

## **Racial Integration as Mutual Transformation**

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### **Introduction**

From the earliest articulations of classical black nationalism to the present, racial integration has inspired a long line of skeptics who question both its practical achievability and its normative desirability. Despite the many varieties of integration skepticism, we can identify a common unifying theme that joins many integration skeptics together. This is the charge that integration functions as a form of compulsory assimilation, destroying the distinct identity and culture of minority racial communities and reinforcing the presumed superiority of middle-class white norms. For if integration merely refers to racial mixing, or the sharing of spaces and institutions, then it can be managed in a way that preserves white supremacy and the subordination of other racial and ethnic groups. To combat the pressure toward assimilation and the maintenance of white supremacy, critics of integration have recommended instead stronger forms of racial and ethnic solidarity and various degrees of separatism.

Increasingly, defenders of integration have formulated a common response to this critique. It is to insist that integration and assimilation are conceptually distinct, that true integration transforms all participants, as well as the political practices and social and cultural norms of the society. Take, for example, Elizabeth Anderson, whose recent book *The Imperative of Integration* (2010) represents the most comprehensive and sophisticated call for integration thus far. She assures us that “integration does not view

disadvantaged communities as the only ones that need to change. Integration aims to transform the habits of dominant groups.”<sup>1</sup> Similarly, John A. Powell, who focuses on school integration, explains that integration “is transformative rather than assimilative. That is, while desegregation assimilates minorities into the mainstream, true integration transforms the mainstream.”<sup>2</sup> Danielle Allen interprets integration as a process of mutual blending, for which the central question is “how to integrate into one citizenship the healthy political habits of both the dominators and the dominated.”<sup>3</sup> Meredith Lee Bryant defends a “right to racial identification” as a core component of true integration, securing respect for racial and cultural differences in an integrated society.<sup>4</sup> While these authors do not conceive of integration identically, all of them believe that we must view integration as a process of *mutual transformation*, so as to guarantee that an integrated society is one that does not demand sacrifices exclusively from people of color.

Yet the concept of “mutual transformation” begs as many questions as it answers, and is all too often under-theorized. Both the *what* and the *how* of mutual transformation demand careful articulation. In other words: of what does this transformation consist, and how can it happen? What processes, practices, policies, and modes of civic interaction will promote integration as mutual transformation? And what exactly is being transformed—material conditions, cultural and educational practices, self-understandings, styles of communication, institutional structures, political processes,

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<sup>1</sup> Elizabeth Anderson, *The Imperative of Integration* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010), 115.

<sup>2</sup> John A. Powell, “A New Theory of Integrated Education: *True Integration*,” in *School Segregation: Must the South Turn Back?*, eds. John Charles Boger and Gary Orfield (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006), 298.

<sup>3</sup> Danielle Allen, *Talking to Strangers: Anxieties of Citizenship since Brown v. Board of Education* (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 2004), 116.

<sup>4</sup> Meredith Lee Bryant, “Combating Schools Resegregation Through Housing: A Need for a Reconceptualization of American Democracy and the Rights It Protects,” in *In Pursuit of a Dream Deferred: Linking Housing and Education Policy*, eds. John A. Powell, Gavin Kearney, and Vina Key (New York: Peter Lang, 2001), 71.

criminal justice proceedings? Perhaps other objects as well? This paper aims to answer these questions, by highlighting two necessary components of integration as mutual transformation: a process of internal, psychic conversion, and a redistribution of power. By internal transformation, I mean that individuals in a truly integrated society would experience a new sense of self, and a new relationship to others, particularly others from whom they had previously felt great social distance. Along with these transformed interpersonal relationships would come a new understanding of the obligations of citizenship and the lessons to be drawn from the country's fraught racial history. And by the redistribution of power, I mean that political, economic, social, and cultural opportunities, resources, and influence would become more equitably shared by members of all racial groups. Not only across the entire nation, but also at state and local levels and within particular institutions such as schools, businesses, museums, and charitable organizations.

Two caveats are necessary before we begin to sketch this ideal of integration. First, this model of integration may strike some readers as peculiar, insofar as it only mentions in passing what is usually taken as the core of integration: racial mixing. Blacks and whites, and members of other racial and ethnic groups, attending the same schools, living in the same neighborhoods, working in the same offices, eating at the same restaurants, drinking in the same bars, attending the same lectures and shows, joining the same organizations. Certainly, some degree of racial mixing is necessary for racial integration to proceed. A biracial country divided between a "white" half and a "black" half, in which the black half contained all the black residents and the white half contained all the white residents and travel between the two halves was extremely rare,

would not be an integrated country, regardless of how equitably resources were distributed between the two halves. But it is a much more difficult question to determine just how much mixture, and what kind of mixture, counts as integration. All too often, integration is conflated with simple racial proportionality: the idea that members of racial groups should be distributed throughout space, and within specific institutions, in roughly equal proportion to their numbers in the broader population. Understanding integration in this way is deeply problematic, as it consigns minority races (in strict numerical terms) to minority status everywhere, obscures the interracial dynamics within mixed spaces, and fails to ask whether the spaces are racially stratified. This paper aims to rectify this omission by showing that more is needed for racial integration than just racial mixing. As to the question of racial mixing itself, it is beyond the scope of this paper, but I have argued elsewhere that integration does not rule out majority-black (or, for that matter, majority-Mexican or majority-Chinese) spaces or institutions.<sup>5</sup>

