

Connecting the Ideological Lineage: From W.E.B. Du Bois to Huey P. Newton

by

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Abstract

This study puts forth the idea that beginning with the year 1896, the year of the Plessy v. Ferguson Decision, the publishing of the dissertation of W.E.B. Du Bois initiated a modern era of individuals who would aim the majority of their scholarly production toward the examination of human “beingness” through the lens of blackness with the intended purpose of creating a better lived experience. Much of this scholarly output forms what this author sees as the foundation of an ethnic reflective canon, which is relevant for the understanding of the differences between the constructive philosophies which have developed within the departments of Black Studies (African American, Africana, Africana Women, Afro-American, and Africology) and those that developed within traditional departments of such disciplines as Philosophy. In order to demonstrate this difference, this study focuses on the significance of this ethnic reflective canon and its many implications, Two implications in particular will be scrutinized closely: 1. the intentional effort among black scholars of the modern era to participate in the movement for Black Freedom through the creation of ideas and scholarly production; 2. the creation of a school of philosophy or critical thought which was constructive in purpose, countering, not correcting traditional studies, such that coexistence in traditional departments became difficult and new departments became necessary. This period, I have given the name “Modern Era of the African American Freedom Struggle,” is a period that ends in 1975, the year the last troops return from Vietnam. This unique modality of scholar activist, a paradigm first exemplified in this period by W.E.B. Du Bois, is also exhibited by the pursuits of a stream of social thinkers and averted by a series of events culminating with the end of the Vietnam War (including the demise of the Black Panther Party, COINTELPRO, and the increase in drug addiction among Black people to name few). In this study, beginning with W.E.B. Du Bois and his brand of scholar activism, the evidence shows this; there is a significant connection from DuBois to many other African Americans who also began to use their scholarly callings or vocations as a means of activism, such that their ideas set the bounds, which define the period called “Modern Era of the African American Freedom Struggle.”

In 1896, the dissertation of W.E.B. Du Bois was published initiating a modern era of individuals who would aim the majority of their scholarly production toward the examination and explanation of human “beingness” through the lens of blackness with the intended purpose of creating a better lived experience. This burgeoning ethos can be seen in what Du Bois wrote in a diary entry, as graduate student at Harvard in 1890, “These are my plans: to make a name in science, to make a name in literature, and this to raise my race”(Lewis, 1995, p.3). Much of this scholarly output forms the foundation of an ethnic reflective canon that is useful in the understanding of the differences between the constructive philosophies which have developed within the departments of Black Studies (African American, Africana, Africana Women, Afro-American, and Africology) and those that developed within traditional departments of such disciplines as Philosophy. This canon includes, but by far is not limited, such titles as *The Souls of Black Folk* by W.E.B. Du Bois, *Discourse on Colonialism* by Aimé Césaire, *Black Skin White Mask* by Franz Fanon, *Jesus and the Disinherited* by Howard Thurman, *Blues People* by Leroi Jones (Amiri Baraka), and *Revolutionary Suicide* by Huey P. Newton. The significance of this ethnic reflective canon has many implications, but for the purposes of this study the significance is twofold: It demonstrates an intentional effort among Black scholars of the modern era to participate in the movement for Black freedom through the creation of ideas and scholarly production; secondly, it demonstrates that beginning with W. E. B. Du Bois, a school of philosophy or critical thought developed which was constructive in purpose also countering, not correcting traditional studies, such that coexistence in traditional departments became difficult and new departments became necessary (Rabaka, 2009).

Although Du Bois is considered by many to be the father of Black Studies, his contemporaries, B.T. Washington and Marcus Garvey, also played an important role in the creation of a certain ethos among Black people, which gave way to the creation of community development/social transformation. Washington set the stage for white philanthropists who were liberal and had a desire to play a role in designing the new Black community. Garvey is given credit for the Ethiopic sentiment among Black people in the diaspora. He felt that if diasporic Black people could work together with Black people on the continent of Africa, then neither would remain the victims of white oppression. The ethos created by the ideas of these two great men gave way to the understanding that Black people would no longer be defined by their past of enslavement, a new Negro had arisen from the pit of servitude (Reed, 1997).

