationalism. Since the early twentieth century, the city had been at the center of some of the most popular Black movements in the United States, including the Harlem Renaissance and the Garvey movement. Through the lingering influence of these movements and intergenerational memory, these movements still informed New Yorkers' thinking about racial progress and liberation. In particular, it was the emphasis on cultural pride and economic self-sufficiency in these movements that allowed Black Power organizations like the Nation of Islam (NOI) and the Black Arts Movement (BAM) to gain a large following in the city several

²⁴³ "Entrevista ku Benjamin Fox," 3; Diekmann, 104.

²⁴⁴ Letter from Stanley Brown to Benjamin S. Fox, n.d., *Vito-artikelen, Archief, 1969-1971, N.B. Correspondentie e.a.*, Microfilm Collectie Brown, Box 3, Section 121, Archivo Nashonal, Willemstad, Curaçao; "B.S. Fox," 3; Otto Kuijk, "Rapport van een Razernij," *De Telegraaf*, June 1, 1969, 5.

²⁴⁵ "B.S. Fox," 3.

²⁴⁶ "Statius Muller, Hoofd Veiligheidsdienst N.A." Important to note here is that Brown would deny knowing Fox prior to 1969 in his interview with Oostindie thirty years later. However, because numerous archival documents – including those in his own collection at the Archivo Nashonal – prove otherwise and corroborate Fox's story, this has been excluded from the narrative above.

decades later. Additionally, both the Harlem Renaissance and Garveyism had given the city's Black community an unparalleled diasporic consciousness, shaped by the movements' combined American and Caribbean roots and membership.²⁴⁷

Having spent several years in this community, Fox's vision for Black Power in Curaçao was strongly influenced by these ideas as well. In line with the basic principles of Black nationalism, the young activist believed that Black Power was first and foremost about self-determination, which allowed communities of African descent to "take care of [their] own businesses, of [their] own people."²⁴⁸ A fervent reader of history, Fox believed that the lack of racial progress in the past had shown that Black people could depend only on themselves and, therefore, had to take their liberation into their own hands. The example he used to demonstrate this was that of the recent Civil Rights movement, which he respected but which methods he disagreed with. He explained:

Something in my gut told me it was not right. You are not going to ask for your rights. If you are desperate and young, then you fight for your rights. (...) I cannot be hit on the cheek by some guy and then turn the other to him too. Because by then, he would have punched me to death. Then I am gone. I would be insane! But when he hits me, and I hit back hard enough, he will think twice before he hits me again. He will leave me alone, I will leave him alone. And then I do not have to beg [for my rights]. I just take what belongs to me.²⁴⁹

Reflecting on the previous decade, Fox was convinced that the strategies of the Civil Rights movement had led to a dead end. Although the movement had some legislative successes, Fox believed such reforms to be pointless as long as Black citizens were not seen as equals by the White authorities who ran the legal system. As long as those authorities had their personal prejudices, Black people would be at a disadvantage and had to stand up for themselves.²⁵⁰

²⁴⁷ For a study of Caribbean leadership and participation in these movements, see Louis J. Parascandola, *Look For Me All Around You: Anglophone Caribbean Immigrants in the Harlem Renaissance* (Detroit: Wayne State UP, 2005).

²⁴⁸ Diekmann, 101.

²⁴⁹ Diekmann, 99-100.

²⁵⁰ Diekmann, 99.

While complete Black self-determination was the ultimate goal for Fox, he also believed that Black people would not be able to truly stand up for themselves unless they had reached a certain level of self-respect. The role of the Black Power movement, he argued, was to provide diasporic Africans with the intellectual tools to decolonize their minds; that is, to rid them of the 'inferiority complexes' they had developed through centuries of European colonialism.²⁵¹ In line with the theories of anticolonial philosopher Franz Fanon, Fox believed that Black folks had to overcome these psychological barriers by familiarizing themselves with their ancestors, collective histories, and cultural heritage, which could help them build the self-respect they needed to rise up. Without self-respect, he believed Black people would depend too heavily on anger, which was unsustainable and could, therefore, not support a lasting revolution. Self-worth and dignity, on the other hand, were stable motivators and, as such, served as a precondition for freedom.²⁵² This kind of thinking connected the Antillean Black Power advocate to an ideological tradition of cultural nationalism, connecting him to prominent Black intellectuals like Marcus Garvey, Malcolm X, and Maulana Karenga – all of whom Fox expressed appreciation for.

Cultural awareness also served another purpose. Besides reconnecting diasporic Africans to their roots, it was also intended to reconnect them to each other. By creating a sense of rootedness and belonging, Fox and other cultural nationalists hoped to restore the ties between estranged Black communities that had been ripped apart by the transatlantic slave trade and colonial policies. "The whites have kept us divided," Fox stated in his interview with Diekmann. "That has been the genius work of the whites. What they always preached was: concur and divide! They have done an excellent job at that – damn well!"²⁵³ This was not even unique to the African diaspora alone, he stated, but could be seen anywhere in the world:

The white countries that have colonized Africa, Asia and South America have always had a politics of setting people of color up against each other. Why have the whites done that? Simply because while those who are black fight each other, while they do not confide in each other, while there is no union amongst people of color themselves, the whites can

²⁵¹ "Entrevista ku Benjamin Fox," 3; Diekmann, 105.

²⁵² "E Proseso di Benjamin Fox," 4; Diekmann, 100, 102.

²⁵³ Diekmann, 101.

continue to dominate and abuse those countries. Unity creates strength! Colonial whites also know this, and it is exactly what they want to prevent.²⁵⁴

Black Power provided an excellent solution to this, according to Fox, because its cultural platform allowed colonized communities to break through these divisive barriers. By convincing diasporic Africans that they were one family, they could conquer these colonial strategies and return to their (imagined) precolonial communities.

It was precisely this vision that convinced Fox to bring the movement home with him. "Black people are finally finding each other, we are finally finding a sense of unity, not just in the States, but around the entire world," he declared.²⁵⁵ It was time for his people, who could benefit massively from these connections, to join in. In line with his cultural nationalist ideas, he wanted to use the movement to instill a deeper sense of awareness in Antilleans of African descent. He also wanted it to help his people recognize and challenge systems of oppression in their own society, and learn to understand them as part of a more global power structure.²⁵⁶ Ultimately, he hoped these skills would prepare Black Antilleans for more structural change and could inspire them to take control over their land from the Dutch and the local White elite. While these goals were tied to political power, however, he wanted to start by building Black Power in the Antilles from the bottom up, taking the same grassroots approach that groups like the Black Forum had done in New York. Such an approach had proven to be "very effective" in his earlier efforts, he argued, and would ultimately lead to "TOTAL LIBERATION for the Afro-Antillean."²⁵⁷

In contrast to the Black Panthers of Curaçao, Fox aspired for his organization to become active in the entire territory of the Netherlands Antilles. Since all islands belonged to the Kingdom of the Netherlands and shared similar histories of African enslavement and Dutch colonialism, he believed that inter-Antillean collaboration would be vital to the success of the movement. This was by itself already ambitious, as

²⁵⁴ "Black Power," *Vitó*, November 15, 1969, 1.

