DEBUNKING THE MYTH OF MONOLITHIC BLACK IDENTITY IN ORDER TO ADDRESS INADEQUATE LEADERSHIP WITHIN THE AFRICAN AMERICAN COMMUNITY

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DEBUNKING THE MYTH OF MONOLITHIC BLACK IDENTITY IN ORDER TO ADDRESS INADEQUATE LEADERSHIP WITHIN THE AFRICAN AMERICAN COMMUNITY

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ABSTRACT

All peoples are struggling to blast a way through the industrial monopoly of races and nations, but the Negro as a whole has failed to grasp its true significance and seems to delight in filling only that place created for him.... – Marcus Garvey, 1978

Marcus Garvey had the foresight to predict the inner conflict that would lead to complacency and racial crisis within the African American community. This crisis, manifested by perpetuated notions of monolithic identity, led to a rejection of diversity and poor group self-esteem. As a result, the collective identity of African Americans is disoriented.

The body of work to follow expels the myth that being African American in America means having a monolithic sense of identity. It is not only false to suggest all African Americans share one identity, but such perpetuations lead to larger problems for the establishment and functionality of leadership within the community. If a group member happens to also be a member of multiple subgroups (identifiers), they risk not only being discriminated against by mainstream society
but also by members of their social group whom share some but not all of their identities.¹

In Chapter one, I debunk the myth that monolithic identity ever existed by exploring the historical and cultural sources of group interests within the African American community. These associations or grouping have origins in the foundation of slavery, expanded through the origination of colorism and the black bourgeoisie, and were cemented through the completion of the Civil Rights Movement. Chapters two and three explore the historical patterns and traditions of black leadership in order to link leadership trends to positive group efficacy and shared interests. Chapter three concludes with a comprehensive explanation of the social undertakings that have lead to the current influx of ineffective leadership. Finally in chapter four, social theory is applied to plight concerning leadership and community efficacy in order to propose solutions to dilemmas within the African American community.

While complete restoration of community dynamics is not possible, social theorists referenced in this thesis support the notion that it is possible to make positive strides toward restoring group efficacy and impactful leadership. It is only through appreciating the diversity within the African American community, that those in leadership positions can implement strategies that will restore order, set clear goals, and ensure equal representation on a national level.

The self is indeed a threat to group identity.

DEDICATION

To my mother, my sister, and my father, thank you for creating a space where I could think critically about the issues that face our community. I am truly indebted to each of you for the guidance and support extended to me as I embarked on this project.

To the Georgetown community that has helped me mold my ideas, thank you for affording me one of the most extraordinary experiences of my life.

To those who will read this in the future, please continue the great work of exploring the conditions that plague ethnic communities and be a voice for the marginalized everywhere.

Never stop searching for solutions.
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INTRODUCTION

In order to accurately dissect fallacies regarding identity and leadership within the African American community, it is imperative that an understanding of identity is established. Identity as defined by Byaruhanga Rukooko Archangel in the book *National, Cultural, and Ethnic Identities*, is "abstract, but when applied to a social process, it bears a specific meaning whose application can be sufficiently effective."\(^1\) Most importantly, identity is a complicated concept that everyone must atone for independently. In fact, as is the case within the African American community, it is problematic when declarations of identify are definitively forced upon others.

In consort with identity, is an understanding of what it means for a person (s) to possess multiple identities. For many ethnic groups, shared culture implies shared social identity thus identity is not discovered individually. Shared social identity consists of ethnic groups and or social organizations that are homogenous and permanent.\(^2\) Dominant-shared characteristics that individuals have or don’t have in relation to others in that particular society are emphasized by social identity.\(^3\)

Binding, exclusive elements such as shared citizenship and racial or cultural heritage are required in order for a social group to truly be sustainable. For the

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\(^2\) Ibid.

\(^3\) Ibid.
African American community, skin color and history of shared struggle is the
binding indicator that can never be erased or replaced. As is the case with ethnic
groups around the world, identity is often consolidated and only viewed through the
lens of the social group exclusively. Therefore being a member of a particular ethnic
group means automatically belonging to the social group that ethnicity exemplifies.
Positive ethnic orientation also provides group members with a peace of mind that
fosters healthy individual identity.¹ Benjamin Aigbe Okonofua, Professor at
University of Benin, Nigeria states the following:

Ethnic identity constitutes a basic part of the ethnic individual’s
personality and is a powerful contributor to ethnic group formation
and maintenance. Apart from being a social construct, ethnic identity
is also a psychological construct, a set of self-ideas about one’s own
ethnic group membership, and it is multidimensional in that it has
several dimensions and components along which these self-ideas
vary. One dimension along which people’s views of their ethnic selves
vary is self-identification, which refers to the ethnic labels or terms
that people use in identifying themselves, and the meanings of these
labels. A second dimension is the knowledge or ideas they have about
their ethnic culture including the traditions, customs, values, and
behaviors permissible within that culture. A third dimension is the
preferences, feelings, and values that people have about their ethnic
group membership and culture. Ethnic people may embrace, reject, or
have neutral feelings and preferences about their ethnic families,
companions, and values.²

Okonofua argues that identity is partially determined by ethnicity and not solely by
the individual. However, sociologist Alejandro Portes suggests that it is contact and
competition with outside groups rather than confinement in one’s own community

¹ Ibid.

that leads to ethnic awareness and mobilization. A heightened sense of ethnic solidarity occurs among minority groups who have achieved considerable socioeconomic assimilation but whose pathway to total acceptance and equality remains blocked.6

Before delving into what makes up the social group identity of African-Americans specifically, it is important to understand how culture shapes tradition through the creation of a racial defined social group. Archangel outlines how group identify is both created by individual and social identifiers and is also conflicted by both.7 This means that all humans uniquely formulate their sense of identity (self) through experiences and mental processes. Identity is also affected by the cultural and environmental parameters individuals inhabits. As a result, concepts of identity are often instilled and programmed into individuals before they have an opportunity to decipher concepts for themselves. Conclusively, identity formation is easily corrupted which is largely the case within the African American community.

Again, solidarity with social group members often overrides individual identity. M. Sandel, author of “The Procedural Republic and the Unencumbered Self” asserts “we can understand ourselves as the particular person we are only as


7 Ibid., 58.
members of a particular family, community, or nation, as bearers of that history.”

George F. McLean, contributor to National, Cultural, and Ethnic Identities, argues that in order for the human spirit to produce proper results; a person needs to belong to a social group or community. Social group values and virtues derive from the experiences and practices of the group over time. The aforementioned values and virtues set the pattern of social life thus establishing culture for a particular group. It is the responsibility of all members to preserve the cultural identity that distinguishes them from other social groups.

In conclusion, the notion that there is only one way to identify is inaccurate. Identity is fluid and ever evolving depending on but not limited to, environment, experiences, lifestyle and personality, relationships, history, culture, tradition and self-discovery. The primary determiners of which identifiers hold more weight are a result of norms, values, culture, and institutions within a given society. In other words, “identity implies permanence amidst change, but in another sense, it may imply oneness or unity amidst diverse surroundings.” Think of the concept of multiple identifiers as inner competition. Individuals are capable of changing from

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8 Ibid., 200.

9 Ibid., 22.

10 Ibid., 201.


one identity to another or suppressing one in favor of another. Moreover, multiple identities can be embraced even if they seem contradictory which is often the case when individual identifiers conflict with social group identifiers within a community.

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13 Ibid., 67-68.
CHAPTER ONE

DISSECTING THE MULTIPLE IDENTIFIERS OF AFRICAN AMERICANS IN AMERICA

It comes down to this: black people were stripped of our identities when we were brought here, and it's been a quest since then to define who we are.

– Spike Lee, Every Day I Fight

In her own words, social and political activist Angela Davis brilliantly analogized what it means to be black in America: “If a people is like gumbo then add a dollop of color and blend it with an assortment of physical features that reflect every face you may possibly encounter on this great earth. Mix that with a culture that loves to improvise, signify, reclaim, renew, and react and you’ve got the recipe for black folk.”¹ The gumbo analogy impeccably defines any and everything you can imagine regarding black social identity. All these dynamic and diverse variations lead to one extraordinary group of people. Illustrated another way by Professor Henry Louis Gates, “There are 10 million cultural artifacts of blackness and if you add them up and put em in a pot and stew it, that is what black culture is.”² No matter how many layers there are to black expression and identification, all are connected through the ethnic reality of being black people in America.

But, if the African American community is as diverse and individualistic as the gumbo analogy suggests, what other than color ties them together as a social group? First, African Americans are bonded through a shared history of victimhood and common struggle. Shelby Steele recalls that growing up in Chicago in the 50s

¹ Marlon Riggs, Black Is...Black Ain’t, Directed by Marlon Riggs (1994; New York: Docurama, 2009), DVD.

and 60s, blacks had in common their shared oppression. To Steele that was the source of black unity.\textsuperscript{3} Second, the African American community was historically self-confined by its own limited notions of identify and interests. Singularity of viewpoint was valued as the ideal way to establish and ensure black unity.\textsuperscript{4}

Third, social group identity was also closely tied to physical community dynamics. Before and even long after the passage of Civil Rights legislation, African Americans were segregated to physical communities delegated by race. Physical community dynamics have frequently been credited for creating an atmosphere of family. A unknown contributor to the documentary “Black Is Black Ain’t” described his upbringing in a segregated community as “A family...every female in that neighborhood was like my mother...All the kids in the neighborhood belonged to everybody, so it was like you had this huge extended family that there was nowhere you could go where someone didn’t know you and know who you belonged to.”\textsuperscript{5} In the realm of education, black teachers taught in black schools. African Americans established a responsibility for the education and moral-character building of their own.

What are group interests? Black group interests are the overarching definer of group ideology and commonality. Historically, black group interests are lumped into two major categories, social and economic. At one point, black social life and


economic status were coiled by historical experiences and current conditions.\(^6\) In other words, due to the shared experience of slavery and subsequent bondage of segregation, African Americans were bound to the same reality and expectations of social and economic mobility.

Established at the inception of slavery in America, African American group interests were rooted in three focal areas: freedom, literacy, and political and economic independence.\(^7\) Cathy Cohen, author of “The Boundaries of Blackness,” expresses this interconnectedness and shared group interests by summarizing the conditions that led to African American solidarity: “Recognizing the inaccessibility of dominant systems, marginalized groups (African Americans) often turned inward, redirecting their resources, trust, and loyalty toward community based institutions and relationships that more directly addressed their needs.”\(^8\) In this regard, group interest and group aspirations were synonymous.

American journalist and author Toure’, understands that being black in America is rooted in both the individual experiences and ideologies of its members: “There is a core, a recognizable black culture, but out of that core it’s splintered and fragmented and it drifts in ten thousand directions.”\(^9\) Thus, while African Americans are all one group each has varying ways of interpreting roles, interests, and levels of

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\(^8\) Cathy Cohen, *The Boundaries of Blackness* (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1999), 51.

efficacy. Race and class are the two major identifiers and methods of identity formation, however they don’t stand-alone. Religion, sexual orientation, and environment are common secondary associations. What’s critical about multiple identities is that they are never equal in importance because each identifier serves to disrupt group interdependence.\textsuperscript{10} Essentially, these multiple identities serve as independent interests that often conflict with group interests.

So what is the difference between an identifier and an interest? Examples of identifiers include sexual orientation, class, color, and any other subgrouping that a person can associate with under the umbrella of the social group. Individual interests are points of concern that are often designated to members of specific subgroups within the social group. For example, for a member of the Lesbian, Gay, Bi-sexual, and Transgender (LGBT) subgroup, a point of interest may be gay civil rights. While this concern isn’t exclusive to LGBT identifiers, it is a heightened concern for subgroup members as opposed to someone with no identifying nexus to that subgroup. The previous example of dual identification within the African American and LGBT community is a complex example of how individual interests can be alienating.

Another paradigm is the debate over minimum wage. Minimum wage is a point of concern for all Americans regardless of race, but for African Americans the issue can be quite divisive. Members of the black middle class may not be in favor of a wage increase (likely because they are not hourly employees, but work for corporations with invested interests in regulating non-salaried income) while the

black impoverished hold great reliance on its enforcement (likely because they support their families on what they make per hour). As will be illustrated in Chapter 3, even though both subgroups belong to the African American community, they each have conflicting interest regarding this particular issue. Each paradigm proves that embracing multiple identities is possible even if they seen contradictory.\textsuperscript{11} The LGBT and minimum wage paradigms illustrate how subgroups can have exclusive interests that trump social group solidarity.\textsuperscript{12} This is because in many cases, the liberation of one (achieving LGBT rights) does not equal the liberation of the other (the end of racism and racial injustice).\textsuperscript{13}

Subgroup identifiers can also vary based on gender. The documentary “Black Is...Black Aint” introduces us to individuals that struggle with balancing multiple identifiers and thus multiple points of view (individual interests) with expectations delegated by the larger framework of the community. A black woman interviewed identified herself as black, creole, female, and Catholic. She was a self-proclaimed feminist. Feminists in general, specifically African American feminists believe they face a struggle within a struggle for rights and respect. Black feminists also believe they battle heightened assertions of sexual immorality and exaggerated sexual worth.


