“Black is a Country”:

The Impact of the Cuban Revolution on American Black Radical Solidarities

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James Chiyoki Ikeda

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Abstract

This Master's thesis looks at the solidarities of black radicals in the mid-20th century and traces how they evolved in contact with the Cuban Revolution. I argue that the Cuban Revolution refracted and altered existing threads of black radical solidarity by acting as a discursive site for theorizing and debating the tactics and ideology of black freedom. This resulted in the strengthening of black American Third World identity, the proliferation of a colonial understanding of the black condition, and the development of competing forms of black nationalism. This thesis positions the Cuban Revolution as a definitive moment in black radical intellectual history which did not necessarily originate any of the major threads of black radical solidarity, but which had a profound impact on the ways that the animating ideas of mid-20th century black radicalism were theorized and expressed from the 1960s through the 1970s and beyond.

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Introduction

History's watershed moments occupy a curious space in our understanding of the past as their significance is at once self-evident and difficult to state precisely. It is often the most visible and discussed events which become historicized as special moments so their impact, however far-reaching it was to begin with, becomes enmeshed with the impact of the reactions that the event triggered. The 1959 Cuban Revolution is one such moment as it is undeniably one of the most influential events of the 20th century yet the manifold branches and contours of that influence are not nearly so obvious.

The Cuban Revolution is usually considered solely in terms of its dramatic, disproportionate impact on the Cold War, as the event which brought to power the regime of Fidel Castro whose decision to host Soviet nuclear missiles nearly triggered Armageddon in 1962. In this narrative, Castro's Cuba was merely a Soviet satellite, a communist state that fell neatly into the ideologically bifurcated world-system that defined the Cold War era. Its significance was thus reducible to its geographic proximity to the United States which added immense gravity to its connection with the Soviet Union at the height of the Cold War. While this narrative still prevails in American high school history textbooks, a half-century of scholarship has revealed a far more nuanced, dynamic revolutionary project in Cuba in the years immediately following 1959. The Soviet satellite conceptualization of Cuba fails spectacularly at containing even a hint of the complexity and the contradiction which gave life to the revolution in its early years.

Moreover, it is very clear that the ascension of Castro's regime had global repercussions in terms of its cultural and ideological influence, including having a tremendous impact on America's mid-20th century radical left. Revolutionary Cuba became a site of vital importance to radicals in the 1960s, the discursive nexus where the threads of African decolonization, Afro-Asian solidarity, the formation of Third World consciousness, opposition to American imperialism, the emergent New Left in the United States, the increasingly fractured global Marxist movement, the fledging Non-Aligned Movement, and America's mid-century black freedom movement converged and intertwined. Within this space, the radicals of America's black freedom movement developed and cultivated much of the philosophical infrastructure upon which the movement would grow into the 1960s and 1970s. Several of the most influential developments involved the evolution of radical *solidarity*, the sense of common cause and/or common identity that binds people across the traditional, narrow boundaries of community. This paper takes as its subject the impact of the Cuban Revolution on the solidarities of American black radicals.

A Brief Historiography

This subject intersects with a lot of existing literature. There is, for example, a recent historiography on the relationship between the Cold War and the Civil Rights Movement. The widely-accepted narrative of this relationship holds that during the 1930s and 1940s agitations for black freedom were supported by groups focused specifically on racial justice such as the NAACP, as well as what Eric Arnesen calls the "CP [Communist Party] left-labor-civil rights

coalition for black equality"[1] evident in instances like the communist-led legal defense of the Scottsboro Nine. Important figures of the era like A. Philip Randolph demonstrated that economic and racial justice were inextricably linked so that, while tactical and ideological differences guaranteed a diversity of opinions about how to move forward, the need for unity between civil rights organizations, labor, the radical left, etc. was nonetheless apparent. This leftist coalition for racial and economic justice also stretched beyond national borders, with figures like Paul Robeson, W.E.B. Du Bois, C.L.R. James, George Padmore and others engaged in a broad, transnational discourse on black nationalism, Pan-Africanism, and Marxism. These collaborations later helped to justify a smothering of post-war civil rights mobilizations by a vicious anticommunism that branded every person and movement with communist affiliations 'subversive,' and this in turn led to the fracturing of the multi-racial, class-conscious, transnational coalitions that had developed. What remained was a nationally-focused civil rights movement with severely limited, moderate goals like securing voting rights for black Americans.

Despite this, Brenda Gayle Plummer explains that "insufficient gains on civil rights required continued recourse to the moral authority of the international community,"[2] and ultimately these appeals to the international community in the context of Cold War politics helped to provide leverage for later, incremental

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[1] Eric Arnesen, "Civil Rights and the Cold War At Home: Postwar Activism, Anticommunism, and the Decline of the Left," *American Communist History* 11, no. 1 (2012): 8.
[2] Brenda Gayle Plummer, *Rising Wind: Black Americans and U.S. Foreign Affairs, 1935-1960* (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 1996), 218.

concessions to the rejuvenated Civil Rights Movement in the 1950s and 1960s. In other words, a compelling case has been made for interpreting the US government's gradual surrender to the demands of the Civil Rights Movement as an extension of Cold War policy. According to Gerald Horne "the international community played a substantial role in compelling the nation to disavow the more outrageous aspects of racism"[3] during the Cold War, with black America's international allies and the Soviet Union always poised to undermine American credibility as a beacon of freedom abroad by drawing attention to the gross hypocrisies of Jim Crow at home. Faced with Soviet propagandizing about America's treatment of black people,[4] American policy makers were incentivized to make concessions to civil rights activists.

These concessions were, however, focused exclusively on sanitizing America's image abroad rather than on achieving substantive equality at home. According to Mary Dudziak, "U.S. diplomats around the world were concerned about the effect of domestic race discrimination and of propaganda on U.S. racial problems on the anti-United States or pro-Communist leanings of other nations" in the late 1940s.[5] The United States responded by *contextualizing* American racism in "a story that led ultimately to the conclusion that, in spite of it all, America was a great nation," a story which aided the goal of "rehabilitating the

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[3] Gerald Horne, "Race from Power: U.S. Foreign Policy and the General Crisis of White Supremacy," in *Window on Freedom: Race, Civil Rights, and Foreign Affairs 1945-1988*, ed. Brenda Gayle Plummer (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 2003), 54.
[4] Mary L. Dudziak, *Cold War Civil Rights: Race and the Image of American Democracy* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000), 38.
[5] Ibid., 45.

moral character of American democracy" as it was perceived from outside the country but without addressing the root of the problem.[6] Thus, civil rights leaders were given leverage but only within the highly restrictive boundaries of acceptable Cold War politics. As Dudziak explains, the homogenizing anti-communist political pressures of the post-war period meant that "civil rights groups had to walk a fine line, making it clear that their reform efforts were meant to fill out the contours of American democracy, and not to challenge or undermine it."[7]

A corollary of this careful negotiation between the strictures of Cold War politics and the Civil Rights Movement, Dudziak argues, was that "a broad, international critique of racial oppression was out of place."[8] The tying of racism in America to white supremacist Western imperialism around the world had provided a potent framework for transnational activism in the 1930s and 1940s which was, Dudiak argues, rendered untenable by Cold War pressures. Penny Von Eschen further explains that the embrace of Cold War anticommunism by accommodationist black American liberals "effectively severed the black American struggle for civil rights from the issues of anti-colonialism and racism abroad"[9] such that, by the 1950s, "the mass politics of the earlier anticolonial alliances had been superseded by a middle-class politics of symbolism and federal

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[6] Ibid., 46.
[7] Ibid., 11.
[8] Ibid.
[9] Penny M. Von Eschen, *Race Against Empire: Black Americans and Anticolonialism, 1937-1957* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1997), 3.

patronage."[10] The ideological bottleneck of the Cold War thus forced a culling of the black freedom movement, suppressing its more radical, internationalist elements in favor of those more moderate, integrationist elements ultimately credited with the legislative victories of the heroic period of the Civil Right Movement.

Proponents of this narrative, in juxtaposing the Civil Rights Movement with the parallel activities of 'radicals,' imply that those people and groups associated with the Civil Rights Movement were not themselves radicals. If we take 'radicals' in the Cold War context to mean people or groups promoting internationalism and anticolonialism, however, then this binary of radicals and civil rights advocates may not be warranted. Carol Anderson has demonstrated this by comparing the responses of famed 'radical' Paul Robeson and his Council on African Affairs (CAA) with the response of the NAACP, often considered a middle-class, incrementalist, politically moderate civil rights organization, to the post-World War Two crisis of what to do with the former Italian colonies in Africa. Anderson asserts that, in the case of these colonies, "the center of gravity for Robeson's anticolonialism was not necessarily the needs of the colonized but, in fact, Soviet foreign policy."[11] She recounts how Robeson's position on what to do with the colonies changed dramatically over time, but always in line with shifts in Soviet policy. On the other hand, Anderson offers a glowing account of the NAACP's handling of the same issue: "For the NAACP, democratic self-

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[10] Ibid., 148.

[11] Carol Anderson, "Rethinking Radicalism," in *Black Power Beyond Borders: The Global Dimensions of the Black Power Movement*, ed. Nico Slate (New York City, NY: Palgrave MacMillan, 2012), 20.

government was the sine qua non of justice—globally and domestically. As a result, the association simply refused to be knocked off its anticolonial agenda by the turbulence and inconsistencies in US foreign policy."[12] Anderson describes an NAACP that operated tactically within Cold War strictures yet also took principled stands that required criticizing both Soviet and American imperialism. Anderson's critical contribution to this discourse is that the designation 'radical' may need rethinking: perhaps it is better to consider particular *actions* or *positions* as radical rather than *people* or *groups* which, of course, change over time. While this paper does largely operate within the traditional model of examining the thought of 'radical' people and groups, the designation should be understood as fluid and contextual rather than absolute.

Considering Anderson's contribution in light of Dudziak and Eschen's theses, it still seems clear that Cold War politics constricted radical anticolonial and antiracist internationalism in the post-war period. These central components of earlier black freedom agitations were increasingly smothered by the forces of history. Yet, there is also a recent historiography of Black Power radicalism in the late 1960s and 1970s which was undergirded by an international anti-racist and anti-colonial critique as well as Third World solidarity. It is well established that Stokely Carmichael, Huey Newton, Angela Davis and other leading black radicals of late 1960s and 1970s conceived of the struggle of black Americans as intimately tied to the struggles of other oppressed people globally. This influence between black Americans and people abroad who identified with the Third World

[12] Ibid., 24.

was reciprocal: Nico Slate and others have demonstrated the virality of Black Power symbolism by tracking the reproduction of Black Panther-style groups all over the world, from India to Israel to Polynesia and beyond.[13] Moreover, even the man most emblematic of the apparently moderate heroic period of the Civil Right Movement, Martin Luther King Jr., embraced anticolonial, transnational solidarity through his public opposition to the Vietnam War in the late 1960s, shortly before his assassination. This suggests that the transnational solidarities which were so prominent a part of the black freedom movement of the 1930s and 1940s had returned to the center of black freedom discourse by the late 1960s. One cannot help but wonder when this decisive shift back to black transnational, anticolonial solidarity took place.

Recent scholarship has been effective in advocating for a reimagined periodization of black freedom that bridges these periods, including a 'long civil rights movement'[14] connecting the mobilizations of the 1930s and 1940s with the legislative victories of the 1960s, and a 'civil rights-black power' movement in which these two apparently distinct movements actually comingled over several decades, challenging the idea that Black Power militants *initially* emerged in the 1960s in response to the insufficiencies of civil rights legislation. Indeed, Peniel Joseph asserts that "Black Power militancy paralleled—and at times overlapped with—the heroic period of the civil rights era."[15] Joseph also writes that, in

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[13] Nico Slate, ed., *Black Power Beyond Borders: The Global Dimensions of the Black Power Movement* (New York City, NY: Palgrave MacMillan, 2012).
[14] Jacquelyn Dowd Hall, "The Long Civil Rights Movement and the Political Uses of the Past," *The Journal of American History* 91, no. 4 (March 2005): 1233–63.
[15] Peniel E. Joseph, *Dark Days, Bright Nights: From Black Power to Barack Obama* (New York City, NY: Basic Books, 2010), 15.

response to the Cold War repression of figures like Robeson and Du Bois in the 1950s, "black militants in the United States became increasingly shaped by revolutionary movements that were changing the face of much of the world during that time,"[16] implying the continued presence of a transnational consciousness among black Americans throughout the early Cold War era. Despite these continuities, it is nonetheless clear that transnational solidarities among black Americans were *nearly* smothered out of existence in the late 1940s and early 1950s before reappearing in the late 1960s.

At what point, then, did this reemergence occur? If transnational solidarities and global critiques of racism and colonialism were disallowed in the late 1940s and 1950s (save for a few radical outliers) by Cold War political constraints, but were central to organizations like the Black Panthers in the late 1960s and to the interwar-era black freedom movement in the 1930s and 1940s, when did this internationalism return in full force? The answer lies at the end of the 1950s on the Caribbean island of Cuba.

The Cuban Revolution and its leadership, principally Fidel Castro and Che Guevara, played a crucial role in bridging these two periods of black radical internationalism. Cynthia A. Young asserts that "Castro's uniting of antiracist rhetoric and anticolonial politics in his appeals to black Americans enabled them and other U.S. Third World Leftists to connect domestic struggles for racial equality to Third World liberation movements."[17] Expanding on this, Rafael Rojas

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[16] Ibid., 20.
[17] Cynthia A. Young, *Soul Power: Culture, Radicalism, and the Making of a U.S. Third World Left* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006), 23.

writes that in the years following the revolution “many black leaders became significantly engaged with the Third World struggle against colonialism, and their involvement with that struggle contributed decisively to the internationalization of the civil rights and black nationalist movements back in the United States.”[18] This constituted a return to the black internationalism of the pre-Cold War era. To be sure, the post-1959 opposition of the US government to social reforms for racial equality in Cuba would continue to go in “tandem with opposition to the civil rights movement and the persecution of radical black nationalist leaders” in the US itself,[19] demonstrating the continued connection between Cold War interests abroad and Civil Rights policies at home. That said, these forces would not be sufficient to crush the tidal wave of black American transnational solidarity which washed over the black freedom movement in the 1960s. The Cuban Revolution was an enormously impactful historical force which reinvigorated existing, if weakened, transnational solidarities among American black radicals and helped to return anti-colonialism, global anti-racism, collaboration with the radical left, and black nationalism to the forefront of the black freedom movement by the late 1960s.

The Contribution of this Master’s Thesis to the Existing Historiography

This Master’s thesis is an attempt to intervene into the historiography of the black radical tradition by situating the Cuban Revolution as the bridge between two different eras when transnational solidarities were central to black

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[18] Rafael Rojas, *Fighting Over Fidel: The New York Intellectuals and the Cuban Revolution*, trans. Carl Good (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2016), 166.
[19] Ibid., 173.

radical thought. While much has been written about the immediate impacts of the revolution on black radicals, and on the interactions of individual black radicals with the revolution, there has not yet been an attempt to look at the ways that the Cuban Revolution interacted with and altered *existing* threads of black radical solidarity with an eye towards the *lasting* impacts of the revolution on the black radical tradition.

To be clear, this paper takes an entirely American perspective as it is concerned with how black American thinkers experienced and responded to the Cuban Revolution. As such, while Cuba is at the center of the project, it serves more as the setting for an exploration of American black radical intellectual history than as the subject itself. I argue that transnational solidarity among black radicals in the United States has a long history defined by certain discursive threads that reemerged in different forms during different time periods, including tensions over choosing integration or separation as the pathway for black freedom, debates over what constitutes black self-determination, appeals to black nationalism intended to reveal similarities between black Americans and foreign oppressed people, and the blending of antiracist thought with anti-colonial thought under the counterhegemonic banner of opposition to white supremacist imperialism. In this paper, I carefully trace the development of these discursive threads in the decades prior to the Cuban Revolution and then describe how they continued to evolve in both the immediate aftermath of the revolution and over the fifteen-or-so years which followed the revolutionary regime's rise to power.

In doing this, I argue that the Cuban Revolution played an invaluable role in shaping the black radicalism of the 1960s and 1970s, serving as a critical discursive space for theorizing black freedom, inspiring a generation of black radicals to identify with the Third World and thus to frame black freedom as a process of decolonization and as part of a global, counterhegemonic uprising, and generating the conceptual base upon which the Black Power Movement was built. While the existing historiography on the relationship between black radicals in the United States and the Cuban Revolution covers much of this ground already, this Master's thesis is a unique attempt to cohere into a single narrative the manifold impacts which the Cuban Revolution had on the solidarities of American black radicals. It connects seemingly unrelated trends in black radical thought in the late 1960s and 1970s back to Cuba while also situating those trends as extensions of a discursive history that long predates the revolution, revealing critical continuities across time while also highlighting the specific role the Cuban Revolution played in shaping this history.

Periodization, Theory, and Methodology

Considering the long and winding discursive history of black nationalism, Pan-Africanism, Third Worldism, the Civil Rights Movement, Black Power, etc., periodization is a major obstacle for historians of mid-20th century black radical intellectual history. This paper relies on an understanding of continuities across space and time and must thus escape from the narrow constraints of traditional periodizations, while halting the temptation to construct an ahistorical, simplistic narrative that obscures the ways in which real limits acted on the drawing of these

solidarities at different points and in different ways. As such, this paper uses the expansive term 'black freedom movement,' referring to all organization and agitation for black freedom over time and across space, while also recognizing and grappling with the discontinuities inherent to so broad a conception of a 'movement.' Thus, when reference is made to either the Civil Rights Movement or Black Power Movement these are being invoked consciously and specifically as sub-categories of a much broader movement.

Within the umbrella of the black freedom movement, this paper details a range of different solidarities that are characterized as either nationalist or internationalist. These two categories will not be discussed in binary terms as there are significant, even essential connections between the black nationalist and black internationalist discourses within the black freedom movement. Though the evidence for this is decisive, the nationalist-internationalist connection has been infrequently articulated, perhaps because it is somewhat counterintuitive. There has been a historical trend of people mistakenly separating these into two wholly distinct categories with opposite qualities: Black nationalism in all its many forms has been condemned as 'black chauvinism' by critics who see it as an essentially closed-off, tribal sort of solidarity while internationalism is characterized as an inclusive solidarity forged across cultural difference. This is misguided because, in fact, *all* solidarities are a negotiation between the *exclusive* group identities formed by a narrow definition of belonging and shared opposition to or separation from the perceived other, and the *inclusive* group identities formed by an

expansive embrace of commonalities and a willful subsuming of internal differences. These are, in a sense, two sides of the same coin.

Furthermore, for the purposes of this paper the distinction between solidarity and identification, the former being the recognition of a common *cause* or *condition* across difference and the latter being the creation of a common *identity* across difference, are considered not as fundamentally different but rather as separate points on the same spectrum of affinity. All of these affinities will fall under the general term '*solidarities*.'

This framework opens up space for focusing on the question of what constitutes the *basis* of solidarity nationally and internationally: race, class, culture, history, colonial condition, interests, etc., as well as *how* these solidarities have been invoked differently over time. This paper draws upon Benedict Anderson's idea of 'imagined communities' but expands its application beyond the creation of national identity alone to the creation of all forms of solidarity. Focusing on 'nation' as the primary expression of group identity ignores the highly fluid, expansive, nature of group identity over time and can needlessly separate and isolate different identity formation processes that are, in fact, very similar. That said, much of the analysis is centered on the question of American black national identity and in that realm Anderson's theories regarding the formation of national consciousness have been highly instructive. Anderson's assertion that "nation-ness is the most universally legitimate value in the political

life of our time"[20] combined with his characterization of the curious paradox of "the 'political' power of nationalisms vs. their philosophical poverty and even incoherence"[21] prepares the way for a study of solidarities unconcerned with the absolute 'truth' of articulated solidarities and focused instead on the circumstances of their formation and their development over time. In addition, Anderson's core idea that pilgrim creole functionaries and provincial creole printmen (and their equivalents) often play the decisive historical role in creating the imagined community of nation through educational and administrative pilgrimages that decoupled people from their original communities while still imposing ceilings of access serves as part of the model within which black national consciousness formation is understood in this paper.

Sidney Lemelle and Robin Kelley also provide some concepts that underpin this study. While Anderson posits that nationalism should be understood as emerging from large cultural systems[22] and focuses on the movement of creole functionaries within the context of empire, Lemelle and Kelley's collection *Imagining Home* explores transnational African diasporic identity through studying the self-conception of diasporic African people as "an oppressed 'nation' without a homeland" and describes attempts "to locate, no matter how mythical, a single culture with singular historical roots."[23] The ideas of national identity in the

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[20] Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (New York City, NY: Verso, 1983), 3.
[21] Ibid., 5.
[22] Ibid., 12.
[23] Sidney Lemelle and Robin D. G. Kelley, eds., *Imagining Home: Class, Culture and Nationalism in the African Diaspora* (New York City, NY: Verso, 1994), 7.

absence of a homeland and the attempt to find common identity in common culture and history are prominent throughout this paper as diasporic identity-formation is explored.

In terms of methodology, this paper draws on a variety of different sources including autobiographical accounts, newspaper articles, and intellectual productions of the eras in question, as well as a host secondary sources. While intellectual trends over time are the focus of the paper conceptually, those trends are accessed via the comparative study of individual thinkers. As such, the writings of specific black radical thinkers from the 1960s, including Amiri Baraka, Robert F. Williams, Harold Cruse, John Henrik Clarke, Stokely Carmichael, and others, constitute the principal source materials.

Chapter Summaries

This paper is divided into three chapters. The first looks backward from 1960, tracing the development of different threads of black radical solidarity in the early 20th century, including black nationalism and Pan-Africanism, Marxism, antiracism, and anti-imperialism. Looking at the development of these solidarities from the interwar years through the early Cold War period, the chapter ends by detailing how black Americans initially encountered the Cuban Revolution in 1959 and 1960. Chapter two then looks forward from 1960, roughly through 1963, at how these radical solidarities developed in the wake of the Cuban Revolution. This chapter describes the experiences of four black radicals who encountered the Cuban Revolution in its early stages, looks at the ways Cuba shaped their solidarities, and details a generational divide precipitated by the

revolution among black radicals which, in tandem with the New Left, caused a rupture that shifted existing discursive threads of black radical solidarity in new directions. The third and final chapter traces these new trajectories into the late 1960s and beyond, focusing on the maturation of black American Third World identity and internal colonialism theory in the form of Black Power, Cuba's role in shaping black cultural nationalism, and the tensions between cultural and revolutionary black nationalism.

It is abundantly clear that the Cuban Revolution was an event of immense importance to the black radical tradition and it is high time to properly define the ways in which this is so. The Cuban Revolution refracted and intensified existing threads of black radical solidarity by acting as a discursive site for the strengthening of a black American Third World identity and a colonial understanding of the black condition, returning transnational solidarity to the center of black radical discourse and setting the direction for how these solidarities would develop over time.

Chapter 1: Looking Backward from the Revolution

A Brief History of Black Radical Solidarities to 1960

To determine the impact of the Cuban Revolution on black radical solidarities one must first establish what trends characterized these solidarities in the decades preceding the revolution. While it may seem like a misguided exercise in excess to devote an entire chapter to explaining this context, it is one of the primary objectives of this paper to link the intellectual impact of the Cuban Revolution to the conceptual threads of a decades-old discursive history of black radical solidarities. As such, it is necessary to be thorough in tracing the development of the intellectual landscape into which the revolution intervened. This chapter will explore the concepts which animated black radical discourse, with a focus on national and transnational solidarities, through 1960.

To begin with, there is a long and rich history in the United States of what can broadly be called Black Nationalism. While this is at best an umbrella term for loosely related identities and solidarities, all black nationalisms are attempts to define black Americans as their own nation, separate and distinct from the general American nation which is, in such instances, coded white. Emerging from the historical exclusion of black people from participatory membership in American society, black nationalist discourse is a response to an American nationalist discourse that has historically assumed, promoted, and protected white supremacy. As such, black nationalism is typically juxtaposed with integration: both are tactical and philosophical paths to black freedom but the former proposes a unique black identity as a shield (and weapon) against America's intractable white supremacy while the latter, as in Gunnar Myrdal's estimation, supposes that

white supremacy contradicts the fundamental American creed of equality and can be dismantled by widening the net of American national identity to genuinely include black Americans.[24] Thus, black nationalist discourse is tied up with the questions of what the *American nation* really is and what role white supremacy plays in American national identity.

Opposition to the monolith of white supremacy, however, has not itself produced a monolith. The heterogeneity of black nationalist discourse is derived from disagreements over what constitutes the *basis* for black national identity: culture, geography, material conditions, language, history, etc. Furthermore, considering black nationhood in a global context raises questions about how to respond to the existence of the black nation: can the black nation exist within the political boundaries of the United States or not? What might black national self-determination look like? These questions have made for a robust discursive history of black nationalism in the United States.

A Brief History of Black Nationalism

American chattel slavery provided utterly unique conditions for the development of group consciousness among black people, entangling race with class, occupation, marriage, property ownership, and access to citizenship with its concomitant political rights. From the colonial period on, all facets of American life have been constructed within racially-determined boundaries of access (albeit in ways that have changed in response to the various pressures of historical force

[24] Gunnar Myrdal, *An American Dilemma*, 1944.

and individual/group agency). Following Benedict Anderson's reasoning, these limitations created specific networks within which black people could navigate and out of which some derived a sense of national consciousness.

This deliberate, historical exclusion resulted in a widespread belief in the incompatibility of black people and American society, an idea reinforced continuously by the culture of white supremacy which developed in early American history. One result of this thinking was the creation of the American Colonization Society (ACS) in the early 19th century which proposed 'repatriating' black Americans to the African continent. Bringing together an odd mixture of ideologies, the ACS was supported by well-meaning whites looking to aid free black people, proto-black nationalists convinced that black people could never be integrated into American society, and supporters of slavery fearful of the potential role of free blacks in fomenting slave revolts, particularly following the Haitian Revolution. Advocates of emigration often clashed with more integration-minded abolitionists like Frederick Douglass who sought an end to American slavery *and* saw a permanent place for free black people in the United States. Early black nationalism finds its roots in this 19th century discourse on emigration and abolition, separation and integration, with the emigrationist Martin Delaney usually regarded as its forefather.

A significant feature of black nationalist thought from its earliest days has been the internationalism inherent to race-based solidarity. To be an emigrationist, for example, meant to assert that black Americans, having been denied meaningful access to white American society, would necessarily be at home in a

continental African society solely because of their race. As such, black nationalist thought has long been linked with pan-Africanism which assumes a global black identity based on race or on a common history of racist exploitation and oppression. Merely implied by emigrationists, pan-African solidarity was not explicitly articulated until decades after the abolition of slavery in the United States. In 1900 the First Pan-African Conference was held in London, bringing together African-descended people from the United States, the United Kingdom, the West Indies, and continental Africa, as well as many white delegates, to discuss how to ameliorate the unforgiving conditions endured by black people around the world.[25] Though the conference was originally planned in order to "investigate and publicise the situation of Blacks in the British Empire," the scope of the conference was eventually "broadened to cover the treatment of 'native races' under European and American rule," meaning all people suffering under the yoke of Western imperialism, with a specific focus on black people.[26] The conference seems to have taken an even broader view according to an address titled "To the Nations of the World," produced during the conference by the American academic W.E.B. Du Bois, which included the following appeal:

> Let the nations of the World respect the integrity and independence of the free Negro States of Abyssinia, Liberia, Hayti, etc., and let the inhabitants of these States, the independent tribes of Africa, the Negroes of the West Indies and America, and the black subjects of all nations take courage, strive ceaselessly, and fight bravely, that

[25] Marika Sherwood, "Pan-African Conferences, 1900-1953: What Did 'Pan-Africanism' Mean?," *The Journal of Pan African Studies* 4, no. 10 (January 2012): 107.
[26] Ibid.

