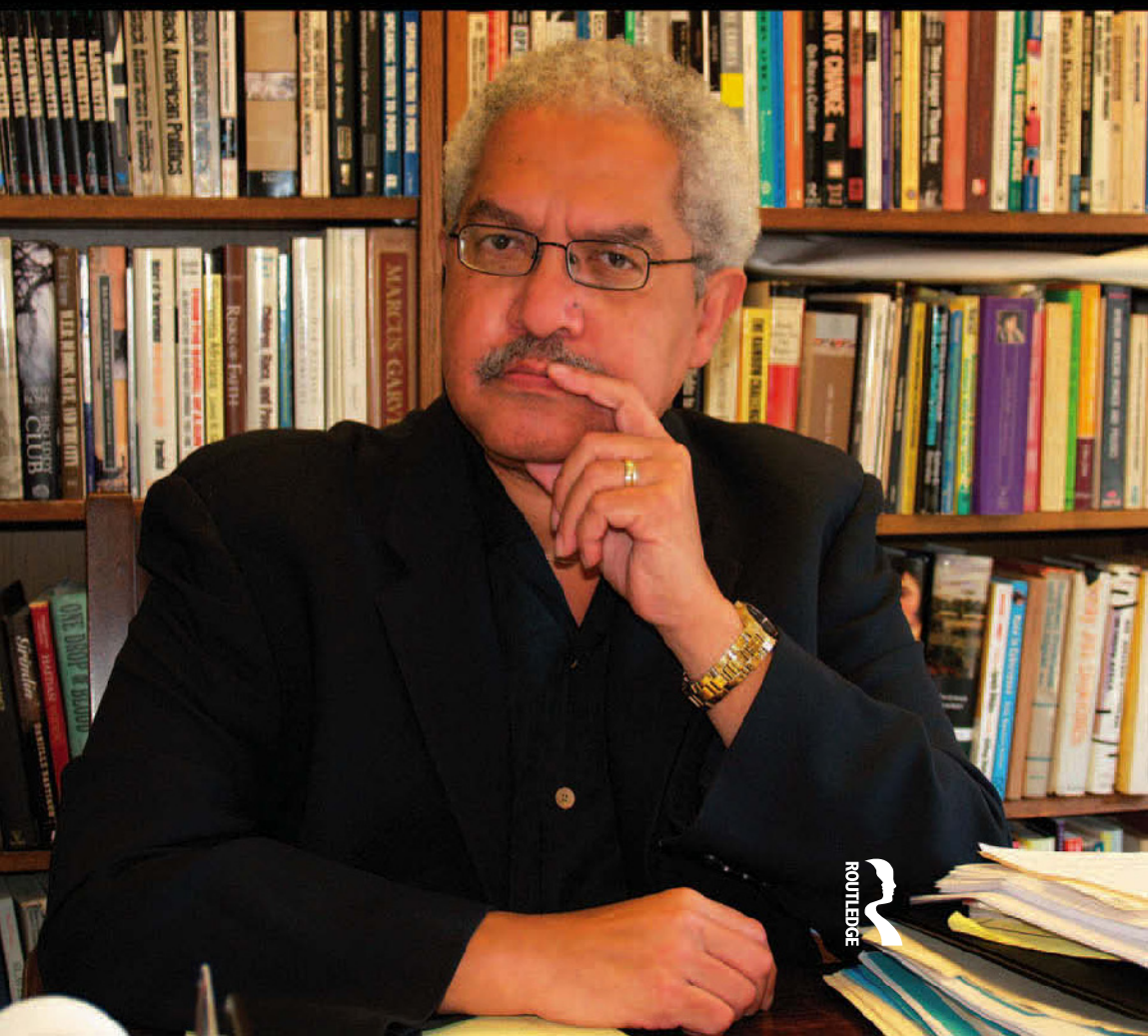


# BEYOND BOUNDARIES

## THE MANNING MARABLE READER

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MANNING MARABLE  
edited by RUSSELL RICKFORD



# *Beyond Boundaries*

*The Manning Marable Reader*

MANNING MARABLE

Edited by  
RUSSELL RICKFORD

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# Preface

The black intellectual tradition is the body of critical analysis and scholarly commentary about the people of African descent, over the past several centuries. At the core of this tradition is black history—the study and documentation of the black experience over time. In traditional West African societies, local historians who had memorized the sagas of their people were called *griots*. In the United States, for many years the enterprise of black history was suppressed and distorted. White historians for many years discounted oral histories or testimonies from slave *griots* about their lives in bondage, for example, because such evidence was deemed biased. It was only within the black intellectual tradition that scholars placed at the center of their work the perspectives and voices of African-American people. These intellectuals understood that history's power was rooted not simply in memory but also in possibility. A clear vision of the future begins with an understanding of the past.

My introduction to the black intellectual tradition came initially from my mother, June Morehead Marable. During World War II my mother worked as a secretary at a military installation. Saving her money, in the fall of 1944, June matriculated at historically black Wilberforce University in Ohio. She was subsequently employed as a housekeeper for several years in the home of Wilberforce college president, Dr. Charles H. Wesley. A noted historian of the African-American experience, Wesley made history accessible to everyday people through his popular writings and lectures. After his presidencies at Wilberforce and Central State University, Wesley went on to lead the Association for the Study of Negro Life and History. When my mother graduated in 1948, she promised that one of her children would become a black historian, in honor of Wesley. Two years later, on May 13, 1950, I was born in Dayton, Ohio. My mother, a public school teacher, organized a regime of obligatory books to read, covering US and world history. Every summer I wrote dozens of book reviews analyzing increasingly complex studies. And I loved all of it. I found freedom within the historical imagination, the search for meaning in our past. My life and career as a historian had been determined before I was born.

Consequently, from the beginning of my academic life I viewed being a historian of the black experience as becoming the bearer of truths or stories that had been suppressed or relegated to the margins. Following the models of W. E. B. Du Bois and Wesley, I came to understand that history itself could empower the oppressed; that history always had a point of view, and the perspectives we assume inevitably

shape the outcomes of our inquiry. I came to recognize the complicated dialectics of history: that all people make history, but not in ways they choose, to paraphrase Marx. History, to the disadvantaged, can become a site of resistance and cultural renewal. It forms the foundations necessary for an alternative consciousness.

*Beyond Boundaries* presents an outline of my life and adventure as a public historian and radical intellectual in the final decades of the twentieth century and the dawn of the twenty-first century. There have been several central themes that have defined nearly all of my work. The first and foremost is a question—which also preoccupied Frantz Fanon and Malcolm X—the nexus between history and black consciousness: what is the meaning of black group identity as interpreted through the stories of African-American people, over time? How do oppressed people create the tools and language of resistance? I have tried to answer these questions by examining the rise and fall of different sorts of black social movements within the United States, the Caribbean, and Africa. Each struggle is unique, yet there are also general lessons that can be taken from these experiences as a whole. Consciousness also involves the question of how people define “leadership”—the capacity of any group to realize its interests and visions. Because African Americans were denied voting rights and full political representation for hundreds of years, they evolved attitudes about politics and leadership that most white Americans did not share.

I was also fortunate to come to maturity at a time when the Black Freedom Movement in the United States emphasized the connections and commitments with Africa, other parts of the African diaspora, and other international populations. There has always been a long history of internationalism, of course, within the African-American political culture. Henry Highland Garnet, Edward Wilmot Blyden, W. E. B. Du Bois, Marcus Garvey, Paul Robeson, and Ralph Bunche all in different ways expressed internationalism. In the early 1970s, an intellectual commitment to Pan-Africanism meant, to me, that it was impossible to be a serious, well-grounded student of black American history without also knowing a good deal about Africa and the Caribbean as well. Consequently, my doctoral dissertation was a biographical study of John Langalibalele Dube, the first president and cofounder of the African National Congress (ANC). Although the primary focus of my writing from the late 1970s on was devoted to black America and the United States, I continued to analyze events and struggles across the African diaspora. I wrote extensively, for example, about the anti-apartheid movement, the triumph of the ANC, and the difficulties and challenges of post-apartheid society. I developed political and academic contacts across the black world, but especially in Jamaica, Cuba, and Great Britain. My conversations and debates with the Cubans and Jamaicans in the 1980s, for example, deeply influenced my 1987 book *African and Caribbean Politics*.

Finally, I have long been preoccupied with studying the role of intellectuals in the remaking of racialized societies. Theoretically, my points of reference were provided by the writings and lives of Du Bois, C. L. R. James, and Antonio Gramsci. Du Bois was the consummate Renaissance man, a genius in the arts, literature, sociology, and historical writing. But he was never content just to interpret the world. So he also helped to establish the Niagara Movement in 1905 and the National Asso-

ciation for the Advancement of Colored People five years later. James continually linked theoretical work to political practice, from his involvement in the international Trotskyist movement during the 1930s, to his leadership role in Trinidad and Tobago's independence movement, and subsequently in the Federation movement in the English-speaking Caribbean in the late 1950s–early 1960s. Gramsci provides the great example of how a critically engaged mind can overcome even the draconian power of prisons. I have learned from each of them and have tried to apply the same discipline and passion they embody to my own endeavors.

