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Introduction

Over the course of political history in the United States, black nationalism has appeared in a number of guises. During the mid nineteenth century, under the looming shadow of the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850, Martin Delany, James T. Holly, and others argued that black people should relocate to the Caribbean, Central America, Canada, or Africa in order to establish an "African nationality." During the early 1920s, Marcus Garvey urged his followers to do the same. Dressed in military garb, topped with helmet and plume, he told black people to reject white propaganda, resettle to Africa, and redeem the race. Building partly on Garvey's legacy, in the 1960s Malcolm X also encouraged black people to separate, on the grounds that integration meant conforming to the roles and status demanded by whites in America. And Malcolm X's one-time rival and the current head of the Nation of Islam, Louis Farrakhan, offers the most visible example of an old posture. Self-determination. Reclaiming one's roots and identity. Manhood and esteem. These are the ideas that have been manifested in black nationalist movements, past and present.

But, in terms of politics, black nationalism's militant rejection of things American and European is not its most vital political feature. It hasn't always done that. As Wilson Moses has persuasively argued, nationalists before 1925 or so were assimilationists – they embraced Western culture.[1] Nor is patriarchy black nationalism's most vital feature.[2] This is a common, if not universal, characteristic of all kinds of nationalism. Nor is it, as Moses suggests, its messianic quality. All nationalism is, as Anderson notes, inherently quasi-religious.[3]

Rather, I will argue that the most politically consequential feature of black nationalism is its apparent inability to diverge from what could be considered the "normal" politics of its day. By accepting the notion that black people constitute an organic unit, and by focusing on the goal of nation building or separate political and economic development, black nationalism *inadvertently* helps to reproduce some of the thinking and

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practices that created black disadvantage in the first place. Most white Americans have long thought blacks to be essentially different; and they have used that idea to justify expelling blacks, restricting black movement, and limiting the range of rights, privileges, and opportunities available to black people. It stands to reason, then, that most attempts by black people to identify their differences from the majority population and pursue political and economic autonomy on that basis, conform to one of the oldest American political fantasies – what Ralph Ellison calls the desire to "get shut" of the Negro in America – to "banish [blacks] from the nation's bloodstream, from its social structure, and from its conscience and historical consciousness."[4]

First, some remarks about my characterization of black nationalism. For the "classical" period of black nationalism (roughly 1850–1925), I use a strict definition – activists must have worked for separate statehood. For the "modern" period, particularly the post–World War II era, I employ a broader definition to include both those who favored separate statehood, as well as self-identified "nationalists" who supported the more modest goal of black administration of vital private and public institutions. I do this for historiographical reasons. By understanding black nationalism as an affective state, or as any form of racial solidarity, scholars have often glossed over many significant distinctions and outright conflicts among historical agents. They have put forth the view that black nationalism reflects a timeless, recurring impulse that rejects integration and cultural assimilation.

For instance, numerous studies have labeled political leaders like Booker T. Washington, W. E. B. Du Bois, and Marcus Garvey as "nationalist." However, while each activist understood blacks to share a common destiny, and while each encouraged blacks to work together toward common political and economic goals, only one, Garvey, wanted a separate state. Similarly, during the Black Power era of the late 1960s a wide range of activity fell under the heading "nationalist." However, according to my formulation some of this was "purer" nationalism, while most, as I will argue in Chapter 5, is better described as a black version of ethnic pluralism.[5]

Indeed, black activists in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries operated in profoundly different intellectual and political realms from those of the modern period. They unhesitatingly valued Christianity and "civilization," understood "race" as nearly synonymous with "nation," and often thought that "nations" possessed essential traits. While these nationalists sought to establish "a distinctive tradition in art, architecture, music and letters . . . classical black nationalists did not employ the term 'cultural nationalism,' which was not coined until the twentieth century."[6]

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By contrast, modern black nationalists, especially those operating after World War II, outwardly rejected Western values, opposed "integration" as the central programmatic goal, and instead pursued projects ranging from separate statehood to black administration of key institutions of social, political, and economic life.

