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Ernest Allen Jr.
University of Massachusetts Amherst

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Ernest Allen, Jr.

Afro-American Identity: Reflections on the Pre-Civil War Era[1]

I am told that there are Haitians able to trace their ancestry back to African kings, but any American Negro wishing to go back so far will find his journey through time abruptly arrested by the signature on the bill of sale which served as the entrance paper for his ancestor. At the time—to say nothing of the circumstances—of the enslavement of the captive black man who was to become the American Negro, there was not the remotest possibility that he would ever take power from his master's hands. There was no reason to suppose that his situation would ever change, nor was there, shortly, anything to indicate that his situation had ever been any different. It was his necessity, in the words of E. Franklin Frazier, to find a "motive for living under American culture or die." The identity of the American Negro comes out of this extreme situation, and the evolution of this identity was a source of the most intolerable anxiety in the minds and lives of his masters.

—*James Baldwin, "Stranger in the Village"*

THE FOLLOWING ESSAY fails to contain any novel information, archival or otherwise, but rather offers a revised historical interpretation of the Afro-American quest for identity from the 1820's or so up to the Civil War. This particular project is actually the outgrowth of, a momentary but necessary detour from, a historical study of the origins of Afro-American radicalism on which I have been working for some time.

Although one would be hard pressed to document the existence of any

[1]This paper began as a humble presentation given at the August, 1985 URPE Summer Conference at Sandwich, Massachusetts, and forms part of a larger work in progress. The essay's development over the succeeding year partially coincided with an undergraduate course on the Afro-American Cultural Experience taught by James Baldwin at the University of Massachusetts in Spring 1986. To the extent that the paper "hits the mark," the influence of Baldwin's always inspiring lectures, interactions with colleagues who, like myself, taught discussion sections for the course, as well as classroom interchanges themselves, helped in many ways to sharpen the arguments. The paper has also benefited from discussions on the general topic which I have had with a number of other colleagues—Arlene Avakian, John H. Bracey, Jr., Onita Estes-Hicks, Sidney Kaplan, and William Eric Perkins, especially—and their trenchant critiques of this essay, as well as recommendations on additional sources to be consulted, have been most appreciated. If perchance they discover glimpses of their own insights in unintended contexts, may they neither be surprised nor dismayed!

"Golden Age,"[2] there have occurred three "major" and two "minor" periods of Afro-American nationalism from the pre-Civil War era to the present. The first significant period began several decades following the creation of the republic, in the form of autonomous institutions among free blacks as well as emigrationist pursuits. This particular phase was highlighted by the strengthening in the 1850's of emigrationist tendencies among a small but growing number of free northern blacks in the face of increasing competition for urban jobs from European immigrants, passage of the Fugitive Slave Act, and the impact of the Supreme Court's infamous Dred Scott decision. A "minor" period of emigrationism and migrationism, sometimes with the aim of establishing either an all-black republic outside or an all-black state within the U.S., took place in the latter part of the 19th century up to World War I. The second most significant wave occurred from approximately 1919 to 1925 during the Garvey era, when something like 100,000 people of African descent joined the Universal Negro Improvement Association, and millions more world-wide felt the influence of the Pan-nationalism of its indominitable and irresponsible leader, Marcus Garvey. What must be considered another "minor" expression of nationalism did in fact manifest itself in northern, urban areas from the mid-Thirties through World War II. It took the form of "Don't-Buy-Where-You-Can't-Work" campaigns, solidarity with Ethiopia against Italian Fascism, the sympathetic identification of large numbers of Afro-Americans with Japan, and, finally, the March-on-Washington Movement. The years 1965–1968 marked the third, most formidable, and most recent burgeoning of mass nationalist sentiment among Afro-Americans, a tendency given coherence by the continuing influence of the martyred Malcolm X and, to a lesser extent, the Nation of Islam; a vast and highly visible "army" of poets and other artists which suddenly sprouted from black communities coast to coast like clovers in spring; as well as organizations such as the Revolutionary Action Movement, the Republic of New Africa, the "US" cult, and, during its initial, brief nationalist phase, the Black Panther Party for Self-Defense. There were strong nationalist overtones, too, within the League of Revolutionary Black Workers.[3]

[2] For a different view see Wilson J. Moses, *The Golden Age of Black Nationalism, 1850–1925* (Hamden, CT: Archon/Shoe String Press).

[3] See Ernie Allen, "Dying from the Inside: The Decline of the League of Revolutionary Black Workers," in Dick Cluster (ed.), *They Should Have Served That Cup of Coffee: Seven Radicals Remember the Sixties* (South End Press, 1979), 71–109. As post-script, one notes growing subterranean movements of nationalist expression in the 1984 Jackson presidential campaign as well as continued mass support for Minister Louis Farrakhan.

The significance of the apparent ebbs and flows of nationalist discourse and social movement have often been obscured by the assimilationist proclivities of activists as well as scholars. Especially following publication of Myrdal's *An American Dilemma* in 1944, conventional scholarly wisdom, passionately wedded to the dream of a society devoid of proscriptive "racial" or ethnic distinctions, effectively established assimilationism—now the ship, and all else the sea—as the putatively "neutral" ideological framework through which Afro-American politics would be evaluated. When not outright ignored, nationalism could then be treated either as a temporary aberration or as an aid to the assimilation process.[4] On the other hand, the orientation of the dominant forces of the American Left from the Socialist Labor Party in the late 19th century, through the Communist Party into the 1950's, left little ground for other than assimilationist visions of a future socialist America—despite the several exceptions that one might readily cite.[5]

Afro-American nationalist upheavals of the 1960's led to dramatic changes within the interpretations of numerous scholars, however, and influenced a large fraction of the New Left to reassess the position of self-determination for blacks. Uncritically, and for the most part dogmatically, a number of New Left groups resurrected the Haywood/CP position on the "Negro Question," a move which, in itself (at least for most), signalled their recognition of a distinct

[4] For a good summary of the assimilationist frameworks within major sociological literature, see James A. Geschwender, *Racial Stratification in America* (Dubuque, IA: Wm C. Brown, 1978), 19–68. Additionally, in his introduction to *A Survey of the Negro Convention Movement, 1830–1861* (Arno Press and the New York Times, 1969 [1953]), Howard H. Bell reminds us that historians examining the last three decades of the antebellum era have been slow to break with the abolitionist tradition of downplaying emigrationism and its attendant expressions of black nationalism. All of which, until recent date, has allowed the unchallenged pre-eminence of assimilationist interpretations of the period. The point is, however, that Afro-American assimilationist tendencies can never be taken for granted, but must be *explained* no less than nationalist ones.

[5] The close relation of the Foreign Language Federations to the Socialist Party, utilized principally by the latter as a vehicle for increased party voting strength in popular elections, harbored an implicit recognition of cultural if not political pluralism based upon ethnicity, for example. (And let us not forget those respected, backward-leaning elements of the SP who hardly had assimilation in mind when they envisioned the *segregation* of blacks under socialism!) And finally, although officially the CPUSA espoused the "right of self-determination" for Afro-Americans in the Black Belt South from 1928 to 1959, assimilationism dominated the party's political policies towards northern blacks—who were the majority of the CP's Afro-American constituency. Concerning the latter phenomenon, see Mark Naison, *Communists in Harlem during the Depression* (University of Illinois Press, 1983).

Afro-American nationality.[6] Many scholars, cognizant of Integration/Separation ideological struggles within the black community, came to recognize, if not advocate as a social model, cultural pluralism rather than assimilationism—all within the context of a (bourgeois) democratic, capitalist America, to be sure. The source of all those intense "Integration vs. Separation" debates of the early 1960's was the militantly nationalist Nation of Islam, which publicly pitted itself against the assimilationist shibboleths of Civil Rights organizations. This important ideological skirmish left us with an ambiguous intellectual legacy: while implicitly challenging strict assimilationist interpretations of Afro-American history, and thus awakening us to the possibility of a variety of pluralisms, to some extent it also influenced a number of social scientists and political activists to read backwards into time the internal playing out of "Integration vs. Separation" clashes throughout all of Afro-American intellectual history. In the worst of cases, the entire history of Afro-American thought is itself reduced to a protracted war in which these two mighty foes, taken as Manichean categories, engage one another on an eternal ideological battlefield.[7]

Within the germ of this metaphysical approach, however, certain "truths" lay aborning. As far back as the 19th century one could indeed discern dichotomies within Afro-American life—whether in the subjective, experiential, group reality of blacks or in the observable "products" of that experience. For example, even among the staunchest adherents of inter-marriage one might occasionally find a desire for "no-fault" assimilationism: that is, a desire to be assimilated into

[6] Harry Haywood passed away in February, 1985 at the age of 86. He was the author of *Negro Liberation* (International Publishers, 1948), *Black Bolshevik* (Liberator Press, 1978), as well as a number of articles, pamphlets, and published and unpublished manuscripts dating from the late 1920's through the 1980's. This writer is in the process of editing a book of Haywood's selected works.

[7] To a great extent Harold Cruse fostered such an interpretation in his nonetheless important *The Crisis of the Negro Intellectual* (William Morrow Publishers, 1967). Here the terms "integration" and "separation" were essentially taken as formal, lexical definitions, rather than from a careful study of how both terms were employed in relation to the *social* order. See Eric Perkins, "Harold Cruse: On the Problem of Culture and Revolution," *Journal of Ethnic Studies,* 5:2 (Summer, 1977), 3–25; Ernest Allen, "The Cultural Methodology of Harold Cruse," Ibid., 26–50; and Arthur Paris, "Cruse and the Crisis in Black Culture: The Case of the Theater, 1900–1930," Ibid., 51–68. Strongly influenced by Karl Mannheim's *Ideology and Utopia,* Ralph Bunche in the late Thirties posited the division of Afro-American world-views into accommodationism (Ideology) and escapism (Utopia), but such artificial categories would be devastatingly challenged by the realities of the later Civil Rights movement. (Incidentally, Cruse's dichotomy referred mainly to the question of identity, whereas that of Bunche addressed the question of social justice.) Bunche's largely unpublished work was selectively employed

American society but on terms demanding that the actual achievements of blacks be duly recognized in the process. Or the call by more nationalist-oriented individuals for emigrationism, soon to be eclipsed by their enlistment in the Union army following the declaration of civil war. The use of all-black, voluntary organizations as a vehicle to effect a "color-blind" society certainly had its contradictions, as did the demand for full citizenship, often accompanied by bitter, "anti-patriotic" sentiment. On the other hand we genuinely come to understand that Afro-American culture, from its African folk roots to the absorption of Euro-American Christianity, is not only unique in its Afro-American essentials, but because of influences from, as well as influence upon, American culture in general, is profoundly and simultaneously American. One might surmise that such unresolved dualities lie at the very core of Afro-American identity itself. . . .

I. TWO SOULS, TWO UNRECONCILED STRIVINGS

> *It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One ever feels his twoness—an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder.*
>
> —*W. E. B. Du Bois,* The Souls of Black Folk

To be sure, the assertion that dualities exist *internal to* as well as *between* the thoughts and social practices of both proclaimed nationalists and ardent assimilationists hardly tips the scales of analytic revelation. It was Du Bois who first revealed the phenomenon when in 1897 he proclaimed that "We are

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by Gunnar Myrdal in the writing of *An American Dilemma: The Negro Problem and Modern Democracy* (Harper and Row, 1944); still useful in many ways for its empirical findings as well as reflections, it has remained in relative obscurity. See "Programs, Ideologies, Tactics, and Achievements of Negro Betterment and Interracial Organizations"; and "Conceptions and Ideologies of the Negro Problem" (both unpublished). The manuscripts are available at the Schomburg Collection of the New York Public Library as well as on microfilm. Yet another of Bunche's Carnegie Study manuscripts was published as *The Political Status of the Negro in the Age of FDR* (University of Chicago Press, 1973). Finally, Harry Haywood offered a class analysis of Afro-American ideologies which is closest to my own, but in his methodological quest to link every ideological manifestation to a particular class base, he tended to ascribe all manifestations of "narrow nationalism"—even those among black laborers—to the influence of the "ghetto bourgeoisie," that is, black small proprietors.

Americans, not only by birth and by citizenship, but by our political ideals, our language, our religion. Farther than that, our Americanism does not go. At that point, we are Negroes, members of a vast historic race. . . ."[8] But Du Bois' main concern with the existence of Afro-American duality would eventually reside in what he considered to be its stressful psychological as well as political consequences: "two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder."[9]

One must note here that Du Bois' oft-cited passage contains *two* distinct and overlapping meanings which tend to escape most readings of it. On the one side there is the question of *duality*; on the other, that of *hegemony*. For Du Bois, it is the purported hegemony, the supposed triumph of white American images of

[8]W. E. B. Du Bois, *The Conservation of Races* (Washington, D.C.: American Negro Academy, Occasional Papers No. 2, 1897); reprinted in John Bracey, August Meier, Elliot Rudwick (eds.), *Black Nationalism in America* (Bobbs-Merrill, 1970), 258. More recently, August Meier's masterful study, *Negro Thought in America, 1880–1915: Racial Ideologies in the Age of Booker T. Washington* (University of Michigan Press, 1963) also took note of Afro-American ideological duality for the period lying between post-Reconstruction and World War I. Confining his own inquiry to a more select group of black spokesmen, Howard Brotz's penetrating introduction to his *Negro Social and Political Thought, 1850–1920* (Basic Books, 1966)—not to mention his solid but curiously organized *Black Jews of Harlem: Negro Nationalism and the Dilemmas of Negro Leadership* (Schocken, 1970 [1964])—examines that same duality in a more limited sense but over a broader time span. I differ with Meier on two counts here: although he clearly notes the dual outlook of middle-class blacks of the late 19th century, he views that outlook as being overridden by a dominant assimilationist tendency, and ascribes that tendency to *all* blacks. Brotz sees the post-Civil War political duality of blacks played out historically and concretely in struggles waged among black Americans themselves for or against the question of voluntary community. However, since he views these struggles through selective writings of prominent middle-class leadership, he is unable to consider alternatives other than those which that strata, given its class limitations, was able to put forward. Eugene Genovese briefly discussed the notion of duality in his essay, "Class and Nationality in Black America," *In Red and Black* (University of Tennessee Press, 1984 [1971]), 58, and entertained a more thorough discussion of duality within slave religion in *Roll, Jordan, Roll: The World the Slaves Made* (Random House, 1976), 280–84. Leonard Sweet, *Black Images of America, 1784–1870* (Norton, 1976) fully recognizes the duality of black political thought and action, but interprets the overall function of Afro-American nationalism as being an indispensable aid to assimilation.

