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## **Black Remobilization and the Crisis in American Democracy and Security in the US Election of 2020: Part I**

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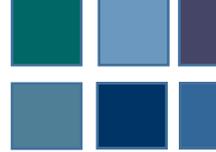
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“If one can speak in terms of a ‘radical sociology,’ or of a social analysis that clarifies the role of Black urban protest movements as vehicles for American social change, then one can better reassess the rapid succession of issues that emerged in the 1960’s. For one thing, this ‘interpretation’ or ‘analysis’ reveals that ultimately the Black movement(s) cannot bring about a ‘social revolution,’ or fundamental ‘social change’ in and by itself alone. However, what Black urban movement(s) can do, which no other white movement(s) can achieve, is to play the uniquely fundamental role of social catalyst, which is to say a catalyst that, by its very nature, poses the central issues and problems which plague the whole of American society. It is the historic role of Black urban movements to point the way to exactly where, in the complex structural organism that is American society, the possible Black and white political coalition must direct its organized thrusts to bring about, nay, force, constructive social change on behalf of the best interests of all the people who are deeply perplexed and uneasy over the internal problems of American society. Or, to put the question another way, the Cultural Revolution, if properly conceived, is a program that Black urban movements can pursue in the best interests of the Black community, but latent responses outside the Black communities which can demand that the Federal Government reschedule the numerical order of its political, economic, cultural, and educational priorities. However, in pursuit of these demands, the Black urban movement(s) remains at all times, self-determining, autonomous, self-led, self-inspired, and self-informed. This is necessary, if for no other reason than that Black urban movements must center their attentions on the internal problems of the several and differentiated Black cities.”

Harold Cruse, “BLACK and WHITE: Outlines of the Next Phase,” Black World May 1971

### **Introduction**

This analysis, the first in a series is inspired by the ‘Count Down to US Elections 2020’ webinar series produced by the African Center for the Study of the United States at the University of the Witwatersrand in Johannesburg, South Africa. The interpretation of ongoing developments in this discussion ‘think piece’ regarding the Trump-Biden presidential contest is a preliminary attempt at analyzing unfolding developments in terms of the stakes they hold for Black America at a critical inflection point of multiple crises facing America as a whole. Whether Biden-Harris win the November presidential election or not, the racial fascism of the Donald J. Trump presidency that has spiked in US Election 2020 amid the perfect storm ravages of the coronavirus, the ensuing economic downturn of depression proportions alongside serial police killings of unarmed blacks is likely to demand more than a business as usual return to ‘normality’ for African-Americans.



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With the 2020 election entering its 'home stretch' after Labor Day, events of 2020 between George Floyd's murder and the shooting of Jacob Blake, beg major questions about America's Black Leadership against the backdrop of the globally surging Black Lives Matter movement that has become the activist center of gravity of Black America's political ebb and flow of struggle against the racial status-quo. Why this is so has to do with the ebb in post-1960's/70's civil rights and Black Power activism.

### **Background**

By the beginning of the 1980's, the African-American leadership had become a largely spent force in the wake of the essential decapitating of the Black Leadership class that had emerged in the Assassination Decade of the 1960's in the murders of John and Robert Kennedy as well as of Malcolm X and Martin Luther King along with the extensive FBI Counterintelligence Program (COINTELPRO) destabilizings of Black organizations generally, interacting with Justice Department investigations resulting in the demise of the first Congressional Black Caucus leadership generation beginning with the iconic Rev. Adam Clayton Powell. The demise of Detroit founding chair of the Caucus, Charles C. Diggs, Jr., D.C. Delegate, Rev. Walter Fauntroy and Philadelphia Congressman, Rev. Bill Gray and eventually, Harlem successor to Powell, Congressman Charlie Rangel fall within this context. (I was a professional staffer for Diggs and Fauntroy.) Fast forward to 2020, the federal probe into Black billionaire Robert Smith who helped finance the Smithsonian African-American Museum and committed to paying off the student loans of Morehouse College class of 2019 raises similar issues.<sup>1</sup> In any case, essentially, by the mid-1980's to early 1990's the national Black Leadership had been neutered only to begin showing signs of vitality with the historic presidency of Barack Obama toward the end of the 1st decade of the 21st century. Not that Obama has ever seen himself as a 'black leader' apart from being an all-American national leader.

