

**RACE RELATIONS IN THE UNITED STATES IN 1990s:
THE PERSPECTIVES OF JESSE JACKSON
AND LOUIS FARRAKHAN**

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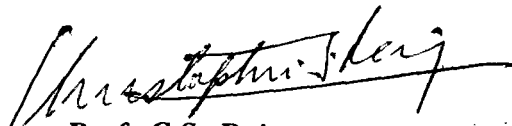



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CERTIFICATE

Certified that the dissertation entitled "RACE RELATIONS IN THE UNITED STATES IN 1990s: THE PERSPECTIVES OF JESSE JACKSON AND LOUIS FARRAKHAN" by SASMITA SINHA in partial fulfillment for the award of the Degree of MASTER OF PHILOSOPHY (M.Phil) of this University is her original work. This dissertation has not been submitted for any other degree of this University or any other University. We recommend that this dissertation be placed before the examiners for evaluation.


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CONTENTS

Page No.

PREFACE	<i>i-iv</i>
CHAPTER I: HISTORICAL OVERVIEW	1-33
i) Slavery in the South	
ii) Civil War and After	
iii) The New Century	
iv) Era of the Civil Rights	
CHAPTER II: THE SEARCH FOR AN IDENTITY	34-61
i) Racism and Counter Racism	
ii) African Vs. African - American	
iii) Black Power	
iv) Black Vs. White	
CHAPTER III: PERSPECTIVE OF JESSE JACKSON	62-87
i) Civil Rights Activist	
ii) Politics of Race Uplift	
iii) Vision and Strategies	
iv) The Present Decade	
CHAPTER IV: PERSPECTIVE OF LOUIS FARRAKHAN	88-106
i) Early Life	
ii) Leader of the Nation of Islam	
iii) The Present Decade	
iv) The Million Man March	
CONCLUSION	107-117
BIBLIOGRAPHY	118-131

PREFACE

The end of the cold war brought the global ideological conflict to an end. However, conflicts as such did not cease, only their nature underwent a change. Instead of superpower rivalry the world erupted into a plethora of local, racial and ethnic conflagrations. No part of the world, whether developed or developing, was left untouched. The only superpower of the world, the United States of America, also found its age old racial problem escalating. Although this problem is as old as the country itself, no solution has been found for it yet. The problem revolves around the assimilation of the African-American community into the mainstream of American life which could be acceptable to, both, the majority as well as the minority.

The United States has been mostly populated by immigrant groups and nearly all of them had to struggle through the prejudice and discrimination from the earlier inhabitants. However, the case of the African-Americans was different still. A majority of them had been brought to the United States as slaves to work on the plantations of the south. Even after the United States had proclaimed the equality of all men in its constitution the African-Americans were not taken to be covered by the term 'men'. Both in law and practice they continued to be treated as property with very few rights of free men. Though there were always a group of Americans who continued to oppose slavery on moral grounds, they gained real strength only when the material interests of the north combined with them. The result was a long civil war. At the end, slavery

was abolished and the African-American community was legally accepted as equal to other men and women.

Their troubles continued in spite of these developments. The civil war was soon followed by a white reaction which almost nullified the gains of the civil war. In such circumstances the two communities developed a pattern of interaction which had been characterized by Prof. Gunnar Myrdal as the 'cast' system of America. Under the system the blacks occupied a subordinate position by reasons of birth and colour itself and no amount of personal merit or achievement could quite offset this disadvantage. Throughout the twentieth century both historical factors and conscious efforts of the blacks combined to struggle against this inferior position of the blacks. The race problem diffused itself to embrace all aspects of the life of the African-Americans. In time it developed two clear strains: the first stressed material improvements through the internal reforms within the community before an equal position could be demanded from the society; the second advocated a relentless search for an equal and proud identity before concentrating on material improvements. Basically the first accepted the argument that the onus for the improvement of the community's status lay upon them while the second placed it largely upon the society which had wronged them.

The two strains combined most effectively in the 1950s and the 1960s to bring about the civil rights revolution. For the first time since the civil war, this movement succeeded in putting together a national consensus favouring societal initiatives and governmental reforms to improve the situation of the blacks. This period saw a great improvement in their legal status. They were even granted special concessions in the

fields of education and employment. Throughout this period the leaders of the African-American community served the very important purpose of bringing the diffused issues of race relations together in one point of view and communicating it to the whites. As the accepted spokespersons of their people they represented the feelings and aspirations of their community to the elite of the society. Not only this but they also communicated the mood of the majority back to their own people. It was up to them to constantly evolve strategies to satisfy both the communities and walk a fine line between the demands of the larger society and the expectations of their own people. Their rhetoric, therefore, could be used as a barometer of the condition of race relations at any given time.

The situation today has also become more fluid as far as race relations are concerned. Once again the leaders of the community are called upon to balance the interests between the whites and the blacks. The strengthening of racial identities and solidarity since the end of the cold war has complicated the matters further. The views of the leaders of the African-American community may be taken to be a fair indicator of the condition of the racial problem at present.

The views of the two giant spokesmen of race relations- Jesse Jackson and Louis Farrakhan might throw some contemporary dimensions on race relations. For an appreciation of the aspirations and fears, the expectations and suspicions of the two communities, well reflected by the two leaders may be viewed against the backdrop of the historical perspective.

The first chapter has dealt with a historical overview of the problem and the strategies of various spokespersons of the community till the 1960s.

The second chapter is concerned with the growth of those approaches which emphasised the process of identity formations.

The third and fourth chapters are devoted to the views of the two most important leaders of the African-Americans, Jesse Jackson and Louis Farrakhan respectively, who have been called upon to synchronize these two approaches in the present decade.

Both the approaches, which have been called the approaches of "accommodation" and "protest"¹ contribute to the defining of the racial situation as it stands today in the two chapters. This study also attempts to understand how the adoption of certain approaches by the leaders may reflect to a certain extent the social issues of the past and could indicate the understanding of the present situation.

I am specially indebted to my supervisor, Prof.R.P.Kaushik, not only for his kind guidance of my work but also for the patience and the characteristic sense of humour with which he dealt with my shortcomings. My thanks are also due to our chairperson, Prof. C.S.Raj, and, Dr. Vijayalaxmi for their guidance and encouragement.

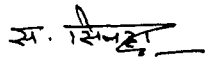
In the preparation of this dissertation I have visited several libraries. I wish to express my deep sense of gratitude to the staff of these libraries which include

¹ Gunnar Myrdal, *An American Dilemma* (New York, 1972), vol.2, p. 858.

American Centre Library, New Delhi, the library at the American Studies Research Centre, Hyderabad and the Jawaharlal Nehru University Library, New Delhi. Their cooperation in collecting materials for this dissertation has been very helpful.

My dearest sister and brother and all my friends deserve special thanks for everything from correcting my grammatical errors to soothing my fears in the moments of panic. Last, but not the least, my esteemed regards for my parents, whose contribution in each stage of my life and career has been of a nature which defies description in words.

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(Sasmitha Sinha)

Chapter I

HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

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(I) SLAVERY IN THE SOUTH

A paradox attended the birth of the United States of America as an independent nation. The Constitution that proclaimed the inherent right of all men to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness, also contained provisions recognizing the institution of slavery. It was a paradox which two hundred years later resulted in a civil war and continued to haunt the American democracy. Race problem therefore was rooted in the characteristics and attitudinal inheritance that had been bequeathed by that Peculiar institution.¹

Negro slavery had been regarded as old as the oldest white settlements in America. However, it was from the mid 18th century that the institution came to acquire an entirely new significance. The rise of capitalist agriculture in the southern parts of the United States created the ideal conditions for its nurture and growth. The planters found that they could maintain an edge in the world markets, specially in the cotton markets, when their labour came as cheap as the Negro slaves. These cotton plantations did so well and so came to be associated with wealth and affluence that in the sunny southern lands cotton became 'king'.

1. Kenneth M. Stamp, *The Peculiar Institution: Slavery in the Ante-Bellum South*, (New York, 1956) is an exhaustive study of the subject of slavery in the United States. It is important enough to have provided its name as a synonym for slavery in the United States.

'King cotton's' slaves, however, were as poorly off as he was rich. The plantations at this time came to resemble a rural factory and the slave here was simply a factor of production. Like all tools in the hands of early capitalists, his treatment was also determined by a desire for maximum returns from his labour while putting in the minimum investment possible, in him.

Scholars have produced extensive records to show the intolerable conditions in which the slaves were made to live and work. Despite justifications by some southern scholars, most commentators have shown the housing arrangements to have been shocking. The lodgings generally consisted of narrow, wooden cabins with sparse or no furniture and hardly any ventilation seems to have been provided. The fare was in most cases bland and monotonous consisting primarily of meal and meat. The clothing of a larger number of slaves was scanty and so uniform that it came to be known as "Negro clothes". Shoes were not handed out except during the months of winter. The common thread running through all these arrangements was of economic efficiency compatible with keeping the slave in proper working order. Further, his status and behaviour were regulated through a series of laws popularly called the Black Codes. The name suits the laws perfectly not because its subjects were black, but because of its very nature. These Black Codes erected an entire edifice of race relations founded upon the idea of slave reduced to property. This de jure dehumanization of the entire people provided the most piteous and hair raising aspect of slavery in America and also coloured the views of the master race towards its human property. In most cases the

slave was denuded even of the fundamental rights to life and self defence. The codes legitimized the slaves working for 18-20 hours a day; they legitimized whipping, mutilating, burning and branding as forms of punishments for mistakes which were often slight or even wholly imaginary; they legitimized the breeding of slaves like animals; they also legitimized the break up of entire families to be sold at the auction block merely at the will of the master; in short, they legitimized an impossibly inhuman bondage of the slave's body and soul in the hands of his master.²

It is pertinent to point out here that in 1860, out of a population of 8 million whites in the south, only 384, 884 were owners of Negro slaves. Thus, three quarters of the whites derived no immediate economic benefits from the institution. But cotton cultivation was the mainstay of southern luxury and it was but natural that most of the people dreamed of becoming plantation owners some day. Thus the hopes for the future, if not gains at hand, made them acquiesce in continuation of slavery. To add to this was the dominance and influence exercised by the great slave owners.³ They

² For a discussion of the socio-economic conditions during the slavery period, see Eugene D. Genovese, *The Political Economy of Slavery: Studies in the Economy and Society of the Slave South*, (New York, 1965). Also, see, John Hope Franklin, *From Slavery to Freedom* (New Delhi, 1967), pp. 185-213.

³ In 1860, only 384,884 whites owned slaves. Thus, three-fourths of the white people of the south did not own slaves. Even amongst the slave holders 88% came in the category of small slave holders, i.e. those who held twenty slaves or less. However, it was the 12% of the slave holders who owned more than 20 slaves each who came to influence the contemporary as well as the later views about slavery. The reasons for this included, above all, the tremendous productivity of the large plantations; secondly, it was they who produced the great majority of the staple crops and so they always remained in the limelight. Consequently, the rest of the population took on the habits and patterns of thought of the large planters before actually joining that select group. The views of the later generations were also influenced by the fact that a considerable number of the large

were the gentlemen aristocrats who set the standards in every thing from fashion to philosophy. As the standard bearers of its culture, they communicated successfully their own ideas as the real culture of the entire southern society.

For the relations between the races this system had some important and long lasting effects. The white community developed a philosophy to justify a system so obviously out of place in a democracy. This philosophy tended to rationalize the enslavement of the black community on the basis of their supposed racial inferiority. The belief became slowly widespread that the negro was best kept in servitude where he could be guided by a superior white master. The negroes were looked upon as a simple and child like race who could hardly be left to their own devices with safety. It gave the whites a sense of right in holding such people in a powerful thrall and blinded them to the injustices of the system.

On the side of the African-Americans one could find two kinds of reactions to such a state of affairs. These have been called the ways of "accommodation" and "protest"⁴. Both paths were noticeable for producing leaders of the community who tried to help their people to cope with their difficult situation in life. Both traditions contained seeds of strategies later pursued by the African-American leadership after emancipation. It is in this context that the history of this tradition of local and

slave holders kept diaries and other materials about their activities which constitute an important source material for present studies. For details, see, John Hope Franklin, *From Slavery to Freedom* (New Delhi, 1967), pp. 186-187.

⁴ Gunnar Myrdal, *An American Dilemma*, (New York, 1972), vol.2, p.858.

community leadership assumes special significance.

The tactics of accommodation were basically followed by priests and community leaders of the type drawn by Harriet Beecher Stowe in *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. These were mostly church preachers and other intensely religious men. They counselled obedience and patience to their people and promised rewards in the next world. In this world they accepted the ideals and the religion of their masters. They substituted faith in place of reason as the more comforting force in life. Historians have noted the predominantly otherworldly nature of the sermons in the Negro churches. While the White churches found many- an-occasion to comment upon and justify the existing system of slavery, the Negro church chose to largely ignore the institution. Perhaps the intense and single minded focus upon the world beyond was an effort to blot out the painful facts of this world. This very intensity made Negro worship full of a tremendous fervour and religiosity which made them distinct in character.⁵ Many instances have been quoted when the preachers merely made prayers about their personal experiences and the congregation prayed along. Singing and chanting hymns became important parts of Negro worship as forbidden feelings flowed out in frenzied religious worship.

⁵ The emotional nature of Negro worship was most often brought out in private and secret prayer meetings which find repeated mention in literature dealing with the lives of slaves. A good example is Harriet Beecher Stowe, *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (New York, 1982). For a historical analysis of the nature and role of the Negro church, see, Mary Frances Berry, *Long Memory: the Black Experience in America* (New York, 1982), pp. 70-113, and, Gunnar Myrdal, *An American Dilemma*, (New York, 1972), vol.2, pp. 858-878.

The Church thus acquired a place in the life of the community which was unique. It became something more than a mere place for worship. Here the community assembled in small, intimate groups for a communal act. The church served the purposes of a townhall, a social club and a place for entertainment. It was here that the preacher helped the slave to cope with his life. He came to acquire, by the virtue of his position, a tremendous influence over his flock. Needless to say, he was considered a useful man by the masters too. They lent an ear to his pleadings and were careful to grant a few concessions from time to time. They were more comfortable dealing with a man who represented their slaves as a group and so could act as a sort of conduit between the two communities. The favour shown to him by the powerful and the strong improved his standing inside the community.

Such leadership was essentially status quoist. The Black minister could hardly be expected to teach his flock their rights and rewards and still continue with his church. The philosophy of meekness taught by christianity coupled with his dependence upon the white community generally served to opt him into the system as a kind of safety valve. He provided a release for the pent up frustrations of the Black community which were acceptable to the whites. Therefore, he accepted the philosophy put forward by his masters in which the African-Americans were to stay below the whites for ever.

But there was another group of men who refused to bow down to such thinking and admonitions. They constituted the rebels of the system. Till the Emancipation Proclamation finally freed the slaves, the masters had not found a way to reconcile

their chattels with the sorry existence which was their lot. Those who rebelled had to choose one of the very limited and hazardous choices open to them. Some of them simply snapped in the face of reckless cruelty; they indulged in vengeful violence openly and immediately . Yet others reacted to their status by running away. Scholars have found instances galore of such desperate bids for freedom. The news papers of the times almost daily ran advertisements and notices asking information about runaway slaves. Those who were brought back were generally made an example of. Slaves were valuable property and any instance which encouraged their loss could not be taken lightly.

However, helped by the law and fortified by philosophy, the slave owners managed to deal with rebellion of this kind at their own level. Most often they disliked the idea of either the state or the community meddling in their personal affairs. What evoked panicky and knee-jerk reaction from the white community were organized conspiracies and revolts. These generally involved a larger number of Negroes and were carried out with prior planning and preparations. The men who led these revolts were the first examples of real leaders supplied by the community. They had given thought to the unjust state of their community, had consciously applied their minds to seeking solutions to their plight and made attempts to convert others to their cause.

Two of the most famous such conspiracies were led by Denmark Vesey and Nat Turner in 1822 an 1831 respectively. Vesey had been a slave who had purchased his freedom from his master. Not content to live in liberty while the rest of his brethren lived under the yoke of slavery, Vesey decided to demolish the system with armed

rebellion. He carefully planned an uprising in his native South Carolina. His ideas spread slowly to a large number of slaves but the whites got wind of what was happening. Even before the plan could materialize as open rebellion they rounded up Vesey's principal assistants and nipped the trouble in the bud. But the planning left them shaken to the core. The large numbers estimated to have been Vesey's followers ran as high as 9 thousand.