²⁵⁵ Diekmann, 101.

²⁵⁶ "Eskudo di Antiyas," *Vitó*, November 1, 1969, 3; "Entrevista ku Benjamin Fox," 3; Diekmann, 101.

²⁵⁷ "B.S. Fox," 3; "Entrevista ku Benjamin Fox," 3.

few inhabitants actually identified as Antillean; it was much more common for them to associate with their specific islands. To Fox, this was one of the largest barriers that Antilleans had to overcome in order to achieve independence. If they wanted to be liberated, he argued, they first had to cooperate. “Why are you fighting against your own brothers?” he once asked a Curaçaoan audience. “Don’t you see that you share the same battle[?] Don’t you understand that [their] progress will be yours too?”²⁵⁸ Despite this goal, he also understood that such unity could not be built out of thin air; Black Power first had to strengthen Black communities on their respective islands before it could spread across island shores.²⁵⁹ As such, he decided to first concentrate on his own island: Curaçao.

The Antillean Black Power Organization

It took a while before Fox could get his Black Power campaign started after his return to Curaçao on that notorious 30 May. Even though rumors about his involvement had caused quite some commotion in the aftermath of the uprising, he had been unable to use that publicity to his advantage because of his arrest. After four months of incarceration in Koraal Sprecht (minus a successful one-day escape “out of protest against the ridiculousness of the whole system”), Fox was released from prison on 30 September 1969, exactly four months after his arrival.²⁶⁰ And to the disappointment of the Antillean government, he was no longer planning to return to the United States. Both the hostility of the immigration police and the disproportionate prison sentence had been intended to discourage Fox from staying on the island. If anything, however, it had prompted him to stay in Curaçao indefinitely – not necessarily as a response to his unjust treatment, but because his time behind bars had caused him to lose his apartment, all of his belongings, and his job back in New York. Because he had initially only planned to spend a couple of days on the island, he had not made any appropriate arrangements back in the States.²⁶¹ Not that the young

²⁵⁸ “E Lucha Kontra Nos Rumannan,” 3.

²⁵⁹ “Black Power,” November 15, 1969, 1.

²⁶⁰ “B.S. Fox,” 3.

²⁶¹ “B.S. Fox,” 3; Diekmann, 108-109.

activist seemed to mind. Now that there was little reason left for him to return, he could focus on what he had planned to do in Curaçao in the first place: form an Antillean Black Power organization.

In the weeks following his release, Fox began to build his new organization. As was common for Black Power organizations in the United States, he wrote a sixteen-point program which outlined his plans:

1. To teach the history of black people
2. To organize and maintain brotherhood
3. To demand rights for black people
4. To maintain our culture and identity
5. To educate our brothers as much as possible and within our black system
6. To teach the use of economic boycotts
7. To become independent of the structure of 'White Power' by using our economic power
8. To maintain and conserve our language 'Papiamentu' [and] demand that studies will be taught in our language
9. To teach our black brothers how to protect themselves when they get into trouble with white justice
10. To have dignity and respect for our siblings, above all our black sisters
11. To help obtain a strong representation of black people in the island council and parliament
12. We must give black people the capacity to overcome their feelings of being useless
13. We want black people to get preferential treatment when seeking work
14. We want to take a piece of the cake
15. [We] must have a basic income for all our black brothers
16. We must establish Black Power shops, kept by black people, for our brothers.²⁶²

These points can be grouped together into three main objectives: to create a sense of self-respect through awareness of Black history and culture, to become financially independent from the White-dominated economy, and to protect Afro-Antilleans' legal rights. Violence, Fox stressed, had no place in his organization, and should only be seen as a last resort in case "the whites ever obstruct our plans."²⁶³

²⁶² A full overview can be found in "Entrevista ku Benjamin Fox," 3.

²⁶³ "Entrevista ku Benjamin Fox," 3.

Fox put these plans into action through three different routes: first, by reaching out to poor Black communities in the 'ghettos' of Willemstad, second, by writing a *Black Power* column in *Vitó*, and, third, by participating in the mass meetings at the Gomez Square on Saturdays. Unfortunately, very little was documented with regard to the first, though the ABP described community work as the cornerstone of his program.²⁶⁴ This is not exceptional for grassroots activism, which tends to be highly informal. His work in *Vitó* and at the Gomez Square, on the other hand, left more traces. Initially, Fox had announced that he would start publishing a weekly Black Power newspaper that would "teach people with a dark skin color about themselves and to inspire them to honor one another."²⁶⁵ Instead of publishing his own paper, however, Fox ended up joining forces with his contacts at *Vitó*, where he started publishing a *Black Power* column. Both parties profited from this deal: it allowed *Vitó* to further expand on its antiracist criticism, while it provided the ABP with a solid channel to reach its target audience.²⁶⁶ In Fox's first appearance in the journal on 25 October 1969, the Black Power frontman – who by this point was well-known for his reputed involvement in 30 May – was introduced by the editor (likely Brown) as a prominent member of the Curaçaoan revolution, having served his time in prison along some of the most prominent members of the uprising. Stating that Fox's fight for Black Power was virtually the same as theirs, *Vitó* argued it was essential for his voice to be heard.²⁶⁷

And so it happened. Over the following months, Fox's *Black Power* column became an integral part of the journal, and his organization an integral part of the *Vitó* movement. In accordance with the abovementioned plans of the ABP, Fox frequently wrote about Black history and culture in the column, with recurring articles on Black heroes, the beauty of natural hair and African clothing, and the conservation of Afro-Antillean traditions, such as *tambú*, a traditional folk dance with West African origins that had long been forbidden by the Catholic church. Also frequent were stories of

²⁶⁴ Entrevista ku Benjamin Fox," 3.

²⁶⁵ "'Fox Gaat Blad over Black Power uitgeven," 3.

²⁶⁶ "Black Power," *Vitó*, August 20, 1970, 3.

