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Asafa Jalata

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# REVISITING THE BLACK STRUGGLE

## Lessons for the 21st Century

ASAFA JALATA  
*University of Tennessee*

This article critically examines the cumulative successes and failures of the African American struggle for liberation and equality, and it hints at the future direction of the Black movement in the United States. Specifically, it demonstrates how the Black movement legally dismantled direct institutional racism and why it failed to eliminate indirect institutional racism. This article also explains why the objectives of cultural self-determination and fundamentally transforming Black America were not successful. By looking at the major problems of the Black community today, this article emphasizes the need to learn critically from the past struggle and leaders in order to incorporate the best experiences in the future struggle for economic development, self-determination, and multicultural democracy.

**With the emerging** of the 21st century, African Americans, their allies, and supporters need to critically reassess the cultural, ideological, political, and economic aspects of the past struggle to account for the successes and failures of the Black movement and to map out the future strategy of struggle, because the majority of African Americans still face serious crises. By critically and comprehensively reevaluating the process through which the African American movement was produced by social structural and conjunctural factors (i.e., politicized collective grievances, cultural memory, economic change and social transformation, international politics, migration, urban community formation, elite formation, production and dissemination of liberation knowledge, cognitive liberation, and the development of social infrastructures in forms of institution, organization, and human agency), we can identify some important insights that are necessary to develop the strategy of future struggle for this society. The Black struggle was produced by

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social structures and human agency, like all movements. "For very long and very short time spans, and from very deep and shallow perspectives," Wallerstein (1997, p. 1255) wrote, "things seem to be determined, but for the vast intermediate zone things seem to be a matter of free will." The African American movement gained political legitimacy because it politicized the grievances of collective memory and appealed to a common ancestry to regain for this people cultural, political, and economic rights by rejecting subordination and White cultural supremacy or hegemony. This movement showed that "people who participate in collective action do so only when such action resonates with both an individual and a collective identity that makes such action meaningful" (Buechler, 1997, p. 228).

Collective identities are not automatically given but are "essential outcomes of the mobilization process and crucial prerequisites to movement success" (Buechler, 1997, p. 228). The Black movement maintained its diversity and collective identity by creating the unity of purpose among various organizations for collective action. "One critical intervening process which must occur to get from oppression to resistance," Buechler (1997, p. 228) wrote, "is the social construction of a collective identity which unites a significant segment of the movement's potential constituency." The African American movement recognized the importance of collective identity and diversity, which led to its legal success during the mid-20th century. "If the social construction of a collective identity is an ongoing, never-completed task in social movements," Buechler (1997, p. 229) noted, "this is because movements are often composed of diverse and heterogeneous individuals and subgroups." With the legal success of the Black movement, the diversity of African American society has increased, and Black conservatives and some liberals joined the establishment and started to resist social change. Not all of those who fought against racial segregation support the struggle for fundamental transformation of the Black community. The movement had diverse movement centers that focused on either cultural, political, or civil rights or on fundamental social transformation. How did this movement develop? What were its major successes and failures? What lessons do we

draw from these successes and failures for the future strategy of struggle?

Initially, ancestors of African Americans resisted slavery in their motherland, Africa, without systematically organizing themselves. The cultural and political resistance of African Americans continued after their enslavement and colonization in the United States of America. After slavery was abolished, African Americans were dominated, controlled, and exploited by White society and their government and institutions. Although the national struggle of the Black people had been the continuation and culmination of the previous resistance, it emerged from certain social structural, historical, and sociological factors. By critically exploring the dialectical interaction between social structures and processes and human agency, we can demonstrate the development, essence and characteristics, and outcomes of African American nationalism. The Black movement developed as a cultural, intellectual, ideological, and political opposition to American apartheid and colonialism and institutions that denied African Americans cultural and historical space and autonomous social development. In the process of the struggle, some educated elements of this society recognized the irreconcilability of the contradiction between the colonizing structures and the subjugated African Americans, and they started to re-discover the cultural heritage of this people in the social process that Cabral (1973, p. 61) called "a return to the source" and Bereciartu (1994) called it "national revindication." The return to the source or national revindication is a social process through which the subjugated people attempt to reclaim and retrieve some elements of their lost cultural, political, and economic rights by developing the collective consciousness of nationalism. Asante (1985, 1989, 1990, 1993), referring to the cultural and intellectual struggle of Africans in Africa and in the diaspora, called this paradigm *Afrocentricity*. The African American national revindication, or return to the source, involved ethnoclass consciousness because Blacks were culturally suppressed, economically exploited, and politically disfranchised. The complex processes of structures, human agency, and cultural and historical memory facilitated the development of Black nationalism.

### THE RISE OF AFRICAN AMERICAN NATIONALISM

African American nationalism developed as a mass movement during the mid-20th century as a cultural, intellectual, ideological, and political movement to achieve civil equality, human dignity, and development by overthrowing White racial and colonial dictatorship. This development was facilitated by the cumulative struggles of the previous generations and social structures and processes and conjunctures. There were various forms of individual and group resistance struggles and proto-nationalism in African American society before the 20th century. The ancestors of African Americans, both individually and in groups, resisted enslavement in Africa and fought against slavery on slave ships and later on the American plantations; they fought culturally, and some of them ran away whereas others engaged in mutinies and armed resistance. Clarke (1976) noted that African culture “sustained the Africans during the holocaust of the slave trade and the colonial system that followed it. . . . African culture, reborn on alien soil, became the cohesive force and the communication system that helped to set in motion some of the most successful slave revolts in history” (p. 41). There were about 250 slave rebellions in the United States between the 17th and 19th centuries (Colston, 1979, p. 234); about 50 maroon communities were formed by thousands of runaway slaves and their descendants between 1672 and 1864 in the forests and mountains of southern states (see Aptheker, 1947, 1979).

