The Rhetoric of “Nationhood” in Black American Nationalism

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Abstract: The consciousness and desire for nationhood has been a critical component of Black Nationalism in America from the dawn of enslavement. Reacting to rejection, oppression and the denial of the rights and privileges of American citizenship, leading blacks began to articulate a vision of an independent black nationality. From the mid-nineteenth century emigration movement, through the early twentieth century Garveyist movement to the Civil and post-Civil rights Black Power and Nation of Islam movements, alienated blacks have theorized on the utility of an independent nation and nationality. The construction of this nationality has taken three dimensions: First, internal statism (the envisioning of an independent black nation within the boundaries of the United States); second, external statism (an externally situated and independent black nation); and third, ideological statism (the construction of a “non-state” nation designed for purely psychological consideration).

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Introduction

Black Nationalism in America is a subject of intense scholarly interest and debates. Generally, scholars have analyzed nationalism within the discourse of alienation. Nationalist ideas and movements have galvanized peoples’ struggles for freedom from domination, exploitation and hegemony. In the classical model, nationhood represents the ultimate geographical expression of independence. Foreign and externally imposed domination often provoke nationalist consciousness. This can occur in both the classical, foreign imposed colonial model, and the domestic “internal colonial,” model. Some characterize Black Nationalism in America as directed not necessarily at complete severance of political ties, but the redressing of socio-economic and political imbalances associated with the system of “internal colonialism.”

Throughout history, Black Nationalist consciousness and movements have evolved in reaction to alienation and deprivation of the rights and privileges of American nationality. However, because this “internal colonial” situation, like the classical colonial model, also entailed economic, social and cultural deficiencies, black American nationalism has entailed quests for economic independence, social equality, and cultural validation. Consequently, though the black American situation is not consistent with the classical colonial model, it does reflect aspects of it. For black Americans, achieving independent nationhood became a
sine qua non for survival. For some, this meant literally creating a nation outside of the United States. For others, the goal is an independent black nationality within the United States. Since blacks were characterized in pro-slavery discourse as a people without the knowledge and ability to successfully and efficiently organize a state, black nationalists sought to negate this perception by demonstrating that blacks indeed possessed the capacity to organize a nation-state independently and successfully.

At its core, Black Nationalism is a quest for existential validation. It is rooted in the systems and structures of oppression that informed American history. The challenges of the ever-elusive American Dream, the ever-expanding and seemingly indestructible culture of racism and, more recently, the upsurge of right-wing conservatism, and accompanying relentless attacks on civil rights, have bolstered nationalist consciousness. Many believe that the attainment of nationhood would bring respect, recognition and validation. Quintessentially, therefore, the black struggle in America has been directed either at achieving recognition and acceptance as integral members of the American nation, with all the accompanying rights and privileges or, absent this, establishing nationhood in an external location, safe and distant from American hegemonic influences. However, the black quest for nationhood is much more complex. Some black nationalists sought nationhood within a racially divided United States, with blacks occupying certain designated territories and states.

In *History in Black* (2001), Yaacov Shavit observed a historical tendency among oppressed and deprived groups to seek to counteract the dominant culture of hegemony by creating “a national culture.” They seek a kind of “restoration” by locating the “nation” in a distant past, and conferring ennobling and empowering status and qualities on that nation. Shavit focused on black Americans and their challenge of acquiring the “aura of a black nation” meant to change the widespread image of inferiority that had legitimized white domination. Although Shavit focused his study on radical Afrocentric quest for a black nationality in contemporary America, the desire for nationhood as an expression and symbol of self-determination is rooted in history. Since the early nineteenth century, blacks in America have persistently searched in the distant past for a foundation upon which to construct a distinct black nationality that would serve both as a countervailing framework of resistance and a means of existential validation. Denied the ability and capacity for political responsibility, as well as the rights and privileges of American nationality, blacks counterpoised a conception of nationhood that was both domestic and external. First, they affirmed their right to “nationhood” within the United States by proclaiming their status as that of “a nation within a nation,” and demanding all the rights and privileges due to a distinct and oppressed nationality. The concept of “a nation within a nation” was meant to both highlight the distinctive identity of blacks as an oppressed group, and to legitimize their right to organize and resist. Second, in the event of a failure to attain the rights of nationhood within the existing nation-state, they sought an externally-based and independent black nationality. This paper identifies and discusses two phases in American history during which blacks aspired for, and theorized about, an independent nationhood or nationality--first, from the early nineteenth century to the early twentieth, and second, from the 1960s civil rights movement to the early 1980s.
Early 1800s to Early 1900s

The Colonization schemes of the early nineteenth century represented the earliest expression of a desire for distinct nationhood among black Americans. Paul Cuffee and Lott Cary were among the pioneers of colonization. Concerned about the negative impact Africa’s alleged backwardness and primitive condition had on the black American experience, Cuffee and Cary proposed strategies for developing Africa and uplifting Africans. An experienced sailor, Cuffee wanted to establish trading networks with Africa as well as relocate some free blacks who would function as bearers of “civilizing” values. He worked closely with British abolitionists and their colonization scheme in Sierra Leone, West Africa. He made several trips to Sierra Leone in the early 1800s and successfully repatriated about 38 free blacks to the colony. His trips and efforts bolstered interest in colonization in America, and he was soon contacted by both free blacks who were curious about repatriation, as well as prominent founding members of the emerging American Colonization Society (ACS). Cuffee’s pioneering efforts helped further the ACS and its settlement of free blacks in Liberia in the 1820s. His untimely death in 1817 ended this relationship.

