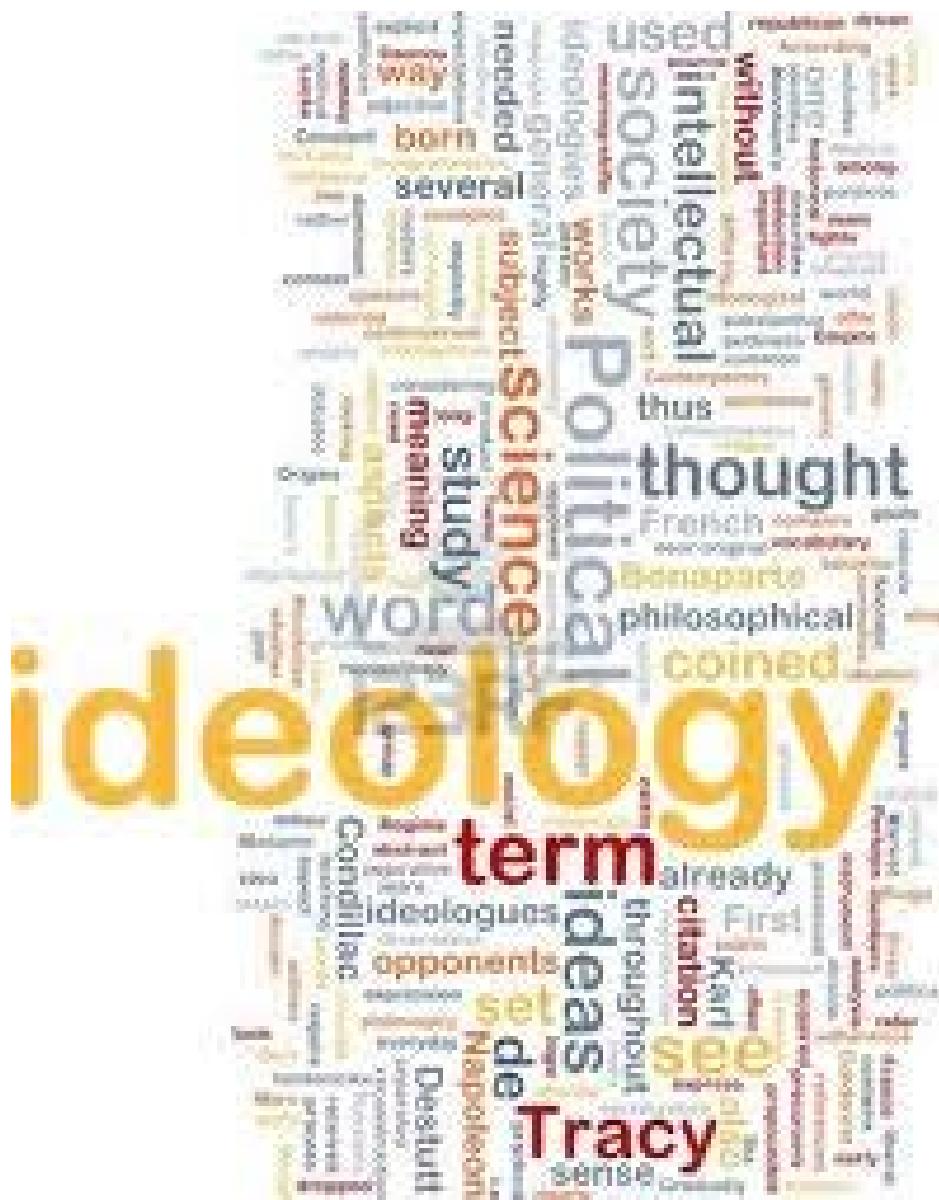


Rethinking Theory in Black Studies



Abdul Alkalimat
Department of African American Studies
University of Illinois
Fall 2011

The Lecture Series

Rethinking Theory in Black Studies

45 years after Black Power posed a challenge to thinking by and about the African American experience it is necessary to rethink this legacy of changing consciousness. This is both a look at the theoretical formulations in the academic field of Black Studies, but more importantly it is thinking about how we the people can understand and be more self determining about our consciousness and how we can reorient ourselves to the fight for freedom. Now as then, we have work to do.

Towards this end we have planned five public lectures as part of our Fall 2011 course, *Theory in Black Studies*:

September 13

Ideology

September 27

Methodology

October 11

History

October 25

Tradition

November 8

Debate

Historical development of Black Studies

Black Studies as **social movement**

Black liberation movement targets higher education and creates new intellectual space for creative work to serve the needs of the people



Black Studies as **academic profession**

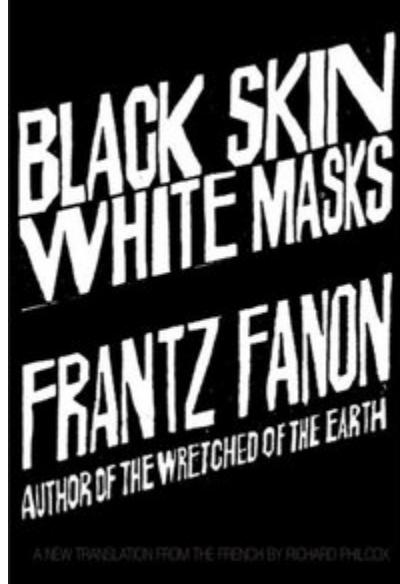
Black Studies conforms to campus culture and administrative practices and becomes estranged from the community



Black Studies as **knowledge network**

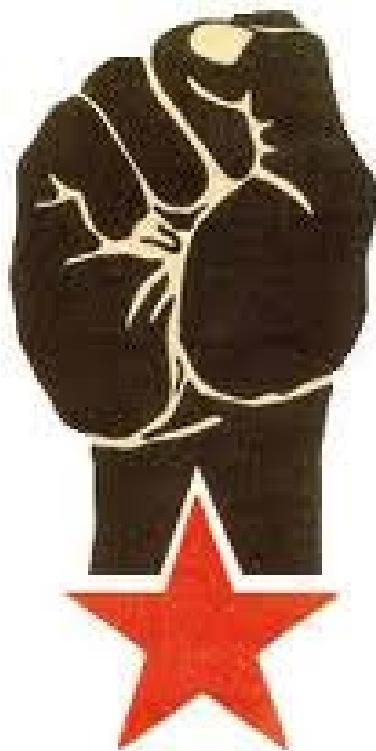
With digital technology, Black Studies begins to reunite with the community via cyberspace and become a major global discourse