This new ethos brought about an era that would later be called the Harlem Renaissance. In the 1920's, Black people began to move into the area of New York known as Harlem and other cities of the North and Midwest such as Chicago (Glasrud & Wintz , 2012). Many of these newcomers to the Harlem area were poets, artists, and writers. This talented group of individuals took as their subject matter the essence of blackness. The literature and other forms of culture developed during this period placed emphasis on expressing a true Black world view in its entire variegated splendor as opposed to what Black people had become as a result of racism (Harris, 1989). While studying at the Sorbonne, a Martinician named Aimè Césaire met a Senegalese student named Leopold Senghor. These two men studied classics of Western Culture. Apart from these studies, they came across the writings of Alain Locke and Du Bois concerning the new era of self-definition for Black people (Césaire, 1972). The writings of these architects of the Harlem Renaissance pushed Césaire and Senghor to the concept of Negritude. According to Césaire, “although I was not directly influenced by any American Negroes, at least I felt that the movement in the United States created an atmosphere that was indispensable for a very clear coming to consciousness”(Césaire, 1972, p. 28). Negritude became the precursor to the slogan of the 1960's and 1970's that “black is beautiful” (Neal, 2012).

Each man returned home and continued to write poetry and other philosophical works. Senghor involved himself in politics while Césaire became an educator and activist. One of his most notable students was Frantz Fanon (Fanon, 2008, p. vii). Fanon wrote four books, two of which influenced Malcolm X. These writings along with the writings of Marcus Garvey and also the teachings of Elijah Muhammad influenced Malcolm X to develop his own concept of raising consciousness (Cone, 1991). Malcolm X's charismatic speeches encouraged Black people in general and specifically those of the Black power movement also to take part in what is typically known as Black consciousness (Seale, 1970). Martin Luther King was also an influence on this movement, but the leadership or vanguard for this movement did not develop amongst the usual hegemonic structures within the church (Newton, 1973). Those who were a part of the vanguard for this movement consciously decided that they would act upon the traditional structures of society, rather than be acted upon by them. They created a vision and an ideology of community separate from white mainstream thought (et. al., 1973) and one that challenged others who had not been as active in creating a vision that was separate from white ideology.

Huey Newton contributed to this ideological shift by first being one of the founding members of the Afro-American Association from which developed the movement for Black Studies departments in American colleges and universities. Secondly, it was the intent of the Black Panther Party under Newton's direction to not only influence the consciousness of Black people through a new political theory (as opposed to the rhetoric of prominent Black leaders of his day) but another of Newton's aims was to encourage a generation of Black people, who lived out the philosophy of Black humanity espoused by Malcolm X (Newton, 2009).

What is constructive philosophy one might ask? It is my way of denoting special appearances of philosophies that develop within a culture or a time period where there were major schools of thought accepted as presenting limited truths without consideration given to the effect of culture on the supporting premises. In other words, there is a presumed notion of virtue, fact, historicity, and even the troubled concept of objectivity tied into the logic of these philosophies in general assuming the universality of their applicability, foregoing the possibility that with the existence of different perceptual identities that sometimes come from different worlds, or at least differing world realities (Dewey, 1980). Within the existence of this attitude, it is usually thought of as proper philosophy that succeeding philosophers will either perform connective or corrective discourses with existing schools of thought. An example of this would be the young Hegelians and Karl Marx, who while disagreeing with the philosophy of history interpreted by Hegel, performs a corrective discourse with Hegel's ideas while maintaining certain foundational concepts such as the dialectic (Henrich, 2003). Constructive philosophers, on the other hand, while being familiar with existing philosophies, find it necessary to construct new paradigms. These philosophers use respected philosophical methods but create space between their own philosophical understandings and those which already exist, such as deconstructionism. In the same vein, Du Bois' philosophical discourse concerning race uses respected philosophical methods such as the desire to discover a lived experience that can be considered good, however, he departs from foundational concepts concerning the humanity of African Americans. By doing so, he creates the foundation for a new era in thought (Rabaka, 2009).

