

Missing the Revolution Beneath Their Feet: The Significance of the Slave Revolution of the Civil War to the Black Power Movement in the USA

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Abstract At the outset of the Black Power Movement (BPM), Malcolm X called for both a black political and cultural revolution; however, he never developed his thesis on the latter and did not adequately explain the relationship between the two. Like many BPM revolutionists, he drew on cases of revolutions from abroad which were ill-fitted to the peculiar history and contemporary challenges of black America. W.E.B. Du Bois (1935) historicized a black political revolution in the USA in his *Black Reconstruction*, and Alain Locke theorized cultural revolution in the USA a decade later; thus, prior to the BPM, theses on black political and cultural revolution in the USA were available to BPM revolutionists, but they were ignored. They suggested the salience of the Slave Revolution in the Civil War as an exemplar of subsequent black revolutions in the USA. In this essay, I examine Du Bois' and Locke's arguments and their relevance to the BPM, focusing less on the revolutionary theory the BPM adopted and more on this one it neglected.

Keywords Black Power Movement · White supremacy · Revolution · Malcolm X · W.E.B Du Bois · Alain Locke

Introduction

Revolutions are aimed at overthrowing governing or dominant political, economic, or social systems with the aim of establishing substantially different ones. We can usefully distinguish among three types of revolutions: political revolutions, which involve the transformation of the system of government—the polity (e.g., the French, American, Russian, Chinese, and/or Cuban Revolutions); economic revolutions, which involve the

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transformation of the economic system—the economy (e.g., market revolution that transformed European feudalism to capitalism, the overthrow of chattel slavery in the USA)¹; and social revolutions, which involve the transformation of the social system—the society (e.g., Mao’s Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution (GPCR), Pol Pot’s “Year Zero” plan). We can further differentiate between two types of social revolutions: demographic and cultural. Demographic revolutions are dramatic transformations in the distribution of groups in society resulting from major demographic events such as immigration, emigration, diasporization, urbanization, suburbanization, ruralization, demographic transitions, youth bulges, or the aging of the population, which result in changes in the composition of society that revise conceptions of the identity of the society. Cultural revolutions entail the overthrow of one cultural system and its replacement with another. It may also be viewed as a dramatic transformation in the expression, representation, and prominence of a group’s culture in the broader cultural system of the society (e.g., cultural hegemony) resulting from changes in the racial, religious, ethnic, linguistic, aesthetic, and educational institutions and/or the familial structures, voluntary associations, and gender relations of the group and/or the society. This process historically has involved the overthrow or radical transformation of the major cultural institutions of a state and a reordering or renunciation of the cultural hierarchy in the major institutions of the state, such as occurred in Mao’s GPCR or the overthrow of the secular regime of the Shah of Iran and its replacement with the theocracy of Khomeini’s regime. Cultural revolutions may encompass an entire state, a group within it (e.g., a racial, ethnic, linguistic, or religious group), or occur across states.

At the outset of the Black Power Movement (BPM) in the early 1960s, Malcolm X called for both a black political and cultural revolution in the USA. While his call for political revolution is widely known and is captured in his most famous speeches and writings, including “Message to the Grassroots” (1963), “The Ballot of the Bullet” (1964), “The Black Revolution” (1964), and “The Worldwide Revolution” (1965), his arguments on a black cultural revolution are not as widely appreciated—although they were no less central to his arguments. The latter is evident in the “Statement of the Basic Aims and Objectives” of Malcolm’s most important post-Nation of Islam (NOI) organization, the Organization of Afro-American Unity (OAAU), in which he stated that “[w]e must launch a cultural revolution to unbrainwash an entire people” and insisted that “[c]ulture is an indispensable weapon in the freedom struggle”, noting that “[a]rmed with the knowledge of the past, we can with confidence charter a course for our future” (Malcolm X 1970: 427). Malcolm’s call for cultural revolution was consistent with his view that the black liberation struggle in the USA was part of a broader “worldwide revolution,” consisting of both a political revolution against Western imperialism, modeled on the anti-colonial struggles occurring throughout the so-called third world, and a cultural revolution among black Americans against white supremacy in the USA.

However, Malcolm X and major BPM revolutionists and organizations that followed him (e.g., the Revolutionary Action Movement (RAM), Us, the Black Panther Party (BPP), the Republic of New Africa (RNA), the League of Revolutionary Black Workers (LRBW), the Congress of African Peoples (CAP), the Shrine of the Black Madonna (SoBM), and the Black Liberation Army (BLA)) did not develop a theory of

¹ Marx’s, Weber’s, and Polanyi’s are the most popular articulations of economic revolution.

political revolution grounded in black American history nor adequately explain the relationship between political and cultural revolution. Instead, they largely analogized their struggles to revolutions from abroad—notably from Africa and the third world—which were ill-fitted to the peculiar history and contemporary challenges of black America. Interestingly, decades before, W.E.B. Du Bois documented a black political revolution in the USA—the “slave revolution” of the US Civil War, and Alain Locke theorized a cultural revolution in the USA as well. Thus, on the cusp of the BPM, two theses were available to revolutionists to inform their liberation struggle, but these black American sources were largely ignored by both revolutionists and many scholars of the BPM, as well. In this study, I examine Du Bois’ and Locke’s theses and discuss their salience for the BPM. After briefly reviewing Malcolm X’s revolutionary theses, I examine Du Bois’ thesis on the “slave revolution” of the Civil War and Locke’s lesser known argument on cultural revolution, before discussing the applicability of both theses to the BPM. The analysis focuses less on the revolutionary theory that BPM revolutionists adopted and more on elucidating Du Bois’ and Locke’s theses that they neglected.²