Characterizations of black nationalism that are broad and generally inattentive to historical context tend to encourage the view that black nationalism reflects timeless, recurring concerns in black politics, particularly its rejection of integration and acculturation into Euro-American institutions and ways of life. Following Moses, and against the view of most accounts of the historical phenomena, I set out the view that black nationalism reflects (and sometimes influences) the dominant trends concerning race and politics of specific historical periods. While black nationalists continually react to white racism across time, the sorts of ideas and the types of activism they advocate typically have homologues in the broader political and intellectual landscapes of specific historical periods. This explains why black nationalists often reproduce ideas about racial distinctiveness and calls for separate political and economic development that have often been linked to black disadvantage.

A number of anthologies published in the late 1960s and early 1970s that compile writings by black nationalist writers of the eighteenth, nineteenth, and twentieth centuries display the tendencies I have outlined here.[7] The most notable among these is Bracey, Meier, and Rudwick's *Black Nationalism in America* (1971). According to the editors, black nationalism – the basic sentiment of racial solidarity – can have a territorial, religious, bourgeois reformist, revolutionary, cultural, or religious orientation. These categories are not mutually exclusive. Under these headings, Bracey, Meier, and Rudwick place a wide range of thinkers and activists, including James T. Holly, Booker T. Washington, and Malcolm X; and they provide often-insightful historical and biographical background for the specific texts and authors they feature. However, their initial characterizations of black nationalism are so broad that they actually inhibit careful comparison across time. Indeed, as I will argue more fully in Chapter 3, their typology conceals as much as it reveals. Due to shifting political and intellectual landscapes, black nationalism of, say, 1859 shares more in common with politics and ideology of its historical context than with black nationalism of 1959. Thus, categories like "religious" and "cultural" capture the emphasis of an individual or group only after we know something about the time in which they operated.

Considering the fact that much of the secondary literature on black nationalism appeared at the height of the black liberation struggles of

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the 1960s and 1970s, we should not be surprised that scholars were not closely attentive to changes in black nationalism across time, or to the close relationship of black politics, thought, and culture to "mainstream" politics, thought, and culture. After all, these studies reflected the spirit of the times, and by the late 1960s black nationalism represented the vanguard of black radical activism and theory. By the early 1970s, the importance of the paradigm was evident in black studies programs across the country. It was also evident in black popular and scholarly journals, as well as in the fields of drama, poetry, and literature in the early 1970s.

But even more recent studies reproduce ideas of black nationalism as a tranhistorical, and hermetically sealed, phenomenon. One prominent example is Sterling Stuckey's important *Slave Culture: Nationalist Theory and the Foundations of Black America* (1987), in which he attempts to trace the roots of black nationalist theory to slave culture. After an initial chapter on slave culture, Stuckey's remaining chapters analyze various thinkers of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, including David Walker, Henry Highland Garnet, W. E. B. Du Bois, and Paul Robeson, to determine the extent to which these thinkers recognized the "Africanness" of blacks in America – their connection to forms of slave culture – and the extent to which this realization influenced their brands of nationalist ideology. Stuckey's otherwise provocative and richly researched study is bothered by the problem of loose characterization. His definition of nationalism is available only by inference; he uses the term to mean such things as belief in racial solidarity, self-help, and the idea that blacks share a common destiny. However, these basic ideas underlie the thinking of *most* black political activists, past and present; but, of course, most black political activists have not supported the goal of separate statehood, nor have they identified themselves specifically as nationalists. Nor does conscious or unconscious deference to African roots and culture determine "nationalist" consciousness. Before World War II, black nationalists did not embrace indigenous African cultures.