[9]Du Bois, *Souls of Black Folk* (New American Library, 1969 [1903]), 45. The alienation of black Americans from American society draws upon a seemingly inexhaustible wellspring. It would be interesting to compare and contrast the dualities of Afro-Americans with those of other "hyphenated" Americans, that is to say 19th and early 20th-century European immigrants, as well as the ways in which the group consciousness of each developed on American soil.

blacks in the minds of blacks themselves, that explains, in part, the unyielding *Angst* which he ascribes, rightly or not, to Afro-Americans *in general.* For the black artisan, minister, or doctor it was the necessity to pursue often unrewarding labor among the impoverished and ignorant of the race, which often led to ineffectiveness, the lowering of ideals, or contemptuousness on the part of the former; on the other hand there were the assimilated social values of the white world which, in addition, rendered these uncommoners ashamed to perform such lowly tasks. For the black artist who, for the purpose of achieving the broadest possible recognition, was forced to take into account the esthetic ideals of that dominant world, there was the consequent difficulty of articulating the "soul-beauty" of black folk to a larger, unreceptive audience; and on the other side, that same artist, psychologically and historically rooted in the collective folk experiences of her own people, was unprepared to express the message of any other. And, finally, the knowledge that could teach the white world was unintelligible to the "would-be black *savant,*" whereas the knowledge which the black world needed had long been available to whites. In short, as a black American one was faced with the paradox of attempting to serve two unreconciled ideals, and of being ultimately effective at accomplishing neither. Du Bois' "double consciousness" thus comes to mean *not* simply a bi-cultural perspective which shifts noiselessly into proper gear depending on social circumstances, but rather a convoluted, grinding process "which yields [the Negro] no true self-consciousness, but only lets him see himself through the revelation of the other world."[10] The resolution of that inner tension lay in the attaining of "self-

[10] Ibid., 45. Robert E. Park described the syndrome as that of the "marginal man," ordinarily of "mixed blood," who was "condemned to live in two societies and in two, not merely different but antagonistic, cultures." The concept itself becomes marginally useful to the extent that the "two antagonistic cultures" undergo *mutual* transformation over time—a process unrecognized by Park's model of assimilation, where culture flows from dominant to subordinate group only; or where, as Frazier noted, ostensibly "marginal" individuals are identified with, or *choose* to identify with, the subordinate group. Robert Ezra Park, *Race and Culture* (The Free Press, 1950), 356, 373; E. Franklin Frazier, *Race and Culture Contacts in the Modern World* (Beacon Press, 1965 [1957]), 311-15. For a stimulating discussion of the notion of "identity crisis" see Roy F. Baumeister, *Identity: Cultural Change and the Struggle for Self* (Oxford University Press, 1986), 198-232. The dilemma which Du Bois described was the product of an identity conflict where one assumed identification with values which negated one's humanity. On the other hand Du Bois himself never got around to fully elaborating upon this important, preliminary inquiry, and those who came after him have been content to employ his concept of duality, for the most part, under purely *descriptive* circumstances. But perhaps of even more relevant note is the fact that Du Bois' duality is confined to expressions of *cultural pluralism*: those of a political or economic persuasion are not considered at all. In this form the "dilemma" remains a

conscious manhood" through the merging of the double self "into a better and truer self." In that synthesis, which would result, apparently, from the ultimate acknowledgement and respect by the world—Afro-Americans included—of the unique and powerful artistic message which the latter had to proffer, neither American nor Negro elements would be lost.

In retrospect—and refusing comment on a naiveté that only hindsight could render so clear—one can see that on at least one count Du Bois' poignant analysis extended too far, but in other ways not far enough. For he ascribed this internal psychic warfare to *all* segments of the Afro-American population, when it more properly depicted the situation of the *most acculturated* within the Afro-American community: the then miniscule, educated *petit-bourgeois* strata (to which Du Bois himself belonged) which, up to that time, had unquestioningly upheld the hegemonic ideals of the dominant society as its own. To misquote Fanon, the quest for disalienation by an Afro-American professor at Atlanta University is of a different order than that which a black sharecropper experiences along the Mississippi Delta:

> In the first case, the alienation is of an almost intellectual character. Insofar as he conceives of a European culture as a means of stripping himself of his race, he becomes alienated. In the second case, it is a question of a victim of a system based on the exploitation of a given race by another, on the contempt in which a given branch of humanity is held by a form of civilization that pretends to superiority.[11]

Looking backward we can more easily see that the deracination which Du Bois so movingly describes also belongs to a particular historical epoch when Afro-American folk roots were considerably stronger, where black intellectuals

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cultural question to which cultural/educational solutions are to be delivered. Although in *The Souls of Black Folk* he considered the largest black churches to have been "governments of men," and in his subsequent work, *Economic Co-operation Among Negro Americans* (Atlanta University Press, 1907), perceptively examined the inner economic life of the race, Du Bois neglected to include parallel black political or economic structures—that is to say, social relations—within his concept of duality. Of course, Du Bois had been a consistent advocate of producer and consumer co-ops. By the 1930's he was prepared to consider the desirability of voluntary economic communities within the context of acknowledging segregation as a reality which would not disappear anytime soon. For the latter, see *Crisis,* XLI (February, 1934), 52–53; Ibid. (June, 1934), 182; *Dusk of Dawn* (Harcourt, Brace and World, 1940), 197–220; and the recently available "The Negro and Social Reconstruction," in *Against Racism: Unpublished Essays, Papers, Addresses, 1887- 1961* (University of Massachusetts Press, 1985), especially pp. 143–57.

[11] Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks* (Grove Press, 1967 [1952]), 223–24.

(then extremely few in number) had become highly acculturated *vis-à-vis* the dominant culture, and where the dominant culture itself—to which these intellectuals looked for inspiration—had not yet absorbed Afro-American cultural elements in the way that it would following World War I.[12]

So much for the anguish of double-consciousness, *perhaps,* but what of duality itself? If dualism is a fundamental characteristic of Afro-American identity, what is its source? In fact, the duality of black identity occurs within the context of a duality characteristic of American identity in general. Our methodological point of departure here is the psychologist Erik Erikson's insightful (and dialectical) observation concerning American national identity made over thirty years ago:

> It is commonplace to state that whatever one may come to consider a truly American trait can be shown to have its equally characteristic opposite. This, one suspects is true of all "national characters," or (as I would prefer to call them) national identities—so true, in fact that one may begin rather than end with the proposition that a nation's identity is derived from the ways in which history has, as it were, counterpointed certain opposite potentialities; the ways in which it lifts this counterpoint to a unique style of civilization, or lets it disintegrate into mere contradiction.[13]

The significance of Erikson's approach should not be understated: avoiding the traditional attempt to define national identity by way of a long cataloguing of

[12]For blacks living on American soil, to find a "motive for living under American culture" was to confront the necessity of struggling either to extend the frontiers of American identity (and restrictively defined *human* identity) that the latter might unequivocally embrace all of Africa's descendants in America, or to deepen and expand the meaning of Afro-American group identity in its own right—or more commonly, *both.* In the resulting, dynamic, and always incomplete synthesis of those two inner poles, American popular culture became substantially and inadvertently more "Africanized," and, following a similar but often more calculated and deliberate pattern due to the unyielding thrusts of assimilationists, Afro-American culture more "Americanized." For Afro-American intellectuals of later periods the gulf between the two cultures would become progressively less profound, and the corresponding alienation, less. For the role of minstrelsy in antebellum American culture see Constance Rourke, *The Roots of American Culture and Other Essays* (Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1942); Robert C. Toll, *Blacking Up: The Minstrel Show in Nineteenth Century America* (Oxford University Press, 1974); Hans Nathan, *Dan Emmett and the Rise of Early Negro Minstrelsy* (University of Oklahoma Press, 1962); and George F. Rehin, "The Darker Image: American Negro Minstrelsy through the Historian's Lens," *American Studies,* 9:3 (December, 1975), 365–73. Du Bois' comprehension of the duality of black Americans did not always allow him to politically rise above the phenomenon. See, for example, Ernest Allen, Jr., "'Close Ranks': Major Joel E. Springarn and the Two Souls of Dr. W. E. B. Du Bois," *Contributions in Black Studies,* 3 (1979–1980), 25-38.

[13]Erikson, *Childhood and Society* (Norton, 1950, 1963), 285.

single-factor descriptors—for each of which one can readily locate an opposite trait—he instead discovers the locus of this identity within the *unity* of those particular sets of opposites. It was left to historian Michael Kammen, in his brilliantly provocative *People of Paradox,* to explore the nature of those counterpoints which have defined American national character over time.[14] Partaken democratically, however, sauce for nationalities seems to serve well as sauce for national minorities, for it strongly appears that the general appraisal of Afro-American duality by Du Bois and other scholars is fully compatible with the broader framework provided by Erikson.

Before proceeding further, however, a qualification of terms seems in order. Erikson equates "national identity" with "national character"—that is, with an ensemble of observable traits which are counterposed one to the other. The difficulty is that this particular definition obscures the role of consciousness in the determination of identity—one of the more central concerns of our study. And consciousness often involves the *favored* acknowledgement of a specified number of traits at the expense of their dialectical counterparts or opposing potentialities, a process as fragmentary and selective as it is hierarchical. Contrary to Erikson's usage, then, the term "national identity" will be reserved here in reference to a specific, acknowleged trait: *national consciousness.* Whether countervailing loyalties of American citizenship or black political self-determination, the meaning will be apparent from textual context. National identity must also be distinguished analytically from other broad spheres of self-acknowledgement such as *gender* (being black and also a woman or man), *religion* (being simultaneously black and Christian, for example), or

[14] *People of Paradox: An Inquiry Concerning the Origins of American Civilization* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980 [1972]). See pp. 97–116 especially for Kammen's discussion of Erikson and the question of biformity. A self-confessed eclectic, Kammen was perhaps least systematic when he attempted to confront the dual identity of Afro-Americans, however. Most important to the present discussion, the author neglected to place Afro-American duality in any social or historical context. And there are serious problems, too, when, for example, he interprets Afro-American "double-consciousness" (à la Kenneth Stampp's *The Peculiar Institution*) as the plight of "a man suspended between two cultures, unable to participate fully in either." Ibid, 192. (This is one of the legacies of Robert E. Park's concept of "marginality," discussed earlier.) For his part, Erikson's observations regarding "the Negro" appear, and are, terribly outdated: for example, we learn that the Negro's "only historically successful identity" was "that of the slave," which Erikson, forgetting duality for the moment, describes as "mild, submissive, dependent, somewhat querelous, but always ready to serve, with occasional empathy and childlike wisdom. " Erikson, *Childhood and Society,* 242. See Genovese, *Roll, Jordan, Roll,* 280, for refutation of the argument concerning "cultural suspension" among slaves.

social class (e.g., being a worker and a black worker at the same time).[15] Although indissolubly connected, each terrain encompasses arguments specific to itself, specific institutional arrangements, and specific social dynamics which must be taken into account. Because national and religious loyalties constitute the two most singularly powerful and broadest-based historical forces for the period under examination, we shall accord them our greatest attention. National identity, to be sure, tended to be of overriding concern to a highly vocal group of northern free blacks, whereas Christian identity permeated the lives of slaves and not a few freemen as well.

SOURCES OF AFRO-AMERICAN NATIONAL AND RELIGIOUS DUALITY

That having been said, one notes that the peculiar dualism of Afro-American identity *vis-à-vis* American nationality is itself historically linked to and "bounded by" the hegemonic duality of American thought and practice regarding the civil status of blacks.[16] This ambivalence on the part of whites regarding Afro-American citizenship was rooted in mutually exclusive *sets* of thoughts and practices which crystallized at the genesis of the American republic: the conceptualization and practice of egalitarian ideals which, purportedly without exception, applied to *all* persons born within its borders—a birthright; and the conceptualization and practice of a *Herrenvolk* nationalism in which citizenship and political equality applied to whites only.[17] Had free northern blacks

[15] Because "race" constitutes the principal *point of reference* within each of these dualities, it cannot be considered a separate element of identity within the conceptual framework offered here.

[16] An exhaustive treatment of the subject is found in Benjamin B. Ringer, *"We the People" and Others* (Tavistock, 1983); more shall be said about this important work at a later date.

[17] Historically, it was *never* a question here of any so-called "dilemma" existing between a lofty ideal and an imperfect practice: *both* constituted self-contradictory ideals of the dominant society; *both* found their way into institutionalized social practice and custom. Nor is it a question of sectionalism, where in the North there existed compromised ideals of individual liberty, and in the South where the individual liberties of one class of persons was *dependent upon* the witholding of those assumed rights from another. In general, the self-identity of the majority, who defined themselves as "white" in order to distinguish themselves from the "red" Indians and "black" Africans whom they encountered on New World soil, demonstrated little tolerance for basing their newly coalescing national identity upon much more than Anglo-Saxon tradition and

been entirely excluded from civic participation, the social underpinnings for duality in this sphere would have collapsed. With no other place to go, any emergence of political identity, conditions permitting, would have to have developed from within the Afro-American community alone, with much greater potential for the emergence of an unambivalent, autonomous national consciousness. As it happened, American national identity emerged among (literally) free*men* through socialization and through participation, if only partial, in the dominant civic institutions; a corresponding "Afro-centric" identity, on the other hand, emerged as a result of partial or sometimes full exclusion from such institutions, contributing to as well as resulting from efforts by Afro-Americans to construct parallel social edifices over which they had full control.

The development of religious duality among slaves and freemen alike followed a pattern similar to that of political duality among freemen, with some significant differences. Strongly, ambivalent, too, were the practical applications of Christianity on American territory. On the one hand a doctrine and a practice of equality of all persons before God; on the other a secular doctrine and practice which totally negated the former. But whereas it had been necessary to go outside secular, egalitarian ideals in order to justify their non-applicablity to Afro-Americans, Christian doctrine itself possessed a built-in "escape clause" in the form of Ham's curse, which could be liberally interpreted as a justification for slavery.[18] Second, citizenship required the formal, juridical recognition by other citizens of one's status as such; but since Protestantism was a personal matter between the believer and his or her God, one could still be a Christian in the face of denial by others. As one slave put it, "Dey law us out of

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physical / metaphysical "whiteness." And all the while there was proclaimed, in absolute terms, the (abstract) inclusionary character of the society ruled in their name. See van den Berghe, *Race and Racism,* 29, 77–94; Kenneth P. Vickery, "'Herrenvolk' Democracy and Egalitarianism in South Africa and the U.S. South," *Comparative Studies in Society and History,* 16:3 (June, 1974), 309–28; George M. Fredrickson, *Black Image in the White Mind: The Debate on Afro-American Character and Destiny, 1817-1914* (Harper and Row, 1971), 322–25; James H. Kettner, *The Development of American Citizenship, 1608–1870* (University of North Carolina Press, 1978), 300–333. A residual distinction still lingers within contemporary cultural categories: by the late 1960's American-born people of color were finally accepted by the dominant society as "Americans; in some quarters, however, whites were ideologically transformed into (non-athletic) "All-Americans" in a futile effort to retain the hierarchy.

