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Claude McKay



The Socio-Politics of Black Exile

From 1776 to 1976

By Haki R. Madhubuti

The year 1976 will bring with it a national celebration unprecedented in the history of the world. Through the mass media and tele-electronics, the United States will come to us live and in living color direct from the White House and the Pentagon in observance of its 200th year as a successful white settler colony in North America. The energy, planning, money and people that will be used to support and make real this giant birthday party constitute an enormous waste. If the same resources were used creatively to aid the poor and sick in this country, we would truly have something worthwhile to celebrate. But it must be remembered that the priorities in America are not people, but defense and comic illusions about progress. Therefore, one must not encourage the wasteful use of the tax payer's monies.

The 200th anniversary of the United States will be a gigantic fashion show with

W.E.B. DuBois



Marcus Garvey



Kwame Nkrumah



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exhibitions of U.S. power, corporate instability, melting pot hypocrisy, global status, space technology, illegal wealth, industrial genius, mass miseducation, protestant arrogance, scientific know-how, Aryan nationalism and independence. (Cheikh Anta Diop, "The African Origin of Civilization," has a theory that there is a basic global division of peoples into two kinds: the Negro-Africans and the Aryans—a category covering all whites. An Aryan is either a Semite [Jew or Arab], a Latin [from Europe or South America], a Nordic [from Germany or the U.S.A.] or a Slav [whether in Russia or in Canada].) Observance will come from all quarters. The Indians (Native Americans) will be encouraged by the Bureau of Indian Affairs and the State Department to let by-gones be by-gones and smoke a new peace pipe with prized North Carolina tobacco. They will be allowed to leave the reservations for brief visits to the White House to sign new treaties as a testimony to their *survival without growth*. The Chi-

practice and protect their traditional culture and will receive grants to aid them in the effort to enhance the image of the celebration. The Japanese will commence dialogue on the oneness of the U.S. and Japan as capitalist and technological monopolies, without the slightest murmur about Hiroshima, Nagasaki and the detention of 110,000 Americans of Japanese descent less than 40 years ago.¹

Outside of the white nationals (Irish, Jews, Anglo-Saxons, Polish, Italians, etc.) the negroes or Afro-Americans as we are now known, will be expected to provide the color, music, dance and all-out general support for the most successful of the European slave-making, slave-raping and slave-owning colonies. More than any other Aryan settler colony in the world (with the possible exception of Canada, Brazil, South Afrika and Egypt in certain areas of "development"), the United States has given to the world the grand design for minority rule. The prescription (or scenario) for take-over and control is basically a simple one: (A) elimination of

the indigenous population or (B) assimilation (that is slavery through acculturation) of the indigenous population.

In the case of the United States, the brutal and systematic removal of the indigenous people (Indians) from their land — thus taking away their major life-giving resources, food and spirit, foretold the destruction of *nations* of red people in America:

On the part of the whites, it was unqualifiedly a war of aggression, of immoral appropriation and illegal confiscation.

On the part of the Indians, it was from its very beginning a war of defense, a ceaseless struggle to save their homes, their resources, their lives. . . .

They (the Indians) were not subjects of fascism who clubbed to death infants in the arms of Indian mothers. They were not Nazis who shot running Indian children to demonstrate their prowess as marksmen.

It was not a "dictatorship" which condoned the illegal appropriation of ter-

The systematic destruction of men was the crucial step in the total elimination of the Indians as a power, as a people. Dee Brown in his book, *Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee*, recorded that Red Cloud of the Ogallala Sioux in his old age finally assessed the true relationship between the Indians and the whites when he stated: "They made us many promises, more than I can remember, but they never kept but one; they promised to take our land and they took it."

ritory awarded Indians by solemn treaty for "as long as the waters run and the sun rises."

It was not an "apartheid" that drove thousands of Indians from their ancestral homes, from the farms and hunting grounds upon which they depended for survival, not a Fuhrer or a duce who herded them into prison camps and let them die of malnutrition, cold and disease.

It was not a Romissariat in the white house which permitted and condoned the ridiculing and depreciation of the Indians' religious beliefs, blasphemed their gods and their rituals and took no steps to halt the destruction of their shrines and the places in which they worshipped.²

These were the everyday white people who instigated genocidal wars against the Indians and in the end these same people finally forced the resettlement of the old, the ill, and the few women and children left on reservations.