The most rewarding aspect of my intellectual life has been to work with young scholars, who are defining the new directions of the black intellectual tradition. One of the most talented and insightful intellectuals of this new generation is Russell Rickford. He has already produced several outstanding, scholarly studies, and his Ph.D. dissertation was a critical historical interpretation of independent and alternative educational institutions during the black power period of the 1970s. Rickford possesses a deep knowledge of the freedom struggle, as well as a Pan-Africanist's appreciation for the connections between the various leaders and resistance movements throughout the African diaspora.

Rickford has thoughtfully reviewed my historical and political essays on many different topics, produced over thirty-five years. What is really impressive is how he has focused on themes that are central to all of the works, regardless of the particular topics they may address. The collection title, *Beyond Boundaries*, is an acknowledgment of my intellectual debt to and kinship with James, author of *Beyond a Boundary*. It is a metaphor for what social history and critical theory must accomplish: the shattering of barriers that divide people into social hierarchies, that condemn human beings to lives of inequality due to their color, class, or gender. Another way of life is possible, and critical reconstructions of the past are essential in creating such futures.

Manning Marable  
June 21, 2010



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# *Introduction*

*Russell Rickford*

*The race question is subsidiary to the class question in politics, and to think of imperialism in terms of race is disastrous. But to neglect the racial factor as merely incidental is an error only less grave than to make it fundamental.*

— C. L. R. James

I first came to Harlem, the Upper Manhattan neighborhood that would provide the backdrop for some of my most significant political awakenings, to join a protest. Well, actually, it was to interview a subject for a book project I was working on, but the interview was to take place amid a sidewalk demonstration in which said subject—controversial City College of New York black studies professor Leonard Jeffries—was participating. This was around 2000, and a 6,000-square-foot Disney retail store had just opened on the corner of 125th Street and Frederick Douglass Boulevard in the heart of black Harlem. Disney's arrival on 125th, the storied thoroughfare upon which the great platform speakers—Marcus Garvey, Adam Clayton Powell, Jr., and Malcolm X—had once exhorted, and which urban decay had long since blighted, was being touted by private developers as a centerpiece of a larger Harlem revitalization. That economic revival, bolstered by the area's designation as a federal empowerment zone, would bring an Old Navy and a Magic Johnson Theater to the once-shabby block that Disney now anchored, and ultimately would clog much of "Two-Fifth" (as some black New Yorkers call Harlem's major artery) with national outlets, including H&M, Blockbuster, and, inevitably, Starbucks.

Back in 2000 some Harlemites welcomed early signs that 125th might become an overgrown strip mall. Ritualized consumerism, after all, is as much a cultural tradition—and as much a spectacle—in the largely poor, uptown community as it is on Rodeo Drive in Beverly Hills. But other locals saw the coming of big chains to their neighborhood as a kind of recolonization of the capital of

black America, a takeover that would bring few jobs and the scourge of gentrification, displacing residents and small, black-owned businesses. Especially galling to foes of Harlem's corporate redevelopment was the incursion of Disney—a brand associated with a long history of stereotypical and racist characters and plots—just paces from the famous Apollo Theater and other sacred landmarks. Black nationalists shared the impulse to defend black cultural space and the tenuous, petty bourgeois privileges of African-American storeowners against the onslaught of white capital. And so it was that sometime in 2000, having driven up from Philadelphia to interview Jeffries, I found myself tromping back and forth between police barricades on the corner of 125th and “Freddy-D,” a cassette recorder in hand, questioning the handsome professor as he strode alongside other picketers urging a boycott of the Disney store.

At the time I thought the protest entirely appropriate. I knew that Harlem had long resisted the exploitation of the non-African-American merchants, big and small, who control much of the commerce north of 110th Street. Their businesses, which often dispensed low-quality food and overpriced products to poor residents, had been targeted during spontaneous uprisings (or “race riots”) in the 1940s and 1960s, and had drawn the condemnation of the redoubtable stepladder preacher Carlos A. Cooks, whose African Nationalist Pioneer Movement had pressed Harlemites to “Buy Black.” Back in 2000 I viewed economic exploitation in much the same manner that Cooks and other Garveyites had: primarily in racial terms. To me, Harlem represented the black proletariat, and its oppression came inexorably at the hands of white rulers. It was only after I moved to the neighborhood in 2002 to attend graduate school that my critique of capitalism moved decisively beyond black and white.

In a sense, it was my ideological journey from conservative nationalism to socialism that catapulted me to Harlem in the first place. As an adolescent attending affluent, predominantly white schools in Palo Alto, California, during the 1980s and early 1990s, I had become an unabashed black nationalist. By high school I had utterly rejected the creed of liberal integration conveyed through the mushy idiom of “multiculturalism” and reinforced by triumphalist narratives of the civil rights movement of the 1950s and 1960s. Imbibing the neo-black nationalist themes of the ascendant hip-hop movement, I unquestioningly embraced racial solidarity as the exclusive path to black liberation. I idolized Malcolm X (whose uncompromising image contemporary rappers, filmmaker Spike Lee, and a host of commercial interests had recently resurrected) as an icon of black manhood and cultural authenticity.

My nationalism remained patriarchal and bourgeois as I matriculated at Howard University, Washington, D.C.'s historically black mecca, in the mid-1990s. I vividly recall the collective euphoria of the Million Man March of October 16, 1996, an event that coincided with my senior year. As I communed with thousands of black men on the National Mall that day, the deeply conservative implications of our gathering in the nation's capital to “atone” for our failure to adequately provide for, protect, and control the heterosexual, patriarchal family simply did not cross my mind. To

me, the peaceful congregation of so many brothers was evidence in itself of black progress. Clearly we were “getting ourselves together.”

As I graduated from Howard in 1997 and went to work for a Philadelphia newspaper, the assumption that the struggle against white supremacy meant fighting for black advancement within the existing capitalist order continued to largely define my political outlook. In subsequent years, however, as I began to read more seriously black thinkers whose radicalism combined racial and class analyses (including C. L. R. James, Frantz Fanon, Walter Rodney, Huey P. Newton, Angela Davis, Assata Shakur, and Malcolm himself), critiques of global capitalism as the author of the most brutal forms of racial exploitation began to pierce my consciousness. Finally, around 2001, I read Manning Marable’s *How Capitalism Underdeveloped Black America*.

It’s funny how books find you when you’re ready for them. I can’t remember precisely how I got my hands on that copy of Marable’s classic study of racism and political economy, originally published in 1983. I do recall that the slim volume, which takes its title from Rodney’s magisterial *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa*, helped cement the fragments of class analysis that had been bobbing on the sea of my racial awareness without a body of theory upon which to fasten themselves. I did not immediately become a socialist. Pan-Africanism, which I considered the most enlightened form of black nationalism, continued to shape my political sensibilities. But I knew that I had to apprentice myself to this Marable. You can imagine how delighted I was when the scholar phoned in the spring of 2002 to tell me that I had been accepted to the master’s program at Columbia University’s Institute for Research in African-American Studies (IRAAS), which he had founded in 1993 and now directed.

Columbia, which perches atop the Upper West Side of Manhattan, calls its surrounding neighborhood “Morningside Heights.” But the instant I got Marable’s call I knew where I was headed: I would live and study just north of that Ivy League behemoth in the historic village of “Harlem, USA!”

When I finally arrived in Harlem in the fall of 2002, the changes that I had first glimpsed two years earlier while shuffling around the new Disney store were gaining momentum. Condominiums continued to shoot up, their glass facades a rebuke to the brick housing projects that had long towered over much of the neighborhood. More big chain stores had appeared, and Bill Clinton had moved his headquarters into the massive State Office Building at 125th and Adam Clayton Powell Boulevard.

Some of these developments brought real benefits and convenience to local residents eager to hunt for discount clothing at the new Marshalls or pay a phone bill at the Sprint store. Many Harlemites welcomed the returning prestige of a community that, despite the glamorous episodes of its past, had for decades been associated with drugs and crime. It was this promise of continued renaissance (and, I would argue, a psychic need for white affirmation) that generated the ecstatic black crowds that greeted Clinton as he moved into his uptown office in 2001. Long before the recession began to slow the uneven development that had brought new sidewalk cafes and bank branches to some sections of Harlem, however, it was obvious that poverty

remained as omnipresent in the neighborhood as the liquor stores, pawn shops, and check-cashing joints cluttering many of its corners.

Some symbols of Harlem's economic oppression clearly reflected the domination of white elites. White absentee landlords jacked up already criminally high rents, ensuring that the gears of gentrification continued to churn. Despite Clinton's rapturous welcome to the 'hood (I was scandalized to see a 125th Street mural depicting the former president paternally holding aloft portraits of Martin Luther King, Jr., and Malcolm X), the man who had overseen welfare "reform" in the 1990s was himself responsible for curtailing the meager supplemental income upon which many of the community's working families depended. Even Harlem's tourist influxes, which every Sunday morning filled black storefront churches with Europeans toting expensive cameras, seemed to highlight the color line dividing affluence and need.

It soon grew apparent, however, that class inequity in Harlem was not merely a matter of color. Many of the young professionals moving into condos and refurbished brownstones (and thus driving up rent) were black. (Though I complained as bitterly as other tenants about soaring bills, I came to recognize that as a Columbia grad student living in an overpriced one-bedroom in Central Harlem, I was as much the face of gentrification as anyone else.) In time, African-American entrepreneurs opened an incongruous caviar store near Marcus Garvey Park. When a black-owned Lamborghini and exotic car dealership favored by bling-bling rappers appeared on Malcolm X Boulevard in an area that had seen a resurgence of homelessness, heroin addiction, and hungry children, I lost it. "This society is insane!" I thought. Some black capitalists, it seemed, were as eager as their white counterparts to exploit Harlem's renewed cultural cachet, no matter what the social cost.

