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composition keeps changing, we might pose the question this way: Who or what will help to channel the country's protean energies away from Balkanization and dissolution and toward a better civic culture? If public policy and the media only heighten people's awareness of one another's religious and ethnic identities, they will hinder individuals' passages (and promotions) to a second, broader tier of American creativity and belonging. We need that second tier more than ever before. Precisely because the country is becoming more racially and religiously diverse, we should be working overtime to identify and nurture the *shared* values and affectional bonds that have spared it the fate of so many nations.

Yet too many who do work at this every day are unnoticed or disdained in the media. The *Times* ignored or stereotyped the men of all colors at the Promise Keepers rally at Shea; the worshippers of all colors at the Pope's masses in New York and New Jersey; the white Southern voters who cast their ballots for black candidates in the 1996 elections; and the many thousands of Giuliani voters, including white liberals, Asians, and Hispanics, who realized that "rainbow" politics had failed them. Liberals may believe that color-coding our public life liberates the oppressed, but it is the freedom to cross racial and tribal lines that draws to America millions of people in flight from their homelands' traditional cobwebs and feuds. They don't want the patronizing, cookie-cutter designations that frame "diversity"-oriented coverage and commentary on racial districting, elections, school curricula, and religious rallies. Even American blacks, here longer than most of us, and angered by media neglect or stereotyping, often resent corrective efforts to anoint everyone with a black skin the bearer of an "authentic" racial culture that exists only in reactions to the long-discredited American practice of coding by color.

We know how destructive such racial designations have been, here and around the world; what do we suppose would be the consequences of their becoming even more deeply ingrained in our public and corporate life? To its credit, the *Times* reported at length in 1996 that many "multiracial" couples and their offspring refuse to check any U.S. Cen-

sus-designated ethnicities except "Other." They, too, are fleeing the scripted solidarities of the past. The media should stop reinforcing them. Journalists should take better account of the vigorous American irreverence that so often confounds racial and ethnic designations and loyalties—on playing fields, in cultural arenas, and especially in politics.

race loyalties.

Of course, that American irreverence is not going to prevail in every public controversy or political campaign. But isn't it a great newspaper's mission to keep that hope alive, whether in congressional districts in Georgia and Florida or in the boroughs of the city of New York? Isn't it a great newspaper's mission to stand against racialism and help the American spirit soar?

Mightn't that even be good for a great newspaper's bottom line?

CHAPTER 5

WAY OUT OF AFRICA

◆ The Whiteness of Blackness

Even as Americans' notions of race become more fluid and ecumenical, the old idea that one's skin color determines one's destiny—and that it *should*—seems to be regaining ground among blacks. That isn't the fault only of diversity liberals in the media, Afrocentric writers and educators in schools, or race hustlers in politics and in the streets. Their doings are symptoms and, sometimes, accelerants of a more mysterious condition: a deepening uncertainty about the meaning of black identity in the United States—and, for that matter, anywhere else.

Sensationalized or not, the signs of confusion are proliferating. In recent years, prominent black leaders and activists have careened from precipitating a near breakdown of the NAACP to cheering black jury nullifications in cases like O.J. Simpson's; from flirting with Ebonics and dreaming of lost African glory to commercializing the celebration of Kwanzaa; from admiring Louis Farrakhan's pseudo-Islamic demagoguery to supporting the racial districting that has isolated black political leaders; from discouraging interracial marriages and adoptions to displaying a marked coolness toward the prospect of Colin Powell's running for president.

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Black ambivalence about the larger society is hardly new. Ever since the abolitionist Frederick Douglass stunned a white Fourth of July audience in 1852 by asking, "What have I, or those I represent, to do with your national independence?" American blacks have been shadow-boxing with an all-enveloping whiteness, by turns both threatening and seductive. "Lure and loathing," the black scholar Gerald Early ⁵ ~~called~~ ^{to} that ambivalence in the title of an anthology of essays by black writers addressing the problem. Black responses of whiteness oscillate between "fight" and "flight," between integrationism and separatism. "Can I be both [an American and a Negro]?" asked educator and writer W.E.B. Du Bois at the turn of the century, "or is it my duty to cease to be a Negro as soon as possible and to become an American?"

By midcentury, black writers and leaders seemed to prefer the second option. But now the tension between calls to race loyalty and calls to transracial dignity is taking a new twist: The wide national acceptance of black celebrities, artists, professionals, intellectuals, and politicians—not to mention the loosening of the old Anglo-Saxon norms by other nonwhites and by "Anglos" themselves—has prompted new, complicated reflections. Even as some black Americans "pass" into an integration their forebears could barely have imagined, others' definitions of racism have become more exceptional, elusive, extenuated, and, paradoxically, more insistent. The conviction that racism is growing draws strength from incidents that are ballyhooed in the media and from new literary portraits and studies of black pain. Yet that conviction is shaken repeatedly by rising rates of white "crossover" voting, ^{and} interracial marriage, the increase in earnings of two-income black families relative to those of white families, and other good news which liberals now ritually deny. Racism persists, but it cannot be the main source of confusion.

Why, then, does it seem so long since that Saturday night three decades ago when the Smothers Brothers crooned "The Lord Is Colorblind" to what CBS-TV must have assumed was a reasonably receptive national audience? Why would many blacks and white liberals now consider such a receptive audi-

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ence naive, hypocritical, and even racist? Why do so many consider an assertion that color isn't important an insult to black pride?

For a moment in the mid-1970s, *Roots*, Alex Haley's saga of Africans' abduction into slavery here, seemed to have found an answer. Turning on an intrepid black writer's report of an astonishing encounter with his ancestral African past, it promised to weave a recovered black story into the American national myth whose promise, whatever it was, would become more coherent for resolving the ambiguities in its black story line. The story of *Roots*' rapid rise and descent sheds some light on the new ambiguity of black identity in an America whose own identity is increasingly ambiguous, too.

Published late in 1976, *Roots* became the next year's top nonfiction bestseller after a record 130 million Americans saw the twelve-hour television miniseries it inspired. At least 250 colleges began offering credit courses based significantly on *Roots*. Travel agencies packaged Back-to-Africa "Roots" tours. Even before television had anointed him white America's best-known interpreter of black experience since Martin Luther King, Jr., I watched Haley tell a rapt Harvard undergraduate audience, most of it black, about his breathtaking encounter with the *griot*, or oral historian, of a village in Gambia from which, Haley said, his ancestor Kunta Kinte had been abducted to America in 1767. When he noted, as he had in the book, that the *griot* had "had no way in the world to know that [his ancient African-village narrative] had just echoed what I had heard all through my boyhood years on my grandma's front porch in Henning, Tennessee," there were gasps, and then the packed Quincy House dining hall was awash in tears.

With this unprecedented return by a black American to the scene of the primal crime against his West African forebears—"an astonishing feat of genealogical detective work," Doubleday's original dust jacket called the book—a long, tortuous arc of dispossession and yearning for a historic reckoning seemed, at last, to come home. *Roots* wasn't just Haley's own story, it was "a symbolic history of a people," he told a British

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reporter who had raised doubts about its accuracy. "I, we, need a place called Eden. My people need a Pilgrim's Rock." What the black nationalist writer Harold Cruse called the "sleepless nightmare of nonrecognition" endured by millions of blacks like Haley's grandmother might be relieved, if not dispelled, by a glimpse of Kinte's fortitude in a brutal, bottomless absurdity.

That absurdity hadn't abated with emancipation. Even as some whites preached a "melting pot" Americanism that would transcend racial divisions, they provided for themselves along carefully patrolled racial lines. Such hypocrisy forced blacks to play a similar double-game—a dance, really—that alternated between deference and defiance, with many other steps in between. Sudden lurches toward integration in the 1960s threw these deft coping strategies into stark relief, scrambling the coordinates of an uneasy racial coexistence and confounding pious hopes for a smooth transition. Some white-ethnic Roman Catholics and Jews, regretting their own subordination to Anglo-Saxon ideals, resisted the racial integration even more, intensifying their subcultural identities as "unmeltable ethnics."

Some blacks responded to this and to their own doubts about assimilation with a retaliatory black parochialism, assailing other blacks whom they deemed too accommodating and forcing even assimilationist whites to acknowledge their own hyphenated Americanism. Hollywood got into the act, spoofing Jewish assimilation in films like *Goodbye, Columbus*, and generating blaxploitation films, like *Putney Swope* and *Shaft*, that parodied integration. Suddenly it was unclear whether the nation would move toward a new synthesis or slip back into the racial and ethnic enclaves the melting pot's champions had hoped to dissolve.

Appearing amidst all this confusion, *Roots* at first startled, then relieved pessimists on both sides of the color line. By the grace of Haley's pilgrimage, it seemed, blacks would recover and share the true story of their dispossession, prying open some secrets of an American nightmare, wisdom whites had barely known. At last, the country might weave its black

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threads into a fabric resilient enough to sustain a decorous pluralism of peoples and a decent integration of persons. Coming less than fifteen years after King's speech at the Lincoln Memorial, Haley's mythopoeic triumph tugged at people's hearts and certified a realignment in the national cosmos. Americans of all colors were transfixed by Haley's account, even as charges emerged—some in an early review by the historian Willie Lee Rose in the *New York Review of Books*—that *Roots* contained critical historical errors, unacknowledged fabrications, and an indeterminate amount of plagiarism from recent novels. Haley received a "special" Pulitzer Prize, an unprecedented "Citation of Merit" from a National Book Awards panel, and many other accolades and honorary degrees. Two years later, ABC-TV produced a second series, *Roots: The Next Generation*, based on Haley's new book *Search*, chronicling his family's later triumphs and tribulations, including Haley's work on *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*, which he said had inspired the search for his own forebears that took up the series' final episode. "Now, as before," wrote Frank Rich on February 19, 1979 (he was then at *Time* magazine) "*Roots* occupies a special place in the history of our mass culture; it has the singular power to reunite all Americans, black and white, with their separate and collective pasts."

Today, *Roots* is seldom mentioned. The History Channel's twentieth-anniversary broadcast of the original series in February 1997 was little remarked on by viewers or print commentators. The book is still in stores—a Doubleday spokesman says it remains "an important title on the Dell [paperback books] backlist"—but it's not much read in college or high school courses. "*Roots*?" laughs C. Eric Lincoln. "It's disappeared! Alex Haley was my friend, and I can tell you he was a journeyman freelance writer, not a political writer or historian. He was given a status that he didn't deserve or expect." The black press seldom mentions him, except in connection with Malcolm X's autobiography. Comedian Richard Pryor parodied *Roots* with a skit about a black American beseeching an African village *griot* to tell him about his ancestors. The

griot hands him a photograph. "But, that's a *white* man," sputters the visitor. "*Tell me where I'm from.*" The *griot* rummages through his materials and replies, "You're from *Cleveland*, nigger!" It is almost as if Haley's effort has been air-

S brushed or laughed out of history and popular culture.
Roots' virtual disappearance can't be rationalized by claiming that it accomplished its mission by transforming the consciousness of a generation. What will the next and later generations learn from today's Afrocentric stories, so many of which are less about blacks' introduction to America than about the glories of ancient Egypt? These stories did not displace *Roots*; they tried to fill a vacuum it had left unfilled. Nor is it enough to claim, as some of Haley's critics did, that *Roots* shortchanged women by portraying them as passive help-mates to men like Kunta Kinte; Haley's misconstruals have been more than redressed by Alice Walker, Toni Morrison, Maya Angelou, and many other black women, but few authors now offer strong, redemptive narratives to young black men.

Haley embarrassed his true believers by taking folklore and fictional liberties with a narrative he'd claimed was historically true. He fabricated "discoveries" about Kinte and even recycled others' fiction, settling out of court for \$650,000 with author Harold Courlander, passages of whose novel *The Africans* he had pretty much copied. C. Eric Lincoln recalls that many members of the ~~(now defunct)~~ Black Academy of Arts and Letters considered *Roots* fraudulent in literary as well as historical terms because they viewed Haley as less than a true writer and the book itself as more cinematic than "interior" in the ways that written fiction can be. But, by that standard, a lot of popular "history," from Marco Polo's accounts of a Far East he may never have visited, to Parson Weems's fanciful portraits of George Washington, long in McGuffey's Reader, should have been retired sooner than they were.

While *Roots* was denounced as a scholarly "fraud" by the historian Oscar Handlin, it was defended as an irresistible historical novel and pedagogical tool by other historians such as Bernard Bailyn, Robert Fogel, Edmund S. Morgan, and David Brion Davis, who told the *New York Times*, "We all need cer-

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tain myths about the past, and one must remember how much in the myths about the Pilgrims or the immigrants coming here has been reversed." Morgan called it "a statement of someone's search for an identity," noting that Paul Revere and his "midnight ride" were unknown until Longfellow wrote a poem about it. But the black writer James McPherson says of such rationalizations, "They were like the last whiff of a condescending liberalism, saying 'Let's give them at least *that!*' "

What drained *Roots* of its power with the public—black as well as white—was a loss of faith in the myth itself, a disillusionment in at least three dimensions.

First, Haley had dissembled a lot about Africa. He depicted a precolonial Eden that hadn't existed; created his account of Kunta Kinte's youth there more out of current anthropology than history; paired all that with the story of his own communing with village elders in *postcolonial* Gambia; and wildly inflated black Americans' expectations of sub-Saharan Africa, past and present. Sudan, Ethiopia, Somalia, Rwanda, Burundi, Zaire—one could double the list before finding a sub-Saharan nation that isn't now run by thugs, wracked by bloody tribal wars, or watching hundreds of thousands starve. Black Americans visiting such places have experienced "solidarity" with their inhabitants only by letting skin color eclipse virtue and blaming everything on the legacies of colonialism. Africans can't do that because they are busy fighting other black Africans, as did their precolonial forebears, who enslaved and sold millions of people to the whites who transported them here. This is not hyperbole; it is a reality which it takes hyperbole to deny, especially now that South Africa no longer serves as a foil against which black nations to its north can be made to seem more grand, or at least legitimate, simply for being black.

In a second dimension, though, Haley wasn't just distorting history; he was juggling archetypes. "Just as he poured Malcolm X's life into a Western literary paradigm of suffering and redemption that would appeal to whites as well as blacks, he took a whole people and poured it into a paradigm that wasn't its own," says Gerald Early. Unlike classical, mythical

A. James A. McPherson

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accounts of the Hebrew slaves' exodus from Egypt and the Puritans' "errand into the wilderness" around Plymouth Rock, *Roots* wasn't a product of its protagonists' own mother culture. It was the work of a deeply Western, Christian, American writer who took as much from Hebrews and Puritans as from Africans. Gerald Early thinks Haley may have taken a little, too, from the Southern myth of the noble lost cause, evoked so powerfully in Margaret Mitchell's *Gone With the Wind*. If there was any nobility in Haley's attempt to weave blacks more smoothly and clearly into the American tapestry—to make Kunta Kinte a mythic *American* figure like Paul Revere—there was also something historically tragic, though potentially redemptive, in the fact that he had to use the abductors' language and metaphysical looms.

That hard truth is irreversible, and we need to comprehend it, for the hope that Haley's impulse can be redeemed may be America's best hope. In a nation born of fraught departures, clean breaks, and fresh starts on new frontiers, the special difficulties that attach to explaining how blacks came here and what they lost along the way make them more critical to our shared destiny than is any other minority. Dragged here, not lured, they "had to construct their moral universe almost out of nothing, almost heroically, in the cauldron of slavery," says the black economist and social critic Glenn Loury:

Becoming Christians kept them afloat and gave them strength to deal with a tremendously oppressive situation; the [black writer] Albert Murray says we are "the omni-Americans," people whose faith in this country rose highest because the alternative was total despair. As my friend Nathan Huggins put it, "We're not an alien population; we're *the alienated* population." We're after getting our birthright. We're the son who hasn't been acknowledged. See, *that binds you*. You can't turn back from it. Part of what I want is an acknowledgment of my place, my legitimacy, my belonging [interview with author].

The special depth of this need to end the sleepless nightmare of nonrecognition is what makes blacks "America's meta-

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phor," as Richard Wright called them—America's best cultural barometers and moral witnesses, as well as its harshest, sometimes nihilist, assailants. Not to understand this—and liberals and conservatives both have their distinctively willfull ways of misunderstanding it—is not to know one's country. We should try harder. Haley was trying to help.

Finally, though, *Roots* failed to take hold not only because Haley had to dissemble and juggle what myths he had about Africa, but because the myths themselves are losing their coherence and appeal to a newly implacable mass-marketing of novelty and instant gratification that deepen collective amnesia. "Increasingly we are learning that an individual's moral character is formed by narrative and culture," writes the sociologist Alan Wolfe. "Contracts between us are not enforced by laws or economic incentives; people adhere to social contracts when they feel that behind the contract lies a credible story of who they are and why their fates are linked to those of others." If neither laws nor material prosperity can substitute for a credible account of black identity, that is partly because America no longer has a credible account of its own.

We have always been reckless about this, and, like golf superstar Tiger Woods, millions of Americans have no single racial, ethnic, or religious identity that is rooted in a communal narrative. Whether anything creative or exalted can come of our life together along *this* new frontier is the American Question, and all power to those who engage it. But, at this point in our journey, it is time to say candidly that our national prospects are daunting, for we are losing not only the old communal subcultures but Western mythology's profoundly tragic sense of life. Because Haley tried to skirt the latter by telling an upbeat story for the mass market, *Roots* became our latest "Myth for a Day," turning immense historical pain into immense profit. That was what the slave trade had done, of course, and it was what *Roots* was meant to counter. But Haley's TV-friendly, docudramatic tale of black dispossession subtly reinforced the moral neutrality of classical liberalism, where markets are stronger than myths and history's tragic truths are not so much falsified as tamed.

