

# AN INDEPENDENT BLACK POLITICAL PARTY: POSING AN ALTERNATIVE TO ASSES, ELEPHANTS AND RAINBOWS

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*“Any action, regardless of its motives, is sterile unless it produces practical and concrete results.”<sup>1</sup>*

*“[S]egregation is that which is done to inferiors by superiors. Separation is done voluntarily by two people. . . . Chinatown is never called a segregated community, but the so-called Negro community is always called a segregated community. The reason Chinatown is not regarded as a segregated community is that Chinese in Chinatown control all their own businesses, all their own banks, their own politics, their own everything, whereas in the so-called Negro community everything is controlled by outsiders. We live in a regulated or segregated community.”<sup>2</sup>*

*“who’s gonna make all  
that beautiful blk/rhetoric  
mean something.  
like  
i mean  
who’s gonna take the words  
blk/is/beautiful  
and make more of it  
than blk/capitalism.  
u dig?  
i mean  
like who’s gonna  
take all the young/long/haired  
natural/brothers and sisters  
and let them grow till  
all that is impt is themselves  
moving in straight/revolutionary/lines  
toward the enemy (and we know who that is)  
like, man.  
who’s gonna give our young  
blk/people new heroes  
(instead of catch/phrases)  
(instead of cad/ill/acs)  
(instead of pimps)  
(instead of wite/whores)  
(instead of drugs)*

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1. A. CABRAL, RETURN TO THE SOURCE: SELECTED SPEECHES OF AMILCAR CABRAL (1975).  
2. MALCOLM X, THE END OF WHITE WORLD SUPREMACY 75 (1971).

*(instead of new dances)*  
*(instead of chit/ter/lings)*  
*(instead of quick/fucks in the hall/way*  
*of wite/america's mind)*  
*like. this. is an S O S*  
*me. calling. . . . .*  
*calling. . . . .*  
*some/one*  
*please reply soon.*"<sup>3</sup>

#### DEDICATION

To Uliza, my light, my completion, my goal, my wife — May my words and my analysis meet the high expectations we share, and the high achievements that are the necessities for our race.

To Cabral, my inspiration, my reflection, my son — May my work inspire you to continue building for our people, and for eternity.

And to African America — Our reality is struggle, our aim is Umoja — Unity — and our goal is liberation. May we be as willing to be led as to lead, as willing to fight as to pray, and as willing to die as to be free.

#### INTRODUCTION

The history of African Americans\* in the United States has been one of constant and continuous oppression and exploitation. The fact of our survival, and the evidence of our determination to achieve freedom and dignity are legend. Within that heroic history exists a rich chapter on the attempts of African Americans to extract that freedom from engagement in the political process. Our previous history and present status speak to the failure of those in power to realistically respond to our needs and desires. It is the contention of this author that by design and implementation this political system cannot offer freedom to African American people. That freedom must be defined by African Americans and must be *taken* by us. Long ago Frederick Douglass admonished us to recognize that "If there is no struggle, there is no progress. Power concedes nothing without a demand. It never did and it never will."<sup>4</sup>

The means available to achieve these ends are many. But none lies within

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3. S. SANCHEZ, *WE A BADDDDDD PEOPLE* 15-6 (1970).

\* — African American people refer to themselves by many names. This author prefers to use the appellation "African American" to describe this nation of people. This name identifies where we came from, our historical and ancestral home, as well as our actual and present home. It also describes the dual character of our existence that DuBois enunciated so clearly at the turn of this century.

This author uses the convention, common amongst all other ethnic and racial groups in the United States, of capitalizing the term "African American". This is done not only to continue convention, but also to make a statement about the equality with which we as a people see our place in this society. Since African Americans have historically called themselves by many different names, and have been called by many names by others, this manuscript presents more than one usage. However, the author is consistent in using "African American" wherever he is the creator of the text. But, the term "white" is not capitalized. This decision is based on the fact that "white" is a term used to connote a race of people, whereas the term "African American" connotes both a racial and cultural differentiation that requires capitalization. These designations parallel current convention in the social sciences.

4. Conyers, Jr. *Toward Black Political Empowerment: Can the System be Transformed?*, 7

the confines of the traditional two party system. Hence, this Comment proposes the creation of a third party, an all-African American party. This author is under no illusions that the freedom we seek will be granted should African Americans organize into a cohesive voting bloc. However, the author is willing to admit that such a result is possible. In the meantime, the organization of our people is a vitally important necessity. And, should the two party system act true to form and not grant our demands, we will still have the necessary organizational cohesion to pursue other alternatives.

This proposal for an Independent Black Political Party (IBPP) does not emanate from the analytical meandering. On the contrary, African American history is replete with attempts to organize political parties to gain redress using the electoral system. These attempts, both as part of parties dominated by whites, and parties made up completely of African Americans, have left us a rich legacy from which to project the shape and substance of a proposed Independent Black Political Party. Thus, this Comment will begin with some definitions of power and politics. It will then move to a recapitulation of the history of African American involvement in politics, including an analysis of its successes and failures. That history will set the backdrop for the proposed Independent Black Political Party.

#### POWER AND POLITICS: DEFINITIONS

In 1969, African American political analyst Chuck Stone wrote [W]e should examine how black people can rise to a position of massive political empowerment that does three things: controls the black community, proportionately controls the decision-making apparatus of a white racist government and guarantees black survival. This can only be done by acquiring political power. There is no other recourse.<sup>5</sup>

African American theorist and ideologue Dr. Maulana Karenga writes [T]he essence of politics is power which can be defined as the social capacity of a group to realize its will, even in opposition to others. . . . The assumption here then, is that the presence of conflict in society is normal, rather than abnormal and that its most severe forms are rooted in the struggle for power and the values it provides and protects . . . . another way to define power is as a group's capacity to define, defend and develop its interests . . . . power in society is ultimately determined by a people's *relationship to the state*.<sup>6</sup>

Karenga goes on to note that the state uses two institutions to control: These are the institutions of dominance, i.e., coercion . . . and political socialization. . . . The instruments of political socialization represent the right and ability to define social reality and the instruments of domination represent the power of the state to make its definition stick.<sup>7</sup>

Stone sees political power as "government control or the ability to decide who shall control."<sup>8</sup> Former SNCC leader and leader of the All-African Peo-

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BLACK SCHOLAR, Oct. 1975, at 7. Taken from a speech delivered at the West India Emancipation celebration in Canandaigua, New York, on August 4, 1857.

5. Stone, *Black Politics: Third Force, Third Party or Third-class Influence?*, 1 BLACK SCHOLAR, Dec. 1969, at 8.

6. M. KARENGA, INTRODUCTION TO BLACK STUDIES 227-29 (1982).

7. *Id.* at 229.

8. Stone, *supra*, note 5 at 8.

ple's Revolutionary Party, Kwame Ture (Stokley Carmichael), adds a different perspective to the definition of political power:

In *Politics Among Nations*, Hans Morgenthau defined political power as 'the psychological control over the minds of men'. . . . This control includes the attempt by the oppressor to have *his* definitions, *his* historical descriptions, *accepted* by the oppressed. . . . The concept of Black Power rests on a fundamental premise: *Before a group can enter the open society, it must first close ranks*. By this we mean that group solidarity is necessary before a group can operate effectively from a bargaining position of strength in a pluralistic society.<sup>10</sup>

Activist Ron Daniels discusses the strategies available to African Americans given the power relations that exist in United States. The strategy entitled reform includes-

1. [taking] control of all institutions of critical importance to black people, and 2.- develop[ing] black-controlled cultural, educational and economic programs, projects and institutions which foster self-development of the masses of black people; Reconstruction, which focuses on eliminat[ion of] the present system of racism, capitalism, and imperialism; and Working Political Relationships—Alliances & Coalitions, touching agendas, which focuses on work with other oppressed nationalities and groups where deemed necessary, appropriate and in the best interests of the national black community<sup>11</sup>

African Americans lack political power as defined here. The reasons for this deficiency are many: a historic repression and denial of our humanity and our rights in this country, an ongoing and systematic denial of access to the political process, our historic lack of resources, the coopting, controlling and killing of our leaders, the confusions as to our goals, and our enduring belief that those who oppress us have enough humanity in them that we can convince them to change their ways and give us our due.

Given the limited nature of political power presently available to African Americans, and the strategies available to effect power, one may wonder what attempts have been made by African Americans to gain input into the political process, and what have been the results?

#### TRADITIONAL PARTY POLITICS

Though many African Americans would argue the point, most analysts of the political arena agree that neither the Democrats nor the Republicans have made a serious commitment to empowering African Americans.

Both parties have betrayed us whenever their interests conflicted with ours (which has been most of the time), and whenever our forces were, unorganized and dependent, quiescent and compliant . . . by now we must know that the American political system, like all other white institutions in America, was designed to operate for the benefit of the white race. . . .<sup>12</sup>

Political scientist Ron Walters points out that white candidates are accustomed to taking African American politicians for granted.

9. H. MORGENTHAU, *POLITICS AMONG NATIONS* 29 (1962).

10. S. CARMICHAEL & C. HAMILTON, *BLACK POWER: THE POLITICS OF LIBERATION IN AMERICA* 29, 35, 44 (1967).

11. Daniels, *The National Black Political Assembly: Building Independent Black Politics in the 1980s*, 11 *BLACK SCHOLAR*, Mar.-Apr. 1980, at 40.