My old political assumptions—that black Americans represent a nation within a nation, share a more or less uniform experience of cultural, economic, and political oppression, and can resist white subjugation only by building strong, internal institutions—seemed increasingly inadequate for comprehending Harlem realities. Meanwhile, my formal education (both at IRAAS and within Columbia's history department, where I went on to pursue a doctorate) and involvement in radical study groups exposed me to more Marxist and black feminist critiques of bourgeois nationalism. I knew that I was not becoming a doctrinaire Marxist-Leninist. Though third world anti-imperialism powerfully informed my emerging, materialist visions of social justice, narrow economic determinism seemed to me as shortsighted and reductionist as rigid black chauvinism. The virulent racism historically exhibited by white workers, moreover, left me suspicious of theories of multiracial class alliances. And the noisy sectarianism I encountered at radical conferences made me wary of the Left's belligerent orthodoxies.

The more progressive and leftist my democratic principles became, however, the more reactionary Harlem's black nationalists (as represented by self-styled fundamentalists such as the Black Israelites) began to seem. One afternoon while dining at the Uptown Juice Bar, a local vegetarian joint, I overheard a streetwise young brother, perhaps a member of the breakaway Nation of Islam faction known as the Five Percenters, railing against black lesbianism at a nearby table. According to this

guy, who like me was in his thirties, homosexuality in the 'hood was just another sign of the disintegration of the "traditional" African family, the principal cause, he argued, of much of black America's crises. Despite my better instincts, I spoke up.

Actually, I volunteered, the main source of black suffering was a devastating matrix of discrimination in areas such as housing, employment, health, education, and criminal justice rooted in a bitter history of capitalist exploitation. What black America truly needed was an end to structural racism and a massive Marshall Plan for the inner city. Besides, I concluded, how did banishing African-American gays, lesbians, and feminists from the sanctuary of authentic "blackness" empower working-class and poor black folk? The brother paused, then leaned in close, eyeing me warily. "Brother," he asked solemnly, "are you a homo?"

During my tenure in Harlem, I grew convinced of the futility of trying to dismantle white supremacy with the tools of the white supremacist—i.e., racial chauvinism, militarism, sexism, homophobia, and the unrestrained ethic of private wealth accumulation. As I continued to study and evolve, struggling to devise a political framework that could accommodate both my deep belief in the necessity for black political and cultural self-determination and my newer emphasis on the material realities of workers and the poor, I came to adopt a rather complex political identity. I was, I finally decided, a progressive black nationalist-feminist driven by the radical ethics of the Marxist-Leninist and the pragmatism and anti-authoritarianism of the social democrat.

Oddly enough, rather than segmenting my political philosophies, this approach synthesized my evolving beliefs. I still insisted upon the inalienable right, under the principle of self-government, of black folk to gather *as black folk* to address certain issues, such as affirmative action or reparations for slavery, even as we coordinate with progressive whites and others on behalf of such causes. On the other hand, I came to believe that for black workers, progressive racial consciousness and class consciousness could be symbiotic (though I recognized that all people must guard against racial essentialism and its tendency to obscure class interest). In time I also witnessed the profound power of multiracial organizing, which strengthened opposition to the American invasion of Iraq and the fascist assault on black New Orleans after Katrina. I began to understand women's liberation and gay rights as crucial weapons in the fight against racism and capitalism. I grasped the vital link between democracy and socialism—the need to place human need before private profit, distribute capital more evenly, and reorganize society along cooperative lines—and I embraced both strategic reform and rebellion as paths to social change,

In retrospect, what I was struggling toward during my sojourn in Harlem was a viable praxis—a way of translating my political revelations into a coherent system of thought and practice. How could my life and work more fully embody the expansive visions of social justice that inspired me? How could I scientifically critique corrupt political economies while defending human individualism, creativity, and joy? How could I build socialism and express solidarity with workers and the poor while drawing my livelihood from large, private universities that themselves reinforce capitalist hegemony? Ultimately I decided that I would reject dogma, orthodoxy, and static

theories in my personal and professional lives, even as democracy and economic justice remained constant ideals in my political imagination. It is this awareness and commitment to self-criticism that finally made me a true child of Malcolm, who never stopped evolving, though it cost him his life. And it is this adaptability, as much as a fundamental devotion to socialism and black freedom, that has made me a spiritual son of Manning Marable.

Marable represents the best tradition of the public intellectual. For four decades he has exemplified the principle that knowledge is communal, that it ought to be widely disseminated as a weapon of the masses rather than hoarded as the private prerogative of elites. Indeed, he has defended that old, venerable idea that non-elites—workers, prisoners, and the poor—generate their own revolutionary knowledge, and that any sound endeavor to redeem American democracy must bear in its soul the lessons of their lived experience.

Marable is a custodian of the belief that radical intellectuals must practice their craft in the scrum of political debate, alongside (and not merely on behalf of) the oppressed. Their lifestyles, in other words, must be a bit frenetic, a bit uncomfortable. At all times, in every possible way, they must struggle to place their interpretive energies at the disposal of the people. Marable inherited this sense of duty early in his career from figures like Walter Rodney, the leftist Guyanese historian and Pan-African theorist, who prior to his 1980 assassination, in the service of workers and the poor in Jamaica, Tanzania, and Guyana, essentially committed what Guinean revolutionary Amílcar Cabral called “class suicide.”

Marable met Rodney during the 1970s when both scholars were associated with Atlanta’s Institute of the Black World, an extraordinary collection of black intellectuals dedicated to cultivating the internationalist, progressive, and emancipatory impulses within the black studies movement. Though it is easy to forget today, that movement emerged during the 1960s from the basic conviction that black scholarship should respond to the total needs of black communities. This radical vision still propels Marable, whose accessible, astonishingly profuse publications and lectures (a remarkable portion of which are dispatched to popular audiences) have long nourished “the grassroots” while edifying the “ebony tower” of the academy.

As an exuberant graduate student, I sat in Marable’s seminars and listened to him passionately extol the activist concept of black studies. He continually stressed the corrective, descriptive, and prescriptive functions of the field. Our task was to correct distortions of black heritage, describe the African diasporic experience, and prescribe solutions for enduring racial inequality and subjugation. In conveying this charge, Marable often cited the example and wisdom of his personal heroes, especially the distinguished Marxist theorist C. L. R. James (whose affectionate moniker, “Nello,” he invariably used), and Du Bois, father of all black intellectuals.

Marable’s writing crackles with the energy of these two titans. Its breadth and multidisciplinary nature recall their fiercely incisive political critiques and that of other black radicals who have helped sustain democratic and anticolonial movements throughout the world. Indeed, Marable’s criticism, in which the disciplines of political science and history commingle, reflects a similar long-term preoccupation with social

justice. His central mission as social scientist and humanist has been to map out tactical, progressive, and leftist responses to shifts in political economy (the link between economic relations and the organization of politics), even as corporate capital has consolidated its global hegemony over the course of his professional life, especially during the final quarter of the twentieth century and the first decade of the new millennium.

Marable has consistently promoted the ideal of a supple, ecumenical, internationalist, and multiracial American Left, alert to the illusions of liberal reform; willing to cooperate with progressives for genuine social democratic change; responsive to the day-to-day struggles of minorities, immigrants, and the poor; imbued with the transformative, egalitarian spirit of the black freedom struggle. At the same time, he has agitated for a more radical, inclusive, independent, and proletarian black political agenda committed to liberating women and homosexuals, building progressive alliances across racial lines, ending the mass imprisonment for corporate profit of African Americans and Latinos, and seeking wholesale economic justice rather than the chimera of pluralist capitalism.

Throughout the backlash against black freedom, the long midnight of Reaganism, the destruction of the social wage, the horror of apartheid and genocide, the evisceration of the inner city, the betrayal of liberal complacency, the menace of corporate globalism, and the specter of imperialist war, Marable's devotion to these values has proven steadfast. He has encouraged black folk and people of conscience to remain hopeful and determined, urging us to seek strategic social reform while working to topple the leviathan of capitalism. This message, elegantly represented in the contents of this volume, may yet rescue us from cynicism, dogma, and despair, laying before us a course of radical resistance.

The articles that follow, culled from the best of Marable's popular and scholarly writing over the last thirty years, reflect the urgency, insight, and diversity of the intellectual's work. They are presented here in six interrelated sections: On Race and Racialization; On Black Protest and Politics (1970s and 1980s); On Black Protest and Politics (1990s to Present); On the Southern Question; On Black Leadership; On Building a Global Justice Movement. Taken as a whole, the pieces reveal an abiding concern with political economy, the persistence of structural racism, and the evolution of black political culture. Their most salient theme is the vortex of race and class—the historically specific manner in which systemic racism and class exploitation have conspired to stifle human progress, and the strategic ways that we can help reverse the resulting devastation.