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Roots' acknowledgments lavishly credit Murray Fisher, an editor at *Playboy* magazine who helped Haley "structure this book," whose "story line . . . he then shepherded throughout. Finally," writes Haley, "in the book's pressurized completion phase, he even drafted some of *Roots*' scenes. . . ."

One consequence of this Faustian bargain with mass marketing is the emergence of an *ersatz* tribalism, the sort of race-loyal posturing that was exposed, ironically, in a young black man's shouting "Only in America!" as he exulted outside the Los Angeles County courthouse over the Simpson criminal trial acquittal. *Ersatz* tribalism, oriented as much to the media as to the spirit, has been evident, as well, in the rise of Louis Farrakhan, who claims that he was taken by aliens into outer space—which sounds, ironically, rather like what Kunta Kinte must really have felt what was happening to him. Such responses seem a lot more facile and self-indulgent than the truly heroic struggles which Haley meant to evoke by turning Kunta Kinte into a composite of Nat Turner, Sojourner Truth, and the noble black regiment officer in the movie *Glory*.

If there was any saving grace in Haley's Faustian bargain, it was that, as mass entertainment, *Roots* did make blacks seem more "American" to whites who hadn't acknowledged how deeply American they are. However ephemeral, *Roots*' success also showed Americans of all colors that blacks' destiny is here, not in Africa. For all the Nation of Islam's proclamations to the contrary, even Farrakhan knows this, at least in the half of his deeply troubled mind that isn't in Sudan praising African slavers. Not for nothing did he hold his march on the Washington Mall, surrounded by all those white monuments, rather than in Chicago's South Side, or in the part of the Mississippi Delta that his predecessor Elijah Muhammad's enthusiasts and other activists designated as the provisional seat of the Republic of New Africa in late 1960s. Had he done that, a lot fewer black men would have come. In Washington, Loury recalls being moved by the sight of many black men regarding those monuments as their own. But how enduring is that sense of belonging? The story of *Roots*' own demise deepens the question but only partially answers it.

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♦ Africa: There Is No "There" There

On the bright side, at least from an American civic cultural perspective, the *Roots* myth foundered first on disillusionment with a Pan-African vision—but also with "blackness" itself. In a dozen books and countless speeches and conversations, American blacks who made pilgrimages inspired by Haley's epiphanies reported the perplexing discovery (often painful, sometimes relieving) that they have no common destiny with Africa, in part because they share very little across the hundreds of tribal and linguistic lines that keep even Africans from having any common history with one another beyond that imposed by Europe.

Once the visitors got past their often European- or American-trained African hosts, they found what Eddy L. Harris described in 199² in *Native Stranger: A Black American's journey into the heart of Africa*, and what *Washington Post* correspondent Keith Richburg recounted in a grieving, confessional essay in 1995 (later expanded into a book, *Out of America*): bitter disillusionment in encountering a continent they had hoped, even expected, to love. American Afrocentrists and liberal whites who sought a romantic, Pan-African foil to whatever they loathed in America found that millions of Africans are no more compatible with one another than are Croatians, Serbians, and Bosnians even now—all of them Slavic, as well as white, yet many of them guilty of "ethnic cleansing."

Similarly, while black American pilgrims to Africa were newly preoccupied with the significance of being "black," they found that that designation has no significance in most of Africa. There, the same skin color encompasses multitudes of cultural and tribal differences and is no more useful a moral or political lens than is "white" in the Balkans or, for that matter, in Scandinavia. Many Africans, recognizing their black visitors immediately as Americans, treated them as aliens having nothing in common with Africans who hadn't studied here or followed American culture. When the Rev. Johnny Ray Youngblood of Brooklyn made his first "Roots" trip to Ghana

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 in 19⁹⁰—prompted by a congregant's discovery of his own ties there—he identified himself as “African American” on a customs form. A Ghanaian official crossed out “African,” saying, firmly, “You are *American*.”

Other Africans mistook visiting black Americans at first glance for natives, whereupon they treated them as tribal enemies or as allies, depending solely on each individual's “ethnic” looks. When the *Washington Post*'s Richburg was entering Zaire, the customs official eyed him and insisted, despite Richburg's denials, that he was really a Zairian with a phony American passport. “Finally, I thought of one thing to convince him,” Richburg writes. “‘Okay,’ I said, pushing my French to its limit, ‘Suppose I was a Zairian. And suppose I did manage to get myself a fake American passport. . . . Tell me, why on Earth would I be trying to sneak back into Zaire?’” The immigration officer pondered this for a moment, churning over in his mind the dizzying array of possibilities a fake U.S. passport might offer . . . “You are right,” he concluded, as he picked up his rubber stamp and pounded in my entry. “You are American. . . .” In Somalia, a gunman guarding a militia leader raced up to Richburg, shoved him to the ground, and took aim. One of the strongman's assistants rescued him and apologized, explaining, “You look like a Somali. He thought you were someone else.”

In more historical terms, “the tie to Africa is an empty hope for Americans. All there is is remnants and echoes,” says Glenn Loury, who keeps in touch with former students teaching in several African nations. Black Americans' only coherent memories and myths begin in the holds of the slave ships to which other Africans ~~had~~ consigned them—a point that haunted Maya Angelou on a visit to Ghana, as she found herself wondering whether some of her hosts' ancestors had helped to sell hers. “During the long history of the Atlantic slave trade,” write the historians James M. McPherson, Gary Gerstle, et al., in *Liberty, Equality, Power*, “nearly every African shipped overseas had first been enslaved by other Africans.” One couldn't learn that from *Roots*, where Haley

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has two white men kidnap Kunta Kinte. That is not how most African enslavement began. *(Out of America.)*

Richburg's 1995 *Post* essay, which prompted heated, if private, discussions among black journalists and authors, describes how some visiting black Americans' historical amnesia and misplaced enthusiasms made him realize that he's not only more American than African, but more American than African-American. Recalling an "African-American Summit" in Gabon that brought "black American civil rights activists and business leaders together with African government officials and others," he lamented that

at a time of profound change across Africa—more and more African countries struggling to shed long-entrenched dictatorships—not one of the American civil rights luminaries ever talked about "democracy" . . . or "political pluralism." . . . Instead, what came out was a nauseating outpouring of praise from black Americans for a coterie of some of Africa's most ruthless strongmen and dictators. There were such famous champions of civil rights as Jesse Jackson, heaping accolades on the likes of Nigeria's number one military thug at the time, Gen. Ibrahim Babangida. . . .

I had seen that kind of display before around Africa: black Americans coming to the land of their ancestors with a kind of touchy-feely sentimentality straight out of *Roots*. The problem is, it flies smack into the face of a cold reality.

Last March in the Sudanese capital of Khartoum, I ran into a large group of black Americans who were . . . being given VIP treatment by the Sudanese regime. . . . The U.S. ambassador in Khartoum had the group over to his house, and the next day, the government-controlled newspaper ran a front-page story on how the group berated the ambassador . . . [and told him] that it was unfair to label the Khartoum regime as a sponsor of terrorists and one of the world's most violent, repressive governments. After all, they said, they themselves had been granted nothing but courtesy, and they had found the dusty streets of the capital safer than most crime-ridden American cities.

"I was nearly shaking with rage," Richburg wrote. "I couldn't even bring myself to write 'African Americans' in this essay."

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This from a man who in 1967 had watched some black residents of his native Detroit "burn a large part of the city to the ground." Even were Detroit as bad as Khartoum, it would be hard to understand a typical black Detroit resident preferring Khartoum, and equally hard to imagine a black American preferring to live in Africa.

An Afrocentrist might counter that surely whites would feel comfortable in other parts of Europe, especially England or France, which are historically important to American identity. That's true. And it must be why writers and artists like James Baldwin, Richard Wright, Paul Robeson, Chester Himes, Josephine Baker, Dexter Gordon, Claude McKay, and other black Americans felt more comfortable there than they would have in Africa. Even as they turned their backs on a racist America, some of them reflected insightfully on the discovery that they were irreversibly American—indeed, "Western." Attending a Pan-African conference in Paris in 1956, Baldwin noted, in his essay "Princes and Powers," that the strongest opponents of European colonialism depended on Western values and languages to make their case to their fellow Africans. Just as these writers preferred Paris to Accra or Lagos, thousands of middle-class *Africans* who could be helping to run their black nations have also chosen to live in Europe and America. Something more than race is in play here, something both good and bad: a larger human destiny which Western universalism has done much to illuminate, if little to resolve.

European colonization did forever change the continent some Africans are fleeing. It is difficult to exaggerate—yet curiously difficult for some blacks to acknowledge—how overwhelming and all-enveloping was the European presence, not for every African individual and society, but decisively for all of the African social structures and states that might have kept the invaders at bay had they been stronger and more unified. "Whatever Africans share," writes Kwame Anthony Appiah, the Ghanaian philosopher now at Harvard, "we do not have a common traditional culture, common languages, a common religious or conceptual vocabulary. . . . We do not even have a common race. . . . This is not to deny that there are strong

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living traditions or oral culture . . . in most of the 'traditional' languages of sub-Saharan Africa, or to ignore the importance of a few written traditional languages." But they were too diffused to mount an African alternative of the scale and power of the European presence.

Even the work of such celebrated Pan-African writers as Wole Soyinka and Chinua Achebe presupposes what Appiah calls "the recognition that a specifically African identity began as the product of a European gaze." They write and are read almost exclusively in English and French. When the Kenyan writer Ngugi wa Thiong'o chose to write in Gikuyu, his mother tongue, members of other Kenyan ethnic groups regarded him, wrongly, as a tribal partisan. Even some of the more local, apparently indigenous African traditions were actually concocted in response to, and sometimes with the tactical support of, the white colonizers, complained the anticolonialist, Parisian-educated African writer Frantz Fanon, whose *The Wretched of the Earth* was a bible for Third World liberation movements. To build those movements, Africans had to create "national" identities and liberations using European military, economic, philosophical, and linguistic tools. "In a sense," writes Appiah, reflecting on Ngugi's experience, "we have used Europe's languages because in the task of nation-building we could not afford politically to use each other's." In another sense, the African writers' explorations of the subtle, often nonracial ironies of oppression, resistance, and liberation depend on Western philosophical and literary resources.

Afrocentrists who object that the West owes many of its own conceptual and even technological powers to ancient African civilizations like Egypt never explain why those purported advances didn't penetrate sub-Saharan Africa beyond Nubia and Kush. Racial differences seem to correlate with cultural ones, but a glance at Europe's gypsies, medieval Russian serfs, and millions of illiterate, barely functional whites elsewhere in the world suggests other, historical contingencies. Whatever the truth, whites' own ghastly, bloody misadventures since 1914 remind us that the West's "strengths" often ratchet up human folly into unprecedented levels of barbarity.

We are still far out of Eden, and even the notion, embraced by some Afrocentrists in a retaliatory way, that skin color carries a common destiny is itself the detritus of the bad scientific and cultural beliefs that bedraped nineteenth-century European imperialist states in all their clanking, blundering glory.

One lesson is that racial solidarity goes nowhere, even as a response to racial imperialism. No "racial" identity concocted that way can endure, especially in America. In *Plural But Equal*, Harold Cruse offers a cautionary example:

It was once the custom of West Indians to flaunt the history of Haiti and its glorious revolution under Toussaint L'Ouverture. . . . The innuendo was that American blacks had never fought for their freedom. But the 1980s saw the unprecedented spectacle of Haitian refugees risking death by drowning in shark-infested seas to gain entry into the United States—the land of freedom, liberty, and opportunity—in the racist southern state of Florida, no less! . . . Yet, the most vociferous supporters of the rights of black Haitians to the privileges of American citizenship were American blacks! . . . If their black American citizenship is so empty and unrewarding, why . . . champion the rights of Third World peoples (especially black ones) to emigrate to the United States?

The black writer Albert Murray, a friend of the late Ralph Ellison, could have admonished the American black luminaries visiting Gabon and the Sudan with a comment he made in 1996. Noting that the Jeffersonian idea that all are equal didn't come from Africa, he remarked in a C-Span interview in 1996 that when "the captive Africans who came to consciousness in the United States . . . went off on the Underground Railroad . . . they were not trying to get back to the tribal life in Africa. . . . They have no birthrights anywhere in the world except in America"

♦ Says Who? The Problem of Myths

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If it is difficult to exaggerate white colonialism's influence on the African continent, it is impossible to exaggerate its effects on the Africans it transported into utterly alien realms. In America, the remnants of African cultures could hardly prevail against the ascendant missionary, civic, and mercantile dispensation. It is here that an understanding of Haley's mythical constructions must begin. His resort to "Eden" and "Pilgrim's [Plymouth] Rock" metaphors to characterize his book (even if only to market and defend it) illuminates something he couldn't conceal yet couldn't quite admit: *Roots* is an expression not of African cultural traditions, which made little of the mass abductions, but of Western European religious, literary, and political canons that had ~~had~~ no real counterparts in Kunta Kinte's precolonial home.

Haley's intent was to weave sub-Saharan Africa's diffuse cultural threads into a Western myth of "exile" or "pilgrimage" for a black American audience that had internalized such notions from the Old Testament and Christianity, and for other Americans who needed to understand, in both Christian and liberal-Enlightenment terms, what their own forebears had perpetrated or suborned. Only with those Western compasses could Haley's redemptive journey be undertaken. (For that matter, as the investigative reporter Mark Ottaway of the London *Times* discovered, Haley's *griot*, too, was a dubiously traditional, somewhat Westernized operator whom Gambian advisers had tipped off to what Haley was hoping to hear.)

But—even had Haley's *griot* been authentic; even had Haley not mischaracterized, as an African Eden, a village whose leaders had done a brisk business with white slave traders at his ancestors' expense; even had he not invented the circumstances of Kunta Kinte's departure and imputed to the ship's passengers snatches of dialogue copied from Courlander's novel; and even if, as Haley and his defenders insisted, *Roots* isn't a work of historical scholarship ~~anyway~~, but a myth no less valuable than that of Moses leading the Israelites out of Egypt or the Pilgrims celebrating the first Thanksgiving—there remained this more consequential problem: *Roots* represents an attempt to recreate, in a Judeo-Christian idiom, a journey

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which millions of Africans did *not* undertake like the Hebrew slaves heading for the Promised Land.

Because it is not the offspring of its black protagonists' own mother cultures, *Roots* prescribes for them a tragic but ultimately redemptive sojourn in a Western, biblical diaspora. Ultimately, *Roots* is a Western account of a monstrous Western crime—a crime only according to Western religious and political standards that triumphed later when the British Empire and other European regimes abolished slavery as no African authority had done and as some African ethnic groups in the Sudan and Ghana have yet to do now. It was those same Western standards that triumphed still later in the freedom-loving impulses of writers from W.E.B. Du Bois to Fanon.

If there is any glory for the West in all this, it lies not in Western power but in Western thought, which projects triumphs out of tragedies and which, for all its depredations, nourishes the capacity for rational self-contradiction that alone has put words like "democracy," "liberation," and "human rights" on lips around the globe. The West's true Eden is not Haley's bucolic African village but the home of a serpent and a corruptible couple of human beings. It was in distorting this Eden that Haley—like countless Western writers before him—shrank from the tragic Western truth about human dignity that began with the story of the Fall.

The emblematic fumbler of this contradiction was Du Bois, who spent his last years in Ghana because, carrying the nineteenth-century West's own racist and rationalist notions too far, he had talked himself into a Pan-African fantasy so rickety and irrational that he eventually had to buttress it with another unsustainable fantasy, world communism. He abjured a third, less coherent yet more promising option; the American one, which Americans themselves seem always about to destroy but somehow never quite do.

♦ Their "There" Is Here

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Exposing Africa's dismal pasts and the inadequacies of Haley's myth does not suggest black inferiority, as some whites seem to believe. It is, rather, a necessary if hardly sufficient condition of blacks' *American* rise from an abyss of captivity so vast it made Gertrude Stein say, "They were not suffering from persecution, they were suffering from nothingness."

"The concept of historic reparation grows out of man's need to impose a degree of justice on the world that simply does not exist," writes Shelby Steel in *The Content of Our Character*. "Suffering can be endured and overcome; it cannot be repaid." Ironically, unfairly, some of the most important solutions always lie with the victims. At some of the most critical moments of any struggle, only they have the power to overcome the oppressor's weapons and deceptions.

Blacks who have made it out of their New World abyss have done so first by using the very tools with which it was created. Most of the black American writers who speak in these pages anticipated the challenge that now faces everyone: We are all being "abducted" from our ancient mythical wellsprings and moorings by forces we no longer control and do not fully comprehend. It is thanks significantly to blacks, who started from "nothingness" here, that America—itsself unprecedented and self-inventing even when blacks arrived—has an even better head start on a now global problem. Europeans sometimes say, as the Swiss psychologist C. G. Jung did first, that white Americans walk and talk "black." That fits neatly with some Africans' feeling that black Americans are not "black" at all. Again, the designation is meaningless.

Yet neither the real America nor the one we envision—whether we are libertarians or socialists, strict constructionists or judicial activists—can fulfill its raceless destiny without the people whites called "Negroes," "blacks," and "African Americans" when whites were on their best, but still misguided, behavior. America needs blacks not because it needs blackness but because it needs what they've learned on their long way out of blackness—that which others can't learn on the journeys they need to take out of whiteness.

And what have blacks learned?

Stanley Crouch in *The All-American Skin Game*:

From the Old Testament's tragic vision of human frailty, from the Passion of Christ and perhaps the greatest blues line ever written, "Father, why hast Thou forsaken me?" Negroes fashioned one side of their vision. [On the other side,] perhaps from the incantational percussion of Africa, and what I can only call a heroic recognition of the vibrance at the center of existence, Negroes have transmuted pathos and tragedy into exultation through the rhythmic lyricism of swing . . . a congress of form and human feeling . . . ^

African kingdoms, real or invented, make no impression on how I see myself, primarily because Africa had absolutely nothing to do with the conception of the ideas that eventually led to the end of slavery and were so essential to the recent history in which people the world over became more and more involved in breaking down the reign of South African apartheid. The international recognition and support of Nelson Mandela were born of the evangelical humanism at the center of modern democracy, which has no precedents in anything of African origin. It was Negro Americans, not Africans, who were central to the enriching of that humanism through their role in the difficult evolution of American democracy.