Nat Turner, on the other hand, was a mystical slave. He had run away and then returned to his master. He believed in destiny and entwined within himself the two strands of current Negro leadership- religion and rebellion. His revolt in 1831 was extremely violent and spread rapidly. Both state and federal troops had to be called out to stem its rise. The entire south was badly jolted by this Virginian revolt and the masters grew ever more angry and vigilant towards their slaves.⁶

However, these were not the only conspiracies to take place though they were the more famous and wide spread. They lasted as long as the institution which gave birth to them. These two different ways of coping with the difficult and demeaning life left their mark upon all leaders of the community to this day. They either sought to carve out a place for themselves within a largely unequal society, hoping for slow

⁶ The rebellion of Nat Turner drew a lot of attention not only from his contemporaries but also from modern historians. This attention was due not only to the widespread nature of the revolt but also to a 'confession' which he is supposed to have made prior to his execution. For discussions of the revolt, see, Herbert Apthekar, *Nat Turner's Slave Rebellion* (New York, 1966), John B. Duff and Peter M. Mitchell, ed., *The Nat Turner Rebellion: the Historical Event and the Modern Controversy* (New York, 1971) and William Styron, *The Confessions of Nat Turner* (New York, 1971).

progress or they took shelter in a complete turning away from the existing system. The reason was not far to seek. Although the Civil War brought to an end slavery as an institution, the African-American struggle in America continued unabated. Though the dark skinned American is no longer considered a 'thing', he has not yet completed the voyage between being a 'thing' and being a 'person'. Nearly one and a quarter century earlier, however, the dream had almost come true.

(II) CIVIL WAR AND AFTER

The cause of the American Civil War has been defined in a variety of ways both by the immediate participants and by posterity. What seems true is that several different factors came together to embroil the Union in a crisis which could only be resolved through an armed conflict. On the economic front, the Northern capitalists had progressed enough to desire a cheap supply of labour for their expanding industries. They resented the slave system which tied the most likely group of such labour to the farm. As the slave was the property of his owner, no amount of higher wages could snatch him away to the centres of industry. They, thus, pressurised political and social systems to destroy slavery once for all. Even the Midwestern farmers resented the expansion of rich planters and the Negro slaves to their areas. They could never hope to compete successfully with slave worked farms. Both of these economic motives found their own ideological answer to the South in the growing

Abolitionist movement.⁷

The Abolitionist appeal was based upon Christian morals and principles and the dedicated members of the movement made personal sacrifices to aid slaves in running away from their masters. They assiduously created a climate where it was impossible for any thinking person to remain untouched by the issue. No one, who was anyone, could afford to stay neutral; sides had to be taken and invisible battle lines were drawn. With the election of Abraham Lincoln in 1859 to the office of the President of the United States, these battle lines became real. He was a Republican who was looked upon by the South as a sympathizer of the Abolitionists. They distrusted him and unless he decided to go out of his way to woo them they would only view him as an antagonist, an enemy. After a whole year of tension and political uncertainty, this situation reached its climax to culminate into a civil war.

⁷ The divergence of attitudes towards slavery in America did not become acute until the rise of the Abolitionist Movement. By the 1830s it was becoming clear that the planters would never agree to voluntary abolition as some of the early anti-slavery societies had hoped. Various individuals in different parts of the north then began to attack slavery in much more militant terms, insisting that it was contrary to both Christian and American ideals. Most of them were members of different Protestant churches and the whole movement was permeated with a spirit of religious idealism. New England, specially Boston was the centre of the movement, though other branches were later established in Ohio and New York. By 1840, there were about 2000 Abolitionist societies, claiming a total membership of nearly 200 thousand. Their activities included meetings and marches, publishing pamphlets, newspapers and most importantly, the establishment of Underground Rail Road, which helped runaway slaves escape to Canada. Most of the general histories dealing with the period carry material on the subject. For reference to original documents pertaining to the subject, see J. Mortimer Adler, et. al., ed., *The Negro in American History: Slaves and Masters, 1567-1854*, vol. 3 (U.S.A., 1969), pp. 161-276 and C. Peter Ripley, ed., *Black Abolitionist Papers*, vols. 1-5 (London, 1985). For a discussion of the ideas and approach of the foremost Abolitionist, see Aileen S. Kraditor, *Means and Ends in American Abolitionism: Garrison and His Critics on Strategy and Tactics, 1834-1850* (New York, 1969).

However, more than the causes, the effects of the war affected the African-American community. Whether the war had been fought on the issue of slavery or not, it certainly acquired that status much before it came to an end. The most important effect of the war was the change in the legal status of the African-Americans. The Emancipation Proclamation of 1863 freed all the slaves. The political climate immediately after the war made it imperative to bend the energies of the nation towards settling the question of slavery. Between 1865 and 1867 the Congress of the United States adopted three amendments to the Constitution which revolutionized the legal status of the coloured man in America. By the first of these amendments slavery was abolished. The second and third guaranteed citizenship and suffrage to the African-Americans.

The second important effect had to do with the social and material fallouts of this new found legal equality. It is important to remember that the Northern victory in the Civil war had been won only on the battle field. The South gave in only because it could not hold out any longer. As Prof. John Hope Franklin has pointed out there was no conversion of the southern hearts to a different ideology.⁸ Most southerners continued to believe that the typical African-American was a lazy and shiftless imbecile unfit for the supreme gift of citizenship. To add to this was their humiliation in being forced to acknowledge him as an equal citizen. He was the cause of the war and they feared that the victory of the Union armies would make him act 'uppity'. Ever since

⁸ John Hope Franklin, *Race and History: Selected Essays, 1938-1988* (Baton Rouge, 1989), p. 140.

the end of the war, the South became obsessed with 'keeping the Negro in his place'. From 1865 to 1867, the helm of the nation was in the hands of Abraham Lincoln and Andrew Johnson who believed in conciliatory reconstruction of the defeated states. Their main aim was to stamp out treason from the hearts of the Southern citizens and not sympathy for slavery. They trusted time to achieve the later. During this period the Federal Government granted considerable freedom to the state governments to carry out their own reconstruction. Predictably, in the sphere of race relations this leniency translated into the resurrection of the old, infamous Black Codes in new garb. The state governments found legal loopholes to circumvent the new constitutional amendments and the negroes continued to be socially and materially marginalised.

By 1867 it was becoming clear that this state of affairs was unpalatable to powerful economic and political interests in the North. Coupled with this was the wrath of the Abolitionists at the renewed servitude of the African-Americans. This coalition succeeded in ushering in the era of Radical Reconstruction.⁹ It was driven by the Congress rather than the President and it dictated to the South the solutions to its 'Negro problem'. State conventions were elected to enact the basic law or constitutions

⁹ The years of Radical Reconstruction lasted from 1867 to 1870. For efforts and experiences of black people during Reconstruction, see W.E.B. DuBois, *Black Reconstruction in America*, (New York, 1964). For the economic conditions and social changes during Reconstruction and immediately after, see Eli Ginzberg and Alfred S. Eichner, *The Troublesome Presence*, (London, 1964) pp.199-231 and see pp.163-198 for political expediency guiding Reconstruction. For some primary material touching various aspects of southern life during the period, see Mortimer J. Adler, et.al., ed. *The Negro in American History*, vol.2, (U.S.A., 1969), pp.215-294. Also see Carter G. Woodson, *The Negro in Our History*, (Washington, D.C., 1922), pp.382-424.

for the states. The constitutions chalked out at these conventions were radically progressive and secured for the African-American community both liberty and franchise. It failed, however, to make any permanent impact either upon the prejudices of the white community or the condition of the blacks.

Throughout Reconstruction the negro church offered both spiritual and material relief to its people. Since the law was now powerless to check the growth of independent churches and proscribe the preachers of the African-American origin, there was a sudden spurt in the number of such churches. The African-Americans themselves broke away from the white dominated churches to setup their own branches. By 1870 when the African-Americans had organized five conferences, the first general conference of the Colored Methodist Episcopal Church was held, and White bishops came to consecrate W.H.Miles and R.H.Vanderhorst as the first Negro bishops. As the first and the most important organizations of the community, the church provided the only solid anchor to the suddenly rudderless community.

As the first social institution fully controlled by African-Americans in America the churches provided their members with the opportunity to develop qualities of leadership. It was no coincidence that many outstanding African-Americans had been ministers. Bishop H.M.Turner of Georgia, The Rev. R.H.Cain of South Carolina, and the Bishop J.W.Hood of North Carolina were a few of the political leaders who gained much of the experience in the Negro Church. The continued dependence of the black community upon the church showed that the conditions which had given rise to such dependence in the ante-bellum period had not disappeared even after the civil war. In

the absence of definite social and state institutions to guide and protect him the black man continued to depend upon his community. In the American society his place was still that of the member of the black community and not of an individual citizen in his own right.

The efforts of the political and religious leaders, notwithstanding, Reconstruction simmered to an end by 1877. The whites had never been reconciled to Washington's political control of the South. They had created conditions of extreme lawlessness and disquiet. Northern industrialists slowly grew weary of the situation. European migrants to the United States were beginning to provide them with much needed labour. Though they still welcomed the African-American they were no longer interested in this war of attrition over him. Moreover, the 'Carpetbaggers' and the 'Scalawags' had hugely discredited the Northern efforts at Reconstruction. They had succeeded in showing it up as sucking the blood of the defeated in the war. A general amnesty of 1872 had restored the franchise to nearly the whole of the White community so that they could translate their discontent into political action. As expected, with the return of the franchise to the whites, the Democrats also began to return to the control of the state governments. The cause of Radicalism, having won the war, now stood defeated in peace.

By the dawn of the new century White supremacy had been firmly established in both law and practice. To circumvent the implications of the African-Americans'

equality, the legislatures evolved the 'Jim Crow' laws.¹⁰ These were elaborate legal devices to segregate the Freedman completely and totally. They had found a way to reestablish the inferiority of the African-Americans; since they could not force him into legal servitude they merely cut him off from the main arteries of the social, political and economic systems. The result was the same; the African-American, without resources, without noticeable political representation and without moral support was again on the bottom most rung of the ladder. Only this time there was not even an oppressive master to call him his own.

The old pattern of race relations wherein the blacks as a group had to be represented by a single spokesperson returned with the return of white supremacy. The lack of elected representatives again made the community dependent on one or two members to establish communications with the white community. The inferior position of the blacks made the choice of the representative a white prerogative to a large extent.

The man who rose to the occasion to guide them in this awesome task of survival at this time was called Booker T. Washington. He is generally considered to be the foremost champion of accommodation in the post-bellum period. Till his death in 1915 he completely dominated the stage as far as race relations were concerned. Not

¹⁰ For information on laws relating to blacks at various points of American history, see C. Van Woodward, *The Strange Career of Jim Crow* (New York, 1974), Don E. Fehrenbacher, *The Dred Scott Case, its Significance in American Law and Politics* (New York, 1978), Albert P. Blaustein and Robert I. Zangrando, ed., *Civil Rights and the American Negro* (New York, 1968), pp. 71-317.

only in the South but also in the North he came to be looked upon as the spokesman of the community. Washington believed in the all-American philosophy of every man being the arbiter of his own destiny. He propagated the doctrine of self-help for the African-American wherein the coloured man was to rise through business and industry. Towards this end he setup the famous Tuskegee Institute. Here the coloured people were trained in what were considered the 'industrial' arts like brick laying and masonry. Here also were taught the essentials of survival for the Negro people. Washington accepted segregation, advocated a quiet and law abiding way of life and an avoidance of any kind of intellectualism which may alarm the whites. His attitude made him acceptable both to the whites in the South as well as in the North. The Southern whites were pleased because here was a coloured man who evidently understood his 'place' and was content to remain there. The Northerners liked his message of peace which he was preaching because only a quiet South could afford them the opportunity for industrial exploitation. They also believed that trained Negroes would provide an industrial labour force. The tremendous eminence of Booker T. Washington was due to this very understanding of the prevailing mood of the national elite and the ability to fall in with it.

Washington, however, it seems, was simply following the methods of the Black preachers of the slavery days. He taught an acceptance of and acquiescence in the existing system because he saw no way of overthrowing it immediately. However, his disenchantment seems clear as he was quietly financing some of the earliest court cases against segregation. In this way he also began the very creditable and far reaching

association of the judiciary in the African-American's pursuit of justice.

But the training which was imparted at Tuskegee was not really of an industrial kind. Moreover, the dearth of capital and strong racial prejudice combined to keep the African-Americans out of any jobs or enterprises which had even a semblance of respectability about them. Booker T. Washington had not really reckoned with the 'caste' status of the Negroes, as Gunnar Myrdal has called it, and obstacles which it would place in the rise of even the trained and well educated ex-slaves. The 'caste' system in America was best described in the words of Gunnar Myrdal himself:

When we say that Negroes form a lower caste in America we mean that they are subject to certain disabilities solely because they are 'Negroes' in the rigid American definition and not because they are poor and ill-educated".¹¹

The upper and middle class Whites were too strongly prejudiced to accept the equality of the African-Americans. The theories of a lazy, incompetent and child like race Negroes were still very much alive in their minds. The poor Whites relied on the caste system to restrict the African-American competition for jobs. Several Trade Unions refused to accept Black members as their white constituents refused to work with coloured men.

The traditional leaders and guides of the community, the Black preachers and ministers, also carried on their traditions of conservatism and accommodation. In this way they remained acceptable to the Whites and maintained their prestige amongst their flock by winning minor concessions every now and then. Some progressive leaders

¹¹ Myrdal, n.4, p.669.

blamed the African-American church for being stooges of the White majority in return for favours and finances on which depended its very existence. In some cases this could certainly have been true. However, the majority of the community also expressed itself through the church. They were as yet too frightened and too preoccupied with problems of daily existence to put faith in radical solutions. Most of them seemed really to have believed that education would guarantee them a place "separate but equal" in the American society.

This was probably what explained the short existence of the more radical Niagara Movement of W.E.B. DuBois and others. W.E.B. DuBois, the first coloured graduate of Harvard University and professor at Atlanta, stood in stark contrast to Booker T. Washington. He was impatient with and contemptuous of the gradualism and conciliatory approach of the latter. He disapproved of the idea of flattering the whites and expressing gratitude to them for the concessions granted. He was more preoccupied with the injustices meted out to his people. He did not look at the exigencies of the existing system because he was appalled by the denial of constitutional rights to an entire community. He advocated a frontal assault upon the system to wrench from it the basic dignity and freedom, which he felt was the right of every man simply by virtue of his being a man. As Washington spoke of duties, DuBois emphasized rights; as one advocated prudence so the other preached revolt. This became the chief dividing line between accommodation and protest throughout the post-bellum history. DuBois blamed Washington and his dominance of race relations for worsening the conditions of the African-Americans for the sake of an artificial

harmony between the races. In his autobiography, he expressed his dissatisfaction in these words : "At a time when Negro civil rights called for organized and aggressive defence, he broke down that defence by advising acquiescence or at least open agitation".¹² He was also agitated because this policy seemed to put 'the chief onus for his condition upon the Negro himself'. The Niagara leaders had ambitious plans for setting up a radical organization with branches in all the states to fight discrimination, segregation and also the conciliatory approach of Mr. Washington. The plan, however, did not materialize.¹³

Despite the near monopoly which Booker T.Washington exercised over the leadership of the African-American community, the opposition of W.E.B. DuBois served to highlight certain facts and tendencies. Washington became more conscious of the views which he expressed and the reactions of the African-American community to them rather than just the whites. This seems to suggest that a fair number of African-Americans identified themselves with the views of W.E.B.DuBois .It seems to bear out the statement of Gunnar Myrdal that accommodation is never complete in any American negro. Booker T.Washington stood for the road of accommodation and adjustment .W.E.B.DuBois was the spiritual heir to the slaves who took the road to revolt. This struggle for racial leadership crystallized itself into a pattern which with some variations continued to mark the course of race relations.

¹² W.E.B.DuBois, *Dusk of Dawn in DuBois: Writings* (New York, 1986), p. 606.

¹³ Myrdal, n.4, p. 742.