Lott Cary shared similar concerns about the primitive and backward conditions of Africa and he too embraced colonization. He became even more involved with the ACS and the Liberia settlement. However, neither Cuffee nor Cary envisioned an independent nationality in Africa. The settlement of free blacks anywhere in Africa was largely a “civilizing mission” to uplift “primitive” Africans, a development that they hoped would reflect positively on the condition of blacks in America. Under the auspices of the ACS, colonization evolved into a movement with a well-defined philosophy. Founded by whites, many with pro-slavery sympathies, and questionable intentions, the society attracted some blacks for whom the American dream had become a nightmare. For these blacks, colonization inspired the dream of an alternative homeland. The ACS dangled Africa to blacks as a viable alternative to rejection in America. The society’s efforts inspired generations of future black nationalists. The founding of Liberia notwithstanding, colonization was unpopular among blacks. Since many perceived colonization as pro-slavery, it failed to generate a sustainable momentum. Consequently, few blacks went to Liberia. This lack of support, coupled with the challenges the early settlers encountered, especially conflicts with indigenous Africans, destroyed the credibility of colonization. Without a critical mass of would-be black emigrants, it declined. Though colonization failed, a constellation of negative national policies and developments would deepen black alienation and keep the nationality flame burning. In fact, despite the failure of colonization, Liberia remained a beacon of hope for blacks. Its founding affirmed black nationhood, and inspired generations to turn toward Africa.

By the second half of the nineteenth century, a new movement aimed specifically at creating an independent black nationality emerged. Popularly known as emigration (to distinguish it from colonization), this movement was led by Martin Delany, Henry H.
Garnet, Alexander Crummell and Henry McNeal Turner. Unlike colonization, emigration gained more support. What was significant about emigration was that it witnessed sustained attempt by alienated blacks to push vigorously for an independent nationality in Africa. Delany, Crummell and Turner initiated programs and worked vigorously for an independent black nationality. They sought independence after years of frustrating quests for the elusive American nationality. Oppression and rejection in America pushed them toward separatism.

National reforms and developments in the second half of the nineteenth century underscored a resilient racism and further undermined the faith of blacks in America. These reforms included the Fugitive Slave Law of 1850, the Dred Scott Decision of 1857, the collapse of Radical Reconstruction in the late 1870s, and subsequent erosion of the rights guaranteed to blacks by the Fourteenth Amendment (citizenship and equal protection of the law), the Fifteenth Amendment (the vote), and the ascendance of Jim Crow (legalized segregation).

Martin R. Delany (1812-1885) was among the earliest to mobilize a movement for independent nationality with a coherent philosophy. He is widely recognized for his leadership of the back-to-Africa movement of the 1850s and 1860s. Delany theorized a direct relation between racism and nationhood. According to him, the quest for nationhood is a logical consequence of hegemonic rule. As he argued:

in all ages, in almost every nation, existed a nation within a nation—a people who although forming a part and parcel of the population, yet were from force of circumstances, known by the peculiar position they occupied, forming in fact, by the deprivation of political equality with others, no part, and if any, but a restricted part of the body politic of such nations, is also true [emphasis added].

Writing in the 1850s, Delany referred to the Poles in Russia, the Hungarians in Austria and the Scotch, Irish and Welsh in Britain as examples of dominated and marginalized minorities. He meant this reference to global reality to contextualize the black experience in America as a classic example of a colonial situation. Blacks were “a nation within a nation,” a people denied all the rights and privileges of American nationality. The situation provoked desire for a distinct black nationality. Delany championed the drive for this new nationality which he identified with Africa. He summoned a national emigration convention in Cleveland, Ohio in 1854, and as President, was mandated to explore the prospects for black nationality in Africa. He traveled to Africa in the late 1850s during which he visited Liberia and other locations in West Africa to ascertain prospects for eventual emigration of black Americans and creation of an independent black nation.

Convinced that Africa possessed all the requisites for a successful nationality, Delany spent the greater part of the second half of the nineteenth century advocating the emigration of resourceful and enterprising blacks to Africa to help create an economically
and politically viable independent black nationality that would demonstrate the capacity of blacks for political organization, economic and cultural developments.\textsuperscript{16} He offered blacks, “a new country and new beginning,” (as) “the only true rational political remedy for our disadvantaged position…\textsuperscript{17} He insisted that blacks would never be respected or given their rights and privileges as long as their plights and causes were not represented by a united nationality. As he reasoned, “the claims of no people, according to established policy and usage, are respected by any nation, until they are presented in a national capacity.”\textsuperscript{18} Delany, Turner, Garnet and Crummell pushed vigorously for establishing a black nationality in Africa.\textsuperscript{19} In their judgment, Africa possessed all the essential elements for a successful black nationality—land, natural resources and manpower in abundance. They believed that the emergence of a strong black nation in Africa would deconstruct centuries of myths and misconceptions about Africa and blacks. It would also win respect and recognition for blacks worldwide. As Delany contended, it is only when blacks presented themselves to the outside world in a unified nationality that they would command attention and respect.\textsuperscript{20} To bolster self-deterministic consciousness in favor of an independent nationality required confronting and deconstructing entrenched self-abnegating and destructive Eurocentric ideas that had historically justified black subordination. This became a major theme in Black Nationalist writings. Delany, for example, demonstrated black capacity for industry and civilization, and highlighted, inter alia, the contributions of blacks to the development of America. Challenging Eurocentric historiography, he also underlined the antiquity of civilization in Africa, as well as the moral, economic, social, cultural wealth and accomplishments of Africans.\textsuperscript{21} He sought to validate black history and culture, and instill in blacks ennobling and self-deterministic consciousness.