> they may prove to the world their incontestable right to be counted among the great brotherhood of mankind.[27]

Thus, according to Du Bois, all African-descended people colonized on the African continent *and in the diaspora* represented one large group engaged in a common struggle to assert their humanity, owing presumably to their shared history of slavery, colonialism, and Western domination. This broad pan-African solidarity, first expressed in 1900, led to a series of other Pan-African Congresses in 1919, 1921, 1923, 1927, and 1945, the latter of which issued several anticolonial resolutions calling for "the independence or at least self-government for all of all British, French and Italian colonies in Africa and the West Indies."[28]

While these bodies of black radical intellectuals called for transnational black solidarity against the forces of white supremacy and imperialism, an influential Jamaican thinker and political leader named Marcus Garvey brought his brand of pan-Africanism to an even wider audience. Most influential during the 1920s, Garvey promoted the idea that African-descended people from all over the world constituted a single nation and should thus unify to secure economic and political power while taking pride in their black heritage and recognizing the full impact of the history of slavery. Garvey wanted black people to 'return' to Africa to form a black empire for African-descended people. In a 1923 speech, Garvey recounted asking himself "'Where is the black man's Government?' 'Where is his King and his kingdom?' 'Where is his President, his country, and

[27] W.E. Burghardt Du Bois, "To the Nations of the World" (London, UK: Pan-African Conference, 1900), 3, http://credo.library.umass.edu/view/pageturn/mums312-b004-i321/.
[28] Sherwood, "Pan-African Conferences, 1900-1953: What Did 'Pan-Africanism' Mean?," 109.

his ambassador, his army, his navy, his men of big affairs?' I could not find them, and then I declared, 'I will help to make them.'"[29] At a time when the African continent (Ethiopia and Liberia excepted) had been conquered by European colonial powers, Garvey lamented the absence of a state that all black people could identify with and belong to and used the idea of pan-African identity to make common cause with the entire African continent and the African-descended diaspora. In order to promote and actualize his vision of black nationhood, Garvey built a black nationalist mass movement through his Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA) which, at its height, "spread its branches in thirty-eight states in North America as well as in forty-one countries outside the United States."[30]

The nationalist-internationalist connection was apparent here: Garveyites were supposedly unified by a common racial identity which was available only to African-descended people but were consequently expected to subsume linguistic, ethnic, historical, and cultural differences beneath the umbrella of race which was to be the fundamental determinant of national identity. This demonstrated both a highly narrow understanding of national identity and a remarkably expansive, global sense of community across every conceivable difference (save for race). This framework enabled Garvey to establish clear connections between black Americans (and the rest of the diaspora) and continental Africans, which he saw

[29] Marcus Garvey, "Declaration of the Rights of the Negro Peoples of the World (Aug. 1920)," in *Selected Writings and Speeches of Marcus Garvey*, ed. Bob Blaisdell (Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, Inc., 2005), 3.

[30] Komozi Woodard, *A Nation Within A Nation: Amiri Baraka (LeRoi Jones) & Black Power Politics* (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 1999), 26.

as a prerequisite to black uplift and liberation. As Kelley and Lemelle explain, "the main characteristic of early Black nationalism was a concern with intellectually establishing the existence of a racial-cultural bond between continental Africans and diasporan Africans, and demonstrating the importance of Pan-African unity in building an emancipatory movement."[31]

In truth, however, Garvey's popularity was tied less to his specific theorization of pan-Africanism and more to his enthusiastic embrace of black pride and the cultivation of a positive black self-image as the root of liberation. His personal example as a man with a powerful, positive black self-identity was intoxicating to his followers in the 1920s. Garvey was living proof that, in the context of brutal white supremacy, pride could be a potent weapon. Thus, while his specific ideology is certainly worth examining in order to place him within a broader discursive context, it is important to keep in mind that his political model for pan-African black nationalism was arguably not his most impactful contribution to black radical thought.

In keeping with the mainstream racial theory of his time, Garvey was a racial essentialist: He, for example, wrote against integration by arguing in favor of 'racial purity' for both blacks and whites.[32] This implies that he believed race was not a construction but rather an inherent characteristic of people. Garvey's racial essentialism led him to believe, like other emigrationists before him, that black people needed to separate from white people in order to control their own

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[31] Lemelle and Kelley, *Imagining Home: Class, Culture and Nationalism in the African Diaspora*, 3.
[32] Marcus Garvey, "The Negro's Greatest Enemy (Sept. 1923)," in *Selected Writings and Speeches of Marcus Garvey*, ed. Bob Blaisdell (Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, Inc., 2005), 8.

affairs. He shared this racial essentialism with another major black nationalist figure of his era: Elijah Muhammad of the Nation of Islam (NOI). Under Muhammad's leadership during the 1930s, shortly after the fall of Garvey's movement, the NOI "preached a mélange of racial pride, personal discipline, and economic uplift as part of an unorthodox interpretation of the Islamic faith."[33] Though not an emigrationist like Garvey, Muhammad also saw racial separation as the only viable pathway for black liberation.

While black nationalists believe by definition that self-determination of a sort is necessary for black people to prosper in the context of global white supremacy, colonialism, and imperialism, black nationalist discourse has always fragmented over the question of whether self-determination entails the creation of a separate black state (as Garvey thought), the development of an independent political or economic power base within existing states, or something different. For example, W.E.B. Du Bois, who was one of Garvey's most outspoken critics, endorsed a very different kind of black nationalism from Garvey and Muhammad. As his contribution to the First Pan-African Conference suggests, Du Bois located black national identity in the "political, social, historical, and cultural 'common' characteristics and experiences shared by continental and diasporan Africans"[34] and saw the cultivation of a collective black identity as a prerequisite for effective organizing towards the end of community uplift. Du Bois saw the extreme

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[33] Peniel E. Joseph, *Waiting 'Til the Midnight Hour: A Narrative History of Black Power in America* (New York City, NY: Henry Holt and Company, LLC, 2007), 16.

[34] Reiland Rabaka, *Africana Critical Theory: Reconstructing the Black Radical Tradition, from W.E.B. Du Bois and C.L.R. James to Franz Fanon and Amilcar Cabral* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2010), 40.

racialization of black people and the apparent racelessness of white people as the root of white supremacy, which dramatically disadvantaged black people in the United States.

Additionally, Du Bois mixed black nationalist and socialist ideas, recognizing racial oppression as a phenomenon with material consequences. The solution for Du Bois was to dismantle white supremacy in order to enable class solidarity across racial lines rather than to abandon the United States as hopelessly white supremacist as Garvey and Muhammad preferred. Self-determination in this context meant the ability to navigate life unencumbered by systemic racism and Du Bois saw race-based solidarity as the best means for confronting the race-based oppression which hampered black self-determination.

Moreover, Du Bois' recognition of the relationship between cultivating group identity and combating systems of oppression led him to draw solidarity not only with other black people globally, as with Garvey's pan-Africanism, but with all other people suffering under the yoke of Western imperialism. It was this transnational solidarity which led him to famously proclaim that "the problem of the Twentieth Century is the problem of the color-line,"[35] which, while originally directed at his presumably American audience, had a much broader resonance as the term 'colored' was applied by Americans to all non-white people globally. Throughout the first half of the 20th century, American black radicals cultivated nationalist and internationalist solidarities rooted in global anti-racist and anti-

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[35] W.E. Burghardt Du Bois, "The Forethought," in *The Souls of Black Folk (1903)* (New York City, NY: Dover Publications, Inc., 1994), v.

imperialist impulses that tied the black experience of Jim Crow and white supremacy at home with the experiences of colonized and imperialized 'colored' peoples around the world.

Anti-Imperialist & Global Anti-Racist Solidarities

It is critical to remember the historical context in which figures like Du Bois and Garvey were operating in the early 20th century. It was in response to the accelerating, hyper-aggressive imperialism of Western countries that they formulated their solidarities and this fact profoundly impacted how those solidarities developed. Garvey's essentialist pan-Africanism may strike readers today as extreme or unreasonable, but as Kelley and Lemelle point out, "no matter how conservative or atavistic the rhetoric, Pan-Africanism was intended to be an oppositional ideology" and pan-African consciousness "has always been a determined effort on the part of Black peoples to rediscover their shrines from the wreckage of history,"[36] a task made urgent in Garvey's time by the bulldozing of African autonomy by European colonizers. A global assault by white supremacist Western imperialism upon Africa, Asia, and the Caribbean marked the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

It is worth clarifying the ideas which underpinned the global movement for white supremacy that Garvey and Du Bois sought to undermine. In his 1885 book *Our Country,* American imperialist and white supremacist Josiah Strong

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[36] Lemelle and Kelley, *Imagining Home: Class, Culture and Nationalism in the African Diaspora*, 2.

wrote of an impending 'new stage' in world history, "the final competition of the races, for which the Anglo-Saxon is being schooled," during which

> this race of unequaled energy, with all the majesty of numbers and the might of wealth behind it—the representative, let us hope, of the largest liberty, the purest Christianity, the highest civilization—having developed peculiarly aggressive traits calculated to impress its institutions upon mankind, will spread itself over the earth.[37]

Strong further asserted that "nothing can save the inferior race but a ready and pliant assimilation,"[38] a belief stemming from the supposed dichotomy of civilization and savagery which required all who were not of the aforementioned "highest civilization" to either 'become civilized' through assimilation or to perish in an inevitable race war. Considering the pseudoscientific, violent racism out of which such beliefs developed, it is no wonder why Garvey and Du Bois stressed the importance of autonomous black identity in their quest for black freedom.

This philosophy of global white supremacy did not merely exist in the abstract; it helped to dictate American foreign policy. US Senator Albert Beveridge, another advocate of white supremacist imperialism, celebrated the Spanish-American War in 1898 as a victory for the civilized world over the savage world, though he went a step further and asserted the particular importance of American imperialism, rather than just Western imperialism in general. Following the end of the Spanish-American War, Beveridge said that "we are enlisted in the cause of American supremacy, which will never end until

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[37] Josiah Strong, "The Anglo-Saxon and the World's Future," in *Our Country* (New York City, NY: The American Home Missionary Society, 1885), 175.
[38] Ibid.

American commerce has made the conquest of the world; until American citizenship has become the lord of civilization, and the stars and stripes the flag of flags throughout the world."[39] It is worth noting that the Spanish-American War, which Beveridge supported strongly, centered on an American intervention in the consciously multi-racial Cuban independence struggle, drowning the spirit of multi-racial, anti-imperialist solidarity in a flood of white Americanism. Defending America's imperial aspirations in Hawaii, Puerto Rico, the Philippines, and Cuba, Beveridge relied, like Strong, on the notion of global white supremacy in a time of global race war.

The apparent dichotomies of 'white' and 'colored,' 'civilized' and 'savage,' underpinned the philosophies of American imperialists like Beveridge and Strong and drew on domestic discourses on the position of American Indians and black Americans vis a vis white American society to justify imperialist aggression abroad. In response, Du Bois and others usurped this language to construct transnational solidarities in opposition to Western racism and imperialism. If, for example, the 'colored' nations of the world were all those which were not predominately populated by European-descended people, then Western denunciations of 'colored' people in Hawaii or Cuba were related in some way to the plights of colonized African and Asian peoples as well as to the ongoing struggles of black Americans. This was the theoretical basis for an ever-growing network of transnational solidarities forged and strengthened throughout

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[39] Albert J. Beveridge, "March of the Flag" (Speech, Indianapolis, Indiana, September 16, 1898).

the first half of the 20th century which served as the channel through which black Americans connected with other oppressed peoples world-wide.

Japan's 1905 victory over Russia in the Russo-Japanese War challenged the fundamental precept of global white supremacy; namely that 'white' nations were destined to dominate all 'colored' nations. In doing so, the Japanese were thrust into a symbolic position of global leadership for non-white people who were resisting Western imperialism. It was the Japanese who asserted a claim for racial equality at the Versailles peace conference in 1919, albeit unsuccessfully.[40] A 1921 novel by retired Japanese general Sato Kojiro imagined "the surprise destruction of the U.S. Pacific Fleet, occupation of Hawaii, and an invasion by Japanese forces of the U.S. mainland supported by ten million Negroes led by Marcus Garvey."[41] Furthermore, a Japanese communist elected to the 1928 Communist International, Sen Katayama, "helped to formulate the official communist position on the 'Negro Question,' including the 'right of Negroes to self-determination in the Southern States'"[42] which will be discussed later. Du Bois spent part of 1936 traveling to Japan, which he called a "colored nation,"[43] and while he was hardly uncritical of the culture of conformity and militarism he found there, he nonetheless wrote with apparent admiration of the symbolic

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[40] Yuichiro Onishi, "The New Negro of the Pacific: How African Americans Forged Cross-Racial Solidarity with Japan, 1917-1922," *The Journal of African American History* 92, no. 2 (Spring 2007): 194.
[41] David Levering Lewis, "Racism in the Service of Civil Rights: DuBois in Germany, China, and Japan, 1936-37," *Black Renaissance* 4, no. 1 (Spring 2002).
[42] Horne, "Race from Power: U.S. Foreign Policy and the General Crisis of White Supremacy," 53.
[43] W.E. Burghardt Du Bois, "The Meaning of Japan (1937)," *CR: The New Centennial Review -- Toward a New Parallax* 12, no. 1 (Spring 2012): 233.

significance of Japan's rapid ascension to world power status for other people of color:

> Thus in two bounds Japan, from being in 1868 a country about to be dominated by European merchants, became in 1905 one of the powers of the world, breaking the myth of white world domination. From this time until today Japan has presented a problem for those who think of the future of modern civilization as a problem of white folk.[44]

Later, during the Second World War, several black nationalist leaders were arrested for pro-Japanese sympathies, including Elijah Muhammad of the Nation of Islam.[45] In isolation each of these instances of transnational solidarity between the Japanese and black Americans might seem strange but, taken together in the context of American and European efforts to establish global white supremacy, they make perfect sense. Transnational solidarity allowed space for black Americans to forge a symbolic connection between Japan's impressive rise to Great Power status as a non-white country and their own position in the United States vis a vis white supremacy.

Other transnational solidarities were constructed around opposition to specific acts of imperialist aggression against perceived compatriots of the 'colored' world. As the United States began to aggressively interfere in Central American and Caribbean countries during the so-called Banana Wars, black Americans voiced their opposition on behalf of the conquered. In 1915 US marines invaded Haiti and would remain there as occupiers until 1934, motivated

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[44] Ibid., 238.
[45] Horne, "Race from Power: U.S. Foreign Policy and the General Crisis of White Supremacy," 53.

by a desire to "open up the processes of capital accumulation by and for US capital" but justifying the intervention "on the grounds that as Blacks, Haitians were unstable and incapable of governing themselves."[46] By 1919 the marines found themselves in a serious guerilla war with a group that Henry Lewis Suggs refers to as the "Haitian revolutionaries" and, in its coverage of this fighting, the African American press "championed the Haitian revolutionaries as freedom fighters in the tradition of American abolitionists such as Gabriel Prosser, Denmark Vesey, and Nat Turner."[47] This conjured up a common, transnational history of struggle against white supremacy in which Haitians fighting American marines in the early 20th century were continuing a line of resistance that reached back decades and across national boundaries to opponents of American slavery in the 19th century. Suggs also chronicles the consistent support for withdrawal from Haiti among the NAACP and the black press and argues that "between 1915 and 1922 the African American press made the withdrawal of U.S. forces from Haiti a *cause celebre*."[48] Moreover, Suggs suggests that a conscious connection was drawn between American abuses in Haiti and racial violence in the American South[49] and he cites several Pittsburgh Courier editorials from 1927 and 1928 to show that the African American press was making such transnational connections very frequently, having "petitioned for full U.S. citizenship for residents in the

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[46] "Haiti and Its Occupation by the United States in 1915: Antecedents and Outcomes," *The Journal of Haitian Studies* 21, no. 2 (2015): 20.
[47] Henry Lewis Suggs, "The Response of the African American Press to the United States Occupation of Haiti, 1915-1934," *The Journal of African American History* 87, no. The Past before Us (Winter 2002): 72.
[48] Ibid., 73.
[49] Ibid., 72–73 & 75.

Virgin Islands, for a Cooperative Economic Enterprise in Puerto Rico, for more self-determination for Nicaragua [which US marines occupied from 1912-1933], and for more Negro diplomats."[50] Thus, during these years of frequent American intervention in Latin America, a contingent of black Americans remained engaged with American foreign policy by making common cause with victims of American imperialism abroad. This often involved transplanting the language of 'Jim Crow' to a foreign context, suggesting that American racism operated at home and abroad in similar ways.

The use of the idioms of American racism to describe imperialist aggression abroad created direct, transnational parallels between the experiences and status of black Americans and of imperialized people in other countries vis a vis white supremacy. These solidarities were, however, considerably less expansive in their scale then the non-racially-focused political solidarities of the interwar years and the Second World War, namely international communism and anti-fascism. These two political forces generated numerous overlapping transnational networks of solidarity, albeit towards different ends at different times, and would intersect with the transnational exchanges that black Americans were already engaged in.

The communists were active all over the world in the interwar years and worked tirelessly to facilitate transnational solidarities, including with black Americans. The goal was to build international support for communism (as

[50] Ibid., 75.

embodied in the Soviet Union) by applying a class-focused interpretive lens to anti-racist and anti-imperial struggles, recasting virtually all global struggles as component parts of the work of building communism. This meant promoting a radically expansive solidarity that encouraged poor white workers to combat their own personal racial biases while drawing a connection between empowering working class people and ending racial discrimination globally. Ultimately, however, the class-focused approach of the communists meant conflict with organizations like the NAACP who were specifically focused on the uplift of black people, across class lines. The central issue was determining what constituted the basis for solidarity; race, class, or some amalgam of the two. This raised the vexing question of black agency in the context of communist activism; were black American communists simply coopted by Soviet ideology or did they help to shape it? Glenda Gilmore, concerned with this question of agency, asserts that

> Whether or not a Southerner joined the [Communist] Party mattered because it meant that he or she sought the most radical solution available to change the South and one that called for complete racial equality. Tying together the history of southern Communism with the Kremlin's actual involvement dispels the myth of robotic spies roaming the region, funded and controlled by Moscow gold. Black and white southerners helped forge Soviet policy on race and revolution.[51]

Others argue that while black Americans who engaged with communist discourse and action exercised some agency over these transnational networks of solidarity, that agency was ultimately circumscribed by Soviet ideology. In any case, the

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[51] Glenda Elizabeth Gilmore, *Defying Dixie: The Radical Roots of Civil Right, 1919-1950* (New York City, NY: W.W. Norton & Company, 2008), 6.

apparently unapologetic embrace of antiracist ideology by communists was one of the principle causes of the internationalization of the black freedom movement during the interwar period.

As evidenced by the saga of the Communist Party USA's legal defense of the Scottsboro Nine, these interwar transnational antiracist solidarities were complicated instances of translation between local ideologies and movements and the apparently universal doctrines of the communist party. In the mid-1930s, solidarity with the Scottsboro Nine could be seen all over the world, in each instance using the example of injustice in the Jim Crow south to raise concerns about domestic issues. Frances Sullivan has written on the impact of the Scottsboro case on racial discourses within Cuba, arguing that "in the context of ongoing racial struggles and a spike in racist violence, defending the Scottsboro Nine was, for Cubans of color, a clear and straightforward opportunity to speak out against racism from within the narrow strictures of permissible racial dialogue in Cuban society."[52] In other words, support for the Scottsboro Nine served as an avenue for indirectly (and thus, safely) critiquing Cuban racism from the inside. Pointing out the spontaneity of some Scottsboro-related demonstrations in Cuba, Sullivan further suggests that this solidarity with black Americans over the shared cause of antiracism was widespread and, crucially, included common people. Moreover, Sullivan emphasizes that the communist party's involvement in the

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[52] Frances Peace Sullivan, "'For the Liberty of the Nine Boys in Scottsboro and Against Yankee Imperialist Domination in Latin America': Cuba's Scottsboro Defense Campaign," *Canadian Journal of Latin American and Caribbean Studies* 38, no. 2 (2013): 285.

Scottsboro case "cemented a close ideological relationship between black liberation and the radical Left in the 1930s," making clear the connection between anti-racist and class-based mobilizations.[53] Although her study focuses on Cuban perspectives, Sullivan's conclusion that solidarity with the Scottsboro Nine was used by Cubans of color to critique Cuban racism demonstrates some of the main ways that transnational solidarities operate: they help to frame and legitimize domestic opposition to oppression by connecting those struggles in spirit and substance to other geographically situated oppressions and then, in turn, reframe both in universal terms. In other words, the realities of racism in Cuba, when compared with similar oppressions in the United States, made an act of resistance in Cuba into an act of resistance against the same global forces that also negatively impacted black Americans (in this case, white supremacy). The international outrage over the injustices of Scottsboro created solidarity between black Americans and anti-racist/anti-imperialist activists abroad by creating a global space in which black Americans could share and borrow the idioms of resistance transnationally for their own benefit while also raising consciousness about the shared conditions of oppression among the victims of racism and imperialism globally.

There were other transnational connections being made between black Americans and foreign peoples through the interwar period, often in the form of support for various national independence struggles. Owing in part to the enduring influence of Garvey's pan-Africanism, there was a groundswell of

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[53] Ibid., 283.

support among black Americans for Ethiopia following the 1935 Italian invasion. John Munro has convincingly argued that this was not merely a reflection of the opinions of the era's 'race leaders' but was, in fact, a popular movement of ordinary black Americans whose pan-Africanist, internationalist solidarities allowed them to make common cause with the Ethiopians.[54] Many black Americans even saw the invasion of Ethiopia in personal terms, as an attack on their own country. Later on, according to Robin Kelley, the 1936-39 Spanish Civil War offered frustrated black Americans like poet Ramon Durem "a way of avenging Ethiopia for Mussolini's bloody invasion,"[55] further stretching the internationalized boundaries of the black freedom struggle beyond just solidarity with non-European people. The synthesis of anti-racism with the radical Left meant that the anti-fascist coalition called for to defend republican Spain would be very broad and could draw from a deep well of existing transnational solidarities. That the fight against fascism in Spain was for some an acceptable substitute for fighting the Italian fascists who conquered Ethiopia indicated that pan-African solidarity could harmonize with the Black Left and with anti-fascist solidarities that stretched far beyond race. (The subtitle of Danny Duncan Collum's book on black American participation in the Spanish Civil War, "This Ain't Ethiopia, but It'll Do," neatly sums this up.[56]) Thus, the boundaries of transnational solidarity can be quite elastic depending on the context.

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[54] John Munro, "Facing East: African American Internationalism and the Italian Invasion of Ethiopia, 1935" (Master's Thesis, Simon Fraser University, June 2003), 60–61.
[55] Robin D. G. Kelley, *Freedom Dreams: The Black Radical Imagination* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 2002), 65.
[56] Danny Duncan Collum, *African Americans in the Spanish Civil War: "This Ain't Ethiopia, but It'll Do"* (New York City, NY: G.K. Hall, 1992).

Interwar-era mobilizations demonstrated the transnational character that America's domestic fight against racism had taken on: black Americans drew parallels between white supremacy in the United States in the form of Jim Crow and global white supremacy in the form of imperialism. Indeed the Second World War itself took on a racial character for many, with the Japanese Empire ironically using the defeat of white imperialism as a justification for its own imperial expansion, while in the United States it became increasingly difficult "to explain why it was necessary to make sacrifices to defeat systems of racial domination devised in Tokyo and Berlin, while racialized systems of oppression were maintained at home."[57] This also led to black critiques of the systems of racial domination extant in countries allied to the United States, including the United Kingdom which clung bitterly to control of its empire throughout the war. This struggle was most dramatic in the case of India.

India's growing independence movement attracted many black Americans during the 1930s and was thus the site of some of the most visible collaborations between the black freedom struggle and anti-imperialist mobilizations abroad. Mutual interest in employing satyagraha (nonviolent civil disobedience) to combat Jim Crow brought black Americans into contact with Mohandas Gandhi and his representatives to a point where, according to Daniel Immerwahr, "sending prominent blacks over to India became a sort of cottage industry" in the 1930s and 1940s.[58] Indeed, Du Bois and Paul Robeson were personal friends of

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[57] Horne, "Race from Power: U.S. Foreign Policy and the General Crisis of White Supremacy," 54.
[58] Daniel Immerwahr, "Caste or Colony? Indianizing Race in the United States," *Modern Intellectual History* 4, no. 2 (August 2007): 292.

Jawaharlal Nehru and champions of Indian independence. During the war, the Indian National Congress refused to support the British war effort until full Indian independence had been granted, a bold position that inspired black Americans who were conflicted about offering their full support for their country given the persistence of Jim Crow. Penny M. Von Eschen explains that "African American journalists and activists…carved out an advocacy of anticolonialism that refused to accommodate wartime national loyalties," offering consistent support for immediate Indian independence throughout the war, despite the American alliance with the United Kingdom.[59]

Thus, over the course of the early 20th century the black freedom movement increasingly embraced an internationalism which included not only the pan-Africanist solidarities of the Garveyites but also more general antiracist and anti-imperialist solidarities opposing the global hegemony of white supremacists and opposing fascism while frequently collaborating with communists globally. Consequently, black freedom in America became increasingly linked with decolonization and resistance to Western imperialism abroad.

Black Radical Solidarities and the Cold War

The aftermath of the Second World War set the stage for successive waves of decolonization which would help to generate new internationalist solidarities. With the old giants of Western imperialism dramatically weakened by years of total war, the colonized people of Asia and Africa could more aggressively twist the arms of their colonizers in hopes of winning their freedom. With Indian

[59] Von Eschen, *Race Against Empire: Black Americans and Anticolonialism, 1937-1957*, 28.

independence from the United Kingdom in 1947 and the triumph of Chinese communists in 1949, the world's two most populous countries were free to forge their own paths, the former following two centuries of direct and indirect political rule by the British and the latter following a century of economic exploitation by the West. India and China would come to occupy an important place in the 20th century as powerful, independent countries with whom the West would have to contend but whom the West could never again dominate.

While this could have led to an explosion of anticolonial solidarity in the United States, US-Soviet Cold War politics had set in by the late 1940s, and "the narrowed scope of acceptable protest during the early years of the Cold War would not accommodate criticism of colonialism."[60] Particularly alarmed by the 'loss' of China to the communist sphere in 1949, America's anti-communist Cold Warriors were intent on preventing any further communist victories elsewhere in the world and were thus leery of the radical politics which had been responsible for the broad, transnational solidarities of the interwar and war years. As such, general anticolonial critiques from within the United States, and national independence movements in Asia and Africa themselves became ensnared in the Cold War binary which branded all acts of resistance against colonialism as sinister attempts by Soviet communist puppet masters to dig their claws into foreign soil in the interest of dispassionate Realpolitik. The Soviets reasoned in like manner, suspicious of America's imperial designs abroad, thus all agitations for national independence quickly became mere sideshows in the global struggle

[60] Dudziak, *Cold War Civil Rights: Race and the Image of American Democracy*, 11.

between the Soviets and the Americans, the conflicts in French Indochina and Korea being prime examples.

In the United States, this Red Scare was reflected in domestic developments as much as it was in foreign policy. The transnational anti-colonialism preached by many black radicals came under fire as potentially communistic. Even as well-respected an organization as the NAACP, which Carol Anderson claims had been staunchly devoted to anti-colonialism even in the early Red Scare period of the late 1940s, began to experience serious external attacks and internal disarray in the early 1950s. It was as though "a grenade of anticommunism had been detonated" in the organization "by right-wing legislators and their supporters," after which "the Association leaders picked up a similar grenade and tossed it into the rank and file."[61] Eager to wash their hands of any connection with the radical left, the leadership of the NAACP sought to silence and remove radicals. Du Bois, a co-founder of the Association, left amidst this conformist, anticommunist frenzy in 1948, in part, according to Gerald Horne, because of "his persistence on pressing the issue of United States racism in the United Nations," which, by that point, was easily tied to communist sympathy within the new rules emerging in American political discourse. American white supremacists had learned as early as the 1950s that, while overt racism was falling out of fashion, branding anti-racist actions as communistic was a simple and effective alternative. As Horne explains, "with the anti-Hitler war substantially

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[61] Gerald Horne, *Black & Red: W.E.B. Du Bois and the Afro-American Response to the Cold War, 1944-1963* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1986), 61.

discrediting racist ideology, Rankin, Bilbo, Eastland, and others found it useful to score Black activists as being as red as their blood in their campaigns of bigotry. Blacks and their organizations were an early and repeated target of the red scare offensive."[62] The Red Scare also impacted the ability of black radicals with known socialist and communist affiliations to travel outside of the US: In 1950 Paul Robeson had his passport seized by the State Department while Du Bois, initially hesitant to even apply for a renewal of his passport, was predictably denied that renewal when he finally sought it in 1952. [63] It was during these years from the late 1940s through the mid-1950s that the internationalism of the interwar and war years, which had peaked with the united front against fascism, was nearly snuffed out by Cold War politics.