Malcolm X and Black Revolution in the USA

Malcolm X was the central revolutionary theorist of the BPM. His thesis on black revolution was rooted in his black nationalism, which he saw as a broad, dynamic, and evolving ideology having political, economic, and social aspects rooted in the belief that African Americans comprised a “nation within a nation” with the right of national self-determination, that is, the right to determine the political entity that would govern it.³ Malcolm’s thesis on black revolution evolved with his black nationalism from a static, unidimensional, religious-based conception of his NOI years into a dynamic, multidimensional, secular framework of his OAAU years. It envisioned black revolution in the USA as part of a “worldwide revolution” that proceeded in two phases: (1) a political revolution against Western imperialism evident in the anti-colonial wars of the “third world” and (2) a cultural revolution in black America, utilizing black culture to transform major institutions of black communities and mobilizing them against white supremacy. This cultural revolution would be associated with a political revolution in the USA. In radically transforming the most powerful country in the world, the black revolution in the USA would culminate the worldwide revolution.

The shortcomings in Malcolm X’s analyses were epitomized in its reverse civilizationism (Henderson 2018). Reverse civilizationism inverts civilizationism, which for Moses (1978) is a tendency evident in classical black nationalism advocating Westernization in pursuit of industrial and technological development for Africans. Moses (1989: 7) notes that for black nationalists such as Crummell, “[c]ivilization implied a historical process, whereby mankind progressively learned the laws of physical, moral, and economic science.” These laws “were universal—they did not belong to any race or culture”; therefore, “[t]hey were discovered, not invented, and [were] not the

² On revolutionary theory in the BPM, see Bracey et al. (1970), Van Deburg (1992).

³ In his last days, Malcolm did not distance himself from black nationalism but revised and reconciled his black nationalism with his revolutionary thesis that drew from it (Henderson 2012).

creation of any race or nation.” Hence, “[t]he fact that Europeans were farther along in the process of civilization did not mean that they had been more intelligent, inventive, or creative,” but “merely that they had submitted earlier to the divine and natural law and were now carried along in the current of inevitable progress.” Classical black nationalists tended to view Africans in benighted terms; thus, civilizationism not only impelled support for repatriation to Africa to free blacks from slavery and racist oppression in the USA, but to industrialize African states and bring American Christianity to African “heathens.” In sum, classical black nationalism advocated territorial separation (e.g., emigration) and cultural assimilation (i.e., civilizationism) (Moses 1978).

Du Bois elided the civilizationism of classical black nationalism, acknowledging the roots of civilization in Africa and the historical and contemporary contributions of African peoples and their culture to world history. In contrast, Du Bois affirmed African American culture, which was constituted, in part, from African cultural retentions but mostly from black folk culture, which emerged from the slave plantations (Stuckey 1987) and was becoming increasingly urbanized as a result of the Great Migration (Baraka 1963; Wilkerson 2010; Taylor 2011).⁴ Du Bois (1903) rejected civilizationism and promoted the cultures of African people throughout the world, including African Americans; thus, *modern* black nationalism after Du Bois became synonymous with black *cultural* nationalism. Yet, Malcolm reversed Du Bois’ arguments affirming African American culture, and as Malcolm denied that African Americans possessed a culture, he inverted the teleology of civilizationists: instead of Africans trailing African Americans, as civilizationists argued, the reverse was true—African Americans trailed Africans—thus, *reverse* civilizationism (Henderson 2018).

Reverse civilizationism insists that black Americans were stripped of their culture through enslavement and Jim Crow. It rests on two main assumptions: (1) African Americans are deficient relative to Africans with respect to culture, therefore, they need to draw on African culture to reconstruct their identity and formulate political projects emanating from it; and (2) African Americans trail Africans in their revolutionary praxis, therefore, they should follow the examples of African anti-colonial revolutions in their pursuit of revolution in the USA. These assumptions contributed to BPM revolutionists’ minimizing the significance of African American culture to appropriate often ill-fitted African cultures to conditions in the USA and to neglect revolutionary antecedents in US history to inform their revolutionary praxis. These shortcomings confounded major BPM revolutionists that followed Malcolm X’s theoretical and programmatic example—as well as scholars analyzing them. In the next section, I discuss Du Bois’ explication of an African American revolution three decades prior to Malcolm’s death, which BPM revolutionists largely ignored as a historical and theoretical referent: the Slave Revolution of the US Civil War.

⁴ On this point, Moses converges with Stuckey (1987) and Franklin (1992), but there are important divergences, as well. Most notably, Stuckey viewed black nationalism arising from “slave culture”—a pan-Africanist amalgam of African cultures whose remnants were manifest in folk customs and retentions that ultimately were given African American institutional forms, and these customs provided the bedrock of African American culture, which provided the foundation of black national consciousness. Franklin insists that black national consciousness was reinforced by the commonality of racial oppression and resistance to it, eventuating in a syncretic “African American” culture, which provided a sense of national identity for African Americans. Stuckey’s and Franklin’s perspectives are in contrast with Moses’ view that African American culture derived less from “slave culture” of the South and more from the “high culture” of free black intellectuals in the North situated in prominent black institutions such as the AME Church.

W.E.B Du Bois and Black Political Revolution

Du Bois' (1935) *Black Reconstruction* argued that during the Civil War enslaved blacks prosecuted a general strike, furnishing about 200,000 troops to the Union "whose evident ability to fight decided the war." The next year, in *The Negro and Social Reconstruction*, he noted that

"the largest and most successful slave revolt came at the time of the Civil War when all the slaves in the vicinity of the invading armies left the plantations and rushed to the army and eventually some 200,000 ex-slaves and Northern Negroes joined armies of the North, in addition to a much larger number of laborers and servants. It was this revolt ... and the prospect of a much larger movement among the 4,000,000 other slaves, which was the real cause of the sudden cessation of the war" (Du Bois 1985: 105-6).