Henry Turner equally insisted that blacks needed a “Negro nationality” for self-respect. He too chose Africa as the foundation of this nationality because, “I see no shelter from the stormy blast, from the red tide of persecution, from the horrors of American prejudice.”\textsuperscript{22} Like Delany, Turner emphasized the linkage between racism in America and the quest for an independent black nationality. Turner’s advocacy of African nationality began after his expulsion, along with other black State Legislators, from the Georgia legislature in 1870. This expulsion and subsequent developments such as the US Supreme Court decision of 1883 which nullified the civil rights act of 1873 which had prohibited discrimination in public facilities convinced Turner of the imperative for an independent black nationality.\textsuperscript{23} For Turner as well, building a black nationality in Africa became a means by which blacks in America and elsewhere in the world could regain their dignity and self-confidence. As he declared, “Africa will be the thermometer that will determine the status of the Negro the world over…”\textsuperscript{24}

Emphasizing the linkage between black American and African experiences, Turner argued, “The Negro will never be anything here while Africa is shrouded in heathen darkness… The elevation of the Negro in this and all other countries is indissolubly connected with the enlightenment of Africa…”\textsuperscript{25} He also believed that regardless of their accomplishments, blacks would never account for anything, without
proof of the capacity to organize an independent nationality, and Africa offered the best chance of demonstrating this capacity. As he underscored, “Nothing less than a nationality will bring large prosperity and acknowledged manhood to us as a people.”

He dreamed ultimately of a “United States of Africa.” In 1893, Turner, like Delany almost thirty years earlier, summoned a national convention in Cincinnati to discuss emigration. Establishing an independent nationality became *sine qua non* for global respect. Echoing Delany, Turner opined, “I do not believe any race will ever be respected, or ought to be respected, who do not show themselves capable of founding and manning a government of their own creation.”

Securing nationhood, therefore, became a means by which blacks would gain respect. Turner urged blacks to go to Africa and “build a civil government that would serve as an asylum for the oppressed and degraded portion of our race.”

Crummell’s nationalism had a strong religious overtone. He too believed in developing a strong African nationality, but more of a Christian nation that would, in solidarity with black in Diaspora, mitigate the barbarism and negative qualities of indigenous Africa, as well as constitute the basis for reforming and transforming the black American condition. This vision of an African nationality, according to Monday Akpan, led Crummell to visit Liberia in 1853. He would eventually assume Liberian citizenship and become actively involved in proselytizing and educational reforms among the natives. His goal was to build “a strong, virile ‘African nationality’ capable of, and indeed essential for protecting the interests of the Negro race and winning for it the respect of other races.”

Crummell, like Delany and Turner, believed that the creation of a black nationality required the leadership of “civilized” black Americans to effect the transformation of a backward and benighted indigenous African population.

For leading nineteenth century black nationalists, therefore, Liberia became the launching ground for an independent black nationality and, at different times, Delany, Turner and Crummell, visited the country to help lay the groundwork for this nationality. Their nationality scheme had a strong economic component. The projected independent African nationality would be built on a strong economic foundation of cotton industry. Everything hinged on cheaply produced, high quality, African cotton, which they hoped would rival and eclipse American cotton, thus undermining slavery. Built on this economy, organized by “civilized” blacks from America, the projected independent black nationality would become the black man’s “city on a hill,” winning global acclaim and respect for all blacks. Their efforts, however, did not yield the projected black nationality. Liberia, and indeed the entire continent of Africa, soon became consumed by the avalanche of European colonialism and, given their own condescending views of Africa, Delany, Turner and Crummell were in the uncomfortable and ambivalent posture of validating European racist imperial ideology which justified intrusion into Africa, even as they tried to fend-off European encroachment. Though they looked toward Africa, paradoxically, these nationalists considered Africa not quite ready to serve as the foundation for a black nationality. Echoing prevailing Eurocentric constructions of the continent, they characterized Africa was backward and primitive, and Africans as
heathens who were in desperate need of the infusion of “civilizing” values from the West. In their views, therefore, *a priori*, indigenous Africans had to be civilized and transformed. All three proclaimed their status as “civilized” agents, and thus ideally suited and even divinely ordained to serve as bearers of civilization to Africa. They believed that the black American quest for an independent nationality would not materialize if Africa remained shrouded in paganism and barbarism. Their ambivalent and condescending attitudes toward Africa are discussed and analyzed exhaustively elsewhere. As discussed elsewhere, though driven by rejection in America to seek an independent nationality, all three nationalists developed a clear understanding and model of that nationality consistent with their western/European socialization. In other words, the independent nationality they sought would be “independent” only geographically and politically, but culturally it would replicate the western society they were running from. They seemed caught between two contradictory conceptions of nationhood—while they dreaded and rejected the political nation in which they were raised and socialized, they very much admired its cultural character. Paradoxically, the independent political nation they envisioned in Africa would bear the cultural imprints of the political nation they were rejecting in America. However, before an independent African nationality would materialize, indigenous Africa had to be cleansed of its primitive and barbaric culture, replacing this with western culture. It is curious, therefore, that these nationalists who seem to loathe Eurocentric hegemonic cultural values sought an independent nationality built precisely on those hegemonic cultural values.

Some critics denounce these nationalists as imperialistic and hegemonic. Others consider them elitist, since they neither appealed to a mass audience nor spearheaded any mass emigration to Africa. The projected independent black nationality did not materialize. Why? Some scholars attribute their failure to the very limited nature of their appeal. They were not able to attract a broader audience and could not generate the kind of resources needed to launch a successful independent nationhood drive. Others attribute the failure to the integrationist vision, optimism and aspirations inspired by the dominance of the philosophies and strategies of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), and Booker T. Washington from the late nineteenth to the second decade of the twentieth centuries. There was no doubt that most nineteenth century black nationalists, as Theodore Draper argued, were reluctant nationalists. Their quest for independent nationhood was inspired more by rejection in America. Whenever the prospect for integration seemed bright, many simply abandoned independent nationhood drives. This was true of Delany who returned to the United States in late 1861 on the outbreak of the Civil War to pursue integration. Turner’s failure was more the result of his inability to garner critical mass and capital for his ventures. His persistent frantic appeals in the 1890s to middle class blacks for support fell on deaf ears. But the dream of an independent nationality did not occur in a vacuum. Consequently, one needs to historicize the failure within the discourse of expanding European imperialism, which was a major stumbling block to the success of an independent nationality in Africa. Furthermore, these nationalists also had to contend with social, political and cultural realities on the African soil. Success had to take into
account not only the resistance of indigenous Africans but also, perhaps most critically, in the second half of the nineteenth century, a growing and combative European imperial drive into the continent. The independent black nationality dream was soon compromised and subverted not just by the lack of resources or critical support and ideological inconsistencies, but also European imperialism.