Black Americans and the Third World

A new sort of internationalism would begin to take shape in the mid-1950s. While the internationalism of the 1930s and 1940s was rooted in international Communism or opposition to fascism, the emergent internationalism of the 1950s would be rooted in the desire for national independence. The Cold War's division of the world into Soviet and American spheres of influence triggered a global consciousness among the so-called 'Third World' nations who increasingly sought an independent path, united in their resistance to political, economic, and cultural domination by either of the two superpowers. Third World consciousness was aided by the handful of anticolonial uprisings which were not

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[62] Ibid., 97 & 61.
[63] Ibid., 208 & 213.

completely suppressed by Cold War power politics; the Mau Mau in Kenya arose to challenge their British colonizers while the French struggled to retain control of Vietnam, both in the early 1950s. From the mid-1950s on, the collective momentum of these movements began to be felt, and India's Jawaharlal Nehru, Egypt's Gamal Abdel Nasser, and others helped to facilitate the spread of this Third World identity which could then be claimed by new, emerging nations as a critical period of decolonization in Africa and Asia commenced, beginning with Ghana in 1957. The twin global forces of decolonization and opposition to the Cold War binary provided space for expansive internationalist solidarities within the categories of 'the colonized' and the 'Third World,' both of which would eventually be claimed by black radicals in the United States.

Historians tend to cite the 1955 Afro-Asian Conference in Bandung, Indonesia as the first major expression of this modern Third World Internationalism. Penny Von Eschen explains that "Bandung helped to widen the terms of debate about international politics after the most constricted years of the Cold War" as it was "the most important and influential of several attempts to gain and then maintain independence from Cold War politics."[64] Across national, linguistic, and cultural differences the participants in the conference worked to construct a common sense of purpose grounded in their shared desire for independence and self-determination. The conference was organized by the leadership of Indonesia, Burma, Ceylon, India, and Pakistan, and was attended by representatives from 29 African and Asian countries all enticed by the prospect of

[64] Von Eschen, *Race Against Empire: Black Americans and Anticolonialism, 1937-1957*, 168.

forging a third path amidst the stifling Cold War binary world-system which subsumed the critical question of national independence beneath ideological quibbles and superpower security concerns. Black Americans did not participate as a distinct group (nor was the US formally represented, though Congressman Adam Clayton Powell Jr. unofficially spoke in defense of the US and the rest of the West), but several did attend as individuals, including author Richard Wright, reporter Ethel Payne, and others. It is thus important not to romanticize the mere existence of the conference or to exaggerate its scope and impact vis a vis black Americans, but this powerful symbol of Third World collaboration and solidarity did undeniably lay the foundation for the Third World identity which many black American radicals would later embrace as their own.

The Third World movement that grew out of Bandung was heterogenous, encompassing the Non-Aligned Movement that resisted the Cold War binary, as well as communists and anti-communists, radicals and the more moderate upper leadership of Third World countries, etc. These differences were important to be sure, but in terms of black American solidarities, Bandung and its institutional progeny (such as the 1957 Afro-Asian Conference in Cairo, the 1961 Belgrade Conference, and the 1966 Tricontinental Conference in Havana) should be looked at more narrowly as sites for transnational Third World identity formation. Bandung was, ultimately, an inspirational moment for a generation of young activists in the United States who would, according to Cynthia Young, increasingly come to see "the interconnections between U.S. minorities and Third

World majorities in a moment of global decolonization."[65] This could be seen as a mere extension of the earlier era of black internationalism, but it was the wave of decolonization and the emergence of the 'Third World' as a broad new imagined community to which black Americans might belong that constituted a major difference from the mere oppositional solidarities of earlier antiracism and anti-imperialism. Ultimately the difference was context: opposition to imperialism at a time when the major global empires remained intact produced a certain kind of solidarity but the idea of an autonomous global power block which accompanied Third World identity emerged at a time when the major global empires were actually crumbling, a development which produced a different kind of solidarity.

Black Americans and the Colonial Condition

The flourishing of Third World identity was bolstered by successive waves of decolonization and, as such, was tied to the parallel process of national identity formation in these newly formed countries. For black Americans, this trend raised the historical question of how their condition compared with that of these new countries with whom they drew anticolonial solidarities. Given the peculiar history of the trans-Atlantic slave trade, American slavery, and Jim Crow, the question was raised as to whether black Americans ought to be best understood as an oppressed national minority or as a sort of colonized nation-within-a-nation that would one day celebrate its own moment of liberation. Considering this in the light of black nationalist discourse, one returns to the

[65] Young, *Soul Power: Culture, Radicalism, and the Making of a U.S. Third World Left*, 3.

question of what black self-determination, the nebulous goal unifying black nationalists, might look like.

Here again, the history is significant. Beginning in the late 1920s, the Communist Party divided over the issue of black American self-determination as part of the struggle between Stalinists and Trotsky's Left Opposition that followed Lenin's death. Beginning at the Sixth Communist International in 1928, the party officially began to analyze the situation of black people in the United States through the lenses of colonialism: black freedom was to be a question of territorial national self-determination, of separate statehood, as in other colonized nations.[66] In short, the party considered black Americans a nation within a nation, a colonized people geographically concentrated in the so-called 'Black Belt' of the south where they maintained numerical majorities in many counties but without the concomitant political or economic power. Like other colonized people, black Americans would need to follow the route of nationalist revolution to cast off the chains of colonialism and achieve self-determination ahead of the eventual proletarian revolution.

This 'black belt thesis' was supported by some black communists like Harry Haywood, but also "met fierce opposition from white, and some black, party leaders."[67] Max Shachtman, a white American communist of the Left Opposition, wrote in 1933 against the idea of 'self-determination for the Black Belt.' While he acknowledged that all Communists believed in "the right of self-

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[66] Kelley, *Freedom Dreams: The Black Radical Imagination*, 49.
[67] Ibid.

determination of oppressed national minorities, peoples, [and] colonies,"[68] he considered the application of this principle to black Americans to be a reactionary, Stalinist perversion because "the American Negroes do not constitute a nation separate and apart from the rest of the population of the country."[69] Black Americans were, according to Shachtman, Americans first and foremost. He considered "a language and a territory"[70] to be the foundations of a nation and saw that Americans of all races shared both of those things. A large part of Shachtman's argument was that black Americans did not have unique historical ties to the 'Black Belt' in the same way that colonized people did to the land they occupied: indeed, he said, "the diffusion of the Negro population in one country leaves it without any territory except that which is common to all,"[71] rendering invalid any claim to black nationhood, particularly in the context of the First Great Migration during which a million and a half black Americans left the black belt for northern cities.

This territory-focused discourse on black statehood would prove less sturdy than the black nationalism of thinkers like Du Bois who focused on shared historical conditions and material deprivation as the basis of black nationhood, or indeed like the many promoters of Negritude and the Harlem Renaissance who saw national identity in the cultivation of a coherent culture. Nonetheless, the national minority/colonized nation question would continue to simmer in the

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[68] Max Shachtman, "Communism and the Negro (1933)," in *Race and Revolution*, ed. Christopher Phelps (New York City, NY: Verso, 2003), 69.
[69] Ibid., 71.
[70] Ibid.
[71] Ibid., 73.

background of the black freedom movement through the 1950s. By that point, the rift within the black freedom movement between integrationists and those unsure of the possibility of genuine integration would begin to widen while increasingly being framed alongside the colonial question: integrationists envisioning black Americans as a national minority and the others open to a black nationalist, colonial interpretation of the black condition. This divide was by no means absolute or even consciously articulated in the 1950s but the trends which would eventually create this gap were certainly developing by that point. At least in the 1950s, however, the difference was unimportant in terms of Third World solidarity: In 1959, Martin Luther King Jr. remarked that "the strongest bond of fraternity [is] the common cause of minority and colonial peoples in America, Africa and Asia struggling to throw off racialism and imperialism,"[72] demonstrating that national minorities and colonized people had grounds enough for shared interests and solidarity even absent a black nationalist, colonial interpretation of the black condition.

Save for the simplistic communist policy of self-determination for the Black Belt, explicit formulations of what would come to be called internal colonialism theory for black Americans were not articulated in the first half of the 20th century, nor were explicit calls for a black American Third World identity. The groundwork was laid for these solidarities but they would remain latent possibilities, unrealized on any serious scale even through 1959.

[72] Martin Luther King Jr., "My Trip to the Land of Gandhi," July 1959, The Martin Luther King Jr. Papers Project.

The Renewed Pan-Africanism of the 1950s

In addition to the development of this groundwork for Third World and colonial solidarities, pan-Africanist solidarities continued to influence the imagination of black Americans into the 1950s, reinvigorated by the wave of anticolonial agitations throughout Africa. Ghana, the first sub-Saharan African nation to break the shackles of European colonialism, would hold particular symbolic significance: A 1957 editorial on Ghanaian independence published in the Pittsburgh Courier drew not only on pan-African sentiments, but also on the belief that "the Majority of American Negroes are Ghanaians whose cultural roots have been destroyed," stating that "Ghana's contributions, as a free nation, to peace, to art, to industry, to government, will be regarded by American Negroes as symbols of their own worth and potential."[73] Far more than an expression of distant solidarity, the article presented the narrative of Ghanaian independence as a story *about* black Americans, drawing a direct historical connection between the two populations. As with Ethiopia over twenty years earlier, identification with the African independence struggles of the 1950s was personal for many black Americans.

Historian John Henrik Clarke wrote often about African independence, regularly contributing pieces on African culture and history to the Pittsburgh Courier in late 1950s and consistently advocating for the study of Africa throughout his long career. He penned a piece in 1961 criticizing the black press

[73] "The Courier SALUTES GHANA," *The Pittsburgh Courier (1955-1964)*, March 9, 1957, sec. Editorials, B1.

for insufficient coverage of African independence, saying that they "have missed or mis-handled the story of emergent Africa" which Clarke called "the greatest news event in the age in which we live."[74] Clarke made a compelling case for increased coverage of Africa in the press but perhaps more impactful was the extent to which Clarke seemed to identify with African people in their quest for liberation.

These far-off African nationalist struggles occupied an important place in domestic black freedom discourses, as James H. Meriwether explains:

> The nonviolent, direct action tactics of the protesters in South Africa's 1952 Defiance Campaign …resonated in black America, as did the more militant approach of Mau Mau fighters in Kenya. Viewing these events, African Americans reflected on the possibilities for their own situation, with discussion about Africa refracting as well as reshaping debates within black America.[75]

The proliferation of African independence struggles throughout the 1950s opened an important discursive space in which black Americans could compare their own struggles with those of continental Africans. Though the scope of these solidarities and identifications were circumscribed by race within the African context, they nonetheless provided the framework for a transnational sense of *belonging* that would later manifest in black American Third World and colonial identities. Moreover, the use of distant movements for national independence as discursive spaces for reflecting on the tactics and ideology of black freedom in the

[74] John Henrik Clarke, "Africa and the American Negro Press," *The Journal of Negro Education* 30, no. 1 (Winter 1961): 64.
[75] James H. Meriwether, *Proudly We Can Be Africans: Black Americans and Africa 1935-1961* (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 2002), 2.

United States would become increasingly common through the 1950s and into the 1960s.

The existing discourses on black identity, black Americans' relationship to the US in general, antiracist-anticolonial solidarity, and Third World Internationalism were invigorated by the Bandung Conference, Ghana's independence, the Mau Mau Uprising in Kenya, anti-apartheid agitation in South Africa, the Chinese Civil War, Indian independence, etc. all of which provided a rich discursive context for understanding and responding to the Cuban Revolution when 1959 finally arrived.

Black Americans' Initial Encounter with the Cuban Revolution

It was in the context of this global moment of decolonization, of resistance to Western imperialism, and of Third World solidarity, that Fulgencio Batista, who had ruled the small Caribbean island of Cuba as a dictator since 1952, was deposed and forced into exile by an army of young, bearded revolutionaries. Led by Fidel Castro, Raul Castro, and Che Guevara, these *barbudos* ousted Batista on New Year's Day 1959, successfully capping a years-long revolt and initiating a series of dramatic changes to Cuban society. The revolution began in 1953 with Castro's July 26th attack on the Moncada Barracks from which the revolutionary movement derived its name; the *Movimiento 26 de Julio.* Despite the abject failure of the attack in military terms, "Moncada came to occupy an exalted spot in revolutionary historiography, as symbolizing the beginning of a complete break with Cuba's past."[76] Castro, jailed for his participation in the attack, defended his

[76] Aviva Chomsky, *A History of the Cuban Revolution* (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011), 36–37.

actions in one of his most celebrated speeches in which he called for the implementation of five "revolutionary laws" including "the restoration and implementation of the 1940 Constitution, an agrarian reform putting land in the hands of those who tilled it, obligation of employers to share profits with workers, guaranteed markets for small sugar farmers, and confiscation of all enterprises obtained through fraud and corruption," famously concluding "history will absolve me."[77] Imprisoned and then exiled in Mexico, Castro returned to Cuba in 1956, intending to land the yacht *Granma* with a small band of revolutionaries which would then trigger a simultaneous uprising in the city of Santiago and initiate a revolutionary struggle against Batista. This was, however, another military failure, this time resulting in Castro retreating into the Sierra Maestra mountains with a dramatically reduced group of supporters with whom he would wage a two-year guerilla campaign.[78] It was over the course of the campaign in the Sierra Maestra that the revolutionary ideology of the July 26th Movement crystalized, as the guerillas' confrontation with the scope and depth of rural poverty influenced later revolutionary policies including the "fundamental redistribution of resources that focused on the countryside" and the prioritization of "nation-building and consciousness -raising, by bringing urban Cubans face to face with the realities of rural poverty."[79] By building support among the rural poor in the Sierra Maestra over two years of fighting, Castro and the other

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[77] Ibid., 37.
[78] Ibid., 38.
[79] Ibid., 39.

barbudos managed to build a massive revolutionary movement which, in tandem with the work of revolutionary urban saboteurs, resulted in Batista's ouster.

Although not supportive of Castro's movement, the United States had cut its military aid to the Batista regime in March of 1958, leaving Batista to unsuccessfully fend for his regime's survival against a rising tide of popular opposition.[80] Batista's fall created a complicated situation for the American government and for American investors who had a vested interest in keeping Cuba stable and within America's sphere of economic influence. Though Castro was a Cuban nationalist and not a Soviet-backed communist revolutionary, he existed in a time when America's perspective on the world was inextricable from Cold War security imperatives so it is no wonder that a popular revolution a mere ninety miles from the American mainland raised eyebrows.

Lars Schoultz explains that the United States government had a variety of foreign policy concerns in 1958 which initially distracted it from the situation in Cuba: "The final year of fighting in Cuba had coincided with the U.S. invasion of Lebanon, with the communist Chinese shelling of the Nationalist islands of Matsu and Quemoy, with ominous communist advances in Laos, and now, in early 1959, with renewed Soviet threats to Berlin," in addition to the May 1959 death of John Foster Dulles who had been a central figure of American foreign policy through the Eisenhower years, and a massive shift in power from President Eisenhower's Republican Party to the Democratic Party following the 1958 midterm elections.[81]

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[80] Ibid., 40.

[81] Lars Schoultz, *That Infernal Little Cuban Republic: The United States and the Cuban Revolution* (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 2009), 83.

Schoultz concludes that “with Western Europe’s security in play and other East-West issues occupying whatever room remained at the top of the foreign policy agenda, Cuba’s significance to Washington rested squarely on one question: Where did it stand on the Cold War?”[82] Though initially convinced that Castro was not a communist and thus not a threat, State Department officials were increasingly worried by the public executions in Cuba, Castro’s anti-U.S. rhetoric, his denunciations of the “regional symbol of anticommunist solidarity,” the Organization of American States (OAS), his re-legalization of communist political parties, and other behaviors seen as beneficial to international communism.[83] With the enactment of agrarian reforms, the expropriation of properties owned by American investors, and continued rhetorical attacks on the United States, those worries eventually morphed into open hostilities. There was not, however, a uniform American response to the Cuban Revolution: Rather, Cuba came to represent different things for different people.

A racially diverse, post-emancipation society like the United States, Cuba and its revolution loomed large in black American consciousness. While many Americans were concerned about the possibly communist character of the revolution by the end of 1959, historians agree that it enjoyed widespread support among black Americans, at least in its early stages. Framed by the black press as a ‘colored’ country intent on recognizing and unmaking its entrenched institutional racism, black radicals as well as moderate, middle class black Americans

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[82] Ibid.
[83] Ibid., 91.

established ties of solidarity with Cuba. Moreover, the image of the triumphant, youthful *barbudos* embodied a sort of story-book heroism that particularly appealed to young people. Poet and playwright LeRoi Jones saw Castro in this light, writing in his autobiography that he "had been raised on Errol Flynn's *Robin Hood* and the endless hero-actors fighting against injustice and leading the people to victory over tyrants" and so to him "the Cuban thing seemed a case of classic Hollywood proportions."[84] At the same time, the image of a country liberating itself from a leader who had, up until recently, enjoyed American backing, and moving to institute radical social changes meant Cuba could also have fit into the existing imagined community of the antiracist and anti-imperialist Third World. This was not the case initially, however, as Castro did not employ overtly anti-imperialist rhetoric or embrace the Third World moniker while wresting power from Batista in the 1950s. To be sure, anti-imperialism and Third World identity would become ideological pillars of the revolution within a year of his ascension to power, but even in the first months of 1959 this was not yet apparent, thus the black press was focused entirely on an anti-racist framing rather than an anti-imperialist framing of the revolution.

The primary reason that black Americans came to support Castro was the fact that many identified with the struggles of the Cuban revolutionaries and saw Cuba through the lens of their own situation in the United States vis a vis white supremacy. This resulted from both the confluence of historical events (the Cuban

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[84] Imamu Amiri Baraka, *The Autobiography of LeRoi Jones/Amiri Baraka* (New York City, NY: Freundlich Books, 1984), 161.

Revolution came, as Jones points out, in 1959, when "the civil rights movement was rising with every headline"[85]) and the favorable coverage of the revolution in the black press. Van Gosse writes that there was a

> wave of black interest and sympathy, largely journalistic, that began during the revolution's earliest days in power in 1959. At a point when the struggle to fulfill the amorphous promises of Brown v. Board of Education was at its most bitter, and Southern politics had been taken over by the White Citizens Council in most states, the sudden triumph in Cuba appeared to much of the black press as a metaphor for what needed to be done at home.[86]

The black press played an important role in shaping the emerging narrative that linked the fates of Castro's revolution with African Americans. This was at least partly by design: Van Gosse explains that Castro's government brought "hundreds of international journalists and observers" to witness the triumphs of the Cuban Revolution as part of 'Operation Truth' in January of 1959, including many from the black press in the United States.[87] Gosse identifies this occasion as the moment when the black press first became exposed to, and thus first began to transmit, "the interracial character of Castro's 26th of July Revolutionary Movement" with its "very visible black figures in leadership," as well as "Castro's public attacks on discrimination, both in Cuba and in the United States" including "his explicit calls for racial equality," all of which appealed to black Americans.[88]

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[85] Ibid.
[86] Van Gosse, "The African-American Press Greets the Cuban Revolution," in *Between Race and Empire: African Americans and Cubans before the Cuban Revolution*, ed. Lisa Brock and Digna Castaneda Fuertes (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 1998), 267.
[87] Ibid., 268.
[88] Ibid.

This solidarity between Cuba's revolutionary regime and black Americans relied on the existing conventions of international antiracism; casting the Cuban Revolution in racial terms and relaying the events through the idioms of American racism. In a January 17th, 1959 editorial in the *Baltimore Afro-American*, Batista's fall was framed in racial terms. According to the *Afro-American,* Batista was "part African, part Indian, part Chinese and part Spanish" and thus "embodied the hopes of the peasantry who comprised all of these elements" when he first came to power in 1933, but over time "both in his thinking and in his attitudes, [he] slowly submerged all of his other claims to racial identity but that which identified him as white," and it was "in exact ratio to this evolution [that] he lost the support of his base which Castro picked up in the predominantly colored Eastern Provinces of Oriente, Santiago, and Camaguey."[89] Here the author portrayed the revolution in the language and paradigms of the black freedom movement in the United States by using the word 'colored' to describe an underrepresented segment of Cuban society and by tying Batista's descent into authoritarianism to his exclusive embrace of white identity, implying the operation of white supremacy even in the case of a multiracial leader. The article thus drew attention to the multiracial character of Cuba and implied that keeping power there required maintaining the support of the non-white population, something which would clearly have appealed to black Americans who had since Reconstruction suffered under governments that did not meaningfully represent them. The 1959 revolution was presented in this story as a repetition of history in

[89] "Revolution in Cuba," *The Baltimore Afro-American*, January 17, 1959, sec. Editorials.

which "the colored folk are coming into their own again," leaving the question of whether or not Castro, "having attained his ends," would follow "the course of his predecessor by forgetting those who helped him to power," or if he would continue to support the people of color whose support had been essential to the success of the revolution.[90] This warning to Castro to address the needs of non-white Cubans who, it was implied, would no longer tolerate governments that would ignore or mistreat them, was clearly written to appeal to the feelings that many black Americans had towards their own government.

By casting Cuba as a country similar to the United States where a long-suppressed population of people of color were rising up to unmake white supremacy, the black press was implicitly building a case for seeing the Cuban Revolution as an alternative to the American racial order of Jim Crow. Through direct comparisons between the two, using the language of Jim Crow, Castro's Cuba was depicted as an active battleground in the international war on Western racism where the scales were tipped in favor of racial justice, in stark contrast to the United States. In the February 7th, 1959 issue of the *Afro-American*, Cliff MacKay wrote of the "three faces" of Cuba, claiming that "in Oriente, where colored people outnumber white…there is absolutely no discrimination" while "Santa Clara is the Dixie of Cuba" and Havana is a combination of both.[91] MacKay ended his article by saying that Castro (who MacKay described as a "realist" and "not a dreamer or an idealist" as he was often branded) had offered

[90] Ibid.
[91] Cliff MacKay, "Cuba Has 3 Faces!," *The Baltimore Afro-American*, February 7, 1959.

assurances that the Jim-Crow-like segregation in Cuba would be changed.[92] Later that month MacKay penned another article in which he quoted a law school classmate of Castro's saying that "Fidel was always taking up for the colored students" and "was persistently critical of how the racial problem was being handled in the United States."[93]

In the *Afro-American*'s coverage of Cuba in1959 much emphasis was put on the sincerity of Castro's anti-racism and on the multiracial character of the revolution, always with an implicit or explicit comparison to the United States. A May 23rd, 1959 article praised Castro's plans for "F.E.P.C. [Fair Employment Practice Committee] type legislation for Cuba" and included the claim "that [Castro's] official party contained Cubans of several different shades of skin pigmentation."[94] These articles need not be read as outright endorsements of Castro's regime, however it is fair to say that black Americans reading them might have thought fondly about a revolution that overthrew a dictator portrayed as perpetuating Cuban Jim Crow and replacing him with a government that consciously and programmatically sought to end racial discrimination. Cuba thus offered a radical vision of an alternative racial order wherein people of color wielded substantive political power and historical biases were openly acknowledged and intentionally rooted out through multiracial collaboration and structural reforms to society. This meant an early solidarity between many black Americans and the Cuban Revolution.

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[92] Ibid.
[93] Cliff MacKay, "Inside Castro's Cuba," *The Baltimore Afro-American*, February 21, 1959.
[94] Charles P. Howard Sr., "Who Is This Man Castro?," *The Baltimore Afro-American*, May 23, 1959.

The Cuban Revolution and the Tactics of the Black Freedom Movement

Looking at the evolution of this line of thinking through 1960 we see that Cuba was increasingly seen as the anti-racist foil to the entrenched white supremacy of the United States. Fueled by the rising tide of black freedom in the United States, however, perceptions of Cuba began to reflect not only the general hope for a racially egalitarian future, but also the black freedom movements' own internal tensions between gradualists and radicals. Advocates for radical, immediate change gravitated towards Cuba's revolutionary example, proudly displaying Cuba's antiracist successes as refutations of more moderate, incremental approaches to black freedom. Two American black radical advocates for the Castro regime, journalist William Worthy and writer Julian Mayfield, published articles in the *Afro-American* in 1960 emphatically praising Cuba's racial progress. In his September 24th, 1960 article, "No Color Bar In Cuba," Worthy wrote "if I were a colored parent, eager to raise my children free of racial complexes and ingrained subservience I would at any sacrifice treat them to at least one impressionable year in revolutionary, non-discriminatory Cuba where the free and unself-conscious mixing of races and complexions is startling to an outsider."[95] He went on to critique America's incrementalism on the civil rights question, such as the failure of the US government to meaningfully enforce the 1954 desegregation decision in *Brown v. Board*, juxtaposing it with "Fidel Castro's bold measures that overnight established equality as the law of the land,

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[95] William Worthy, "No Color Bar In Cuba Says Writer," *The Baltimore Afro-American*, September 24, 1960.

as the rigid policy of his government and as the day-by-day habits of the citizenry."[96] This propagandistic-sounding endorsement of the Castro regime, while built on the now-familiar comparison between US and Cuban approaches to racial justice (or injustice), nonetheless reveals that pro-Castro elements within the black freedom movement were becoming more radical as early as 1960.

Worthy framed his advocacy for the revolution in the context of the domestic tactical debates within the American black freedom movement by implicitly comparing Castro's apparently very effective example of immediate, revolutionary change with the gradualism which characterized America's crawl towards racial equality, essentially arguing that radical change of the Cuban sort was the better option for black Americans and could be replicated in the United States. One must keep in mind the undertones of this discourse; questions over the role of violent and non-violent tactics to black freedom always sat in the background of these debates, even when not explicitly discussed. Though Worthy did not name non-violence specifically, by 1960 the different camps of the black freedom movement had developed to the point where gradualism, incrementalism, and strict non-violence all implied one another so Worthy's denunciation of gradualism could also be read as a denunciation of strict non-violence and his enthusiastic praise for the Cuban Revolution could be read as, at the very least, a tolerance for liberatory violence as a tactic. In truth, Worthy and Mayfield both saw in Cuba the great potential of a state committing its full power to the eradication of racism and were likely not thinking about violence specifically, but

[96] Ibid.

seeing as how Castro took power through a violent revolution which enabled him to wield state power towards anti-racist ends, it is important to recognize the place of the tactical question over violence in any discussion of Cuban antiracism and within the broader discursive space of the black freedom movement in the late 1950s and 1960s.

Just a week later, on October 1st 1960, the *Afro-American* published the most unambiguous endorsement of Castro yet, an article by Mayfield titled "Cuba Has Solution To Race Problem." In that article, Mayfield encouraged black Americans to "not be frightened by newspaper reports and the present ill-feeling between the United States and Cuban governments," saying instead that they should pay attention to Cuba's example which proved that "it doesn't take decades of gentle persuasion to deal a death blow to white supremacy."[97] He praised Cuba's "educational campaign against racism," the placement of Cuba people of color in positions of power within the government, and the banning of racial discrimination in housing, employment and education, concluding that "a government that is sincere can show it means business by imaginatively using its moral and legal weight to destroy racial injustice…Colored leaders ought to go to Cuba to see for themselves."[98] Again, Cuba was juxtaposed with the United States in terms of black freedom and was framed as an example of what the widespread embrace of a tactically radical model for change could produce. Thus with the more overt embrace of Castro's Cuba by radical black intellectuals in 1960 we see

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[97] Julian Mayfield, "Cuba Has Solution To Race Problem," *The Baltimore Afro-American*, October 1, 1960.
[98] Ibid.

also the domestic tactical debates of the black freedom movement projected onto the world stage with the example of Cuba used to fuel the case against incrementalism and strict non-violence. The more radical elements within the movement would, in turn, increasingly lean on the symbolic power of Cuba to black Americans to make their case for radical action.