Harold Cruse in *Plural But Equal*:

The history of America and the world since World War II, and especially since the emergence of Martin Luther King [Jr.] and the civil rights movement, amply demonstrates that out of the international turmoil of social revolutions, wars, atrocities . . . the United States, with all its flaws and imperfections, takes on the semblance of the "best of all possible worlds." . . . This is especially true, and ironically so, for American blacks, who are just about the only nonwhite minority group in the entire world having no options to pack up and emigrate anywhere (including the African continent). For better or worse, the American black minority is stuck with the American version of political and capitalistic democracy. . . . There will be no social revolutions in the United States because historically the American nation is an evolutionary society. . . .

Gerald Early in *Civilization* magazine:

Afrocentrism is a historiography of decline, like the mythic

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epic of the [lost, antebellum] South. The tragedy is that black people fail to see their "Americanization" as one of the greatest human triumphs of the past 500 years.

→ 91 O.J. Simpson's cheerleaders were "un-American," one might retort. Yes, they were—like the countless cheerleaders for countless whites acquitted in mere simulacra of trials across blacks' long sleepless nightmare of nonrecognition. Farrakhan's support for African slavers today is "un-American" certainly—but much of this country was built by people who collaborated with such slavers. The oft-highlighted black pathologies are indeed incompatible with an American civil society that relies heavily on individual conscience, not colorized absolution or blame—a society whose genius is, as the American literary historian Daniel Aaron put it, to be "ethical and pragmatic, disciplined and free." But just as incompatible with such a society are the pathologies recorded on nineteenth-century police blotters and "vice" investigations concerning Irish-Americans in New York City's Hell's Kitchen, and in Henry Adams's despairing observations about the limited capacities of Jewish immigrants on the Lower East Side.

In a country that has lost its moral bearings and collective memory, indicting racism in order to excuse Simpson, Farrakhan, gangsta rappers, "crack mothers," and lethal kids only reinforces perceptions of immutable racial differences that are already disproven. We are all led downhill, too, by moral posturing on either side of the subtly color-coded ideological line behind which conservatives blame everything on black "pathology," while blacks (and white liberals) blame "angry white men."

Blacks who have thought most deeply and productively about this are shedding a defensive blackness to join with whites who disown both their own past supremacy and their counterproductive guilt. They would have us forget Alex Haley's Africa, except as citizens of the world. They would have us recover the tragic realism in Western myths and stop up our ears against the racial siren songs that sometimes echo within those myths and, still, within ourselves. They would

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have us become Americans. Much as there is to learn from the old solidarities we are shedding, and many ^{are} their treasured remnants and lessons, the time is approaching when Americans of all colors will have to give their racial banners decent burials and kiss even their hyphens goodbye. The question is whether we can renew or rebuild a civic culture worth joining and defending. The answer turns on whether we can discard both blackness and whiteness as we have known them.

CHAPTER 6

MANY COLORS, ONE CULTURE?

♦ A Look Beyond Race

If one looks at the most admirable efforts by activists to overcome racial oppression in the United States, what one finds are people who yearn for justice, not merely for the advancement of a particular group. One finds people who do not replicate the racial alienations of the larger society but instead welcome interracial intimacy of the most profound sorts. One finds people that are not content to accept the categories of communal affiliation that they inherit but instead insist upon bringing into being new and better forms of communal affiliation . . . in which love and loyalty are unbounded by race.

—Law professor Randall Kennedy,
speaking at Columbia University,
1996

But, this is where the ambiguity enters. There is an elemental tension between the existential necessity of black self-development and the moral requirements of a humanism which transcends race. One draws on ties of blood, shared history and common faith. The other endeavors to achieve an integration of the most wretched, despised, and feared of our fellows along with the rest of us into a single political community of mutual concern. One

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takes the social fact of race as a given, even celebrating it. The other aims to move beyond race altogether.

—Glenn Loury,
in *Commonquest*,
a black/Jewish journal, Fall, 1966

The first time I heard Randall Kennedy speak publicly on the subject of "Racial Pride, Racial Kinship, and Other Problems," many of his listeners seemed sullen, or, at best, subdued. Kennedy, a rising star in our dark night of racial contention ^{legal} law, was delivering a rigorous attack on liberal racist thinking to more than a hundred mostly liberal academics and students, about half of them black, in Columbia University's 1996 Lionel Trilling Lecture. Eight months later, when I heard him give a shorter version of the same talk to eight hundred undergraduates in the political philosopher Michael Sandel's Justice course at Harvard, the response was more open-minded. The students' bouyant, if skeptical, engagement with his argument was even more impressive in light of the fact that he debated it first with Sandel, the "authority figure" in the room. Sandel was defending not liberal racism but the idea that we do have obligations to some groups to which we are bound by birth, history, or necessity, but not necessarily by choice.

At both Columbia and Harvard, Kennedy opened by asking, "What is the proper role of race in determining the way I, an American black, should feel toward others?" His answer, which he elaborated analytically and anecdotally for half an hour, was, "Neither race pride nor racial kinship offer guidance that is intellectually, morally, or politically acceptable." Clearly, he meant to push or carry color-blind humanism beyond what most blacks, and even most white liberals, today consider a racial breaking point. Insisting that any race is merely "a conglomeration of strangers," he cast a cold eye on even the apparent solidarity of the Million Man March, wondering aloud how most of the men who called one another

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er "Brother" would have responded had someone asked, "Would you be willing to loan \$100 to this brother? . . ."

Kennedy then deepened his attack "on assumptions which privilege . . . the loyalties of blood . . . over chosen loyalties, the loyalties of will." As he has in the media and as a participant in a high-profile lawsuit, he defended (white) foster parents' custody of (black) children against the claims of natural (black) parents who had abandoned them or had had them taken away after abusing them, but, years later, wanted them back. No blood tie could excuse violating the children's dignity and the foster parents' voluntary, "loving effort," he said. "In my view, many people, including legislators and judges, make far too much of blood ties in derogation of ties created voluntarily by loving effort." He explained what he feels is at stake:

. . . Analogizing race to family is a potent rhetorical move used to challenge those, like me, who are animated by a liberal, individualistic, and universal ethos which is skeptical of, if not hostile to, the particularisms—national, ethnic, religious, and racial—which seem to have grown so strong recently, even in those arenas, such as major cosmopolitan universities, where one might have expected their demise.

So uncompromising was Kennedy's opposition to expressions of racial affinity that he even criticized Yale Law School professor Stephen L. Carter, a thoughtful and persuasive critic of affirmative action and other racial policies, for writing about the pleasure he and his wife ~~took~~ in inviting black students to their home at Christmas, feeling "a deep emotional connection to them, through our blackness . . . a reminder of the bright and supportive side of solidarity." Kennedy's response was that

. . . in the mind, heart, and soul of a teacher there should be no stratification of students such that, on grounds of racial kinship, a teacher feels closer to certain pupils than others. No teacher should view certain students as his racial "brothers and sisters"

take

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while viewing the others as, well, mere students. Every student should be free of the worry that, because of his or her race, he or she will have less of an opportunity to benefit from what a teacher has to offer.

Kennedy is rigorously rational in his public speaking and writing; he eschews colorful or emotive language. So, coming from him, the phrase "mind, heart, and soul of a teacher" signaled his deep conviction that being a good teacher means more than performing "official duties" such as answering students' queries and keeping regular office hours. In his lecture, he lauded some of his own white teachers—John McCune, Eric Foner, Sanford Levinson, and Owen Fiss—whose keen interest in teaching and in him had changed his life and nourished friendships that continue. In effect, he paid tribute to a dimension of civil society that can't be regulated but makes all the difference to individual growth and social health.

Kennedy anticipated two likely objections to his argument: As long as a teacher performs his or her "official duties" equally well for all students, none are deprived. And since racism is a fact of life, black students need and deserve whatever knowledge, guidance, and assistance a black professor can provide—not in "kinship" but to meet race-neutral, universal moral standards. Kennedy warned that when a teacher affirms racial kinship, "I find it inconceivable that there will be no seepage from the sphere of the personal into the sphere of the professional." Students invited to a professor's home are enjoying an opportunity that may well "be reflected, for instance, in letters of recommendation to Judge So-and-So and Law Firm Partner Such-and-Such" and in the students' own perceptions and feelings of the pedagogical relationship. Only a clear moral duty, not color-coded "kinship," should animate a teacher, he argued, explaining the difference:

Am I demanding that teachers be blind to race? No, I am not. . . . They should be keenly aware, for instance, that . . . the dominant form of racial kinship in American life . . . [is] mobilized on behalf of whites. . . . Consider the case . . . in which white students are

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receiving considerable attention from teachers, while black students are being widely and wrongly ignored. In this case, it would be morally correct for a professor . . . to reach out with special vigor to black students. . . . Note, though, that the basis for this outreach is not racial kinship. Rather, the outreach is justified on grounds of distributive justice. . . . Under this rationale, white teachers are at least as morally obligated to address the problem as are black or other professors.

Broadening his argument from the nature of teachers' obligations to that of social obligations more generally, Kennedy argued that "difficulties that disproportionately afflict black Americans are not 'black problems' whose solution are the special responsibilities of black people. [These problems'] solution or amelioration are the responsibility of us all, irrespective of race." He celebrated whites, from Elijah Lovejoy, who was murdered in 1837 for opposing slavery, to 1960s civil rights activists Andrew Goodman, Michael Schwerner, and others who lost their lives struggling to secure blacks' civil rights out of a sense of moral obligation, not racial kinship. "Against this history," he concluded, "I see no reason why paying homage to the struggle for racial justice must entail any sort of racially-stratified loyalty. Indeed, this history suggests the opposite." The way to oppose racism is to renounce racial loyalty—which is chimerical and only compounds racism itself—and to honor and reward "loving effort" that is guided by a universal morality can animate everyone from foster parents to civil rights activists.

At Columbia, many of Kennedy's listeners thought him hopelessly if not willfully naive about the bitter experiences of blacks, who had long heard whites mouthing such pieties ^{New York} hypocritically. University law professor Derrick Bell had already charged portentously in the *New York Times* that Kennedy "is willing to speak for whites"—which meant that, by Bell's lights, he ^{was} a race traitor. Responding to Kennedy at Columbia, Manning Marable, a professor of history and African-American studies there, acknowledged that blackness in America is a not a primordial or mystical bond but a "social

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construct," a product of racism. Still, he asked, given the depth and prevalence of white racism, was there not—and shouldn't there continue to be—a black community borne of shared endurance, resistance, and memory? Another listener, a black man with an activist's mien and an ~~erudite~~ Caribbean accent, made the same argument, but in language more damning of Kennedy. In Sandel's class at Harvard, a black student responded much as Marable had, asking Kennedy to agree that the shared "ordeal" of being black in America bonds and obligates blacks to one another.

Kennedy's responses recapitulated what he had said in his lecture:

A brute fact [of racism] does not dictate the proper human response to it. . . . Blacks should insist, as did Martin Luther King, Jr., that acting with moral propriety is itself a glorious goal. In seeking to attain that goal, blacks should be attuned not only to the all-too-human cruelties and weaknesses of others, but . . . as well . . . of themselves. . . . Unless inhibited, every person and group will tend to gravitate toward beliefs and practices that are self-aggrandizing.

Kennedy was warning, in effect, that his critics' invocations of black solidarity are only half-answers to racist oppression. They leave unanswered the question of whether *any* group or society can sustain its members' dignity, much less respect it in others, if it stops taking universal principles seriously. Ultimately, Kennedy said, there really is no substitute for a classical, universal liberal morality. He warned that "national" solidarities are as suspect as explicitly racial ones but acknowledged, in response to a question from me, that loyalty to the American republic is justifiable to the extent that citizenship here is based not on mystical ties in "blood and soil" but in the republic's commitments to implement race-transcendent ideals. That is precisely why "millions of people come here from all over the world," he said.

Yet Kennedy wanted to preserve a tension between even the most benign loyalty to America and higher obligations to

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human rights around the world. Sometimes, as in the Vietnam War, patriotism cannot be reconciled with higher obligations—and never mind that Lyndon Johnson presented the war as a moral crusade against an immoral ideology. While communism was a perversion of universal morality, Johnson was wrong because America's "crusade" was inseparable from militarism and capitalist greed, which coexist uneasily with higher liberal aspirations. At Columbia, some of Kennedy's nonwhite listeners asserted that militarism and greed are indeed inextricable from liberalism itself, and, moreover, that there is something quintessentially "white" about that corruption of universal standards. Kennedy denied that the connection was inevitable, even though he had protested the war.

A stronger case for maintaining nonwhite subcultures in a classical liberal society came, ironically, from Kennedy's white interlocutor at Harvard, Michael Sandel. He asked whether Jackie Robinson had been wrong to say, while recounting his experience of breaking baseball's color bar, that he had taken "pride in the pride which my people took in me." Isn't there an important value, asked Sandel, as had Marable at Columbia, in honoring one's membership in a group that has been shaped by and forged in oppression? Going even further, Sandel asked whether people may not have enduring obligations to ancient subcultures which, while not avowedly liberal and universal, nurture individual dignity and moral obligation in their members. Where else did Kennedy think young people would acquire and affirm dignity? Certainly not only in a liberal marketplace of goods and ideas.

If Kennedy was taking liberal humanism to extremes of abstraction in his battle against liberal racism, Sandel was pushing a little the other way. He suggested that there really is no such thing as a morally "unencumbered self," dear though that notion might be to some liberal Constitutional scholars and free-market economists. But Kennedy resisted even Jackie Robinson's seemingly harmless notion of racial kinship. He recalled how members of an NAACP audience had objected when presidential candidate Ross Perot addressed them as "you people"; yet, the next day, the same listeners

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referred to themselves as "our people," showing, in Kennedy's view, how provisional—indeed, shallow—racial or ethnic "peoplehood" in America can be.

But just how provisional is the experience of racial kinship for Kennedy himself? Thereby hangs a tale of the creative tension between parochial nurture and liberal aspiration in America, a tension which Kennedy and many others have known. To learn how difficult and important the right balance can be, Kennedy's own story is a good place to start.

♦ An American Universalist

In his professional and public life, Kennedy lives uncompromisingly by the principles he enunciated in the lectures. When some Harvard Law School students invited a little-known member of ~~Nation of Islam~~ ^{the} Nation of Islam to speak at the school in 1993—a year after Farrakhan lieutenant Khalid Muhammad's infamous anti-Semitic rant at Kean College in New Jersey—Kennedy attended the speech at some of his own students' request. "For awhile," he recalled later, "the guy didn't say anything blatant; it was all innuendo, insinuation. But there came a point, after about thirty minutes, when he said something—I've forgotten it, frankly—in which the implication was sufficiently clear so that I felt like I had to do something."

There was a group of mainly Jewish students in the back holding up these placards, with messages like "Hate is not welcome here at Harvard," and I went up to one—I think at first the guy thought I was trying to take his placard away from him, and then he understood that I just wanted to hold it—and I just walked down the aisle to the front and held it up. Muhammad was still speaking, and I didn't stop the show, but I felt that it was important to show that it wasn't just the group of students in the back who felt this way. I don't think it was that big a deal.

Some students came up to me afterward and said, "Thanks." Others thought I had acted wrongly, and one said, "This guy didn't really say anything anti-Semitic." I said, "Frankly, my re-

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sponse to you is just what it would be when David Duke's people claim that he doesn't say anything antiblack nowadays." (conversation with author *2, June, 1996*).

At around that time, Kennedy "went public" in defense of interracial adoptions, which the National Association of Black Social Workers was equating with "genocide" on the grounds that such adoptions deprived black infants of "culturally consistent" environments. The NABSW supported regulations that would leave black infants who'd been abandoned by their parents languishing in hospitals until other black families could be found to adopt them. But—contrary to what a liberal racist might presume—more white families than black stand ready to adopt black children. Apparently, white love is as threatening as white hate to those who would rather treat a race as a "family" than respect individuals' cross-racial moral choices.

The NABSW induced New York State to adopt "cultural consistency" regulations and got Ohio senator Howard Metzenbaum to propose a "Multiethnic Placement Act" that would keep black "boarder babies" in hospitals at least until concerted efforts had been made to find them black homes. Kennedy endorsed efforts to recruit more black families, as a group called Miracle Workers does in New York. But he knew that any delay in placing abandoned infants with loving families retards their development. What especially galled him into opposing the Metzenbaum bill was its incorporation of a principle of racial matching driven by what he called "ugly and destructive" sentiments such as "antiwhite racism, a rigid determinism according to which people of one race are simply incapable of fully loving and empathizing with people of another race, . . . and a tendency to view black children as hostages that can justifiably be used to advance the ideology and bureaucratic power of the NABSW."

When Kennedy made this case to one of his classes during a wrenching discussion of the problem, a black student responded, "The reason you take that position is that you don't believe in diversity." Thirty years ago, an equally provocative

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charge might have been, "You don't believe in racial integration"—the very thing Kennedy was now affirming, as he had in his Trilling lecture by endorsing "interracial intimacy of the most profound sort." So he turned the tables on his student:

Let me stop you right there. I think that's an interesting point you just made. Couldn't it be that *you're* a conservative, and that *I'm* saying, "Let a hundred flowers bloom"? I think it can be great to have a family of many colors. I'm for new ways of thinking, new formations, nontraditional family models. Isn't *that* "diversity"? Suppose that, in a supermarket, we see a family with differently colored parents and kids go through the line. You're going to be upset by that, and I'm not.

