

BLUEPRINT for BLACK POWER

A Moral, Political and
Economic Imperative for
the Twenty-First Century

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First Edition 1998
Second Printing

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Executive Editor: Sababu N. Plata
Assistant Editor: Adisa Makalani

Cover Illustrator: Joe Gillians

ISBN: 1-879164-06-X

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Wilson, Amos N.

Blueprint for Black power: a moral, political, and economic imperative for the twenty-first century / Amos N. Wilson. — 1st ed. p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 1-879164-06-X (alk. paper). — ISBN 1-879164-07-8 (alk. paper)**

1. Black power—United States. 2. Afro-Americans—Social Conditions—1975- 3. Afro-Americans—Economic conditions. 4. Afro-Americans—Politics and government. 5. African diaspora. 6. Twenty-first century—Forecasts. I. Title.
- E185.615.W54 1998
305.896 073—dc21

98-22964
CIP

**Library [Hardbound] Edition

AFRIKAN WORLD INFOSYSTEMS
743 Rogers Avenue, Suite 6
Brooklyn, New York 11226

Printed in the U.S.A.

New York 1998
Afrikan World InfoSystems

perceive power as drawing a vast range of human behavior into its orbit. The arena of power is no longer the exclusive preserve of a power elite or an establishment or persons clothed with legitimacy. Power is ubiquitous; it permeates human relationships. It exists whether or not it is quested for. It is the glory and the burden of most of humanity.¹

Thus, according to Burns, social power is, in essence, *collective*, and involves two essentials, intentionality (i.e., purpose, motive) and resources. Power, then, involves dynamic relationships between powerholders and power recipients and the motives and resources they utilize in their efforts to achieve mutual or individual goals. Our concern in this brief chapter is with the intentionalities and resources of a particular class of powerholders, i.e., Afrikan American leaders, and their relationships to the Afrikan American community and whether their interaction with it leads to its empowerment or disempowerment. Time and space does not allow us to critically analyze the individual and organizational leadership in the community in any detail. Therefore, we will confine ourselves to very cursory and preliminary critiques of their predominant ideological tendencies. And these will be reviewed relative only to their ability to enhance or diminish the power of the community.

The relative powerlessness of Afrikan Americans, as we have demonstrated, is not due to an absence of resources but to the misjudgment and misguided intentionalities of their leadership. The vast resources of the Afrikan American community and their potential for conversion into formidable political-economic power have been ruinously wasted or prostituted by leaders whose ineptness borders on treachery.

For our purposes herein we shall follow Burns' description of leadership:

Leadership over human beings is exercised when persons with certain motives and purposes mobilize, in competition or conflict with others, institutional, political, psychological, and other resources so as to arouse, engage, and satisfy the motives of followers. This is done in order to realize goals mutually held by both leaders and followers, as in Lenin's calls for peace, bread, and land. In brief, leaders with motive and power bases tap followers' motives in order to realize the purposes of both leaders and followers. Not only must motivation be relevant, as in power generally, but its purposes must be realized and satisfied. Leadership is exercised in a condition of conflict or competi-

1. James MacGregor Burns, *Leadership* (New York: Harper Torchlight, 1978), p. 15.

Chapter 31

THE CRISIS OF LEADERSHIP

Leaders and Followers

IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA the primary source of the host of problems which plague the Afrikan American community is powerlessness. Powerlessness is also the source of the host problems which plague Afrikan nations and peoples across the Diaspora. Afrikan communities, both at home and abroad, are corrupted by weaknesses which if not remediated by their acquisition of power will inevitably lead to their absolute corruption and final demise. Rollo May asserted "Power is essential for all living things. If we neglect the factor of power, as is the tendency in our day of reaction against the destructive effects of the misuse of power, we shall lose values that are essential to our existence as humans."

In our beginning chapters we contended, in line with the consensus of many other students of power, that power is created, defined and sustained by organized relationships between persons and between groups. James MacGregor Burns defines the primary basis of social power thusly: "Power is a *relationship* among persons." He goes on to say:

To define power not as a property or entity or possession but as a *relationship* in which two or more persons tap motivational bases in one another and bring varying resources to bear in the process is to

tion in which leaders contend in appealing to the motive bases of potential followers....

Leaders are a particular kind of power holder. Like power, leadership is relational, collective, and purposeful. Leadership shares with power the central function of achieving purpose....

The crucial variable, again, is *purpose*. Some define leadership as leaders making followers do what *followers* would not otherwise do; or as leaders making followers do what the *leaders* want them to do; I define leadership as leaders inducing followers to act for certain goals that represent the values and the motivations — the wants and needs, the aspirations and expectations — of *both leaders and followers*. And the genius of leadership lies in the manner in which leaders see and act on their own and their followers' values and motivations.

Leadership, unlike naked power-wielding is thus inseparable from followers' needs and goals.²

In the political arena, in reference to his discussion of the leadership of Mao Tse-Tung, Burns intimates that "one of the supreme qualities of the gifted political leader is to understand not only the needs of potential followers *but the way in which those needs could be activated and channeled*." [Emphasis added]. Furthermore, Burns implies that "the classical role of the great leader...is to comprehend not only the existing needs of followers but to *mobilize within them newer motivations and aspirations* that in the future [will] furnish a popular foundation for [a new] kind of leadership." [Emphasis added]

We argue here that the crises of the Afrikan American and Pan-Afrikan communities as a whole are one with the crises of leadership of those communities. Moreover, we contend that these crises of leadership flow from its intellectual and ideological bankruptcy, its wrongheaded sense of purpose or intentionality, its inability to recognize and articulate the fundamental needs of its followers and its impaired ability to pragmatically satisfy those needs if they were recognized and articulated. Black leadership as presently constituted, precisely operates against the most basic interests of the Afrikan community. It is therefore unwittingly allied with other inimical forces arrayed against the community. It is imperative that this leadership be razed from its ideological foundation so that a new leadership structure capable of realizing the needs of the Afrikan community can be constructed on its ruins.

Essentially, a crisis of leadership occurs when the intentions and needs of leadership are severely mismatched with those of its

followers. The intentions of leadership are to a significant degree indicated by its ideological orientations or attitudes in addition to its behavioral history. In this final chapter, therefore, we will very broadly review the general needs of the Afrikan American community and see in what ways the ideological intents and political orientations certain Black leadership organizations empower or disempower the community.

The Cry For New Leadership

Forty years after the United States Supreme Court outlawed segregation of the races in America's schools, supposedly in the interest of providing Afrikan Americans with "equal education" through racial integration, the majority of Black students find themselves hypersegregated in urban ghetto schools, entrapped in an education system in severe crisis and in imminent danger of total collapse. Forty years after Blacks in Montgomery, Alabama, won the right to ride in the front of the bus, Blacks in urban America are virtually the only ones, along with other forlorn minorities, riding the buses — buses to nowhere. Thirty years after gaining the right to vote, having benefitted from passage of the great 1964 voting rights act, Blacks in urban and rural America vote for Black politicians who cannot improve their plight. They can vote for the president of the United States, the only problem being that their urban votes are no longer crucially influential in determining who will be elected president. Therefore, the major parties gain political supremacy by running hard against Black images and Black interests. Twenty years after passing fair housing legislation Blacks are hypersegregated in urban ghettos and suburban neighborhoods. Worse still, many Blacks are homeless, sleeping on the sidewalks, under bridges and in abandoned buildings. After twenty-five years of affirmative action Blacks find themselves with the highest unemployment rates, locked out of corporate America, drifting into poverty evermore rapidly, begging for handouts on the streets of America. Twenty-five years after the initiation of Black capitalism Blacks find their community markets dominated by aliens. Black business persons find that they can do little business in America or with America. After forty years of being America's moral conscience, Blacks find their communities being devastated by immorality; after preaching brotherly, race-transcending love, they find themselves the most hated of races. For Blacks in America, thirty years after hearing the ringing words: "Free at last! Free at last! Thank God Almighty, I'm free at last!" America

2. *Ibid.*, p. 18.

has become even more a prison, sealing their bodies, hopes and aspirations in dungeons of despair.

For Afrikan Americans, all the promises of the Civil Rights Era have been betrayed, everything has been reversed. The more Black officials have been elected the worse the Black electorate has fared; Black homelessness became a national scandal during the tenure of a Black Secretary of Housing; the Black community was overrun with AIDS, drug addiction, tuberculosis, all sorts of diseases and maladies during the tenure of a Black man as Secretary of Health; Black nations were overrun by the imperial armies of the United States while a Black man was Head of the Joint Chiefs of Staff; the more Black judges appointed to the bench, the more Black men become police commissioners and police officers, the more Black men fill America's prisons and the more Black-on-Black violence ravages America's Black ghettos. While some 60 distinguished Black men and women sat on some 165 major corporate boards, Blacks were the only ethnic group who suffered net employment losses in major American corporations. At the time when Afrikan Americans suffered net losses in employment and other minority groups and Whites achieved net increases, Black conservative men presided as the heads of the Equal Economic Opportunity Commission. At the time when the masses of Blacks are ghettoized in America's declining cities and no longer live on, own or work the land, a Black man presided as Secretary of Agriculture. In 1993, at the appointment of a Black woman as Surgeon General, an ardent advocate of sex education and the dispensing of condoms, Black teenage pregnancy and female-headed families threaten the very foundations of Black family culture and Black cultural viability.

