

The Niagara Movement: Black Protest Reborn 1905-2005

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To my Creator whom I serve, to my ancestors on whose shoulders I stand, to President Judson, to Dr. Dixon, to Dr. Appeanding, to the Black goddess in my life (Dr. Nanthalia McJamerson), to the Black History Committee who invited me to do this lecture, my fellow colleagues, to the students, ladies and gentlemen I say. Ina labari? Labari sai alheri. What is the new? The news is good. I have just spoken to you in one of the oldest languages known to mankind, the Hausa language of northern Nigeria. Certainly the news is good that we are here tonight to celebrate the beginning of African American History Month.

A point of personal privilege. Take 5 minutes per class period and teach about the history of GSU, according to the Consent Degree Master, "It is the National University in Louisiana."

Shall we begin?

Each year the Association for the Study of African American Life and History

(ASALH), which was founded by Dr. Carter G. Woodson in 1915, selects the theme for Black History Month. This year's theme is "The Niagara Movement: Black Protest Reborn 1905-2005". As I begin this lecture, it is important to put this theme into historical perspective. Lets look at the following, briefly: (1) the conditions that led to the creation of the Niagara Movement; (2) the Niagara Movement itself; (3) the lingering effects of the movement and (4) where are we now, in the year 2005.

Historical Overview

Black protest prior to the Niagara Movement was made up of action of individuals. In 1829, David Walker, a free Black from Boston published a militant anti slavery pamphlet titled "An Appeal to the Colored People of the World" to cast off the yoke of slavery. Denmark Versey, a free Black artisan of Charleston, South Carolina, planned a slave revolt there. The most successful slave rebellion was led by Nat Turner in 1831, in Southhampton County, Virginia. Also, individuals, such as Harriet Tubman (Underground Railroad fame), Sojourner Truth and Frederick Douglass (North Star, Newspaper founder) worked with the abolitionists to end slavery. Afterwards they spoke out for equality. Legal actions included two cases filed with the Supreme Court, the Dred Scott Case (1857) which denied citizenship to African Americans and in the 1896 Plessy v. Ferguson case that sanctioned "separate but equal" as the law of the land until the Brown decision in 1954. Those were the types of efforts at Black protest in the 19th century prior to Dr. Du Bois' bold move.

Historical Perspective

At the end of Reconstruction, African Americans witness the great betrayal, as the three branches of the federal government (the president, Congress and the Supreme Court) turned their backs on them and left them to the mercy of their former slave masters as the Bourbons/Democrats regain home rule in the South. This was clearly demonstrated with Rutherford B. Hayes and the Compromise of 1877, in which he struck a deal to win the presidential election of 1876 by withdrawing federal troops from the South. With the return of the Democrats to Congress, the Radical Republicans once the champions of African Americans rights and their desire to retain control of Congress had their strength diluted. The Supreme Court sanctioned laws that invalidated many of the newly won freedoms African Americans had gained as it ruled in favor of Jim Crowism and share cropping became the labor system of the South. The Ku Klux Klan, the Knights of the White Camellia and white leagues enforced the laws of the land. Disfranchisement reigned throughout as various methods were used to deny African Americans the right to vote including the grandfather clause, the poll tax, and the literacy test.

Education seemed the only hope for African American as they along with white philanthropists paved the way. Southerners hailed Booker T. Washington as the savior of his race after his Atlanta Exposition speech in 1895. Opposition developed toward Washington for the conciliatory nature of his policy in dealing with whites and his advocacy of an industrial education. The opposition occurred within the ranks of the educated African American elite. One of his most outspoken opponent was Dr. W.E.B. DuBois.

With the backdrop of the racial divide and the growing influence of Booker T. Washington, another approach was developed. Dr. Dubois and thirteen other black intellectuals called for a meeting in Niagara Fall, Canada in June, 1905 to form the Niagara Movement. A totally Black movement, its platform called for the following: (1)freedom of speech and criticism; (2)male suffrage;(3) the abolition of all distinction based on race;(4) the recognition of the basic principles of human fellowship and (5)the respect for all working persons.

