

Radical Chic: That Party at Lenny's

“... It's a tricky business, integrating new politics with tried and true social motifs...”

By Tom Wolfe

From the June 8, 1970 issue of New York Magazine.

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But at that moment Radical Chic was the new wave supreme in New York Society. It had been building for more than six months. It had already reached the fashion pages of *Vogue* and was moving into the food column. *Vogue* was already preparing a column entitled “Soul Food.”

“The cult of Soul Food,” it began, “is a form of Black self-awareness and, to a lesser degree, of white sympathy for the Black drive to self-reliance. It is as if those who ate the beans and greens of necessity in the cabin doorways were brought into communion with those who, not having to, eat those foods voluntarily as a sacrament. The present struggle is emphasized in the act of breaking traditional bread

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SWEET POTATO PONE 3 cups finely grated raw sweet potatoes ½ cup sweet milk 2 tablespoons melted butter ½ teaspoon each: cinnamon, ginger, powdered cloves, and nutmeg 2 eggs salt ½ cup brown sugar ½ cup molasses or honey Mix together potatoes, milk, melted butter, cinnamon, ginger, powdered cloves, and nutmeg. Add a pinch of salt and the molasses or honey. (Molasses gives the authentic pone; honey a dandified version.)”

A little sacramental pone ... as the young'uns skitter back in through the loblolly pine cabin doorway to help Mama put the cinnamon, ginger, powdered cloves and nutmeg back on the Leslie Foods “Spice Island” spice rack ... and thereby finish up the communion with those who, not having to, eat those foods voluntarily as a sacrament.

Very nice! In fact, this sort of *nostalgie de la boue*, or romanticizing of primitive souls, was one of the things that brought Radical Chic to the fore in New York Society. *Nostalgie de la boue* is a 19th-century French term that means, literally, “nostalgia for the mud.” Within New York Society *nostalgie de la boue* was a great motif throughout the 1960s, from the moment two socialites, Susan Stein and Christina Paolozzi, discovered the Peppermint Lounge and the twist and two of the era's first pet primitives, Joey Dee and Killer Joe Piro. *Nostalgie de la boue* tends to be a favorite motif whenever a great many new faces and a lot of new money enter Society. New arrivals have always had two ways of certifying their superiority over the hated “middle class.” They can take on the trappings of aristocracy, such as grand architecture, servants, parterre boxes and high protocol; and they can indulge in the gauche thrill of taking on certain styles of the lower orders. The two are by no means mutually exclusive; in fact, they are always used in combination. In England during the Regency period, a period much like our own—even to the point of the nation's disastrous involvement in colonial wars during a period of mounting affluence—*nostalgie de la boue* was very much the rage. London socialites during the Regency adopted the flamboyant capes and wild driving styles of the coach drivers, the “bruiser” fashions and hair styles of the bare-knuckle prize fighters, the see-through, jutting-nipple fashions of the tavern girls, as well as a reckless new dance, the waltz. Such affectations were meant to convey the arrogant self-confidence of the aristocrat as opposed to the middle-class striver's obsession with propriety and keeping up appearances. During the 1960s in New York *nostalgie de la boue* took the form of the vogue of rock music, the twist-frug genre of dances, Pop Art, Camp, the courting of pet primitives such as the Rolling Stones and José Torres, and innumerable dress

fashions summed up in the recurrent image of the wealthy young man with his turtleneck jersey meeting his muttonchops at mid-jowl, à la the 1962 Sixth Avenue Automat bohemian, bidding good night to an aging doorman dressed in the mode of an 1870 Austrian army colonel.

At the same time Society in New York was going through another of those new-money upheavals that have made the social history of New York read like the political history of the Caribbean; which is to say, a revolution every 20 years, if not sooner. Aristocracies, in the European sense, are always based upon large hereditary landholdings. Early in the history of the United States, Jefferson's crusade against primogeniture eliminated the possibility of a caste of hereditary land barons. The great landholders, such as the Carrolls, Livingstons and Schuylers, were soon upstaged by the federal bankers, such as the Biddles and Lenoxes. There followed wave after wave of new plutocrats with new sources of wealth: the international bankers, the real-estate speculators, the Civil War profiteers, railroad magnates, Wall Street operators, oil and steel trust manipulators, and so on. By the end of the Civil War, social life in New York was already The Great Barbecue, to borrow a term from Vernon L. Parrington, the literary historian. During the season of 1865-66 there were 600 Society balls given in New York, and a great wall of brownstone mansions went up along Fifth Avenue.