In an essay that seeks to characterize dominant trends in black political ideology in the post–civil rights era, Marable and Mullings also describe nationalism in terms too broad to capture historical nuance. In contrast to "inclusionists," who believe that "African-Americans are basically 'Americans who happen to be black'" and demand an end to all "sites of racial particularity and social isolation," "the orientation of black nationalism assumes that 'race' is a historically fixed category, which will not magically decline in significance over time; it suggests that blacks must define themselves within their own cultural context; and it is deeply pessimistic about the ability or willingness of white civil society

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to transform itself democratically to include the demands of people of color." Marable and Mullings add that "[c]ulturally, [black nationalism] suggests that African-Americans are African people who happen to speak English and live in America."[8] Yet while black nationalists demonstrate pessimism about the prospects for equality in the United States over time, they sometimes reject "inclusionism" or integration reluctantly. Further, their understandings of culture have varied considerably over time.

While more attentive to the political context that has defined "modern" black nationalism, William L. Van Deburg's introduction to his anthology *Modern Black Nationalism: From Marcus Garvey to Louis Farrakhan* (1997) also defines the term "black nationalism" broadly. For Van Deburg, black nationalists, like nationalists generally, place a high value "on self-definition and self-determination." They are "determined skeptics" about the prospects for interracial peace and equality, and seek to "strengthen in-group values while holding those promoted by the larger society at arm's length."[9] The editor notes that "[t]heir issue orientation may tend toward territorial, religious, economic, or cultural concerns," and he offers a "rule of thumb": "Since most people are known primarily by their deeds, if someone looks, speaks, writes, and acts like a nationalist, others may be justified in treating them as such until compelling evidence to the contrary is produced."[10] Van Deburg's criteria, particularly his rule of thumb, have limited application for historiographical purposes. Again, words do not always carry the same meaning over time. Van Deburg's formulations establish a standard of evidence that is far too broad for historical purposes. After all, many avowedly non-nationalist blacks have favored "self-determination," and many have been skeptical about the prospects for racial equality. In addition, black nationalists often share the values of the larger society even when they seek to do the opposite. Indeed, I will argue that, more often than not, nationalists share conventional assumptions common to their historical periods about "race," "culture," gender, class, and group mobility.

My argument builds on a number of insights and analyses of black nationalism which stand out with respect to the rest of the field. Wilson J. Moses's scholarship grounds the study of black nationalist thought in particular historical contexts, suggesting that "[b]lack nationalism assumes the shape of its container and undergoes transformations in accordance with changing intellectual fashions in the white world." Classical black nationalism, according to Moses, was "abolitionist, civilizationist, elitist, and based on Christian humanism. After the first world war, new tendencies arose that were relativist, culturalist, proletarian and secular."[11] Robert Hill's and Judith Stein's scholarship also challenges the notion of a "timeless" and recurring black nationalist tradition by emphasizing the historical particularity of the Garvey movement.[12]

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These studies show that while black nationalism of different eras has had recurring characteristics, these are due to responses to similar problems, all stemming from white racism. Nevertheless, across time, political and intellectual activity among black nationalists has differed enormously. There is no "essential" black nationalist tradition, despite similarities; the positions of nationalists of different eras have diverged because their nationalisms have been products of partly similar but largely unique eras of politics, thought, and culture. Missing this point can result in an ahistorical, teleological interpretation of black nationalism as an historical phenomenon.

The previous point derives from a broader one: as Ralph Ellison and others have noted, Afro-American politics and thought and "mainstream" politics and thought are *mutually constitutive*. To conceive of Afro-American politics and thought as separate from the "mainstream" is to misrepresent both sets of phenomena.

In order to make my case about black nationalism in the United States, I will begin with proposals and ideas from the nineteenth century and, bringing the analysis to the present, will offer evidence that details the changes black nationalism undergoes as the historical, political, intellectual, and economic landscape changes. By situating black nationalism in specific historical contexts, I will evaluate the phenomenon with respect to competing strategies and with respect to broader currents of American politics and thought.