There is a pervasive sense of foreboding and impending doom among Afrikans who let themselves look reality dead in the face. In the face of the tremendous deterioration of their quality of life — mounting unemployment, increasing poverty, crime, moral degradation; devastating miseducation and the even more devastating lack of education; overwhelming drug addiction and insensate violence, homicide, terror, prostitution, disease and corruption; in the face of children having children, social incivility, a youth culture whose raucous music speaks of nihilism, rape, robbery and murder, the degradation and venal hatred of Black women, of everything Black; in the face of unfulfilled longings for the satisfaction of basic needs in the midst of the "affluent society" — the need for food, shelter, for physical safety and security, for belonging, love, acceptance, higher self-esteem, knowledge and understanding, freedom and autonomy,

achievement, creativity and self-realization; in the face of all these needs unfulfilled, the Afrikan community in ever-rising crescendos emits a heart-rendering cry for new leadership. Even old leaders are calling for new leadership. The persistent call for leadership in the Black community is a call for help, a call for a set of leading persons, organizations and ideas who can provide the community with a sense of unity, definition, direction, power, with a developmental plan and the wherewithal to realize its abundant human potential.

The most persistent complaints the community makes concerning its current leadership are that they have either been co-opted by the ruling White regime; are outdated in terms of values, goals and techniques; are not truly and deeply committed to the welfare of the people; are self-centered, self-serving, egocentric, corrupt; out of touch with current and future realities; timid and cannot recognize the needs of the people or articulate those needs in ways which move the people toward their satisfaction; are intellectually inept and are not effectively educating the masses and inspiring them to realize the enormous power which lies dormant within themselves.

We will not debate or critically evaluate these complaints. We believe that even if the contemporary Black leadership accurately gauged and articulated the needs of the Afrikan American community, it could not necessarily empower it as such. Though a match between leadership intentions and those of the community is necessary to Black empowerment, it in itself is not sufficient. The generation of social power requires appropriate organization, tactics and strategies — and a unifying vision or sense of mission. It requires a guiding set of ideas or an ideology whose attempted realization defines the social attitudes, relations and institutions which together can empower a people. A people are empowered or disempowered by the guiding ideologies of the leaders to whom they pledge allegiance. Though leaders recognize the needs of their followers and are at one with them in terms of their own needs, their choice of inappropriate social-political ideologies and goals may bring both themselves and their followers to despair.

In light of the foregoing discussion we think it more appropriate and productive to critically look at the ideological orientation of certain types of leadership establishments which prevail or are emergent in the Afrikan American community today, than to critically analyze the individual leaders and their politics. While grouping persons into categories is a hazardous undertaking, inevitably some do not fit neatly into a particular category or may "straddle the fence," we do think that if this is done with due precautions, categorization

can be a time-saving and productive activity. With this in mind we will immediately launch into brief critiques of three ideological orientations exhibited by Black leadership today—the assimilationist/moralist, the neo-conservative/bourgeois, and the cultural nationalist.

The Assimilationist/Moralistic-oriented Leadership Establishment

The assimilationist/moralistic leadership establishment, hereafter referred to as the assimilationists, is arguably the predominant leadership group in the Afrikan American community today. This leadership establishment is primarily comprised of civil rights organizations such as the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), the National Urban League and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC). This establishment is heavily influenced and in many instances led by congeries of Black ministers. Consequently, it is closely allied with the institutional Black Church and its leadership who, forming the most influential leadership group in the Black community, accounts significantly for its moralistic and moralizing orientation.

Besides seeking to attain full and equal civil rights, the groups which make up the assimilationist leadership establishment see the integration or assimilation of Blacks into virtually all social areas with Whites as their ultimate social and political goal. Their penultimate goal appears to be that of total psychosocial, politicoeconomic merging of Blacks with Whites to the point where the Black community will lose its ethnic identity, residential and cultural distinctiveness, self-reference and visibility as an Afrikan people or as a community of persons of Afrikan descent. They seek to not be seen as possessing "color" but to be characterized in deracialized abstract terms.

The moralistic coloring of this leadership establishment follows from its belief that separation by race is morally reprehensible, that ethnic exclusivity is morally unconscionable. More pertinent, however, is its belief that racism, especially in the form of White supremacy and all that it implies, represents a fundamentally moral problem—a problem founded on racial prejudice, stereotypes, deviations from Christian ethics, lack of racial or humanistic enlightenment and moral will. The assimilationist/moralistic establishment essentially overlooks the economic rationale for one race dominating another. Consequently, while pursuing legal and legislative remedies for racial discrimination, while vigorously protesting racial injustice, this group

advocates what Cornel West³ calls "the politics of conversion", or "a love ethic". In other words, dominant Whites must be converted or "born again" to the fundamental beliefs of the Christian religion, Christian charity, brotherhood and love, or some humanistic equivalent thereof. Politically, the belief is that Whites must become true believers in and doers of the Word. If this moral goal is achieved then Blacks would be liberated and empowered the same as Whites. Thus it follows from the logic of this ideological orientation that the freedom and well-being of Blacks are dependent on the conversion of Whites to unconditional humanity through legalistic measures and moralistic appeals to their presumed "better nature", and above all, through the "redemptive love" and self-sacrifice of Blacks.

The tenacious adherence of the assimilationists to the moralistic, non-economic, non-ethnic-based, non-Afrikan-centered approaches to the problems confronting Afrikan peoples is apparently based on their belief that White power over Blacks is essentially a moral problem or a problem involving the inadequate enforcement of constitutional guarantees; their almost absolute faith in the idea that the merging of Blacks and Whites into one represents the only possible route to freedom for Blacks; and their absolute faith that once these two groups are integrated they cannot be dis-integrated.

Neither the NAACP, Urban League, SCLC or the institutional Black Church has proposed or sought to realize ethnically based, sociocultural, politicoeconomic, technologico-military development plans for Afrikan peoples—things essential to their survival and advancement. In fact, these organizations have a history of opposing and seeing the drafting and execution of such plans as racist, nationalistic, separatist and self-segregating. While this opposition may point to a lack of confidence in the idea that such developmental plans are intellectually and organizationally achievable or desirable for Afrikans, it appears to be motivated more by the unfounded belief that the inevitable assimilation of Blacks and Whites will make such efforts on the part of Blacks unnecessary. By becoming indistinguishable from Whites, Blacks would thereby automatically inherit the power, prestige, privilege and material advantages Whites already enjoy. Thus the pursuit of power by Blacks, which would require the full active development of ethnically based organizations and institutions, is perceived as counterproductive, as a hindrance to racial merger—the supreme goal of Black assimilationists.

Consequently, the assimilationist leadership is terrified by the Black Power movement. It readily allies itself with dominant Whites

3. Cornel West, *Race Matters* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1993).

to mortally combat such. Evidently, a racial balance of power that can protect the human rights and ensure the exercise of freedom and justice of Blacks presents an undesirable alternative to what is a patently false race-merging fantasy, a delusion having absolutely no substantiating foundation in human history. A racial balance of power apparently has no appeal to the establishment whose inferiority complexes and traumatized egos are such that any other approach besides racial merger is to them unthinkable or unimaginable.

The assimilationist leadership establishment defines liberty and equality, i.e., freedom, in terms of individual liberty, equality of socioeconomic opportunity, equality before the law, equal opportunity to participate fully in the election and processes of government to public regard to race, color, or creed. It seeks to gain and involve public agencies in the protection of the private liberties and civil rights of Blacks against governmental and private racial oppression and discrimination. It hopes that the achievement of these ends would enable it to influence government and private agencies to expand the liberties of Blacks and their opportunities to gain education, nutrition, health, employment and housing equal to that of Whites. However, the expectation on the part of the assimilationists that race as a basis for the abridgement of equal rights and opportunity would lose all significance once the formal achievement of egalitarian civil rights and individual liberties as well as the establishment and commissioning of numerous public and private agencies to protect as well as affirm the equal rights and opportunities of Blacks was achieved, has proved to be an abysmal failure. While the Black community has acquired the right to vote, a substantial modicum of individual liberties and civil rights, it has not yet achieved the fundamentally important ability to effectively influence the government or private-corporate interests to live according to their egalitarian credos and to satisfy the economic and social needs of the largest majority of Black people.