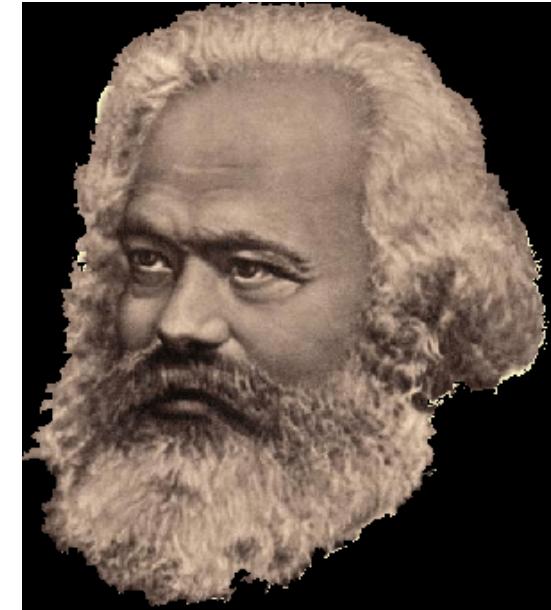


Lecture #1: IDEOLOGY

The ideological crisis we face
The ideology we need



In the social production of their existence, men inevitably enter into definite relations, which are independent of their will, namely relations of production appropriate to a given stage in the development of their material forces of production. The totality of these relations of production constitutes the economic structure of society, the real foundation, on which arises a legal and political superstructure and to which correspond definite forms of social consciousness. The mode of production of material life conditions the general process of social, political and intellectual life. **It is not the consciousness of men that determines their existence, but their social existence that determines their consciousness.** At a certain stage of development, the material productive forces of society come into conflict with the existing relations of production or – this merely expresses the same thing in legal terms – with the property relations within the framework of which they have operated hitherto. From forms of development of the productive forces these relations turn into their fetters. Then begins an era of social revolution. The changes in the economic foundation lead sooner or later to the transformation of the whole immense superstructure.



Karl Marx (1818-1883)



What is ideology? Why do we start here?

A theory is an abstract description and explanation of what is. However, we never engage in this kind of thinking without a context, especially when dealing with social theory, theory about society.

Our theory is always formulated in a dialectical time dimension:

Past.....Present.....Future

In the **present** we imagine a desired **future** and for that we reconstruct our understanding of the **past**.

The “**what is**” focuses on theory, the “**what ought to be**” focuses on ideology, and that includes theory.

For the African American experience there is no more important focus than on what ought to be! The ideological struggles over the past are significant because they are alternatively tied to different visions of what future “ought to be.”

Decoding the polarity of ideological conflict



We created the wealth and development of society as the prime movers of history.

The ruling class

The corporate rich and all other major racists and exploiters

We want to rule forever!

(Is there a middle ground or do people have to choose sides?)

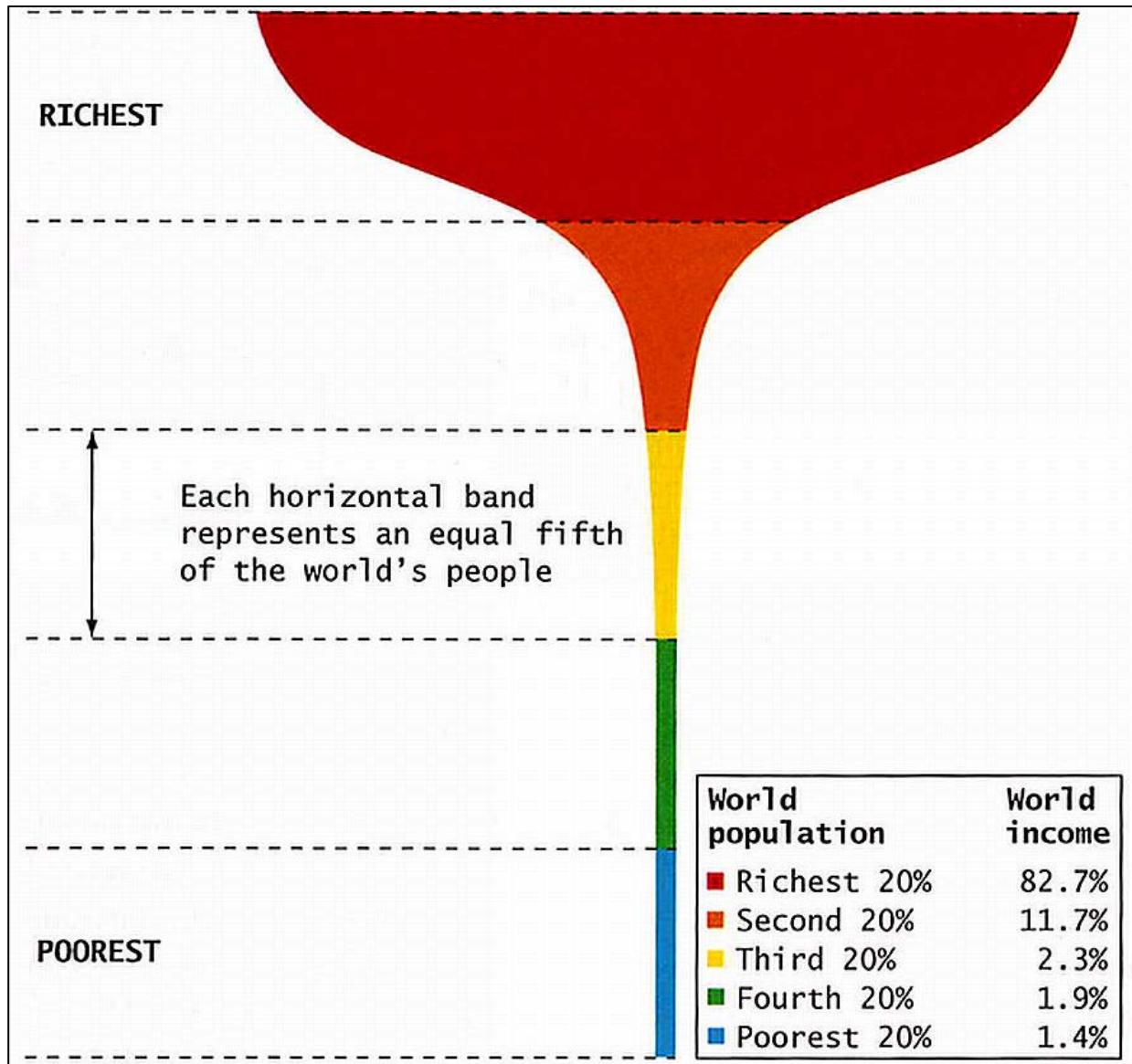
We have been cheated out of the wealth of our labor and we have to fight the rulers to get justice and end poverty.

The oppressed

African Americans and all other oppressed and exploited people

We want freedom and a decent life!

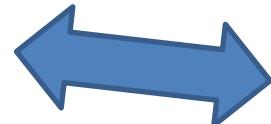
Great macro-ideological struggle of the 20th century



The champagne-glass distribution of income.



Capitalist countries fight each other to divide and re-divide the world for their plunder through WWI and WWII. In the end the US rises as the leading capitalist power in the world, operating through global institutions like the UN, IMF and World Bank.



Polarities of 20th century struggle

Communist parties lead the fight of workers to seize power from the capitalists and create **the socialist camp**. In the end the USSR was the critical leader, including the fight against fascist Germany, a capitalist power gone berserk.



Popular forces in the colonized countries of Asia, Africa and Latin American create **national liberation movements** to fight to end the domination of western colonialism and imperialism.