In the early 1880s New York's social parvenus—the people who were the Sculls, Paleys, Engelhards, Holzers, of their day—were the Vanderbilts, Rockefellers, Huntingtons and Goulds. They built the Metropolitan Opera House for the simple reason that New York's prevailing temple of Culture, the Academy of Music, built just 29 years before at 14th Street and Irving Place, had only 18 fashionable proscenium boxes, and they were monopolized by families like the Lorillards, Traverses, Belmonts, Stebbinses, Gandys and Barlows. The status of the Goulds and Vanderbilts was revealed in the sort of press coverage the Met's opening (October 22, 1883) received: "The Goulds and the Vanderbilts and people of that ilk perfumed the air with the odor of crisp greenbacks." The Academy of Music is now a moviehouse showing double features, although it did enjoy one moment of eminence in 1964, when the Rolling Stones played there, live, with Murray the K as M.C.

By the 1960s yet another new industry had begun to dominate New York life, namely, communications—the media. At the same time the erstwhile "minorities" of the first quarter of the century had begun to come into their own. Jews, especially, but also many Catholics, were eminent in the media and in Culture. So, by 1965—as in 1935, as in 1926, as in 1883, as in 1866, as in 1820—New York had two Societies, "Old New York" and "New Society." In every era, "Old New York" has taken a horrified look at "New Society" and expressed the devout conviction that a genuine aristocracy, good blood, good bone—themselves—was being defiled by a horde of rank climbers. This has been an all-time favorite number. In the 1960s this quaint belief was magnified by the fact that many members of "New Society," for the first time, were not Protestant. The names and addresses of "Old New York" were to be found in the Social Register, which even 10 years ago was still confidently spoken of as the Stud Book and the Good Book. It was, and still is, almost exclusively a roster of Protestant families. Today, however, the Social Register's annual shuffle, in which errant socialites, e.g., John Jacob Astor, are dropped from the Good Book, hardly even rates a yawn. The fact is that "Old New York"—except for those members who also figure in "New Society," e.g., Nelson Rockefeller, John Hay Whitney, Mrs. Wyatt Cooper—is no longer good copy, and without publicity it has *never* been easy to rank as a fashionable person in New York City.

The press in New York has tended to favor New Society in every period, and to take it seriously, if only because it provides "news." For example, the \$400,000 Bradley Martin ball of 1897. The John Bradley Martins were latecomers from Troy, New York, who had inserted an invisible hyphen between the Bradley and the Martin and preferred to be known as the Bradley Martins, after the manner of the Gordon Walkers in England. For the record, the Bradley Martins staged their own ball in 1897 as "an impetus to trade" to alleviate the suffering of the poor. Inflamed by the grandeur of it all, the newspapers described the affair down to the last piece of Mechlin lace and the last drop of seed pearl. It was the greatest single one-shot social climb in New York history prior to Truman Capote's masked

ball in 1966.

By the 1960s New York newspapers had an additional reason to favor New Society. The Seventh Avenue garment trade, the newspapers' greatest source of advertising revenue, had begun recruiting New Society in droves to promote new fashions. It got to the point where for a matron to be photographed in the front row at the spring or fall showings of European copies at Ohrbach's, by no means the most high-toned clothing store in the world, became a certification of "socialite" status second to none. But this was nothing new, either. Forty years ago firms flogging things like Hardman pianos, Ponds cold cream, Simmons metal beds and Camel cigarettes found that matrons in the clans Harriman, Longworth, Belmont, Fish, Lowell, Iselin and Carnegie were only too glad to switch to their products and be photographed with them in their homes, mainly for the sheer social glory of the publicity.

Another source of publicity was aid to the poor. New York's new socialites, in whatever era, have always paid their dues to "the poor," via charity, as a way of claiming the nobility inherent in *noblesse oblige* and of legitimizing their wealth. The Bradley Martin ball was a case in point. New money usually works harder in this direction than old. John D. Rockefeller, under the guidance of Ivy P. Lee, the original "public relations counsel," managed to convert his reputation from that of robber baron and widow-fleecer to that of august old sage philanthropist so rapidly that small children cried when he died. His strategy was to set up several hundred million dollars' worth of foundations for Culture and scientific research.