It is this emphasis on strategy that lends this volume its striking timeliness. Whether discussing black land tenure after Reconstruction or racial profiling after the 9/11 attacks, the articles collected here forcefully argue that only the coordinated, sustained response of coalitions of people of color, workers, the poor, young people, and progressives can prevent the consolidation of a world order based on imperialism, capitalism and militarism, a project that caused profound suffering in the twentieth century and that now threatens to outdo itself in the twenty-first.

Readers will discover in these pages brisk accounts of the rise of contemporary political reaction, especially as it has devoured the moral energy of black insurgency



during the “post–civil rights” era of the last four decades. The suppression and distortion of the black freedom struggle, a movement that produced one of the greatest challenges to entrenched social inequality that the modern world has known, helped transform the flawed but hopeful War on Poverty into the social chaos and racism of the War on Drugs and the War on Crime, setting the stage for today’s jingoistic War on Terror. At the same time, the forces of reaction have waged war on social welfare, civil liberties, workers, organized labor, the poor, immigrants, women, minorities, gays, and lesbians in the name of that most patriotic American mission: subsidizing the expansion of corporate capital and expropriating wealth for the ultrarich.

While the essays featured here soberly indict the state apparatus for its role in these crimes, their primary analytic subject is us. Marable demonstrates that the internal contradictions and theoretical weaknesses of progressives and people of color are as responsible for the failures of democracy as is any onslaught from the Right. He reserves his most trenchant critiques for the shibboleths of black politics and protest. He argues, for example, that by substituting incremental reformism, accommodationism, and their own petty bourgeois class interests for more thoroughgoing definitions of black freedom, African-American leaders (from moderate leftists like A. Philip Randolph to centrists like Barack Obama) have consistently failed to fulfill their own progressive potential.

Moving beyond a narrow focus on elites, Marable invites all dissenters from the traditions of racist capitalism to help rewrite black and antiracist politics from the ground up. Doing so, he suggests, will require a bold expansion of our radical imagination. We must acknowledge the futility of bourgeois reformism and “black capitalism” as paths to racial equality. (A social structure predicated upon unemployment and severe labor exploitation can never offer the black masses full inclusion.) We must end our slavish devotion to the Democratic Party. (Genuine political dissent cannot mean sacrificing principle for vain promises or marginal gains.) Indeed, we must act within and beyond the electoral realm, resisting the delusion that Obama’s ascent to the White House signals the advent of postracial politics and the decline of institutional racism as a target for agitation and legislation.

The vision of social justice that emerges from this collection empowers us to reject elitism, dogma, and mechanistic theories while fighting for full employment, a guaranteed income, quality education and housing, universal health care, the nationalization of industries vital for human survival and prosperity, and the ethical reconstruction of our political economy. As Marable reminds us, this mandate for sweeping social change has drawn its most powerful historical impetus from the black freedom struggle’s spirit of radical egalitarianism. Today it falls to us to fulfill the movement’s largely forgotten materialist ethos and revive the dream of economic democracy.

As we embark on this mission, the moral clarity of this text may prove indispensable. Its title, borrowed from *Beyond a Boundary*, C. L. R. James’s brilliant essay on cricket and colonialism, seems especially apt. Now more than ever, drafting a new lexicon of radical struggle means traversing boundaries of race, gender, nation, religion, and ideology. By crossing these divides we may yet free our consciousness, decolonize our neighborhoods, and finally liberate Harlem.

# SECTION I

## *On Race and Racialization*

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## INTRODUCTION

### The Prism of Race

Black and white. As long as I can remember, the fundamentally defining feature of my life, and the lives of my family, was the stark reality of race. Angular and unforgiving, race was so much more than the background for what occurred or the context for our relationships. It was the social gravity which set into motion our expectations and emotions, our language and dreams. Race seemed far more powerful than distinctions between people based in language, nationality, religion or income. Race seemed granite-like, fixed and permanent, as the center of the social universe. The reality of racial discrimination constantly fed the pessimism and doubts that we as black people felt about the apparent natural order of the world, the inherent unfairness of it all, as well as limiting our hopes for a better life somewhere in the distant future.

I am a child of Middle America. I was born in Dayton, Ohio, on 13 May 1950, at the height of McCarthyism and on the eve of the Korean conflict. One of the few rituals I remember about the anti-Communist hysteria sweeping the nation in the fifties were the obligatory exercises we performed in elementary school, “ducking and covering” ourselves beneath small wooden desks in our classroom to shield ourselves from the fallout and blast of a nuclear explosion. Most of what I now recall of growing up in south-central Ohio had little to do with nuclear war or communism, only the omnipresent reality of race.

In the 1950s, Dayton was a predominantly blue-collar, working-class town, situated on the banks of the Great Miami River. Neighborhoods were divided to some extent by class. Oakwood was the well-to-do, WASP-ish community, filled with the corporate executives and professionals who ran the city’s enterprises. Dayton View on the northwest side was becoming increasingly Jewish. Kettering and Centerville were unpretentiously middle class, conservative and Republican. But beneath the divisions of income, religion and political affiliation seemed to be the broad polarization rooted in race. There appeared to be two parallel racial universes which cohabited the same city, each with its own set of religious institutions, cultural activities, social centers, clubs, political organizations and schools. African-Americans

generally resided west of the Great Miami River. The central core of the ghetto was located along the corridors of West Third and West Fifth Street. With the great migration of southern blacks to Dayton immediately following World War II, the African-American population became much more dense, and began to spread west, out to the city's farthest boundaries.

The black community existed largely in its own world, within the logic of institutions it had created to sustain itself. We were taught to be proud of our history and literature. Every day, on the way to Edison Elementary School, I would feel a surge of pride as we drove past the home of celebrated African-American poet Paul Lawrence Dunbar. My parents, James and June Marable, were school teachers, a solidly middle-class profession by the standards of the status-conscious Negro elite. During the fifties, my father taught at predominately black Dunbar and Roosevelt high schools during the day; after school was dismissed, he worked as a laborer in the second shift at Dayton tire factory. Although my father had a principal's certificate and a Master's degree, which qualified him to be appointed as a principal, he was constantly passed over by white administrators because of his fiercely independent spirit and self-initiative. Frustrated, my father eventually went into business for himself, borrowing the money to build a private nursery and daycare center for black children on the city's West Side.

Because of my parent's education and jobs, we were part of Dayton's Negro middle class. Our family attorney, James McGee, was elected the city's first black mayor after the successes and reforms in the wake of the civil-rights movement. Most of my parents' friends were physicians, dentists, lawyers, school teachers, entrepreneurs and professionals of various types. Despite their pretensions, most middle-class Negroes were barely two or three paychecks from poverty. Many of the businesses that sold consumer goods to blacks, which were located on West Third Street, were white-owned. Our own business sector consisted chiefly of funeral parlors, beauty salons, auto repair shops and small restaurants.

The college-educated Negro middle class had begun purchasing comfortable, spacious homes clustered high on the ridge which overlooked the West Side, not far from the mostly German farm families who lived in Jefferson Township. Poorer black families lived closer to the factories and foundries, near the dirt, smoke and industrial stench I vividly recall even today. Social class and income stratification were not unimportant. There seemed to be striking similarities between the houses and the manner in which working and poor people were dressed on "our" side of town and in "their" working-class neighborhoods. But color was the greatest denominator of all.

On Gettysburg Avenue there were a group of small rental properties and boarding houses which were within walking distance of the Veteran's Administration Hospital on the far West Side. In the front windows of most of these buildings were small cardboard signs, reading simply "No Colored." Blacks legally could not be denied entrance into the hotels or best restaurants downtown, but they were certainly not welcomed. White taxicab drivers often avoided picking up black passengers at the train station. Very few blacks were on the local police force. Black children weren't permitted to use the public swimming pool on Germantown Pike. In most aspects

of public and private life, whites acted toward African-Americans as “superiors,” and usually expected to be treated deferentially. There were exceptions, certainly. At my elementary school, there were white students who were friendly. There were white teachers who displayed kindness and sincerity toward their black students. But there was always an unbridgeable distance separating us. No white students with whom I attended school ever asked to come to my home. Although my parents taught in the Dayton Public School system, most white teachers and administrators maintained a strictly professional rather than personal relationship toward them. Whites were omnipresent in our lives, frequently as authority figures: politicians, police officers, bank-loan officers, school administrators, tax auditors, grocery-store managers. Race existed as a kind of prism through which we understood and saw the world, distorting and coloring everything before us.

Despite these experiences and numerous examples of discrimination, Dayton, Ohio, was never the Deep South. Although the largest department stores downtown rarely employed Negroes, I recall that black customers were usually treated with courtesy. Whites were enrolled in every school I attended. Occasionally, whites attended our black church. Public institutions were largely desegregated. The color line was at its worst where it converged with the boundaries of class inequality. Blacks were treated most differently, for example, when it was also clear that they lacked money or material resources. Conversely, middle-class African-Americans certainly experienced prejudicial behavior by whites, but often encountered a less virulent form of hatred than their sisters and brothers who were poor. The recognition of class mobility and higher education gave a small number of blacks a buffer status from the worst forms of discrimination at a day-to-day level. But despite this relative privilege, we never forgot that we were black.

