

# The BLACK C o M M e n t a t o r

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## **The Dream Merchants' Fall The Decline of Civil Rights Hegemony in the Age of Barack Obama By T. S. Aschenge**

**BlackCommentator.com Guest Commentator**

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At approximately 6:45 A.M. on August 3, 1961, I began my global sojourn on terra firma out of the sacred enclave of my mother's womb. What I was not understandably aware of at the time, was that on the following day several thousand miles away the future first Black President of the United States was beginning his earthly sojourn as well. Like Barack Obama I was not quite seven years old when Dr. Martin Luther King's life was tragically ended by an assassin's bullet. However, this one event would actually become the single-most transformative moment of my entire life. Even though I was a mere adolescent at the time, my oldest sister was rather active amongst the far-flung coterie of the New York Black Panther Party; and thus a good measure of that natural activist spirit was easily bequeathed to me as well. What I can still remember of that time, is the ubiquitous sense of impending chaos that seemed to prevail throughout the Panther community. The world that I knew was under siege. Although not everyone in the Black community was a member of the Black Panthers, the Party continued to enjoy widespread nationwide support throughout its existence. Back then, there were many White allies from the Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) as well. Just like the American Founding Fathers, it seemed that everyone that I knew was together engaged in a revolutionary war against the awesome power of imperialist tyranny. That much was clear.

Contrary to the neatly contrived image that has been conspicuously painted into the illusionary landscape of an overwhelming popular perception, the 1960's Black freedom struggle was never simply a Civil Rights Movement after all. Civil Rights as a concept was but one aspect of a struggle that was engaged upon a number of intellectual fronts, not the least of which was the enormous desire for Human Rights and Self-determination. This sentiment had arguably gained the utmost supremacy in the

hearts and minds of Black people by the time of Dr. King's assassination. Truth be told, by September of 1968 *'Say it Loud, I'm Black and I'm Proud'* had become the most popular thought of the day; even as J Edgar Hoover's Cointelpro program intensified its efforts at destroying the independent will of Black people nationwide. More than 130 cities went up in flames immediately after Dr. King's murder as nonviolent resistance was no longer deemed a tactic that was in the best interest of Black people. Nevertheless, first they killed the militant, and then they killed the moderate. From that moment on, the way was made clear, for the merchandizing of the dream. From April 5, 1968 onward, a clever mythology began to take ubiquitous shape and it was neatly propagandized by a whole new cabal of Black leaders, who now that the man himself had transitioned, could easily claim their role as the presumptive heirs to the enormous egalitarian spirit of Dr. King. Hosea William's Feed the Hungry program was the only tangible evidence of Dr. King's Movement that would actually survive the regime change of 1968. With the BPP and Black Nationalists once again under a vast murderous siege by J. Edgar Hoover and the United States government, and with Dr. King out of the way, the world would now be saturated with a Disneyland version of the recent past. For the very first time in the relay-race of African-American history, a whole new generation of Black leadership failed to pass the baton.

For all intents and purposes, the Ten Point Program, and the Black Panther philosophy in general, was simply another form of political Garveyism on the ground. When the Black Panthers shouted "All Power to the People!" this was really being broadcast through the intergenerational echo of Garvey's call, "Africa for the Africans Home and Abroad!" All that Garvey was trying to impress upon Black people in America was that they should take heed to make sure that they continue to own the stores and control the economy of their own communities. On the face of it, there should have been nothing that could even appear to be unreasonable about this at all. It was a plea for self-determination pure and simple, not much different than what we witness in the Korean, Jewish, or Mexican American community today. The economics of the African American community in Garvey's time were a far cry from what they are today, as the economic wealth has completely abandoned the neighborhoods and most of the stores are now owned by foreign nationals who were actually once enemy combatants of the United States. What is certain is that no people on the planet can ever hope to survive with their mental health and culture intact unless they maintain a measure of their own collective economic independence. However, for this Garvey and Garveyism was immediately attacked by the Talented Tenth, whose desire to be accepted by the dominate White community grossly outweighed their love for their own people. Freedom for them meant, gaining a "seat at the [integrated] table of brotherhood" and "dodging the spit of their fellows!"<sup>[1]</sup> This is what WEB Dubois meant in 1916 when he stated that the New York branch of the Boulee was formed in order to keep the Black professional away from the Garvey Movement. Soon thereafter, Dubois, the Boulee, the Talented Tenth and J Edgar Hoover using the enormous power of the federal government would form a coalition in order to destroy the Garvey Movement. This very same coalition would rear its head once again in the 1960's under the FBI's Cointelpro Program, and then emerge once more to attack the Hip Hop Nation from the 1980's through 1990's; in a queer metamorphosis that grew from Cointelpro to Nowintelpro. Ultimately, thousands of independent Black townships across the nation were destroyed, either by vicious White riots from 1919 to 1960 or by the flight of Black capital from 1970 onward once affirmative action had become a matter of law. So too, by the late 1980's billionaire pornographer Bob Johnson had almost single-handedly created a whole new industry of video whores which only helped to further erode the very fabric of the African American community. Garvey called these Black sycophants the Negroes Greatest Enemy.