The student was already upset, and the rest of the class's response was mixed, if muted. "I think the majority sentiment was with me, but people who felt that way were very quiet," Kennedy reflected later. "Clearly the people who feel most confident these days are the race-matching people. I don't care. When Clint Bollick of the [conservative] Institute for Justice contacted me about signing on to a Texas case involving white foster parents who were defending their custody of a black child from a challenge by the birth mother who had abandoned the infant, I said, 'Yes.'"

Teaching a special summer course for legal practitioners, Kennedy asked the class whether it was racist of Congress to mandate Draconian sentences for the possession of crack-cocaine, with which blacks disproportionately use, but not for the less dangerous powder cocaine, which is used more by whites. The legislation didn't mention race, Kennedy noted; Congress's "rush to judgment" might be "hysterical, it might be unwise, it might be counterproductive," he said, but mightn't its harsh crack penalties reflect a sincere belief that crack is more lethal and socially disruptive than powder? Didn't it matter that that belief and harsher sentences were endorsed by Harlem congressman Charles Rangel, who sponsored the legislation, and by many others in the Congressional Black Caucus who voted for it?

, as he does in his book
Race, Crime, and the Law,

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Kennedy kept on pitting humanism against racialism. "People say there's no reason for Alan Bakke [the white medical-school applicant who sued successfully against an affirmative-action policy which he believed had denied him admission] to feel discriminated against because he's being disadvantaged for a larger common good," he told me, ~~describing his work on a book about race and the criminal justice system.~~ "I say, let's talk that way, then, about a black [motorist] being stopped by a cop. Your skin color is simply incidental to a larger problem [of black crime, which harms blacks more than whites]; you shouldn't feel discriminated against, either. [But] if that doesn't satisfy me as a driver—assuming, of course, that the officer is polite and just checking records—why should it satisfy Bakke?"

Kennedy almost always poses such questions as rigorously ~~and rationally~~ as he did in the Trilling lecture. But late in 1996, in a review for the *Los Angeles Times*, he characterized Johnnie Cochran's *Journey for Justice* as a manipulative, preening account of his life and work that reeked of emotional and intellectual dishonesty. That prompted Kennedy's Harvard colleagues Leon Higginbotham, Charles Ogletree, Jr., and David Wilkins to charge in the same newspaper that he had "unfairly maligned Cochran's honesty and integrity."

No new ¶ ~~Does Kennedy really believe that racism wasn't prevalent in the police behavior he had examined and in the congressional crime legislation? Is he just playing devil's advocate when he challenges the conventional racial wisdom? Or is Randall Kennedy deracinated, or, worse, a race traitor—supporting "white power" against blacks and other "people of color"? The last question was posed pointedly—indeed, furiously—for the first time in 1989, when he published, in the ~~41~~ issue of *Harvard Law Review*, a magisterial assessment of the work of "critical race theorists" such as Derrick Bell, Richard Delgado, and Mari Matsuda. The controversy it sparked illuminated the cultural and philosophical gap between liberal racists and those whom Kennedy considers true liberals.~~

In the essay, "Racial Critiques of Legal Academia," Kennedy summarized critical race theorists' contention that nonwhites'

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historic and continuing subordination gives them special insights and wisdom, leaving whites "entitled to less 'standing' in race-relations law discourse than academics of color." He noted that these theorists also believe that simply being non-white "should serve [applicants for student admissions and faculty positions] as a positive credential for purposes of evaluating their work" and that if nonwhites are underrepresented or ranked poorly in academies, that is due largely to "prejudiced decisions by white academics," not to a dearth of fully qualified nonwhites, which would reflect a confluence of other factors. More fatefully, he noted, critical race theorists insist that rigorous rational analysis, rooted in classical liberal conceptions of empirical proof and of individual rights and responsibilities, is "white" thinking, and that legal scholarship and processes must be changed to accommodate the collective consciousness of nonwhites, using literary fables whose truths are deemed vital, even when they can't be established by traditional scholarship.

In his essay, Kennedy disagreed, of course. He believes in "a liberal, individualistic, and universal ethos ~~which is skeptical of, if not hostile to, the particularisms—national, ethnic, religious, and racial—which seem to have grown so strong recently. . .~~" *that* ~~In the essay, he fully acknowledged the persistence of white disdain for nonwhites' intellectual efforts. But he also exposed the intellectual failings in "critical race" narratives, which tend, he wrote, "to evade or suppress complications that render their conclusions problematic. Stated bluntly, they fail to support persuasively their claims of racial exclusion or their claims that nonwhite legal academic scholars produce a racially distinctive brand of valuable scholarship" that is beyond comprehension by whites.~~

Far from being a problem just for legal scholars, Kennedy warned, critical race theory lends support to "certain educators who conclude, on the basis of flimsy evidence, that there exists a 'black learning style' that distinguishes black children from the children of other racial groups. Left unchallenged, this tendency will seep into the culture at large and reinforce beliefs about 'natural' divisions that have, for too long, con-

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stricted our imaginations." The seepage is already evident in many public-school curricula. Moreover, as ~~the American literary~~ ^{erary} ~~historian~~ Daniel Aaron has observed, the most effective and enduring black writers, from Richard Wright to Albert Murray, have wrestled with the lure of black racialism and the challenge of universalism, finding their own moral centers, as Aaron noted, by identifying their predicament as blacks with the American predicament. Are they their race's traitors, or redeemers?

Kennedy's article provoked bitter, highly personal responses. At a panel sponsored by the Association of American Law Schools, a critical race theorist likened Kennedy to a Tonto figure, the fictional Indian whose loyalty to the Lone Ranger set him apart from, if not against, his tribe. Derrick Bell told Kennedy that he shouldn't have published his article because "we need you on our side, not in our way." The writer Jonathan Wiener characterized him in *The Nation* as the voice of a white-bread legal establishment—no small irony, since Kennedy himself is a member of the magazine's editorial board. Kennedy found the irony somewhat amusing—and instructive:

(told me he)

I thought, "How stupid." Here I am, a social democrat who would redistribute wealth in ways that would put me on the left of Democratic Party, yet, simply because of this, I'm called a conservative. My younger sister was at Howard Law School at the time, and some of her fellow students told her, "Your brother's so conservative," all because of reaction to this piece. My fate isn't so different from that of [the black sociologist] William Julius Wilson, who was called a conservative just because he said that race was declining in significance as a cause of black poverty. Ironically, the self-styled "radicals" who attack me are the real conservatives. What about experimentation? What about open-mindedness?

(interview by author)

q1 → The attacks in *The Nation* and some other left-wing periodicals showed how thoroughly the once-universalist left had succumbed to its racism, leaving people like Kennedy as hold-

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outs for humanism, at least on that end of the political spectrum. But that did not turn holdouts like Kennedy into conservatives. "When some on the right viewed the attacks as a signal that I was a possible recruit, I thought, 'This is an interesting kind of dynamic that creates a Thomas Sowell [the sociologist and partisan conservative columnist],'" Kennedy told me. "I've never responded to either side. I'm somewhat at fault for that; it's an intellectual's responsibility to respond, unless an attack is in bad faith or the critic is a crank. But I didn't like the feeling of having to choose between 'right' and 'left,' with one side viewing me as a renegade, the other as a convert."

♦ A Child of Black Struggle

As it happens, Kennedy knows what it's like to be stopped unjustly by cops and what it's like to be black in America. Born in Columbia, South Carolina, in 1956, he moved to Washington, D.C., in infancy with his parents, who, he recalls, considered themselves refugees from "a white-supremacist South which they thought would strangle them and their kids. My father thought he would get into trouble there," owing to a couple of scrapes with abusive policemen and shopkeepers. One of Kennedy's indelible memories is of watching his proud father accommodate Jim Crow etiquette to protect his family when police pulled him over during a drive back to South Carolina in 1965:

The cop said, "Boy, where ya comin' from? Where ya goin'?" My father said, "Sir, I'm coming from Washington, D.C. I'm going to South Carolina." He was not foolhardy; he knew what could happen if he answered as he felt like answering, and he had my mother and us kids in the car. I remember spending the summer of 1964 with my Aunt Lillian in Columbia, when the state closed its parks rather than desegregate them; I clearly remember climbing the stairs to the black section of the movie theater. I remember being called "nigger."

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I know black history inside and out; I am thoroughly familiar with the various sectors of the black population, and I don't have any problem with my blackness whatsoever. I know and love Gospel music; I've been in more than a few Baptist churches where people ran down aisles and shouted. Some people are taken aback when I say that I am in favor of transracial adoption and try to hit me with, "You're naive; you don't know about white racism." But I know.

How, then, can Kennedy remain a staunch universalist when many blacks are deciding that integration has failed and are withdrawing into racial particularism and proportionalism? He insists that liberal racialism is nothing but a moral and spiritual dead end and that it cannot be reconciled with moral or intellectual integrity. But how did he come by that insight and his passion for defending it?

The answer has something to do with disciplined aspiration at the core of the black culture he knew, which placed an almost religious emphasis on balancing personal moral responsibility with universalism. It also has something to do with an experience of racial integration where white friendships were natural and deeply rewarding.

Kennedy's father, a postal worker, and his mother, a public school teacher, scrimped and saved until they could move from an apartment in southeast Washington, D.C. to a row house and, as he entered adolescence, to a freestanding house in the northwest neighborhood of Takoma Park, which at the time was half white.

Education was the end-all and be-all. Respectability was ultra-important. My parents were not interested in "success" but in doing your best. They weren't overawed by wealth or even achievement. A person who takes care of their family, stays out of trouble, and can be counted on—those are the things that matter. Some of our neighbors were garbagemen. Fine! Wonderful neighbors! In my parents' eyes, the man who goes to work every day and takes care of his property doesn't have to take a back step to anyone in the world.

We attended Asbury United Methodist Church, an old, solidly

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working-class congregation. The ministers were my heroes. I was very active; I read the liturgy and went to Camp Atwater in Worcester, Massachusetts, a black summer camp. My house was religious, culturally conservative—no cursing, smoking, or drinking.

I became a father relatively late partly because I was daunted by what I had seen in my parents' incredible generosity and single-mindedness. We kids came first; it was as simple as that. There was this total investment. In that way, we grew up "above our station," even though they were not wealthy at all. It's why my brother's a judge [in District of Columbia Superior Court], I'm a law professor, and my sister's a lawyer.

→ Something else accounts for the Kennedy children's remarkable ascent: the fullness of the integration they experienced, both through their parents' example and in the neighborhood of Kennedy's youth. In 1960, Kennedy's mother became the first—and for many years was the only—black teacher in a Chevy Chase (Maryland) elementary school, all of whose students were white. But even more important than her experience was his own among playmates of all colors, in Tacoma Park.

It was a *wonderful* place to grow up! I learned to play tennis in the park. I played in the National Junior Tennis Tournament. My sister played the violin. My elementary and junior high schools were integrated. I've always gone to school with a good number of white kids and had a lot of white friends.

My brother [who is five years older] went to Princeton because of a white guy who went to Coolidge High School with him, a guy named Harvey. ~~Froischtade~~ When Harvey told him he was applying to Princeton, my brother said, "Princeton doesn't want people like me"—this was in 1966—and Harvey said, "Nah, nah, things are changing; Princeton is *looking* for people like you." Harvey's encouragement made the difference. My brother got in on a big scholarship. And because he went to Princeton and did well, I and my sister went, too. The idea of having white friends through all this was not a big deal, but, in some ways I never thought about self-consciously, it played a role in my thinking.

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Kennedy didn't follow his brother to Coolidge High School, which was going downhill quickly in all the predictable urban ways. He got into Washington's exclusive, private St. Albans School, where he had fine teachers and made close white friends. Still, he felt a stab of recognition one night in 1995 when he turned on C-Span and saw that the Coolidge High auditorium was the site of a lurid anti-white hate-fest on the eve of the Million Man March. At Coolidge, diatribes against whites were delivered by people who wouldn't be on the podium at the Mall the next day. "I saw that," Kennedy moans. "I watched it. Malik Abdul Shabbazz [one of the event's ring-leaders] was in my sister's class at Howard Law School. Oh, was that *horrible!*"

It was also symptomatic of what had become of the kind of integration Kennedy had known. He sighed when I mentioned that David Dinkins, the former mayor of New York, had once gotten teary while describing his friendship with a now-deceased Jewish man, saying, "We were so close that one didn't know what the other was":

If David Dinkins made that comment in one of my classes now, people would roll their eyes and think it's ridiculous. In an article on "unconscious racism," Chuck Lawrence [a critical race theorist] quotes a white person saying, "I never notice the difference between my friends," and he writes that that person is deluded. But I can imagine a person saying that and it being a quite decent, thoroughgoing thing. What he's saying is, "Of course I know that you're a different color and that things may be different for you, but there's a deeper thing going on here; you're a child of God, I'm a child of God." And of course I believe that and embrace that. ~~(conversation with author)~~

Are such friendships indispensable to learning that racist thinking is wrong? "No, I don't think so, really," Kennedy answered. "Some of the kids who are the most 'group-istic' grew up in integrated environments and are rebelling against that." Were their encounters with integration mandated and force-fed, not embraced naturally, as Dinkins' and Ken-

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nedy's had been? "Maybe, but part of what you end up believing [depends on] what ideas grabbed you. I think that, early on, integrationist notions grabbed me. I was only eight years old when Martin Luther King gave his 'I have a dream' speech, but it's the ideology that I grew up with."

Kennedy's mother kept that faith not just by reporting to her school every day and taking home a paycheck; she embodied and implemented it. Today's legal and pedagogical racism, so sweeping in asserting immutability of black/white differences, derides her faith nearly as much as did the old, white opposition to integration itself. "That's my problem with some people's romantic notion of speaking for all people of color," Kennedy says.

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They write as if it's really not a dilemma you have to think hard about. I'm saying there are actually dilemmas out here, real choices facing people of goodwill. What is the best way to allocate voting power? What is the best way to organize public education? What kind of social order do we want? What is racial equality? Solving these demands knowledge, a command of facts and figures. Instead, people like Bell are saying, "Jeez, Dred Scott was really wrong, racism is really bad." I say, "Have we finished with that?" They do not want to finish that conversation.

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Liberal racists will take this last complaint as an affront and as proof that Kennedy is discounting the strong racial kinship that made the Asbury United Methodist Church and his summer camp such wonderful places to grow up. But he is posing a far different challenge: In his view, growing up means outgrowing temptations to resort to racial kinship as the central preoccupation and organizing principle of one's life. It means broadening the range of one's friendships and commitments, even as one sustains and enriches communal institutions that are rooted deeply but aspiring broadly. Kennedy thinks that blacks need to emphasize the latter in their public life right now and to resist more than ever before the temptation to withdraw into the fantasy of a separate racial destiny. Truly to grow up is to discover that it is a fantasy.

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♦ A Sojourn on the Right

No one would ever mistake the economist and social critic Glenn Loury for a deracinated black man. A native of Chicago's South Side whose father worked in the stockyards, Loury looks physically as many would expect a son of the solid, stolid black working class to look: Where Kennedy is trim, athletic, well-tailored, and horn-rimmed, Loury, a professor of economics at Boston University and the holder of a prestigious fellowship at the international Econometric Society, is heavy-set and properly yet indifferently attired. A rigorous, lucid public speaker, he nevertheless conveys a grounded black urban sensibility, by turns preacherly and colloquial.

More important than the two men's appearance and manner of address, of course, is their intellectual provenance. While Kennedy has rejected black race loyalty and the leftist "identity politics" of *The Nation* for a more vital liberal center, Loury has left behind conservative hypocrisy about "color-blindness" and the preoccupation with black pathology at the neoconservative *Commentary* magazine, for which he wrote frequently until breaking with it over its support for *Bell Curve* author Charles Murray. He also resigned from a fellowship at the conservative American Enterprise Institute to protest its sponsorship of Dinesh D'Souza's *The End of Racism*, which was widely condemned for emphasizing the role of black cultural "pathologies" in black alienation from the larger society. But, like Kennedy, Loury doesn't find liberal racism attractive:

I came to conservatism in the first place because I was really angry with liberals—disgusted, disappointed, tired with their keeping their heads in the sand, unable or unwilling to look at how their best intentions had gone awry, particularly as it had to do with black folk. I'd point at that, and a ton of bricks would fall on my head; it all went back to the Moynihan Report and people's accusations that if you endorsed it you were giving aid and comfort to the enemy.

When I came to Harvard in 1982, I tried to become editor of

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the *Review of Black Political Economy*. I was the most qualified for that job. Those people did not come close to letting me edit it, because I had discredited myself as a loyal black person. I was still the same person, except I had written some articles saying that everything is not right with the civil rights movement. (conversation with author, June, 1996).

What Loury admired in neoconservatives, he wrote recently, was "their willingness to confront the patronizing relativism which white liberals seemed inevitably to bring to questions of race. [Liberals were] blind to the desperate need of the 'victims' to take responsibility for their own lives." Neoconservatives seemed to take blacks seriously enough to criticize them; when Loury began writing for Irving Kristol's journal, *The Public Interest*, he thought he was joining a community based in the concern for poor blacks which the sociologist Nathan Glazer and U.S. senator Daniel Patrick Moynihan had demonstrated, albeit in ways that had angered liberals and leftists.

But eventually Loury concluded that neoconservatives and conservatives are more interested in showing where liberals went wrong than they are in treating the urban poor as fellow Americans—an approach that, in his view, would require a national mobilization driven by transracial, humanist principles such as those Kennedy defends. Conservatives' sponsorship of *The Bell Curve* and *The End of Racism*, which both went in the opposite direction and beyond, were wake-up calls for Loury, and he was instrumental in discrediting them. But he had been made to feel uncomfortable in conservative circles:

At one meeting, I said, is it really the case that every possible acknowledgment of the reality of race is a totally corrupting thing? About those who say yes, the kindest thing I can say is, they're confused. Sometimes they just have a *schtick* about color-coding, and they're milking the opposition to it for all it's worth. When I would dissent, people would say, "I thought you were on our side, Glenn." It was like, "He's deviating a little bit."