Black American National Identity and the Cuban Revolution

It is clear that Castro's stalwart black supporters in America were, by 1960, a radical albeit vocal minority. While the Revolution had enjoyed widespread sympathy among black Americans in 1959, that sympathy was quickly eroded by corrosive Cold War politics. Richard Welch Jr. writes that

> in the spring of 1959, Castro's speech proclaiming 'The Rights of the Black Man in Cuba' had received favorable notice in the black press in the Northeast, but the much-publicized denunciations of America by Castro over the next year produced the conviction that the Eisenhower administration was correct: Castro was a self-declared enemy of the United States and of U.S. citizens of all races. Once the issue was made to appear as Cuba versus the United States, the force of nationalism predominated for most black Americans.[99]

By 1960 the debates over Cuba, specifically concerning the most appropriate US response to Castro's revolution, were already being collapsed into the question of national loyalty because support for Castro meant support for his anti-American rhetoric. In the context of a debate over what constituted genuine integration into American society, most black Americans saw rejection of Castro's Cuba as a component of national loyalty and thus as a component of full integration.

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[99] Richard E. Welch Jr., *Response to Revolution: The United States and the Cuban Revolution, 1959-1961* (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 1985), 128–29.

Correlatively, an embrace of Cuba could be interpreted as a rejection of America and thus as an affront to integration. Moreover, US opposition to social reforms in Cuba that helped black people was increasingly seen by pro-Cuban elements as going in tandem with opposition to the Civil Rights Movement in the US itself.[100] Cuba was increasingly being used as a symbolic, foreign arena for distinctly American debates over national identity and belonging.

Additionally, in the throes of the Cold War there was no escaping the further collapsing of debates over Cuba into America's anxieties about the spreading of communism and thus of Soviet influence into the Western Hemisphere. It is worth noting that Fidel Castro did not declare himself a Marxist-Leninist until 1961 and both he and Che Guevara publicly distanced themselves from communism in the early years of the revolution, but there were suspicions about Raul Castro's ties to communism early on and a general uneasiness about Fidel's reforms (particularly his land reform program) among Americans, as well as concern about the growth of Cuban-Soviet economic and diplomatic relations in the early 1960s.

That 1960 was a Presidential election year certainly did not help; Democratic Presidential candidate (and later President) John F. Kennedy was content to conflate Castro's victory with Soviet victory in his attacks on the Eisenhower administration, casting the Cuban Revolution as yet another example of America's waning global hegemony so soon after Sputnik foregrounded fear of the 'missile lag' and a loss of the 'space race.' Lars Schoultz writes that in 1960,

[100] Rojas, *Fighting Over Fidel: The New York Intellectuals and the Cuban Revolution*, 173.

Cuba was "for the Republicans what the loss of China had been for the Democrats eight years earlier—a political albatross."[101] There was, of course, some real cause for concern; the first half of 1960 saw a Soviet-Cuban trade deal that effectively included an exchange of Cuban sugar for Soviet petroleum and machinery[102] as well as the continued expropriation of nationalized goods and properties which had been owned by American companies, part of what Schoultz calls "the largest uncompensated nationalization in U.S. history."[103] These concerns, as well as the McCathyism of the Cold War era, raised the stakes of perceived political dissent. Thus, in light of Castro's scathing condemnations of American imperialism and the apparent cooperation between the Cubans and the Soviets, speaking favorable of Castro's regime in America could be interpreted as disloyalty. Incidentally this may have been why Worthy and Mayfield penned such overtly pro-Castro articles in 1960: The Cold War polarized the dialogue about Cuba so the stridency of the anti-Castro elements was increasingly reflected in the stridency of the pro-Castro elements, erasing the more cautious, and frankly more journalistic coverage of the revolution which was possible only a year prior.

That praise of Cuba could easily be denounced as praise of Soviet communism, and therefore as essentially disloyal and un-American at a time when McCarthyism held sway, had the significant effect of pushing those who retained their respect for Castro away from America. Black Americans who did

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[101] Schoultz, *That Infernal Little Cuban Republic: The United States and the Cuban Revolution*, 110.
[102] Ibid., 114.
[103] Ibid., 118.

not abandon their belief in Castro's model for dismantling racial inequality increasingly came to see the Cuban revolutionaries as their kin and Washington as their common enemy. This challenged their American identities but also created new pathways for transnational solidarity. The inverse was true as well; those who wanted to avoid having their patriotism questioned had to forsake Cuba.

These binaries of politics and of national identity presented by Cuba could be seen in the way that Castro's black American advocates increasingly tied praise for the Cuban Revolution with criticism of American racism, but also in the situation of one famous black American, former heavyweight boxing champion Joe Louis. Louis's victories in the ring enabled him to represent the United States on the world stage even at the height of Jim Crow and by the late 1950s he was a highly visible symbol of the moderate black middle class. In May of 1960 *The New York Times* reported that a "public relations concern of which Joe Louis is vice president" had signed a contract worth $287,000 to "promote tourist travel in Cuba among U.S. Negroes."[104] The article contained several desperate sounding quotes from a Mr. William Rowe, the president of the company, saying that Louis had nothing to do personally with the account, and claiming that Louis "said he had no political connection with Premier Fidel Castro."[105] The following week, Louis threatened to "withdraw as a partner unless [the company] dropped the Cuban account," telling *The Washington Post* that his "record as an American

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[104] "Joe Louis Agency Engaged By Cuba: Publicity Concern Promotes Tourism by U.S. Negroes Under $287,000 Contract," *The New York Times*, May 26, 1960, ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The New York Times with Index.
[105] Ibid.

[was] as well known as anyone's and [he] mean[t] to keep it that way."[106] He then reiterated that "the job was completely non-political" and that neither he nor the firm were "personally connected with (Premier Fidel) Castro."[107] Louis' emphatic denial of any political ties to Castro and his odd appeal to his "record as an American" reveal not only the stifling Cold War political climate of 1960 but also the continued entanglement of one's opinions about the Cuban Revolution with one's perceived loyalty to the United States and one's American identity. Louis's response to this situation revealed the Cuban dilemma for middle class black Americans; regardless of Cuba's exciting example of racial progress, support for Cuba meant closing the door on integration into the American mainstream.

The divisiveness of the Cuban Revolution within the black freedom movement was displayed again in 1960, during Fidel Castro's famous trip to the United Nations. On that occasion, Castro moved the entire Cuban delegation from their midtown Manhattan hotel to the Hotel Theresa in Harlem after feeling disrespected by the staff at the original hotel. Castro hosted several world leaders during his stay at the Hotel Theresa, including Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev, but he also met and spoke with significant black radical figures, perhaps most importantly the famous black Muslim protégé of Elijah Muhammad, Malcolm X.

Malcolm X and his then-affiliated group The Nation of Islam (NOI) were by 1960 the most vocal and visible advocates for black nationalism in Harlem and had begun to position themselves as the radical opposition to MLK's strict

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[106] "Joe Louis Cuts Links With Cuba," *The Washington Post, Times Herald*, July 2, 1960, ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The Washington Post.
[107] Ibid.

nonviolence and integrationism within the black freedom movement. The NOI sought recognition of the national status of black Americans, sometimes advocating for an actual separate state, other times articulating the need for economic and political power independent of the white establishment and/or for recognition of black culture as unique and discrete from the rest of American culture. Embraced by radicals, particularly in poor, urban black enclaves, Malcolm X was reviled by middle class integrationists for his militant rhetoric. Malcolm X and his brand of black nationalism were first introduced to a national audience in the 1960 television documentary *The Hate That Hate Produced*, after which he became a leading, if polarizing figure in black radical thought.[108]

While black radicals drawn to Malcolm X's black nationalist rhetoric were happy to see the American political mainstream outraged by Castro's actions and were pleased by Castro's Harlem visit, Richard Welch Jr. writes that middle class black opinion of Castro and the Cuban Revolution dropped:

> A majority of black politicians, disturbed by violent altercations between Castro's entourage and anti-Castro exiles, decided not to attend a reception for Castro sponsored by the Fair Play for Cuba Committee, a decision independently reached by the poet Langston Hughes and the NAACP branch president, Joseph Overton. The Baptist Ministers' Conference of Greater New York sent Governor Nelson Rockefeller a telegram deploring 'any attempt by Fidel Castro to make the Harlem community a battleground for his ideologies and a cesspool of his doctrine of hate and greed.'[109]

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[108] Amiri Baraka and Edward Dorn, *Amiri Baraka and Edward Dorn: The Collected Letters*, ed. Claudia Moreno Pisano (Albuquerque, NM: University of New Mexico Press, 2013), xviii.
[109] Welch Jr., *Response to Revolution: The United States and the Cuban Revolution, 1959-1961*, 128.

Contrasting these responses with those of enthusiastic supporters of Malcolm X reveals that Castro played a crucial role in defining the divisions within the black freedom movement. In any case, Castro's stay at the Hotel Teresa was a public relations victory: Historian Timothy B. Tyson called it a "master stroke of international diplomacy"[110] and pointed out that Jackie Robinson (in this case a stand-in for the black middle class) called it "propaganda."[111] The Harlem visit gave Castro strong anti-racist credentials among American black radicals and helped to forge an apparent tie between revolutionary Cuban nationalism and the black nationalism preached by Malcolm X while also intensifying the polarization within the black freedom movement. It is, as such, unsurprising that only a relatively small group of radical African Americans like Worthy and Mayfield remained publicly pro-Castro as the 1960s proceeded, while the more moderate black middle class chose continued support for integration, American nationalism, and the concomitant surrender to Cold War politics.

That said, the example of racial egalitarianism that revolutionary Cuba had supposedly set was not simply ignored by black Americans. Tyson asserts that "though most blacks in the United States did not become *fidelistas*, African Americans did realize that racial progress in Cuba outstripped any reforms that white political leaders in the United States seemed likely to accept," thus Castro's model continued to constitute an alternative response to the ongoing crisis of

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[110] Timothy B. Tyson, *Radio Free Dixie: Robert F. Williams & the Roots of Black Power* (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 1999), 220.
[111] Ibid., 234.

American racism.[112] This is a crucial point: just because most black Americans did not seek to immediately replicate Cuba's example or to publicly decry the US government's chilly relationship with Havana or even to publicly voice support for Castro, did not mean that they were not paying attention to and thinking about Cuba. Rather, we see that Cuba quickly became a *symbol* for black Americans frustrated with their condition, proof that radical change was possible, and evidence for radicals engaged in the domestic tactical debates within the movement. As Mark Q. Sawyer explains in his book *Racial Politics in Post-Revolutionary Cuba,* "to blacks in the United States, the [Cuban] revolution appeared to have created a far more fluid system of race and class than the system that existed in the United States," due in part to Castro's outlawing of racism and his regime's "commitment to eliminating class differences," all of which "proved attractive to African American activists,"[113] even those who were not prepared to openly voice support for Castro.

Conclusion

Thus, by 1960, the Cuban Revolution had become central to black American discourses on the tactics for black freedom and was increasingly used to define the growing split between radical black nationalists and moderate integrationists vis a vis American national identity. Additionally, the revolution was positioned at the nexus of black nationalism, anticolonialism, antiracism, and

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[112] Tyson, Timothy B., *Radio Free Dixie: Robert F. Williams & the Roots of Black Power.* Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press. 1999. pg. 235.

[113] Sawyer, Mark Q., *Racial Politics in Post-Revolutionary Cuba.* New York City, NY: Cambridge University Press. 2006. pgs. 79-80.

Third World Internationalism, all of which animated black radical thought in the United States. Ultimately, the revolution would provide the symbolic and discursive space wherein black radicals could cohere those different solidarities. It should be clear at this point that the Cuban Revolution was not the point of origin for any major discursive thread of black radical solidarity but rather acted as a prism through which all extant threads passed, shifting their direction and intensity in concert with other contemporary events and developments. Though it may be difficult to isolate the specific impact the revolution had, there were clear post-1960 discursive trends that cannot be disentangled from Cuba, including the cultivation of a black American Third World identity and the proliferation of a colonial analysis of the black American condition. Additionally, the revolution helped initiate a generational split among black radicals, with the older radicals encountering the revolution as an important but not definitive influence on their solidarities while the younger radicals who would enjoy intellectual leadership of the movement in the late 1960s saw their solidarities and ideologies of black freedom shaped fundamentally by their encounters with Cuba. Chapter two will trace the emergence of these developments through the overlapping narratives of four black radicals who were impacted by the Cuban Revolution: Amiri Baraka, Robert F. Williams, Harold Cruse, and John Henrik Clarke.

Chapter 2: Looking Forward from the Revolution

Black Radical Solidarities in the Wake of the Cuban Revolution

While Cold War forces rendered black moderate support for Cuba untenable by 1960, this was compensated for in the intensity of black radical support for the Revolution. Particularly for those radicals who were disillusioned with Martin Luther King Jr.'s leadership of the black freedom movement and with strict non-violence as a liberatory philosophy, the Cuban Revolution served as the exemplar of a radical, alternative theory and praxis. Encounters with Cuba in the early 1960s provided these radicals with a discursive space for the theoretical and practical mixing of the national with the international, antiracism with anti-imperialism, politics with art, and black nationalism with Third World revolution, all of which would leave an indelible mark on the emerging generation of black freedom leaders in the United States. This was clearest in the cases of the poet and playwright LeRoi Jones (later Amiri Baraka) and the icon of armed self-defense Robert F. Williams, whose encounters with the Cuban Revolution in the early 1960s proved to be definitive moments in their respective political developments.

Bohemian to Radical: Amiri Baraka Encounters the Cuban Revolution

Amiri Baraka was born to an upper-working class family in Newark, New Jersey in 1934. Coming of age in the post-war period, Baraka was shaped initially by his time at Howard University and then in the US Air Force in the early to mid-1950s. Baraka's time at Howard, the traditional point-of-entry into the black bourgeoisies, exposed him to "the sickness of black America" while his time in

the Air Force exposed him to "the sickness of white America,"[114] both of which pushed him away from traditional black and white middle class values and pathways. Baraka complained of the anti-intellectualism of the upwardly mobile black bourgeoisies at Howard and believed that the school merely taught black students to mimic whiteness in the service of getting a job.[115] Jerry Watts writes that "Howard students appeared to be more interested in acquiring the 'proper' black bourgeois weltanschauung than in obtaining a serious education," in Baraka's estimation.[116] In 1954, after two years at Howard, Baraka dropped out to join the Air Force where he remained until leaving with an "undesirable discharge" in 1957 (he was erroneously accused of being a communist). The "Error Farce," as he would later call it, left him with the impression that white Americans were destroyed by their own racism, that the weight of "having to make believe that the weird, hopeless fantasy that they had about the world was actually true…deforms them and finally, makes them even more hopeless than lost black men."[117] This insight echoed a central theme of Martinican writer and Negritude-pioneer Aime Cesaire's *Discourse on Colonialism,* namely that oppressors dehumanize themselves through the process of dehumanizing others.[118] By 1957 Baraka was hungry for intellectual stimulation, disillusioned

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[114] Jerru Gafio Watts, *Amiri Baraka: The Politics and Art of a Black Intellectual* (New York City, NY: New York University Press, 2001), 25.
[115] Ibid., 22.
[116] Ibid.
[117] LeRoi Jones, "Philistinism and the Negro Writer," in *Anger and Beyond: The Negro Writer in America*, ed. Herbert Hill (New York City, NY: Harper & Row, 1966), 52–53.
[118] Aime Cesaire, *Discourse on Colonialism (1950)*, trans. Joan Pinkham (New York City, NY: Monthly Review Press, 2001).

with his received knowledge about how to live a good life, and uncertain about the direction of the growing Civil Rights Movement.

At this point, Baraka relocated to Greenwich Village in New York City, where he spent the late-1950s helping to cultivate the bohemian art scene out of which the Beat Generation emerged. It was here that Baraka began to find his stride as an artist, but he was hardly the *political* radical that he would later become. In *Amiri Baraka/LeRoi Jones: The Quest for a Populist Modernism*, Werner Sollors criticizes the "aesthetic protest" of the bohemian Beat movement, arguing that despite (or, perhaps, because of) their "desire to be as anti-middle class as possible, Bohemians present no political alternative to bourgeois rule, but merely invert images of bourgeois *values*."[119] An art rooted only in *negation* is radical in a sense, but is fundamentally dissimilar from a political radicalism which rejects existing social structures and rules *and* seeks to construct newer, better ones. Nonetheless, Baraka's embrace of Bohemian 'aesthetic protest' did prepare the way for later political radicalism, including the radical solidarities he would eventually develop, because Bohemians often relied on a very broad (if equally facile) "sympathy for outcasts and oppressed minorities," that included all people and groups seen as "in conflict with the middle class, from the proletariat to deposed kings, from criminals to lunatics to artists and Bohemians themselves."[120] This expansive understanding of oppression (everything outside of the homogenizing force of middle class 'progress'), though simplistic, was similar

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[119] Werner Sollors, *Amiri Baraka/LeRoi Jones: The Quest for a "Populist Modernism"* (New York City, NY: Columbia University Press, 1978), 19.
[120] Ibid., 18–19.

in form to the radical, transnational solidarities that were gaining (or regaining) purchase in black radical circles at the time: The supposed unity between opponents of imperialism or between 'Third World' peoples who fell outside of the homogenizing Soviet and American spheres of influence. While Baraka was not yet explicitly articulating these radical political solidarities in the late 1950s, it is noteworthy that similarly expansive oppositional solidarities were a major component of the Bohemian art scene in which he participated. It was this encompassing, anti-middle class Bohemian solidarity that first brought Baraka into contact with the Cuban Revolution in 1959.

Castro's revolution put American sugar and tourism interests in a precarious position, provoking hostility towards the revolution from the American government and the American political mainstream, while simultaneously attracting the sympathies of America's domestic cultural dissidents, including the Beats of Greenwich Village. To celebrate the successful ouster of Batista, Baraka contributed to and edited a slim volume of poetry titled *Fidel Castro, January 1st 1959* which included works by Jack Kerouac and other prominent members of the Beat Generation. This act in favor of the Revolution earned Baraka an invitation to Cuba in 1960 with a group of black American artists and scholars organized by the Fair Play for Cuba Committee (FPCC). Founded by the CBS journalist Robert Taber in April of 1960 and operating until 1963, the FPCC was an American activist organization which advocated for the normalization of relations between the United States and revolutionary Cuba with financial help from the Cuban government itself. The 1960 visit to Cuba was to provide an opportunity for

Americans already somewhat sympathetic to the revolution to see it unfold with their own eyes, absent the obfuscating filter of American media bias. With some more prominent black artists like Langston Hughes declining to participate, the delegation was ultimately made up of some less well-known, younger figures, including Baraka and the journalist Julian Mayfield, as well as some older, more established thinkers including John Henrik Clarke and Harold Cruse. Robert F. Williams, who will be discussed later, was also present for the 1960 FPCC trip and fell somewhere in the middle, a Civil Rights activist in his mid-30s who had already attained some international notoriety for his advocacy of black armed self-defense beginning in the mid-1950s.

The 1960 trip was life-changing for Baraka, fundamentally challenging his identity as a politically disengaged, bohemian artist and pushing him towards an enthusiastic embrace of radical politics. In his essay about the trip, "Cuba Libre," Baraka wrote that "the idea of 'revolution' [had] been foreign to me. It was one of those inconceivably 'romantic' and/or hopeless ideas that we Norteamericanos [had] been taught since public school to hold up to the cold light of 'reason.'"[121] His encounter with Cuba, however, shattered this idea: in a 1977 interview, Baraka recalled that in 1960 he "didn't understand that that was real stuff, that people actually could make a revolution, that you could actually *seize* countries. There I was down there [in Cuba] with a whole lot of young dudes my own age who were walking around with guns—they just did it. It blew my mind; I was

[121] LeRoi Jones, "Cuba Libre (1960)," in *Home: Social Essays* (New York City, NY: Akashic Books, 2009), 77–78.

never the same."[122] While so many young black Americans like Baraka languished in their pessimism and disillusionment with the seemingly glacial pace of racial progress in the US, "the young and energetic intellectuals in Cuba were actually engaged in government and were involved in the process of transforming their country into a more humane place" guided by a radical humanist philosophy that Baraka found both refreshing and intoxicating.[123] This sort of decisive revolutionary action contrasted sharply with the mere aesthetic protest of his Greenwich Village art scene and forced Baraka to question the purpose of his art. In one famous episode during the trip, Baraka told a Mexican graduate student in Economics ("Senora Betancourt") that he was a poet and thus "'not even interested in politics'" which prompted a severe response:

> She called me a 'cowardly bourgeois individualist.' The poets, or at least one young wild-eyed Mexican poet, Jaime Shelley, almost left me in tears, stomping his foot on the floor, screaming: 'You want to cultivate your soul? Well, we've got millions of starving people to feed, and that moves me enough to make poems out of.' [124]

This shook Baraka to his core, revealing the profound emptiness of his aesthetic protest and demanding a new, political approach to his art.

Upon returning to the United States, Baraka could not help but to compare the situation of black Americans to that of Cuba's poor and racially diverse masses who had, under Castro's leadership, apparently risen up in arms and

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[122] Charlie Reilly, "Amiri Baraka: An Interview, Kimberly W. Benston/1977," in *Conversations with Amiri Baraka* (Jackson, MS: University Press of Mississippi, 1994), 108.
[123] William J. Harris, *The Poetry and Politics of Amiri Baraka: The Jazz Aesthetic* (Columbia, MO: University of Missouri Press, 1985), 77.
[124] Jones, "Cuba Libre (1960)," 57.

transformed their country for their own benefit. For Third World artists like the cohort he encountered on the train in Cuba, there was no time for mere aesthetic protest as the need for political, liberatory art was serious and urgent. In drawing the connection between the experience of Cubans of color and the black experience in the United States, Baraka had to square his approach to art with the relationship between black Americans and the Third World. Rather than continuing to seek an art that would allow him to hide from the vapid mores of middle class American life, Baraka began to seek an art which connected him to other oppressed people and which could serve as genuinely liberatory. He would spend the rest of his long career writing poems, plays, and essays towards this end. Thus, contact with the Cuban Revolution transformed Amiri Baraka from an apolitical Greenwich Village Bohemian to a fledgling radical who saw politics and art as inextricable and who came to see black Americans as part of the emergent Third World.

Self-Defense and National Identity: Robert F. Williams Encounters the Cuban Revolution

Another member of the FPCC delegation, Robert F. Williams, was already immersed in the world of the political. Though still a young man, Williams had already achieved notoriety by the time he arrived in revolutionary Cuba in 1960. Born in 1925, Williams served as a US marine for several years before joining the Monroe, North Carolina chapter of the NAACP in 1955. Elected president of the chapter the following year, Williams led the local opposition to Jim Crow laws and, in the process, drew the ire of the local Ku Klux Klan. Aware that local law

enforcement would not protect NAACP activists from Klan violence, Williams sought a charter from the National Rifle Association and formed an armed self-defense posse called the Black Guard to protect Monroe's black residents. Although he always believed that the Black Guard's activities were morally and legally defensible, providing means for collective self-defense against racist violence in the lawless south, Williams was eventually suspended by the NAACP and estranged from the mainstream Civil Rights Movement for his expansive notion of self-defense which seemed to some like advocacy of liberatory violence as a tactic for black freedom. In the years before Malcolm X became the ideological foil to Martin Luther King Jr., Robert F. Williams was the face of an alternative black freedom movement.

Though MLK himself said that "violence exercised in self-defense" is accepted as moral and legal by "all societies from the most primitive to the most cultured and civilized"[125] he feared that armed organizations like Williams' would attempt to win concessions through violence rather than simply defending themselves. King considered this a foolhardy and ultimately unviable strategy and frequently responded to tactical questions about violence by saying that black Americans would never be able to *win* a violent struggle so it should not be considered a serious option. He firmly held that "there is more power in the socially organized masses on the march than there is in guns in the hands of a few desperate men."[126] Williams and his supporters, however, were not alarmed or

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[125] Martin Luther King Jr., "The Social Organization of Non-Violence," in *Negroes With Guns* (Mansfield Centre, CT: Martino Publishing, 2013), 13.
[126] Ibid., 14.

deterred by the possibility of accepting a more expansive definition of 'self-defense,' and even embraced the idea that violent resistance might be the preferred strategy for black liberation.

Furthermore, Williams and his defenders considered violent resistance to be a method for full *integration* into America rather than one for separation: Armed resistance against tyranny was an American *birthright* (albeit one historically reserved for white people) and exercising that right demonstrated membership in the American community. Truman Nelson, a white civil rights activist sympathetic to Williams, situated violent resistance historically as quintessentially American, responding to MLK's claim that violence was a 'second-class method' by writing that "as the heir of a great tradition of revolutionary morality, I resent [King's] position, not believing that Lexington Green, Concord Bridge, and the celebration of the Fourth of July [are] at all second class."[127] In making these comparisons, Nelson (echoing Williams' own sentiments) seemed to conflate armed self-defense with armed struggle in the term 'resistance,' and argued that resistance in this sense would better align black Americans with their own *American* national history than would a policy of strict non-violence. To take up arms in resistance against Jim Crow and its defenders, like the KKK, against oppression and mistreatment, would be to honor the history of the American revolutionaries of 1776, a history from which black Americans had been excluded. He argued that the centrality of armed resistance to the

[127] Truman Nelson, "The Resistant Spirit," in *Negroes With Guns*, ed. Marc Schleifer (Mansfield Centre, CT: Martino Publishing, 2013), 21.

mainstream narrative of American history meant that the price "for full inclusion into the American consciousness" for blacks, whose "passive resistan[ce], or passiv[ity] to attacks on [their] person" had made this "real, revolutionary American consciousness" alien to them, was to display "*the will to visibly resist.*"[128] The black man, Nelson said, was "the birth-right possessor of inalienable rights. He cannot give them up if he wants to. He was not born to be a punching bag to test the longevity of the Southern whites' desire to beat him."[129] Thus, black Americans who took up arms against the KKK, for Nelson, were taking up the cause of liberty like the founding fathers had done. Likewise, any black person who passively accepted their lot in white supremacist American society was forfeiting their connection to that history of 'revolutionary morality.' These arguments were rooted in an appeal to the American nationalism of black Americans and of white allies to the black freedom movement. The underlying assumption was that black Americans were shut out from a central part of the American experience and were thus denied the full realization of their American identity when they could not themselves refresh the tree of liberty with the blood of patriots and tyrants, as Thomas Jefferson said people must do from time to time.[130]

Implicit to Williams' and Nelson's claims was the belief that MLK was wrong in his doubts about the potential success of violent tactics; that black

[128] Ibid., 29.
[129] Ibid., 33.
[130] Thomas Jefferson, "Extract from Thomas Jefferson to William Stephens Smith," November 13, 1787, Library of Congress, Washington D.C.

Americans, like the American revolutionaries from generations past, could in fact fight their way to the negotiating table from which they could make forceful and effective demands for their rights. Even though not all black Americans had arrived at this precise conclusion by 1959, there was a clear divide between those who accepted King's tactics and leadership and those who did not but had yet to develop an alternative program. Amiri Baraka fell into the latter category in the late 1950s, a period he reflected on in his autobiography: "I knew I rejected King's tactics. I would not get beat in my head. I would fight, but what was I doing?"[131] There was also the related issue of gradualism; MLK's non-violent model for change was incremental in nature while those advocating armed resistance sought more radical, immediate changes. Moreover, questions about the American or un-American character of violent resistance infused these discourses with a meta-discourse about nationalism and national belonging for black Americans.