Second, insofar as the historical battle for integration in the United States was principally intended to dismantle the system of Jim Crow segregation in the South, it has unique resonance for and application to the black community. While other racial and ethnic groups have obviously suffered from explicitly discriminatory policies of subjugation as well as violent and brutal treatment at the hands of private citizens and institutions, Jim Crow was a system of social control designed specifically to secure the ongoing social marginalization, economic exploitation, and political disenfranchisement of black Americans in the wake of emancipation and Reconstruction. Consequently, this paper specifically focuses on integration as an ideal intended to secure the incorporation

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<sup>5</sup> Sharon Stanley, "Toward a Reconciliation of Integration and Racial Solidarity," *Contemporary Political Theory* 13 (2014), 46-63.

of black Americans on terms of full equality into the polity. Certainly, a complete picture of an integrated United States must take account of the country's multi-racial, multi-ethnic character, and of the unique struggles and position of various Native, immigrant, and refugee communities. But this paper has a more modest goal: to envision a process of the integration of black Americans that would not entail compulsory assimilation and that would dismantle not only the spatial and institutional isolation of blacks but also white supremacy itself.

### **Hearts and Minds**

Let us begin with the concept of internal transformation. Writing specifically about school integration, John A. Powell proclaims: "we need to integrate not only the students inside the building but the hearts and minds of the students as well."<sup>6</sup> In other words, a classroom which is 50% white and 50% black is not thereby integrated merely because black bodies and white bodies are sharing the same space. If distrust and hostility reign between the students, if the teacher favors the white students and orients her lesson plans toward their interests and talents, if the black students do not feel comfortable expressing themselves in the classroom, then the classroom hardly deserves to be called integrated. If the students do not interact outside of the classroom, and resent being compelled to share an interracial space, then the school does not deserve to be called integrated. To magnify our example, a country in which private racism is pervasive does not deserve to be called integrated even if all forms of overt state

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<sup>6</sup> Powell, "A New Theory of Integrated Education," 299.

discrimination have ceased. Any theory of integration must therefore offer an account of how the relations between citizens would change in an integrated nation.

For Dr. Martin Luther King Jr, the process of internal transformation was the crucial distinguishing mark between true integration and mere desegregation. In a speech delivered in Nashville, Tennessee on December 27, 1962, he describes a desegregated but unintegrated society: “It gives us a society where men are physically desegregated and spiritually segregated, where elbows are together and hearts are apart.”<sup>7</sup> This is a bleak picture of a profoundly alienating society. In such a society, laws mandating the separation of the races have been rejected, but racial mixing occurs without true harmony or commonality of purpose. Indeed, racial animosities can simmer just beneath the surface, occasionally bursting out into the light. This desegregated society, King suggests, violates humanity’s innate sociality, our incessant striving for a community defined by cooperation, mutuality, and love. This vision of authentic community—“genuine intergroup, interpersonal doing”—, often described as the beloved community, represents perhaps the most inspiring vision of integration possible.<sup>8</sup>

King recognizes that no new laws and no new institutions can secure what he calls true integration. Laws can certainly dismantle the old system of government-enforced segregation, and they may over time even influence our actions and sentiments, but they do not wholly constitute our inner lives or our dispositions toward others. In order to recognize the dignity and humanity of another human being, and to seek to harmonize one’s interests with the interests of the other, one must undergo an inner transformation:

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<sup>7</sup> Martin Luther King Jr., “The Ethical Demands for Integration,” in *A Testament of Hope: The Essential Writings and Speeches of Martin Luther King, Jr.*, ed. James M. Washington (New York: HarperCollins, 1991), 118.

<sup>8</sup> King, “The Ethical Demands for Integration,” 118.

“Such obligations are met by one’s commitment to an inner law, written on the heart. Man-made laws assure justice, but a higher law produces love.”<sup>9</sup> This is not to suggest that the partisans of integration can do nothing but wait and hope for the psychic conversion of their fellow citizens. Rather, they can provide a foretaste of the beloved community in their own movement. James Forman, a former chairman of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), in its early days as a multiracial organization committed to nonviolence and integration, famously described SNCC as “a band of brothers, standing in a circle of love.”<sup>10</sup> In theory, at least, such organizations can provide inspiration to others, particularly when they consciously practice an ethos of humility, openness, and true cooperation in the communities they seek to organize.

Furthermore, King connected his theory of integration to his theory of nonviolence through an elaboration of the concept of love. Nonviolent resistance requires the love of one’s adversary, even the most ardent segregationist. This love, which King defines through the Greek concept of *agape*, refers to “understanding, redeeming goodwill for all men. It is an overflowing love which is purely spontaneous, unmotivated, groundless, and creative.”<sup>11</sup> The practice of *agape* will not immediately transform the adversary. Instead, it will be met with bitterness and intransigence. But, King notes, nonviolence does more immediately transform the souls of those who practice it: “it gives them new self-respect; it calls up resources of strength and courage that they did not know they had.”<sup>12</sup> And, with time, the suffering and sacrifice of nonviolent resisters will stir the admiration and sympathy of onlookers, and finally even

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<sup>9</sup> King, “The Ethical Demands for Integration,” 123.

<sup>10</sup> James Forman quoted in Meta Mendel-Reyes, *Reclaiming Democracy: The Sixties in Politics and Memory* (New York: Routledge, 1995), 33.