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At a meeting convened by William Bennett in 1995 to discuss the "culture wars" conservatives were waging against liberals on several fronts, Loury brought up the problem of conservative finger-pointing at blacks.

I mentioned the antiblack campaign rhetoric of some Republicans running in state races, against, for example, "the sewer of New Orleans." I said, "Look, if you will stand up and do the right thing on this and the *Bell Curve*, I'll keep denouncing liberal abuses, correcting, instructing, hectoring. I want to know how much black pathology language do we really need to get our work done here? How much demonization of these people? We want to try juveniles as adults. What's next, twelve-year-olds? You don't have to be a "society-is-to-blame" liberal to recognize that there's stuff going on in inner cities that doesn't give people choices. You don't have to like liberal solutions. I don't either. What's not acceptable is writing these people off and making them into objects you run against."

Well, they were bored. Bill Bennett was *bored*. They didn't want to talk about this. They were talking about campaigns against movie producers, record stuff, which is fine with me, you know, but there was no ~~action~~ item on the agenda about what I was trying to raise.

Late in 1996, after *Commentary* editor Norman Podhoretz announced that neoconservatism was no longer distinguishable from conservatism, Loury announced his break with both in *Commonquest*, a black-Jewish journal in the Fall 1996 issue:

Many neoconservatives marched for racial justice thirty years ago. Then, the demons were clear; they are less so now. But you cannot tell me that what now transpires in ghetto America does not constitute a great injustice to those hundreds of thousands of youngsters who never got a chance. Conservative ideologues may rest content with being right about liberals having been wrong. But, if they are to remain true to their own roots, these intellectuals who grew up in Brooklyn or on the Lower East Side . . . should want more. If neoconservatism has ceased to exist, then its cause of death is a failure of moral imagination.

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I asked Louri whether there aren't some conservatives who agree with him about the importance of reaching for poor urban blacks as fellow Americans, even if that means mobilizing resources. He cited several who share his concern, but added,

There's no school of thought within conservatism saying this, no reckoning with the problem. [Republican former congressman and vice-presidential candidate] Jack Kemp believes in dynamic capitalism, and that's great, but, to me, that's a question about method, not values. A person has to be willing to adjust their method and be driven by their values. . . . I am the first to say the old liberal way has not worked. But there's no way around the fact that the first few years of these [poor, inner-city] kids' lives are critical; we are either gonna take them away from incompetent parents, or we're gonna enrich the environments they're in so they have a possibility of getting on the track of opportunity. Now, that's gonna cost money or something. It's gonna cost freedom; if we take 'em away from parents, it's gonna be intrusive, and we're gonna have to substitute something for that. Or it's gonna require a tremendous upswelling of voluntarism and engagement across the board.

The conservative problem with race is as obvious as its solution. The problem is that a significant minority of the movement's members and leaders regard poor inner-city blacks less as fellow Americans than as aliens—so much so, in fact, that they can't seem to stop generating (and subsidizing) genetic theories that reinforce their misguided contempt. The solution, which honorable conservatives must help find, involves doing much more to combat discrimination and to help struggling, inner-city blacks enrich the first critical years of children's lives. But Louri knows that few conservatives are likely to do anything serious along those lines.

If conservatives treated Randall Kennedy as a potential recruit, however wrongly, mightn't liberals try to welcome Louri as one of them? Some have reached out, but it is hard to count on liberals' enduring commitment to a passionate, visibly "authentic" black man who refuses to abandon the clas-

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sical liberal principles which liberal racism has betrayed. Louri recalls the discomfort he caused when he told a group of liberals that they ignore or misconstrue inner-city dilemmas as much as conservatives do. At a friend's behest, he spoke at a conference on racism in 1995 at the liberal Hubert Humphrey Institute in Minneapolis:

It was exactly what I had feared—a "world conference" on racial and ethnic inequality that was politically correct. On a panel with [defenders of liberal orthodoxy such as] Barbara Bergmann and Manning Marable, I said, any national effort to deal with the underclass simply has to be built on transracial, humanistic principles. It can't be about reparations, or log-rolling in the Democratic Party, where you get your special thing by giving them your votes. It's about what kind of people we as Americans, about what kind of commonality we can build upon.

[racial]

Many liberals and leftists in the audience, preferring, as always, imaginary purity to actual progress, were uneasy with Louri's insistence on "commonality." Some became even more uncomfortable when he noted that applying humanist principles means making hard judgments about the damage done not just by racism and the economy but by failures of individual responsibility:

I said, "What are you going to do about welfare mothers who don't take responsibility for their children, and about criminal felons? You have to be prepared to make judgments." And we got into the testing thing, and I said, "Look, don't be in denial; there are real differences in the cognitive abilities as they are expressed between blacks and whites in this country. Those test scores are not a figment of anybody's imagination. They're not about bias—I'm not saying bias doesn't exist—and not about mean-spirited scientists trying to malign people—even though there's that, too. The story is that the developed capacities of human beings differ by race. I don't believe it's genetic; I think you can easily give plausible accounts of how this could happen. But it's a fact. Okay?"

"So let's talk about who's going to read to these kids; let's talk about the verbal stimulation of kids as they develop their lin-

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guistic abilities. How come these public libraries at the corners of housing projects aren't overflowing? I mean, people have different styles, and I don't care if it's Barney or computer games; but let's talk about the development of the abilities of these children."

Q Loury was raising the "culture of poverty" problem which many liberals deride or duck. In 1990, the *New York Times* ran a fifty-year-old photograph of the Stone Avenue branch of the Brooklyn Public Library, now surrounded by high-rise public housing projects in the borough's poor, black Brownsville section. Fifty years earlier, the story noted, poor kids such as the literary critic Alfred Kazin and *Commentary* editor Norman Podhoretz had spent hours there, reading books they could never otherwise have obtained; an old photograph showed scores of ~~such~~ children lined up outside because the building was already crowded with children reading. (Liberal government hadn't abandoned the Stone Avenue branch since then; thanks to Mayor Dinkins's visionary operations director Harvey Robins, all ~~New York City~~ local library branches, whose schedules had been constricted since the fiscal crisis of the mid-1970s, ~~would reopen~~ ^{are open} six days a week. Yet even when the Stone Avenue branch ~~was open and ready~~ ^{is} to serve, its children's section ~~was~~ almost deserted.) Shown the old photograph, branch librarian Robert Visceglia said, "We don't get lines like that anymore. It looks like they were giving something away for free." Well, they were—and ~~they~~ ^{is} are still. The question is why there are so few takers. The problem isn't racism or capitalism—at least no more so than in the 1930s, when the parents of many of the children in the old photograph were ~~as poor and illiterate as my father's parents~~ ^{is}. If anything, Brownsville's politics then was anticapitalist and antiracist enough to demand the construction and racial integration of new public housing. That ~~wasn't enough to~~ ^{won't} solve the new problem.

such as Andrew Hacker and Benjamin DeMott

But Loury's listeners couldn't acknowledge the importance of moral responsibility in his discussion of test results. When he noted that standardized tests recorded kids' deficiencies in reading, "People said, 'Oh, the SAT doesn't measure these

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abilities well,' or 'The counselors channel the kids into the wrong thing.' I didn't want to argue with them about that. I simply said, 'Okay, let me concede that to you. There's that. But then there's also this problem of culture, of reading to kids. Can we talk about this now?' "

Some couldn't. They complained that such talk played into the hands of conservatives who wanted to exclude blacks, not uplift them. Yet Louri had struck a nerve.

Afterwards, people came up to me. . . . There was one woman who said, "I've heard you speak, I've always had a problem with you, but I realize tonight that I had never really listened to you before."

I think I am saying it differently now than I used to. I used to say, "Here's what's wrong with the traditional black leadership." Now I say, "Do you know what these conservatives are up to?" I use a line about black ju-jitsu politics, the strategy of saying, "I'm weak, therefore I'm strong. I use your strength against you by saying that we blacks haven't accomplished anything; we're weak, therefore, you owe us, because you treated us badly." Well, the jig is up on that, I say, because conservatives answer, "You people don't have the equipment to function in modern society. You're barbaric, you're incompetent, you're dumb." And it's not just whispered; it's trotted out with great detail and sophistication. And people are listening.

It just won't work for liberals to point to prisons overflowing with young black men and then accuse the system of injustice. People will say, "What about the individuals who were raped, bludgeoned, robbed?" We have to persuade a majority of our fellow citizens to get with us in a program that they can see is consistent with their values and their interests. That is not a racial undertaking. That is a civic undertaking. It's about what kind of country is the United States of America.

What kind of country *is* the United States of America, if conservatives succeed by playing the divisive politics Louri describes? How enduringly, abidingly racist is it? "Well, I look at NBA playoffs, and I see Michael Jordan," he told me. "I look at the statistics on interracial marriage and there is no doubt

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that there has been deep, deep change. [An important study by Douglas Besharov of the American Enterprise Institute shows that, of all marriages in 1990 in which one or both persons were black, about 6 percent are black-white marriages—a fivefold increase since 1960. And, Besharov finds, the rate of black-white marriages is now increasing even more rapidly.] White kids listen to rap music, and there's a lot that's wrong with rap music, but it shows the energy, centrality, the dynamism that comes out of black America."

Such observations have prompted Loury to consider something that liberals accuse Kennedy of neglecting: the communal—and, therefore, racial—dimensions of moral responsibility. "Obsession about racial difference is a threat to American democracy, and yet assimilation is a threat to identity," Loury says. "People do need a protected cultural environment within which to create individualism itself." Loury felt a deep sense of belonging as he walked across the Washington Mall during the Million Man March, confirming Michael Sandel's assertion that there's no such thing as an "unencumbered" individual—that people need to be raised in some subculture.

Yet in choosing the national Mall for the march—and not Harlem, Farrakhan was affirming, if only unwittingly, that American civic culture operates on two tiers: People are nurtured in varied subcultures, but they transcend them at times to participate in a shared civic life in which all agree to curb racial and ethnic affinities in order to treat people as individuals, not group delegates.

I proposed to Loury that blacks, always the most excluded from the upper tier, had nevertheless kept the two-tiered balance best of all. When Rosa Parks quietly refused to give up her seat on that segregated public bus in Montgomery in 1955, she expressed a desire to embrace and redeem society, not to rebuff it as inherently, eternally racist. The solid black working class from which Loury came had kept that faith, too, often with greater fortitude and idealism than do whites who tout civil society now. Such blacks, I said, *are* the most American of us all, because of what they go through to sustain the balance of parochialism and universalism.

Randall

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"I agree with you totally," Lory replied, "but the bottom tier was gritty, intimate, personal, and immediate, while, for most people, the larger thing involved abstraction, belief, faith.

Blacks had to believe we would overcome even when there was scant reason to believe we would: People had to go to court fight for antilynching laws and debate the meaning of the Constitution just to sit in integrated trains and buses. People who thought that progressive politics would be transformative had to deal with the fact that it was incomplete. And faith in the larger society is waning now under the pressures of postmodern, multicultural critiques of liberalism. The upper tier of the model is something people have lost confidence in. Say that this is a melting pot, and people laugh. They say it's a salad bowl. What are we all supposed to believe in? There's no clear message anymore, from liberals or conservatives.

For blacks, faith in the larger American society arose because the alternative was despair. I was at a conference with Charles Johnson, Ishmael Reed, and other novelists and writers who debated all this. The key issue was whether writers like Ralph Ellison and Albert Murray, who called us the omni-Americans, were the good guys or the bad. Ishmael was arguing they're the bad guys, because their faith was misplaced, that adhering to this sense of inextricable Americanness, this aspiration, would be rewarded. But if you decide that it's all just quixotic and misplaced, that leads to reactionary stuff.

♦ Finding a Balance

Both Lory and Kennedy now write occasionally for the centrist-liberal *New Republic* (of which Lory is a contributing editor), and both contributed to a special issue of the Democratic Leadership Council's (DLC) *New Democrat* magazine, which Lory guest-edited, entitled "Shall We Overcome?" Kennedy couldn't agree more with Lory's comment about the reactionary consequences of succumbing to racialism, but Lory is still wrestling with the costs and consequences of keeping

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faith with the larger society. Some of that struggle surfaced in a small-group discussion which both men attended at the invitation of the Democratic Leadership Council, held in the basement of Harvard's Robinson Hall in June 1996.

"There may not be as many fundamental clashes between the black minority and the white majority as some think," said the DLC's Will Marshall, posing the challenge,

but political alignments and strategies are congealed that way, around the symbolism of an old civil rights consensus that's breaking down. Can racial iconoclasts who've been marginalized for telling that truth come together to create a safe harbor of support? We need to defend a civic culture that transcends group identities. Can we find common ground in rebuilding the economic basis of urban life with fewer race-specific initiatives, in normalizing life with more employment and homeownership?

Our challenge is to interrupt people going to their assigned spots on the floor every time some keyword like "preferences" is spoken. Conservatives say to liberals, "OK, you brought us in on the notion of color-blindness, but now you want to change the debate with more racial classifications and remedies." Well, *we* don't want to change it that way, but neither do we see much color-blindness coming from conservatives. How can we go to black leaders and say, "Stop pushing a strategy that's based on diminishing returns"?

They Loury and Kennedy understood these questions only too well. *not* Neither had come to Robinson Hall to make any commitments to an organization whose own thinking was also in transition, but to talk with people who posed the right questions and had the will and, perhaps, the political connections to do something about them.

"There has to be clarity about motives," Loury responded, expressing his concern that race not be completely lost from the discussion.

You talk about a new push on urban problems, and I agree it's needed, big-time. But when you debate why plants close as CEOs' incomes rise, or what to do about foreign competition, or

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whether to have more prisons or more midnight basketball, aren't there racial implications? Public figures on all sides of these issues who might want to discuss race rationally have strategic vulnerabilities which they try to mask by pointing at opponents who they claim would try to shoot them down if they brought up race at all.

Loury added that conservative whites do this as often as liberals blacks: When Jack Kemp dropped such defenses and "passed the 'motive test' with skeptical black leaders" by courting them with visions of small-business development and homeownership, "I heard talk in conservative circles that Jack had 'gone native.' "

"The worst thing is to let racists stampeded us into *trying* to build a politics around their attacks," Marshall replied, trying to set out some limits on racial discourse.

Politics can affect the answer if the question is, how do we get people out of a generation of poverty and the crime that comes with it? If affirmative action goes down and poverty goes up, the solution isn't to expand the welfare state, though it will take serious money to connect people to work and convert public housing subsidies to homeownership. The point is to convert paternalistic dollars to empowerment dollars.

Americans might support this, Marshall added, if more leaders, black and white, left and right, stopped accommodating and exploiting racial hustlers of all colors and persuasions: "People are tired of that. We're working with the counterintuitive notion that the country is getting ready for a new push on urban policy."

"But how many conservatives do pass the motive test on race?" Kennedy asked, worrying not just about how conservatives talk, but about whether they duck real problems that have a racial cast: "I don't sense that inner-city poverty gets Bill Kristol's blood running," he continued, referring to the Republican political strategist and editor of the *Weekly Standard*. "We need clarification about what we want. Before we

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talk about downplaying racial remedies, we need a clearer sense of what is racial justice and racial equality, and even what is integration"—a subject Kennedy had just addressed in the democratic-socialist quarterly *Dissent*. "Then we have to apply it to specific dilemmas," he concluded. Kennedy is no fan of race remedies. In a discussion of affirmative action in Michael Sandel's class, he called himself "a meritocratic fundamentalist." But he is decidedly a fan of thorough analysis, which smokes out racist nonsense.

The Robinson Hall group reached no conclusions but agreed to meet again. Whether it does or not, the kind of discussion it held is indispensable to redeeming our otherwise arid, evasive public discourse on race. As a classical liberal moralist, Kennedy knows as well as conservatives that the soaring universalism of the old left tends to overreach and collapse into its most deadly antithesis, ethnic exoticism, as it has in Belgrade and Los Angeles. But Kennedy also knows that unbridled capitalism can divide and eviscerate civil society, driving some of the wounded into warring racial and ethnic camps. He finds little honest reckoning with this on either the left, which indulges the racial-identity trap, or the right, which indulges market and corporate excesses.

At the same time, ironically and less openly, the liberals flirt with free-market libertarianism and conservatives play with racial division. A seamless hypocrisy links both camps, which often deserve each other. While liberals, for example, are drawn to Loury as he calls for a national commitment to the urban poor, the depth of his concern for the casualties exposes all that is patronizing and ineffectual in others' moral posturing against racism. Loury would give race-consciousness more political room than Kennedy does, but he, too, draws the line whenever it threatens intellectual and civic integrity. As our politics and culture have weakened under the pressures of inner-city isolation and anomic consumerism, racist thinking has gained legitimacy among sophisticated liberals at the Ford Foundation, the *New York Times*, and in the Democratic Party, no less than it has among sophisticated conserva-

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tives at the American Enterprise Institute and the right-wing *American Spectator*, and in the Republican Party.

The best way to dissolve these hypocrisies is to reaffirm the two-tiered American civic faith the early civil rights movement mobilized so well. It synthesized parochial black religious communalism and strong universalism to strengthen an American civic culture, which, even in 1995, was still strong enough to induce one of its chief detractors, Louis Farrakhan, to hold his march on the Washington Mall. At its best, the American civic culture and civil religion have showed the world how to balance parochial loyalties with cosmopolitan opportunities and commitments. Now, after thirty years of flailing amid guilt and recrimination over the civic culture's old racial fault lines, it is time for the country to strike a new balance with its black citizens, who have been both its most fervent supporters and its most embittered assailants. The challenge has economic and political dimensions aplenty, but our purpose here is to ask what we can do culturally to vindicate individuals, of all colors, who want to affirm an American belonging that is not colored by others' racial prescriptions.

