14th ANNUAL SETTLEMENT FALL CONFERENCE

SPEECH ON COMMUNITY CONTROL OF COMMUNITY SERVICES
The theme on which I have been asked to speak today is particularly appropriate. The issue of community control, particularly the issue of control of black communities by black people, is one of the most pressing and one of the most fascinating questions of democracy our country has ever faced.

I have lived in Roxbury almost all of my life. I attended the public schools in Boston and the public college in Boston — formerly called State Teachers College. In those years of learning, I studied, as did most of you, the process of democratic decision-making upon which this country was based. I learned about the importance of the vote and how much the right to vote is actually more than a right. It is a duty and a responsibility. Through the system of one man — one vote, the richest and the poorest, the most cultured and the least cultured are supposed to become as one — equal in power and equal in importance.

But during these years — the years that I attended the public schools which taught me about the democratic system — during these years I lived in Roxbury. And it has become increasingly apparent to me since I left the halls of formal education, that the democratic system has somehow malfunctioned in this country.

And when I look at the schools in Roxbury; when I look at the streets in Roxbury; when I look at the alleys in Roxbury; when I look at the housing in Roxbury; when I look at the public services in Roxbury; when I see the men — young and old — who are unemployed in Roxbury — then it is difficult for me to justify these conditions as against the promises of the democratic system and the lessons I learned about the importance of participating in the democratic system.
I am a black woman; and when I look at my city, I look at it through the eyes of a black woman. And when I attempt to analyze the success or failure of the democratic system in our country, I make that analysis through the eyes of a black person.

There are no black people on the Boston School Committee. There never have been. It is likely that there will not be for a long time to come. There are no black people on the Boston City Council. And unless Tom Atkins gets the kind of mass support he needs in this city, it is not likely that there will be for a long time to come. There never has been a black Mayor. There is no black person of any consequence in the government of my city. None of the Department heads are black. None of the ranking officials of major city departments are black. My people --- black people --- are almost totally unrepresented in the councils of power in this city. Yet, we are nearly 15 percent of the population. What has happened to our democratic process?

The results of this lack of representation --- and the lack of influence over conditions in the black community --- are obvious for all to see. The littered streets; the lousy schools; the racist police and welfare departments; etc., etc., etc.

It is now clear to me that the major reason for the deteriorating, frustrating condition of the black community of Boston has been and remains the lack of local control --- control within the community --- over the basic institutions --- public and private --- that exist within our community.

If the phrase "No Taxation without Representation" was true and legitimate in this city little less than 200 years ago, how much truer must it be today.
White people who run this city do not care about black people. Their racism, however, does not concern me. What concerns me is that they --- with that racism --- are teaching our children, patrolling our streets, counseling our welfare mothers.

Roxbury is a colonized area. Its turf is entirely controlled from without. It is no more reasonable to expect an oppressed black people in Roxbury to stand for this oppression and colonization and exploitation than it is to expect colonized people in Africa to put up with it. When those kids out on the streets last June rebelled against white shop owners, they were just as heroic and as defiant as the freedom fighters and the revolutionaries in emerging African nations. America salutes the emergence of oppressed peoples in Africa, Asia and Latin America. America should afford the same heroic praise to the freedom fighters who are rebelling against colonialism right in our own country.

When I salute those youngsters who revolted in Roxbury and in Detroit and in Newark last summer, I am also aware that what we really want in the black community is for it to become a decent, peaceful, soulful place for black people to live. We do not want the kind of violence of last summer, if it can possibly be avoided. We do not want our homes and the homes of our families, friends and neighbors to be burned to the ground. No sane man would ask for this thing for his neighborhood. It is imperative that black adults seek radical solutions now so that in coming summers, conditions will be better and rebellions will not be necessary. I agree with Stokeley Carmichael when he says, as he said on his last trip to Roxbury --- "We must turn our ghettos into communities of love for each other." That is the responsibility of black adults, working
with our young people — to turn our ghettos which our young people and adults cannot abide much longer, into communities of love for each other.

It is my opinion that white people cannot accomplish this — not even liberal white people. It is my opinion that the internal development of black communities must be sponsored and conducted by black people. When whites participate it must be on a subsidiary basis — with financial, technical and organizational skills — no control, no invited positions on boards of directors, no influence over planning or programming. Whites can add their resources to this process of internal development, but blacks must write the agenda.