\textsuperscript{13} Marlon Riggs, \textit{Black Is...Black Ain’t}, Directed by Marlon Riggs (1994; New York: Docurama, 2009), DVD.
Black female crusaders such as Ida B. Wells, Harriet Tubman, and Anna Julia Cooper have always been recognizable contributors to the struggle for equality. However despite their undeniable contribution to the struggle at large, women’s voices in the black church were always silenced in favor of patriarchal leadership.\textsuperscript{14} Angela Davis argues that the problem with posturing black males as the leaders in the community, who should be supported from behind by black women, is that it leaves women without a purpose of their own. It aids the insecurity of their identity within and outside of the African American community.\textsuperscript{15}

Conversely, a black man identified himself as black, homosexual, HIV positive, middle class, and Christian. He projected deep layers to who he was as an individual and as a member of a diverse community.\textsuperscript{16} Black men have historically been avowed for their strength, brute characteristics, and great sexual endowment. They are not regarded nor are they encouraged to show emotion and be vulnerable.\textsuperscript{17} As a result, black men struggle with establishing true identity for themselves. Furthermore, the struggle to self-identify is exacerbated by the difficulty of articulating the disenfranchisement and abuse inflicted by mainstream society.\textsuperscript{18} In this regard, black men have long sought to prove the richness of their


\textsuperscript{15} Marlon Riggs, \textit{Black Is...Black Ain’t}, Directed by Marlon Riggs (1994; New York: Docurama, 2009), DVD.

\textsuperscript{16} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{17} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{18} John Davis, ed., \textit{Perspectives in Black Politics and Black Leadership} (Lanham: University Press of America, 2007), 48-49.
thought and the equal value of their intellect. Feminist Michele Wallace often addresses the theory of the “black super woman” and the “mad black woman” stereotype. Wallace discusses the myth of a macho, hyper-sexualized black male that often overlaps with ideas of criminality and weak associations with traditional manhood. She suggests that black women and men are collectively consumed with a desire to disprove the identity others place upon them. Through their quest for dignity they decipher identity for themselves.

Another influential subgroup within the community is the LGBT identifier. As previously stated, this group has specific interests that in many cases align more with the group interests of other communities than with the dominant group interests of the African American community. Essentially, the gay lifestyle has never been fully accepted in the African American community. For many LGBT members, this is an additional source of insecurity, inequality, and rejection. A challenge for mobilization is presented when a person(s) is a member of a group whose interest don’t support or accept their lifestyle choices. To this end, people often change from one identity to the other or suppress one in favor of the other because no two identifiers co-exist with equal velocity.

Henry Louis Gates sums up the concept of multiple identities by explaining that there have always been multiple identities and interests in the community. The

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20 Marlon Riggs, Black Is...Black Ain’t, Directed by Marlon Riggs (1994; New York: Docurama, 2009), DVD.

difference according to Gates is that because of surges in economic and intellectual diversity within the community there is now a “multiplicity of multiple identifiers.”22 Researchers of African American community dynamics support Gates’ argument by noting significant class, educational, economic, and political differences that have always divided group identity.23

A deeper division exists not only between members of the community but also with mainstream society. Franz Fanon exposes the intricate relationship between the “Negro” and mainstream society: “The black man has two dimensions, one with his fellow black man and the other with the white man. A Negro behaves differently with a white man than with another Negro. This self-division or ‘bi-culturality’ is a direct result of colonial subjugation upheld by theories that claim to prove the Negro is a stage in the slow evolution of monkey into man.”24 To such a degree, not only do African Americans face questions of value from within their community, they subconsciously and consciously face it from outside. Another term for bi-culturality is double consciousness, defined by the mental process in which blacks in America begin viewing themselves and other members of the group through the judgment (stereotypes) and standards of whites. Even after realizing this behavior, it is a struggle to break free from this consciousness. Falsified images of blackness are perpetuated in the media and internalized. Double consciousness

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overwhelmingly affects the behaviors of the middle class.25 W.E.B. Du Bois describes this confliction as one feeling his “twoness”, one being an American and the other as a Negro, “two souls, two thoughts, two un-reconciled strivings.”26

The Black Heuristic Theory can serve as an aid to the development of positive group identity. By definition, Black Heuristic Theory is the mental mechanism that enables one to specify the conditions under which African American group interests become stronger or weaker relative to individual interests. For example, episodic instances of racial hostility may lead African Americans to base their political choices and behaviors (to some degree) on a calculation of racial group interests even if, over a short period of time, race has seemed to be less of a factor.27 The Black Heuristic Theory reinforces group over individual importance in achieving the greater good for all members because what is best for the group is always better for the individual in the long run.

The Black Heuristic Theory not only reinforces group efficacy, but it establishes the basis of self-identity formation.28 Individual attitudes are shaped partly by a response to individual perceptions of their status in the group. Inversely, individual attitudes about other groups help form group identity and group


26 Ibid.


28 Ibid.
exclusivity. Moreover, it partially determines the threat posed by other groups. Overall, The Black Heuristic Theory is particularly relevant when analyzing the relationship between the black middle class and their interactions with other members of the African American social group.

A bi-product of living in a social community segregated by race is the emergence of an unavoidable (internal) class structure based on social distinctions designed to create a social pyramid or racial caste system within the community. The result in the African American community is the emanation of class-based subgroups formed during slavery that would eventually lead to the creation of the middle class. In 1860, nearly 4,000 freedmen owned slaves and or skilled laborers. Dating before the emancipation of 1865, free Negroes began to acquire real estate and property in the North. In 1888 following the Emancipation proclamation, these same freedmen would earn a living building independent ventures in banking.

During Reconstruction, many of those considered middle class obtained newly available legislative and government positions. In addition, the door to public access and higher education opened and the middle class was taking advantage in two central ways. First, as white philanthropists such as the Rockefellers founded colleges and universities such as Morehouse College in Atlanta and Howard University in Washington, D.C., the black middle class began sending their children to these exclusive institutions. Second, as Jim Crow took over the south, blacks would focus on business enterprises in their newly segregated communities. Formerly referred to as the black bourgeoisie, the black middle class encouraged

\[29\text{ Ibid.}\]
and enforced a system of secondary marginalization (to be later defined) in the slave owning south. Free blacks in the North and the South developed separate communities (within the confines of the already established segregated communities) that created an elite, black, and often mulatto sub group within the African American social group.³⁰

Dating back to the 1880s, African Americans felt like they needed to have a response to depictions in minstrel shows that made a mockery of black life by perpetuating idleness, competency, and immorality. Eager to denounce negative associations, black elites strived for higher educational opportunities and private ownership. Additionally, the black middle class supremely valued knowledge of select history.³¹ Selective history is the history of middle class mobility rather than the history of common struggle amongst the African American community as a whole. By making this separation, the middle class justified their deviation from the black masses. Boasting of small group orientation, the black middle classes further distinguished themselves as a separate entity.

Accompanying manufactured stereotypes are negative association to darker skin colors. African Americans cope with both fulfilling and disproving stereotypes forced upon them by the dominant culture.³² As depicted in the documentary “Black Is Black Ain’t” the color black has long been associated with dirt, darkness, and notions of inferiority and lack of desirability. In many ways being called black was


an insult. Concepts of color association are engrained psychologically in the minds of all African Americans (as will be elaborated further on in the chapter). It is the reason colorism is and has always been a source of contention. The health of the community and social group functionality is key to the development of positive group identity.

The “skin color” issue was and still is a source of contention and insecurity within the African American community although not necessarily a problem for the middle class of the 21st century. Mulattos are African Americans (former slaves) of mixed heritage. In the establishment of the black bourgeoisie, light skin color was a requirement of membership. Simply having lighter skin merited more privileges and a better quality of life. The value of light skin tone would carry over even after the Emancipation Proclamation. Conflicts over skin color differences grew contentious due to the relatively few positions of status and privilege available within and beyond the black community.

Many blacks associated the glorification of light skin tone with disloyalty to the community. On the contrary, mulattos and members of the “Blue Vein Society” took pride in skin so light; their blue veins were transparent. Whitewashing became the plight of self-proclaimed “mulattos” in the community. The mulatto population continued to struggle through the turn of the century to belong in both their community and find success in the mainstream society. This is because despite

33 Marlon Riggs, *Black Is...Black Ain’t*, Directed by Marlon Riggs (1994; New York: Docurama, 2009), DVD.

denouncing black association (and to a certain extent color), mulattos could not
deny their shared history of struggle. Every fraction of blackness could not be
escaped.\textsuperscript{35}

Overtime, the obsession with assimilation in order to get proper recognition
turned into, for some, a need to more closely associate with whiteness through a
subconscious desire to be white. A deep-rooted feeling of paranoia resulted from
continuously defending black respectability. The newly established black bourgeoisie
defended their respectability by carefully regulating their social behavior and
associations.\textsuperscript{36} The black elite class had an obsession with wealth because they
believed that economic mobility would diminish white hostility and deliver
acceptance from the dominant race.\textsuperscript{37}

The new elite class embraced their special status by creating exclusive clubs
(Jack and Jill), religious denominations (African-Methodist and Catholicism
primarily), schools, and housing facilities.\textsuperscript{38} Whenever possible, black elites sought
to live in white neighborhoods, if only on a single block. If it wasn’t possible to live in
white neighborhoods, black elites inhabited specific blocks occupied by other black
elites.\textsuperscript{39} Differences between social and economic class structures were also
perpetuated through various outlets of the black press. The black press has always

\textsuperscript{35} Marlon Riggs, \textit{Black Is...Black Ain’t}, Directed by Marlon Riggs (1994; New York: Docurama,
2009), DVD.

\textsuperscript{36} Ibid., 68.

\textsuperscript{37} Ibid., 84.

\textsuperscript{38} Cathy Cohen, \textit{The Boundaries of Blackness} (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1999), 55-70.

\textsuperscript{39} Ibid.
had a preoccupation with the black bourgeoisie likely because they were the largest contributors and funders of black press. Affluently themed content saturation was most common in: Ebony and Jet Magazine, local black newspapers, and with few exceptions black television. Special commentary was devoted to social events and gatherings.\(^{40}\) Distracted by black elitism and fare, the chief social and political responsibility of black media outlets was neglected. Writer Lewis Martin notes that historically, the black press has concentrated much more on commentary than on ongoing news coverage. The contention has always been that it requires too much staff and hence money to adequately cover the happenings of the black community.\(^{41}\) Additionally, pressure was put on media related business owners to uphold the respectability and positive imagery of the community. A focus on positive imagery meant community related coverage was devoted to family and entertainment programming which conveniently targeted middle class audiences.\(^{42}\) Thus, after the civil rights movement, the plight of the underclass was virtually unreported.

Class differentiation was not always a detractor from group efficacy. Pre Civil Rights Movement, blacks of all socio-economic classes were striving for bourgeoisie respectability in the absence of freedom and rights.\(^{43}\) Achieving respectability for the middle class meant civilizing (uplifting) the broader community not ostracizing


\(^{42}\) Ibid., 192.

them. However, at a certain point, the black bourgeoisie unequivocally rejected any identification with the black masses. Kevin Gaines, author of “Uplifting the Race: Black Leadership, Politics, and Culture in the Twentieth Century,” notes that the “The general pattern was that black elites seized upon the status of the family and moral and cultural distinctions between themselves and the black masses to affirm the class differences among African Americans that racist whites were loathe to acknowledge.” Additionally E. Franklin Frazier, in his book “Black Bourgeoisie: The Rise of the Middle Class in the United States” outlines the stages of middle class assimilation that ultimately led to expatriation from both the community of origin and the community they hoped to infiltrate:

Since the black bourgeoisie has rejected identification with the masses, its isolation has been further intensified. In escaping from identification with the masses, the black bourgeoisie has attempted to identify with the white propertied class. Since this has been impossible, except in their minds, because of racial barriers those identified with this class have attempted to act out their role in a world of make believe. In the world of make-believe they have not taken over the patterns of behavior of the white-collar and professional white workers, but have adopted the values and as far as possible the patterns of behavior of wealthy whites. With their small earnings, their attempt to maintain the style of living of the white properties classes has only emphasized the unreality of their way of life.

Bourgeoisie attitudes stem from the middle class desire to “help themselves” and exude western respectability. Unfortunately, these associations were tied to

44 Ibid., 3.
45 Ibid., 11.
stereotypical beliefs that caused them to reject any and all behaviors and group association that deterred this effort.\textsuperscript{47} Here, Cohen again asserts that the real problem for the black middle class was that “every position of one’s own, every effort at security, is based on relations of dependence, with the diminution of the other.”\textsuperscript{48} In this instance, the other was the rest of the African American community. Only by highlighting the differences and distinguishing themselves as a separate group, could the black bourgeoisie satisfy desires to feel superior and more closely aligned with the dominant white social group. The black middle class was able to exert control over internal resources that both secured their position as leaders both inside and outside of the community.\textsuperscript{49} Ironically, in an attempt to escape alignment with the black masses, the bourgeoisie developed a self-hatred that reveals itself in the devaluing of the physical and social characteristics that all black people embody.\textsuperscript{50} In turn, the bourgeoisie also lost the respect and support of the community.

The living and behavioral conditions of the poor only affirmed their lack of cultural esteem and barbarism in the eyes of the black middle class. Middle class blacks felt they were the only group that could exude respectability.\textsuperscript{51} According to Professor of Political Science at University of Pennsylvania, Adolph Reed, any


\textsuperscript{48} Cathy Cohen, \textit{The Boundaries of Blackness} (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1999), 211.