12. *Id.* at 32.

It would be incorrect to say that such politicians have no strategy and are, therefore, corruptible, but that they have adopted a strategy of personal gain tied to tact[ic]s of personal loyalties to white politicians, even at the sacrifice of the advancement of the total black community.<sup>13</sup>

And Richard Hatcher, the first African American mayor of Gary, Indiana, noted that patience and faith, two primary attributes of the African American personality, have been used against us by the major parties in the past:

In our infinite patience, we have tried year after year, election after election, to work with the two major political parties. We believed the pledges, believed the platforms, believed the promises, each time hoping they would not again be sold out . . . hoping . . . hoping . . . always hoping.

We are through believing. We are through hoping. We are through trusting in the two major white American political parties. Hereafter, we shall rely on the power of our own black unity.<sup>14</sup>

One result of this abuse of African American collective humanity is the discouragement of the African American voter. As Walters points out, over time, the statistical percentages of African Americans voting in major elections has declined, although the Jesse Jackson presidential campaign may change this.

[T]he slippage in the number of blacks that vote every four years may be accounted for by the increasing number who are either not interested in politics or not interested in the candidates, either way a manifestation of a high level of alienation." . . . There are two sources- the general level of alienation in society; and ignorance of the successful use of politics in the black community to solve short-run issues, and on the other hand, "the knowledge or perception that most of our black elected officials and assorted politicians have no power, that many of them are hustlers and rip-off artists, and that they basically represent an extension of the white community and its domination of the black community."<sup>15</sup>

By way of illustrating the powerlessness of the African American vote, some analysts point out that only in close elections does that bloc vote, given to one candidate, affect the outcome. The number of African Americans that hold high elected office is another indication of the power of the African American in the political arena.

Only in the 1960 Presidential election, did black people play a decisive role for the first time in history in a national election. [The African American vote was also decisive in electing Carter in 1976]. . . [That] blind single-party loyalty has given blacks- nine black Congressmen out of 435; allowed the Democrats to oust Adam Clayton Powell with impunity; [and the] Republicans aren't trying to woo us, and don't count us when they are in office.<sup>16</sup>

The history of American politics has shown that third parties and third forces have been able to disrupt the two party system at times by-

1. becoming a dominant force in itself. In 1854, the Republican party was a third party, but became a major party. In 1912, Teddy Roosevelt ran on the "progressive party" ticket, and split the Republican vote so that Wilson won with less votes than the two republican candidates.
2. becoming a cohesive force which shifts its political loyalty as a

13. Walters, *Strategy for 1976: A Black Political Party*, 7 BLACK SCHOLAR, Oct. 1975, at 12.

14. Hatcher, *Black Politics in the '70's*, 4 BLACK SCHOLAR, Sept. 1972, at 18.

15. Walters *supra*, note 13, at 9-10.

16. Stone *supra*, note 5, at 10-11.

'balance of power,' either as a 'third force' or as a Third Party." Third forces have been the Catholic, Jewish, and labor vote. Third parties are like the liberal party that got Lindsay elected mayor of New York in the 1960's.<sup>17</sup>

African American leaders from all ends of the political spectrum have commented on the powerlessness that the two party system perpetuates in the African American community. In his famous speech "The Ballot or the Bullet," El Hajj Malik el Shabazz (Malcolm X) said: "In this present administration (1964) they have in the House of Representatives 257 Democrats to only 177 Republicans. They control two-thirds of the House vote. Why can't they pass something that will help you and me?"<sup>18</sup>

A potent illustration of the powerlessness of African Americans was manifest when the racist governor of Alabama, George Wallace, ran for president on an independent party ticket in 1968. When Wallace formed his independent party in 1968, "black politicians saw that their hoped-for political influence with the two major parties had evaporated and that the two parties were moving toward Wallace's side of the street."<sup>19</sup>

After loyally voting Republican for many years, from the Civil War up to the Great Depression, African Americans abruptly switched their vote to the Democrats, convinced that the New Deal of the Franklin Roosevelt administration promised a significant place for African Americans in the mainstream of American society. Thereafter, African Americans have continued to support the Democrats because their platforms are more favorable to the socio-economic issues facing African Americans; because they have been supportive of civil rights for African Americans since the Roosevelt administration; because group cohesiveness reinforces itself once established; because socialization into a given party tends to persist; and because the Republicans offer no alternative on socio-economic and civil rights issues.<sup>20</sup>

This long history of powerlessness has led analysts to some sobering realizations. Robert Parris Moses, a former strategist in the voting rights movement says that "Working the electoral system has resulted in very dramatic gains for a very small segment of the black population. . . It just takes time for people to get it through their bones that the electoral system really isn't going to work for them."<sup>21</sup>

Adam Clayton Powell, who rose to be the most powerful African American on the American political scene in the 1950's and early 1960's, recognized the need for African Americans to vote collectively, and to hold those candidates they elect accountable to them in terms of delivering goods and services. In his Black Position Paper on Black Power, he listed criteria for participation by African Americans in mainstream politics. Among them were:

that the Black masses must demand and refuse to accept nothing less than that proportionate percentage of the political spoils, such as jobs, elective offices, and appointments, that are equal to their proportion of the popula-

17. *Id.* at 9.

18. MALCOLM X, *The Ballot or the Bullet*, in WHAT COUNTRY HAVE I?: POLITICAL WRITINGS BY BLACK AMERICANS 149-50 (H. Storing ed. 1970).

19. H. WALTON, JR., BLACK POLITICAL PARTIES 57 (1972).

20. M. KARENGA *supra*, note 6, at 236.

21. Bussey, *Civil Rights Leaders of '60s Take Different Paths As Movement Evolves, Issues Get More Complex*, Wall St. J., Nov. 2, 1987, at 60, col. 1.

tion and their voting strength; and that . . . Black people must support and push black candidates for political office first, operating on the principle of 'all other things being equal.'<sup>22</sup>

Where black politicians elect to work *within* the system by remaining Democrat or a Republican, black people should only support them if — and this is important — if they are responsive first to black people and place the black community first in their commitment to the political process.<sup>23</sup>

Walters points out that

“some Black politicians understand that the way to bargain during national elections is to come to the table with a plan, and the credibility of the threat to exercise sanctions on the Party which does not agree with the bargaining objectives . . . the way to arrive at the construction of a credible threat is through exercising the discipline necessary to arrive at a unified organization capable of flexible responses. . . . What keeps the black leadership from espousing the creation of a black political party . . . [is that] any deviation away from the traditional religion is defined as ‘unrealistic’ or ‘naive’ or-the final blow- ‘radical.’ ”

*The question is, do they fear the steady deterioration in the survival of black people more. . . . The Black Political Party is the instrument through which the national black community might organize itself into the necessary weapon by disciplining its votes.”<sup>24</sup>*

The great promise of the two party system is empowerment. For African Americans this is an illusion not borne out by the garnering of goods, services or power in return for our vote. Instead, our allegiance has either been taken for granted by the Democrats or boldly ignored by the party of Lincoln. Our continuing patience and faith has borne us no fruit. Since these attempts at integrating into the Republican and Democratic parties has gotten few benefits for African Americans, separation into an independent party not only cannot hurt African Americans any more than our present situation, but it will probably benefit us as we build a sense of unity and organize in our best interests.

### HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

For much of the period during which white scholars acknowledge the presence of Africans in the western hemisphere,<sup>25</sup> and more specifically within the confines of what is called the United States, Africans were not allowed to vote. For these Africans, the Revolutionary War that won independence of the thirteen British colonies from England had no effect in altering their status as chattel slaves. The Constitution, as adopted by the incorporators of the United States, counted Africans as three-fifths of a person for tax purposes.<sup>26</sup> During the ratification process of the Constitution, in addition to extending slavery twenty years, “Negroes, like other valuable articles of commerce,

22. POWELL, ADAM BY ADAM: THE AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF ADAM CLAYTON POWELL, JR. 247 (1971).

23. Stone *supra*, note 5, at 12.

24. Walters *supra*, note 13, at 13-14.

25. Dr. Ivan Van Sertima asserts the presence of Africans in this hemisphere long before the arrival of Christopher Columbus. I. VAN SERTIMA, THEY CAME BEFORE COLUMBUS 1976.

26. Article 1, Section 2 of the Constitution states, in pertinent part that direct taxes would be determined by adding, “to the whole Number of free Persons . . . three fifths of all other persons.” U.S. CONST. art. I, § 2.

could be taxed at ten dollars a head."<sup>27</sup> The political status of the free Negro was left to the states to decide, but escape to a free state did not free the slave; they were to be returned.

It is in this arena that African American political involvement began and continued over the years. Early independent parties either alienated African Americans or made policies with reference to them ineffective due to their prejudice. These were integrated parties which sought the African American vote to win elections and not to address their needs; or, if the party lost an election, they blamed the African American as an obstacle to progressive reform.<sup>28</sup>

Yet these parties showed many positive qualities, facets that can be duplicated today in an Independent Black Political Party. They were created and maintained in an atmosphere of adversity. They were created using few resources, and drew from a membership that was, for the most part, poor. They were able to promise little beyond dedication to the empowerment of African Americans and a commitment to freedom. They created and trained many African American leaders. They espoused values that were different, above, and in contradiction with the values held by the dominant parties. They did not have much success electing people to office. But like the African American church, they provided ways for the community to come together and to organize for their own protection and benefit.