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After the elimination of the Indians, somebody had to work the land and "free" the resources and no one was better suited for this job in terms of strength and visibility than Black people. (Color was a prime factor for identifying the newly created slave caste. By this time in much of the world, slave and Black had become synonymous.) The newly arrived Afrikans, strangers in a strange land, were ultimately controlled through both *elimination* and *assimilation*. Assimilation for those Afrikans brought to America was a slave making process of inducing Blacks to think

and act as white people with no individual or collective will. That is to say, the individual and collective wills of Blacks in no way were allowed to come in conflict with the majority will in the land. For those Afrikans who would not submit to inhuman treatment, breeding, family separation, rape, castration and acculturation (slave making), the answer was simple: kill them, thus making them examples. The Aryans' blatant disregard for Black life greatly weakened the Afrikan physically and psychologically:

The rebellious slave was punished swiftly and cruelly to discourage others. The oppressive acts consisted of cropping ears, castrating, hanging, burning and mutilating. . . . On numerous occasions, planters branded, stabbed, tarred and feathered, burned, shackled, tortured, maimed, crippled, mutilated, and castrated their slaves.³

Even with Black resistance, the slave-making process was actually only a matter of time. The whites had the weapons, the food, the energy, the psychological advantage to eventually bring the defenseless Afrikans under control. Slavery worked well in the 17th, 18th and 19th centuries, and to show how history out-does itself, witness the 20th century Blacks who play key roles in the celebration of 200 years of our own brain and body mis-management.

The Social-Political Reality of Black Exile

When one first ponders the term exile (forced removal from one's country or home. If one uses this definition for the 30 million Black people in the United States the term takes on added importance and is significant as a cultural, political and economic concept.) one's mind flashes to certain individuals: Marcus Garvey, Kwame Nkrumah, C.L.R. James, Richard Wright, George Padmore, Claude McKay, Chester Himes, Frank Yerby and W.E.B. DuBois. In most recent times, one thinks of Robert Moses, Abdias Do Nascimento, Wole Soyinka, Robert Williams, Carlos 3

Moore, Eldridge Cleaver and Huey Newton.

Robert Williams and Eldridge Cleaver have since returned to the United States, which is very significant and has underlying tones in terms of the Black struggle in America vis-a-vis the international Black struggle. Both men, after world travel and involvement with the "international" or national liberation struggles in other parts of the world, chose to return to the land of their birth to face great personal uncertainty. Regardless of what is thought of them ideologically, their return is an issue that needs to be studied.

Much of the origins of modern Pan-Afrikanism and Black Nationalist thought is deeply rooted in the political lives of Black exiles. These former Black American, Afrikans and West Indian scholars, activists, poets and leaders—because of their political maturity and dedication to the Black struggle—were forced from the lands of their birth to reside and agitate in places often more alien to them. Their influence is known and is important, but with regard to the lives of the majority of Black people in the world, they have had little effect. Of the names mentioned, the best known are Marcus Garvey, Kwame Nkrumah and W. E. B. DuBois—three Black exiles whose visions were never realized and often mis-interpreted and prostituted.

But, however critical we are of individual men and women, what these exiles left us with is the power of their *ideas* and the example of their individual and collective struggles.

The reaction to the term exile in an individual sense is shortsighted, for there are approximately 25 to 30 million people of Afrikan descent currently living in the United States, people whose foreparents were forcefully removed from their native land. And there are about 125 million people of Afrikan descent in the western hemisphere, with about 50 million in Brazil. This is the real meaning of Black Exile. Afrikan-Americans are 350 years removed from Afrika, which is not long

to forget under certain conditions. And the act of not only *forgetting* who we are but *forgiving* those who have done irreparable damage to us is crucial to any analysis of the Black situation in the United States.

As mentioned earlier, the slave-making process, in part, belittled and erased from our consciousness those positive aspects of our Afrikan selves except that which we were able to retain in our dance, music, art, religion, and family structure. However, today (1976), by and large, the majority of Black people living in the United States see themselves first as Black Americans and second—a distant second—as part of the Pan-Afrikan community. Blacks in America have been totally absorbed by the political, economic and cultural melting machine to the extent that many of our people are the most patriotic of Americans. Many books have been written on the making of the negro in America and, indeed, in our mere acts of survival we have developed a new culture that combines the Afrikan with the Euro-American. Culture, if understood properly, is something more than what the writers, musicians and artists work with. Culture is the integral life-force of any people:

A culture is not the product of a creative "group mind; or the expression of a "general will." No society began with a social contract, no economic system with the idea of barter or wages, no family structure with an insight into the advantages of cohabitation. A culture evolves when new practices further the survival of those who practice them.⁴

Let us illustrate the survival and integrated nature of the Afro-American culture by noting a few personal observations.