Among the new socialites of the 1960s, especially those from the one-time "minorities," this old social urge to do well by doing good, as it says in the song, has taken a more specific political direction. This has often been true of Jewish socialites and culturati, although it has by no means been confined to them. Politically, Jews have been unique among the groups that came to New York in the great migrations of the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Many such groups, of course, were Left or liberal during the first generation, but as families began to achieve wealth, success, or, simply, security, they tended to grow more and more conservative in philosophy. The Irish are a case in point. But forced by 20th as well as 19th century history to remain on guard against right-wing movements, even wealthy and successful Jewish families have tended to remain faithful to their original liberal-left worldview. In fact, according to Seymour Martin Lipset, Nathan Glazer, and Kenneth Keniston, an unusually high proportion of campus militants come from well-to-do Jewish families. They have developed the so-called "red diaper baby" theory to explain it. According to Lipset, many Jewish children have grown up in families which "around the breakfast table, day after day, in Scarsdale, Newton, Great Neck and Beverly Hills," have discussed racist and reactionary tendencies in American society. Lipset speaks of the wealthy Jewish family with the "right-wing life style" (e.g. a majority of Americans outside of the South who have full-time servants are Jewish, according to a study by Lipset, Glazer and Herbert Hyman) and the "left-wing outlook."

This phenomenon is rooted not only in Jewish experience in America, but in Europe as well. Anti-Semitism was an issue in the French Revolution; throughout Europe during the 19th century all sorts of legal and *de facto* restrictions against Jews were abolished. Yet Jews were still denied the social advantages that routinely accrued to Gentiles of comparable wealth and achievement. They were not accepted in Society, for example, and public opinion generally remained anti-Semitic. Not only out of resentment, but also for sheer self-defense, even wealthy Jews tended to support left-wing political parties. They had no choice. Most organizations on the Right had an anti-Semitic or, at the very least, an all-Christian, cast to them. Jews coming to the United States in the late 19th and early 20th centuries saw little to choose from among the major political parties. As to which party seemed the more anti-Jewish, the Democratic or the Republican, it was a tossup. The Republicans had abolished slavery, but the party was full of Know-nothings and anti-immigrant nativists. Even the Populists were anti-Jewish. For example, Tom Watson, the famous Populist senator, denounced the oil cartels, fought

against American involvement in World War I as a cynical capitalist adventure, defended Eugene Debs, demanded U.S. recognition of the Soviet Union shortly after the Revolution—and was openly anti-Semitic and anti-Catholic and was laid out in the shadow of an eight-foot-high cross of roses from the Ku Klux Klan at his funeral in 1922. As a result, many Jews, especially in cities like New York and Chicago, backed the socialist parties that thrived briefly during the 1920s. In many cases Jews were the main support. At the same time Jews continued to look for some wing of the major parties that they could live with, and finally found it in the New Deal.

For years many Jewish members of New Society have supported black organizations such as the NAACP, the Urban League and CORE. And no doubt they have been sincere about it, because these organizations have never had much social cachet, i.e., they have had “middle class” written all over them. All one had to do was look at the “Negro leaders” involved. There they were, up on the dais at the big hotel banquet, wearing their white shirts, their Hart Schaffner & Marx suits three sizes too big, and their academic solemnity. By last year, however, the picture had changed. In 1965 two new political movements, the anti-war movement and black power, began to gain great backing among culturati in New York. By 1968 the two movements began to achieve social as well as cultural prestige with the Presidential campaigns of Eugene McCarthy and Robert Kennedy; especially Kennedy’s. Kennedy was not merely an anti-war candidate; he also made a point of backing Caesar Chavez’ grape workers—“La Causa,” “La Huelga”—in California. On the face of it, La Causa was a labor union movement. But La Causa quickly came to symbolize the political ambitions of all lower-class Mexican-Americans—*chicanos*, “Brown Americans”—and, by extension, that of all colored Americans, including blacks.

The black movement itself, of course, had taken on a much more electric and romantic cast. What a relief it was—socially—in New York—when the leadership seemed to shift from middle class to . . . *funky!* From A. Philip Randolph, Dr. Martin Luther King and James Farmer . . . to Stokely, Rap, LeRoi and Eldridge!

This meant that the tricky business of the fashionable new politics could now be integrated with a tried and true social motif: *Nostalgie de la boue*. The upshot was Radical Chic.