For Du Bois (1969: 67), the General Strike reflected "not merely the desire to stop work" but "was a strike ... against the conditions of work." In total, it involved "perhaps a half million people" who "wanted to stop the economy of the plantation system, and to do that they left the plantations." "The Negro," he argued, became "the key to Southern resistance. Either these four million laborers remained quietly at work to raise food for the fighters, or the fighter starved," and "when the dream of the North for man-power produced riots, the only additional troops that the North could depend on were 200,000 Negroes, for without them, as Lincoln said, the North could not have won the war" (p. 80). He added that the General Strike

"... was not merely a matter of 200,000 black soldiers and perhaps 300,000 other black laborers, servants, spies and helpers. Back of this half million stood 3 ½ million more. Without their labor the South would starve. With arms in their hands, Negroes would form a fighting force which could replace every single Northern white soldier fighting listlessly and against his will with a black man fighting for freedom" (p. 80).

In contrast to abolitionists' limited strength in the South, "slaves had enormous power" because "[s]imply by stopping work, they could threaten the Confederacy with starvation," and "[b]y walking into the Federal camps," they convinced Union forces of the value "of using them as workers and as servants, as farmers, and as spies, and finally, as fighting soldiers" while "by the same gesture, depriving their enemies of their use in just these fields" (p. 121). Du Bois insisted "[i]t was the fugitive slave who made the slaveholders face the alternative of surrendering to the North, or the Negroes" (p. 121). He emphasized that "[i]t was this plain alternative that brought Lee's sudden surrender" (p. 121), noting Lincoln's view that "[w]ithout the military help of black freedmen, the war against the South could not have been won" (p. 716).⁵ Du Bois argued that the "mutiny of the Negro slave" was followed by the "disaffection of the

⁵ Approximately 186,000 black troops served in the Union Army, and about 10,000 served in the Union Navy. They fought in more than 400 engagements including 40 major battles, and even in the racist context of the time, 16 blacks received the Medal of Honor, the country's highest military honor.

poor whites” as thousands deserted Confederate ranks. Du Bois conceived the efforts of slaves and poor whites as “one of the most extraordinary experiments of Marxism that the world, before the Russian Revolution had seen” (p. 358). In contrast to the Marxist gloss, Du Bois situated the General Strike in the religious-based claims of slaves, belying the Marxist view of religion as an “opiate of the masses.” In fact, from the perspective of black Americans, it was a religiously inspired political revolution—a cultural revolution motivating a political revolution (also see Robinson 1983: 321–3). The General Strike transformed a civil war to “save the Union” to a political revolution to transform the USA, and while its impetus was cultural, its objectives were also political and economic.

Henderson (2015) pointed out that Du Bois did not link the causative agents of black participation in the war to its precedents in the earlier major slave revolts in the antebellum USA, epitomized in the Gabriel, Denmark Vesey, and Nat Turner Revolts. He argued that two mutually reinforcing factors contributed to those revolts: (1) slave religion, which provided an ideological justification for overthrowing the slave system and mobile slave preachers to articulate it, and (2) the system of hiring out slaves—especially slave artisans, which expanded networks across rural and urban slave and free black communities (Kaye 2007) and, in some industries, began to proletarianize artisanal slave labor. These two factors provided ideological motivation and institutional coordination for the major slave revolts, and although they were brutally suppressed, the networks they emanated from persisted, broadening the scope of slave communities, expanding their communicative capacity. These networks ultimately facilitated the movement of slaves to Union lines to fight against their former masters. Utilizing these networks, slaves transformed a war to preserve the Union into a revolution to overthrow chattel slavery in the USA.

Du Bois’ inattention to the earlier slave revolts limited his ability to see how slave religion and slave hiring reinforced each other in a revolutionary synthesis. Yet, given his argument that slave religion was a key factor motivating the General Strike, he showed how a political revolution resulted from a cultural impetus and, in this way, provided an original conception of black American revolution: black cultural revolution (reflected in the transformation of slave religion towards emancipation, motivating the General Strike) generated a political revolution (executing the General Strike, fighting with Union forces, changing Lincoln’s war aims of restoring the status quo ante to ending slavery). Du Bois did not label what he described in *Black Reconstruction* a black cultural revolution; yet, his narrative revealed slaves’ revolutionary agency effectuated through changes in their religion, suggesting the significance of black cultural change to black liberation. In this way, it demonstrated that black culture—in this case, slave religion—could provide the impetus for political and economic revolution. Given Du Bois’ exegesis, it was necessary to appreciate the historic and contemporary importance of black culture in political revolution; yet, Du Bois’ thesis on black revolution was rarely appreciated by BPM revolutionists—or scholars, analysts, and activists, in general. Thus, three decades before Malcolm’s death, Du Bois provided a historical exegesis of political revolution in the USA—and one implicating black culture in the process. Nevertheless, Du Bois did not theorize the revolution he historicized, this was left to Alain Locke.

Alain Locke and Black Cultural Revolution

Locke's contributions to the concept of black cultural revolution are as massive as they are ignored by activists and academics. He studied culture as few had up to his time as the first African American Rhodes Scholar. A proponent of cultural pluralism, he asserted the salience of "Aframerican" culture. He agreed with Du Bois' view of black culture rooted in the folkways of the black South, but he drew a clearer distinction between African and Aframerican aesthetics in a broader project linking black culture to his sociological view of race. To appreciate Locke's thesis on cultural revolution, it is important to consider his analysis of race, culture, and cultural change.