Thus, at this juncture that the assimilationist leadership establishment has not achieved racial assimilation, it has achieved the right of Blacks to vote while they suffer homelessness, un- and under-employment, grossly inadequate education, continuing racial discrimination, injustice, and oppression. While this establishment has secured individual liberties (within expanded limits), other abstract rights and liberties for the Afrikan American community, such rights and liberties have not curtailed the amoral liberalism of rampant teenage pregnancy, devastating drug trafficking and addictions, Black-on-Black criminality and violence, cultural vulgarity

and incivility, educational underachievement, disruptedness and drop-outism, and the paucity of business ownership and economic impoverishment in the community.

While the bourgeois assimilationists have used their newly acquired liberties to stick their toes into the American mainstream, to take advantage of their accumulated skills, class privileges and access to some mainstream prerogatives; while they have escaped or are seeking to escape from the urban masses into the suburbs and edge cities of America, the "dangerous classes" abandoned in the inner-cities engage in a titanic struggle against their destruction by the economic demands of White supremacy and their own reactionary self-destruction. However, the assimilationists forebodingly sense that the struggles of the urban masses against destruction will inevitably engulf them as well. For their fate, their fervent wishes and self-deceptions to the contrary is inextricably tied to the fate of the masses of Black people. Thus the problems of inner-city Blacks are also the problems of assimilationist Blacks. Therein lies the dilemma of the assimilationists. And this dilemma has paralyzed their leadership and having paralyzed it, made it impotent, ineffective, and spurned by the Black masses.

The Dilemma of Assimilationist Leadership

The central dilemma of the assimilationist leadership involves the fact that the resolution of problems faced by the Black community requires that it empowers itself first through its reclamation of the Afrikan-centered consciousness and identity. The achievement of Black Power involves a revolutionary confrontation with and neutralization of the White Power establishment with which the assimilationists seek total acceptance. The avoidance of this very confrontation motivates the assimilationist to seek refuge in the pursuit of a fantasized raceless society. For assimilationists, true freedom is the freedom of a mythical raceless society.

Apparently, the assimilationists have never stopped to consider the possibility that the raceless society may never come into existence — that racism may be a permanent feature of human nature and sociopolitical relations. They evidently have never considered the possibility that even if a raceless society were to become an actuality in the far distant future the Afrikan race, given its current vulnerabilities, may not be around to enjoy its benefits. If the assimilationist could at least hypothesize the permanence of racism, they may accept the rationality of seeking to ensure the ability of Afrikan peoples to

survive by developing their sociocultural, politicoeconomic, military and technological abilities to do so.

The assimilationists obviously have underestimated the tenacity of Whites to maintain the fundamental racial status quo which has proved to be of such obvious and opulent material benefit to them and has also provided them the exhilarating psychic benefits of racial superiority. They did not seriously consider and prepare, apparently, for the possibility that Whites would vigorously play the political and economic game of taking back with one hand what they gave with the other, a game where just as Blacks are permitted to enter the rules are *suddenly* changed and Blacks must protest again to have the rules changed anew.

Sidney Wilhelm describes this new form of "invisible racism" adeptly:

Are Negroes advancing toward equality? No doubt about it, they are indeed. But where is the advancement leading them? As legal retributions seemingly preclude racial segregation and discrimination in education, transportation, military service, housing, and so forth, whites turn to other ways of depriving the Negro people. The new efforts are designed not to subjugate or oppress the black minority, but rather to isolate it. Whites wish to avoid contact with blacks. And this is more readily accomplished by treating any Negro the same as any white. When the Negro dons the military uniform, equality keeps him out of reach of officer ranks and within combat units; as job requirements rise drastically, equality in evaluating applicants regardless of race excludes the Negro just as effectively as discrimination, so massively unqualified is he in terms of what is now required for employment; the denial of employment and promotion on the basis of equality reduces the Negro to economic servitude just as impressively as Southern sharecropping; Negro college admissions remain low for integrated education when judged by educational standards expected of whites; equal economic standards for loans and home mortgages keep the Negro from new housing in the suburbs just as efficiently as restrictive covenants; the equal application of the neighborhood unit within ghettos as the basis of school districting leads to *de facto* educational segregation and results in racial separation just as surely as *de jure* educational segregation.

Such revamping of old prejudices indicates the coming trend in race relations. *Racial discrimination has not been removed entirely; racism is still a fundamental feature of White America.* It would be a mistake to say no discrimination exists in housing, education, employment, or elsewhere; we have seen racism flourishing in such areas. *But as equality becomes more and more a fact of life, we cannot*

avoid its concomitant of increasing racial separation! Whites are more anxious than ever to introduce equality where equality fosters racial division within America. This arrangement facilitates Negro removal from the affairs of White America with full compliance to an idealistic democratic precept rather than Negro entrance into mainstream American life. The Negro moves from the plantation to the ghetto as the nation concedes equality on economic terms and upholds racism: "What white Americans have never fully understood — but what the Negroes can never forget —" the *Report of the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders* so cogently testifies, "is that white society is deeply implicated in the ghetto. White institutions created it, white institutions maintain it, and white society condones it." *White America intends to forget about its black minority.*⁴ [Emphasis added]

In many areas the efforts of the assimilationists have proved very beneficial for Afrikans in America and abroad; however, the range, depth and endurance of these benefits are exceedingly questionable. It is absolutely clear that in regard to the empowerment of the Afrikan American community their failure has been colossal and catastrophic! The very phantasmic central goal of the assimilationists — that of a raceless society, a society where Afrikanicity would be of no significance, would be invisible, obviates against the construction and use of Black Power based on Afrikan-centered consciousness and identity, racial solidarity and unity, and against the construction of a powerful Pan-Afrikan politicoeconomic system. As indicated above, the construction of race-based systems and institutions of any kind requiring relative racial exclusion or separation on the part of Blacks, represents for them intolerable obstacles on the pathway to the achievement of a raceless society — their hearts' desire. This obsession registers the presence in the collective assimilationist psyche of a near-psychotic, mind-numbing ambivalence toward race and power. Ultimately, the assimilationists must destroy the very vehicle they utilize to achieve the goals for which they strive. As is evident throughout the history of the civil rights movement, the assimilationists find it necessary to use Black Power in the form of *organized, Black-based protests, marches, boycotts, class lawsuits, sit-ins, affirmative action programs, bloc voting, and so forth*, to achieve what they perceive as assimilated equality. In other words, the achievement of racial assimilation requires the use of blackness as a basis for organization. Consequently, the assimilationists find themselves in the untenable position of trying to preserve their political cake while

4. Sidney Wilhelm, *Who Needs the Negro?* (New York: Anchor Books, 1971), pp. 152-63.

eating it too. Cruse (ibid) speaks to this self-defeating contradiction when he notes the changes in race relations presaged and precipitated by the Supreme Court decision of 1954:

What would propel the politics of these changes was the enhanced power of the black vote, based in the expanded black urban ghettos. Here a contradictory fact of life ran counter to civil rights hopes and goals. One prominent white liberal put it: *"The urban ghetto was at one time and the same time the force that constricted Negro life and aspirations and yet formed the base for black political power and the activities of civil-rights organizations.* Because the black vote was often tied to democratic city machines, it was not as effective a voice of protest as some believed it could have been. Here a case of demographics worked in mysterious ways for civil rights wonders to perform. Only the segregated black urban ghetto could produce such political power. Yet, *the individual benefactors, the appointed and elected public officials and politicians whose status was predicated on the very existence of the urban ghettos would reject the legitimacy of the ghettos' existence. The general logic of this political leadership would be to eschew and disdain all social policy aimed at internal economic, social and cultural improvements of the ghettos on the assumption that such improvements amounted to the perpetuation of segregation. The civil rights influence of white liberalism had, from the outset, played a dominant role in fostering this logic.* By the 1950s, before the persistence of segregated black urban ghettos (i.e., communities) would render public school desegregation a mockery, a prominent liberal commentator had to admit:

Without the urban base, the Negro protest movement would have remained small, and without the political leverage the urban masses provided, it would have remained impotent. Though no one realized it at the time, and though other factors were also essential in bringing about the events that were to follow, by midcentury the vote of the black ghetto in the North had reached the proportions that made possible the civil rights revolution.⁵

[Emphasis added]

And yet the assimilationists have willfully resisted the full and independent political, social and economic organization of their power base, the foundations of their class standing and prestige — the urban Black masses. To put it more prosaically, the assimilationists are prone to kill the Afrikan goose that lays the golden eggs of Black Power. What is worse, it has permitted the masses to sink into economic submarginality and political impotence. As Cruse further contends:

Because of its unprecedented and unexpected social and economic evolution, this class and its various spokesmen and spokeswomen cannot admit in a political and/or economic fashion that, for all intents, it has written off the contemporary condition of the black underclass as a lost cause. (Apropos of DuBois's critique of 1934, only the state and the uplift forces and agencies of the nation can help save the black underclass.) Flushed with the civil rights optimism of the liberal consensus, the emergent new class both denied and evaded the self evident existence and the growth of a permanent underclass with its ominous signs of black family disintegration as outlined in the controversial Moynihan Report of 1965, *The Negro Family — A Case for National Action*.⁶

The ideological as well as behavioral orientation of the assimilationist leadership establishment have not been merely irrelevant vis-à-vis the Afrikan American community, especially its urban masses, but as Cruse argues, "is detrimental to future developments in the political, economic, educational, and cultural dimensions of the black cause. More than that, the traditional *civil rights leadership will oppose any attempt on the part of an alternate leadership to organize blacks into an independent political bloc.*" We must conclude that assimilationist ideology has lived far past its usefulness and must immediately undergo political euthanasia if the Afrikan community is to live.