From the beginning it was pointless to argue about the sincerity of Radical Chic. Unquestionably the basic impulse, “red diaper” or otherwise, was sincere. But, as in most human endeavors focused upon an ideal, there seemed to be some double-track thinking going on. On the first track—well, one *does* have a sincere concern for the poor and the underprivileged and an honest outrage against discrimination. One’s heart does cry out—quite spontaneously! — upon hearing how the police have dealt with the Panthers, dragging an epileptic like Lee Berry out of his hospital bed and throwing him into the Tombs. When one thinks of Mitchell and Agnew and Nixon and all of their Captain Beef-heart Maggie & Jiggs New York Athletic Club troglodyte crypto-Horst Wessel Irish Oyster Bar Construction Worker followers, then one understands why poor blacks like the Panthers might feel driven to drastic solutions, and—well, anyway, one truly *feels* for them. One really does. On the other hand—on the second track in one’s mind, that is—one also has a sincere concern for maintaining a proper East Side lifestyle in New York Society. And this concern is just as sincere as the first, and just as deep. It really is. It really *does* become part of one’s psyche. For example, one *must* have a weekend place, in the country or by the shore, all year round preferably, but certainly from the middle of May to the middle of September. It is hard to get across to outsiders an understanding of how *absolute* such apparently trivial needs are. One *feels* them in his solar plexus. When one thinks of being trapped in New York Saturday after Saturday in July or August, doomed to be a part of those fantastically dowdy herds roaming past Bonwit’s and Tiffany’s at dead noon in the sandstone sun-broil, 92 degrees, daddies from Long Island in balloon-seat Bermuda shorts bought at the Times Square Store in Oceanside and fat mommies with white belled pants stretching over their lower bellies and crinkling up in the crotch like some kind of Dacron-polyester labia—well, anyway, then one truly *feels* the need to obey at least the minimal rules of New York Society. One really does.

One rule is that *nostalgie de la boue*—i.e., the styles of romantic, raw-vital, Low Rent primitives—are good; and *middle class*, whether black or white, is bad. Therefore, Radical Chic invariably favors radicals who seem primitive, exotic and romantic, such as the grape workers, who are not merely radical and “of the soil,” but also Latin; the Panthers, with their leather pieces, Afros, shades, and shoot-outs; and the Red Indians, who, of course, had always seemed primitive, exotic and romantic. At the outset, at least, all three groups had something else to recommend them, as well: they were headquartered 3,000 miles away from the East Side of Manhattan, in places like Delano (the grape workers), Oakland (the Panthers) and Arizona and New Mexico (the Indians). They weren’t likely to become too much . . . *underfoot*, as it were. Exotic, Romantic, Far Off . . . as we shall soon see, other favorite creatures of Radical Chic had the same attractive qualities; namely, the ocelots, jaguars, cheetahs and Somali leopards.

Rule No. 2 was that no matter what, one should always maintain a proper address, a proper scale of interior decoration, and servants. Servants, especially, were one of the last absolute dividing lines between those truly “in Society,” New or Old, and the great scuffling mass of middle-class strivers paying up to \$1,250-a-month rent or buying expensive co-ops all over the East Side. There are no two ways about it. One *must* have servants. Having servants becomes such a psychological necessity that there are many women in Society today who may be heard to complain in all honesty about how hard it is to find a nurse for the children to fill in on the regular nurse’s day off. There is the famous Mrs. C-----, one of New York’s richest widows, who has a 10-room duplex on Sutton Place, the good part of Sutton Place as opposed to the Miami Beach-looking part, one understands, but who is somehow absolute poison with servants and can’t keep anything but day help and is constantly heard to lament: “What good is all the money in the world if you can’t come home at night and know there will be someone there to take your coat and fix you a drink?” There is true anguish behind that remark!

In the era of Radical Chic, then, what a collision course was set between the absolute need for servants—and the fact that the servant was the absolute symbol of what the new movements, black or brown, were struggling against! How absolutely urgent, then, became the search for the only way out: white servants!

The first big Radical Chic party, the epochal event, so to speak, was the party that Assemblyman Andrew Stein gave for the grape workers on his father’s estate in Southampton on June 29, 1969. The grape workers had already been brought into New York social life. Carter and Amanda Burden, the “Moonflower Couple” of the 1960s, had given a party for them in their duplex in River House, on East 52nd Street overlooking the East River. Some of New York’s best graphic artists, such as Paul Davis, had done exquisite posters for “La Causa” and “La Huelga.”

The grape workers had begun a national campaign urging consumers to boycott California table grapes, and nowhere was the ban more strictly observed than in Radically Chic circles. Chavez became one of the few union leaders with a romantic image.