Chapter 1 analyzes black nationalist ideas and projects appearing from the antebellum period to the Great Depression, concurring with Moses's finding that classical black nationalism was a conservative rather than a radical tendency in black politics.[13] Chapter 2 reconsiders the significance of Elijah Muhammad's Nation of Islam and his one-time disciple Malcolm X to black nationalist theory and practice during the post–World War II era. I argue that Elijah Muhammad provides the template for black nationalism during the postwar period and show how Malcolm X takes on enormous significance to many subsequent groups and activists as they canonize the slain leader. Chapters 3 and 4 elaborate the forms black nationalism took during the 1960s and early 1970s, and the political and discursive developments that propelled the ideology. I argue that, despite frequent and significant efforts to characterize black nationalism in the United States as one of many Third World independence movements, black nationalism in the United States typically conformed to local political and intellectual terrain. By examining black nationalist politics in the context of model cities program and especially the War on Poverty, Chapter 5 shows how and why black nationalism mostly took the form of "ethnic pluralism" – pursuit of racially soli-

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daristic efforts in a pluralistic political system subsumed by a capitalistic economic one. Chapter 6 shows that, like the classical varieties, modern nationalism shared deeper assumptions about "culture" and mobility that shaped thinking about race, acculturation, poverty, and empowerment for the better part of the twentieth century. These assumptions I call the "ethnic paradigm." Chapter 7 takes my thesis to the present, examining the two most prominent manifestations of black nationalism, the Nation of Islam under Farrakhan, and Afrocentrism as principally defined by Molefi Kete Asante.

I give special attention to the postwar period – the bulk of the study – for two reasons. First, while many studies explain black nationalism's resurgence in this period, they do not show how, nor explain why, black nationalism adapts to its local terrain, and why its radical potential is unrealized. Second, while a number of studies focus on individual groups like the Nation of Islam and the Black Panther Party, few studies systematically scrutinize the deeper, epistemological premises of black nationalist ideology during the postwar period.

Throughout my study I will invariably examine some phenomena that fail to meet my strict definition, like many forms of Black Power activism of the 1960s and early 1970s, but which have been discussed by activists and commentators as "nationalism." Similarly, in the final chapter I will discuss the mostly scholar-led Afrocentric perspective not because proponents favor separate statehood, but rather because Afrocentricity derives from "cultural" nationalist tendencies of the late 1960s and early 1970s.

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Anglo-African Nationalism

Marcus Garvey thought that the solution to the problem of black inequality required a powerful black nation in Africa. And so, beginning in 1918, he faced off against the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People and rejected the goal of "social equality." He also rejected trade unionism as a vehicle for black advancement, as well as more radical alternatives. Instead, he offered an aggressive black-politics-as-business-enterprise, and he sold his entire scheme with a militantly pro-black rhetoric. By so doing, Garvey anticipated the style of much of the black nationalism that would follow – its principled rejection of American identity, and its notion that black enterprise could somehow lay the foundation for separate statehood. Yet, despite his own and his followers' militancy, and the U.S. intelligence agencies' assumption that his UNIA posed a threat to the political order, Garvey's theories and strategies hardly escaped the conventions of his era, particularly those concerning racial purity, gender, capitalism, social Darwinism, and, most importantly, the idea that the United States was the domain of Protestant Anglo-Saxons. Garvey's failure to articulate an alternative "African" culture proved to be an important paradox. He was militantly pro-African, in a pro-European or "Eurocentric" kind of way. Most significantly, his plan to build power through enterprise failed as a short-term and as a long-term strategy. Nevertheless, his flamboyance, militantly pro-black rhetoric, and ambitious business ventures attracted hundreds of thousands of members and several times more supporters.

Garvey's nationalism embodied the past and anticipated the future. Black nationalists who preceded him, men like James T. Holly and Martin Delany in the antebellum period and Bishop Henry Turner in the 1880s and 1890s, worked to relocate the black population outside the boundaries of the United States. They shared with Garvey a certain orientation toward Western culture and capitalism, operating out of what we today would call a "Eurocentric" framework. They focused on

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the ideals of "manhood," "African nationality," Christianity, and civilization. The notion of "manhood" referred to a nineteenth-century self-concept developed by the middle class to stress "its gentility and respectability." But manhood was not only a gendered term, it also applied exclusively to the white race.[1] Black nationalists of what Moses calls the classical period (roughly 1850–1925) assumed that the proper practice of Christianity and the establishment of civilization were both means and ends to manhood and African nationality. Neither Garvey nor the black nationalists who preceded him had any intention of reclaiming African culture, as some 1960s "modern" nationalists would. They wanted to be rid of it.