The neutering of Black activism over these decades was part and parcel of the overall shifting of American politics to the right as the Democratic party adopted the neoliberalism of the Democratic Leadership Council, giving us the Bill Clinton-Al Gore administration which bequeathed a vibrant economy to a George W. Bush administration which ran into the Great Recession financial crisis of 2008/9. This event unveiled the crisis of globalization with an ascendant financial economy over the 'real economy' at the expense of working and much of middle class America. Obama, as America's 1<sup>st</sup> Black president was never able to revive the economy into full recovery due to his own strategic ambivalences amid the backlashing onslaught of a Republican party moving ever further to the right in regaining both houses of Congress before Obama's two terms ended in 2016 followed by the



unexpected and unconventional backlash presidency of Donald J. Trump. Trump's election ended what existed of a fast fading bipartisan political establishment after Obama's defeat of Senator John McCain in 2008 and the Republican Party's morphing into an extremist white Christian evangelical movement. Trump has transformed this extremism into a would-be 'Strong Man' personality cult with fascist overtones and potential, committed to dismantling as much of the American safety net as he can manage with the complicity of a Republican Senate under the ultra-obstructionist leadership of Kentucky Senator Mitch McConnell. McConnell sabotaged much of Obama's agenda.<sup>2</sup> *Racial fascism* is an imminent trajectory of the post-election landscape if Trump is reelected in November.

### **Threat perception**

Trump's ascendancy and the possibility of his re-election, in spite of a thus far sustained lead by Democratic challenger Joe Biden, exposes the fundamentally undemocratic structural flaw in the American political system reflected in the Electoral College; this is a feature increasingly favoring a conservative-to-far right minority presidency at the expense of genuinely democratic popular sovereignty amid demographic changes transforming the US into a minority-majority continental nation of multiracial and multicultural diversity with a shrinking white population. This is at the heart of the current crisis specifically of the 2020 election and of American democracy more generally. The immediate and longer term outcome of this predicament after November 3<sup>rd</sup> is highly uncertain even if Joe Biden and Kamala Harris are elected. Trump's ego compulsions for re-election have resulted in a heightening of racial and political contradictions to a point bordering on outright fascism in his mobilizing an alignment between the Republican party, police unions, far-right white vigilante militias, including evangelicals and an extensive 'echo chamber' centered around the Rupert Murdoch family's Fox News 'ministry of disinformation' and social media platforms.

The overt racism in this toxic alignment is unabashedly blatant. Hence, 'racial fascism' defining the Trumpian phenomenon propelling Trump's second term bid. According to draft documents prepared by the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), white supremacist extremists (WSEs) pose the greatest threat to the US and is likely to remain the most "persistent and lethal threat" to the homeland through 2021; this is in spite of President Trump and his administration's politically motivated downplaying of the white supremacist threat which Trump himself has stoked as he has also downplayed Russia's election interference amid submissiveness to Russian president Vladimir Putin.<sup>3</sup> Indeed, the two are interrelated in as much as, according to DHS: "Russia will probably be the primary covert foreign influence actor and purveyor of disinformation and misinformation in

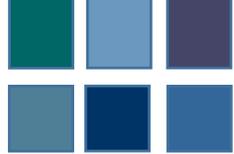


the Homeland” because, according to CNN’s analysis, “Moscow’s primary aim is to undermine the US electoral process and weaken the United States” as some “Kremlin-linked disinformation also might motivate acts of violence in the US “according to the DHS draft report.<sup>4</sup> As such, it is feared that given WSEs sophistication, white supremacists are planning something big along the lines of the Oklahoma bombing.<sup>5</sup> Yet the Trump administration propaganda strategy is to equate domestic terrorism with peaceful protest against rampant police violence against African-Americans while conjuring up a ‘radical left, anarchist, Antifa’ threat and non-existent election interference by China! Further, by rhetorically stoking violence in an attempt to drown out his coronavirus failure that is killing hundreds of thousands in the run-up to the election, Trump hopes to pull out a re-election victory. Democratic complacency in outreach to Hispano-Latino constituencies, especially in Florida could also contribute to such an outcome.