By the early twentieth century, however, the decline or failure of emigration did not necessarily obliterate the conditions that had initially inspired it. In fact, despite the hopes and expectations generated by Booker T. Washington’s philosophy of accommodation and, the integrationist focus of the NAACP, the turn of the century was a time of distress for blacks. The age of *Jim Crow* was arguably the most violent era in American history. The nationwide lynchings of blacks assumed epidemic proportions. Diminishing opportunities, racial intolerance and violence compelled southern blacks to embark on the northward migrations. But the North was not the welcoming society many had anticipated. The North itself turned out to be a most intolerant place, as blacks confronted more *Jim Crow* and lynchings. These developments, therefore, kept the nationhood dream alive and very soon launched its next phase. Marcus Garvey was the person who would galvanize this condition into what some scholars characterize as the first flowing of grassroots black nationalism. A Jamaican by origin, Garvey came to the United States in 1916 with a growing Pan-African and global consciousness and convictions.\(^42\) He came from, and grew up among, poverty-stricken, working class Jamaicans. His developing critical working-class consciousness took him to Central America where he witnessed and became briefly involved in organizing, and raising the consciousness of, West Indian migrant workers. He moved to London in 1912 where he attended college briefly while working in the shipyards. There he encountered more West Indian migrant workers and African students. He quickly came to the conclusion that regardless of geographical location, blacks confronted similar challenges associated with imperialism and racism.\(^43\) This reinforced the growing Pan-African consciousness which became a defining character of his liberation ideology.

In 1914, Garvey founded the Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA), the organizational framework for advancing his Pan-African vision and nationalism. Two years later, he moved to the United States with a movement and an ideology geared toward an independent black nationality. But Garvey quickly realized that this nationality would not come easily. It required unity, a problematic and seemingly unattainable condition, given the culture of racism and self-debasing values that blacks had imbibed for centuries. In addition to the absence of sufficient awareness of shared racial and cultural attributes among blacks on which to construct unity, there was also deep class division as reflected in his native Jamaica, where he had been frustrated by members of the black middle class. To change these, Garvey felt it was necessary first for blacks to develop a consciousness of shared nationhood. This became a dominant theme in his writings. He described blacks as a people of African ancestry who shared racial and cultural attributes.\(^44\) Underlining the imperative for nationhood, he wrote; “The Negro must have a country and a nation of his own.”\(^45\) He urged blacks to “have a government of their own.”\(^46\) Blacks would never attain equality with whites, he insisted “without first
on their own account proving to the world that they are capable of evolving a civilization of their own.”

“Nationhood” he opined, “is the strongest security of any people, and it is for this that the UNIA strives as this time.”

The objective of the UNIA was to lead the struggle for actualizing this independent nationhood in Africa. To underscore this fact, Garvey declared, “Nationhood is the only means by which modern civilization can completely protect itself…Independence of nationality, independence of government, is the means of protecting not only the individual, but the group. Nationhood is the highest ideal of all peoples.”

He too saw Liberia as a possible launching ground for this nationality. Garvey wanted Diaspora blacks to colonize Africa and create their own nation and aristocracy that would empower blacks globally. But first Garvey had to deal with centuries of mis-education and racism that had implanted in blacks negative ideas about African heritage and history. A successful African nationality required that blacks be socialized and reeducated to validate, and develop pride in, their history and culture.

Race and culture became the ethos with which Garvey sought to raise black consciousness of shared identity and consideration for nationhood. Upon this foundation, Garvey hoped, would emerge a great and mighty African nationality with Garvey himself as the provisional President. Garvey’s philosophy of nationhood emphasized a search for a glorious African past that could be used to counteract the dominant Eurocentric historiography that had been used to demean blacks. In the ancient African past, Garvey found and offered strong evidence to advance his platform of racial pride and black consciousness. But his projected African nationality was futuristic, the result of an energized and empowered people, driven and motivated to unite on the platform of shared racial and cultural identity. He also emphasized strong linkage between racism and nationhood. Though Garvey’s philosophy supposedly appealed to a mass audience, he did not advocate mass emigration to Africa. He called upon the resourceful and enterprising among blacks to help redeem Africa for black nationality. In Garvey’s philosophy, Africa embodied black nationhood, the attainment of which represented the ultimate expression of self-determination. As he contended, “nations are…natural entities and only in their own separate nations can the various races and the individuals who belong to them realize themselves.”

Furthermore, he insisted;

All men should be free—free to work out their own salvation. Free to create their own destinies. Free to nationally build up themselves for the upbringing and rearing of a culture and civilization of their own…the world should be liberal enough to allow the Negro latitude to develop a culture of his own.