CHAPTER 7

WHAT WE HAVE LOST

◆ How One Civic Culture Worked

Since the late 1980s, the phrases "civic culture" and "civil society" have been tripping off the tongues of pundits and politicians, sad testimony to many Americans' growing sense that something awful is happening to the network of voluntary yet public associations upon which democratic government and a healthy economy depend. We're told that civic and social groups in which people learn to balance self-interest with communal teamwork—Little Leagues and bowling leagues, Boy Scouts and Girls Scouts, neighborhood improvement groups, churches, parent-teacher associations—are becoming shells of their former selves.

Economic and cultural upheavals are said to leave beleaguered citizens little time or disposition to join others in common endeavors, especially when "others" of the same background treat one another like aliens. Gone, we're told, are the shared hopes and values that made cooperation possible and nourished individual dignity and fellow-feeling, even across ethnic and religious lines. Instead, people are withdrawing into atomized, defiantly selfish pursuits, or they are seeking a semblance of "belonging" in degraded sporting and

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musical spectacles or warring camps that are defined by little more than their hostility to one another.

Some of these alarums about civil society are excessive, especially when set against the riotous urban and frontier societies in our national past. But its deterioration is unmistakable, and, beyond speculating about the causes, we would do well to understand better how it worked, sometimes even to the benefit of "aliens" in its midst. One place to look is the long, conflicted relation to American civic culture of W.E.B. Du Bois, who bestrode black intellectual and political life from the post-Reconstruction era through the first crumbings of Jim Crow in the ~~late 1950s~~, when he left this country to pursue a chimerical Pan-African, quasi-Marxist dream. Flawed though the Yankee New England civic culture of his youth was, it was sometimes brilliant at balancing parochial traditions and universal aspirations, individual autonomy and communal obligation. There is much to be learned from looking at Du Bois's encounters with it—and from his mistake in writing it off.

Born in Great Barrington, Massachusetts, in 1868—"by a golden river and in the shadow of two great hills, five years after the Emancipation Proclamation," as he put it portentously in his autobiography—Du Bois grew up in a traditional, Congregationalist civil society. Actually, there were several Yankee cultures, and in his remarkable life, Du Bois rang most of their chimes, soaring to contentious distinction among the Brahmins of Boston and mastering the Concord tradition of moralist dissent that ran from Emerson and Thoreau through the abolitionism of Harriet Beecher Stowe and Horace Greeley. The western New England subculture of his youth was more democratic and less pietistic than those of Boston and Concord, more ironic and good-humored in its recognition of human failings, and more rational in its handling of them. As it happens, I grew up forty miles east of Du Bois and eighty years after him, and much of what he saw in Yankee New England was still palpable in the 1950s.

The civic culture of his youth carried on an intense moral

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conversation with its natural environment. Of Great Barrington, Du Bois wrote [^]

[^](?)

The town and its surroundings were a boy's paradise. There were mountains to climb and rivers to wade and swim; lakes to freeze and hills for coasting . . . and all of it was apparently property of the children of the town. My earlier contacts with playmates and other human beings were normal and pleasant. Sometimes there was a dearth of available playmates but that was peculiar to the conventions of the town where families were small and children must go to bed early and not loaf on the streets or congregate in miscellaneous crowds.

Similarly, the nineteenth century New England cleric and reformer Orestes Brownson observed [^]

← [^](?)

Our children are educated in the streets, by the influence of their associates, in the fields and on the hill sides, by the influences of surrounding scenery and overshadowing skies, in the bosom of the family, by the love and gentleness, or wrath and fretfulness of parents, by the passions or affections they see manifested, the conversations to which they listen, and above all the general pursuits, habits and moral tone of the community (cited in Christo-

~~pher Lasch's *The True and Only Heaven*~~.

Always, it seemed, a few leading citizens set the local moral tone with "a bright, cheery courage despite some dryness and gravity, a practical, insuppressible, active temperament with the force of ten men, ready with a word for every emergency," as John Jay Chapman, a bearer of that tradition in the late nineteenth century, characterized it. The best of these school-teachers and officeholders taught their fellow citizens the arts of civil discourse, almost on the sly, by example and without too much preaching. Their deft wit and dauntless good cheer deflected many a confrontation in classrooms, on playing fields, and at town meetings.

Not everyone was genial, of course, but everyone was disciplined, and since one spoke up in a class or at a meeting only after weighing one's needs respectfully against others', one's

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well-chosen words carried more weight. One bore oneself in ways that signaled a disciplined public-spiritedness and goodwill, so one got the same in return. Self-important or self-absorbed body language was taboo; one rebuffed it in priggish moralists as well as in proles. Both individual and community were strengthened in these modest, mannered exchanges, not in psychodramas or litigation, certainly not in a conspicuously material, therapeutic, or otherwise "expressive" individualism.

This balance of individualism and community had a religious taproot. Condemning the Roman Catholic and Anglican priestly hierarchies, the Puritans who settled Massachusetts conceived a "priesthood of all believers," each one "justified" before God not by sacraments and the Mass but by an intensely personal faith that emphasized introspection. Ministers instructed the faithful in the arts and limits of self-scrutiny, but individual moral vigilance was God's own instrument in building a New Jerusalem. By drawing the passions into a vortex of self-scrutiny, even the secular Yankee tradition of later years curbed gratuitous "communication," making few words say more because they were taken to issue from depths of private reckoning: "Good fences make good neighbors." "God helps those who help themselves." "Let your yea be yea, and your nay, nay." "Plain living and high thinking."

, of course

Du Bois was not a man of few words, yet he was marked by this tradition of reserved introspection:

In general thought and conduct, I became quite thoroughly New England. It was not good form in Great Barrington to express one's thought volubly, or to give way to excessive emotion. We were even sparing in our daily greetings. I am quite sure that in a less restrained and conventional atmosphere I should have easily learned to express my emotions with far greater and unrestrained intensity; but as it was I had the social heritage not only of a New England clan but Dutch taciturnity.

This was later reinforced and strengthened by inner withdrawals in the face of real and imagined discriminations. The result was that I was early thrown in upon myself. . . . the habit of

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repression often returned to plague me in after years, for so early a habit could not easily be unlearned. The Negroes in the South, when I came to know them, could never understand why I did not naturally greet everyone I passed on the street or slap my friends on the back.

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If the dominant Yankee culture was more rational than pas-
sional—and more tragic than perfectionist in its appreciation
of human foibles—it was the more resilient for it. Once one
internalized the rules of its road and learned how to “drive” in
a way that respected other drivers’ intentions and needs, one
got more mileage out of civil discourse across lines of differ-
ence than one would have gotten by deconstructing the rules
and leaving oneself and others with no trustworthy means of
communication. New England civil society nourished more
genuine public-spiritedness that way than do communities
premised on intensely parochial or Promethean identities, or
on sweepingly salvific or ideological systems—a paradox that
needs explaining to some liberals, who forget how much
social progress depends on accepting moral authority. When
liberals view civil and cultural authority as inherently racist, for
example, they only reinforce the expectation that blacks will
live outside of civil society’s strictures and rewards.

In Great Barrington, by contrast, Du Bois was a child of
racial integration before the fact. Although there were fewer
than fifty black families in his town of four thousand, he was
set apart less by his color than by his quirky brilliance. His
own family, descended on his mother’s side from a Dutch set-
tler’s slave and the settler’s own family, had lived in the area
for more than a century before his birth. Du Bois’s paternal
grandfather, of mixed French Huguenot and black descent,
passed for white at the elite Cheshire Academy and became
something of a Victorian gentleman in New Bedford, from
which many a Yankee slave ship had sailed. “He was not a
‘Negro’; he was a man!” Du Bois wrote—a claim that might
make more sense to a nineteenth-century New England Cal-
vinist than to a late-twentieth-century liberal.

In Great Barrington, he recalled, “There was no real dis-

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crimination on account of color." Visiting his white friends' homes, he recalled  

I think I probably surprised my hosts more than they me, for I was easily at home and perfectly happy and they looked to me just like ordinary people, while my brown face and frizzled hair must have seemed strange to them. Yet I was very much one of them. I was a center and sometimes the leader of the town gang of boys. We were noisy, but never very bad. . . . As time flew I felt not so much disowned and rejected as rather drawn up into higher spaces and made part of a mightier mission.

At his high school graduation in 1884, Du Bois, the only black in his class, was applauded repeatedly by an overwhelmingly white audience for an oration on the antislavery agitator Wendell Phillips, who had died that year and whose career prefigured Du Bois's in its opposition not only to racism but to capitalism. Frank Hosmer, the school's principal and a classic New England abolitionist, took up a collection among the town's white elite to send Du Bois to Fisk University in Tennessee. "The crusade of the New England schoolmarm was in full swing," Du Bois recalled later. "The freed slaves, if properly led, had a great future. . . . They needed trained leadership. I was sent to help furnish it."

Du Bois recalls that blacks in western Massachusetts spoke "an idiomatic New England tongue, with no African dialect. The [black] family customs were New England, and the sex mores," he wrote, perhaps a bit wistfully, as his father had abandoned him in infancy, causing him quiet consternation and shame in Calvinist, not racial, terms. "The color line was manifest, and yet not absolutely drawn," he wrote. "The racial angle was more clearly defined against the Irish than against me." Little in Du Bois's experience of race in Great Barrington prepared him for what he encountered in the South. If anything, his New England moralism must have deepened his shock when he went to Tennessee, still a teenager, a year after his graduation address in Great Barrington.

Du Bois's experience was anomalous, of course, even in

abolitionist New England. And his biographer, David Levering Lewis, cautions that the great man's reminiscences about the region, by turns lyrical and vague, may have appropriated the best of the local civic culture when it suited him and rejected the rest when it reminded him of familial and social problems it didn't or couldn't help him resolve. Still, what we know of his early life deepens our understanding of race in America: Because the civic culture of his youth put so much weight on ethically autonomous yet publicly accountable individuals, it could liberate determined individualists from racial and even religious stereotypes. When respect for individualism is intense enough, its judgments of individuals are not so easily circumscribed by race.

♦ Calvinism and Capitalism

Because Yankee values emphasized how to get along as much if not more than they emphasized what to believe, they nourished, in some, a capacity for high-souled dissent strong enough to defy even established legal and economic constraints. New England's dissenters were most effective when, acting in the name of generally shared values, they credibly accused others of failing to honor them. One might search one's soul, commune with God through Bible, brooks, and trees, and then, like Bunyan's pilgrim, take one's stand against the dominant temporal powers. "The powers that be" is a resonant phrase because it reminds that they may *not* "be" tomorrow.

Steeped in this vaguely mystical civil religion, Du Bois opened a chapter in *The Souls of Black Folk* with the lines from the poet James Russell Lowell that expressed well its Protestant posture of righteous insurgency against established but corrupted temporal power:

Careless seems the great Avenger;
History's lessons but record
One death-grapple in the darkness

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'Twixt old systems and the Word;
 Truth forever on the scaffold,
 Wrong forever on the throne;
 Yet that scaffold sways the future,
 And behind the dim unknown
 Standeth God within the shadow
 Keeping watch above His own.

This is pure Yankee moralism. "For purposes of yeast, there was never such a leaven as the Puritan stock," wrote John Jay Chapman. Out of that "stock" and others that embraced its beliefs came the abolitionist crusade, the great pedagogical project that sent Du Bois and hundreds of New England schoolmarms to the South to "instruct" freed slaves, and a civil rights movement that combined black Baptist communalism with a race-transcendent, Calvinist theology of a personal responsibility and justification by a faith beyond color. Eventually Du Bois would claim that those values were too narrow for him and the world he encountered beyond. But he owed a lot to those values and he knew it. Because we are all legatees of this confluence of Protestant universalisms, many Southern whites, Northern reporters and other firsthand witnesses were riveted and transformed by its emergence in the churches and on the streets of Montgomery, Birmingham, Selma, and Little Rock.

The biggest test of dissent in nineteenth-century New England was not racism but capitalism. Without "the Protestant ethic" of heroic individual striving, there would be no spirit of capitalism; yet without Protestant curbs on that capitalist spirit, the urgency of its accumulation and consumption would become idolatrous and self-destructive (as they are now). Without a strong religious faith, New England's aggressive, acquisitive economy could transmute individual initiative into greed, struggles for personal dignity into a kind of paranoia, and propriety into conformism.

Yankee civic culture never resolved this tension between its Calvinism and its capitalism. The Puritans' most prosperous descendants evaded it by construing material success as a sign

of the grace of God, from Whom all blessings flowed. But consumption that was too conspicuous was blasphemous, so their pride in their plenty was masked by reserve. Asked by a nineteenth-century visitor to Boston where the ladies of Beacon Hill got their hats, a citizen retorted, "They don't *get* their hats; they *have* their hats," as if the goods had been bestowed, not bought. Actually, the hats came from an aggressive mercantile economy that was not above trading in slaves, penning up working girls in textile-mill towns, and pitting Irish-immigrant workers against "free" Northern blacks. One can only marvel at the iron restraints of faith and propriety that were needed to reconcile such an economy with its masters' priestly pretensions.

And yet the same restraints could be liberating, unleashing prodigious quantities of hard, productive work that tempered class differences in an apparent commonweal because work was understood as a form of divine service for rich and poor alike. While one awaited God's judgment, "plain living and high thinking" marked one's devotion, suffusing the industrious Yankee culture's norms of personal privacy, initiative, and propriety. For all the psychic strain those norms imposed, New Englanders not only didn't apologize for their way of life, they seldom explained it, and made understanding it an art: "They *have* their hats."

"Wealth had no particular lure," Du Bois recalls, even though "the shadow of wealth was about us. That river of my birth was golden because of the woolen and paper waste that soiled it. The gold was theirs, not ours; but the gleam and the glint was for all. To me it was all in order and I took it philosophically. I cordially despised the poor Irish and South Germans, who slaved in mills, and [I] annexed the rich and well-to-do as my natural companions. Of such is the kingdom of snobs!" This tension presaged the next century's hostilities between white-ethnic Catholics and blacks, when "race" would assume narrower meanings. But in Du Bois's time, blacks, even barred from Great Barrington's mills, were still so attached to what remained of yeoman farming and "service"

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industries that many of them affected to disdain mill work, as Du Bois did.

Moreover, industrial capitalism had not yet strained the town's civic culture to the breaking point. "Naturally the income was not proportioned to the effort," Du Bois wrote, "but we did not dream of a day when a man doing nothing could be a millionaire at thirty-five, while his fellow broke back and heart and starved." At the same time, something of Beacon Hill's moralism had penetrated Du Bois's Berkshires:

I grew up in the midst of definite ideas as to wealth and poverty, work and charity. Wealth was the result of work and saving and the rich rightly inherited the earth. . . . I clearly came to understand that to be "on the town," the recipient of public charity, was the depth not only of misfortune but of a certain guilt. I presume some of my folk sank to that, but not to my knowledge. We earned our way.

In fact, Du Bois, after his father's abandonment, did support himself and his mother—earning his way at one time as Great Barrington's correspondent for the *Springfield Republican*, a beacon of the abolitionists in his time and my own hometown paper eighty years later. By the time I was a child, in the 1950s, Du Bois was assailing the class structure he had once accepted. Certainly, it had grown more severe. But it wasn't Great Barrington's hypocrisies about class that destroyed Du Bois's faith in Yankee civic culture. More likely, all that was wholesome in the village that raised this child left him so unprepared for what he found in the South that it seemed to have misled him about the world beyond its reach.

♦ Moralism Amok

The broader its reach, the more condescending New England's religious and civic moralism sometimes became: "The degradation of the black man did not cause [Ralph Waldo Emerson] sleepless nights (although he came to think better

of the Negro's prospects, he apparently never lost a slight colorphobia)," writes Daniel Aaron of Emerson's reaction to abolitionism and the Civil War, "but the transformation of a man whatever his color into a 'thing' struck him as a profanation and a monstrous wrong. The moral dirt produced by slavery had to be cleaned up in order to make the United States inhabitable for the white man" (~~The Unwritten War~~). A

According to Van Wyck Brooks, the literary interpreter of Puritanism, when the jug of old New England finally cracked, spilling its Puritan wine, the liquid ran into the earth as rank commercialism, while the vapor and aroma rose heavenward in the dissociated mysticism of transcendentalism. Du Bois would complain bitterly that such high-souled dissent among the scions of New England's upper classes was driven mainly by guilt—that it deceived others and itself about how it had gotten its hats. Loftier reformers sometimes resorted to a purely gestural moralism as unrealistic about economic reality as ~~were~~ the older Puritan conventions it pretended to expose.

Despite ~~the~~ such noble intentions, "the lower register of sensations and emotions which domesticate a man into fellowship with common life was weak," Chapman observed. Emerson, thinking of upper-class reformers, complained that "Young Americans are educated above the work of the times and the country, and disdain it. Many of the more acute minds pass into a lofty criticism, which only embitters their sensibility to evil and widens the feeling of hostility between them and the citizens at large." Du Bois would later be characterized somewhat that way by black critics, and no wonder: Reminiscing about his youth in Great Barrington, he remarked, "At times I almost pitied my pale companions, who were not of the Lord's anointed and who saw in their dreams no splendid quests of golden fleeces" ^A ~~Anointed!~~ How New England!

Insufferable though it could be when turned in upon its own parlors and psyches, the New England conscience did move mountains. Yankee abolitionism and postwar educational missions to the South confirmed Chapman's assessment of the Puritan ability to enflame social movements. Of Harriet Beecher Stowe, whose *Uncle Tom's Cabin* almost dis-

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placed *The Pilgrim's Progress* as a moral primer before the Civil War, Vernon Parrington wrote: "A thinker who can dig from the harsh soil of Calvinism the doctrine of disinterested benevolence will discover a tender conscience in his own bosom." Of Horace Greeley, he wrote, "With his Yankee capacity for hard work, his daring enterprise, his vigorous independence, he embodied an extremely sensitive social conscience, keen sympathy for those who do the work of the world and a transparent honesty of mind and purpose."