(III) THE NEW CENTURY

The first half of the twentieth century saw the subtle workings of some momentous socio-economic forces which made both the black and white communities more amenable to the rhetoric of protest as against that of accommodation which had been predominant till then. These forces were affecting both the material and psychological conditions of the community. The first of these was booming industrialization. The White supremacy in the age of the great Reaction after Reconstruction succeeded in tying the Freedman to land and agriculture. But the second decade of the twentieth century was an age of great agricultural depression in the South. The migration of Negro tenants and croppers could no longer be checked as there was no agriculture to be tended.¹⁴ Crowds of impoverished Negroes flooded the urban industrial centres, most of which were in the North. This exodus from the South had deep implications. It freed a large number of African-Americans from the thrall of White supremacy and Jim Crow laws of the South. Until 1910 some 90 percent of all blacks lived in the South but by 1960 their number had been reduced to 60 percent. Even in the South, the expanding textile, oil, lumber and chemical industries had drawn 60 percent of the region's population to the urban centres, undermining the traditional plantation culture with its strict distinctions of race and class. The growth of a business economy and culture began to undermine the

¹⁴ For the economic forces affecting blacks in this period, see R. Higgs, *Competition and Coercion: Blacks in the American Economy, 1865-1914* (Cambridge, England, 1977) and Nicholas Lemann, *The Promised Land: the Great Black Migration and How it Changed America* (New York, 1991).

distinctions in their most impregnable fortress till date, i.e. the hearts of the White men. The logic of business growth required an educated labour force, employed on the basis of economy and merit rather than colour and a domestic market unhampered by racial divisions of consumers or disruptive social tensions. A small but influential minority of business men, therefore, was not too keen to maintain Jim Crow.

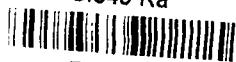
Another major fall out of the movement was to draw a hitherto isolated and powerless minority into the political main stream. The North gave them the franchise and the reform politics of 1930s afforded them a particularly crucial vehicle for advancing their rights. The vote in the hands of the Black workers suddenly found them being courted by both the political parties. The vast welfare apparatus which emerged in the aftermath of the Great Depression was a giant leap forward in giving the blacks some of the benefits of the American society. Coupled with the economic reasons was the support of the liberals who refused to deny these benefits to the bona fide Americans simply on the basis of race and colour.

The rise of industrial unions in mid-1930s added to the political leverage of the blacks. Unlike the established craft unions which had blatantly excluded the African-Americans, the emerging unions in steel, automobile and other mass production fields enlisted Negroes as an equal. The fusion of African-American and labour interests, though incomplete, advanced a loose Democratic coalition of blacks and other rising social groups. In the preceding decade Republican administrations had almost exclusively championed corporate interests while showing little concern for either the poor whites or the ethnic minorities. The respectful treatment of blacks by President

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F.D. Roosevelt signalled a sharp turn away from the politics of White supremacy. Critics of racism also gained a more respectful hearing in this tolerant political climate. Social scientists, rallied to disprove the fallacious theories of the inherent inferiority of the blacks which had been treated as cardinal truths.

Even at such moments, however, and in Northern cities, the African-Americans did not find a friendly reception. Subtle and invidious prejudice divided them almost as completely from the whites as Jim Crow laws had done in the South. They were concentrated in "inner cities" in ghettos and slums almost totally populated by them. The Northerners favoured equal opportunity for all but even they shied away from integration. Even well educated and middle class African-Americans found it difficult to move into middle class areas. However, the ghettos were not so far from the suburbs that the blacks should not realize their poverty by contrast. Secondly, their concentration in densely populated areas sharply underlined their racial solidarity as well as their shared problems. Thirdly, the "Negro problem" no longer belonged to the South alone. It was fast becoming a national problem and like all national problems was slowly shifting from the domain of the state to that of the Federal government.¹⁵

Another important factor was American participation in the two World Wars. America based her participation in both the wars upon principles of democracy and equality abroad. Her advocacy of the four freedoms showed up in sharp contrast the

¹⁵ See, Robert Weisbrot, *Freedom Bound: a History of America's Civil Rights Movement* (New York, 1990).

poor plight of her own African-American people. Shunned, derided, exploited and abused they were the perennial pariahs despite all their sacrifices from the time of the American Revolution to the Second World War. By the end of World War II, the community was seething with discontent.

The political rhetoric of the war times and the liberal climate had sharpened the sensitivities of all Americans to issues of justice and fairness. The blacks were more ready to ask for them and the whites were more ready to listen. The African-Americans had also developed an effective organization for carrying on the struggle for civil liberties in the form of National Association for Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). Created in 1909 it was a logical next step to movements like the Niagara Movement. During the 1930s the organization launched a concerted attack on school segregation that slowly stripped the judicial fences around Jim Crow. The association's source of legal inspirations was built on a single proverb by the Attorney Nathan Margold: that the reform climate of the New Deal favoured appeals to equal opportunity but not demands for integration. The NAACP, therefore, challenged the 1896 Plessey decision by indirection, claiming that inferior facilities mocked the claim of "separate but equal". In this way it desegregated graduate and law schools in Maryland, Missouri, and other states unable to persuade Federal courts of an equal commitment to black and white students. Although it failed to pressurize the government to pass civil rights legislation but it brought about a growing openness in national politics about the long forbidden subject of Federal responsibility for racial

justice.¹⁶ It was this change in the mood of the majority community which allowed the ascendancy of a more rights oriented leadership amongst the African-Americans. The leadership, however, did not lose sight of the duties of the community and their language was one of morality towards all concerned. This is what made for their greater acceptance.

The African-Americans were, however, not united in deeming this strategy as the only one fit to challenge racism and segregation. As far back as 1920s a number of Black intellectuals had begun to question the advisability of following the slow and deliberate course of taking cases up through the courts while, as they saw it Black people were suffering without relief. Some, even then, questioned any piecemeal approach of attacking one institution- for example, the education system- instead of trying to alter the entire social order. Such people has A.Philip Randolph and other Socialists branded leaders like DuBois as "a handkerchief head", that is, a hat-in-hand Negro. In *The Messenger*, which Randolph edited, the NAACP was attacked as a bourgeoisie organization and an alternative, a working man's movement, was advocated. With capitalism defined as the enemy of all poor people, Randolph sought to rally blacks and whites. He did not succeed. As August Meir and Elliott Rudwick point out, Randolph's ideological rhetoric was too much for many blacks to comprehend; his integrationist appeal was too much for many White workers to

¹⁶ For more details on the organisation and role of the N.A.A.C.P., See, Myrdal. n.4, pp.819-836.

stomach.¹⁷What was clear,however, was that in the African-American community by 1940s "the protest was still rising".¹⁸

Such radical ideology, therefore, flourished on the periphery while the main stream community continued its search for a uniting leader and philosophy in search for racial justice. The realization of this fact, however, for the nation was long in coming. It took a heroic struggle of an unprecedented scale to put the question of race relations squarely on the priority list of American politicians. The epic saga of this struggle has been told too often and too well to need detailed recounting. It would be well, even then, to recapitulate briefly. African-Americans had, individually and sporadically defied Jim Crow laws since the 1930s.The efforts, however, had been individual and the support, generally, nil. They, however, were signs of growing restlessness in the minds of the coloured community. The heart of the whites-that fortress of prejudice-was to clash with an equally impassioned desire for freedom growing in the hearts of the African-Americans. The single most important event to signal the change in the thinking of the powerful came in the shape of the famous decision in the case of *Brown v. Board of Education* in 1954. In this case the Supreme Court in a landmark judgement finally struck down the doctrine of "separate but equal", to recognize that separation necessarily entails inequality. It did not dismantle the discriminatory regime immediately but what it did do was to catalyze the forces which would bring that about. The blacks were suddenly filled with far greater

¹⁷ Quoted in Peter I.Rose,ed.,*Old Memories, New Moods* (New York,1970),p.124.

¹⁸ Myrdal, n.4,p.819.

confidence in their cause and the whites reacted with the venom of the ante-bellum period, sharply highlighting the contention of the black leadership that the mindset which had kept slavery going had not come to an end with the end of slavery.

(IV) ERA OF THE CIVIL RIGHTS

The most remarkable leader to emerge at this time, and the one who dominated the scene till his death in 1964 was Martin Luther King, Jr.. Through him the traditional leadership of the Church in the community became emphasized. But his actions showed how the psyche of the community had changed. The days of the cringing, acquiescing negro were gone. When the Church spoke for standing up for the rights of the African-Americans, it spoke for the community. In his traditional role, the Negro preacher again formed a link between the whites and his people but this time he spoke the language of the rebel. Inside his own mind, the slave had finally become emancipated. The philosophy of revolt had found enough converts to become the philosophy of the people. Dr. King understood this and seized the initiative.

He worked out new modalities to carry forward the struggle. He understood the fact that armed overthrow and total accommodation with the existing system, are both philosophies of extremes. He came up with the idea of integration of the races which combined certain features of both the above mentioned strategies. He was a believer in the doctrine and practice of non-violent resistance of Mahatma Gandhi. It involved suffering rather than inflicting sufferings upon others, to show up the cruelty of the oppressor. His convictions were matched by an uncommon and moving eloquence

which allowed him to impress Black and White alike. He first came to public notice through the Montgomery bus boycott in 1956. The boycott had been organized in support of a Black woman, Rosa Parkes, who had been disallowed to sit at the front of a segregated bus. He was successful in keeping his people united for an entire year when the Supreme Court ordered desegregation.¹⁹

Dr. King's efforts were assisted and complemented by a number of civil rights organizations. NAACP carried on with the legal battles for desegregation and had a mass support which could easily and swiftly be mobilized. Congress of Racial Equality (CORE) enlisted the support of White liberals. It was instrumental in providing militant workers who even laid down their lives for the cause. Dr. King himself founded the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) taken grass roots level support.

The methods employed by all the organizations were also fairly novel. Protesters held sit-ins at segregated public facilities and rode in desegregated buses as a challenge to official segregation. The leaders had realized that only a problem of crisis proportion would galvanize growing public sympathy into concrete action. Therefore, a crisis was exactly what they decided to give the nation. Their choices of locations for the bus rides and marches were deliberately the strong holds of prejudice and racism. From Montgomery, Alabama which was proud to be called "the cradle of

¹⁹ For selected speeches of Dr. King showing his philosophy, see, Coretta Scott King, *The Words of Martin Luther King, Jr.*, (New York, 1983), for discussion of his ideals and personality, see C. Eric Lincoln, ed., *Martin Luther King, Jr.: A Profile*, (New York, 1970) and Hanes Walton, *The Political Philosophy of Martin Luther King, Jr.*, (Connecticut, 1971).

confederacy" to Birmingham, Alabama the sites were certain to evoke violent white reaction. The leaders were not disappointed. Local mobs every where turned out to extend a ruthlessly bloody welcome to the protestors. Beatings, abuses and assault were the general fare handed out. In many places, local politicians, thinking of next elections and political expediency, only inflamed the situation further. The local police tossed all democratic norms to the wind and finished the jobs of terrorizing begun by the mobs.

In 1960, the Republican administration of Dwight D. Eisenhower gave way to the Democrats as John F. Kennedy moved into the White House. The President set up the Commission on Equal Employment opportunities, with Vice President, Lyndon B. Johnson as the Chairman. After he issued the order to prevent discrimination in the new federally supported housing, he appointed a Commission on Equal Opportunities in Housing. He also appointed African-Americans to important Federal positions. However, without legislative efforts the picture for African-Americans continued to be dark. The message went home to the community that winning over the President was important but not enough. In 1963 it seemed that finally a united march of African-Americans on Washington was an idea whose time had come. The protests till then had begun to yield some results. However, it would be impossible to desegregate each state county by county. The kind of time, effort, man power and money required for such a task could never be put together. It needed the help of an agency which could deal with all the states in a single stroke. The leaders, therefore, decided to delegate the job to the Federal Government. Meanwhile the problem of caste in South had its equivalent

in the poverty of the Northern ghettos. The blacks here had to deal with a segregation which was informal, insidious, yet nonetheless as real as in the South. The marchers called the African-Americans to rally in Washington under the slogan "For Jobs and Freedom". A quarter of million blacks gathered together along with 50 thousand whites to hear their leaders. It was the finest hour for the leadership of African-Americans as well as the community. They had succeeded in organizing the biggest peace time rally of independent America. Dr. King mesmerized the audiences with his words.

".....When we
 allow freedom to ring from every town and every hamlet, from every
 state and every city, we will be able to speed up that
 day when all of God's children, blackmen and white men, Jews and
 Gentiles, Protestants and Catholics will be able to join
 hands and sing the old negro spiritual,
 'Free at Last! Free at Last!
 Great God A-mighty,
 We are free at last.'²⁰

President Kennedy, at the end of the day, found himself impelled to act. He mobilized his administration for a Civil Rights legislation which should end discrimination in public life. As he left for the fatal campaign tour of the Deep South, he expressed the hope that the legislation would be a reality by the next year.

The entire civil rights campaign of the preceding decade had showed that the leadership of the community had come of age. Men like Baynard Rustin grasped the essentials of democratic mass mobilization effectively. The mobilization and harnessing of the Black vote in the 1960 election was a measure of their ability. They had also

²⁰ Coretta Scott King, *The Words of Martin Luther King, Jr.*, (New York, 1983)p.98.

realized the value of White support for the cause of Black equality. The leadership of various organizations displayed considerable maturity in coming together to act despite their varying agendas. It was Dr. King, however, who stood out as the tallest leader. He combined the piety and morality of the Church with a revolutionary fervour. While accepting the futility of violent action like Booker T. Washington, he combined it with the high moral ground of W.E.B. DuBois.

The momentum generated by the march resulted in the most important and far reaching victory of the civil rights movement in the form of The Civil Rights Act of 1964. It was the most comprehensive law in support of racial equality ever enacted by the Congress. Some of its major provisions forbade discrimination in most places of public accommodation and established a Federal Community Relations Service to help individuals and communities solve civil rights problems.

The action of the Congress, however, exploded a racist bomb which showed more clearly than anything else that the white forces opposing negro equality were still alive and strong. The African-American organizations found that their drives for voter registration were more vehemently opposed than their marches for desegregation. The Ku Klux Klan came back to take the leadership of the White backlash. Since laws could no longer be used to 'keep the Negro in his place', the majority had recourse to sheer violence. In July 1964, three civil rights workers disappeared after having been arrested for speeding in Mississippi. Several weeks later their bullet riddled bodies were discovered buried in an earthen dam. No convictions took place. Between June and October, some 24 African-American churches in Mississippi were totally or

partially destroyed by bombings and fire. It became a pattern.

The elections of 1964 made it clear that the existing legal protection of the Black voters was miserably inadequate. President Johnson, who had received their wide spread support called upon the Congress in a memorable speech for further action. The Congress responded swiftly by passing his proposals for a right-to-vote law. However, the African-Americans were made to realize repeatedly, how fierce was the prejudice to be overcome and strong and dynamic were their opponents. In Selma, Alabama, the sheriff used tear gas, whips and clubs against the demonstrators so brutally as to attract world wide attention. The fifty thousand strong demonstration from Selma to Montgomery in March 1965 led by Dr. Martin Luther King amply demonstrated that the problem of racism in America was far from being solved.²¹

To add to the violence in the South was the frustration of the blacks in the North. The Whites there had consistently though quietly refused to allow any intermixing of the two races. More and more, the African-Americans had come to be concentrated in the slums of "inner cities" of America as the Whites fled to the suburbs to escape the dreaded touch. Neither the civil rights campaign nor the Civil Rights Act of 1964 had done any thing to mitigate the situation for them. The squalor, the poverty, the disillusionment of the inner cities seemed to poison the lives of the children from the very beginning. Unlike the South, the law was not the culprit here.

²¹ For detailed descriptions, role of the various organisations and a narration of the most important events of the civil rights era, see, Harvard Sitkoff, *The Struggle for Black Equality*, (New York, 1994).

The Southern activists had concrete opponents to fight and subdue but the prejudice in the North was so subtle and all pervasive that it seemed to permeate the very air making it difficult to target specific opponents. The spectacle of the struggle in the South fanned the fires of discontent in the northern cities and left them writhing in the heat of the "long, hot summers" that followed. In mid July 1964 violence broke out in New York city over the killing of a Black teenage youth by an off-duty policeman. The unrest spread to the other parts of the city often accompanied by looting and rioting. Similar disturbances erupted in Rochester, New York, Paterson, Elizabeth and Jersey City, New Jersey, Philadelphia and Chicago. The worst were probably the riots in Watts, Los Angeles in 1965. All these riots which continued with unabated fury developed a pattern of wide spread violence. They had not been planned and their spread was spontaneous.

The cities, therefore, developed local leaderships which were generally far more militant than the moralistic leadership of the South till then. With the law having been changed the civil rights movement faced the far greater task of combating prejudice at the local and individual level. It was now called upon to develop strategies for political and economic uplift of the community to give meaning to their citizenship rights. Without a clear and concrete symbol of injustice to fight, by the early 1970s the movement had fragmented into several organizations each trying out its own strategy of development and working the newly found political liberty. What ended with the end of the 1960s was that pattern of race relations where accommodation had been the predominant reaction of the black community. The protest movements had gained a new

legitimacy and sharpened the reactions of the community to perceptions of white prejudice. This changed psyche of the blacks added a new dimension to the problem of race.