Because of DuBois' desire to participate in an active struggle, it was necessary that he project his ideas into the public sphere, insuring a catalytic effect in the Modern Era of the Freedom Movement (Reed, 2009). This sentiment can be discovered in Du Bois' 1897 challenge to the Negro Academy, in his essay entitled "The Conservation of Races," where he suggest that the academy "gather about it the talented, unselfish men, the pure and noble-minded women, to fight an army of devils..." (Lewis,1995, p.26) And, if we define a movement loosely as a period of prolonged social action with the intent of affecting some political change within a definitive group which also develops certain cultural attributes such as songs, art, ways of dress, and use of language then it is difficult to view the struggle or quest for freedom by people of African descent in the Americas as something other than a movement. This movement certainly developed specific cultural attributes such as slang terms, freedom songs, and literature. This movement can also be thought of as having spanned a tremendous amount of time if we also consider that there are attempts to organize and perform systematic acts of rebellion which are documented as early as the 1700's. Vincent Harding intimates that resistance happened early and was constant, "Thus it was on the edges of our continent where some of us gulped handfuls of sand in a last effort to hold the reality of the land that the long struggle for freedom..."

Struggle was inevitable for the captives and preparations were made early.” (Harding, 1981, p.1) When defined using this constructed framework or one that is similar, the major goal of freedom can be easily identified; however, certain other characteristics begin to appear besides the goal of freedom such as the strategic means by which freedom should be attained. Specifically speaking, uprising and escape were the main means used when Black people who were in physical bondage, but after 1865 there was a dramatic shift from chattel slavery to legal state sanctioned unequal status in 1896, with the Plessy vs. Ferguson decision. This shift also influenced the manner in which W.E.B. Du Bois developed his new means by which to struggle.

In essence, Plessy v. Ferguson roguishly represents not simply one of the greatest symbols of American apartheid, but also a bitter and brutal reminder that the United States government, in fact, sanctioned, was patently part and parcel of the racial formation of the nineteenth century, which, as will be witnessed in our discussion of *The Souls of Black Folk*, led W.E.B. Du Bois to prophesy, ‘The problem of the twentieth century is the problem of the color-line...’ (Rabaka, 2010, p. 24)

This new means of struggle ushered in a new era in the freedom movement, an era which I have chosen to call the Modern Era of the African American Freedom Movement, and I also situate this era within the years 1896 (the year DuBois dissertation was published) to 1975 (which is the year the last troops come home from Vietnam). However, for the purpose of analyzing the unique modality of a scholar activist, the biggest pronouncement of this change in attitude is made when W.E.B. Du Bois begins what he termed as the scientific study of Black people. For it is from his investigations, that Du Bois attempts to describe the subjective experience of blackness and its causes, which essentially is to create a humanistic study of Black perceptual identity and the phenomenological description of the experience of blackness (Rabaka,2008).

It is in the Modern Era of the Freedom Movement, beginning with W.E.B. Du Bois that other African Americans began to use their scholarly callings or vocations as a means of activism. There are a few other Black scholars during the time of Du Bois’ matriculation and subsequent graduation and some existed before Du Bois, to be sure, but it was with Du Bois that a scholarly agenda of increasing the consciousness concerning the humanity of Black people was created. As he wrote in *Dusk of Dawn*,

I think I may say without boasting that in the period from 1910 to 1930 I was a main factor in revolutionizing the attitude of the American Negro toward caste. My stinging hammer blows made Negroes aware of themselves, confident of their possibilities, and determined in self-assertion. So much so that today common slogans among the Negro people are taken bodily from the words of my mouth. (Lewis, 1995, p.1)

The impetus for Du Bois' decision to dedicate his life's work to the liberation and humane treatment of black people was the combination of his experience in the South, while studying at Fisk, his experience as a student at Harvard, and probably most pivotal was his experience after graduating from Harvard and beginning his job search.

Du Bois was indebted to the education he received during this period, but he does not take the usual path of agreeing with or correcting paradigms created by existing philosophies of history, philosophies of being, and the existing philosophies of art and aesthetics.

A more interesting way to make the point is to say that Du Bois is a transformational thinker. His encounters with Western philosophy do not obviously yield contributions to the debates that have come to define the tradition in modern universities. Instead, like Emerson or Marx, his work edifies us by questioning the limits and the silences of those debates. Somewhat paradoxically, those silences sometimes occur where the oldest questions of philosophy should arise – What does a good human life require? And what is humanity? – and where modern forms of identity-based injustice give these questions new urgency. (Taylor, 2010, p.905).