So, too, it was with William Lloyd Garrison, William Cullen Bryant, Wendell Phillips, and other abolitionists. New England sent Bryant to the *New York Evening Post* and Greeley to the *New York Tribune* to remoralize public discourse in that city. It sent the Yankee schoolmarms to the South to instruct not only the freed slaves but, decades later, descendants of slaves such as C. Eric Lincoln, who recalls, in *Coming Through the Fire*, that, as a youth in Alabama in the early 1930s,

I was fortunate enough to receive the best education available in the area, provided by dedicated New England spinsters who did not teach for money, but who bargained away their lives and their comfort out of a sense of *ought* that the "best people" of the South were unable to entertain.

... Such a prospect was patently unacceptable to the distressed prevailing Southern mind. ... The effective answer ... was to defang the threat of the Yankee education of Negroes by having the South itself do the educating. ... Nevertheless, there had been a significant crack in the holding pens of ignorance. ... At Trinity I read everything ... my delighted Yankee schoolmarms could import for me—Walter Scott, Shakespeare, Dryden, Pope, Goethe, Ovid, Pushkin ... Washington Irving, and the Transcendentalists.

The black sociologist E. Franklin Frazier would lampoon fussy, censorious Yankee missionaries as progenitors of an imitative, thin-blooded black bourgeoisie; C. Eric Lincoln, too, occasionally arches an eyebrow at them in his fiction. Yet, sixty years after his encounters with them, he could still recite to me his teachers' names and their New England hometowns.

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As a student at Boston University, Martin Luther King, Jr., integrated a conservative New England theology into his black Baptist communalism. There, too, a black student from Texas named Barbara Jordan steeped herself in New England's moral eloquence and transcended it. In 1973, as the House Judiciary Committee prepared to vote for Richard Nixon's impeachment, Rep. Jordan told her colleagues and a national audience what she felt was at stake:

I felt somehow for many years that George Washington and Alexander Hamilton just left me out by mistake. But through the process of amendment, interpretation and court decision I have finally been included in "We, the people." My faith in the Constitution is whole, it is complete, it is total, and I am not going to sit here and be an idle spectator to the diminution, the subversion, the destruction of the Constitution.

Here, as in the writings and speeches of Du Bois, King, and C. Eric Lincoln, a living black voice and a sepulchral voice of New England dissent become one.

It needn't matter whether a civic culture draws its nourishment from New England Calvinists' conscience-ridden individualism, from Southern black Baptists' passional communalism, from West Virginia coal miners' class-tinted folkways ~~and structures mutual obligation~~, from South Side Chicago's solid, working-class black traditions, or from any other distinctively American taproot. The question is whether a civic culture succeeds in balancing parochial traditions with universal aspirations, individual autonomy with communal obligation.

♦ Du Bois's Derailment

In Du Bois's case, the balance broke down. I have noted the suggestion that the more proper a "Victorian" he became, the more he was "educated above the work of the times and the country" and disdained it, passing into the "lofty criticism" that, in Emerson's description, "only embitters [one's]

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sensibility to evil and widens the feeling of hostility between [one] and the citizens at large." Du Bois also had to suppress Calvinist shame at his own family's dissolution, which may have shadowed his assessments of the civic culture in which it occurred. In the end, New England may not have betrayed him as much as he rebuffed and transcended its inherent contradictions, for good reasons but with sad results.

Torn between the relative racial comity of his childhood and the racial moralism of his later years, he undertook star-crossed efforts to defeat racism with Pan-Africanism and replace colonialism with communism. The Du Bois whose early worldview was shaped by Calvinist moral rectitude understood well that there can be no humanist retreat from racism into a racialism that persists in treating racial differences as essential. Yet the Du Bois who fled his family's own tangled New England roots to confront the South's racial caste system and wrestle with nineteenth-century racial ideas could not bring himself to fashion an identity that wasn't essentially a reaction against white racism itself.

Writing about his subsequent withdrawal from America to Africa in 1961, he acknowledged that he had no primal or cultural tie to that antedated white colonialism. "Since the fifteenth century these ancestors of mine and their other descendants have had a common history; have suffered a common disaster and have one long memory. . . . The real essence of this kinship is its social heritage of slavery, the discrimination and insults. . . ." Embittered by the West's soaring hypocrisy in this matter, he depicted a white racism so ubiquitous and implacable that it transmuted blackness into a fellowship with all nonwhites: ". . . and this heritage binds together not simply the children of Africa, but extends through yellow Asia and in to the South Seas. It is this unity that draws me to Africa."

This was a fatal mistake. Du Bois emigrated just as legal segregation was beginning to fall. The first American public announcement of his death in Accra two years later came to 250,000 people on August 28, 1963, at the March for Jobs and Freedom on the Washington Mall, an event that could not

white
black

Africa

have contrasted more tellingly with the hideous state funeral staged by Ghana's Osagyefo ("Redemer") Kwame Nkrumah. In his *W.E.B. Du Bois*, David Levering Lewis describes the spectacle in Accra,

9 ~~Shortly before 3:00 PM~~ Fellowship [at Du Bois's state-provided compound] gave way to a maximum-security autocracy in a wail of sirens and backfiring motorcycles as a behemoth Russian ZIL limousine arrived. (There were only three of these machines in the country—Nkrumah's, the Du Boises', and the Soviet ambassador's, whose country's gift they were.) The leader of Ghana, a trim, slight man with a polished forehead, descended briskly . . .

[The funeral was] intended to advertise abroad and to enhance at home, with solemnity and pageantry, the reality of an African nationhood still being consolidated. "O God, Our Help in Ages Past" filled the heated air as the trombones and tubas of the Central Army Band followed behind the ZIL and the slow-moving caisson. Next came two double columns of elite infantry in gold-braided tunics of crimson—rifle stocks reversed and cradled in underarm position—executing the distinctive, ceremonial glide, the famous Slow March, learned from British drillmasters. . .

During the next few days, the newspapers would tally the impressive cable traffic—from Gus Hall of the American Communist Party . . . to Kim Il Sung of North Korea. Walter Ulbricht of the now dismantled German Democratic Republic wished that "the memory of Dr. Du Bois—an outstanding fighter for the liberation and prosperity of Africans—[would] continue to live in our hearts." The cables from Mao Tse-tung and Cho En-lai were lengthy but less formulistic . . . reflecting the political and personal camaraderie that had been so much advertised during the Du Boises' two sojourns in China. . . Expressing his sense of loss, [Soviet] premier Nikita Krushchev wrote Shirley Graham that her husband's "shining memory" would stay forever "in the hearts of the Soviet people."

In the mid-1970s, C. Eric Lincoln visited Du Bois's grave in Accra. "It was overgrown, run-down, neglected. It was as if they'd forgotten all about him." But even more telling had been the funeral's Yankee hymn, the British Slow March, and the communist encomia. "It is Europe's fictions of Africa that

(cradled)

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we need to forget," Anthony Appiah writes. Du Bois's fictions, too. And even some of Alex Haley's.

♦ Civic Defaults

to American civic renewal

The obstacles are too daunting for racist solutions. A few years ago, Gladys Hernandez, an inner-city elementary school teacher in Hartford, Connecticut, sixty miles southeast of Great Barrington, took her students on a field trip. Half of them were African American; half were Puerto Rican, many of whom spoke little English; and virtually all were from poor, single-parent families. They were so isolated from the rest of the city, so bereft of the civic language and culture that helped Du Bois make sense of his youth along one of New England's "golden rivers," that the field trip was a revelation to Mrs. Hernandez as well as to the students. As she testified later in *Sheff v. O'Neill*, a 1993 case about inner-city school segregation, the students grew increasingly excited while riding along in the bus, because

... it was like they had never seen a bridge. ... The most extraordinary thing happened when they came to the river. They all stood up in a group and applauded and cheered, and I was aware that they were giving the river a standing ovation. And they were so happy to see the beauty of the river, something that most of us go back and forth [over] and never take time to look at. ... [They] are sensitive to beauty and to their environment and the richness of the world, but so seldom do they have the opportunity to ... encounter the world.

In an account of the case for *Harper's* magazine, James Traub wrote that "some of the trial testimony was so piercing that people wept in the courtroom." Reading Traub's account, I recalled the pleasure Du Bois had taken in his "boy's paradise" along the Housatonic, and my own pleasures growing up along the Connecticut River, just twenty miles north of Mrs. Hernandez's students. The *Sheff* trial transcript shows

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that Mrs. Hernandez had thought a lot about what her students had been missing. "How does the racial isolation and poverty concentration affect the self-esteem of your students?" the plaintiffs' lawyer asked. She replied:

Well, I think that children can overcome the stigma of poverty. I think that children can overcome the stigma of their ethnicity. But what they cannot overcome is the stigma of separation. That is like a "damned spot" in their being, in their self-image, a spot that, no matter what success you have, you can't wipe it out. . . . No amount of salary, money . . . I wish I could go around and tell people that it hurts our children, that we're destroying our best resource.

Elsewhere in her testimony, Mrs. Hernandez acknowledges the importance of poverty and race, but here she points beyond them. What her students lacked was not only money, but also a civic culture like that described by Du Bois and ~~the~~ *Orestes Brownson*—one that could inspire, discipline, and induct its youth into a larger social and natural world. Certainly that required money, and Mrs. Hernandez was not shy in saying so. But Traub found that Hartford, whose students are 92 percent nonwhite and 64 percent poor, spends more money per capita on them than does middle-class, suburban Glastonbury, where a school he visited sent most graduates to college even though it was *less* well-equipped than a sister school in the inner city. "The kids in Glastonbury were simply replicating their parents' success, as the kids in Hartford were on their way to replicating their parents' failure," Traub noted.

Their parents' failure—a phrase pregnant with judgments of the sort made also by Du Bois, but not by liberal racists for at least thirty years. "What about *justice*?" I can hear some liberals ask. "What would happen to blacks in a civic culture like the old one, in all its oppressive conformity?" The early civil rights movement had an answer old New England would have understood. Because the movement invoked moral judgments in order to convict white segregationists of sin, it was able to point them toward redemption. And its civic and

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moral standards did not exempt its own members, black as well as white, from criticism, even in the teeth of oppression. Ultimately, it understood that right and wrong have nothing to do with race.

~~That is an understanding many of us have lost.~~ "Yo, Mister Sleeper!" an unidentified young man accosted me in a voice mail message he left at the New York *Daily News*. "If you've got time to write about minister Farrakhan, why don't you take the time to write about why we like him?" My column that day had lamented that, at the previous day's Million Man March, so many rightfully angry, yearning, decent black men had gotten conned by ~~a black minstrel named Louis Farrakhan~~, whose performance had puzzled and then bored even the few who had come primarily to hail him. My caller continued:

¶ Sometimes, ~~the stigma~~ of what Gladys Hernandez called "the stigma of separation" seems partly self-imposed.

Why don't you write about how we were systematically taught to hate by white slave owners? Why didn't you talk about how we had to be in separate, distinct burial grounds because we weren't fit to be buried in the same ones with you?

You white people are so condescending. Minister Farrakhan is speaking the truth, but all you want to do is come out with your own hidden agenda. Your world is crashing under the weight of your own evil. This man is a power in this country. You white people are gonna have to accept that. The more you call him a liar, the more we love him. The more bad shit y'all say about him, the more we love him. You don't want to see him around? Then don't say anything about him.

But you know what? You white people are the reason so many people were at the rally yesterday. Don't you see that? You talk about Martin Luther King. Well, Martin Luther King is dead, and you killed him. You Jews and the U.S. Government were his enemies. . . . You killed him.

So you need to stop being such damned hypocrites. We're gonna grow great in spite of all that you do. We're getting stronger, while you're getting weaker. We're gonna rise up. You keep on doing the same thing you tried to do since this country was created, you're gonna fail like you're failing now.

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The caller wasn't only an angry victim of racism; he was wrestling, I think, with Du Bois's famous question: "Can I be both [an American and a Negro]? Or is it my duty to cease to be a Negro as soon as possible and to become an American?"

The caller was right about the history of white hypocrisy and brutality, but his impulse to make me understand that history was more "all-American" than he may have known. Obsessed with defying history by pegging blacks' rise to an apocalyptic white fall, he was trapped shadowboxing with ghosts. By his own choice, *he* was a ghost, speaking his "truths" anonymously into a voice-mail receptor; so *I* became a ghost, too, unable to respond or even to tell him I had bothered to listen.

I figured him for around twenty years old, perhaps an undergraduate like many I'd met over the years. Were his college alumni association to convene a meeting to plan a new, integrated cemetery, he would rise from his seat—at the back of the hall, of course—and protest, "You white people are trying to deny us our peoplehood in death, just as you've tried to deny it to us in life." Whatever his judgment about historical exclusions, he would never admit to wanting to share the same burial ground with whites now. He was trapped between past and future, between a black separation and an American belonging.

It happens all the time: For want of a secure footing in a shared civil society, many blacks struggle aimlessly with Du Bois's unresolved question. *Los Angeles Times* columnist Karen Grigsby Bates warns white readers that even the most refined of their black colleagues at work may well vote for Marion Barry or Al Sharpton (as, indeed, blacks have done overwhelmingly in several elections) to "send a message." yet, in another column, she finds it "insulting" that whites assume that "all blacks think alike." Maybe so, but if blacks give their votes overwhelmingly to leaders like Barry and Sharpton, something else rings true, as it did in the O.J. Simpson acquittal and the message on my voice mail: "The more bad shit y'all say about [the black villain of the day], the more we love him."

So be it. But then what? No one who sends such a message

He protested separate burial grounds, but

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answers this question seriously. Racial "message" senders are tree shakers, not jelly makers; they think it their duty only to evoke and provoke, to spin black pain and anger into webs of narrative and metaphor—"We're gonna rise up . . . You're gonna fail . . ." Someone else—always, someone else—will have to turn such sentiments into a viable politics and policy.

As we have seen, people like my caller can take their cues even from professors. In 1995, I was on a panel discussing ethnic differences in New York City when one panelist, J. Phillip Thompson, a black assistant professor of political science at Barnard, said, "People have to keep in mind that African-American attitudes toward property may vary, because we *were* property. We were *owned*." It was the kind of show stopper that often prompts whites in an audience shrink with shame—and sometimes seems calculated to make them do just that.

Sometimes they shouldn't and, this time, I didn't. "Well, then," I responded, parodying multicultural doctrine, "I guess you can't blame racism for prompting 77 percent of New York City's 'Asian' voters to back Rudolph Giuliani over David Dinkins in the 1993 mayoral election. Koreans run so many dry-cleaning and grocery stores in New York that obviously they don't confuse twentieth-century property ownership with the slave trade. But Dinkins failed to protect them when some Korean stores in Brooklyn were subjected to a long, extortionist 'boycott' by a small group of black militants. Although Koreans had backed Dinkins in 1989, they turned against him in 1993, so their political differences with the black community were rooted in culture, not racism."

"I don't even understand your point," Thompson replied testily. But if he believed in cultural diversity, he should have. The "Korean boycott," as the two-year-long conflict was known, reflected a breakdown in black civic culture. An activist named Sonny Carson had organized it to punish Korean merchants who, he claimed, had "an attitude" toward black customers and were out to "destroy" the local community's economy and culture. Yet the Korean stores provided the only late-night shopping and lighting in local commercial centers that

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usually shut down after dark, in fear of crime. What Carson and the boycotters really wanted was a piece of the profits: "We are going to take back our community by any means necessary," said Carson associate Coltraine Chimurenga. He never mentioned the only "means" that would have worked: Recruit and train young blacks to work fifteen hours a day at low wages, in close family units, collecting, scrubbing, displaying and selling vegetables. Koreans do that in order to pay their debts to ethnic lending societies that pool the money to invest in the stores. They can do ~~this~~ because they have a culture in which people keep their families and their promises.

In contrast, consider an example of the power that is forfeited by those who always send "messages" and "fight the power." In 1960, J. Raymond Jones—a black politician who, instead of sending "messages," patiently built so strong a Democratic machine in Harlem that he became the Democratic Party leader of all Manhattan—drove a hard bargain with House Speaker Sam Rayburn in a hotel room at the party's national convention in Los Angeles. Rayburn needed delegate support for a presidential bid by his fellow Texan, Lyndon Johnson, so Jones got Rayburn to promise that if Manhattan's convention delegates backed Johnson over John F. Kennedy on the first ballot for the presidential nomination, Rayburn would make Harlem congressman Adam Clayton Powell chairman of the powerful House Education and Labor Committee, and Johnson would be a strong ally in the civil rights struggle.

Kennedy won the nomination, and Johnson had to settle for the vice presidency, at least for awhile. But since Jones had kept his part of the bargain, Rayburn kept his. Alas, Powell squandered the power Jones had won for him by sending pointless, nose-thumbing "messages" to the crackers in Congress. He may have enjoyed himself, but others had to pick up the pieces. Jones was dismayed but not disillusioned. In 1990, at age ninety-one, he told me that many black politicians "view the media as an opponent" and prosecutors as out to get them, and he acknowledged they "are partially correct." But, he added, "the media is the enemy of all politicians, period."

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And it is up to politicians to set such a standard, and maintain it to such a high degree, that there will be nothing justifiable" in the inevitable exposés and probes. Still more important, Jones said, is marshaling votes and bargaining hard in politics, and, at the same time, starting businesses.

The late Commerce Secretary and Democratic National Committee Chairman Ronald Brown grew up in Jones's Harlem and was a product of such thinking. Brown struck many as an opportunist and some as a "house Negro," but he became so powerful that he no longer had to "send" messages but could deliver them in person or, as often, receive and act on messages sent by others. This is a politics of impassioned gradualism, not utopian revolution. But while the Jones/Brown model of effective engagement with the larger society has its seamy, back-room dealmaking side, there are other even more, constructive examples set by black writers, educators, activists and political leaders.