Justifications for white racism progressed through distinct yet often mutually reinforcing rationales rooted initially in theology, then biology and anthropology. Religious and biological justifications of white supremacy are well known (e.g., the "Curse of Ham", phrenology), and Boas is credited with undermining biologically based white supremacism, ushering in the anthropological discourse of cultural relativism. Locke embraced Boas' arguments that physical, mental, and cultural traits associated with race were mutable and adaptable to different environments, but in a series of five lectures at Howard University in 1916, he rejected the anthropological view of race, arguing instead that race was sociological (Stewart 1992: xxiv). For Locke (1992: 11), race was not "about the anthropological or biological idea at all" but the relative fortunes of "an ethnic group," which in anthropological terms are "ethnic fictions" given that they are the result of "countless interminglings" and "infinite crossings of types," which "maintain in name only this fetish of biological [purity.]" (p. 11). The extent that a person has a race "he has inherited either a favorable or an unfavorable social heredity, which unfortunately is [typically] ascribed to factors which have not produced [it]" (p. 12). Locke "was standing racialist theories of culture on their heads: rather than particular races creating Culture, it was culture—social, political, and economic processes—that produced racial character" (Stewart 1992: xxv). Race was sociological—or, in today's verbiage, a "social construct." He was among the first scholars to explain race in this way, and his insights were as prescient as they are ignored.

Although Locke demystified race as a social construct, he did not jettison the concept. He asserted its usefulness as a concept and point of reference, viewing it as a prominent signifier that was unlikely to be "superceded except by some revised version of itself"; therefore, Locke sought to revise it in such a way as to serve as an ameliorative (p. 85). He asserted the value of race consciousness, while rejecting either extreme that race was either a "permanent biological entity or nothing at all" (Stewart 1992: xxv). He argued that "[t]he only kind of race that is left to believe in and to be applied to modern problems is what we call the idea of social race, defining it more narrowly as a conception of civilization or civilization kind" (p. 88). For Locke, "a basic law in human society" was that "[e]very civilization produces its type" and "it should be judged in terms of that civilization type, and [that it] should come to know itself in proportion as it recognizes the type" (pp. 88–9). Civilization type evokes for Locke that "sense of shared practices and modes of life consistent with participation in ... common core institutions" of modern society (Fraser 1999: 12). Fraser notes that "modern societies," for Locke, "tend to produce a single 'civilization type,' an ideal-typical sort of person, which members come roughly to approximate by virtue of participating in a common social structure and institutional framework" (pp. 12–13).

Although civilization type generates conformity, it is less homogenizing than providing common frames of reference for its constituent social cultures to provide a sense of belonging and solidarity. People articulate social cultures within the context of their civilization type, and diversity within the civilization is reflected in the diverse social cultures that participate in it. Since social culture is dynamic, civilization type is subject to change from within—as a result of changes in its constituent social cultures, and from without—through interactions with social cultures of other civilization types. For Locke, social cultures are highly interdependent such that “no social culture in the present day world will be ignorant of other types or object to [some kind of]contact with other types,” and this relationship obtains “no matter how much a line is drawn theoretically between races” because “the practical demands of present day life necessitate the contact of races, and an increasing contact of races” (Locke 1992: 13–14). The social races that cultures generate are also dynamic, and this dynamism is accentuated through inter-racial contacts.

It followed for Locke that social races should be conserved to the extent that they promote solidarity, a sense of belonging—especially for marginalized racial minorities—and assist in the articulation of their cultural expression. By articulating a “consciousness of kind,” which he viewed as “healthy... and a fundamental social instinct,” he was convinced that under certain conditions “race types and race kind can be transformed... into social kind” such that “essentially a man must become one of the same race [or civilization type] when he lives or [learns] to live in the same civilization and [has] conformed to a civilization type. [This] is the only essential kind of race that exists in the world today” (p. 79). Thus,

“... if you have the same manners and customs and have allegiance to the same social system, you belong to the same race [or social kind.] even though ethnically you may not; so that really when you conform or belong to a civilization type...you are of the same race in any vital or rational sense of race” (p. 79).

He notes that race prejudice “falsely attributes to certain arbitrary ethnological and biological factors, sociological and social standards which do not pertain to them at all” (p. 79).

Locke was convinced that “American society is hastening the process of social assimilation by the very restrictive measures that [it is] imposing” in part because “[w]hile social assimilation is in progress there seems to be necessary some counter-theory, or rather some counter-doctrine. This counter-doctrine one finds in racial solidarity and culture” (p. 96). For Locke, “secondary race consciousness” is the race consciousness of a minority group in a society. He argued that the “stimulation of a secondary race consciousness within a group” was necessary “for several practical reasons” (p. 96). Foremost among them was the group’s need “to get a right conception of itself...through the stimulation of pride,” which secondary race consciousness provides to groups in the way self-respect does for the individual. For Locke, “race pride seems a rather different loyalty from the larger loyalty to the joint or common civilization type.” While “apparently paradoxical” in the abstract, it is not so in practice because the

“stimulation to collective activity which race pride or racial self-respect may give will issue into the qualification test and the aim to meet that qualification test, which...must be in terms of the common standard. So that through a doctrine of race solidarity and culture[,] you really accelerate and stimulate the alien group to a rather more rapid assimilation of the social culture, the general social culture, than would be otherwise possible” (p. 97).

