Chapter nine

EPILOGUE: BLACK LEADERSHIP: CONTINUITIES AND CONTRASTS

> Negro leaders should be viewed from the standpoints of the two castes and their interests. The white caste has an interest in supporting those Negro leaders who can transfer their influence upon the lower caste. The Negro caste has two interests: one, to express the Negro protest as far as it does not damage its immediate welfare; two, to get as much as possible from the whites. The partly contradictory interests of the Negro community can be taken care of by the same individual leaders or by several different leaders in a division of responsibility.
>
> (Myrdal, *An American Dilemma*)[1]

> 'It seems to me,' said Booker T.,
> 'That all you folks have missed the boat
> who shout about the right to vote,
> And spend vain days and sleepless nights
> In uproar over civil rights.
> Just keep your mouths shut, do not grouse,
> But work, and save, and buy a house.'
> 'I don't agree,' said W.E.B.,
> 'For what can property avail
> If dignity and justice fail?
> Unless you help to make the laws,
> They'll steal your house with trumped-up clause.
> A rope's as tight, a fire as hot,
> No matter how much cash you've got.
> Speak soft, and try your little plan,
> But as for me, I'll be a man.'
> 'It seems to me,' said Booker T.–
>
> 'I don't agree,'
> Said W.E.B.
>
> (Dudley Randall, 'Booker T. and W.E.B.')[2]

Booker T. Washington, W. E. B. Du Bois, Marcus Garvey, Malcolm X and Martin Luther King developed and utilized distinctive personal appeals in their attempts to eliminate (or improve) the inferior caste

status of Afro-Americans. Collectively, however, they displayed ideological similarities – as well as significant differences – in a shared concern to improve the condition of blacks through economic, educational, cultural, political and psychological advancement. All displayed and sought to build on some form of racial pride among their followers, and encouraged the self-help ethic. With the exception of King, they all, at some stage in their careers, endorsed some kind of racial separatism. Again, all owed their elevation, at least in part, to the support (or opposition) of whites. Lines of ideological continuity also link these five black leaders. Washington, himself an admirer of Frederick Douglass's ideas on industrial education for Negroes, was the source of Marcus Garvey's racial and economic philosophy. Malcolm X acknowledged an early (and continuing) enthusiasm for Garvey. Martin Luther King paid tributes to Washington, Du Bois and Garvey, and had at least a grudging respect for his contemporary rival, Malcolm X.

Before the publication of *The Souls of Black Folk*, Du Bois and Washington shared some basic convictions. Both urged a programme of racial advancement which stressed economic achievement and the emulation of white middle-class virtues – thrift, sobriety and capital accumulation. Until the late 1890s

> both tended to blame Negroes largely for their condition, and both placed more emphasis on self-help and duties than on rights ... both placed economic advancement before universal manhood suffrage, and both were willing to accept franchise restrictions based not upon race but on education and/or property qualifications equitably applied.[3]

In time, Du Bois was equally opposed to Washington's apparent acceptance of disfranchisement and segregation, and Garvey's Washington-derived vision of a black economy as well as his rejection of the possibility of an egalitarian biracial society in the United States. Ironically, Du Bois came to agree with both Washington and Garvey 'on the necessity of the "black economy" which was Booker T. Washington's original idea, and then on the "Back to Africa" possibility which was Garvey's main platform – which, in turn was a further elaboration of the black economy theme'.[4]

In assessing the contributions of these five black leaders to the causes which they represented, a historical perspective reveals the changing connotations of such concepts as 'integration', 'segregation', 'accommodation' and 'civil rights'. Moreover, such a perspective also suggests that the adjectives 'radical' and 'conservative' when applied to black leaders and the policies they espoused, reflect particular conditions and circumstances. To his contemporary critics, Washington's deprecation of political action and support for social separation of the races, smacked of supine surrender to white supremacy. The NAACP, which institutionalized Negro opposition to Washington and the Tuskegee Machine, was at its inception a radical

organization, pledged to securing political participation and racial integration. With the advent of the Nation of Islam, and the rise of Black Power in the 1960s, separatism was seen as a 'radical' response to the dilemma of Afro-Americans, while integration, the agreed goal of the older elements within the civil rights coalition, was regarded as 'conservative' by a younger generation of blacks who rejected integration as 'assimilationism'. They advocated instead, a form of cultural pluralism – a 'Negro nation within a nation' – without sufficient awareness of earlier formulations of the concept.