With the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King in 1968 the movement lost the unity of leadership and the unifying symbol provided by him.²² The next two decades were a time of relatively quiet experimentation by racial leaders to improve the socio-economic conditions of their people. They tried to work the new Black assertiveness and the new White liberalism into programmes for development. Two of the most important such experiments were made by Jesse Jackson and Louis Farrakhan which would be taken up in later chapters.

²² Most of the material on the civil rights struggle has been taken from David G. Garrow, *Bearing The Cross* (New York, 1986), Robert Weisbrot, *Freedom Bound: A History of America's Civil Rights Movement*, (New York, 1990), Ralph David Abernathy, *And The Walls Came Tumbling Down* (New York, 1989) Hugh David Graham, *The Civil Rights Era: Origins And Development of National Policy 1960-1972*, (New York, 1990), Mary King, *Freedom Song*, (New York, 1987) Charles W. Eagles, ed., *The Civil Rights Movement in America*, (Jackson, 1986) C. Eric Lincoln, ed., *Martin Luther King, Jr.: A Profile*, (New York, 1970)

Chapter II

THE SEARCH FOR AN IDENTITY

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THE SEARCH FOR AN IDENTITY

(I) RACISM AND COUNTER RACISM

Despite their fight against political and legal injustice, the African-Americans have waged a battle to define, both, to themselves and to the larger society, their identity in America. This battle is neither separate nor independent from the battle for economic and social justice but interacts with them. The most stupendous and forceful manifestation of their assertion appeared during the 1960s in the form of 'Black Nationalism'. But, its roots go as deep as the history of the United States. It has been basically split into two parts: the first denies the possibility of the whites and the blacks ever living together in peace and harmony and conceives of an 'African identity and an African future' for the community; the second, takes cognizance of the differences between Africans and the African-Americans and seeks the respectable home and future within the United States. The efforts of the latter are seen in strategies of accommodation and integration which have been discussed in Chapter I.

The former tendency has expressed itself over the years variously as 'emigrationism', or 'colonization' as the leaders despaired of the whites ever allowing the blacks an equal position in society. Both of them existed together but were always in competition for the attentions of the community. In this chapter, we shall discuss the second tendency of Black Nationalism. The earliest versions of 'emigrationism' belong

to the whites themselves. Eminent opponents of slavery like Jefferson and Lincoln even were not optimistic about the co-habitation of the country in peace by both blacks and whites. In his autobiography Jefferson wrote in 1821:

Nothing is more certainly written in the book of fate, than that these people (Negro slaves) are to be free; nor is it less certain that the two races, equally free, cannot live in the same government.¹

His sentiments were echoed by Lincoln later in April 1865 after he made the States a country of hope for the blacks. In a letter to Gen. Benjamin F. Butler, United he wrote: "But what shall we do with the Negroes after they are free ? I can hardly believe that the South and North can live in peace unless we get rid of the Negroes." He still advised: "I believe that it would be better to export them all to some fertile country with a good climate, which they could have to themselves."²

This solution of the problem was seen as the panacea to the racial issue not only by these statesmen but by other whites and blacks who sincerely made efforts to transport the blacks to some African homeland. These formed the basis of the various Back-to-Africa movements which are flourished since the American Society for Colonizing the Free People of Color in the United States was founded in 1816. None of the efforts, however, had much success. Liberia and Sierra Leone were publicized widely as the African 'homeland' where the blacks could gain a positive identity and a life of fulfillment. But by the time the civil war came on, not more than ten to fifteen

¹ Cited in Theodore Draper, *The Rediscovery of Black Nationalism* (New York, 1970), p.5.

² Cited in W.E.B. DuBois, *Black Reconstruction in America* (New York, 1935), p.149.

thousand blacks had migrated to these countries.

Other efforts at 'colonization' took the form of separate organized black communities within the United States, oftentimes aided by White philanthropist efforts. The most celebrated amongst these was the colony of Nashoba in Tennessee by Frances Wright but even that lasted only for four years from 1826 to 1830, when despairing of her efforts, she sent her slaves to Haiti. Other black organized communities in the United States and Canada were more carefully planned but the results remained the same. It seemed impossible to provide this synthetic and artificial solution to the problem outside of United States. The last and the most spectacular such effort, however, came at the end of World War I in the form of the movement of Marcus Garvey.

It is to Marcus Garvey that the credit must go for starting the first real mass movement of African-Americans in America. The end of World War I had left the African-American community seething with discontent. Their material condition was deplorable and the continuing white prejudice in matters of housing and employment only made matters worse. During the war the black soldiers had generally been relegated to the labour camps or as servants. They met discrimination every where and derogatory rumours about their behaviour were spread. On the one hand, the vision of the larger world which the African-American soldiers saw abroad served to make them more conscious of their rights, on the other hand, the returning soldiers met with white suspicion and hostility as rewards for services rendered. In the North, their new foot holds in industry were contested by anxious job seekers in the post-war depression. A

wave of lynchings swept the South, and even more bloody race riots erupted in the North.

Garvey knew how to capitalize on these embers of discontent to turn them into a fire of protest. His unique manner of combining practical ideas with dramatic visions as he stirred his audiences with rhetorical heroics, made him an astonishingly effective speaker. He renounced all hopes of understanding from white Americans. The only solution, according to him, was for the African-Americans to assert themselves against the whites and any other race which may choose to look down upon them,

"In view of the fact that the black man of Africa has contributed as much has to the world as the white man of Europe, and the brown man and the yellow man of Asia, we of the Universal Negro Improvement Association demand that the white, yellow and brown races give to the black man his place in the civilisation of the world."³

His basic appeal lay in the pride and self respect which he could arouse in the continually derided African-American:

...Wheresoever the cause of humanity stands in need of assistance, there you will find the Negro ever ready to serve. He has done it from the time of Christ up to now. When the whole world turned its back upon the Christ, the man who was said to be the Son of God; when the world cried out 'crucify him', when the world spurned Him and spat upon Him, it was a black man, Simon, XtheCyrenian, who took up the cross. Why ? Because the cause of humanity appealed to him."⁴

He defined the content of the black man's character in an entirely new way; making him superior to all others. With his rhetoric, Garvey combined a practical

³ Speech at Liberty Hall, New York city, November 25, 1922 as cited in L. Smith and Stephen Robb, ed., *The Voice of Black Rhetoric: Selections* (Boston, 1971), p. 104.

⁴ *ibid*, p. 108

programme of self help. He opened co-operative enterprises of various kinds. His biggest and most stupendous venture, however, was Black Star Line which was meant to provide shipping services to the African-Americans for returning to their home land

Africa. This was the idea popularized by Garvey in a dazzling fashion. He gave in Africa a grand history and instilled a new pride of ancestry amongst even the downtrodden lower class African-Americans. He took up negotiations with the League of Nations and the Republic of Liberia so that the African-Americans could return to Africa and live with dignity under their own governments and gain the respect of other nations.

The movement reached its peak in 1920-21 and was strong in many parts of the country. Eventually, however, the movement collapsed. His businesses turned sour or involved him in legal tangles. The propaganda against him began to be effective as his practical remedies failed to solve the economic problems of his people. Finally, he was convicted for financial frauds and deported.

Although, Garvey's movement was not the first to attempt a radically different delineation of the African-American history and culture, it was the first on a national scale. It evolved certain methods and strategies which were later effectively used by others. His idea of economic self-sufficiency was successfully tried by the Nation of Islam which accounted to a large extent for the stability and survival of that organization. According to Prof. Gunnar Myrdal, Garvey's movement also highlighted some important facts: first, the African-American masses, though generally meek and passive, could be effectively mobilized through powerful rhetoric and appeals to self

respect or even racial chauvinism. Secondly, that any leader who antagonized white America greatly would at best be confined to a narrow circle and, at worst, be toppled altogether. What the movement underlined most effectively was the disaffection in the African-American community with their present material and emotional morass and their disillusionment with the American system. Any efforts for radical change, properly organized, could get their support.⁵ Most importantly, the movement legitimized a kind of counter-racism where black was exalted to unprecedented heights in comparison with white. Garvey extolled everything black. Black stood for strength and beauty, not for inferiority. He even declared God and Christ black to spare the African-Americans the humiliation of worshipping the images of white man. He[©] preached the purity of the race and condemned amalgamation. This strain of racial pride, expressed as clash of white and black resulting in the superiority of the black, became firmly embedded in the radical protest thought of black America and permeates black psyche to a significant extent even today.

The mass appeal of Marcus Garvey in America, and his failure to arouse Pan-Africanism outside, showed that his rhetoric reflected real hopes and resentments of the black people in America. The fact that it did not receive the same response elsewhere in the African community was proof of the fact that African-Americans in America could not become Africans. It was negative in character and its positive solution of going back to Africa was only a psychological relief to uprooted people

⁵ Gunnar Myrdal, *An American Dilemma*, (New York, 1972), vol.2, pp.746-750.

who were made to feel like aliens in the land of their birth. This very psychological nature of the solution became the undoing of Garvey's movement. Since its action was limited to the minds of men, where its impact is still continuing, there was nothing concrete for an organization to do. Having injected a strong dose of counter racism into the Black protest movement, Marcus Garvey disappeared from the scene.⁶ It was a long while, however, before the idea of an African identity was given up by the black leaders.

The disillusionment with the American home land and a desire for new identity were also expressed by a more profound, though less dazzling opponent of Garvey, W.E.B. DuBois. DuBois joined together the two strains that had been struggling for supremacy amongst the blacks. They were, he maintained, neither Americans nor Africans but some thing of both. Thus he opened himself to attack from both the sides. Torn between both of these he developed the idea of a "double consciousness"⁷ about his identity. It led him ultimately to the espousal of a Pan-African movement in which he called upon American blacks to play a leading role. He was instrumental in organizing Pan-African Congresses, of which four were held between 1919 and 1927 and a fifth and last in 1945. By the time he published his autobiography *Dusk of Dawn* in 1940, he had become convinced that the fate of

⁶ For a discussion of Marcus Garvey's movement, see Theodore Draper, *The Rediscovery of Black Nationalism* (New York, 1970), pp.50-56, John Hope Franklin, *From Slavery to Freedom* (New Delhi, 1967), pp.489-493 and Edward Peeks, *The Long Struggle for Black Power* (New York, 1971), pp.180-200.

⁷ Draper, n. 1, p.48.

African-Americans was closely tied with the course of white racism in United States. They could not live together in close contact. He, therefore, advised them not to fight separation and segregation within the country but to use it intelligently to their advantage for mitigating poverty and economic deprivation. He also advised them to be prepared for being pushed out of their "American fatherland".⁸ But DuBois also faced the same problem as Garvey in converting African-Americans to his cause of Pan-Africanism. No one was prepared for emigration or even a serious linkage of the interests of the African-Americans in United States and Africans on the African continent. As an imaginary balm to the psychological wounds of racism, the African-Americans were prepared to accept an African identity or even nationalism but for concrete action their eyes turned inwards to the United States.

An important out come of this turning inwards has been the propagation of the idea of a separate American homeland for the black people of United States. It recognized the fact that African- Americans might have come from Africa but for all practical purposes they were Americans. Yet the fact of white racism denied a life of equality, dignity and respect to the coloured community. The only via media was, as they saw it, to counter rejection by rejection, racism by racism. Instead of looking for accommodation, they believed that the blacks should themselves uphold segregation and minimize contacts with the white society. All the bitter resentment against the prejudices of the white community found vent in an opposite swing of the pendulum

⁸ *ibid.*, p.50.

where those who preach black separatism actually present the whites as inferior and evil.

The most remarkable and lasting expression of this form of black "nationalism" was to be found in the organization called the Nation of Islam. It was believed to have been inspired by a Back-to-Islam movement of the "Moorish-American Science Temple" set up in 1913 or thereabouts by a man called Drew Ali. With little formal education, Drew Ali decided on the idea that American blacks could achieve salvation simply by making themselves into "Asiatics" or, more specifically, into Moors or Moorish-Americans whose ancestors had come from Morocco. He composed a 64 page Holy Koran-very different from the original-which his devotees were enjoined to guard as a secret. Thus, Drew Ali provided American blacks with a new national origin that made them part of a far-flung Moorish nation that had some how made its way to North America. The key to Drew Ali's success was the clear recognition of the fact that any relief to be provided to the African-Americans by the idea of emigrationism, had to be purely psychological. Unlike Garvey, he did not tell them to leave United States. It was enough for them to identify with an Islamic African nation and to adopt its religion, if only in name. Thereafter, they simply had to wait for the inevitable destruction of the white rule when God would redeem his chosen people.⁹

His ideas, however, were developed with greater dazzle and detail by a man called W.D.Fard who appeared mysteriously in Detroit in 1930. His influence spread

⁹ *ibid.*, pp.69-73.

slowly and he came to be regarded as a prophet in his own right. He spoke in mysterious metaphors-of the Black Nation as his "Uncle" and its white oppressor as the "Cave Man", "Satan" and the "Blue-eyed Devils". He also weaned his followers away from the Bible to the Koran and his teachings became violently anti-white over a period of time. His esoteric doctrine was set forth in a written text, *Teaching for the Lost Found Nation of Islam in a Mathematical Way*, and an orally transmitted text in two parts, *Secret Ritual of the Nation of Islam*. W.D.Fard gave an entirely different mythology to his followers. He carved out an identity for them which was neither African nor American but Arabian. They were portrayed as the chosen people who had been delivered into slavery 379 years back and who would be delivered out of it by divine grace. This mythology shifted the whole issue away from a nationality based on birth or one based on race, and gave the people relief from constantly swinging between the two. With the introduction of religion the entire focus seems to have shifted to a higher plane so that his followers could endure their difficult circumstances with a courage born out of a sense of moral superiority.

Politically, Fard's doctrine was clearly nationalistic. His message was addressed to a nation-the "Nation of Islam". Those who belong to it were not Americans and were to have as little to do with American institutions as possible. A group of Muslims broke away from him on this issue of refusing to deny their American nationality. It made clear that the Black Muslims were not unmindful of the effect of this nationalism upon their status as Americans. Therefore, those who accepted the doctrine did so fully conscious of its implications.

In late 1933 or 1934 Fard disappeared as mysteriously as he had come and his followers split into two camps. The more influential group "The Temple People" were now led by a man called Elijah Muhammad.¹⁰ He provided for the stability of his sect by giving them a further elaboration of the fantastic mythology which allowed them to glory in the colour of their skin rather than be ashamed of it. He called the dark skinned Americans as the original, good people, the chosen of Allah. The white man had been created by Yakub, the Nation's devil. Within the larger Black Nation, the so called Negroes brought to America make up the Nation of Islam and have been appointed to lead the way towards the destruction of the present dominant white civilization. Master Fard and then His Prophet, Elijah Muhammad, were sent to find these people and to bring them back to the Black Nation from which they had come. The time of slavery was to end in 1955 when Allah was to reclaim his lost children. He would then lead them to a paradise to be found not in the sky but here on earth.

This mythology served the same purpose as that of W.D.Fard: to take the question of African-American identity out of the mundane political realms and into the supposedly higher realms of religion. The people could afford to wait out their present misery since salvation was the concern of the Lord who had already decided upon a time span. As a result, in spite of the virulent anti-white rhetoric of the Nation of Islam and the portrayal of the whites as the "blue-eyed devils", this doctrine could be used to reduce rather than exacerbate black-white confrontations.

¹⁰ A recent study to have dealt with Elijah Muhammad in detail is Claude Andrew Clagg 3d, *An Original Man: The Life and Times of Elijah Muhammad* (New York, 1997).

In practice, Elijah Muhammad showed himself to be a more down-to-earth politician. He did not encourage any violation of the American law or the Constitution. Though Muhammad was always adamant on the separation of blacks and whites, he did not seek any direct confrontation with the state. This separation could take a psychological, a religious, and an economic form even if it could not express itself in the ultimate guise of a national territory.

The Nation of Islam found its greatest success with the poorest and the least educated blacks as also prisoners and criminals. It seemed to have succeeded in giving them a new dignity, self-discipline, and social responsibility. Despite the element of fantasy in the Nation of Islam, it provided a new day-by-day reality for the blacks at the bottom rung of the ladder. Through its war against drunkenness, delinquency, drug addiction, prostitution, idleness, ignorance, and self-denigration it had given them a new vision of themselves though the more educated find it difficult to pay the initial price of belief in the Nation's mythology.