I intend to spend some time, during my talk with you, discussing three specific programs in which Operation Exodus is involved, all of which are leading toward the development of internal power in the black community. But before I do, I have a feeling that it may be necessary to go just a little bit deeper into this issue of local or community control. It is my opinion that much too much has been made of this issue in the press and other places. Operation Exodus last September was called a "separatist" organization by columnist Robert Levey because we have begun to focus to a much greater extent on improving conditions of the schools in Roxbury. What we in the black community in Boston are saying is that government — democratic government — has gotten too far away from one specific interest group in this city. That interest group is black people. Now there is nothing unusual in our feeling this or in our saying this. Last year, the voters of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts passed what was called the "Home Rule Amendment" to the state
constitution. Now this amendment was passed on a referendum of all the voters in the Commonwealth. It stated loudly and clearly that the voters in the 351 cities and towns in Massachusetts feel that a number of functions served by the state are really local issues and should be left in the hands of the local communities. And the reason that local communities feel this way is that the state is divorced from intimate involvement in local issues. It is impossible for the state legislature to be aware of and cognizant of the complex issues in all 351 of the cities and towns.

Now the black community in Boston has a population of some 80,000 people. Its population is larger than many, if not most, of the 319 towns in the commonwealth and some of the cities.

All of these cities and towns have local government which looks after their special interests. Some are rural towns; some are industrial towns; some are fishing towns; some are mill towns; some are college towns; some are farming towns. Each of these cities and towns has a democratic process for deciding what individuals and what policies will best meet the needs of the particular type of community it happens to be.

For 80,000 people in Boston, our community happens to be black. The whites who run our community cannot --- and by that I mean it is impossible for them to --- accurately reflect the basic needs and life style of our residents.

Thomas Jefferson, after he had seen to the formation of a country based on autonomous states, made the comment that even the states were too large. We must divide the states into counties. It was his feeling that the democratic process depends on wise decision-making based on full and intimate knowledge of the issues
involved.

It is my opinion that we live in a racist country. And as I said before I am less concerned with the prevalence of that racism than with the fact that that racism is in the hearts and minds of white people who have the power to disseminate their racist attitudes on black children and adults.

I am interested, from a theoretical point of view --- in eliminating racism. But from a practical point of view, I am even more interested in removing power from the hands of the racists and in removing the racists from the black community.

Social service agencies have, for a long time now, played a rather ambiguous role in the black community. On the whole, however, it is my opinion that most social service agencies have fostered the racism and the powerlessness that are now causing rebellions in black communities. The notion of social service comes out of Puritan and Christian American attitudes about class and race. Those attitudes said, in effect, that people who are poor are poor for a reason...they are poor because they are lesser human beings; because they do not have the get up and go or the motivation and the drive to succeed. Those attitudes said about black people that these are poor, culturally-deprived individuals who can't do for themselves and must be helped along. They are like children or small animals. We must civilize and humanize them so they can be culturally rich like we are.

I am not going to comment further on the above statements. The ethnocentrism, the white superiority; the chauvinism they symbolize speaks for itself.

I am going to say, however, that the time for that kind of attitude in black communities is over. You have succeeded in civiliz-
ing some of us as you would say. You have succeeded in motivating us, as you might put it. And the best indications of the extent to which some of us have been civilized and motivated by you is the fact that the suicide rate of black middle class Americans is now approaching that of white middle class Americans; and the rate of severe neurosis among black middle class Americans is now approaching that of white middle class Americans. So you have successfully acculturated or civilized us and now we are ready to take over our community.

I mean that it is time for whites who are members of boards of directors of social service agencies in our communities to resign their positions and turn them over to black people.

I mean that it is time for white people who are on the staffs of social service agencies to turn their positions over to black people.

I mean that it is time for agencies to begin to look seriously at the kind of community in which we exist and to design programs that more specifically meet the needs of those communities.

I mean that it is time for agencies to begin to preach a philosophy of blackness; a philosophy of pride in black culture; black history; black leadership.

And I mean that it is time for social service agencies in black communities to orient all of the services in a way that will enhance and support any efforts in the community that move toward black people taking control of their communities.

If social service agencies do not move swiftly in this direction then I think I can give you some idea of what might happen.

On June 2 through June 5, I watched those youngsters move in
waves down Blue Hill Avenue. The first wave hit all the white-owned stores toward which the kids felt hostile. The no-money-down furniture stores that have been robbing their mothers; and the grocery stores that have been charging high prices. The second wave hit the rest of the white-owned stores. The third wave hit the black-owned stores that were owned by people who were not good soul brothers or who had acted rudely or disrespectfully to the kids.

The kids did not hit any of the social service agencies. But that's what's coming. That's coming. The time for change is upon us. And the gun is at our heads. If we do not change now, the time for change will be past and the only sound we will be able to hear will be the sound of the gun going off near our ear.