Secondary race consciousness facilitates the re-creation of the race type and its ultimate merging with the civilization type. Locke asserts that “we can only get recognition for our [contribution] collectively [and only] through a recognition... given a re-created race type that expresses itself in terms of a representative class or representative products,” which secondary race consciousness stimulates and facilitates (p. 98). Locke’s thesis insists that race consciousness “prevents the representative classes, as they develop[, from] being merged[, really absorbed] into the larger group, from being dissipated and lost in the larger group,” while coincidentally “harnessing” the larger group to the “submerged group,” stimulating “the general progress [of the group,]” (p. 98).

Given its functionality for minority groups seeking a basis for cultural identity, belonging, and solidarity, social race should be conserved through the promotion of secondary race consciousness. But Locke is clear that “this is not a doctrine of race isolation” but a “practice” which “conserves the best in each group, and promotes the development of social solidarity out of heterogeneous elements” (p. 98). Thus, it is not a “doctrine of race conservation” but of “social conservation” (p. 99), which Harris and Molesworth (2008: 126) note that Locke proffers while “avoid[ing] any suggestion of chauvinism or separatism.” The objective of “race progress and race adjustment” for Locke is the promotion of “culture-citizenship,” which results from the “group contribution to what becomes a joint civilization” and is “acquired through social assimilation” of that contribution to the civilization (Locke 1992: 99). Locke argued that when the “alien” group’s talents and representative products are developed and incorporated into the joint culture), then a “final and satisfactory race recognition” is facilitated (p. 99). The essential “talents” and “representative products” that are candidates for incorporation and facilitate “race recognition” are artistic expressions in music, the arts, and letters. Locke argues that

“movements by which the submerged classes are coming to their expression in art—seem to be the forerunners of that kind of recognition which they are ultimately striving for, namely, recognition [of an] economic, [a] civic, and [a] social sort; and these [movements] are the gateways through which culture-citizenship can be finally reached” (p. 100).

Locke encouraged Negroes to cultivate the art derived from their syncretic Aframerican social culture, characteristic of the race. Further, “[t]hrough art blacks could build social solidarity and race consciousness, without overly threatening the white power structure. Moreover, by developing their cultural productivity, blacks would contradict the notion that African Americans were a people without culture, whose only choice was complete assimilation” (Stewart 1992: xxxii). He thought the “thinking Negro” was the more effective purveyor of those elements of Aframerican

culture to articulate the representative aspects of the social culture that would “blend” with the civilization-type and “accelerat[e] the ‘levelling up’ processes in American society” (Locke 1951: 557). The reciprocal recognition of social cultures within the civilization-type facilitates “culture-citizenship,” which reflects the ideal of cultural development: the attainment of cultural cosmopolitanism, which for Locke (1992: 100) would be realized in a multiracial democracy.

Given the greater freedom for interaction of individuals, groups, and cultural practices and institutions in more open political systems, Locke was convinced that cosmopolitanism was most likely to be actualized in a multiracial democracy; thus, his framework implies a relationship between culture and democracy. Locke viewed multiracial democracy as a stage that no state had achieved and one that the USA with its inveterate white racism was not close to realizing (Buck 2005). The problems of achieving racial democracy were partly embedded in one of the obstacles to states attaining its precursor phase, cultural democracy, which “rests on...the guarantee of the rights of minorities” (p. 251). Moreover, Locke contends that “the race question” is the crux of the “struggle for cultural democracy” and “[i]ts solution lies beyond even the realization of political and economic democracy” (p. 251). In Locke’s conception, cultural democracy extends political and economic democracy—its precursor phases in Locke’s scheme—to the cultural sphere and, in so doing, facilitates racial democracy. Cultural democracy extends political and economic democracy through challenges on the cultural front, which alters the dominant cultural system of the society to reflect the values, views, and interests of culturally marginalized groups and in so doing facilitates racial democracy. In this way—anticipating Cruse (1967), cultural democracy is critical to the establishment of racial democracy in the USA.

The analysis, thus far, goes to the heart of the significance of black cultural revolution in the USA: it not only challenges the cultural hegemony of white supremacism, but it does so through raising and reinforcing the political and economic demands of black Americans to the cultural sphere to facilitate racial democracy in the USA. The cultural claims motivating such profound changes transcend issues of cultural representation (e.g., aesthetic production, institutionalization, distribution, and commodification) and encompass more fundamental issues. In the antebellum era, the eradication of racial slavery is one such issue. By asserting the human rights of slaves, black revolutionaries of the Civil War were asserting a cultural claim (the right of enslaved blacks to freedom) and simultaneously a political claim to civil rights (those related to equal pay and provisions in the Union Army, initially, and extended to citizenship rights in the USA) and economic rights (the value of their own labor). The result was a demand that implicated racial democracy in the USA by overthrowing chattel slavery and the CSA, creating a putatively racially democratic USA—at least a *de jure* racial democracy. In this way, Locke’s thesis on social culture and racial democracy allows us to theorize the Slave Revolution that Du Bois historicized, explaining how a cultural revolution in the black community generated a political revolution in the USA.

Locke’s thesis suggests that the transformation of slave religion that Du Bois observed resulted from the changed values in the antebellum era that reversed the catechism of the White Church that justified slavery. Moses (1993: 246) argues that it is unlikely that enslaved Africans learning Christianity in the USA would do so while “remaining blind to such concepts as ‘righteous wrath’ and the idea of a God who

expects his faithful to behave as instruments of his wrath.” Transposing these values to slave society provided a divine sanctioning of revolt. Further, the interaction of hired-out slaves with their free counterparts heightened the contradictions between them and for skilled bondsperson, especially, further highlighted the extent of their exploitation, encouraging an incipient proletarianization of the latter (Henderson 2015). These mutually reinforcing factors compelled the slave revolts, culminating in the Slave Revolution in the US Civil War.