Every summer we had the opportunity to encounter a far more racially charged society. At the end of the school year, my family packed our 1937 Chevrolet and traveled south, through Cincinnati and Nashville, along highways and narrow, two-lane country roads. Often at night we were forced to sleep in the cramped confines of the automobile, because we could find no motel which permitted black people to stay overnight. We would stop along the highway to purchase gasoline, never knowing in advance whether we would be allowed to use the gas station's toilet facilities. If we were stopped for any reason by a highway patrol officer, we had to be prepared for some kind of verbal, racist abuse, and we had absolutely no recourse or appeal against his behavior or actions. Finally, we would arrive at my father's family home, Tuskegee, Alabama, where the sense of racial hostility and discrimination against African-Americans was the central theme of local life. I knew that Tuskegee then was in the midst of a major legal struggle initiated by blacks to outlaw the political gerrymandering of the city that had in effect disfranchised African-Americans. We were taught that any open protest or violation of the norms of Jim Crow segregation was to court retaliation and retribution, personally and collectively. We learned that whites, with few exceptions, saw us as subhuman, without the rights to economic development, political expression and participation, and public accommodation which whites accepted and took for granted for themselves.

It was in Tuskegee, during my long visits to Alabama's Black Belt as a child, that many of my basic impressions concerning the relative permanence and inflexibility of race were formed. Part of that consciousness was shaped by the experiences and stories of my father. James Marable was the grandson of slaves, and the second son of thirteen children. His father, Manning Marable, had owned and operated a small sawmill, cutting pulpwood for farm households. Along with other black rural families, they experienced the prism of race in hundreds of different ways, which formed the basic framework of their existence. From being denied the right to vote to being confined to unequal, segregated schools; from being harassed and intimidated by local white police officers to being forced to lower one's eyes when being directly addressed by a white man, "race" was ingrained in the smallest aspects of Southern daily life.

My father rarely talked at length about growing up black in the Deep South. But occasionally, and especially when we were visiting his large, extended family in Tuskegee, he would reflect about his own history, and recall the hostility and rudeness of whites toward himself, his family and his people. He was trying to prepare me for what I would surely experience. One of my father's stories I remember best occurred on a cold, early winter day in 1946. World War II had ended only months before, and millions of young people were going home. My father had served as a master sergeant in a segregated unit in the US Army Air Corps. Arriving in the Anniston, Alabama, bus station, he had to transfer to another local bus to make the final forty-mile trek to his family's home outside Wedowee, Alabama.

My father was wearing his army uniform, proudly displaying his medals. Quietly he purchased his ticket and stood patiently in line to enter the small bus. When my father finally reached the bus driver, the white man was staring intensely at him. With an ugly frown, the driver took a step back. "Nigger," he spat at my father, "you look like you're going to give somebody some trouble. You had better wait here for the next bus." My father was immediately confused and angry. "As a soldier, you always felt sort of proud," my dad recalls. This white bus driver's remarks "hit me like a ton of bricks. Here I am, going home, and I'd been away from the South for four years. I wasn't being aggressive."

Dad turned around and saw that he was standing in front of three whites, who had purchased tickets after him. James Marable had forgotten, or had probably repressed, a central rule in the public etiquette of Jim Crow segregation. Black people had to be constantly vigilant not to offend whites in any way. My father was supposed to have stepped out of line immediately, permitting the white patrons to move ahead of him. My father felt a burning sense of rage, which he could barely contain. "You get there some other way, nigger," the driver repeated with a laugh. The bus door shut in my father's face. The bus pulled away into the distance.

There was no other bus going to Wedowee that afternoon. My father wandered from the station into the street, feeling "really disgusted." Nothing he had accomplished in the previous four years, the sacrifices he had made for his country, seemed to matter. The rhetoric of democracy and freedom which had been popularized in the war against fascism rang hollow and empty. Although he eventually obtained a ride home by hitchhiking on the highway, my father never forgot the bitterness and

hatred in the bus driver's words. Years later, he still felt his resentment and rage of that winter afternoon in Alabama. "When you go against the grain of racism," he warned me, "you pay for it, one way or another."

For both my father and myself, as well as for millions of black people for many generations, the living content of race was simultaneously and continuously created from within and imposed from without. That is, "race" is always an expression of how black people have defined themselves against the system of oppression, as well as a repressive structure of power and privilege which perpetuates an unequal status for African-Americans within a stratified social order. As an identity, race becomes a way of perceiving ourselves within a group. To be black in what seems to be a bipolar racial universe gives one instantly a set of coordinates within space and time, a sense of geographical location along an endless boundary of color. Blackness as a function of the racial superstructure also gives meaning to collective memory; it allows *us* to place ourselves within a context of racial resistance, within the many struggles for human dignity, for our families and for material resources. This consciousness of racial pride and community awareness gave hope and strength to my grandfather and father; it was also the prime motivation for the Edward Wilmot Blydens, Marcus Garveys and Fannie Lou Hamers throughout black history. In this way, the prism of race structures the community of the imagination, setting parameters for real activity and collective possibility.

But blackness in a racially stratified society is always simultaneously the "negation of whiteness." To be white is not a sign of culture, or a statement of biology or genetics: it is essentially a power relationship, a statement of authority, a social construct which is perpetuated by systems of privilege, the consolidation of property and status. There is no genius behind the idea of whiteness, only an empty husk filled with a mountain of lies about superiority and a series of crimes against "nonwhite" people. To be black in a white-dominated social order, for instance, means that one's life chances are circumscribed and truncated in a thousand different ways. To be black means that when you go to the bank to borrow money, despite the fact that you have a credit profile identical to your white counterpart, you are nevertheless two or three times more likely to be denied the loan than the white. To be black means that when you are taken to the hospital for emergency health-care treatment, the quality of care you receive will be inadequate and substandard. To be black means that your children will not have the same academic experiences and access to higher learning resources as children in the white suburbs and exclusive urban enclaves. To be black means that your mere physical presence and the reality of your being can trigger surveillance cameras at shops, supermarkets, malls and fine stores everywhere. To be black, male, and to live in central Harlem in the 1990s, for example, means that you will have a life expectancy of forty-nine years of age—less than in Bangladesh. Race constantly represents itself to black people as an apparently unending series of moments of inequality, which constantly challenge us, sapping and draining our physical, mental and moral resources.

Perhaps this is what most white Americans have never fully comprehended about "race": that racism is not just social discrimination, political disfranchisement



and acts of extra-legal violence and terror which proliferated under the Jim Crow segregation of my father's South. Nor is racism the so-called "silent discrimination" faced by my generation of African-Americans raised during the civil-rights era, who are still denied access to credit and capital by unfair banking practices, or who encounter the "glass ceiling" inside businesses which limits their job advancement. At its essential core, racism is most keenly felt in its smallest manifestations: the white merchant who drops change on the sales counter, rather than touch the hand of a black person; the white salesperson who follows you into the dressing room when you carry several items of clothing to try on, because he or she suspects that you are trying to steal; the white teacher who deliberately avoids the upraised hand of a Latino student in class, giving white pupils an unspoken yet understood advantage; the white woman who wraps the strap of her purse several times tightly around her arm, just before walking past a black man; the white taxicab drivers who speed rapidly past African-Americans or Latinos, picking up whites on the next block. Each of these incidents, no matter how small, constructs the logic for the prism of race for the oppressed. We witness clear, unambiguous changes of behavior or language by whites toward us in public and private situations, and we code or interpret such changes as "racial." These minor actions reflect a structure of power, privilege and violence which most blacks can never forget.

The grandchildren of James Marable have never encountered Jim Crow segregation. They have never experienced signs reading "white" and "colored." They have never been refused service at lunch counters, access to hotel accommodation, restaurants or amusement parks, or admission to quality schools. They have never experienced the widespread unemployment, police brutality, substandard housing and the lack of educational opportunity which constitute the everyday lives of millions of African-American youth. For my children—eighteen-year-old Malaika and sixteen-year-old twins Sojourner and Joshua—Martin Luther King, Jr., Medgar Evers, Fannie Lou Hamer and Ella Baker are distant figures from the pages of black history books. Malcolm X is the charismatic image of Denzel Washington from Spike Lee's film, or perhaps the cinematic impression from several recent hip-hop music videos. "We Shall Overcome" is an interesting but somewhat dated melody of the past, not a hopeful and militant anthem projecting an integrated America.

Yet, like my father before them, and like myself, my children are forced to view their world through the racial prism. They complain that their high-school textbooks don't have sufficient information about the activities and events related to African-Americans in the development of American society. In their classrooms, white students who claim to be their friends argue against affirmative action, insisting that the new "victims" of discrimination are overwhelmingly white and male. When Joshua goes to the shopping mall, he is followed and harassed by security guards. If he walks home alone through an affluent white neighborhood, he may be stopped by the police. White children have moved items away from the reach of my son because they have been taught the stereotype that "all blacks steal." Sojourner complains about her white teachers who have been hostile and unsympathetic toward her academic development, or who have given her lower grades for submitting virtually the identi-

cal level of work turned in by her white friends. As my daughter Malaika explains: "White people often misjudge you just by the way you look, without getting to know you. This makes me feel angry inside."

A new generation of African-Americans who never personally marched for civil rights or Black Power, who never witnessed the crimes of segregation, feel the same rage expressed by my father half a century ago. When they watch the beating of Rodney King on television or the trial of O. J. Simpson, they instantly comprehend the racism of the Los Angeles police officers involved in each case, and the larger racial implications of both incidents. When they listen to members of Congress complain about "welfare dependency" and "crime," they recognize the racial stereotypes which are lurking just behind the code words. They have come to expect hypocritical behavior from the white "friends" who act cordially toward them at school but refuse to acknowledge or recognize them in another context. Race is a social force which still has real meaning to the generation of my children.