Third world fight against colonialism and imperialism

Colonialism/imperialism:

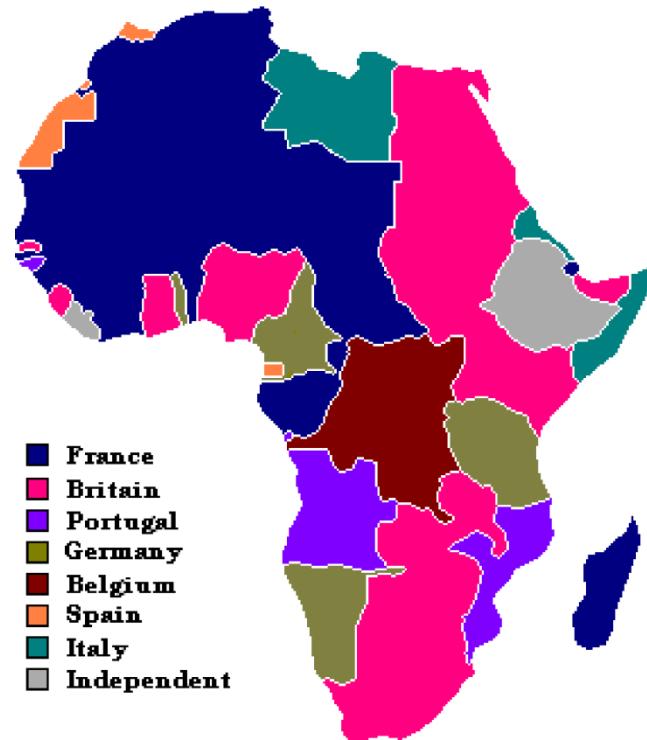
European/western powers

Decadent feudalists

Comprador capitalists

Mercenary war lords

Example: The **1885 Berlin Conference** when they carved Up Africa for European interests.



National Liberation Movement:

Workers

Peasants

Middle class

National capitalists

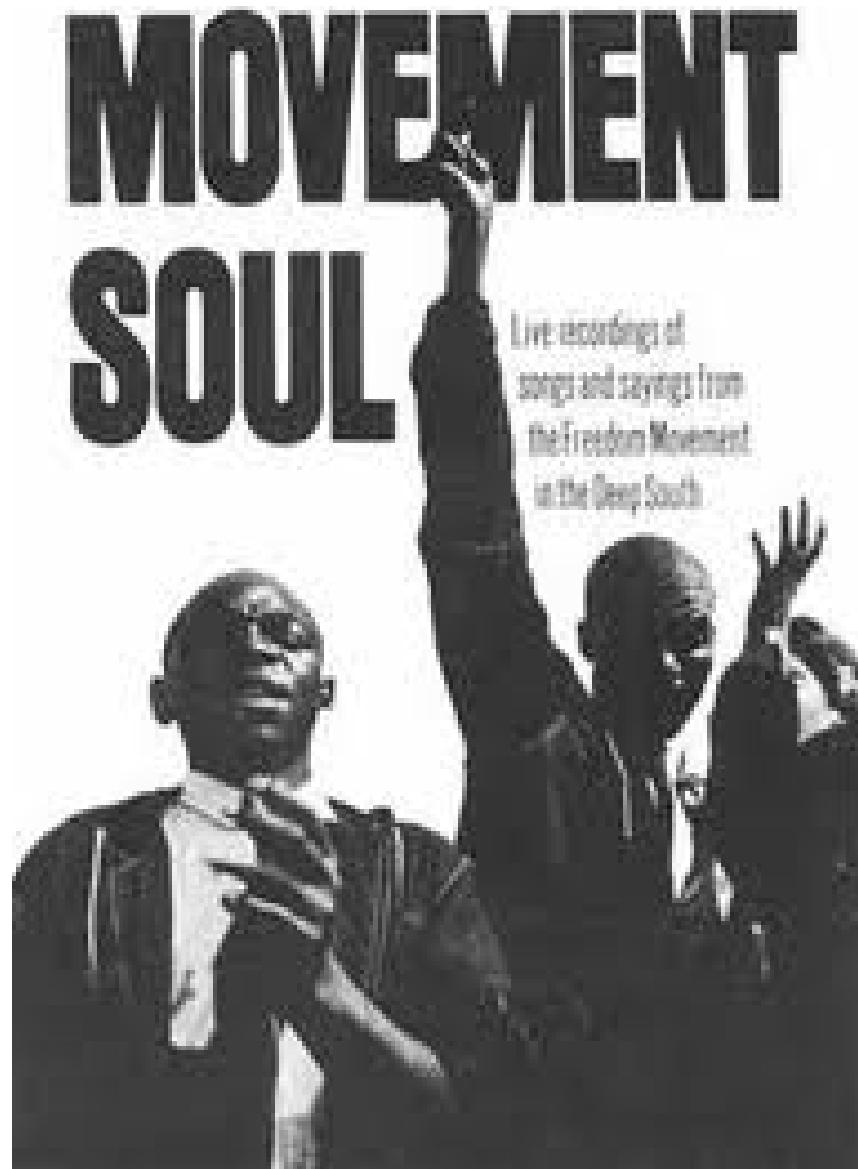
Patriotic feudal leaders

Example: The **1955 Bandung Conference**



Our freedom struggle was turned into a civil rights struggle

- 1789** **US Constitution** goes into effect. Written by slave owners. Failed to end slavery or even the slave trade. Established “civil rights.” But the Bill of Rights was not included and had to be added after the threat of armed struggle by the workers and farmers.
- 1865** **The thirteenth amendment** to the Constitution ended slavery. 1963 Abe Lincoln had issued the “Emancipation Proclamation” to free the slaves where he couldn’t but not where he could.
- 1964** **The Civil Rights Act** defines the accomplishment of the “Freedom Movement” that had been turned into a “civil rights movement.” Fighting to be free from the system became being in that system! Freedom became a piece of paper.



Social Class

Crisis of National liberation/Socialism = crisis of Black Power

National liberation movement was led by middle classes who in the end betrayed the revolutionary process by being captured by neo-liberal policies of late capitalism. The exception was China and the leadership of the Communist Party and Mao's theory of New Democracy.

Socialism of the 20th century is turning to embrace various forms of capitalism in the 21st century. Class polarity and poverty have forced socialism into crisis.

Black Middle Class in the US now includes a mainstreamed fraction that has joined with corporate interests in opposition to the African American majority.

Examples of betrayal:

Zimbabwe
South Africa

Examples of restoring capitalism:

Russia
China

Examples of betrayal:

Corporate officials
High government officials
Elite academics

E Franklin Frazier sounded the ideological alarm



1894 – 1962
Professor, Howard University

“All **African intellectuals** begin with the fact of the colonial experience of the African. They possess a profound understanding of the colonial experience and its obvious effects upon not only their traditional social organization, but of the less obvious and more profound effects upon the culture of the African personality.

The **American Negro intellectual** goes his merry way discussing such matters as the superficial aspects of the material standard of living among Negroes and the extent to which they enjoy civil rights. He never begins with the fundamental fact of what slavery has done to the Negro or the group which is called Negroes in the United States.”

“The failure of the Negro Intellectual”
Negro Digest (February, 1962, pages 26 – 36)

Malcolm X : A Research Site - Mozilla Firefox

File Edit View History Bookmarks Tools Help

http://www.brothermalcolm.net/aug04index.html

Malcolm X : A Research Site

Introduction
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Chronology
Family
Speeches
Photographs
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Webliography
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Conferences
Words
Search
What's New
Research Organizations
Malcolm X Video Revolution

MALCOLM

NAVIGATING THIS BOX

The Detroit Speeches of MALCOLM X

The Speeches: Introduction

1963 *Message to the Grass Roots*
TEXT AUDIO STUDY GUIDE

1964 *Ballot or the Bullet*
TEXT AUDIO STUDY GUIDE

1965 *Fighting on All Fronts*
TEXT AUDIO NOTES

The Legacy

Our greatest challenge is to understand Malcolm X's method of critical independence.

