

CHAPTER THIRTY-ONE

Searching for Place: Nationalism, Separatism, and Pan-Africanism

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Perhaps no concept in the history of American radicalism has been more maligned or misunderstood than the concept of the “black nation.” The quest of Afro-American people for some form of territorial integrity and national self-determination has had a long and winding history . . . [T]he Afro-American people have given the concept of the “black nation” their own definition, utility, and both an organized and unorganized expression of its political intent.

. . . The idea of a “black nation” has not disappeared but has taken on an even newer expression. (William Eric Perkins, “Black Nation,” in *Encyclopedia of the American Left*, 1992)

In March of 1968, 500 Black¹ Nationalists met in Detroit, Michigan, to discuss the direction of their movement at the Black Government Conference. The conference was convened by the Malcolm X Society, former associates of Malcolm Shabazz, continuing his work in Michigan. The roster of participants of this convention read like a who’s who of Black Nationalists. Conference participants included the widow of Malcolm X, Betty Shabazz; former associates and confidants of Malcolm X, Imari Obadele, attorney Milton Henry, Hakim Jamal, Obaboa Owolo (Ed Bradley); the founder of the holiday Kwanzaa, Maulana Karenga; the poet and author Amiri Baraka; spiritual leader of the Yoruba Kingdom of the United States, Oserjiman Adefumi; and former Garveyite and Communist “Queen Mother” Audley Moore. At this conference, the participants declared their independence from the United States, demanded reparations as compensation for slavery and other violations of black human rights, identified South Carolina, Georgia, Alabama, Mississippi, and Louisiana as the national territory of the proposed Black nation, and established a provisional government for Blacks desiring to live outside the jurisdiction of the United States. The conference also voted to name the independent state the Republic of New Afrika.

The rejection of American national identity and the desire of Blacks to be independent from the jurisdiction from white society was nothing new. Over two centuries before George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, and other American patriots formed their American state, enslaved Africans in North America had rebelled to

form independent African communities. Since the colonial period of United States history, the desire to have self-determination and sovereignty has been present among African descendants in America. The history of Black Nationalism, Separatism, and Pan-Africanism has reflected a search for home for enslaved Africans and their descendants in North America. In that searching for home, nationalism, separatism, and Pan-Africanism have competed with the liberal, integrationist ideological trends for the hearts and minds of Africans in North America. While expressions of nationalism have existed throughout the Black Experience in the United States, have even been a dominant trend in some periods, they have received marginal treatment from the academy. This chapter will explore the historical role of Black Nationalism, Separatism, and Pan-Africanism in the experience of African descendants in North America and their treatment in the historiography of the African Experience in the United States.

The nationalist/separatist tradition begins with the earliest presence of captive Africans in North America. This chapter sees Black nationalists as those persons of African descent in North America who seek a separate identity from American national identity and desire to “regain some form of separate existence as a free and distinct people” (Yaki Yakubu 1994: 1). Black nationalists/separatists do not view the United States as a multi-cultural, pluralist democracy. Nationalist identity is reflected in the chosen ethnic designation of nationalists (such as “New Afrikan,” “African in America,” “Asiatic,” or “Black nation”). The USA is viewed by Black nationalists/separatists (called simply “nationalists” from here on) as a white supremacist settler colonial empire. Black nationalists believe Black people do not have the possibility of maintaining their collective integrity or humanity if they attempt to integrate into a white supremacist state. They seek some form of self-determination, up to and including independent statehood.

There are indications of Black advocacy and aspiration for political self-determination, independent statehood, and a developing national consciousness in every period of the Black Experience in the United States. Bracey, Meier, and Rudwick (1970) agree that nationalism has been the dominant ideological trend within the national Black community during certain periods in the history of African descendants in the United States. The turn of the eighteenth century (1790–1820), the late 1840s through the 1850s, the later decades of the nineteenth century through the 1920s, and the middle 1960s through the early 1970s are the moments in history when nationalism was in ascendancy or the dominant trend in Black communities throughout the United States. Without properly assessing the significance and nature of Black Nationalism, a limited and distorted picture of the historical reality of the Black Experience in the United States has been created.

Although Black aspirations to be part of the mainstream of US society have certainly been a significant part – even the dominant aspect – of Black protest, historically integration and assimilation have competed with nationalism for the hearts and minds of Black people. Some historians have argued that African descendants in the USA have exhibited an incipient and dynamic national consciousness. In a 1949 article, Herbert Aptheker addressed the issue of “Negro nationality.” Aptheker showed the development of an incipient national consciousness among Black people from the late eighteenth century until the eve of the twentieth century. In a later work, he draws attention to

... the fact that the concept of Negro nationality, however rudimentary or distorted the forms, has been expressed by various sections of the Negro population for well over a hundred years. Of no other people within the United States is this true, and this fact constitutes a very significant feature of Negro history. (Aptheker 1956)

While the traditional historiography of the Black Experience has emphasized the struggle of Black people in each generation since enslavement to enter the American political, economic, and social mainstream, in reality people of African descent have also engaged in separatist movements ever since enslavement began. A persistent theme in the Black Experience is a historical interplay “between who ‘want in’ (of white America) and those of us (Black people) who ‘want out’ (of the United States to establish a new Black nation)” (Yaki Yakubu 1994: 1).