(II) AFRICAN Vs. AFRICAN-AMERICAN

In the quest of the African-Americans for an identity and a homeland, the Nation of Islam represented the mile stone where the African-Americans finally stopped looking back to Africa in terms of concrete physical emigration. It was an acceptance of the fact that no emigrationism should go beyond the imagination and the psyche. It was also a step towards finding practical solutions to the American reality by the protestors rather than the accomodationists once the question of identity had

been dealt with. Booker T. Washington had charted out mostly the same course of economic self reliance as the Nation of Islam but he had not been able to instill any self respect or confidence in his people. The nation combined both the efforts of African-American leadership: to create a positive image of the community in their own minds and then to make use of it to redress material grievances. However, the element of fantasy and the inability of the leaders to provide a definite homeland proved to be its main drawbacks so that its influence remained limited.

The problem of a clearly demarcated territory as the 'homeland' had haunted all the African-American leadership except those who chose to look upon their community as oppressed Americans in America. Since America did not seem to accept the African-Americans as her people and physical emigration *en mass* was impossible, where was this 'home land' to be found. And how could the identity of a community be determined without having their roots clearly in one place or another. One of the greatest exponents of 'Black Nationalism' in the 1960s, Malcolm X¹¹, confronted the problem and was totally confounded. He identified the African-Americans, at first

¹¹ Malcolm X was one of the most remarkable and extraordinary of the black protest leaders. Malcolm Little, as he was earlier, was converted to the Muslim faith of the Nation of Islam while serving a jail sentence. After his release he became an active and trusted member of the inner most coterie around Elijah Muhammad and in time came to rival him in popular adulation. However, always a thinking man, Malcolm became increasingly distant from the separatist and racist rhetoric of the Nation till he finally broke away to set up his own Muslim Mosque, Inc. and, later, the Organization of Afro-American Unity. The best source of his philosophy is *Autobiography of Malcolm X*, with Alex Haley (New York, 1965). Also see Peter Goldman, *The Death and Life of Malcolm X* (New York, 1973) and George Breitman, *The Last Year of Malcolm X* (New York, 1967).

completely as Africans. "You are nothing but Africans. Nothing but Africans", he said.¹² In this phase of his philosophy he called upon the United States to execute her responsibility to send all her black people to their "own home land" in Africa or failing which they should be given territory here in the Western Hemisphere, "where the two races can live apart from each other."¹³ Yet later on he recognized that any emigrationism with Africa could only be philosophical,

...if we migrated back to Africa culturally, philosophically and psychologically, while remaining here physically, the spiritual bond that will develop between us and Africa through this cultural, philosophical migration, so called migration, would enhance our position here, because we would have our contacts with them acting as roots or foundations behind us.¹⁴

Later still he further recognized the problems in calling all the whites as racists or looking upon the blacks as constituting a 'Nation'. Towards the end of his life Malcolm X accepted that a black 'state' in United States was not possible and he even gave up referring to black nationalism. Malcolm X wrote in his autobiography: "My whole life had been a chronology of- *changes*."¹⁵ In this life of changes he epitomized the mind boggling plethora of claims and tendencies which an African-American leader is called upon to balance. Their confusion about their identity seemed to affect the community also. Within his own community and even within Harlem, almost his personal fiefdom,

¹² George Brietman, ed., *Malcolm X Speaks* (New York, 1965), p.36.

¹³ *ibid.*, p.57.

¹⁴ *ibid.*, pp.62-63.

¹⁵ Malcolm X, n.11, p.339.

he was beginning to face challenges towards the end of his life as he was perceived to be becoming more and more pro-white, and by implication of the convoluted logic of American race relations, anti-black. Malcolm X was shot dead in 1965.

But black nationalism was rooted in such a deep and continuous identity crisis of the community that it could not die out with Malcolm X. The most visible group of people towards the end of the 1960s who sought to define the place of the black people in U.S. were the Black Panthers. Their philosophy epitomized the influence of socialism on the black movement which had become visible in the time of Malcolm X himself. Malcolm X had preached the need of a revolution in America 'by any means necessary'¹⁶ to ensure equality, dignity and liberty for the African-American people. However, true to the turmoil filled changes in his life, he ~~extended~~ the scope of the revolution later on to include the oppressed whites in the category of its beneficiaries too. He declared himself to be against 'white racists' but not against whites per se. his only condition, which remained till the end was that the problem of African-Americans needed to be looked into first. The Black Panthers solved the problem of identity by reverting to the idea of a Black Nation but they were sensitized enough to the movement for civil rights to know that Back-to-Africa was only culturally possible. They also faced the problem of defining the concrete territory of the Black Nation. They came up with a solution which had been hazily toyed with by some other black intellectuals too, i.e. to describe the black ghettos of America as the territory of the

¹⁶ Quoted in Robert Weisbrot, *Freedom Bound: A History of America's Civil Rights Movement* (New York, 1990), p. 176.

Black Nation.

This, however, could hardly be a tenable concept since it was riddled with practical and theoretical problems. How could a national territory be so vastly fragmented and then what about the sovereignty of the nation ? Where was its government to be found ? It was nothing but a desperate attempt to scale down the aspirations of the people to fit the practical realities. To overcome any criticism they fell back upon the language of abuse which was fast becoming their hallmark. However, they became popular because to this idea of a Black nation existing within the United States they added the civic virtues of a far more organized, disciplined and efficient way of life so that the community could be proud of itself. But they were also careful not to preach habitual violation of American laws. Their vehemence, socialism and violence, however, ultimately put them on the F.B.I.'s agenda and by the beginning of 1970s the Black Panthers had been wiped out as a movement.¹⁷

Both Malcolm X and Black Panthers carried forward the task of creating a new and respectable identity for their community. But Malcolm X was far more involved in the process of history and myth-making than the Black Panthers. It was his objective to create a credible but positive image which should negate and destroy the inferiority complex bred so systematically into his people. He used his superb oratory for putting the white community on the defensive not only in the U.S., but internationally. By internationalizing the problem, he also sought to convert a helpless

¹⁷ Most of the ideas on the Black Panthers have been taken from Draper, n. 1, pp. 97-117, and for their activities, see Gene Marine, *The Black Panthers* (New York, 1969).

minority into an important part of the coloured majority of the world. Though never really a rabble rouser, his legacy probably was to legitimize violence in the cause of justice. The Black Panthers, a far more openly militant group, gained their legitimacy from his spade work. To the psychological counter racism created most importantly from the time of Marcus Garvey, there now developed a physical dimension. Some contemporary studies of the 'Long Hot Summers' of the 1960s recorded how a majority of the black people interviewed, accepted the violence as a legitimate means of ending inequality. While the civil rights groups were fighting for integration, for 'colour-blindness', the black American, in effect, was becoming more and more colour-conscious. Issues came to be viewed in strict black and white terms not only by the whites but also by the blacks. This did not augur well for the future of race relations because the divide between races was now too broad and neither side wished to close it.

(III) BLACK POWER

Remaining willingly and deliberately separate, the African-American community, in fact, went a step further. It raised the cry of 'Black Power' to fulfill the dreams of the community. No discussion of the African-American's reinventing himself in the post-bellum period can be complete without discussing the concept of Black Power. It came as an anguished cry during the James Meredith march in 1966 from Stokely Carmichael, the chairman of SNCC. He later collaborated with the historian Charles V. Hamilton to write a book of the same name. But the concept remained

elusive and difficult to define. Carmichael and Hamilton wrote that the black people inside the United States formed "a colony" on whom colonialism had been practiced. They redefined colonialism to mean "institutional racism". This makes clear what their cry was against: racism, that *bete noir* of African-American life which refused to die down. But the solutions it offered were nothing very radical. They did not advocate revolution or any aspirations for 'nationalism' of any kind. But it did not make clear what exactly was Black Power. It was defined simply as 'the creation of power bases from which black people can work to change statewide or nationwide patterns of oppression through pressure from strength-instead of weakness.'¹⁸ Their aim in chalking out a programme was to obtain "black self-determination and black self identity". This was perhaps the best description of what the community at large understood from the term Black Power. But the expression of this "Black Identity" took different forms with different groups encompassing every thing from African clothes and hairdos, to Black Power salutes, ghetto violence and defiance of established authority to creative co-operative efforts aimed at empowerment of the poorest of the poor. Black Power was also generally taken to be against integration though Carmichael denied any racist or separatist nuances of the term. Ultimately Black Power was more successful as a slogan than as a philosophy. Its success as a slogan lay in the fact that it "conjures up the historical conflict between blacks and whites at home and abroad. It suggests Negro dominance and retaliation against whites for centuries of

¹⁸ Quoted in Draper, n.1,p.120.

oppression... it induces plain old human pipe-dreaming occasioned by frustration, maglomania or the relief that comes from transporting one's feelings aloft on the jet of the imagination."¹⁹ Thus, to the inferiority complex which the white society had always tried to breed into the blacks, was now added the image of a weak, helpless man and Black Power was a slogan of rebellion against this image. But as a philosophy, it went back to the self-help programme of Booker T. Washington and showed how the new and the old continued to mix together in the image formation of the community.

It would be pertinent to take note of one more, a rather different, expression of the blacks reaction to racism, before we move on to the current status of the debate, i.e. the Black Studies movement. The blacks, in their anger at being shunned by the white majority have tried to look upon themselves as a separate people, a nation within a nation. Yet, Theodore Draper feels, without a territory and sovereignty of its own, black nationalism had only remained a "quasi-nationalism". As such it had been looking for "a surrogate sovereignty, a substitute for a nation", and this was the reason why blacks demanded separate, autonomous "Black or Afro-American studies" in colleges and universities. The first school to introduce a Black Studies Programme was San Francisco State College in 1966. By 1968 even a major university like Yale had offered a course in Black Studies.²⁰

¹⁹ Peeks, n.6, p.7.

²⁰ Draper, n.1, p.158.

However, the question of the contents and the purpose of Black Studies was full of an acrimonious debate resulting even in sporadic violence in several campuses. From the words of some of the first blacks to associate with the programme it was clear that the programme had been "conceived in frustration and bitterness by an articulate and highly emotional minority".²¹ Tom Jones, one of the earliest participants in the movement for Black Studies, described what had inspired him and his followers in 1969, in these words, "The purpose of our Black Studies Programme was number one, to give us that psychological freedom of self-definition, to define what we are now, what we have been as a people, and what we will be as a people and as a nation in the future. The second purpose of the Black Studies Programme was to teach us the political methods, the political ideology to lead to the kind of political freedom and economic self-determination that we have to have."²²

This obviously was a very political and action oriented programme but it held sway for several years dominating the debate about the purpose of Black Studies. However, such an approach was anti-intellectual and quite at variance with any tenets of cognitive knowledge. The advocates of this point of view were primarily interested in changing the all white perspective of the world, as it had been taught in educational institutions till then, to an entirely black perspective regardless of its academic merits. However, from the time of its inception itself, and more and more so as the years

²¹ Saunders Redding, "The Black Revolution in American Studies", in Robert H. Walker, ed., *American Studies: Topics and Resources* (Connecticut, 1976), p. 146.

²² Quoted in Draper, n.1, p. 155.

passed, the perspective came to be challenged by eminent black scholars like Kenneth B. Clark. They protested against the overriding emotional component and the mystique of "Negritude" propounded by these programmes. Slowly the Black Studies Programme has come to acquire a far more academic orientation. However, for our purposes, it is the emotional content which is also very important because far more clearly than any other programme, it highlighted (a)-counter racism and its spread amongst disillusioned black youngsters, (b)-the recurrent return of black nationalist to Africa for a positive image of the community, (c)-the continuing perception of racist oppression giving rise to angry and violent frustration, and (d)-the small but influential minority of the intellectuals who were willing to demand justice on the terms of the American society itself and not through any appeal to Africa or its mystique in the minds of African-Americans.

If there is one thing which this whole narrative brings out very clearly, it is the fact that racism has been a major experience of African-Americans in America. It pervaded their psyche to an immeasurably significant extent. There can be no doubt that black racism was an answer to perceived white racism over the centuries. As Malcolm X has exclaimed, "I cannot speak French to Germans".²³ Even after the end of slavery, the stereo types of Negroes as "inferior" and "beastly" did not die out in the white community. Since they could no longer associate with the blacks as accepted superiors, they chose not to interact with them at all. While the South incorporated its

²³ Goldman, n.12, p.63.

hatred in its laws, the North fled at the touch of the blacks, abandoning the inner cities to become ghettos. All the leaders from Marcus Garvey to Black Panthers recognized this fact and reacted to it. The continuity and wide spread acceptance of the movements of protests and 'emigrationism' are testimony to the continuation of this prejudice.

(IV) BLACK Vs. WHITE

However, once the legal and judicial barriers between the races had been brought down, the interaction between the races became still more entangled and difficult to characterize or quantify. Two and half decades later , the argument had become heated on whether racial prejudice was still causing discrimination in any significant way or not. The focus of the debate had shifted to the question of 'Affirmative Action'. There were those who would still separate the blacks as a special case with special and historical grievances to be redressed and would, therefore, give them special consideration. However, they were opposed by a growing number of people who denied that the blacks as a community should be given any preference. They would rather treat the poorer blacks as part of the American 'underclass' and treat them as such while denying any special consideration to those who have managed to escape this economic category. The issue of affirmative action would bear slightly detailed discussion at this stage.

Back in the stormy days of 1960s, affirmative action was brought forward as the proverbial oil to calm the troubled waters of race relations. It originated in the Executive Order No.11246 issued by President Lyndon Johnson. The intent of the

Executive Order may be best expressed in the words of the President himself: "You do not take a person who, for years, has been hobbled by chains, liberate him, bring him up to the starting line of a race and then say, 'You are free to compete with all the others' and still justly believe you have been completely fair."²⁴ Therefore, merely the act of dismantling the blatantly discriminatory laws could not have been sufficient to ensure equality. What was needed was some thing positive, or something 'affirmative' to bring the African-American community at par with the others. Affirmative action programmes were designed to fit this need. They included a plethora of Federal, State and local initiatives and regulations to prepare the blacks for successful competition in a society where "fair and non-discriminatory" competition was to be guaranteed. The Great Society envisioned by Johnson stressed education, training, and the strengthening of black institutions. The basic idea was to improve the quality of life of the blacks so when opportunity did come their way, they were as well prepared to take advantage of it as the whites. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) was entrusted with the job of implementing this vision.

Despite clear objectives, the programme was difficult to implement. It basically broke itself down into two components: the 'outreach' programmes which gave special training and skill-building support to the African-Americans, and, what many suspect to be an undeclared quota system where corporations, businesses and government offices were required to translate the goal of 'diversity' into visible numbers of

²⁴ Quoted in Hugh Graham Davis, *The Civil Rights Era: Origins and Development of National Policy* (New York, 1990), p. 74.

minority employees.

Nathan Wright, Jr., the chairman of the National Black Power Conference in 1967, spelt out the black objections to the first part of the programme: "It is a commonplace that Negroes of great potential are excluded from middle-management and other higher level positions simply on the basis of color... The basic emphasis by industry and government upon new means of overcoming lack of training among the Negro community has come increasingly to be seen as a perhaps unconscious dodge to delay giving immediate and significant opportunities to *Negroes who are already more than prepared* for jobs for which they would apply."²⁵

It was a complaint which is still the major grievance of the African-American community as also its white supporters. Deval Patrick, the head of the Justice Department's Civil Rights Division in 1994 reported, that in that year, the EEOC had received 91,000 complaints of job discrimination and a study by Glass Ceiling Commission indicated that white men still have the vast majority of upper level jobs.²⁶

This had led all civil rights groups to demand greater reliance upon the second part of the programme, i.e. visible and quantifiable increase in the employment of African-Americans. This, however, was exactly the point where the issue became really contentious. The white majority felt enraged by any kind of quota system which

²⁵ Nathan Wright, Jr., *Black Power and Urban Unrest* (New York, 1967), p.92. Emphasis in the original.

²⁶ Cited in Jeffrey Rosen, "Is Affirmative Action Doomed", *The New Republic*, no.211 (17 October 1994), p.27.

should judge the minorities by lower standards simply to increase the level of employment amongst them. It went, they argued, against the very corner stone of the American system which prided itself on strict promotion and reward of merit. They had, therefore, expressed their opposition to racial preference in recent years in opinion poll after opinion poll. The margins of those in opposition to those in support have generally been 3 to 1.²⁷ However, a majority is not against, what may be termed, soft affirmative action, entailing special training and outreach efforts. They also seem to be willing to accept some short term compensatory measures to rectify obvious cases of proven discrimination. But what they absolutely refused to accept were programmes which were perceived to be aggressive, numbers-driven preference schemes like those in university admissions and civil service hiring.