Andrew Stein’s party, then, was the epochal event, not so much because he was fashionable as because the grape-workers were. The list of guests and sponsors for the event was first-rate. Henry Ford II’s daughter Anne (Mrs. Giancarlo Uzielli) was chairman, and Ethel Kennedy was honorary chairman. Mrs. Kennedy was making her first public appearance since the assassination of her husband in 1968. Stein himself was the 24-year-old son of Jerry Finkelstein, who had made a small fortune in public relations and built it up into a firm called Struthers Wells. Finkelstein was also a power in the New York State Democratic party and, in fact, recently became the party’s New York City chairman. His son Andrew had shortened his name from Finkelstein to Stein and was noted not only for the impressive parties he gave but for his election to the State Assembly from Manhattan’s Upper West Side. The rumor was that his father had spent \$500,000 on his campaign. No one who knew state politics believed that, however, since for half that sum he could have bought enough of Albany to have the boy declared king.

The party was held on the lawn outside Finkelstein's huge *cottage orné* by the sea in Southampton. There were two signs by the main entrance to the estate. One said Finkelstein and the other said Stein. The guests came in saying the usual, which was, "you can't take the Fink out of Finkelstein." No one turned back, however. From the beginning the afternoon was full of the delicious status contradictions and incongruities that provide much of the electricity for Radical Chic. Chavez himself was not there, but a contingent of grape workers was on hand, including Chavez' first lieutenant, Andrew Imutan, and Imutan's wife and three sons. The grape workers were all in work clothes, Levis, chinos, Sears balloon-seat twills, K-Mart sports shirts, and so forth. The socialites, meanwhile, arrived at the height of the 1969 summer season of bell-bottom silk pants suits, Pucci clings, Dunhill blazers and Turnbull & Asser neckerchiefs. A mariachi band played for the guests as they arrived. Marvelous! Everyone's status radar was now so sensitive that the mariachi band seemed like a *faux pas*. After all, mariachi bands, with those Visit Mexico costumes on and those sad trumpets that keep struggling up to the top of the note but always fall off and then try to struggle back up again, are the prime white-tourist Mexicans. At a party for La Causa, the grape workers, the fighting *chicanos*—this was a little like bringing Ma Goldberg in to entertain the Stern Gang. But somehow it was . . . *delicious* to experience such weird status thrills . . .

When the fund-raising began, Andrew Imutan took a microphone up on the terrace above the lawn and asked everybody to shut their eyes and pretend they were a farm worker's wife in the dusty plains of Delano, California, eating baloney sandwiches for breakfast at 3 a.m. before heading out into the fields . . . So they all stood there in their Pucci dresses, Gucci shoes, Capucci scarves, either imagining they were grape workers' wives or wondering if the goddamned wind would ever stop. The wind had come up off the ocean and it was wrecking everybody's hair. People were standing there with their hands pressed against their heads as if the place had been struck by a brain-piercing ray from the Purple Dimension. Andrew Stein's hair was long, full, and at the outset had been especially well coifed in the Roger's 58th Street French manner, and now it was . . . a wreck. . . . He kept one hand on his head the whole time, like the boy at the dike . . . "eating baloney sandwiches for breakfast at 3 a.m. . . ."

Then Frank Mankiewicz, who had been Robert Kennedy's press secretary, got up and said, "Well, all I know, if we can only raise 20 percent of the money that has gone into all the Puccis I see here today, we'll be doing all right!" He waited for the laughter, and all he got was the ocean breeze in his face. By then everyone present was thinking approximately the same thing . . . and it was *delicious* in that weird way . . . but to just blurt it out was a strange sort of counter-gaffe.

Nevertheless, Radical Chic had arrived. The fall social season of 1969 was a big time for it. People like Jean vanden Heuvel gave parties for *Ramparts* magazine, which had by now become completely a magazine of the barricades, and for the Chicago Eight. Jules Feiffer gave a party for the G.I. coffee houses, at which Richard Avedon, America's most famous fashion photographer, took portraits of everybody who made a \$25 contribution to the cause. He had his camera and lights set up in the dining room. As a matter of fact, Avedon had become a kind of court photographer to the Movement. He was making his pentennial emergence to see where he was now at. Five years before he had emerged from his studio to take a look around and had photographed and edited an entire issue of *Harper's Bazaar* to record his findings, which were of the Pop, Op, Rock, Andy, Rudi and Go-Go variety. Now Avedon was putting together a book about the Movement. He went to Chicago for the trial of The Eight and set up a studio in a hotel near the courthouse to do portraits of the celebrities and activists who testified at the trial or watched it or circled around it in one way or another.