\textsuperscript{49} Ibid., 27.


apparent unity among African Americans as a whole is reflective of the middle class’ dominance over the narrative and agenda of the community while ignoring the interests and needs of the poor.52

As the middle class entered the 21st century, middle class characteristics began to evolve. Class status was no longer determined by skin color or social club exclusivity. More and more the middle class was made up of non-traditional members such as athletes, entertainers, and white-collar personnel. These new members were monetarily middle class but not necessarily ideologically middle class in any traditional sense. Essentially the elitist and exclusive nature of their personification was tied solely to economic status and interests.

E. Franklin Frazier synopsizes the middle class predicament by concluding that, “Despite their attempt to escape identification with the masses of Negroes, the middle class discovered they could not escape the oppression any more than their less fortunate kinsman.”53 In attempting to assimilate, “The black bourgeoisie has been uprooted from its ‘racial tradition’ and as a consequence has no cultural roots in the Negro or the white world.”54 So, even though the black middle class tried to assimilate into mainstream society, they were prevented from doing so. Instead of the desired outcome, the black middle classes would ostracize themselves from any and all social group homogeneousness. As a consequence of their isolation, the


54 Ibid. 98.
majority of the black bourgeoisie would continue to live in a cultural vacuum, unable to reestablish their association to either group.55

The isolation of the middle class has grave effects on the institution of the black church. The foundation of African Americans culture has roots firmly planted in the black church. For African Americans, the church was critical in shaping the culture, values, norms, policy positions, and models of behavior for everyone in the community.56 In other words, the church was instrumental in establishing and sustaining group efficacy through the duration of the Civil Rights Movement. “The black church has historically been the foundation of the community life, providing continuity during the transition from slavery to freedom and thereby ensuring stability to African American community.”57 In essence, the black church was the center of black life. The prominent vehicle for representing black interests, the church, is particularly unique because it is the only multipurpose venue in which so many different social classes congregated together.

For free blacks in the North fleeing inferiority in white churches and for southern slaves seeking spirituality in bleak circumstances, the black church was a fortress. Particularly in the rural South, preachers stood out as the acknowledged leaders of the community.58 The church was the first social organization for blacks

55 Ibid.


in America and was the most endearing because of all the leadership roles the institution fostered in the community.⁵⁹ Among them is the church’s management of community maintenance, which includes activities such as revivals, weddings, baptisms, funerals, and community outreach programs.

Cornel West recounts that black preachers served as models for him in the sense that they used their vision and analysis in addition to their moral character to affirm the humanity of blacks in America.⁶⁰ For black women specifically, they could take off the mask they were forced to wear in their daily life of maid-work and diminution. West recalls being told every Sunday, in Chapel, “that you had to give service to the race. It created a moment of necessary accountability, because with the erosion of the service ethic, the possibility of putting the needs of others alongside of one’s own diminishes.”⁶¹

There is no way to acknowledge the quest for freedom and liberation without acknowledgment of the church’s role in bringing freedom to fruition. The church did more than provide a meeting place; it provided African Americans hope for the future and dignity for a people who accepted degradation as part of their life. Most importantly, the church helped enforce the political importance of the perception of group interests.⁶² The role of the church was always to reinforce group

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⁶¹ Ibid., 15.

consciousness by fostering collaboration. Thus, the church continues to be overlooked as a driver of political activism and social group identity.

Accompanying the church in reinforcing group efficacy is the concept of linked fate. Linked fate, according to theorist Michael Dawson, is the idea that what happens to some blacks affects all individuals in the community. For example, perpetual discrimination affects both poor and affluent blacks. It cannot be escaped and isn’t respectful of merit or economic status. Those that understand this think about how policies and actions affect the community as a whole. The entire African American community is continually faced with resistance from the dominant society seeking to appropriate certain aspects of their culture. This appropriation makes them finally feel accepted while simultaneously continually discouraging their direct participation. These individuals, despite individual identity and interests, support that which gives the entire community the best shot at advancement. Subsequently, linked fate constrains class divisions. Irrespective of economic status, the stronger the perceived link, the more likely one is to support black group policies and the more united the community will be.

Linked fate lends itself to the importance of the church as well. Historically, the measure of whether one heard political messages was determined by attendance of church services. In this regard, the church helped prove the validity

\[\text{63 Ronald W. Walters and Robert C. Smith,}\ \text{African American Leadership}\ \text{(Albany, Suny Press, 1999), 116.}\]
\[\text{64 Michael C. Dawson,}\ \text{Behind the Mule: Race and Class in African American Politics}\ \text{(Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), 194.}\]
\[\text{65 Ibid., 82.}\]
of linked fate because no matter the subgroup, the church was the center of black life.

From this chapter, two conclusions are reached. The first is that slavery detribalized African Americans. Slavery erased every trace of history and heritage before their arrival to America thus eliminating any reference point of identity. African Americans have spent the last 300 years creating a new culture and identity that is organic but also influenced by outside perceptions of who and what black people should be and how they should be socialized in America. The second is that it is clear the African American social group was always conflicted by individual interests and subgroup identifiers. Earl Lewis asserts in his book “In Their Own Interests: Race, Class, and Power in the Twentieth-Century Norfolk, Virginia,” “Intra-racial subgroup interests and experiences shaped perspectives almost as much as life in a Jim Crow city did.”

In the next chapter, we will delve deeper into the historical patterns of leadership within the African American community in order to connect shifts in group identification and interests with the disconnect of leadership on the national and local levels. By understanding how patterns of leadership have changed since the 1900s, special consideration can be placed on proposing solutions that address leadership discrepancies. Examining leadership tendencies will also better illustrate how individual and subgroup identifiers have affected leadership trends overtime.


CHAPTER TWO

AN OVERVIEW OF LEADERSHIP CHARACTERISTICS AND TRENDS

Have a vision. Be demanding. – Colin Powell, 2005

What does it take to be a leader in a particular social group? By definition, any persons devoted to the expression of the ideology and who can harmonize the prevalent feelings and strategies of a particular group is best suited to champion the causes and encourage unity.¹ Good leaders are able to motivate groups of people to follow them and at “critical junctures” take one course of action over another.² Leaders routinely analyze, organize, prioritize and spearhead courses of action based upon the degree of unflattering circumstances and scenarios faced by members of the community.³ While any good leader should possess these characteristics, they are not necessarily innate. Individuals can learn most of what is required of a good leader. As a result, the likelihood is that most of the problems currently facing the African American community and stifling its leadership can be reversed or more effectively addressed.

For the African American community two categorizations of leaders apply: individual leaders and social-political organizations. Leaders and organizations are charged with the duty to provide strategic guidance in strengthening both the


³ Ibid., 49.
common framework and resource base in the African American community. Doing so enables individuals and group members to achieve the objectives with the highest priority.4

Leaders within the African American community face a unique set of challenges. Ronald Walters and Robert Smith, two scholars of African American politics, affirm that leaders are given “the daunting task of accurately determining, within a given historical context, what strategies paired with what problems can be addressed that give promise to positive outcomes.”5 According to Walters and Smith, “black leadership is historically characterized by an internal conflict over values, resources, and legitimacy while simultaneously addressing conflict with the dominant social group.”6 This means deciphering which issues most urgently affect the majority within the group and overwhelmingly reflect group interests. Doing so has always been a challenge for those in leadership positions.

During the process of prioritizing issues within the African American community it is also critical for leaders to not only adhere to the demands of the majority, but also to remember their responsibility to both empathize and answer the calls of all members of the community. Martin Luther King Jr. conveyed this responsibility by stating, “Moreover, I am cognizant of the interrelatedness of all

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6 Ibid., 62.
communities and states. I cannot sit idly by in Atlanta and not be concerned about what happens in Birmingham...Whatever affects one directly, affects all indirectly.”

Traditional leaders within the African American community were overwhelmingly middle class and middle aged. The black middle class has always played an essential role in the growth and facilitation of social progress. In fact, mobilization of the entire community depended on the strength or subsequent weakness of the black middle class. Historically, leaders were members of the clergy, who tended to be intellectual in thought, and strived to propose programs and multilateral solutions. Often these same leaders were the benefactors of white male empathizers. Emeritus Professor of Anthropology at the University of Connecticut, Bernard Magubane, provides historical analysis for the relationship between “Negro” leaders and white empathizers: ”Negroes here and there have been hailed as leaders...but a thorough analysis of these famous Negro leaders will disclose the fact that they owed their prominence mainly to white men who considered such spokesman as those persons through whom they could work to keep the Negro in his place.” Leadership always preferred social over economic resources for mobilization and facilitation. Emphasis was placed on the group as a

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collective and its shared culture. Modern black leadership is lacking emphasis in shared culture and group functionality.

While traditional leadership within the African American community has always shared common goals, dissention is an ever-present reality whenever multiple individuals and or entities are charged with decision-making. Thus supporting the affirmation that interests within the community consistently varied and courses of action were continuously debated. Booker T. Washington for example, believed blacks should be content with the advantages they were afforded. Competing with the skills African Americans already possessed was the way to achieve a version of Civil Rights he felt they could be comfortable with. “Brains, property, and character for the Negro will settle the question of civil rights.”

On the contrary, a leader who envisioned upward mobility and quality of life for African Americans in a contradistinctive way to Washington was Marcus Garvey. “Garveyism,” the term most commonly used to refer to the social philosophy of Marcus Garvey, was effective for the same reason the Civil Rights Movement would be generations later: uplift ideology. Uplift-self-respect ideology was needed to change the mentality of African Americans and moreover change their condition. Uplift ideology coupled with W.E.B. Dubois’ strong beliefs in black ownership and education fueled the crusade for equality through the era of Civil Rights.


However, from 1930 to the late 1950s, leadership and mobilization would fall into a slump of overwhelming complacency and stagnation. Commonly referred to as the era of “accommodationists,” leaders sought menial modifications without challenging the racial caste system in America. During this time in the South, leadership duties were dispersed between preachers, teachers, and lodge leaders. Northern leadership consisted primarily of business owners, teachers, postal workers, and low-level government officials. Those tasked with representing the respectability of African Americans were usually well-educated, prominent athletes or entertainers such as Lena Horne, Harry Belefonte, and Arthur Ashe.

Accommodationists were either restricted from challenging or feared challenging the condition of blacks. With the exception of Thurgood Marshall and Adam Clayton Powell Jr., leadership was absent from the political stage. Each focused on challenging the legal parameters that upheld segregation. At the time, middle class blacks supported desegregation because they recognized the opportunity to even the playing field and achieve the social recognition and autonomy in society they felt they deserved. Despite the subtle approach to affecting change, leadership in the 30s would set the stage for pristine assembly during the Civil Rights Movement. Peaking late in the decade, unified leadership fronts previewed what was to come in the 60s. The Brown v Board of Education ruling and Civil Rights Act of 1957 that established the Commission on Civil Rights fueled the resurgence in social group mobilization and grassroots activism that prevailed during the Civil Rights Movement.
The most compelling period of effective and transformative leadership in American history is the Civil Rights Movement. Organizational and grassroots leadership had clearer goals than ever before and deliberate methods of achieving them. Those in leadership positions were characterized as possessing great oratorical skills as masters of the art of persuasion, while also embodying a genuine concern for people. Preachers and other religious representatives were at the helm of every mobilizing effort. For many reasons, men of faith were held in high esteem, which proved to be an advantage because their accessibility and trustworthiness allowed them to easily reach broad audiences.\(^{14}\) Two of the most esteemed men of faith were Malcolm X and Martin Luther King Jr.

Malcolm X advised against integration, refuting it as a solution to racism while acknowledging its role as a hindrance to black economic development.\(^{15}\) He was often accused of alienating the black middle class by focusing his efforts on the urban underclass. Never seeking external validation or acceptance, X was concerned only with the progression of the black economic and social condition in America. As a representative of the Nation of Islam, his faith represented another divergence from traditional leadership. In this way he avoided the same distractions and enticements that would taunt future generations of leaders.

Though the faces of the movement, Martin and Malcolm were not the only champions of civil rights. E.D. Nixon the leader of the NAACP, JoAnne Robinson of the Black Women’s Political Caucus, Ella Baker the SCLC Executive Director, future


Congressman John Lewis, James Farmer the organizer of the Freedom Riders and representative of CORE, Andrew Young, and martyr Medgar Evers all collectively represented the varying positions but unified mission and group interests of African Americans in the 60s. Each of these great leaders exemplified the power ordinary people can have when they cast aside charismatic ego and agenda-driven mentalities.

The shared mentality of Civil Rights leaders is another reason they were so successful. Civil Rights leaders were younger than any previous generation and had no desire to be modest in their demands. Leaders embraced their calling to improve the quality of life for African Americans like never before.16 All classes and subgroups together aligned their common interests for the Civil Rights Movement. Never again would the group interest of African Americans trump the divergent individual interest that for decades have been more aligned with economic over social factors.

The second category of leadership within the African American communities is socio-political organizations. In the late 50s theses organizations would focus their efforts on achieving Civil Rights. Stanford Sociology Professor, Doug McAdams believes organizations are crucial instruments for any social group and political movement because they give the insurgency a platform to stand on.

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McAdams goes on to illustrate the importance of social group affiliation by explaining:

Here (organizational level) the political meaning of an issue is at least exacerbated and communicated. Group members are encouraged to think of issues in terms of the rights and entitlements necessary for the sustainability of the community at large. Thus being a part of a social group promotes a process that elevates the role of indigenous structures and provides the basis of group consciousness needed for collective mobilization”.

However, group consciousness and mobilization are contingent upon the efficacy of the members of the social group.

