African American LEADERSHIP

A Reference Guide

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MISSION BELL MEDIA

FIRST EDITION

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biblical convention in clothing with West African styles, along with the custom of converts' assuming a Hebrew name. With regard to the African Hebrew Israelite customs, the group's dietary preferences are also notable. Based on their interpretation of Genesis 1:29, the African Hebrew Israelites observe a strictly vegan diet; however, they are known for making vegan versions of foods commonly prepared in African American cuisine. More recently, the group has gravitated toward a position indicating an increased openness to white Jews. Because of negotiations between the Illinois state legislature and the Israeli government in 1990, the African Hebrew Israelites living in Israel received temporary citizenship that allowed them to hold jobs and receive social services from the Israeli government. With their three Negev Desert settlements combined, the group's population in Israel is roughly more than 2,000. Concurrently, the African Hebrew Israelites operate a number of satellite synagogues in major U.S. cities such as Chicago, St. Louis, Atlanta, Detroit, and Washington, D.C.

Other post–World War II black Hebrew Israelite formations were based on the leadership of individuals such as Abba Bivens. Bivens founded the Israeli School of Universal Practical Knowledge (ISUPK) in Harlem, New York, during the 1960s. From its beginning, the ISUPK was devoted to practicing the tenets of Jewish law. As Bivens and his followers grew as a religious body, they eventually changed their name to the Israelite Church of God in Jesus Christ. The most recent black Hebrew Israelite formation unfolded under the leadership of Hullen Mitchell, Jr. After a brief stint in the military and several decades of civil rights activism, Mitchell began the Nation of Yahweh in Miami, Florida, in the late 1970s. At the time he founded the Nation of Yahweh, Mitchell renamed himself Yahweh Ben Yahweh (Lord Son of the Lord). While their practices are similar to other black Hebrew Israelite formations, the Nation of Yahweh has been occupied with returning its members to Africa. Although he and several members were involved in a series of legal issues during the 1980s and 1990s, Yahweh Ben Yahweh and the Nation of Yahweh continue in several parts of the United States today.

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See Also: Back-to-Africa Movement; Black Liberation Theology; Religion and Leadership.

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Black Power Movement

The Black Power movement grew out of the turbulent environment of 1960s' upheavals ranging from explosive racial uprisings to the Vietnam War. The first large-scale public expression of Black Power arose in Mississippi during the summer of 1966 and lasted approximately a decade. Responding to the violence and harassment aimed at breaking civil rights activists' will to agitate for full equality, Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) members Stokely Carmichael (Kwame Ture) and Willie Ricks (Mukasa Dada) declared the phrase to a crowd of peaceful marchers. The masses of demonstrators raised their voices in response, proclaiming, "Black Power!" Their cries signaled the changing mood in black America.

The sentiment of the youth coming of age during this era ranged from disgust to infuriation about the status quo. They were growing increasingly impatient with the slow rate of change and many criticized the entire fabric of American liberalism as well as global imperialism. Espousing self-determination, self-respect, and self-defense, Black Power leadership spanned from the religiously based, do-for-self programs of the Nation of Islam to the appeals for cultural reorientation

and pride made by Ron Everett (Maulana Karenga) and LeRoi Jones (Amiri Baraka). The most prominent organization was the Black Panther Party (BPP). Advocating armed community defense, the group was founded in 1966. Although fraught with controversy and conflict, the Black Power movement had an impact on America and the larger world, particularly in the realms of artistic expression, higher education, and politics.

Black Power was a movement of movements, with influences extending as far back as early-20th-century "Back to Africa" expressions. Moreover, Black Power's reverberations lasted well into the 1980s. Movement leaders, in some cases, supported civil rights; however, at other times, they demanded deep social, economic, and political transformation in the name of human rights. Often, Black Power leadership decried democracy's contradictions and pointed out that integration could not provide holistic equality. Some claimed, at the very least, African Americans constituted a colonized nation within a nation in need of strong, independent institutions. In the most intense cases, theorists forwarded the idea that nations should no longer exist and activists must bring about revolution with the aim of rearranging the world into interdependent communities.