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Malcolm X (1925 – 1965)

A revolution in Black ideology and political culture took place when Black people broke free from the integrationist movement to return to the demand for freedom. The main ideological spokesperson for this movement was Malcolm X. He was also undergoing ideological transformation toward the *three speeches in Detroit* that laid out in great rhetorical style the outlines of the ideology of Revolution from a Black perspective. **Malcolm X was our revolutionary icon.**

The Malcolm X Moment = systemic qualitative change

Black Power = community organizations fighting for elected officials, redistribution of budgets, representation on policy making bodies. Black people need to rely on themselves.

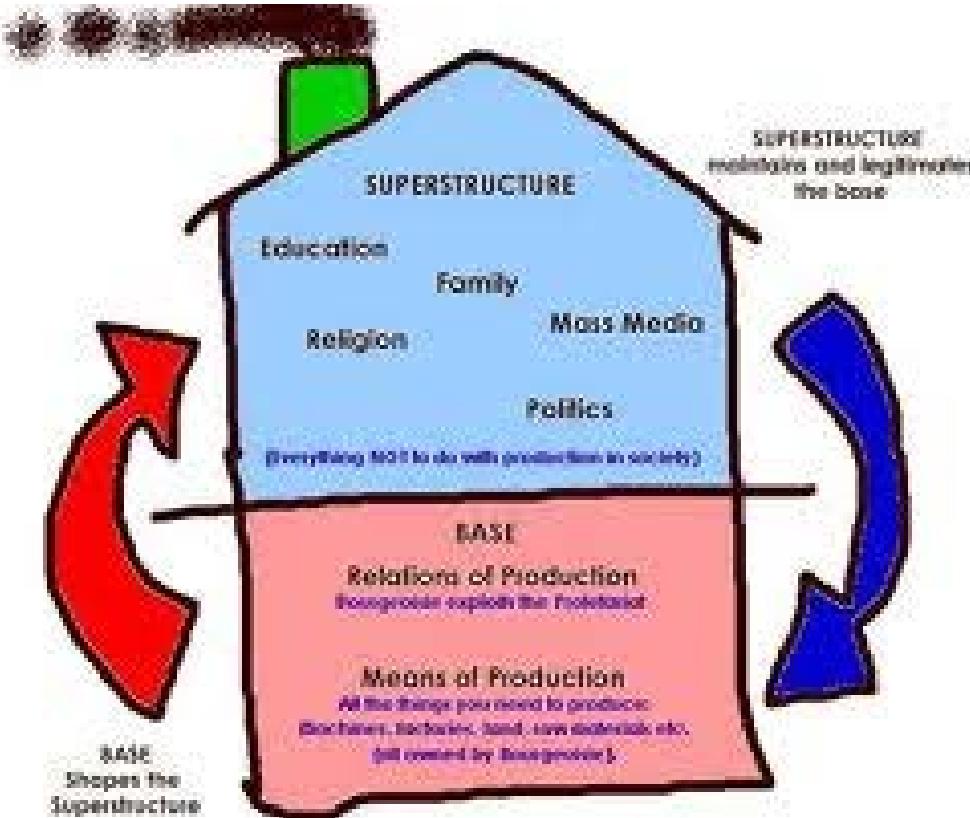
Black Arts Movement = redefined aesthetics and standards of beauty creating an autonomous space for Black creativity. Black People are beautiful and profoundly human.

African Liberation Support = reuniting the Black liberation movement of the African Americans with the fight for national liberation in Africa. All of Africa must be free!

Black Studies = greatest anti-racist innovation in higher education, greatest increase in development of a Black intelligentsia with a liberation consciousness. We are our own source of knowledge.



There is a technological revolution!



Digital technology, including computers, the Internet, genetic engineering, etc., has transformed the means of production.

This technology has permanently excluded masses of workers from ever again having full time employment. This creates a new class of people with no social contract for their survival.

This technology has allowed the capitalists to delink from a specific country and become global capitalists more than ever before.

If there is a revolution in the base,
how will a revolution take place in the superstructure?

The new developments are new classes!

New classes means new revolutionary possibilities



*Where
Is the
Party
Of the
New Class
Of
Impoverished
workers?*



The dialectical opposite of the new global corporate and government elite is the impoverished sector being thrown out of society with no social contract and near permanent unemployment. The global capitalists are amassing great fortunes while the masses of people are being forced into new levels of poverty.

Many thought that Obama could be another FDR & transform the Democrat Party for us. *Did he?*

1944

A plan he proposed but couldn't get:



- The right to a useful and remunerative job in the industries or shops or farms or mines of the nation;
- The right to earn enough to provide adequate food and clothing and recreation;
- The right of every farmer to raise and sell his products at a return which will give him and his family a decent living;
- The right of every businessman, large and small, to trade in an atmosphere of freedom from unfair competition and domination by monopolies at home or abroad;
- The right of every family to a decent home;
- The right to adequate medical care and the opportunity to achieve and enjoy good health;
- The right to adequate protection from the economic fears of old age, sickness, accident, and unemployment;
- The right to a good education.

All of these rights spell security. And ... we must be prepared to move forward, in the implementation of these rights, to new goals of human happiness and well-being.

2011



A plan against the people that he got!:

Bail out for the big banks he considered too big to fail. Black youth unemployment nearly 50% in many cities!

Preparing to cut Medicare and Medicaid.

Cut home heating subsidy for the elderly.

Fails to meet with and support the policies of the Congressional Black Caucus.

Continues to lead the US into unnecessary wars, the latest being Libya.

**The Obama Moment was thought to be
a political opportunity, but now we know
it as an ideological defeat! More than him.**



A section of the middle class embraces multi-racialism while the masses remain Black! Example is Tiger Woods & Cablinasian and US Census changes.



6. What is this person's race? Mark one or more boxes.

White

Black, African Am., or Negro

American Indian or Alaska Native — Print name of enrolled or principal tribe.

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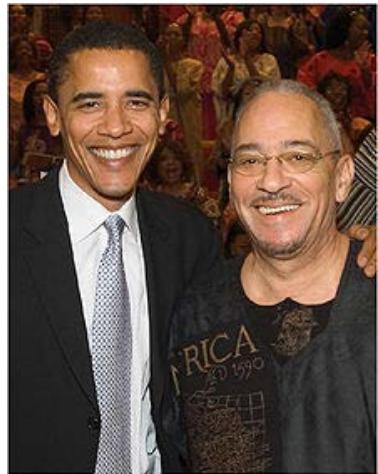
Asian Indian Japanese Native Hawaiian
 Chinese Korean Guamanian or Chamorro
 Filipino Vietnamese Samoan
 Other Asian — Print race, for example, Hmong, Laotian, Thai, Pakistani, Cambodian, and so on.
 Other Pacific Islander — Print race, for example, Fijian, Tongan, and so on.

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Some other race — Print race.

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Obama rejects the Freedom movement for compromise with American mainstream



Is the American glass half full, or half empty?