Du Bois is more concerned with the construction of paradigms more specific to the understanding of the phenomenon of being Black. In this analysis, I focused upon what Du Bois contributes to the philosophies of being and philosophies of art/aesthetics and how his ideas in these areas have influenced others. This study is not intended to be exhaustive of all of Du Bois' contributions in these areas, however, it was my intent to show that the ideas presented here do cause a shift in the ideas surrounding blackness in the Modern Era; thereby, creating the necessity for others who's desire it is to become a Black scholar activist to dialogue with his ideology, whether in agreement or not. There is also enough proximity of his thoughts in these areas of reflection to speak of an ethnic reflective canon focused upon the idea of raising consciousness and thus increasing the status of Black people through a true liberation of the mind. Du Bois poetically lays out this objective in the forethought of *The Souls of Black Folk*, "Herein lie buried many things which if read with patience may show the strange meaning of being black here at the dawning of the Twentieth Century." (Du Bois, 1903, p. xxxi).

In Du Bois' first published work, his dissertation, through the choice of the subject matter, it is evident that he is demonstrating the significance and effect of the crime against humanity via the slave trade within American history. "That the slave-trade was the very life of the colonies had, by 1700..." (Du Bois, 1896, p.8). While other historians were writing as if the episode of slavery and attempts to suppress its occurrence were tangential to the historical narrative of the Americas, Du Bois move the discussion more towards the middle.

He does this by demonstrating the integration of the efforts to suppress slavery within the greater society. By the 1903, Du Bois' philosophical views, that shape the Modern Era, are beginning to take form. In *The Souls of Black Folk*, subjective experience of blackness and its causes, Black perceptual identity, and the phenomenological description of the experience of blackness are brought to the fore. He does this through his explication of the Veil, the idea of double-consciousness, and the color-line. These ideas would echo throughout the Modern Era, shaping the philosophical ideas to form an ethnic reflective canon. Soon other black writers would follow Du Bois' lead in an attempt shape the framework for this canon and to also add to the canon (Du Bois, 1903).

In *Discourse on Colonialism*, Aimè Cèsaire describes the creation of the concept referred to as Negritude. Cèsaire describes Negritude as a philosophical critique of Black people in the Antilleans who identified with French ideologies, assimilating these cultural ideas into their writings. According to Cèsaire, the writing of Antilleans became colorless having totally rejected their own culture in favor of an alien school of thought. Cèsaire describes Négritude as an attempt to dis-alienate from the colonization of culture by the French. Cèsaire agreed with Karl Marx, however he felt that Marx's approach did not go far enough in terms of answering the question of racial oppression. Cèsaire felt that emancipation consisted of more than political emancipation. A significant connection Cèsaire shared with the subjects of this study was the influence of the Harlem Renaissance upon this movement, of which Cèsaire said, "I felt that the movement in the United States created an atmosphere that was indispensable for a very clear coming to consciousness" (Cèsaire, 1972, p. 28).

A work that also follow this pattern is entitled *Blues People*, which was an attempt to describe the "cultural gene" which developed from LeRoi Jones' (Amiri Baraka) desire to trace the origin of an African American culture which could be said to be over and above African culture. To this culture, Jones gave the name which was already a part of the vernacular—"Negro," which was offered to the world by the Europeans but given understanding and shape through the actions and experience of the New World African. Jones describes this culture by writing, "the reaction and subsequent relation of the Negro's experience in this country in his English is one beginning of the Negro's conscious appearance on the American scene." In this work, it is Jones' intent to intimate exactly how the experience of the African American created the blues and jazz through its ability to portray the consciousness of the people at the moment, to speak to that consciousness, and to also lift that consciousness, much the same as a religious myth becomes a part of the moral fiber of a community or nation. Jones' description of this phenomenon also gives insight into the African diaspora's culture through its birthing of what might be called an African American cultural genetic code (Baraka, 1995).