Liberal Interpretations of Black Nationalism

To reiterate, historically the Black struggle for liberation in the United States has revolved around three basic ideological trends – assimilation, pluralism, and nationalism. Advocates of assimilation seek to integrate Black people into the American mainstream politically, socially, and culturally. Assimilationists do not question the basic values of American society or the dominant paradigms. Pluralists believe ethnic and interest groups should be able to participate in the political and economic mainstream of American society, while maintaining their cultural identity. Some may seek to achieve pluralist goals through reformist or radical means. Nationalists seek a separate national identity from the dominant society and self-determination, up to an independent national state (Van Deburg 1992: 25–8). Within these trends fall a number of different viewpoints and expressions. Each of these trends has risen and declined in influence at different times in history. Individuals and organized groups have at different moments reflected aspects of more than one trend at the same time or changed from one position to another.

One of the issues in the historiography of Black Nationalism is the ongoing dialogue between scholars from the neo-liberal critics/interpreters and those sympathetic to Black Nationalism. Nationalism exists as a critique of the American liberal tradition. Political theorist Michael Dawson asserts that “black nationalism provided the most enduring challenge to both the black and white liberal traditions” (Dawson 2001: 85). Challenging pluralist conceptions, Black nationalists argue that – owing to racism and white supremacy – Blacks cannot achieve liberty, equality, and humanity within the context of American republican democracy. This has been a historic nationalist theme from Martin Delaney and Marcus Garvey through Queen Mother Audley Moore, Malcolm X, and Kwame Ture. In contrast, interpretations of Black Nationalism by scholars from the liberal tradition have initiated a lively debate with scholars who see nationalism as a viable and legitimate Black political expression and objective.

Liberal historians of Black protest have generally characterized Black liberation as a struggle to be included and accepted into US society. Viewing the United States as a plural democracy, liberal scholars see parallels between the ideologies of descendants of enslaved Africans and ethnic immigrants that came to the USA from Europe, Latin America, and Asia. For example, August Meier and Elliot Rudwick assert in

the introduction to *Black Nationalism in America* (1970) that while a broad range of ideological viewpoints exists among ethnic immigrants, from assimilation to emigration (as in Jewish Zionism), the main thrust of ethnic ideologies is inclusion into US society. In particular, Meier and Rudwick suggest that ethnic immigrant efforts for solidarity and group power are just means to “secure integration into American society on an equal footing” (Bracey, Meier, and Rudwick 1970: liv).

While Meier and Rudwick represent a liberal interpretation in *Black Nationalism in America*, their co-editor John Bracey represents the voice of scholars sympathetic to the nationalist tradition. Offering a different conclusion in the introduction to the book, Bracey takes issue with his colleagues’ thesis. Bracey contends that Black people’s experience in the USA has been significantly different from that of ethnic immigrants because of the history of slavery and oppression. Bracey argues that Black people’s status as an underdeveloped and colonized nation makes Black Nationalism similar to the anti-colonial nationalism of Third World national liberation movements. Bracey also asserts that Black Nationalism has been “persistent and intensifying” since the founding of the American republic (ibid: lvii). He argues that the “anti-nationalist bias of most historians” is a result of their lack of attention to the activity of the masses of Black people, which would indicate nationalist sentiments. Because of the “anti-nationalist bias,” the trend toward Black autonomy and self-determination has been inadequately represented in the historiography (ibid: lix.).

The debate between Theodore Draper and Earl Ofari in *Black Scholar* also exemplifies the tension between liberal interpreters and nationalist sympathizers. Draper’s book *Rediscovery of Black Nationalism* was motivated by his concern for the politics and perspectives of the Black Studies movement of the late 1960s and early 1970s. Draper links Black Studies to the 1960s Black Power movement and its nationalist antecedents in American history. He links the Black separatist tradition to the white-inspired colonization movements of the nineteenth century. The nineteenth-century desire to send “free” Blacks “back to Africa” is described by Draper as a “white fantasy to get rid of Blacks.” On the other hand Black Nationalism is a “Black fantasy to get rid of whites.” He argues that Black Nationalism, particularly as it was manifesting itself in the 1960s, was a divisive “fantasy” potentially leading to broader conflict in American society. He argued that through democratic processes Blacks could receive equality and inclusion into the mainstream of American society (Draper 1970: 176–81).