“This is the reality in which Reverend Wright and other African-Americans of his generation grew up. They came of age in the late fifties and early sixties, a time when segregation was still the law of the land and opportunity was systematically constricted. **What's remarkable is not how many failed in the face of discrimination, but rather how many men and women overcame the odds;** how many were able to make a way out of no way *for those like me who would come after them.*”—Obama, March 18, 2008

“When it came to putting the citizens of African descent fairly, America failed. She put them in chains. The government put them on slave quarters. Put them on auction blocks. Put them in cotton fields. Put them in inferior schools. Put them in substandard housing. Put them in scientific experiments. Put them in the lower paying jobs. Put them outside the equal protection of the law. Kept them out of their racist bastions of higher education, and locked them into positions of hopelessness and helplessness.

“The government gives them the drugs, builds bigger prisons, passes a three strike law and **then wants us to sing God Bless America. Naw, naw, naw. Not God Bless America. God Damn America!** That’s in the Bible. For killing innocent people. God Damn America for treating us citizens as less than human. God Damn America as long as she tries to act like she is God and she is Supreme.”—Rev. Wright, April 13, 2003

The crisis we face is 1963 vs 2008: The Malcolm X Moment vs the Obama Moment

Malcolm X argued that Black people must unite and fight against a common enemy, the system of racism and class exploitation, on a world scale “western interests.”

Obama argues that Black people must unite with all Americans and fight for political reforms based on policies that Republicans and Democrats can agree on.

Malcolm argued that we have to begin with an analysis of revolution on a global scale based on land and bloodshed.

Obama argues that we begin within the policy framework of the US and that we proceed based on the policy recommendation of the military generals.

Malcolm argued the position of the field Negroes and spent his time with them.

Obama argues the position of the mortgage bankers and pulls them close to him as advisors.

**This is the ideological crisis we face. What is the future we want?
What has been our past?**

The solution is in our hands – We must become difference makers

There are several critical questions to be answered to resolve this ideological crisis, questions that require us to become masters of our ideological orientation.

1. Do we believe freedom is possible, no matter the odds?
2. Do we believe Black people can once again build a freedom movement?
3. Do we believe that America will be good for Black people without a freedom movement, the mainstream will do what is right?
4. Do we believe in “academic excellence and social responsibility”?



We need an ideological framework

(a tool for mapping others and personal transformation)

- 1. *Identity:*** Who are we? Who am I? Why is this important?
- 2. *Analysis:*** What are the problems we face? That I face? And what are the solutions that are possible?
- 3. *Commitment:*** How important is the solution to me? To us?
- 4. *Program:*** What plans do I (we) have to get to the solution? Who are my (our) friends? Enemies?
- 5. *Action:*** What are the concrete steps to be taken now?

Identity:

Who are Black people?

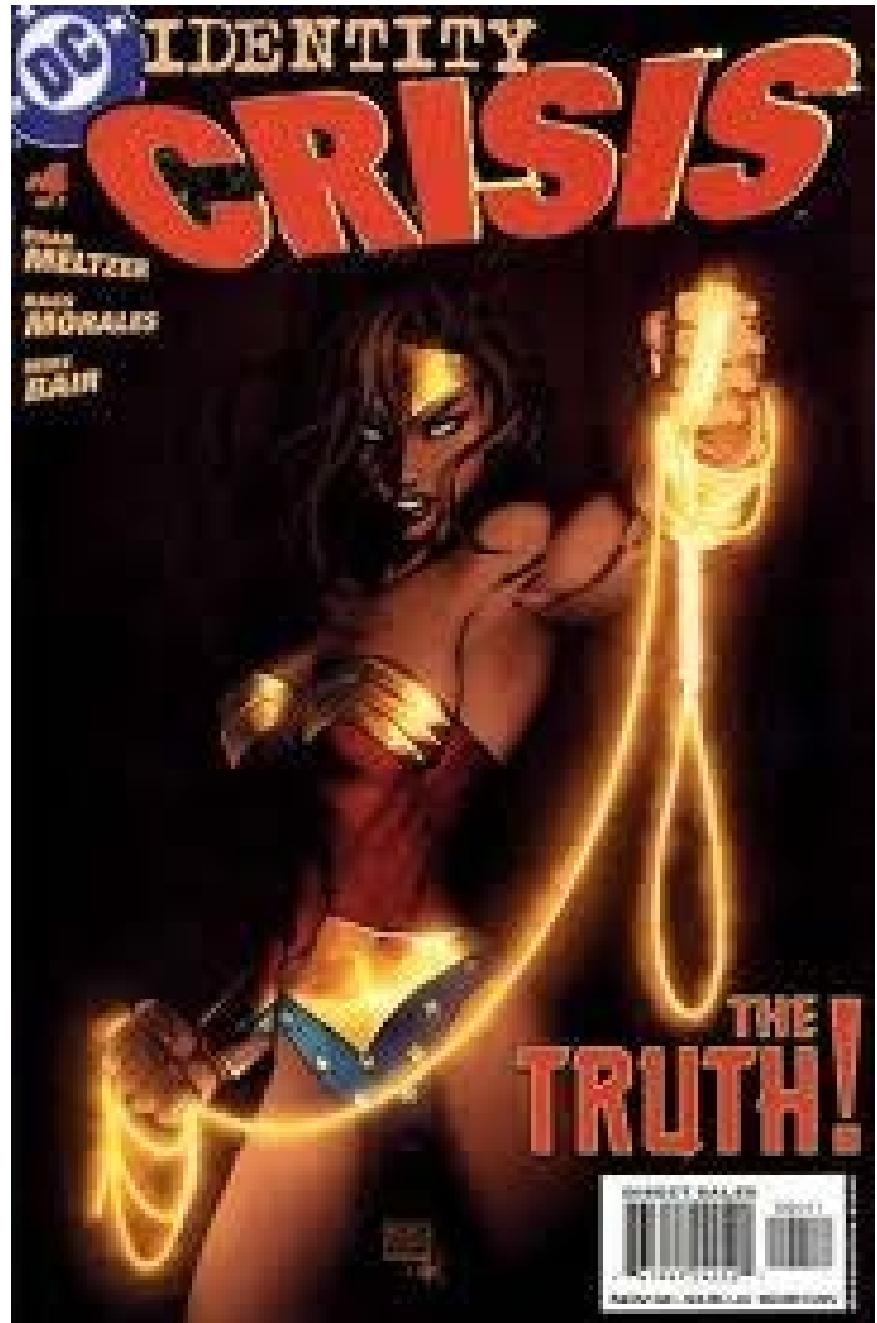
How do we know?

Who do they think they are?

What do others think?

What difference does it make?