Black Neo-Conservatism

In terms of their ideological or direct organizational influence on the political and economic character and behavior of the Afrikan American community as a whole, a nascent group of Black American ideologues commonly referred to as "Black conservatives," "Black neo-conservatives," does not merit discussion here. This group of theorists and polemicists has no significant organization or constituency in the Afrikan American community to speak of. It nevertheless has managed to worm its way into the consciousness of the community and society in general. Moreover, the Black neoconservative establishment is used by the White conservative establishment as cannon fodder in defense of White racism and domination against both Black and White liberals and Black nationalists. Black neoconservatism has defined itself in opposition to constant call of assimilationists for government intervention and largesse in the uplift of the socially depressed and politically oppressed Black masses. It also opposes the

5. Harold Cruse, *Plural But Equal*, pp. 216-17.

6. Ibid., p. 390.

belief that government and industry should make special efforts on behalf of Blacks in reparation for harm done in the past resulting from White racism. This stance by the Black "neo-con" establishment does not in anyway stand in the way of its members' or advocates' voracious pursuit and acceptance of any high offices offered by both government and industry, whether in the name of affirmative action, quotas, or just plain "help wanted." Black neo-conservatives have been ably assisted in this regard by White neo-conservatives, conservatives and crypto-racists, due to their ideological compatibility with the values and goals of the White supremacist establishment. This has led to their receiving favorable exposure in the mainstream print and electronic media, to their being appointed to influential offices and professional positions such as heads of the EEOC, the Civil Rights Commission, and to the U.S. Supreme Court under conservative administrations, and to departmental chairs at prestigious universities. These well-paid propagandists, themselves "the prime beneficiaries of precisely those maximum social, educational and professional advances resulting from civil rights legislation" (Cruse) paradoxically oppose the very collectivistic civil rights activities which have made their occupational positions possible. Their central thesis is that the current condition of Afrikans at home and abroad is no longer the result of historical or contemporary machinations of White supremacy, racial bigotry and discrimination. Some Black neo-conservatives go so far as to argue that the past oppression of Blacks and their continuing racial domination by Whites, whose significance they vigorously downplay, does not provide satisfactory explanations of the current socioeconomic subordination and marginality of Afrikan Americans and of Afrikans across the Diaspora. Martin Kilson, professor of government at Harvard University and an Afrikan American, summarizes the relationship between mainstream, i.e., White, conservatism and Black neo-conservatism thusly:

At no point in the twentieth century have the claims of black Americans for social and political parity (organized by constitutionalistic and nonviolent pressure groups like the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People) gained serious support from conservative leaders and intellectuals, secular or religious — support, that is, comparable to that which the liberal and moderate sectors among white leadership have sustained on behalf of equality of status and mobility for blacks. From the end of Reconstruction in the 1880s to the late 1960s, American conservatives typically ignored the authoritarian and violent racial-caste practices and values arrayed against black Americans in southern states where the vast majority

of blacks lived. Although American conservatives have, throughout this century, often embraced freedom movements elsewhere in the world — in Europe, Latin America, East Asia — they have always firmly resisted a proactive embrace of the black American civil rights movement as a bona fide movement fully worthy of their support. So it is in the shadow of this dismal record of mainstream American conservatism vis-à-vis black Americans' long and arduous quest for equality of status that new black conservatives have emerged.⁷

Kilson goes on to summarize the main tenets of Black neoconservative discourse relating to Black Americans.

This discourse has centered on several basic arguments concerning the black experience in the post-civil rights era. First, black conservatives assert that federal court decisions and civil rights legislation since the middle 1960s have created a color-blind milieu for black mobility, making it counter-productive for blacks to persist in viewing themselves as victims of racism and so in need of unique public policies. A second argument, linked to the first, claims that the failure of blacks and their leadership to recognize the prevalence of a color-blind American society has hindered the development of self-help or ethnic-uplift strategies for closing the black/white mobility gap. The third argument — basic to black conservative discourse — claims that affirmative action practices go too far in distorting what black conservatives perceive as the high-merit ideals that govern American occupational mobility. Black conservatives are especially concerned that such distortion of merit ideals tends to devalue the real achievement of successful black Americans, because whites will ask: "Did they make it by themselves or by affirmative action?"

The argument by conservatives on behalf of a new color-blind American society asserts that, since the middle 1960s, we can talk only of an *American racist past* — legalized housing segregation, lynchings, segregated public and private schools — and no longer of an *American racist legacy*, in the form of persistent or vestigial attitudes, values, norms, and informal practices that prevail within a variety of institutions (economic, social, political) in our post-civil rights era. In short, conservatives — black and white — claim that through legislation and judicial decisions, America's culture of racism has been vanquished, leaving no meaningful and significant traces and practices.

Generally, Black neoconservatives argue that current liberal Black leadership's obsessive concern with past racial injustice and compulsory affirmative action hinders the development and execution of

7. "Anatomy of Black Conservatism," *Transition*, Issue 59, 1993.

"self-help strategies." It is ironic that these advocates of "self-help" among Black Americans are themselves a group of "client-scholars", i.e., mercenary intellectuals, attached to the umbilical cords of the financial and institutional bastions of the conservative White American power establishment like the Heritage, Scaife, Bradley, and Olin foundations. One of the major functions of these institutions is to fund the work of both Black and White critics of Black struggles for civil rights, racial equality and affirmative action, and of the Afrocentric movement. Consequently, Black neo-cons essentially serve to rewrite traditional White conservative and racist ideological canards, trying to win for them legitimacy in the Afrikan American community by making it appear that these warmed-over, self-serving White supremacist contentions originate from their own independent minds. The central function and role of the Black neoconservative is to put a Black face on White Power.

If a central tendency of Black and White neoconservative argument can be discerned, it may best be defined in terms of an extreme White American mythological individualistic, "blaming the victim" ideological orientation. This particular White conservative tendency has been well delineated and refuted by authors William Ryan⁸ and Michael Lewis. American individualism relative to its conceptual use by neo-conservatives [and a class of neo-liberals] is best defined by Michael Lewis under the rubric *the individual-as-central sensibility*. He defines it thusly:

The emergence of this individualistic moral sensibility is of considerable significance, for as we shall see it has become central to the existence of the American *culture of inequality* — an interpretation of unequal outcomes given the assumption of equal chances. It is a sensibility that virtually ignores the impact of social structure upon personal achievement and mobility. According to this sensibility, it is the individual alone who is socially significant, who determines what his or her contribution to the commonweal will be, and who is therefore responsible for the degree of personal success achieved. Society is seen as benign, offering up opportunities and waiting to be enriched by those who have the will and the capacity to make productive use of them. This sensibility therefore removes inequality of personal perquisites from the category of social conditions in need of reform. If such inequality is seen as the product of traditional restrictions on opportunity it becomes a target for social reformers to whom it is the arbitrary and unjust outcome of a reactionary system. If, however, such inequality is simply an indication of differentials in

8. William Ryan, *Blaming The Victim* (New York: Vintage Books, 1976).

the productive exertion of individuals, free to exercise their ambitions and talents to the fullest, then the presumption of social arbitrariness cannot be sustained and only the individual can be held accountable for the state of his or her well-being. If inequality exists it is nothing more than a reflection of different personal qualities....