[18] See Thomas Virgil Peterson, *Ham and Japhet: The Mythic World of Whites in the Antebellum South* (Scarecrow Press, 1978).

church, but dey couldn't law 'way Christ."[19] Third, unlike the question of citizenship, Afro-American slaves brought to Christianity a wealth of beliefs and behaviors bequeathed them by their African past, significantly transforming practice of the doctrine not only for themselves but also for whites with whom they came into contact. And finally, the development of autonomous religious institutions among slaves and freemen alike was always a formidable and sometimes dangerous task, but it paled in comparison to the skills, material resources, and leap in consciousness requisite to the establishment of a separate Afro-American nationality—a goal which assumed considerable urgency among many free blacks by the 1850's. Exclusion from, or the existence of restrictions within, northern white churches drove freemen—whose religious practices did not differ significantly from those of their white peers—to found their own autonomous places of worship in the late 18th century. Often forced to worship clandestinely, slaves, on the other hand, preferred their own services, where surviving Africanisms played an important cultural role. In either case the moral hypocrisy of slave-holding whites and their apologists was duly noted, and served to divide white and black practitioners of Christianity everywhere.

However central to this discussion, national and religious duality were hardly the only expressions of Afro-American duality in the 19th century. To the extent that its individual elements remained the expression of dual potentialities, moreover, Afro-American identity was essentially no different from that of any other national identity of the period. The result of complex adaptations to a new and hostile world, black American dualism has retained its own peculiar traits, to be sure—traits which were by no means irreconcilable in all of their manifestations. Overall, our task will be to more fully understand the internal nature of those contradictory, interlaced, and inseparable ideals at the core of Afro-American identity by exploring the quality of their interpenetration as well as the historical limits to fulfillment at either pole: unqualified assimilation at one end, the full flowering of black political nationalism at the other.

[19] Genovese, *Roll, Jordan, Roll,* 213.

II. LIFT EVERY VOICE: THE ADAPTIVE ROOTS OF AFRO-AMERICAN *GROUP* IDENTITY

O wrestlin' Jacob, day's a-breakin';
I will not let thee go!
O wrestlin' Jacob, day's a-breakin';
He will not let me go!
O, I hold my brudder wid a tremblin' hand;
I would not let him go!
I hold my sister wid a tremblin' hand;
I would not let her go!

—*Traditional*

Simultaneously defined within and without the pale of Christendom; denied the full rights of citizenship as freemen; refused, at times, the formal right to citizenship itself; physically persecuted and psychologically traumatized; exploited to the very edge of rational capital accumulation— little wonder that descendants of Africa developed their own unique sense of group self-consciousness on American soil. Nor is it surprising, in retrospect, that some of the key elements of this "Afro-centricity" should be extracted from hegemonic Euro-American intellectual sources: for example, pre-World War II notions of "Africa" and of "African" themselves, which came not from Africa but from Europe;[20] and that of adopted principles of a 19th-century western nationalism, through which would eventually be forced a *political* crystallization of black group identity. On the non-secular side, of course, the adaptation of Christianity by slaves and free blacks alike also resulted in group solidarity within the context of a broader religious identity. The overall, inward identity of Afro-Americans (as that of the collective self-consciousness of any people) has been the result of a dynamic *process* of adaptation involving the complex intersection of numerous factors, subjective as well as objective, over a span of several centuries. At the "subjective" level, one can discern at least three overlapping mirrors of Afro-American group self-recognition: as biological and cultural descendants of Africa, bearing physical and cultural characteristics distinct from those of members of the dominant society; as human beings conscious of having shared a common (lived) culture, out of which also arose the collective recognition of group or individual achievements (which, in this case, amounts to the same thing); and as victims of a common oppression, the terms of which

[20]See Christopher L. Miller, *Blank Darkness: Africanist Discourse in French* (University of Chicago, 1985); Marion Berghahn, *Images of Africa in Black American Literature* (Rowman and Littlefield, 1977).

have often been expressed through theological categories and images.[21]

Oppression itself rested first upon corporeal distinctions. *Physically* distinguishable from the majority of Americans in terms of skin color, hair texture, and the like (biological permutations notwithstanding), those characteristics were hammered by white society into a mark of oppression;[22] in black hands they could and would be transformed into weapons of solidarity and struggle against that oppression—but in a way that could only confuse physical blackness with its metaphysical counterpart.[23] From the beginning there was the danger that physical characteristics, the most obvious and distinguishing feature of black identity, would acquire an "epidermalized," mythic dimension.[24] Racists proclaimed the existence of a "Negro nature," fraught with negative biological traits ranging from the physical and temperamental to the moral and intellectual. Although the principal efforts of literate blacks lay in countering such stereotypes, some *also* yielded to the hegemonic notion of innate racial differences, inverting assigned values and transforming alleged liabilities into virtues. As James McCune Smith advised, "We must learn to love, respect and glory in our Negro nature."[25] Samuel Ringgold Ward and John S. Rock would issue even more strongly worded sentiments in the 1850's.[26] It would require a

[21] From the perspective of "lived" culture, the great mass of Afro-Americans have drawn upon a reservoir of residual values and practices bequeathed by their West African ancestors, a heritage dynamically and qualitatively modified through a process of acculturation lasting hundreds of years, and involving adaptation to a new physical environment as well as to the values and practices of the dominant society. Ultimately, however, despite important parallels with African as well as other diasporic cultural elements, and despite political imperatives which require a continuing solidarity of Africa's descendents in the face of global racial and economic domination by the West, contemporary Afro-American culture is *American* culture.

[22] Here race is treated as a social category rooted in physical characteristics; see Pierre van den Berghe, *Race and Racism: A Comparative Perspective* (John Wiley, 1967), 9.

[23] See Henry-Louis Gates, Jr., "Preface to Blackness: Text and Pretext," in Dexter Fisher and Robert Stepto (eds.), *Afro-American Literature: The Reconstruction of Instruction* (Modern Language Asociation of America, 1978), 44–68.

[24] See Thomas F. Slaughter, Jr., "Epidermalizing the World: A Basic Mode of Being Black," in Leonard Harris (ed.), *Philosophy Born of Struggle: Anthology of Afro-American Philosophy from 1917* (Kendall/Hunt Publishing, 1983), 283–87.

[25] Benjamin Quarles, *Black Abolitionists* (Oxford University Press, 1969), 86.

[26] Jane H. Pease and William H. Pease, *They Who Would Be Free: Blacks' Search for Freedom, 1830–1861* (Atheneum, 1974), 102–103. To understandable—perhaps historically unavoidable—feelings such as these, Douglass refused to allow himself to be ultimately defined by the dominant criteria: "Our race and color are not of our own choosing," he noted in 1889. "The only excuse for pride in individuals or races is in the fact of their achievements. Our color is the gift of the Almighty. We should neither be proud of it or ashamed of it." "The Nation's Problem," April 16, 1889; cited in Brotz, *Negro Social and Political Thought,* 11.

full century for the Afro-American side of the myth to reach its apogee.[27]

The growing and eventually widespread acceptance of Christianity by slaves in the early 19th century assuredly bore witness to a profound process of cultural adaptation, to a resulting "Americanization"—if by that term we are always careful to mean a process of cultural "cross-fertilization" in which dominant as well as subaltern cultures underwent transformation. But within that process bondsmen were also "re-creating themselves, in good part, out of the images and myths of the Old Testament Jews,"[28] fashioning for themselves a distinct and coherent identity *apart from* that of the dominant Christian community. As Baldwin explains:

> The more devout Negro considers that he *is* a Jew, in bondage to a hard taskmaster and waiting for a Moses to lead him out of Egypt. The hymns, the texts, and the most favored legends of the devout Negro are all Old Testament and therefore Jewish in origin: the flight from Egypt, the Hebrew children in the fiery furnace, the terrible jubilee songs of deliverance: *Lord, wasn't that hard trials, great tribulations, I'm bound to leave this land!* . . . The images of the suffering Christ and the suffering Jew are wedded with the image of the suffering slave, and they are one: the people that walked in darkness have seen a great light.[29]

The North became the "Promised Land," "Beulah Land," "Canaan," and the "Ark of Safety"; later northward migrations, from their suggestive resemblances to the flight of the Israelites from Egypt, would take the name of "exodus" and the migrants themselves, "exodusters"; and passage over the Ohio river from Kentucky to Ohio itself would become akin to biblically traversing the river Jordan.[30] From the masters' perspective the extension of "full" Christianity to slaves was no more desirable than the application of full citizenship to freemen. In consequence the spread of evangelicalism among slaves and slave-owners alike divided even while it united: what slaves derived from their own catechisms quickly took on *oppositional* cultural characteristics within a cir-

[27] See the short but relevant critique by Sidney W. Mintz, *Caribbean Transformations* (The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1974), 6-8.

[28] Ralph Ellison, "The World and the Jug," in *Shadow and Act* (Random House, 1964 [Vintage edition]), 117.

[29] James Baldwin, "The Harlem Ghetto," in *The Price of the Ticket* (St. Martin's / Marek, 1985), 7–8. Later periods would actually witness the rise of black Jewish organizations in the United States; see Brotz, *The Black Jews of Harlem*.

[30] Emmett Scott, *Negro Migration During the War* (New York: 1919), 45–46. Also see Nell Irvin Painter, *Exodusters: Black Migration to Kansas after Reconstruction* (Knopf, 1976).

cumscibed political context. As Genovese incisively noted, slave

> religion simultaneously helped build an "American" Christianity both directly and as a counterpoint and laid the foundation for a "black" Christianity of their own. That is, it made possible a universal statement because it made possible a national statement. But, for blacks, the national statement expressed a duality as something both black and American, not in the mechanical sense of being an ethnic component in a pluralistic society, but in the dialectical sense of simultaneously being itself and the other, both separately and together, and of developing as a religion in a nation within a nation.[31]

Eventually considering themselves to be *the* "true Christians," bondsmen condescendingly regarded slaveholding whites and their apologists as "Bible Christians"—that is, nominal converts untrue to the full spirit of Christianity itself.[32] Other manifestations of common identity in the slave quarters were expressed in a general group solidarity and spirit, in that special bond which tended to exist among female slaves in particular, and, directed towards whites, a sense of moral superiority as well as antipathy which transcended religious categories.[33] Unlike Du Bois' "Negro Americans," whose acculturation found them much embarassed in the face of the folk culture which they had discarded, slaves, rooted in that same culture, often professed superiority in their own collective lifestyle, as the following song implicitly attests:

> White folks go to chu'ch,
> An' he never crack a smile;

[31] Genovese, *Roll, Jordan, Roll,* 280–81.

[32] For one of the most perceptive discussions of slave religion, see Ibid., 161–284. Also Albert J. Raboteau, *Slave Religion: The "Invisible Institution" in the Antebellum South* (Oxford University Press, 1978) and V. P. Franklin, *Black Self-Determination: A Cultural History of the Faith of the Fathers* (Lawrence Hill, 1984), 29–67. In his otherwise remarkable work, *Beyond Ethnicity: Consent and Descent in American Culture* (Oxford, 1986), 47, 50, Werner Sollors advances a most curious argument *à propos* the typology of American religious expressions. Phyllis Wheatley (and Jupiter Hammond?) aside, he admits that the "promised land" of Afro-Americans was often re-secularized as "North," as Canada, or as Africa—not to mention the Caribbean or Central America. On the other hand he collapses the specific references of typological patterns assumed by "white and black, business and labor, Jew and Gentile. . . ." into a singularly unified theme: "Because it was the promised land, America was promise." In this way the conceptual diminishing of the pre-eminent role of "race" *vis-à-vis* the historical condition and conditioning of Afro-Americans is accomplished without so much as a blush.

[33] Thomas L. Webber, *Deep Like the Rivers: Education in the Slave Quarter Community, 1831–1865* (Norton, 1978), 63–101; Deborah Gray White, *Ar'n't I a Woman?: Female Slaves in the Plantation South (Norton, 1985),* 119–41.

An' nigger go to chu'ch, An'
you hear 'im laugh a mile.[34]

Racist propaganda to the contrary, such feelings of superiority could only be reinforced when, for example, white mistresses openly sought the advice of slave conjurers on matters of intimate concern, when black preachers ministered to devout white followers, or when, on occasion, slave fiddlers were given preference over white musicians when entertainment was desired at sumptuous balls hosted by wealthier masters.[35]

There was identification, too, with what were felt to be the symbolic achievements of the group: the anonymous products of the collective culture as well as with individuals who transformed ordinary, everyday practices into the extraordinary. As we now well know, slaves valued artistic prowess, physical endurance, knowledge of herbs, medicines, and conjurative practices, storytelling abilities and mastery over the Word in general, as well as the ability to outwit "paddyrollers," overseers, and slavemasters alike. Similar to the case of religion, quite often the process of adaptation led to dual expressions of consciousness in other spheres. As bibliophile Arthur Schomburg perceptively observed, for example, even Afro-American cuisine "developed along two lines—cabin cooking and cooking for the big house." Schomburg noted as to how "the Negro's preference for his own flavory dishes contrasted with the more elaborate ones which he prepares for his masters' kitchens."[36]

INSTITUTIONAL ROOTS

At the "objective" level of "Afro-centric" identity, on the other hand, lie institutional and economic ties which furnish its material underpinnings: the creation of "fictive kin" within the Afro-American extended family, for example, binding people together in a familial network extending beyond consanguinal ties;[37] mutual aid and other varieties of secular, cooperative endeavors; and, above all, a linking together of Afro-American communities at a multiplic-

[34] Webber, *Deep Like the Rivers,* 94.

[35] See Genovese, *Roll, Jordan, Roll,* 217–18, 257.

[36] Cited in John Brown Childs, "Afro-American Intellectuals and the People's Culture," *Theory and Society,* 13:1 (January 1984), 77.

[37] Herbert Gutman, *The Black Family in Slavery and Freedom, 1750–1925* (Pantheon, 1976), 196-216.

ity of levels within the social institution known as the black church.[38]

In the same way that churches in general tended "to be perhaps the most powerfully cohesive factors in American civilization,"[39] by the early 19th century the black church would become the most important institutional embodiment of evolving Afro-American identity, in the "free" North and slave South equally. But (extending Du Bois' original argument somewhat) the spectacular rise and impact cultural impact of the church as cultural phenomenon has tended to obscure the critical *economic* role which it played in the sustaining of that inward identity.[40] More than just the historical product of inner-group cultural and political actions and reactions, the authentic *national characteristics* which developed were also the result of these latter manifestations having become invariably and institutionally intertwined with *economic* activities arising out of group needs. Writing in 1907, Du Bois argued that

> We must not expect, for instance, to find a separately developed economic life among the Negroes except as they became under compulsion a part of the economic life of the nation before emancipation; and except as they have become since the emancipation, a part of the great working force. So far as their own inner economic efforts are concerned we must expect in looking over their history to find great strivings in religious development, in political life and in efforts at education. And so completely do these cultural aspects of their group efforts overshadow the economic efforts that

[38] Cutting across class lines as well, the eventual emergence of social ties between erstwhile black entrepeneurs and the Afro-American masses occurred from the late 19th century onward. This was the result of the creation of a small black business strata, and then, by way of the market as well as external oppression, the economic "fusion" of that strata to the masses of black working people. Frazier, *The Negro in the United States,* 381, pointed out that through membership in fraternal organizations such as the Elks, "the educated and professional leaders establish contacts which are necessary and profitable in their professional relations with the masses. The professional men who hold offices in the Elks not only gain prestige among the masses but also secure comfortable incomes in some instances." The inescapable logic of such ties pointed to the maintaining and further development of black voluntary communities, an idea to which the assimilationist-oriented were consistently opposed. In the end, due to economic impotence, the "ghetto nationalist" entrepenurial strata was never able to overcome the ideological momentum established by its educated, professional, assimilationist-oriented counterparts within the black community.