As in the 1960s, when Malcolm X and Martin Luther King appeared as the polar extremes of black leadership, so too, in the early twentieth century, Washington and Du Bois (and later, Du Bois and Garvey) represented conflicting philosophies of racial advancement. Their respective personal rivalries also reflected a constant problem facing black leaders in America: the inability of any one programme of racial protest to encompass the varieties and changes in the black experience. Writing in 1937, the social psychologist John Dollard observed:

> It will be noted that the official attitude of southern Negro leaders, like Booker T. Washington, has been conciliatory and accommodative, whereas the most active hostility to caste has come from the northern Negroes and their various associations, of which perhaps Dr W. E. B. Du Bois and the National Association for the Advancement of Coloured People are representative. One might say that the difference between Washington and Du Bois is due to a difference in regional culture; Washington wanted to do something in the South, while Du Bois wished to mobilize hostile sentiment against the caste institution and make clear the contradiction between the formal American definition of the status of the Negro and actualities of his situation.[5]

From the end of Reconstruction to the Second World War, Southern black leadership was forced to operate within the 'separate but equal' framework of race relations. Whatever influence Southern black leaders possessed was (as in the case of Booker T. Washington), exercised through white intermediaries. Blacks generally accepted these leaders because they had no other choice. But during the 1950s and 1960s, more assertive Southern black leaders began to emphasize aspirations which ran counter to white customs and mores. Next to racial intermarriage and sexual relations between black men and white women, the South's 'rank order of discriminations' encompassed:

> ... dancing, bathing, eating, drinking together and social intercourse generally ... the segregations and discriminations in use of public facilities such as schools, churches and means of conveyance ... discriminations in law courts, by the police, and by other public servants. Finally came the discriminations in securing land, credit, jobs, or other means of earning a living, and discriminations in public relief and other social welfare facilities.[6]

From the 1950s onwards (as in the case of Martin Luther King), Southern black leaders – with the growing support of Northern sympathizers – began to challenge the traditional list of racial proscriptions. 'The crusade for civil rights specifically aimed at the relatively limited (and ultimately practical) goal of abolishing legal segregation; it was widely (and wrongly) believed that other barriers to racial equality would speedily fall. That they ... failed to do so should not be made a reason for condemning the crusade.'[7]

With these considerations in mind, the claims of Booker T. Washington, W. E. B. Du Bois, Marcus Garvey, Malcolm X and Martin Luther King, Jr, to be regarded as the five outstanding Afro-American leaders of the period from 1895 to 1968 can be given more objective assessment.

BOOKER T. WASHINGTON

In the circumstances of his time and place, Washington evolved a programme and strategy designed to secure the acquiescence of Southern and Northern whites in the educational and economic elevation of a rural black peasantry and an aspiring black bourgeoisie. 'One of Washington's chief concerns as a black leader was to undermine the old otherworldly ethic of the plantation, and to replace it with an ethic of achievement.'[8] Aware that slavery had brought manual labour into disrepute, Washington (in tune with his age) preached a gospel of hard work, self-help and self-reliance. His advocacy of industrial education reflected this belief, as it also reconciled Southern whites to the idea of *any* form of education for blacks. Tuskegee Institute, the Tuskegee Machine and the carefully crafted phrases of the Atlanta Compromise Address, made Washington's position as the outstanding Southern black leader of his day virtually unassailable. Above all, Washington was the master tactician, interracial diplomat and archetypal 'trickster'. In many respects, he bears a striking (and intentional) resemblance to the black college principal, Dr A. Herbert Bledsoe, in Ralph Ellison's novel, *Invisible Man.* Describing his methods and rise to power in the South to the ingenuous narrator, Bledsoe could well have been retailing Washington's personal success formula:

> Negroes don't control this school or much of anything else. True they support it, but I control it. I'm big and black and I say 'Yes, suh,' as loudly as any burrhead, when it's convenient. ... The only ones I even *pretend* to please are big white folk, and even those I control more than they control me. I tell them; that's my life, telling white folks how to think about the things I know about. ... It's a nasty deal and I don't like it myself. But I didn't make it and I know that I can't change it. I had to be strong and purposeful to get where I am. I had to wait and lick around. I had to act the nigger. I don't even insist that it was worth it, but now I'm here and I mean to stay – after you win the game you take the prize and keep it and protect it; there's nothing else to do.[9]

Despite repeated invitations to move to the North, Washington realized that his work lay in the South, although the growing threat from Northern black critics forced him, in later years, to sharpen his condemnations of racial inequalities. In a period of worsening race relations, Washington continued to build up the reputation and resources of Tuskegee (and thereby his own reputation), and secured philanthropic funds for Southern black schools and colleges. Unable to prevent such developments as the loss of black voting rights, racial violence and economic exploitation, Washington attempted (both publicly and privately) to contain them. As Gunnar Myrdal noted perceptively, Washington, his critics to the contrary, was never a totally 'accommodating' race leader, and looked to complete equality as the 'ultimate goal' of black leadership.