Garvey believed that blacks would never achieve justice in their present location, among their oppressors. They had to migrate to Africa, their ancestral homeland. His philosophy was “Africa for Africans” at home and abroad. He advanced a Pan-African conception of nationhood that would later develop into the Pan-African Congress movement. Establishing a nation in Africa was the key not only to improving the
condition of the black race, but also a compelling case for equality with whites. Rejecting
the call for integration in America, and reacting to the emphasis of the NAACP and
William E. B. Du Bois on integration and equality, Garvey insisted that blacks would
never achieve real equality with whites until they demonstrated the capacity for self-
government, and this would come only in the form of organizing an independent
nationality elsewhere. As he warned, “Don’t encourage them (blacks) to believe that they
will become social equals of the whites in America, without first on their own account
proving to the world that they are capable of evolving a civilization of their own.”54

Garvey’s search for nationhood and black nationality, like that of his nineteenth
century predecessors failed. He never set foot in Africa. Although he tapped into the
growing disillusionment of blacks, Garvey did not spearhead any mass emigration either.
He failed, some scholars argue, because he confronted a formidable foe that was
indomitably opposed to emigration—the NAACP. Key NAACP leaders, most notably Du
Bois, condemned Garvey as an outside agitator who misled blacks. Undoubtedly,
Garvey’s separatist philosophy ran afoul of the integrationist agenda of leading black
Amercians. The NAACP, Du Bois and other leading blacks would be implicated in the
plots that eventually resulted in Garvey’s arrest, incarceration and deportation.55 Other
scholars suggest that Garvey failed because he was driven more by personal ambitions,
and that his movement was riddled with corruption; that it was more rhetorical and less
substantive, and could not guarantee the force and agency necessary to implement a full-
scale plan of emigration to Africa.56 Also, Garvey’s militant rhetoric alienated the black
elite in Liberia who saw him as possibly a threat and rejected his vision. Regardless of
the reasons for his failure, Garvey succeeded in raising the consciousness for black
nationhood, its utility and Pan-African character, and inspired future generations.

The 1960s and Beyond

During the 1960s Civil-Rights phase, two leading organizations and movements
undertook the challenge of raising black consciousness for nationhood and constructing
an independent and distinct black nationality—the Nation of Islam (NOI), and Black
Power separatism. It should be recalled that the mainstream leadership of the civil rights
struggles represented by organizations such as the Southern Christian Leadership
Conference (SCLC), the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE) and the NAACP, focused
more on integration, the challenges of making America a more just and equitable society.
They envisaged what Martin Luther King, Jr., called the “beloved community.” However,
not everyone shared this hope in the ultimate perfectibility of America. There were
organizations, most notably the NOI led by Elijah Mohammed that remained indomitably
opposed to integration and instead envisioned a distinct black nationality, and focused on
raising black consciousness for independent nationhood.

In his sermons, Mohammed predicted the imminent destruction of white America
for its evil deeds in enslaving blacks and denying to them equality and justice. Given this
inevitable doom, he deemed it counterintuitive for black to seek integration into such society. According to him;

Integration means self-destruction, and the means to this end is exactly that—death and nothing else... The Black people throughout the earth are seeking independence for their own, not integration into white society. What do we look like trying to integrate into our 400-year-old enemies?  

He urged blacks to seek their own land that would actualize their vision of nationhood. As he suggested, “In order to build a nation you must first have some land.” Mr. Mohammed insisted that Allah was angry with whites and blacks were his chosen and favored people. Blacks had been subjected to the most inhumane treatment by whites. They had become “a nation in a nation” abused and brutalized. His solution was simple: “we must be separated from them (i.e., whites) and given a place on this earth that we can call our own.” In his view, blacks were a captive nation, entrapped and desperately in need of free and independent nationality.

As an alternative to integration in America, Mohammed implored his followers to develop consciousness of distinct black nationhood under the banner of the NOI. He had no doubt that this historical reality would emerge from the ashes of, or in the aftermath of the destruction of, whites. The fact that blacks would realize this nationhood in an America rid of whites underscored blacks’ chosen status. According to Mohammed, “But God has chosen us to be His people, and He delights in fighting the enemy.” Mr. Mohammed’s philosophy, Allah was in favor of a distinct black nationality in America. It should be noted that Mohammed’s vision of nationhood would be realized in America, not in Africa. He was vehemently opposed to an African nationality. As he argued;

For nearly forty years I have been preaching to the Black man in America that we should accept our own; and instead of the Black man going to the decent side of his own, he goes back seeking traditional Africa, and the way they did in jungle life and the way you see in some uncivilized parts of Africa today. They are not using barber’s tools, shears, and razors to keep themselves looking dignified as a civilized people should look. The Black man in America accepts the jungle life, thinking that they would get the love of Black Africa. Black brothers and Black sisters, wearing savage dress and hair-styles will not get you the love of Africa.

Mohammed, therefore, viewed the quest for civil rights and integration destructive to blacks. As he suggested, even Allah was opposed to civil rights and
integration. According to him, for blacks to “absorb themselves and their kind…into the white race,” would not only be “ending the black race,” but also, “it is just the opposite with Allah, myself, and my followers. We want out completely. We want no claim to kinship with people who by nature are not our kin.” Underlining the imperative for separation, he affirmed, “We want a home on this earth we can call our own. We want to go for self- and leave the enemy who has been sentenced to death by Allah.” The NOI envisioned an internal Black nation. It would not be in Africa. Africa, in the estimation of Mohammed was backward and primitive. Black Americans should hope for nothing uplifting from the “jungle life” of Africa. The black nationality Allah had ordained would be realized in the United States. It would emerge from the ruins of white America.

Malcolm X, a disciple of Elijah Mohammed, faithfully advanced this separatist apolitical philosophy of the NOI. Malcolm philosophy of nationhood reflected the separatist convictions of his religious mentor. He devalued political participation and distanced himself from Martin Luther King, Jr. and the mainstream civil rights movement. Malcolm rejected integration, especially if it meant integration into a state that Allah had doomed for destruction. He too envisioned a distinct black nationhood that would emerge triumphant in the aftermath of Allah’s destruction of whites. Although this futuristic black nation would emerge in America under the banner of the NOI, Africa soon assumed a critical role in Malcolm’s philosophy. He believed that blacks had been mis-educated about their history, culture and heritage, and in consequence had developed self-hatred which undermined self-deterministic consciousness. Malcolm sought to reverse this condition through re-educating blacks about the true history of Africa. Although not advocating mass emigration to Africa, consciousness of black nationhood based on a positive conception of Africa became the foundation of Malcolm’s philosophy. He urged a philosophical and psychological “return” to Africa for a positive sense of nationhood which would unite, strengthen and empower blacks. As he emphasized,

And I believe this that if we migrated back to Africa culturally, philosophically and psychologically, while remaining here physically, the spiritual bond that would develop between us and Africa through this cultural, philosophical and psychological migration, so-called migration would enhance our position here, because we would have our contacts with them acting as roots or foundations behind us. You will never have a foundation in America.