Organizers were often seen as an alternative to singular black leadership. In fact, many prominent leaders of the civil rights movement got their start managing grassroots organizations. In the decades following the Civil Rights Movement, sociopolitical group leaders were the face of black representation. According to Northwestern Sociology Professor Aldon Morris, strategic organizational action was successful because of its reliance on community resources already in place. The sustainability of organizations depended almost entirely on membership and the fees associated with membership. Local organizations met and recruited in churches, barbershops, and other public forums within the community. Recruitment was hyper-effective because the limitations of segregation restricted members of the African American community to specific geographic locations.

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Traditionally, the hierarchy of organizational leadership was structured under the umbrella of national organizations, followed by coalitions, and local and or grassroots organizations. Examples of national organizations include the Congressional Black Caucus (CBC), National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), National Urban League (NUL), and National Council for Negro Women (NCNW). The conglomerate of Civil Rights Organizations that made up the “big five,” widely regarded as the most effective, included the NAACP, NUL, Student Non-violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), Southern Christian Leadership Council (SCLC), and the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE). Each made significant contributions to the corralling and advancement of Civil Rights endeavors in the 60s. Coalition organizations include the National Black Leadership Forum, leadership from the National Pan Hellenic Council Organizations (Greek letter organizations), and the National Conference of Mayors.

Early Civil Rights organizations were backed by white sympathizers just as several political figures were. White philanthropists for example, founded the National Urban League in 1911. On the local level, chapters often acted in consort with the interest of their white funders. Deepening NUL’s conflicting interests was the fact that it was an elite organization that claimed to serve the interests of the working class without including any representatives from that class in its membership or appointing any to leadership positions.19 Discouraging lower class involvement was a pattern that mirrored itself in the formation and facilitation of other black civic organizations.

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An exception to the traditional form of organizational leadership was SNCC. SNCC represented the final divergence between the black elite and the underserved masses. Stokely Carmichael spearheaded student-led initiatives to combat racially exclusive economic, political, and social developments. Early on, the sit-ins, protests, and freedom rides were met with great resistance until their efforts garnered national attention. Together with Carmichael, SNCC brought a fresh and youthful approach to leadership and the struggle for advancement. Such efforts opened the door for a new organization in the 1970s that resembled the “uplift ideology” crafted by Marcus Garvey nearly four decades earlier: The Black Panther Party. In many ways the Black Panther Party was prolific in their demand for the autonomy to determine the social and economic trajectory of the entire black community, specifically the underserved and underrepresented. The Black Power movement’s focal goal was to suffocate the eminent intra-class divide in the community. Temporarily, the actions of the leaders in the movement were successful to a certain extent in restoring some form of security in social group efficacy. Long-term, the movement only exacerbated the divide between class groups who could not agree on methodology or restoration rhetoric. Irrespective of how historians have dismissed their contribution, The Black Panther Party spoke loudly for a community largely abandoned.

Post 1960s, African Americans (majority middle class) found themselves climbing the legislative ladder while reaping the benefits of post Civil Rights

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legislation. As the population of African American congressional leadership increased, a need was identified to unite politicians around central strategies and legislation geared directly toward the communities each represented. The Congressional Black Caucus (CBC) founded in 1971, wanted to invest their efforts in more than just legislation but also in creating a pathway for future leaders. Early agenda items included: comprehensive anti-poverty solutions, urban reconstruction and development, and full employment. However divided by individual interests, members of the CBC collectively sought to craft a shared framework of goals and strategic plans designed to advance the demands in the community. The founding and early success of the CBC symbolized what solidarity within the community could yield. Through working to advance voter registration and political education, a high number of African Americans were elected to Congress. CBC members worked diligently together in the House to prove that they did not have to sell out to get elected or to advance pro-black legislation. An example of their collaboration was the campaign to bring awareness and ultimately end apartheid in South Africa.

The National Black Leadership Roundtable was a short-lived extension of the CBC. Their aspiration was to create a national leadership platform tasked with mobilizing as many members of the community as possible through membership and direct action. Admirably declining tax-exempt status, the NBLR remained completely independent of government involvement and dictation. The NBLR had twelve agenda goals: protect the elderly and the youth, increase voter registration, support local (chapter) regions, address community crime, contribute to the Black Defense Fund, advocate for black ownership, increase transparency with elected
officials, boycott biased media, support black family structure, support other black organizations, excel in education, and be in touch with African Diaspora. Unfortunately, the NBLR would face the same challenges as the more established national organizations and find it difficult to unite the rapidly expanding and diverse African American population. As a result the organization would become defunct in 1991.

Each decade following the Civil Rights Movement would be charged with answering this question: can black leadership deliver the necessary initiatives to transform the living conditions of African Americans and overcome dormant political institutions still tasked with upholding large-scale marginalization?22 Regarded as the last decade of race-conscious activism, 70s leadership focused on addressing this question as well as minimizing the fallout and growing dissention resulting as a side effect to the victories of the civil rights movement.23 As previously stated, the passage of voting rights legislation in the 60s initiated a surge of black elected officials in the 70s. One notable addition to Congress was Barbara Jordan, the first black woman elected from Texas to the United States House of Representatives. President Carter embraced his executive authority and attempted to even the political playing field by appointing several African Americans to federal positions. Andrew Young was appointed Ambassador to the United Nations, Patricia Harris was named the Director of the Housing and Urban Development Agency, and


Eleanor Holmes Norton was appointed Chair of the Equal Employment Opportunity Council. With new rights came new responsibility and it was the task of new leaders to reassess and refocus the goals of the community moving forward.

However, in reassessing the goals of the community, the plight of the urban impoverished was overlooked. By 1973, one-third of minorities lived below the poverty line.\textsuperscript{24} Before his passing, Dr. King even expressed his intent to focus on elevating the poor out of poverty and creating a pathway for success for the underserved in the community. David Abernathy succeeded Dr. King as head of the SCLC, but he lacked the charisma, leadership skills, and political esteem to effectively fill his shoes. CORE would find itself in a similar downtrodden position. Without the media draw from freedom rides and sit-ins, CORE lost its edge. Both the SCLC and CORE experienced a steady decline in membership and influence following the Civil Rights Movement. The NAACP focused their efforts on monitoring the integration of schools. When necessary, the legal department filed complaints against harassment and other mistreatments. Unfortunately, a heavy focus on upward economic mobility and the mass election of African Americans to political and government positions detracted from community-based agenda items.

In 1972, the National Black Political Convention was held with the theme “A Call for Unity.” Nearly every prominent black leader attended the convention. Ego and lack of formality initially interrupted proceedings, but it was another announcement that caused participants to walk out. Shirley Chisolm announced she was seeking the Democratic nomination for President. Uproar ensued because a

\textsuperscript{24} Ibid., 237.
large population of leaders felt she should have asked for the support of the leadership pool before making a final decision to run. When the conference concluded, a Chicago Defender editorial summarized the unfortunate sentiments on the outcomes of the convention, “Out of the maelstrom of flamboyant, militant rhetoric...no clear leadership has emerged. The convention was an assemblage of conflicting ideologies, half-baked dilettantism, and infantile assumptions. It did not live up to its rooseate promise. It had a chance to be a force in the consortium of American politics, it has muffed it.”25 Internal strife, illustrated in a very public way, confirmed that black leadership could no longer be taken seriously. No sense of collective leadership existed in the community and the failed convention proved no consensus was on the horizon. The message was loud and clear: individual success and notoriety was more important to than collective advancement.26

By the 1980s, 21 African Americans held Congressional seats.27 The increase in electoral power created a pathway for a new genre of black leadership: the black conservative. Some black conservatives like Colin Powell, garnered favorable views among black voters while others such as future Supreme Court Justice Clarence Thomas would not. Reagan sought to discredit black organizations by campaigning against their relevancy. He refused to acknowledge the NAACP National Convention by skipping it all together. One of the more recognizable beneficiaries of the black conservative movement was Clarence Pendleton. Pendleton had no qualms being

25 Ibid., 232.

26 Ibid., 240-241.

the mascot for black conservatism declaring, “I say to black America’s leadership, open the plantation gates and let us out. We refuse to be led into another political Jonestown...we want to be free!”  

Black leaders, who rose to prominence at this time, did so by aligning themselves with black conservatism.  

The overall increase in professional opportunities also deepened the divide between the black middle class and the other sectors of the community. Select members of the middle class were placed in positions of authority primarily housed in the federal government. Until the 80s, black elected officials willfully served as representatives of the black community. The intent behind getting elected was to implement an agenda based solely on advancing the quality of life for African Americans; all other policy issues were secondary.  

Too distracted and enticed by fame, political promise, and money, national politicians began to neglect their core constituency. National leaders were also out of touch with the communities they were elected to serve. Speaking with several community activists, Sheila Rule of The New York Times, recounts the sentiment that national leaders were afraid to vocalize injustices in African American communities out of fear of loosing donor support and alienating white voters.  

By the 1990s, the narrative of the black struggle for equality would look quite different. A plethora of new opportunities was available in both political parties.

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29 Ibid., 254.

30 Ibid., xiii-xiv.

31 Ibid., 257.
Every major city in the United States had elected at least one African American mayor. The first black Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff was appointed and Fortune 500 companies were diversifying their executive boards with African American CEO’s. The CBC proved to be an influential voice in Congress hosting 40 Congressional Representatives and one Senator in the 104th Congress. The black middle class also thrived in new positions of authority and in suburban communities. Each paradigm of political success emphasized the sentiment that the struggle for equality was in the past. In comparison, less than one-sixth of African Americans lived in suburbs in 1970. By 1980, the percentage would rise to 22% and again to 32% by 1995.

In response to the conservative domination of the Reagan Administration and black conservatism in the 1980s, Jesse Jackson launched a major Voter Registration Campaign to reengage the African American community. Anchoring his efforts to reenergize the community was his run for President. While Jackson ultimately lost the nomination, he won seven primary races and helped scores of black mayors win elections. Champion of the poor and underserved, Al Sharpton also rose to prominence by lending a voice to the plight of the poor and by exposing incidents of racial injustice trending throughout the country. Notwithstanding the success of African American politicians in the 90s, leadership continued to chase

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32 Ibid., 307.

positions of notoriety while remaining oblivious to the discontinuity and subsequent predicament of a large portion of the community.

However, aside from Jesse Jackson and later Al Sharpton, charismatic leadership was nonexistent. A CNN/US Gallup Poll conducted in 1996 indicated that the most influential (leadership figures) category of African Americans were athletes by 64%. 53% of respondents felt that entertainers such as Oprah Winfrey and Eddie Murphy, two of the most revered in their fields, held the greatest influence. Understandably, public figures such as Murphy, Winfrey, and Michael Jordan transcended racial barriers in a way that had never been done before. Undoubtedly having Louis Farrakhan and the Reverend Al Sharpton in mind, 50% of respondents still believed ministers held the greatest influence in the community. Farrakhan preached self-reliance and appealed directly to marginalized sectors of the community. Only 45% of those polled believed African American politicians were the most influential.\textsuperscript{34} The influence of celebrities marks a shift in leadership appropriation in America. This was the first time celebrities held greater influence than traditional leaders in the community. The role of each of these types of leaders in the 90s was to guide public opinion about African Americans in a decade lacking mobilization.\textsuperscript{35} Unfortunately, at the time, no strategy was in place to capitalize on the influence these individuals possessed.

The late 90s and early 2000’s ushered in a new era in leadership. The new faces to the movement hoped to realign group interests within the African American

\textsuperscript{34} Ibid.

community. Deemed self-starters, characteristically new leaders were Ivy League educated and interested in giving back. Notable leaders included Deval Patrick, the former Governor of Massachusetts, Adrian Fenty, former Mayor of DC, Cory Booker, now Senator from New Jersey, Harold Ford Jr. and of course, Barack Obama. New Century leadership was “de-racialized” and many won in diverse geographic districts lending statistical support for “post-racial society” theories. Encompassing more than traditional political figureheads, many of these new leaders were historians and intellectuals such as Roland Martin, Michael Eric Dyson, Henry Louis Gates, Cornell West, Melissa Harris-Perry, and William Wilson. So-called “black intellectuals” used their newfound influence to highlight disparities inside and outside of the community. Each of these scholars used their published work, media related commentary, and activism to advance a separate narrative for leadership within the African American community.

However, organizational leadership would continue to struggle. The NAACP along with what was left of the big-five organizations had to continue to do the work abandoned by grassroots and political leadership. Unfortunately, many of the successful socio-political organizations of the Civil Rights Movement found it difficult to concentrate on creating strategies and policy issues because they were putting out too many internal fires engulfed by scandal. For example, by 1994, the NAACP was leaderless. Outgoing leader, Benjamin Chavis, only served one year before being ousted for fraudulent spending. Internal conflict continued to plague the NAACP as they went so far as to sue their own legal defense fund for unauthorized use of their acronym. By the mid-late 1990s, despite the appointment
of widow to Medgar Evers, Merlie Evers Williams, to board chair, the image of the NAACP was irreversibly tarnished.

Organizations were beginning to realize their powerlessness. Even consistent leadership grew fatigued. Socio-political organizations lacked the appeal necessary to attract young people and funding continued to be an issue. Membership in the NAACP began to fall in 1970 by 25% from 1969 and continued to fall through the 90s. As middle class blacks reaped the benefits of desegregation in suburban communities, they lost further interest in financially supporting these organizations. Repeated incidents of money laundering further dissuaded middle class blacks and white empathizers from contributing. For both groups, the war for equality appeared to be won. In the 60s, the entire country witnessed on television the legitimate grievances of African Americans, but by the 90s, audiences grew tired of the black struggle narrative. Not only would they reconsider funding these organizations, they also saw no viable need for their existence.