> It is a political axiom that Negroes can never, in any period, hope to attain more *in the short term power bargain* than the most benevolent white groups are prepared to give them. With shrewd insight, Washington took exactly as much off the Negro protest – and it had to be a big reduction – as was needed to get the maximum cooperation from the only two white groups in America who in this era of ideological reaction cared anything at all about the Negroes: the Northern humanitarians and philanthropists and the Southern upper class school of 'parallel civilizations'. ... Remembering the grim reaction of the period, it is difficult to study his various moves without increasingly feeling that he was a truly great politician. ... For his time, and for the region where he worked and where then nine-tenths of all Negroes lived, his policy of abstaining from talk of rights and of 'casting down your buckets where you are' was entirely realistic.[10]

Washington's faults were glaring – his astigmatism on the intensity of white racial prejudice, his unquestioning acceptance of the normative values of white America, his materialism and philistinism. Yet despite (or because of) these failings, he was, a *representative* black leader. Frank Hercules is correct in his assertion that it is impossible to understand the ethos of Afro-Americans in the main, 'not that of the dissentient minority', unless it is understood that 'they are closer in their thinking to Booker T. Washington – and the governing rules of their behaviour are in more intimate consonance with the standards he described – than they are to any other representative figure in American history. The blacks of America are conservative – like Booker T. Washington; Christian – like Booker T. Washington; profoundly conscious – like Washington – of being, with their former white owners, archetypal Americans.'[11] Moreover, during the years of Washington's

ascendancy, militant black protest and agitation in the South would have been a warrant for genocide. Washington recognized and respected the reality of the South's commitment to white supremacy; his evaluation of the situation was realistic and far-sighted. The last black leader to emerge from slavery, Washington not only led Southern Negroes, but preserved them from racial catastrophe. But he also lived dangerously, forced, in Langston's Hughes' phrase, to spend most of his life with his head 'in the lion's mouth'.

Not only was Washington attacked by Negro 'radicals', he also failed to satisfy Southern white extremists. Thomas Dixon, Jr, author of *The Clansman: an historical romance of the Ku Klux Klan* (1905), alleged that Washington, precisely because of his skill in disguising his real aims, was 'the greatest diplomat his race has ever produced'. In fact, Dixon claimed, Washington was quietly preparing the way for the amalgamation of the races, or, and equally dangerous, the building of a separate Negro nation within a nation. Dixon was in no doubt as to the consequences of Washington's educational and economic strategy: education would inevitably polarize the races since 'if there is one thing a Southern white man cannot endure it is an educated Negro'. By the same token, Washington's efforts to make the Negro into a potential competitor with the white man could only end in bloodshed.

> Does any sane man believe that when the negro [*sic*] ceases to work under the direction of the Southern white man this race will allow the negro to master his industrial system, take the bread from his mouth, crowd him to the wall and place a mortgage on his house. Could fatuity reach a sublimer height than the idea that the white man will stand idly by and see this performance. What *will* he do when put to the test? He will do exactly what his white neighbour in the North does when the negro threatens his bread – *kill* him.[12]

Booker T. Washington, one of his biographers contends, has not been given fair evaluation 'partly because his methods were too compromising and unheroic to win him a place in the black pantheon, but also because he was too complex and enigmatic for historians to know what to make of him'.[13] Yet, as J. R. Pole suggests:

> Washington's role playing, though devious, was not essentially mysterious. Like many people of his basic disposition, he was instinctively supple towards his masters while revealing his authoritarian personality towards subordinates. ... In many ways he emerges as a type remarkable for its familiarity among the operators of American interest groups – that familiarity being disguised by skin pigmentation. He worked assiduously within the system, to whose economic and political conventions he faithfully subscribed; he took conservative views of larger social causes while showing great tactical skill in maintaining his own personal power base.[14]

On all counts Washington was, and remains, a black leader to be reckoned with.