Also, Leonard Barrett's *Soul Force* was a monumental attempt to describe in vivid detail the essential qualities of the inward nature of Black life that has given Black people the ability to survive the horrors that have accompanied their experiences in a foreign land. According to Barrett, "It was [the black man's] quality of "soul" that finally leavened the bread of calculated materialism, and his suffering finally evoked guilt in the conscience of his oppressors which brought sanity and humanity to New World." This work created the framework for the discussion of a cognitive awareness that grew from the depth of the Black experience. Barrett's nomenclature for this cognitive awareness was not original, and was already being used in the Black vernacular. "Soul" or "Soul Force" was the instigator of Black culture. Barrett proves this by analyzing Black humanistic expression (Barrett, 1974).

Barrett's work is important and unique because it is a work which for the first time attempts to encapsulate this awakening of consciousness into a specific period of time. He uses the beginning of the Garvey Movement as the beginning of this period of awakening. For Barrett, it was at this juncture that Black people to begin recreate their identity. This ideology allowed the masses of Black people to participate in a communal movement they could understand because it arose from the common experience of being Black. In this new consciousness the seeds for a Black aesthetic were also contained. According to Barrett, the conscious understanding of blackness gave Black people the ability to reinterpret the past, understand the present, and plan the future. Barrett's work is also unique because it considers all the movements from Garvey to the Black power movement as one movement. This point of view makes space for this writer's concept of the freedom movement. For Barrett, the development of *Soul Force* created a pleasurable experience resulting in a mass movement, not just for Black people in America, but also the world over.

The idea of analyzing the experience of Black people through artistic works created by writers of African descent using a culturally based aesthetic was also furthered by W.E.B. DuBois along with other writers of the Harlem Renaissance. It was during this time period that the conceptual framework for the black aesthetic and its logical conclusion were conceived. Then, just as now, there were proponents and critics. In a 1926 article entitled "Criteria for Negro Art," W.E.B. DuBois argued that Black writers had a responsibility to transform reality through their writings: "Thus all Art is propaganda and ever must be." He went on to say that he was unashamed to write Black writings to gain the right for Black people to "love and enjoy." However, DuBois' idea of transformation for Black writers was that Black writers should become equal to white writers in the acclaim they received. It was not his goal to identify the characteristics that made Black writing unique (Locke, 1997).

Not all writers of the Harlem Renaissance thought as DuBois. Langston Hughes, in his 1926 article entitled “The Negro Artist and the Racial Mountain,” put forth the idea that Black writers should write from their experience. Hughes did not want the Black writer who wrote from the Black experience to feel inferior. He wrote in response to those who felt that to write from Black experience cheapened the literary product. Hughes believed that Black culture was valuable and did not need to mimic white culture. Similarly, Zora Neale Hurston created an argument to support this conception in her 1934 essay, “Characteristics of Negro Expression.” She argued that Black people had not only developed a culture but also had developed an aesthetic through which the culture was experienced and interpreted. Hurston believed that there was an interpretation of English that was unique to Black people and went even further to create a list of some of the characteristics of black speech and writing patterns. Richard Wright, in a 1937 essay entitled “Blueprint for Negro Writing,” also expressed a similar view to that of Hurston. This shared view was that, as a theme in black writing, these characteristics sprang forth through the Black writer’s personal encounter and manipulation of the experience of Black people, a-historically, as if the total cultural experience that is blackness happened in one generation. This activity of remembering, retooling, and reusing the experience of blackness as a sort of cultural genetic unit, according to Wright, has the ability to “lift the level of consciousness” of Black writers (Napier, 2000).

Although many disagreements existed concerning the exact purpose and strategies of diasporic artistic creations, few if any critics as well as artists would disagree that a basic cultural memory could be identified in these creations stemming from a common aesthetic experience and common cultural memory. These two elements in concert have strongly contributed to the confluence that exists among artists and major thinkers of this period. This confluence, according to Afrocentric thinkers, developed as a direct result of being forced to accept blackness and give up ethnic connections as a result of the great historical and ongoing atrocities inflicted on people of African descent. This aesthetic moment was simultaneously buried deep within the soul of the Black memories of being a Fulani, a Wolof, an Akan, a Fante, etc., and gave rise to the African, which was represented fully in the Black diaspora and thus also giving rise to the freedom aspect of the African aesthetic. A philosophy of freedom may have developed during enslavement, but it was clearly not canonized until the 1800’s with the academic writings W.E.B. DuBois. Its aim was community development/social transformation which it considered to be dependent upon having a national consciousness rather than economics. The African people who were enslaved in the Americas had an image and conception of themselves which was derived from their cosmology and image of God; however, this image was redefined to match the existential conditions in which they found themselves (Thompson, 1983).