In the June 1971 issue of the *Black Scholar*, Black author Earl Ofari offered a critique of Draper’s book. In response to *Rediscovery of Black Nationalism*, Ofari linked Draper with a tradition of liberal interpreters who have analyzed the Black Experience without consulting Black people. He characterized him as a “typical, know-it-all white liberal” and challenged not only Draper’s interpretation but also his research. Ofari argued that Draper’s lack of investigation and his liberal bias prevented him from understanding the nature of Black Culture and Black Nationalism. He also criticized Draper for not challenging the role of American capitalism and imperialism in the oppression of Africans globally, as well as inside the United States (Ofari 1970: 47–52). A response by Draper and a counter-response by Ofari appeared in the June 1971 issue of the *Black Scholar*. Draper, among other things, defended his characterization of Black culture as an ethnic, not a “national” culture,

and his interpretation of Malcolm X's abandoning nationalism in the last year of his life (Draper 1971: 3–41). Ofari, reflecting a Black Marxian perspective, dismissed Draper and other white liberals and their Black counterparts, and argued for a scholarship that reflected the experiences of the “Black working class,” calling for a “principled struggle for political control and self-determination” that is “Black working-class led” (Ofari 1971: 41–4).

Challenges of Contemporary Interpretation

One challenge for contemporary interpreters of the Black Experience is to accurately reflect nationalism – and aspirations for a separate existence – in previous generations, after uncovering evidence of it. One example of this is Russell Duncan's *Freedom's Shore: Tunis Campbell and the Georgia Freedmen*. Tunis Campbell, a nineteenth-century Black leader and activist, was born “free” in New Jersey. In 1865, at the close of the Civil War, Campbell was assigned by the Union Army to administer the Georgia Sea Islands. With a philosophy Duncan labeled “separatism for strength,” Campbell swiftly redistributed the land to the freedmen on the islands. After observing white federal troops' abuse of freedpersons on Saint Helena Island in South Carolina, Campbell decided to organize autonomous Black communities on the Georgia Sea Islands. The Saint Catherine's community was organized for self-reliance and self-determination, with its own constitution, bi-cameral legislature, judiciary (including a supreme court), and a civilian militia.

Union General William Sherman's Field Order Number 15 redistributed land to Blacks in coastal South Carolina and Georgia, and prevented white planters who had abandoned the land during the Civil War from returning without federal approval. In the spirit of the order by Sherman, Saint Catherine's constitution ordered that whites not be allowed to come on the island without the permission of Campbell's government. As in other parts of “Sherman's Reservation,” Saint Catherine's Blacks resisted when the Freedman's Bureau decided to pursue a policy of utilizing freed Blacks as contract laborers rather than promoting land redistribution. The Black Militia of Saint Catherine's would not allow former slavers to come back to the island to reclaim their former plantations. When federal officials were not permitted to enter the Island by militia forces, the US military was ordered to disarm the militia and expel it to the mainland (Duncan 1986: 23–32; Magdol 1977: 104; Harding 1983: 270–1).

Duncan believes that Campbell was not motivated by aspirations for sovereignty. He concludes “[W]hether Campbell ever seriously considered setting up a truly separate black nation on the Sea Islands is unknown . . . Surely he did not intend to establish a permanent black nation” (Duncan 1986: 21). Duncan cites Campbell's opposition to the white-controlled American Colonization Society in the 1840s as evidence that he was opposed to the establishment of a sovereign Black state. Duncan may not have been aware that in the late 1850s, up until the eve of the Civil War, Campbell was an officer in the emigrationist African Civilization Society. In a period when nationalism was a dominant ideological trend among “free” Blacks, Campbell was not alone – other Black leaders, including Martin Delaney, Daniel Payne, and Henry Highland Garnet, played significant roles in the African Civilization Society. Obviously, like other Black leaders, Campbell had developed nationalist

sentiments in the face of the Dred Scott decision of 1857 and Fugitive Slave Law of 1850 (Brotz 1966: 191–6).

Another example of challenges in interpreting separatist aspirations and visions appears in *Slave Culture* by Sterling Stuckey, who has written extensively on nineteenth-century Black Nationalism. In *Slave Culture*, he quotes sections of a speech by Henry Highland Garnet to the New England Colored Citizens Convention in 1859. By that time Garnet had also moved to a more pronounced Black Nationalist position and was a leader in the emigrationist American Civilization Society. Garnet stated there was a need for a “grand center of Negro nationality, from which shall flow the streams of commerce, intellectual, and political power . . .” When asked where this “Negro nationality” would be located, he identified the southern states of the USA.