For 250 years, African Americans influenced North America through their resistance struggle that aimed at retaining an African identity and restoring human freedom (see Drake, 1967). This shows that despite the fact that the plantation and slave owners established firm control on this enslaved population with the support of American institutions, they could not totally control their minds and spirit. American racial slavery absolutely denied human freedom to the ancestors of African Americans; it was during this slavery that African American peoplehood developed from the enslaved Africans of various ethnonational origins. “As products of African amalgamation (Hausa, Asante, Yoruba, Ewe, Ibo, Wolof, Mandingo, Congo, and a hundred other ethnic groups) and the

American crucible we have become a new people unknown prior to the 15th century," Asante (1989, p. 59) wrote, "our perspectives, attitudes, and experiences are peculiarly fitted to change the frame of reference for African people." This peoplehood developed from the past African cultural memory, collective dehumanization of slavery, and the hope for survival as a people in the future.

African Americans never accepted slavery and its ideology and continued to resist depending on the conditions in which they found themselves. Furthermore, some ex-slaves with the support of a few antislavery Whites (see Roediger, 1991) relentlessly struggled to liberate their fellow Africans from racial slavery; they also later fought to eliminate racial segregation through building institutions and organizations. All these and other forms of ideological and cultural resistance established a strong social foundation from which cultural memory and popular historical consciousness emerged to facilitate the development of African American nationalism (see Bethel, 1999). The freed and segregated African Americans in the urban North established autonomous self-help and fraternal associations, churches, schools, small businesses, media, and cultural centers. According to Moses (1996, p. 1), "Classical black nationalism originated in the 1700s, reached its first peak in the 1850s, underwent a decline toward the end of the Civil War, and peaked again in the 1920s, as a result of the Garvey Movement." When freed Africans and their children helped the emergence of Black nationalism between the 1770s and the 1860s, the persistence of racial slavery, denial of education to slaves and freed Blacks, the repression of African culture and the imposition of Euro-American culture, and the absolute denial of freedom to African Americans had delayed the development of African American nationalism.

However, the Black indigenous institutions later provided "a favorable structure of political opportunities" for the African American struggle (McAdam, McCarthy, & Zald, 1998, p. 697); antebellum freed African Americans developed "organizational infrastructure" that evolved from these indigenous organizations and institutions that helped develop the African American movement during the first half of the 20th century. McAdam (1997) argued that "the ability of insurgents to generate a social movement

is ultimately dependent on the presence of an indigenous 'infrastructure' that can be used to link members of the aggrieved population into an organized campaign of mass political action" (p. 178). The antebellum African American scholars wrote several books, magazines, newspapers, and journals that later helped build Black cultural memory and popular historical consciousness. These scholars and activists, although fighting against racial slavery and segregation, also attempted to capture intellectually the past African cultural experience, evaluated the negative and positive experiences of Africans in the New World, and rejected American racist cultural elements and structures. Through reconnecting African Americans to the African cultural past and showing various African civilizations to the world, they challenged White supremacy and Eurocentric historical knowledge that claimed that Blacks were backward, primitive, pagan, and intellectually inferior to Whites.

By explaining that African civilizations and cultures prior to the 16th century were equal to and in some aspects more advanced than those of Europeans, they refuted the claim of the natural superiority of the White people. However, despite their positive contributions, these scholars sometimes manifested elitist, sexist, and "modernist" positions. They produced an alternative knowledge that laid the foundation of an Afrocentric scholarship, the paradigm that promotes the idea of multicultural society. Bethel (1999) asserted that during this period, "African Americans fused two disparate elements of identity: an increasingly remote African ancestry and cultural heritage, and a popular historical consciousness shaped directly by a corpus of New World experiences" (p. 96). Freed and freeborn Blacks struggled to free their Black brothers and sisters from slavery and to gain civil equality, and they consolidated the cultural and ideological foundations for African American political consciousness and nationalism between the 18th and 19th centuries.

Politically conscious freedmen and their children used different platforms to fight against racial slavery and to promote civil equality. For instance, the nation's first African American newspaper, *Freedom's Journal*, was established by Thomas Paul, Jr., and Samuel Cornish in 1827. The editors of this newspaper provided a critical social, political, and cultural commentary that

invoked the common African ancestry on which the earlier pamphleteers had drawn to shape a moral community. Yet the African American press pursued an explicitly political rather than implicitly moral agenda, manipulating the symbolism of common ancestry to unify public opinion and mobilized collective action. (Bethel, 1999, p. 172)

Similarly, David Walker published the *Appeal, in Four Articles* in 1829, declaring that “the greatest riches in all America have arisen from our blood and tears,” and demanding that White Americans “make a national acknowledgment to us for the wrongs they have inflicted on us” (quoted in Bethel, 1999, p. 78). Bethel (1999) commented on the essence of the *Appeal* as follows:

Reverberating with passionate energy, setting aside the civility previously used to address white audiences, no longer needing to mask their frustration and anger with a veneer of rhetorical reserve, within the freedom movements African Americans spoke to each other in a vocabulary of race unity and cultural autonomy; and from those movements an ethnic identity grounded in a common mythic African heritage welded from a blend of autobiographical and generational memory emerged and crystallized. (p. 78)

In his manifesto, David Walker demanded civil equality and cultural integrity by condemning racial slavery, White racism, and the corruption of Christianity and other institutions. William Lloyd Garrison also founded a magazine called *Liberator* on January 1, 1831. Gradually, some politically conscious elements started to build a collective movement.

With the suggestion of Hezekiah Grice, a Baltimore ice dealer, Richard Allen convened a clandestine meeting of 40 self-selected delegates in September 1830 in Philadelphia and founded the National Convention Movement, the first civil rights movement in the United States. This movement met only twice in 1830 and 1835, and it shaped the future African American political agenda:

The architects of the movement transformed race identity for free African Americans into a political resource upon which two major twentieth-century liberation movements would draw to fuel their

agendas. Within the National Convention Movement, African American concerns about emigration in general, and about the Canadian refugee settlements and opportunities for resettlement in Hayti [sic] in particular, anticipated the impulse for cultural unification of people of color that would also drive twentieth-century Pan-Africanism. At the same time, and complementing the focus on citizenship and the improvement of the status of free African Americans, the movement aimed to eradicate structural and legal sources of racial oppression. In this way it foreshadowed the political and economic agendas both of post-Civil War Reconstruction in the Southern states and of the 1960s Civil Rights Movement. (Bethel, 1999, pp. 83-84)

Furthermore, the Haitian Revolution that led to the formation of a Black republic in 1804 “extended African American consciousness beyond the borders of the United States” (Bethel, 1999, pp. 92-93). According to Bethel (1999),