*These are fundamental aspects
of the ideology we need*



Five approaches to the identity of Black people

...as a social relation

...as a language, name

...as psychology, self concept (image)

...as culture

...as class



African Diaspora
Maritime

The dialectics of Black identity as a social relation

1. Black relations with whites (Europeans)
2. Black relations with other Blacks (Africans and the Diaspora)
3. Black relations in the US with each other
4. Blacks in global context

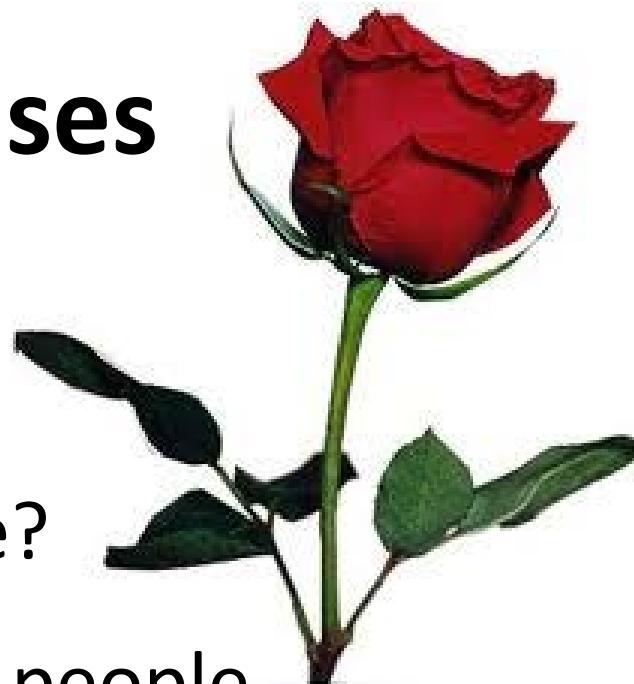


Three naming crises

What is the **biological name**?

Is this science or racist ideology?

Is this about phenotype or genotype?



What is the **group name**? Are Black people a nationality? Negro? Or is there a land based reference for origin?

What is the **individual naming practice**? Were Black people named after slave masters? How do we name ourselves today?

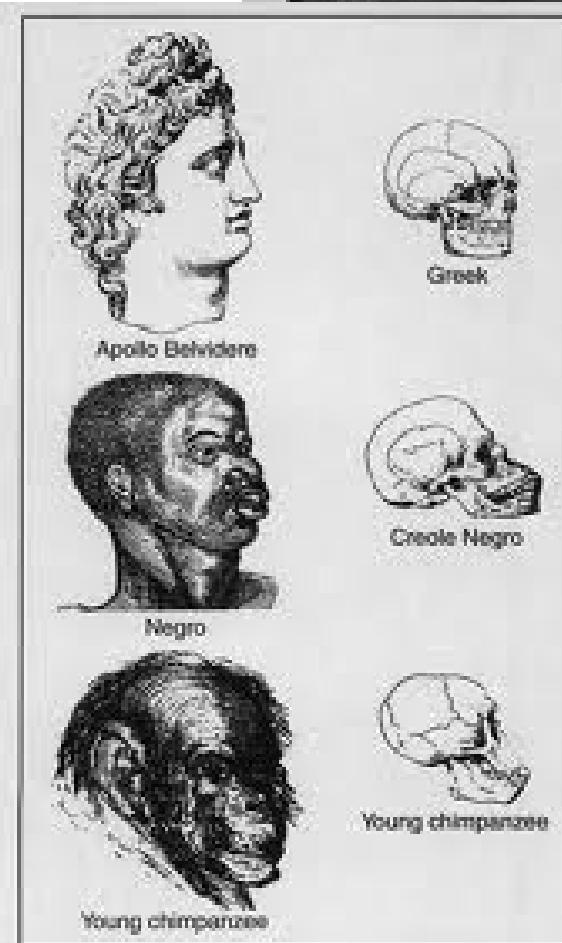
Group names are critical: What have we been called?

Social relations with white people:

Colored
Nonwhite

Names of isolation:

Negro
Nigger



TO BE SOLD on board the
Ship *Bance Island*, on tuesday the 6th
of May next, at *Abley Ferry*; a choice
cargo of about 150 fine healthy
NEGROES,
just arrived from the
Windward & Rice Coast.
—The utmost care has
already been taken, and
shall be continued, to keep them free from
the least danger of being infected with the
SMALL-POX, no boat having been on
board, and all other communication with
people from *Charles-Town* prevented.
Austin, Laurens, & Appleby.

N. B. Full one Half of the above Negroes have had the
SMALL-POX in their own Country..

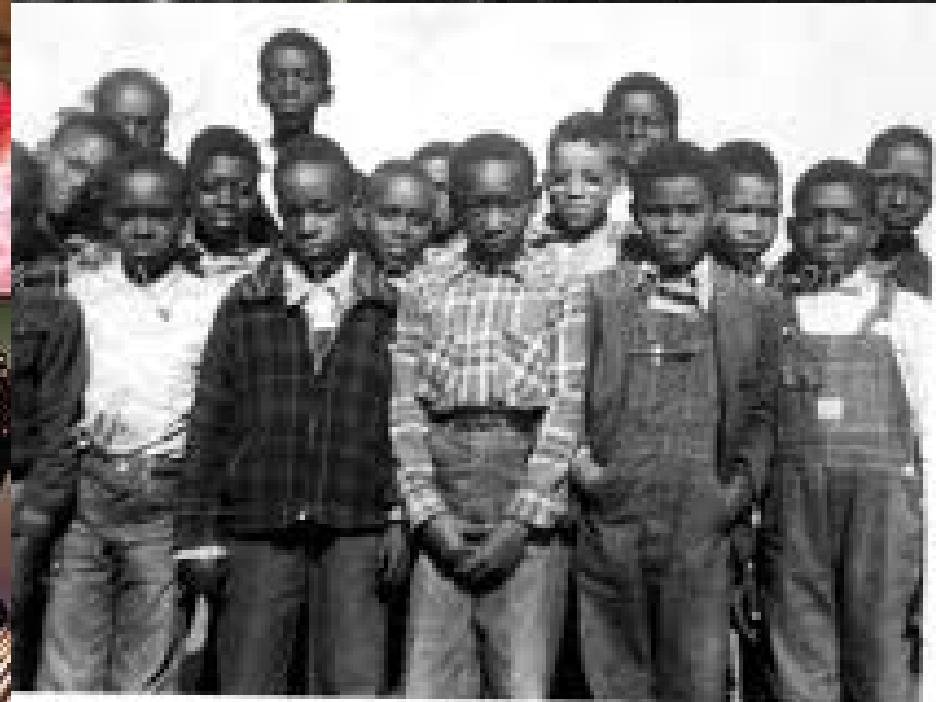
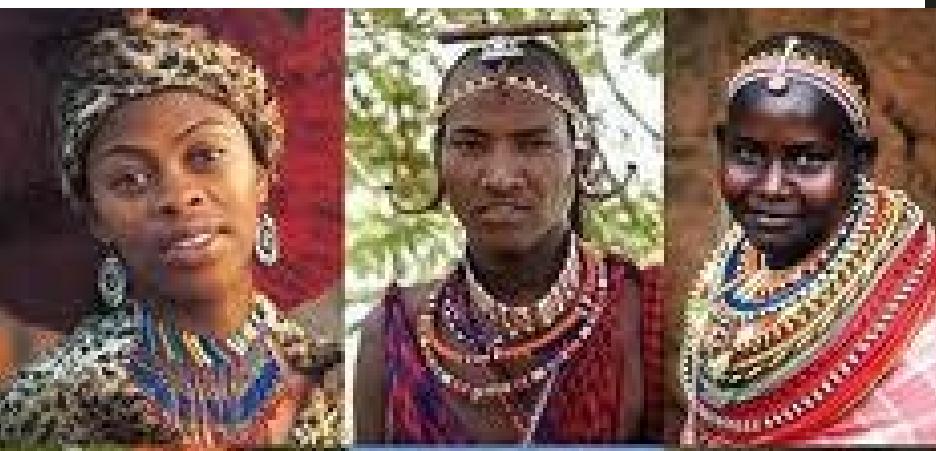
What have we called ourselves?