It was in the context of these tactical debates infused with questions about national identity and belonging, of integration and separation, that Robert F. Williams first encountered the Cuban Revolution. For Williams, as it had been for Baraka, Cuba served as an entrée into the global fight against oppression, a foreign discursive space where the racial conflicts of his native Dixie were playing out in a radically different way. In his 1962 book *Negroes With Guns*, Williams wrote about how his encounters with racism in Dixie shaped the way he

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[131] Baraka, *The Autobiography of LeRoi Jones/Amiri Baraka*, 161.

encountered the Cuban Revolution as well as the significance that the revolution had for him:

> My experiences in Monroe and with the NAACP which had resulted in launching The Crusader were also sharpening my awareness of the struggles of Negroes in every part of the world, how they were treated, their victories and their defeats. It was clear from the first days that Afro-Cubans were part of the Cuban revolution on a basis of complete equality and my trips confirmed this fact. A Negro, for example, was head of the Cuban armed forces and no one could hide that fact from us here in America. To me this revolution was a real thing, not one of those phony South American palace revolutions. There was a real drive to bring social justice to all the Cubans, including the black ones. Beginning late in 1959 I had begun to run factual articles about Cuba in The Crusader, pointing up the racial equality that existed there.[132]

Like Baraka, Williams was taken with the authenticity of the revolution but he also drew a direct connection between the experiences of Afro-Cubans and those of black Americans even before making the 1960 trip with the FPCC. Williams' focus on Afro-Cubans echoed the Pan-Africanism of much of the black American transnationalism of the 1950s, but this could also be a result of the fact that Williams was conditioned by the brazen, violent white supremacy of the South and was thus particularly responsive to the racial dimension of the revolution in Cuba.

In Cuba, Williams found an entirely new, racially egalitarian world which stood as a serious and direct challenge to American racism. Immediately acting to counter the mainstream American narrative which was developing in opposition to the Cuban Revolution, Williams was vocal and insistent about the genuine

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[132] Robert F. Williams, *Negroes With Guns*, ed. Marc Schleifer (Mansfield Centre, CT: Martino Publishing, 2013), 68–69.

nature of Castro's social reforms. Responding to doubts about the sincerity of Castro's anti-racism, Williams wrote that

> Only a fool or a mercenary hypocrite could muster the gall to call a nation and its great leader insincere in dealing with the captive blacks of North America when in the course of their daily lives they display the greatest measure of racial equality and social justice in the world today...In past months I have twice been to Cuba and there is nothing insincere about my being made to feel that I was a member of the human race for the first time in my life. If this is America's idea of insincerity, then heaven help this nation to become insincere like Fidel Castro and Free Cuba in granting persons of African descent entrance into the human race.[133]

Williams' description of having his humanity recognized was certainly powerful and presented a vision of a just and compassionate Cuba. The island quickly became a sort of 'race haven' in the minds of black American radicals, a place not only free of Jim Crow, but aggressively committed to racial equality. Other accounts evoking the race haven idea were more outlandish, for example journalist William Worthy's comments on Cuba in 1963 which read rather like a fantasy story:

> Do you know what would happen if Fidel Castro were President of the United States instead of John F. Kennedy?...Bull Connor would be given a fair trial and then shot. Ninety five percent of the police would have to flee to South Africa for political asylum. J. Edgar Hoover would be thrown into an integrated jail. It [sic] that didn't cure him, he would be left there for life.[134]

While this was obviously an exaggeration to generate sympathy and support for Cuba amongst black Americans, clearly the idea that Cuba's racial politics

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[133] Ibid., 70.
[134] Jerry Watts, *Harold Cruse's The Crisis of the Negro Intellectual Reconsidered* (New York City, NY: Routledge, 2004), 28.

consisted of a direct rejection of American-style racism was pervasive and appealing in the early 1960s.

Furthermore, Williams saw Cuba's model of an anti-racist alternative to American Jim Crow as *globally* significant. Not only did Cuba create a problem for American racists attempting to preserve Jim Crow at home, it also posed a challenge to American attempts to export white supremacy abroad. While opposition to global white supremacy had been a major motivation for an earlier generation of black Americans building networks of transnational solidarity with majority non-white countries, this framing was less common by the 1960s. Williams, however, saw American racism as a global issue and bolded asserted that

> Cuba's aversion for America's inhumanity to man is not an interference in a 'native American problem.' It is common knowledge that the master race of the 'free world' is out to export North American manufactured racism. Racism in the U.S.A. is as much a world problem as was Nazism.[135]

Clearly Williams saw Cuba as hugely important to the global cause of opposition to American racism. A symbol of an anti-racist philosophy, revolutionary violence as a pathway to liberation, immediate, radical change, and opposition to white supremacist American imperialism, Cuba was, in the early 1960s, the ultimate fulfillment of Williams' vision of black freedom.

It is no surprise, then, that Williams sought refuge in Cuba in 1961 after fleeing the United States to avoid arrest over trumped up kidnapping charges. As

[135] Williams, *Negroes With Guns*, 70.

he put it, "I could think of no other place in the Western Hemisphere than Cuba where a Negro would be treated as a human being."[136] Though he did include Truman Nelson's piece advocating armed self-defense through an appeal to American nationalism in his 1962 book, Williams published that book from exile in Cuba and had already translated his estrangement from a persistently racist United States into an enthusiastic embrace of black nationalism and Third World solidarity. Referencing the "new militant movement designed for the total liberation of the Afro-Americans,"[137] of which he was a leader, Williams demonstrated his continued commitment to liberatory violence and was doubtlessly emboldened by his experiences in a country that had successfully employed revolutionary violence, supposedly in the service of the poor masses of color. Cuba served as not only a physical safe haven for the exiled Williams but also as a philosophical inspiration for how to carry on the cause of black freedom, namely through a violent struggle for national liberation.

By the time Williams was exiled in Cuba he had developed a *comprehensive* Third World transnational solidarity, linking the struggle for black national liberation in America with the struggles of the colonized peoples of Asia and Africa, as well as with the Cuban people vis a vis American imperialism:

> Yes, wherever there is oppression in the world today, it is the concern of the entire race. My cause is the same as the Asians against the imperialist. It is the same as the African against the white savage. It is the same as Cuba against the white supremacist imperialist.[138]

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[136] Ibid., 104.
[137] Ibid.
[138] Ibid., 72.

Thus, the black nationalist, anti-imperialist, anti-racist, and Third World solidarities which had earlier been smothered by the Cold War's ideological bottleneck were triumphantly reinvigorated in the wake of the Cuban Revolution by Williams, Baraka, and other black radicals.

Harold Cruse & John Henrik Clarke Encounter the Cuban Revolution

Of course, not all black radicals took to the Cuban Revolution in precisely the same ways. If Amiri Baraka and Robert F. Williams exemplified one response of black radicals to the revolution, then Harold Cruse and John Henrik Clarke exemplified another. Cruse and Clarke encountered the Cuban Revolution at the same time as Baraka and Williams as they were also members of the famed 1960 FPCC delegation, but while the latter focused on Cuba's significance as a 'race haven,' both Cruse and Clarke analyzed revolutionary Cuba in material terms, specifically identifying Castro's various agrarian reforms as the most exciting and radical changes taking place. While there were significant commonalities between the four thinkers in the early days of the revolution, their differences revealed the variety of ways that people contextualized Cuba in history. Baraka and Williams encountered Cuba from within the discursive context of the tactical and ideological debates gripping the American Civil Rights Movement while Cruse and Clarke were drawing on a longer history of black radical thought, considering the well-trod discourses of pan-Africanism, black nationalism, black Marxism, and Third World solidarity from the outset rather than arriving at them initially through contact with Cuba. In other words, the Cuban Revolution pushed Baraka and Williams to engage with these existing discourses for the first time while

Cruse and Clarke brought them to their initial encounters with Cuba. This difference ultimately constituted a generational divide between older and younger black radicals, with the Cuban Revolution as the central event defining the split.

Considering the long history of economic imperialism in Cuba it made sense to consider the effects of the revolution in material terms first and foremost. On the eve of the revolution, Cuba was a model of economic dependency: sugar constituted eighty percent of Cuban exports, with forty percent of sugarcane farms and fifty-five percent of the sugar mills owned by U.S. companies along with half the railroads, the vast majority of the telecommunications and electrical utilities, and "significant portions of the banking, cattle, mining, petroleum, and tourist industries."[139] Castro's revolutionary agrarian reforms, including large-scale expropriations of land owned by American companies, began to reverse this long-standing pattern of economic domination by American investors. These measures were combined with the famous literacy campaign and other popular mobilizations designed to improve the lives of poor Cubans through increased access to education, healthcare, jobs, housing, and other necessities, efforts which paid major dividends even amidst the massive capital and social capital flights triggered by the revolutionary reforms. The narrative that captivated Baraka and Williams, that Castro was acting on behalf of the Cuban masses of color to immediately eliminate racism, was merely one component of this package of reforms.

[139] Chomsky, *A History of the Cuban Revolution*, 46.

It is crucial to acknowledge that these revolutionary policies were not merely rhetorical or symbolic, as one might cynically expect: Alejandro de la Fuente points out that while the regime's declaration of the elimination of racism was admittedly premature, "it is nonetheless true that the massive structural transformations implemented by the revolutionary government during its early years in power resulted in a dramatic decline of various forms of social inequality, including those associated with race."[140] These efforts were enormously successful: "free and massive access to education, nutrition, and social services, coupled with an aggressive redistribution of national income, resulted in a social leveling unprecedented in Cuban History,"[141] a collection of policies which Cruse called "Cuba's New Deal."[142] It was this social leveling via redistribution that most interested Cruse and Clarke.

In his 1960 essay reflecting on the FPCC trip, Cruse claimed that "Cuba today has achieved agrarian reform—a revolutionary transition without which no nation can really become a democracy. This is the first instance of complete democratization of agriculture in the history of the western hemisphere."[143] He was referring to the parceling out of expropriated land to poor Cubans, the cornerstone of many revolutionary ideologies in Latin America and the Caribbean but in this case a real political program in progress. Cruse saw the capture and

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[140] Alejandro de la Fuente, "Race, Culture, and Politics," in *Looking Forward: Comparative Perspectives on Cuba's Transition*, ed. Marifeli Perez-Stable, 2007, 139.
[141] Ibid.
[142] Harold Cruse, "A Negro Looks At Cuba (1960)," in *The Essential Harold Cruse: A Reader*, ed. William Jelani Cobb (New York City, NY: Palgrave, 2002), 12.
[143] Ibid., 8.

equitable redistribution of land formerly controlled by foreign businesses as the heart of the revolution, but this did not preclude a racial analysis of the revolution. In fact, there was a racial component built in to this redistribution of land, according to Cruse. He noted that "inter-racial relations in Cuba are not to be equated with our North American racial practices" because "racial intermingling has been the rule" in Cuba while, he implies, the United States had long seen severe racial segregation (de jure in the South, de facto in the North), a fact which meant radically different racial norms between the two countries.[144] Considering Afro-Cubans to be "pretty well integrated into lower-class society," Cruse asserted that "the discrimination heretofore practiced against 'people of color' has been economic since the lower-class Cubans of whatever color all suffered the same fate of existing in a semi-colonial, underdeveloped society. In other words, racism as we know it in the U.S. is not endemic in Cuba."[145] By this logic, measures for economic democratization (such as agrarian reform) would aid the Cuban lower classes which would necessarily mean the uplift of Cubans of color. Moreover, this meant that the apparent absence of American-style racism which so excited Williams and Baraka and which they both attributed to Castro's reforms must have long pre-dated the revolution.

Despite Cruse's materialist focus on agrarian reform, he nonetheless rejected the idea that race was not a useful category of analysis, as a classical Marxist might claim. In fact, he was insistent that the Cuban Revolution had

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[144] Ibid., 9.
[145] Ibid.

nothing to do with Marxism, and his writings on Cuba reflected the nuance and experience of a thinker who had survived the Cold War-fueled intellectual conflict over communism which had fractured the black left during the preceding decades. By the time he arrived in Cuba, Cruse saw little of value in the thought of black communists and recognized that entirely class-focused reform, no matter how revolutionary, would never unmake racism by itself. Moreover, Cruse believed that the new integrationist movement initiated by *Brown v. Board* in 1954 had created a new outlet for black protest which rendered the black communist left largely irrelevant and the thought of its central proponents, like Paul Robeson, passé. In his celebrated 1967 book *The Crisis of the Negro Intellectual*, Cruse lamented that "every Negro that sided with the Communists swallowed European Marxism whole, and added not a single new concept that the Russians had not thought of beforehand."[146] At the same time, he did not trust the middle-class integrationism of the mainstream Civil Rights Movement which eschewed any hint of black nationalism and was thus, in Cruse's eyes, woefully insufficient. Caught between the inadequacies of an increasingly irrelevant communist tradition, a reformist, middle-class integrationism, an intellectually narrow black nationalist movement, and Cold War political pressures, Cruse saw the Cuban Revolution as a sincere and successful attempt to navigate existing ideological boundaries towards the end of genuine social revolution.

[146] Harold Cruse, *The Crisis of the Negro Intellectual (1967)* (New York City, NY: The New York Review of Books, 2005), 245.

Dismissing the common American fear of Cuban communism, Cruse said that to "smear the Cuban revolution with the charge of 'communism' is to do the Western Hemisphere a great disservice" for there was "nothing communistic about Cuba but the Cuban Communist Party which is permitted the right to function aboveground."[147] In truth, Cruse asserted, Cuba had experienced "a middle-class-led revolution against foreign economic control" which included radical agrarian reforms "in order to win the support of the numerically dominant class—the peasant."[148] He went on to say that

> the Cuban revolution is a new kind of revolution, unique in world history. [It] does not aid or abet Communism in the western hemisphere. On the contrary, the Cuban revolution actually proves that Communism, as an international philosophy in politics, is obsolete and superfluous. The Cuban revolution is an un-Marxian revolution and was carried out by non-Marxists. A Marxist revolution is not intended to make individual landowners out of landless peasants as the Cuban reforms have done. Moscow, I am sure, understands this perfectly. The realities of the Cuban revolution are more of a threat to Russia's Communist philosophy than…to the American's way of life.[149]

Cruse cast the Cuban Revolution as a challenge to the existing, stale models for revolution, as a rejection of Soviet Marxism as well as a rejection of American capitalism, and as essentially motivated by an egalitarian, democratic, and anti-colonial sentiment in favor of elevating the peasantry while expelling foreign exploiters. This vision of overcoming dramatic inequalities through state policies imposing a great social leveling combined an apparent moral imperative with a delicate avoidance of the Cold War ideological binary.

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[147] Cruse, "A Negro Looks At Cuba (1960)," 19.
[148] Ibid.
[149] Ibid.

This reflected Castro's own framing of the revolution, at least in its early stages. In an April 1959 speech at Princeton University, Castro claimed in starkly un-Marxist terms that "our revolution was made without hate of classes. There never was a division of one class from another. Our revolution is a revolution for social justice, for the poor people and, of course, too, for the middle class."[150] Expanding on this, Castro explained that "in the world there are two ideas: capitalism and communism. One sacrifices freedom and the other, many times, the needs of the people. We feel that there is a system which combines both, which we call humanism."[151] Far from embracing communism, Castro declared that "when our goals are won, communism will be dead."[152] This conscious forging of a third way, particularly a revolutionary 'humanist' third way concerned with the material uplift of the oppressed through the redistribution of wealth and including the open acknowledgment of the need to dismantle racism, appealed to Cruse's various sensibilities.

Moreover, Cruse was right to claim that "race relations being what they are in the U.S., Fidel Castro does not have to be a political genius to realize that there might be a more profitable market in American Negro goodwill towards his revolution than the market that vanished with the Cuban sugar quota."[153] While noting Castro's early tourism campaign directed at black Americans, including

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[150] Fidel Castro, "The United States and the Revolutionary Spirit" (Speech, Program in American Civilization, Senior Conference, Woodrow Wilson Hall at Princeton University, Princeton, New Jersey, April 20, 1959), 1, http://blogs.princeton.edu/mudd/2012/10/fidel-castro-visits-princeton-university/.
[151] Ibid., 2.
[152] Ibid., 3.
[153] Cruse, "A Negro Looks At Cuba (1960)," 9.

the failed engagement with Joe Louis's public relations firm, Cruse did point out that it was unwise for Castro to bet on the support of the black middle class (one need only consider the realities of Cold War politics paired with Cruse's quip that "there are no greater patriots in the U.S. than our elite members of E. Franklin Frazier's 'Black Bourgeoisie' who never were and never will be 'revolutionaries' even on the question of their 'civil rights'"[154]) but it was clear that for black American radicals, like Cruse, Baraka, Williams, and Clarke, goodwill towards revolutionary Cuba was abundant. In his articulation of Castro's conscious decision to appeal to black Americans, Cruse demonstrated more refined political instincts than Baraka or Williams, both of whom embraced the revolution in the early days with a youthful excitement and enthusiasm reflective of their relative inexperience compared to an established intellectual like Cruse.

John Henrik Clarke was also deeply moved by his encounter with "the inspiring truth of the Cuban Revolution" during the 1960 FPCC trip.[155] Clarke offered his recollections of the trip in the inaugural spring 1961 issue of *Freedomways*, an influential black intellectual journal. Echoing Cruse's focus on agrarian reform, Clarke explained that his father was a sharecropper in the South and that he, as such, had "wanted to see some of rural Cuba [to] observe the program of land reform," believing that "the Cuban Revolution will stand or fall on the basis of what is done to improve the lives of people in Cuba whose hopes and dreams are similar to those of my father," namely poor peasants seeking to

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[154] Ibid., 9–10.
[155] John Henrik Clarke, "Journey to the Sierra Maestra," *Freedomways* 1, no. 1 (Spring 1961): 33.

acquire land.[156] Clarke considered the failure of the United States to carry out land reform following the abolition of slavery to be a fundamental error which ultimately served to perpetuate existing racial inequalities. Cruse agreed, asserting that

> Practically all the ills of the race problem in the South can be traced to the failure to carry through the Northern victory to its logical conclusion—agrarian reform which would have stripped the slaveowners of their economic and political power for all time. As a direct result of this failure, American democratic processes, in and out of Congress, have been hamstrung and undermined by a long line of Southern reactionaries—the political progeny of the slaveowners.[157]

A successful agrarian reform policy in Cuba meant creating the possibility of genuine democracy, unencumbered by the structural inequalities which plagued the United States due to its failure to carry out such reforms. Cruse and Clarke also believed that the example of successful agrarian reform in Cuba could be instructive for future American efforts. Thus, like the others, Clarke saw Cuba as a discursive space for testing out and refining strategies which could be applied to the cause of black freedom in America.

Of course, Cuba's apparent example of how to effectively redistribute land resonated far beyond American sharecroppers. The monopolization of land ownership by a small, wealthy class had historically been the rule in colonized lands, so land reform offered a model for freedom that was transferable between First World minorities and colonized nations. In other words, the same reforms which could potentially underpin racial justice for black Americans also held the

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[156] Ibid.

[157] Cruse, "A Negro Looks At Cuba (1960)," 8.

promise of building equitable social and economic orders in the new nations which were throwing off the shackles of colonialism. Having spent the 1950s as a vocal champion for African decolonization and pan-Africanism, Clarke's reflections on Cuba and on the potential power of agrarian reform were predictably filtered through an Afro-centric lens, focusing on the emerging countries of independent Africa. Continuing his thoughts on agrarian reform, Clarke wrote that "some of the same methods can be made applicable to certain parts of the United States where there are still sharecroppers," and he also thought "of agrarian reform in relation to the newly emergent nations of Africa. In these nations the possibilities of friendship and trade with Cuba is a bright prospect for the future. Though an American Negro, I have been a devout African nationalist most of my life."[158]

Here we see several threads of transnational solidarity converging: class solidarity in the shared condition of landless poverty, anti-colonial solidarity in the celebration of Third World nationalism, and pan-African solidarity in Clarke's 'African nationalism.' The economic position of landless poverty shared by black American sharecroppers, Cuban peasants, and continental African peasants could be addressed by employing similar land reform programs, the new nations of decolonizing Africa could establish political and economic ties with a newly liberated Cuba in an act of Third World Internationalist solidarity, and Clarke's African nationalism proposed a common racial bond between black Americans, Afro-Cubans, and continental Africans in their pursuit of liberation. Thus, for

[158] Clarke, "Journey to the Sierra Maestra," 33.

Clarke, Cuba did not offer new political ideas, but rather served as a powerful example which he utilized to bolster his existing worldview.

Cruse and Clarke both positioned the Cuban Revolution at the front of a long string of events from the African decolonization struggles of the 1950s to the earlier internationalist mobilizations against racism and imperialism which marked the 1930s and 1940s, to the fundamental issues of land ownership and equitable distribution of resources which were raised in every revolutionary context. On the other hand, Williams and Baraka saw Cuba from the much more limited vantage point of the then-present American Civil Rights Movement and the debates over armed self-defense and liberatory violence therein, only beginning to consider transnational solidarities and black nationalism with exposure to Cuba. This difference was generational: though all four thinkers were somewhat close in age they were far enough apart that the filters through which they encountered and understood Cuba had been shaped by personal intellectual histories which were rooted in rather different historical periods.

A Generational Divide

Cruse (b. 1916) saw Williams (b. 1925) as one of the primary figures shaping a new generation of black radicals who were coming into their own by 1959, including Baraka (b. 1934), who would breathe new life into the radical wing of the black freedom movement yet lacked familiarity with the robust, decades old discursive context out of which they were emerging. Cruse asserted that

> This generation grew up in time to be deeply impressed by the emergence of the African states, the Cuban Revolution, Malcolm X and Robert Williams himself. They were witnessing a revolutionary age of the liberation of oppressed peoples. Thus, they were led to connect their American situation with those foreign revolutionary situations. They did not know, of course, that to attempt to apply foreign ideologies to the United States was more easily imagined than accomplished. They did not know the revolutionary Marxists had attempted this and had come to grief. In fact, they did not even know what a Marxist was, even though they were destined to have to contend with them in their own little movements. They did not realize how little they actually understood about what they saw happening, nor did they have the slightest idea of how much they had to learn about the past forty-odd years before they could even begin to understand the revolutionary age in which they lived.[159]

Thus, in Cruse's estimation, Baraka and his generation were drawn to revolutionary politics because they came of age in a global revolutionary moment to which they were reacting, while his own generation had already been politicized and was interpreting the current revolutionary moment with theories and paradigms they had already developed through experience. The fact that Cruse expressed his long-standing frustration with the inadequacies of Marxism in his initial encounters with the Cuban Revolution while the same revolution initiated Amiri Baraka's political transformation which would lead to him becoming a Marxist in the mid-1970s reveals the truth in Cruse's assessment. All the trends in black radical thought, from transnational solidarity with the Third World and with anti-colonial and global antiracist agitations generally, the radical left and Marxism, black nationalism and Pan-Africanism, etc., had developed and evolved over years of tumultuous history but the Cuban Revolution marked the emergence of a new generation who would adopt and alter these trends without

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[159] Cruse, *The Crisis of the Negro Intellectual (1967)*, 354–55.

any conscious connection to their history. As Cruse explained, "they were acting intuitively and the outlines of the future were vague and undefinable, as this generation had the impossible inheritance of three decades of conflicting ideologies not their own."[160] These inherited discursive threads of black radical thought and solidarity would retain some of their historical features but would, in the final accounting, be transformed to reflect the insights and realities of a new generation of black radicals for whom the Cuban Revolution was the point of entry into the black radical tradition.

This generational split amongst black radicals overlapped precisely with another, related split amongst the American Left generally. Tensions within and against the Cold War ideological binary played out against a background of anticolonial conflicts in the Third World, precipitating a rupture within the Left that laid the foundation for the activism of young leftists which defined much of the 1960s. The Cuban Revolution was critically important to this split, as different opinions about the revolution helped to define the ideological distinctions between the so-called Old Left and the so-called New Left.

The New Left and the Cuban Revolution

The Cold War complicated the traditional left-right political split in the United States, as the hawkish anticommunist foreign policy orthodoxies of the time were largely shared by the mainstreams of both major political parties. The emergence of revolutionary Cuba in 1959 was predictably worrying to American

[160] Ibid., 356.

Cold Warriors of all stripes and, to be sure, the mainstream left embodied in President John F. Kennedy in the early 1960s was hostile towards what they saw as a potentially communist regime in Cuba. The radical Left, however, was even further divided: by 1960 there was a clear split developing between the 'Old Left' of organized labor, Marxism, and relative warmth towards the Soviet Union, and what would come to be called the 'New Left,' which rejected American and Soviet orthodoxies and enthusiastically embraced the Cuban Revolution.

The term 'New Left' was popularized by C. Wright Mills whose 1960 essay "Letter to the New Left" argued against Daniel Bell's idea of 'the end of ideology' which Mills characterized as the American equivalent of Soviet Socialist Realism: Both, according to Mills, eschewed the structural and systemic criticisms that he believed ought to underpin Leftism in favor of an uncritical reformism that encouraged only minor adjustments to the existing systems which were believed to be fundamentally fine. He asserted that

> what needs to be understood, and what needs to be changed, is not merely first this and then that detail of some institution or policy. If there is to be a politics of a New Left, what needs to be analysed is the structure of institutions, the foundation of policies. In this sense, both in its criticisms and in its proposals, our work is necessarily structural.[161]

Such structural critiques could obviously lead to solutions requiring dramatic, immediate, and indeed fundamental change, namely revolutionary change, rather than gradual reformism. This made thinkers of the New Left ideologically receptive to revolutionary movements and given the time this intellectual camp was forming it is no surprise that Cuba was foregrounded in many minds when

[161] C. Wright Mills, "Letter to the New Left," *New Left Review* 5 (October 1960): 21.

discussing the idea of systemic critique and concomitant systemic change. The Cuban Revolution offered a dynamic new approach to old social problems and presented a systemic alternative to the tired models of the United States and the Soviet Union.

Additionally, the period around 1960 was marked by a fracturing of global communism which diversified the options available to the radical left, further eroding the Cold War ideological binary. Lievesley writes that

> at the time of the Cuban Revolution, Soviet hegemony over the world communist movement was being challenged by Maoism and Trotskyism and the Latin and Central American communist parties were experiencing splits and schisms as they disputed competing strategies and political loyalties. Cuba would provide more ammunition for these ideological battles.[162]

As a supposedly radical humanist revolution which initially rejected communism, Cuba (or at least perceptions of Cuba) quickly entered the ideological and tactical debates among leftists globally and, as was the case for the black freedom movement, provided a symbolic arena in which different positions could contend. Amidst this atmosphere of ideological factionalism there was a pronounced willingness to deconstruct even the most apparently fundamental elements of what had become for some a rather stale leftist orthodoxy.

Mills argued that the Old Left Marxism which designated organized industrial workers as the sole and universal agents of history was outdated and unreflective of reality. Given that this orthodoxy was essential to the traditional Marxist ideas of class struggle and of historical change, Mills considered it a

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[162] Geraldine Lievesley, *The Cuban Revolution: Past, Present and Future Perspectives* (New York City, NY: Palgrave, 2004), 86.

critical task to address this "seeming collapse of our historic agencies of change" by locating historical agency elsewhere.[163] Mills ultimately identified "the young intelligentsia," who he said were the ones "thinking and acting in radical ways," as the potential possessors of historical agency in 1960 and he listed several examples of radical student activism around the world to make his point.[164] In that list Mills mentioned Cuba, where, he said, "a genuinely left-wing revolution [had begun] full-scale economic reorganisation—without the domination of US corporations" and had been carried out by young revolutionaries whose leaders averaged only about 30 years of age and which was "certainly a revolution without any Labour As Agency."[165] Cuba was presented as an example of how young intellectuals might well have been the most revolutionary class with the historical agency that the Old Left stubbornly reserved for the organized working class, and as such Cuba would serve in the early 1960s as the model for the New Left.