Foreshadowing the anticolonialism, cultural unification, and self-determination of twentieth-century pan-Africanism, the Haytian Revolution and the republic created and ruled by peoples of African descent offered a resonant *lieu de memoire* for African Americans during the antebellum period. While the African American mandate for racial unity hinged on the mythic common ancestry forged from African environments of memory, the Haytian *lieu* inspired African American visions of a civic culture and a democratic future. (pp. 93-94)

The publication of several books, magazines, newspapers, and journals by scholars and journalists further helped to lay the foundation of African American consciousness and nationalism.<sup>1</sup> The dehumanizing experiences of racial slavery and the struggle for freedom and civil equality were reflected in both personal and cultural memories of the antebellum African American scholars:

The welding of past to present and the crafting of a political agenda informed by that union took place at a revolutionary intersection of social movements and demographic shifts in antebellum America. In particular, the numerical growth of the free African American population in the Northern states, and the expansion of a literate public within that population, combined with two great civil rights

movements—the (biracial) anti-slavery movement and the (African American) Convention Movement. The resulting political climate nurtured an intellectual and literary tradition. (Bethel, 1999, p. 168)

This intellectual and literary tradition “redefined the boundaries as well as the content of a collective past by grounding that in historical consciousness rather than autobiographical memory and by subordinating the particularized and individualized to larger explanations of events and processes” (Bethel, 1999, p. 168). The emergence of a few intellectuals helped to lay the ideological foundation of African American nationalism by developing African American collective consciousness from politicized collective grievances and personal experiences expressed through autobiographical and cultural memory. “The popular historical consciousness that resulted from these *lieux de memoire*—a body of shared beliefs, myths, and images—connected a New World past to an American present and validated a vision of the future that would inform the African American political and cultural agenda into the twentieth century” (Bethel, 1999, p. 194). The struggle of freedmen had a few sympathizers and supporters in White American society. The anti-slavery movement was a biracial movement that brought together Black activists and White reformers to fight against American slavery. These White abolitionists were inspired by religion and the political ideals of the natural rights of man although the majority of Whites were pro-slavery. The first religious groups to oppose slavery were Quakers. Although there were Quakers who became slave owners, most of them opposed slavery. For instance, the two Quakers, Benjamin Lay (1677-1759) and Ralph Sandiford (1693-1733), characterized slavery as “the epitome of evil” (Dillon, 1974, p. 7). Quakers dominated the antislavery movement until the 19th century by providing large membership and effective leadership (Dillon, 1974, p. 8-9).

However, some of these abolitionists were racists and wanted to get rid of freed Blacks: “In 1816, a group of reformers who sought the end of slavery as a great evil—but who at the same time rejected as a similar evil the prospect of the Black’s remaining in America—formed the American Colonization Society” (Dillon, 1974, p. 19). Although the early abolitionists for the most part failed, they suc-

ceeded in persuading the congress to pass gradual emancipation laws in the North and to end the foreign slave trade in March 1807 (Dillon, 1974, p. 22). Dillon (1974) argued that these abolitionists had “great moral courage and independence of mind venture to subvert the dominant practices and values of their age” (p. xiii). The role of African American human agency and the struggle of the antislavery movement cannot be adequately understood without linking them to social structural factors and processes and conjunctures, and by critically examining the dialectical connection among these social forces. During this period, complex social structural changes were taking place in the United States because this country was changing from agrarian to industrial and from a semiperiphery to a core country. How did these changes affect the position of the United States in the global economy? How did these changes affect racial relations in the United States?

During the political confrontation between the North and the South on several political, economic, and strategic issues, abolitionists provided an ideological ammunition for the northern leadership that wanted to establish its class hegemony by developing core capitalism through removing the obstacles created by the planter class and for African Americans who wanted to dismantle racial slavery. The development of core capitalism in the North and the persistence of peripheral capitalism in the South led to contradiction in the strategy of national development and facilitated class struggle in the antebellum United States (Chase-Dunn, 1980, pp. 189-230). The class forces of core capitalists and their allies and peripheral capitalists contended to control federal state power. This gradually resulted in civil war. How? The South control of the Federal state crumpled when the alliance between the farmers of the West and the planters of the South was broken, and when the Northern and Southern Democrats were divided, and when the Republicans succeeded to capture the federal state by the election of Abraham Lincoln to the office of the president in 1860 (Chase-Dunn, 1980, p. 221). According to Chase-Dunn (1980),

The crumpling of this alliance provoked the Civil War even though the Republicans never advocated the abolition of slavery but only prevention of its expansion to the West. Southern peripheral capital-

ism was expansionist because of its extensive nature and the quick exhaustion of the soil, but this was not the main reason why the South desired the extension of slavery to the West. The main issue for the South was control over the Federal state. Planters opposed the creation of free states because the alliance with free farmers was tenuous and they felt they would have less and less power in the Federal state. (p. 221)

The Civil War was initiated by the slave owners that seceded from the federal union, and the northern core capitalists and their allies entered into the war to maintain the union and to impose the strategy of core capitalist development (Chase-Dunn, 1980, pp. 222-223). The United States achieved upward mobility from semiperiphery to core by the alliance among the classes of northern core capitalists, some workers, and farmers who opposed the expansion of slavery to the west of the country:

It was not slavery that was the main issue but the question of who would dominate the Federal state. Free farmers and workers found themselves at odds with the interests of the peripheral capitalists of the South on the issue of the frontier, and so cast their lot with core capital. In so doing, they destroyed the plantocracy and created a strong core state. The Civil War and reconstruction firmly established the hegemony of core capitalism and core labor over the Federal state. (Chase-Dunn, 1980, p. 223)

“Slavery must be abolished then not so much because it was the just course to follow,” Dillon (1974) noted, “as because it was the most direct way to destroy the power of planter class” (p. 254). Challenging the misconception that the American Civil War was fought to end slavery, Dillon (1974) asserted that the issues of slavery and the welfare of African Americans were secondary:

Such motives for abolition bore slight resemblance to the moral and religious imperatives that had inspired abolitionists during their long crusade. The new kind of antislavery had little to say about the rights of black people and about justice for freedmen. It was, finally, an emancipation policy derived from enmity generated by the strategic errors of slave holders rather than from a recognition of the evils inherent in slavery itself. (pp. 254-255)