[39] Russel Blaine Nye, *Society and Culture in America, 1830–1860* (Harper and Row, 1974), 5.

[40] The "black bourgeoisie," so-called, would be forever deprived of the means to leverage itself into a full-fledged national bourgeoisie, and it is in large part due to its inhibited fluorescence—highlighting the failure of a *significant* inner-group economic life among Afro-Americans to form under capitalism—that the national character of Afro-Americans was destined to remain in a budding state.

> at first a student is tempted to think that there has been no inner economic co-operation, or at least that it has only come to the fore in the last two or three decades. But this is not so.[41]

Du Bois remarked upon the underlying and often subtle economic aspects of Afro-American religious organization both during and after slavery; the "political striving" in the aftermath of the Civil War which, for the "great mass of the race," was primarily a matter of economic welfare; and the struggle for education, which had as its predominant if not principal aim, the economic elevation of blacks as a whole." When, therefore," he continued,

> we take up under the head of economic co-operation such institutions as the church, such movements as the Exodus of 1879 and the matter of schools, etc., it is from the economic side that we are studying these things, and because this economic side was really of great importance and significance.[42]

He then examined in considerable detail, from the earliest efforts onward, varying manifestations of cooperation evidenced in the formation of churches, schools, beneficial, insurance, and secret societies, nursing homes and orphanages, banks, and cooperative as well as private businesses. (By no means were such activities restricted to free people of color: in early 19th century Virginia, for example, in virtually "every city of any size," slaves participated in beneficial and burial societies without benefit of legal sanction.)[43]

In 1903 Du Bois referred to the largest, turn-of-the-century black houses of worship as "governments of men,"[44] but it should not be forgotten that from the mid-18th century up until 1830 or so, New England slaves were allowed to elect their own "governors": "The Negro 'government' had its 'judges,' 'sheriffs,' and 'magistrates,' and its 'courts' probably tried trivial cases against Negroes, as well as petty cases brought by masters against their slaves."[45] But the vast majority of

[41] W. E. B. Du Bois, *Economic Co-operation Among Negro Americans,* 10–11.

[42] Ibid., 11.

[43] Ibid., 20–21.

[44] Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk,* 215.

[45] Lorenzo Greene, *The Negro in Colonial New England* (New York, 1942), 254. Greene dismissed such manifestations as "direct imitation of the master class," as "a subtle form of slave control," as "psychological outlet," and "as a sort of political school." Save for the first accusation, there is probably some truth to all assertions; nonetheless, the phenomenon can also be validly seen as a proscribed manifestation of the duality of Afro-American life. Ibid., 255. The most thorough discussion of New England black government is to be found in William D. Piersen, "Afro-American Culture in Eighteenth Century New England: A Comparative Discussion" [unpublished doctoral thesis, Indiana University, 1975], 211–88; especially worthwhile is his comparison of the institution

similar, pre-Civil War institutions could hardly be considered the embodiment of explicit political ideals, given their primary function as cultural or economic forms of organization. In themselves, however, the existence of church, mutual aid, self-help, and other such institutional activities at the very least constituted a profound structuring of *alternative* cultural beliefs and practices, a culture comprising a vast reservoir of political potential—and one requiring only the proper political context in order to assume *oppositional* credentials.[46]

OPPOSING POTENTIALITIES WITHIN THE FOLK CULTURE

The forms in which self-recognition of distinctive Afro-American characteristics have been most manifest are to be found in the "collective memory," by which knowledge of the pain and suffering of a people has been preserved and transmitted to subsequent generations; in folklore—especially in the celebrated role of the "trickster"; in the spirituals, gospel, blues, ballads, and jazz, with its creative tension between improvisation and structure; in the ever vital rhythms of dance; in speech patterns and mannerisms; in identification with special foods as well as distinct culinary practices; in a dramaturgy woven around Sunday morning sermons not infrequently spiked with apocalyptic imagery; and in highly rhythmic rhymes and games.[47] Qualities which have persisted over time—and which extend through and beyond the above mentioned forms—are to be found in the unique way in which opposing potentialities are momentarily "resolved" out of the intersection of African cultural traditions on one side, and adaptation to American life on the other. For example, there has always been the swift and unremitting suppression of individualism, a defensive historical practice stemming from situations where single-minded action threatened the welfare of the entire community; all of which stands in relief to group celebration of a highly creative and highly individualized sense of "style" in dress and

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to similar ones in Brazil and the Caribbean, suggesting adaptation rather than "direct imitation" as its principal reason for being. (I am indebted to Sidney Kaplan for this reference.) Also see Joseph P. Reidy, "'Negro Election Day' & Black Community Life in New England, 1750–1860," *Marxist Perspectives,* 3 (Fall, 1978), 102–17; Ira Berlin, "Time, Space, and the Evolution of Afro-American Society on British Mainland North America," *American Historical Review,* 85 (February, 1980), 53–54.

[46] Raymond Williams, *Problems in Materialism and Culture* (London: Verso Editions and NLB), 40.

[47] Ralph Ellison, *Shadow and Act* (Random House, 1964; Vintage edition), 263; Stanley Edgar Hyman, *The Promised End* (World Publishing, 1963), 296–97.

mannerisms: the precipitous cocking of a hat, the cultivation of a particularly outrageous "walk" or style of speech, etc.[48] Hard work was transformed into play through the instrument of "joyous singing."[49] And through spiritual song was expressed "the slave's instinctive distillation of sorrow and spiritual triumph over it. . . ."[50] Often contrasted to frequent inner-group vindictiveness and spite, the tendency away from bitterness and vengefulness, towards the containment of pain, and towards forgiveness of the dominant group—the latter forms of which constitute a legacy of Christianity.[51] Or, again from biblical sources, "an optimistic faith in the face of morbitity, pessimism, or unmitigated despair," contrasted with the *appearance* of fatalistic resignation characterized in certain passages of the blues.[52] Complex, too, has been the relation between joy and sorrow, comedy and tragedy, as Margaret Just Butcher observed: "Frequently masking sorrow, and sometimes impotent resentment, the Negro's laughter was certainly more often contrived and artificial than natural and spontaneous, despite contrary Southern conviction."[53] As

[48]The observations of Sidney Mintz and Richard Price in regard to the cultural individualism of Afro-American slaves of the Caribbean apply, no doubt, to those of North America as well; see "An Anthrological Approach to the Afro-American Past: A Caribbean Perspective," *ISHI Occasional Papers in Social Change,* 2 (Philadelphia: Institute for the Study of Human Issues, 1976), 26. To be sure, the internal war on individuality has also been the result of petty jealousies and rivalries generated in the sticky cauldron of group oppression. But in the main, "pre-individualistic" attitudes and practices on the part of Afro-Americans represent the opposite face of a suppression of black individuality waged from the outside: "In the pre-individualistic thinking of the Negro," the late Edward Bland recalled, "the stress is on the group. Instead of seeing in terms of the individual, the Negro sees in terms of "races," masses of peoples separated from other masses according to color. Hence, an act rarely bears intent against him as a Negro individual. He is singled out not as a person but as a specimen of an ostracized group. He knows that he never exists in his own right but only to the extent that others hope to make the race suffer vicariously through him." Edward Bland, "Racial Bias and Negro Poetry," *Poetry,* 63 (March 1944), 332. After affirmatively responding ". . . to the Army's invitation accepting Negroes into integrated units," Corporal Bland died in combat in 1945; *Poetry,* 66 (June, 1945), 174. Also see Ellison, *Shadow and Act,* 83–84, 89–90. It would be interesting to compare the cultural / psychological properties of Afro-American individualism with those of American individualism in general.

[49]Frederick Douglass, *Life and Times of Frederick Douglass, Written by Himself* (Crowell-Collier, 1962 [1892]), 580.

[50]Margaret Just Butcher, *The Negro in American Culture* (Knopf, 1956), 58.

[51]Ellison, *Shadow and Act,* 111. For the 20th century, anyway, "Forgive them Father, for they know not what they do" has a contrapuntal analogue in blues singer Rosetta Crawford's equally unambiguous line, "Cut him if he stand still, shoot him if he run."

[52]Butcher, *The Negro in American Culture,* 58, 98, 111.

[53]Ibid., 24.

psychological defense the role of humor became another weapon in the arsenal of the legendary trickster. Navigating the "rough and rolling sea" of life's ambiguities as well as the task of mediating the eternal swings between ecstacy and sorrow were aided as well by a judicious employ of irony—not to mention the nurturing of a distinct "coolness" of manner for which Robert Farris Thompson appears to have discovered an African antecedent.[54] Recurring tension between sexual freedom and sexual restraint was, to be sure, managed in a fashion distinctly different from that of the puritannical West: the acceptance of pre-marital sex, for example, was conditioned by the desirability of faithfulness once marriage vows were exchanged.[55] And then there are manifestations which do not readily lend themselves to any meaningful dialectical categorization of opposing potentialities at all: for example, call and response forms (attuned to an altogether different dialectic) within both religious and secular rituals and music; or a veneration of those possessing power over the Word. And, finally, standing apart from western tradition, a sometimes arbitrary distinction between the religious and the secular (which beckons further analysis), as well as the tendency to bypass the (western) distinction between art and entertainment (and within that latter context the distinction between participant and observer as well).[56] All of these attributes rooted in an earlier, southern black folk culture—and the above constitutes only a truncated,

[54] Hyman, *The Promised End,* 312; Robert Farris Thompson, *Flash of the Spirit: African and Afro-American Art and Philosophy* (Random House, 1983), 12–16.

[55] Of course, the most cogent discussion of slave sexual behavior is to be found in Herbert Gutman, *The Black Family in Slavery and Freedom,* 60–86. As Gutman noted, in addition to universal incest taboos, Afro-Americans added the prohibition against marriage between first cousins; Ibid., 88–91. Despite the marring of John W. Blassingame's discussion of slave morality by his own vacillating impositions on that subject, his point regarding slave ambivalence towards sex following Christianization is well taken; *The Slave Community: Plantation Life in the Antebellum South* (Oxford, 1979), 162.

[56] The subject of slave religious "dance" is discussed in Genovese, *Roll, Jordan, Roll,* 234. (Crossing one's legs while dancing during Pentacostal religious services, viewed as a secular act, can get one ejected from the church even today.) The fiddle and banjo were "instruments of the devil," but "plantation preachers did not hesitate to double as fiddlers at parties in the quarters." Ibid., 218–19. Also see Paul Oliver, *Blues Fell This Morning: The Meaning of the Blues* (Horizon Press, 1960), 132–33. Music was a communal phenomenon on the plantation. Referring to a later period, Morroe Berger emphasizes, for example, that most of the early New Orleans jazzmen did not live apart from the community that produced them." Many players had other jobs that brought them into the life of the community. They lived with their neighbors, played and drank with them; they were not a class apart, seen only when performing." "The New Popularity of Jazz," in Bernard Rosenberg and David Manning White (eds.), *Mass Culture: The Popular Arts in America* (The Free Press, 1957), 406.

unclassified, descriptive list, to be sure—have undergone perpetual modification within U.S. society, and many an element among them has long been absorbed into American popular culture. But despite the fact that blacks otherwise share fully in the dominant, popular values of the society, continually replenished echoes of inner-group characteristics nonetheless persist in providing the great mass of Afro-Americans with a broad-based, cultural source of identity relatively distinct from that of "mainstream" white America.

III. CIVILIZATION AND CITIZENSHIP, COLOR, CLASS, AND GENDER: OTHER STIRRINGS OF SELF-RECOGNITION

. . . and ar'n't I a woman?
—Sojourner Truth

> *I met here [in Florence, Massachusetts, 1844] for the first time that strange compound of wit and wisdom, of wild enthusiasm and flint-like common sense, who seemed to feel it her duty to trip me up in my speeches and to ridicule my efforts to speak and act like a person of refinement. I allude to Sojourner Truth. She was a genuine specimen of the uncultured Negro, [sic]. She cared very little for elegance of speech or refinement of manners. She seemed to please herself and others best when she put her ideas in the oddest forms.*
>
> *—Frederick Douglass*[57]

Within black communities both North and South at least a few signs of polarization along cultural/class lines had been evident from the late 1820's.[58] Appointed to the pastorate of a Baltimore A.M.E. church in 1850, but finding himself rejected by the congregation, Bishop Daniel Alexander Payne described one of those instances:

> They said that the people had no fault to find with my character, but that I had too fine a carpet on the floor and was too proud; that if one of the members should ask me to take tea with them, I would not; and lastly, that I would not let them sing their "spiritual songs."

Bishop Payne admitted only that, as in the past, he had ". . . endeavored to modify some of the extravagances of worship. . . ." That of course meant

[57]"What I Found at the Northampton Association," in Charles A. Sheffeld, *History of Florence*; reprinted in *The Massachusetts Review,* XXVI: 2–3 (Summer-Autumn, 1985), 442.