The Niagara Movement met in 1905, 1906, 1907 and finally in 1908. As an all black movement it suffered from weak finances and a policy which restricted membership to black intellectuals only. After the Springfield, Illinois riots in 1908 which shocked the north, white liberals called a national meeting and invited the radicals of the Niagara Movement. Educators, professors, publicist, bishops, judges, and social workers from all across America met. From that meeting the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) was formed in 1909. Dr. DuBois became the only officer and the director of publicity and research. This was later to change after Dubois and the Black intellectuals learned the hard way that Blacks and whites needed each other as the black and white keys on a piano, and yet they could still maintain their own individuality. Dr. Dubois would create the *Crisis* which became the publication arm of the NAACP while the organization used the court system to break down racial bearers in America. Today, the NAACP is the oldest civil right organization in America.

Most of the NAACP's early efforts were directed against lynching. In this area it could claim considerable success. In 1911 there were 71 lynchings in the United States, with a black person the victim 63 times; by the 1950s lynching had virtually disappeared. Since its beginning, and with increasing emphasis since World War II, the NAACP has advocated nonviolent protests against discrimination and has disapproved of extremist black groups such as SNCC and the Black Panthers in the 1960s and 70s and CORE and the Nation of Islam in the 1980s and 90s, many of which criticized the organization as passive. While complacent in the 1980s, it became more active in legislative redistricting, voter registration, and lobbying in the 1990s.

National Urban League

In 1910, with the aid of B. T. Washington, the National Urban was established in New York City to counter balance the influence of the NAACP. From its conception it was an interracial organization. Initially it began to assist Black migrants who had come to the cities, unschooled and unguided about the competition of the northern labor markets and craft unions. Today, it is an interracial, non-profit community service organization that uses the tools and methods of social work, economics, law, and other disciplines to secure equal opportunity in all sectors of society for African Americans and other minorities. This was unheard of when the Urban League began in 1910.

Whitney M. Young, Jr. became the executive director in 1961. Its tax-exempt status barred it from engaging in protest activities; however the League did host planning

meetings in its home base of New York, for Dr. King's 1963 March on Washington. After Young's death, Vernon E. Jordan, Jr. took became president in 1971. He oversaw a major expansion of its social-service efforts in housing, health care, education and minority business development. Jordan also established The State of Black America Report given once a year to the nation. In 1982, John E. Jacob took the leadership position and increased the financial stability of the organization. By 1994 Hugh B. Price became the league's top man as efforts were being made to roll back gains made by blacks in the 1960's. He launched a three-fold program:

- (1) education and youth development;
- (2) individual and community-wide economic empowerment and
- (3) forceful advocacy of affirmative action and the promotion of inclusion. His most notable achievement was the League's campaign for African American Achievement, a community mobilization and advocacy initiative creative to raise awareness and promote understanding, especially among young people, that achievement matters.

On May 15, 2003, the national board selected Marc H. Morial of New Orleans as its head – its future looks bright. This organization is considered to be more conservative than the NACCP. It has 50, 000 members in 115 affiliates in 34 states and the district of Columbia

Congress of Racial Equality

CORE which was formed in 1942, created a new mood in the black community-one of open resistance and continuing confrontation with racial injustice across the U.S. The Core tactic was centered on non violent self-sacrifice within the context of

direct action according to one of its founders, James Farmer. Core pioneered the sit-ins in Chicago in 1943, later, drug and department stores in St. Louis; theatres in Columbia, Missouri; registration drives in South Carolina and Louisiana and in 1961, the Freedom Rides across in the South.

In the late 1960's Core switched its emphasis from integration to black nationalism and then it endorse the adjenda of the Reagan's and George H.W. Bush's administrations. This caused a number of whites to flee the organization. Today, as we enter the new millennium, Core is focused on preparing minorities for the technical skills that are needed in this new age. Core also continues to fight against job discrimination, prejudice in labor, housing, education and the criminal justice system. To this end Core has established several programs to meet these needs. Core has 100,000 ,embers, 5 regional groups, 39 state groups and 116 local groups.

Southern Christian Leadership Conference

SCLC was the result of the refusal of Rosie Parks to give up her seat to a white man on a bus in Montgomery, Alabama in 1957. From that incident, the SCLS organization was organized, the Montgomery Bus Boycott was established and the Rev. Martin L. King was elected as its head. Dr. King headed it until his assassination in 1968. Rev. King was America's foremost proponent of non-violent protest and "passive resistance". SCLC seeks to gain for African American "full citizenship rights" and "total integration" into the fabric of American life. This is accomplished through the technique of "non-violent direct mass action". The SCLC

is interracial in character, and has supporters among people of all faiths, religion and creeds.