Just as Locke’s framework helps explain the Slave Revolution, it is also applicable to the BPM. It suggested that by tapping into black cultural institutions, networks of religiously inspired black workers, and utilizing a general strike strategy, BPM revolutionists might organize a cultural revolution to compel a political revolution in the USA. This orientation was not privileged by BPM revolutionists, who, influenced by reverse civilizationism, minimized black American revolutionary referents in favor of importing poorly fitted models of anti-colonial struggles from abroad (Henderson 2018). Although they appreciated the historical significance of slavery in the oppression of black Americans, they did not realize that the Slave Revolution was the archetypal black revolutionary struggle in the USA, and it could serve as an exemplar for the BPM. The significance of the Slave Revolution should not be diminished because of the ultimate failure of Reconstruction, which demonstrated the extent to which the counter-revolutionaries were committed to ending it. In the event, the cultural system of white supremacy, which had not transformed, receded briefly before reasserting itself in the major political and economic institutions of the former CSA, making the transformation of US and Southern society short lived. Nonetheless, a major implication of the success of the Slave Revolution for BPM revolutionists was the utility of similarly situated, religiously inspired proletarians to adopt a similar strategy. A key challenge was to focus on an issue as profound in its implications for racial democracy as chattel slavery had been in the 1860s and to devise a mobilizational strategy centered on it. In Locke’s era, an obvious issue was Jim Crow, which was overturned by the monumental Civil Rights Movement (CRM) of 1955–1965. The BPM faced the remaining major unresolved cultural claim of black Americans: reparations for chattel slavery and Jim Crow.

The failure of the USA to provide an economic floor to support its manumitted slaves through provisions of land and an effective franchise to ensure their political rights made reparations for chattel slavery, Jim Crow, and state-sanctioned white supremacy the major unresolved culture claim of black Americans implicating racial democracy in the USA. Reparations was both an issue of social justice and one intended to provide a material basis for black political freedom. It had the potential to unite blacks across classes to make real political and economic democracy in the USA and in this way provide for multiracial democracy in the USA or justify a revolution to create it. Although Locke did not focus on reparations or outline the means to achieve racial democracy, he advocated the overthrow of Jim Crow. Relatedly, he appreciated the awesome struggle for cultural democracy that was a prerequisite for racial democracy—foreshadowing, at least in philosophical terms, the necessity of something approximating a black cultural revolution to achieve multi-racial democracy. For Locke, white racism in the USA was “the acid test of the whole problem” and one which “will be crucial in its outcome for the rest of the world”: the USA was “the world’s laboratory” for the attainment of racial democracy (p. 252). Inferring from Locke’s thesis, racial democracy in the USA necessitated a black cultural revolution.

Fusing Locke's and Du Bois' Views

It should be clear up to this point that prior to the onset of the CRM, both Du Bois and Locke had supplied theses implicating black culture in revolutionary change in the USA. In their shared orientation to black culture, both Du Bois and Locke rejected reverse civilizationism and its contention that African Americans did not possess a culture, which may suggest why their theses were ignored by Malcolm X and BPM activists who drew uncritically from Malcolm's mistaken formulation. This neglect undermined the ability of BPM revolutionists to develop theses of black cultural revolution in the USA. In combination, their theses (1) established the relevance of the Slave Revolution of the Civil War as a historic political revolution in the USA, which had been stimulated by a black cultural revolution. The key components of the Slave Revolution were slave religion and the incipient class consciousness of hired-out slaves (Henderson 2015). Their analog a century later was the increasingly urban, religiously inspired proletarian blacks who initiated and joined the CRM and the BPM. Given Du Bois and Locke's theses, what was key for BPM activists was to utilize African American culture to mobilize African Americans into purposive agents of revolution to overthrow not only the political and economic systems, but the cultural system as well.

The Slave Revolution left unabated the cultural system of white supremacy. It was a *black* cultural revolution that generated a political revolution, but it did not generate an *American* cultural revolution, and this spoke to the resilience and persistence of white supremacy among white Americans and their institutions of power, which made black freedom a caricature of what blacks fought for and thought they had obtained. Post-Civil War white supremacy undermined black claims to reparations, full citizenship, and even a modicum of social justice through its racist cultural system throughout the USA—especially its institutions of civil society, before reasserting itself unabashedly in its polity and economy. Therefore, white cultural transformation would be a major objective in future black liberation strategies, and culture would need to be viewed as not only an instrument to organize blacks, but a focus for whites, as well. Further, since the Slave Revolution did not transform the cultural system's white supremacy, which continued to influence the major institutions of the postbellum state well into the BPM era, then it followed that the BPM could usefully draw on strategies that had been effective a century before.

In the context of a future general strike strategy, the cultural system would need to be both a source of inspiration, internally (i.e., the cultural system within black communities), and a target of mobilization, externally (i.e., the cultural system of the USA). Black revolutionists would need to utilize black culture—embedded in its major cultural institutions—towards political and economic ends to overthrow white supremacy in the USA. Unfortunately, most BPM revolutionists did not appreciate the significance of the Slave Revolution since the reverse civilizationism they often uncritically adopted from Malcolm X compelled them to draw their models, programs, and theories of revolution from African and other third world cases. Convinced that African Americans had been stripped of their culture, even when they appreciated the relevance of culture to revolutionary struggle, they did not recognize the centrality of religiously inspired incipient black proletarian culture in the Slave Revolution or in the revolution they hoped to fashion.