²⁶⁷ "Entrevista ku Benjamin Fox," 3.

discriminatory practices at businesses on the island, including the Hilton Hotel, supermarket Vreugdenhil, and “all businesses that stimulate and promote the [Sinterklaas] holiday.”²⁶⁸ Fox urged his readers to boycott these businesses until they improved their employment policies, customer relations, and marketing campaigns. “The time has come especially here on Curaçao that we realize that ‘black is not only beautiful’, but that ‘black is money’ too,” Fox wrote.²⁶⁹ In contrast to the first two categories, the organization’s campaign for legal rights was less visible in the *Black Power* column. The only exceptions were articles in which the author stressed that Black Power was not opposed to Whites as people, but to the privileges they received in the power structures that they had built for themselves. “All that we as Black Power in the Antilles and all around the world hate are the rights, the protection that whites get that we do not get, especially on our beautiful piece of rock where 90% of the people are black,” he explained.²⁷⁰ Elsewhere, he would share a similar sentiment, writing: “We do not hate whites. We hate the privileges that whites have. We hate the protection that they get in our community, a protection that we do not get.”²⁷¹

Around the same time that he started to publish in *Vitó*, Fox also started attending the weekly meetings at the Dr. Da Costa Gomez Square in Punda, where the Black Panthers of Curaçao also met. Fox first appeared on stage at the gatherings on 1 November 1969, several days after the Antillean Black Power organization was introduced in *Vitó*. It was a long-awaited moment for many of the attendees, who had been eager to hear from the ‘American’ Black Power leader since his arrival on the island but had been unable to meet him because of his incarceration. Even prominent public figures such as René Römer and Alejandro F. ‘Jandi’ Paula came to hear him speak.²⁷² They were not disappointed. Reflecting on Fox’s performance, Römer and Paula stated that Fox was a “fascinating speaker” whose lectures were “nuanced and

²⁶⁸ “San Nikolas ta Muriendo,” *Vitó*, November 22, 1969, 3.

²⁶⁹ “Black Is Not Only Beautiful,” *Vitó*, February 12, 1970, 4.

²⁷⁰ “Black Power,” *Vitó*, November 22, 1969, 3.

²⁷¹ “Entrevista ku Benjamin Fox.”

²⁷² Römer describes his experience in his interview while interviewing the head of the Antillean security agency as part of the 30 May investigations. See “Status Muller, Hoofd Veiligheidsdienst N.A.” Paula, who was also present, agrees with Römer’s judgments of Fox’s performance, suggesting that he was present as well.

factual” while also appealing to the painful experiences shared by nearly all Curaçaoans of African descent.²⁷³ Following the success of his first Gomez Square performance, Fox decided to incorporate these gatherings into his weekly outreach. To him, the meetups provided the perfect opportunity to “fulfill our duty as good Curaçaoans by educating our black brothers.”²⁷⁴ Yet, he did not see this educational effort as a one-way street. Although the Gomez Square meetings allowed the organization to spread its message, Fox also wanted to use them to gather immediate feedback from the audience. This allowed him to gain insight into the concerns of the Curaçaoan population, which helped him shape the agenda of the ABP.²⁷⁵

Both the *Black Power* column in *Vitó* and Fox’s participation in the weekly Gomez Square gatherings helped Fox to spread his message effectively. By the spring of 1970, the ABP had obtained a relatively secure place in the radical scene of the island. What had started as Fox’s personal quest to introduce his people to the ideology of the transnational Black Power movement had now grown into a popular grassroots organization with a reasonable following. Although the media continued to portray Antillean Black Power as a one-man show with Fox at the center, the Black Power leader had – according to his own estimates – gathered a group of around one thousand like-minded Curaçaoans around him who supported his ideas and helped him to realize his plans.²⁷⁶ Fox described these followers as ‘intellectuals’, most of them aged sixteen and forty and living in Willemstad, though he was hoping to extend his outreach to the ‘kunuku’, the rural Black communities in the countryside, in due time.²⁷⁷ His followers were recognizable by their Black Power greetings, their afro

²⁷³ “Statius Muller, Hoofd Veiligheidsdienst N.A.”

²⁷⁴ “Makamba, Keda Afó,” *Vitó*, November 8, 1969, 4; Fox, “Black Power,” November 22, 1969, 3.

²⁷⁵ The dynamics of these discussions are described by Römer in “Statius Muller, Hoofd Veiligheidsdienst N.A.” and by Diekmann, 23.

²⁷⁶ Exact numbers were not registered because the organization did not keep a membership administration, as Fox believed that anyone who accepted the ideology of Black Power automatically became a member, as stated in “Black Power,” November 22, 1969, 3. However, his estimates did roughly coincide with the attendance numbers of ABP activities, which ranged from several hundreds to two thousand. See “Laat Blanken Zelf Hun Zaak Regelen,” *De Tijd*, February 9, 1970, 1; “Vandaag Beslissing Jonckheer,” *De Stem op Zaterdag*, February 7, 1970, 28; “Benoeming Dr. Jonckheer op Losse Schroeven?” *Leeuwarder Courant*, February 2, 1970, 3; American Consul Curaçao, *Periodic Summary I*, 4.

²⁷⁷ Diekmann, 105. ‘Kunuku’ historically refers to the small plantation communities in the rural areas of Curaçao, Aruba, and Bonaire. Today, these communities are still inhabited by the direct descendants of enslaved Africans and their villages are still referred to by that same term.

hair, and their daishikis, following the example of Fox himself.²⁷⁸ He also explicitly stated that he had no intention of involving older generations, who he believed to be a lost cause. “I don’t trust [them],” Fox shared with Diekmann. “They have already been so indoctrinated that there is no sign of contact between us.”²⁷⁹

Claiming a Place in the Movement

Not unexpectedly, the Antillean Black Power organization shared many of its followers with *Vitó* and the recently established Workers’ Liberation Front (Frente Obrero Liberashon, FOL). Formally called the 30th of May Workers’ Liberation Front Party, the FOL was a political party established by Wilson Godett, Amador Nita, and Stanley Brown after Trinta di Mei. Having received thousands of votes in the national elections that year, all three had obtained a seat in the Antillean parliament.²⁸⁰ By the fall of 1969, *Vitó* and the FOL had become practically indistinguishable, as both their leadership and membership overlapped. After the events of 30 May, *Vitó* had turned into an informal medium for the party, regularly discussing the FOL’s political plans and opinions on the party’s behalf. This was not out of the ordinary, since the journal had played a significant role in the uprising and its readership made up a significant chunk of the FOL’s constituency. After his election into office, *Vitó* founder Brown had handed over the position of editor-in-chief to Henriquez while he took responsibility for the ideological direction of the FOL.²⁸¹ These connections blurred the lines between the two groups, leading to them being collectively referred to as the 30 May movement by scholars such as Anderson and Dynes. In the period at hand, the 30 May movement was the most influential anticolonial movement in Curaçao.

Fox stood in close proximity to these groups through his column in *Vitó* and his participation in the Gomez Square gatherings, where the ABP represented the second largest group after the *Vitó*/FOL crowd, recognizable by their caps with the words

²⁷⁸ Anderson and Dynes, 12; “2x Claudette,” *RUKU: Algemeen Cultureel Maandblad voor de Nederlandse Antillen* 2.2-3 (1970), 6, 19; “Brunilda Arduin,” *RUKU: Algemeen Cultureel Maandblad voor de Nederlandse Antillen* 2.4 (1970), 1.