Traditional African nations

Black

African Americans

Afro-Americans



American Black Baby Names for Girls

American Black Baby Names for Girls have origins in many languages including French, Latin, English and African. Many black baby names for girls have the popular prefix of 'La' or 'Le' (Latoya, Lashawn, Latrice etc) and also 'Da' and 'De' (Denelle, Danisha etc) Names like Tanisha (meaning the name of a day indicating birth on a Monday) originate in Africa from the Hausa language. Other African languages include Zulu, Swahili, Igbo and Yoruba.

Black Baby Names for Boys

Black Baby Names for Boys also have origins in many languages including French, Latin, English and the various languages which originated in Africa. Many Black Baby Names for Boys have connections to Greek and Classical literature, the bible or reflect noble positions such as Earl, Prince or Duke. There are also those with the prefix of 'La' as is Lamarr or Dajon. There is also a trend to make unusual use of hyphens in Black Baby Names for Boys, capital letters and apostrophes such as D'marreio or D'Sean and Le-Vaughn.

**The masses of Black people continue to assert
a Black identity in naming children!**

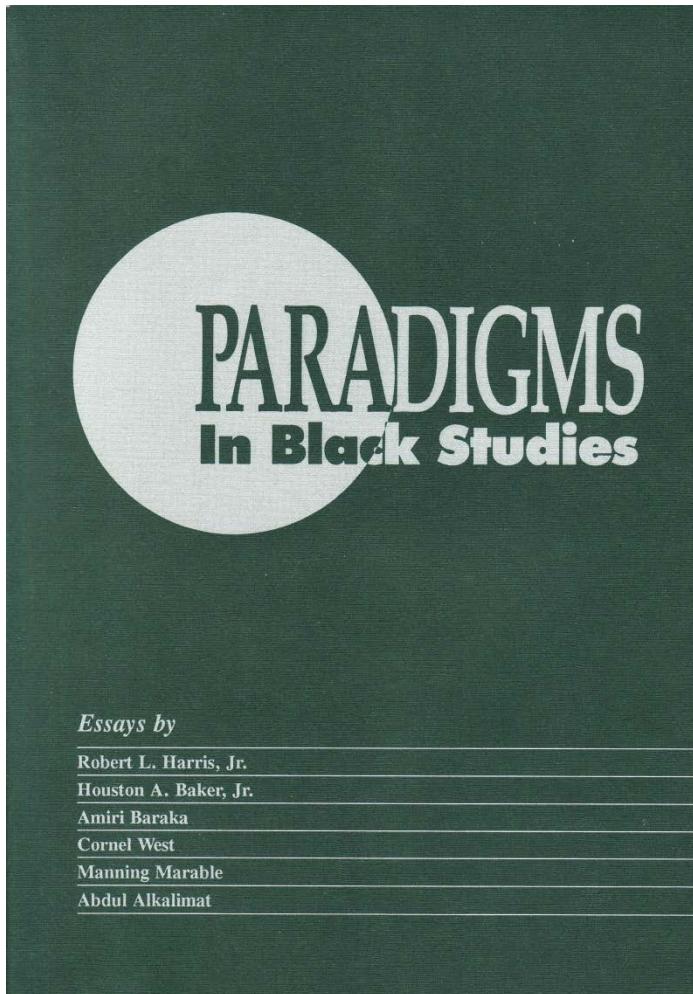
Analysis:

Crisis of Metaphysical vs Dialectical Thinking

Time	Problem	Solution
Past	National oppression, Class Exploitation	Negotiate, escape, or fight
Present	National oppression, Class Exploitation	Negotiate, escape, or fight
Future	National oppression, Class Exploitation	Negotiate, escape, or fight

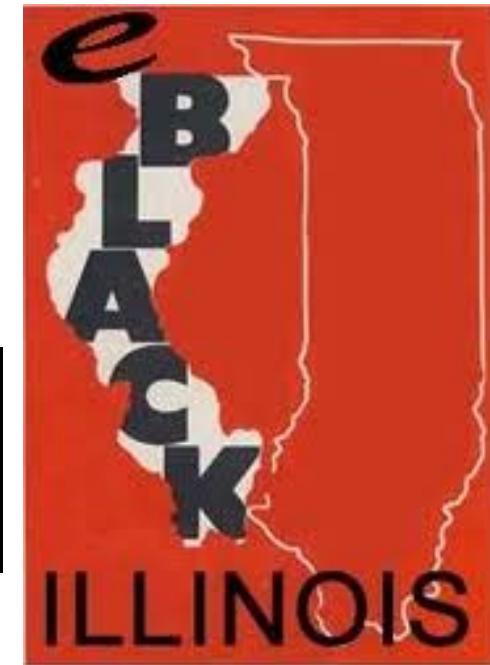
A new paradigm!

The Malcolm X moment changed all disciplines



The integrationist position negated a Black perspective because of the absolute need to be universal. This was reversed. The Black particularity was defined as the fundamental grounding for attaining the universal. This was/is a return to the source.

Ideological mission of Black Studies: Academic excellence and social responsibility



e
BLACK
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Black Studies as Text
1967 - 2009 [INTRODUCTION](#) [HOW TO CITE](#)

Black Studies has published and not perished in all three of stages: *social movement*, *academic profession*, and *knowledge network*. This ebook is a historical anthology of work produced by a network of activist intellectuals called Peoples College under the leadership of Abdul Alkalimat (Gerald McWorter). This site contains full text files of 28 different publications as searchable PDF's.

Historical Anthology of work by Peoples College

SOCIAL MOVEMENT - Select Text ...
ACADEMIC PROFESSION - Select Text ...
KNOWLEDGE NETWORK - Select Text ...

Recording the History of African American Studies

AFROCENTRICITY • AFRICOLGY • AFRICANA STUDIES • PAN-AFRICAN STUDIES •
• AFRO-AMERICAN STUDIES • BLACK STUDIES •

This site established February 21, 2000 / Edited by [Abdul Alkalimat](#) mcworter@uiuc.edu
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Excellence is defined by Black intellectual history.

Our analysis can build upon centuries of insight, especially the last 100 years of scholarship in the radical Black tradition.



W. E. B. DuBois
(1868 – 1963)

Social responsibility means serving the people.



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Manifesto

Manifesto 2011: Community and Technology

We dedicate ourselves to become difference makers! An information revolution is underway, leading global transformation in health, education, business, culture and in the diverse activities of our daily lives.

This revolution cannot and will not bypass any underserved or low income community. Every person and every neighborhood is impacted and therefore challenged to act.

We rely on: cyber-democracy, collective intelligence, and information freedom.

Cyber-Democracy means universal access: every person and every community organization able to make full use of new technologies.

Collective Intelligence means hearing all voices: all of us uploading as well as downloading.

Information Freedom means online information is findable, easy to use, and requires no special permission to access.