Although the abolitionists might have had some impact on some leaders, the Lincoln government started the idea of emancipation as a political measure after the Civil War began mainly to weaken the Confederacy by depriving Black manpower, to stop the English and French support to the South, and to get support from the Radical Republicans in the Congress (Chase-Dunn, 1980, p. 222; Dillon, 1974, p. 256). Despite the fact that Black and White abolitionists had made an ideological contribution against slavery, the institution of racial slavery was dismantled mainly because of the contradictions between core and peripheral capitalism, the strategic mistake of the South, and the alliance of some workers and farmers with core capitalists to control the federal state. Although most of these forces were not abolitionists, they indirectly contributed to the abolition of slavery for political and economic expediency. These social structural factors and conjunctures created a new condition for ex-slaves. This new condition and its outcomes gradually contributed to the development of Black nationalism. The historical contradiction between the core capitalism of the North and the peripheral capitalism of the South resulted in the Civil War that created conducive social structural and conjunctural factors that later contributed to the development of Black nationalism. In other words, the Civil War, the defeat of the planters, and the abolition of slavery transformed the nature of the African American struggle. The “push” factors, such as Jim Crow laws, racial dictatorship and oppressive social control mechanisms, lawlessness, denial of political and cultural rights, poverty, lack of education and other opportunities, and “pull” factors from the North, such as availability of jobs and the possibility of freedom, facilitated the great migration of the Black folk to northern and other cities.

This mass migration transformed African Americans from rural and agricultural workers to industrial and urban workers. As a result, they began to form communities, associations, fraternities, churches, mosques, schools, organizations, and other kinds of urban relations. The educated class and other activists who were previously isolated from the slaves found a fertile social ground in which they would sow their ideas of social change and struggle. African American activist intellectuals, such as Du Bois and others,

politicized collective grievances and mobilized White activists and reformers who participated in the antislavery movement and their children and others. Some White reformers and radicals supported the struggle to legally dismantle racial segregation; this struggle received some White assistance in several forms from some foundations, clergy, and student volunteers. Jenkins and Eckert (1986, pp. 812-815) called these supporters "conscience constituencies." In the turn of the century, several African American organizations, such as the NAACP, the National Urban League, and others, emerged and promoted the African American movement. Social structural factors, processes, conjunctures, and human agency, which included politicized collective grievances, war, migration, economic and political changes, urban community formation, the emergence of an intellectual class, and the formation of institutions and organizations facilitated the development of Black nationalism in the first half of the 20th century in three different forms.

### **TRIPLE FORMS OF THE BLACK MOVEMENT**

The three forms of the African American struggle were cultural nationalism, the Civil Rights Movement, and revolutionary nationalism. Although it is a practical difficulty to draw boundaries among these three forms, they can be analytically separated and explained. The African American movement attempted to redefine Black cultural identity that was distorted by racial dictatorship, to liberate Blacks from the racial caste system, and to introduce a fundamental social transformation in the Black community. The White society forced on African Americans cultural assimilation while denying them primary and secondary structural assimilation to maintain racial boundary mechanisms (see McLemore, 1991; Semmes, 1992). Black cultural nationalism emerged in opposition to racist discourse and White cultural hegemony. Bracey, Meier, and Rudwick (1970) noted that the period "from about 1880 to 1930 witnessed the flowering of a clear-cut cultural nationalism. It was evident particularly in a rising self-conscious interest in the race's past and in efforts to stimulate a distinctively black litera-

ture” (p. 299). The “New Negro” movement promoted the principles of ethnonational self-help, cooperation, ethnic heritage and pride, militancy, and determination to struggle for constitutional rights (see Meier & Rudwick, 1985, p. xix).

Starting from the era of racial slavery and segregation, African Americans struggled to build their historical continuity and humanity through developing their peoplehood and cultural identity. “African Americans, slave and free,” Semmes (1992) mentioned, “began to rediscover symbolic foundations for a redemptive African-centered consciousness” (p. 14). Black cultural nationalists gradually challenged the negative images of Africanness and Blackness by refuting the false claim of the Western world racism that inflated the values of “Europeanness” and “Whiteness” in the areas of civilization and culture. As a result, African Americans reclaimed and retrieved their African heritage and accepted Blackness as a mark of beauty by rejecting names such as *Negro*, *Nigger*, and *colored* that were given to them by White society, and they replaced such names with Black or African American. The three ideological movements that reconnected African Americans to Africa were Garveyism, the Harlem Renaissance, and Pan-Africanism (see Magubane, 1989, p. 127). According to King (1964a), Garvey’s “movement attained mass dimensions, and released a powerful emotional response because it touched a truth which had long been dormant in the mind of the Negro. There was reason to be proud of their heritage as well as of their bitterly won achievement in America” (p. 33). Similarly, the Harlem Renaissance reconnected African Americans to Africa and cultivated Africanization in art and made the Black artist turn to his or her African heritage (see Huggins, 1971).

The regeneration of Black culture and the ideological connection to Africa through these ideologies manifested cultural, national, and international characteristics of the emerging Black nationalism. The maturation of Black nationalism in the form of cultural awakening started in the first two decades of the 20th century. Prominent Black activist scholars, artists, and literary figures moved to Harlem and made it a center of African American cultural and intellectual discourse (see Bontemps, 1972; Huggins, 1971).<sup>2</sup>

Smith (1991) asserted that an ethnonational “identity comprises both a cultural and political identity and is located in a political community as well as a cultural one” (p. 99). The civil rights movement evolved from the African American cultural, ideological, intellectual, and political experiences that emerged in urban America. Organized voices of the African American freedom movement, supported by White reformers, started to articulate the Black problem during the turn of the 20th century. The movement of Blacks to urban areas, new allies, and the development of institutions and the creation of organizations facilitated the development of the civil rights struggle (see Oberschall, 1973).

The civil rights activists and their supporters formed various organizations during the first half of the 20th century to marshal Black human, financial, intellectual, and ideological resources to fight for Black freedom by dismantling American apartheid.<sup>3</sup> Movement scholars explain that

the level of infrastructure in a given population is itself shaped by the type of macro factors. . . . Broad macro-processes, such as industrialization, urbanization, mass migration, and the like, largely determine the degree to which groups in society are organized and the structure of that organization. The extent and structure of that organization in turn imply very different potentials of collective action. (McAdam, McCarthy, & Zald, 1998, p. 711).