Meanwhile, some of the most prestigious young matrons in San Francisco and New York were into an organization called Friends of the Earth. Friends of the Earth was devoted to the proposition that women should not buy coats or other apparel made from the hides of such dying species as leopards, cheetahs, jaguars, ocelots, tigers, Spanish lynx, Asiatic lions, red wolves, sea otter, giant otter, polar bear, mountain zebra, alligators, crocodiles, sea turtles, vicunas, timber wolves, wolverines, margays,

kolinskies, martens, fishers, fitch, sables, servals and mountain lions. On the face of it, there was nothing very radical about this small gesture in the direction of conservation, or ecology, as it is now known. Yet Friends of the Earth was Radical Chic, all right. The radical part began with the simple fact that the movement was not tax deductible. Friends of the Earth is a subsidiary of the Sierra Club. The Sierra Club's pre-eminence in the conservation movement began at precisely the moment when the federal government declared it a political organization, chiefly due to its fight against proposed dam projects in the Grand Canyon. That meant that contributions to it were no longer tax deductible. One of the Sierras Club's backstage masterminds, the late Howard Gossage, used to tell David Brower, the Sierra Club's president: "That's the grea-a-a-atest thing that ever happened to you. It removed all the guilt! Now the money's just rollllllling in." Then he would go into his cosmic laugh. He had an incredible cosmic laugh, Gossage did. It started way back in his throat and came rollllling out, as if from Lane 27 of the Heavenly bowling alley.

No tax deduction! That became part of the canon of Radical Chic. Lay it on the line! Matrons soliciting funds for Friends of the Earth and other organizations took to making telephone calls that ended with: "All right, now, I'll expect to see your check in the mail—and it's *not* tax deductible." That was a challenge, the unspoken part of which was: You can be a tax deductible Heart Funder, April in Paris Baller, Day Care Center-of-the-roader, if that's all you want out of your jiveass life . . . As for themselves, the Friends of the Earth actually took to the streets, picketing stores and ragging women who walked down the street with their new Somali leopard coats on. A woman's only acceptable defense was to say she had shot the animal and eaten it. The Friends of the Earth movement was not only a fight in behalf of the poor beasts but a fight against greed, against the spirit of capitalistic marauding, to call it by its right name . . . although the fight took some weird skews here and there, as Radical Chic is apt to do.

Those goddamned permutations in taste! In New York, for example, Freddy Plimpton had Jacques Kaplan, the number one Society furrier, make her a skirt of alley cat pelts (at least that was the way it first came out in the *New York Times*). Not for nothing is Jacques Kaplan the number one Society furrier. He must have seen Radical Chic coming a mile away. Early in the game he himself, a furrier, started pitching in for the embattled ocelots, margays, fitch and company like there was no tomorrow. Anyway, the *Times* ran a story saying he had made a skirt of alley cat hides for Freddy Plimpton. The idea was that alley cats, unlike ocelots and so on, are an absolute glut in the ecology and end up in the ASPCA gas chambers anyway. Supposedly it was logical to Kaplan and logical to Mrs. Plimpton—but to hundreds of little-old-lady cat lovers in Dickerson Archlock shoes, there was some kind of a weird class warp going on here . . . Slaughter the lowly alley cat to save the high-toned ocelot . . . That was the way it came out . . . and the less said about retrieving decorative hides from the gas chambers, the better . . . They were going to picket Jacques Kaplan and raise hell about the slaughter of the alley cats. The fact that the skirt was actually made of the hides of genets, a European nuisance animal like the ferret — as the *Times* noted in a correction two days later—this was not a distinction that cut much ice with the cat lovers by that time. Slaughter the lowly alley genet to save the high-toned ocelot . . .