These explanations suggest that, because of inadequate personality structures, some people are self-defeating and therefore incapable of making the most of the opportunities which society (once again benign) proffers. Because they subscribe to poverty or lower-class subcultural world-views, some are inadequately motivated to make their way in a middle-class-dominated urban-industrial world. Because of the absence of a strong paternal model of conventional masculine competence, some boys grow up in families which ill-prepare them to participate fully and successfully in the economic mainstream. Because they lack sufficient cognitive skills to read at expected levels or reason adequately with figures, some people simply do not qualify for vocational opportunities which hold out real promise of personal success. Because of insufficient knowledge of what it takes to get along and work well with others (interpersonal competence), some are unable to make the best use of whatever productive talent they possess.⁹

While more sophisticated versions of this argument, ones preferred by liberal social scientists may attribute individual and group failure to psychodynamic makeup, cultural deprivation or orientation, family background, socialization practices, educational, cognitive and/or interpersonal incompetencies, the neoconservatives are more likely to attribute them to moral deficiencies. For the neoconservative, individuals and groups fail because of a lack of will, of desire to achieve, of drive; of the appropriate moral and social values. Failure is due to laziness, welfare dependency, a love of "low life" pleasures, and the like. The failed individual or group lacks self-respect and is not interested in striving for social respectability as defined by middle-class norms and behavior. Thus, according to this logic, as Lewis further contends, "...success" (and its attendant perquisites) comes to be understood as being within the grasp of any individual who possesses the will and develops the necessary competence to succeed, "...alternatively 'failure' (or visible disadvantage) comes to be understood as the price an individual must pay for personal dissolution and/or incompetence...."

This line of argumentation makes it saliently apparent why Black neoconservatives who utilize it are so immediately and tightly

9. Michael Lewis, *The Culture of Inequality* (New York: New American Library, 1978), pp. 8-9.

embraced by White conservatives and are so readily and copiously given White conservative and right-wing ideological, media, institutional and monetary support. Obviously this line absolves Whites and the White supremacist establishment of all historical and contemporary blame and reparative responsibility for the subordination and deprivation of Blacks. Under the rationalizing regime of this argument, White-dominated society is assumed to be fairly egalitarian and benign. Its very structure and functionality are perceived as having little significant formative impact on the personal and group morals, virtues and competencies thought to be crucial for individual and collective success. The Black neoconservative establishment, with its apparent need to rationalize its lack of ethnic connectedness and identity; its refusal to acknowledge and repay its debt to Black community activism; its refusal to take responsibility for helping to liberate the community from White domination; in its desire to enjoy the fruits of the good fortune bequeathed it by the death of numberless Black martyrs to the cause of racial justice and equality; undisturbed by the crying needs of contemporary African peoples, wants to convince Black Americans that in America opportunity is virtually unlimited and that limitations are not inequitably imposed on them by the functional imperatives of contemporary White American racism and capitalism.

We have neither the space nor time to refute the ahistorical and patently unsubstantiated idealistic arguments of the Black neoconservatives. We agree with Cruse when he contends, and goes on to establish, that "conservative arguments used to explain away racism or racial discrimination as the most important cause of black economic disadvantages...are historically and sociologically of dubious validity."

The neoconservatives seem to readily overlook the fact that even if it were absolutely true that Whites no longer engaged in racial discrimination, due to historical circumstances Blacks would remain disadvantaged relative to Whites. This would be the case simply due to the accumulated material and sociopolitical, sociocultural benefits Whites have inherited from the free labor of Black slaves; from the centuries-long racial domination and exploitation of Blacks. That is, even if they absolutely no longer practiced racial discrimination Whites would continue to enjoy an overwhelming competitive advantage over Blacks based on their near-400 years of accumulated assets alone. Moreover, neoconservatives overlook the fact that after 400 years of White racist social conditioning of Blacks; of White physical and psychic violence against Black bodies, minds and souls; of all types and combinations of physical and social restraints and

frustrations visited on Blacks by White supremacy, that the mere removal of those conditioning paradigms and social limitations in the last 20 to 30 years would enable Blacks to take full positive advantage of the alleged new freedoms and opportunities now available to them. For a tree bent by restraints since it was a sapling, in its later maturity does not immediately stand straight because those restraints are rather suddenly removed. The gambler who has played with loaded dice, who has had all the odds in his favor, who owns the "house", who has virtually stripped his marks of all their material and social assets, does them little favor when he, for whatever reason — without justly compensating them for having cheated them before — decides to "play fair" with unloaded dice. This is especially the case when he still controls the "house", sets the rules of the game, and plays with his huge accumulated cache of filthy lucre or blood money. Centuries of White oppression have so conditioned the emotional, social and behavioral orientations of Blacks to be compatible with White domination that even their complete emancipation from it would make it appear that they desire to remain subordinated or are innately incapable of independent existence. In fact, the physical, social, political and economic conditioning of Blacks by Whites continues unabated to this moment — Black neoconservative obtuseness and psychological denial notwithstanding! Blacks are *yet* to be emancipated from White domination and exploitation.

It is important to note that Black neoconservatives generally revel in making insidious comparisons between American Blacks and various immigrant groups, even Black immigrant groups who have achieved economic and professional success while native-born Black Americans presumably have lingered behind. Often this putative situation is explained in terms of the cohesiveness of the other groups, their co-operativeness, willingness to work hard, thrift, family values, morals, and the like, compared to relative impairment or absence of such virtues among Black Americans. The Black neoconservative overlooks the fact that even if this argument could be empirically verified, it is of little primary explanatory value. People are not born innately prepared to be what their culture needs for them to be if it is to sustain and advance itself. They must be socialized, i.e., socially conditioned, taught and trained to be the persons they must be if they are to positively contribute to the well-being of their culture and to their own personal well-being. Members of immigrant groups have been *socialized* to function as they do. In light of this basic socioeconomic fact, it is the role of the student of Black American socioeconomic behavior not to merely describe Black cultural traits by way of

explaining the social conditions of Blacks, but to provide a psychohistorical explanation for their evolution and presence among Blacks, of the means by which these traits were and are conditioned and socialized in Blacks by and within the context of the larger White-dominated American society. Furthermore, it is the role of the student to analyze and explain how the traits he attributes to Black Americans, putative traits such as "laziness," apathy, disunity, etc., are not only induced in them by their American experience (apparently since they have nothing to do with their Blackness, since other Black immigrants do not exhibit them), but what politicoeconomic function they serve in maintaining America's White-Black power differential and the American racial status quo. Finally, after such analyses are completed it is incumbent that alternative socialization processes, social and institutional arrangements, reconstructed racial attitudes and relations be prescribed so as to re-socialize Black Americans in ways which will transform their disadvantages into advantages. These tasks the Black neoconservative ideologues have refused to undertake. Consequently, they can only present reactionary arguments in place of promulgating proactive, pragmatic programs for resolving the problems faced by Black Americans and Afrikans across the Diaspora.

Furthermore, as we alluded to in our discussion of the assimilationist leadership establishment, the Black neoconservatives overlook the "indian giving" propensities of dominant Whites. That is, what they give with one hand they take with the other. Consequently, even if Whites decided to be absolutely racially non-discriminatory in hiring Blacks they would still maintain overwhelming competitive advantage due to the existence and practice of racial discrimination in areas pertinent to qualifying for job opportunities. For example, let us say that White-owned companies engage in absolutely no racial discrimination in the hiring of Black computer scientists. Moreover, let us say they may even give these scientists a certain number of extra credits due to the past discriminatory practices relative to their White counterparts. We contend that a strong bias in favor of hiring a much larger number of White scientists would still functionally exist not just because of their larger percentage in the population, but more tellingly, because of race and class-based differences in the funding, staffing and organization of courses in computer science which inhere between predominantly Black urban schools and predominantly White suburban schools. This structural dynamic in the education of Blacks and Whites ensures that while the Blacks who "make it" will not be discriminated against or may be even favored to some degree,

there will be relatively few of them who will qualify to receive the blessings of racially non-discriminatory employment. Ironically, it will probably be more likely under these circumstances that those Black scientists who are hired and who are either unaware of the operation of the structural differentials in the education of Blacks and Whites or who have forgotten these things as the result of so enjoying the rarified atmosphere of "racial equality", are more likely to become neophyte Black neoconservatives than Black scientists who perceive things differently. They will more likely argue that based on their lack of experience of negative racial discrimination in hiring, the significance of race in accelerating or retarding social mobility has drastically declined or disappeared.

The Black neoconservative, like the Black assimilationist, is a fanatical believer that fairy tales do come true — that the king always offers his daughter, the beautiful princess, and half his kingdom to the triumphant hero who slays the dragon. And they live happily ever after. Harking back to some of the preachments of B.T. Washington, they believe that when the Black man demonstrates his worth and proves himself worthy of the White man's respect he will be accepted as an equal in the White man's domain and live happily ever after! This never-never-land perspective is based on numerous faulty and completely unwarranted assumptions, central among which is the assumption that the White man will always rule a Kingdom he can equally divide with his Black dragonslayers; that he is inclined or compelled by nature to give away or share his daughters and his wealth with his Black underlings, hero or none; that he will not take both daughter and the given half of his Kingdom back should the need arise.