In the concepts presented in the initial works of DuBois in these first years, we find the ancestral home for the creation of new and in some instances separate canon giving to the field we know of today as Black Studies and all of its derivative titles. These ideas push forth a new consciousness and set as an agenda the changing and lifting of consciousness through literature, art and its criticism. This occurs in the so called, “The New Negro Movement” which exerts pressure on the greater for the right of self-definition through art and literature. Following this moment, there is the Negritude idea which Césaire, while admitting to not being influenced by any African American in particular, felt that an atmosphere was created for the New Negro Movement that was indispensable for a very clear coming to consciousness. Then, Fanon continues to push forward adjusting the perceptual identity through a lifting of consciousness through his attempt at a phenomenological description of blackness in *Black Skin White Mask*. Moving into the sixties, the ethnic reflective canon broadens through works such as *Blues People*, *The Black Aesthetic*, and *Black Fire*, all of which are constructive in nature and they continue to push back the main stream while inserting a legacy for a new canon.

In the late sixties, the ideas move into their logical conclusion with major upheavals occurring around the push for Black Studies classes and departments. This new level of scholar activism occurs because of the realization that these ideas are not derived from sorts of questioning are therefore and not reaching the same truths of traditional departments of study. Accepted facts and hints of objectivity cloud any real discussion of race, racism, and racial identity. And it becomes clear that two, if not more, perceptual frameworks exists causing, at a minimum, a disrespect for differing points of view developing from different ideological vantage points.

Finally, the climax of the scholar activist is seen in the works of the Black Panther Party for Self-defense, particularly in the activity of Huey P. Newton. Newton, in many ways, epitomizes the ideal scholar activist. In an article written in July, 1967, Newton announced that “the main function of the party is to awaken the people, teach them the strategic method of resisting a power structure..., and to always exemplify revolutionary defiance.” Newton constantly claimed that the purpose of the Black Panther Party was to raise the consciousness of the people. Newton maintained scholarly pursuits while continuing his attempts to transform the perceptual identity of Black people, especially those who were considered disadvantaged. For Newton, it was necessary to do so because this was a means of struggling against oppression, which he explains by writing, “I saw all my turmoil in terms of racism and exploitation and the obvious discrepancies between the have and the have-nots. I was trying to figure out how to avoid being crushed and losing respect for myself, how to keep from embracing the oppressor that had already maimed my family and community”(Newton, 2009, p. 62). It was his goal that the desired experience as he perceived possible would become the lived experience through a raised level of consciousness.

Newton speaks to these concerns and more in an early publication entitled, *The Genius of Huey P. Newton*, which was published in 1970. The Panthers were founded in October of 1966. It was at this time that Newton, along with Bobby Seale, penned the ten-point program that was to be the basis of the party's ideology. It was Newton's role to develop new ideas and theories that the party would place into action. Initially, many of Newton's writings were filled with the rhetoric of the revolutionary philosophies of the day. Many of these philosophies had very little relevance to the existential conditions in which Newton and inner city young blacks found themselves during the late 1960s. These philosophies were also disconnected from the dynamics of the particular racial tensions between African Americans and whites during this period. This caused Newton to come to the realization that although these philosophies could serve as a basis for shaping ideas, their relevance was tangential at best. Within this writing, Huey shows glimpses of his subsequent development, such as the nature of his ability to use written prose to express the political theories that shaped the Black Panther organization into a group wielding international influence. (Neal, 2015)

In this collection of writings, which includes letters and essays, Newton begins with a letter addressing a previous communication from Robert Williams of the New Republic of Africa. In the letter, Newton revealed some of the direction that he felt the Panthers should take based on their ideology. The subject matter of the letter is centered on the difference in philosophy of the two organizations. Newton's claim for the difference in the organizational plan of action has little to do with the difference in philosophies and more to do with the theories that supported each organization's analysis of history. The Republic of New Africa was steeped in idealism, while the Panthers read history through the lens of dialectical materialism. It was idealism that caused the Republic of New Africa to consider their present time to be optimal for the building of a nation using the southern states Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama, Georgia, and South Carolina. In contrast, Newton and the Panthers saw the time period as not yet ready, based on the economic conditions of black people, the lack of military might, and the ability of the United States to colonize "Third World Countries" of that time through the use of advanced technology. (Neal, 2015)