Thus, to look at these parties without this backdrop in mind is to miss the real story they tell—struggle against odds; unifying an oppressed people; creating organizations that worked in their name and in their best interest; teaching an enslaved people how to work within the system that oppressed them to try and extract some benefits; raising a moral agenda for a morally bankrupt political arena; daring to take the life of African America into their own hands and attempt to reshape their destiny. Through these parties issues were raised, concessions were made by those in power, and the African American position(s) were articulated and taken seriously. These issues, and the African Americans who gained political office and other jobs as a result of the existence and pressure of these parties, are the successes that present possibilities for an Independent Black Political Party.

Formal involvement in politics began in the 1830's with the abolitionist movement. The first party that allowed participation by African Americans was the Liberty Party. The Liberty Party had but one principle, opposition to slavery.<sup>29</sup> In the National Liberty Convention of 1841, James Birney, the chief figure in the party, called for the extension of voting rights to Negroes and increased Negro participation in political affairs.<sup>30</sup> The Reverend Henry Highland Garnet joined the Liberty Party in 1840, feeling that it put no barriers in the way of African Americans engaging in politics.<sup>31</sup> Frederick Douglass differed with Garnet on the issue of political participation and the Liberty Party. He said: "We were opposed to carrying the anti-slavery cause

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27. WALTON, *supra*, note 19, at 64.

28. L. KILLIAN, *THE IMPOSSIBLE REVOLUTION?* 28 (1968).

29. H. WALTON, JR., *THE NEGRO IN THIRD PARTY POLITICS* 11 (1969).

30. *Id.* at 13.

31. E. OFARI, "LET YOUR MOTTO BE RESISTANCE": THE LIFE AND THOUGHT OF HENRY HIGHLAND GARNET 22 (1972).

to the ballot-box, and they believed in carrying it there. They looked at slavery as a creature of law; we regarded it as a creature of public opinion."<sup>32</sup> Another African American critic of the Liberty Party observed:

'The professed object of this party is to secure the rights of *colored men* in THIS country; [but] they have given no opportunity to the poor colored man to speak for himself, by placing him in the legislature where he *ought* to be heard with themselves. . . In view of this state of things, what better is this third abolition *party* for us than either of the other parties?"<sup>33</sup>

In 1849, the Free Soil Party was formed. It was an anti-slavery party, but was against political and social equality for African Americans fearing that such a stand would alienate potential supporters.

The Free Soil doctrine was a much greater threat to southern interests than was radical abolitionism. This doctrine demanded only that slavery be prohibited in the new territories being organized in the West. It conceded the constitutional right of the states to legalize slavery, but sought to stop the spread of the institution.<sup>34</sup>

When the Liberty party ran its equal rights platform in the 1852 presidential elections, the Free Soil Party was doomed.<sup>35</sup>

Though these parties, and others that sprung up and died in this era-battled fiercely among themselves, nothing in their struggles concerned the right of black people to claim and deeply share America . . . when they asked what principles should dictate policy toward black people, these white leaders continued to see blacks essentially as objects. Their principles were the principles of white supremacy."<sup>36</sup>

But these third parties did provide some African Americans with their first exposure to politics, and a few leaders achieved high positions which became springboards to leadership positions.<sup>37</sup>

But in the meantime, slavery continued unabated, and not all African Americans saw the political process as the means to their freedom. Many saw emigration back to Africa as the only viable alternative. Among this group was Martin Delaney, a so-called "freedman." He led an expedition up the Niger River in the 1850's in the hope of finding land and settling it along with other African Americans who would emigrate there. His analysis of the power of the vote for African Americans was that

[t]here has, of late years, been a false impression obtained, that the privilege of *voting* constitutes, or necessarily embodies, the *rights of citizenship*. A more radical error never obtained favor among an oppressed people. . . To have the 'right of suffrage,' as we rather proudly term it, is simply to have the *privilege*-there is no *right* about it-of giving our *approbation* to that which our *rulers may do*, without the privilege, on our part, of doing the same thing.<sup>38</sup>

As if to lend credence to Delaney's perception of African American powerlessness, the United States Supreme Court handed down the Dred Scott deci-

32. F. DOUGLASS, *THE LIFE AND TIMES OF FREDERICK DOUGLASS* 229 (1962).

33. V. HARDING, *THERE WAS A RIVER: THE BLACK STRUGGLE FOR FREEDOM IN AMERICA* 135-36 (1981).

34. L. KILLIAN *supra*, note 28, at 29.

35. Foner, *Politics and Prejudice: The Free Soil Party and the Negro 1849-1852*, 50 J. NEGRO HIST., Jan. 1965, at 251.

36. HARDING, *supra*, note 33, at 155-156.

37. WALTON, *supra*, note 29, at 21.

38. F. ROLLIN, *LIFE AND PUBLIC SERVICES OF MARTIN R. DELANEY* 328-29 (1969).

sion,<sup>39</sup> which “upheld the Fugitive Slave Law, opened Federal territory to slavery, and denied citizenship rights to American negroes.”<sup>40</sup>

With the advent of Civil War and Lincoln “emancipating” the African Americans ostensibly to save the Union,<sup>41</sup> political activity by African Americans died down for a while. But no sooner had the South been defeated when the southern states instituted the Black Codes. These were a series of edicts specifically designed to deny the newly freed slaves any rights so that they would not be able to alter their status, and hence the status of the South, and of the country as a whole.<sup>42</sup> These codes were symbolic of an era of terror and repression that eloquently spoke of the intention of white people to maintain their control of the South, and to keep African Americans subjugated.

On the political level, the thirteenth, fourteenth, and fifteenth amendments were passed, officially abolishing slavery, granting to African Americans a citizenship they never were allowed to choose and a due process they continue to be denied, and a vote (for the men only) that was soon to be taken away.<sup>43</sup> But politics was a volatile arena during this era, and votes were a precious commodity. “Desperate for votes after the Civil War, the Republicans hastened to recruit us. And vote Republican we did—at least twice saving the presidency for our new masters.”<sup>44</sup> Historian Benjamin Quarles notes that Frederick Douglass “believed that participation in political life was the normal condition of man. On the other hand, the Radicals (aside from [William] Sumner) were completely indifferent to the Negro’s political capacity. They looked upon Negro suffrage as a means of punishing the South as a guaranty that the control of the national government would remain in Republican hands.”<sup>45</sup>

As white Americans tried to consolidate their power, African Americans continued to use their newly won rights, combined with the instability of a war-torn country, to press for political empowerment. Many African Americans were elected to both state and national offices.<sup>46</sup> In 1872, the Equal Rights Party “nominated the first woman candidate for the presidency, and the first negro candidate for the vice-presidency.”<sup>47</sup> (Frederick Douglass, a staunch advocate for womens’ rights, as well as the rights of African Americans, was the vice presidential candidate.) The party platform advocated equal rights for women as property-holders, and the right to vote for women. This party was unsuccessful, but it did raise the consciousness of the African American community as to the viability in seeking and attaining high national office.

Retrenchment by the white South, however, soon brought any hopes of real change to a halt. In 1876, a compromise was made between northern Republicans and southern Democrats to choose a president. “Federal troops,

39. *Dred Scott v. Sanford*, 60 U.S. (19 How.) 393 (1857).

40. C. STONE, *BLACK POLITICAL POWER IN AMERICA* 103 (1968).

41. L. BENNETT, JR., *CONFRONTATION: BLACK AND WHITE* 63-64 (1965).

42. HARDING, *supra*, note 33, at 312.

43. L. BENNETT, JR., *BEFORE THE MAYFLOWER: A HISTORY OF THE NEGRO IN AMERICA: 1619-1964* at 181, 224 (1964).

44. Hatcher *supra*, note 14, at 18.

45. L. KILLIAN *supra*, note 28, at 33.

46. *See, e.g.*, J. FRANKLIN, *FROM SLAVERY TO FREEDOM* 315-43 (3d. ed. 1969).

47. H. WALTON, JR. *supra*, note 29, at 33.

which the Negroes had relied on for protection, were withdrawn from the South, in exchange for the support by the Southern Democrats of the Republican presidential candidate Hayes.<sup>48</sup> A hands-off policy toward the Negro question in the former slave-holding states was instituted. In 1883, the Supreme Court held that the Civil Rights Acts of 1875 were unconstitutional. Thereafter, the Negro was removed from political office by any means, and were put in their place.

After Reconstruction, as the Democrats moved to gain total control of the South, the Republicans reorganized a lily-White Republican party to maintain some voting strength. African American people, seeing no alternatives, organized parallel parties in several states, called Black and Tan Republican parties, using existing structures to try to achieve goals.<sup>49</sup> Though these parties were unsuccessful in winning political offices, they did serve valuable functions as educational vehicles for a newly enfranchised (and newly disenfranchised) African American electorate, and as a tool to organize African American communities to combat retrenchment through unified struggle.

Nonetheless, African Americans continued to organize on a political party level. In December, 1886, the first African American political organization was formed in Texas. Known as the Colored Farmers' Alliance, it later became a national organization, the Negro Alliance. Eventually the Negro Alliance joined with a parallel white alliance, but they later separated over the Jim Crow disenfranchisement,<sup>50</sup> which returned African Americans to political and economic powerlessness.