W. E. B. DU BOIS

Intellectually superior to Washington, Du Bois through all his ideological shifts and turns, attempted to resolve what he regarded (and personally experienced) as being the fundamental dilemma of the Afro-American: 'One ever feels his two-ness'. Unlike Washington, Du Bois always felt himself to be apart from the mass of Negroes and for long periods of his life was defiantly out of step with orthodox black responses to such issues as segregation, socialism, Marxism and Pan-Africanism. An inferior (and disinterested) administrator, Du Bois, as editor of *Crisis*, was the outstanding agitator and propagandist of the Negro protest movement which arose in opposition to Washington's power and policies. 'Where Washington wanted to make Negroes entrepreneurs and captains of industry in accordance with the American economic dream, Du Bois stressed the role of the college educated elite ... and later developed a vision of a world largely dominated by the coloured races which would combine with the white workers in overthrowing the domination of white capital and thus secure social justice under socialism.'[15]

More than any other black leader, Du Bois influenced the Negro intelligentsia (the Talented Tenth), and contributed to the formation of that black consciousness which had its flowering in the Harlem Renaissance, and the growing awareness of black peoples throughout the world of their relationship to Africa, to each other and to whites. Du Bois himself admired but was rejected by white society, and out of this rejection came his reasoned but impassioned hatred of racial discrimination. As Frank Hercules suggests, had Du Bois been a British colonial subject, his abilities would have been recognized and rewarded. 'They would have knighted him, and as Sir Burghardt Du Bois, he would have been intellectually estimable, politically reliable, and ideologically harmless. But the Americans, with their crude oversimplification of racial categories, could only make an enemy of him.'[16]

From the formation of the Niagara Movement to his resignation from the NAACP, Du Bois (who would have preferred a life of historical and sociological research bent to the cause of black advancement) was the singularly gifted spokesman for Negro economic and political rights, and for racial integration. With the death of Booker T. Washington in 1915, the continuing black exodus from the South and the rising expectations of the educated black middle class, Du Bois finally achieved leadership of the Talented Tenth. Simultaneously, he also waged a bitter internal campaign against what he regarded as the élitism, conservatism and narrowness of the organization which had elected him as its major propagandist. The NAACP rejected Du Bois' call for voluntary segregation (which he had first articulated in the 1890s), and

did not share his Pan-African or collectivist enthusiasms. He had to live with the irony that to his black critics, such a programme, with its materialist bias, resembled nothing so much as the philosophy of the despised Booker T. Washington. Yet Du Bois, on the eve of his departure from the NAACP, was firmly opposed to any deprivation of black political, civil, social or economic rights, and to enforced segregation. 'He did not wish to shut whites out of black organizations; he wanted interracial organizations such as the faculties of black colleges or the NAACP to assert the centrality of black power as a goal and to make the furthering of black pride and black economic advance their main interest. Du Bois could hardly have hoped to convince the NAACP of 1934 to adopt such a programme.'[17] By this date, leadership of the association had passed to racial conservatives, who were 'radical' only on the issue of segregation, and to whom Du Bois had become an embarrassment, if not a liability.

Du Bois, however, had multiple careers, which spanned the lifetimes of Booker T. Washington, Marcus Garvey, Malcolm X and Martin Luther King. In comparison with these leaders, Du Bois' 'longevity and productivity have given him a quantitative claim hard to match'. As one of his biographers suggests:

> Du Bois' significance will emerge more clearly if the extravagant claims made by him and for him are scuttled. ... Du Bois' importance to the history of the Negro in American society lies in two achievements: First, for thirty years he made himself the loudest voice in demanding equal rights for the Negro and in turning Negro opinion away from the acceptance of anything else. ... Du Bois' second achievement lies in his service to the Negro's morale. When Booker T. Washington was training Negro youth for manual work, Du Bois held high the ideal of liberal education. When Washington measured civilization in material terms, Du Bois reminded his people of Socrates and St Francis. ... His monthly editorials held up the strong, recharged the weak, and flayed the compromisers. *Crisis* became the record of Negro achievement. ... In this context, even Du Bois' aloofness became an asset; it removed him in Negro eyes from everyday life and, by giving him a transcendent quality, it raised the goal of aspiration.[18]

In the course of his long, distinguished and eventful life, Du Bois was inspired by a vision of reasoned, ordered and dynamic racial change. This vision was perhaps best expressed in the 'Postlude' to his second autobiography:

> ... this is a beautiful world; this is a wonderful America, which the founding fathers dreamed until their sons drowned it in the blood of slavery and devoured it in greed. Our children must rebuild it. Let then the Dreams of the Dead rebuke the Blind who think that what is will be forever and teach them that what was worth living for must live again.[19]

MARCUS GARVEY

Where Du Bois failed to reach a mass black audience, Marcus Garvey, his bitter rival in the 1920s, was able to build a popular movement and following for his programme of racial uplift and the redemption of Africa. Garvey's greatest achievement was to arouse in poor and lower-class blacks, unaffected by or unaware of the Harlem Renaissance and the 'New Negro', a fierce pride in their colour.

> Garvey, singlehanded, transformed the racial consciousness of black people in America into a potent instrument of racial uplift. He moved large numbers of blacks from a defensive to an aggressive position on the subject of race. The slogan 'Black is Beautiful' was not minted, except perhaps in the literal sense, by Stokely Carmichael. It was Garvey's distinctive coinage. ... No one since Frederick Douglass and before Malcolm X had so aroused and rallied the pride of Negroes in the sheer fact of being black. ... Garvey possessed remarkable powers of oratory, and, like Martin Luther King, he had a dream. In his case, it was the dream of returning to Africa. That it was a dream largely impracticable of realization never seemed to occur to him; or if it did, he concealed it from his followers. He spoke as though the then colonial powers in Africa did not exist. ... He sought, in effect, to make Zionists of black Americans and ... of blacks everywhere.[20]

More important as a phenomenon than as a social movement, Garveyism struck a responsive chord in the black masses of the 1920s because it exalted all things black and inverted white standards while retaining, in large part, the values of the surrounding white society. For every white institution and belief, Garveyism offered a black counterpart: the Black Star Line, Black Cross Nurses, *The Negro World*, the Black Legion and the Black Eagle Flying Corps. Both a religious – a black God and a black Christ – and a secular impulse, Garveyism linked its constituent elements to the concept of blackness. Moreover, the programme of the UNIA, with its stress on economic nationalism and African liberation, permitted Afro-Americans to identify with 'primitive' Africans from a position of technological and material superiority.

As a West Indian, however, Garvey was not finely attuned to the peculiarities and nuances of either the Negro or Negro–white situation in America. 'He tried to transplant to the United States the West Indian distinction between blacks and mulattoes, thereby alienating many American mulattoes.'[21] Again, in scorning the established black American leadership and appearing to share the racist assumptions and objectives of white supremacists, Garvey succeeded in arousing the bitter opposition of Negro radicals and conservatives, and the suspicions of white liberals.

> ... the Garvey movement illustrates – as the slave insurrections did a century earlier – that a Negro movement in America is doomed to ultimate dissolution and collapse if it cannot gain white support. ... For white support will be denied to emotional Negro chauvinism when it takes organizational and political form.[22]

Garvey's appeal, then, was limited to those blacks for whom the promised land of the American city had proved to be the squalid ghetto. The UNIA and its flamboyant leader offered compensatory dreams for the dispossessed. But the bulk of Garvey's followers (in common with most black Americans) were never seriously attracted by the prospect of going 'back to Africa'.

> Regardless of how dissatisfied Negroes were with conditions in the United States they were unwilling in the 1920s, as their forebears had been ... to undertake the uncertain task of redeeming Africa. The widespread interest in Garvey's programme was more a protest against the anti-Negro reaction of the post-war period than an approbation of the fantastic schemes of the Negro leader. Its significance lies in the fact that it was the first and only real mass movement among Negroes in the history of the United States and that it indicates the extent to which Negroes entertained doubts concerning the hope for first-class citizenship in the only fatherland of which they knew.[23]

Garvey's larger significance as a leader lies in the fact that he made the established American Negro leadership class painfully aware of its distance from the rank and file of blacks. After Garvey's deportation, and particularly during the period of the Second World War, civil rights organizations tried more strenuously than before to close the gap between themselves and the majority of American Negroes.