I want to talk now about specific programs. And the three programs I will describe briefly are the Roxbury Community School Board; the Grove Hall Community Development Corporation; and the Operation Exodus Stationary Store.

A year ago, Operation Exodus began to call together parents from various sections of the black community to begin the formation of the Roxbury Community School Board. Some of you may have read articles in Boston newspapers commenting — all favorably — on the School Board. Our efforts of a year ago were impeded in early November when Exodus ran out of operating funds and had to curtail several programs in order to concentrate on the busing program. One of the curtailed programs was the Community School Board.

Last week, Exodus received preliminary information that a New York foundation is willing to fund Exodus to organize the local school Board which we started last year. Within the coming month, we expect to begin work again on the School Board.
The School Board will be organized around 14 parent committees spread throughout the black community. It is our plan to organize one parent committee in each of the 14 school districts which contain predominately black schools. The function of these 14 district parent committees will be two-fold.

1. They will work at the predominately black schools in their areas to create a positive atmosphere, to force radical change in curriculum and teaching methods and to effectively control and insure a high level of quality education in those schools.

2. They will democratically elect one individual to serve as the district representative on the Roxbury Community School Board.

In addition to these 14 district representatives, the Roxbury Community School Board also will be comprised of an additional 10 or so people selected at-large in the community on the basis of their involvement in private educational programs or on the basis of their expertise or ability in educational or other relevant fields.

The Roxbury Community School Board will serve certain functions that relate to community-wide, as opposed to district, issues. For example, the Community School Board will establish relationships with resources in the university community. It will conduct recruitment for black teachers in other parts of the state and the country. It will review curriculum and teaching methods that relate directly to the needs of black children.

I will refrain from saying more about the School Board, because it is our opinion at Exodus that although we will be the coordinating agency and the organizer of the Board initially, we want to leave the decision-making responsibility to the elected parents.
I will only say that this is a program which is moving directly toward the crucial need in our community of parent involvement, influence and control over the inept and often racist schools that are destroying our children. Social Service agencies in our community must support these efforts. Whatever personal feelings or philosophical considerations might have divided us in the past must be put aside for this is important work.

I will speak only briefly about the Grove Hall Community Development Corporation. Little more than a year ago, Operation Exodus began to work with several other organizations on Blue Hill Avenue in Roxbury on a more coordinated and comprehensive approach to community change. The results of more than six month of planning is the Grove Hall Community Development Corporation, which was legally formed last May and is currently involved in several programs. The Corporation is comprised of member delegates from most of the agencies and organizations located in Blue Hill Avenue in Roxbury and a few organizations and individuals not located on the Strip, as Blue Hill Avenue is called. The Grove Hall Corporation is working on comprehensive plans for economic and social development of a 35 block area in and around Grove Hall. The area contains some 20,000 individuals and it has all of the usual signs of deterioration and slum life.

The Grove Hall Corporation currently is conducting Small Business Development Seminars for black businessmen in the Grove Hall community and other parts of the black community. In a short time we will be working on an economic feasibility survey for the community. Organizations which are participating in our programs are Exodus, Boston CORE, New England Grass Roots Organization
American Friends Service Committee, Housing Innovations Inc., New England Community Development Corporation, Cooper Community Center, Mothers for Adequate Welfare, the Urban League, and others.

It has been somewhat distressing that one of the agencies that has refused to join in with this more comprehensive approach is the Roxbury Multi-Service Center, the largest social service agency in the area. The Multi-Service Center has resources and skills that the Grove Hall Corporation would benefit from. We are moving ahead rapidly, however, without the cooperation of Multi-Service. The motto of the Grove Hall Corporation is Community Development through Community Control. Toward that end, we are working on programs that will increase ownership of the black community by black people, particularly in the areas of home ownership and business ownership.

The third program I want to mention specifically is the Operation Exodus stationery store. It is our intention to support a stationery store to be located on Blue Hill Avenue owned and operated by a person who is now active in our organization. We will assist this person in obtaining contracts in advance for paper and other stationery supplies from among the many social service and civil rights agencies and from businesses run by black people in the community. We anticipate that our stationery store will become the central outlet for the sale and distribution of stationery for the black community. A portion of the profits will be returned to Operation Exodus to help our organization run its programs. The remainder of the profits will be used to pay the salary of the owner-manager and to pay notes on the small business loan we will have to obtain to stock the store.
It is my firm hope that social service agencies in the community will join black businessmen and civil rights agencies in using our stationery store and in that way support our programs. We feel that this stationery store will be an experiment in methods for the black community to begin to assume some of the responsibility for running its own social service and social change programs and organizations.