With the tactics of this organization, Dr. King was able with the aid of the world media in bringing America to the point of improving race relations in the country by exposing the harsh treatment blacks suffered at the hands of their fellow countrymen.

Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee

SNCC is perhaps the only civil rights organization that women activist played a major role in its founding and developing. Ella Baker, director of the Atlanta headquarter of the SCLC advocated students for protestors in Raleigh, North Carolina to form their own organization. Some of the other women were Diana Nash, Ruby D, Smith, and Roberta Yancy to name a few. The most famous was Fannie Lou Hamer (1917-77) who in the 1964 Democratic Convention helped to unseat the regular white Democratic Party delegates from Mississippi and seat her Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party delegates. During the Black Power period the organization became increasing male dominated as Stokely Carmichael took over and by the 1970's with external repression and internal ideological conflicts the organization cease to exist.

The Black Panthers

The Black Panthers Party was founded in 1966 in Oakland, California by Bobby Seale and Huey Newton. They demanded the right to control the schools,, medical centers, welfare programs and police system in poor black areas, exemption from military service and the right to bear arms for self-protection. They organized chapters throughout the country, initiating ‘liberation’ schools, breakfast programs for children, and medical clinics in poor areas. The black Panthers had many confrontations with the police that led to shootings and arrests. Newton was from Monroe (1942) earned a Ph.D. in Social Philosophy from Univ. of CA in 1980 and was killed in 1989 in Oakland. Seale is on the speaking circuit. The party ceased to exist.

Summary

The decade in which the Niagara Movement started was seminal to African American society. The Black intellectuals that formed the Niagara Movement was the first wave of educated African Americans to come out of slavery to organize a recognized national organization to give voice to themselves and their race. They would soon learn the lessons of the necessity of capitalism and networking with other racial groups. This singular act of standing up by DuBois and the other Black intellectuals sparked a chain reaction in Black America, as numerous other African Americans began to follow their lead and establish organizations on their own, whether fraternities/sororities, black newspapers or others. African Americans had begun to speak out for themselves and that was only the beginning.

The fact that Booker T. Washington was “hand picked” by whites as the leader of his race was the beginning of a selection process that has continued until today, in 2005. While Washington drew fire from this selection and even has been branded as an Uncle Tom, that I submit he had to play the cards he was dealt and play by the politics of the times. When looking closely at the situation, the following needs to be evaluated:

- (1) Washington was located in Alabama where the KKK ruled the day and night, there was no support to turn to on the local, state, nor federal levels as in later decades
- (2) while Washington publicly and daily operated in a manner to support what the times demanded, he secretly funneled money to the NAACP to tear down the very system he publicly advocated.

Finally, the disagreement between Washington and DuBois over how to educate African Americans is an ongoing discussion about these two men and their role in America and it will continue. In my opinion, both were right, it took an industrial and agricultural education for African Americans to adjust to the impact of their newly won freedom(a look at the early history of GSU will verify that) and DuBois was right also. We needed and we still continue to need the intellectuals to teach and inspire our people to excel and achieve.

The disagreement between these intellectuals led to the formation of the Niagara Movement, then the NAACP and other black protest organizations in America. Each organization used a different approach.

To a degree one can say that the Black protest movement was still in its formative/building stages during the 1920's, especially since it was a dress rehearsal for what would happen in the 1930's and there after. During WWII, the Black press, led by the Pittsburgh Courier launched the "Double Victory Campaign" which stood for victory over racism abroad and victory over racism at home. The returning troops who survived the battles fields of Europe were in no mood to be treated like second class citizenships. They eagerly joined the NAACP and other groups that spoke out for their rights. It was also during WWII between 1940 and 1941, Asa Phillip Randolph, head of the Sleeping Car Porters and Maids, with the aid of the NAACP and Urban League, formed the March On Washington Movement (MOWM) to force the federal government to stop the discrimination in the war industry. The mere threat of a march on the national capital by thousands of African Americans was enough to get Franklin D. Roosevelt to issue Executive Order 8802 which forbade discrimination in government and defense job hiring and establish a Fair Employment Practice Commission to enforce the order. This singular act set the tone for what was to come in the future of Black protest (mass action).