Ranged against Trump’s coronavirus distraction ploy and allied white supremacist forces, apart from the Democratic challenge of the Biden-Harris presidential campaign, is an incipient black-led, multicultural mass democratic movement fueled by a crisis of what could be coordinated serial police killings of unarmed blacks (given reported white supremacist law enforcement infiltration) with the dramatic effect of globalizing Black Lives Matter (BLM) given racial divides of increasing salience and global media resonance in the UK and throughout Europe. The question is how would such a movement dynamic take shape as the BLM is by no means the only black activist actor in this scenario and is not likely to emerge at the leadership forefront of a revived black-cum-mass democratic movement. It is quite possible that Democratic vice-presidential candidate Kamala Harris could, along with other dynamic black women like Stacey Abrams and in conjunction with *More Than A Vote* leader, LeBron James, emerge in the leadership vanguard of a broad coalition of black activists and traditional institutional forces which, in turn, could morph into a much broader multiracial and multicultural American mass democratic movement.<sup>6</sup>

### **A new black coalition of forces?**

Although the BLM has recently shown signs of taking on a more manifestly political agenda in its late August convening of a National Black Political Convention reminiscent of the early 1970’s, it’s primarily protest format and ambivalence toward a more pro-Democratic party alignment would not seem to position it at the helm of a renewed black political activist momentum.<sup>7</sup> To be sure, BLM is strategically critical to any new Black political-cum-mass democratic movement prospect. Especially at local levels in a ‘bottom-up’ grassroots mobilizing dynamic. But its youthful leadership has appeared too politically insular and inexperienced to be able to competently and with nuance navigate the Trump-led far-right ‘culture war’ onslaught at the epicenter of the



white supremacist domestic terror threat. This assault is one with a Russian-backed agenda that would essentially install a veritable right wing racial dictatorship anchored in the Electoral College accompanied by hyper-partisan gerrymandering, multifaceted voter suppression and a conservative judicial regime combined with armed militia and vigilante auxiliaries. And because this racial fascist dynamic has captured the Republican Party, the counter-mobilization of progressive forces on the left has to mount electoral fight backs; it has to assume the partisan mantle of the Democratic Party in accordance with dialectical dictates of an unfolding struggle that could become increasingly bitter and protracted irrespective of the outcome of the November election.

Moreover, the fact that African-Americans comprise the most loyal and strategic base among Democrats should be a no-brainer in dictating where Black political-activist balance of forces should be concentrated in navigating the magnitude of mobilization called for in resisting the racial fascist 'culture war' and domestic terrorism onslaught. If Biden-Harris become the successor administration to Trump, Kamala Harris will have to take on a much more manifestly black political profile than was the case with Obama. Harris should have ample leeway as a mixed race African-American of South Asian as well as Jamaican descent in fashioning a much broader multiracial-multicultural coalition of progressive forces within and outside the Democratic Party. Perhaps this could take the form in two respects: 1) reviving and foregrounding domestic counter-terrorism anti-WSEs strategy within the National Security Council in conjunction with the Justice Department, the FBI and DHS; 2) convening a presidential and/or congressional *National Study Commission on Historical Justice and Reconciliation*.<sup>8</sup>

If Biden-Harris are unable to overcome Trump's Electoral College advantage, then outside of government, Harris, remaining a presidential prospect for 2024 will, virtually by default be positioned to assume outright leadership of bitterly frustrated and demoralized oppositional forces in need of regrouping into a sustained resistance. The same Black coalition of forces outlined above would need to be consolidated. In addition, there will no doubt be a revival of armed black groups that may already be mobilizing to take on white extremist militia-vigilante terrorism. These groups, after all, are 'cruising for a bruising' to instigate racial civil war in defense of a declining White America. As it is, the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century north-south Civil War of secession never ended in a comprehensive political settlement with the white terrorist overthrow of Reconstruction.

Either way, win or lose in November, Harris will need to lead in tandem with a credible non-elected echelon of leadership offering a fresh, new claim to activist credibility. Here, along with other black and non-black female political actors, LeBron James, at



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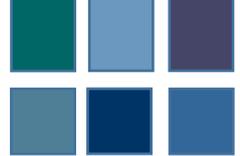
the head of a newly politicized phalanx of activist athletes who are well positioned to excite the imagination of a youthful constituency and fans of the NBA, would seem to fit the bill. Then, there is Stacey Abrams and her Fair Fight and Fair Count initiatives. Another candidate might be former US attorney general under Obama, Eric Holder, heading up the *National Democratic Redistricting Committee* (NDRC) co-founded with Obama. Harris, either as vice-president or as an aspirational candidate waiting in the wings for 2024, coordinating in tandem with Abrams and/or Holder, LeBron and his happy NBA warriors could consolidate a dual alliance of Black and multiracial progressive forces for a protracted pro-democracy campaign. If Harris is vice-president, an Abrams- Holder-LeBro leadership alignment with Harris' backing could become the focal point through which she would work through more indirectly.