At age 34, I am distinctly a product of the Sixties. I was educated in the public schools of Detroit and Chicago, achieved maturity in the U. S. Army and the streets of Chicago. I have always lived (and still do) in the core of the Black community. Due to this intimate association with the center of my people, I grew up with

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30 few illusions about the law and Black people, and *never* held the misconception that the constitution, the law makers or law enforcers would change things for the majority of Black people in the United States. (It must be noted that a Black minority elite was created in the Black community as a go-between for the white power structure. Marcus Garvey described this group of people as the "Buffer Negro." These people were always used as examples of what the majority of our people could be if we were "educated" and "cultured.") All too often, all I saw was the law being broken by those sworn to serve and protect the law and us. Living in Chicago has, if nothing else, taught me that power is the only and final legislator. The Chicago Irish are good teachers. Study the Irish and you will discover a people who maintain a profound distrust and contempt for the law as well as for those non-Irish who make, enforce and interpret the law. When the Irish came to Chicago, they literally took over—politically, economically and culturally. Their style of backroom city politics and street organizing suited their world-view, and as they gained power, maintained it and protected themselves from the *law* by becoming the *law makers* and *enforcers*.⁵ Chicago is a good teacher because I soon realized that the Irish controlled everything, including Black people, and that the Irish were for the Irish first and then other white people if it suited their plans for the future.

Early in life I could never understand why Black people did not form political, economic or cultural organizations, institutions or parties like the Irish, Jews, Catholics, and Protestants to aid in the development of Black people. History has since taught me that we did have such organizations, institutions and parties. Yet, on the whole they were (and are) ineffective. But it seemed to me, as the Sixties advanced and became bloodier and bloodier and the survival of Black people clearly became our most important concern, that our chief failure was our

own internal weaknesses, one being the continued inaccurate *conceptualization of Black Struggle in America*.

Harold Cruse, in *The Crisis of the Negro Intellectual*, puts forth the concept that Black maturity in the areas of politics, economics and culture has not sufficiently developed in the context of American realities—one might add world realities also.

The "Black" reality as taught to us all too often has not been truly Black; it is white reality painted Black. The late Carter G. Woodson put it accurately when he said:

*No systematic effort toward change has been possible, for through the same economics, history, philosophy, literature and religion which have established the present code of morals, the negro's mind has been brought under the control of his oppressor. The problem of holding the negro down, therefore, is easily solved. When you control a man's thinking, you do not have to tell him not to stand here or go yonder. He will find his "proper place" and will stay in it. You do not need to send him to the back door. He will go without being told. In fact, if there is no back door he will cut one for his special benefit. His education makes it necessary.*⁶

To state it another way, there are no Black men or women in a position of real *power or influence* in the United States who have not been trained or "educated" by the system. Most Blacks in "positions" of cosmetic influence, if not directly trained by white people, most certainly have been trained by Blacks who have been trained by whites. This state of Black "educated" more than anything else has guided not only Black "leadership" but the Black masses also. For in the final analysis *we all do what we have been taught to do*.

Therefore, it seems that if we cannot bring a new and imaginative analysis to our condition in the last quarter of the century, life will continue to be uncertain.

Rhetoric, which in the last 10 years has taken precedence over ideas and concepts, is not the answer anymore.

The Social-Political Reality of the Black Exile

In its most fundamental way, this means the ability of a people to make and carry out life-giving decisions made in their own best interest at every level of human existence. By no stretch of the imagination are Black people in the United States a liberated people. In addition, the value of Blacks to the capitalist economy is only marginal and for the most part Black people have been reduced to ineffective consumers of technological gadgetry which keeps minds off real problems.

*A people whom the society had always denied social value—personality—had also lost economic value. Theirs was the problem of all Black America: survival. Examination of the problem must begin with a single overpowering socioeconomic condition in the society: black Americans are obsolete people.*⁷

Blacks are obsolete as a labor force due to the efficiency of the capitalist technological-industrial-corporate complex. International corporations have cut their personal base to the specialist and managerial class from which Black people are traditionally excluded.⁸

[When I say that Black people in the United States are at war with white supremacy, I am often accused of talking overkill and advised that all such talk can do is to continue to separate the races and possibly precipitate a Black-white confrontation. Having spent three years in the U. S. Army, the one thing I am very sure of is that Black people in the United States are not prepared to take on the U. S. Marine Corps, Army, Air Force or Navy. This is not to speak of the National Guard, local, state and federal police agencies, minutemen, white women's rifle clubs and the Veterans of Foreign Wars. The majority people of the U. S. are the best armed people in the world and my intentions are not to instigate suicide among

our people. Yet, it cannot be denied that since our forced movement to this land, we have been at constant war, but always on the defensive.]