The 1950's was the decade of the NAACP's greatest legal victory in the Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka Kansas and it also mark the 1957 Little Rock, Ark. intervention by federal troops at Central High School, this was just a prelude of what was on the horizon!

The 1960's began with the sit-ins in Greensboro, North Carolina. The series of protest actions included the following in 1961 the Freedom rides in the South, in

1963 King's March on Washington, in 1965 march from Selma to Montgomery, in 1965 assassination of Malcolm X, and Stokely Carmichael use of the term "Black Power", James Brown said, "Say it Loud, I am Black and I am Proud" and in the 1968 assassination of Martin Luther King. The word was "Burn, Baby, Burn!" as riot after riot took place in over 100 cities after Dr. King's death.

The 1970's, 1980's and 1990's witnessed the attempt to right past wrongs with affirmative action, and by the time the 1970's was over, the Bakke case in 1978 challenged that. Later decades witnessed a backlash to affirmative action, the rejection to the quota system, the limitation of the use of race in admission to higher education, the re-segregation of America along racial lines, increased racism in profiling of African American drivers, the Rodney King beating, the reaction to the O.J. Simpson verdict and the personal scandals of high profile African Americans. Currently, there is a changing of guard in the leadership of some the Civil rights organizations (NAACP-Efume stepped down and (SCLC-Martin L. King, III stepped down, and the URBAN LEAGUE named Marc Morial as new head.

WHERE DO WE STAND TODAY IN 2005 ?

Lets review the following factors:

- (1) demonstrations, Freedom rides and riots of the 1960's and 1970's are over with. These methods may not work in the new millennium

- (2) since the Brown decision, many African Americans are realizing that it was not the panacea we believed it would be, REALITY CHECK? America is moving to a segregated gated society.
- (3) the civil rights organizations must adjust to the new America with new bold strategies and tactics like Dubois did with the Niagara Movement and if they do not work, we must quickly change courses as he did instead of trying to make a dead horse wake up and run.
- (4) DuBois and Washington both knew their history and had a sense of who they were, we must insist that our youth learn our history and we, their elders must learn our history also. Dubois and Washington understood that!
- (5) DuBois and Washington both understood the power of networking with other ethnic groups as demonstrated with the NAACP and with Tuskegee. Will we learn from their examples?
- (6) Both men knew the harsh reality of American capitalism and they used it to benefit their race.
- (7) DuBois the creator of the “talented tenth concept” advocated an active participation in the affairs of our communities, will we follow his lead?

The debate started by DuBois’ rejection of Washington’s conciliatory tone has to be viewed objectively in the time, place and politics of the era in which these men lived.

Regardless of which view you follow, both were:

1. intellectuals and were recognized by their peers as such

2. both left living legacies (Washington-Tuskegee, Urban League and GSU, and DuBois-NAACP/Crisis) and that was in addition to the books they wrote.
3. both were controversial figures in African American and American histories (Washington considered to some as an Uncle Tom and DuBois as a militant/Communist to others).
4. The debate of their role and positions in history will continue to a subject of discussion for many generations to come.

As I take my seat, I leave you with these poetic words:

Who Will Speak Now-Who Will Lead Us Now?

From the edifices of worshipping our God to the halls of academia, they came forth often at great personal sacrifice and threats of death to lead us, and to speak for us.

Who will speak now, who will lead us now?

Fortified with the strength of our ancestors, the faith of our forefathers, solified with the strength of being and cause, they stood their ground under tremendous pressure. Clothed with the armor of rightness of purpose and with the intellectual awareness of a sage they lead and spoke for our race without fear or intimidation.

Who will speak now, who will lead us now?

By assassin's bullet, death by natural causes, by drug or sex scandals or by being cooped the leaders of the past and today are silenced. Who will speak now, who will lead us now?

Who will come forth to pick up the mantle DuBois, Martin, and Malcolm left? Who will inspire today's generation? Who will challenge the system? Who will have the strength and fortitude to see it through? Who will stand his ground and not be move? Who will speak now, who will lead us now? Who will? Who will?

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