Black Power has been characterized as broad and flexible, highlighting as well as linking the diverse paradigms and practices of those involved. To define and explain the term, Carmichael and political scientist Charles V. Hamilton wrote a groundbreaking treatise questioning whether African Americans could achieve liberation through traditional political channels. They claimed sustained transformation would only come through closing ranks and self-determined institution building. In the book, titled *Black Power: The Politics of Liberation*, the authors fundamentally defined the ideology as African American political unity and strength. An astute theorist and charismatic leader, Carmichael became a movement icon in the late 1960s.

Fundamental Concepts

In characterizing the aims of the Black Power movement, key leaders emphasized three fundamental goals: self-determination, self-respect, and self-defense. Self-determination necessitated developing institutional mechanisms for exercising control of the daily life and future of African American communities. Self-respect related to the concept of reclaiming African heritage and culture to restore a sense of pride and value in having a black identity. Intense racial violence was a constant threat to many African-descended communities; thus, advocates of self-defense asserted that black people had a human right to protect themselves against racially driven violence and instances of law enforcement abusing its power. During the Black Power movement, the struggle toward realizing these fundamental concepts manifested in several ways. Four key Black Power manifestations are cultural, political, religious, and women's empowerment.

Cultural Nationalism

Cultural nationalism provided a driving ethos for certain approaches to Black Power. The term is generally defined as the theory that African Americans have a unique and collective sense of beauty, values, and ethics originating from contemporary folkways
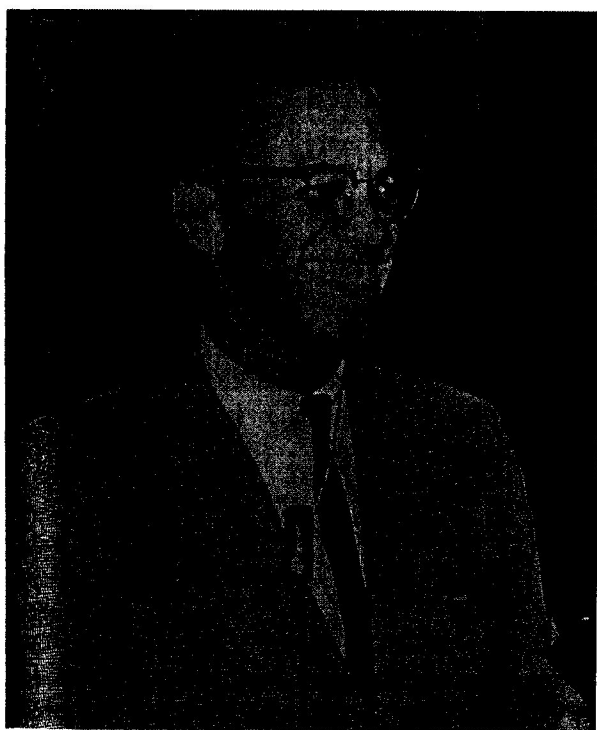
Human rights activist Malcolm X in March 1964. At this time in his life, this influential African American began to turn away from the teachings of the Nation of Islam. In February 1965, he was assassinated by members of the Nation of Islam. (Library of Congress)

and/or African heritage. Foregrounding this sense of collective blackness, leaders guided by cultural-nationalist beliefs stressed the need to positively transform black thinking, identity, mythology, customs, holidays, language, and aesthetics. Members of the Los Angeles–based Us Organization were among the foremost cultural nationalists. Also calling for black self-defense, Us meant "us" (blacks) rather "them" (whites) and was founded in the aftermath of the 1965 Watts rebellion. During the same year, Karenga and other founding members also established Kwanzaa, a celebration aimed at affirming unity, self-knowledge, and cultural grounding in the midst of the black liberation struggle. Karenga also assisted with launching the Black Power Conferences of the late 1960s, which were modeled on the pre–Civil War African American convention movement and designed to provide a platform for addressing critical black community issues.