Tom Skinner, the former Executive Director of the CBC, recognized the struggles facing African American socio-political organizations and worked to prevent further dismantling. Skinner held "off the record" retreats with other figureheads of black organizations. He believed that if leadership could just come together to rebuild trust and transparency within the community they could easily improve their leadership capabilities. Any collaboration had to be grounded in a

36 Ibid., 235.
37 Ibid., 241.
renewed set of goals for community progress and that is what was lacking in his
desire to unite organizational leadership.

In this chapter the history of leadership in the African American community
was acknowledged for its expansiveness and diversity. Diversity in this context is
indicative of the social and economic makeup of the community outlined in chapter
one. However, if not properly regulated, too much differentiation can dismantle all
the progress achieved in the past fifty years. The next chapter continues the
conversation of exploring how multiple conflicting interests, coupled with a lack of
political strategy and groupthink, has completely broken African American
community dynamics.
CHAPTER THREE

LOST IDENTITY AND DEFUNCT LEADERSHIP

In concrete ways, crosscutting issues represent the distinct racialized experiences of different segments of black communities, the fragmentation that threatens a perceived unified black group identity and interests, and the waning probability of effective mobilization.

–Cathy Cohen, 1999

African Americans now face a deep decline in institutional associations that historically have upheld and validated group interests. On the subject of evolving considerations of group interests, Cathy Cohen contends, “The political agenda of the African American community was once dominated by consensus issues defined as having an equal impact on all those sharing a primary identity based on race. Now cross-cutting issues defined by social, political, and economic cleavages that tear at the perceived unity and shared identity of group members prevail.”¹ In other words, crosscutting issues are those perceived as being contained to identifiable sub-groups in black communities, specifically those groups that are the least empowered.² No longer can consensus issues be affirmed as the only concerns affecting African Americans.

Since integration, African Americans have not cultivated enough committed relationships to their community or themselves.³ What group interests are left, do not outweigh individual interests in any comparable way. So now, what exists is a

² Ibid.
community that is grappling with a sense of mutual betrayal. Cornel West believes the fundamental crisis facing blacks in America is one of too much poverty and abandonment, and too little self-love and appreciation. Another critical fault line is the lack of acknowledgment of linked fate. If one does not believe that one's fate is linked to that of the race, then political and social movements based on race are not likely to be associated with one's own advancement. Therefore, addressing intra-community conflicts and proving linked fate are increasingly difficult tasks as community institutions have been weakened. African American schools, churches, physical communities, and civil society are depleted leaving the social group culturally naked. The divisiveness between members of the community is a consequences of the following occurrences: the declining influence of the black church, the divide within leadership over direction and interests, dismantling of the physical community, the growing desire of members of the community to prioritize individual interest, and false notions of assimilation and de-racialization.

Once the staple of the community, the church is now a fraction of the institution it once was. Consumerism, hedonism, and narcissism are eroding spirituality in the black church. West best illustrates this in a reflection of his own regarding the loss of attachment to the church, “We have witnessed the collapse of

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7 Ibid., 52.
the spiritual communities that in the past helped Americans face: despair, disease, and death and that transmit through the generations dignity, decency, excellence and elegance.”

This is because as the middle class worked up the social ladder they sought spirituality in more exclusive religious denominations less associated with black culture such as Episcopalian, Presbyterian, and Catholic churches.

Previously, African Americans of all socio-economic backgrounds fellowshipped in the same churches, resulting in a common identifier that forced all subgroups to interact and commune with one another. Following desegregation, not all African Americans attended the same community churches thus making mobilizing efforts far more challenging. In many ways the church is now a dividing identifier. Whereas the church was formally a center of group life it is now an institution used to divide social group members.

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Scholars of religion and sociology, C. Eric Lincoln and Lawrence H. Mamiya conclude from their research:

The gradual emergence of two distinct black Americas along color lines – of two nations within a nation – has raised a serious challenge to the black church. Historically, the membership of the seven historic black denominations is composed largely of middle income, working class, and middle-class members, with a scattering of support from poorer members (especially those in southern rural areas who tend to be the most loyal members). But black pastors and churches have had a difficult time in recent history reaching the hard-core urban poor, the black underclass, which is continuing to grow. In past generations some of the larger urban black churches were one of the few institutions that could reach beyond class boundaries and provide a semblance of unity in black communities. The challenge for the future is whether back clergy and their churches will attempt to transcend class boundaries and reach out to the poor, as these class lines continue to solidify with demographic changes in black communities.10

Additionally, emerging counter lifestyles have surfaced creating new identifiers that historically have not been supported by the church. For example, the church does not support dual membership in both the African American and LGBT community. Consequently, individuals could potentially find greater acceptance with other members of the LGBT community even if it means their allegiance no longer aligns with that of the African American community.

Unlike the church, the black political sphere has always been at odds.11 In the post Civil Rights era, virtually all the talent and resources of black leadership has been devoted to integration and incorporation into the dominant structure of society.

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10 Cathy Cohen, The Boundaries of Blackness (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1999), 287.

society. Meanwhile, the core community that they claim to lead has become increasingly segregated and isolated. It’s society, economy, culture, and institutions of internal uplift and governance have decayed.12

Semblance and incorporation were two critical desires of black conservatives. Thomas Sowell, “the founding father of black conservatism,” is a conservative economist that was interested in seeking new approaches to post Civil Rights conditions. Thus, he convened the Fairmont Conference in 1980. Sowell claimed the unemployment, crime, and family dysfunction that rattled urban black communities was attributed to excessive government rather than lingering racism or extreme marginalization. Black conservatives believed it was the culture of entitlement, not middle class abandonment, which subjected lower class blacks to a life of poverty. Sowell rejected narratives of victimhood. Following the victories of the Civil Rights Movement, victimhood was an apathetic strategy because it didn’t sufficiently atone for the diversity of issues faced by both the middle and lower classes in the community. Conservatives also believed Affirmative Action was doing a disservice to the community and thus advocated for the eradication of quota systems. Great emphasis was placed on self-determination and accountability in conservative discourse. Self-proclaimed conservatives such as Clarence Thomas, despite growing up in poverty, vehemently rejected arguments that suggested it was not the sole responsibility of each individual to change their trajectory and be successful.

During the Reagan Administration, black conservatives were celebrated and rewarded with political appointments. Clarence Thomas was appointed Chair of the Equal Employment Opportunity Council, Samuel Riley became the U.S. Secretary to the Department of Housing and Urban Development and Clarence M. Pendleton was appointed Commissioner for Civil Rights. Each of the departments directly affected the opportunity for progression and equal opportunity for African Americans.

Although black conservatives weren’t necessarily speaking for Reagan, they were largely viewed as puppets used by the Republican Party to support the scaling back of entitlements and public assistance programs. Tensions arose between the black political establishment and conservatives over fundamental ideological beliefs about the causes and solution of urban plight. Black Republican and Democratic leadership pegged the other as the enemy; a destructive manipulative force that sought to further decay the community. Reagan expounded upon this tension by forcing blacks to blame other blacks for the reversal of “progressive legislation”. In this regard, Reagan solidified the wedge between black conservatives and the black political establishment by using their differences as a weapon to serve his own political agenda.

Black conservatives were in return shunned by the black masses for expressing their discontent. They were labeled “sell-outs” “traitors” “uncle toms” and overall disregarded as not black enough. The black conservative movement responded by cutting all ties with the black political establishment and acknowledged their blackness only when it was required, and rarely celebrated it.

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Some black conservatives, unwilling to acknowledge blatant instances of injustice against African Americans, operated under a particular extension of self-hate and limited scope. Some wished so deeply to assimilate, they were willing to relinquish group membership in order to overcompensate for the skin color barrier that traditionally prevented complete acceptance. Others were simply ostracized for their desire to think independently about issues within the African American community and choose viewpoints that didn’t readily align with dominant social group ideologies.

The African American community is conflicted between a majority’s discouragement of non-consensus thought and the adamant expression of such thought by black conservatives. The black mass of liberal politicians condemns the black conservative position. Despite not doing much to alleviate hardships in urban communities, the black political establishment would discourage conservatives from doing so, claiming their intentions were to “air out our dirty laundry.” However, not all scholars find fault with black conservatives. Cornel West reflects on the contribution of black conservatives and applauds them for “calling attention to the failures of the black political establishment.” West would go on to suggest that if anything, the black conservative movement should “encourage us all to come up with more progressive and active solutions to our problems.” 14

A question for present day leadership is what comes first: mobilizing the community or addressing the needs of the urban poor? Present leadership is both

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unable to answer this question or to balance the immediate need to foster
community activities, values, and positive familial interaction with the pressing
need to reclaim a voice on the national stage. The true failure for black leaders is
now in vision. It is quite clear that the limited scope on the part of leadership has
made it increasingly difficult to implement a comprehensive political agenda.

Likewise, socio-political organizations have become shrines of their previous
stature instead of instruments for the future rebuilding of African American
communities. The CBC for example, is relegated to exuding only symbolic power.
The first 20 years of the CBC were filled with comprehensive agenda items such as
anti-poverty, urban reconstruction, and employment endeavors. Currently, the CBC
seems focused on decrying community injustices without proposing any solutions
or implementing any programmatic initiatives. Under recent Republican and
Democratic administrations alike, the CBC has become a silent presence only
acknowledged during black history month and the annual CBC Week in DC.

15 John Davis, ed., Perspectives in Black Politics and Black Leadership (Lanham: University
16 Ibid., 41.
17 Ronald W. Walters and Robert C. Smith, African American Leadership (Albany, Suny Press,
1999), 73.
In many ways, Ron Dellums, founding member of the CBC, foreshadowed the current predicament of ineffectiveness when he declares as follows:

In order for the CBC to be effective we had to acknowledge that we were legislators...and we were not in a position to be all things for all people...the NAACP, CORE, SNCC...all existed to further the interests of their members and our communities. If we tried to do the job of all these organizations we would fail our constituents at the most fundamental level.18

A differentiation had to be made between the role of social organizations and the institutions that uphold the laws of the country. When an elected official adds “United States” to their title, they hold a responsibility to all constituents and not just that of African Americans. Although there is a responsibility to serve all constituents, not many can be relied on to champion the interests of African Americans and to some extent black elected officials are endowed with this responsibility.

Another reason for the current lull of black leadership is an overall absence of the vibrant traditions of resistance and community emphasized by shared ethnic ideals and struggles.19 As a result, author and social activist Bell Hooks claims that African Americans are a people without an immediate sense of direction.20 Blacks are simply complacent in their current condition. Additionally, post Civil Rights


leadership lacks “authentic anger and general humility” (West) for any interest outside of their own. What does this mean? According to West, at one point the sustainability of the entire community relied on how fast the collective condition of African Americans could be improved. Now, the concern is of personal predicaments that as a result of class deviation and identity shifts, no longer directly affects or includes the ALL.\textsuperscript{21}

Black intellectuals had the potential to fill vacancies within leadership but many were too enticed by the lure of Ivy League stature. Those with tenured positions grew fatigued by requests to reduce race-based subject matter as a means to further their careers.\textsuperscript{22} Inversely, complete rejection of mainstream academia often silenced many intellectuals from the only outlet (pre-social media boom) to share their thoughts on community issues. This predicament for black intellectuals has yet to be reconciled.

Even leaders who rose to great prominence post Civil Rights failed to properly channel their leadership abilities. West argues, for example, that the problem with Al Sharpton is that he lacks an inclusive vision. He focuses all his energy on the underserved while completely neglecting the needs of other subgroups. Sharpton, while being a champion of the poor, completely alienates the middle class. Doing so cuts off the sector of the community responsible for donorship and social support. Jesse Jackson, on the other hand, faces challenges that are more ego-driven. Observers of Jackson’s history of leadership feel he is simply


\textsuperscript{22} Ibid., 64.
unwilling to share the spotlight and collaborate with other leaders. He thrives solely off acknowledgment and notoriety. For both Jackson and Sharpton, their gifts lie more in rhetoric than actual problem solving.23

Black mayors in post Civil Rights decades struggled to realize they did not have an equal stake in power. Elected officials and constituents alike struggled to be critical of politicians out of fear of unfairly shaming one of their own. To this day, African American leadership continues in its hesitation of critiquing each other publicly. In this regard, mayors faced the same issues as congressional representatives. While some were elected to majority African American cities, others were not. Governing practice shifted to a focus on legislating diversely instead of exclusively advancing the African American quality of life.

In keeping with shifts in governing practices, current leadership is transactional. Leaders are fully indoctrinated into the ruthless political system that behooves politicians to ask “what’s in it for me?” first.24 Today’s leaders are too driven by status to be angry about the condition of their community and are too eager for advancement to voice their concerns. Furthermore, public acts of defiance and outrage are more for bravado and performance than indicative of true concern and empathy.25

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De-racial theory is the greatest advancer of transactional leadership practices. De-racialization was initially a concept created by economist Charles Hamilton and Stokley Carmichael. The principle thought was that de-racialization could be used as a political tool to combat the southern white strategy of using coded language to appeal to white voters. As a response to southern political tactics, Carmichael and Hamilton believed, “if Democrats (black candidates) could frame their campaign around generic themes that appealed to all voters they could be viable candidates in the eyes of a diverse pool of voters.” Hamilton’s vision of de-racial implementation continued to expand as he detailed that if black politicians could frame their campaign “in a stylistic fashion that defused the polarizing effects of race by avoiding race-specific rhetoric and references,” while simultaneously emphasizing issues that are not race exclusive, then he or she could mobilize a significant sector of the electorate and win elections in diverse communities. De-racialization practices were presented before a convening of black politicians at the 73rd Annual National Urban League Convention in 1983.