But the problem with the prism of race is that it simultaneously clarifies and distorts social reality. It both illuminates and obscures, creating false dichotomies and distinctions between people where none really exists. The constructive identity of race, the conceptual framework which the oppressed create to interpret their experiences of inequality and discrimination, often clouds the concrete reality of class, and blurs the actual structure of power and privilege. It creates tensions between oppressed groups which share common class interests, but which may have different physical appearances or colors. For example, on the recent debates concerning undocumented immigrants, a narrow racial perspective could convince African-Americans that they should be opposed to the civil rights and employment opportunities of Mexican Americans, Central Americans and other Latino people. We could see Latinos as potential competitors in the labor market rather than as allies in a struggle against corporate capital and conservatives within the political establishment. On affirmative action, a strict racist outlook might view the interests of lower-class and working-class whites as directly conflicting with programs which could increase opportunities for blacks and other people of color. The racial prism creates an illusion that "race" is permanent and finite; but, in reality, "race" is a complex expression of unequal relations which are dynamic and ever-changing. The dialectics of racial thinking pushes black people toward the logic of "us" versus "them," rather than a formulation which cuts across the perceived boundaries of color.

This observation is not a criticism of the worldviews of my father, my children, or myself as I grew up in Dayton, Ohio. It is only common sense that most African-Americans perceive and interpret the basic struggle for equality and empowerment in distinctly racial terms. This perspective does speak to our experiences and social reality, but only to a portion of what that reality truly is. The parallel universes of race do not stand still. What was "black" and "white" in Booker T. Washington's Tuskegee of 1895 was not identical to categories of color and race in New Orleans a century ago; both are distinctly different from how we perceive and define race in the USA a generation after legal segregation. There is always a distance between our consciousness and the movement of social forces, between perception and historical

reality. “Blackness” must inevitably be redefined in material terms and ideologically, as millions of black and Hispanic people from the Caribbean, Africa and Latin America immigrate into the USA, assimilating within hundreds of urban centers and thousands of neighborhoods with other people of color. As languages, religions, cultural traditions and kinship networks among blacks in the USA become increasingly diverse and complex, our consciousness and our ideas of historical struggle against the leviathan of race also shift and move in new directions. This does not mean that “race” has declined in significance; it does mean that what we mean by “race” and how “race” is utilized as a means of dividing the oppressed are once again being transformed in many crucial respects.

At the beginning of the African presence in the Americas, an African-American culture, nationality and consciousness was constructed. Against great odds, inside the oppressive context of slavery and later racial segregation, the racial identity and perspective of resistance, a community empowered by imagination, was developed against the weight of institutional racism. That historic leap of collective self-definition and inner faith must once again occur, now inside the very different environment of mature capitalism. We must begin the process of redefining blackness in a manner which not only interprets but also transforms our world.



# HISTORY AND BLACK CONSCIOUSNESS

## The Political Culture of Black America

The central theme of black American history has been the constant struggle to overcome the barriers of race and the reality of unequal racial identities between black and white. This racial bifurcation has created parallel realities or racial universes, in which blacks and whites may interact closely with one another but perceive social reality in dramatically different ways. These collective experiences of discrimination, and this memory of resistance and oppression, have given rise to several overlapping group strategies or critical perspectives within the African-American community, which have as their objective the ultimate empowerment of black people. In this sense, the contours of struggle for black people have given rise to a very specific consciousness: a sense of our community, its needs and aspirations for itself. The major ideological debates which map the dimensions of the political mind of black America have always been about the orientation and objectives of black political culture and consciousness. The great historical battles between Booker T. Washington, the architect of the "Atlanta Compromise" of 1895, and W.E.B. Du Bois, the founder of the NAACP, and the conflicts between Du Bois and black nationalist leader Marcus Garvey were fought largely over the manner in which the black community would define for itself the political and economic tools necessary for its empowerment and future development. Sometimes the battle lines in these struggles for black leadership and for shaping the consciousness of the African-American community were defined by class divisions. More generally, the lines of separation had less to do with class than with the internalized definitions of what "race" meant to African-Americans themselves in the context of black political culture.

Ironically, the historical meaning and reality of race was always fundamentally a product of class domination. Race, in the last analysis, is neither biologically nor genetically derived. It is a structure rooted in white supremacy, economic exploitation and social privilege. It evolved in the process of slavery and the transatlantic slave trade. Racism has power only as a set of institutional arrangements and social outcomes which perpetuate the exploitation of black labor and the subordination of the black

community's social and cultural life. But all of this is masked by institutional racism to those who experience the weight of its oppression. The oppressed perceive domination through the language and appearance of racial forms, although such policies and practices always served a larger class objective. As a result, the political culture of black America is organized around racial themes, either an effort to overcome or escape the manifestations of institutional racism or to build alternative institutions which empower black people within environments of whiteness. The approach of political empowerment is distinctly racial, rather than class-oriented.

Most historians characterized the central divisions within black political culture as the 150-year struggle between "integration" and "separation." In 1925, this division was perceived as separating Du Bois and the NAACP from the Garveyites. In 1995, the division is used to distinguish such pragmatic multicultural liberals as Henry Louis Gates, director of Harvard University's Afro-American Studies department, from the architect of Afrocentrism, Temple University professor Molefi Asante. However, this theoretical model has serious limitations. The simple fact is that the vast majority of African-American people usually would not define themselves as either Roy Wilkins-style integrationists or black separatists like City University of New York Black Studies director Leonard Jeffries. Most blacks have perceived integration or black nationalism as alternative strategies which might serve the larger purpose of empowering their community and assisting in the deconstruction of institutions perpetuating racial inequality. As anthropologist Leith Mullings and I have argued (Chapter 17, *Beyond Black and White*), a more accurate description of black political culture would identify three strategic visions; these can be termed "inclusion" or integration, "black nationalism," and "transformation."

Since the rise of the free Negro community in the North during the antebellum era, inclusion has been the central impulse for reform among black Americans. The inclusionists have sought to minimize or even eradicate the worst effects and manifestations of racism within the African-American community. They have mobilized resources to alter or abolish legal restrictions on the activities of blacks, and have agitated to achieve acceptance of racial diversity by the white majority. Essentially, the inclusionists have operated philosophically and ideologically as "liberals": they usually believe that the state is inherently a "neutral apparatus," open to the pressure and persuasion of competing interest groups. They have attempted to influence public opinion and mass behavior on issues of race by changing public policies and educational and cultural activity. But the theoretical guiding star of the inclusionists has been what I term "symbolic representation." They firmly believe that the elevation and advancement of select numbers of well-educated, affluent and/or powerful blacks into positions of authority helps to dismantle the patterns and structures of racial discrimination. The theory is that if blacks are well represented inside government, businesses and social institutions, then this will go a long way toward combatting the traditional practices of inequality and patterns of discrimination. Black representatives within the system of power would use their leverage to carry out policies that benefited the entire African-American population.

Embedded deeply within the logic of inclusionism were two additional ideas. First, the intellectual foundations of inclusionism drew a strong parallel between

the pursuit of freedom and the acquisition of private property. To unshackle oneself from the bonds of inequality was, in part, to achieve the material resources necessary to improve one's life and the lives of those in one's family. This meant that freedom was defined by one's ability to gain access to resources and to the prerequisites of power. Implicitly, the orientation of inclusionism reinforced the logic and legitimacy of America's economic system and class structure, seeking to assimilate blacks within them. Second, inclusionists usually had a cultural philosophy of integration within the aesthetic norms and civil society created by the white majority. Inclusionists sought to transcend racism by acting in ways which whites would not find objectionable or repulsive. The more one behaved in a manner which emulated whites, the less likely one might encounter the negative impact and effects of Jim Crow. By assimilating the culture of whites and by minimizing the cultural originality and creativity of African-Americans, one might find the basis for a "universalist" dialogue that transcends the ancient barriers of color. Historically, the inclusionists can be traced to those groups of former slaves in colonial America who assimilated themselves into majority white societies, who forgot African languages and traditions and tried to participate fully in the social institutions that whites had built for themselves. In the nineteenth century, the inclusionists' outstanding leader was Frederick Douglass. Today, the inclusionists include most of the traditional leadership of the civil-rights organizations such as the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People and the National Urban League, the bulk of the Congressional Black Caucus and most African-American elected officials, and the majority of the older and more influential black middle class, professionals and managerial elites.

On balance, the inclusionists' strategy sought to transcend race by creating a context wherein individuals could be judged on the basis of what they accomplished rather than on the color of their skin. This approach minimized the extensive interconnectedness between color and inequality; it tended to conceive racism as a kind of social disease rather than the logical and coherent consequence of institutional arrangements, private property and power relations, reinforced by systemic violence. The inclusionists seriously underestimated the capacity and willingness of white authorities to utilize coercion to preserve and defend white privilege and property. Integration, in short, was a strategy to avoid the worst manifestations of racism, without upsetting the deep structures of inequality which set into motion the core dynamics of white oppression and domination.

