Young 'Blacks' Don't Want to Be Called 'Negroes'

By John Leo

NEW YORK, Feb. 26 (NYT). —One result of the Black Power movement is an assault on the word "Negro."

"Negro is a slave word," said H. Rap Brown of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee. He, Stokely Carmichael and other Black Power spokesmen insist on the word "black" and often refuse to talk to reporters who speak of "Negroes."

Leaders such as the Rev. Martin Luther King of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference and Roy Wilkins of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People have been heckled and denounced for using the word "Negro."

The New York "Amsterdam News," the largest newspaper published in Harlem, has barred the word from its columns and generally uses "Afro-American." Letters from readers are running 9-to-1 in favor of the change, according to Richard Edwards, assistant managing editor.

"There seems to be violent objection to the term Negro among young people, who link the word with Uncle Tom," he said.

Keith Baird, the coordinator of the Afro-American History and Cultural Center of the New York City Board of Education, said:

Not Semantics

"This is not a minor semantic dispute. It engages the emotions and intellect of a vast number of people, from Southern campuses to the corner of 125th St. and Seventh Ave. in Harlem."

Mr. Baird, a Jamaican, prefers "Afro-American," which, he says, "clearly relates us to land, history and culture, whereas black doesn't have that kind of cultural reference."

Separate surveys by "Ebony" and "Jet," sister publications in the black press, show that "Afro-American" is the term most preferred by readers, with "black" second and "Negro" a weak third. Recently, many small civic and campus organizations have put "Afro-American" or "African-American" in their titles.

The Negro Teachers Association of New York City, for instance, is now the African-American Teachers Association.

Hoyt W. Fuller of "Negro Digest" says "Afro-American" is being promoted by internationally minded men as a semantic reminder that the fate of the black struggles today in America and in Africa are closely linked.

In recent years, the greatest pressure for the word "black" has come from the Nation of Islam (Black Muslims) and the late Malcolm X, who referred contemptuously to "so-called Negroes" who refuse to struggle for their rights.

This usage has caught on widely. Ossie Davis, the playwright-actor, wrote recently: "A black man means not to accept the system as Negroes do, but to fight hell out of the system as Malcolm did."

Mr. Fuller said: "There is definitely a generation gap in usage. Those who have adjusted to things as they are use Negro; those that haven't use black and Afro-American."

He said "Negro Digest" was under "great pressure" to change its name.

Mixed usage has become common. Dr. Ralph J. Bunche, undersecretary for special political affairs in the United Nations Secretariat, says he now uses "black" as often as "Negro," though he attributes little significance to the dispute.

C. Eric Lincoln, the sociologist, now at Union Theological Seminary, said: "I use black when talking to young people, and Negro when addressing those past 40 who are comfortable with that term. In writing, I find myself shifting from Negro to Black American."

New York Mayor John V. Lindsay rarely uses the word "Negro" anymore, using "black" instead.

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