Reverse civilizationism implied that black American culture would need to be created or (re)constructed, requiring a political project to achieve this objective. The specific project would suggest the form of this newly created black culture. For example, the NOI promoted a notion of black culture defined as “Asiatic”; Us, CAP, the RNA, and the SoBM promoted black culture rooted in conceptions of “traditional” African culture; and RAM, the BPP, and the LRBW—the groups less reliant on the cultural aspects of reverse civilizationism but embracing its political orientation—promoted a black culture reflected in the practices of “brothers on the block.” In addition, in analogizing their situation to that of Africans struggling against settler colonialism and neocolonialism, many BPM revolutionists construed their context in terms of domestic colonialism and their cultures as African—the latter to be put in the service of overthrowing domestic colonialism in the USA; however, the actual relationship between African American culture and revolution was more complex than a grafting from African postcolonial forms suggested.

As Cruse (1967) recognized, a black cultural revolution in the USA would entail a process of cultural education and institutionalization far more extensive than would be necessary in Africa. Unlike in Africa, it was not simply an issue of a Somali resuming his/her pre-colonial cultural practices once the colonial fetters were removed or even the more difficult task of Ewe, Yoruba, Acholi, and Bakongo maintaining their ethnic identity even as their postcolonial nationality became Ghanaian, Nigerian, Ugandan, or Congolese, respectively; black Americans had a more difficult task of cultural identification since they did not have a readily identifiable “pre-colonial” culture to serve as a referent. Black Americans were a diverse pan-Africanist amalgam of predominantly West and Central African culture groups from which there was no single, encompassing national culture. Moreover, even if such a referent culture existed, the process by which blacks would adopt it was much more profound than that facing postcolonial Africans. Black Americans of the BPM era were not likely to stop speaking English or attending church to adopt a pre-existing culture if one were uncovered, notwithstanding a small and influential group of BPM activists promoting Kiswahili and small communities in the USA focusing on Yoruba culture. Black Americans were unlikely to accept a vision of themselves as African, New African, or other designations of their identity over their more enduring racial and/or religious identities.

In fact, many blacks were embracing a synthesis of their identity as Americans whose ancestry was African—i.e., African Americans, and on that basis asserting their full and unfettered rights as American citizens, while acknowledging and reinforcing their cultural roots in their predominantly black churches: demonstrating both their political and spiritual efficacy during the apogee of the CRM. The CRM under MLK’s influence was giving new political life to the Black Church, as an institution and as a key locus of black political mobilization, which Malcolm also was recognizing; yet, even as many of Malcolm’s acolytes advocated black cultural revolution, they had difficulty integrating the major black cultural institution, the Black Church, into their theoretical arguments and often were antagonistic towards it—except for the SoBM. Ambivalent, at best, on whether blacks possessed a culture—much less a liberating one—and often rejecting the Black Church, some attempted to fill the resultant spiritual and institutional vacuum by creating their own religious alternatives such as Us’ and CAP’s “Temple of Kawaida” (Woodard 1999; Brown 2003) or the BPP’s “Son of Man Temple” (see Alkebulan 2007). Ironically, reverse civilizationism, which underlay the

claims of many BPM revolutionists espousing black cultural revolution, undermined their appreciation of both African American culture and black cultural revolution in the USA.

Further, most BPM activists had only a superficial understanding of the diverse cultures of African societies so that they appropriated or in some cases manufactured aspects of one or more of the hundreds of major African cultures to fit their specific projects, their leader's personal proclivities, their organizational programs, and/or their immediate political objectives (Fila-Bakabadio 2018; Henderson 2018). For the most part they settled on hierarchical aspects of selected customs, often exclusively communal rather than cosmopolitan, associated with one or a few specific culture groups, in what were more than 40 states of sub-Saharan Africa during the BPM. The culture groups of these African states range from the more than 200 ethnic groups of the DRC (formerly Zaire) to the culturally homogeneous Lesotho. Many BPM revolutionists ignored the urban, working class, egalitarian, or cosmopolitan features of the diverse cultures of Africa. Markedly absent was an adoption of African democratic forms of organization and governance such as palaver. They often constructed these myopic (mis)conceptions of African cultures as timeless and monolithic African culture (Henderson 2017). Particularly abhorrent was the adoption of—and construction of other—feudal conceptions of African womanhood.⁶

Locke's conception of black cultural change and, by implication, black cultural revolution was not hamstrung by such shortcomings. Locke wed cultural change only to democracy, which was necessary to ensure that individuals and groups within and across cultures could express and share their cultures in myriad interactions. It advocated democracy within and between culture groups—unencumbered by non-cultural (i.e., political, economic, demographic) hierarchies and impositions. Its main limitation was that it did not explain how cultural change could be implemented programmatically to assist blacks to navigate American society through the stages of democratic development Locke outlined. The fate of the BPM was that its major theorists—except for Harold Cruse (1967, 1968)—were oblivious to Locke's thesis, and their programs, practices, and objectives reflected as much. Cruse's influential thesis on cultural revolution was not encumbered by Malcolm's reverse civilizationism, but it was only superficially adopted by the major BPM organizations in practice and suffered from its own inconsistencies.⁷ In the event, it was Du Bois' evolutionary approach from *The Negro and Social Reconstruction* that BPM revolutionists endorsed and programmed for—even those publicly advocating armed struggle, rather than the revolutionary approach of *Black Reconstruction*.⁸ Thus, they pursued an evolutionary strategy to achieve revolutionary ends.

⁶ Sexism in the BPM—as in the CRM, and the White Left—was widespread (Bukhari 2010). Woodard (1999: 123) notes that while Malcolm elevated women to leadership in the OAAU, “no clear pattern of women's leadership was established for the organizations that claimed Malcolm's legacy.”