The majority of Blacks moved to cities and became members of the urban working class during the first half of the 20th century. This created conducive conditions for the development of Black institutions and organizations. Then African Americans started to be connected together through social networks, the media, transportation, communication networks and technologies, and so on by overcoming their dispersion in rural areas. The geographic concentration in cities increased the density of interaction among them and facilitated recruitment in various movement organizations. The indigenous institutions and organizations became the foundations of professional social movements and political organizations. According to McAdam and colleagues (1998),

The key concept linking macro- and micro- processes in movement emergence is that of the *micro-mobilization context*. A micro-mobilization context can be defined as any small group setting in which processes of collective attribution are combined with rudimentary forms of organization to produce mobilization for collective action. (p. 709)

The African American movement blossomed and began to galvanize the African American people and their supporters for collective action. Explaining how urbanization and collective action were related in African American society, McAdam and colleagues (1998) expounded that “the rural to urban migration of Blacks within the South greatly enhanced the prospects for collective action by transforming an impoverished, geographically dispersed mass into an increasing well organized urban population” (p. 703). As the main national organization, the National Association for the Advancement of the Colored People (NAACP) was engaged in its legal struggle to challenge Black disfranchisement and racial segregation.<sup>4</sup> This organization expanded its branch offices to the South in 1918 and linked its activities to the Black church and fought against lynching, segregated education and transportation, and political disfranchisement (see Morris, 1984). The NAACP provided organizational and management skills for the Black national struggle by recruiting and training ministers, lawyers, doctors, teachers, union organizers, and other activists, and it taught them how to organize themselves and establish working relationships among themselves (see Morris, 1984). The lawyers of the NAACP successfully challenged the legality of school segregation, and the Supreme Court by its decision of *Brown v. Board of Education Topeka, Kansas*, ruled against the segregated public school system in 1954. Despite the fact that its bureaucracy discouraged the participation of the Black masses in their struggle for freedom, this organization made a serious preparatory work for the struggle of the 1950s and 1960s (Morris, 1984). Because of these legal successes, White racist and terrorist groups, such as White Citizens’ Council, the American States Rights Association, the National Association for the Advancement of White People, and the Ku Klux Klan, intensified their organized attacks on the NAACP with

the tacit acceptance of Southern States in the 1950s and weakened it by creating an organization vacuum for the Black struggle in the South (see Morris, 1984, pp. 28-30).

The Black people were further disillusioned and frustrated in the 1940s and 1950s because these legal actions were opposed by White society. As a result, African Americans were convinced that court actions by themselves could not destroy racial segregation without protest and revolutionary action. As King (1964a) said, "We know through painful experience that freedom is never voluntarily given by the oppressor; it must be demanded by the oppressed" (p. 80). The founding of the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE) in 1942 by some Black students and elites, White socialists, liberals, and pacifists contributed to the development of the nonviolent direct action strategy to fight against racial segregation in public facilities (see Farmer, 1985). The direct action of CORE included sit-ins and freedom rides to desegregate the public transportation system. In the 1950s and 1960s, CORE combined its nonviolent struggle with the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) and the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) (Farmer, 1985). Taking the Black church as the center of liberation struggle in Southern states because it had an independent leadership of clergymen, financial source, organized mass base, and cultural and ideological foundation, African Americans started to create what Morris (1984) called movement centers in the South.<sup>5</sup> The SCLC was formed by these movement centers in 1957 as "the decentralized political arm of the Black church" (Morris, 1984, pp. 28-30).

Martin Luther King emerged as the charismatic and sophisticated revolutionary leader of the SCLC and the Black struggle of the mid-20th century; he combined the social and otherworldly gospel in leading the struggle. King (1964b, p. 185; 1967, p. 96) expressed that the church has the obligation to deal with moral issues in society as "the voice of moral and spiritual authority on earth" and as "the guardian of the moral and spiritual life in the community;" he criticized the White church for ignoring its social mission and sanctioning the racial caste system, colonialism, and imperialism (see King, 1964b, p. 14; Zepp, 1989). King understood

the vital roles of the masses and elites in bringing progressive social changes, and he developed with his colleagues the political strategy of involving the masses and elites in mass direct action through boycotts, demonstrations, and marches. He believed that when the oppressed “bury the psychology of servitude” within themselves, no force can stop them from struggling for their freedom (King, 1964a, p. 111). King (1969a) considered the Black struggle for freedom as a “new expression of the American dream that need not be realized at the expense of other men around the world, but a dream of opportunity and life that can be shared with the rest of the world” (p. 234).

This visionary and democratic revolutionary leader dreamed and struggled to create a just multicultural society where all peoples can live together as brothers and sisters, where every person “will respect the dignity and worth of human personality” (King, 1968a, p. 15). SCLC, SNCC, CORE, and other organizations led effective desegregation campaigns. According to Bloom (1987), “Nonviolence and mass participation in the freedom struggle became a central part of King’s contribution to the cause of black freedom. Mass action transformed the character of the struggle itself—making it immeasurably stronger, with a much rapid pace” (p. 143). King used religion, the media, nonviolence strategy, and mass mobilization and participation in challenging American apartheid. “White America,” King (1964a) noted, “was forced to face the ugly facts of life as the Negro thrust himself into the consciousness of the country, and dramatized his grievances on thousand brightly lighted stages” (p. 112). With the blossoming of the civil rights movement, two important laws were passed: The Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965. Recognizing that these civil rights laws would not fundamentally change the condition of the Black majority, King started to expand the scope of the civil rights movement. King raised human rights issues and aimed at creating an alliance with all poor and the working class in the United States (Allen, 1983, p. 323). As a very complex religious and pragmatist leader, he challenged the racist capitalist system on its territory by developing different strategies and tactics of struggle.