As the middle class continued to expand into diversified and often suburban sectors of the community, de-racialization became that much more essential. Politicians had to rely on more than just the “black vote” to win elections and de-racialization helped them appear as universal candidates. The initial fruits of de-racialization implementation were efficacious. The first group to experiment with de-racial theory was the first generation post segregation to be elected. In 1989,


27 Ibid., 243.
America elected its first black mayor in New York City, David Dinkins. Following this election was the mayoral win of African Americans in Seattle and New Haven.

Newly elected de-racial politicians embraced “I just happen to be black” mantras. While not attempting to deny their blackness per se, de-racial politicians acknowledge it as an insignificant fact. De-racial theory calls for the good of all citizens and requires politicians to remain silent when issues specific to the African American community are raised. As a result, “what’s in it for me” quickly morphed into “what’s best for my political career.” For many new leaders, this is not merely a political strategy but a reflection of their upbringing. Overwhelming products of middle class households, many experienced socialization in diverse communities. These leaders didn’t have much interaction with the communities they were charged with devoting their legislative careers to helping.

Moreover, a firm belief rests in the idea that color can be overlooked. Perhaps the earliest example of de-racialization was the election of Tom Bradley as Mayor of Los Angeles in 1973. Bradley felt indebted to the non-black constituents who helped him get elected. He credited his survival to supporting causes that were not race specific.28 Politicians such as Deval Patrick, Adrian Fenty and Barack Obama, to varying degrees, won elections running de-racial campaigns. However, while de-racialization proved to be a successful tool to crossover, thus elevating group progress, the progressive black group agenda diminished as a result.

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Professors of Political Science, Byron D’Andra Orey and Boris Ricks conducted a survey in 2007 on the validity of de-racialization. Most African American politicians polled embraced some form of de-racialization. In majority of the elections when a race conscious candidate ran against a de-racialized candidate, the de-racialized candidate won.\textsuperscript{29} As is apparent with the pool of young, moderate, and Ivy League educated politicians of today de-racial theory prevails.

Subsequently, de-racialization is a major reason African American institutions such as the NUL and CBC lost their stake on the national stage. Formerly, African American elected officials joined the CBC (and or several other socio-political organizations) to advance African American agendas in the singular hope of improving the quality of life for members of their community. When more and more African American leaders began to win elections by running de-racial campaigns it created a rift in the functionality of the CBC. Naturally, the organization was less effective with members who had no real interest in fighting exclusively for black issues. De-racial politicians wanted to focus on other issues. Perhaps they grew tired of the responsibility of always having to fix black urban communities. For many politicians (as members of the middle class), perhaps the journey to incorporation is complete meaning blacks can discard the former parameters of social group leadership.\textsuperscript{30}


For some like E. Frederick Morrow, the first black assistant to a President, shying away from black agendas was not out of embarrassment or lack of concern, but it was out of a desire to be recognized as an individual and not a representation for an entire group. Morrow, “refused to be his (President Eisenhower) advisor on Black Affairs. I said I wanted to go to Washington to assist him if I were given the same recognition, response, and privileges of any other staff members. There was something abhorrent to me in being a professional ‘race-saver’.\textsuperscript{31} Now Black politicians are careful not to be typecast as racially biased. In this way being a “race-saver” is quite limiting. African Americans who fear subjugation, want to be chosen for their merit and not for their contribution to race baiting.

Disassociation with race-based identification transcended more than just the political sphere. The middle class also desired migration away from physical community parameters. In fact, shifts in community dynamics began before the Civil Rights Movement in the 1940s. The greatest shift in community, the Great Migration of blacks from the South to the North and West, created crowded city sectors of black community life. These crowded city sectors birthed the first urban ghettos. Immediately following desegregation, the middle class abandoned their urban dwellings. Once the middle class left urban inner city communities so did business, government, and philanthropic entities all equating to a surge in crime and social disorganization.\textsuperscript{32} As a result, at the close of the 80s, despite making up only 12% of


\textsuperscript{32} John Davis, ed., \textit{Perspectives in Black Politics and Black Leadership} (Lanham: University Press of America, 2007), 63.
the population, blacks were responsible for 48% of homicides, 46% or rapes, and 62% of robberies resulting in arrest.33 Two decades earlier, Martin Luther King Jr. would expose the irony of migration shifts that reflected the flight of black and white households to the suburbs; “Our cities constructed elaborate expressways and elevated skyways, while onlookers speed from suburb to inner city through vast pockets of black deprivation without ever getting a glimpse of the suffering and misery in their midst.”34 Political discussion and trust was at low levels in urban communities. Urban constituents recognized the abandonment and lack of empathy of the middle class. Addressing segregation alone was not enough to reverse poor quality of life and revive feelings of value and worth in urban communities.

Middle class failures to address conditions of the poor in the past have led to thoughts of selling out. Black flight to the suburbs made middle class blacks want to prove “Negro respectability.” The desire to fit in trumps any desire to help others succeed.35 Though united in efforts to achieve universal civil rights, the middle class has long lacked knowledge and empathy for the conditions of the lower class.36 This uplift abandonment and notions of “selling out” have led to a much larger disconnect which aligns more with class over race. As a result, electoral districts changed a great deal. Initially de-racial politicians didn’t have a choice in deemphasizing race-


based issues. Their core constituency in many cases was not majority African American. Elected officials had an obligation to acknowledge and align themselves with the desires of their constituency or risk losing elections.

En lieu of diverging economic interests, which is more important when shaping African American politics; race or class? According to Bell Hooks, many privileged black folks obsessed with living out a bourgeoisie dream of liberal individualistic success no longer feel as though they have any accountability in relation to the poor population they left behind.\textsuperscript{37} The ethic of service, so necessary to the communal survival in traditional communities, has been altered by a shift in class relations.\textsuperscript{38} The results of aligning with class over race have proved catastrophic for the community in the following ways.

First, black elites find themselves ambushed between the rejection of whites and the resentment of less privileged blacks.\textsuperscript{39} According to E. Franklin Frazier, rapid social mobility led middle class blacks to sacrifice their folk traditions and social heritage in order to obtain acceptance. For many, integration was a matter of shredding their “racial identification.”\textsuperscript{40} However, unlike their European counterparts, African Americans found it difficult to assimilate into mainstream society. Even if culturally achievable, the permanence of skin color prevents


\textsuperscript{40} Ibid., 255.
complete assimilation. As Cornel West understands it, “black people will never value themselves as long as they subscribe to a standard of valuation that devalues them.”41 Today African Americans search for validation of their self-worth from outside sources while ignoring the greatness within.

Secondly, plaguing the African American community is a lack of collective response to the way the dominant society has appropriated black culture. An article by the Pittsburg Courier posed the question, “How great can the American Negro become in self-esteem and personal dignity if his history and culture are lost.”42 Furthermore, consumer capitalism has changed the nature of everything we claim as black experiences.43 The community has shared so much of its culture that some are unable to recognize it as their own. With no direct ties to a central definition of community, younger generations are lost trying to identify what is unique or “cherishable” about their existence as African Americans. Instead they are addicted to consumer goods and material wealth. Loss of cultural identity is specifically a grave distraction for African American youth.

Finally, according to journalist, Ray Stannard Baker, black upper class elites have abandoned their historic “uplift” function in the community as role models by leaving behind communities once inhabited by all members of the social group.44 As


author of “The Boundaries of Blackness” Cathy Cohen points out, “uplift ideology was not simply a matter of educated African Americans wanting to be white...on the contrary, uplift, represented the struggle for a positive black identity in a deeply racist society, turning the designation of race into a source of dignity and self-affirmation through an ideology of class differentiation, self-help, and interdependence.”45 What tainted “uplift” ideology was not the understandable desire for dignity, equality, and social mobility. Rather, the difficulty stemmed from the emergence of class differentiation within racial and cultural hierarchies. This class hierarchy helped foster a double consciousness in society.46 African Americans of varying backgrounds have learned to be chameleons in a society intent on judging them. However, once double consciousness requires dis-allegiance to the community, it poses a threat to overall group progress and is no longer a gift.

The disconnect between classes has led to a shift in group association. Across racial groups in the 21st century, allegiance is broadly aligned with class rather than race. According to University of Chicago Professor, William Wilson, “when members of a racial or ethnic group become affluent they seek to preserve their ‘well-earned’ measure of security and privilege by forming coalitions with other ‘well-earners’

44 Ibid., 11.
46 Ibid.
(not necessarily from the same ethnic group) who share economic interests and status.”

This transition is known as secondary marginalization.

There are four stages of marginality that individuals and or groups are subject to from the dominant society: Categorical, Integrative, Advanced, and Secondary. Categorical marginalization is complete exclusion of an entire group. Slavery is a useful example of categorical marginalization. Integrative and Advanced marginalization are similar in example as both involve maintaining relative and heightened power over the marginalized group. For African Americans, this was enforced through Jim Crow laws. Secondary marginalization, also known as “Intra-marginalized group stratification” is the mildest from of marginalization. At this stage, the relative dominant members (of a marginal group) choose to ostracize themselves from the remaining group members.

The black middle class is not in a position to enforce categorical, advanced or integrative marginalization over lower and impoverished classes, but this group has overtime practiced secondary marginalization. As community dynamics continued to weaken and economic factors gained in relevance, secondary marginalization ensued. Those that pose a perceived threat to this advancement become the targets. Marginal group members with the greatest chance of assimilation get

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49 Ibid., 27.
closer to achieving dominant power status through involvement in decision-making and by seeking to control the public image of the entire social group.

Where once formal exclusion was the law of the land, institutional subordination of minority groups has remained. Middle class minority group members, under advanced marginalization, are provided mobility, but in return they are expected to police, both literally and figuratively, the most resource-needy and alienated members of their communities.\textsuperscript{50} The key emphasis is on self-regulation and on policing the behaviors and actions of other group members (lower class).\textsuperscript{51} During the process of marginalization, group members are forced to demonstrate the respectability acquired through class privilege, exuded in the attitudes and behaviors they exhibit, and displayed in the dominant institutions they operate within. Middle class enforcers of secondary marginalization begin to integrate by adhering to values and norms defined by the dominant group.\textsuperscript{52} The dominant members possess the resources, natural connectivity, and power to help others reach middle class status, but choose not to out of fear it will hinder their own advancement. More broadly, they also don’t see the relevancy of advocating for those with whom their interests don’t align.

When subgroups are formed they begin to replicate the same stages of marginalization. Though still subjected to discrimination, increased economic leverage creates a shield (for the middle class) from race-based infractions that the

\textsuperscript{50} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{51} Ibid., 72.

\textsuperscript{52} Ibid., 64.
lower classes don’t possess.\textsuperscript{53} De-racialization, declines in the institution of the church, divided political interests, secondary marginalization, and denouncement of linked fate all support assertions that class now trumps race.

The argument that economic interests have always conflicted with social interests is realized in three ways. First, marginalization is and always has been less of a factor in determining a person’s life choices and status if they are economically astute. Increased economic heterogeneity in any population leads to increased diversity in political behavior.\textsuperscript{54} Secondly, the Civil Rights movement largely promoted middle class advancement. New freedoms benefited those who were financially able to take advantage of them. For instance, only those with a certain amount of financial capital were able to buy homes in the suburbs. Furthermore, to some degree, the civil rights movement was consciously led by the black middle class to serve their own interests.\textsuperscript{55} Leaders of the movement operated under an assumption that those with the greatest resources would benefit the most from new opportunities. Class divisions undoubtedly play a role in shaping views on desirable degrees of black autonomy. The higher ones income, the less likely they are to support black autonomy. In other words, rather than focusing on strategies for advancement within the community, the middle class emphasizes reform under the


\textsuperscript{54} Ibid., 4.

\textsuperscript{55} Ibid., 8.
current system because they are already reaping the desired benefits.\textsuperscript{56} As a result, this group doesn’t feel they stand much to gain from its overhaul.

How does this abandonment affect the underclass sub group? When poor urban populations are consistently shut out of economic opportunity, educational advancement, and equal treatment under the law, frustrations mount and urban insurrection is inevitable.\textsuperscript{57} In the late 60s, the middle class took advantage of the opportunities afforded to them and achieved a degree of socio-economic mobility. Middle class blacks experienced more pressure to establish and maintain relationships with the political, social, and economic institutions that employed them.\textsuperscript{58} Unfortunately, while the middle class population gained dramatically relative to whites, the lower class was left even farther behind.

Between 1960 and 1991, the population of the black middle class more than doubled as a result of new opportunities for economic advancement.\textsuperscript{59} By 1980, black men aged 25-34 with at least some college credit, eared 80-85\% as much as their white counterparts. Conversely, black men of the same age that hadn’t completed high school couldn’t even compete in the economy. According to a 2007 Pew Research Center Survey, 6\% of blacks saw divergence between the values of poor and middle classes. 53\% of blacks were apt to blame blacks for their own

\textsuperscript{56} Ibid., 194.

\textsuperscript{57} Marlon Riggs, \textit{Black Is...Black Ain’t}, Directed by Marlon Riggs (1994; New York: Docurama, 2009), DVD.