Soon thereafter, African American political party activity arose in the North. T. Thomas Fortune, a prominent African American activist and journalist, boldly proclaimed "Race first, Party Second," as the only approach that African Americans should take.<sup>51</sup> He founded The National Afro-American League (NAAL) in 1890. Its successor, the National Equal Rights League (NERL) also used peaceful and legal methods of quasi-political nature. Both sought equal rights for African Americans. Neither was successful.<sup>52</sup>

In 1892, the Populist Party was formed in St. Louis. An alliance of labor and farm groups and poor whites, they sought African American support. This party posed a serious threat to the dominance of the two main parties in the election of 1896. Thereafter it declined. It had a hard time ever getting African American support because they were all solidly committed to the Republican party, the party of Lincoln.<sup>53</sup>

In 1896, the *Plessy v. Ferguson*<sup>54</sup> case upheld the doctrine of separate but equal. This doctrine resulted in racial segregation in all aspects of public life in the South.<sup>55</sup>

In 1904, the all African American National Liberty Party was formed. The party chose George Edwin Taylor to run for president. Though the party

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48. *Id.* at 37.

49. WALTON, *supra*, note 19, at 25.

50. *Id.* at 38-39.

51. Ofari, *Independent Black Politics: An Old Idea*, 15 BLACK SCHOLAR, Sept.-Oct. 1984, at 21.

52. WALTON, *supra*, note 19, at 49.

53. *Id.* at 41-42.

54. 163 U.S. 537 (1896).

55. C. STONE, *supra*, note 40, at 103.

was not successful, it kept the protest against racism and violence against African Americans alive.<sup>56</sup>

In 1908, Monroe Trotter, the African American activist from Boston, formed a political party.

Trotter's group, the Negro-American Political League, was virtually all black. . . . A complex of motives lay behind his insistence that *his* group, at least, must be black-led. On a tactical level, he knew that whites in any racial group would have a moderating function, and he did not want to waste his time arguing for radical approaches with men from the other side of the color line. On a philosophical level, he thought it only proper that blacks should lead and finance a movement for their own freedom.<sup>57</sup>

This party grew out of a dispute between Trotter and W.E.B. DuBois and the white people responsible for the Niagara movement, which resulted in the formation of the National Association for the Advancement of Coloured People (NAACP). Trotter's disagreement was based on his distrust of the motives of white people.<sup>58</sup>

In 1915, *Guinn v. United States*<sup>59</sup> held that the Southern states' "grandfather clause" was unconstitutional. Specifically the case dealt with the clause in the Oklahoma constitution.<sup>60</sup> The grandfather clause was a device used to disenfranchise African Americans by making them prove that their grandfather had voted as a prerequisite for them to vote. Slavery having been officially abolished for fifty years when this decision was rendered, there were already many African Americans who could qualify to vote in spite of this clause.

About this time, Marcus Garvey came to the United States and began to build the United Negro Improvement Association (UNIA). For much of its existence, the UNIA disavowed the political arena, and concentrated on organizing and on economic ventures. The overall program echoed that of Martin Delaney — back to Africa. However, in 1924, the UNIA Convention acted on the decision of a committee, "and the Universal Negro Political Union was formed . . . Garveyites in their respective localities decided who best served their needs and aspirations in legislatures."<sup>61</sup>

In 1927, a year after the Garvey was convicted of mail fraud, dealing the UNIA a severe blow,<sup>62</sup> the Supreme Court struck down the "White" primary in *Nixon v. Herndon*<sup>63</sup> This case, came from Texas, opened primaries to African American voters, and was an important breakthrough for African American political activity in the South.<sup>64</sup>

In 1930, an important international event occurred. A resolution of the Communist International recognized African American people as an oppressed nation in the Black Belt of the South. They led a fight for self-determination that included the right to separate, but did not exclude the right to federate. With the dissolution of the Communist Party in 1944, the Black Belt

56. WALTON, *supra*, note 19, at 51.

57. S. FOX, *THE GUARDIAN OF BOSTON: WILLIAM MONROE TROTTER* 140 (1970).

58. FRANKLIN *supra*, note 46, at 446.

59. 238 U.S. 347 (1915).

60. C. STONE, *supra*, note 40, at 103.

61. A. GARVEY, *GARVEY & GARVEYISM* 96 (1963).

62. BENNETT, *supra*, note 41, at 126.

63. 273 U.S. 536 (1927).

64. C. STONE, *supra*, note 40, at 103.

nation thesis died, and later Communist Party USA conventions saw African-American people as a national minority.<sup>65</sup> During this same period, the Socialist Party was vying for support by African Americans. However, "the Socialist Party failed among Negroes because it offered him no panacea for prejudice and caste but assumed that the uplift of the white worker would automatically emancipate the black worker. The party had nothing special to offer the Negro."<sup>66</sup> By this time, the NAACP had become active in utilizing the court system to seek redress for the racism and violence that remain realities of African American life to this day.

With the rise of the Depression, and the involvement of the United States in World War II, there was little time for organizing along African American political lines. In 1947, the Supreme Court, *Shelley v. Kraemer*<sup>67</sup> declared that "the Federal and state courts could not enforce restrictive covenants designed to prevent negroes from buying property."<sup>68</sup> Then, in 1954, the Supreme Court handed down the decision in *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka*<sup>69</sup> which "declared public-school segregation unconstitutional and stated that the separate-but-equal doctrine could not be enforced any more."<sup>70</sup> These advancements in the legal equality had little effect on the day-to-day racism faced by African Americans. Thus, while African American party formation was dormant, the need for such a party remained great.

The late 1950's saw the rise of the Civil Rights movement, with Martin Luther King as its leader and spokesman.<sup>71</sup> In 1960, the Afro-American Party, an all African American Party, was launched, with the majority of its strength concentrated in Alabama. Its platform consisted of equality and justice for African Americans.<sup>72</sup>

The March on Washington in 1963 launched the all African American Freedom Now Party. "Whites panicked, saying that this was not the way. Chair of the Committee Conrad Lynn said the party was designed to be a 'constructive form of revolt' "<sup>73</sup> The party's platform consisted of taking principled positions in an effort to forge racial unity. The National Civil Rights Party was formed in 1963.<sup>74</sup>

Subsequent to World War II, various organizations held positions on the Black Belt thesis. These positions "ranged from the viewpoint that the African-American people are not a nation unless they will to become a nation, to the position that the African-American people are a nation of people in the southern part of the United States with definable territorial boundaries."<sup>75</sup> The goal of those who advocate the Black Belt thesis continues to be a five-state union consisting of Mississippi, Louisiana, Alabama, Georgia, and South Carolina.<sup>76</sup> This separatist ideology was espoused by the Nation of Islam dur-

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65. J. FORMAN, *SELF-DETERMINATION & THE AFRICAN-AMERICAN PEOPLE* 70 (1981).

66. H. WALTON, JR. *supra*, note 29, at 67.

67. 334 U.S. 1 (1947).

68. C. STONE, *supra*, note 40, at 103.

69. 347 U.S. 483 (1954).

70. C. Stone, *supra* note 40, at 103.

71. See, e.g., FRANKLIN, *supra*, note 46, at 619-34.

72. H. WALTON, JR. *supra*, note 29, at 78.

73. Worthy, *An All Black Party*, 3 *LIBERATOR*, Oct. 1963, at 18.

74. M. KARENGA *supra*, note 6, at 237.

75. J. FORMAN *supra*, note 65, at 70.

76. I. OBADELE, *WAR IN AMERICA: THE MALCOLM X DOCTRINE* 55 (1968).

ing the era of Elijah Muhammad.<sup>77</sup> Muhammad called for “‘a separate nation for ourselves, right here in America. . . . To integrate with evil is to be destroyed with evil. Justice for us . . . is to be set apart.’”<sup>78</sup> El Hajj Malik el Shabazz (Malcolm X) said that the Nation of Islam abstained from voting as a method of voting.<sup>79</sup> The Republic of New Afrika and its successor organization, the New Afrikan People's Organization also advocate establishing an independent nation in the Black Belt states.<sup>80</sup>

While agreeing on the need to organize toward an independent existence, the African People's Socialist Party, disagrees on the absolute focus on the land question. Their leader, Omali Yeshitela, wrote that:

“the land question is being used by bourgeois elements to limit it to a struggle to achieve land *ownership*. The land question does not address the issue of land and black nationality. But it does bring the issue of political independence and self-determination to the surface.”<sup>81</sup>

Their position is that our struggle is of a dual character- liberation and unification of Africa under a socialist government as a means of realizing our national identity, and “to fight for liberation wherever we are located in order to deal with the oppressive conditions of existence we are confronted with”.<sup>82</sup>

Four parallel Black parties, parties that mirror the two dominant parties, but which are populated by people dissatisfied with those parties, were also formed in the 1960's. They were the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party, formed in 1964; Lowndes County Freedom Organization or the Black Panther Party of Alabama, formed in 1966; the National Democratic Party of Alabama, formed in 1968; and the United Citizen's Party of South Carolina, formed in 1969.<sup>83</sup>

The Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party (MDFP) was an integrated party formed by a grass roots organizing campaign spearheaded by the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC). In 1964 the party waged an unsuccessful campaign to have the racist Mississippi delegation to the Democratic Convention unseated in favor of their popularly elected delegation. In 1965, the party unsuccessfully challenged the seating of the congressmen elected via the same institutionally racist apparatus that had chosen the delegation.