It had been clear to the leaders from the start that any kind of quota or reservation system would not be acceptable to the majority of Americans. Supporters of the civil rights bill of 1965 led by Hubert Humphrey had been careful to promise specifically that the law's purpose was to rectify cases of intentional discrimination and that it was not intended to impose sanctions simply because a workplace contained few blacks or because few blacks passed an employment test.

In practice, however, it became more and more difficult to find any other way of demonstrating the efficacy of the government programmes except to go in for unofficial quotas. To further complicate matters, most of the affirmative action

²⁷ Arch Puddington, "What To Do About Affirmative Action", *Commentary*, no.99 (June 1995),p.22.

programmes were based upon executive action and not legislative decrees so that the details were hardly ever debated or made public. This left a lot of room for subjective and personal analyses where both sides could quote 'facts' in their own support.

What did seem clear, however, was that standards in many areas of public life viz. education, government contracts and civil services had been changed to accommodate the minorities. A 1995 study by Rutgers Professor Alfred Blumrosen found that five million minority workers and six million women have better jobs today than they would have had with out preferences and anti-discriminatory laws.²⁸ This had been done, according to the supporters, to promote 'diversity' so that the ethnic minorities might not be forced to fit the strait jacket of Anglo-saxon standards designed to put them ahead of the rest. They contended that the African-Americans were being judged not by 'lower' but by 'different' standards which recognized their own special qualities and attainments. But their detractors remained unconvinced. To a majority of whites, specially male, population, this was simply 'discrimination in reverse' where they were being made to pay for their colour or race. According to this view, just as racism had created its legal edifice in the form of Jim Crow laws so were the affirmative action programmes the legal embodiment of a counter-racism which had its own white supporters and stooges.

These feelings were not new but what was new was their intensity and extent. The elite consensus which had overridden the conservative opposition to affirmative

²⁸ Cited in Catherine Yang, "The Education of DevaPatrick", *Business Week* (12 December 1994), p.93.

action in 1960s was breaking down. When recently, the Supreme Court, in *Adarand Construction v. Peña* struck down a programme which had earmarked highway contracts for minorities, the civil rights leaders were angry. Rev. Jesse Jackson called it a "major setback" but the reaction of the civil rights allies - the administration, the press and liberal intellectuals - was muted.

The courts since Bakke in 1978 had been important allies of the affirmative action programmes. In recent years, however, the courts had grown reluctant to use "race-conscious remedies" not only in workplace but also in educational institutions and for voting rights. Gerrymandering to promote more minority representatives in legislature had been struck down. Critics also charged that the defence of affirmative action came from the few, privileged sections of the minority who had improved their positions substantially due to the programme. But the advantages had not filtered down to the ordinary blacks. The programmes, therefore, were simply undemocratic instruments of elite aggrandizement.

Even within the African-American community doubt existed about the efficacy of the programmes. 46 percent of the respondents in a recent poll showed themselves to be against affirmative action in employment or college admissions while 50 percent supported them.²⁹ In another survey, 41 percent identified black families themselves as the most capable and suitable agency for improving the lot of the community. Only 14 percent recognized the government to be such an agency.³⁰ However, most

²⁹ See Howard Fineman, "Race and Rage", *Newsweek* (3 April 1995), pp.26-28.

³⁰ Howard Fineman, "Grappling With Race", *News Week* (23 October, 1995), pp.20-23.

African-Americans, at the same time, were highly sensitive to the perceptions of white assaults on civil rights and consequently backed their leaders unitedly in defending affirmative action.

This highlights first of all, their perceptions of a still rampant racism and secondly, the need for solidarity and a 'black' identity in the face of such racism. But despite the long struggle for a positive identity formation and the various forms which it took, both black leaders and their people still seemed confused and their reactions were largely responses to white moods and ideas rather than separate from or independent of them.

Chapter III

PERSPECTIVE OF JESSE JACKSON

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(I) CIVIL RIGHTS ACTIVIST

The views of one of the major spokespersons for the African-American community for the past two decades, i.e. of Jesse Louis Jackson are notable features of the minority problem. Jesse Jackson has been an important civil rights activist and leader during the present time. He has had, both, staunch supporters, who swear by him at all costs, and equally strong detractors who denounce him as a fraud, as being nothing more than a refined con artist. Not only this but the colour of his skin draws him inexorably into the vortex of the problem of race relations. Both his enigmatic personality and the complexity of the racial issue combine to make the task of such an analysis even more formidable. However, it may be well to begin with a brief history of his past since it has had a profound effect on shaping the present Jesse Jackson.

Born in Greenville, South Carolina, in 1941, Jackson was an "outside" child of a sixteen year old unwed mother Helen who had herself been born without a father. She later married Charles Henry Jackson who provided the baby with his name and the security of a home. His natural father, Noah Robinson, however, never denied his paternity. He was an affluent man who felt both affection and responsibility for his son. But the South of those days was still fairly conservative and out-of-wedlock children were still considered something of a scandal and an anathema. A married man, with three legitimate children, Noah Robinson could not possibly keep Jesse

Jackson with him but he decided "to give him everything he asks for."¹ Noone in town commanded the respect from both black and white communities that Noah Robinson did. He could, therefore, afford to live with the situation and still show Jesse consideration. However, there were two ills which still plagued the heart of the little boy which his father could not cure. The first were the cruel taunts of the school children about his illegitimacy. "Children oftentimes are cruel" he said, "But it always comes down to their parents."² It has been reported by several of his biographers that he was always taunted to be "nothing but a no-body."

The second was the pain of watching his half brother. Noah Robinson, Jr. live a life of luxury which his own middle class parents could not provide. Though not poor, he certainly could not afford to move in the elite circles where Noah Robinson, Jr., was accepted automatically as an equal. From the very beginning, Jesse Jackson showed himself to be a person of undoubted talent and ambition. After graduating from Greenville's Sterling High School in 1959, he attended the University of Illinois on a football scholarship. He left after his freshman year due to racial discrimination, transferring to North Carolina A & T, where he received a B.S. degree in Sociology. Though interested in studying law, at first, he was persuaded to join the Chicago Theological Seminary later. Though it seems to have been a second thought at that time but Noah Robinson, Sr., remembered Jackson's wish to preach at the age of fourteen.

¹ Gail Sheehy, *Character: America's Search for Leadership* (New York, 1988), p.88.

² *ibid.*p.86.

I remember the age that the dream started so well because I thought it was peculiar that it was the same age when Jesse's grandfather began preaching. Jesse told me he dreamed he would lead an army across the waters like Moses did. I remember telling him, I don't know if you could really lead an army, but you might be a good preacher like your grand daddy was.³

He joined the Seminary in 1963. These were the years of the stormy Civil Rights Movement. The African- American community was in a state of flux and change and this change was being guided by a surprising amount of religious activism. Some of the most important leaders of the movement, the tallest being Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., were Christian priests. At such a time, Jesse Jackson, was naturally drawn to the battle for racial equality. In 1963, he led the students' sit-ins at Greensboro till the county abolished segregation. He recalled being conscious of the racial segregation of the times and his hurt at being forced to live with it.

I went to catch a bus with my mother and the sign above the bus driver's head said, COLORED SEAT FROM THE REAR. My mother had to pull me to the back. I said I wanted to sit up front. She said, 'Let's go'. She pinched me. She was conditioning me to reduced options.⁴

This consciousness of unjust victimization propelled Jackson to become very active in the Civil Rights Movement and then later to identify completely enough to make it his career. His dedication and leadership qualities brought him to the notice of the youth led CORE at first and then, finally, to Dr. Martin Luther King himself.

³ Quoted in Thomas Landees and Richard Quinn, *Jesse Jackson and the Politics of Race* (Ottawa, 1985), p. 12.

⁴ Sheehy, n. 1, p. 90.

It was at this time that he also exhibited his rare gifts for powerful oratory as well as aggressive and innovative initiatives. Though commentators have not always been charitable in judging these qualities, they, nevertheless, acknowledge their existence. Gail Sheehy has quoted the opinions of two of his professors at the Chicago Seminary, one called him "a tremendous con artist" while the other found him brilliant and spoke of his "ready tongue and vivid language."⁵ Both agreed only on his power of speech.

This power combined with his initiative at the Selma march led by SCLC in 1965 for enforcing the voting rights of the Blacks. There, when the attention of the crowds was flagging he simply went on the stage to make a speech which mesmerized the audiences. He was immediately brought closer to the leaders. Though never fully accepted by Dr. King's tight circle of aides, Jackson nonetheless helped to orchestrate his northern campaign in Chicago; eventually he came to head Operation Breadbasket, an affiliate of Southern Christian Leadership Conference. After the assassination of Dr. King in 1968, the organization experienced internal tensions and rivalry. Finally, in 1971, Jesse Jackson and a handful of his faithful followers broke away from the SCLC to set up a separate organization, People United to serve Humanity, called PUSH.

⁵ *ibid.*

(II) POLITICS OF RACE UPLIFT

Operation PUSH employed as many as 120 staff members but it basically worked through thousands of volunteers. It had over seventy affiliates in large and small cities across the United States, and its Saturday morning national forum, which Jackson conducted regularly, was broadcast by several radio stations. Through PUSH, Jesse Jackson set "economic rights" as the agenda for 1970s and 1980s. Though PUSH had engaged in strictly political activities like voter-registration campaigns, grass-roots political organizing and such other campaigns, its major focus had been economic activity.

Using the weapons of picketing and boycott, it had made an impressive economic impact. It launched an Economic Justice Campaign to pressurize the big corporations into giving a fair share of their jobs to blacks, other minorities and women in return for their considerable consumer dollars spent. Such large multinationals as Coca-Cola, Burger King, Avon, Quaker Oats and General Foods bowed before Jackson's pickets and agreed to ensure 'diversity' in their employment policies. Even a unique PUSH LULAC (League of United Latin American Citizens) agreement was finalized which was a Black-Hispanic arrangement to achieve these ends.

The second most important initiative by PUSH was in the field of education. PUSH for excellence was created in 1977. It was a programme to inspire slum children, to persuade them to turn their backs on drugs and crime, to behave themselves in school and to study hard, and finally to become useful citizens to bring

about constructive changes in society. The programme had six components: a "state of the school" address, student pledges, teacher pledges, parent pledges, a "written ethical code" and a voter registration card. For the next three years, PUSH- EXCEL took the country by storm and was successful. It received grants and supports from such institutions as the Ford Foundation and the Chicago Community Trust as also the federal government. Jesse Jackson directed his charisma to bringing slum children hope and to make an effort to develop positive thinking amongst them. In 1981, when Jesse Jackson turned his attention to global politics after the "Andrew Young"⁶ affair, PUSH EXCEL lost its drive.

All the PUSH operations had been allowed to run in such an interconnected fashion that financial irregularities were suspected to have occurred. Both New York Times and Washington Post, tried in 1984, to investigate the matter but could not come up with any hard evidence. The only important fallout of this controversy was the dipping of the revenues of PUSH corporation.

More serious was the attack launched upon the programme within the African-American community. Black educators like Barbara Sizemore, professor of Black Community Education, Research and Development at the University of Pittsburgh and former superintendent of schools in Washington, D.C., felt that "EXCEL obscures the need for black power for the collective force of the black community."⁷ Nancy Arnez of Howard University would put it even more directly,

⁶ See, Landees and Quinn, n.3, pp.49-80.

⁷ *ibid.* p.77.

"In effect", she said "Jackson talks about diffusing the very black power he needs by advocating metropolitan desegregation. It is very difficult to understand exactly what is he proposing and why."⁸

They were responding to such statements of Jesse Jackson as, "The door of opportunity is open for our people but they are too drunk, too unconscious to walk through the door" and "Nothing can save us from us but us".⁹ They were incensed at what they perceived to be a denial of the need for special treatment of black people and any programme of studies related to them. They felt that Jackson was responding to a more conservative national environment to become a 'white man's black man' or an establishment man. Jackson defended the statements by saying that they were meant to eradicate the supplicants' mentality amongst the community youth and not to deny their victimization at the hands of white racism. Some prominent blacks supported the programme by sharing his platform, most notably Kenneth B. Clark. The cause of children continued to figure high on the Jackson agenda and he was to return to it in 1990s with renewed vigour. The high point of Jesse Jackson's political career was reached when he contested for the Democratic party's nomination for presidentship in 1984. His candidacy marked the first full-scale effort by an African-American to capture the nation's highest office.

The Keystone of the Jackson presidential campaign was the Rainbow Coalition. Through the Rainbow coalition, Jackson tried to forge a new coalition of blacks,

⁸ *ibid.*p.77.

⁹ *ibid.*

browns, native Americans, Asian Americans, Arab Americans, Jewish Americans, and Caribbean Americans and the other poor, in American politics. It had been his contention that since there were, numerically speaking, more white poor than black poor, the Rainbow Coalition was a vehicle for empowering all marginalised Americans and not simply a party of African- Americans. The success of the coalition was obvious when Jackson managed to capture 465.5 delegates rather than the projected 175-200 delegates. 21% of the Jackson vote was non-black.¹⁰ Once again in 1988, Jesse Jackson ran a high- profile campaign for the Presidential nomination to be accepted as a valid spokes-person for the African-Americans as also other Americans who felt left out of the system. It had been generally accepted that the two Jackson Campaigns "built unprecedented coalitions of farmers and inner-city residents, of academics and factory workers in support of two progressive campaigns."¹¹ Thus throughout the 1980s Jesse Jackson dominated African-American politics but he was also the first black leader to be acknowledged as a major political player in the main stream politics. His successes in 1984 and 1988 were such that all the Democratic presidential candidates courted him in 1992 and at least a couple implied that he would make a suitable running mate. His 'core' constituency remained the African-Americans but his message was as much cultural as it was economic or racial. This afforded him the opportunity to link the anguish of the African-American community with a coalition

¹⁰ As cited in Roger D. Hatch and Frank E. Watkins (ed.), *Rev. Jesse L. Jackson: Straight From the Heart* (Philadelphia, 1987), p.xiii.

¹¹ Interview to the *Progressive*, vol.59 (January 1995), p.28

of the "forgotten" and the disinherited. Chastising those who embrace the political expedient, Jackson challenged his fellow candidates to reach for the "moral centre",¹² the godly response to the economic crises.

From this commentary, a few facts emerged:(i)- from the mid-1970s the African-American community faced a more conservative national environment, than in the 1960s. As the most prominent African-American leader Jesse Jackson responded not by separatist rhetoric and protest from outside the system but by joining the system; (ii)- his effort was to mobilize the African-Americans as an important political force but without losing the sense of moral rightness which comes from standing above or outside the system. As a result, he was the most vocal voice of what had been characterized as the "politics from outside" combining "prophecy and politics";¹³ (iii) he recognized the need to join the issues of race and poverty. It was the only way that his strategy of using mainstream politics for racial justice could acquire force.

(III) VISION AND STRATEGIES

The two distinguished editors of Jesse Jackson's collection of speeches *Straight from the Heart*, Roger D. Hatch and Frank E. Watkins have recognized four key elements in Jesse Jackson's understanding of the race problem and his efforts towards solving it:(i) a religio-ethical vision, (ii) racism as a central problem of

¹² *ibid.*

¹³ Allen D. Hertzke, *Echoes of Discontent: Jesse Jackson, Pat Robertson, and the Resurgence of Populism* (Washington, D.C., 1993), p.2.

American life, (iii) the nature of reality, and (iv) efforts for social change.¹⁴ His religio-ethical vision involves "a vision of a just society and peaceful world."¹⁵ The continued connection of Jesse Jackson with the Church would itself testify to his religious vision and any reading of his speeches only suggested to reinforce the issue. Announcing his candidacy for the Democratic party's 1984 presidential nomination, he said: "Thus I seek the presidency to serve the nation at a level where I can help restore a moral tone, a redemptive spirit, and a sensitivity to the poor and dispossessed of this nation...".¹⁶ Other commentators also noted the sprinkling of religious and ethical concerns and metaphors in his speeches',

"In 1992 this minister denounced the 'ethical collapse' and 'moral degeneracy' infecting American society, in particular rebuking its 'Sodom and Gomorrah sex ethic'. He called for stronger family life, prayer life, ethical education and a return to the Ten commandments."¹⁷

Hatch and Watkins contended that the race problem had been the central concern of Jackson. The fact that his speeches and statements embraced a wide range of issues and concerns was only due to the all-pervasive nature of racism. According to them, Jesse Jackson felt that racism had become institutionalized into virtually every aspect of American life: political, educational, economic, the military, housing, health care, religion. Therefore, Jackson had had to oppose it as it appeared in each of these

¹⁴ Hatch and Watkins, n. 10, pp. xiv-xxiii.