[58]See Reidy, "'Negro Election Day' & Black Community Life in New England," 113; E. Franklin Frazier, *The Negro in the United States* (Macmillan, 1957), 275–76.

suppression of the religious practice of "rousement" as well as the exorcism of spirituals, otherwise known as "corn-field ditties," from any place in this proud reverend's church![59]

That the Latin root word *civis* evolved historically into the notions of both *citizen* and *civilization*[60] is of more than etymological interest here, given that the ideals of the Enlightenment would re-meld the two concepts in such a way as to have bearing on Reverend Payne's negative behavior toward his spiritual flock. The peculiar way in which the two elements were linked within the United States left an indelible imprint on the struggle for black freedom (defined in nationalist *or* assimilationist terms) which would last from the birth of the republic until fairly recent date. By the early 19th century social divisions within Afro-America had begun to crystallize both North and South. From the perspectives of the developing, northern Afro-American "upper class"—drawn from the upwardly mobile free blacks of the pre-Civil War era—to assume the rights of American citizenship was to simultaneously assume the "highest" values of Euro-American civilization. Or more precisely, as black physician James McCune Smith argued, the civilizing process was requisite to Afro-American inclusion within "civil society":

> . . . the Negro, for the first time in the world's history brought into contact with high civilization, must prove his title first to all that is demanded for him; in the teeth of unequal chances, he must prove himself equal to the mass of those who oppress him—therefore, absolutely superior to his apparent fate, and to their relative ability.[61]

What Brotz observed with regard to Frederick Douglass and Booker T. Washington was applicable, in general, to acculturated, articulate, free northern blacks of the antebellum period: they did not consider the hegemonic values of western civilization to be either the product or property of a small group of humanity; rather, these were *universal* standards to which all people should aspire, as well as be judged.[62] Literacy, temperance, assured living standards,

[59] Tensions over his handling of services and a transfer of church property moved an infuriated female member of the congregation to assault the good bishop with a club! Bishop Daniel Alexander Payne, *Recollections of Seventy Years* (Nashville: 1888), 93, 94; also see 81 and 253–57.

[60] Raymond Williams, *Keywords* (Oxford University Press, 1976), 48.

[61] Cited in Henry-Louis Gates, Jr., "Preface to Blackness: Text and Pretext," 52.

[62] Brotz, *Negro Social and Political Thought,* 20. The very acceptance of these ideals caused Douglass to note that "American civilization abounds in strange and puzzling contradictions." He cited the absence of respect for human life in many areas, including transportation safety, the lack of regulation of physicians, and mob outbreaks. Because it came as a whirlwind, instead of emerging from a slow, internal process, American

self-uplifting in all spheres—in a word, the quest was for *elevation, improvement*.[63] The precariousness of the freeman's condition was inextricably tied to the existence of slavery; the powerfully felt rationale for the latter, as well as for the inequality meted out to the freeman, was that neither slave nor freeman were capable of attaining civilization's high standards. Taking rationale for actual cause, the "elite" then surmised that the liberation of the slave depended upon the *elevation* of the freeman.[64] *Herrenvolk* racism had proclaimed Africa and her descendants to be beyond the pale of civilization (and therefore citizenship) because their attainments were allegedly proscribed by inferior genetic capacity.[65] On the trail to full citizenship, then, what more logical course than to extol hegemonic values, then detach oneself as thoroughly as possible from those characteristics of the race deemed inferior by the dominant culture? Farewell forever to gaudy dress, loud talking, patting Juba, corn-field ditties, conjuration, ash cake, cakewalking, folktales, spirit-possession, and anything else even faintly reminiscent of life on "de plantation." Thus were the distinct goals of cultural assimilation and the full attainment of civil rights implicitly joined. That much existed within black folk culture which could be equated

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civilization was "A sort of sham civilization, which resembled the savages of whom Humboldt tells, who painted themselves coats, pants and vests on their bare skins, that they might appear in European style." "American Civilization," in Philip Foner, *The Life and Writings of Frederick Douglass* (New York: International Publishers, 1950, 1952, 1955, 1975), 5:458. Elsewhere Douglass had remarked that "The Negro is the test of American civilization, American statesmanship, American refinement, and American Christianity." "Our Western Tour," in Ibid., 422. On the other hand, Douglass, an Anglophile of sorts, had a hard time reconciling the uncivilized practices of British civilization in the "Coolie" trade, in the oppression of the Irish and others, as well as in the imperial penetration of Africa; see Waldo E. Martin, Jr., *The Mind of Frederick Douglass* (University of North Carolina Press, 1984), 199.

[63] As Gates notes, "Learning to read, the slave narratives repeat again and again, was a decisive political act; learning to write, as measured by an eighteenth-century scale of culture and society, was an irreversible step away toward a freedom even larger than physical manumission." "Preface to Blackness: Text and Pretext," 45.

[64] Quarles, *Black Abolitionists*, 92; Martin Robinson Delany, *The Condition, Elevation, Emigration, and Destiny of the Colored People of the United States, Politically Considered* (Philadelphia: 1852), 205; Douglass, *The Life and Writings*, 2:246, 274. Through self-improvement, the freeman would deprive adversaries and skeptics alike of a key supporting argument for Afro-American oppression and exploitation. Whereas the assimilationist-oriented anticipated such "uplift" occurring in the United States, emigrationists felt that only in the unfettered climate of an all-black nation could Afro-Americans achieve elevation and self-respect. The psychological basis for either action, in any case, lay in the desire for recognition and respect by others.

[65] J. R. Pole, *The Pursuit of Equality in American History* (University of California Press, 1978), 158–59.

with ignorance and degradation was undeniable. But at least several generations would have to pass before the black middle class could make the effort to recognize the nutritive folk seed from its chaff, culturally speaking—and even then not primarily for its own sake.

THE AMALGAMATIONIST IMPULSE

For many northern freemen the assimilation of Afro-Americans into the larger society extended past the cultural domain to the point of complete physical amalgamation. In order to prevent further miscegenation and a resulting erosion of *America's* identity as they pictured it, numerous white Americans, Jefferson and Lincoln included, argued for expulsion of Africa's descendants from the shores of the republic.[66] In response, an influential section of northern, mulatto leadership reasoned that the very salvation of the race *depended upon* miscegenation in order to escape such physical expulsion or death.[67] Thoughout his life Frederick Douglass, for example, acted on the premise that Afro-Americans would ". . . be absorbed, assimilated, and . . . only appear finally . . . in the features of a blended race":

> Two hundred years ago there were two distinct and two separate streams of human life running through this country. They stood at opposite extremes of ethnological classification: all black on one side, all white on the other. Now, between those two extremes, an intermediate race has arisen, which is neither white nor black, neither Caucasian nor Ethiopian, and this intermediate race is constantly increasing. . . .
>
> . . . I would not be understood as advocating intermarriage between the two races. I am not a propagandist but a prophet. I do not say that what I say *should* come to pass , but what I think is likely to come to pass, and what is inevitable.[68]

Between prophecy and advocacy many a distinction has lost its way, and Douglass' remarks proved no exception. *Theoretically,* amalgamation was

[66] For contemporary arguments against miscegenation, see Frederickson, *The Black Image in the White Mind,* 321.

[67] In the words of Du Bois, "There was a time when the American Negroes thought of themselves simply in relation to the people of the United States and it was then that we argued that there could be but two methods of settling the Negro problem; either the Negro [would] be absorbed physically into the nation, or else he would die out by violence or neglect. Since the World War, this attitude has changed." "The Negro and Social Reconstruction," in *Against Racism: Unpublished Essays, Papers, Addresses, 1887–1961,* 155.

[68] "The Future of the Colored Race," in *The Life and Writings,* 4:195; see also pp. 411–13.

inevitable, but at some undetermined future time; *practically*, in the here and now, Douglass tended to oppose any and all measures which might hinder the inevitable, grudgingly accepting alternatives only where no other possibility existed.[69] In any case, here was, in essence, a proposal for/prediction of an identity, a *new* identity based upon a physical synthesis of radically differing "racial types," containing elements of both but remaining distinct from each; the implicit embrace of middle-class, Euro-American values; and the equally implicit rejection of Afro-American folk culture. To be sure, these were simultaneously lived *class* identities as well, which in a handful of southern cities reached their highest development prior to the Civil War.[70] In locales like antebellum Charleston, New Orleans, Washington, D.C., and Baltimore such identity, upheld by self-conscious mulatto elites, assumed an *exclusive* bearing, manifesting itself in class and color-caste terms within the Afro-American community.[71] As Johnson and Roark recently noted in the case of antebellum Charleston, ". . . free mulattoes were a 'people' who, despite their individual differences, shared a common identity, a common fate, and a common humanity."[72] These commonalities were viewed as being distinct from those of darker-

[69] However, it will also be recalled that Douglass' remonstrations against "complexional" institutions did not hinder him from establishing his own newspaper in the face of opposition by Garrison and others." Present circumstances are the only apology for such institutions," he responded when declining to lend his name to plans for an all-black college in late 1865, but he was ". . . not for building up permanent separate institutions for colored people of any kind." This was hardly a new position with Douglass: "Having held it when the prospect was dark, I shall not relinquish it now when the clouds are disappearing and the heavens are bright." Douglass to W. J. Wilson, August 8, 1865; in *The Life and Writings*, 4:172, 173. In 1847 Douglass also opposed the establishment of a black vocational college; see Robert Factor, *The Black Response to America* (Addison Wesley, 1970), 20; a thoroughly masterful and now out-of-print work, Factor's book has never received its just acclaim.

[70] Frazier, *The Negro in the United States*, 276.

[71] See Joel Williamson, *New People: Miscegenation and Mulattoes in the United States* (New York University Press, 1984), 41. Frazier, *The Negro in the United States*, 276n, mentions lesser developments in Richmond, Virginia and Louisville, Kentucky. For Louisiana the testimony of Roldolphe Lucien Desdunes, *Our People and Our History: A Tribute to the Creole People in Memory of the Great Men They Have Given Us and of the Good Works They Have Accomplished* (Louisiana State University Press, 1973 [1911]) , exhibits an overlap between the specific identity of *gens de couleur* and that of Afro-Americans in general; while the ethnic "exclusiveness" of the mulatto colony of Isle Brevelle is documented in the excellent work of both Sister Frances Jerome Woods, *Marginality and Identity: A Colored Creole Family Through Ten Generations* (Louisiana State University Press, 1972) and Gary B. Mills, *The Forgotten People: Cane River's Creoles of Color* (Louisiana State University Press, 1977).

[72] Michael P. Johnson and James L. Roark, *Black Masters: A Free Family of Color in the Old South* (Norton, 1984), 207.

hued blacks as well as whites. Douglass and other free northerners, to the contrary, saw mulattoism in *inclusive* terms, as a foreshadowing of a new and larger *American* identity which would result from further amalgamation.[73]

GROUP IDENTITY: CULTURAL SOLIDARITY IN THE FACE OF OPPRESSION

As it turned out, of course, ideological mulattoism of neither exclusive nor inclusive bent would retain lasting vitality in any significant social way in the United States.[74] Rejected by the dominant society, it was both natural and necessary that the Afro-American fashion values which gave validation and meaning to his own life. In seeking to "prove himself equal to the mass who oppress him," he inadvertently latched onto the readily available 19th-century European model of cultural nationalism.[75] Blacks had to prove their title, Dr. McCune Smith had argued, but he also noted that positive results were rapidly accumulating:

> . . . the indestructible equality of man to man is demonstrated by the ease with which black men, scarce one remove from barbarism— if slavery can be honored with such a distinction—vault into the high places of the most advanced and painfully acquired civilization.[76]

But in dwelling upon their own distinct achievements Afro-Americans paradoxically lay the groundwork for a cultural dualism. A half-century later Kelly Miller most clearly articulated the dual quality (and astonishingly unchanged value) of such endeavors:

> The significance of these superior manifestations, however, must not be measured by their intrinsic value. They serve both as an argument and an inspiration. They show the American people that the Negro, at his best, is imbued with their own ideas and strives after their highest ideals. To the Negro they serve as models of excellence to stimulate and encourage his hesitant and disheartened aspirations.[77]

[73] See Martin, *The Mind of Frederick Douglass*, 219–24.

[74] Save for Washington, D.C., Charleston, and especially New Orleans and its environs, where mayoral campaigns of our own day have a penchant for unearthing long-standing color-caste distinctions.

[75] See August Meier, "The Emergence of Negro Nationalism (A Study in Ideologies)," Part II, *The Midwest Journal*, IV:2 (Summer, 1952), 95–103.

[76] Cited in Henry-Louis Gates, Jr., "Preface to Blackness: Text and Pretext," 52.

[77] Kelly Miller, "Eminent Negroes," in *Radicals and Conservatives* (Schocken, 1968 [first published as *Race Adjustment*, 1908]), 203.

American "men of letters" in general measured the quality of their newly developing national character, their new civilization, by the standards of western Europe, as did southern regionalists. In the western world of the late 18th and early 19th centuries mastery of art, commerce, mechanics, and warfare were coveted traits linked to a strong, positive sense of national identity. From the late 1820's or so, these New World intellectuals became increasingly concerned with the process of assessing and defining American national character in a manner which did not stray from prevailing guidelines.[78] Not to be outdone, the free black "elite" measured their own achievements by the same tape. But in a way that crossed Dr. McCune Smith's later supposition that blacks had to "prove" their title, delegates to one of the early Negro conventions claimed

> . . . to be the offspring of a parentage, that once, for their attainment in the arts, literature and science, stood before the world unrivalled. We have mournfully observed the fall of those institutions that shed lustre on our mother country, and extended to Greece and Rome those refinements that made them objects of admiration to the cultivators of science.[79]

The duality within Afro-American ideologies concerning having already proved capacity for civilization, and on the other hand needing to prove that same capacity, would continue well into the 20th century.[80] On the nationalist side, emigrationists could assert their ". . . purpose of diffusing light & civilization & knowledge in Africa"[81] as easily as others who viewed nationhood in Africa as a way by which blacks could demonstrate to the world their capacity for civilization. But if articulate free blacks were placed on the defensive by the charge of having contributed little or nothing to civilization, the irony, to be sure, was that at the same time European *lumières* such as the Abbé Raynal

[78] See Nye, *Society and Culture in America.*

[79] *Minutes of the Fifth Annual Convention for the Improvement of the Free People of Color In the United States . . . 1835,* (Philadelphia: 1835), 21; facsimile reproduction in Howard Holman Bell, *Minutes of the Proceedings of the National Negro Conventions 1830–1864* (Arno Press and the New York Times, 1969). Also see William Lambert, "An Address to the Citizens of the State of Michigan," *Minutes of the State Convention, of the Colored Citizens of the State of Michigan . . .* [1843], in Philip S. Foner and George E. Walker, *Proceedings of the Black State Conventions, 1840–1865,* I (Temple University Press, 1979), 190–94.

[80] The contradiction itself, in a degenerated form pocked by casuistry, constituted an integral element of Garveyism after 1921; Ernest Allen, Jr., "Marcus Garvey and Booker T. Washington: Patterns of Militancy and Accommodation" (unpublished paper, 1978).