The Black neoconservative argument rests on the very dubious assumption, the one being refuted everyday now that the American economy and social opportunity system will continue to prosper and expand, will offer abundant opportunities continuously, and therefore all Blacks have to do is *qualify* for those opportunities! They need not worry about constructing an ethnically based, Afrikan-centered economy of their own, or worry about creating their own opportunity structure for self-employment; that they can depend on the beneficent White-dominated economic system to meet their needs if only they behave appropriately. In fact, they believe attempts to construct an Afrikan-centered sociocultural, politicoeconomic system would retard Black acceptance in a White or multicultural world — a world, incidentally, where Whites and other groups own and control their own ethnocentric, social and economic systems. Black neocons have

infinite faith in the propositions that other non-Afrikan ethnic groups will, in all their *magnanimity*, sacrifice their own ethnic interests, prerogatives and welfare in the interests of democratic ideals and in the interest of economically raising to equality, dependent and militarily weak Afrikans — just as Blacks have sacrificed their own vital interests in the name of "*fraternité et égalité*". There is absolutely no historical foundation for this genocidally-dangerous guiding fiction — so avariciously accepted by Black conservatives and assimilationists alike.

In the face of the ethnically based economic and military power of other ethnic groups; in the face of the fact that individual achievement, success, power, influence, and self-actualization are made possible and take place as a consequence of and within a *social* system, a system of *social* relations, a system of persons and groups and institutions systematically interacting according to societal and cultural commonalities, identities, commitments, obligations, reinforcements, regulations and expectations; in face of the fact, as noted by Parenti, that "while the socialization of owning-class members is designed to foster class loyalties and cohesions, the socialization of the propertyless moves with opposite effect", that White power is the result of White solidarity against non-whites; — in the face of all these obvious facts, the Black neoconservative is the consummate individualist. Self-hating, ethnically irresponsible, and extremely desirous of shedding his Afrikan identity which he misperceives as the source of his suffering in a White racist-dominated world, in a world marked from time immemorial by ethnocentrism, the Black neoconservative longs for an atomized individualism for himself and all other Afrikans where he will no longer be "judged by the color of his skin but by the content of his character".

Under modern capitalism, society itself becomes little more than an impersonal arena of private interests, of people devoid of strong communal bonds, living for individuated, rather than collective, need. Organic links dissolve before the rationalized, restless demands of the market society. Divested of functional productive tasks and communal relations other than the necessity of having to earn money and consume, the individual often has a difficult time "finding" himself or herself. The need to discover "who am I?", a preoccupation unknown to many earlier societies, is mistakenly treated as an interior personal matter having nothing to do with the way society is organized. Implicit in the quest for one's "individuality" is the dubious notion that the individual exists as something abstracted from a

social matrix, apart from the web of tasks, obligations, affections, and collective relationships which give people their identities, their social meaning, and their experience of humanity and of themselves. Thus people search for "autonomy" and seek to free themselves from emotional dependency upon others without questioning whether such an accomplishment is, in the deepest human sense, desirable or possible. Finding so many of their social relations to be loveless, exploitative, and opportunistic, people mistakenly seek to build an individualized autarky, to find "liberation" in a composed isolation....

Yet the question remains for all groups and persons: liberation toward what?¹⁰

The naive belief in and the desire for unalloyed, uncommitted, ethnically undefinable individuality by the extreme Black neoconservative (for not all Black neoconservatives reject race consciousness and identity) will to his utter surprise neither liberate him individually nor rescue him from his racial identity — as the phrase *Black Conservative* [note: not merely "conservative", but "black conservative"] clearly implies. Nomadic individualism will neither enhance the security of Blacks nor necessarily heighten the quality of their lives. This is made clear by the fact that the rise to material well-being and prominence by a sizable class of Black American professionals who haughtily designate themselves as "Americans" or more abstractly, as "human beings", and the rise to power by an Afrikan ruling elite, has been attended by the rapidly accelerating decline into poverty and powerlessness of the Black American and Afrikan masses.

For the neoconservative Black — like the child who believes that when he closes his eyes, the sun disappears — forgets one crucial and disempowering fact: that not because he refuses to identify himself as Afrikan, the ethnocentric world around him will cease to exist, that other ethnics will no longer see him and treat him as a Black, as an Afrikan. A race of self-chosen, disconnected former Blacks or Afrikans must lose the power that can come only from connectedness, from empathic ethnic identity, from ethnically and culturally based organization.

The neoconservatives pose the problems of Afrikan Americans and their solutions in terms of personal and familial character, ethics, morals and behavioral deportment. Their concern is not with the problems of power but with demonstrating presumed moral and characterological deficiencies of Black people, with moral adulations, idealistic preachments, and vacuous political diatribes. Moreover, since these minions of the White conservative establishment will not

10. Michael Parenti, *Power and the Powerless*, pp. 105-6.

"bite the hands that feed them" — White conservative foundations and think tanks — they dare not challenge White Power with Black Power. They cannot present Black America with proactive proposals for Afrikan liberation and empowerment, only reactionary and accommodative ones. They achieve victory over White racism by simply denying its existence and its threat to the well-being and survival of Afrikan peoples everywhere, a threat only to be overcome by Black empowerment.

Black neoconservative ideology is, therefore, in the main, disempowering for Afrikan peoples. Consequently, Afrikan peoples whose fundamental ailment is powerlessness can only do themselves a vital service by rejecting it in all haste.

Black Nationalist Leadership

Nationalism is an ideology of a thousand faces. While we all may have a similar sense of what it involves, we cannot all agree on any one definition of it. As an ideological and political concept, nationalism is related to the equally unwieldy concept of "nation". Rooted in the prefix "nat" — "to be born", nation implies an entity composed of persons who are born or adopted members of a people who share a common language, territory, economic life, worldview, a set of social experiences, values, thinking and behavioral orientations. The word "nation" is an abstract symbol which is evoked and utilized to elicit certain concrete states of consciousness and "to legitimate numerous social actions and movements often having very diverse aims."¹¹ Verdery relates nationalism to nation in the following way.

Nationalism, in this perspective, is the political utilization of the symbol nation through discourse and political activity, as well as the sentiment that draws people into responding to this symbol's use. Nationalism is a quintessentially homogenizing, differentiating, or classifying discourse: one that aims its appeal at people presumed to have certain things in common as against people thought not to have any mutual connections. In modern nationalisms, among the most important things to have in common are certain forms of culture and tradition, and specific history.

Citing the work of anthropologist John Borneman,¹² Verdery distinguishes "between nationalism and nationness, the former referring to conscious sentiments that take the nation as an object of

active devotion, the latter to daily interactions and practices that produce an inherent and often unarticulated feeling of belonging, of being home."

One of the central bases for assuming a sense of nation may be ethnicity. Ethnicity, the sense of common descent, whether real or imputed, especially when validated by generations of common historical experience and when allied with nationalism, has been the most potent force in people's attempts to achieve self-determination, to struggle against domination and exploitation by alien peoples. Nationalism undergirded by the sense of nation, provides the basis for mutual support, solidarity, identity, structure and cohesion to a people who otherwise may feel atomized, insecure, vulnerable, bereft of stabilizing norms, values and affirmative social relations. Through nationness and nationalism the individual transcends his existential aloneness and shares in the much broader virtues and powers of the group. His power and that of the group of which he is a member are one.

The power of the group amplifies and extends the power of its individual members. Nationalism has been used by nation-states to facilitate the consolidation of a distinct people(s) and territory as well as to create colonies and empires. Conversely, it has been, and can be utilized to overthrow colonial and imperial domination. Nationalism creates a collective, focused power which enables a people to achieve ends which, as separate individuals pursuing their own unrelated self-interested ends, they could never achieve. The power generated by nationalism is the bane and harbinger of destruction to those who wish to establish or maintain imperial control over other peoples. This is the main reason it is defamed vociferously by imperialistic peoples and nations despite the fact that it is the main instrument of their own domination of other peoples and nations. Nationalism is often catalytically brought into active existence by oppression. As an instrument of power it is often logically chosen as a means of overcoming oppressive and repressive conditions by a people who perceive themselves to be oppressed by another. Such is the case in regard to Black peoples and in regard to Black Nationalism.

Why Black Nationalism?

Nationalism is a double-edged sword. It can be wielded as a tool of oppression by cohesively organized peoples or nation-states such as those of Western Europe, who used it to impose their exploitative rule over many non-European nations and peoples, or by White Americans to enslave and otherwise dominate Black Americans. It can also be

¹¹ Kathrine Verdery, "Whither 'Nation' and Nationalism?: Nation and Nationalism: What are they?" *Daedalus*, Summer, 1993.

¹² John Borneman, *Belonging in the Two Berlins: Kin, State, Nation* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1992).

used as a tool to organize an oppressed people, nation-states, to best achieve their liberation from oppression and/or to achieve sovereignty or self-determination and to gain control of a national territory.