The trauma of American slavery actually split the African personality. Thus, what is witnessed in the Integrationalist prerogatives of the Boulee-Talented Tenth, and in the heart-felt desire for Self-determination expressed through the principles of Black Nationalism, are but two somewhat dis-associative streams of historic African American consciousness. They are a part of the intellectual response to the uniquely tragic experience of the Maafa<sup>[2]</sup>. They are quite naturally aspects of '*Maafian consciousness*' if you will.

However, these varying streams of divergent thought have not always necessarily been at acrimonious odds with one another. Indeed, it can arguably be said that this has only truly been so when the *Tenth* have gone on the offensive against Black Nationalism. What must first be understood is that these are relationships that were initially forged by the peculiar hierarchical order of the slave community during the bullwhip days. The House Negro often considered him or herself to be a better and perhaps a '*more civilized*' person than the Field Negro. The Field Negro often viewed the House Negro as a sell-out, a sycophant, and a Judas even. The *Tenth* for instance, eventually adopted and continued to nurture the legacy of Black-skin-color caste as a neurosis directly curried from the slave community. However, there have been those moments throughout American history where these two seemingly divergent ideologies have actually existed peacefully side by side and in natural harmony with one another. Fredrick Douglass was an ardent Integrationalist and Martin Delany was a staunch Black Nationalist, and yet during the middle of the nineteenth century these two men actually edited a newspaper together. They held two different views of the road to Black liberation. Yet, there was no acrimony in their co-existence. For the short decade that they shared the political limelight together, Malcolm X and Martin Luther King Jr. actually became good friends. Of course, they publicly sparred over their individual views on political tactics, yet there was always one thing upon which they could both readily agree. If it were not for the militancy of Malcolm X, the moderate gains achieved by the forces of Civil Rights Integrationalist probably would have never been possible. This throws a whole new light on the oft-spoken notion that people simply died for future generation to have a right to vote. The point is that it went without question that the voice of the entire community was necessary in order to succeed.

Nonetheless, the movement that Dr. King led actually died along with him. Suddenly, gone were the courage and the will to speak out forcefully for the greater good of the greatest number of the people. However, we now know that when he was alive he really had no intention of creating a Civil Rights Movement at all. It was his stated intention to build a rainbow (multicultural) Human Rights coalition. Like Malcolm X, he too understood that Human Rights are superior to Civil Rights, and in 1961 he even stated as much. The concept itself is actually rather simple. How can you expect someone to demonstrate a concern for your civil rights, if they have absolutely no respect for you as a human being in the first place? In other words, if you find yourself living next door to a Jeffrey Dahmer, what is your greatest concern; the idea that he just may not be courteous to you when he passes you on the sidewalk, or the very real frightening possibility that he just might eat your children? Kathryn Johnson a 92 year old grandmother was lynched in her own home by the Atlanta police, simply because her neighborhood was viewed as not deserving of human dignity. It does not take a rope and a tree in order to lynch somebody. The New Year has just begun and three Black men have already been lynched in Houston Texas, Oakland California, and New Orleans.<sup>[3]</sup> In the 21st Century Black people are still being lynched in America not simply because their Civil Rights are being violated, but because their Human Rights have not been observed as an indisputable matter of international law. The Talented *Tenth* have never demonstrated their adequacy as advocates for the whole human

being.