[81] Bracey, Meier, Rudwick (eds.), *Black Nationalism in America,* 22.

were applying the criteria of civilization to the United States as a whole and found the results wanting.[82] Gates is factually correct in his observation that in this period the "... documentary status of black art assumed priority over mere literary judgement. . . ." And there is perhaps reason to lament the inability of early black literary forms to be judged on their own artistic merits—whatever the criteria. But keeping perspective, we must not fail to recall that in rushing to embrace their own, unique, and newly forming national identity in the face of the massive cultural heritage of Europe, post-revolutionary American statesmen were also "possessed" by the felt need to document their own "contribution history."[83] In any case, the assertion by whites of black intellectual incapacity, however complex the argument, was little more than a justification for oppression. Challenging civilization's yardstick on its own turf could never, in itself, eliminate or even seriously modify that latter reality, whose *raison d'être* was economic exploitation. What is more, to embark on "proving" the collective capacity of a people by painstakingly documenting its achievements, one by one, throughout the ages, was certainly to entertain a journey without end.[84]

The significance of slave naming practices to slave identity is a subject given

[82] Constance Rourke, *The Roots of American Culture and Other Essays* (Harcourt, Brace, 1942), 43. In a similar vein, out of sentiments of inferiority *vis-à-vis* the North, southern regionalists were led to cultivate a shrill sense of cultural superiority; for the case of literature see McCardell, *The Idea of a Southern Nation,* 141–76.

[83] Gates, "Preface to Blackness: Text and Pretext," 46. To be sure, the documentary status of American art did not remain the sole criterion for its evaluation. For a discussion of the concept of "contribution history" in the context of the feminist movement, see Gerda Lerner, *The Majority Finds Its Past: Placing Women in History* (Oxford University Press, 1979), 4.

[84] Frederick Douglass, above all, was aware of such pitfalls. During the course of delivering an address which noted that "Egypt was one of the earliest abodes of learning and civilization . . . ," and that Egypt was indeed in Africa, he concluded by posing the question: "What if the Negro may not be able to prove his relationship to Nubians, Abyssinians, and Egyptians? What if ingenious men are able to find plausible objections to all arguments maintaining the oneness of the human race? What, after all, if they are able to show very good reasons for believing the Negro to have been created precisely as we find him on the Gold Coast—along the Senegal and the Niger—I say, what of all this?—'*A man's a man for a' that*'"; "The Claims of the Negro Ethnologically Considered," in *The Life and Writings,* 2:296, 307. Frantz Fanon would echo a similar argument in the 1950's: "The discovery of the existence of a Negro civilization in the fifteenth century confers no patent of humanity on me. Like it or not, the past can in no way guide me in the present moment." *Black Skin, White Masks,* 225. While Douglass and, much later, Fanon both firmly rejected the framework of "racial determinism" in the construction of individual identity, Aimé Césaire, in his still remarkable poem, *Cahier d'un retour au pays natal,* approached the question by celebrating the inversion of values assigned civilization; *Return to My Native Land,* English translation, (Penguin Books, 1969 [1956]).

considerable momentum by the work of the late Herbert Gutman. As Gutman clearly demonstrated with regard to slave surnames in particular, their use by 18th century Afro-American slaves indicated both the acceptance of an Anglo-African cultural practice and a rejection of symbolic identification with current owners.[85] There was significance, too, in the acquisition of new names by former slaves commensurate with their changed status. After leaving the "house of bondage" Isabella Baumfree asked the Lord for a name more in keeping with her role as a traveler and expositor of verities, thereafter calling herself Sojourner Truth. In South Carolina in 1820, ex-slave April Ellison successfully petitioned a district court to allow that his name be legally changed to William. And, after fleeing the Cotton Curtain, both Frederick Douglass and William Wells Brown permitted ". . . those who had befriended them to choose their surnames. . . ."[86] Institutional names, on the other hand, tended to reveal select parameters of *group* identity deemed appropriate by their respective architects. Many of those names were of a "distinctly racial" character, while many were not.[87] Those that were tended to reveal, as did the surnames of individual slaves, a sense of acculturation *and* social distancing from whites, as well as that of group solidarity. Names like Free African Society, Angola Beneficial, Daughters of Zion Angolian Ethiopian Society, or the African Lodge (of Masonic Orders), illuminated the African origins of their members, the cultural fusion of African ethnic groups on the North American continent, as well as a process of adaptation to the dominant culture. Then, too, there were also a handful of organizations such as Charleston's Brown Fellowship Society, based upon "exclusive mulattoism."[88] In the 1830's, especially, controversies often erupted concerning the manner in which autonomous black organizations should be designated. For example, on the motion of William Whipper, seconded by Robert Purvis, the 1835 Philadelphia convention, "after an animated and interesting discussion," unanimously opted for a lower collective profile:

> "Resolved, That we recommend as far as possible, to our people to

[85] *The Black Family in Slavery and Freedom*, 244. Also see Genovese, *Roll, Jordan, Roll*, 443–50.

[86] Dorothy Sterling (ed.), *We Are Your Sisters: Black Women in the Nineteenth Century* (Norton, 1984), 151; Johnson and Roark, *Black Masters*, 3–4; Gilbert Osofsky, *The Burden of Race: A Documentary History of Negro-White Relations in America* (Harper and Row, 1967), 32–34.

[87] A full list of black, urban beneficial societies for the first half of the 19th century does not exist. Leonard Curry, *The Free Black in Urban America, 1800–1850: The Shadow of the Dream* (University of Chicago Press, 1981), 201.

[88] Ibid., 196–215. For early New England see Piersen, "Afro-American Culture in Eighteenth Century New England," 151–53.

> abandon the use of the word 'colored,' when either speaking or writing concerning themselves; and especially to remove the title of African from their institutions, the marbles of churches &c."[89]

In such debates was sometimes questioned the wisdom of erecting all-black institutions themselves.

THE DEBATE OVER AUTONOMOUS INSTITUTIONS

The emergence of autonomous institutions among free northern blacks in the late 18th and early 19th centuries grew almost as much out of the necessity to provide avenues for the cultivation of talented, independent leadership as it did to address the material as well as ethereal wants and needs of Afro-American communities. Neither requirement was satisfied by the larger society. And therein lay the dilemma: logically, to elect for assimilation was to relinquish the possibility of group power in exchange for the possibility to achieve one's highest potential within the broader society; but what might be the practical results if long-term prospects for assimilation were to be severely circumscribed? On the other hand, the very existence of such institutions went beyond utilitarian value in the sense of providing further examples of black achievement. In this way autonomous institutions whetted the appetite of cultural nationalism and lent additional support to Afro-American group identity and pride. As even Bishop Payne would later note, the separation of the African Methodist Episcopal Church from the Methodist Church in 1816 had been "... beneficial to the man of color by giving him an independence of character which he could never hope for nor attain unto, if he had remained as the ecclesiastical vassal of his white brethren."[90] Moreover, that such voluntary organizations—churches, literary societies, mutual aid and burial associations, lodges, and the like—even existed, also contradicted the ideals of a "color-blind" society which most articulate northern blacks envisioned. How to reach a balance between the demonstrated need for institutions whose very presence undercut one's

[89] *Minutes of the Fifth Annual Convention for the Improvement of the Free People of Color In the United States, Held by Adjournment in the Wesley Church, Philadelphia, from the First to the Fifth of June, Inclusive, 1835* (Philadelphia: 1835), 14–15. Benjamin Quarles, *Black Abolitionists,* 8, attributes this action to hostility on the part of convention delegates to the American Colonization Society, but does not provide documentation supporting that specific interpretation.

[90] Daniel A. Payne, *History of the African Methodist Episcopal Church* (Nashville: 1891), 12; reprinted in Bracey, Meier, Rudwick (eds.), *Black Nationalism in America,* 13.

long-term desire for total assimilation? From the 1830's through the 1840's, when such issues were often hotly debated among organizationally active freemen, the general response evolved from outright *opposition* to "complexional" organizations, as they were then called, to their *toleration* as a temporary expediency.[91] "Never refuse to act with a white society or institution because it is white," advised one convention address,

> . . . or a black one because it is black; but act with all men without distinction of color. By so acting, we shall find many opportunities for removing prejudices and establishing the rights of all men.—We say, avail yourselves of *white* institutions, not because they are white, but because they afford a more convenient means of improvement.[92]

Toward the late 1840's, however, even the most hard-shelled amalgamationist was reluctantly moved by the growing intolerance or indifference of white northerners to abolitionism, as well as his or her own negative experiences within the organized abolitionist movement, to brush aside paradox and let practical necessity ply its own course.[93] For despite the very real contradiction which they posed between aims and means, it was primarily "complexional" groups which could give that unity of purpose necessary to the Afro-American pursuit of full equality in the 1850's.[94] When nominally "free" black men and women required social assistance, with few notable exceptions it came from self-help and mutual-aid organizations located in black communities. When runaway slaves in the North were threatened with a return to captivity under the menacing Fugitive Slave Act of the 1850's, it was the "complexional" efforts of all-black "vigilance committees" which stood guard in northern cities. Hence as early as 1849 Douglass himself had called for the formation of a national black

[91] In all of these debates, it is rare to find any public criticism of the "complexional" nature of the most important Afro-American institution, the church, which as Brotz observed, enjoyed a privileged status in the ongoing disagreements. See *The Black Jews of Harlem*, 62–63.

[92] *Report of the Proceedings of the Colored National Convention, Held at Cleveland, Ohio, on Wednesday, September 6, 1848* (Rochester: 1848), 19; facsimile reproduction in Bell, *Minutes of the Proceedings of the National Negro Conventions 1830–1864*. Douglass was one of the signers and the principal author of this "An Address to the Colored People of the United States."

[93] "It will be a long time before we gain all our rights; and although it may seem to conflict with our views of human brotherhood, we shall undoubtedly for many years be compelled to have institutions of a complexional character, in order to alter this very ideal of human brotherhood." Ibid., 19.

[94] This, of course, is not to deny the contributions of those outside the black community, which were often substantial.

organization which would lend guidance to Afro-American efforts towards economic uplift and full equality. As Howard Bell observed, by 1853 this vision had crystallized into call for a National Council, among whose concerns would be the establishment of a labor school, a consumer cooperative, a library, and a business and unemployment registry. Most significant of all, a quasi-judicial system was also to be constituted, where blacks "... were expected to bring their problems and thus avoid appeal to the courts of the United States."[95] None of these efforts came to fruition. But by the crisis-laden 1850's, on the other hand, the strengthening of emigrationist and political nationalist sentiment among a sizeable sector of the "elite" had transformed the principal debate from one in which the question of all-black organization was the issue, to one in which the contest would occur around the speciffc form that political nationalism should take. Whether blacks should emigrate from the United States, or remain and seek the strengthening of Afro-American institutions, had now become the core issue of inner-group conflict.[96] By 1855 even William Whipper, an earlier foe of "complexional" organizations, was ready to concede that

> In our onslaught upon what we term separate institutions, we too frequently lose sight of the fact that to our church, association and school we are at this hour chiefly indebted for whatever of preparation we have made for the great battle of today.[97]

By that time, too, emigrationists such as Martin R. Delany had determined that the ultimate fate of Afro-Americans lay not on U.S. soil but outside. His looking outward unleashed an entirely new facet of Afro-American national identity, engendering "racial" and political identification with the world's people of color: "The white races are but one-third of the population of the globe," wrote Delany, "—or one of them to two of us—and it cannot much longer

[95] Frederick Douglass, "The Union of the Oppressed for the Sake of Freedom," *The North Star* (August 10, 1849); in *The Life and Writings,* 1:399–401; Pease and Pease, *They Who Would Be Free,* 251; Bell, *A Survey of the Negro Convention Movement,* 163, 167. Likewise, although Douglass staunchly opposed emigrationist or colonizationist programs for blacks, the acute crisis of the 1850's inexorably led him to accept an invitation from the Haitian government in early 1861 to examine the possibilities of temporary Afro-American emigration there. The raining of Confederate bombs upon Fort Sumter not only "saved" Douglass from serious compromise with one of his most steadfast principles; it also spared many historians the bother of having to consider the implications of his change in position as well. Ibid., 221–22. Douglass' subtle wavering on the question of Haitian emigration can be seen in his reply to George C. Anderson, March 1861, in *The Life and Writings,* 5:471–72.

[96] Bell, *A Survey of the Negro Convention Movement,* 168–69.

[97] Quarles, *Black Abolitionists,* 68.

continue, that two-thirds will passively submit to the universal domination of this one-third."[98]

GENDER IDENTIFICATION: AR'N'T I A WOMAN, AR'N'T I A MAN?

Between the evolving, dominant ideals of dominant southern society and the gender roles which black female and male slaves were physically coerced into "playing," there lay gender ideals and practices which slaves themselves elaborated in their processes of adaptation to a seemingly impossible situation. While a considerable portion of imposed slave labor tended toward the eradication of gender demarcations, a sexual division of labor nevertheless remained—particularly on larger plantations. And, in general, the specific oppression of female slaves *vis-à-vis* biological reproduction and as sexual objects of white males, stood in special relief irregardless of farm or plantation size.

Involvement of female slaves in arduous, physical labor contradicted white southern ideals of womanhood, as did considerations of their infant children as commodities and slave women as unadorned objects of lust.[99] In contrast, the labor of slave men (save for the factor of coercion) conformed to that exercised by white males on "free-soil" farms in the South, the Northeast, and West.[100] On the other hand, the role of slave males *qua* males was "compromised" by the absence of authority over the family—what might well be termed a "sexist"

[98] "Political Destiny of the Colored Race on the American Continent," in *National Emigration Convention of Colored People* (Pittsburgh: 1854), 41. There exists an inexorable historical link between *class stand* and self-acknowledged identity among Afro-Americans which needs to be more fully explored. Moreover, as a numerical minority within a hostile society, how one views potential allies in the struggle for social justice is also closely joined to the question of national and class identity. For the 20th century, for example, there is a distinct correlation between one's primary identity as a proletarian, and unity with other workers across ethnic/national lines as the basis for achieving social justice. Likewise, the viewing of oneself primarily as a person of African descent connects to expressions of Pan-African solidarity. Finally, primary identification as a "person of color" tends toward (what we have called since the 1960's) "Third World" unity, a core idea of which was expressed by Delany in the above citation.

[99] Lerner, *The Majority Finds Its Past*, 71. As Angela Y. Davis, *Women, Race and Class* (Random House, 1981), 5, notes, "Judged by the evolving nineteenth-century ideology of femininity, which emphasized women's roles as nurturing mothers and gentle companions and housekeepers for their husbands, Black women were practically anomalies."

[100] Jacqueline Jones, *Labor of Love, Labor of Sorrow: Black Women, Work, and the Family from Slavery to the Present* (Basic Books, 1985), 12.

ideal today, but which constituted—as did the "pedestal" role for white women—the hegemonic, southern role model for men in a society dominated by white males. But included in that lack of authority was the inability of slave males to keep their mates from becoming sexually exploited,[101] or their children and wives from being otherwise maltreated—not to mention themselves. They were also well aware of being unable to materially provide for their families as free men did. Nevertheless, slaves did develop a gender division of labor within the quarters which tended towards an equitable distribution of responsibilities. In the process, independent standards of "manhood" and "womanhood" evolved, however compromised, according to the circumstances in which slaves found themselves.[102] Slave women, to be sure, continued to have specific grievances based upon their specific oppression as women. But on the whole, the negative equality which emanated from relatively equal oppression in the realm of coerced labor was transformed by slaves into a positive one: relative egalitarianism in social relations.[103]

We do not know about the daily lives of free blacks in the way that we now know many of the rich details of late antebellum slave life; consequently, much of our understanding of the gender identities of free northerners is gleaned from the surviving testimony of middle-class Afro-American males. In this sense it is probably true, as one researcher has affirmed, that ". . . most black males thought the best place for their potential marriage partners was in the home."[104]

[101] Lerner, *The Majority Finds Its Past,* 72; Jones, *Labor of Love,* 37–38.