Richard Welch Jr. expanded upon this idea by pointing out that in revolutionary Cuban ideology there was a "bonding of the worker and the intellectual" which "marked [Cuba's] distinction from communist and capitalist societies alike. Castro's Cuba wished not the forced industrialization of Stalin's Five Year Plans but a new humanist socialism linked to moral incentive and egalitarian voluntarism."[166] It was in this ideal of the worker-intellectual acting on

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[163] Mills, "Letter to the New Left," 22.
[164] Ibid.
[165] Ibid., 23.
[166] Welch Jr., *Response to Revolution: The United States and the Cuban Revolution, 1959-1961*, 131.

moral impulse for the collective good that Mills and other New Left thinkers saw the future of historical agency in 1960.

Mills also listed black Americans alongside revolutionary Cuba, supposing the connection between the black freedom movement in "our own pleasant Southland" and Cuba's revolution to be the involvement (and indeed the leadership) of students and young intellectuals.[167] This was appropriate as 1960 saw the birth of the student-led sit-in movement and the formation of the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), and of course the movement's most visible leader, Martin Luther King Jr., was only in his early 30s. Mills' articulation of New Left ideas helped to cement the link between the black freedom movement and the Cuban Revolution for leftist thinkers, further expanding the transnational solidarity between the two which would become even more pronounced as the 1960s progressed.

Furthermore, the New Left's goal according to Mills was "the establishment of a more humane society marked by the elimination of all instruments of political and economic coercion," which was more or less the goal of the black freedom movement albeit without the explicit focus on racial oppression, and both could look to Castro's Cuba as the real-world actualization of that goal, at least as they perceived it.[168] Although they would remain on the margins politically and would thus "have little or no influence on the evolution of the Cuban Revolution or upon U.S. Cuban policy" the New Left was nonetheless

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[167] Mills, "Letter to the New Left," 23.
[168] Welch Jr., *Response to Revolution: The United States and the Cuban Revolution, 1959-1961*, 130.

"strongly influenced by its perception of the Cuban Revolution. Indeed, that revolution furnished the prism through which the New Left saw its separation from both the Old Left and the liberal establishment"[169] similarly to how black radicals increasingly saw support for Cuba as a breaking point with the mainstream of the Civil Rights Movement which sought to work towards progress within existing systemic boundaries. Welch Jr. could just as easily have been describing Amiri Baraka as C. Wright Mills when he wrote that "in Castro they found revolutionary inspiration and in the Cuban policy of the U.S. government confirmation of the evils of the American political system."[170] The New Left, which would come to encompass an ideological coalition that differed in part from but also overlapped with the black freedom movement, acted as a broader intellectual vehicle for accommodating leftist critiques of American foreign policy (including America's hostility towards Cuba) as well as for foregrounding other structural critiques (including ones related to civil rights), giving a larger voice to the pro-Cuban perspectives of black radicals.

The younger black radicals who were most deeply impacted by the Cuban Revolution were in dialogue with this New Left movement and shared its focus on humanism, on the celebration of youthful leadership, on rejecting the Cold War ideological binary, on critiquing America's aggressive foreign policy towards Cuba, and on radical, structural critiques of oppression. Out of this dialogue they arrived at many of the same conclusions that older thinkers also

[169] Ibid.
[170] Ibid.

embraced, except that their thoughts were framed significantly by the Cuban Revolution and were separated from the complex discursive history of the preceding decades. This generation of black radicals embraced a Third World solidarity that Cuba played a major role in defining, embraced black nationalism from a Third World perspective, and began to theorize a new black American anti-colonialism which included a colonial analysis of the black condition in the United States.

Third World Solidarity, Internal Colonialism, and the Resurgence of Black Nationalism

The 'Third World' concept developed in a global moment of decolonization and was thus tied to the idea of 'new' countries emerging from old empires. In the case of Cuba, the revolutionaries took to this idea of the 'new,' young revolutionary country so the rhetoric of the revolution became entwined with references to youth. As such, young black radicals like Amiri Baraka (who made the famous FPCC trip to Cuba at age 25) came to personally identify with the self-consciously young *Movimiento 26 de Julio* not merely for political or racial reasons but because of a shared sense of generational radical identity. While older black radicals largely looked upon the Cuban Revolution as an admirable venture to pay attention to, their younger counterparts saw other young people seizing control of a country and attempting to rectify historical injustices, an act whose symbolism would speak volumes to people like Baraka about the potential power of young people to change the world. After all, Fidel Castro himself was only 33 years old at the time of the FPCC trip. Combined with the sense that Cuba

was part of a *global* revolutionary moment, this youthful hope and excitement constituted a generational tie between young black American radicals and Third World revolutionaries, in addition to their shared conditions of oppression and shared opposition to racism and imperialism.

In his book about Baraka's role in the black freedom movement, Komozi Woodard writes that

> Harold Cruse would not identify with that generation of Third World rebels in quite the same manner as LeRoi Jones [aka Amiri Baraka]. Jone's encounters with leaders such as Fidel Castro in Cuba…challenged his identity both as a writer and as a man. As far as Jones was concerned, he was on the path to finding himself, and it all revolved around the sense of kinship that he felt with that generation of radicals in Cuba, Africa, and Asia. Their problems would become the heartfelt concerns of LeRoi Jones and his wing of the black liberation movement.[171]

Solidarity with young, Third World radicals pushed Baraka and others to theorize a common Third World *identity* which black Americans could share with other oppressed people globally. This *identification* with the Third World was clear in Baraka's 1961 essay "Letter to Jules Feiffer" in which he discussed black Americans and oppressed Third World peoples alongside one another through a critique of the moderate liberalism that failed both groups: "They, or rather, you, liberals," Baraka said, "are people with extremely heavy consciences and almost nonexistent courage. Too little is always enough," as "a single black student in a Southern University" in America or the "shallow conscience-saving slogans and protests of moderation or 'political guarantees'" offered to "the new countries of

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[171] Woodard, *A Nation Within A Nation: Amiri Baraka (LeRoi Jones) & Black Power Politics*, 53.

Asia, Africa, and Latin America" clearly fall short of peoples' real needs.[172] Pointing out that "most of the peoples in the world" suffered from serious ills like illiteracy and lack of access to food, clothing, and shelter, Baraka asserted that "Fidel Castro, Kwame N'Krumah, Sukarno, Nasser, and some others," unlike American liberals like Feiffer, had "actually done something about these ills, in their own countries."[173] More pointedly, Baraka said "I get the feeling that somehow liberals think that they are peculiarly qualified to tell American Negroes and other oppressed peoples of the world how to wage their struggles. No one wants to hear it."[174] Though on the surface this was just a tirade against moderate liberalism, Baraka's letter demonstrated his growing sense that black Americans and oppressed people in these 'new countries' shared both the condition of material poverty and a relationship of exploitation with the West. Moreover, by focusing on the 'new' countries of the Third World and quoting William S. Burroughs to characterize moderate liberalism as a "horrible old condition,"[175] Baraka employed a confrontational tone, evoking a feeling of youthful opposition to the tired, established ways of paternalistic liberals in America and paternalistic Western countries globally.

Earlier generations of black radicals had drawn conscious parallels between their own condition and that of imperialized peoples abroad, but Baraka's generation saw these connections through the twin lenses of anticolonial

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[172] LeRoi Jones, "Letter to Jules Feiffer (1961)," in *Home: Social Essays* (New York City, NY: Akashic Books, 2009), 80–81.
[173] Ibid., 81.
[174] Ibid., 82.
[175] Ibid., 81.

nationalism and Third World solidarity. The global wave of *successful* anticolonial liberation movements which marked the 1950s and 1960s pushed young black radicals in America towards a new, *anticolonial* black nationalism and a *colonial identification* with the Third World, variations on common themes but important developments nonetheless. Old questions about what constituted the black nation and how black Americans should respond to their status as a nation returned with a new life.

Baraka connected the language of 'nationalism' to the material conditions of exploitation shared by black Americans and Third World peoples. In his 1962 essay "Black is a Country," he equated 'nationalism' with "the concept of 'acting in one's own best interests,'"[176] and applied the concept broadly. He argued that nationalism in this sense was the foundation of Western imperialism but that when the people and countries "who [had] been used or exploited because it served the best interests of a Western power…suddenly become politically and/or physically powerful enough to begin talking about *their* own best interests, which of course [were] usually in direct opposition to the wishes of their exploiters," then nationalism became "a dirty word" in the West.[177] In defining 'nationalism' in terms of interests, Baraka left room for a broad application of the idea, even reducing the American Civil War to a clash of nationalisms that saw "the victory of the industrial interests in the country over the agricultural."[178] In this section

[176] LeRoi Jones, "Black Is a Country (1962)," in *Home: Social Essays* (New York City, NY: Akashic Books, 2009), 101.
[177] Ibid., 102.
[178] Ibid., 102–3.

Baraka mentioned the "Castro-American wars"[179] as an example of the United States acting in its own interest against Cuba's, in apparent reference to the American government's attempts to unseat Castro, most infamously in 1961's failed Bay of Pigs operation. Cuban and American nationalisms clashed as Castro's revolution seemed to pit Cuban self-determination against American economic interests. For Baraka this clash of nationalisms defined conflict "even in our own south,"[180] implying that black revolt in the United States amounted to a discrete group of people fighting for their shared interests, as in Cuba or elsewhere in the Third World. This was, of course, the point of the title "Black is a Country:" Baraka saw black Americans as a discrete group with specific interests who ought to employ nationalism towards the end of protecting those collective interests.

Here was a return to the old black nationalist discourse about what constituted self-determination. If black Americans were a nation who needed to defend their interests, would they go the way of the Cubans and violently secure territory in the South, like the old Communist Party's Black Belt program suggested? Perhaps not, but this idea of a literal black nation certainly looked different in the early 1960s than it had three decades prior. While this idea had lacked the support of black intellectuals in the 1930s, the imperative of self-determination was reframed in the global anticolonial moment as an issue of national identity and independence *in the context of colonial exploitation*. In other

[179] Ibid., 102.
[180] Ibid.

words, black radicals in the United States increasingly came to view themselves and Third World peoples as sharing a *colonial relationship* with the West which was responsible for their shared material poverty as well as their social, political, and economic estrangement from the white, Western mainstream. This fundamentally challenged the integrationists for whom black Americans were an oppressed minority rather than a colonized nation, and it also provided a new theoretical framework for understanding black nationalism domestically and internationally.

In the fall of 1961, John Henrik Clarke published an article titled "The New Afro-American Nationalism" in which he plainly asserted that the rising generation of black nationalists believed that black Americans were "what is tantamount to an exploited colony within a sovereign nation" whose fight was for "national, and personal liberation."[181] Clarke recognized that this idea of internal colonialism, that black people were not merely a separate nation in the sense of having their own culture and history, but a separate nation in the sense of being an occupied people subject to colonization by the United States, "fed handily into the philosophic stream of traditional black nationalism" despite being very much a product of the historical moment of the early 1960s.[182] This colonial analysis of the black American condition proliferated in the 1960s, in part due to the influence of the Cuban Revolution which reinvigorated and modified older black nationalist rhetoric to imply a colonial context. This developed in tandem with

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[181] John Henrik Clarke, "The New Afro-American Nationalism," *Freedomways*, Fall 1961, 285–95.
[182] Brenda Gayle Plummer, "Castro in Harlem: A Cold War Watershed," in *Rethinking the Cold War*, ed. Allen Hunter (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 1998), 134–35.

and fed the Third World solidarity of black Americans which became more an identification with others *sharing the same colonial condition* than a solidarity with people suffering under merely *similar* conditions. In other words, the idea that white supremacist imperialism was the foreign equivalent to Jim Crow at home began to give way to the idea that colonialism was a universal mechanism employed against Third World majorities as well as First World minorities. Though it emerged in its modern form in the early 1960s, internal colonialism theory proliferated rapidly in the second half of the 1960s after it became apparent that structural racism in the United States had survived the 1964 Civil Rights Act and 1965 Voting Rights Act.

Harold Cruse offered a more theoretically refined version of internal colonialism theory. Cruse asserted that "the Negro has a special relationship to the dominant culture of the United States similar to that of colonies and semi-dependents to their particular foreign overseers: the Negro is the American problem of underdevelopment."[183] Cruse related the colonial condition to black Americans via the Marxist concept of uneven development, echoing Baraka and Clarke's assertions with a more scholarly flair. In his influential 1962 essay "Revolutionary Nationalism and the Afro-American," Harold Cruse made the case for a colonial analysis of the black condition:

> Like peoples of the underdeveloped countries, the Negro suffers in varying degree from hunger, illiteracy, disease, ties to the land, urban and semi-urban slums, cultural starvation, and the psychological reactions to being ruled over by others not of his kind.

[183] Harold Cruse, "Revolutionary Nationalism and the Afro-American (1962)," in *Rebellion or Revolution?* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1968), 74.

> He experiences the tyranny imposed upon the lives of those who inhabit underdeveloped countries.[184]

Cruse saw the dismal material conditions of black Americans, including their poverty and their lack of power over their own lives, as the results of a consciously engineered program of underdevelopment carried out by a colonizing power. Cruse's 'revolutionary nationalism' relied on a colonial understanding of the black condition and promoted Third World solidarity by suggesting that all colonized peoples suffered from the same set of circumstances and that revolutionary action was the remedy for all forms of colonialism.

These ideas only had real meaning to large numbers of black Americans with the arrival of concrete examples of revolutionary action that could be copied, such as the Cuban Revolution. Cruse argued that "the rise of free African nations and the Cuban Revolution…stirred up the latent nationalism of many Negroes," noting that "the popular acclaim given Fidel Castro by the working-class Negroes of Harlem during his visit in the fall of 1960 demonstrated that the effects of the colonial revolutions are reaching the American Negro and arousing his nationalist impulses."[185] There was excitement in Harlem about Castro and his revolution which became increasingly relatable as more black Americans embraced Third World solidarity by way of black nationalist identity and the concept of internal colonialism. Cruse thought beyond his fellow black radicals and pushed other leftists who embraced revolutions elsewhere to embrace a colonial understanding of the black condition in the United States as well:

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[184] Ibid., 75–76.
[185] Ibid., 79.

> Those on the American left who support revolutionary nationalism in Asia, Africa, and Latin America must also accept the validity of Negro nationalism in the United States. Is it not just as valid for Negro nationalists to want to separate from American whites as it is for Cuban nationalists to want to separate economically and politically from the United States?[186]

Echoing the Soviet Black Belt policy of the 1930s, Cruse asserted that "the only factor which differentiates the Negro's status from that of a pure colonial status is that his position is maintained in the 'home' country in close proximity to the dominant racial group," pointing out that the resurgence of black nationalist fervor fit perfectly into the global mood of opposition to colonialism.[187] The Cuban Revolution brought the gravity of real possibility to the idea of an anticolonial black nationalism, giving new life to nationalist discourse among black radicals.

If, in fact, Baraka, Clarke, and Cruse were all advocating for a colonial understanding of the black condition by 1962, what of the aforementioned generational split precipitated by Cuba? In truth, the difference was in their personal ideological paths of development and the degrees to which they embraced revolutionary ideas: Clarke, for example, arrived at internal colonialism theory from a long personal history of pan-Africanism so it made perfect sense to conceptualize black Americans as separate from Americans generally, a fundamental requirement for a pan-Africanist. Cruse was also drawing on a long personal history of connecting black liberation to other liberation movements globally and he too came to accept internal colonialism theory readily and early in

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[186] Ibid., 94.
[187] Ibid., 77.

the 1960s. A relative neophyte in the world of black radical thought, Baraka's appeals to internal colonialism theory and black nationalism were less developed and far more ambiguous than Cruse's or Clarke's when he wrote "Black is a Country" in 1962.

Coming so recently from the apolitical, predominantly white Beat Generation scene in Greenwich Village, Baraka grappled with black nationalism through struggles with his own personal identity. While Cruse could support his nationalism by arguing that "from the white's point of view, the Negro is not related to the 'we,' the Negro is the 'they,'"[188] Baraka continued to think of himself as a part of the American 'we' through the early 1960s. Werner Sollors asserts that "the pronoun 'we' in 'Cuba Libre' never stands for Afro-Americans"[189] because Baraka experienced Cuba not merely as a black man but as an *American* black man. In "Cuba Libre" Baraka wrote jokingly of being "true to his American heritage"[190] in choosing to drink an evening in Havana away at a bar and made a quip about how being a poet meant he wasn't a *real* American like Nixon.[191] In the piece he frequently played with the 'American' label in this way, using it as a comedic vehicle for communicating his ambiguity about his own national identity. It was, however, made clear that Baraka experienced Cuba in 1960 as an American when he lamented the "rotting of the mind which had enabled us to think about Hiroshima as if someone else had done it,"[192] in part to

[188] Ibid.
[189] Sollors, *Amiri Baraka/LeRoi Jones: The Quest for a "Populist Modernism,"* 67.
[190] Jones, "Cuba Libre (1960)," 52.
[191] Ibid., 48.
[192] Ibid., 78.

describe his evolving identification with not only the United States but also with the actions of its government.

Like Truman Nelson and Robert Williams, Amiri Baraka celebrated and seemed to identify with the idea of America's revolutionary past, but he took as his focus the apparent contradiction between the revolutionary ideologies underpinning that past and the realities of the America he knew which were in so many ways in direct opposition to one another. Lloyd Brown writes about this in his book on Baraka, arguing that Baraka's writings in the early 1960s tended to critique American hypocrisy: For Baraka, "America's role in the Third World" seemed to "contradict all of those values which Americans take for granted as their heritage—the idealization of America's 'revolutionary' past, and the traditional American rhetoric of freedom and equality."[193] The Cuban Revolution, so bitterly attacked by the American political establishment yet so inspirational for American left-wing thinkers was, for Baraka's generation, the event which first laid bare this hypocrisy with a clarity that made it impossible to ignore. Disgusted by the "contradictions between rhetorical idealism and political reality" in the United States and hungry for "sociopolitical unity and consistency," Baraka was drawn to Cuba which he must have considered more honest than the United States in its efforts to actualize its stated values.[194] Thus, Baraka was expressing some black nationalist sentiments by 1962 but was really still fighting with himself over his national identity in the symbolic arena of the Cuban Revolution.

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[193] Lloyd W. Brown, *Amiri Baraka* (Boston, MA: Twayne Publishers, 1980), 31.
[194] Ibid.

Baraka later took up the issue of black American identity in his celebrated 1963 book *Blues People: Negro Music in White America*, in which he explored the origins of blues and jazz music. Baraka poked fun at what he saw as the traditional, 'transformative' narrative of black history in America wherein black people "had been 'removed' from Africa and had been transformed by this hideous 'trip,' and by the context of their lives in the actual 'West,' into a Western people. By the beginning of the nineteenth century, Du Bois points out, the majority of us were 'Americans.' (Here, a pause, for 'canned' studio laughter!)"[195] Despite this sarcastic jab at the idea that the descendants of African slaves 'became' Americans this seems to be close to what he himself proposed in the book, albeit with a great deal of ambiguity. More specifically, he proposed that 'American' identity developed as a result of cultural synthesis so that, for example, the echoes of black African cultural influence existed in 'American' culture in 1963 so coding American culture as 'white' was a mistake. Further, he argued that black Americans were "the most American of Americans,"[196] having generated the most original and authentic elements of American culture, including the musical genres around which the book centered.

Baraka also challenged uncritical integrationism, acknowledging that historically "the Negro could not ever become white and that was his strength; at some point, always, he could not participate in the dominant tenor of the white man's culture," and it was "this boundary, this no man's land, that provided the

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[195] LeRoi Jones, *Blues People: Negro Music in White America (1963)* (New York City, NY: Perennial, 2002), X.
[196] Ibid.

logic and beauty of his music."[197] It seemed then that white Americans' refusal to allow black Americans to fully assimilate spurred the development of a separate black American culture which, in turn, rendered genuine integration in the future an impossibility; a classic argument of black nationalists. And yet, while he joked that "Afro-American music did not become a completely American expression until the white man could play it,"[198] Baraka still argued that jazz made "a common cultural ground where black and white America seemed only day and night in the same city and at their most disparate, proved only to result in different *styles*, a phenomenon I have always taken to be the whole point."[199] Ultimately, he argued that distinctly black influences continuously reinvigorated American music in a cycle of black musical innovation and white cooption and mainstreaming of a watered-down form of black music. Throughout the book there is a sense that black culture is autonomous from mainstream, white American culture yet still, paradoxically, is the only *quintessentially American* culture that isn't reducible to mere inauthentic consumerism.

Read as a long-form rumination on the complicated relationship between black Americans and American identity, *Blues People* reveals Baraka's deep struggle to understand his own emergent black nationalism, mixing an apparently definitive rejection of integrationism with an unwillingness to concede 'American' culture to white people exclusively. This was the heart of the generational divide: while the Cuban Revolution helped older black radicals to

[197] Ibid., 80.
[198] Ibid., 155.
[199] Ibid., 150.

precisely lay out the logical conclusions of their long-developed ideologies, the revolution planted seeds in the minds of younger black radicals which would alter their ideologies in major ways but which did not lead to an immediate, unequivocal embrace of, for example, Harold Cruse's brand of black nationalism.

Conclusion

Thus, while the intellectual foundations for the resurgent black nationalism (namely internal colonialism and anticolonial Third World solidarity) were first theorized in detail by older figures like Clarke and Cruse, these ideas would reach a broader audience through Malcolm X and Robert F. Williams in the early 1960s and would eventually be embraced fully by the younger generation of black radicals in the mid- to late-1960s. These young black radicals in America came increasingly to see the Cuban Revolution and other Third World nationalist movements not merely as *similar* struggles to their own, but as *extensions* of the black American struggle. Building on the New Left's focus on the connection between the activism of young intellectuals in different countries and on the generational solidarity which tied Third World revolutionaries to young black radicals, Baraka, Williams, and their peers began to perceive a global revolutionary struggle *of which they were now a part*. While this emergent solidarity may not have been fully realized by the younger generation of black radicals in the early 1960s, black Americans' experiences with the Cuban Revolution and its symbolism up to that point unquestionably provided the basis for the wave of both black nationalism and Third World solidarity which would grip the more radical wing of the black freedom movement through the rest of the

1960s and into the 1970s. The ideological seeds of resurgent black nationalism, Third World solidarity, and a colonial analysis of the black American condition, planted by the older generation of black radicals like Clarke and Cruse would be enthusiastically embraced by the younger generation later in the 1960s. Significantly, the relationship between black radicals and Cuba would change as Cuba's revolutionary regime evolved and the trends of black radical ideology shifted, but the impact of those initial encounters in the early 1960s would continue to reverberate, ensuring the enduring intellectual importance of the revolution even as some black radicals began to distance themselves from it.

Chapter 3: New Directions in the Late 1960s and 1970s

Tracing the Trajectory of Black Radical Solidarities set by The Cuban Revolution

The final task, then, is to trace the development of these early impacts of the Cuban Revolution on black radical solidarities through the remainder of the 1960s and into the 1970s. The intellectual trajectories set in the early 1960s provide a pathway for tracing how the later trends of black radical thought connect back to antecedents that emerged in dialogue with the Cuban Revolution. Of course, the dense network of discursive threads that already constituted black radical thought in the earliest days of the revolution only thickened as the 1960s progressed, complicating any attempt to draw neat, causal relationships that might reductively tie, for example, the 1960 FPCC trip to the emergence of the Black Panthers. It is thus necessary to think in terms of intellectual *trends*, and to see how such trends evolved over time, emerging from particular discursive contexts and interacting with changing historical conditions. How did the influences of the Cuban Revolution on the black freedom movement in the early 1960s, including the development of a black Third World identity and the revitalization of internal colonialism theory, interact with, for example, the assassination of Malcolm X in 1965, the urban rebellions which marred America's cities in the late 1960s, or the growth of the Black Power Movement from 1966 on? From the mid-1960s through the 1970s, Third World identity and internal colonialism theory became central components of black radical thought, while the Cuban model for revolution, which foregrounded cultural production as a crucial part of the task of anticolonial nation-building, influenced the development of a culture-focused black nationalism in the United States, and interactions between agents of the

black freedom movement and revolutionary Cuba helped to define a major schism among black nationalists over the usefulness of multi-racial coalitions and of Marxism to the cause of black freedom. Through each of these examples, it is clear that Cuba had an evolving, long-term impact on black radical solidarities and discourse in the United States.

Much of the focus of this chapter is on the evolution of black nationalism. In the early 1960s the Cuban Revolution contributed to a resurgence of black nationalism in the United States which fed (and fed on) Third World solidarity and internal colonialism theory, and both would in turn help to shape the definitive black radical movement of the late 1960s and 1970s; the Black Power Movement. The black nationalist ideology upon which Black Power rested relied heavily on Third World solidarity and internal colonialism theory for conceptual clarity, as the need for an independent black political power block to represent black interests grew out of a colonial understanding of black nationhood which supposed that collective uplift could only practically come from autonomous organization and the seizure of power along the lines of Third World, anti-colonial revolution.

Additionally, the Cuban Revolution's ideology which cast cultural production as generative of national identity served as the principal example for so-called black *cultural* nationalists who came to see revolutionary art as a prerequisite to the political project of building Black Power. Amiri Baraka, for example, spent most of the 1960s trying to define and nurture the black arts towards the end of defining and nurturing the black nation. Furthermore, the

political evolution of black cultural nationalism into the Modern Black Convention Movement, as well as the evolution of internal colonialism into a theoretically robust critique of institutional racism and state violence hugely impacted black radical solidarities into the 1970s and can be traced, though with increasing difficulty, back to Cuba.

Despite these developments, the late 1960s saw a widespread disengagement of black radicals from Cuba. Ironically, though its resurgence in the United States was so intimately tied to the Cuban Revolution, black nationalism had always been anathema to Cuba's own raceless revolutionary ideology and as the 1960s progressed this tension pushed many American black radicals away from Cuba and toward other revolutionary sites where black nationalism harmonized with prevailing revolutionary ideologies. Other black nationalists did continue to support Cuba, but the ideological friction between those nationalists who stressed racial self-determination and those who more enthusiastically embraced Marxism and multiracial coalition split the nationalists roughly into two groups, a division largely (though not entirely) defined by opinions about Cuba in the late 1960s and 1970s. The island thus maintained its enormous symbolic power as the discursive space where black radicals in America theorized black freedom from afar, but this process bitterly divided black radicals by the late 1960s while it had united them in the early 1960s.

Thus, while the black radical intellectual trends stoked by the Cuban Revolution in the early 1960s helped to develop Black Power which defined black radicalism in the late 1960s and 1970s, engagement with the revolution also

provoked the develop of different, competing types of black nationalism which increasingly came into conflict with one another, and with Cuban revolutionary ideology, eventually precipitating a disencounter of many black radicals from Cuba by the late 1960s.

Third World Solidarity, Internal Colonialism, and the Black Power Movement

Thanks to black radical contact with the Cuban Revolution in its early stages, Third World solidarity was a central part of black radical discourse throughout the 1960s. Meanwhile, internal colonialism theory gradually developed from a convenient, if facile framework for a black American Third World identity to a nuanced and theoretically refined concept which allowed black radicals (specifically black nationalists) to articulate their status as a Third World people in material terms. Though these ideas were the driving force behind much black radical intellectual activity in the *early* 1960s, it was the thought-leaders of the Black Power Movement of the *late* 1960s who successfully cohered their them into a sophisticated, praxis-promoting theoretical framework.