Once the Voting Rights Act was passed, and the congressional challenge made by the MDFP was lost, SNCC decided to sever its ties with MDFP. They adopted a strategy that coalitions with white liberals had outlived their usefulness . . . While the Voting Rights Act eliminated de jure discrimination, apathy and fear operated to deny African Americans in the south a free opportunity to vote.<sup>84</sup>

MDFP had problems with other integrated organizations which were trying

77. E. MUHAMMAD, MESSAGE TO THE BLACKMAN IN AMERICA 163 (1965).

78. M. MARABLE, BLACK AMERICAN POLITICS: FROM THE WASHINGTON MARCHES TO JESSE JACKSON 32-33 (1985).

79. E. U. ESSIEN-UDOM, BLACK NATIONALISM: A SEARCH FOR AN IDENTITY IN AMERICA 291 (1964).

80. *Principles & Programme of Action of the New Afrikan People's Organization*, 4 BY ANY MEANS NECESSARY, Sept.-Oct. 1987, at 2.

81. O. YESHITELA, NOT ONE STEP BACKWARD! 247-48 (1982).

82. *Id.* at 260-261.

83. M. KARENGA *supra*, note 6, at 238.

84. H. WALTON, JR. *supra*, note 19, at 113.

to advance the cause of African American people as well. The MDFP-NAACP split was due to the MDFP perception that the NAACP had money, skills, national organization, and was conservative, middle-class and unconcerned with poor African Americans in the state. The NAACP saw the problem as MDFP being visionary, immature, uncompromising, impatient, and doomed to fail.<sup>85</sup> In 1966 SNCC organizing in Alabama bore fruit.<sup>86</sup>

In 1965, Black Alabamans turned away from voter registration. Led by SNCC and under the direction of Stokely Carmichael, the Lowndes County Freedom Organization (LCFO) was formed. They ran people for county office. The SNCC strategy was to create independent parties in each A[labama] county to gain bargaining power. They believed the vote to be useless since the democrats/dixiecrats controlled Alabama politics.<sup>87</sup>

Unfortunately, the African American political process in Alabama was undermined by African Americans. When SNCC, under Stokely Carmichael, called for a African American boycott of the regular Democratic primary and for holding a separate African American primary (in the mid 1960's), the state office of SCLC asked Dr. Martin Luther King to urge Blacks across the state to take part in the regular primary.<sup>88</sup>

The National Democratic Party of Alabama was successful in getting African Americans to vote, particularly in rural Alabama, and did win some local offices.<sup>89</sup> The United Citizens Party in South Carolina had similar success on a local level.

In 1968, the Peace Freedom Party, a coalition of white left and several militant African American groups including the Black Panthers, was formed. It ran Eldridge Cleaver for national office, but had little success in its overall efforts.<sup>90</sup>

Historically, African Americans have only had nominal input into third party political formations: in early parties participation was nominal; they provided vehicles for young politicians who were key in the anti-slavery crusade. Pro-slavery parties kept them out and tried to keep them down.<sup>91</sup> "These parties, whether motivated by the desire to win, by humanitarian or selfish reasons, actively sought and campaigned for Negro participation. Their politics enhanced the movement for Negro equality and social justice."<sup>92</sup> Unfortunately, the results have been miniscule by comparison to the effort. Thus Kwame Ture's position is that "The issue is still the same: arriving at political power commensurate with our strength. [The answer:] 'Revolution.' " . . . [Ture's solution involves] 'Pan-Africanism: the total liberation and unification of Africa under scientific socialism'.<sup>93</sup> Scientific socialism is a philosophical system that seeks to subserve the influences of Europe and Islam to fit the traditional reality of African societies.

Many African Americans shared Ture's view. This segment, combined with the greater push by African Americans toward receiving their due,

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85. *Id.* at 116.

86. CARMICHAEL & HAMILTON *supra* note 10, at 106.

87. Kopkind, *The Lair of the Black Panther*, NEW REPUBLIC, Aug. 13, 1986, at 11.

88. H. WALTON JR., *supra*, note 19, at 142.

89. H. FRYE, BLACK PARTIES AND POLITICAL POWER 161 (1980).

90. H. WALTON JR., *supra* note 29, at 82.

91. *Id.* at 79.

92. *Id.*

93. Bussey, *supra* note 21, at 60.

moved the African American community as a whole more to the left. One result of this movement was the Gary Convention, also known as the National Black Political Assembly.

'The National Black Political Assembly, taking note of the fact that the 94th Congress with its Democratic majority had not addressed itself to the basic human problems of blacks and lower income whites, had been struggling with the creation of a third party patterned after the populist movement of the nineteenth century to overcome the political isolation the major political parties have imposed upon these groups by denying them effective representation and participating in Republican and Democratic affairs.<sup>94</sup>

The Gary strategy was to see if it could get either party to accept its goals and priorities, and would deliver the African American vote to that party.<sup>95</sup> But there was a split between "nationalist and progressive forces and most of the black elected officials and their associates, precipitated by the drafting of a radical version of the black convention's interests- the National Black Political Agenda."<sup>96</sup> And, unfortunately,

one week after the [National Black Political] Agenda was released, the Congressional Black Caucus, dissatisfied with provisions in the document relating to anti-busing and anti-Israel positions, released its own document calling it the Black Declaration and the Black Bill of Rights—little more than a watered down version of the Agenda.<sup>97</sup>

These problems, as well as a dissonance among the leadership, spelled doom for this party.<sup>98</sup>

Most recently, Jesse Jackson has spearheaded a national campaign that is interracial in nature and advocates humanistic values, equality of sex, gender, and race, and the use of coalition politics to gain power. "The Rainbow shall be known not by color, but by destination."<sup>99</sup> While his 1984 and 1988 campaigns have inspired many third world people both in the United States and across the globe, the benefits accruing to masses of African American people have yet to be substantial.

### THE THIRD PARTY ALTERNATIVE

Racism, powerlessness, and a lack of input in the dominant parties made for few alternatives. One alternative was to opt out of the political system. This took the form of not voting and devoting energies to other endeavors, as Delaney had done (and as those advocating political separation or revolution advocate), or of creating a third political force as a power bloc that attempts to extract goods, services, and elected office out of an insensitive system.

The third party alternative shares many features in common with its separationist and revolutionary counterparts. It acts as a vehicle to bring an oppressed people together for their mutual benefit and survival. It creates unity by bringing people with a similar experience together to work on common solutions. It is effective as a means of pooling monetary and other resources

94. Barnes, *Black Response to Economic and Political Realities Ujamaa*, in AN INTERDISCIPLINARY INTRODUCTION TO BLACK STUDIES 108 (1977).

95. H. WALTON JR., *supra*, note 19, at 59.

96. Walters, *Black Presidential Politics in 1980: Bargaining or Begging?*, 11 BLACK SCHOLAR, Mar.-Apr. 1980, at 23.

97. Walters, *supra* note 13, at 11.

98. Daniels, *supra* note 11, at 34-35.

99. Jackson, *The Rainbow Coalition Is Here to Stay*, 15 BLACK SCHOLAR Sept.-Oct. 1984, at 72.

amongst a people who historically have had less of these commodities to engage in the pursuit of power. It is an aid in fostering a racial consciousness and ethnic identity that is a vital element in all organizing activities. It creates the power of numbers, and if effectively used, can be manipulated to extract real gains from those whose continued ability to wield power necessitates the possession of this bloc of votes. And finally, as examples of what African Americans have done, it provides precedents as to what can be done in the future.

But unlike the emigrationist, nationalist and revolutionary alternatives, the third party alternative assumes that the electoral system can be utilized to make some gains, and works toward that goal. The other forms see nothing to be gained by utilizing the system of relations as they are presently constituted, and they seek alternatives that empower and free African Americans from the bondage that this system perpetuates.

One analyst of African American third party politics posits that Independent black political parties tend to rise when (1) black participation in one or the other major party is denied, e.g., the Mississippi Freedom Democratic party and the National Democratic party of Alabama; and (2) political leaders decide that aspects of their social, political, and economic grievances cannot or will not be met by the existing parties, e.g., the United Citizens party in South Carolina and the Lowndes County Freedom organization in Alabama.<sup>100</sup>

Given the current trend toward conservatism, popularly being called "the end of Second Reconstruction," this effort seems feasible today. Dr. Maulana Karenga adds:

Black parties arise as a result of 1) increased levels of Black consciousness; 2) the desire for an independent politics which not only wins a share of political power, but also makes a statement concerning their capacity for independent action; and 3) perception that party-building and electoral activities are ways of politically educating, mobilizing and organizing the masses of Blacks around vital issues.<sup>101</sup>

Racial consciousness is an important ingredient for the success of any effort to organize African Americans.

To have an ethnic identity is to have a specific identity, an awareness of past glories and future power. It is an emotional in-gathering of peoples who may have a vague geographical sense of community, but are gripped by a fervent preoccupation with the solidarity of their ethnic background. For them, this is the most salient fact of life. In a collision between divergent or conflicting claims for their loyalty, the claim of nationality or religion tends to prevail. . . . Until black people are able to acquire the same loyalty to the fact of their race-and the new ethic of Black Power appears to be a big step in hastening such identification-they will not receive their share of the political spoils that their percentage in the population demands.<sup>102</sup>

Once a racial consciousness is added to an awareness of the power endemic in bloc voting that is not blind, but is delivered on the basis of a return of goods and services, political clout begins to become manifest.