<sup>11</sup> King, “My Pilgrimage to Nonviolence,” <<http://www.salsa.net/peace/conv/8weekconv4-4.html>>.

<sup>12</sup> King, *Stride Toward Freedom*, in *The Essential Writings and Speeches of Martin Luther King Jr.*, 487.

the conscience of the adversary himself, who will ultimately recoil from the brutality with which he greets such a dignified, peaceful expression of resistance: “Finally it reaches the opponent and so stirs his conscience that reconciliation becomes a reality.”<sup>13</sup> Thus, nonviolence repairs a broken community and slowly rebuilds the severed connections between human beings, paving the way for the emergence of the beloved community.

Yet perhaps such a vision is altogether too lofty for imperfect human beings to achieve. One can still formulate a less transcendent model of integration in which internal transformation plays a crucial role. On this model, not love but *mutual respect* is necessary for the establishment of democratic community. Acknowledgment of the other’s basic human dignity requires us to take seriously their claims as citizens and to treat them as deserving a space and a voice in the public realm. Segregation relied not only on laws but also on the deeply ingrained belief held by numerous white citizens that they were entitled to maintain “key public spaces as their exclusive possession.”<sup>14</sup> Habits of interaction echoed this belief. Reflecting on the famous photographs of Elizabeth Eckford being heckled by a white mob while attempting to enter Little Rock High School in 1957, Danielle Allen identifies the two “etiquettes of citizenship” for whites and blacks under segregation—“the one of dominance, the other of acquiescence.”<sup>15</sup> For integration to proceed, then, it is not enough merely to allow Elizabeth Eckford to sit in the classroom alongside white students. They must abandon their posture of dominance and truly recognize her right to be there as an equal participant, and she must be able to claim that right assertively, not forced by the hostility of others into a posture of acquiescence. She must feel comfortable speaking in class, and white students must welcome her

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<sup>13</sup> King, *Stride Toward Freedom*, 487.

<sup>14</sup> Allen, *Talking to Strangers*, 4.

<sup>15</sup> Allen, *Talking to Strangers*, 5.



contributions, even (or especially) when they induce uncomfortable self-reflection. Our imaginary classroom may not quite describe a beloved community, but it does describe a community of mutual respect.

Laws and institutions can no more guarantee this community of mutual respect than the beloved community. Accepting Elizabeth Eckford's right not only to a space but also to an equal role in the classroom, whether this entails love or simply respect, relies upon a radical transformation of the self. To cease to demand abjection and humiliation from others is simultaneously to abandon one's own pose of arrogance and domination, of isolation and sovereignty. It is to recognize, furthermore, how the experience of freedom and self-sovereignty felt by many whites was essentially built upon the denial of those very possibilities to blacks, how white security depended upon black insecurity—and how it continues to do so in the present. James Baldwin refers to willful ignorance of this fact as “opting for safety instead of life” and John A. Powell captures just how radical a transformation is required when he writes that “the problematic and isolated white self forms the backbone of resistance to a truly robust, inclusive America.”<sup>16</sup> A recognition that white achievements are not only the result of personal striving but also of privileges secured through the suffering of others necessarily transforms one's understanding of self, other, community, and history.

Furthermore, recognizing Elizabeth Eckford's equal place in the classroom transforms not only one's relationship to Elizabeth Eckford and to the self, but to the classroom as well, which becomes open to the contestation of previously accepted

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<sup>16</sup> James Baldwin, “On Being White ... and Other Lies,” in *The Cross of Redemption: Uncollected Writings*, ed. Randall Kenan (Vintage, 2011), 169; John A. Powell, *Racing to Justice: Transforming our Conceptions of Self and Other to Build an Inclusive Society* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2011), xvii.

“truths” – truths about American history, about white innocence, about the nature of democracy, about the country’s gallery of heroes and villains, about the very meaning of American-ness. In particular, the history of black subordination can no longer so easily be presented simply as an exception to the country’s lofty and unblemished ideals or the country’s otherwise untainted practice of democracy. An integrated classroom would be one that confronted Joel Olson’s question: “What if...racial oppression and American democracy are mutually constitutive rather than antithetical?”<sup>17</sup> To even ask this question sincerely, let alone to answer it, requires psychic conversion, particularly of white Americans who do not want to confront their own complicity in what Olson calls white democracy. But asking the question is both a necessary precondition and component of true integration, insofar as it signifies a willingness to acknowledge the true extent of black subordination, and therefore, perhaps, a willingness finally to dismantle both its lingering effects and its contemporary practices.

Those who have experienced the wounds of segregation will undoubtedly tread with suspicion in newly mixed spaces. History affords them countless reasons to be skeptical of the capacity of white Americans to undergo true psychic conversion. Integration must provide them with indications that the conversion is authentic, then. These indications constitute what Andrew Valls refers to as symbolic or cultural justice:

If that regime was committed to a view that denied the equal rights of some of its citizens, some symbolic expressions are required to reaffirm the dignity of these individuals or groups during the period of transition, and on an on-going basis under the successor regime. There is a wide variety of measures available to perform this function—truth commissions, national holidays, monuments and memorials, museums, official apologies, and changes in national symbols and in educational curricula—and are

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<sup>17</sup> Joel Olson, *The Abolition of White Democracy* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004), xv.

all possible ways to reject the views of the past and reaffirm the equal human dignity of all citizens.<sup>18</sup>