Soon—just a few weeks after his first big Radical Chic party—Andrew Stein was throwing another one, this time for Bernadette Devlin, the Irish Joan of Arc. Not to be outdone, Carter Burden, his chief rival, developed what can only be termed the first Total Radical Chic lifestyle. In 1965 Burden, then 23, and his wife Amanda, then 20, had been singled out by *Vogue* as New York's perfect young married couple. They had moved into an ample co-op in the Dakota and had coated and encrusted it with a layer of antiques that was like the final triumph of a dowager duchess in an Angela Thirkell novel. They were described as possessing not merely wealth, however, but also "enquiring minds." To clinch the point, *Vogue* pointed out that "Mrs. Burden, with the help of a maid, is learning how to keep house." Just a year after their Dakota triumph, the Burdens moved to River House, flagship of the East River co-op gold coast from Beekman Place to Sutton Place. They set up house in a duplex and hired Parish Hadley, interior decorators to Jacqueline Kennedy, Jay and Sharon Rockefeller, the Paleys, the Wrightsmans

and the Engelhards. “Gossip has it,” said *Town & Country*, “that a cool million was invested in Carter and Amanda Burden’s River House apartment alone, just for backgrounds. Most of the art and furniture were already there.” But in a couple of years the Burdens went Radical Chic. True, they did not give up their River House showplace. In fact, they did not disturb or deplete its treasures in the slightest. But they did set up another apartment on Fifth Avenue at 100th Street. This established residence for Burden in the Fourth Councilmanic District and qualified him to run for the New York City Council; successfully, as it turned out. It also gave him the most exquisitely poised Total Radical Chic apartment in New York.

There was genius to the way the Burdens gave visual expression to the double-track mental atmosphere of Radical Chic. The building is perhaps the scruffiest co-op building on Upper Fifth Avenue. The paint job in the lobby and hallways looks like a 1947 destroyer’s. There is a doorman but no elevator man; one has to take himself up in an old West Side-style Serge Automatic elevator. But . . . it *is* a co-op and it *is* on Upper Fifth Avenue. The apartment itself has low ceilings, a small living room and only five rooms in all. But it *does* overlook Central Park. It is furnished almost entirely in the sort of whimsical horrors—japanned chairs, brass beds, and so on—that end up in the attic in the country, the sort of legacies from God knows where that one never gets around to throwing away . . . And yet they *are* . . . amusing. The walls are covered in end-of-the-bolt paintings by fashionable artists of the decorative mode, such as Stella and Lichtenstein . . . the sort of mistakes every collector makes and wonders where he will ever hang . . . and yet they *are* Stellas and Lichtensteins . . . somehow Burden even managed to transform himself from the Deke House chubbiness of his Early *Vogue* Period to the look known as Starved to Near Perfection. It is within this artfully balanced style of life that the Burdens have been able to groove, as they say, with the Young Lords and other pet primitives from Harlem and Spanish Harlem and at the same time fit into all the old mainline events such as the Metropolitan Museum of Art’s 100th anniversary gala and be photographed doing the new boogaloo.

So . . . Radical Chic was already in full swing by the time the Black Panther party began a national fund-raising campaign late in 1969. The Panthers’ organizers, like the grape workers’, counted on the “cause party”—to use a term for it that was current 35 years ago—not merely in order to raise money. The Panthers’ status was quite confused in the minds of many liberals, and to have the Panthers feted in the homes of a series of social and cultural leaders could make an important difference. Ideally, it would work out well for the socialites and culturati, too, for if there was ever a group that embodied the romance and excitement of which Radical Chic is made, it was the Panthers.

Even before the Bernsteins’ party for the Panthers, there had been at least three others, at the homes of John Simon of Random House, on Hudson Street, Richard Baron, the publisher, in Chappaqua, and Sidney and Gail Lumet, in their townhouse at Lexington Avenue and 91st Street. It was the Lumets’ party that led directly to the Bernsteins’. A veteran cause organizer named Hannah Weinstein had called up Gail Lumet. She said that Murray Kempton had asked her to try to organize a party for the Black Panthers to raise money for the defense of the Panther 21.

The party was a curious one, even by the standards of Radical Chic. Many of the guests appeared not to be particularly “social” . . . more like Mr. and Mrs. Wealthy Dentist from New Rochelle. Yet there was a certain social wattage in the presence of people like Murray Kempton, Peter Stone, writer of *1776*, the Lumets themselves, and several Park Avenue matrons, the most notable being Leonard Bernstein’s wife, Felicia.

