Rethinking the Black Freedom Movement: The Box Lectures

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Rethinking Theory in Black Studies

Rethinking...
THEORY IN BLACK STUDIES

UIUC Public Lecture Series / Fall 2011

September 13: Ideology
September 27: Methodology
October 11: History
October 25: Tradition
November 8: Debate

Professor Alkalimat presents innovative ideas to promote a rethinking of how to approach theory in Black Studies. Each lecture will present his original ideas developed over forty years of academic activist practice.
2012
Rethinking Black Freedom
The Box Lectures

9/11  The Box
10/2  In the Box
10/23 Out the Box
11/13 New Box
12/4  No Box
What is a box?
A box is what limits freedom.

So what is freedom?
Freedom is without the limits of a box.
Henry “Box” Brown 1815 – 1889

He shipped himself from the slave state of Virginia to the free city of Philadelphia in March 1849. He was 34 years old.

When Brown was released, one of those present remembered his first words as "How do you do, gentlemen?" He then sang a psalm from the Bible he had previously selected for his moment of freedom. But he then had to run from more boxes.
Translation

The Box: the conditions that have always been forced on Black people because of racism and economic exploitation, especially by the government and the corporations in different historical periods.

In the Box: The Civil Rights Movement fighting to integrate into the society within the framework of the Constitution.

Out the Box: The Black Nationalist and Pan-Africanist Movements that focus on the autonomous self-determination strategies for Black people. There is also the tradition of migrations, moving out.

New Box: Revolutionaries of all kinds who fight to transform society, usually from capitalist oligarchy to socialist democracy.

No Box: Given the information revolution there is a new beginning, but we also face the digital divide – can we escape boxes?
Humans are born into many boxes simultaneously. Sometimes boxes are positive and provide a nurturing environment and sometimes not. But that’s where we all begin - in boxes.

Gender
Color
Family
Neighborhood
Community
School
Church
Job
Nationality
Size and shape
Hair
Year born

None of us are free. The only choice we have is what we do about the boxes.
Black boxes of cohesion have faced multiple disruptions.
Theory of the four forms of freedom

1. Consciousness
2. Individual acts
3. Sub-cultures
4. Movements for social change
Consciousness: the language, ideology and rituals of freedom

We spoke in tongues and made music rhythms to old testament stories of wars of freedom.

Emancipation debate
Self Determination Debate
Black Liberation debate
Individual acts:
Self-defense and disrespect
Sub-cultures: Resistance as political culture
Movements for social change: To end slavery

Slave Revolts

Abolitionist Movement

Under Ground Railroad

Civil War

Reconstruction
Movements for social change:
To end oppression

UNIA
NAACP
African Blood Brotherhood
Negro Labor Council
Sharecroppers Union
Communist Party
Black Churches
Southern Negro
Youth Congress
National Negro Congress
This is a motion to become part of the big box, the very box most responsible for the exploitation of Black people, but where a few can get rich.
Dialectics of the African American Freedom Dance

The integrationist option:
Achieve within the box, and change it

The Nationalist/Pan-Africanist Option:
Leave the box, create an alternative

The Revolutionary option:
Take over the box and transform it into something new
Dialectics of fighting the Box(es)

The assimilationist phase: “In the first phase, the native intellectual gives proof that he has assimilated the culture of the occupying power.”

The nationalist phase: In the second phase we find the native is disturbed; he decides to remember who he is.”

The fighting phase: “Finally...the native...will on the contrary, shake the people.”

Frantz Fanon
1925 - 1961
IN THE BOX...

1. What are the rules of the box – laws, customs, and structure?
2. What are the degrees of freedom within the box – any wiggle room?
3. What are the rates of success within the box – anybody able to make it?
4. Are we being polarized within the box - are all Black people in the same box?
OUT THE BOX...

1. What are the opportunities to migrate to a better place?
2. What is the role of liberation in Africa and the African Diaspora?
3. What are viable strategies of self-determination?
4. What is the difference between leaving the box and being put out?
NEW BOX...

1. What is the 21st century alternative to capitalism?
2. How can we end racism and national oppression?
3. Who hates this system and can they be united?
4. How much freedom is possible?
In sum...

How do you feel about being in the box?