A Third Force is, by definition, independent, unpredictable and totally black-oriented. It asks only one question: "what do you intend to do for

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100. H. FRYE *supra*, note 89, at 5.

101. M. KARENGA, *supra* note 6, at 233.

102. C. STONE, *supra* note 40, at 147-148.

black people". A "Third Force" is a cohesive vote which oscillates at will between the candidacies of a Democrat, a Republican or a Third Party black man, depending upon which one the black Third Party can more effectively control. (A black Third Party is not going to be able to control an Uncle Tom, nor is he going to want their support.)

Another principal advantage of the black Third Force is its flexibility in forming alliances.<sup>103</sup>

Others take the view that since no relevant politics have been practiced with reference to African American people, such a third party would provide a realistic beginning to African American participation in the political system. "The rewards of independence can be considerable . . . this force might move to create new national and local political parties-or more accurately, the first *legitimate* political parties."<sup>104</sup> Still, questions remain.

*Some Black people are ready for a new politics.* The question is whether those politics will be dedicated to a new life for Black people and a new America, or for an old life in an old, decrepit, vicious, corrupt, racist America. . . . We need a party that is concerned about the controlling of institutions, the building of new institutions, the shaping of our destiny, a party that sees itself concerned fundamentally with assuming power. A party that sees its essential historical task and mission as *the challenge to govern this society.*<sup>105</sup>

#### CONCEPTUALIZING AN AFRICAN AMERICAN POLITICAL PARTY

The viability of an Independent Black Political Party is dependent on three factors. African American people must be able to organize themselves into unified, organized power blocs that are capable of delivering their votes to a candidate of their choice. They must remain united in the face of attempts to destroy the party or siphon off votes to the major parties. They must build an enduring organization that has a life beyond and outside of politics, and which can begin to address other pressing needs in African American communities as a way to gain, and keep members. If these requisites can be accomplished, the organized and unified front presented by the party will force white America to take a serious look at the demands made by the party. It will also give a sense of power, of possibility, and of success to a people that have had too few in their lives. And it will create a climate where other disaffected groups will wish to ally themselves with the party, thereby increasing their overall strength without losing the autonomy that integrationist alternatives always extract as a price of alliance.

This party can be a player both inside and outside the sphere of electoral politics. Within the system, it can force meaningful attention to be paid to issues of concern to African America as a price for obtaining the votes the party controls. Failing any real concessions by the major parties, it can run candidates of its own, winning office by bloc voting and alliances, and forcing a sharing of power even while losing, since the winner will recognize in the party a force that must be considered and accommodated. This structure also creates the option of going outside the political system, and toward the nation-

103. Stone, *supra* note 5, at 11.

104. CARMICHAEL & HAMILTON *supra* note 10, at 175-176.

105. Strickland, *The Gary Convention and the Crisis of American Politics*, 21 BLACK WORLD Oct. 1972, at 25-26.

alist and separatist camps. If the membership do not see any viable benefit to participation in electoral politics, the organization should have the sophistication and flexibility to consider nationalist and revolutionary alternatives. Such consideration, alone, will bring attention and concessions from the two party system, since those parties have a vested interest in maintaining the status quo in which they have been so successful.

Thus, the term "independent" means both independence from the Democrats and the Republicans, and it means independence from the political system as presently constituted. In either case, the party will be engaged in organizing and unifying African American people, in creating and recreating African American cultural traditions, and in preparing a powerless people to take and exercise political power. Even if the party ends up outside the political system as constituted, it will still pose a moral and ethical alternative to that system. It will act, by its presence, as an indictment of the inadequacies of the present system for addressing the needs of many Americans. And it will tell the world that African American people are no longer allowing external forces to determine internal conditions in their communities. The party will be both an indictment and a challenge. If it reaches this stage, the world will be forever transformed, and Africans the world over will have the opportunity to alter the positions they occupy vis-a-vis the white controllers of their countries.

The preamble of the National Black Political Agenda, also known as the Gary Declaration, states "all truly black politics, must begin from this truth: The American system does not work for the masses of our people, and it cannot be made to work without radical fundamental change (indeed, this system does not really work in favor of the humanity of anyone in America). . . ."<sup>106</sup> Another way of saying this is

Therefore, the ability to both clarify and operationalize black interests, at a time when such interests and the national interest are diverging, increasingly suggests a move from dependence to *independent political organization* from which a more sophisticated range of strategies can emerge that improve the competitive position of blacks. The continuation of traditional approaches to electoral politics promotes continued strategies of inflexibility in voting behavior, the making of moderate demands, and the lack of presidential or party accountability, which makes the current style and content of black participation amount to more begging than bargaining.<sup>107</sup>

This sense of the need to separate, and to organize as a race to gain redress is not a new one. In the *Crisis*, the newspaper/magazine of the NAACP, Dr. W.E.B. DuBois wrote in 1916:

There is but one and only one effective political move for colored voters. We have long foreseen it, but we have sought to avoid it. It is a move of segregation, it 'hyphenates' us, separates us from our fellow Americans; but self-defense knows no nice hesitations. The American Negro must either vote as a unit or continue to be politically emasculated as at present. . . . Their only effective method in the future is to organize in every congressional district as a Negro Party to endorse those candidates, Republican, Democratic, Socialist, or what-not, whose promises and past performances give greatest hope for the remedying of the wrongs done the Negro race. If no candidate fills this bill they should nominate a candidate of their own and give that candi-

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106. Daniels *supra*, note 11, at 32.

107. Walters, *supra* note 96, at 31.

date their solid vote. This policy . . . would make the Negro vote one of the most powerful and effective of the group votes in the United States.<sup>108</sup>

Yeshitela of the African People's Revolutionary Party says that "our actual presence in the U.S., and the form of our oppressive exploitation within the U.S., themselves pre-determine-independent of our will-that we struggle for political independence."<sup>109</sup>

Political independence is a cornerstone of nationalist ideology, an ideology represented by such groups as the Republic of New Afrika, The National Afrikan People's Organization, Us, The United Negro Improvement Association, and the Black Panther Party (the California-based organization) and the Nation of Islam, (in their earlier years).

'The political philosophy of black nationalism means that the black man should control the politics and the politicians in his own community; no more. . . . A ballot is like a bullet. You don't throw your ballots until you see a target, and if that target is not within your reach, keep your ballot in your pocket.'<sup>110</sup>

Given those reasons for forming and backing an Independent Black Political Party, (This name was consciously chosen for the party. Since many African Americans are more comfortable with describing themselves as "Black", this name exemplifies an attempt to find some common grounds on which to unify.) if it is created, what should be the goals of such a party? One author's view of the goals of African American politics in general is that they consist of:

- (a) total liberation of the masses of black people from the oppression of racism, economic exploitation and genocide
- (b) struggle to create a new social order to eradicate hunger, poverty, and disease and all those ills which cripple the human spirit
- (c) develop a new society controlled by the masses of black people and other oppressed people where the distribution of goods and services is based on the absolute priorities of human needs, equality, human dignity, and human progress
- (d) struggle for democratic rights and self-determination for black and all third world people. . . .
- (e) achieve the same goals for people of color and oppressed people worldwide.<sup>111</sup>

African American scholar Harold Cruse noted that culture is a necessary ingredient for any political change to be successful.

A truly radical black program for social change in America must include the elements of *economics, politics, and culture* in a proper programmatic combination. . . . In the same way that the Nation of Islam used religion to bind Negroes together into a social and economic movement (without politics), the secular black radical movement must use the cultural ingredient to bind Negroes into a mass movement *with economics and politics*. This has to be done through a cultural program that makes demands for cultural equality on American society. Without cultural equality there can be no economic and political equality.<sup>112</sup>

This primary component of culture is a system of values that inform and guide

108. W.E.B. DuBois, *The Negro Party*, 2 THE SEVENTH SON 309-10 (1971).

109. O. YESHITELA *supra* note 81, at 79.

110. Malcolm X, *The Ballot or the Bullet*, *supra* note 18, at 158.

111. Daniels, *supra* note 11, at 38-39.

112. H. CRUSE, REBELLION OR REVOLUTION 246-47 (1968).

its development. This truth makes values and ethical considerations a cornerstone of the independent African American political party formation process—“Any new Black politics, then, must have an ethical value system and a moral authority that clearly sets itself apart from the American political tradition. It must say plainly to people that it has come to transform the society and not to seek a niche in it.”<sup>113</sup>

“the only way to reverse our negative progress is to realistically function in the context of a value system that works for us here in the West. The value we are most concerned with here is Umoja (Unity) to strive for and maintain unity in self, family, community, neighborhood, nation, race, and world.”<sup>114</sup>

#### AN INDEPENDENT BLACK POLITICAL PARTY: PROBLEMS

There are many problems involved in the creation and sustenance of an Independent Black Political Party. Most of the difficulties encountered by such formations in the past have been externally imposed. These problems include the cultural and institutional racism that engulf America, the destruction and cooptation of leaders, the resultant lack of resources that flows from our historic and continued oppression and the psychic sense that we might not be able to get and wield power is another such problem.