While the nationalism of some peoples or nation-states may be evoked and utilized to realize some racial sense of superiority or "manifest destiny" or to motivate one group to commandeer and exploit the resources of another, the nationalism of some peoples or nation-states is evoked and utilized to liberate themselves from their oppressive exploitation by imperialistic peoples or nation-states; to increase and realize their inherent socioeconomic potentials without necessarily implying that they are racially superior to, or intend to dominate other peoples or other states. The former nationalism intends to achieve or maintain national self-determination while denying that status to others in so far as it is able to do so. The latter nationalism intends to achieve and sustain national self-determination while not engaging in imperialism by denying autonomy or independent nationhood to others. Thus nationalism by definition and intention is not a monolithic concept and therefore all nationalisms are not the same or are equally racially or politically pernicious or counterproductive as some Eurocentric and liberal intellectuals and government spokespersons would have us believe.

Black or Afrikan nationalism is of the second variety — a nationalism of liberation and self-determination, not of conquest and domination. It is premised on the precept that Blacks as a people should not be the subjects of another people nor should they subject other peoples; that Black peoples and nations should exercise their full rights to develop and utilize their material, human and spiritual resources primarily for their own benefit and well-being and for the benefit and well-being of others as they see fit to do. They view their personhood and humanity, their nationality and ethnicity as equal to that of any and all other persons or peoples, that they are not the inferiors of others and are not destined by god or man to exist in forced servitude to others. And when, and if, and for however long they may be willfully subjected to the domination of others, they are commissioned by their inalienable right to freedom as human beings to resist such domination and overthrow it as soon as humanly possible. This is the bedrock credo of Black nationalism today as it manifests itself in the United States of America, across the Diaspora and in the world.

To paraphrase Jean Jacques Rousseau, the Afrikan is born free but he is everywhere in chains. Throughout this volume and in hundreds of volumes and papers scattered around this globe we have

chronicled the material sufferings and political vassalage of Afrikans at home and abroad, the largest proportion of these situations wrought by the hands of alien peoples. However, a crucial and substantial proportion of Afrikan suffering has been and is wrought by their own hands. Black nationalism recognizes that the power of Afrikan peoples to achieve liberation and self-determination lies within their grasp. Afrikan liberation and self-determination will not and cannot be willed or given to Afrikan peoples by non-Afrikan peoples. They must be won through the self-sustained exercise of power generated by Afrikans themselves.

The primary tools used by Black [or Afrikan] nationalists in breaking the mental chains of subordination of Afrikan peoples to other peoples are historical and cultural re-armament. Black nationalism recognizes that European peoples' domination of Black peoples has been primarily achieved and maintained by their stringently clever falsification of the consciousness of Black peoples; by their conditioning of oppressed Blacks to behave in self-defeating, self-destructive ways. This falsification of Afrikan consciousness and the related conditioning of Afrikan misbehavior, combined with the material and social deprivations imposed on Afrikans under the aegis of European economic and military prowess, describes the fundamental context of Afrikan American and Pan-Afrikan socioeconomic, sociocultural subordination and physical peril. These conditions must be hastily and soundly rectified if Afrikans in America and the world-over are to survive and prosper in freedom.

Black Cultural Nationalism. While there have been very notable attempts to address the material or economic deprivation of Blacks and the powerlessness these conditions breed, especially attempts by the Honorable Marcus Mosiah Garvey and the Nation of Islam under the leadership of the Honorable Elijah Muhammad and Malcolm X, the bulk of the attention and energy of Black nationalists have been focused on the rectification of falsifications of Afrikan history and culture. Efforts in this regard on the part of many prominent past and contemporary Black nationalists have been referred to as Black cultural nationalism, in contrast to what we might refer to as Black economic nationalism. (The reader should keep in mind that these "nationalisms" are not by any means mutually exclusive, but are merely a matter of emphasis — having important consequences nevertheless.)

Cultural nationalists seek to restore in Afrikan peoples a knowledge and practice of their true history and culture, mainly through

education and the use of various cultural artforms. They generally believe that the cultural revolution must necessarily precede or is a form of political revolution (and presumably economic revolution). Black cultural nationalists believe that Black people must free themselves culturally before they free themselves politically. Black nationalism as ideology is based on the belief that Black people in America constitute a cultural Nation.

The impact of resuscitated Afrikan and Black American history and culture has been remarkably significant in culturally revolutionizing the mind, consciousness and behavior of many in the Black community today. The growing acceptance of the ideology of Afrocentricity, Black or Afrikana Studies, Afrikan-centered and multicultural curricula; the proliferation of Afrikan study groups, Afrikan-centered seminars, forums, conferences and lectures; the establishment of Afrikan cultural institutions; the growing enactment of Afrikan-centered socialization practices and social rituals; the increased consumption of Afrikan-styled items, products, art, artifacts and wearables; the tremendously expanded trade and readership in Black American and Afrikan-centered books and literature, brilliantly attest to the effectiveness of cultural nationalism in reorienting and reconfiguring the consciousness and cultural attitudes of many in the Afrikan national and international communities. Let us hasten to add that Black nationalism has always had a significant constituency in the Afrikan American community. This constituency tends to expand during periods of crisis and to contract under the heavy-handed influences of a combination of state welfarism, concessional White liberalism allied with Black assimilationism per organizations like the NAACP, the National Urban League and other civil rights organizations, and perhaps, better economic times. Cultural nationalism has to a measurable extent even penetrated the consciousness of the traditional civil rights leadership. The tentative embrace of the Honorable Louis Farrakhan by the head of the NAACP, Ben Chavis [since deposed], and by other assimilationist leaders and some leading ministers in the institutional Black Church, seems to indicate that the message of Black nationalism is being listened to, if not put into practice, by Black establishments which not so long ago patently disavowed its preachments.

Contemporary Black Nationalism:

Absence of Organization, Creed and Plans

The relatively remarkable success of cultural nationalism in changing the cultural consciousness and tastes of a sizable segment

of the Afrikan American community simultaneously highlights its crucial success, failings and vulnerabilities. The cultural success of cultural nationalism has not been paralleled by Black social, economic and political success. While the cultural indoctrination of Black America moved apace, the social disorganization and deterioration of the Black urban community easily out-paced it. The monopolization of the Black community's economic infrastructure by alien groups has been astoundingly rapid and gripping. Unemployment in the Black community has reached Great Depression levels and continues to rise. The political clout of the Afrikan American community has diminished and is increasingly neutralized by the growing political and economic clout of other minority groups. All of these events along with others already discussed have converged to disempower Black America. In the face of this and other indicators we must conclude, therefore, that cultural nationalism and Black nationalism in general, have not yet been able to convert Black and Afrikan cultural sentiment, Black and Afrikan history, culture and pride into tangible Black Power. In this instance it has reached essentially the same impasse as that reached by the assimilationism and the Black neoconservatism. They all have been unable or unwilling to convert their ideological achievements into programmatic, tangible, bankable, politicoeconomic imperatives for Afrikans in the Americas and across the Diaspora. Relative to Black nationalists, there are a number of important reasons for this situation. We shall now list a few of the most important ones. *Washington*

Reactionary-Compensatory Blackness and Afrikanicity. Black nationalists have rightly responded to Eurocentric, White supremacist assaults on the collective body, mind, soul of Afrikan people. However, their response has too often involved a reactionary obsession with demonstrating the equality of Afrikan humanity, the primal and extraordinary accomplishments and qualities of Afrikan history and culture. While re-educating the Afrikan community about its true history and culture and the true nature of White imperialism and racism, contemporary Black nationalism has demonstrated inadequate concern with organizing effective means of overthrowing politicoeconomic oppression of the community by Whites and other ethnic groups. Huey Newton's critique of cultural nationalism still seems apropos, even if a bit overstated — "The cultural nationalists are concerned with returning to the old Afrikan culture and thereby regaining their identity and freedom. In other words, they feel that the Afrikan culture will automatically bring political freedom" (*The*

Movement, August 1968). We believe that this somewhat "magical thinking" while of utmost importance in restoring the critically wounded Afrikan ego to vital health, has retarded the equally important ability of the nationalists to provide the political rationales, theories, developmental plans, working organizations and systems to enable Afrikan peoples to regain their sovereignty and to enhance their well-being and standing in the world.

Militant Retreat. The critique originally leveled against cultural nationalism by Robert Allen still holds true for an important segment of the nationalist community. Allen (ibid) correctly points out that the belief "that black culture and art [and the mere individual and group reclamation of Afrikan culture and identity] alone will somehow bring about a revolution...has allowed a passive retreat into "blackness" on the part of some of those who call themselves revolutionaries." He goes on to say, "These so-called black revolutionaries measure their militancy by how much "black awareness" they have or how "bad" they can talk. Verbal militance thus replaces action, and the net result is passive nonresistance to oppression. Black culture becomes a badge to be worn rather than an experience to be shared." While fully supportive of the need for a deepening awareness of Black culture and history and the absolutely crucial role it must, has, and does play in motivating and shaping Black activism and the politics of Afrikan liberation, we concur with Allen when he cautions that cultural nationalism can become a retreat into reaction "if it is not firmly incorporated into a revolutionary political movement."