Like Malcolm X, Paul Robeson, and quite a few others, Dr. King rose above the exclusive burdens of his upbringing, and he naturally exuded an enormous *sweet-butter* love for Black people. If he had lived, on some of the more pertinent issues of the last 40 years, it is doubtful that Dr. King would have remained as silent as those who came along to claim the legacy of his leadership. For sure, he certainly would not have kept quiet about the savage September 13, 1971 end to the Attica Prison Riot, or the government's unremitting murderous dirty war against the Black Panther Party. One would have to believe that Dr. King would have had a lot to say on May 13, 1985 when the city of Philadelphia dropped a bomb on a Black household, killing six children and five adults, and then even had the nerve to send Ramona Africa a bill for services rendered. No one could ever make me believe that Dr. King would not have traveled the world to expose the human rights violations central to the Dark Alliance of the Iran-Contra scandal, the destruction that it ultimately caused to the Black community, and the devious Rockefeller Drugs Laws that came in the aftermath. For sure he would have raised Hell at the lingering incarceration of Mumia Abu Jamal and the banning of Assatta Shakur. Not to mention the fact that as the world today bristles with disgust at the atrocities committed at Abu Ghraib and Guantanamo Bay, the American press continues to ignore the case of the San Francisco 8 and the Black men tortured in a similar fashion right here in the United States. It is certain that the King that we all knew would not have hesitated to speak truth to power and the unremitting tornadoes of misery and anguish might by now have finally come to an end for the victims of Hurricane Katrina.

Wielding the pedagogy of a forth generation, represented by Boulee Vernon Jones, Andrew Young, and Jessie Jackson as the New *Tenth*, no cabal of Black leaders in American history has maintained perceptual sway for so many years over the direction and the prerogatives of the Black community since Booker T. Washington wielded political hegemony a century ago. Just one day after Dr. King's assassination on April 4, 1968, the narcissistic personality of Jessie Jackson was on full display as he quickly made his way to New York City and to the set of *Good Morning America*. It was there less than 24 hours after King's death that he proclaimed to the world that he wore the blood of the slain beloved leader upon his shirt. No one should have been surprised 40 years later when as one of the most well known and frequently dubbed controversial leaders in the country he feigned ignorance of an open mike on the set of the stridently conservative Fox News, only to openly call for the castration of Barack Obama.

A Boulee Talented Tenth outsider, Obama does not actually share the same physic memory of the slave community as most African Americans. His father's homeland actually had a somewhat different colonial experience, and his mother is a White woman from Kansas. Perhaps this is all for the best. Perhaps it is a sign that the true hopes and aspirations of the entire African American community will no longer simply be marginalized to the voice of a singular mouthpiece; pimping their own distorted view of reality. Perhaps now the youth will rise up and demand that those who claim the mantle of leadership in the Black community will forever demonstrate they have a stake in the vitality of African American neighborhoods; and thereby speak in a language that actually looks like them. The idea that the progress of any community lies in the uplift of a marginalized professional class who are exclusively groomed to wage a desperate struggle in order to get the Hell out of the neighborhood as soon as they can, is no less ludicrous today that it was when Norman Lear helped to popularize the song *Moving on Up* decades ago.

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**The BlackCommentator Readers' Corner Blog**

**BlackCommentator.com** Guest Commentator T. S. Aschenge is an Author/Publisher and fulltime writer who lives and works in Atlanta Georgia. Among his writing skills and qualifications are Search Engine Marketing and Optimization, Ghost Writing, Technical Writing, Journalism, Resumes, Press Releases, Abstracts, Essays, and Research Papers. His website is called [I CAN WRITE THAT 4 U!](#) This year will mark his debut as a fiction writer as he publishes his first novel set in titled Woodruff Park. Click [here](#) to contact Mr. Aschenge

Endnotes


[1] This comes from the first essay On Our Spiritual Strivings of the 1903 WEB Dubois seminal classic The Souls of Blackfolk.


[2] The term The Maafa was coined by Dr. Marimba Ani, who is perhaps the greatest living cultural alchemist of African and African American History and the new Dean of the Great Awakening after the transitioning of the great Dr. John Henirick Clarke. The term *Maafa* literally means: *the great calamity* and it describes the period during the Second Rise of Europe from the initial kidnap and capture of African people down until this very day. Dr. Na'im Akbar characterizes it as a period in which the lifestyle of African people was disrupted.

[3] December 31. Robbie Tolan unarmed, shot in the back while in his own driveway by Houston police. New Years Day police in Oakland California shoot Oscar Grant III in his back as he was laying face down handcuffed on a train platform. Again on New Years Day in New Orleans, police shoot Adolph Grimes in the back, 14 bullet hitting his body.

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