¹⁵ *ibid.* p. xiv.

¹⁶ *ibid.* p. xiv.

¹⁷ Hertzke, n. 13, p. 83.

diverse areas of American life. He seemed to echo Gunnar Myrdal's description of racism as an "American dilemma" when he called it "fundamentally a moral problem, a problem of human values, running from our minds to our local communities to our international community."¹⁸ Some of the other prominent black leaders have affirmed that they found Jackson too close to the racial issue. "Black politicians knew they had to win the votes and confidence of whites to get elected. A number of these political figures-including Virginia's Douglas Wilder, the nation's first black governor and David Dinkins, New York city's first black mayor-indicated that they considered Jackson too controversial too black. "The move is mainstream now", said a Dinkins associate.¹⁹

The third element in this analysis was Jackson's vision of reality. His opposition to racism was based on religious and ethical appeals. However, in an effort to tone down the mixing of religion and politics, he gave the central place to morality or ethics. Thus, instead of calling upon his vision of God or divinity, he justified his antiracist stance by saying that 'it is grounded in the nature of reality itself.'²⁰ By thus appealing, his message connected itself with public principles with which all Americans could agree or disagree rather than to private beliefs. In this vision of reality, the importance and worth of each individual was recognized. Many

¹⁸ Hatch and Watkins,n.10,p.108.

¹⁹ Robert E. Jakoubek, *Jesse Jackson: Civil Rights Leader and Politician* (New York,1991),p.31.

²⁰ Hatch and Watkins,n.10,p.xvi.

writers noted his 'I am somebody'²¹ chant which he administered to school children to show them their worth. The chant ran thus,

I am somebody.
 I may be poor,
 but I am somebody.
 I may be uneducated,
 I may be unskilled,
 but I am somebody.
 I may be on welfare,
 I may be prematurely pregnant,
 I may be on drugs,
 I may be victimized by racism,
 but I am somebody.
 Respect me. Protect me. Never neglect me.
 I am God's child.

There were thematic variations from time to time but the essence remained the same: to create self-respect in the lowly individual so that he was inspired to achieve his best. He has said,

"I am a unique person with hopes, dreams, and aspirations that must be encouraged and developed rather than crushed or ignored. The acceptance, in word and deed, of this idea, this premise, this feeling, is the first step to achieving a brighter future for millions of our children and our society."²²

However, Jackson believed in the "rainbow nature of reality".²³ He believed that individualism should be carefully handled. If it could give an individual sense of his own worth, it could also lead to false notions of individual's primacy over the group. He would like to remind the people that "it is impossible to help someone else

²¹ *ibid.*, p.xvii; Sheehy,n.1,p.80; Hertzke,n.13,p.63.

²² Hatch and Watkins,n.10,p.107.

²³ *ibid.*, p.xvii.

without helping yourself in the process. And by the same token, it is impossible to hurt someone else without hurting yourself at the same time."²⁴

Thus people should develop whatever powers and resources which they possessed to gain leverage to bring about changes. Yet he was alive to the fact that generally the poor and the 'have nots' who needed this social change most, did not have the power to bring it about. To remedy this ill, his prescription was to build coalitions. First of all, the rejected should form a coalition of their own and his Rainbow coalition was designed to achieve this end. Secondly, they must align themselves with other forces seeking progressive change and lastly the middle class should be persuaded to see that it had more in common with such a Rainbow coalition than with the rich. In this way, a majority of the electorate would be grouped together in such a way that progressive social change through their collective political will would be made possible. It was necessary to put together an agenda which aimed truly at solving the problems of the masses and a coalition would automatically forge itself to get a political majority,

When I was a child... the Reverend... would quote Jesus as saying, 'If I be lifted up, I'll draw all men unto me.' When I was a child I didn't quite understand what he meant. But I understand it a little better now. If you raise up truth, it's magnetic. We must raise up a simple proposition: feed the hungry, and the poor will come running; study war no more, and our youth will come running.....put Americans back to work...the unemployed will come running.²⁵

²⁴ *ibid.*

²⁵ Hertzke, n. 13, p. 68.

In this way, Jesse Jackson took another step towards joining the interests of the African-Americans with the interests of the American majority. When he took on the mantle of the foremost black leader in America, the Civil Rights Movement was at a crossroads. Gail Sheehy wrote,

.. the civil-rights agenda Dr. King activated had been waiting for a hundred years. Jackson was not so favoured by history. When he emerged in the seventies, a brash young talent burning with ambition, there was no fresh movement waiting for a leader.²⁶

Moreover, Jim Crow had forever been laid to rest and legal rights to the African-American community had been brought at par with the rest of the citizens. What the blacks had to reckon with in the 1970s was prejudice at the individual and institutional levels which proved to be a far more elusive task. Added to this was the new perception of blacks in the national psyche as violent and barbaric. The Black Power rhetoric at the end of the 1960s and in early 1970s had eulogized violence as a legitimate means of securing racial justice. Ghetto violence in the years 1965-1968 had added searing images of looting and burning to the words of the leaders. The result was the replacement of the old stereotype of blacks as "docile", "child like", "lazy" and "imbeciles" with a new but equally negative stereotype of their being violent and "trigger-happy". This image, in fact, continues to this day. A national survey conducted in 1992 by the Boston based research firm of Martila & Kiley found 38% of respondents agreeing with the statement that "Blacks are more prone to violence

²⁶ Sheehy, n. l, p.98.

than people of other races."²⁷ This stereotype made it difficult for the African-American leadership to reclaim the victim's sense of righteousness and moral justice which had informed the Civil Rights Movement till then. The rest of America was turning wary of granting further concessions to the community.

The questions to be addressed at this juncture involved status and economic opportunity. Since segregation had been manifestly wrong and the blacks had clearly been victimized, the justice of their claims was easier to recognize and grant but economic backwardness was known to nearly all ethnic groups in America. As Jackson himself conceded in his more circumspect moments, poverty was not a racial issue. All races have their share of indigent citizens who seemed unable to extricate themselves from their financial plight; as even black leaders, given the right circumstances, are quick to point out, there are more whites on the welfare rolls than any other racial category.²⁸

Economic concessions, therefore, were more difficult to obtain. Yet the historical legacy of slavery and segregation had damaged the blacks not only in economic but also psychological terms by breeding an inferiority complex in them. "It gives white people an unjustified sense of superiority and black people a false sense of inferiority."²⁹ In such difficult circumstances, Jesse Jackson responded creatively

²⁷ Quoted in Ellise Cose, "Breaking the Code of Silence", *Newsweek*, vol.cxxiii (10 January 1994),p.23.

²⁸ Landees and Quinn,n.3,p.242.

²⁹ Hatch and Watkins,n.10,p.40.

through Operation PUSH and PUSH EXCEL. The two were designed to tackle the race issue on both its facets: while Operation PUSH tried to wrench economic rights from the society, PUSH EXCEL tried to strengthen the community from within by promoting self- respect and moral conduct.

In the 1980s, under the assault of Reaganomics, the black community faced a severe crisis. Ronald Reagan was ideologically committed to reversing the gains of the civil rights era. Further, the Blacks were particularly ill- positioned to benefit from Reagan's supply-side revolution, the rise of the service economy, and the transformation of the global market-place. The flight of capital and industrial jobs from inner cities deepened the cultural crisis; out-of-wedlock pregnancies, inner city violence, and lagging educational attainment left many young blacks vulnerable and alienated.³⁰ By showing a hardened attitude and a lack of sympathy for affirmative action programmes, the Republican administration revived the feelings of systemic victimization in the community. The leaders could either revert to extrasystemic protest politics or move further towards joining the mainstream politics. As noted earlier, Jesse Jackson chose the latter path. Throughout the 1970s, a new class of local and state level black politicians had come to power. This process had regularized black political participation and provided a set of concrete, systemic avenues for

³⁰ For the situation of the African-Americans in the 1980s see, Jewelle Taylor Gibbs and others, *Young, Black and Male in America: An Endangered Species* (Massachusetts,1988); William Julius Wilson,*The Declining Significance of Race* (Chicago,1980) and also see the editorial by Mortimer B. Zuckerman, "The New Realism", *US News & World Report* (25 May 1992),p.94.

expression and realization of black interests. Informally but powerfully, Jesse Jackson had been a part of this process. Now he decided to continue the process and take it to its logical conclusion by entering national level politics. Based upon this vision of practical and pragmatic integration of the races expressed through the Rainbow coalition, Jesse Jackson ran his 1984 and 1988 campaigns for the presidential nomination by Democratic party.

(IV) THE PRESENT DECADE

He thus entered the 1990s with these remarkable successes in hand. His vision of the race problem was already formed and his solution was to embrace mainstream politics and inject the morality of an extrasystemic protest movement in it. But the very success of what has been called, 'populist' politics of Jesse Jackson and Pat Robertson in 1988 elections had legitimized a new rhetoric of economic progressivism combined with social conservatism. Although, both of these elements had been part of Jackson's rhetoric for long but the voter enthusiasm which they aroused in the 1988 elections jolted the rest of the politicians. He successfully "registered hundreds of thousands of new voters and then [won] 90 percent of the black vote and more than a half-dozen primaries..."³¹

Immediately, other candidates, both Democratic and Republican, jumped upon this bandwagon but the Republicans married the platform of social conservatism to a

³¹ Marc Cooper, "The Trouble with Jesse", *Village Voice*, vol.37 (21 April 1992), p.28.

conservative philosophy of laissez-faire while the Democrats also moved far more to the right than was traditionally their wont. The three Republican administrations, specially through the charismatic Ronald Reagan, had constantly denounced, what they called, pandering to the minorities. Affirmative action programmes were under attack and the mood of the whites showed a definite swing away from accommodating any more Civil Rights agenda. In the elections of 1992 Jesse Jackson decided not to run. Not only this but he also decided not to back any particular nominee for the Democratic nomination, as his own candidate. He chose instead the strategy to "broaden the message" of the Democratic party by exerting his influence behind the scenes.

This might have been a purely personal decision or it might have been a recognition by Jesse Jackson that the national mood was turning conservative again and the blacks needed to conserve their political strength within the party rather than pitch in the fray as a third force. It might also have been a recognition of the fact that the Rainbow coalition of the 'dispossessed' which had tried to win over the middle class as the second part of its coalition building had not succeeded. In 1988, despite the success of his voter-registering drive, he was ignored by the candidates Michael Dukakis and Walter Mondale. In 1992, he ultimately ended up backing William J. Clinton, in spite of his earlier conservative stance on race relations. He was a member of the Democratic Leadership Council which Jackson had denounced several times,

The Democratic Leadership council is a fundamental split in the Democratic party. Here's a group of Democratic officials- of which Clinton was president at one point. And they've been involved in various

distancing schemes. The distancing schemes relative to me- as a dominant persona because of the campaigns I've run- extended down to every level. People felt that same distancing strategy across the board.³²

The same electoral strategy was adopted in 1996 elections with Jesse Jackson making a big effort to endorse the Clinton candidacy. However, he was not unaware of the impact of this conservative Democratic stance upon the black voters.

In so many instances, the base of cities and labor and workers and blacks was low, demoralized.... Not only did many of the Democrats attack the President, not only were they afraid to identify with the successes, they ran from the base of working class people and labor and blacks.³³

It was obvious then that Jesse Jackson still considered electoral politics as the main vehicle for racial justice. He campaigned actively in both 1992 and 1996 elections.

When he wasn't defending affirmative action, Jackson led a voter-registration drive in dozens of cities across the United States. And he campaigned actively in behalf of progressive Democrats seeking House seats.³⁴

However, within the framework of mainstream politics, he did not see any alternative to the Democratic party, since his own Rainbow coalition failed to develop grassroots organization and become a viable political force. His strategy, therefore, was to strengthen the Democratic party to tackle the race problem as he saw it in the 1990s. And he was not very happy with what he saw.

³² Interview with the *Progressive*, vol.59 (January 1995),p.30.

³³ *ibid.*, p.29.

³⁴ John Nicholas, "Over the Rainbow", *Progressive*, vol.60 (December 1996),p.29.

He had recognized that the races were drifting apart again. Those politicians who had constantly hammered away at the special position of blacks, seemed to be gaining the upper hand.

There is an awful lot of race-baiting laced into the welfare focus and the affirmative-action focus of our debate these days, Jackson told a multiracial crowd in Madison, Wisconsin, and we know why that is; they are out to divide us again. They cannot have us talking about corporate welfare and health care for all, so they raise false issues to get us fighting. We do not have to fight one another. We do not have to divide and be conquered.³⁵

Yet, always a pragmatic politician, he had realized that the politics of division was not without its success. The Republican rhetoric of welfare encouraging immorality and lack of family values amongst blacks, was going home to the middle class white voters. The Republicans had successfully cast the Democrats as captives of minority special interest groups and the Democrats had bowed to what they felt was the wish of the influential middle class voter.

More importantly, during the general campaign his managers will not allow him to make any direct appeals to blacks, just as Dukakis didn't. Why ? Because it alienates white people- that's why!³⁶

As a result, Jackson saw no choice but to focus on the black community itself. Though he continued to blame societal neglect, Jackson increasingly aimed his speeches at the most basic moral issues among his people: black-on-black violence, the disappearance of families and religious values in city slums, the silent, corrosive assent

³⁵ *ibid.*, p.27.

³⁶ Cooper, n.31.

of students to guns and drugs in urban schools. Some of his stands had a conservative caste. He believed that the blacks must undergo a 'social-values revolution'.³⁷ Students must report drug and gun users. Families must lay down rules. He had called black-on-black violence "the No. 1 civil rights issue"³⁸ in the country. "We can not be silent in the face of random killings- no matter who the killers may be" he insisted. In 1994 he convened a three-day Rainbow Coalition conference on Violence, at which black leaders such as California's Rep. Maxine Waters and Washington, D.C.'s Rep. Eleanor Holmes Norton addressed wide ranging issues from welfare to the popular speech amongst the black masses. Every Thursday morning, Jackson held a meeting of ministers, educators, police and parents called Rainbow Reclaim Our Youth. Their goals included setting up a nationwide mentoring programme.

This seemed to be an acknowledgement that for further progress on the civil-rights front, the African-Americans would have to first put their own house in order. Since his strategy of building coalitions demanded appeals to those principles with which all Americans could identify, he had to pay heed to their concerns. The reason why the two races seemed to be growing more hostile to each other, was because the New Right had co-opted the moral tone of the Civil Rights Movement. The whites no longer saw blacks merely as victims but as a group of people who refused to clean up their own act while pointing a finger at the failings of the white

³⁷ Howard Fineman, "An Older, Grimmer Jesse", *Newsweek*, vol.cxxiii (10 January 1994),p.24.

³⁸ Elizabeth Glick, "Stand and Deliver", *People Weekly*,vol.41 (11 April 1994),p.100.

community. Jackson's bold acceptance of this accusation as valid and his determination to address the issue publicly had opened him up to attacks from within the community. Other black leaders feared that he might be feeding racial stereotypes. "I don't like the term black-on-black crime",³⁹ the Reverend Calvin Butts of Harlem's Abyssinian Baptist Church had said, "Crime is crime. Murder is murder".⁴⁰ But the statistics bear out the pragmatism of Jackson's stance. "The FBI catalogued 23,760 murders for 1992. Roughly half of the victims were blacks; and in cases where the assailant was known, 94% of black victims were slain by other blacks".⁴¹ Other leaders, though reluctantly, were also beginning to put crime-fighting on their agendas. Wade Henderson, head of the NAACP's Washington office, said, "Since many people believe crime is now synonymous with race, we're being forced to debate the issue on those grounds".⁴²

However, Jackson was not about to condone societal neglect either. He had castigated President Clinton's approach to welfare reform and cuts in federal programmes that aid the poor. His concentration on reforming the African-American community might be a tactic of playing "good defense before you get back on

³⁹ *ibid.*

⁴⁰ Cose, n.27, p.22.

⁴¹ *ibid.*

⁴² *ibid.*

offense".⁴³ He had expressed his dissatisfaction with the Democrats and the Republicans both who, in their efforts to reach the 'political centre' were neglecting the 'moral centre'. He exhorted the Democrats, "Our vision is to lift America up with a higher vision, to redeem the canyon, to find the moral centre".⁴⁴ He was out to save his coalition of poor whites and blacks by emphasizing the similarity of their economic plight.