²⁷⁹ Diekmann, 104.

²⁸⁰ Anderson and Dynes, 104.

²⁸¹ Anderson and Dynes, 120.

'Black Power' written on them.²⁸² In an interview with Dutch journalists, Brown even joked that Fox, Henriquez, and himself had collectively gathered so much support from the Gomez Square crowds that they had become "the three most dangerous people of the Antilles."²⁸³ Their shared spaces, similar ideologies, and mutual followers often made it difficult for outsiders to differentiate between the radical groups. Former prime minister and Democratic Party leader Ciro Kroon, for example, mockingly referred to the Gomez Square leaders as 'Stanley Fox'.²⁸⁴ Others, like the American diplomats who were keeping an eye on the local movement, were having similar issues. In a letter to the Department of State, US Consul General John G. Oliver wrote that Fox's organization of "professional 'black Antilleans' [and] 'black power' advocates" was in part responsible for helping the FOL "aggressively assert(...) power and position in the Antilles."²⁸⁵ Likewise, the CIA feared that Fox was using his connections to the party "to achiev[e] control of the government."²⁸⁶ According to Fox himself, however, these kinds of claims could not be further from the truth. Although his organization campaigned for more Black representation in local government and decolonization, he personally had no intention of becoming involved in politics, as he had already stated many times over in his writings and speeches.²⁸⁷ "Black Power (...)

²⁸² "Kabinet-Petronia is Zijn Volgzame Politie Kwijt," *Leeuwarder Courant*, January 28, 1970, 5; Diekmann, 23.

²⁸³ Wim Kroese and Ron Govaars, "Stanley Brown de Castro van Curaçao," *De Telegraaf*, January 3, 1970, 5.

²⁸⁴ "C. Kroon-Antwoord aan Black Power," 3; Diekmann, 111.

²⁸⁵ American Consul Curaçao, *FY 1972 CASP*, December 23, 1969, page 3, Central Foreign Policy Files, 1967-1969, Box 2364, Pol 19 NETH ANT, General Records of the Department of State, Record Group 59, National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD, United States.

²⁸⁶ CIA, "Black Radicalism in the Caribbean – Another Look."

²⁸⁷ Perhaps Fox's most successful protest was against the appointment of Efraïn Jonckheer as the country's new Governor. Fox led hundreds of Antilleans in his protest against Jonckheer's nomination and successfully encouraged the government in The Hague to retract their nomination. Similar protests were organized by Brown. The success of their actions caused quite a stir in Antillean politics, especially when the Democratic Party decided to organize a counterprotest. For more information, see "Telegrammen van Vito en Black Power," *Amigoe di Curaçao*, February 7, 1970, 3; "C. Kroon-Antwoord aan Black Power," *Amigoe di Curaçao*, February 9, 1970, 3; "Organisaties Willen Jonckheer Niet als Goeverneur," *De Vrije Stem*, February 8, 1970, 4; "Laat Blanken Zelf hun Zaak Regelen," 1; "Vandaag Beslissing Jonckheer," 28; Diekmann, 111.

works with everyday problems. We will vote for whoever is closest to us in [our] fight.”²⁸⁸

But these outside observers misunderstood more than Black Power’s political ambitions (or rather the lack thereof) alone; they also misjudged the uniformity of the anticolonial movement. Although *Vitó*, the FOL, and Black Power publicly underscored their alliances in the fight for Afro-Antillean liberation, their ideologies and methods had led to a number of internal conflicts. To those who were involved in the movement, these intellectual clashes were clearly visible, as discussions between the groups at the Gomez Square could be quite heated and last for hours.²⁸⁹ Though many attendees participated in these debates, the majority of conflicts actually revolved around the groups’ leaders: Fox and Brown. Fox, as this chapter shows, was an avid proponent of cultural nationalism and believed that a political revolution could only follow from gradual community activism. Although Brown had welcomed this message at first, the former Black Panther leader was growing increasingly dissatisfied with Fox’s intellectual stances. In line with the revolutionary ideology of the Black Panther Party, he believed that anticapitalism was imperative to anti-racism and that both had to be resolved through revolutionary politics. He saw Fox’s emphasis on racial pride and heritage as a distraction from the necessary structural change that he envisioned for the island. In a way, then, tensions between the Black Power groups of Curaçao mirrored those of the movement in the United States.

These intellectual differences understandably led to some confusion among their mutual followers, especially since the *Black Power* column had been introduced as a replacement for “Black Panthers na Korsow” and on the surface seemed to share the same goal. Fox decided to clarify the differences between the two in his column in December 1969. Repeating his earlier definition of Black Power, he stated that: “Black Power (...) arms people with dignity and respect. (...) We believe in loving our black brothers and protecting them all whenever [and] however.”²⁹⁰ In contrast, he described the Black Panther Party as an aggressive paramilitary organization that

²⁸⁸ “Entrevista ku Benjamin Fox,” 3.

²⁸⁹ “Statius Muller, Hoofd Veiligheidsdienst N.A.”

²⁹⁰ “Black Power,” *Vitó*, December 13, 1969, 3.

“knows no other way of speaking than with a revolver.”²⁹¹ He also stated that the Black Panthers were anti-White and Black Power was not, while the Black Panther Party was actually one of the few radical African American organizations that *did* collaborate with White allies (in contrast to most Black Power organizations).²⁹² This piece led to a massive debate between Fox and the leaders of the Black Panthers of Curaçao at the next Gomez Square meeting.²⁹³

Fox’s criticism of the Black Panthers did not at first have any consequences for his column in *Vitó*. His cultural nationalist ideas continued to be published and neither the journal nor its editors made any public statements to refute his work. Behind the scenes, however, the relationship between Fox and Brown became tense. Fox was confident that the Afro-Curaçaoan population needed self-confidence and self-determination more than anything else. Self-determination, in his view, also meant using the free market to their advantage. Angel Salsbach, who had been a *Vitó* editor for years, agreed. Henriquez, the other editor, absolutely did not. As she wrote to fellow Black Panther supporters in the Netherlands, Brown and herself believed it was much more pertinent to focus on “the fight of the laborer and the global revolution against capitalism.”²⁹⁴ Brown also accused the ABP of being discriminatory, interpreting its message of “black is beautiful, black is smart, [and] black is good” as reverse racism, despite having promoted the same message in the Black Panther column several months earlier.²⁹⁵ Fox denied this and in turn accused Brown of only wanting to “publish in line with the Black Panthers because – in his words – ‘Black Panther is trendy.’”²⁹⁶ After several months of conflict, Fox decided that their

²⁹¹ “Black Power,” December 13, 1969, 3; Diekmann, 23.