The less attractive face of Garveyism was its authoritarianism, paramilitarism and failure to confront directly the problems facing those Negroes (the overwhelming majority) who wished to remain both physically and psychologically within the United States. Garvey himself has been typified as a charismatic leader and a shameless demagogue, a revolutionary and a reactionary, a racial realist and a racial fantasist, the father of recent black nationalist ideologies, and the purveyor of a falsified version of the African past and the Afro-American experience. Two of his biographers, while disagreeing as to the nature of Garveyism, are in substantial agreement as to Garvey's major accomplishment as a race leader in America. David Cronon, a severe critic of Garvey's failure to devise a meaningful programme for the 'redemption' of black Americans in their own country, suggests that: 'The creation of a powerful feeling of race pride is perhaps Garvey's greatest and most lasting contribution to the American race scene.'[24] Similarly, Theodore Vincent asserts that in the twentieth century, 'Garvey did more than anyone else to stimulate race pride and confidence among the black masses.'[25]

MALCOLM X

An admirer of Garvey, and the pre-eminent black separatist spokesman of the 1960s, Malcolm X was a more complex and ambiguous figure than his West Indian predecessor.

> He was feared and hated by both blacks and whites, and often the same individuals who shared these sentiments admired him for his intellectual ability and candor. During his lifetime his appeal among Afro-Americans, especially the youth, was widespread, but he was constantly maligned by black integrationists and whites in general. After his assassination he finally achieved a position of respect from all segments of the black community and from younger white radicals.[26]

As a Black Muslim minister and as an independent leader of his own movement after his break with Elijah Muhammad, Malcolm X was dedicated to the spiritual regeneration of black Americans, and employed the rhetoric of racial separatism to affirm the determination of blacks to exist on their own terms within (but apart from) the surrounding white society. An accomplished and artful public speaker, Malcolm analysed the plight and dilemma of the Afro-American with remarkable clarity and vividness. His speeches were filled with visual images, slogans, and allusions to black history, music and folklore. 'To the end of his life, his speeches were delivered in the cadence and style of Bible-thumping Baptist and Pentecostal preachers and prophetic leaders of millenaristic sects.'[27] Unable to establish a sound institutional base for his post-Nation of Islam activities, Malcolm X, through his exposure by the media, reached an American and an international audience. In this respect, Malcolm, like Booker T. Washington, owed his elevation to race leadership partly to white publicists.

The most remarkable feature of Malcolm's remarkable life, was his capacity for intellectual growth. 'From the relatively simplistic racist and separatist outlook of his Black Muslim period, he moved toward a somewhat socialist world view at the time of his death. Far from being Machiavellian or calculating, as many of his admirers and enemies have contended, Malcolm's inconsistencies and reversals may better be comprehended in terms of his augmented understanding.'[28] As an independent (or aspiring) leader, Malcolm made few actual converts, yet he voiced the feelings of ghetto youths who were either hostile or indifferent to Martin Luther King's philosophy of non-violence and the power of redemptive suffering. As a Black Muslim minister, Malcolm energized and greatly increased the membership and visibility of what had been a relatively obscure and largely elderly sect. But from 1963, he became increasingly impatient with the political disengagement enforced on the Nation of Islam by Elijah Muhammad, and attempted to raise the struggle for civil and human rights to include all the coloured

peoples of the world. In particular, Malcolm pointed up the weaknesses in the objectives of a civil rights coalition which, after some successes in the South, had come to regard racial integration as a panacea.

Before his contemporary rival and ideological opponent, Martin Luther King, Malcolm X highlighted the economic and educational condition (and needs) of Negroes, and the failure of non-violent resistance to effect meaningful change in the lives of the lower classes. Moreover, Malcolm espoused (and personified) black leadership from the grass roots, free from the domination of the established black and white middle classes. This aspect of Malcolm's thought appealed to the younger elements in the civil rights movement – the members of CORE and SNCC – who, after Malcolm's death, were even more estranged from the strategies and pronouncements of Martin Luther King.

Like Garvey, Malcolm X has been claimed as a revolutionary, a black nationalist and a latter-day (but unwitting) follower of Booker T. Washington. Like Garvey also, Malcolm X had more followers than those who formally belonged to the OAAU. Where Garvey spoke to the mood of the 1920s, Malcolm X was receptive to the despair of the enduring black ghettos of the 1960s, which he sought to transform into centres of black consciousness, enterprise and liberation. Two differing estimates of Malcolm X, both delivered after his death, illustrate his strengths and limitations as perceived by black contemporaries. Asked why he 'eulogized' Malcolm X, Ossie Davis, the actor, director and playwright, replied:

> We used to think that protocol and common sense required that Negroes stand back and let the white man speak up for us, defend us, and lead us from behind the scenes in our fight. This was the essence of Negro politics. But Malcolm said to hell with that! Get up off your knees and fight your own battles. ... That's the way to make the white man respect you. ... Malcolm, as you can see, was refreshing excitement. ... Once Malcolm fastened on you, you could not escape. ... He would make you as angry as hell, but he would also make you proud. It was impossible to remain defensive and apologetic about being a Negro in his presence. ... I knew the man personally, and however much I might have disagreed with him personally from time to time, I never doubted that Malcolm X, even when he was wrong, was always that rarest thing in the world among us Negroes: a true man.[29]

Bayard Rustin, who had earlier expressed the view that Malcolm was a lost leader in search of followers, conceded after his death that: 'Malcolm strove to retrieve the Negro's shattered manhood from the wreckage of slavery, from the debris of family instability, from poverty and narcotics, from conditioned aimlessness, self-hatred and chaos.' Yet his efforts were doomed to failure 'because these are not problems that can be exorcized by religious mysticism or denunciatory rhetoric. ... If only he had cast his lot with the civil rights revolution! We could have profited mightily from his talents, now so wastefully silenced.'[30]

MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR

From the time of the Montgomery bus boycott, Martin Luther King was the great proponent of passive resistance as the strategy for achieving racial equality in America. To his admirers, white and black, King was the outstanding black leader of the twentieth century, whose contributions to the civil rights cause were uniquely Christian and Southern. King's confrontations with the forces of Southern racism resembled (as they were intended) a medieval passion play, in which the forces of good engaged (and eventually overcame) the forces of evil. To his critics, King was the exponent of an unrealistic, if not pathological doctrine, which enjoined its adherents to love their oppressors, and to resort to prayer rather than decisive action against injustice. Yet, as his critics also recognized, King's appeal rested on his profound religious faith. August Meier, writing three years before King's murder, suggested that:

> Publicity alone does not explain the durability of King's image, or why he remains ... the symbol of the direct action movement, the nearest thing to a charismatic leader that the civil rights movement has ever had. At the heart of King's continuing influence and popularity are two facts. First, better than anyone else, he articulates the aspirations of Negroes who respond to the cadences of his addresses, his religious phraseology and manner of speaking, and the vision of his dream for them and America. King has intuitively adopted the style of the old-fashioned Negro Baptist preacher and transformed it into a new art form. ... Second, he communicates Negro aspirations to white America more effectively than anyone else. His religious terminology and manipulation of the Christian symbols of love and nonresistance are partly responsible for his appeal among whites. To talk in terms of Christianity, love, nonviolence is reassuring to the mentality of white America. At the same time, the very superficialities of his philosophy – that rich and eclectic amalgam of Jesus, Hegel, Gandhi and others ... make him appear intellectually profound to the superficially educated middle-class white American ... by uttering moral cliches, the Christian pieties, in a magnificent display of oratory, King becomes enormously effective.[31]

Until the emergence of the Black Power slogan, King managed to hold together an obviously fragmenting civil rights coalition through the force of his own personality and prestige among white and black Americans. In this respect, he served as the vital centre of the movement, standing between the 'conservatism' of the NAACP and Urban League, and the 'radicalism' of SNCC and CORE. The Vietnam War, a growing awareness that the black protest movement needed to include economic rights, and a realization that the structure of American society itself needed drastic alteration, moved King, in his final years, towards a more

radical and less sanguine assessment of the racial/class situation in America. Like Malcolm X, at the time of his death King was also a figure in transition. But if he is judged only by his contribution to the civil rights revolution in the American South, his shaming of Congress into passing the 1964 Civil Rights Act, his courage in the face of physical danger, and his inspired and visionary address during the 1963 March on Washington, King will be remembered as the greatest black leader of the twentieth century.

From Booker T. Washington's Atlanta Address of 1895, to Martin Luther King's last (and prophetic) speech in Memphis in 1968, five outstanding (although not the only) black American leaders attempted to realize for themselves and their followers the fundamental aspiration of the Afro-American as expressed by W. E. B. Du Bois:

> He simply wishes to make it possible for a man to be both a Negro and an American, without being cursed and spit upon by his fellows, without having the doors of Opportunity closed roughly in his face. . . . Merely a concrete test of the underlying principles of the great republic is the Negro Problem, and the spiritual striving of the freedmen's sons is the travail of souls whose burden is almost beyond the measure of their strength, but who bear it in the name of an historic race, in the name of this the land of their fathers' fathers, and in the name of human opportunity.[32]

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