The United States has in fact taken important symbolic steps along these lines. From civil rights museums in Atlanta, Memphis, Charleston, Birmingham, and numerous other cities, to the recently unveiled Martin Luther King Jr. memorial in Washington D.C., to Martin Luther King Jr. Day, to history classrooms across the nation devoting substantial time and resources to the civil rights movement, the country has made an effort to publicly acknowledge the heroism of those who fought for racial equality and the wrongs of slavery and segregation. However, these museums and monuments, admirable though they are, also carry their own risks. Insofar as they tend to focus on very specific historical moments and figures, they can give the impression that racial injustice was an unfortunate part of the country's past, now transcended once and for all by the heroic but equally historic figures of the 1950s and 1960s civil rights movement. Such a message does not signify true psychic conversion, because it still refuses to acknowledge and atone for the legacy of that past which still infects the present, as well as the specific sins of the present—including the systemic racial bias of the criminal justice system, enduring forms of segregation that do not simply replicate the Jim Crow system of the past, and degrading racial imagery in movies, books, advertising, fashion, and political campaigns. In other words, these incomplete symbols of racial atonement paradoxically protect white innocence by projecting white guilt entirely onto long-dead ancestors. True integration cannot come until whites are willing to gaze critically at their own reflection, and accept their own complicity, albeit often unchosen, in enduring racial injustice.

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<sup>18</sup> Andrew Valls, "Racial Justice as Transitional Justice," in *Polity* 36.1 (October 2003): 58.

Of course, mutual transformation implies the transformation not only of those who derived privileges from a system of subordination, but also those who were formerly subordinated. Blacks in an integrated society, too, would experience a changed self, and a changed relationship to others. However, under conditions of enduring white supremacy, it is clearly not irrational for blacks to distrust mainstream social and political institutions, nor to be skeptical of the willingness of most white Americans to work for true racial equality. Danielle Allen has argued that “the weak have been incorporated into the democratic polity only when they are in an equal position to request sacrifice from others.”<sup>19</sup> Thus, I would contend that black transformation will come as an effect of and a response to clear evidence that white self-transformation has begun – that white America is willing to relinquish its privileged position. In this sense, the process of psychic conversion is linked to the second component of mutual transformation—the redistribution of power. For a genuine acknowledgment of one’s complicity in ongoing racial injustice entails a commitment to radical transformation of social, economic, cultural and political processes and institutions. Incorporation into the polity, and into the institutions of the polity, of those who have been excluded, marginalized, and exploited as equal citizens calls for a redistribution of power—the dismantling of white supremacy.

### **Redistributing Power**

I use the word power with some caution, for its meaning is hotly contested among political theorists and other students of politics. To speak of a “redistribution” of power

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<sup>19</sup> Allen, *Talking to Strangers*, 110.

may sound dangerously close to Robert Dahl's oft-criticized formulation of power as the property of identifiable individuals who could then wield it over the powerless to influence their actions: "A has power over B to the extent that he can get B to do something that B would not otherwise do."<sup>20</sup> I am entirely persuaded by the many critiques of this approach that it is overly simplistic and misleading. Following Clarissa Rile Hayward, I conceive power "as social boundaries (such as laws, rules, norms, institutional arrangements, and social identities and exclusions) that constrain and enable action for all actors."<sup>21</sup> This means that both black and white Americans operate against the backdrop of a field of power that pre-exists them, at least partially constitutes them, and exceeds their ability to unilaterally transform it. But the key point for us is that under a regime of white supremacy, social boundaries operate in such a way as to enable many more whites than blacks to access the resources and opportunities that secure comfortable living standards, respectable status, and, most of all, an influential role in the recreation and reconstruction of those very social boundaries. To redistribute power is not to remove some portion of it from whites and hand that portion over to blacks, but rather, to transform the operative social boundaries that produce such discrepant effects in the lives of blacks and whites, and to transform them in a way that is shaped by the effective participation of blacks in the transformation process itself. What whites actually lose in this transformation is not so much power as privilege—the privilege that comes from occupying a more favorable position in the field of power.

Power is a useful concept in spite of its contested definition not only because of its commonplace usage and intuitive appeal, but also because of the prominent place it

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<sup>20</sup> Robert Dahl, "The Concept of Power," *Behavioral Science* 2 (1957): 202-203.

<sup>21</sup> Clarissa Rile Hayward, *De-Facing Power* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 12.

has occupied in the lexicon of the civil rights struggle, and especially in the radical critique of the mainstream movement. The “black power” movement instantly conjures images of black militancy, symbolized above all by a clenched black fist, in the American popular imagination. Yet it is impossible to offer a singular account of what black power actually meant, because the movement comprised countless different factions. From the ardently separatist Nation of Islam to the socialist and internationalist Black Panthers, from young urban blacks frustrated with the slow progress and utopian idealism of integrationism to black intellectuals inspired by Third World independence struggles, black power assembled a broad and often internally divided array of supporters under its banner.<sup>22</sup> But common threads did connect these many diverse participants in the movement. All were frustrated by what they saw as the reformism, incrementalism, and excessively conciliatory tone of the mainstream civil rights movement. To varying degrees, all believed that the black community must wrest itself from outside, white control so as to articulate its own goals and run its own affairs. Any version of integration that required assimilation and threatened black solidarity was rejected. All viewed the history of racism in the United States as having left deep psychic wounds in the black community, wounds that would be cured through a proud, collective embrace of the distinctiveness of black identity rather than a desperate attempt to assimilate into white middle-class America. This proud embrace of blackness typically entailed an aggressive posture of toughness and militancy to demonstrate the new generation’s refusal of submissiveness and acquiescence. For many in the black power movement,

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<sup>22</sup> For a meticulous account of the origins, rise, and fall of the black power movement in the United States, including a detailed look at the variety of ideologies and movements assembled under its name, see Peniel Joseph, *Waiting ‘Til the Midnight Hour: A Narrative History of Black Power in America* (New York: Owl Books, 2006).

nonviolence was simply the latest iteration of traditional black submissiveness. In contrast to nonviolence, they justified violent self-defense at the very least, if not armed revolution.