[102] Jones, *Labor of Love,* 12–13. Also, resistance to slavery by female and male slaves alike may have caused both to question the metaphysical notion of "manhood" offered by the dominant society.

[103] Davis, *Women, Race and Class,* 18. On one hand, Jacqueline Jones tends to dismiss such equality as a paradox, but she is also fully aware of the significance of the continuation of these patterns, established in slavery, into the post-bellum period. *Labor of Love,* 41–42. That they would persist was not simply due to their having constituted a fruitful ideal for many, but also because the absence of property and the continuing necessity for black women to work towards the economic support of their families simply did not allow for traditional patriarchy to emerge in any significant social sense among Afro-Americans. Webber, *Deep Like the Rivers,* 149, notes the absence of themes of male supremacy or of female dominance in slave narratives.

[104] Sharon Harley, "Northern Black Female Workers: Jacksonian Era," in Sharon Harley and Rosalyn Terborg-Penn, *The Afro-American Woman: Struggles and Images* (Kennikat Press, 1978), 9. But the range of intertwining motives which might influence the male ideal could be quite complex: patriarchal notions gleaned from the dominant society; nationalistic sentiment which bristled at the very thought of black females in the domestic employ of white folks; or consideration of manual labor in itself as degrading. Martin Delany, for example, embraced the second position and was accused of harboring the third. In addition, he declared himself in opposition to females who worked in

On the other hand, men could assess the problems of women as being separate from those of themselves, or as similar; could view women as requiring "uplifting," or men and women equally; or women as being in need of special protection, or as equal to men.[105] All-black female societies, in a manner similar to the nominally "genderless" ones established by Afro-American men (who did not particularly encourage the participation of women in leadership roles, and who, in earlier years, at least, did not welcome them as members) ". . . indicated black women's desire to control and head their own societies as well as demonstrate self-help."[106] But in addition to the absolute need for many black women to work outside the home, as well as the narrow range of property holdings by Afro-Americans, disfranchisement and oppression left little room for the institutionalization of black male chauvinism.[107] Consequently, there was also little opportunity for the emergence of oppositional forms of female identity within Afro-American free communities in the North. For Afro-American men as well as women, overall, national consciousness tended to eclipse gender consciousness,[108] spreading at times to the borders of metaphysical darkness. As Frederick Douglass once said of his sometime friend and ideological nemesis, Martin Delany, "I thank God for making me a man, simply, but Delany always thanks Him for making him a black man."[109]

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order to purchase non-necessities of life. Delany, *Condition, Elevation, Emigration,* 43, 197–200. *Report of the Proceedings of the Colored National Convention Held at Cleveland, Ohio . . . 1848* (Rochester: 1848), 5–6; also see convention resolutions 2–4 in Ibid., 13.

[105]Rosayn Terborg-Penn, "Black Male Perspectives on the Nineteenth Century Woman," in Harley and Terborg-Penn (eds.), *The Afro-American Woman,* 28–29.

[106]Linda Perkins, "Black Women and Racial 'Uplift' Prior to Emancipation," in Filomina Chioma Steady (ed.), *The Black Woman Cross-Culturally* (Schenckman Publishing, 1981), 320. Documents relative to all-female societies can be found in Dorothy Sterling (ed.) *We Are Your Sisters,* (Norton, 1984) 104–19. In Philadelphia, out of 43 societies reporting their returns in 1831 (there were judged to be more than 50 in early 1832), 27 were all-female; Herbert Aptheker (ed.) *A Documentary History of the Negro People in the United States: From Colonial Times Through the Civil War,* I (The Citadel Press, 1951), 111–14, 131.

[107]Perkins, "Black Women and Racial Uplift," 321; Jones, *Labor of Love,* 13–14.

[108]Lerner, *The Majority Finds Its Past,* 68. In that respect the feminist ideas of Sojourner Truth were not generally shared by black women of her day. Ibid., 73; also see Esther Terry, "Sojourner Truth: The Person Behind the Libyan Sibyl," *The Massachusetts Review,* XXVI:2–3 (Summer–Autumn, 1985), 429–42.

[109]Cited in Martin, *The Mind of Frederick Douglass,* 95.

IV. SINGING THE LORD'S SONG IN A STRANGE LAND: THE PERILOUS FOUNDATIONS OF BLACK *AMERICAN* IDENTITY

Far, far the way that we have trod,
From heathen kraals and jungle dens,
To freedmen, freemen, sons of God,
Americans and Citizens.
—James Weldon Johnson, "Fifty Years"

Just because a cat has kittens in the oven doesn't make them biscuits.
—Malcolm X

For there they that carried us away captive required of us a song; and they that wasted us required of us mirth, saying, Sing us one of the songs of Zion.
—Psalm 137

"In what manner may I be treasonous to a country which I am not allowed to call mine?" asked Martin Delany in 1847.[110] In posing that question he was responding to one of several paradoxes inherent to the "second-class" status of Afro-American freemen: in this instance, a demand for civic *loyalty* on the part of blacks—itself a "back-door" acknowledgement of Afro-American citizenship; and, on the other hand, the denial of citizenship at the level of full civil and political *rights*. Slavery, disfranchisement, property qualifications as a condition for exercising the elective franchise, segregation in transportation and public schools, taxation without benefit of rights—here were practices supposedly incompatible with the American creed. But what did it mean to be an American, after all?

Western European nationalism of the 18th and 19th centuries expressed a confluence of forces based (often in mythical ways) upon common territory, history, and culture—if not "race." But the earliest notions of American national identity, while linked in a circuitous way to common territory, were not so much rooted in a common history and culture as they were a collective embodiment of the ideals of what has been termed the Revolutionary Enlightenment:[111]

> National identification in America was achieved by the adoption of abstract, universal ideas which legitimized national independence and

[110]Cited in Victor Ullman, *Martin R. Delany: The Beginnings of Black Nationalism* (Beacon Press, 1971), 79.

[111]See Henry F. May, *The Enlightenment in America* (Oxford University Press, 1976), 153–304 especially.

> served as formative principles of the states and the Federal Union. The permanent influence of this system of ideas and values on the course of American history—the fixation of an ideological attitude—was due to the fact that the American people considered themselves a new kind of society. The very existence of the nation was bound up with the maintenance of those principles of social and political organization.[112]

To be an American in the juridical sense of the term was to exercise the birthright of inalienable freedoms: of speech, of press, of assembly, etc. The traditional vocabulary of American jurisprudence left room for neither intermediate status nor gradation in the rank of citizenship; one was either a citizen or one was not.[113] Consequently, in the parallel sphere of nationality, one was an American, or one was not. Not without logic, Martin R. Delany insisted that the actual legal position occupied by "... black and colored inhabitants of the United States ..." was comparable to the *jus quiritium*—a subaltern citizenship class—of ancient Rome: the "... evailing or *supplicating* citizen—that is, one who was continually *moaning, complaining, or crying for aid or succor*." Within this class might also be included the *jus suffragii*, "... who had the privilege of *voting*, but no other privilege."[114] The intentions of the Founding Fathers on this subject were well known: blacks were never be considered a part of the body politic. Hence in the wake of the American Revolution, the emergence of freemen in ever increasing numbers created a very real crisis in American jurisprudence. By color and *custom* these freemen were inextricably tied to the legal status of the slave; by *law* they fulfilled all requirements of citizenship birthright status.[115] Until the Dred Scott decision, however, racist arguments substituted for a very real lack of clear-cut, legal distinctions, creating an ambiguous category of persons who were citizens in name, yet were denied the full accords of citizenship.[116]

Stripped of any claim to political rights, Afro-American slaves, of course, were not considered citizens—nor could they have rationally fancied themselves as such. Baraka is no doubt correct in his claim that recently arrived

[112]Yehoshua Arieli, *Individualism and Nationalism in American Ideology* (Penguin Books, 1966 [1964]), 29.

[113]Kettner, *The Development of American Citizenship*, 319. Pole, *The Pursuit of Equality in American History*, 158–59.

[114]"Political Destiny of the Colored Race on the American Continent," 34.

[115]See Robert Purvis, "Appeal of Forty Thousand Citizens, Threatened With Disfranchisement, to the People of Philadelphia," in Richard Barksdale and Keneth Kinnamon (eds.), *Black Writers of America: A Comprehensive Anthology* (Macmillan, 1972), 143–50.

[116]Kettner, *The Development of American Citizenship*, 311–12.

African slaves "did not believe that they would be here forever. Or even if they did, they thought of themselves as merely *captives*."[117] Nor could one necessarily expect that the majority of native-born slaves would have willingly proffered their allegiance to a national state with which their abject and complete oppression was identified. With Lord Dunmore's declaration no doubt still ringing in his ears, Thomas Jefferson realized as much when he noted:

> For if a slave can have a country in this world, it must be any other in preference to that which he is born to live and labour for another: in which he must lock up the faculties of his nature, contribute as far as depends on his individual endeavours to the evanishment of the human race, or entail his own miserable condition on the endless generations preceding from him.[118]

Presumably even the most subservient chattel invited to participate in Fourth of July celebrations by his master—and the practice appears to have been common[119]—did so more out of devotion to lip-smacking barbecue and relief from forced labor than to flag-waving panegyrics. Conversely, even the most dull-witted, ignorant master came to understand that allowing bondsmen to listen in on Independence Day speeches was a particularly dangerous practice. Exposure to republican ideals at such gatherings could surely do no less than kindle in the breast of the slave a desire for equal protection under the flag and Constitution—if not those of his or her own making.[120] From the slave's perspective, however, the principal question was usually not one of citizenship versus non-citizenship, but of freedom versus slavery, the interpretation of which tilted more decisively toward the religious than the juridico-political.[121] And, save for the most pitiful "Sambo" (or "Sambalina"), there could be little ambivalence in such a choice. For the very small number of free northern blacks fortunate to have lifted themselves above the level of degradation and abject poverty, on the other hand, a surfeit of paradoxes would arise from their inclusionary / exclusionary civil status.

That in practical terms both egalitarian ideals and practices within the United States were of a dual nature, lay at the core of the fiercely ambivalent feelings of

[117] LeRoi Jones [Amiri Baraka], *Blues People* (William Morrow, 1963), xi–xii.

[118] *Notes on Virginia* (1787), cited in Merle Curti, *The Roots of American Loyalty* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1946), 87.

[119] James Oakes, *The Ruling Race: A History of American Slaveholders* (Knopf, 1982), 142.

[120] See Eugene Genovese, *From Rebellion to Revolution* (Louisiana State University Press, 1979), 126–37.

[121] See, for example, James Redpath's observations quoted in Ibid., 437.

nominally free Afro-Americans towards their own American identity. Socialized as Americans, enmeshed, if often marginally, in the nexus of economic relations defined by an expanding national market, and allowed at least partial access to civic participation, the process by which free, northern black males were to consider themselves American citizens essentially followed the same path as that of white contemporaries: from identification first with one's community and / or state in which one resided, then to the United States as a whole.[122] Traversing Pennsylvania's mountainous terrain from Philadelphia to Pittsburgh in 1849, a lyrical Delany could also reflect that "The soul may here expand in the magnitude of its nature, and soar to the extent of human susceptibility. Indeed it is only in the mountains that I can fully appreciate my existence as a man in America, my own native land."[123]

On the *Herrenvolk* side, the existence of slavery as well as the curtailing of citizenship rights among freemen encouraged the emergence of alternative political loyalties. Dating from the early 1830's, free blacks, in protest against the non-independence of slaves, recognized *their* July Fourth observances on the following day.[124] "How can we sing the Lord's song in a strange land," Frederick Douglass replied at the podium, affirmatively responding to a request by the white citizens of Rochester to give the Fourth of July address. "This Fourth July is *yours,* not *mine. You* may rejoice, *I* must mourn," he stated in that now oft-quoted speech.[125] But from August 1, 1834—independence day for slaves under the British—until the Civil War, many Afro-Americans in the U.S. preferred to celebrate that date rather than July 4th or even the 5th.[126] "I have no

[122]See David Potter, "The Historian's Use of Nationalism and Vice Versa," in his *The South and the Sectional Conflict* (Louisiana State University Press, 1968), 67; Robert Ernst, "Negro Concepts of Americanism," *Journal of Negro History* (July, 1954), 206. Further research is necessary to determine the attitude of free black women towards questions of nationality. In the wake of the Nullification crisis southern sectionalism, formerly a component of union allegiances, began to compete with American nationalism for the loyalties of white southerners, of course. See McCardell, *The Idea of a Southern Nation.*

[123]Cited in Ullman, *Martin R. Delany,* 100; also see Meier, "The Emergence of Negro Nationalism (A Study in Ideologies)," Part I, *The Midwest Journal,* IV;1 (Winter 1951-52), 101.

[124]Benjamin Quarles, *Black Abolitionists,* 118-23; also see the July 5, 1832 speech by Peter Osborne in Herbert Aptheker, *A Documentary History of the Negro People in the United States,* I (The Citadel Press, 1951), 137-38; and that of the same date by David Nickens in Bracey, Meier, Rudwick (eds.), *Black Nationalism in America,* 34-37.

[125]"The Meaning of July Fourth for the Negro," speech at Rochester, New York, July 5, 1852; in Douglass, *The Life and Writings,* 2:189. One will recall, too, that Nat Turner's ill-fated August insurrection was originally planned for July 4, 1831.

[126]Quarles, *Black Abolitionists,* 123-29.

love for America, as such," exclaimed Douglass in 1847,

> I have no patriotism. I have no country. What country have I? The institutions of this country do not know me, do not recognize me as a man. I am not thought of, or spoken of, except as a piece of property belonging to some *Christian* slave-holder, and all the religious and political institutions of this country, alike pronounce me a slave and a chattel. Now in such a country as this, I cannot have patriotism. The only thing that links me to this land is my family, and the painful consciousness that here there are three millions of my fellow-creatures, groaning beneath the iron rod of the worst despotism that could be devised. . . .[127]

Yet patriotic ambivalences persisted. As the 1853 Colored National Convention declared in its address to the people of the United States: "We are Americans, and as Americans, we would speak to Americans. We address you not as aliens nor as exiles, humbly asking to be permitted to dwell among you in peace; but we address you as American citizens asserting their rights on their own native soil . . ." Its author, the very same Frederick Douglass, understood that such claims would be considered "inconsiderate, impertinent and absurd" by many.[128] But the optimism apparently attending this upbeat declaration had already been steadily waning within free black northern communities since the late 1840's, as Douglass' earlier speech attests. The growth of northern, urban segregation, declining opportunities for employment, and passage of the Fugitive Slave Law increasingly rendered emigration as one of the few practical alternatives left—even while many free blacks continued to assert their legitimate claim to full American citizenship.[129] With the arrival of the Supreme Court's well-known Dred Scott decision in 1857 the legal discord surrounding Afro-American citizenship was resolved on a blue note: not only was Dred Scott "not a citizen of Missouri within the meaning of the Constitution of the

[127]"The Right to Criticize American Institutions," May 11, 1847, in *The Life and Writings,* 1:236–37.