Karl Von Clausewitz, the Prussian soldier, war theoretician and philosopher in his much used book, *On War*, states:

War is nothing but a duel on an extensive scale. If we would conceive as a unit the countless number of duels which make up a war, we shall do so best by supposing to ourselves two wrestlers. Each strives by physical force to compel the other to submit to his will: each endeavors to throw his adversary, and thus render him incapable of further resistance. War therefore is an act of violence intended to compel our opponent to fulfill our will.⁹

This has been the case for Black people in America.

A study issued by the U.S. government¹⁰ reported on the status of Black people in America more than anything else, except possibly the continued acts themselves, points out the continued war on Blacks, especially Black men. The study stated that Black women outlive Black men by 8 years and that white men outlive Black men by 7 years and white women live 15 years longer than Black men. Nearly twice as many Black babies die before their first birthday than white babies (30.2 per 1,000 compared to 16.8 per 1,000). Black people who are about 11.1 percent of the population represent 22 percent of those being forced into mental institutions (in 1970 about 89,000). This problem too is heaviest among Black men between the ages of 25 and 34 who are placed in mental institutions at a rate about equal to the institutionalization rate for all whites and Black women combined.

As victims of violent crimes, again the burden falls heavily on Black people. Black women are nearly four times as likely to be raped, seven times as likely to be robbed and five times as likely to be assaulted as white women. The homicide (murder) rate for white women according

000; for white men it is 7.0; for Black women it is 12.7. Therefore, Black women are murdered at a rate higher than the homicide rate for white women and white men combined. However, the homicide rate for Black men per 100,000 population is 60.3. Black men are murdered at a rate almost three times higher than the combined rates of white women, Black women and white men. The saddest part of these statistics is that more Black men kill each other (about 66 per cent). But, the question that should be asked is why do Black men kill other Black men? This speaks to a major casualty of war—the destruction of the mind. *We do what we have been taught to do.*

Blacks in America have moved from wearing the original slave dress of buttnaked with chains to the more accepted tie and shirt or skirt and blouse. Many drive big cars and some live in large houses or condominiums and have what most would consider "good" jobs. However, for the majority of Black people, the economic, political and cultural status has yet to change to any degree commensurate with that of the society at large. In fact it may never change since Blacks are becoming obsolete. The point is well made by Sidney Wilhelm:

After much postponement due to economic dependence on black labor during the last 350 years, the Negro question finally transforms into the Indian question. What is the point, demands White America, in tolerating an unwanted racial minority when there is no economic necessity for acceptance? With machines now replacing human labor, who needs the Negro?¹¹

Euro-Americans who expended an unbelievable amount of time, energy, money and people to force Afrikan people into the "new world" to build and maintain it for the white settlers are now confronted with a new racial, economic and political reality. The question is: as a purely economic necessity, Black people had to be tolerated in the 17th, 18th and 19th centuries for the greater "idea" of Aryan

expansionism and imperialism. What happens now in the last quarter of the 20th century where Black people are not an economic asset to the country anymore? Basic business principles of capitalism state that growth and development are commensurate with an increase in assets and a decrease in liabilities. Black people are now a racial, economic and political liability. How will this human liability be handled in keeping with the profit and power motives of the Aryans? This is the question that faces Black exiles in America as the 21st century approaches.

The Black Exile in America and the Afrikan Reality

Many Blacks as well as whites began to take Afrika as an idea, continent and people seriously when President Ford proclaimed friendship with the people of Angola in his State of the Union address in January, 1976. This was indeed confusing to the average Black person because prior to the military confrontation between the Soviet-backed faction and the two factions backed by the West, Angola was not even a memory in the minds of Black people in America. Our relationship to Afrika as a whole has been more romantic than real; our knowledge of Afrika has mainly come through the films of Tarzan, Jungle Jim, King Kong and She Woman. The few media organs in this country in the last 10 years that have consistently reported positively about Afrika have been *Muhammed Speaks* (now *The Bilalian News*), *Black World*, *Freedomways*, and *Africa Report*. (*Black World* as of the April, 1976 issue has been discontinued by Johnson Publishing Company.)

Therefore, when Cheikh Diop states that, "We must restore the historical consciousness of the Afrikan peoples and reconquer a Promethean consciousness,"¹² he speaks of a task so enormous as to make one seriously doubt one's ability to complete it under present world conditions. Yet, it must be done. As stated earlier, many Black people in America consider themselves Americans first and foremost.