My aim in this section is not to offer a comprehensive analysis of the black power movement. Rather, I focus on the apparent opposition between “power” and integration. A close reading of the work of Stokely Carmichael, the figure most responsible for popularizing the idea of black power, reveals that the concerns of black power activists can be used to reformulate integration rather than reject it. Indeed, none other than Martin Luther King Jr. himself emphasized the necessity of a kind of black power for true integration to proceed. In calling for a “redistribution of power”, then, I aim to conceive of integration in a way that reconciles the aspirations of King with the legitimate concerns of Carmichael.

For Carmichael, the mainstream civil rights movement simply failed to understand the scope and breadth of racism, thus prescribing cosmetic fixes that left in place a vast architecture of political, economic, and psychological oppression—which Carmichael identified with a form of internal colonialism—or, worse, inadvertently strengthened that architecture. The pervasiveness and political invisibility of institutional racism, as opposed to the more dramatic and widely deplored acts of individual racism, was the true culprit in producing black immiseration:

When white terrorists bomb a black church and kill five black children, that is an act of individual racism, widely deplored by most segments of the society. But when in that same city—Birmingham, Alabama—five hundred black babies die each year because of the lack of proper food, shelter and medical facilities, and thousands more are destroyed and maimed physically, emotionally and intellectually because of conditions of poverty and discrimination in the black community, that is a function of institutional racism. When a black family moves into a home in a white neighborhood and is stoned, burned or routed out, they are victims of an overt act of individual racism which many people

will condemn—at least in words. But it is institutional racism that keeps black people locked in dilapidated slum tenements, subject to the daily prey of exploitative slumlords, merchants, loan sharks and discriminatory real estate agents. The society either pretends it does not know of this latter situation, or is in fact incapable of doing anything meaningful about it.<sup>23</sup>

Because it is “not in the interest of the colonial power to liberate” the colonized, the politics of brotherhood, integration, and multi-racial movement-building were naïve and doomed from the start.<sup>24</sup> They might successfully produce widespread condemnation of the most dramatic acts of individual racism, and token integration for a few blacks aspiring to assimilate into middle-class white America, but they would not threaten institutional racism. Before black Americans could seek transformation of the country as a whole and a new relationship to white America, they needed to strengthen their own communities: “Before a group can enter the open society, it must first close ranks.”<sup>25</sup> Black power stood for this strengthening—a consolidation of the political and economic resources of the black community, the creation of a strong sense of black solidarity, a wholesale rejection of the rotten value system of middle-class white America, and a project of self-definition, through which blacks would determine for themselves what their goals should be and how these goals should be pursued.

Carmichael sometimes spoke of “power” in a simplistic fashion, railing against the “white power structure” and speaking as though absolute sovereignty, autonomy, and pure self-determination were possible for the black community (or any other group) if they could only unify and demand “control” of their own institutions. This apparent simplicity may not be so much a theoretical failing on his part as an effective rhetorical strategy to inspire passion and mobilization amongst the most downtrodden and invisible.

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<sup>23</sup> Ture and Hamilton, *Black Power*, 4.

<sup>24</sup> Ture and Hamilton, *Black Power*, 5.

<sup>25</sup> Ture and Hamilton, *Black Power*, 44.



But Carmichael's emphasis on institutional racism demonstrates his understanding of the social boundaries that Hayward identifies as constitutive of power. When he calls for blacks to seize power in their communities, his aim is to enable the most marginal and disenfranchised black communities to push back against those boundaries, to enable "full participation in the decision-making processes affecting the lives of black people."<sup>26</sup>

Simply put, the black power movement recognized that you could "integrate" some blacks into pre-existing white institutions without even touching many of the harshest and most intransigent boundaries that tragically constrained the horizon of possibility for so many others. That kind of integration was worse than a band-aid solution—it further damaged the black community by "draining skills and energies from the black ghetto into white neighborhoods."<sup>27</sup> Thus it appears that integration and black power stand opposed to each other in Carmichael's vision.

But it is not quite right to say that Carmichael rejected integration wholesale. For his withering denunciations of integration were often accompanied by caveats limiting the object of his critique to a specific version of integration—"their kind of integration"<sup>28</sup> or "'integration' as a goal today"<sup>29</sup> or "what 'integration' has required thus far."<sup>30</sup> These carefully parsed formulations suggest the possibility of a different and more worthy integration, one that takes black power not as its antithesis but as its very premise: "Such situations will not change until black people become equal in a way that means something, and integration ceases to be a one-way street."<sup>31</sup> This language is striking not

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<sup>26</sup> Ture and Hamilton, *Black Power*, 47.