Although the inclusionist perspective dominates the literature that interprets black history, it never consolidated itself as a consensus framework for the politics of the entire black community. A sizable component of the African-American population always rejected integration as a means of transcending institutional racism. This alternative vision was black nationalism. Black nationalism sought to overturn racial discrimination by building institutions controlled and owned by blacks, providing resources and services to the community. The nationalists distrusted the capacity of whites as a group to overcome the debilitating effects of white privilege, and questioned the inclusionists' simple-minded faith in the power of legal reforms. Nationalists rejected the culture and aesthetics of white Euro-America in favor of what today

would be termed an Afrocentric identity. Historically, the initial nationalist impulse for black group autonomous development really began with those slaves who ran away from the plantations and farms of whites, and who established “maroons,” frontier enclaves or villages of defiant African-Americans, or who mounted slave rebellions. Malcolm X and Marcus Garvey, among others, are within this cultural, intellectual and political tradition. However, like the inclusionists, the nationalists often tended to reify race, perceiving racial categories as static and ahistorical, rather than fluid and constantly subject to renegotiation and reconfiguration. They struggled to uproot race, but were frequently imprisoned themselves by the language and logic of inverted racial thinking. They utilized racial categories to mobilize their core constituencies without fully appreciating their own internal contradictions.

The black nationalist tradition within black political culture was, and remains, tremendously complex, rich and varied. At root, its existential foundations were the national consciousness and collective identity of people of African descent, as they struggled against racism and class exploitation. But, as in any form of nationalism, this tradition of resistance and group consciousness expressed itself politically around many different coordinates and tendencies. Within black nationalism is the separatist current, which tends to perceive the entire white community as racially monolithic and articulates racial politics with starkly confrontational and antagonistic overtones. Today, one could point to educator Len Jeffries’ controversial descriptions of European Americans as “ice people”—cold, calculating, materialistic—and African-Americans as “sun people”—warm, generous, humanistic—as a separatist-oriented, conservative social theory within the nationalist tradition. The Nation of Islam’s theory of Yacub, first advanced under the leadership of Elijah Muhammad, projected an image of whites as “devils,” incapable of positive change. At the other end of the nationalist spectrum were radicals like Hubert H. Harrison, Cyril V. Briggs and Huey P. Newton, and militant groups such as the League of Revolutionary Black Workers from the late 1960s, who incorporated a class analysis and the demand for socialism within their politics. To this radical tendency, black nationalism had to rely on the collaboration of other oppressed people regardless of the color of their skin, languages or nationalities. Between these two tendencies is the black nationalism of the rising black petty bourgeoisie, which utilizes racial segregation as a barrier to facilitate capital accumulation from the mostly working-class, black consumer market. Nationalist rhetoric such as “buy black” becomes part of the appeal employed by black entrepreneurs to generate profits. All of these contradictory currents are part of the complex historical terrain of black nationalism.

The basic problem confronting both inclusionism and black nationalism is that the distinct social structure, political economy and ethnic demography which created both strategic visions for black advancement has been radically transformed, especially in the past quarter of a century. Segregation imposed a kind of social uniformity on the vast majority of black people, regardless of their class affiliation, education or social condition. The stark brutality of legal Jim Crow, combined with the unfor- giving and vicious character of the repression that was essential to such a system, could only generate two major reactions: a struggle to be acknowledged and accepted

despite one's racial designation, or a struggle to create an alternative set of cultural, political and social axioms which could sustain a distinctly different group identity against "whiteness." But as the social definition of what it means to be "different" in the USA has changed, the whole basis for both of these traditional racial outlooks within African-American society becomes far more contentious and problematic.

Many people from divergent ethnic backgrounds, speaking various languages and possessing different cultures, now share a common experience of inequality in the USA—poor housing, homelessness, inadequate health care, underrepresentation within government, lagging incomes and high rates of unemployment, discrimination in capital markets, and police brutality on the streets. Yet there is an absence of unity between these constituencies, in part because their leaders are imprisoned ideologically and theoretically by the assumptions and realities of the past. The rhetoric of racial solidarity, for instance, can be used to mask class contradictions and divisions within the black, Latino and Asian-American communities. Symbolic representation can be manipulated to promote the narrow interest of minority elected officials who may have little commitment to advancing the material concerns of the most oppressed sectors of multicultural America.

What is also missing is a common language of resistance. Race as a social construction generates its own internal logic and social expressions of pain, anger and alienation within various communities. These are often barriers to an understanding of the larger social and economic forces at work which undermine our common humanity. From the cultural threads of our own experiences, we must find parallel patterns and symbols of struggle which permit us to draw connections between various groups within society. This requires the construction of a new lexicon of activism, a language which transcends the narrow boundaries of singular ethnic identity and embraces a vision of democratic pluralism.

The immediate factors involved in a general strategic rethinking of the paradigms for black American struggle are also international. A generation ago, black Americans with an internationalist perspective might see themselves as part of the diverse nonaligned movement of Third World nations, strategically distanced between capitalist America and Communist Russia. Like legal racial segregation, the system of Soviet Communism and the Soviet Union itself no longer exist. Apartheid as a system of white privilege and political totalitarianism no longer exists, as the liberation forces of Nelson Mandela and the African National Congress struggle to construct a multiracial democracy. The Sandinistas of Nicaragua lost power, as their model of a pluralistic, socialist-oriented society was overturned, at least for the time being. Throughout the rest of the Third World, from Ghana to Vietnam, socialists moved rapidly to learn the language of markets and foreign investment, and were forced to curtail egalitarian programs and accommodate themselves to the ideological requirements of the "New World Order" and the demands of transnational capital. Millions of people of color were on the move, one of the largest migrations in human history. Rural and agricultural populations migrated to cities in search of work and food; millions traveled from the Third World periphery to the metropolitan cores of Western Europe and North America to occupy the lowest levels of labor. In many



instances, these new groups were socially stigmatized and economically dominated, in part by the older categories of “race” and the social divisions of “difference” which separated the newest immigrants from the white “mainstream.”

Nevertheless, within this changing demographic/ethnic mix which increasingly characterizes the urban environments of Western Europe and North America, the older racial identities and categories have begun in many instances to break down, with new identities and group symbols being formulated by various “minorities.” In the United Kingdom by the 1970s, immigrants—radically divergent ethnic backgrounds and languages—from the Caribbean, Asia and Africa began to term themselves “black” as a political entity. In the US, the search for both disaggregation and rearticulation of group identity and consciousness among people of color is also occurring, although along different lines due to distinct historical experiences and backgrounds. In the Hawaiian islands, for example, many of the quarter of a million native Hawaiians support the movement for political sovereignty and self-determination. But do native Hawaiians have more in common culturally and politically with American Indians or Pacific islanders? What are the parallels and distinctions between the discrimination experienced by Mexican-Americans in the US Southwest, and African-Americans under slavery and Jim Crow segregation? Do the more than five million Americans of Arab, Kurdish, Turkish and Iranian nationality and descent have a socioeconomic experience in the USA which puts them in conflict with native-born African-Americans, or is there sufficient commonality of interest and social affinity to provide the potential framework for principled activism and unity?

Similar questions about social distinctions rooted in mixed ethnic heritages and backgrounds could be raised within the black community itself. At least three out of four native-born Americans of African descent in the USA have to some extent a racial heritage which is also American Indian, European, Asian and/or Hispanic. Throughout much of the Americas, racial categories were varied and complex, reflecting a range of social perceptions based on physical appearance, color, hair texture, class, social status and other considerations. In the USA prior to the civil-rights movement, with a few exceptions, the overwhelmingly dominant categorization was “black” and “white.” In the late 1970s, the federal government adopted a model for collecting census data based on four “races”—black, Asian, American Indian and white—and two ethnic groups, Hispanic and non-Hispanic, which could be of whatever “racial” identity. Today, all of these categories are being contested and questioned. Some of the hundreds of thousands of African-Americans and whites who intermarry have begun to call for a special category for their children—“multiracial.” By 1994, three states required a “multiracial” designation on public-school forms, and Georgia has established the “multiracial” category on its mandatory state paperwork. The “multiracial” designation, if popularized and structured into the state bureaucracy, could have the dangerous effect of siphoning of a segment of what had been the “black community” into a distinct and potentially privileged elite, protected from the normal vicissitudes and ordeals experienced by black folk under institutional racism. It could become a kind of “passing” for the twenty-first century, standing apart from the definition of blackness. Conversely, as more immigrants from the

African continent and the Caribbean intermarry with native-born black Americans, notions of what it means to be "black" become culturally and ethnically far more pluralistic and international. The category of "blackness" becomes less parochial and more expansive, incorporating the diverse languages, histories, rituals and aesthetic textures of new populations and societies.