There are many internal problems as well. The distrust African Americans have of their leaders, trust in white America, the clash of many different ideologies and the inability to come to a concensus are all significant internal problems. This issue brings up the question of, and need for, a grass roots organizing effort, so that each unit of the party has its own organization, and can bring its own agenda to the national group that is formed out of the local groups. In this way, local projects and issues can be addressed at the level where life is affected on a daily basis most directly, while representatives meet nationally to tackle larger issues.

The importance of having a historical perspective from which to view earlier parties is to be able to identify those problems, analyze them, and come up with constructive alternatives to avoid facing similar problems in this attempt at an Independent Black Political Party.

Chief among these problems is the context of ideological hegemony and racism in which such party must organize, and against which it must fight for its existence.<sup>115</sup> Karenga lists the constraints as

(an) institutionalized cooptation process which absorbs real and potential Black challengers; single member districts which prohibit numerical minorities from winning; rigid built-in qualifying rules and gerrymandering of political districts; political underdevelopment of the Black community; ideological hegemony of the system which argues that only two parties are viable and realistic; fear of penalty, i.e., loss of benefits from the Democratic or Republican party; fear of failure; and lack of an historical model which worked well for a considerable time.<sup>116</sup>

Another area of focus has been organization — should the party be organized from the bottom up or the top down? Top down organization occurs when the structure of the party and the leadership group are chosen, and the

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113. Strickland, *supra* note 105, at 23.

114. H. MADHUBUTI, ENEMIES: THE CLASH OF RACES 133 (1978).

115. FRYE, *supra* note 89, at 167.

116. M. KARENGA *supra* note 6, at 240.

values, ideology and platform are put together first, and then the party seeks members in order to expand and gain power. Bottom up or grass roots organization springs from the desire of one or more persons to come together and create an organization that addresses specific problems of concern to them, and which expands to include similar organizations across the country, eventually forming a national party that reflects their ideologies and values. The experience of the Gary Convention caused Daniels to state: "The lesson to be learned . . . is that an independent black political organization must be solidly organized from the bottom up, and must be firmly rooted in a strong base of local and state organizations and/or chapters."<sup>117</sup> This statement arises from the fact that one of three leaders of the National Black Independent Political Party destroyed the party by shifting his personal ideology and trying to move the party to his new position, thereby creating divisions in this top-down party organization.<sup>118</sup> The struggles of the Lowndes County Freedom Organization and the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party, which were grass roots organizations that were directed by local people with the aid of Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee workers, adds credence to Daniels' point. Both of these parties suffered when SNCC changed its ideological stance to become an all African American group, and the two parties were severely weakened, indicating that much of the leadership was a top-down effort.<sup>119 120</sup> Far more poignant in both instances, however, was the impact of the racist and repressive environment in which these parties sought to gain legitimacy.

The choice of values for the party has also led to difficulties. One difficulty is that the choice to be a party open only to African Americans is viewed as separatist, and therefore an undesirable alternative to both the white power structure, and to African Americans who believe in an integrationist philosophy-

under certain social conditions the proponents of third-party politics will be attacked by the traditional black political elite; . . . the proponents of the party will be charged with practicing racial separatist politics; and . . . the party will be up against the institutionalized racism existing within the American political arena.<sup>121</sup>

The overall value of unity within the party is also difficult to achieve and maintain.<sup>122</sup>

Often the purposes and framework of the organization are not stated. Confusion and infighting often result, and energy is diverted from the real issues around which the party was formed.

There was no clear statement of purpose (the Gary Declaration had been approved but was only tenuously accepted by the more moderate to conservative forces which remained in the N.B.P.A.) nor organizational format. The subsequent result was near disaster: A tripartite leadership structure with three persons of widely divergent views on the nature and role of the N.B.P.A. (Congressman Charles C. Diggs, President; Mayor Richard Hatcher, chairperson of the Political Council; and Imamu Amiri Baraka, Secretary General). Hence each national officer spoke from their own per-

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117. Daniels *supra*, note 11, at 35.

118. *Id.* at 36.

119. H. WALTON, JR. *supra* note 19, at 113.

120. CARMICHAEL & HAMILTON *supra* note 10, at 106.

121. FRYE, *supra*, note 89, at 167.

122. M. KARENGA *supra* note 6, at 239.

sonal political vantage points. Two were elected officials and too busy to provide consistent leadership.<sup>123</sup>

Another result of this problem is the "creation of bureaucratic a monster that swallows up the organization"<sup>124</sup>

Lack of money to finance the party has also been a problem in the past.<sup>125</sup> Past parties have used people power and their energy, and have had to find other non-material incentives to reach party goals.

A large problem is defining the scope and criteria for party membership.<sup>126</sup> The choice to be an all African American party stems from the historic difficulties in maintaining control and direction, and obtaining relevant results when the party is integrated. Though all African American parties have met with little success in electing African Americans to political office, they have been much more successful in articulating the desires and aspirations of African American people. The experience at Gary taught organizers that moderate, conservative and radical elements could work together toward common goals, but that all should be clear as to the goals and agenda of the party.<sup>127</sup> The conflicts experienced by the MDFP with the NAACP and with SNCC after it changed its racial composition reiterate this point. This question of goals is reflected by the problems related to the leadership of the party.

Historically, African American third parties have relied on charismatic leadership to be a major force in achieving goals. In most cases, that leadership has represented the interests of the party well. But, on occasion leaders have proven to be a devisive element. The National Black Political Assembly (the Gary Convention) is instructive in this regard. First, shortly before the convening of the convention, one of the members of the Congressional Black Caucus, Shirley Chisholm, announced that she was running for president in the Democratic primaries.<sup>128</sup> Next, a tripartite leadership group was set up representing the Congressional Black Caucus (Representative Charles Diggs), the nationalist community (Amiri Baraka), and the mayor of the host city, Richard Hatcher. Given the nature of their work responsibilities, Diggs and Hatcher were unavailable for key discussions and votes, leaving Baraka with effective control of the party. Thus when Baraka moved from a personal ideology of cultural nationalism, which espoused an all African American ideology, to Marxist-Leninist-Mao Tse-Tung thought, a multiracial ideology, and tried to move the party in that direction, the party was clearly doomed.<sup>129</sup> But the most decisive ingredient in the downfall of the National Independent Black Political Party was the defection by the Congressional Black Caucus, which decided that the platform adopted by the Assembly, called the Black Agenda, was too radical. They instead adopted a watered-down version of the Agenda and took it to the national Democratic Convention in 1972.<sup>130</sup> The use of African American leaders to diffuse such grass roots efforts has occurred in other contexts as well, as was illustrated by the use of Dr. King to

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123. Daniels, *supra* note 11, at 35.

124. H. WALTON, *supra* note 19, at 60.

125. M. KARENGA, *supra* note 6, at 239.

126. H. WALTON, *supra* note 19, at 195.

127. Daniels *supra*, note 11, at 34.

128. H. WALTON, *supra* note 19, at 58.

129. Daniels *supra* note 11, at 35.

130. *Id.* at 34.

oppose the efforts of the LCFO to win a primary in Alabama.<sup>131</sup>

### INDEPENDENT BLACK POLITICAL PARTY: POSSIBILITIES

An Independent Black Political Party poses an ideological alternative to the dominant parties. This party has the interests of African Americans as the center of its focus. It seeks truth and justice in the political arena, and thus poses a serious moral, ethical and value orientation to the dominant system of relations. It can empower African American people — give them the power to control their communities, their futures, and their daily lives. It can provide a means to organization for liberation, both inside and outside the system. It is a tool for raising racial consciousness. It is a power in the world, and a refuge from it. It is a vehicle for creating honest leaders that have the interests of the masses of African Americans as their focus, and it can punish those leaders who short sell or sell out our people.

As past third party efforts made exclusively by African Americans have shown, there is a need for unity and organization. Independent organizing fills that and other needs, and leaders, as well as members, are better able to follow the ethos of the community and express the collective will of the masses of the people. The have nots have a say, and the haves have to listen. And if they do not, then the organization is ready to go outside the system and take what is necessary for African Americans to survive and prosper.

Various strategies have been proposed to deal with these problems. They all stress grass roots organizing. "The community organization is always the kernel for the political party."<sup>132</sup> A key ingredient is participation by local groups giving input to the national organization. "The political party with which we identify ourselves must work from the bottom up, not the top down . . . . critical decisions . . . must be discussed in every nook and cranny of this country."<sup>133</sup> With this strong base, the party will have a mandate for taking tough and principled stands. "What is called for is an independent black political party capable of providing militant leadership . . . so long as the political party is solidly based upon the masses of ordinary black working people, the task is not inconceivable."<sup>134</sup> Grass roots organizing entails the development of program foci as well as of membership. This party- "must be a mass-oriented movement reflecting mass needs and interests which will have to be discovered rather than theorized about."<sup>135</sup>

On the question of values, "Loyalty, whether it derives from a religious or a racial background, is the most important element in building a powerful bloc vote."<sup>136</sup>

Independent black politics cannot have the same moral and political values as the system it has come to change and must challenge that system at its very vitals . . . (The party) must strive for racial unity built around program and principles which speak to all the contradictions of all the people rather

131. WALTON, *supra* note 19, at 142.

132. Baraka, *The Pan-African Party and The Black Nation*, 2 BLACK SCHOLAR Mar. 1971, at 28.

133. Hatcher *supra*, note 14, at 19.

134. R. ALLEN, BLACK AWAKENING IN CAPITALIST AMERICA 279-80 (1969).

135. Strickland, *Whatever Happened to the Politics of Black Liberation?*, 7 BLACK SCHOLAR, Oct. 1975, at 25.

136. C. STONE, *supra* note 40, at 80.

than the pressing concerns of the privileged few.<sup>137</sup>

There is a "need for a training institute where ideological and theoretical tools and skill development can be carried on for organizers, facilitators and members of these organizations."<sup>138</sup>

The question of format or structure remains an evasive problem. Walters suggests

A fairly well-defined black coalition of representatives coming from such segments of the black community as labor, clergy, Democrats, Republicans, Black Mayors, Congressional Black Caucus, National Black Political Assembly, Community Organizations, and Professional Organizations, should form a Coordinating Council to provide the support base for the Black Political Party. [S]ince most people tend to work through their constituent organizations, it is best to bring them together in coalition to form a National Coordinating Council.<sup>139</sup>

Robert Allen writes "This party should not act as an occasional vote-getting machine, but as a governing entity, creating programs in diverse arenas aimed at black self-determination."<sup>140</sup> A coalition with equality in voting affords the greatest chance of success, and also affords the highest possibility of working out ideological differences successfully.