<sup>27</sup> Ture and Hamilton, *Black Power*, 55.

<sup>28</sup> Ture and Hamilton, *Black Power*, 53.

<sup>29</sup> Ture and Hamilton, *Black Power*, 54.

<sup>30</sup> Ture and Hamilton, *Black Power*, 55.

<sup>31</sup> Ture and Hamilton, *Black Power*, 54-55.

only because it defies the most caricatured depictions of black power activists as intransigent separatists, but also because it proved amenable to leaders of the very mainstream civil rights movement that Carmichael frequently mocked.<sup>32</sup> Addressing the black power movement in *Where Do We Go From Here?*, King himself recognizes the need for black power as a constitutive feature of true integration, but carefully distinguishes his understanding of power from separatism, violence, or domination. Instead, he defines it simply as “the ability to achieve purpose.”<sup>33</sup> Notably, this definition allows a substantial common ground with Carmichael’s understanding of power as “full participation in the decision-making processes affecting the lives of black people.” Furthermore, both understandings call attention to those background conditions, those pre-existing boundaries and invisible fences, that shape the range of opportunities available to different communities:

I speak here of integration in both the ethical and the political senses. On the one hand, integration is true intergroup, interpersonal living. On the other hand, it is the mutual sharing of power. I cannot see how the Negro will be totally liberated from the crushing weight of poor education, squalid housing and economic strangulation until he is integrated, with power, into every level of American life.<sup>34</sup>

When King calls for integration “with power” he is underscoring a crucial point of convergence between his understanding of true integration and Carmichael’s—and the one we are trying to sketch here. Both men highlighted the inadequacy of the educational opportunities in black communities, the exploitative and materially inadequate housing

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<sup>32</sup> This is absolutely not to suggest that there were not real and intractable difference between Stokely Carmichael and Martin Luther King Jr. Carmichael was a withering critic of the discourses of love and suffering at the heart of the civil rights movement, and perhaps most significantly, utterly rejected King’s call for nonviolence.

<sup>33</sup> King, *Where Do We Go From Here: Chaos or Community?* In *The Essential Writings and Speeches of Martin Luther King Jr.*, 577.

<sup>34</sup> King, *Where Do We Go From Here: Chaos or Community?*, 594.

options available to blacks, and the overall “economic strangulation” of the black community as a profound obstacle to worthwhile integration. Both men understood that these interlocking elements of racial injustice constrained the opportunities of individual blacks and of entire black communities, thus severely limiting their ability to achieve purpose. Recalling Hayward’s formulation of power, education, housing, and economic resources play a crucial role in the construction of social boundaries that delimit the prospects of many Americans. Of course, there are key differences between King and Carmichael as well. First, and most obviously, King believes integration must be an immediate goal, and that the very movement fighting for integration must provide in its own ranks an example of an integrated community, whereas Carmichael separates the redistribution of power from integration, making the former a chronological prerequisite of the latter. Second, and relatedly, Carmichael’s understanding of power is fundamentally collective—the black community must have the capacity to determine its own course. King places more emphasis on the capacity of individual blacks to achieve their own ends through access to essential resources and opportunities. Nonetheless, it is striking that both men see power as a non-negotiable element of true integration, and we can take elements from both visions as we formulate our model of integration.

We can begin by identifying the specific social boundaries that continue to produce limited opportunities and resources for blacks in the present, as well as those boundaries that make it difficult for them to redress these sources of inequality. Education, housing, economic resources, and political influence play a crucial role in positioning any group in American society. Furthermore, all four categories are tightly linked. Home ownership has been a cornerstone of middle class wealth since the FHA

began insuring loans against default in the 1930s. Yet blacks were cut off from this new source of wealth, as well as the neighborhoods where the new middle class settled, because of a combination of explicitly discriminatory federal lending policies, racially restrictive covenants (until *Shelley v. Kraemer* in 1948), and endemic discrimination in the real estate industry, the latter of which continues to the present.<sup>35</sup> Unequal home ownership therefore contributes both to the enormous wealth gap between blacks and whites in the United States, and to the deplorable conditions in neighborhoods of concentrated poverty, starved of resources and employment opportunities as the middle class fled to greener pastures, with jobs and businesses following them. Residential segregation feeds into school segregation, particularly as families move into new school districts. This pattern of flight leaves behind not only overwhelmingly black and brown schools, but also resource-poor schools that must educate a student body facing the most acute challenges in the nation. John A. Powell has persuasively argued that only a coordinated plan combining housing and school desegregation can begin to address these problems, and can do so in a fashion that moves us toward true integration rather than mere desegregation.<sup>36</sup> Finally, both wealth and education enable a greater voice in the political process. At the same time, urban black populations are perennially marginalized in national electoral politics, as the electoral college overemphasizes issues of concern to a narrow group of swayable voters in battleground states. Thus, across all four dimensions of power, Blacks are systematically disempowered, often in ways that feed into and mutually reinforce each other.

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<sup>35</sup> Margery Austin Turner et al., *Housing Discrimination Against Racial and Ethnic Minorities 2012* (Washington D.C.: U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, 2013), [http://www.huduser.org/portal/Publications/pdf/HUD-514\\_HDS2012.pdf](http://www.huduser.org/portal/Publications/pdf/HUD-514_HDS2012.pdf).

<sup>36</sup> John A. Powell, "Living and Learning: Linking Housing and Education," 80 Minn L. Rev. 749 (1995).