[128]*Proceedings of the Colored National Convention, Held in Rochester, July 6th, 7th and 8th, 1853* (Rochester: 1853), 8, 11; facsimile reproduction in Bell, *Minutes of the Proceedings of the National Negro Conventions 1830–1864.* The address was penned by Douglass, *The Life and Writings,* 2:254–68. As proof that Afro-Americans were indeed American citizens, the address cited evidence gleaned from debates surrounding New York's constitutional convention of 1821 as well as the admission of Missouri into the Union; citations from the U.S. Constitution; and the proclamation of then General Andrew Jackson to the free blacks of Louisiana in 1814.

[129]See Jane H. Pease and William H. Pease, *They Who Would Be Free: Blacks' Search for Freedom, 1830–1861* (Atheneum, 1974), 251–77; Bell, *A Survey of the Negro Convention Movement,* 111–80, 206–61; Floyd J. Miller, *The Search for a Black Nationality: Black Colonization and Emigration, 1787–1963* (Urbana, IL: 1975).

United States . . ."[130] *No* Afro-American could be considered an American citizen. Four years later the outbreak of sectional hostilities offered some hope for a reversal of this decision. But one could not assume too quickly: anticipating Union military service, black men who had the temerity to drill with wooden guns at their shoulders in public, put themselves in danger of being attacked by white mobs who considered the conflict strictly a "white man's war."[131]

Assuming the appearance of ". . . a nation without polity, nationals without citizenship,"[132] a growing number of free blacks were led to the painful decision that, given their rapidly declining political and economic fortunes, a search for a new land was in order. The Civil War, with all its latent promise and hope, cut short most emigrationist preparations, but the "betrayal" of Reconstruction would cause them to be revived time and time again over the next century.

V. CONCLUSION

> *We are Americans, having a birthright citizenship—natural claims upon this country—claims common to all our fellow citizens which may, by virtue of unjust laws, be obstructed, but never can be annulled.*
>
> —*Martin Delany,* Condition, Elevation, Emigration

> *I have no patriotism. I have no country. What country have I?*
>
> —*Frederick Douglass, 1847*

> *But I must admit, that I have no hopes in this country—no confidence in the American people—with a few excellent exceptions—therefore I have written as I have done. Heathenism and Liberty, before Christianity and Slavery!*
>
> —*Martin Delany to William Lloyd Garrison, 1852*

> *We have grown up with this republic and I see nothing in her character or find nothing in the character of the American people as yet which compels the belief that we must leave the United States.*
>
> —*Frederick Douglass,* Life and Times

And so we return, full-spiral, to Du Bois: two souls dwelling in one, but with expanded ontological horizons. Duality as specifically described by Du Bois did exist, but it was a subset of broader dualities lived by the majority of Afro-

[130] Don E. Fehrenbacher, *Slavery, Law, and Politics: The Dred Scott Case in Historical Perspective* (Oxford University Press, 1981), 99.

[131] James McPherson, *The Negro's Civil War: How American Negroes Felt and Acted During the War for the Union* (Pantheon, 1965), 34–35.

[132] E. U. Essien-Udom, *Black Nationalism: A Search for Identity in America* (University of Chicago Press, 1962), 12.

Americans and, in its specificity, more attributable to the highly acculturated in a given historical period.[133] That is not to say that other, or even most Afro-Americans have not suffered alienation from American society, but only that this alienation assumes forms which have yet to be fully explored.

Eight years following publication of *The Souls of Black Folk,* J. E. Casely Hayford described Du Bois' characterization of "two souls dwelling in one" as "pathetic": "Now, fancy Candace, Queen of Ethiopia, or Chephron, the Master of Egypt, being troubled with double consicousness," he scolded.[134] Yet Afro-American double consciousness was not something to be willed away by voluntarist exhortation. That massive acculturation has taken place cannot be denied, yet the full absorption of blacks into American society as forseen by assimilationists would not occur—despite the presence, to this day, of blacks on American soil for over three and one-half centuries. For their part, too, the more nationalist-oriented have been severely hindered in their attempts to forge an autonomous political and economic existence for their people. But despite overriding and contrary motives, those tending more toward assimilationism on one side, nationalism on the other, have been drawn together in a bond of opposing ideological tendencies, a unity internal to their own individual perspectives as well as that which they shared between themselves. With respect to the question of national identity, politically conscious free blacks of the late antebellum era, with their many ideological differences and political conflicts, were of one mind in at least several respects. First, an integral sense of "peoplehood" could lead even Frederick Douglass, with all of his amalgamationist baggage, to speak of blacks ". . . becoming a nation, in the midst of a nation which disowns them, and for weal or woe this nation is united."[135] What

[133] And without pretending to have tendered a full itinerary of ideological couplings, one might note further, for example, the "tension" between the reality of the black American's European, Indian, and African biological admixture, on one hand, and the customary recognition today of the African element *alone,* on the other; or between the "polychrome" quality of Afro-American pigmentation, as the quotable Kelly Miller once observed, and the current popular group designation of all Afro-Americans as "black." As our experiences of the 1960's attest, this latter attribute of Afro-American identity has exhibited decisive political implications as well. Too, one would like to have explored identities arising out of the social division of labor: black artisans both slave and free, for example.

[134] *Ethiopia Unbound: Studies in Race Emancipation* (Frank Cass and Co., 1969 [1911]), 179–82. Given Hayford's status as a western-assimilated African, it is doubtful that much effort would be required to discern his own effusion of "double consciousness" —albeit in a manner different from that articulated by DuBois.

[135] *Life and Times,* 2:246. In "An Address to the Colored People of the United Sates," Douglass wrote: "We are one people—one in general complexion, one in common

gave impulse to the spirit of peoplehood for the black *petit bourgeois* was a common oppression, as well as a justified sense of elevated cultural achievement under adverse conditions—unlike the great mass of Afro-Americans, who, in addition, could draw upon folk cultural roots plunged deep into southern soil. Fervent efforts towards elevation and uplift expressed not only a wish for heightened material and spiritual enlightenment for Afro-Americans as a whole, but also for positive recognition by a society which had relegated blacks to its margins. To the extent that the ability to claim both nationality and citizenship afforded one real "safety" in the modern world, assimilationist and nationalist-oriented alike understood that if Afro-Americans were unable to achieve these goals on U.S. soil, they had to be secured at least *somewhere* on the face of the earth. There was strong belief, too, in the ideals of civilization—without necessarily comprehending that barbarism in the form of slavery and imperial rule, was an essential underpinning of civilization's very existence. And despite initial appearances, Afro-Americans at both poles of the identity spectrum also managed to achieve a contradictory unity on yet another front: in a "... demand for progress, for a rising standard of living, more effective political order, greater social justice. . . ."[136]

For Afro-Americans living in the first half of the 19th century, the overarching battle was for political democracy—the liberation of slaves, above all, as well as the securing of full citizenship for free blacks. It was out of this struggle that the contradictory questions of national identity and other related issues assumed unavoidably overwhelming proportions, with a tendency for other concerns of social justice to be relegated to the background. With an Afro-American class structure in embryonic formation, it was thus quite natural that the emergent black leadership should be drawn mainly from the ranks of the *petite bourgeoisie*.

Informed by the absolute, theoretical ideals of equality bequeathed by American citizenship, and willing to accept nothing less than full participation in *every* aspect of American life, the more assimilationist-oriented *petit bourgeois* plotted his trajectory accordingly. The quest for amalgamation itself was partly fueled by the sentiment, strongly felt from the late 18th through the 19th

degradation, one in popular estimation. As one rises, all must rise, and as one falls, all must fall." Ibid., 1:33.

[136]Clifford Geertz, "The Integrative Revolution: Primordial Sentiments and Civil Politics in the New States," in *The Interpretation of Cultures* (Basic Books, 1973), 258. The conceptualization of the terms of that injustice as well the solutions which must be brought to bear towards its eradication, are inevitably colored by the question of social class.

centuries, that the physical survival of Afro-Americans depended upon biological absorption. This absorption appeared inevitable, given the incredible growth of the mulatto strata in the United States by the mid-19th century. The teleological state of full amalgamation still lay somewhere in the distant future, however, relatively untouched by contemporary events. Following Douglass' lead, one tactfully withdrew from any advocacy of the ritual, avoiding personal embarassment and sidestepping political fire from all sides. In practice, however, the more assimilationist-oriented continued to fight bitterly against any and all ideological tendencies which challenged the "unavoidable," endowing Afro-Americans with a questionable political legacy that continues to this day.[137] Based upon provident faith, their strategy was clearly a gamble: if the question of social justice could be peacefully resolved, and if Afro-Americans could indeed be biologically absorbed into American society over time, there would be no need for the maintaining of a distinct Afro-American identity, no need for Afro-American solidarity, and certainly no need for "complexional institutions." If, on the other hand, the "absorption" of Afro-Americans into all aspects of American life did not or could not proceed at a "reasonable" pace, the absence of powerful, autonomous institutions, of distinct focii of black political and economic power, could prove disastrous to the fate of the majority of black Americans.

To assume such a position is not at all to glorify the nationalist side of the dichotomy, however, for we are, after all, speaking in the language of historical paradoxes and dilemmas which have attended all quests by Afro-Americans for national identity. Exceptions to the pattern assuredly exist, but for well over a century the assimilationist wing of the black *petite bourgeoisie* (though by no means uniformly) has given great impulse to the struggle for political rights; while its nationalist counterparts have tended either to ignore, "postpone," or re-direct such questions into other forms or issues, often pursuing their nationalism within more narrowly defined economic or cultural channels.[138] In contrast to the more assimilationist-oriented, whose bourgeois egalitarian

[137]The tradeoff of "community control of schools" for "integrationist" bussing fiascos from the late 1960's onward provides an excellent example of the political bankruptcy of this strata.

[138]Important, independent economic struggles waged by working masses of Afro-Americans—and I am thinking here of the Colored Farmers' Alliance and the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters, despite their *petit-bourgeois* leadership—have at times rendered the question of national identity a secondary consideration. Another forum—addressing a later historical period where social classes have undergone a greater degree of maturation—will be required to explore the complex links between the questions of identity, social justice, and social class in Afro-America.

ideals tend to stand as an unwavering beacon, here one often, but not necessarily finds acceptance and *legitimation* of the *Herrenvolk* argument—that the American social order has always been, and will continue to be, a "white" society with "white" laws, "white" jurisprudence, a "white" economy, and the like—and a consequent rejection of the notion that blacks can or should lay claim to rights within the "white folks' society." (Here, society sees itself transformed from a complex web of social relations into property!) The brutal logic of such a position beckons emigration or some less drastic form of physical separation as the only alternative solution. Paradoxically, the decision to emigrate (more frequently advocated than consummated) negates the need for autonomous black institutions on U.S. soil no less than does the amalgamationist ethos. But even in the context of a domestically-oriented political nationalism, where such institutions have been desired and their edification pursued, there has been an apparent lack of wherewithall to create parallel mass institutions on a par with, but organizationally and politically apart from, the church. Combined with withdrawal from larger struggles of social import, nationalist-inspired politics of this stamp leaves a void which escapist ideology can only nominally fill.[139] To be sure, the discussion is now straining to burst beyond the conceptualizations established in this essay. For now, one must be content to note that we are only speaking of "extremes" at either end of the assimilationist / nationalist *spectrum,* and must remain on guard against depicting all ideological tendencies regarding identity in this manner. In reality most black Americans have avoided the end points and developed their own institutions within a limited range of possibilities—but always in the double shadow of the extremities, which outline the formal political and material limits of Afro-American potentialities *within the existing social order.*

Since it can be safely assumed, extrapolating from Erikson, that every national group exhibits opposite potentialities in the way in which its given cultural "traits" manifest themselves, there is nothing in itself particularly unique in the existence of an Afro-American duality. What *is* unique is that, of the grand, overlapping categories of self-recognition by which Afro-Americans have viewed themselves in different epochs—whether by nationality, gender, religion, class, or lesser orderings such as that of profession, for example—the singular aspect of "race" has tended to serve as an explicit or implicit counter-

[139] In 1964 Harry Haywood argued for a synthesis of these two ideological tendencies into a revolutionary, third trend. Haywood (with Gwendolyn Midlo Hall), "Is the Black Bourgeoisie the Leader of the Black Liberation Movement?" *Soulbook* 5 (Summer 1966); an anthology of Haywood's writings is forthcoming.

point for all. What *is* unique are the political contradictions, hindrances, and *paralyses* which material conditions underlying that duality have engendered historically. The tendency for the "black" aspect of identity to eclipse all others does constitute a strength from the standpoint of politically mobilizing black Americans across social lines that might otherwise divide, but at times it also looms as a pitfall for critical social concerns and political goals. For example, it is sometimes as difficult today for Afro-Americans, gender aside, to admit that many feminist issues have relevance for black women, as it is for Americans in general to recognize, for example, that the anti-slavery exploits of Harriet Tubman fall within the finest traditions of American democracy. The comparison is not accidental: in either case, self-conscious identity masks even as it apparently clarifies.[140]

And so for the 20th century the struggle has continued on two major fronts, and—as usual—in contradictory ways: first, to modify America's counterfeited identity to correspond to the broad realities of the people actually comprising it; and to continue the healthy and politically necessary existence of a relatively autonomous Afro-American identity. As to the question of social justice on the second front, to fulfill the promises of bourgeois-democratic equality for all, but also, given the clear insufficiencies of such rights in the economic realm—the fault lying in the institution of private property—to extend *beyond* them in a most deliberate and assuming way.

[140]In grand contrast to the 19th and early 20th centuries, yet another example of the eclipsing of identity by "race" lies in the current difficulty for blacks to assume public positions on domestic issues not directly related to "race"—ecology or nuclear energy, for example—or, especially, to take public stands on international affairs. For our own time one readily recalls the repercussions of Martin Luther King's speaking out in 1967 on the question of the U.S. war in Vietnam, or more recently, Jesse Jackson's assuming a pro-Palestinian position on Mideast affairs. Such political narrowness, especially in evidence since the 1930's, is imposed just as much from within the in-group as from without: the Afro-American is simply *not supposed to* address anything other than "black issues."