Because of the concentration and numbers of people of African descent in the South, Garnet saw the potential of self-determination there. Particularly if the transatlantic traffic in African labor were to be made legal again, Garnet believed African descendants in the South would have the necessary population to achieve independence. He compared the South to predominantly African descendant states and colonies in the Caribbean. Garnet continued “Hayti is ours . . . Cuba will be ours soon and we shall have every island in the Caribbean Sea.” Given these developments, Garnet declared that if a “Negro nationality” did not emerge in the South “I am mistaken in the spirit of my people.” However, Stuckey does not interpret Garnet’s declarations as a desire for independent statehood, but rather a call for

organized but dispersed political and economic power in the South, not a separate state, might have been what he had in mind as a nationalist objective . . . [a] black nation in America . . . would have been a last resort. (Stuckey 1987: 183–4)

The Dred Scott decision and the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850 were the last straw for many free Blacks in the USA in the 1850s. Any hope of American citizenship and equal rights was now very faint after the judicial and legislative branches of the US government abandoned any pretense of protecting or respecting Black human or civil rights. The objective of a Black state was common for the nationalists of the nineteenth century. Motivated by the American political climate in 1859, Garnet and several of his contemporaries had given up hope in the promise of American democracy.

Writing in a period when independent statehood for Blacks is not a popular demand, and when liberal and integrationist ideology are promoted by most Black public figures, recent scholars have found it difficult to properly evaluate nationalism in previous periods. Thus, it is necessary to interpret their statements in terms of the political consciousness and perceived possibilities of their time instead of current popular and dominant ideological viewpoints. Without this, historic Black Nationalism cannot be truly understood.

Classical Black Nationalism

Through his important scholarship, particularly in *The Golden Age of Black Nationalism* (1978) and an edited volume titled *Classical Black Nationalism* (1996), Wilson

Moses is responsible for the term “Classical Black Nationalism,” which identifies nationalist ideology between the 1700s and the 1920s. In his edited volume of primary documents of nationalists during this period, Moses defines Classical Black Nationalism as “an ideology whose goal is the creation of an autonomous black nation-state, with definite geographical boundaries – usually in Africa” (Moses 1996: 1). Moses argues that nationalists of this period believed that “the hand of God directed their movement,” in fact that the Divine had authored a specific purpose and destiny for all peoples, particularly Africans in the western hemisphere. He also proposes that classical nationalists be identified with the “cultural ideals” of Europeans and white Americans, as opposed to indigenous African or New World African cultural forms. In fact, these nationalists had come to identify with European and white American notions of “progress and civilization” (Moses 1978: 15–16).

Moses’ notions of the nationalism of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries are challenged by Sterling Stuckey’s view of political and cultural development. In *Slave Culture* he approaches the development of Black identity and culture begun by enslaved Africans. Rather than African Americans being motivated by European cultural ideals and notions of Western Civilization, Stuckey argues that the “lingering memory of Africa” was a “principal avenue” for the development of Black solidarity in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries (Stuckey 1987: 3). In an essay titled “Classical Black Nationalist thought,” Stuckey suggests that “as formulated by African-American ideologists of the 1830s . . . this attitude (Black nationalism) probably owed more to African traditions of group hegemony (which persisted in some forms during slavery) than to any models of European thought or experience” (Stuckey 1994: 83). He argues that traditional African spirituality and Christianity were utilized as a cultural framework in the insurrections led by Denmark Vesey and Gabriel Prosser (ibid: 42–7). If we see these rebellions and other insurgent activity by enslaved Africans as having nationalist objectives, this gives us a very different ideological perspective from what is proposed by Moses. While older studies suggested they had certainly been influenced by, and had appropriated, the culture of their oppressors, the nationalism of enslaved Africans included root doctors and conjurers and their own Africanized forms of Christianity; and recent work on the Seminole Freedmen and other fugitive African rebels reveals the development of a culture of resistance, as opposed to the appropriation of European notions of “civilization” (Mulroy 1993: 1–5).

Scholarship on the Garvey Movement

The Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA) was the largest Black Nationalist and Pan-Africanist organization and movement in history. Under the leadership of its founder and spokesperson Marcus Garvey, the UNIA built an organization that in 1926 had over 814 branches in 38 states of the USA and 215 branches in the Caribbean, South and Central America, Europe, and Africa (Martin 1976: 14–17). As such, this movement is well represented in the historiography of nationalism. Those writing in the liberal tradition – including Gunnar Myrdal, Theodore Draper, and John Hope Franklin – have acknowledged the mass appeal that the UNIA had for common Black people in the United States, but characterize it as an unrealistic movement doomed to failure (Myrdal 1944: 749; Draper 1970:

51–6; Franklin and Moss 1988: 322). The first biography of Marcus Garvey was E. David Cronon's *Black Moses*. Consistent with the liberal interpretation of nationalism, he judged "there remains little of practical significance as a fitting monument to his labors" (Cronon 1955: 223–4). Displaying an anti-nationalist bias, Cronon often referred to Garvey as a racial chauvinist and offered "Garvey sought to raise high the walls of racial nationalism at a time when most thoughtful men were seeking to tear down those barriers" (ibid: 221).