²⁹² “Black Power,” December 13, 1969, 3. Fox was undeniably biased in his portrayal of the Panthers, which largely corresponded to the harmful framing of the party in mainstream media. It is unclear whether he purposely tried to reinforce this image to the advantage of Black Power or if he genuinely believed this depiction to be accurate. Brown believed the latter to be the case and, in retrospect, argued that Fox “only kn[ew] what was written in the papers.” See Brown in *Curaçao, 30 Mei 1969*, 18.

²⁹³ Diekmann, 23.

²⁹⁴ Solidariteitscomité Black Panther Party, *Black Panther Nieuwsbulletin*, March 1970, International Institute for Social History, Amsterdam, the Netherlands, ZK 72913 (1970): 1-4.

²⁹⁵ Brown in *Curaçao, 30 Mei 1969*, 18; Diekmann, 114; “Black Power,” *Vitó*, August 20, 1970, 3.

²⁹⁶ Diekmann, 114.

ideological differences on “the future social structure and evolution of the people of the [Netherlands Antilles]” were irreconcilable. He handed in his resignation to *Vitó* on 3 March 1970.²⁹⁷

Now that Fox had left *Vitó*, Brown was free to redirect the Black Power column however he preferred. In a public attack on Fox, he wrote:

Black Power is a mentality, a state of mind, that has nothing to do with and has absolutely no relation to people's color. (...) Black Power is a fight against poverty, abuse and exploitation, be it white on black or black on black. (...) The fight of Black Power is principally against this rotten system, the economic system that allows abuse to be committed. And if in our white system a black person is synonymous for a poor person, then it is not strange that the fight in which black people demand their recognition is also a fight against poverty, misery and exploitation.²⁹⁸

Shifting the focus back from cultural nationalism to revolutionary nationalism, the Black Power column in the following edition of *Vitó* also reconsidered the differences between Black Power and the Black Panthers, contrasting Fox's earlier comparison of the two. Instead of offering his own perspective on the matter, however, *Vitó* published a translation of Black Panther leader Eldridge Cleaver's infamous open letter to Black Power leader Stokely Carmichael, in which he criticized the latter for his unwillingness to collaborate with White supporters and for his support of Black capitalism.²⁹⁹ This letter was shared globally by allies of the Black Panthers who were dealing with similar local confusion about the differences between the Black Panthers and Carmichael's Black Power, including the Dutch Black Panther committee discussed in the next chapter.

Vitó's distribution of Cleaver's letter to Carmichael was not solely meant to pull the attention of its readership back to the Black Panthers, but also served as an

²⁹⁷ Letter from Benjamin S. Fox to *Vitó*, March 3, 1970, *Vito-artikelen, Archief, 1969-1971, N.B. Correspondentie e.a.*, Microfilm Collectie Brown, Box 3, Section 121, Archivo Nashonal, Willemstad, Curaçao. This confirms what he told Diekmann later, sharing that he “broke things off” with Brown because of their ideological differences. Many years later, however, Brown would tell Oostindie that he “kicked him out of *Vitó*” after a personal conflict. While it is impossible to know exactly what went down, the narrative presented here follows the archive.

²⁹⁸ “Black Power,” *Vitó*, March 21, 1970, 3.

²⁹⁹ “Black Panthers y Black Power,” *Vitó*, April 4, 1970, 3. This letter was most likely translated from the Dutch translation, which was published by the Black Panther Solidarity Committee in their February 1970 newsletter and sent to *Vitó* in March 1970.

explanation of the ideological differences between Brown and Fox. By choosing to publish this specific text, Brown aligned his own stance (as presented in the previous issue of *Vitó*) to that of Cleaver, while likening Fox's vision on Black Power to that of Carmichael, though of course Fox would never receive the opportunity to respond to these allegations. The publication of this letter was followed by an official statement on Fox's departure from the paper several months later. "Fox's racism (...) did not correspond with our anti-capitalist way of thinking," the journal confirmed. "The socialist movement of black people let us know that we must choose between Fox's racist ideology or theirs. We chose to side with the socialist fight of the Black Panthers."³⁰⁰ While this allowed Brown to shift focus back to anticapitalism, the attack on Fox also prompted Salsbach, as well as hundreds of their followers, to leave *Vitó*, leaving only himself and Henriquez on board.³⁰¹ Although the journal itself was published for another year, neither the Black Panthers nor Black Power were ever discussed again.

From Black Power to 'Self Power'

After Fox had distanced himself from *Vitó*, the ABP carried on as usual. The members of the organization still attended the Gomez Square gatherings, where Fox and his followers continued their educational program. Meanwhile, a special committee was established to gather funds for a campaign in the countryside, where Fox and his companions planned to drive around in a sound wagon to spread their ideas.³⁰² Together with Salsbach, Fox also spoke at the summer course of the Antillean Institute for Social Sciences in Willemstad, where they discussed the importance of historical education and mentality change.³⁰³ On top of that, the ABP co-organized the 175th anniversary of the Curaçaoan Slave Revolt, joining *Vitó* and a number of youth organizations in declaring 1970 the Year of Tula and, consequently, the Year of Cultural Revolution.³⁰⁴ Fox also joined the Advisory Board of the Tula Foundation,

³⁰⁰ "Black Power," August 20, 1970, 3.

³⁰¹ Brown in *Curaçao*, 30 Mei 1969, 18.

³⁰² Diekmann, 105.

³⁰³ "Zomercursus Sociale Wetenschappen 1970," *Amigoe di Curaçao*, January 10, 1970, 3.

³⁰⁴ "Anja 1970, Anja di Tula," *Vitó*, March 14, 1970, 4.

which lobbied for the construction of a monument for the leaders of the uprising (which would eventually be established in 1998).³⁰⁵

Fox's work also expanded beyond the Caribbean. For the first time since his high school graduation eleven years earlier, the ABP leader traveled to the Netherlands. Although he made the trip for personal reasons, he wrote that he also wanted to use his time in the metropole to study "the system that is used to degrade us to second class citizens."³⁰⁶ He received funding for his 'European mission' from the *Haagsche Courant* in exchange for an exclusive interview, in which he described the relationship between the Netherlands and its Caribbean territories as "dirty, very dirty" and denounced the Dutch government's support for South African apartheid as a form of global racism. Emphasizing his solidarity with its indigenous inhabitants, he asked: "What does the Netherlands do for my black brothers in South Africa, my brothers, who share the same ancestors as me, Benjamin Fox, the man who has a Dutch passport in his pocket?"³⁰⁷ He raised similar issues elsewhere in the country, speaking about Black Power to students and young progressives in Leiden, Amsterdam, Groningen, and Tilburg.³⁰⁸ As could be expected, his speaking engagements did alarm the Dutch security services – or so Fox himself attested. Sharing with a Dutch reporter that he was constantly tailed by security officers, he joked: "I now see these kinds of people as my personal bodyguards."³⁰⁹

In a way, Fox's tour through the Netherlands symbolized an important moment in his activism. He had been able to criticize the colonial system of the Kingdom at the heart of the problem, and was applauded for doing so by hundreds of Dutch citizens. At home, his work was lauded by a number of prominent Antilleans, including poet

³⁰⁵ "Stichting: Voor Gebouw, Standbeeld en Bezienswaardigheidsplek," *Amigoe di Curaçao*, June 10, 1970, 9.