After the civil rights laws were passed, King (1969a) started the Poor People's Campaign: "I am speaking of all the poor, I am not only concerned about the black poor; I am concerned about poverty among my Puerto Rican brothers; I am concerned about poverty among my Appalachian white brothers, and I wish they would realize that we are struggling against poverty for everybody and would join in a movement to get rid of poverty" (p. 4). He called on the White and Black churches to challenge the status quo and to change an oppressive social order; he condemned racism, economic and labor exploitation, and war as the three primary evils in American society (see Zepp, 1989, p. 54). King's idea of integration was complex: "'Integration' is meaningless without the sharing of power. When I speak of integration I don't mean a romantic mixing of colors. I mean a real sharing of power and responsibility" (King, 1969b, p. 231). That is why he struggled to eliminate or reduce poverty by recognizing the connection among political power, wealth, and poverty. He was a civil rights activist, nationalist and internationalist:

Let us be dissatisfied until rat-infested, vermin-filled slums will be a thing of a dark past and every family will have a decent sanitary house in which to live. Let us be dissatisfied until the empty stomachs of Mississippi are filled and idle industries of Appalachia are revitalized. . . . Let us be dissatisfied until our brothers of the Third World—Asia, Africa and Latin America—will no longer be the victim of imperialist exploitation, but will be lifted from the long night of poverty, illiteracy, and disease. (King, 1968b, pp. 110-111).

King was assassinated in 1968 as was another Black revolutionary leader, Malcolm X, who was assassinated in 1965. Marable (1991) commented that "King's unfinished search for more radical reforms in America may have been the central reason he was killed" (p. 105). There is not any doubt that his ideological and intellectual maturation and commitment for the emancipation and development of all oppressed groups had shortened his life. "Martin Luther King and Malcolm X were both assassinated," Allen (1983, p. 322) wrote, "at precisely the point at which they began

working actively and consciously against the racism and exploitation generated by the American capitalist system, both at home and abroad.” The assassination of these two prominent leaders had frustrated the Black people and increased their militancy even more. Both King and Malcolm X, although they emerged through different routes to lead the Black struggle, recognized the inability of the existing organizations to accomplish the objective of the Black movement. According to Sales (1994), Malcolm X and King “recognized that further development of the movement required new organizational forms and for their supporters to relate to each other in new and different ways. King’s ‘Poor People’s Campaign’ represented this search while Malcolm X created the OAAU [Organization of African American Unity]” (p. 42). Because Malcolm X gradually evolved to become the militant leader, his understanding of the Black question went beyond the comprehension of other leaders of the Nation of Islam.

The Nation of Islam emerged as a religious-national movement in the 1930s, and it appealed to the Black masses in the 1950s and 1960s as the Garvey Movement did in the 1920s. This movement produced Malcolm X, who after his death “quickly became the fountainhead of the modern renaissance of Black nationalism in the late 1960s” (Marable, 1991, p. 92). Because of his views and militancy, he was expelled from the Nation of Islam and first created the Muslim Mosque and then formed the Organization of African American Unity (OAAU) in 1964. Black militant or revolutionary nationalism focused on the fundamental political, economic, cultural, ideological, and social transformations in Black America. Black militant nationalists were antiracists and anti-integrationist and “opposed Jim Crow laws and simultaneously advocated all-black economic, political and social institutions” (Marable, 1991, p. 55). Explaining how African Americans struggled for human dignity and true equality, Malcolm X (Sales, 1994) pointed “that our people want a complete freedom, justice and equality, or recognition and respect as human beings. . . . So, integration is not the objective nor separation the objective. The objective is complete respect as human beings” (p. 80). Malcolm X, Stockely

Carmichael, and other radical leaders forcefully articulated that Black America should have control on its political economy, life, and culture to fundamentally transform itself (see Carmichael & Hamilton, 1967; Malcolm X, 1966). The OAAU, SNCC, the Black Panther Party, and other militant groups fought to bring about a fundamental social change in American society. The new Black militant believed "that black dignity and liberation are not possible in the United States without profound changes in the system" (Marine, 1986, p. 23).

The Black Panther Party developed the 10-point program in 1966; this program included the demands for political power, self-determination, full employment, decent education, housing, food, social justice to end police brutality and unfair trial, and economic development (Marine, 1986, pp. 35-36). Furthermore, the formation of the Republic of New Africa in 1967 to create an independent African American state in the Deep South was another expression of Black militant nationalism. Some of these revolutionary organizations attempted to engage in armed struggle. The urban Black rebellion from 1964 to 1972 was an integral part of Black militancy, which the White establishment could not tolerate. Although the government integrated Black reformist elites by using civil rights laws, it suppressed the Black masses and Black revolutionaries. As a result, several hundreds of African Americans who participated in a series of rebellions and revolutionary leaders were either killed or imprisoned or went into exile. The Black struggle had some structural limit. As reformist approaches limited the capacity of the struggle by preventing a fundamental social change, revolutionary approaches invited repression from the White establishment.

However, the African American

movement succeeded in institutionalizing significant gains during the early 1970s. Blacks became an important voter bloc, participating at higher rates than whites of the same socioeconomic status and the number of black office holders rose rapidly. . . . Although the socioeconomic gap between blacks and whites remained glaringly wide, significant progress against the most overt forms of racial discrimination in education and employment gradually became evident. (Jenkins & Eckert, 1986, pp. 816-817)

Although the Black movement resulted in the legal defeat of the institutions of the racial caste system, practically, individual and indirect institutional racism has remained intact. Because of the opposition from the White establishment and the lack of a long-term political and cultural strategy, the majority of Blacks are still poor and at the bottom of American society.