For example, in southern California, San Antonio, Chicago, Baltimore, and the New York metropolitan region, the Industrial Areas Foundation (IAF) has trained powerful civic organizations of working-poor residents of inner-city neighborhoods to gain substantial power by striking just the right balances between racial or ethnic affinity and color-blind civic virtue, and between personal responsibility and communal obligation. Grounded in coalitions of religious congregations that are often predominantly black or Hispanic, the IAF groups never wave racial or evangelical banners in their dealings with local political and economic elites; they go out of their way to include local white churches as they build affordable housing, set up schools, improve public services, and prompt city councils to pass "living wage" bills to help the employees of private companies doing work for local governments. IAF's two-tiered civic model, which I have portrayed in *The Closest of Strangers* and the journalist William Greider has described in his writings, is catching on among other groups; I wish it had caught on in Evelyn Hernandez's Hartford neighborhood. Yet it is barely comprehended by politicians, philanthropists, journalists and other social observers, like Andrew Hacker.

would catch

Greider

who insist on viewing public life through racial or ideological lenses.

Our purpose here isn't to examine such models but to challenge the racial mindset that inhibits them when liberals kowtow to racial message-senders. Amid the color-coding and shadowboxing, liberals should train themselves to send some clear messages right back. To the "by any means necessary" crowd, they should say, as J. Raymond Jones probably would, "Put up or shut up." When I asked Jones what he thought of the Brooklyn black boycotters' claims that since other racial groups and mobs used force and fraud, they should, too, he responded,

, reinforcing the stigma of separation.

That's what they did say in my time, but it's an argument for people who don't think. We could proceed on that basis and wreck the market. When I went into the ice business, I simply did the same thing the Italian and Irish boys did. When they started invading my territory, I invaded theirs. I bought every piece of junk I could lay my hands on, filled it with ice, and went into their neighborhood. One day on 116th Street, I saw a mob getting together. [But] before it got messy, [Tammany Hall leader] Jimmy Hines pulled his people out and we got together and agreed simply to compete. I said, "We're not scared, we're not gonna run. If everybody is trying to take control and nobody has control, soon the cops will take control." Well, he understood what I was talking about.

Sonny Carson's demonstrators would have no such trouble competing legitimately with the Koreans. What do they lack that Jones did not, even in Depression-era Harlem? Suppose that the Koreans had actually closed their thirty-odd stores in black Brooklyn neighborhoods, as Carson demanded, and had told all their customers to go to Carson for vegetables. Could he have taken over and run all those stores? Yet who was stopping him and the other militants from opening up their own cooperatives, farmers' markets or stores and urging local residents to "buy black"? It doesn't take much capital to start a greengrocery. If the business culture and work habits

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are there, the investors will be found. If the culture and habits aren't there—if, as Randall Kennedy noted, few who called one another "Brother" at the Million Man March would have been willing to "lend this Brother \$100"—then it is wrong just to blame racism, let alone to invoke the days when blacks were other people's property.

That is the point most white liberals seem not to understand or acknowledge. In Jones' view, only a racist would ~~have~~ characterized the boycotters as victims of racism. And doing that would only compound racism by refusing to pay the demonstrators the compliment of holding them to elementary standards of market competition, political and economic organizing, and civil discourse. To trade on the "We were property" argument is to deny Jones's and the IAF groups' achievements and to insult most blacks, who don't trade on victimization and were embarrassed by the boycott rhetoric, even if somewhat cowed by it.

So → The importance of civic culture cannot be overemphasized. When the disadvantaged lack clear moral signals and the footholds that come with them, racial and other divisions run riot, as they did in Los Angeles (which has no civic culture) after the acquittals of the police officers who had beaten Rodney King. Instead of mobilizing a disciplined, well-focused anger, political leaders who had promoted racial division watched helplessly as it dissolved into a war of all against all. Romantically or opportunistically, black leaders such as Rep. Maxine Waters tried to call the riot an "uprising." It was really social dissolution, lacking the outraged dignity that would have come from a social moral center. Poor people desperately need such grounding. Liberals who think that it cannot be had until racism and poverty have been abolished should check their assumptions with Nelson Mandela, or, for that matter, with Malcolm X or Karl Marx.

When 149 garment workers met their deaths in 1911 at New York City's Triangle Shirtwaist Company in a fire caused by the owners' negligence and greed, a disciplined, cohesive union—grounded in a Jewish subculture that had to transcend itself with universal appeals because the owners, too,

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were Jewish—sidelined the would-be bomb-throwers in its midst and mounted a great, silent march whose civic discipline moved the city and drove legislation and economic justice. It was a vast improvement over New Yorkers' reactions to rich draft-dodgers and poor blacks during the Civil War, when rioting and anarchy drove the novelist Herman Melville to his Manhattan rooftop, where he conceived this lament, civil society's eclipse:

All civil charms and priestly spells
That late held hearts in awe;
Fear bound, and subject to a better sway
Than sway of self; these like a dream dissolve,
And man rebounds whole aeons back in Nature.

(no new H) ← Liberals should stop flirting with such decadence in the name of "rights," and they should rediscover civil charms. Taking a leaf from Du Bois's New England, they should stop conflating moral obligation with repression when, in fact, it is often empowering.

The evidence of American liberalism's sad recent history—and, for that matter, of the even sadder "revolutions" abroad in our time—shows that overthrowing civic cultures (or turning one's back on them, as Du Bois did) for the sake of tribal liberations or universalist abstractions wins not more justice but, literally, more death. Counting bodies is not a bad rule of thumb to use when assessing the apparently thrilling alternatives to the impassioned gradualism of the New England civic culture and the pragmatism of a J. Raymond Jones. Instead of threatening to get somewhere "by any means necessary," insurgents, both left and right, black and white, should find ways to affirm civic culture's strengths and redeem its flaws.

The problem is not that economic exploitation, racism, and cultural oppression don't exist. It is that liberal racism like Derrick Bell's and Andrew Hacker's makes it harder to nurture moral and civic standards that undercut racism and strengthen movements against obvious injustice. "This was the gift of New England to the freed Negro: not alms, but a

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friend; not cash but character," Du Bois wrote. It is a gift he shouldn't have discounted, and it is the most important gift liberals can make to the racial shadow-boxers they now so wrongly indulge.

CHAPTER 8

A COUNTRY BEYOND RACE

"The problem of the twentieth century is the problem of the color line," Du Bois wrote in 1903, challenging but perpetuating the nineteenth-century notion that race differences are so profound that one's skin color ~~is~~ ^{determines} one's destiny. ~~That~~ ^{That} ~~every idea~~ ^{every idea} makes even less sense now than it did then, and America will make no sense at all in the years ahead unless it fulfills its destiny to become a society beyond race. Standing now as close to the next century as Du Bois did to the last when he penned his grim prophecy, we must speak a new truth: The problem of the twenty-first century is the challenge of racelessness, of the color line's complete dissolution.

We have seen that liberals, instead of welcoming that prospect and helping the country to cope well with its consequences, ~~liberals~~ ^{liberals} are clinging to color with a desperation as puzzling as it is unseemly. In the name of "diversity"—but in deference to race hustlers, ideologues, and opportunists—liberals are chasing phantasms of racial difference, shrinking from the new America that is unfolding before our eyes. Racism endures, of course, and it is duplicitous and cruel; that only makes liberals' own complicity in it all the more fateful and unforgiveable.

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The stakes are uniquely American, but, ultimately, they are global. None of the battlefield campfires dotting the globe in the new century's early dawn illumines a color line. Hutus against Tutsis, English against Irish, Iraqis against Kurds, Serbians against Bosnians, Pakistanis against Indians, Russians against Chechnyans, even Jewish against Muslim Semites in the Middle East—in each of these conflicts, the opponents are racially indistinguishable. Their differences turn on religion, language, or ideology and cannot be comprehended by race, much less by a “multicultural” education that equates having a skin color with having a culture.

Why have American liberals gotten this so wrong? “Multiculturalism is the price America is paying for its inability or unwillingness to incorporate into its society African-Americans [as] it has incorporated so many groups,” writes the sociologist Nathan Glazer. He is all too painfully right. But pedagogy that conflates cultures with colors exacts far too high a price. Liberals are rightly suspicious of conservatives who assail multiculturalism in the name of a transracial America they did precious little to open to blacks, but that suspicion cannot justify liberals’ fatalistic acceptance of the racist shams in our classrooms, courtrooms, workplaces, and election districts.

The air inside the edifice of liberal racism is growing stale, and it is scented with death. The inhabitants of that edifice are discovering that racial narratives do not cultivate democratic predispositions, that Ebonics and much of what passes for bilingualism do not enrich civic dialogue, and that racial multiculturalism offers nothing to mixed-race children and others who want to escape their immigrant or racial corrals. Racial narrators who deny that reading dead white males such as Thoreau and Whitman can stimulate young blacks now as it did Richard Wright and Ralph Ellison are really denying that black kids can be taught to read the American literature that is their precious heritage, too. Some multiculturalist pedagogues want not the “inclusion” they claim to seek but a ritual certification of exclusion that gamers them paychecks, moral cachet, and sometimes even opportunities to exploit others of

the same color in the name of race loyalty. Let us break up these games and break out of the building.

Of course, we need group memberships and narratives. The philosopher Alasdair MacIntyre has noted that people are "storytelling animals" who become "possessed" by the stories that orient them in the world. But while every racial, ethnic, and religious group considers its own narrative of oppression, assertion, and redemption unique, most follow familiar patterns of self-definition, self-maintenance, and contention with others. Anticipating such patterns, constitutional framers such as James Madison created a system that requires "secular rationality as a basis for communication," relegates religions and philosophies to the private sphere, and yet suffuses the body politic with enough Judeo-Christian universalism to give it a moral mission.

With each of these commitments now openly challenged, America is in crisis. Since even the old elites lack coherent narratives, black marginality has become less exceptional and more typical of the whole country's problem. Merely enlarging the collection of group grievances and accusatory narratives only strengthens the allure of separatism. As I asserted at the outset, precisely because the United States is becoming more racially, ethnically, and religiously complex, liberals should be working overtime to identify and nurture at least a few shared national principles and bonds that deepen a sense of common belonging and nourish democratic dispositions.

We need not proclaim a single new national "story" such as manifest destiny or leadership of the free world. "The reality of diversity in a civil society . . . makes clear that free people have the right and the obligation to choose their levels and kinds of commitments and the measures they might borrow from other groups or, through barter, might extend to them," writes the religious historian Martin Marty. Neither superpatriotism nor racial multiculturalism can fulfill this right and obligation. Nor can ideological understandings of power and wealth, as this bloody century has shown. We do need to rededicate our pedagogy and politics to the kind of civic culture that balances parochialism and universalism, individual responsibility

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and communal obligation in everyday actions that yield real opportunities.

How to do it? Nurturing a cultural authority that draws from both the parochial and the universal and that is grounded in personal responsibility, not group grievances, is an art—perhaps, ultimately, a religious art, as the Industrial Areas Foundation groups demonstrate so well. All I can contribute here is a warning. The loss of a common narrative and consensual rites of passage is driving young people to cults, white militias, and ghetto gangs, and yearnings like theirs are running deep and gathering force. Searching for firmer common ground, Marty offers the philosopher Michael Oakeshott's conception of a "civil association" of communities that, like porcupines in winter, huddle for warmth yet keep some distance from each other's sharp quills. Humans cannot strike such a balance by instinct alone, however, and we need to pay closer attention to past attempts at social integration, as we did in the preceding chapter, and to cultivate more deliberately some common American sentiments and affections. That, not the politics of "difference," should preoccupy us now.

Alan Ehrenhalt showed powerfully in *The Lost City* that if we want the much-touted benefits of "community," we must accept a degree of conformity. To strengthen any social value, we must deepen the stigma against anyone who violates it. Liberals rightly stigmatize those who exclude others by race or sex. But terms of *inclusion* must also be specified in other ways and, yes, enforced. This liberals seldom do well. To invoke rights without responsibilities is to increase the damage being done to a community's moral tone by people who should be stigmatized as individuals, whatever their group label. As Glenn Loury and Randall Kennedy insist, society has an obligation to set and enforce basic standards and to punish their violation with stigma and shame, not in order to keep the historically disadvantaged down, but, if the judgments are sound, to give them firm moral footholds on the way to more freedom and power.

Out of a commitment to shared civic standards, we can find it in ourselves to give greater voice to what former senator Bill

Bradley said to troublemaking black kids on city streets; to what the Bronx baker Peter Medona said to Andrew Hacker about those "troublemakers"; to what white Southern voters "said" to voting rights activists in the 1996 elections; to what Gay Talese said to the *Times*; to what Glenn Loury said to his liberal conference audience; and to what Randall Kennedy said to critical race theorists. And journalists can shuck off the mind-sets that screen out truth-tellers like these. When self-appointed racial spokespersons try to "send a message," we should all send this message back: "You do not have to act as powerless as you think you are. And you do not have to be so defiantly separate from the rest of us."

Even so, millions of Americans who have no recoverable racial or ethnic identities can't reconvene or mobilize along the old lines that separated our forebears. The coordinates of those past struggles are gone, along with their angels and demons. The writer Richard Rodriguez says there ought to be a bumper sticker that reads: "Assimilation Happens." He's right. We cannot do without parochial loyalties and religious revivals, alone cannot sustain a decent balance of discipline and freedom. Nor, certainly, can bureaucratic government. And while markets have the virtue of throwing people together across old lines of division, markets cannot nourish virtue, either. At the very least, we should work harder to shake the false notion, propagated by the Ford Foundation and the *Times*, that we would have little to give one another if color had no more cultural value than aesthetic preferences for brown or green eyes. "*Race is a fantasy* [*italics mine*]," writes C. Eric Lincoln. "A chimera. A stalking horse for power and privilege." People who know this and are trying to live beyond race deserve more support than they get now from politicians, the media, and the schools. A lot depends on the courage and good sense of those of us who not only won't be corralled by color coders, patronized by guilt-mongers, or stampeded by race hustlers but will stand up to and *answer* them. Our strength resides not in more racial monitoring and tinny celebrations of "diversity" but in the gossamer threads

, but they

foundations

(no, they're his!)

media

corralled

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and raceless glue of an endless American belonging which new leaders and artists among us will have to evoke.

In his essay, "On Becoming an American Writer," which appeared in *The Atlantic Monthly* in December of 1978, James McPherson has written tellingly about his experience of the struggle to achieve and sustain civic balance. A native of segregated Savannah, he felt and worked his way in the 1960s and '70s toward an American belonging that transcends racism and race itself. As he and others of his background progressed, they found themselves "trying to make sense of the growing diversity of friendships [and] increasing familiarity with the various political areas of the country:

We never wanted to be "white," but we never wanted to be "black," either. And back during that period [of the late 1960s] there was a feeling that we could be whatever we wanted. But, we discovered, unless we joined a group, subscribed to some ideology, accepted some provisional identity, there was no contractual process for defining and stabilizing what it was we wanted to be. We also found that this was an individual problem, and in order to confront it one had to go inside one's self.

"Going inside one's self" is precisely what liberal racists of all colors fear to do. They flee such self-scrutiny by shouting about "our people" and "sending a message." No wonder that Lounsbury entitled a 1994 book of his essays criticizing liberal racism *One By One from the Inside Out*. That is how a lot of our work will have to be done. As McPherson envisions that project

... each United States citizen would attempt to approximate the ideals of the nation, be on at least conversant terms with all its diversity, carry the mainstream of the culture inside himself. As an American, by trying to wear these clothes he would be a synthesis of high and low, black and white, city and country, provincial and universal. If he could live with these contradictions, he would be simply a representative American.

... [This status] can be achieved with or without intermarriage, but it will cost a great many mistakes and a lot of pain. It is, finally,

James A. McPherson

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a product of culture and not of race. And achieving it will require that one be conscious of America's culture and the complexity of all its people. . . . Such a perspective would provide a minefield of delicious ironies. Why, for example, should black Americans raised in Southern culture not find that some of their responses are geared to [white] country music? How else . . . am I to account for a white friend in Boston who taught me much of what I know about black American music? . . . Most of us are products of much more complex cultural influences than we suppose.

As blacks like McPherson disown whatever is comforting in racial soothsayers like Farrakhan ~~and Derrick Bell~~, whites must disown something comforting, too. Because we long excluded blacks from society's subtlest corruptions and most basic opportunities, we have often expected blacks to come into public life as bearers not only of rebukes and rebellions but also of a kind of salvation, a reservoir of special feeling and perception tapped in black music and the searing moral force of a Martin Luther King Jr.

Of both burdens, blacks have borne more than enough. For all its wrong turns and dead ends, the black quest for American acknowledgment and belonging is the most powerful epic of unrequited love in the history of the world. Even if every broken heart could be mended and every theft of opportunity redressed, there would, of course, remain a black community of memory, loss, and endurance. And so there should. But ultimately there can be only transcendence—an American becoming, without parallel, without equal. Pending that, nothing is more un-becoming than a sentimental, guilt-hobbled white liberalism.

"The old strategies of accusation, isolation, and containment have broken down," writes C. Eric Lincoln, who has found in his own deep experiences of racism the springs of a transracial vision. "The supreme disloyalty is not to a bell [of racial solidarity] that has tolled itself into silence, but to the bell that has yet to ring. . . . If transracial marriage is here, and biracial children are here, can transracial adoptions be far behind? . . . It is time now to reach for the hand that is reach-

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ing for tomorrow, whatever color that hand may be. The evening of today is already far spent." ~~(Coming Through The~~

~~Fire)~~

To watch nonwhite Americans settling down to the ordinary business of running municipalities, military units, media, manufacturing, and money markets is to watch the angels of blackness withdraw with the demons. It is to surrender condescension along with contempt. For all of us, it is to acknowledge that this country's redemption has not and will not come through making race the organizing principle of our polity and civic culture. Liberals must lead struggles against discrimination and abuse. But for those struggles to succeed, in all other endeavors liberals must let race go.

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