³⁰⁶ "Benjamin Fox Bestudeert Onderdrukkingssysteem," 4; J. Kuijk, 11.

³⁰⁷ "Benjamin Fox Bestudeert Onderdrukkingssysteem," 4.

³⁰⁸ Letter from George Soliana to Stanley Brown, April 20, 1970, *Vito-artikelen, Archief, 1969-1971, N.B. Correspondentie e.a.*, Microfilm Collectie Brown, Box 3, Section 121, Archivo Nashonal, Willemstad, Curaçao; J. Kuijk, "Benjamin Fox, een Curaçaose Kabouter," *Trouw*, July 10, 1971, 11; "Zaak B.F. Uitgesteld," *Amigoe di Curaçao*, May 5, 1970, 3; "E Proseso di Benjamin Fox," 38.

³⁰⁹ "Benjamin Fox Bestudeert Onderdrukkingssysteem," 4. Fox also shared that he was being followed by the security services of Curaçao in Wim Kroese and Ron Govaars, "Stanley Brown de Castro van Curaçao," *De Telegraaf*, January 3, 1970, 5.

Boeli van Leeuwen, Minister Leo Chance of the Windward Islands People's Movement, and a group of local bishops.³¹⁰ Yet, Fox himself was starting to grow tired of the hurdles along the way. His conflict with Brown had been part of this. But he also began to feel like the theatrics of the 30 May movement - particularly in the context of the Gomez Square meetings - were distracting Afro-Antilleans from the things that truly mattered, explaining:

There was a lot of attention [for Black Power] from the people, they wanted to know what all of this was really about. I made sure that their interest was at least sparked. But it turned out that it had just become showbusiness to them, just a distraction. I am now starting to regret it. I find it too serious an issue to make a show out of it.³¹¹

On Saturdays, thousands of Afro-Antilleans turned up to listen to him and his companions. They cheered him on and celebrated his ideas. But they never truly committed to the organization. Fox personally attributed this to the wide diversity of revolutionary groups and organizations on the island, which continuously had to compete for the relatively small pool of radicals. Rather than finding a sense of unity in Black Power, different groups were taking ideas from the ABP and enriched their own platforms with them - rather than joining the Black Power movement themselves. This, of course, completely countered the ABP's intentions and caused new rifts in Curaçao's booming anticolonial scene.³¹²

At the same time, Fox also encountered much resistance from those outside of the 30 May movement. For him, part of this had to do with Curaçaoans' rejection of the term 'Black'. In contrast to the United States, where racialization had historically been relatively black-and-white (both literally and figuratively), Antillean categories of race were more fluid. Many Antilleans of mixed heritage did not speak about race at all, but when they did would refer to themselves as 'Colored' or 'Brown' rather than 'Black'. Fox, whose thinking was heavily influenced by the racial discourse of the United States,

³¹⁰ "Wonden van Dertig Mei zijn nog niet Geheeld," *Leeuwarder Courant*, April 20, 1970, 5; Cover, *Amigoe di Curaçao*, January 5, 1970, 1; "Priesters Tegen Bisschoppen," *De Vrije Stem*, October 4, 1969, 2; "Demonstratie Tijdens Bisschoppensynode," *Leeuwarder Courant*, Oktober 2, 1969, 2; "Isolotto-rebellen in Actie Tegen Romeinse Synode," *Amigoe di Curaçao*, September 30, 1969, 8.

³¹¹ Diekmann, 104. He expressed similar concerns in "Benjamin Fox Bestudeert Onderdrukkingssysteem," 4.

³¹² Diekmann, 104.

feared that such color distinctions would prevent Afro-Antilleans from reaching racial solidarity. He clarified: "When we talk about the Black man, we do not talk about Brown, Middle Brown, or Dark Colored. We talk about the Afro-Antillean," meaning anyone with any African heritage.³¹³ He wanted Afro-Antilleans to understand that they had all suffered under the same systems of White superiority, regardless of the complexions of their skins, and that even the most privileged people of color would still benefit from a Black revolution.³¹⁴

But it was not just the interpretation of Blackness that created a barrier. It was also the understanding of what was meant by 'power'. Fox himself was highly consistent in how he defined it. From his very first interview in *Vitó* in September 1969, he persistently explained power as the right to self-determination, built on full self-awareness and self-respect as a form of decolonization. In doing so, the ABP foreman distanced himself from revolutionary violence; self-love was revolutionary enough. Yet somehow this message never really got through to popular discourse on his organization. This was due in large part to the refusal of government officials and (inter)national media to let go of the idea that Black Power was fueled by hate. They often connected Fox's organization to Black Power disturbances in the United States and wider Caribbean and referred to his followers as 'troublemakers', 'rebels', and 'harmful agitators'.³¹⁵ Whether this came from a place of genuine concern or because they consciously tried to prevent it from gaining a more substantial following, this rhetoric created a taboo around Black Power, which made the average Afro-Antillean weary of the movement. This became a significant obstacle for Fox, who had trouble breaking through these preconceptions. "Basically, they are against me because they think I'm a hate mother," Fox explained. "[But] I don't see why I should then travel around the island to prove to them whether or not I'm a hate-mother. I don't have time to educate them; I only have the time to educate my own people and to rid them of that terrible inferiority complex."³¹⁶

³¹³ "Pakiko Black Power," *Vitó*, January 24, 1970, 3.

³¹⁴ "E Lucha Kontra nos Rumannan," *Vitó*, November 1, 1969, 3.

³¹⁵ "Caribisch Gebied Word teen Enorme Vulkaan," *Leeuwarder Courant*, April 24, 1970, 4; "De Opstand op Trinidad Brand Slaat over naar Caribbean," *De Vrije Stem*, April 23, 1970, 1; "Kabinet-Petronia is Zijn Volgzame Politie Kwijt," 5; Diekmann, 101.

³¹⁶ Diekmann, 104.