In this context, a redistribution of power signifies a transformation of these social boundaries to enable more equal access to crucial resources and opportunities. It is not my intention here to specify how exactly this redistribution should be implemented as a matter of policy; indeed, to do so would be to sidestep the necessary public and democratic deliberation over the shape of these policies in which the black community must play a central role. But I will briefly discuss examples of the type of policies that we might consider. These examples are intended to be illustrative, not exhaustive. Jonathan Kaplan and Andrew Valls point to the history of housing and lending discrimination as a justification for reparations payments to black Americans, which could be used to fund policies designed to close the wealth gap:

For starters, the federal and state governments should devote greater resources to preventing and prosecuting the racial steering that we have good evidence to believe continues to take place. Furthermore, African Americans ought to be eligible for very favorable terms on mortgages, with very low interest rates and low or no down payment, subsidized by the government. Also, African Americans should be provided with opportunities that would lead to the creation of wealth through means beyond the housing market alone: access to good education, favorable terms for loans to start news businesses, etc.<sup>37</sup>

Reparations would also provide an important example of symbolic justice, as discussed in the previous section, that does not simply consign racism to an ugly past but acknowledges its enduring impact in the present. Similarly, we might propose programs that enable residents in high-poverty neighborhoods to find housing in lower-poverty neighborhoods, where they would likely have access to better schools and job opportunities, to say nothing of safer streets and a healthier environment. Such programs could take the form of providing housing vouchers directly to eligible participants, or

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<sup>37</sup> Jonathan Kaplan and Andrew Valls, "Housing Discrimination as a Basis for Black Reparations," *Public Affairs Quarterly* 21.3 (July 2007), 269.

incentivizing property owners in low-poverty neighborhoods to provide low-income housing options. Along these lines, Owen Fiss has proposed a \$50 billion/year federal program to “provide those who still are trapped in the ghetto with the economic means to move into middle- or upper-class neighborhoods.”<sup>38</sup> Yet this idea is also controversial, insofar as it threatens to break up predominantly Black communities, many of which provide a sense of solidarity and pride to their residents, while securing a base of political power, as well as to leave behind the poorest of the poor in even more devastated neighborhoods. An alternative proposed by Iris Young is to provide a massive infusion of resources directly to disadvantaged neighborhoods: “Disadvantaged neighbourhoods of high racial concentration need massive public and private investment in housing renovation and development, commercial spaces and businesses, public spaces like community centres, parks, and playgrounds, and job-creating enterprises.”<sup>39</sup> In fact, we need not choose between these alternatives—a combination of both could ensure that the residents of these neighborhoods could make a meaningful, uncoerced choice between staying and leaving. Andrew Valls has proposed exactly this.<sup>40</sup> Finally, serious reform of the electoral system is needed to empower urban Black populations whose votes are simply taken for granted under the present system. Linda Martin Alcoff emphasizes the radical potential of such a transformation: “If we eliminated the electoral college the urban population would therefore determine the presidency, which would mean real enfranchisement for people of color for the first time in U.S. history.”<sup>41</sup> What all of these

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<sup>38</sup> Owen Fiss, *A Way Out: America's Ghettos and the Legacy of Racism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003), 21.

<sup>39</sup> Young, *Inclusion and Democracy*, 227.

<sup>40</sup> Valls, “A Liberal Defense of Black Nationalism,” *The American Political Science Review* 104.3 (2010): 467-481.

<sup>41</sup> Alcoff, Linda Martin, “Latino/as, Asian Americans, and the Black-White Binary,” *The Journal of Ethics* 7 (2003): 5.

proposals have in common is that they attempt to break down the walls—some literal and some figurative—that deny access to high-quality housing, employment opportunities, wealth, high-quality schools, and a political voice to all too many black Americans. In other words, they all seek a redistribution of power.

Criminal justice reform, too, is a crucial arena in the contemporary civil rights struggle, one that has recently received a great deal of mainstream attention owing to the publication of Michelle Alexander's *The New Jim Crow*. The name of the book alone indicates why we must consider it here. Alexander demonstrates that our criminal justice system functions to create a new undercaste, entirely "locked out of mainstream society."<sup>42</sup> Moreover, thanks to the wide discretion available to police and prosecutors in the so-called war on drugs, the undercaste created by mass incarceration is overwhelmingly black and brown. If Stokely Carmichael rightly warned against a form of pseudo-integration in the 1960s that left behind an invisible and forgotten mass of impoverished ghetto residents, then we cannot today leave behind the astonishing number of ex-felons against whom it is perfectly legal to discriminate. Perhaps no one in the United States has their "ability to achieve purpose" more systematically thwarted. Ex-felons are denied public housing assistance and frequently turned away by private landlords. They are forced to check boxes on employment applications acknowledging their past criminal convictions, often dooming any chance of receiving an interview, let alone a job offer. Drug felons are permanently denied access to federally funded public assistance, including food stamps. And, to varying degrees in different states, felons have their most fundamental citizenship right – the right to vote – limited and sometimes

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<sup>42</sup> Michelle Alexander, *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness* (New York: The New Press, 2010), 13.

entirely denied. The pursuit of meaningful integration must include, as one organization within the movement for criminal justice reform highlights, “all of us or none”.<sup>43</sup>

In practice, combating the impact of mass-incarceration could entail a number of different struggles. Overturning legalized forms of felon discrimination is clearly essential. Limiting police and prosecutorial discretion so as to prohibit racial discrimination is also important. We must restore full voting rights to all felons and ex-felons for the sake of our democracy. For many critics of mass-incarceration, drug prohibition itself lies at the root of the problem, and drugs should be either decriminalized or legalized. While I am sympathetic to this argument, it is beyond the scope of this book to enter such a complex policy debate. The key point is that mass-incarceration is yet another bar in the invisible prison that disempowers so many within the black community. Along with housing and lending discrimination, inadequate schools, political under-representation, and consignment to resource-poor neighborhoods, it must be dismantled if we are seriously committed to the project of racial integration.