Leader of the Black Power artistic outgrowth Black Arts, poet, playwright, and theorist, Amiri Baraka was also important in organizing the Black Power Conferences and expanding cultural nationalism throughout the late 1960s and early 1970s. Baraka employed the ideology as a tool for political organizing, particularly through instituting the Committee for a Unified Newark (CFUN). In an effort to actualize self-determination, Baraka and CFUN members were instrumental in electing the city's first African American mayor, Kenneth Gibson, highlighting the interconnected nature of the various Black Power strains. In addition to having an impact on electoral politics, CFUN members also helped found the united-front, cultural-nationalist organization Congress of African People (CAP). Moreover, through their support of African liberation, CAP affiliates were proponents of the contemporary anti-imperialist movements and pan-Africanism, the ideology advocating global unity and uplift of African and African-descended people. In the mid-1970s, Baraka renounced cultural nationalism as retrograde and embraced Marxism-Leninism, transforming CAP to the Revolutionary Communist League in 1976. Revealing Black Power leadership approaches as dynamic and diverse, this watershed transformation intensified organizational advocacy for women's equality but alienated constituents who believed black and white socialists inherently worked toward opposing goals.

Political Expressions

Many of Malcolm X's ideas supported fundamental Black Power concepts. As a result, numerous Black Power movement participants drew from his political philosophy. Through his advocacy of pan-Africanism and third world unity, Malcolm X promoted the solidarity and self-determination of the world's "darker races." He introduced the idea that the black freedom struggle was a matter of human rather than civil rights. In viewing the struggle as an issue of human rights, Malcolm X broadened the scope of forces accountable for black oppression and made valuing and defending black life an imperative. Thus, a major component of Malcolm X's human rights position involved the idea of black self-defense. Although he did not advocate that blacks use armed struggle to achieve liberation, he did maintain that blacks had every right to defend themselves, by any means necessary, when met with racial violence.

In addition to Malcolm X, others employed the strategy of self-defense. Robert Williams, a former National Association for the Advancement of Colored Peoples chapter president in Monroe, North Carolina, organized local African Americans into armed defense groups, successfully repelling Ku Klux Klan terror attacks. Williams established a self-defense model other African Americans, such as the Louisiana Deacons for Defense, would employ to protect black life and property during the freedom struggle in the south. In response to escalating police violence in urban areas such as Oakland, California, Bobby Seale and Huey Newton established the Black Panther Party for Self-Defense, making armed resistance to police brutality and self-determination in the black community central tenets of their nationalist stance. Efforts to produce black political power in the forms of territorial nationalism and black independence in electoral politics manifested during the Black Power movement.

Led by Richard Henry (Imari Obadele) in 1968, some African Americans took initial steps toward territorial nationalism by declaring independence from the United States and establishing a provisional government called the Republic of New Africa (RNA). In Indiana, Gary Mayor Richard Hatcher and Michigan Congressman Charles C. Diggs co-chaired the National Black Political Convention in

1972 along with Baraka. Thousands participated, representing all ranges of the black political spectrum. Session discussions focused on myriad black domestic issues as well as matters of foreign policy. Attendants attempted to express consensus on issues of black poverty, voting blocs, and community self-determination through creating a document known as the "National Black Political Agenda." However the convention revealed considerable divergences between black nationalists and elected officials on numerous political issues.

Religion

Religious manifestations of the Black Power movement found expression through various formations, including those of the African American Muslim and Christian traditions. Under Elijah Muhammad's leadership, the Nation of Islam (NOI) exemplifies the religious manifestations of the Black Power movement within the African American Muslim tradition. Drawing from aspects of the Islamic faith, Muhammad fashioned a brand of religious nationalism that made race purity, racial redemption, and affirmation of the black identity fundamental. In his efforts to focus on the matter of redefining black identity, Muhammad also started the practice of renaming newly converted members. He began replacing NOI members' surnames or "slave names" with the letter "X," which was indicative of inward transformation, for example, an ex-Christian, an ex-drinker, or an ex–mainstream American. Muhammad's philosophy and concepts set the basis for employing systematic discipline and devotion in obtaining black economic empowerment among the members of the NOI.