Cruse, Williams, and Baraka all wrote about internal colonialism in the early 1960s as the logical extension of their Third World solidarity, but this was brought to an even larger audience by the charismatic Malcolm X. In his famous 1963 speech *Message to the Grassroots,* usually remembered for the metaphor of the ‘house negro’ and the ‘field negro,’ Malcolm X painted a global picture of anticolonial and antiracist unity. Beginning with Bandung, which he called “the

first unity meeting in centuries of black people,"[200] (apparently not counting the Pan-African Conferences of the early 20th century—perhaps a result of his generation's apparent obliviousness to their own intellectual inheritance) he proceeded to tie anti-colonialism to revolution, and revolution to nationalism, arguing that "if you love revolution, you love black nationalism."[201] His argument was reminiscent of Amiri Baraka's in that it offered the unifying banner of Third World solidarity and conceptually tied colonialism to white supremacy and anti-colonialism to 'colored' revolution, but there was little analytical depth to his blunt equation of Third World majorities to First World minorities, an oversight which left unaddressed a major theoretical conundrum. As Cynthia Young explains, "the specific forms of oppression faced by national minorities who are legal citizens differ considerably from that of colonized national subjects…the elision of specific historical conditions and their attendant consequences makes certain political and cultural possibilities available, but it also closes down others."[202] While Cruse and Clarke proposed that shared material conditions were the conceptual bridge between Third World majorities and First World minorities, even their writings lacked theoretical rigor in the early 1960s. It was this theoretical problem that Black Power thinkers would address through a critical analysis of the systems and structures promoting internal colonialism.

Black Power began as a slogan but quickly became shorthand for a sophisticated program for black freedom. In 1966, a hastily-planned march

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[200] Malcolm X, "Message to the Grassroots" (Speech, Detroit, MI, November 10, 1963), xroads.virginia.edu/~public/civilrights/a0147.html.
[201] Ibid.
[202] Young, *Soul Power: Culture, Radicalism, and the Making of a U.S. Third World Left*, 14.

through Mississippi brought together the major civil rights organizations of the time to complete the previously-solo March Against Fear which was cut short when the sole marcher, James Meredith, was shot by white racists. During the so-called Meredith March, the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) was represented by their new chairman, 24-year-old Stokely Carmichael, who coined the 'Black Power' slogan during a now-famous speech to marchers. Controversial from the outset, Black Power would become a unifying slogan for many black radicals for the remainder of the 1960s and into the 1970s, providing a new discursive tool for articulating the black nationalist and internationalist solidarities which had become so central to the radical wing of the black freedom movement. At the heart of the slogan, and of the program it proposed, was black self-determination. There was, however, considerable confusion about what Carmichael meant specifically and what embracing the slogan offered black Americans.

Stokely Carmichael and Charles Hamilton's classic 1967 book *Black Power: The Politics of Liberation* clarified and elaborated on the intent and meaning behind the controversial slogan. It laid out a vision for the black freedom movement which brought theoretical depth and analytical complexity to black Third World identity through a detailed exploration of the mechanics of internal colonialism. Carmichael's entire argument for Black Power emerged from a colonial analysis of the black condition that fundamentally rejected the theoretical basis for integration as it was defined by earlier writers like Gunnar Myrdal. He posited that the central thesis of Myrdal's influential 1944 book *An American*

Dilemma, that there was a persistent tension between the 'American Creed' of equal opportunity and meritocracy on the one hand and the unequal treatment of black people on the other which must ultimately push Americans away from their own racism, was flatly wrong. While Myrdal's argument framed American racism as a moral question which had to be addressed through the gradual process of white Americans becoming aware of, and then resisting, their own racism, Carmichael asserted that

> "there is no 'American dilemma' because black people in this country form a colony, and it is not in the interest of the colonial power to liberate them. Black people are legal citizens of the United States with, for the most part, the same *legal* rights as other citizens. Yet they stand as colonial subjects in relation to the white society. Thus institutional racism has another name: colonialism."[203]

In this extraordinary passage, Carmichael equated so-called 'institutional racism' (as distinguished from 'individual racism'), with colonialism, implying that the American system as it existed was structurally unable to provide equality for all citizens and thus had to be fundamentally altered. Carmichael defined 'institutional racism' as "the predication of decisions and policies on considerations of race for the purpose of *subordinating* a racial group and maintaining control over that group,"[204] and it was this system of subjugation and control which supposedly impacted both Third World majorities and First World minorities. Explicitly addressing the potential critique that bridging the gap between these two groups was more complex than just describing systems of

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[203] Stokely Carmichael and Charles V. Hamilton, *Black Power: The Politics of Liberation (1967)* (New York City, NY: Vintage Books, a division of Random House, Inc., 1992), 5.
[204] Ibid., 3.

oppression in the abstract, Carmichael asserted that “it is the objective relationship which counts, not rhetoric…or geography.”[205] He then went on to define that ‘objective relationship’ in concrete terms, dividing the relationship into its political, economic, and social elements.

Politically, Carmichael argued that the colonial strategy of ‘indirect rule,’ wherein a colonial power rules a colony through ‘native’ actors beholden to the colonizer rather than to the colonized, had been employed in the United States to control black people. He explains that “the white power structure rules the black community through local blacks who are responsive to the white leaders, the downtown, white machine, not the black populace. These black politicians do not exercise effective power” and thus “cannot be relied upon to make forceful demands in behalf of their black constituents.”[206] According to Carmichael, this indirect rule also defined class division within the black community, as the black bourgeoisies benefitted from a modicum of power as well as an elevated status and modest material gains granted to them by the white power structure while the social problems of the poor and disempowered black ‘masses’ went unaddressed.[207] Carmichael asserted that “this process of co-option and a subsequent widening of the gap between the black elites and the masses is common under colonial rule,”[208] and, in fact, he seems to have borrowed very heavily from the anticolonial writings of Frantz Fanon, whose influential 1961 book *The Wretched of the Earth* described a similar division of the colonized

[205] Ibid., 6.
[206] Ibid., 10.
[207] Ibid., 12.
[208] Ibid., 13.

community into the middle class whose privileges were inextricably tied to the colonial power structure, and the poor masses whom Fanon saw as the heart of the colonized nation and thus the revolutionary class responsible for unmaking colonialism.[209] In both of these formulations the black middle class and black elites supposedly would not work to combat the structures of colonialism because those structures benefited them, while the 'masses' who experienced the brunt of colonial oppression had to be mobilized as a class to overthrow the colonizers. Though both Carmichael and Fanon relied too heavily on the idealized and simplistic abstraction of the 'masses' as both the authentic manifestation of the nation and the revolutionary class with historical agency, this framework for conceptualizing internal colonialism was still far more sophisticated than anything that Baraka or any other American black radical proposed earlier in the 1960s.

Carmichael's analysis of the economics of internal colonialism was even more impressive and original. He argued that, like in a colonial economy, black Americans played a servile role in the American economy, producing wealth for the benefit of their oppressors and operating in a system of total dependence: "Exploiters come into the ghetto from the outside, bleed it dry, and leave it economically dependent on the larger society"; even "many of the social welfare agencies—public and private—frequently pretend to offer 'uplift services" but really "end up creating a system which dehumanizes the individual," perpetuating his dependency.[210] Rather than leaving the details to the imagination, Carmichael

[209] Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth (1961)* (New York City, NY: Grove Press, 2005).
[210] Carmichael and Hamilton, *Black Power: The Politics of Liberation (1967)*, 17–18.

elaborated: through an exploitative system of credit which offered black Americans either no access to credit or high-interest loans, ruthless real estate speculators and unpayable mortgages on low-quality homes, a routine of hiking prices on low-quality goods, selective underinvestment and underdevelopment which prevented job growth in black communities and left them without critical services like trash collection, the white power structure had

> perpetuated a vicious cycle—the poverty cycle—in which black communities are denied good jobs, and therefore stuck with a low income and therefore unable to obtain a good education with which to obtain good jobs…They cannot qualify for credit at most reputable places; they then resort to unethical merchants who take advantage of them by charging higher prices for inferior goods. They end up having less funds to buy in bulk, thus unable to reduce overall costs. They remain trapped.[211]

This, again, mirrored the process of underdevelopment in the colonial context wherein a subject population was rendered dependent and offered no avenue for genuine economic advancement that was not tied directly to strengthening the colonial power structure.

Finally, Carmichael detailed the social similarities between internal colonialism in America and colonialism in Africa, describing the psychological process through which colonized people are degraded and dehumanized into a state of subordination and permanent inferiority perpetuated by a mentality of colonialism. This, in the American context, emerged out of the history of slavery, which "had to have profound impact on the subsequent attitudes of the larger society toward the black man," namely convincing Americans, black and white,

[211] Ibid., 22–23.

of the natural inferiority of black people so completely that even the abolition of slavery could "not erase such notions from the minds of racists" who would continue to believe in white supremacy.[212] This deeply ingrained belief in the normalcy and even naturalness of an unequal racial order supposedly kept colonized people in both the Third and First world contexts from meaningfully pursuing freedom and kept the colonizers assured of the correctness of their privilege and power.

In response to these colonial conditions, Carmichael called for Black Power; the seizure of local control by black Americans in majority-black urban enclaves in the north and rural counties in the south, towards the end of undoing the structures which kept black Americans subjugated. Carmichael argued that to do this, black Americans first had to "close ranks," as "group solidarity is necessary before a group can operate effectively from a bargaining position of strength in a pluralistic society."[213] This was not merely a matter of black political solidarity, but of black *identity*: Carmichael appealed to a pan-Africanist black nationalism, noting that "the extent to which black Americans can and do 'trace their roots' to Africa, to that extent will they be able to be more effective on the political scene."[214] This was to be done in part through a collective reclaiming of black history from white supremacists. This would then be followed by a program of expanding political participation among black Americans, challenging existing political institutions which perpetuated racism, and formulating new political

[212] Ibid., 25.
[213] Ibid., 44.
[214] Ibid., 45.

institutions that were genuinely responsive to the needs of the black community. Emphasizing that Black Power was a matter of unmaking racial oppression rather than recreating it in favor of a different group, Carmichael explained that "the ultimate values and goals are not domination or exploitation of other groups, but rather an effective share in the total power of the society," something which black Americans had historically been denied.[215]

Though Carmichael's elaborations on internal colonialism theory were not without fault, they nonetheless refined the theoretical basis for his highly-influential program of Black Power, revealing the persistent relevance of the internal colony to black radical thought. Serving as an intellectual guide to the emergent generation of black radicals, including Huey P. Newton and Bobby Seale who co-founded the Black Panthers, Carmichael's nuanced appeal for Black Power demonstrated the new level of sophistication to which black radical discourse on internal colonialism and Third World solidarity had been raised by the late 1960s.

Moreover, the analysis of institutional racism laid out in *Black Power* foreshadowed the study of 'state violence' which, by the early 1970s, had become the paradigm not only for explaining internal colonialism, but also for articulating the relationship between the state and marginalized populations in general. Urban ghettos plagued by over-policing and under-development, and the prison system were conceptualized by black radicals in the late 1960s and 1970s as the primary manifestations of state violence which supported internal colonialism, a belief

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[215] Ibid., 47.

reinforced by organs of radical cultural production such as the media center Third World Newsreel which distributed many prison-related films beginning in the early 1970s. Cynthia Young asserts that "the use of prison as a metaphor for Third World oppression was a standard device in the decade between 1965 and 1975," so "by emphasizing the social-control function of U.S. prisons and their parallels to other state disciplining procedures, Third World Newsreel added material substance to the analogy of inner cities to internal colonies."[216] Of course, prisons were only one component of state violence as it was conceived by black radical intellectuals in the 1970s: Young explains that notable activist and academic Angela Davis and filmmaker Haile Gerima "analyzed the ways in which state practices of containment—incarceration, housing segregation, welfare bureaucracies—constitute[d] powerful forms of state violence that echo[ed] colonial practices."[217] Furthermore, just as internal colonialism theory provided the theoretical framework for positioning black Americans within the Third World, the concept of state violence allowed for an analysis of the black condition in the United States which could be transplanted abroad to better understand the ways that imperialist control operated: Davis, Gerima, and others "showed that state violence directed at peoples of color not only defines U.S. democracy but also provides an insidious blueprint for U.S. imperial designs."[218] These ideas remain highly influential; even today, in an age where internal colonialism theory seems to no longer animate black radical discourse, critiques of institutional

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[216] Young, *Soul Power: Culture, Radicalism, and the Making of a U.S. Third World Left*, 156.
[217] Ibid., 5.
[218] Ibid.

racism centered on prisons and other forms of state violence remain at the center of that discourse, as evidenced by the popularity of recent books like Michelle Alexander's *The New Jim Crow.*

Though the Cuban Revolution went largely unmentioned in *Black Power,* Carmichael's framing of institutional racism in colonial terms and his appeals to a transnational, anticolonial identity (albeit a largely Pan-African one with occasional mentions of Asia) securely positions him, and thus the modern Black Power Movement, within the ideological lineage of the initial black radical encounters with the Cuban Revolution. Like Baraka and Williams before him, Carmichael entered a conversation already long in progress, offering fresh, valuable contributions to an old discourse, but perhaps without fully understanding his historical position and his intellectual inheritance.

The ripples of Cuba's intellectual influence on black radicals were not solely apparent in the proliferation and development of internal colonialism theory and Third World solidarity in the age of Black Power. The resurgent black nationalism of the 1960s, initiated in part by black radical responses to the Cuban Revolution, owed the *trajectory of its development* over the course of the 1960s to Cuban influences as well. The Cuban example of a nationalist revolution which foregrounded cultural production as a component of the nation-formation process would directly and indirectly inform the development of so-called *cultural* nationalism among black radicals in the United States in the mid-1960s and beyond.

The Cuban Revolution and Black Cultural Nationalism

John Henrik Clarke declared that a *New* Afro-American Nationalism was emerging in his1961 essay of the same name, indicating that the black nationalists of Baraka's generation were not merely reviving the worldview and assertions of earlier black nationalists but were in fact creating a new *kind* of black nationalism.[219] Conversant with the revolutionary theories that were being applied in anticolonial nationalist revolutions around the world (most notably in Africa and in Cuba), these new black nationalists came to see the assertion of a national identity rooted in a distinct national culture as a necessary component of national self-determination. In the 1960s, Cuba stood as an obvious, powerful example of this kind of cultural nationalism in practice, and thus had a significant impact on the way that black cultural nationalism developed in the United States.

In her book *Soul Power: Culture, Radicalism, and the Making of a U.S. Third World Left*, Cynthia Young details the enormous influence that the Cuban Revolution had on U.S. black cultural nationalism. Castro's Cuba "offered a model for integrating cultural production and radical politics" and tied both to "the attainment of national autonomy."[220] Castro and his associates invested heavily in the creation of revolutionary film, literature, and art that would help people to envision a new, revolutionary Cuban national identity. Even during the war itself, "Castro's July Twenty-sixth Movement astutely used various cultural technologies to enlist support for its cause," from producing advertisements which subtlety delegitimized Batista to setting up a radio station (Radio Rebelde) from

[219] Clarke, "The New Afro-American Nationalism."
[220] Young, *Soul Power: Culture, Radicalism, and the Making of a U.S. Third World Left*, 9.

which to broadcast news of the guerillas' progress while dodging Batista's censorship measures.[221] Following the successful ouster of Batista, artistic institutions were created to carry on the work of revolutionary cultural production, including, perhaps most famously, the Instituto Cubano de Arte y Industria Cinematograficos (ICAIC) which produced many internationally acclaimed films, and Casa de Las Americas, the literary and cultural center of revolutionary Cuba which "helped spark a pan-American revolution in the arts and catapulted Havana onto the world cultural stage."[222] (It is worth noting that Casa de Las Americas sponsored the 1960 FPCC trip which proved so historically significant for the integration of U.S. black freedom into global Third World liberation.)

The Cuban approach of seeing both political and cultural autonomy as essential components of the same freedom project deeply influenced black radicals in America, particularly because both Cubans and black Americans had long histories of political and cultural domination by the influences of colonialism, slavery, and white supremacy. A reimagined national identity, stripped of these toxic influences and rooted in cultural self-determination, would need to be forged in order to make political self-determination possible and sustainable.

Harold Cruse conceptualized this need for cultural self-determination in the context of black America by arguing, according to Young, that black intellectuals needed to "build autonomous cultural institutions otherwise the black

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[221] Ibid., 23.
[222] Ibid., 25.

movement would remain a domestic rebellion rather than a revolution with international impact."[223] Only by generating and institutionalizing new ideas and a new culture to supplant the old could a movement be truly revolutionary. This was at the heart of Cruse's critique of integrationism: Railing against the use of Sidney Poitier as the sole representative in American films of "the cultural presence, the aspirations, and the social psychology of the largest minority in the United States," Cruse asserted that "the Negro intelligentsia cannot give cultural leadership on these questions because they have sold out their own birthright for an illusion called Racial Integration. Having given up their strict claim to an ethnic identity in politics, economics and culture, they haven't a leg to stand on."[224] Increasing the visibility of black people within the cultural institutions of the white mainstream did not, as Cruse saw it, mean actual inclusion in that mainstream, which was still underpinned by the legacies of slavery, Jim Crow, and white supremacy. Cruse thus saw the black middle class's attempt to integrate as a willful erasure of black identity which would never succeed in alleviating the lived effects of American racism. Meaningful change would require cultivating a distinct ethnic identity to bind black Americans together so they could seize their rights as a unified group. For this reason, figures like Poitier could not be relied upon for defining black cultural identity. By the late 1960s Cruse was focused on black cultural self-determination and cultural production as the primary means of

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[223] Ibid., 48.
[224] Cruse, *The Crisis of the Negro Intellectual (1967)*, 111.

bringing cohesion to the black nation in preparation for garnering serious political power.

Though these reflections seem in line with the culturally-focused methodology of the Cuban Revolution, Cruse did not explicitly cite the Cuban example in the section on black cultural leadership in the nation-formation process in *The Crisis of the Negro Intellectual*. In fact, Cruse narrowly used the Cuban Revolution as an external reference for the use of revolutionary force and violence, something for which he saw little practical application in the United States, and thus completely missed the fact that Castro had carried out a program of cultural revolution in Cuba which was incredibly close to what he proposed for black Americans.[225] Though it is true that the cultural programs and revolutionary violence were brought into being simultaneously in the Cuban context, it seems like a major failing that Cruse did not explicitly recognize that Cuba offered the best real-world example of the sort of cultural revolution he advocated in 1967. Nonetheless, Young asserts that the idea of "national liberation as inextricably linked to cultural regeneration" was "an idea indebted to the Cuban example" with which Cruse was certainly familiar, regardless of whether or not he consciously acknowledged the connection.[226]

It was Amiri Baraka, whose intellectual debt to the Cuban Revolution is well-established at this point, who most successfully attempted to bring the black cultural revolution into being in line with the Cuban model, beginning in the mid-

[225] Young, *Soul Power: Culture, Radicalism, and the Making of a U.S. Third World Left*, 48.
[226] Ibid., 49.

1960s. By 1965, Amiri Baraka was a well-established black intellectual whose most famous work, 1963's *Blues People*, attempted to historically situate the development of blues and jazz music within black history, grappling with the familiar themes of integration and exclusion to lay out a cohesive narrative of the origins and significance of black art in America. That he was already heavily invested in this task by 1963 should indicate that 1965 was not the point of origin for his black cultural nationalism, which he had, in truth, been incubating since his first encounter with the Cuban Revolution in 1960. That said, it was only after the assassination of Malcolm X in 1965, a radicalizing moment for many of Baraka's generation, that he fully embraced his cultural nationalism.

Losing Malcolm was the final straw in a sequence of earlier developments which stoked the tensions Baraka felt in himself as he was split between his emergent black nationalist identity and his mixed-race family and art scene. Baraka was in Buffalo during the summer of 1964, living with his white wife, Hettie Jones, and white poet friend Ed Dorn, and their families. In his autobiography, Baraka explained his growing sense of alienation from the white American society of which he was still a part: "These white men saw that I was moving away from them in so many ways and there was some concern, because it wasn't that I didn't like them any longer, but that where I was going they could not come along. Where that was, I couldn't articulate."[227] It was in this moment of growing estrangement that the 1964 Harlem Rebellion broke out after a racially-charged altercation in which an off-duty white police officer shot and killed a 15-

[227] Baraka, *The Autobiography of LeRoi Jones/Amiri Baraka*, 192.

year-old black student named James Powell. For nearly a week Harlem experienced various degrees of unrest, foreshadowing more rebellions throughout the country later that summer. Baraka was immediately drawn in by the rebellion and he returned to New York City straight away: "The events rang in me like the first shots of a war, which I not only knew would break out but one that I had to get into because I felt I had helped start it. I remember getting a .45 automatic from where I had stashed it…put it in my gas-mask bag, and split."[228]

Baraka's personal confusion and estrangement from white society deepened quickly, as he "now regularly put down 'whitey'" but was still married to a white woman and had many white friends.[229] In one particularly revealing exchange during this period, Baraka responded to a white woman's earnest question "couldn't any whites help?" by saying "'you can help by dying. You are a cancer. You can help the world's people with your death.'"[230] Given the intense internal conflict suggested by this response it is no wonder that Malcolm X's assassination the following year served as a triggering event for Baraka's total transformation into a black cultural nationalist. He heard the news at a book party, "downtown in my mix-matched family and my maximum leader/teacher shot dead while we bullshitted and pretended."[231] Shortly thereafter, Baraka left his wife and two daughters for Harlem, a dramatic move which he, in a manner appropriate to the black Third World identity which black nationalists of his

[228] Ibid., 192–93.
[229] Ibid., 193.
[230] Ibid.
[231] Ibid., 200.

generation had taken on, likened to the works of Aime Cesaire, Franz Fanon, and Amilcar Cabral where

> "the middle-class native intellectual, having outintegrated the most integrated, now plunges headlong back into what he perceives as the blackest, native-est. Having dug, finally, how white he has become, now, *classically*, comes back to his countrymen charged up with the desire to be black…a fanatical patriot!"[232]

It was from his new base in Harlem, and later in Newark, that this newest patriot of black America would help to build the Black Arts Movement which drew implicitly on the model for cultural nationalism that Cuba had already provided.

The early Black Arts Movement emerged from the work of Baraka's ambitious, albeit short-lived, Black Arts Repertory Theatre/School (BARTS) in Harlem. Between 1965 and 1966, BARTS provided both arts education for black youth and space for established artists to perform. Informed by a cultural nationalist worldview, the Black Arts Movement "sought to create autonomous institutions where new interpretations of art and society, running counter to those of the white establishment, could materialize.[233] As such, the BARTS grew quickly to include many different people offering their help in the work of building black national identity: "at the cultural center, Harold Cruse taught black history; Larry Neil, Askia Muhammad Toure, and Max Stanford came as cultural and political advisors; and such musicians as Sun-Ra, Albert Ayler, and Milford Graves provided regular jazz performances."[234]

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[232] Ibid., 202.
[233] Woodard, *A Nation Within A Nation: Amiri Baraka (LeRoi Jones) & Black Power Politics*, 62.
[234] Ibid., 65.

It was Baraka's decision to tie cultural production to the cultivation of institutions that made him so similar to the Cuban revolutionaries. Rather than merely writing and performing his own plays and poems and encouraging others to follow suit, he sought to build up cultural institutions that could serve as the intellectual and cultural nexuses of the nascent black nation. While the BARTS would ultimately fall apart, thanks apparently to ideological sectarian conflict and "a group of nihilistic youth" who "destroyed the program 'from the inside,'"[235] historian Komozi Woodard points out that "the Harlem Black Arts experiment inspired the development of a national Black Arts Movement and the establishment of some 800 black theaters and cultural centers in the United States," so the experiment was an indirect success.[236] Having initiated a nationwide movement dedicated to using cultural production to define the black nation towards the end of political liberation, Baraka's activism was deeply indebted to the Cuban example. Moreover, Woodard characterizes the BARTS as an important step in the history of black cultural nationalism, after which the need for a concrete political program to operate in concert with cultural production was clear.

Awakened to need for simultaneous cultural and political organizing by the collapse of the BARTS, Baraka soon transformed himself into a political organizer. He was dramatically spurred to action once again in response to external inspirations: While the Cuban Revolution was Baraka's entrée into

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[235] Ibid., 67.
[236] Ibid., 66.

radical politics and the assassination of Malcolm X pushed him to embrace cultural nationalism, Woodard argues that the urban uprisings of 1967, as well as the Black Power program of Stokely Carmichael and the example of the Black Panthers, inspired Baraka to link the fate of the black freedom movement to the political momentum generated by the uprisings. This, in turn, led to an embrace of mass politics as the avenue for institutionalizing black cultural nationalism, leading to what Woodard calls the Modern Black Convention Movement. This movement involved the building of municipal-level and national-level mass political meetings and political organizations, beginning with the National Black Power Conferences which took place between 1966 and 1969.[237] Woodard explains that the Modern Black Convention Movement

> created a forum for an ideological struggle over the direction of the Black Revolt; it was a political training ground for new leadership, offering workshops and plenary sessions where young people were exposed to new political perspectives; it nurtured in many local leaders a new identity in a national movement; and it created the political atmosphere for the development of black united fronts.[238]

The zenith of the movement came during the 1972 National Black Political Convention in Gary, Indiana, historic for its successful fusion of "the grassroots ethos of the Black Power movement" with elite black political leadership, and for Baraka's memorable declaration that it was 'Nation Time.'[239] Having played a significant role in building up the cultural foundations for the movement, Amiri Baraka served as one of the chief organizers of the Gary Convention, a fact which demonstrated his remarkable evolution from a bohemian artist in Greenwich

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[237] Ibid., 84.
[238] Ibid.
[239] Ibid., 217.

Village to a successful political organizer on the national level; an evolution tied intimately to the revolutionary example set by Cuba.

Additionally, the Modern Black Convention Movement was invigorated ideologically by the Black Power Movement and thus emerged from an embrace of internal colonialism theory. In fact, Woodard's book, which positions the Modern Black Convention Movement as the political and institutional progeny of black cultural nationalism and Black Power, is called *A Nation Within a Nation.* Thus, the 1970s-era achievements of black political organizations, including the victorious mayoral campaigns of many black politicians in major American cities, may seem to be a world away from, for example, the gun-toting Black Panthers, or Attica's prisoners in revolt; however, they all inherited and further developed the concept of internal colonialism which tied them not only to the Third World but also to the discursive history of black radicalism, from their Black Power present to the recent-past of the Cuban Revolution.

In his 2010 book *Dark Days, Bright Nights: From Black Power to Barack Obama,* Peniel Joseph neatly summarized the various strands of black radical activism and organization which emerged out of the Black Power Movement from the late 1960s-on:

> Black college and high school students from New York City to Greensboro, North Carolina, then out west to the Bay Area cities of San Francisco and Oakland successfully transformed university curricula and founded Black Studies programs and departments around the nation. Trade unionists in Detroit and other cities attempted to organize workers caucuses in order to challenge the entrenched racism of white-controlled labor unions. Cultural workers helped to define black identity through a Black Arts Movement that, through poetry, theater, dance, music, and style,

> reimagined America's cultural and political contours. Black feminists challenged both the movement's and the nation's sexism, and through this, they argued for a more inclusive vision of Black Power that promoted a human rights agenda. Prisoners from Attica to San Quentin agitated for better living conditions, programs, and fair treatment before the criminal justice system. Welfare mothers from New York City to Las Vegas dreamed of a guaranteed income and lectured Dr. King on the intricacies of public policy. Finally, hundreds of thousands of ordinary local people backed a new generation of black politicians and successfully elected them as mayors of a range of urban cities in the 1960s and 1970s: Cleveland, Ohio; Gary, Indiana; Newark, New Jersey; Atlanta, Georgia; Detroit, Michigan; and Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.[240]

While Joseph uses this laundry list of Black Power-related activity in the 1960s and 1970s to situate Barack Obama as "a direct beneficiary of this rich legacy"[241] of Black Power, it is just as important to look backwards at the historical and ideological antecedents which created Black Power and allowed for these momentous developments. Black cultural nationalism spurred the Black Arts Movement and foregrounded the need for cultural production to compliment political organization, a combination which ultimately led to the Modern Black Convention Movement and all of its victories; internal colonialism theory underpinned Black Power ideology and led to the theorization of systems of state violence which still animate the black freedom movement today; Third World solidarity deeply influenced the Black Panthers and remained a central focus of internationally active black revolutionaries like Stokely Carmichael for decades. In all of these cases the intellectual impact of the Cuban Revolution is as undeniable in point of fact as it is easy to ignore in any simplistic retelling of black radical intellectual history.