\textsuperscript{58} Ronald W. Walters and Robert C. Smith, \textit{African American Leadership} (Albany, Suny Press, 1999), 131.

condition, compared to 30% who blamed discrimination.\textsuperscript{60} Feelings of abandonment led to an explosion of crime-ridden ghettos in cities such as Harlem, Watts, Newark, and LA.\textsuperscript{61} Overtime, the divisions between classes have only deepened.

Fortunately, Ferguson and other heightened racial incidents of injustice are quickly interjecting their way into de-racial talking points and middle class oblivion. It is convenient to avoid race-based issues when they are not readily publicized, but recent occurrences have forced politicians of all races to atone for what is happening in urban communities. The insurgence of race-based challenges in America uncovers every shadow de-racial leaders have been hiding behind. Black leaders may be integrated into the dominant culture, but the rest of their community is marginalized, impoverished, and criminalized.\textsuperscript{62} Black leaders need to align with the community, or society, in consort with mainstream media, will continue to perpetuate its own narrative regarding urban plight.

In closing, the black middle class largely lives in a “make-believe” world.\textsuperscript{63} They have perpetuated the distinguishing characteristics of their group, and focused on exclusivity in order to convince themselves they are in a group of their own. Through the deterioration of linked fate, individual interests have taken precedence, although recent happenings have shed light on the fantasy of this philosophy. Restoration can only be achieved through the alliance of group interests and the


\textsuperscript{63} E. Franklin Frazier, \textit{Black Bourgeoisie} (New York: Collier Books, 1962), 166-175.
understanding that linked fate has required and will always require the cooperation of the entire community to achieve progress. The concluding chapter will pinpoint practical theoretical recommendations that, if implemented properly and congruently, can yield tangible results for the restoration of the black social group.
CHAPTER FOUR

SOLUTIONS

...I am not here to discuss anything that we differ about because it’s time for us to submerge our differences and realize that it is best for us to first see that we have the same problem, a common problem, a problem that will make you catch hell whether you’re a Baptist or a Methodist or a Muslim...whether you’re educated or illiterate, whether you live on the boulevard or in an ally...We’re in the same boat.

– Malcolm X, The Ballot or the Bullet

The present climate of tragedy is the only force awakening a sense of linked fate in the African American community. The Black Lives Matter Movement sheds light on the killing of unarmed black men and women in America. These senseless murders are often justified as reactionary consequences of stereotypical misconceptions. African Americans of all classes are beginning to realize that in spite of their fortunes, they cannot escape the stereotypes that are inevitably associated with their ethnicity. It is a blunt reality that loathes acknowledging economic status and does not show signs of changing any time soon. If the African American community hopes to reverse the patterns of identity and structural malfunction, they must heed to new strategies that elucidate current plights instead of simply recycling old strategies that no longer solve relevant problems.

The political milieu of today recognizes no shortage of potential black leaders. In fact, Cornel West reminds us “there has not been a time in the history of black people in this country when the quantity of politicians and intellectuals was so great yet the quality of both groups has been so low.”¹ It is now more important

than ever to establish functional and collective leadership structures. Intellectuals and politicians alike, who recognize the fallacies in leadership, must propose solutions to reverse persistence of malfunction. Jesse Jackson theorizes that the way forward is by emphasizing the following initiatives: Voter registration and turnout, comprehensive public policy, civic pressure, refocus on litigation as a way to address current injustices and institutional racism, and mobilization. Others suggest a renewed focus on effective methods of lobbying and a more concentrated emphasis of social programming.

Drawing from theories previously proposed, transformations in both the social group and political spectrum must address: group esteem and linked fate, staleness in leadership on the local and national level, and weakened moral foundations. If not, addressed soon, the community risks further deterioration, which will likely be irreversible. Specific consideration should also be placed on the interactions between mainstream media and the African American community and how resources are allocated throughout the community at large.

This chapter focuses on three ideological conversions: group political, and moral, that must take place within the community in order to reestablish social group efficacy and re-prioritize leadership structures. First, a rectification of group ideology must transpire. It is essential that each member of the community recognize the value and pertinence in working towards a renewed sense of

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3 Ibid., 228-232.
community functionality. ALL have to be charged with evaluating their individual interests and deciding which conflicting interests to suppress in order to create a healthy space for group dialogue and mobilization.

While there is no monolithic identity within the community there is still enormous value in establishing a consensus within the social group. After all, the greater the perceived link between one’s fate and that of the race, the more concise racial identity becomes.4 Linked fate plays such a critical role in this process because establishing healthy cooperative relationships is essential to reestablish group interests and goals. In order to reinforce groupthink, African Americans must find a way to mobilize, reinvest in black institutions, and reconnect tangible ties to the physical community. The goal is to build communities of resistance where members know their struggle will always fall under the larger struggle the community grapples with together.5 Likewise, goal setting is only worthwhile if the community is able to mobilize in support of goal attainment. Linked fate theory implementation is the only way to get subgroups to see value in collaborating to achieve goals set forth by leadership.

At one point it was frowned upon to vote against the interests of the African American community.6 While the middle class is understandably concerned with their economic interests, a revelation must occur where they begin to value the


linked fate that ultimately binds all classes in the community. Economic interests may appeal to a higher level of priority, but after further reflection, economic interests pale in comparison to the suffering of the lower class by disturbing the efficacy of the entire community. Malcolm X understood this responsibility and asserted, “No matter how much respect, no matter how much recognition, whites show towards me, as far as I’m concerned, as long as it is not shown to everyone of our people in this country, it doesn’t exist to me.”7 While the community may not be linked by economic reality, socially the community will always be linked, because of the history of shared struggle. The middle class (and its representation) must remember that political and social unity transcends class.8 As a community we have to re-link our fate by reinterpreting attacks against any subgroup as an attack against the entire community.9 Through recent incidents of trauma, we are finding that the community is heeding the call to re-link collective fate.

In keeping with invigorating community institutions, African Americans must reinvest in social organizations. African American youth are so engulfed by negative media and societal perceptions that they cannot decipher what is sacred, respectable, and indelible about their rich experience in America. Cultural appropriation has further confused this group of people into believing it is not their legacy and subsequent culture that upholds their specialness, but rather the


innovation of the dominant society. African American social organizations have always been instrumental in supporting group esteem by programmatically celebrating black culture. Social organizations also sustain an outlet for enlightening the next generation about their history. Without that knowledge, African American youth cannot be expected to possess esteem in their identity or pride in their social group membership.

Members of the community, especially the middle class, must begin to understand their voluntary exclusion from the base is to the detriment of the community as a whole. The absence of any group member jeopardizes the sustainability of the community thus straining the link, to varying degrees, that determines the efficacy of each subgroup. Conscientious African Americans are now realizing that they have sacrificed a portion of their identity and group efficacy assimilating into a system that continues to reject them. Psychiatrist Franz Fanon contends that “it is the racist who creates his inferior” which is why African Americans cannot be concerned with achieving equality and acceptance.\(^\text{10}\) Rather the concern should be in mobilizing, uniting, and defining equality for themselves.

Furthermore, the middle class must accept responsibility for leaving the underclass economically crippled and morally fractured. In many ways the isolation of the middle class and current division in the community is not completely amiss. Only after the process of isolation and independence transpires can individuals return to the community with an understanding of place and the appreciation of linked fate. Accompanying a renewed scope is a desire to ensure everyone has equal

opportunity to achieve a desirable quality of life. Following this revelation, the middle class must then begin re-investing in urban communities. For every time resources are taken out of the community, the community becomes morally and economically weaker (as is the case with the flight of the middle class out of the physical confines that geographically housed the entire African American community).

How can re-investment be implemented? For starters, African Americans have to re-invest in black owned businesses in urban communities. Not only will this drive revenue, but it will also create jobs and foster a sense of pride. The urban poor will view reinvestment in business as reinvestment into their quality of life. Jay-Z was able to do this with The Barclays Center in his hometown of Brooklyn, New York. At the one-year anniversary of the opening of The Barclays Center, 80% of the employees were Brooklyn natives and approximately one-third of those employees were from local housing projects.

Secondly, a political conversion must transpire. A mental conversion of leadership away from self-loath and individual advancement, back to an expanse that addresses the needs of the entire community not just certain "privileged" groups, is fundamental. Renewed group efficacy is a prerequisite that will aid in this transition. Other necessary steps to reestablishing continuity in the community are

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related to encouraging fresh and unconventional leadership and reassessing voting practices.

The following recommendations for leadership reform will assist in refocusing the black agenda and will promote the acknowledgement of subgroup interests and representation. First, leadership has to be held accountable for the state of the communities they were elected to serve. The term “authenticity” is thematic when referencing the qualities necessary for the current cohort of leaders to possess. Leaders who are believed to possess a similar desire for justice, equality, and truth in the lives of all community members are considered authentic. The selfish and self-serving characteristics of present day leadership have to be decoded. Only those who can understand the plight of others can truly be trusted to advance the well being of all members. Grassroots activism is a base by which this process can begin. Modern activists should be tasked with keeping the community informed because disproving cynicism in the power of the voice and vote is key.

Second, instead of attaching negative association with de-racialization theory, it should be embraced and acknowledged as an inevitable occurrence in the modern political climate. Those that are skeptical of de-racialization should take Al Sharpton’s advice not to, “wear race as a badge but don’t put it in your pocket either. Stand up for what is right for everybody. But at the same time remember you’re not running to represent the black community, you’re running to represent everybody.”\textsuperscript{14} This is the only way to re-engage the dominant community with black

issues, by helping them understand that it is morally right to intervene when an injustice is occurring.\textsuperscript{15} Doing so doesn’t make them a “race-saver” nor does it compromise their duty to represent all constituents equally and objectively.

In spite of de-racialization, a majority of African American elected officials identify themselves as members of the Democratic Party. For the last 50 years African Americans have guaranteed their vote to the Democratic Party solidifying their position as the most reliable Democratic voting block. Furthermore, national politics is perhaps the only consistent platform in which black voters put group interests above their own by unanimously voting for Democratic presidential candidates.\textsuperscript{16} In spite of great division in intra-group identifiers, the majority of African Americans are still Democrats because historically, their relationship with the federal government has been positive.\textsuperscript{17} Coming full circle, the shared struggle that defines all group members, still defines their political conduct on the national level even though it may contradict individual interests.

While the persistence of unification regarding voting is desirable, it can lead to negative consequences when the loyalty associated with that voting pattern is taken for granted. Third, African American’s should adopt Vernon Jordan’s’ strategy “to hang loose and make the candidates come to us because no one can win without

\textsuperscript{15} Ibid.


the black vote.” Black voters have to do more to prove the value in their vote.\textsuperscript{18} Black constituents will never be able to counteract the “automatic vote” expectation until they create a strategy for how to obtain firm policy commitments from candidates. It starts by holding individual candidates accountable for their own policies. The mistake is assuming just because a candidate is a Democrat he or she will be a champion for advancing the socio-economic quality of life of African Americans. The inverse is true of Republicans. No assumption should be reached that automatically removes the individuals right to decipher the authenticity of candidates for his or herself. Martin Luther King Jr. understood the importance of establishing a strong voice in the political process when he summarized the then common practice of voting:

\begin{quote}
The Negro vote presently is only a partially realized strength...There is no correlation between the numerical importance of the urban Negro vote to the party it supports and the influence wielded in determining the party’s programs and policies, or its implementation of existing legislation...The new task of the liberation movement, therefore, is not merely to increase the Negro registration and vote. Equally imperative is the development of a strong voice that is heard in the smoke-filled rooms where party debating and bargaining proceed. A lack of force that is mute in party councils is not politically represented. The ability to be independent, assertive, and respected when the final decisions are made is indispensable for an authentic expression of power.\textsuperscript{19}
\end{quote}

Fourth, Cornel West was correct in asserting that what is missing in leadership today is the “prophet of black rage.” Malcolm X was that prophet for the

\textsuperscript{18} H. Viscount Nelson, \textit{The Rise and Fall of Modern Black Leadership: Chronicles of a Twentieth Century Tragedy} (Lanham: University Press of America, 2003), 255.

African American community that exuded his “profound commitment to affirm black humanity at any cost.” West applauds the courage it took for Malcolm X to denounce inequalities in American society is presently unmatched. Currently, whispers of rage are heard when incidents of trauma are inflicted on the community. Even then, if the link (linked fate) is not established between the specific group affected and the rest of the community, the reaction can’t possibly be as affective as if the entire community felt personally linked to the traumatic event. If those in leadership positions hope to tap into the power of a “rageful” leader they must emotionally connect with the plight of as many subgroups as possible. This can’t be done from an ivory tower; rather politicians must be a physical presence in the communities they serve.

Fifth, another reality of the state of black leadership is that just like the civil rights movement, what is needed is fresh and youthful energy. The leadership of yesterday cannot relate or service the role of mobilizer for the millennial generation. Former leadership is simply too out of touch and their tactics have proved outdated. Perhaps the rightful recipients of the baton of leadership are members of the hip hop community. Associate Professor of Political Science at Emory University Andra Gillespie, advocates for the incorporation of members of the hip hop community into leadership positions by outlining in her book “Whose Black Politics? Cases in Post-Racial Black Leadership” that “At best, hip hop culture has inspired a brand new generation of grassroots activists and intellectuals who through poetry and lyrics have critically analyzed the conditions of the

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marginalized, such as the ghetto poor, domestically abused women and children, the industrial prison complex, and materialism in America.”