Various progressive church leaders in the African American Christian tradition also embraced the Black Power movement. Using a theological paradigm referred to as Black Christian Nationalism, Reverend Albert Cleage built the Shrine of the Black Madonna in Detroit throughout the 1950s and 1960s. Cleage's Black Christian Nationalism employed models of race and identity-conscious theological reflection and praxis. By 1968, the Shrine of the Black Madonna increased its focus on articulating a theology and an institutional mission that were centered on black self-determination and self-respect. Cleage stressed that the congregation make

the church fit the needs of black people. He dismissed the idea of identifying with a white Jesus and instead asserted that Jesus Christ was a revolutionary black messiah whose missions were to liberate African people and build a black nation.

In 1966, black churchpersons concerned with defining the religious dimensions of Black Power formed the National Council of Black Churchmen (NCBC). In July 1966, the NCBC issued a statement supporting Black Power, which appeared in the *New York Times*. In particular, the NCBC's statement addressed the matters of power, freedom, justice, truth, and love as pertaining to American leadership, the white church, the black community, and mainstream media. The "Black Power" statement created grounds for solidarity between the members of the NCBC and the movement's secular flanks. During the late 1960s, this solidarity was illustrated by the NCBC's establishment of the Inter-religious Foundation for Community Organization (IFCO), as well as its involvement with several entities within the landscape of the Black Power movement throughout the 1960s. In April 1969, IFCO and high-profile movement members cosponsored the Black Economic Development Conference in Detroit. During the conference, SNCC's international affairs director, James Forman, crafted a document known as the "Black Manifesto." In the "Black Manifesto," Forman not only demanded reparations from white Protestant and Catholic churches for African Americans but also outlined programs for building black-controlled economic, social welfare, and academic institutions with the resources received. Later in 1969, the ideological unity between the Black Power movement and the NCBC also gave way to a formal theological outlook called Black Theology.

Women's Empowerment

Although the male-dominated leadership and ideology of Black Power and broader U.S. society are well known, women were, nevertheless, fundamental agents in the movement. For example, radical activist, philosopher, and professor Angela Davis was arguably the most famous female leader in the movement due to her prominent roles with several organizations and causes from prisoner's rights to the BPP. Specifically in terms of the Panthers,

although it began as a male-based group, ironically by the mid-1970s, members were mostly rank-and-file women who carried the organization's community programs.

Moreover, as the party increasingly incorporated socialism into its ideology, leaders revised official organizational policy to support women's self-determination. Additionally, women rose through the ranks in the 1970s, particularly as men faced state repression and detention. Although it is important to note that women's gendered experiences in the BPP varied based on the time, rank, and location of service, the BPP was home to some of the movement's most prominent female leaders, such as Kathleen Cleaver, who served as communications secretary, and Elaine Brown, who ran for public office and served as chairperson, the party's highest position.

Black feminism also emerged as part of the movement's legacy, particularly as SNCC entered its Black Power phase in the late 1960s. In December 1968, African American women in the organization, led by writer and activist Frances Beal, formed a committee to challenge sexism in the group and expand women's roles in the broader black liberation struggle. Over the following years, the committee morphed into several iterations, with various goals, including dispelling the myth of black matriarchy, which put forward the idea that "overly dominant" African American women emasculated black men, thereby causing dysfunction in the entire race. By 1970, the group had expanded to include women of various ethnicities and took the name Third World Women's Alliance (TWWA) to reflect its composition. Repression and conflict caused the organization's dissolution in the late 1970s. Although short-lived, among the organization's greatest creations were its theories of double and triple jeopardy, which enhanced the understanding of race, class, and gender in the movement. TWWA represents an important legacy of Black Power because its members augmented movement concepts with new ideas about feminism, generating an expanded approach to the struggle for freedom and equality. Although too numerous to name here, women served at all levels of the Black Power movement, distinguishing themselves in areas ranging from Black Arts to Black Power politics. As critics have pointed out, despite the changes occurring through women's

sustained resistance to movement masculinism, patriarchy and heterosexism were never fully eroded.