### **THE CURRENT PROBLEMS AND LESSONS FOR FUTURE STRUGGLE**

The objective of fundamentally transforming Black America was not successful. Hence, the majority of African Americans still do not have meaningful access to political, economic, and cultural resources of the country. Furthermore, although the African American movement introduced the agenda of multiculturalism, the struggle for cultural identity and multicultural democracy has not yet reach its desired goals. The suppression of revolutionary nationalism and the denial of self-determination for the Black community, and the imposition of the politics of order on the Black masses and revolutionaries still perpetuate the underdevelopment of Black America. Because of the absence of a national organization that can effectively mobilize and organize Blacks to articulate the demands of the Black majority, presently existing civil rights organizations and Black elites could not obtain adequate goods and services for the Black community. Because of all these factors, the majority of African Americans have been left in ghettos and exposed to all social ills, such as police brutality, poverty, illiteracy, disease, unemployment, crime, drugs, and urban crises.<sup>6</sup>

Conservatives, both Whites and Blacks, argue that the current tragic problem of the Black majority is caused by effects of welfare work disincentives, a ghetto-specific culture, Black nationalism, lack of traditional American values, and Black self-doubt (see Conti & Stetson, 1993; Murray, 1984; Sowell, 1984; Steele, 1990). In their attempts to exonerate the racist American capitalist system and its institutions, conservative scholars and politicians blame the Black community and those leaders who have struggled to liberate

this community from domination and exploitation. These conservatives assert that Black problems are perpetuated by Black culture and the ineffectiveness of the civil rights leaders; they criticize the strategy of groups' rights and reliance on political power rather than on individual initiatives and traditional values (see Sowell, 1984). Steele (1990) commented that Black nationalism does not "help us much in this challenge because it is too infused with defensive grandiosity, too given bombast and posturing" (p. 66). For conservative politicians and intellectuals, the Black problem is internally created by the unconscious replaying of oppression and racial self-doubt. These conservatives ignore chains of external factors, such as the political economy of racism, institutional discrimination, and so on, that have contributed to Black poverty and underdevelopment. For instance, Steele (1990) suggested that to overcome their current problem, African Americans should abandon their Black collective identity and deal with their individuality.

There is no society that has abandoned its collective cultural identity, including White society, because individuals cannot exist out of collective cultural identity. Based on the ideology of individualism, which White elites falsely promote, conservative Blacks and some liberals reject the notion of reaching back and supporting the struggle of the less fortunate Blacks. This self-serving ideology justifies the burning of a bridge on which these conservative and liberal Blacks crossed to the sides of the privileged groups. Black conservative and some liberal policy elites promote similar views in American foreign policy. Discussing the roles of African American policy elites in the U.S. State Department, Jalata (1999) said,

As some African kings and chiefs participated in the slave trade with European slave merchants to commodify some Africans and ship them to North America and other parts of the world, these African American elites collaborate with racist structures that dehumanize African peoples. It is an irony of history that the lack of critical historical knowledge or class interest or the ideological confusion built into this racist policy has brought an alliance between the biological or ideological descendants of slavers and the descendants of slaves to victimize people . . . who have been victimized by colonialism and slavery. (p. 65)

All conservatives and some liberals promote the ideology of individualism that creates a superficial dichotomy between a group identity and an individual one and claim the primacy of the latter over the former. As Asante (1989) noted, "black super conservatives negate history because they refuse to accept the source of their problem. Their lack of historical consciousness [and/or class interest] underscores their inability to approach a problem scientifically" (p. 91). The Black conservatives are compensated by attacking Blacks, and "they are given high profile by the white conservatives who created them" (Asante, 1989, p. 91).

Those who claim adherence to the ideology of individualism create, recreate, and maintain the ideologies of racism, sexism, and classism to protect their class and group privileges through capturing and maintaining institutional power. In creating and socializing a global intermediate class by destroying multicultures in the name of science, the dominant elites and groups in the capitalist world economy use the ideologies of individualism and cultural universalism to look at the world from their own cultural centers and to control the economic and cultural resources of the dominated people (see Wallerstein, 1983, p. 83). As Wa Thiong'o (1993) put, "there could never be only one centre from which to view the world but that different people in the world had their culture and environment as the centre" (p. 9). That is why critical and Afrocentric studies take Africa and the African American experience in the New World as their center and study them within the global context to understand critically the problem of this society and find an appropriate solution. Therefore, these approaches recognize a pluralism of cultural and historical centers to understand critically historical and social relations within a community, region and the world. The critical aspects of these approaches develop through "an earth-wide network of connections, including the ability partially to translate knowledges among very different— and power-differentiated— communities" (Haraway, 1991, p. 187).

The complexity and contributions of the African American movement were intellectually and politically undermined by the White establishment, its institutions, and its collaborators. The framing of all aspects of the Black struggle as the civil rights movement under-

mined the significance of Black cultural and revolutionary nationalism and denied the complex interconnection among all aspects of the Black movement. Those who minimized the importance of the cultural and revolutionary aspects of the Black movement currently started to attack even the contributions of the civil rights movement. As we have seen above, they even argue that Black cultural identity, nationalism, and civil rights leaders undermined the development of the Black community. The sophisticated attack on the Black movement, its contributions, and its leaders need an organized and sophisticated response and planned long-term political, cultural, intellectual, and ideological strategies. The strategies that must be developed need to draw some lessons from the past struggle of many centuries, and they must reflect the concrete conditions of the African American people. The critical understanding of the concrete conditions of African American society requires a critical scholarship and an Afrocentric discourse. The conservative White and Black knowledge elites and some liberals have treated African Americans as historical objects because of their subordination and powerlessness. Critical and Afrocentric studies challenge a top-down paradigm to historiography and cultural studies and make African Americans subjects rather than objects of history; these studies take African Americans as agents and challenge false knowledge on this society and other communities. "Situated knowledges require that the object of knowledge be pictured as an actor and agent," Haraway (1991, p. 198) expounded, "not a screen or a ground or a resource, never finally as slave to the master that closes off the dialectic in his [or her] unique agency and authorship of 'objective' knowledge."

The African American people must be admired for their stamina to survive the holocaust of racial slavery through cultural and ideological resistance; some of them also developed militancy by defying slavery through engaging in armed resistance, forming maroon communities, killing their masters, and burning their properties without fear of torture and death. Learning from these experiences and following the footsteps of their ancestors, the antebellum freed Blacks and their children persistently struggled to free their sisters and brothers from racial slavery by building autonomous institu-

tions and forming different cultural and political platforms. Some intellectual elements started to rediscover ancient African cultures and civilizations and laid the foundation for an Afrocentric paradigm by challenging the ideology of White racial supremacy. By creating institutions and writing newspapers, magazines, and books, these free Blacks developed a popular cultural consciousness that facilitated the emergence of African American nationalism. When the institution of racial slavery was dismantled, Black nationalists and activists and their supporters continued to struggle against racial dictatorship and colonialism. With the emergence of some conducive social structural factors and conjunctures, African American nationalism blossomed and became a mass movement in the first half of the 20th century. The blossoming of this nationalism assisted in legally dismantling racial segregation in the 1960s and 1970s. Despite the fact that the Black middle class expanded as the result of the Black struggle, the majority of Blacks still face serious cultural, economic, political, and social problems.