Hip-hop representatives have the potential to serve as “accountability agents” for elected officials. Groups such as NWA and artists like Tupac Shakur have proved that the potential is apparent in the hip-hop community to be more than just artists. African American music icons such as Jay-Z and Beyonce, Common, Wale, John Legend, professional athletes such as Richard Sherman, Lebron James, and Carmelo Anthony are all outspoken members of the “hip-hop” community that have a reach that informs a broad base of social groups. Each went to great lengths to show support for the “Black Lives Matter” movement whether they wore a tee shirt at a game, donated monies, or marched in protest. Each publicly denounced the pervading culture of injustice. Inherent in their position of fame and notoriety is a platform to speak out against social injustice and inequality. They have the ear of the generation that will inherit the burden of social dysfunction. So, it is rightfully their duty to uphold the legacy of activism and social responsibility by leading the millennial generations of African Americans.

Sixth, black leadership must find a way to work with and uncover common ground with black conservatives. As a community, Marlon Riggs reminds us that members of the community must dissolve the notion that everyone has to agree. Through the process of consecrating Dr. King, the community forgot that there were

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other leaders, leaders who didn’t always agree or share one voice.\textsuperscript{22} This is not how freedom was achieved and this is not how the community is going to continue to progress.\textsuperscript{23} It is imperative to also realize that not all self-proclaimed conservatives are “Negro Wranglers” (individuals who are tasked with sabotaging the black agenda by critiquing it harshly). Some only wish to introduce alternative ways of examining conditions within the community. Former chair of the Republic National Convention, Michael Steele, was quite empathetic and concerned about the emerging assault on young black lives by police officers. When asked on MSNBC whether he thought the Black Lives Matter Movement was valid he replied, “A black man’s life is not worth more than an ham sandwich.” While it is convenient to write off all black conservatives (conservatives in general) as anti-black it simply isn’t the reality. For those conservatives that are concerned with proposing progressive solutions to problems that plague the community, they should be doing so in consort with the black political establishment. Realigning the community means welcoming all facets of the political community into the conversation.

Seventh, while the institution of government is not responsible for solving the problems of the black community, African Americans in government (and the organizations they run) are expected to act as ambassadors for the community at large. The Congressional Black Caucus (CBC) should be an emissary for engaging and empowering other socio-political organizations. The CBC should also be a


\textsuperscript{23} Marlon Riggs, \textit{Black Is...Black Ain’t}, Directed by Marlon Riggs (1994; New York: Docurama, 2009), DVD.
leader in the legislative progress. In three ways, the organization can regain their footing and position of prominence by positioning themselves as leaders in the community whose political interest is taken seriously. First, the CBC should focus on a theme of unity. There is immense power in voting as one. Once linked fate is restored, this will be easily achieved, as social group goals will be agreed upon. Doing so leads to the second restorative task of the CBC, becoming the swing vote for either party. Becoming the swing vote forces the two major political parties to fight for the vote of the CBC. Instead of assuming one party will automatically get the vote, the CBC, should stay neutral by applying pressure on both parties to present the best argument. Furthermore, African American politicians have to develop an understanding for coalition building. The establishment is weakened when one or more interest/minority groups rally together. Finally, the third task entails working with the Women's Caucus and LGBT special interest groups, among others. Collaborating with other special interest groups is a way to help connect the multiple individual interests within the community and mount pressure on the marginal group to value and protect the quality of life of all members of the African American community. If the CBC can do this, they will be an example again of the political power they are capable of possessing without compromising and while working together.

Restoration on the national level cannot completely accomplish all restorative goals of the community. Local grassroots, council, state officials, and other influential members of particular communities have a responsibility to discuss the needs of their community and propose viable solutions. Perhaps the CBC or
some other socio-political institution can conduct leadership summits. Results of these summits should be long-term strategies that establish or rejuvenate programs designed to encourage ownership, moral and ethical character, and improve overall quality of life and sense of community.24 Additional action items at these proposed summits should focus on leadership development. The millennial generation, tasked with leading the community in the coming decades, lacks the appropriate skills to lead effectively. If we hope to continue in a progressive direction, leadership training is essential.

Reconstructing the political blueprint won’t be enough to solve all the problems in the community. As a result, a moral conversion is needed to remind the group that there is a reason to be of service to the community. As a community, African Americans have to rebuild their moral foundation; a foundation rooted in the institution of the black church. Cornel West asserts that the reason so many people go to church is to “find a sense of renewal and a sense of home.” It is in the church that people feel safe, that their struggles can be sustained or fixed.25 This is what’s missing today. This communal safe-haven has guided African Americans through their darkest periods in American history and in order to make it through the trying times of today, the church has to be ever-present in the community. Re-


appointing the black church as a staple in the community will help drive and facilitate mobilizing efforts by providing a meeting place and communal sanctuary.26

Black ministers also need to reestablish themselves as the moral compass in the community. While membership may be down in traditional black churches, the institutions themselves never abandoned the physical community. Our spiritual leadership is best suited to address and properly channel the rage of black youth, specifically males in urban communities. In a time where it is near impossible to counter the negative images of black men and woman portrayed in the media, it is up to the church to “affirm the humanity of black people and foster character and excellence as productive citizens is the only hope in times of moral crisis.”27

Quite the effective case study on the influence of the black church took place in Kansas City in the spring of 2014. The Concerned Clergy Coalition of Kansas City sponsored the series, “The State of the Black Family Series.” This series, sponsored by a host of black churches, sought to discuss their community’s most pressing problems. The goal was to agree on ways, the church as an institution, could be instrumental in proposing solutions to community ailments. The power the church possesses, as a mobilizing force in the community is evident with the diverse groups of people participating in the series such as local psychologists, social workers, educators, and police officers.28 This case study also disproves assumptions that the

26 Ibid., 54.


power the church possesses is in the past. If members of the clergy from other cities 
banned together to encourage the same type of community dialogue, not only would 
the needs of individual communities be addressed, the members of that community 
would be more connected. Likewise, their actions would serve as a blueprint for 
other social organizations that have the ability to address issues on a broad range of 
topics that affect marginal groups of African Americans.

Social group, political, and moral ideological reconstruction is less effective if 
members of the community are unaware of how said changes affect their lives and 
communities. As a result, additional emphasis must be placed on the responsibility 
of the media (specifically the black press) to report without bias providing equal 
awareness to social ailments and victories in all communities. It is the role of those 
in the arts and media to highlight the positive in the community and act as a 
gatekeeper for biased media representation. The mere fact that the major news 
networks spent significant time covering the Straight Outta Compton movie 
premiere, supported by a narrative of violence begetting a violent movie premier, 
but none saw it merited to cover the Million Man March of 2015 is indicative of the 
hypocrisy and neglect of the media to report African American stories accurately. 
This flawed system fuels the negative perceptions of black life and moral indecency. 
Leadership in the community must demand from the media equal and unbiased 
coverage that will encourage better conveyance of urban plight and less perversion 
of the black experience. This kind of exposure will be invaluable to fostering 
tolerance inside and outside of the community.
The black press must fulfill the duties left vacant by mainstream media whenever possible. Few in the black community have walked into a barber or beauty shop, that didn’t have at least one copy of the latest edition of Jet and Ebony magazine. These magazines are crucial to ensuring African American issues are not misreported or misrepresented by mainstream media outlets. Tom Morgan, formerly of the New York Times and President of the National Association of Black journalists, understands the calling and responsibility of the black media in reestablishing group interests, “The new generation of black press, not the Ebony Magazines of the world, but Emerge for example...They have a different kind of ideal.” Morgan asserts that the new generation of black press is trying to reach the community on a more elevated level than its predecessors. The new black press pushes the boundaries on intellectualism and is not simply interested in upholding the current standards for the race. Morgan believes the new generation has more formal training in the “journalistic tradition” thus allowing them to examine the lives of African Americans and society in a completely new way that allows them to be more critical of what’s happening in the physical community and in society in general. An appreciation of diversity and the respect that only comes from understanding the stories of others, even if they are not reciprocated, is the only way to work towards a more harmonious community and tolerant society at large.


While it is the responsibility of the media to accurately convey black life and culture, it is the responsibility of black intellectuals to both recognize the patterns of discontinuity and propose calls to action when warranted. In a very Socratic way, it is the role of the wisest in the community to recognize the negative patterns in group efficacy and pose solutions before it is too late. In this regard it is imperative that black intellectuals remain objective, by staying independent of both internal and external influences. Rather than succumbing to resistance from prominent institutions, that want to restrict activism, black intellectuals should flock to historically black colleges and universities and other institutions that encourage racial dialogue. Furthermore, the era of social media creates a platform for anyone to speak publicly about issues of concern. It is no longer necessary to have the backing of prominent institutions in order to be heard or even to have a particular message validated. Just as the middle class has to make a conscientious decision to stop seeking broad acceptance, so to does the community of black intellectuals. The call to lead the community in theory and in practice has to trump any personal desires of singular advancement.

The African American community has to pick up where Dr. King left off, by rediscovering how to organize internal strengths into undeniable power so the government and dominant society has to adhere to the demands of the community.\textsuperscript{31} Internally, social group efficacy cannot be restored until the community learns to value diversity. This is accomplished through renewed focus on what interests are still relevant to the group and by embracing new strategies.

\textsuperscript{31} Ronald W. Walters and Robert C. Smith, \textit{African American Leadership} (Albany, Suny Press, 1999), 244.
that enables the reconnection of subgroups currently divided by interests. As long as race continues to be a significant (the most) in the lives of individual blacks, it is imperative that as a collective, African Americans follow group cues when engaging and acting in the political world and when making daily decisions.32

Additionally, “...The bands of community, the institutions of information, and the infrastructure for mobilization must constantly be reevaluated with an eye toward their effectiveness not only in promoting unity, but in allowing for debate and movement.”33 As a community, African Americans have to continue to challenge each other to answer the following questions: How can we improve communication so we can begin to see and understand each other? And how can group interests be reinforced despite so many individual differences? These questions should not be reserved for conflict, but should be posed on a regular basis by leadership.


CONCLUSION

As humans, we come to dissect and rationalize a social problem(s) more effectively when social theory is applied to it.¹ This is what so many before me have done in order to make sense of the evolving state of intra-group dynamics and propose theoretical yet practical solutions when conflicts arise. In this thesis I have continued in this tradition by critically analyzing the mental and social conditions that led to group dysfunction within the African American community. Each chapter, in a very specific way, offered historical and sociological evidence that the African American community has never shared a monolith identity and further proved that such assertions have prevented black leadership from effectively leading the community.

In Chapter One, a critical analysis was provided that uncovered the flaws in group alignment and efficacy that originated during slavery. The division in individual identity manifested overtime and resulted in the prevalence of multiple subgroups within the community. In chapter two, a connection was established between the diverging intra-group dynamics and the evolution of African American politics up to the modern era of politics and government. The foundation established in Chapter Two foreshadowed the more detailed evaluation of the consequences of group dysfunction illustrated in Chapter Three. Finally in Chapter Four, theoretical solutions were proposed, that if followed, could potentially

alleviate patterns of poor group association and stale leadership within the African American community.

The following conclusions were drawn from the previous four chapters. First, like the Gumbo analogy used in the first chapter, there is an unlimited amount of ways to self-identify as black in America. While it is true that African American experiences are deeply rooted in shared struggles and activism, it is also true that African American identity is equally rooted in individual experiences relegated by socio-economic class, sexual and religious orientation, and etc. Each individual experience has just as much of an influence in shaping how an individual identifies as any other.

Second, no solution proposed before or even in this thesis will permanently address the deep and pervading juxtapositions of group versus individual interests in the African American community. The community will never be completely aligned, in any comparable way, to the way it was before the Civil Rights movement. Economic mobility is simply to engrained in the fabric of American life and success. However, rediscovering common interests and agreed upon social group goals, that hold equal benefit to all members, is probable.

Third, future consideration should also be dedicated to the long-term affects the Black Lives Matter movement has on social group mobilization and unification. Likewise, as prominent members of the middle/upper class begin re-investing in urban communities, quality of life should begin to improve in those specific communities. Keeping track of specific advancements and failings is imperative to
deciphering whether re-investment is in fact an effective solution to urban plight and group esteem rebuilding.

Fourth, while changes in social group dynamics seem promising, national trends in political behavior do not indicate the likelihood of the black political establishment making significant strides to becoming more inclusive. This is partly because overall (across racial or political party lines) the political climate is experiencing the same unfortunate set of circumstances. Broadly, political leadership is dysfunctional, unwilling to compromise, and is self-serving. Casting aside the national political stage, African American leaders must remember that the history of African American leadership and mobilization is rich in American. Leaders should draw upon previous eras of leadership to hone their mission and purpose as representatives of the community. For this very reason, engagement of hip hop leaders is crucial to the future of effective and inclusive leadership in the African American community.

Fifth, thanks to the social media boom, individuals have the power to hold mainstream media accountable. All anyone needs to do now is post a blog or express their dissatisfaction on social media, and immediately their concerns are heard and others are able to mobilize from remote locations, putting pressure on media outlets to retract statements and remove bias from reporting. In this regard, changes in the way the media portrays black culture and plight are promising.

This thesis relied upon the scholastic research conducted in the fields of sociology, history, anthropology, and political science to validate arguments
proposed in this thesis however; further analytics supported with empirical data could have allowed for further interpretation. As black identity origins and group dynamics is explored in greater detail by future scholars, gathering quantitative data should merit greater consideration.

Finally, my greatest hope is that others will continue the tradition of using social theory to better understand conditions in the African American community and propose solutions. Now that the obstacles have been clearly articulated, I hope members of the community will begin to think more critically about which motivations and desired outcomes are most important when making decisions for themselves as well as those that affect the community at large.
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