The issue of scarce resources is never resolved easily. One commentator suggests that the party "develop a resource base for financial and material self-support of independent Black Politics- master the technologies necessary to generate short-term and long-term funding to insure the institutionalization of independent black politics."<sup>141</sup> Walters notes that "the McGovern campaign . . . proved large sums of money for campaigns can be raised from small contributors."<sup>142</sup>

Membership "in the Party should be open to all and any member of the black community."<sup>143</sup> Some would limit membership to preserve ideological agreement within the party. Dominant ideological stances will develop. Those that disagree with the dominant ideologies may change their position as they see others espouse the ideology. Still others may leave the party. Either alternative, as well as the dissension of those who disagree and remain within the party, is beneficial. Opening the party to all African Americans creates no new problems; it makes for new solutions, and makes a statement on the importance of racial solidarity over ideological stance.

Walton writes that good leadership was key to the success of the National Democratic Party of Alabama, a successor of the Lowndes County Freedom Organization.<sup>144</sup> Hatcher, a leader himself, stated that the National Black Political Assembly should "name our own candidates for public office and our own party and governmental committee members. No political party . . . may any longer pick and choose the Toms and Sallys among us."<sup>145</sup> For Strickland, however, leadership cannot "be based on, though it might include,

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137. Strickland, *supra* note 135, at 25.

138. Daniels, *supra* note 11, at 40.

139. Walters, *supra* note 13, at 15.

140. ALLEN *supra*, note 134, at 280.

141. Daniels, *supra* note 11, at 40.

142. Walters, *supra* note 13, at 14.

143. *Id.*

144. WALTON, *supra* note 19, at 157.

145. Hatcher, *supra* note 14, at 19.

elected officials or groupings competing with those officials, de facto or de jure, for a place in the sun."<sup>146</sup> Allen's position is that "as classes, the intellectuals and the middle class should not be allowed to assume leadership of the party."<sup>147</sup> But perhaps the best point made on this subject was made by Paul Robeson, when he said that "We need more of our women in the higher ranks . . . our womenfolk have often led the way."<sup>148</sup>

Walters provides some insight as to proper tactics:

The major tactic would be to develop a concensus concerning who would become the Party's Presidential Candidate, and have that individual or his/her committee file for office . . . the black candidate would not enter primaries because of the costs, but would tour the country raising issues and mobilizing black people to adopt the strategy. if the party candidate (Democratic) isn't chosen on the first ballot, black delegates could vote for the black candidate. If the winning candidate didn't support the agenda of our party, we could (1) write in for our candidate; (2) stay home; (3) vote only for local candidates; or (4) vote for a candidate other than the ones from the dominant parties.<sup>149</sup>

Supporting the nominee of the two dominant parties at any stage, and in any way buying into the two-party process spells continued subjugation for African American people. Thus, though the rest of Walter's point is acceptable, being part of the Democratic Party process is not acceptable.

Finally, on the question of ideology, Daniels suggests that the party choose an ideological stance, and exclude from the membership those who oppose that stance, since

"What was to be learned from these experiences was the inherent impossibility of constructing an independent black political organization with widely diverse and even conflicting tendencies. That is to say, it is impossible to gather all of the diverse black political tendencies under one umbrella and develop an independent black political organization capable of acting consistently and in an effective manner."<sup>150</sup>

Strickland, however, makes the most telling argument "No independent black politics can begin its life or see its essential purpose as electoral politics. . . ." An independent Black political movement must have a long range perspective.<sup>151</sup>

Dispite the evident problems in creating and sustaining a viable Independent Black Political Party, these formulations, along with the long history of participation in third party organizations by African American people, speak to both the necessity and viability of such an effort. As Karenga notes: "Black party advocates still argue that the Black party is both possible and necessary. For if a party is impossible, they argue, then so is liberation and an effective relation to state power."<sup>152</sup>

146. Strickland, *supra* note 135, at 25.

147. R. ALLEN *supra* note 134, at 279.

148. P. ROBESON, *HERE I STAND* 105 (1958).

149. Walters, *supra* note 13, at 16.

150. Daniels, *supra* note 11, at 36.

151. Strickland, *supra* note 135, at 25.

152. M. KARENGA *supra* note 6, at 240.

IF NOT AN INDEPENDENT BLACK POLITICAL PARTY,  
THEN WHAT? ALTERNATIVES

Since the odds against success in creating an enduring Independent Black Political Party are so strong given the history of such efforts, this Comment would be incomplete without a discussion of other alternatives. These two alternatives are: continue the same ol' thing, and nationalism. This author prefers the latter choice. Nationalism has historically been the means by which all peoples identify themselves, set their values in context, and create and renew their cultures. African Americans have a historic opportunity and a historic duty in this regard. Many of the essential features of our culture and our nationhood were stripped from us during the process of the stealing of our ancestors, and the attempts by white people to dehumanize us to their level of depravity. For us to survive and grow as a people, we must reclaim our culture, and rebuild our traditions. Nationalism, a concept by which we conceive of ourselves as a single group, unites us in history and in possibility. It gives us hope when the present system of relations seems to do no more than invalidate us. It gives us faith in that we become part of a larger whole that is of our own creation and under our control. And it unites us with other African people who share our quest for freedom and the expansion of our greatness as a people.

If the definition of "a party, revolutionary or system-oriented, 'is a political structure specifically designed to seize, control or effectively participate in state power'"<sup>153</sup> then

The radical interest-group strategy is basically nationalist, with socialist and Pan-Africanist themes. Black nationalism is defined by a distinct historical personality that drives them to "unite in order to gain the structural capacity to define, defend and develop their interests." Their goals are to redefine reality in Black images and in Black interest- Afro-centricity; act as a social corrective, to build alternative structures which stop the deprivation and deformation and further Black aspirations; and it is a collective vocation, a call and active commitment to liberate Black people, restore them to their traditional greatness, and "make African presence both powerful and permanent in thruout the world."<sup>154</sup>

Marcus Garvey forcefully told African Americans of the need for independence some seventy years ago:

"Until the Negro reaches this point of national independence, all he does as a race will count for naught. He will not be able to stop mob violence and mob rule via industrial wealth and the ballot . . . we must . . . go out and do-acquit ourselves like men in the economic, industrial and political arena."<sup>155</sup>

Many nationalist theorists and groups are still advocating the Black Belt thesis.<sup>156</sup> Yeshitela sums up the difficulties created by ideological differences within the nationalist arena by saying that as far as differences among various people and groups in the movement, "Our ideological and line differences should not be allowed to define our relationship at this juncture. The factor which should define our relationship at this juncture is the unity we achieved

153. *Id.* at 232.

154. *Id.* at 248.

155. M. GARVEY, *PHILOSOPHY AND OPINIONS OF MARCUS GARVEY* 52, 55 (1968).

156. J. FORMAN *supra*, note 65, at 78; H. MADHUBUTI *supra*, note 114, at 218-219; I. OBADELE, *FOUNDATIONS OF THE BLACK NATION* 150-152 (1975).

in the struggle against ideological imperialism."<sup>157</sup> Walton notes that past attempts at African American political party formations have not been failures:

In the total scheme of things, therefore, black political parties have been no complete failure. They blend successes and failures. In their protest, they affirmed something precious, in their giant electoral failures, they succeeded in the goal of race advancement—their ultimate objective.<sup>158</sup>

Stone says:

White America has never possessed sufficient emotional maturity or sense of democracy to allocate political power to black America. It has been far more reassuring to cling to an assiduously nourished cultural image of black people as an indolent, carefree, fun-loving people . . . than to view them as a race with the capacity to be politicians and businessmen."<sup>159</sup>

Thus, though African Americans are a numerical minority in many locales, and in the country as a whole, they must unite and seek power as a unified front. As the National Black Political Assembly Draft Document says:

"Some will raise the objection that we cannot bring about such changes on our own. Perhaps. But this much we know: going on our own can hardly be any worse than what we have experienced through more than a century of going with white racist leadership . . . our only future, our only real gains are those which our powerful black determination create and consolidate."<sup>160</sup>

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157. O. YESHITELA *supra* note 81, at 82.

158. H. WALTON JR., *supra* note 19, at 7.

159. C. STONE, *supra* note 40, at 1968.

160. Strickland, *supra*, note 135, at 26.