The UNIA, often called the Garvey Movement, has had its defenders. Theodore Vincent challenged Cronon's assessment in *Black Power and the Garvey Movement* (1972). Vincent tied in the UNIA with the explosion of nationalism in the Black Power Movement of the 1960s. Then in 1974, John Henrik Clarke, with the assistance of UNIA leader (and Marcus Garvey's widow) Amy Jacques Garvey, edited *Marcus Garvey and the Vision of Africa*. Clarke, while acknowledging the shortcomings of the UNIA, credited the movement for creating a vision that would spark Black pride and consciousness in the United States and independence movements in Africa, through leaders like Ghana's Kwame Nkrumah (Clarke 1974: 325–9). These studies suggest that the legacy of the UNIA could be witnessed in the ascending nationalism and Pan-Africanism in the Black World during the 1960s and 1970s.

These themes were continued in the work of Robert Hill and Tony Martin. Hill edited seven volumes of Garvey and UNIA papers. In his general introduction to the papers, Hill argues that the UNIA was a forerunner to African independence movements and had significant political and cultural influence on the Civil Rights and Black Power movements in the United States (Hill 1983: xc, xxxv). Martin (1976) not only argues that the UNIA had an ideological influence that persisted in the Black community despite external attacks on the UNIA – by the American and European governments, and by integrationist and leftist political rivals – but that the movement actually expanded in the United States after the incarceration of Garvey in 1925.

It is also interesting to note the recent proliferation of research on the Garvey Movement as scholars recognize its significance as a social movement. As Vincent, Clarke, Hill, and Martin have noted, the triumph of Garveyism would not appear until the 1960s in nationalist and Pan-Africanist movements in the United States, the Caribbean, and Africa. Thus, even earlier critics had to reassess Garvey's significance. In the 1969 edition of *Black Moses*, Cronon offered, in the updated preface:

With the advantage of today's perspective, I would no doubt have written a different book . . . modifying a few of my conclusions . . . Garvey's legacy of racial consciousness and pride impresses me today as more significant than it did in the mid 1950s, when I tended to underestimate the extent to which a younger generation could again be swayed by black chauvinist ideas. (Cronon 1955: xii–xiii)

The Nation of Islam and Malcolm X in the Historiography of Nationalism

After the decline of the UNIA, the Nation of Islam (NOI) became the largest nationalist organization and the movement with the most longevity. Starting in 1930, and still existing, it has been an important influence on Black life and culture

in the United States. Early research on the Nation of Islam tended to be primarily religious or sociological. C. Eric Lincoln's *Black Muslims in America* was the first scholarly examination of the NOI. He praised the NOI's "insistence upon standards of personal and group morality," its ability to serve as a "'safe' outlet" from the hostility of white racism, and serving as a vehicle for Black pride and solidarity. On the other hand, he feared the possibility that the NOI's "virulent attacks on the white man" would lead to "a general increase in tension and mistrust" between Blacks and whites, and anti-Islamic sentiments in the United States (Lincoln 1961: 248–53). In the liberal, integrationist tradition, he labeled NOI calls for, and practices of, social separation from whites as dysfunctional behavior, and argued that

a functional group is one that reinforces not the status quo . . . but the organic unity of society. Segregation is a dysfunctional part of America's status quo, though our irresistible trend is integration. In siding with the disease against the cure the Muslims are profoundly and decisively dysfunctional, both to the Negro community and the society as a whole. (ibid: 252)

While assailing the organization's separatism, Lincoln hoped that the NOI's stance would have a shock effect and would force a "white reappraisal" of the integrationist Civil Rights Movement, which was at that time viewed as "too pushy" or "radical" by many Americans of European descent (ibid: 251).

In 1962, Nigerian professor E. U. Essien-Udom's *Black Nationalism* took a slightly different view on the nationalism of the NOI. He saw nationalism playing a more prescriptive role as opposed to a problematic one. After interviewing and observing members of the Movement (including Elijah Muhammad and Malcolm X) for two years, he concluded that nationalism was a vehicle to challenge "white superiority" and Black "inferiority" in the minds of the Black masses, particularly among the poor and lower income (Essien-Udom 1962: 335–6). Essien-Udom argued that racism and lack of opportunity reinforced attitudes of Black inferiority, a sense of rejection on the part of Black people, and an "uneasy co-existence" between Blacks and whites. Black Nationalism, he asserted, is an effort to "'break-through' the vicious cycle which emerges from the relationship" (ibid: 326).