Inside the United States, other political and social factors have contributed to the reframing of debates on race and our understanding of the social character of the black community. In just the past five years, we have experienced the decline and near-disappearance of Jesse Jackson's Rainbow Coalition and efforts to liberalize and reform the Democratic Party from within; the explosive growth of a current of conservative black nationalism and extreme racial separatism within significant sections of the African-American community; the vast social uprising of the Los Angeles rebellion in April and May 1992, triggered by a Not Guilty verdict on police officers who had viciously beaten a black man; and the political triumph of mass conservatism in the 1994 congressional elections, due primarily to an overwhelmingly Republican vote by millions of angry white males. Behind these trends and events, from the perspective of racial history, was an even larger dilemma: the failure of the modern black American freedom movement to address or even to listen to the perspectives and political insights of the "hip-hop" generation, those African-Americans born and/or socialized after the March on Washington of 1963 and the passage of the Civil Rights Act a year later. The hip-hop generation was largely pessimistic about the quality and character of black leadership, and questioned the legitimacy and relevancy of organizations like the NAACP. Although the hip-hop movement incorporated elements of black nationalism into its wide array of music and art, notably through its iconization of Malcolm X in 1990-93, it nevertheless failed to articulate a coherent program or approach to social change which addressed the complex diversities of black civil society. Both inclusionism and black nationalism had come to represent fragmented social visions and archaic agendas, which drew eclectically from racial memory. Both ideologies failed to appreciate how radically different the future might be for black people, especially in the context of a post-Cold War, postmodern, post-industrial future. The sad and sorry debacle surrounding the public vilification and firing of NAACP former national secretary Benjamin Chavis, for example, illustrated both the lack of internal democracy and accountability of black political institutions, as well as the absence of any coherent program which could speak meaningfully to the new social, political and cultural realities.

The urgent need to redefine the discourse and strategic orientation of the black movement is more abundantly clear in the mid 1990s than ever before. Proposition 187 in California, which denied medical, educational, and social services to undocumented immigrants, as well as the current national debates about affirmative action and welfare, all have one thing in common: the cynical and deliberate manipulation of racial and ethnic stereotypes by the Far Right. White conservatives understand the power of "race." They have made a strategic decision to employ code-words and symbols which evoke the deepest fears and anxieties of white middle-class and working-class Americans with regard to African-American issues and interests.

The reasons for this strategy are not difficult to discern. Since the emergence of Reaganism in the United States, corporate capitalism has attempted to restrict the redistributive authority and social-program agenda of the state. Many of the reform programs, from the legal desegregation of society in the 1960s to the Johnson administration's "War on Poverty," were created through pressure from below. The initiation of affirmative-action programs for women and minorities and the expansion of the welfare state contributed to some extent to a more humane and democratic society. The prerogatives of capital were not abolished by any means, but the democratic rights of minorities, women and working people were expanded. As capitalist investment and production became more global, the demand for cheap labor increased dramatically. Capital aggressively pressured Third World countries to suppress or outlaw unions, reduce wage levels, and eliminate the voices of left opposition. Simultaneously, millions of workers were forced to move from rural environments into cities in the desperate search for work. The "Latinization" of cities, from Los Angeles to New York, is a product of this destructive, massive economic process.

In the United States since the early 1980s, corporate capital has pushed aggressively for lower taxes, deregulation, a relaxation of affirmative action and environmental protection laws, and generally more favorable social and political conditions for corporate profits. Over the past twenty years, this has meant that real incomes of working people in the United States, adjusted for inflation, have fallen significantly. Between 1947 and 1973, the average hourly and weekly earnings of US production and nonsupervisory workers increased dramatically—from \$6.75 per hour to \$12.06 per hour (in 1993 inflation-adjusted dollars). But after 1973, production workers lost ground—from \$12.06 per hour in 1979 to \$11.26 per hour in 1989 to only \$10.83 per hour in 1993. According to the research of the Children's Defense Fund, the greatest losses occurred among families with children under the age of eighteen where the household head was also younger than the age of thirty. The inflation-adjusted income of white households in this category fell 22 per cent between 1973 and 1990. For young Latino families with children, the decline during these years was 27.9 per cent. For young black families, the drop was a devastating 48.3 per cent.

During the Reagan administration, the United States witnessed a massive redistribution of wealth upward, unequaled in our history. In 1989, the top 1 per cent of all US households received 16.4 per cent of all US incomes in salaries and wages; it possessed 48.1 per cent of the total financial wealth of the country. In other words, the top 1 per cent of all households controlled a significantly greater amount of wealth than the bottom 95 per cent of all US households (which controlled only 27.7 per cent). These trends produced a degree of economic uncertainty and fear for millions of households unparalleled since the Great Depression. White working-class families found themselves working harder, yet falling further behind. "Race" in this uncertain political environment easily became a vehicle for orienting politics toward the Right. If a white worker cannot afford a modest home in the suburbs such as his or her parents could have purchased thirty years ago, the fault is attributed not to falling wages but to affirmative action. If the cost of public education spirals skyward, white teenagers and their parents often conclude that the fault is not due to budget

cuts but to the fact that “undeserving” blacks and Hispanics have taken the places of “qualified” white students.

As significant policy debates focus on the continuing burden of race within society, the black movement is challenged to rethink its past and to restructure radically the character of its political culture. Race is all too often a barrier to understanding the central role of class in shaping personal and collective outcomes within a capitalist society. Black social theory must transcend the theoretical limitations and programmatic contradictions of the old assimilationist/integrationist paradigm on the one hand, and of separatist black nationalism on the other. We have to replace the bipolar categories, rigid racial discourses and assumptions of the segregationist past with an approach toward politics and social dialogue which is pluralistic, multicultural, and nonexclusionary. In short, we must go beyond black and white, seeking power in a world which is increasingly characterized by broad diversity in ethnic and social groupings, but structured hierarchically in terms of privilege and social inequality. We must go beyond black and white, but never at the price of forgetting the bitter lessons of our collective struggles and history, never failing to appreciate our unique cultural and aesthetic gifts or lacking an awareness of our common destiny with others of African descent. We must find a language that clearly identifies the role of class as central to the theoretical and programmatic critique of contemporary society. And we must do this in a manner which reaches out to the newer voices and colors of US society—Latinos, Asian-Americans, Pacific Island Americans, Middle East Americans, American Indians, and others.

We have entered a period in which our traditional definitions of what it has meant to be “black” must be transformed. The old racial bifurcation of white versus black no longer accurately or adequately describes the social composition and ethnic character of the United States. Harlem, the cultural capital of black America, is now more than 40 per cent Spanish-speaking. Blackness as an identity now embraces a spectrum of nationalities, languages, and ethnicities, from the Jamaican and Trinidadian cultures of the West Indies to the Hispanicized blackness of Panama and the Dominican Republic. More than ever before, we must recognize the limitations and inherent weaknesses of a model of politics which is grounded solely or fundamentally in racial categories. The diversity of ethnicities which constitute the urban United States today should help us to recognize the basic common dynamics of class undergirding the economic and social environment of struggle for everyone.

Historically, there is an alternative approach to the politics and social analysis of black empowerment which is neither inclusionist nor nationalist. This third strategy can be called “transformationist.” Essentially, transformationists within the racial history of America have sought to deconstruct or destroy the ideological foundations, social categories and institutional power of race. Transformationists have sought neither incorporation nor assimilation into a white mainstream, nor the static isolation of racial separation; instead they have advocated a restructuring of power relations and authority between groups and classes, in such a manner as to make race potentially irrelevant as a social force. This critical approach to social change begins with a radical understanding of culture. The transformationist sees culture not as a

set of artifacts or formal rituals, but as the human content and product of history itself. Culture is both the result of and the consequences of struggle; it is dynamic and ever-changing, yet structured around collective memories and traditions. The cultural history of black Americans is, in part, the struggle to maintain their own group's sense of identity, social cohesion and integrity, in the face of policies which have been designed to deny both their common humanity and particularity. To transform race in American life, therefore, demands a dialectical approach toward culture which must simultaneously preserve and destroy. We must create the conditions for a vital and creative black cultural identity—in the arts and literature, in music and film—which also has the internal confidence and grace of being to draw parallels and assume lines of convergence with other ethnic traditions. But we must destroy and uproot the language and logic of inferiority and racial inequality, which sees blackness as a permanent caste and whiteness as the eternal symbol of purity, power and privilege.

The transformationist tradition is also grounded in a radical approach to politics and the state. Unlike the integrationists, who seek “representation” within the system as it is, or the nationalists, who generally favor the construction of parallel racial institutions controlled by blacks, the transformationists basically seek the redistribution of resources and the democratization of state power along more egalitarian lines. A transformationist approach to politics begins with the formulation of a new social contract between people and the state which asks: “What do people have a right to expect from their government in terms of basic human needs which all share in common?” Should all citizens have a right to vote, but have no right to employment? Should Americans have a right to freedom of speech and unfettered expression, but no right to universal public health care? These are some of the questions that should be at the heart of the social policy agenda of a new movement for radical multicultural democracy.

The transformationist tradition in black political history embraces the radical abolitionists of the nineteenth century, the rich intellectual legacy of W.E.B. Du Bois, and the activism of militants from Paul Robeson to Fannie Lou Hamer. But it is also crucial to emphasize that these three perspectives—inclusion, black nationalism, and transformation—are not mutually exclusive or isolated from one another. Many integrationists have struggled to achieve racial equality through the policies of liberal desegregation, and have moved toward more radical means as they became disenchanted with the pace of social change. The best example of integrationist transformationism is provided by the final two years of Martin Luther King, Jr.'s public life: anti-Vietnam War activism; advocacy of a “Poor People's March” on Washington, DC; the mobilization of black sanitation workers in Memphis, Tennessee; and support for economic democracy. Similarly, many other black activists began their careers as black nationalists, and gradually came to the realization that racial inequality cannot be abolished until and unless the basic power structure and ownership patterns of society are transformed. This requires at some level the establishment of principled coalitions between black people and others who experience oppression or social inequality. The best example of a black nationalist who acquired a transforma-