In addition to censure because of sexism and homophobia, the Black Power movement leadership faced additional critiques of its shortcomings and challenges. Some supporters of mainstream liberalism viewed Black Power as the troubled offspring of the civil rights movement, condemning the radical movement as isolating and ineffectual. Others viewed it as an inversion of white power—merely a kind of black racism that recycled harmful theories of racial essentialism. However, facing the pressures of such critiques proved to be only one issue among many. A combination of growing conservative backlash, internal conflict, and state violence and repression, particularly through the Federal Bureau of Investigation's secret counterintelligence program (COINTELPRO), caused the ultimate weakening of the movement by the mid- to late 1970s. COINTELPRO was created to monitor, defuse, and destroy the domestic groups the bureau judged national security threats. Among other strategies, the program used intra- and intergroup rivalries to achieve its aims, provoking and exacerbating such conflicts as those of the BPP and the Us Organization. Despite such challenges, the Black Power movement and its key leaders left important legacies, from new aesthetic values, education reforms, and the election of officials through Black Power political coalitions. Moreover, vestiges of the movement continue to inform philosophy, artistic expression, and activist organizing from 1980s Afrocentricity and "Malcolmania" to chants of "Black Power" during 2014 Ferguson, Missouri, protests surrounding the killing of unarmed African American teen Michael Brown by a white police officer.

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See Also: Afrocentrism; Back-to-Africa Movement; Nation of Islam.

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Black Theatre Network

The Black Theatre Network pertains to a diverse organization of artists, academicians, students, scholars, and aficionados who are dedicated to conducting exploratory studies and conservation efforts to preserve the theatrical goals of the African diaspora. The function of the Black Theatre Network is to present the beauty and intricacy of African American theater arts and sustain their existence up to the 21st century and beyond.

The history of the Black Theatre Network goes back to the 1960s, when the combined efforts of the National Association of Dramatic Speech Arts (NADSA) and the African American founders of the American Theatre Association established the African Theatre Project, which was later renamed the Black Theatre Project. Two decades later, in 1986, the members of the Black Theatre Network decided to create an independent organization that is now known as the Black Theatre Network.

The mission of the Black Theatre Network is to collect, process, and disseminate information that facilitates the professional as well as personal development of its constituents, which in turn allows the growth of the network. In order to achieve these goals, the Black Theatre Network has organized programs that were specifically designed for particular sectors as it operates under the stance that all its members are interconnected and therefore are capable of helping each other. The Black Theatre Network also campaigns for excellence in the area of theater arts, and this is achieved by nurturing the growth of its students through extensive mentorship of theater professionals. The network also fosters writing competitions that identify highly creative and prolific blacks could play important roles in preserving the theatrical sector of the black community. The network also issues recognition awards to acknowledge highly exceptional blacks whose accomplishments have served as ideal models to the younger aspiring generation. These well-experienced black theater professionals also participate in specific workshops conducted by the network to train and develop the skills of interested members of the black community.

The Black Theatre Network ratified is constitution in 1986 and it was later revised in 1994 and 2009. The constitution states that the network was established by their African ancestors to transfer and preserve the history, tradition, and culture of the community. In the 19th century, Ira Aldridge established the African Grove Theatre as a venue for aspiring artists to be recognized on the American stage. During the 20th century, Randolph Edmonds created a stage for Black theater that served as an arena for the future theater educators. Since then, both theater scholars and professionals have utilized their rich ethnic culture and presented this to the rest of the world. The Black Theatre Network is therefore an extension of the efforts of individuals who recognized the beauty and intricacies of black theater. These individual members of the network also conducted research studies on the roots of African theater. The results of these studies were published and applied to current theater concepts as a form for promoting and sustaining this particular cultural sector.

The objectives of the Black Theatre Network are the following: to establish a network system that includes artists and scholars from various places across the country that will serve as a venue for the exchange of ideas relating to theater arts, to gather and distribute information relating to black theater events using various forms of publications such as newsletters as well as resource books, to present a venue for the discussion and viewing of the activities of the black theater, to encourage and support