In recent years, scholars and journalists have produced biographic and historical studies on the Nation of Islam. Of these, *An Original Man: The Life and Times of Elijah Muhammad* by Claude Andrew Clegg and *In the Name of Elijah Muhammad: Louis Farrakhan and the Nation of Islam* by Mattias Gardnell stand out for their research and balance. Clegg's work is a critical examination of NOI leader Elijah Muhammad. The author acknowledges Muhammad's ideological and organizational contribution to Black life and culture in the United States. At the same time that Clegg recognizes Muhammad's positive contributions, he also raises contradictions in the NOI leader's personal life and his leadership of the movement (Clegg 1997: 282–4). Gardnell, a Swedish religious historian, examines the Nation of Islam from inception in the 1930s through the mid-1990s. As a student of Islam, he views the NOI as "a combination of the notion of militant Islam and the legacy of classical black nationalism" (Gardnell 1996: 8). Similarly to Essien-Udom, Gardnell responds to those who label the NOI as Black racists by saying "the black-man-is-God thesis of the Nation functions as a psychological lever, aiming to break through the mental

chain of inferiority by which the African-American is said to be stuck at the bottom ladder of society” (ibid: 348).

One of the most renowned products of the NOI was Malcolm X. Various studies have attempted to document his life and interpret its meaning and message. The literature on the life and work of Malcolm X could be considered a part of NOI historiography, but – since Malcolm’s activities in his last year went well beyond his work for NOI – they must be given a special focus.

As with his nationalist predecessors, Malcolm had his liberal critics. One example is Bruce Perry’s *Malcolm: The Life and Legacy of a Man Who Changed Black America*. Perry proposes that Malcolm’s radical nationalist politics were motivated by his psychic rebellion against his abusive father. Bruce Perry’s Malcolm X is “a man in conflict,” not with white supremacy or racial capitalism, but with his parent and ultimately also an adult father-figure, NOI leader Elijah Muhammad. According to Perry, “despite his efforts to attribute his unhappiness to white ‘society,’ they originated largely in his loveless, conflict ridden home” (Perry 1991: x).

As opposed to the tragic, conflicted figure that Perry presents, Marxist, radical multiculturalist,² Nationalist and Pan-Africanist scholars have presented Malcolm’s nationalism as being a part of a tradition of resistance of people of African descent in the United States. The Marxist and nationalist/Pan-Africanists differ on interpreting Malcolm’s ideological direction in the last year of his life. In 1967, Marxist author George Breitman argued in *The Last Year of Malcolm X* that “Malcolm was pro-socialist in the last year of his life, but not yet a Marxist.” While pointing out that Malcolm X did not have confidence in white workers, Breitman asserted “if he lived long enough to witness such changes (the radicalizing of white workers), he would have welcomed an alliance with radicalized white workers and their organizations” (Breitman 1967: 50–1).

In his edited volume *Malcolm X: In Our Own Image*, radical multiculturalist Joe Wood argues that Malcolm X abandoned Black Nationalism in the last eleven months of his life. In his contribution, “Malcolm X and the new Blackness,” Wood identifies two Malcolms: the nationalist of the NOI days and the post-nationalist Malcolm. Interpreting which Malcolm is more relevant for future generations, Wood offered:

People interested in a more tolerant society have little use for Malcolm’s narrow (and tattered) nationalism, his lack of political program, his sexism. His fixation on “race.” The first mask (the nationalist Malcolm) simply needs to be changed. The second Malcolm, Malik, will speak for our new community. (Wood 1992: 16–17)

An associate of Malcolm in the Organization of Afro-American Unity, John Henrik Clarke gives an interpretation of Malcolm’s transformation in the last year of his life that emphasizes his message of Black solidarity and Pan-Africanism. After leaving the Nation of Islam,

he attempted to internationalize the civil rights struggle by taking it to the United Nations . . . His perennial call had always been for *black unity and self-defense* in opposition to the “integrationists” program of nonviolence, passive resistance, and “Negro–white” unity. When he returned home from his trip (to Mecca and Africa) he was no longer

opposed to progressive whites uniting with revolutionary blacks . . . But to Malcolm . . . the role of the white progressive was not in black organizations but in white organizations in white communities, convincing and converting the unconverted to the black cause . . . Malcolm had observed the perfidy of the white liberal and the American Left whenever Afro-Americans sought to be instruments of their own liberation. (Clarke 1990: xxi–xxii)

Illuminating the potential of Malcolm’s Pan-Africanist vision, Clarke wrote:

Afro-Americans are not an isolated 25 million. There are over 100 million black people in the Western Hemisphere . . . Malcolm knew if we unite these millions with the 300 million on the African continent the black man becomes a mighty force. (ibid: xxiii)

Most of his scholarly interpreters agree that he had a tremendous impact on the identity and awareness of a generation and a lasting effect on people of African descent in the United States, perhaps worldwide. Since he died as he was in ideological transition, Malcolm’s legacy and direction will remain in debate by intellectuals.