⁷ Cruse's thesis targeted the cultural apparatus—primarily the mass communications media—of the USA, but it inadequately focused on the cultural apparatus of the black community, itself, as a precursor to—or concomitant of—the cultural revolution. This is evident in its inattention to the major black cultural institution, the Black Church, and its ignoring of the major cultural contradiction in black communities, sexism, as a key aspect of the cultural revolution it envisioned. It was also inattentive to substantive cultural demands of black America, such as reparations, which would ramify into the political and economic sphere to augur cultural revolution.

⁸ The evolutionary approach focused on developing parallel black institutions (i.e., Afrocentric colleges, churches, businesses/cooperatives) to provide for black national development.

Inferring from the Slave Revolution, since the revolutionary capacity of black culture was actualized in the most powerful cultural institution in the black community at the time, the “invisible institution,” or slave religion, it follows that black cultural revolution during the BPM would more likely succeed if it was grounded in the Black Church. This did not preclude the salience of other black institutions, such as black political parties, civil rights organizations, and media, but given its grounding in black culture, its prior performance as a change agent, and its greater share of black participants, black economic resources, and black political leverage during the CRM, then the Black Church was the clear candidate. Although a synthesis of their thesis suggested as much, Du Bois was ambivalent towards the Black Church as a progressive change agent for black America, while Locke saw it as an instrument of “self-segregation.” This ambivalence towards and/or denial of the role of the Black Church in the cultural revolution that their theses implied morphed into outright opposition to—and even denunciation of—the Black Church among many BPM activists who attempted a black cultural revolution while ignoring the most powerful cultural institution in black communities. The latter was a major oversight in their theorizing even as BPM groups drew on the institutional support of churches for their programs, while casting their appeal to a largely church-going black working class—both urban and rural, and an emerging middle class. The denial and dismissal of the Black Church among those proposing a black cultural revolution was a fatal flaw in their theorizing and activism, which seriously undermined the BPM.

While reparations for chattel slavery and Jim Crow was the most important cultural claim directed at the US state, there were important cultural claims implicating political and economic democracy to be directed at institutions inside black communities, as well. The major one was the emancipation of black women and girls. The persistence of sexism in black communities was the major unresolved issue of social justice within black communities; thus, overthrowing black sexism was essential to black liberation. With respect to political and cultural revolution, black feminism was as salient as it was to the broader social change that blacks pursued, as black feminists had argued since no later than the nineteenth century. A corresponding focus on white American culture also was necessary because the racist US cultural system would have to be fractured and then utilized to promote divisions among whites (e.g., as between white abolitionists and their white pro-slavery opponents), possibly setting Dixiecrats and their conservative Democrats and Republican allies against liberal Democrats and moderate Republicans, and conservative whites against liberal and radical ones. Domestic discontent with the Vietnam War provided opportunities to promote such division. Splits among whites would denude white power and potentially generate white allies for black insurgents targeting the institutional apparatus of the white supremacist cultural system in the USA. Thus, a black cultural revolution would need to generate a corresponding white cultural revolution, extending black cultural revolution to a broader political *and* cultural revolution.

All told, these challenges required a theory of black revolution that addressed the peculiarly American oppression of black folk, and this was provided by the Du Bois-Locke thesis. In the event, Malcolm X and many BPM revolutionists who followed him, compelled by reverse civilizationism, looked abroad for their revolutionary exemplars when the most salient one, the Slave Revolution, was right beneath their feet and the theory explaining it, within their grasp.

Conclusion

In conclusion, at the outset of the BPM, Malcolm X called for a political and a cultural revolution; however, he never developed his thesis on the latter and did not adequately explain the relationship between the two. Like many BPM activists, he privileged revolutions from abroad which were often ill-fitted to the peculiar history and contemporary challenges of African American politics and culture. Decades before, W.E.B Du Bois (1935) had historicized the Slave Revolution in the Civil War as a political revolution resulting from a cultural revolution, and Alain Locke had theorized the relationship between black culture and revolution in the USA. Therefore, on the cusp of the BPM, a framework for black political and cultural revolution in the USA was available to BPM activists to guide and inform their struggle; however, they were largely ignored. BPM revolutionists failed to adequately historicize and theorize their own movement. Unaware of the revolution “beneath their feet,” the major BPM organizations, such as RAM, Us, the BPP, the RNA, CAP, the LRBW, the SoBM, and the BLA attempted a revolution in the most powerful country in the world using approaches more suited for an African or third world country.

These difficulties are no less evident in African American activism today, which remains inattentive to the revolutionary referents and lessons of the Slave Revolution. For example, the prospect of a strategy grounded in a thesis relating black cultural and political revolution remains auspicious in the present era of social media and to some extent is being attempted in the #BlackLivesMatter (BLM) movement in the USA. BLM’s focus on the police murder of unarmed black civilians includes a demand for broader political, economic, and social justice (including reparations) in a framework that its founders associate with revolution (Khan-Cullors and Bandede 2018). The decentralized BLM has effectively mobilized large numbers of protesters using largely non-hierarchical organizational networks of activists in pursuit of their socio-political-economic demands. The particular significance of BLM, and similar mass, overwhelmingly black—yet diverse—mobilizations is evident in Cruse’s (1968) earlier admonition that a major impediment to black cultural revolution during the BPM was that activists were “severely hampered in their tasks of educating the black masses on political issues because Negroes do not own any of the necessary means of propaganda and communications” (p. 239), but this issue may be largely moot in an era of social media. Given the mobilizing potential of social media and the fact that multitudes of Americans walk around daily with a computer on their person (i.e., a cell phone), the likelihood of utilizing the cultural apparatus for socio-economic political change is markedly enhanced in the twenty-first century. Beyond mobilization, the extent to which BLM takes seriously the kind of revolution that Malcolm and the BPM envisioned, then disciplined study of the Slave Revolution and the historic relationship between black cultural and political revolution is essential.

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