Anyway, the white guests and a few academic-looking blacks were packed, sitting and standing, into the living room. Then a contingent of 12 or 13 Black Panthers arrived. The Panthers had no choice but to assemble in the dining room and stand up—in their leather pieces, Afros and shades—facing the whites in the living room. As a result, whenever anyone got up in the living room to speak, the audience was looking not only at the speaker but into the faces of a hard front line of Black Panthers in

the dining room. Quite a tableau it was. It was at this point that a Park Avenue matron first articulated the great recurrent emotion of Radical Chic: "These are no civil-rights *Negroes* wearing gray suits three sizes too big—these are *real men!*"

The first half of the session generated the Radical Chic emotion in its purest and most penetrating form. Not only was there the electrifying spectacle of the massed Panthers, but Mrs. Lee Berry rose and delivered a moving account of how her husband had been seized by police in his hospital room and removed summarily to jail. To tell the truth, some of the matrons were disappointed when she first opened her mouth. She had such a small, quiet voice. "I am a Panther wife," she said. *I am a Panther wife?* But her story *was* moving. Felicia Bernstein had been present up to this point and, as a longtime supporter of civil liberties, had been quite upset by what she had heard. But she had had to leave before the session was over. Each guest, as he left, was presented with a sheet of paper and asked to do one of three things: pledge a contribution to the defense fund, lend his name to an advertisement that was to appear in the *New York Times*, or to make his home available for another party and fund-raising event. By the time she left, Felicia was quite ready to open her doors. Other charitable organizations began to steer in the direction of Radical Chic, even if they did not go all the way and give up their tax-deductible status. For example, the gala for the University of the Streets on January 22, 1970. The University of the Streets was dedicated to "educating the 'uneducatables' of the ghetto." The gala was a dance with avant-garde music, light shows, movies, sculpture, and "multi-sensory environments." The invitation said "Price: \$125 Per Couple (Tax Deductible)" and "Dress: Beautiful." This was nothing new. What was new was that the ball would not be within the grand coiving-and-pilaster insulation of a midtown hotel but down on the Lower East Side, East Seventh Street and Avenue A, at Tompkins Square, in the heart of Radically Chic Puerto Rican & black & hippie territory. The invitations came in a clear plastic box with a lid, and each had the radiant eye of a real peacock feather inside; also a flower blossom, which arrived dried up and shriveled, and many wondered, wildly, if it was some exotic Southwestern psychedelic, to be smoked. One matron on the invitation list gave the peacock feather to her daughter to take to her school, one of the city's most fashionable private grammar schools, for her class' morning game of "Show and Tell," in which some unusual object is presented, wondered over, and then explained. When she returned home, her mother asked her how the feather had gone down, whereupon the little girl burst into tears. Seven other children in her class had also brought the radiant eye of a peacock feather that morning for "Show and Tell."

The emotional momentum was building rapidly when Ray "Masai" Hewitt, the Panthers' Minister of Education and member of the Central Committee, rose to speak. Hewitt was an intense, powerful young man and in no mood to play the diplomacy game. Some of you here, he said, may have some feelings left for the establishment, but we don't. We want to see it die. We're Maoist revolutionaries, and we have no choice but to fight to the finish. For about 30 minutes Masai Hewitt laid it on the line. He referred now and again to "that M ----- F ----- Nixon" and to how the struggle would not be easy, and that if buildings were burned and other violence ensued, that was only part of the struggle that the power structure had forced the oppressed minorities into. Hewitt's words tended to provoke an all-or-nothing reaction. A few who remembered the struggles of the Depression were profoundly moved, fired up with a kind of *nostalgie de that old-time religion*. But more than one Park Avenue matron was thrown into a Radical Chic confusion. The most memorable quote was: "He's a magnificent man, but suppose some simple-minded schmucks take all that business about burning down buildings *seriously?*"

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To other people involved in Radical Chic, however, the picture was now becoming clear as day. This was no time for Custer's last stand. This was time . . . to panic. Two more couples had already agreed to give parties for the Panthers: Peter and Cheray Duchin and Frank and Domna Stanton. The Duchins had already gotten some of the static themselves. Peter had gone to Columbus, Ohio, with his orchestra . . . and the way some of the locals let him have it! So four nights later Lenny, in a tuxedo, and Felicia, in a black dress, walked into a party in the triplex of one of New York's great hostesses, overlooking the East River, on the street of social dreams, East 52nd, and right off the bat some woman walks right up to him and says, "Lenny, I just think you're a . . . Radical Chic, after all, is only radical in style; in its heart it is part of Society and its traditions. Politics, like Rock, Pop and Camp, has its uses; but to put one's whole status on the line for *nostalgie de la boue* in any of its forms would be unprincipled. Meanwhile, the damnable press dogged Lenny even in London. A United Press International reporter interviewed him there and sent out a story in which Lenny said: "They're the Panthers" "are a bad lot. They have behaved very badly."