With these values, we will work together so all our communities and community organizations can communicate, represent themselves online, and use digital technology to create cyber-power for social change!

Commitment:

A rhetorical passion, or material investment?

1. Words & intentions

vs

2 Time and money



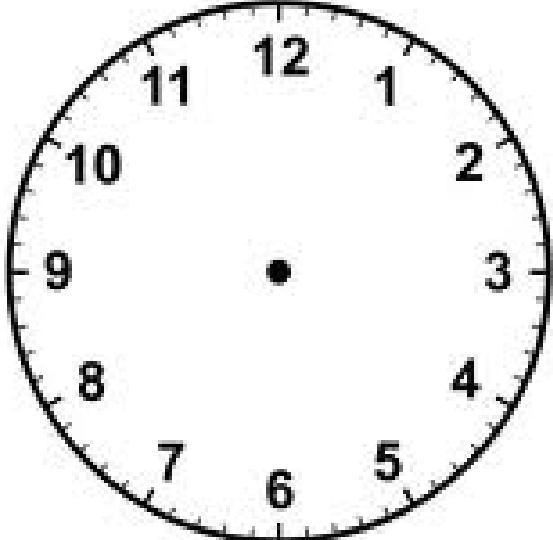
The Nobel Peace Prize 2009

"for his extraordinary efforts to strengthen international diplomacy and cooperation between peoples."



Photo: Pete Souza, Obama-Biden Transition Project, licensed by Attribution Share Alike 3.0
Barack Obama

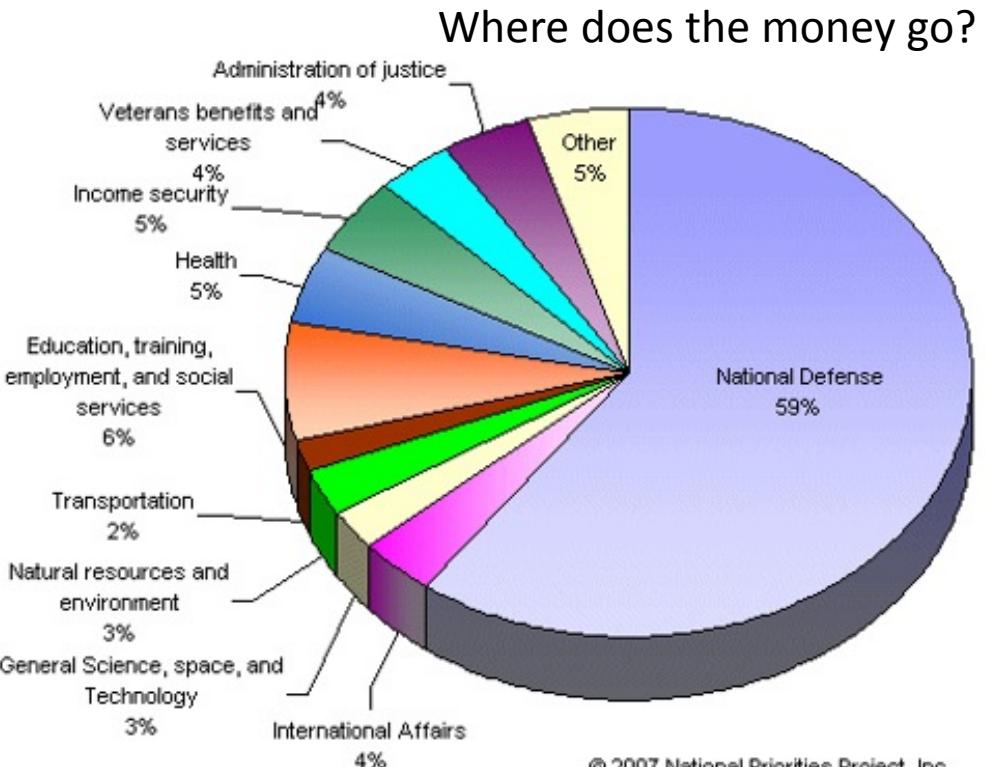
USA



What time is it?



Proposed Federal Discretionary Budget, FY2008



Where does the money go?

How much time do you have: 24/7, right?
How much have you invested in a project?

Program: Plans to utilize all available resources, along with uniting allies, to go up against the enemies of the people

1. Strategy: long range plans for victory
2. Tactics: Short term plans that change with the day to day circumstances within the overall strategy



Strategy

The Strategy Pyramid



Flawed

Execution

Sound

Flawed

Sound

Doomed
from the
Beginning

A
Botched
Job

Flirting
with
Disaster

A Pretty
Good
Chance

**Leadership is about
being responsible to
the community –
so planning is the
essential task!**

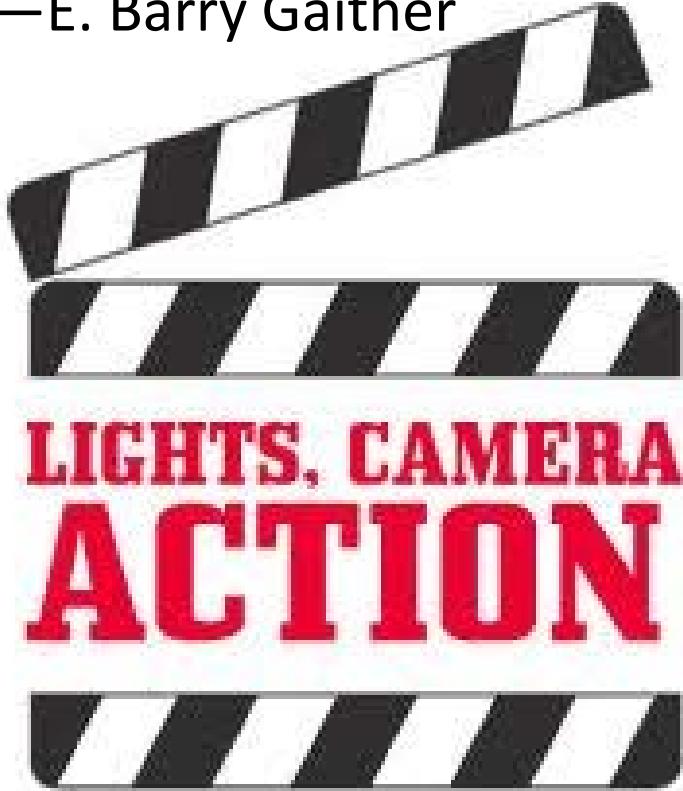


Go to the people. Learn from them. Live with them.
Start with what they know. Build with what they
have. The best of leaders when the job is done,
when the task is accomplished, the people will say
we have done it ourselves.—**Lao Tzu**

“Now is the time.”—Charlie Parker

“There’s nothing to it but to do it.”

—E. Barry Gaither



**Plan your work,
then work your plan!**

**“The enemy advances, we retreat;
the enemy camps, we harass;
the enemy tires, we attack;
the enemy retreats, we pursue”**

—Mao Tse-tung



Websites to check for more info

eBlack Studies

<http://www.eblackstudies.org/>

Brother Malcolm X

<http://www.brothermalcolm.net/>

eBlack CU

<http://eblackcu.net/portal/>

eBlack in Cuba

<http://murchisoncenter.org/cuba/>



Thank you for watching.

Please send comments to



H-Afro-Am@H-Net.msu.edu