As African American ancestors fought against racial slavery, segregation, and colonialism to advance the collective interest of the Black community, the Black middle class and their children have a moral and intellectual responsibility to mobilize and organize the Black majority to solve the problem of this community. If the crisis in the Black community continues, the success that some Blacks made can be attacked and undermined. Therefore, the struggle to change the conditions of the Black majority is not only an issue of moral and intellectual responsibility but also for the advancement of the various interests of all African Americans. Despite the fact that this struggle helped in expanding the African American studies programs, centers, and departments,<sup>7</sup> most of these programs and departments are still dominated by Eurocentric paradigms and resist the Afrocentric and critical paradigms that facilitate cognitive liberation. Using the Eurocentric paradigm, those who wish social death for the Black community undermine the importance of Black collective cultural identity, institutions, organizations, and movements and create obstacles for the future struggle of Black people. To overcome these obstacles, progressive intellectuals, youth, and other sectors of African American society

need to recognize that the success that this community achieved was made by the sacrifice of Black heroines and heroes who struggled for the advance of the Black community. To forget all these achievements and promote the ideology of individualism, consumerism, and individual luxury make African Americans a disorganized and isolated people who cannot solve their common problems by common efforts and struggles.

The struggle for Black liberation requires “a victorious consciousness” that emerges from cumulative African and African American experiences that include original African civilization, culture, tradition, and the ideological, cultural, and political achievements (see Asante, 1988). According to Asante (1988), systematic nationalism, victorious consciousness, and Afrocentric awareness develop “when the person becomes totally changed to a conscious level of involvement in the struggle for his or her own mind liberation. Only when this happens can we say that the person is aware of the collective consciousness of will. An imperative of will, powerful, incessant, alive, and vital, moves to eradicate every trace of powerlessness” (p. 49). The critical and Afrocentric scholars need to reassess critically the significance of the Black collective identity, nationalism, and diversity of movement centers and the importance of leaders. Hence, the future struggle of the Black people needs to draw some lessons from the past movement. Specifically, the incorporation of the best elements of King’s ideological and political sophistication and pragmatism, Malcolm X’s cultural heroism, and mass militancy is absolutely necessary for developing the future strategy of the Black struggle. Furthermore, the future Black movement also will need to broaden its political base on country, regional, and international levels based on the principles of popular democracy and multiculturalism by forming an alliance with antiracist, anticolonial, and progressive forces to expose and remove obstacles to social justice, popular development, and self-determination through educational mechanisms and organized struggle.

## NOTES

1. In 1841, The Reverend J.W.C. Pennnington published *A Text-Book on the Origins and History . . . of the Colored People*. William Cooper Nell's book, *Colored Patriots of the American Revolution*, also appeared in 1855. Similarly, William Wells Brown published his book known as *The Black Man: His Antecedents, His Achievements, and His genius*. William Lloyd Garrison began to publish a magazine known as *Liberator* on January 1, 1931, to advocate a program of immediate emancipation, and its publication ended with the abolition of slavery. Frederick Douglass started to publish a magazine called *The North Star* in 1847. In 1893, Frances Ellen Watkins Harper wrote a novel, *Iola, or Shadows Uplifted*.

2. These scholars and artists included W.E.B. DuBois, James W. Johnson, Marcus Garvey, A. Philip Randolph, Chandler Own, Charles S. Johnson, Langston Hughes, Claude McKay, Countee Cullen, and Zora Neale Hurston.

3. These organizations, associations, and movements included the Niagara Movement that was formed in 1911, the National Association for the Advancement of the Colored People that evolved from the Niagara in 1909, the National Urban League that was founded in 1911, the Garvey Movement, and the Congress of Racial Equality that was founded in 1942.

4. For instance, the NAACP legally attacked the "grandfather clauses" that limited the right to vote and municipal residential segregation ordinances in 1915 and 1917, respectively. It also vigorously attacked the poll tax and school segregation laws between the 1920s and 1950s.

5. The main movement centers were the United Defense League that was organized in 1953 in Baton Rouge, the Montgomery Improvement Association that was formed in 1955, the Inter Civic Council of Tallahassee that emerged in 1956, and the Alabama Christian Movement for Human Rights that was organized in Birmingham in 1956.

6. As Asafa Jalata (1995) summarized, "Currently the infant mortality rate is 17.7 deaths per 1,000 births; children who live in poverty account for 43.2 percent; and AIDS cases account for 28.8 in Black America. . . . The functional or marginal illiteracy rate is about 44 percent. . . . Despite the fact that the black population is only 12 percent of the total American population, about half of murder victims in this country are black, and the main cause of death for young black males is homicide" (p. 165). Out of two million men in American prisons in 1998, 51% of them are Black men; one out of three Black men between the age of 20 and 29 was under some form of criminal justice supervision in 1994. See the Sentencing Project, *New Justice Department Figures Mark a Quarter Century of Prison Building*, [www.sproject.com](http://www.sproject.com), 1998; see Andrew Austin, "The Era of Reaction: Class, Caste, and the Structure of Crime and Punishment in the Post WWII Era," unpublished manuscript, the University of Tennessee, Department of Sociology, August 13, 1999.

7. There are more than 311 African and African American studies programs, centers, and departments in the United States. Most of them emerged as the result of the Black movement in the late 1960s and 1970s. See Gretchen M. Bataille, Miguel A. Carranza, and Laurie Lisa, *Ethnic Studies in the United States: A Guide to Research*, (New York: Garland, 1996).

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*Asafa Jalata is an associate professor of sociology, global studies, and African and African American studies at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville. Professor Jalata is the author of Fighting Against the Injustice of the State and Globalization: Comparing the African American and Oromo Movements (2001) and Oromia & Ethiopia (1993) and the editor of Oromo Nationalism and the Ethiopian Discourse (1998). He also published extensively in various scholarly journals. Professor Jalata was the president of the Oromo Studies Association and editor of The Journal of Oromo Studies.*