A Paucity of Intellectual Vision. Black nationalism is ideally a mass or people's movement. It seeks to encompass the Afrikan masses and involve them intimately in their own liberation from oppression and in the determination of their own political destiny. The chief opponents of Black nationalists have traditionally been bourgeois, assimilationist, liberal, and conservative intellectuals, both Black and White. The people-orientedness and *antibourgeoisism* of Black nationalism and its supporters have bred in many of its influential leaders a paralyzing ambivalence towards an often overt contempt for intellectuals and intellection or theorizing in general. This is not to say that Black Nationalists have no positive regard for intellectuals, for there exist highly regarded nationalist intellectuals both past and present. In fact, on the whole the most popular nationalist intellectuals tend to be those who most effectively expose the nature, history and pernicious effects of White racism, who present a history, cultural

anthropology and sociopsychological characterization supportive of and flattering to the collective and individual egos of Afrikan people.

While these types of intellectuals are justifiably popular and honored and the work they do vitally necessary to Afrikan liberation, the place and role of intellectuals who cover other concerns vital to Afrikan liberation have not been productively recognized or reinforced by the Black nationalist movement as a whole. The overwhelming popularity of charismatic intellectuals whose acclaim is basically founded on exposés of White racism and racist depravity and on flattering or uplifting portrayals of Afrikan history and culture, has unwittingly operated at the cost of submerging Black nationalist intellectuals whose pursuit of broader visions for Afrikan peoples are future-oriented, pragmatic and concerned with dealing directly with the contemporary reality of Afrikan life in the Americas and across the Diaspora. The critique Cruse made of the role played by intellectuals in the Civil Rights Movement, that this "movement is at an impasse precisely because it lacks a real functional corps of intellectuals able to confront and deal perceptively with American realities on a level that social conditions demand," applies equally to the current nationalist movement. The same can be said with regard to the global realities confronting Afrikan peoples worldwide.

Nationalists must recognize nothing is more practical and powerful than broad, solid intellectual perspectives and theories; perspectives and theories drawn from a broad array of knowledge, experience and thought, even some of which may have been developed by the imperialistic, Eurocentric establishment; perspectives and theories inextricably tied to creating the social practices which will actualize the hopes and visions of the people.

Lack of Definition and Organization. We have written of Black nationalism as if it were a clearly defined creed propagated by an organized group of dedicated advocates and activists. That this is most certainly not the case, is Black nationalism's greatest failing. The actual empowerment of Black people under the banner of Black nationalism cannot occur as long as the two main ingredients necessary for power — definition and organization — are missing or underdeveloped. Obviously, Black nationalists and nationalistic organizations functionally exist. But the absence of a consensually clarified set of goals and a working well-coordinated system of interdependent nationalist organizations, makes impossible the conversion of ambiguously defined nationalist sentiments into a powerful political-economic-cultural movement. Such a movement

must become the vehicle for liberation and racial ascendancy of Afrikan peoples in the world of the twenty-first century.

Even if Black nationalist motives and purposes were perfectly defined and matched, Black Power would still prove elusive without organizational appropriateness and a sufficiency of human and material resources. The past and present popularity of Black nationalist leaders and spokespersons, writers and lecturers, organizations and groups, point to broad support in the Afrikan community for Black nationalist ideological values and goals. Today, the Black nationalist-oriented Nation of Islam leader, the Honorable Louis Farrakhan, has a large national, international and personal following, exerts broad appeal and influence in the Afrikan community as measured by his ability to draw very large crowds and assemblies. He, without doubt, is the one of the most popular platform speakers today. There are a sizable number of lesser known nationalists who are held in high esteem across broad segments of the national and international Afrikan community. However, all this is for naught without broad agreement on purpose and without a unifying/unified nationalist organization.

Despite their declining relevance as a leadership establishment and the disempowering logic of their ideologies, the national scope of their organization has permitted the assimilationists to set the agenda, frame and shape the political/economic/cultural issues of the Afrikan American community. In sum, while the assimilationists advocate ideological orientations and programs that have proved not only to be patent failures in certain vital areas but concretely injurious to the broader economic needs and interests of Afrikan peoples, they are organized. They also have White liberal organizational monetary support. While the Black neoconservatives are the recipients of White conservative organizational and monetary support, the Black nationalist leadership establishment which advocates a popular and empowering ideology is largely bereft of the organizational infrastructure which would allow it to garner the monetary and political support of its many supporters, sympathizers and would-be followers.

A Black Nationalist Party

To be maximally powerful and effective the nationalist movement must first officially and organizationally establish its existence and reason for being. It must organize a national political party and economic system with a solid, well-trained and informed, well-organized base of grassroots organizations on local, state, regional,

national and international levels. On these levels and especially on the national and international levels the nationalists must replace the assimilationist and neoconservative organizations as the primary and legitimate leader on behalf of the Afrikan American community. They must provide the community with a viable, workable plan for economic development, development based on a mixed economy of primarily cooperative, self-help, economic institutions and collective enterprises, corporate and proprietary businesses. A Black nationalist party must provide the training, know-how and personnel with which to organize the Black community nationally. It must organize a Black-based political economy which will assume control of the internal communal markets of the community and which can successfully penetrate and effectively influence the national and international marketplace. The Black nationalist party must become the primary political arm of the Afrikan American community, its chief negotiator with other mainstream and third party organizations, the principal agency for forming coalitions with other groups, all in furthering the vital interests of the community and protecting its physical, socioeconomic and sociopsychological integrity as mandated by the community.

Parallel Institutions. A major problem a nationalistic party must face in becoming actively accepted and supported by the people is its legitimacy — that is, it must exist and act in accord with the consent of the people, according to rules, rituals, traditions and cultural values established by the people. It is only when a nationalistic party is perceived as morally and materially legitimate by the community that it can accomplish the missions it will be assigned to complete by the people.

To a significant degree, the legitimation of a Black nationalist party rests on its ability to arrive at a definition of the vital socioeconomic interests and goals acceptable to the Afrikan community and its demonstration that it is capable of realizing those interests and goals in terms of its organizational know-how.

In tandem with its own legitimation process a nationalist party must, to a significant degree, de-legitimate its rivals as representatives of the people. While we cannot in this space discuss the number of ways this delegitimation process can be approached, let us say that in general it involves the clear pointing out the inability of its political rivals and of the powers-that-be to adequately define and satisfy the needs of the people. Moreover, the nationalists must clearly demonstrate how current government policy and the policy of their rivals are actually injurious to the people's interests and well-being.

If a Black nationalist party is to delegitimize the assimilationists, neoconservatives and the White power structure as well as reduce their capacity to structure the desires, thoughts and behavioral tendencies, dependency relations, and common interests of the Black community in their selfish interests, then it must imaginatively develop and actuate an alternative set of rules and social relations, create exclusive autonomous institutions and spaces — protected from the influence of the powers-that-be — that can counteract the institutions and social power relations of the dominant power structure.

To achieve the necessary credibility and support it must attain in order to be accepted as the community's legitimate representative party, a Black nationalist party must prove itself capable of resolving important community problems. For example, a well-organized, highly regarded and trained nationalist party, by very significantly helping to reduce the ravages of drug abuse and miseducation would undoubtedly gain the gratitude and support of a beleaguered Black community. Black nationalist institutions which through manhood and womanhood education and rites of passage can very significantly help to curb violence, teenage pregnancy, school dropout-ism, adolescent incivility, and the like, would undoubtedly gain legitimacy as the true representative of the people. If a Black nationalist party can protect against police brutality; can institute Afrikan-centered schools and cultural programs which markedly enhance the academic and cultural development of Black children; can demonstrate the capacity to establish and maintain successful commercial enterprises against fierce competition from other ethnic groups, and the like, its legitimacy and community support will be assured and its ability to focus and wield Black Power decisively in the interest of Black people and humanity multiplied many-fold. However, these laudable ends cannot be achieved unless and until Black nationalists are organized through conventions, conferences, strategy and training sessions on the national, state, regional and local levels. This party must be organized under a ratified constitution with a workable system of checks and balances and a clearly defined order of election and succession to office. Above all, if it is to be a major instrument of Black Power, the nationalist party must be fully aware that it is the achievement of genuine Black Power, a power which can effectively and successfully rival the power of Whites and of any other ethnic group as well as work with them in the interest of all humankind, which must be its primary goal and reason for being. For without power the people will perish. Power to the People!

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