Black Power Scholarship

The political environment gave momentum to a new development in the tradition of Black Nationalism. The nationalism of Malcolm X was certainly influential among a growing number of young activists and large sectors of the Black community. Many active in, or identifying with, the Civil Rights Movement became frustrated with the lack of effective intervention by the federal government to protect civil rights workers and local people involved in voter registration efforts. Also, many civil rights activists felt betrayed by the Democratic Party leadership seating a segregationist delegation at its 1964 Convention in Atlantic City. These events led elements of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee and later the Congress of Racial Equality to shift from integrationist politics to the nationalistic slogan of “Black Power.” As spontaneous rebellion spread through urban communities of the United States in the middle to late 1960s, “Black Power” also became a popular slogan for Black youth and urban nationalists. Finally, national liberation movements in Africa, Asia, and Latin America influenced the lexicon and vision of insurgency in the United States. Black Power became a political and cultural movement, with a variety of ideological expressions.

Compared to its predecessor the Civil Rights Movement, Black Power has not received much scholarly attention. In the Fall/Winter 2001 issue of the *Black Scholar*, Peniel Joseph addressed this matter. Joseph offered four reasons for lack of scholarly attention to Black Power: first, the retreat from insurgent politics in the United States since the early 1970s; second, the unwillingness of scholars to engage this period, viewed as “the ‘evil twin’ that wrecked civil rights”; third, the lack of archival material for this period; and, finally, the fact that “mainstream scholars” have not taken the topic seriously (Joseph 2001: 2).

While acknowledging Joseph’s argument, significant interpretations of the Black Power Movement have been produced that have initiated interesting dialogues in the academic world. Theodore Draper’s *Rediscovery of Black Nationalism* was motivated

as a response and critique in the liberal tradition of the Black Nationalist legacy of Black Power. As with the scholarship on Malcolm X, more radical interpretations have analyzed Black Power. The fact that Marxists, radical multiculturalists, feminists, and nationalist sympathizers have made scholarly contributions interpreting nationalism fits Joseph's assertion that traditional scholars have not taken this subject seriously.

Black Awakening in Capitalist America by Robert Allen represents an early Black Marxist critique of Black Power. Recognizing the ideological diversity of the movement, Allen distinguished between insurgent (or revolutionary) nationalism and bourgeois nationalism (Allen 1998: 125–6). He also condemned the machinations of corporate capitalism to co-opt Black Power into a vehicle for the neo-colonial exploitation of poor and working Black people (ibid: 244–5). The 1970s and early 1980s brought a sharp feminist critique of patriarchy in the Black Experience, with a particular focus on Black Power and Black Nationalists. In 1979, Michelle Wallace's *Black Macho and the Myth of the Superwoman* sparked a vigorous national debate. Criticizing the male leadership of the Black Power Movement, Wallace stated:

One could say, in fact, that the black man risked everything – All the traditional goals of revolution: money, security, the overthrow of the government – in pursuit of the immediate sense of his own power. Also [t]he black revolutionary of the sixties calls to mind nothing so much as a child who is acting for the simple pleasure of the reaction he will elicit from, the pain he will cause his father.

Reactions to Wallace's commentary exploded into the national Black dialogue. In its May/June issue, the *Black Scholar* was dedicated to "The Black sexism debate," which included such notable Black intellectuals as June Jordan, Robert Staples, Julianne Malveaux, Maulana Karenga, and Askia Toure. In 1981, *Ain't I A Woman? Black Women and Feminism* by bell hooks (a.k.a. Gloria Watkins) contributed to the feminist critique of Black Nationalism and the Black Power Movement; hooks identified the equating of Black Power with "a move for an emerging patriarchy" (hooks 1981: 97).

Building on the themes of Marxist and feminists, radical multiculturalists have offered serious critique of the Black Power Movement. *Is It Nation Time? Contemporary Essays on Black Power and Black Nationalism* represents a radical, pluralist assessment of the period. Edited by Eddie Glaude, Jr, *Is It Nation Time?* features articles by Gerald Horne, Robin D. G. Kelley, Cornel West, Adolph Reed, and Farah Jasmine Griffin. In the words of its editor, *Is It Nation Time?* attempts to engage Black nationalism, while offering critiques of shortcomings in the Black Power Movement. For example, Kelley's contribution on the Revolutionary Action Movement (RAM), titled "Stormy weather: reconstructing (inter)nationalism in the Cold War era," recognizes this often overlooked organization's ideological and activist contribution to the Black Liberation Movement, while criticizing "the politics of machismo and . . . romantic visions of revolution" within the organization (Glaude 2002: 13).