Classical black nationalism mirrored what we could loosely call "white American nationalism" of the time. White American nationalism reflected a sentiment that the United States was, or ought to be, the domain of the white man. This idea, in turn, rested upon a set of notions concerning innate traits that white people in the United States supposedly had, the different traits that blacks (and others) allegedly had, and the appropriate station or social status these traits demanded. In the face of white American nationalism, some black people considered Africa, Central America, Canada, Haiti and various parts of the United States as sites for relocation.

This is where the similarities end. The landscape of black politics during the antebellum, Reconstruction, and post-Reconstruction periods differed considerably from the political context in which Garvey would operate. Garvey moved in a political landscape shaped by World War I, black migration to northern cities, extreme xenophobia, racial riots, militant unionism, and the Red Scare. Moreover, earlier black nationalists did not reject the idea of citizenship in the United States in principle; rather, as their rights were increasingly restricted and as political and economic opportunities vanished, black nationalists, or perhaps more precisely "emigrationists" or "repatriationists," hoped that they could secure a better life elsewhere. This explains why emigration schemes vanished during the period of Reconstruction, when black Americans, with support from the Republican Party, began to participate in state and national politics. By the time Garvey built his Universal Negro Improvement Association, Jim Crow had been codified in law, and Anglo-conformity – the notion that all citizens of the American republic needed to follow the ways of the WASP – had been heightened by the United States' participation in World War I and the political impact of the Bolshevik revolution.

ANGLO-SAXON NATIONALISM

Black nationalism grew out of the context of white American nationalism – the desire for, and the practices that supported, white racial

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homogeneity within the United States. White American or Anglo-Saxon nationalism took a variety of forms, the most extreme being "Indian removal." Indeed, from the earliest times, American expansion meant removing native peoples, securing land and resources for Euro-American settlement. The Civil War slowed white migration westward, but through conquest and disease, by trickery and by treaty, whites slowly seized control of more territory and confined Native Americans to less.

Many Euro-Americans imagined a nation free of black people, but the viability of slavery consistently rendered that dream impossible. Nevertheless, the idea of a nation purged of its black inhabitants appeared throughout the nineteenth century. Thomas Jefferson was one of a number of significant white statesmen who figured that blacks and whites simply couldn't coexist:

> Deep rooted prejudices entertained by the whites; ten thousand recollections, by the blacks, of the injuries they have sustained, new provocations; the real distinctions which nature has made . . . will divide us into parties and produce convulsions which will probably never end but in the extermination of one or the other race.[2]

Jefferson wasn't quite sure what created the difference in color – whether it derived from a membrane just below the skin, or whether the color of blood created the pigment. But he concluded that the differences between races were real, because they were "fixed in nature." He called for a government agency that would deport free "Africans" and replace them with European immigrants.[3]

Abraham Lincoln also considered a colonization scheme. His reasoning grew out of the crisis of the Civil War, and his thoughts about what to do about free blacks were based on an assumption that racial prejudice was a permanent feature of American politics. Lincoln presented his own argument for black colonization in an "Address on Colonization to a Committee of Colored Men" in 1862: "even when you cease to be slaves, you are yet far removed from being placed on equality with the white race . . . It is better for us both, therefore, to be separated."[4] Lincoln favored Central America, and an appointed select committee produced a bill that would compensate former owners of the emancipated slaves of the border states, and colonize these freedmen outside the United States.

Decades before Lincoln thought seriously about colonization, the American Colonization Society (ACS) pursued a similar idea until they established the colony of Liberia in 1822. The founders of this society had various motives. Some thought that free blacks in the United States were a dangerous population that displayed poor work habits and criminal tendencies. Some thought that free blacks might trigger a revolt

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