In *RUKU*, an Antillean journal published in the Netherlands that openly supported Antillean Black Power, Curaçaoan author and linguist Frank Martinus Arion also offered another explanation for why he thought Black Power was not landing on the island. Arion believed the issue was a matter of translation, rather than a lack of understanding. In both Dutch and Papiamentu, power could be translated in two ways: ‘macht’ in Dutch or ‘poder’ in Papiamentu, and ‘kracht’ in Dutch or ‘forza’ in Papiamentu. The former referred to power in the sense of political control, influence, and domination, while the latter lay closer in meaning to strength, force, and courage. In reading about Black Power in the region, Arion had observed that much of Antillean resistance against the movement stemmed from their fear of the former; fear that Black people would want to overthrow the Antillean government to gain control over the islands. Instead, the editor argued, Black Power had to be interpreted along the lines of ‘horsepower’ and ‘manpower’, which indicated strength rather than authority. “After all, nobody can be against negro people powerfully dedicating themselves to society; which does not necessarily mean that they want to dominate,” Arion concluded.³¹⁷

At the same time, Fox was also receiving criticism from those closer to him on the political spectrum: nationalists. Just as Trinta di Mei had created a new space for Black radicalism on Curaçao, the uprising had boosted the nationalist movement that had emerged after the institution of the 1954 Charter. One of the movements that emerged from this boost was *di-nos-e-ta*, described in the introduction to this dissertation. Not unexpectedly, criticism from the nationalist movement primarily concerned Fox’s internationalism. As his writings, speeches, and interviews showed, the Antillean Black Power leader almost routinely underscored his participation in the movement in the United States and his connections to activists in New York and beyond. Likewise, those who described Fox in interviews and reports regularly accentuated his American(ized) mannerisms and speech to build his credibility as an ‘authentic’ Black Power activist. To give an example, journalists frequently cited Fox in English, including Black Power concepts like “self-determination” and “Black is Beautiful” as well as more casual expressions like “hey man” and “God knows what,

³¹⁷ “Uncle-Tomisme Viert Hoogtij in het Caribisch Gebied,” *RUKU: Algemeen Cultureel Maandblad voor de Nederlandse Antillen* 2.4 (1970), 3.

man.”³¹⁸ Although these Americanisms were persuasive tools in convincing locals that Fox was a ‘legitimate’ Black Power activist, they also isolated him and his ideas from the already existing Antillean anticolonial scene. Arguing that Fox’s ideas were derived from particular American experiences and standards, many of his critics rejected the local Black Power organization as import, sometimes even fearing that Black Power would bring a new version of American imperialism (that is, African American imperialism) to their country.³¹⁹

Rejection of Black Power as a foreign movement was especially prevalent on the island of Aruba, where a nationalist movement not only fought for independence from the Netherlands but also from the Netherlands Antilles.³²⁰ One of the most radical groups that worked towards this goal was the Commission for Aruban Separation (Comision Pro-Separacion Aruba). Its president, Holmo Henriquez, fiercely opposed any kind of ‘imported’ ideology, which included that of the Black Power movement. “Everyone who loves this piece of rock should keep their eyes wide open to the infiltration of these elements,” he told fellow Arubans in his new year’s message, warning them that their island might end up in foreign hands if they allowed these ideas to thrive at home.³²¹ Pointing the finger at Black Power in particular, Henriquez exclaimed:

We want neither Black Power nor white Power. What we want is Arubian Power, Arubans who represent and govern Aruba – that is our pride, that is our responsibility and freedom, that is the inner worth of our people, that is our right and our wish, which everyone in the world must respect, including the central government [of the Netherlands Antilles] and including the Dutch government.³²²

³¹⁸ “Eskudo di Antiyas,” 3; Pakiko Black Power,” 3; “Pelea di Gai,” *Vitó*, February 28, 1970, 3; “Entrevista ku Benjamin Fox,” 3.

³¹⁹ 30 Mei 1969: *Rapport van de Commissie*, 172; American Consul Curaçao, *FY 1973 CASP*, November 30, 1970, page 4-6, Subject Numeric Files, 1970-1973, Box 2499, Pol NETH-ANT-US, General Records of the Department of State, Record Group 59, National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD, United States; Kuijk, “Rapport van een Razernij,” 5; J. Kuijk, “Benjamin Fox, een Curaçaose Kabouter,” *Trouw*, July 10, 1971, 11.

³²⁰ For a history of Aruban nationalism, see Alofs and Merckies, *Ken ta Arubiano?*

³²¹ “Pro Separacion Wij Willen Arubian Power,” *Amigoe di Curaçao*, January 8, 1970, 4.

³²² “Pro Separacion,” 4. Parts of this quote are also shared in “Aruba Luidt Nieuwjaar in met Vuurwerk en Klokgelei,” *Amigoe di Curaçao*, January 2, 1970, 5.

This sentiment was shared by other Arubans too, including those of the People's Electoral Movement (Movimiento Electoral di Pueblo, MEP).³²³ While there was some support for Black Power on the island, as there were on the island of St. Martin, these attitudes overruled.³²⁴ This must have been quite a disappointment to Fox, who had initially intended for the ABP to become active throughout the Netherlands Antilles but, in reality, never managed to find ground outside of Curaçao.

By the summer of 1970, Fox had had enough of the continuous sensationalization, misinterpretation, and criticism of the movement. Disillusioned with the possibilities of starting a Black revolution, he decided to leave Willemstad to settle in Boca Samí, a small fishing village three miles west of the capital. Here, he took over the chairmanship of the local community center, where he continued to organize Afrocentric cultural events but maintained a strict no-politics policy.³²⁵ Instead of Black Power, Fox now preferred to speak of Self Power, which aimed “to make people conscious of their personal possibilities [by] teaching them to cut through societal and political apathy with pride and confidence.”³²⁶ In practice, his new ideology differed little from his former, except it now encouraged all groups in society – regardless of their race – to prioritize self-respect and self-determination. “The ultimate goal is a harmonious society, in which there are no more conflicts,” he concluded.³²⁷ How exactly Fox applied this new ideology to his work at the Boca Sami community center is unclear, as he disappeared from the public eye as soon as he left. He did stay in Curaçao, eventually starting a small business in black coral sales in the same tourism

³²³ American Consul Curaçao, *Visit to Aruba During the Dutch Ambassadors' Conference*, January 25, 1971, page 2, Subject Numeric Files, 1970-1973, Box 2499, Pol 7 NETH-US, General Records of the Department of State, Record Group 59, National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD, United States; “Op Aruba Geen Communisme of Black Power,” *Amigoe di Curaçao*, May 15, 1975, 5.

³²⁴ Aruban Black Power groups were mentioned in “Pro Separacion,” 4, and “Tivoli-Juwelen Goed voor Eerste Prijzen,” *Amigoe di Curaçao*, February 22, 1971, 5. The latter discusses a Black Power group that participated in the carnival parade in Oranjestad, where they had their own Black Power float and pan-African flags. Minor Black Power incidents in St. Martin are discussed in “Geruchten over Onlusten op St. Maarten,” *Amigoe di Curaçao*, March 17, 1970, 1, and “Incident bij Receptie voor Gouverneur,” *Amigoe di Curaçao*, October 30, 1970, 3.