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[240] Joseph, *Dark Days, Bright Nights: From Black Power to Barack Obama*, 164.
[241] Ibid.

While it is clear that the Cuban Revolution had a lasting impact on black radical solidarities through the discursive and theoretical frameworks that developed during early black radical encounters with the revolution and through the practical revolutionary model which Cuba represented in the early 1960s, there is an irony to this: as these enduring impacts came to define black radicalism in the late 1960s and 1970s, there was also a widespread disencounter of individual black radicals with Cuba itself. As Cuba's revolutionary regime evolved and drifted further into the Soviet Union's sphere of influence, Cuba's symbolic relevance to black radicals in the United States began to diminish, and the tactical and ideological example it set ceased to reflect the aspirations of many black radicals. To close out this chapter, we will examine the specific reasons for this disencounter.

Cultural vs. Revolutionary Nationalism: The Black Radical Disencounter with Cuba

The solidarity between American black radicals and Cuba's revolutionary regime was always fraught with contradictions. Despite their apparently shared opposition to racism and colonialism, both groups espoused a fluid mixture of ideological positions that harmonized some times and clashed other times. This was, at least in part, an inevitability given the nature of transnational solidarity: The drawing of *transnational* connections necessarily takes place within a particular *national* context and is done towards political and economic ends circumscribed by the paradigms and conditions of that *national* context. For example, Amiri Baraka and Robert F. Williams encountered Cuba as a foreign

discursive space within which they could debate the tactics of the American Civil Rights Movement, which was both geographically and ideologically tethered to the American context. On the other side, solidarity with black Americans provided Fidel Castro's fledgling regime with credible allies in an international environment hostile to popular revolutions. While Castro could advertise Cuban anti-racism to bolster his regime's image at home and abroad, black Americans could hold up the Cuban example to argue for concessions from their own government. This may seem overly cynical, but in truth it is merely an example of what Samuel Moyn and Andrew Sartori refer to as "the eternal localism of globalism," in which "contextual factors predominate" in comparative studies of historical actors who attempt to construct a sense of the global while situated in different national contexts.[242] Even (or, perhaps, especially) the *universalism* implied by Third World Internationalism meant something different for black Americans than it did for Cubans. For this reason, it was possible for contradictory Cuban and black American ideologies to not only coexist but to support one another during the early 1960s. Over time, however, those contradictions became increasingly pronounced, eventually fracturing American black radical opinion of Cuba, with some radicals remaining sympathetic to the regime and others experiencing a disencounter.

The primary contradiction between the two groups resulted from different ideas regarding the nature of nationalism. In *Leadership in the Cuban Revolution,*

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[242] Samuel Moyn and Andrew Sartori, eds., *Global Intellectual History* (New York City, NY: Columbia University Press, 2013), 18.

Antoni Kapcia explains that Cuban nationalism was ostensibly raceless, owing both to Jose Marti's conceptualization of nationalism which had "stressed the political importance of nationalists being neither black nor white but 'Cuban'" as well as the increasingly Marxist orientation of more left-leaning revolutionaries who privileged a class-based understanding of social division over a race-based one.[243] Thus, while eliminating racial inequality was of primary concern for the Cuban revolutionaries upon seizing power, their strategy was to

> "assume that it could be eliminated by legislative action (famously outlawing segregation of properties in 1959) and by social reform. Indeed, as reforms bit deep into the areas of housing (rents and rehousing), food rationing, land distribution and education, it was soon true that they all especially benefited the black population, which was generally at the bottom of the social pile. This therefore meant ignoring the question of race."[244]

Racism, according to this view, emerged out of *class* differences and could thus be largely undone through race-blind socialist reforms. Moreover, national identity was to transcend racial distinctions entirely, so discussions of anti-racism in revolutionary Cuba were always tied up with the radical humanist notion of universal brotherhood, with teaching people to see no distinction between one another, and with categorizing existing racial prejudices as the mere superstructure of *material* inequality. This Marxian-inflected Cuban nationalism left no room for race-based organization, let alone racial nationalism.

Meanwhile, the American discursive context of the Civil Rights Movement pitted strict non-violence, incrementalism, and racial integration

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[243] Antoni Kapcia, *Leadership in the Cuban Revolution: The Unseen Story* (London, UK: Zed Books ltd., 2014), 172.
[244] Ibid.

against violent resistance, revolutionary change, and race-based organization, with radicals increasingly opting for the latter set of ideals. As an apparent counterpoint to Civil Rights leaders' attempts at discrediting revolutionary violence, Cuba fell discursively into the black radical camp with all its components, including race-based organizing. Thus, ironically, the race-blind nationalism of the Cuban Revolution emboldened black nationalism in the United States. American black radicals perceived revolutionary Cuba from within their own national paradigm of radical opposition to Jim Crow and white supremacy, so while Cuba's revolutionaries aimed at forging a raceless national identity, black radicals saw in Cuba proof that the middle class integrationism of the Civil Rights Movement was insufficiently radical to make a real difference. They saw proof that violent revolutionary struggle might be the only pathway to true liberation; that black Americans, like the Cuban people, actually belonged to a discrete nation of the Third World but had been internally colonized by white supremacists. The Cuban campaigns opposing employment discrimination and promoting land reform, opposing personal racial bias and promoting anti-racist education, were radically antithetical to Jim Crow and were thus perceived from within the paradigms of black radical thought in the United States as promoting a black nationalist, liberatory ideology, rather than an integrationist one.

This is how Cuban nationalism came to provide an approximate blueprint for radical antiracism and black nationalism in the United States. Lost in the early days of the revolution, in the initial encounters of Baraka, Cruse, Clarke, and Williams with the revolution in 1960, was the plain fact that Castro was carrying

out a revolution in Cuba which emerged out of local conditions, local revolutionary discourse, and local history, not a revolution in Dixie which emerged out of American conditions, American radical discourse, and American history. Obvious on its face, this distinction was nonetheless obscured in the black radical discourse of the early 1960s out of which solidarity with the Cuban Revolution developed.

To be sure, black radicals in the United States and Cuba's revolutionaries *were* united by a common opposition to racism as well as common support for and solidarity with colonized people elsewhere. It would be an overstatement to assert that 'the eternal localism of globalism' necessarily precluded the emergence of similar counterhegemonic projects in different national contexts. Certainly the anti-colonial thrust of black radical and revolutionary Cuban discourse from 1960 on reflected a genuinely shared belief in national self-determination. That said, fundamentally different ideas about the relationship between race and nation, the result of contextual differences, underpinned an ideological rift which became more pronounced over time, eventually provoking tensions that made disencounter inevitable for individual black radicals for whom Cuba ceased to represent a viable model for black freedom.

In his 2016 book *Fighting Over Fidel,* which details the debates over the Cuban Revolution amongst the New Left in New York City during the 1960s, Rafael Rojas explains the specific ideological differences between black nationalists and the Cuban regime which eventually pushed the two groups apart. He states that

> The ideology of the Cuban Revolution during the 1960s rested on the articulation of a series of contradictory political premises, such as the defense of armed struggle, alignment with the Soviet Union, anti-imperialism, support for Third World decolonizing movements, antiracism, and integrationism. [Robert] Williams's and [Eldridge] Cleaver's backing of Cuban socialism dovetailed with some of these premises (revolutionary violence and anti-imperialist nationalism) but not with others (alliance with Moscow or postethnic nationalism). It was therefore inevitable that tensions would begin to emerge between the reading of the Cuban Revolution by these African American intellectual-political figures and that of the revolutionary government itself.[245]

Thus, a combination of Cuba's 'postethnic nationalism' and its relationship with the Soviet Union alienated some key black nationalists for whom black self-determination was a non-negotiable component of black liberation. The Cuban tendencies to promote an integrationist approach to race and to subsume racism beneath a class-based analysis of oppression contradicted this unifying principle of American black nationalism. Cuba's association with the Soviet Union, an outgrowth of America's military and economic hostility towards the island, was a point of contention for many black radicals for the same reason; the leadership of the USSR understood race in Marxist terms which disallowed autonomous, race-based organization.

As was discussed in chapter one, the widespread collaboration between black radicals and Marxists which had characterized the 1930s had largely collapsed by the 1950s. While that collaboration would return on a smaller scale with groups like the Black Panthers in the late 1960s, the initial association of black radicals with the Cuban Revolution grew from a black nationalist, antiracist, and anticolonial solidarity rather than from an embrace of Marxism. Harold Cruse

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[245] Rojas, *Fighting Over Fidel: The New York Intellectuals and the Cuban Revolution*, 178.

articulated the black nationalist skepticism of Marxism in his 1965 pamphlet *Marxism and the Negro.* In this pamphlet, Cruse viciously attacked Marxists, asserting that the black freedom movement was, in the 1960s, the de facto radical movement in the United States, having displaced Marxism, and that Marxists were trying desperately to remain relevant by appropriating the cause of black freedom as their own. Cruse summed up the crisis for Marxism in the 1960s thusly:

> We have the most unprecedented situation yet seen in the western world—a Marxist movement with a time-honored social theory which does not work out in life with a mass following, and a viable Negro movement of masses in movement which is stymied because it has no social theory or program to take it further. World historical trends have brought both the old Marxist tradition and the new Negro movement face to face on either side of a profound impasse.[246]

It is notable that Cruse saw this as an impasse and not an opportunity for collaboration. For Cruse, the revolutionary energy in the world rested not in the organized working classes of the most industrially-developed nations, but rather in colonized (or 'semi-colonized') people fighting for national self-determination. Cruse framed this distinction primarily in racial rather than class terms, arguing that "the world revolutionary initiative had passed from white nations of the capitalist world to <u>non-white nations</u> of the colonial or semi-colonial world," a development which proved the significance of "the racial factor, which the western Marxists never admitted should be a factor of any importance at all."[247] A black nationalist employing the paradigm of decolonization, Cruse recast the

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[246] Harold Cruse, "Marxism and the Negro (1965)," in *Marxism and the Negro Struggle* (New York City, NY: Merit Publishers, 1969), 4–5.
[247] Ibid., 6.

organized working classes in developed Western nations as reactionary rather than revolutionary, tying them to whiteness and to colonialism. He saw the anticolonial revolutions around the world as a collective refutation of traditional Marxist theory which held that the workers in the most advanced nations would build communism in their own countries long before it could reach the less developed countries, a theory which seemed to resemble Western imperialism. He asserted that

> 'socialism' becomes like 'capitalism' a white-nation conception, the great 'white working-class prerogative. Thus, the 'white man's burden' shifts from the capitalist's missionaries to the socialist's revolutionaries whose duty to history is to lift the 'backward' peoples from their ignominious state to socialist civilization even if the whites have to postpone this elevation abroad until they have managed to achieve it at home."[248]

This damning condemnation of Western Marxism reveals that Cruse had no interest in the radical left, including the Soviet Union. Though the pamphlet does not specifically mention Cuba, the increasing Soviet influence on Cuba into the 1970s would have, within Cruse's framework, reflected an embrace of an ideology which lacked, or even opposed, the genuinely liberatory impulse of non-white anti-colonialism, despite Cuba's nominal leadership within the Third World. As Rojas explains, "inevitably, the decline of the 'radical alliance' between African American civil rights leaders and revolutionary Cuba must be associated with the increasing hegemony of the island's 'traditional communist line'" under Soviet influence.[249] Thus, Cuba's association with the Soviet Union

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[248] Ibid., 10.

[249] Rojas, *Fighting Over Fidel: The New York Intellectuals and the Cuban Revolution*, 179.

had a similar impact as its race-blind nationalist ideology, namely alienating black nationalists.

Crucially, Rojas acknowledges and even centers his analysis on the fact that different black radical intellectuals did not merely experience "the displacement of identification with estrangement" in relation to the revolution, but rather wrestled with the ongoing coexistence of and tension between the two.[250] Each disencounter, then, was a *process* rather than an *event*. Moreover, not all black nationalists experienced outright disencounter, and some were even bolstered by Cuba's slide towards Marxism. Mark Q. Sawyer argues that rather than solely initiating disencounter, engagement with Cuba in the late 1960s provoked a split amongst American black nationalists themselves, with some nationalists supporting Cuba and others rejecting Cuba over the issue of black self-determination.

In his oft-cited 2006 book *Racial Politics in Post-Revolutionary Cuba,* Sawyer posits that black radical disencounter with Cuba was rooted in the tension between two competing types of black nationalism: cultural nationalism and revolutionary nationalism. The former has already been discussed at length, but the latter requires some explanation. In Sawyer's estimation, revolutionary nationalists embraced white allies and sought to bring greater intersectionality to the black freedom movement through broad coalitions, as opposed to the Afro-centric, race-based organizing proposed by cultural nationalists.[251] Sawyer argues

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[250] Ibid., 13.
[251] Mark Q. Sawyer, *Racial Politics in Post-Revolutionary Cuba* (New York City, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 80.

that black cultural nationalists "clung tightly to the idea of black self-determination, emphasized its absence in Cuba, and rejected as unacceptable a paternalistic, white-led regime that focused primarily on class," believing that "multiracial coalitions and Marxist ideals were incapable of producing racial equality," while revolutionary nationalists supported Castro's regime, believing it "modeled the ability of revolution and socialism to eliminate racial inequality."[252] Just as Cuba was a foreign discursive space for debating the role of violence in the black freedom movement, Sawyer argues that different camps of American black nationalists fought their ideological battles on the symbolic field of solidarity with Cuba.

Despite employing a simple, binary framework for categorizing black nationalists who encountered the Cuban Revolution, Sawyer's conclusions are quite nuanced because he recounts the movement of individuals between the poles of the cultural/revolutionary nationalism binary over time, demonstrating how general trends (such as the split between cultural and revolutionary nationalists) emerged out of the overlapping, context-specific experiences of individual thinkers. Additionally, Sawyer considers the evolving relationships between individuals and various nationalist organizations alongside their experiences with Cuba, with the Nation of Islam and the Us Organization promoting cultural nationalism and the Black Panthers promoting revolutionary nationalism. Thus, the ideological meandering of an individual like Eldridge Cleaver can be marked not only by his encounter and disencounter with Cuba but also by his encounters

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[252] Ibid.

and disencounters with different black nationalist organizations; from a committed cultural nationalist of the NOI to a revolutionary nationalist in the BPP back to a cultural nationalist after visiting Cuba in the late 1960s.

In like manner, Sawyer charts the ideological evolutions of several key black radicals in relation to Cuba, concluding that

> While Angela Davis's visit to Cuba confirmed for her the validity of her revolutionary nationalist beliefs, Eldridge Cleaver's period of exile in Cuba convinced him to abandon revolutionary nationalism for cultural nationalism. Robert Williams became convinced that the Cuban regime was racist but clung to his revolutionary nationalist ideology in China. Stokely Carmichael, attracted to many aspects of revolutionary nationalism when he went to Cuba, ultimately rejected it because of the racism he identified on the island.[253]

Out of these overlapping narratives, two key patterns emerged. The first was the incongruity between Cuban revolutionary rhetoric concerning its antiracist achievements, and the lived experiences of those who visited Cuba. By the late-1960s and 1970s, the claim that Cuba had eliminated racism had been in the ether long enough to be scrutinized against the visible realities on the island. Castro's claims to have achieved racial equality were undermined by the racism that, for example, Cleaver and Carmichael faced when visiting in the late 1960s. Reflecting on this hypocrisy, Cleaver said that "the white racist Castro dictatorship is more insidious and dangerous for black people than is the white racist regime of South Africa, because no black person has illusions about the intentions of the Afrikaners, but many black people consider Fidel Castro to be a

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[253] Ibid., 100.

right-on white brother. Nothing could be further from the truth."[254] The persistence of racism in Cuba disheartened American black nationalists and damaged the credibility of the regime. The second pattern was friction between the Cuban regime and those who attempted to implement black nationalist organizing in Cuba. Williams, Cleaver, and Carmichael each got into trouble with the Cuban government for attempting to transplant American black nationalist politics to the Cuban context. The vicious response of the Cuban regime proved that Castro had no intention of allowing autonomous race-based organization in Cuba. Angela Davis, notable for her continued support for Cuban socialism even after visiting in 1972, did not make any conscious attempt at preaching black nationalism and thus did not experience the same friction with the Cuban regime. She left the island still committed to Cuba, though Sawyer points out that she "seems to have been unaware of some of the repressive measures against black identity and Black Power that had been taken by the Cuban government."[255] Whereas Williams, Carmichael, and Cleaver all fell out with Castro's regime over fears that they would bring their race-based nationalist ideologies to Cuba and undermine supposedly race-blind Cuban socialism , Davis's enthusiastic embrace of Marxism and her intersectional focus on understanding "race in the context of other identities"[256] tempered her nationalism to the point where there was no fundamental disagreement with Castro's regime.

[254] Ibid., 95.
[255] Ibid., 97.
[256] Ibid., 95.

There were pragmatic as well as ideological reasons for Castro's aversion to bringing black nationalist politics to Cuba. Ruth Reitan argues that, at least in the case of the Black Panther Party, the souring of relations was caused principally by "the struggle within the Cuban leadership for ideological dominance and for the power to set security policy," with Che Guevara's "active promotion of armed insurrection at one extreme" pitted against the ultimately successful "Moscow-oriented ideology and national security position" at the other.[257] For Reitan, Cuba's gradual drift into the Soviet sphere was not merely a matter of ideology or economics, but was also driven by security concerns: As she explains, "intense debate within the [Cuban] regime centered around the best way to safeguard Cuba's national security," either through "active support for socialist revolution throughout the hemisphere (the Guevarist approach); or by closer ties with the Soviet Union and thus cooperating with agreements made between the superpowers (the traditional Cuban Communist Party approach)."[258] While black nationalists split over their allegiance to Cuba's revolutionary example, the Cubans themselves split over how to most effectively respond to black nationalists from a national security standpoint .

Amiri Baraka is conspicuously absent from Sawyer's piece but offers a compelling challenge to Sawyer's assertion that cultural nationalists disengaged from Cuba while revolutionary nationalists supported Cuba. Consider Baraka's unique ideological development: An apolitical beat poet radicalized by the Cuban

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[257] Ruth Reitan, "Cuba, the Black Panther Party and the US Black Movement in the 1960s: Issues of Security," *New Political Science* 21, no. 2 (1999): 218.
[258] Ibid., 218–19.

Revolution who transformed gradually into an ardent cultural nationalist, then rejected his cultural nationalism and became an ardent revolutionary nationalist and a Marxist by 1974, yet still continued to insist on the need for black self-determination while also enthusiastically embracing multiracial, intersectional coalitions, and who, despite all of this, never stopped citing Castro as a critical influence. If anything, Baraka's encounter with Cuba aided his embrace of cultural nationalism by providing a real-world model for the mixture of cultural production with radical politics. Thus, while Sawyer's assertion that debates over Cuba precipitated a split between cultural nationalists and revolutionary nationalists is compelling, it is important to acknowledge and account for the outliers like Baraka. Nonetheless, the more fundamental thesis offered by both Sawyer and Rojas, that Cuba continued to be a critical discursive space for black radicals from the late 1960s into the 1970s which helped to define the contours of black nationalism whether or not individual black radicals consistently embraced the revolution or rejected it, is undeniable and further established by Baraka's example.

Conclusion

It is clear then, that the Cuban Revolution continued to impact black radical solidarities through the late 1960s and into the 1970s. By helping to promote black Third World identity and internal colonialism theory, black radical engagement with Cuba played a key role in the construction of the paradigms out of which the Black Power Movement emerged. The Cuban emphasis on cultural production was instrumental to the development of black cultural nationalism as

exemplified by the Black Arts Movement which Amiri Baraka helped to originate. In turn, the transplanting of black cultural nationalism into the political sphere led to the Modern Black Convention Movement which laid the foundation for a considerable amount of black political activity from the 1970s on. Finally, continued engagement with Cuba provoked a split between cultural nationalists and revolutionary nationalists which defined the major factions of black radical thought from the late 1960s into the 1970s.

Conclusion

Fidel Castro died on November 25th, 2016, leaving behind his brother Raul to carry the torch of their decades-old revolution, and leaving the world to ponder his legacy. As divisive in death as he was in life, Castro remains nearly impossible to discuss without descending into partisan exchanges guaranteed to alienate and unify people in equal measure. Thus, the debate predictably continues as to whether he ought to be a celebrated figure among black radicals or not. A few think-pieces were published online following Castro's death which reflected on his affiliation with black radicals; some were largely positive, recalling his support for African independence movements and only reminding readers euphemistically that Cuba still "has race problems it must deal with."[259] Others were largely negative, criticizing black Americans who lionize Castro as a committed antiracist and anti-colonialist for "making declarations about a complicated figure we don't quite understand."[260] Unfortunately, these articles, concerned with determining whether or not Castro and his regime were *good*, sacrifice far more interesting questions in favor of chasing an unanswerable one. Indeed, trying to make a simple value judgement on Castro's legacy vis a vis black freedom requires grappling simultaneously with decades upon decades of changing Cuban government policy, changing Cuban social realities on the

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[259] Todd Steven Burroughs, "Black Radicals Owe a Great Deal to Fidel Castro," *Theroot.com*, November 26, 2016, sec. Politics, http://www.theroot.com/black-radicals-owe-a-great-deal-to-fidel-castro-1790857897.
[260] Kimberly R. Lyle, "African-Americans Should Stop Lionizing Castro as Champion of Black Liberation," *Fusion*, December 2, 2016, sec. It's Not Black And White, http://fusion.net/story/373379/african-americans-should-stop-lionizing-castro-as-champion-of-black-liberation/.

ground, changing global political circumstances (including the end of the Cold War), changing race relations in both Cuba and the United States, changing ideological trends among the radical left, etc.

Rather than exhausting any amount of energy on this daunting task, it may be more worthwhile to consider how the early impacts of the Cuban Revolution on black radical solidarities, which this paper has traced through the 1970s so far, continue to express themselves in the present time. This approach allows us to avoid the inaccuracies inherent to the partisan binary of pro-Castro and anti-Castro, thus enabling us to consider the deeper question of how specifically the course of the black radical tradition, which remains vibrant and impactful today, was shifted by the Cuban Revolution which Castro precipitated and presided over. Though direct and definitive connections between the Cuban Revolution and American black radicals today could only be established through the dramatic oversimplification of a profoundly complicated historical narrative, the *echoes* of the early encounters of black radicals with the Cuban Revolution can undoubtedly be heard in the discourses which prevail today.

Many of the important black radical figures discussed in this paper have passed on: Amiri Baraka in 2014, Harold Cruse in 2005, John Henrik Clarke, Eldridge Cleaver, and Stokely Carmichael all in 1998, and Robert F. Williams in 1996. The one notable exception is Angela Davis who continues to write and teach and whose work often centers on internationalism, a thread of black radical solidarity with deep roots which pass through the Cuban Revolution. In her 2016 book *Freedom is a Constant Struggle,* Davis argues that the black freedom

movement must return to its earlier internationalist orientation, asserting that major positive changes in the international struggle for black freedom, such as Nelson Mandela's successful struggle against South African apartheid, grew out of an "internationalism that always urged us to make connections among freedom struggles."[261] While not using the term 'Third World,' which is perhaps too rooted in Cold War history to be useful in the present moment, she draws upon what would in the 1960s have been called Third World transnational solidarity to theorize a common, global history of struggle including the black freedom movement in the US, African and Asian liberation movements, and the Cuban Revolution.[262] The book, which is mostly transcriptions of speeches and interviews, employs the paradigm of state violence to describe this common global struggle. She builds from her earlier work pioneering an analysis of the overlapping oppressions associated with race, class, and gender to argue that all struggles for justice are connected, within and between nations: She asserts that "the greatest challenge facing us as we attempt to forge international solidarities and connections across national borders is an understanding of what feminists often call 'intersectionality.' Not so much intersectionality of identities, but intersectionality of struggles."[263] This transnational, intersectional approach to black freedom seems like a logical extension of the sort of transnational solidarities which black radicals in the 1960s and 1970s theorized within the

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[261] Angela Y. Davis, *Freedoms Is a Constant Struggle: Ferguson, Palestine, and the Foundations of a Movement* (Chicago, IL: Haymarket Books, 2016), 53.
[262] Ibid.
[263] Ibid., 144.

paradigms of colonialism and the Third World, solidarities shaped and refined in their dialogue with the Cuban Revolution.

In addition to the continued resonance of these solidarities to Davis and the black radicals of her generation, new organizations and movements have emerged in the United States to inherit the mantle of the black radical tradition and, unknowingly, to carry on the intellectual legacies of the Cuban Revolution. Let us look, for example, at Black Lives Matter (BLM), which grew specifically out of concerns over police violence against black people and which has occupied center-stage in the national dialogue about race in America since the 2014 shooting death of Michael Brown Jr.by a police officer in Ferguson, Missouri. BLM has been the most visible of a host of racial justice organizations, old and new, that have mobilized to make meaningful social change since 2014. In 2015, echoing the Modern Black Convention Movement of the 1970s, a coalition of those racial justice organizations (including BLM) collectively called the Movement for Black Lives (M4BL) organized a massive meeting in Cleveland, Ohio, the National Convening of the Movement for Black Lives,[264] where they produced a policy platform outlining their vision for the future of the black freedom movement titled A Vision for Black Lives. Representative of the major trends in black radical thought today, A Vision for Black Lives is as much a living record of the history of the black radical tradition as it is a modern platform for substantive political action.

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[264] Jane Morice, "Thousands of 'Freedom Fighters' in Cleveland for First National Black Lives Matter Conference," July 25, 2015.

A Vision for Black Lives contains many of the major elements of Cuba's intellectual impact on black radical solidarities, including Third World transnational solidarity, internal colonialism theory, an analysis of state violence intended to reveal shared conditions of oppression transnationally, as well as black nationalism and pan-Africanism. For example, the platform includes an explicit acknowledgement of the need for global solidarity against globalized forces of oppression:

> While this platform is focused on domestic policies, we know that patriarchy, exploitative capitalism, militarism, and white supremacy know no borders. We stand in solidarity with our international family against the ravages of global capitalism and anti-Black racism, human-made climate change, war, and exploitation.[265]

As in the 1960s, the forces of oppression are theorized as monolithic, requiring an equally monolithic, homogenized opposition in the form of the transnational solidarity of the oppressed. In addition to this general transnational solidarity, there is a specific thread of pan-Africanism in the document, as it states that "we also stand with descendants of African people all over the world in an ongoing call and struggle for reparations for the historic and continuing harms of colonialism and slavery."[266] Echoes of the Black Power Movement, which was indebted to the resurgence of black nationalism triggered in part by the Cuban Revolution, can be heard in the demand for "independent Black political power and Black self-determination in all areas of society."[267] The demand for "an end

[265] The Movement for Black Lives, "A Vision for Black Lives: Policy Demands for Black Power, Freedom & Justice," 2016, https://policy.m4bl.org/platform/.
[266] Ibid.
[267] Ibid.

to the war against Black people" is followed by an elaborate outline of the mechanisms of state violence, a concept which grew out of internal colonialism theory whose modern formulation developed partially in response to the Cuban Revolution.[268] While internal colonialism is not discussed explicitly, there are several mentions of colonialism, nearly all of which seem to be made in reference to black Americans. Finally, Cruse and Clarke's praise for Cuban land reform as well as the broader black collaborations with Cuban socialism endure in the demand for "economic justice for all and a reconstruction of the economy to ensure Black communities have collective ownership, not merely access."[269]

While these connections with the Cuban Revolution may appear tenuous and speculative, taking a long view of history reveals that the themes which animate black radical discourse today, particularly those which pertain to black nationalist and internationalist solidarities, reflect the critical features of the discursive history out of which they emerged; a history deeply influenced by black radical encounters with the Cuban Revolution in the 1960s. Ultimately, the revolution altered the developmental course of black radical solidarities and helped to define how the black freedom movement developed from 1959 through today, even if its role is not widely acknowledged or understood.

[268] Ibid.
[269] Ibid.

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