about you. I am not going to take off black skin. I am going to be black forever."

Ed Murrow thought television could help us understand each other. In the matter of race, I have never seen a more telling effort at genuine understanding. This time real journalism transcended the wasteland.
Prophets and Protesters

August 27, 1989—If Huey Newton and Martin Luther King Jr. ever met, they certainly formed no bond. They are bound nonetheless today by the common threads of how they lived and how each died. In one of history’s curious accidents, their deaths help tell the tale of their times.

Dr. King and Huey Newton shared a deep concern for their people and for the plight of the poor. They aroused the passions of their generations. They were charismatic figures whose words were remembered and repeated. In different ways, the movements they led helped change America.

Dr. King was gunned down in Memphis, probably at the instigation of a hate group. Newton was gunned down in West Oakland, probably the victim of criminal street activity. The full extent of his own criminal involvement is not altogether clear.

What is clear in the first half-light of history is how the two men differed. The work of one is revered in much of the nation, yet the activity of the other was reviled by many Americans.

Newton was representative in the 60s and 70s of sharp and chic radical diversion from the mainstream of the civil rights movement. There were others, such as Stokely Carmichael and H. Rap Brown. Their criticism of Dr. King and the nonviolent movement was that it was too passive, even “Uncle Tom.” They shouted for “Black Power.”

I covered many of those leaders before and after the split in the movement. I found the differences fascinating. So were some of the similarities. All agreed on one basic tenet: Racism was destroying black lives by the millions.

Newton, Carmichael and Brown, though all critics of Dr. King, differed in their styles and approaches. They shared with each other and with Dr. King a great talent at articulating the nature of the inequities in our society.

The radicals differed among themselves and with Dr. King in the solutions they advocated. Newton and the Panthers espoused socialism and allied themselves with fringe groups in the white community. Carmichael and Brown preached black nationalism and racial separation.
Dr. King preached democracy. He resisted those who would change ours to a socialist system. He also had no patience for those who advanced the idea that black people should have a state of their own. Dr. King believed black Americans contributed mightily to the shaping of America and were entitled to their fair share of the American dream.

The struggle of differing views did not die with Dr. King in 1968. Some of those arguments went full force into the decade of the '70s. By then, the Voting Rights Act and other reforms of the non-violent movement began showing tangible results.

The fringe movements died. Their leaders had their 15 minutes of fame. H. Rap Brown took a Muslim lifestyle and name, and leads a very low-profile life. Stokely Carmichael pops up now and again, but he has a small following.

Dr. King, even in death, continues to command the conscience of the nation. This is so because his choice of a remedy was to resort to basic American principles of justice, fairness and equality.

To see the urban underclass is to recognize how much remains to be done. It is also worth noting that the violent streets that spawned the radical movements remain violent streets. It was on those streets that Huey Newton's life ended.

His death is a reminder that the civil rights movement spawned prophets and protesters. Dr. King pronounced a prophecy that remains a challenge to the conscience of our society. And, although Huey Newton and Dr. King differed on solutions, their deaths are joined as reminders of the nation's unfinished business.