³²⁵ J. Kuijk, 11; “Bonte Avond bc Boca Sami,” *Amigoe di Curaçao*, November 18, 1970, 3; “Absoluut Geen Politiek in Buurtcentrum-Werk,” *Amigoe di Curaçao*, December 1, 1970, 9. Fox’s explicit distancing from politics is also mentioned in Oostindie, In *Curaçao*, 30 Mei 1969, 8.

³²⁶ Kuijk, 11.

³²⁷ Kuijk, 11; “Fox: Geen Black Power, Maar Self Power,” *Amigoe di Curaçao*, July 24, 1971, 5.

industry that he had once fiercely opposed.³²⁸ It seems he never moved back to the United States.

The introduction to this chapter posed the question how the 30 May uprising gave rise to Black Power in the Netherlands Antilles. Focusing on the activism of Fox and his Antillean Black Power organization, it has shown that the revolutionary networks responsible for the uprising played a significant role in facilitating his activism, while the anticolonial spirit awakened by Trinta di Mei strengthened its campaign for Black liberation. In fact, it is difficult to imagine what Antillean Black Power might have looked like without the uprising. While Fox had already been thinking about establishing a Black Power organization in Curaçao for several years, Trinta di Mei made clear that racial discrimination on the island could no longer be ignored and that Afro-Antilleans were willing to fight for their rights. It was the perfect time for Fox to return to the island and put his plans into action. As soon as he arrived, the leaders of the uprising welcomed him with open arms, granting him access to their spaces and promoting his ideas among their own following. Fox's ABP came to depend heavily on these platforms and networks, using *Vitó* as its main channel for communication and the Gomez Square for its outreach. In some ways, the Black Power organization could pick up right where the Black Panthers of Curaçao had left off, even if its ideas were slightly different.

The ABP's dependence on the 30 May movement would eventually prove to be both a blessing and a curse. While its connections to *Vitó* allowed the organization to grow into the second largest group in the island's anticolonial movement within months after Fox's arrival, they also left the group without any solid foundation after Fox's falling out with Brown. Without a place to share his ideas, and frustrated with the constant drama and miscommunication in the movement, Fox soon abandoned his organization. Perhaps unexpectedly, their falling out also proved to be catastrophic for the 30 May movement itself, as Black Power had become an essential part of its platform. As Brown explained later, the clash "led to a massive rupture in the movement," as many of their mutual followers decided to take Fox's side.³²⁹ The

³²⁸ "De Recreatie op Curaçao is Exclusief," *De Waarheid*, October 11, 1975, 4.

³²⁹ Brown in *Curaçao, 30 Mei 1969*, 18.

movement was further weakened when Brown left the FOL several months later over another ideological conflict.³³⁰ In a way, then, the fall of Antillean Black Power symbolized the beginning of the end of the 30 May movement – though of course more factors and developments played a role in its demise.

The conflict between Brown and Fox is particularly interesting in the context of this dissertation, as it shows the variety of Black Power activism that could exist even on one small island. Although the ‘why’ was the same for the BPC and the ABP, with both being motivated by the promise of a new Black belonging, the ‘how’ was so radically different that it became impossible for them to work towards this goal together. This shows that understandings of Black Power did not only depend on the local environment in which these kinds of groups emerged, but also with the personal convictions, transnational connections, and opportunities of their respective leaders. For Brown, who had already been sympathetic to Marxism before he learned about the Black Power movement, it was a logical choice to adopt the revolutionary nationalism of the Black Panther Party. For Fox, who learned about the movement while living in New York, where Black resistance was deeply rooted in cultural nationalism, it made more sense to prioritize the revolution of the mind. Black Power in Curaçao thus confirms what Quinn has written previously about the heterogeneity of Caribbean Black Power.³³¹

Many who have studied the 30 May uprising and broader anticolonial movement have reflected on the positive effects it had on racial discourse and acceptance in Curaçao. Already in 1975, for example, William A. Anderson and Russell R. Dynes wrote:

The May Movement was widely interpreted in Curacao as a significant achievement or victory for the black masses. As a result, some persons acquired a new sense of racial identity and pride. Persons who previously had been hesitant about discussing their African ancestry publicly took note of it after May 30. For some Antilleans who had not previously participated in the May Movement, the reference to their racial affinity with those who had was their way of belatedly joining the movement.³³²

³³⁰ Anderson and Dynes, 120.

³³¹ Quinn, 26, as discussed on page 15.

³³² Anderson and Dynes, 114.

Similar things are written by Oostindie in his chapter on Black Power. “Where Dutch, or Western culture in general, had been regarded as normative,” he writes, “Curaçaoan culture now lost the stigma of interiority.”³³³ Dalhuisen et. al. even speak of a cultural ‘renaissance’ after the uprising, as “the feeling of self-worth among the black and colored population increased drastically after the 30th of May.”³³⁴

Looking at the history presented in this chapter, however, it seems unfair to ascribe these developments to the 30 May movement without acknowledging Fox’s role in it. Though Afro-Curaçaoan heritage had already made a comeback in the previous years, it was Fox’s campaign for Black Power that truly boosted the call for cultural awareness in the period after the uprising, thanks in part to the attention he got for his reputed role in the uprising. Through his writings in *Vitó*, Fox encouraged thousands of readers to embrace their African heritage and identity, promoting not only Afro-Curaçaoan but also ‘African’ culture. Surely he was not the only one to talk about these things, but by teaching Curaçaoans about African history and heritage, promoting Black beauty, and introducing them to fashions like the daishiki, he did make an undeniable contribution to cultural debates of the island.

While the ABP never managed to bring ‘total liberation’ to the Afro-Antillean population, it thus does seem like the Black Power leader left a lasting mark on the anticolonial movement and, beyond that, even mainstream culture. As one woman later told Oostindie, the ideas Black Power brought over from the United States were revolutionary to an entire generation of Black women, who “started appreciating themselves like they never had before.”³³⁵ Over the course of only one year, the ABP helped them to break through some of the most persistent legacies of Dutch colonialism, making a notable contribution to the decolonization of Antillean culture. According to Anderson and Dynes, such an accomplishment, in combination with the political achievements of the FOL, “would have made black power movements in the United States and elsewhere somewhat envious.”³³⁶

³³³ Oostindie, “Black Power,” 256; “Woedend Vuur,” 28-29.

³³⁴ Dalhuisen, 143.

³³⁵ This person was anonymized for privacy reasons. The interview is part of the Collectie 30 Mei 1969 (KITLV), UBL474, Special Collections, Leiden University, Leiden, the Netherlands.

³³⁶ Anderson and Dynes, 145.