One might object that the kinds of policies I have sketched may well redistribute power in significant ways, but they do not necessarily secure mutual transformation. But if a redistribution of power enables formerly disenfranchised or marginalized communities to play an enhanced role in reshaping and reformulating the very social boundaries that previously excluded or oppressed them, then transformation of all social actors is inevitable. First and foremost, it ensures that formerly dominant groups can no longer unilaterally impose laws, rules, norms, and issues of concern on the nation, smaller geographic regions, or significant institutions. They must seek coalition with, and affirmation from, groups that they could previously ignore or exploit. But it would

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<sup>43</sup> <http://www.prisonerswithchildren.org/our-projects/all-of-us-or-none/>



change formerly excluded and marginalized groups as well. For the experience of participating meaningfully in the attempt to build a new future is necessarily a transformative one, particularly if one has access to sufficient resources to realize that vision. Ultimately, the point is not to deprive anyone, including whites, of a voice. Rather, the point is to prevent any group from monopolizing the megaphone. And insofar as it is whites (when we are speaking of racial groups) who have monopolized the megaphone historically, some will no doubt experience integration as a loss, even a kind of theft. But true integration would also carry great gains for everyone – a greater understanding of the experiences and concerns of others, a much broader array of cities, towns, and neighborhoods where people felt comfortable exploring or even residing, a less guarded and fearful existence, a more fair and egalitarian economic system that did not squander the future, or the potential social contributions, of so many citizens, a more complete understanding of the nation’s history, the destruction of a massive, sprawling, and expensive carceral state, etc.

### **Integration Skepticism, Again**

I believe that I have shown it is possible to sketch a model of integration as mutual transformation that is not vulnerable to critiques of assimilation. Yet it would be overly sanguine to presume this definitively answers the concerns of integration skeptics. For I have merely shown that we can paint a picture of a worthy kind of integration, not that we can achieve it. This is a much harder question, one that we cannot truly answer from our still-segregated present. The critics of integration, finally, do not simply ask

whether it is possible to *imagine* integration without assimilation. They ask whether this country, given its history and its present, can be expected to pursue such a radical form of integration earnestly. Intellectual honesty surely compels us not to give a wholehearted yes in response.

The core problem is that our cities and metropolitan regions are deeply imprinted by a long history of racial discrimination in every possible dimension of civil life, from school segregation to racially restrictive housing covenants to redlining to the use of market profiles that underrate the buying power of black communities by businesses considering where to open new branches.<sup>44</sup> As a result, many whites find themselves the recipients of racial privileges that simply appear as normal, and not as privileges at all: proximity to jobs, good schools, safe streets, and shopping and entertainment complexes in their neighborhoods; the intergenerational transfer of wealth; absence of police harassment in the streets; embeddedness in social networks that can inform them of employment and educational opportunities; salient political issues that reflect their primary concerns; socialization into norms of speech and dress that are dominant in the business, academic, and political worlds, etc. Because these privileges are easily taken for granted, it is all too easy to see corresponding deficits in the black community as reflecting cultural pathology and poor individual choices rather than structural deprivation. Proposals to remedy racial injustice such as affirmative action policies and redistribution of wealth then appear as “reverse discrimination” — robbing hardworking individuals of the fruits of their labor to grant unearned gifts to the undeserving. As long

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<sup>44</sup> For an excellent discussion of how these market profiles have contributed to a dearth of dining and entertainment establishments in middle-class black suburbs, see Sheryll Cashin, *The Failures of Integration: How Race and Class are Undermining the American Dream* (New York: PublicAffairs, 2005), 155-156.

as significant numbers of whites view the world in this way, then the burdens, pain, and failures of integration will inevitably fall on black shoulders. James Baldwin warned of this lopsided form of sacrifice half a century ago; his warning still rings true today:

In this country, the entire nation has always assumed that I would pay their dues for them. What it means to be a Negro in this country is that you represent, you are the receptacle of and the vehicle of, all the pain, disaster, sorrow which white Americans think they can escape. This is what is really meant by keeping the Negro in his place. It is why white people, until today, are still astounded and offended if, by some miscalculation, they are forced to suspect that you are not happy where they have placed you.<sup>45</sup>

For true integration to proceed, pain and bitterness and sacrifice will necessarily be a part of the process. And blacks cannot be the sole receptacle and vehicle of all the pain, disaster, and sorrow that the integration process itself brings. Integration must mean not only that joy and progress are shared, but also that pain and suffering are shared. This is the still unanswered question at the heart of the debate over integration: will white Americans share that pain and suffering? Integration skeptics say no, and they may be wrong, but their pessimism is hardly fantastical.

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<sup>45</sup> James Baldwin, "The White Problem," in *The Cross of Redemption*, 96.