The Black alliance would bring together the NAACP and its Legal Defense Fund, already working closely with James' More Than A Vote, Abrams' Fair Fight/Count, Rev. Al Sharpton's National Action Network, the BLM-National Black Political Convention, the National Urban League and Black law enforcement professionals, Greek Letter sororities and fraternities such as the Alpha Kappa Alphas and Alpha Phi Alpha, the Omegas and Kappas along with more Democratic party aligned partisan forces such as Eric Holder's National Democratic Redistricting Committee and the Global Black Caucus of Democrats Abroad as well as the House of Representatives CBC and its tri-Caucus Hispanic and Asian congressional allies.

The broader multiracial-multicultural alliance would include such organizations as Justice Democrats and Democratic Socialists of America (within which a new generation of Black challengers to Congressional Black Caucus incumbents are gaining traction) as well as a diverse range of civil society activist constituencies. However, as in the 60's and 70's, Harold Cruse's envisioning of how "Black urban movements" would catalyze interactively with a broader coalition of progressive forces in demanding that "the Federal Government reschedule the numerical order of its political, economic, cultural, and educational priorities" still holds as the third decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century gets underway.<sup>9</sup> As such, "in pursuit of these demands, the Black urban movement(s) remains at all times, self-determining, autonomous, self-led, self-inspired, and self-informed."<sup>10</sup> In other words, the old civil rights 'racial integration' paradigm must be transformed into a duality of black self-determination catalyzing and interacting with a mass democratic movement (MDM) of progressive forces in and outside the Democratic party in motivating major political reforms to accelerate fundamental social changes in the direction of social democratic America.

### **Electoral rebalancing**

For starters, such a coalition of forces will need to prioritize reshaping the structural electoral landscape while, especially if Democrats retake control of both houses of



Congress (and this is as critical as defeating Trump), focus programmatically on the legislative agenda. This will not be enumerated in expansive detail here. However, passage of the John Lewis Voting Rights Act and statehood for the District of Columbia and Puerto Rico as outlined in Barack Obama's eulogy to John Lewis should receive the utmost priority. Statehood, especially for the District of Columbia is critically strategic to overcoming the conservative and Republican bias of the Senate in which the filibuster should also be abolished if not, ultimately, the Senate itself!

Electoral landscape restructuring will also have to prioritize eliminating the Electoral College or reforming it by abolishing its winner-take-all character in a manner aligning closer to the popular vote.<sup>11</sup> Jesse Jackson and Al Sharpton threatened to campaign for abolishing the Electoral College in 2000 when Al Gore lost out to George W. Bush in the Supreme Court decision that awarded Bush the presidency. However, this threat was short-lived. In this vein, expanding the *National Popular Vote Interstate Compact* as a post-election follow-up campaign to LeBron James' More Than A Vote, coordinated with the redistricting work of Eric Holder's NDRC should be at the top of the agenda.<sup>12</sup> In the absence of achieving popular sovereignty, what passes for America's qualified democracy will only become less and less democratic, making mockery of voting in presidential elections. The American electoral system is, in essence, a voter suppression system. It increasingly entrenches white minority rule for which the American anti-apartheid movement campaigned against in promoting majority-rule in South Africa. South Africans may need to return the favor!