Malcolm X suggested that the struggle for nationhood, that is, attaining the rights of American nationality had to occur on a foundation of mental and psychological emancipation derived from a philosophical and psychological “return” to Africa which would nurture self-love and self-knowledge; a re-education process that would undo centuries of self-hate, ignorance and mis-education that had legitimized white domination. Malcolm did not advocate mass emigration to Africa. Though he
acknowledged that it was possible for some individuals to migrate to Africa and be accepted. However, from the perspective of black nationhood, the most effective migration was not physical. Though blacks would “never have a foundation in America,” Malcolm believed that they could remain in America physically, while mentally and psychologically migrating to Africa for the source of empowerment that would significantly and positively impact their lives in America.

Louis Farrakhan, a one-time disciple of Elijah Mohammed, has loyally carried forward the platform and vision of the NOI. His leadership exemplifies the “nation-within-a-nation” concept. He embodies and faithfully advances NOI’s separatist philosophy. A strong believer in the inevitable destruction of white America, Farrakhan repudiated and rejected all attempts at integration. He too believed that a strong black nation would emerge out of the destruction of America. According to Robert Singh, in Farrakhan’s philosophy;

Armageddon—the ultimate and decisive conflict between good and evil—will bring about the end of the present, evil, white-dominated world and the illustrious beginning of a newly righteous kingdom of God on Earth, one in which black Americans are finally spiritually, emotionally, and mentally reborn.

In anticipation of Armageddon, Farrakhan urged blacks to remain separate from whites. They must carve their own separate economic, social and cultural institutions and paths toward achieving ultimate independence from white America. On the subject of independence and separation, Farrakhan is ambiguous. At some point he was supposedly in favor of emigration to Africa. At other times, he described emigration as unrealistic. As he once reasoned;

If you say we must return to Africa, what nation in Africa is willing to receive 40 million of us in the condition that we are in? Let’s be reasonable. And if 40 million of us said tonight we want to leave right now, it would take all of the navies of the whole world, plus their air force, plus whatever barges or ships they could manage, and then it would take generations to get 40 millions of us to return to Africa. And there is not a government on the African continent at present that will accept such a challenge. We must be realistic.

In his lectures and sermons, as Robert Singh observed, Farrakhan’s emphasis has shifted towards mental and cultural separation from white America. Perhaps realizing the impracticability of physical separation, Farrakhan began to stress mental, psychological and cultural separation. Black Americans “must studiously refrain from adopting ‘white’
American norms, values, ideologies, mores, folkways and lifestyles.” Like Malcolm X, Farrakhan emphasized the importance of psychological, mental and cultural independence as the ultimate expression of Black Nationalism. He conceived of “Full and authentic independence” for blacks “only through a true and complete knowledge of both Allah and self.” But Farrakhan’s vision of an independent black nationhood is also tied to economics. Psychological, mental and cultural emancipation alone would not ensure complete black independence. The ultimate expression and manifestation of black independence is economic independence. He urged blacks to invoke and harness the projected 204 billion dollar buying power that they possessed which, according to Black Enterprise magazine, ranks Black America as the 12th richest nation on earth. It is the judicious utilization of this purchasing power that would guarantee the ultimate independence of blacks. Harnessing and discriminatingly using their resources within his POWER (People, Organized and Working for Economic Rebirth) paradigm would transform blacks into producers, distributors and consumers, who use resources to build their community and become strong and powerful within the United States. This would in turn extricate blacks from their slavish mentality and dependence on whites. Based on these convictions, Farrakhan succeeded in organizing the NOI into a kind of miniature government with its own institutions and structures for actualizing his separatist convictions. As visionary and eccentric as Farrakhan appears, he succeeded in creating what in effect is a parallel “nation,” a distinct Islamic theocracy existing alongside, and within the geographical boundaries of, the United States; existing as an alternative, distinct Islamic nation with its own governmental, or some would say, quasi-governmental, structures and institutions that govern the economy, religion, culture, health and education. Farrakhan functions like a head of state over his “nation.” He has created, to borrow Sterling Johnson’s concept, a “Non-state Nation.” It is not a geographically delineated nation, but more of a conceptually constructed nation. It has no constitutional jurisdiction over any parts of the United States, but affirms an existence, and claims legality, within its own conceptualized parameters that often relate not to geographical jurisdiction but to a theologically and culturally constructed entity—the “Nation of Islam and its followers.”

Stokely Carmichael, a leading student activist and founding member of the Black Power movement also argued fervently for black nationhood. Although he eventually relocated to Africa where he died and was buried, Carmichael shared the belief in a Pan-African conception of nationhood that Garvey had popularized. He strongly believed in developing an ideological conception of nationhood to mobilize a global black struggle. He too identified Africa as the foundation for this nationality. He advanced the idea of a progressive Africa to inspire unity and strength among a nation of oppressed blacks. Advocating a Pan-African conception of nationhood, Carmichael argued;

It is time for all African-Americans to become an integral part of the world’s Pan-Africanists, and even though we might remain in America physically while fighting for the benefits that the Constitution guarantees us, we must return
to Africa philosophically and culturally, and develop a working unity in the framework of Pan-Africanism.\textsuperscript{78}

He defined Black Power to mean “all people who are black should come together, organize and form a power base to fight for their liberties.”\textsuperscript{79} For this to occur, a land base was essential, and he directed attention to Africa as the source for this land base. He insisted that blacks would never be able to successfully establish a distinct nationality within the United States.\textsuperscript{80} Carmichael seemed to be reacting to a proposal by another black radical group, the Republic of New Africa (RNA), for constructing a black nationality within the United States.