William Van Deburg's *New Day in Babylon* examines the cultural contribution of the Black Power Movement on people of African descent in the United States and American society in general. Van Deburg views Black Power through its "language, folk culture, religion, and the literary and performing arts" to assess how the

movement “utilized available culture-based tools of persuasion.” He argues the movement had a “lasting influence in American culture,” which has outlived Black Power’s political agenda (Van Deburg 1992: 9–10).

Studies of other Black Power organizations have provided a deeper look into the movement. Scholarship on the largest Black Nationalist movement of the period, the Black Panther Party (BPP), opened the door for new projects. Some have argued that the politics of the BPP did not reflect Black Nationalism, because of its Marxist-Leninist stand and alliance with white radicals. It must be remembered that, prior to 1971, the BPP demanded Black self-determination through a United Nations-supervised plebiscite and labeled itself a “revolutionary nationalist” organization (Umoya 2001: 14–15). However, as with other Black Power groups, with the exception of the Republic of New Afrika (later “New Afrika”), the BPP did not project a specific territory to form a nation state, but emphasized “highly localized, spatially defined demands for communal autonomy” (Pal Singh 1997: 66). Charles E. Jones’ *The Black Panther Party Reconsidered* and Kathleen Cleaver and George Katsiaficas, *Liberation, Imagination and the Black Panther Party*, both include critical examinations by scholars and reflections by former BPP members.

Komozi Woodard’s study *Nation Within A Nation: Amiri Baraka (Leroi Jones) and Black Power Politics* not only documents the political transformation of Baraka, the noted poet and political activist, but also explores the role of Black Nationalism in the United States. Reminiscent of the Meier/Rudwick *versus* Bracey debate, Woodard argues that Black people in the United States are not “an ethnic group along the same lines as Irish Americans, Jewish Americans, and German Americans, destined to be assimilated into American society.” He asserts “African-Americans are an oppressed nationality subjugated by racial oppression in the United States.” According to Woodard, Black Power and particularly Black Nationalism reflects a “distinct black national community” (Woodard 1999: 4–6).

The US Organization, founded in 1965 and headed by scholar-activist Maulana Karenga, was one of the most influential organizations of the Black Power Movement. The ideological and cultural contributions of US remain present in contemporary Black life. Scot Brown’s *Fighting for US: Maulana Karenga, The US Organization and Black Cultural Nationalism* looks at the development of this organization, its leader, and its contribution to the Black Power movement, but critically assesses the internal dynamics and external factors for the decline of US (Brown 2003: 124). Black Power literature has often presented US as a collaborator with the enemies of the Black Power Movement, owing to its rivalry and conflict with the BPP, including the deaths of two BPP members on the campus of the University of California at Los Angeles. Brown presents US as victims of the federal government’s COINTELPRO program, because FBI repression had a “deleterious impact on the internal stability” of the organization.

Yet, the study of the Black Power period of nationalism is still an emerging field. New organizational studies (of the League of Revolutionary Black Workers, RAM, Republic of New Afrika, Combahee River Collective, Black Power Conferences, and so on) as well as local studies are needed, from a variety of perspectives, to interpret this period of nationalism adequately for future generations. Within contemporary Hip-Hop, the group Dead Prez, for example, reminds us that nationalist consciousness is present in the twenty-first century. Paraphrasing Malcolm X, Dead Prez

reiterates the continued embrace of a Black Nationalist identity with the rejection of an American one:

I'm a African
 I'm a African, uhh
 And I know what's happenin

 . . . I'm not american, punk, democrat, or republican
 Remember that, most of the cats we know, be hustlin
 My momma work, all her life and still strugglin
 I blame it on the government and say it on the radio
 (what) and if you don't already know
 All these uncle tom ass kissin niggas gotta go. (Dead Prez)

While liberal politics dominate the discourse among and about Black people throughout the United States, Black Nationalism persists as an ideological trend. As long as racism exists in North America, and people of African descent find their status and humanity marginalized, African descendants will continue to search for place, and a variety of interpretations of the role of Black Nationalism will interact within the historiography of the Black Experience.

NOTES

1. This author spells “Black” with a capital “B.” In the middle and late 1960s, millions of African descendants born in the United States embraced the term “Black” as their ethnic designation. Due to that choice of self-determination, I believe this term is used to identify for that a description of a color but to signify a culture, a political identity, and a consciousness.
2. I am using the term “radical multiculturalist” from Manning Marable’s chapter “Black Studies, multiculturalism, and the future of education” in Floyd Hayes (ed.), *A Turbulent Voyage: Readings in African-American Studies* (San Diego, CA: Collegiate, 2000), 24–33. Marable defines “radical democratic multiculturalism” as “a transformationalist cultural critique.” Intellectuals in this category seek the “radical democratic restructuring of the system of cultural and political power itself.” I’m using this category to define post-Marxist radical scholars who often see “nationalism” as identity politics, which are undesirable in the construction in a democratic and plural society.

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