There are several other essays/letters in the book that are of interest, but two in particular demonstrate Newton's focus on raising consciousness as a means of building community and causing social transformation. In the first of these, "Functional Definition of Politics," Newton does not mention consciousness explicitly; however, it is the goal of the article to illumine the true meaning of politics, from which the black community would become conscious of what would be necessary for true social transformation through political means. Newton quickly moves from defining politics to explaining the failed state of black politics as a result of the lack of power found in the black community.

Newton builds this discussion on the philosophy of existentialism in the writings of Jean Paul Sartre, through which he describes the black political representative as being absurd (in the Sartreian sense of the word) as such a representative represents no political power. This is because, for Newton, “politics is war without bloodshed” or, in other words, the acquisition of power through political means. Political acts are always backed by the threat of a consequence from the community that elects the representative, except in the case of the black representative, who is sent from a community that has no power because it lacks the means to acquire power. These means would include, for example, major land holdings, businesses that are essential to the fulfillment of the American way of life (i.e., General Motors), or organized military might. (Neal, 2015)

In the next essay, “Message from the Minister of Defense: Huey P. Newton on the Peace Movement,” Newton continues the line of thought by examining the phenomenon of the black self. This essay deals with consciousness explicitly by first focusing on the subconscious and the role it plays in determining human perspective. Newton refers to the work of Sigmund Freud and Karl Marx as he communicates his position concerning the subconscious. For Newton, the epitome of being human is to be free. Accordingly, Newton lists two major factors that have a determining effect on the human individual, specifically the black self, to actualize freedom. This idea of freedom can be said to have its beginnings in the concept of “Free Will.” From this concept grows the desire to have a certain type of existence. Newton seems to imply that freedom is connected to the idea of having many choices as opposed to a very limited number of choices determined by outside influences targeting the subconscious. To gain freedom from this deterministic pattern of life, the individual has to become conscious of the internal forces that create appetites and aversions that display themselves through various behaviors. (Neal, 2015)

Newton’s reading of Marx focuses on the external forces that determine behavior. Marx targeted the mode of production when he contemplated what would be necessary to constitute freedom—namely, a transition from a forced mode of production to a creative mode of production. In the forced mode of production, individuals seek to earn a living through their production and are in effect forced to produce non-creatively because those who have the capital to purchase this production become the owners of the production and its producer. These owners determine what is produced, what is purchased, and in essence who lives or dies. Newton, as well as Marx, believed that in order for individuals to break free of this type of passive slavery, the system of private ownership would have to be destroyed. (Neal, 2015)

The purpose for Newton’s use of consciousness in this collection of essays is first to instruct. It was Newton’s belief that his theories were correct, but they required such a paradigm shift that they would have to be continuously taught and demonstrated to the black community. This was because both internal and external factors had made the black community mentally and physically complicit in their own subaltern status.

Newton attributed this phenomenon to a lack of knowledge on the part of blacks concerning their individual and social existence. Next, Newton believed that this style of writing would arouse emotion in any area of high black population, inclining them to bind closer and form a real community based not just on physical similarities but also consciousness, and this new community would search for solutions that would lead to social transformation. (Neal, 2015)

This ideal was encapsulated in the motto “All power to the people,” which for Newton meant that if the people’s development of consciousness were unhindered by the oppressor, all power to the people would come to pass, but since there were contradictions meaning oppressive forces, then it was the call of the revolutionary to raise the level of consciousness so that the people would not rest until it was there lived experience. To be sure there are other works that could be included in this canon, but it is only my purpose to demonstrate how the philosophical ideas of DuBois could be connected to those of Huey P. Newton, and also how they led to the creation of a new canon and new departments all with the purpose of transforming the consciousness of the people and moving toward an end which is true freedom (Rojas, 2007).

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