Led by Imamu Obadele, the RNA described black Americans as a colonized people and likened them to Africans in Zimbabwe, Mozambique and Portuguese-Guinea who are “captive colonies” struggling for a land space.\textsuperscript{81} He urged black Americans to recognize that a land space was fundamental to fulfilling aspirations for freedom. Like the NOI, the RNA believed it was possible for blacks to achieve a distinct nationhood within the United States and not in Africa. In Obadele’s view, blacks had already earned the right, constitutionally, to claim portions of the United States and build an independent nationality. He defined the immediate goal of the black struggle as the attainment of, “a separate black nation.”\textsuperscript{82} As Obadele reasoned, the RNA would claim parts of Mississippi, Louisiana, Alabama, Georgia and South Carolina as the nucleus of the black republic.\textsuperscript{83} He was convinced that blacks in these states would vote overwhelmingly for independence. Carmichael was, however, skeptical. In his views, the states identified by the RNA were essentially agrarian, and a black nationality built solely on agriculture stood little chance of surviving, especially in close proximity to the more industrialized and advanced United States. As he affirmed, “An agricultural nation could never defeat an industrial society. Therefore, we must ask ourselves where best can we get land. My brothers and sisters, I ask you to look with me to Africa.”\textsuperscript{84}

In Carmichael’s view any serious quest for an independent black nationality, “must be pointed toward Africa, especially since we’ve decided that we’re an African people and Africa belongs to all African peoples. It is our homeland!”\textsuperscript{85} Though creating such independent land base in Africa seemed unrealistic, Carmichael, like Garvey before him, strongly believed in the need for blacks to develop a strong sense of pride in African heritage and culture. Upon the foundation of such pride, blacks would be able to achieve conceptually and psychologically, the independent nationality that had thus far eluded them. Thus, even though blacks could never achieve a truly independent land base for a nationality within the United States, and even when the dream of an independent nationality seemed elusive, achieving a psychological and philosophical construction of nationality became crucial. Rejected, marginalized and alienated in America, blacks needed a positive consciousness of African history and heritage to inspire and anchor a sense of identity, even in the face of rejection. This is what Malcolm and Stokely meant by “returning to Africa philosophically and culturally.” Even if the geographical and political nationhood is elusive, an independent, culturally conceptualized nation remains
an empowering possibility. Just like Malcolm X noted above, blacks could “mentally and psychologically” migrate to an independent Africa. This was a conceptual African nationality that would empower blacks with a sense and consciousness of identity denied in real life.

There is, however, a more recent variant of nationhood that has emerged since the 1960s civil rights movement which theoretically offers a distinct politics of identity and ideologically affirms a construction of black nationalism with a psychological and therapeutic African nationality construct as a countervailing force against continued alienation in America—Afrocentrism. Afrocentric scholars attempt to create a “national culture” by invoking African antiquity. They searched for nationhood in the African past. They present Africa as the homeland for all blacks. They described blacks, regardless of geographical location, as peoples of one nation, who share historical and cultural experiences. The invocation of, and claim of affinity to, ancient Africa enabled these blacks also to claim a heritage of civilization in antiquity. This claim to antiquity represents, in Shavit’s words, “an important tool in a vanquished nation’s struggle to obtain pride, dignity and status.” Afrocentricity advocates a kind of cultural and philosophical or psychological conception of nationhood. Afrocentric nationalism affirms an African nationality for black Americans, based on the possession of an African identity that supposedly survived, almost intact, more than three hundred years of enslavement and acculturation in the New World. While leading black scholars affirm a construction of nationalism that acknowledges and validates both the African and American dimensions of black identity, Afrocentric nationalists completely deemphasize America and affirm instead an African-centered conception of identity and nationality. This is a curious affirmation, since, constitutionally blacks retain American nationality. In the Afrocentric genre, blacks retain American nationality not identity. Afrocentrism is a modern-day variant of the “nation-within-a-nation” doctrine. Afrocentric nationalism defines blacks as a distinct and oppressed racial and cultural group that has little in common with whites, centuries of cohabitation notwithstanding. Afrocentric scholars describe blacks as Africans not Americans. Blacks may physically reside in the United States, but culturally and psychologically, their African nationality had neither changed, nor had it been altered by centuries of transplantation. They had always retained their African identity. The only problem, according Afrocentrism, was that the knowledge and awareness of this identity has been destroyed and compromised by centuries of oppression and mis-education. Afrocentrism would help blacks regain this knowledge.

Afrocentric nationalism is, however, much more complex. The concept of nationhood it projects and advocates is psychological, political and cultural. The affirmation of blacks as Africans in identity and culture underscores a conception of blacks as a separate “cultural” nation that or whose existence and survival is threatened by continued association with, and close proximity to, the dominant white society. Afrocentric nationalist construction of an African identity and cultural nationhood becomes a means of combating the destructive impact of mainstream white society and its values. The Afrocentric worldview is based on a definition of black Americans as an
alien, separate and distinct people who should search for validation of their nationality and nationhood not in America but in ancient and classical Africa. Afrocentric nationalist response to historical denial and negation of African and black history and culture is to search in ancient Africa for a countervailing sense of nationhood and nationality that would deconstruct Eurocentrism and its destructive impacts, and validate for blacks a positive sense of self. Malcolm X advanced similar ethos in his emphasis on a philosophical return to Africa. In other words, realization of the problematic of emigration to Africa led many in the mid-twentieth century to focus more on epistemology, and philosophical conceptualization of nationhood and, “return to Africa,” to build a sense of self-esteem for blacks. This would eventually result in a personality that would be more equipped psychologically to resist and survive alienation in America. In other words, Afrocentricity uses Africa to construct a philosophical and psychological consciousness of distinct nationhood to counteract the hegemonic American nation and strengthen resistance to that nationality.