### **Frederick Douglass revisited**

Finally, there is need to comment on ideological dimensions of black movement remobilization within the 2020 US election context and possible international implications that might emerge. Although America's historical and contemporary racial 'original sin' has embedded an ingrained left-leaning gravitational pull in the African-American political reflex, African-Americans, by and large, are pragmatically non-ideological to a fault. This is reflected in Black leadership tendencies, especially amid the postwar anti-communist hysteria that victimized an entire generation of Black leaders and intellectuals such as the iconic W.E.B. DuBois. Amid the grudging cold war-imposed trade-off of racial integrationist civil rights for loyalty in waging war against the Soviet Union, Black nationalism became a casualty as well. This was especially so given the essentially right wing legacies of Afro-West Indian-influenced Garveyism and the separatist brand of religio-nationalism that became associated with the Nation of Islam. Given their alignment with Booker T. Washington's accommodationist brand of 'self-help' and even with the Ku Klux Klan, these separatist movements alienated the postwar Black Leadership establishment in the NAACP and Urban League and more activist tendencies in Martin Luther King's Southern Christian Leadership Conference and Congress of Racial Equality (CORE), though not to the same extent in the Student Non-Violent Co-ordination Committee (which would



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eventually become the vehicle of 'Black Power' consciousness when Stokely Carmichael aka Kwame Toure took the helm while CORE would go the same way under neo-Garveyite Roy Innis).

Tragically, nationalism became incorrectly conflated with separatism when it could have been conceptualized as complementary to a process of American *national* (as opposed to 'racial') integration as experienced by any number of immigrant ethnic (including non-American Black immigrants) groups for which group solidarity as an expression of cultural nationalism served as prerequisite to assimilationist mainstreaming into the wider American polity.<sup>13</sup> Unfortunately, for African-Americans, the 'Uncle Tomism' associated with Booker T. Washington's Tuskegee post-Reconstruction self-help philosophy which played into the segregationist agenda of Jim Crow discredited this very American route to what Black abolitionist Frederick Douglass conceptualized as the multi-ethnic 'composite' character of the American republic. Douglass never really followed up in fleshing out his "Composite Nationality" support for 19<sup>th</sup> Century Chinese immigration into the American West Coast although its democratic cultural pluralist implications might have intellectually bridged the gap between Washington's unacceptable accommodation of Jim Crow segregation and the ethnic solidarity-cum-'nationalist' imperatives of the American assimilationist dynamic.<sup>14</sup> This would preserve African-American national identity within the American 'composite' reality without conflating nationalism or group solidarity with separatism.

### **Pluralist Internationalism**

As the US demographically transforms into a 'we are world' mosaic, transcending the historic biracial divide (which, among African-Americans, is already reflecting an increasing immigrant diversity), revisiting Frederick Douglass 'composite' notion of American identity should not ideologically overburden the American Black political imagination. It could and should facilitate a black-led revisionist intellectual revamping of American national integration on the basis of a democratic cultural pluralism understanding of America and the world if only the US electorate can decisively reject Trump's incipient fascism. The international implications of reconceptualizing America's 'composite' identity could be quite profound given the accelerated post-Western decline in hegemonic Anglo-American liberal internationalism; this is based on the 'deep pluralism' interpretation of the Global International Society (GIS) proffered by Amitav Acharya and Barry Buzan in *The Making of Global International Relations: Origins and Evolution of IR at its Centenary* (Cambridge University Press, 2019). Liberal internationalism, Acharya and Buzan contend, has eroded amid the expansion of the once dominant western core, extending to major non-western claimants, accompanied by a shrinking periphery such that a deep pluralism in the diffusion of wealth, power and cultural authority now defines a post-Western world



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order in transition.<sup>15</sup> The Anglo-American rupture in the UK government of Boris Johnson and the US administration of Donald Trump have accelerated this trend, thereby eroding liberal internationalism's hegemony. However, it can also be argued that this process is being driven by demographic trends in core-periphery dynamics *within* the western core as well, of which the reactionary Trump phenomenon is symptomatic. America inexorably becomes less and less white to the *potential* benefit of the Democratic Party.

Perhaps Trumpian racial fascism signals White America's last stand? Whether or not this is the future defining an unstable interregnum in the American system, at the international level, *Pluralist Internationalism* may well be the contribution to the international relations discourse that the African-American experience might bring to the table in discerning the shape of a global order in transition. Indeed, this has domestic public policy implications for the American Black Nation and America as a whole such as in reigning in the absurdly over-budgeted Military-Industrial Complex and mega-tax cuts for the plutocracy at the expense of the real economy. As such, however Election 2020 turns out, a new black leadership generation should take it upon itself to articulate how deep pluralism at home and abroad relates to America's domestic renewal at home in which black America, the emerging majority-minority demographic as well as the white middle-cum-working class are heavily invested.

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