The late black psychologist Amos Wilson rendered a powerful summation of the imperative for nationhood within Afrocentric nationalism. The solution to the present predicament of black America, he insisted, depended on the attainment of nationhood. Nationhood confers strength and compels respect, and is the key to empowerment. Unless and until blacks developed a strong consciousness of distinct nationality, he suggested, they would remain marginalized and impoverished. Wilson believed that blacks are able to develop this consciousness of nationhood within the boundaries of the United States. Consequently, true to his Afrocentric convictions, Wilson’s conception of nationhood is not totally rooted in geography but also cultural and ethnocentric. He urged blacks to invoke their African heritage as the foundation for developing a strong consciousness of nationhood. As he reasoned;

…if we are to be empowered and our power is to work in our interests, then our consciousness must be an Afrikan consciousness, our values must be Afrikan values, our personality must be an Afrikan-based personality...We must then, as a people, develop a new Afrikan consciousness—an Afrikan-centered consciousness—and that means we develop it based upon an Afrikan history, Afrikan culture and Afrikan values. Most of all, we must develop an Afrikan sense of nationhood.

Afrocentrism represents the ultimate philosophical and psychological return to Africa. Historicizing of ancient African nationality would help blacks more effectively deal with the debilitating legacies of Eurocentric mis-Education. Afrocentric nationalism, therefore, was not an active strive for independent nationhood, but more of instilling in black Americans a liberated mindset, a decolonized consciousness, and an awareness of a “stolen” and maligned but rich historical and cultural heritage in Africa. This becomes the basis of claiming and affirming African nationality philosophically, psychologically
and culturally as a countervailing force against the negative and debilitating force of American nationality. Though blacks physically reside in, and belong to, America, the construction of a psychological and philosophical African nationality would counterbalance and obliterate the deadening weight of the dominant and hegemonic American nationality. The sense of nationhood that Afrocentrism advances, therefore, exemplifies what Sterling Johnson aptly characterizes as a “non-state nation.”

Conclusion

From its inception, Black Nationalism was heavily driven by two complementary dynamics—that of developing a strong and positive consciousness of African nationhood, and sustained efforts to actualize that nationhood politically. These are the two core defining elements of Black Nationalism, regardless of the epoch. In fact, in all the phases discussed, the construction of an African nationality was predicated on developing a strong consciousness of affinity and identity with the problems and challenges of Africa. There are certain critical elements. Blacks advanced two conceptions of nationality—cultural and political. They constructed the cultural nation as a psychological and philosophical bulwark against debilitating Eurocentric values. They advanced the political nation as a geographical entity, an independent nationality, a living testament to the capabilities of blacks, their shining “city on hill,” a beckon to all dejected and alienated blacks worldwide. In other words, the rhetoric of Black Nationalism combined dual constructions of nationhood—nationhood conceptualized culturally and ideologically for psychological development and self-determination; and nationhood as a concrete political entity. The former designed fundamentally to offset and deconstruct centuries of debilitating and dis-empowering Eurocentric values at the roots of alienation from the American nationality. This conception of nationhood as a purely cultural, psychological and ideological entity, envisioning a kind of “non-state nation,” that is, the nurturing of strong nationality consciousness, but without the foundational landmass characteristic of a modern state. In other words, the construction of a positive and psychological portrait of African heritage was meant as much to deconstruct rationale for exclusion in America as to inspire self-deterministic aspirations toward an independent entity. The latter, the conception of nationhood external to the United States as both a demonstration of black capabilities, and also means of negating entrenched Eurocentric myths and misconceptions. Either way, the nationality dream had a strong utilitarian underpinning. The black nation represented the ultimate expression of freedom, the ultimate affirmation and demonstration of black capacity, the nation as a validating entity, the perfect anti-hegemonic force.


3 Ibid.


6 Sheldon Harris, Ibid.


10 Ibid

11 The Fugitive Slave Law of 1850 came as part of a compromise package designed to ease the growing sectional tension between the North and South over the admission of new states to the Union. Under this new law federal and state officials were now obliged to assist in apprehending and returning slave fugitives to the South. In the Dred Scott Decision of 1857, the US Supreme Court ruled against a black man (Dred Scott) who has sued for freedom on the grounds that his prior residency in a free state had invalidated his slave status. The court ruled that Dred Scott had to right to sue in a US court because blacks were not citizens. The ruling further affirmed black inferiority and declared that blacks had no rights that whites were obliged to respect.


13 Ibid.

14 Ibid


17 Delany, *The Condition*, p205

18 Ibid, p210


24 Ibid, p83.

25 Ibid

26 Ibid, p43.

27 Ibid, p44.

28 Ibid, p145.

29 Ibid, p55

30 Ibid, p143.


32 Ibid.

33 Ibid, p181.

34 Ibid, p183.

35 Adeleke, *UnAfrican Americans*

36 Ibid.

37 Ibid.

38 Ibid.

39 Ibid.


43 Ibid.

44 Ibid.


46 Ibid.


48 Ibid, p34

49 Ibid, p6

50 Ibid, p40


52 Ibid, p83.


54 Amy Jacques-Garvey, *Philosophy and Opinion*, p5


58 Ibid.

59 Ibid, p231

61 Ibid, p150

62 Ibid, p177

63 Ibid, p178


67 Ibid.


71 Ibid.

72 Joseph Eure and Richard Jerome, eds., *Back Where We Belong*, p156-157

73 Ibid

74 Ibid, p156

75 Ibid, p150-154

76 Sterling Johnson, *Black Globalism*.


79 Ibid, p202

80 Ibid, p221-227


82 Ibid, p178-179
83 Ibid.

84 Stokely Carmichael, *Stokely Speaks*, p203

85 Ibid.

86 Ibid, p23.


89 Ibid.

90 Sterling Johnson, *Black Globalism*