As corporations downsize jobs, outsource contracts, scab on workers' rights, a class crises emerges as a race problem ... The fight was never about welfare, but always about jobs and opportunity. Welfare is the exhaust pipe of a failed economic engine. We want to be part of the engine of growth.⁴⁵

He had also protested against the move to curb Black congressional districts.⁴⁶

Amidst all this tight rope walking between community reform and systemic reform, Jesse Jackson was aware of the despair of the African-Americans. Once again the issues had moved away from class questions to questions of race and colour. Once again all black men, no matter what their economic status, were forced to look at themselves as black men first and foremost. The apathy or even hostility showed to the African-Americans by both the major political parties, was once again leading to

⁴³ Address delivered at the Democratic National Convention, Chicago, Illinois, 27 August 1996 as reproduced in *Vital Speeches of the Day*, vol. ixii (15 September 1996), p.718.

⁴⁴ *ibid.*

⁴⁵ *ibid.*

⁴⁶ See, "Jesse Jackson's 10-Day Tour Focuses on Youth Violence, Need to Vote", *Jet*, vol.86(27 June 1994), pp.34-6.

the community's disillusionment with the system as it existed.

Jesse Jackson acknowledged this when he chose to share a platform with Louis Farrakhan, the leader of the Black Muslims, during his Million Man March upon Washington in October 1995. At the rally "both Jesse Jackson and Louis Farrakhan spoke about 'slave masters' who had always kept them down, and would go on doing so."⁴⁷ Louis Farrakhan has never been an integrationist. By sharing his platform and his sentiments, Jesse Jackson seemed to be voicing a disenchantment with the current status of the race-relations. Though he continued to support the Democratic party but he might be testing the ground for extrasystemic pressures.

Like Malcolm X, Jesse Jackson also seemed to think that the grievances of the African-American minority could not be redressed till they could be turned into a majority. But whereas Malcolm X tried to forge an international coalition of Black men, Jesse Jackson took a more American approach of combining with the poor white Americans. Even today that continued to be his strategy, "We must never surrender", he said, "And we must keep building coalitions- because only when the workers and women and ethnic minorities identify their common interests do we move the country forward".⁴⁸ But for the moment, he did not seem very hopeful, struggling only to 'keep hope alive', "What keeps me going is that if this room were totally dark, and one candle were lit, it would shine on in the darkness. It is hope that breaks the

⁴⁷ See, "Bow Ties of Allah", *Economist*, vol.337 (21 October 1995),p.19.

⁴⁸ Nicholas,n.34,p.32.

chain."⁴⁹

This rather gloomy, though courageous, view of the present had demoralized his supporters. Reporting on the charismatic way in which Jesse Jackson could transform hope- less children into optimistic ones, Elizabeth Gleick wrote that now the atmosphere dissipated immediately after Jackson left. They no longer had faith in the pledge which he administered. Mario Johnson, a teenager who took the pledge said, "Jackson's message is not going to make everybody stop." By this he meant stop indulging in violence or taking drugs because, said the editor of one school paper, "It's beyond that. We see all types of violence today... We shouldn't have to live like that".⁵⁰ As far back as 1992, the supporters of Rainbow coalition were feeling directionless and the black vote was fragmenting, but a widespread perception prevailed among many black Democratic activists- most of them current or former members of the Rainbow coalition- that Jesse Jackson himself must share part of the blame for the current short shrifting of the progressive Democratic agenda... said Professor Barns, 'There is just no direction coming from the National Rainbow'.⁵¹

As the white pressure against affirmative action mounted, even the Democrats had distanced themselves from Jesse Jackson. The media coverage given to him had been less and several times he had complained of not being heard by the President. In an effort to bridge the gap between the mood of his people and his own actions,

⁴⁹ Gleick, n.38,p.100.

⁵⁰ *ibid.*

⁵¹ Cooper,n.31,p.30.

Jackson seemed to be moving towards slightly more militant politics one again. In September 1995, Rainbow coalition's Citizen's Education Fund convened a one day "State of the Land" Public Policy Institute session where he called upon Black America to "fight back". At the session, he denounced the lack of economic development and government support to the African- American community.⁵² In several pronouncements, he seemed to be particularly concerned about the unsympathetic policy of "three strikes and you're out" being applied to black youth so that jails, "the No.1 growth industry in America" might be kept busy.⁵³

In sum, the Rev. Jesse Jackson is pessimistic about the current state of race relations. His reading of the situation had left him a sad man though he continued to struggle for improvement.

⁵² See, "Rev. Jesse Jackson Sounds National Call to Arms for Blacks", *Jet*, vol.88 (11 September 1995), pp.4-6.

⁵³ *ibid.*, p.6.

Chapter IV

PERSPECTIVE OF LOUIS FARRAKHAN

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(I) EARLY LIFE

The year 1995 formed a watershed in the history of race relations. On 16 October 1995, Washington, D.C., the capital of the nation, played host to the biggest 'civil rights' rally in the history of the United States. Although estimates vary but even the official figures put the number of marchers at 400,000. However, it was not only the size of the rally but also its convener, Minister Louis Farrakhan, who caused the whole of America to sit up and take notice of the event. Although Farrakhan was not unknown before the event¹, but the success of the march catapulted him to mainstream national politics. Despite his influence till then, he had been looked upon only as a peripheral leader in the racial politics of America. The Million Man March, as the Washington rally came to be known, firmly established him as a legitimate and credible leader for the African American Community in the United States. The event was no ordinary birth of yet another leader; it had important implications both for the current state and the future of race relations in America. To understand the gravity of the

¹ Robert Schmuhl in his article, "Past Accord and Present Dissonance's", *Society*, vol.31, (Sep.1994), pp.41-46 has quoted recent opinion surveys to show that Louis Farrakhan's personal ratings, even in 1994, were second only to Jesse Jackson amongst black leaders. He received a favourability rating from two-thirds of those polled.

occurrence, it may be desirable to begin with the past of Louis Farrakhan.²

Louis Farrakhan was born Louis Walcott, the son of Mae Manning, a West Indian domestic in 1933. He was brought up in Boston's Roxbury area, a thriving centre of West Indian culture. He has been quoted as saying that theirs was a "very, very poor family."³ However, he showed himself to have been a talented musician. At the age of 5 itself he took up the violin seriously. He also learned to play the guitar and the ukelele. He was also able to gain admission to Boston Public School, probably the best public school in America, in grade 7. However, feeling lonely in the predominantly white school, Walcott left after a few months.

His political inclination began to be defined by his love for Calypso. The Calypso was, traditionally, a musical political medium which had been brought over from Jamaica. After High School Walcott attended a black teachers' college in North Carolina on a modest track scholarship. He left the course midway, however, to marry Betsy (now Khadijah) and returned to Boston. Here, Marcus Garvey, the leader of the 'Back-to-Africa' movement had gained a large following and was treated as a hero. Separatist philosophy was very much in the ascendent in these areas. Louis Walcott put his musical talents to use and became a calypso singer called 'The Charmer' in 1953.

² Recent articles appearing about the Million Man March discuss generally, not only the march but also its convener. For profiles of Louis Farrakhan, see, Playthell Benjamin, "The Attitude is the Message", *Village Voice*, vol.34, (15 Aug.1989), p.23-31; Adolph Reed, Jr., "False Prophet-I: The Rise of Louis Farrakhan", *Nation*, vol.252, (21 Jan.1991), p.37, 51; Howard Fineman and Vernon E. Smith, "An Angry 'Charmer'", *Newsweek*, vol.CXVI, (30 Oct.1995), pp.46-54.

³ See, Howard Fineman and Vernon E. Smith, "An angry Charmer", *Newsweek*, vol.CXXVI (30 Oct. 1995), pp.46-54.

In 1955, while visiting Chicago he was so impressed by a speech of Elijah Muhammad, the leader of the Nation of Islam, that he joined the organization as Louis X. His musical talents were noticed by Malcolm X, at that time, the highly influential spokesperson of the Nation of Islam. Malcolm X began to groom the new recruit till, in time, he became one of the closest associates of Malcolm X.⁴ Louis X was not only a singer but something of a playwright and a song-writer too. One of his calypsos, "A white Man's Heaven is a Black Man's Hell" was later made into one of the theme songs of the Nation of Islam. he gained public attention through one of his plays also, called *The Trial*. It excited black audiences wherever it was staged. *The Trial* sentenced 'White America' to death for oppressing and dehumanizing blacks for centuries.

When Malcolm X broke with the Nation of Islam, Louis X was promoted as the minister of Temple 7 in Harlem. he was also given the responsibility and the authority to talk to the white press on behalf of the Nation. He rose to become one of the closest aides of Elijah Muhammad and in this capacity even denounced his earlier mentor, Malcolm X. In fact, many believe that he was instrumental in causing the assassination of the latter in 1965 though no hard evidence has come forward so far.⁵

⁴ For details of Louis Farrakhan's rise within the Nation of Islam. See, Thomas Landees and Richard Quinn, *Jesse Jackson and the Politics of Race* (Ottawa, 1985), pp.83-128.

⁵ The suspicion even today is so strong that Qubilah Shabaaz, daughter of Malcolm X, was arrested in 1995 for plotting to kill Farrakhan to avenge her father's death. "The Man the Movement", *Newsweek*, vol.CXXVI, (October 1995), p.54.

(II) LEADER OF THE NATION OF ISLAM

Having thus established his loyalty to Elijah Muhammad and his value for the organization, Louis Farrakhan was perfectly positioned to bid for the dead leader's mantle when he died in 1975. However, it was not till 1978 that he actually challenged the new leader, Wallace Deen Muhammad, the son of Elijah Muhammad. Louis, now Farrakhan, expressed dissatisfaction with the ideas of Wallace Muhammad which were more accomodationist and conciliatory towards White America. Wallace had moved away from the Nation's racist theory of creation and embraced a purer version of Islam. His philosophy was driven more by theology than racism or a typically black American nationalism. He believed Islam preached the brotherhood of man and forbade racism of any kind. He went so far as to travel around the country speaking to integrated audiences., inviting whites to become the members of the Muslim Community.

To many members of the Black Muslim Community, including to Farrakhan, this sounded like schism and hersy. It was a path exactly opposite to the one charted out by Elijah Muhammad. Farrakhan reverted to the original doctrines of the Nation, established himself at Chicago and drew a large number of followers to himself. After several years of confusion, Wallace Deen's group changed its name to the American Muslim Mission, moved its headquarters to California, and continued to preach from there. It is not clear what is the strength of the group which chose to remain with Louis Farrakhan. However, estimates ran as high as 100,000; and the organization's bi-weekly publication, The Final Call, claimed to be the country's largest black

newspaper, with a readership of 600,000.⁶

As the new leader of the Nation of Islam Louis Farrakhan continued to preach the two pronged philosophy of his organization: political segregation and economic autarky. This political segregation translated itself into a refusal to join American system or the American institutions as far as possible. As a result, the Black Muslims did not take part in elections and kept away from the government schools and other institutions. However, one important exception to this rule was the acceptance of government security contracts. In fact, the Nation of Islam has earned high praises from the politicians and the police for its success at Mayfair Mansions, a housing project that only two years ago was notorious for drug related crime. The patrols of the Nation of Islam have virtually eliminated drug dealing and drug violence from the area.⁷ Thomas Landees and Richard Quinn have also noted the opposition of the Nation to cuts in welfare and other government spending upon the poor people.⁸ This independence, notwithstanding, the negative side of black segregationism has been black racism. The mythology of the Nation, as discussed in Chapter II, encouraged the Black Muslims to view the whites as the "blue-eyed devils" and predicted an Armageddon in which the streets of America's cities would turn red with the blood of whites. Farrakhan chose the Jews as his special targets. His jew-baiting and anti-

⁶ See, *Economist*, vol.335, (8 April 1995), p.22.

⁷ Lynda Wright and Daniel Glick, "Farrakhan's Mission", *Newsweek*, vol.115, (19 March 1990), p.25.

⁸ Landers and Qunn, n.4, p.223.

semitic stance served to make him an anathema to the mainstream black politicians and in the eyes of the ordinary citizens the Nation of Islam came to resemble an African American Ku Klux Klan.

However, in 1984, Louis Farrakhan managed to catch the attention of the media, when he threatened the journalist who had made public Jesse Jackson's statement about New York being "Hymietown". He himself recognized the fact that it was a very negative attention that he was accorded, "Unfortunately, that was a very, very negative coming,... the media, used words that I spoke during the Jackson campaign out of context. And so I was lambasted by the press."⁹ Throughout the two presidential campaigns of 1984 and 1988, run by Jesse Jackson, the latter was plagued by popular resentment of his friendship with Farrakhan. In the end he had to let Farrakhan fade quietly away from the scene.

(III) THE PRESENT DECADE

The 1990s, nevertheless, bore witness to reemergence of the discredited Farrakhan as a new and powerful leader of the African - American community at large and not simply of the Black Muslims. To understand this surprising turn - around, one must take note of the changes which had occurred in the 1980s.

⁹ Barbara Kleban Mils, "Predicting Disaster for a Racist America, Louis Farrakhan Envisions an African Homeland for U.S. Blacks", *People Weekly*, vol.34 (17 September 1990), p.113.

Ever since the affirmative action programmes had been put in place, and, federal and state governments had taken the responsibility to improve the status and conditions of the black 'underclass', the African -American community had made major gains. 'The number of black college graduates has increased more than ninefold. Black women have made especially dramatic progress. Their median wage is now 87 per cent of white women's, up from only 36 per cent in 1946, and those with a college education actually outearn the white women.'¹⁰ However, the same article is constrained to take note of the fact that the 'individual African American suffers indignities in the ordinary course of life-on the job, on the street, in the store'.¹¹ It has also been pointed out that between 1960 and 1980 the average black - white educational differentials all but disappeared but black men continued to rank lowest in income and status hierarchies.¹² Nor did the 1980s do anything to improve the situation. The resurrection of laissez-faire doctrines in the workplace and the assault on racial justice programmes under the Reagan and Bush regimes, further pushed the blacks, specially the black male, into positions of indignity and humiliation. The black families suffered tremendously from these strains and breakup of families and illegitimate births grew alarmingly. 68% of all black children are now born out of

¹⁰ Mortimer B. Zuckerman, "Build Bridges, Don't Burn Them", U.S. News and World Report, vol.116, (25 April,1944), p.104.

¹¹ *ibid.*

¹² *ibid.*

wedlock, compared to 22% whites.¹³

June Jordan expressed the resentment of a lot of blacks when she wrote in the *Progressive* about 'an uninhibited scapegoat campaign to stigmatize and invalidate the neediest among us: welfare families dependent on AFDC support that amounts to an average of \$370 a month for a mother and her two children.'¹⁴ However, white America seemed to resent this kind of victim's mentality. Literature had been growing against affirmative action and welfare was looked upon as encouragement to illegitimacy, immorality and plain laziness. The rightist rhetoric of the Republican Party and the success of virulently racist and populist rhetoric of candidates like Pat Robertson and Pat Buchanan combined to achieve two ends: one, they humiliated the ethnic minorities and the poor and two, they legitimized politics of extremism and hate. The national atmosphere grew more and more conservative and mainstream black leaders like Jesse Jackson were forced to walk a fine line between exhorting the society to hand out racial justice and exhorting the African American community to adopt programmes of self-help and revitalization. It was evidently an acceptance of the fact that the majority community was no longer in complete sympathy with the blacks.

At such a time, the philosophy of the Nation of Islam, seemed to fit the bill for leading the African Americans. Its policy of self-help and black pride could be a balm to the hurt pride of the community while the propagation of self-help doctrine would win favour from both whites and blacks. As the situation slowly deteriorated in the

¹³ See, s.n.10.

¹⁴ June Jordan, "A Powerful Hatred", *The Progressive*, vol.58 (May 1994), p.23.

1990s. Louis Farrakhan shifted his stance in a slight and subtle fashion towards more centrist rhetoric and pronouncements. In 1993, he seemed to have been moving away from anti-semitism. As a conciliatory gesture, he played the music by the Jewish composer Felix Mendelssohn on the violin.¹⁵ In September 1993, Kweisi Mfume, Chairman of the Congressional Black caucus, invited Farrakhan to address the caucus annual legislative conference and announced a "covenant" between the two groups to work together on strengthening the black community.¹⁶ It was part of a tentative but remarkable rapprochement between Farrakhan and mainstream black leaders. Although, the black legislators were quick to react to the inflammatory and anti-Jew speech of a Farrakhan aid, Khalid Abdul Muhammad, Farrakhan did not retreat too far. He "demoted Khalid Muhammad in the organization and condemned the speech as a repugnant, malicious and mean - spirited", but he was quick to confirm, "...I stand by the truths that he spoke".¹⁷ He also criticized mainstream black leaders for publicly rebuking him rather than speaking to him in private. This new found confidence of his was justified when two of the other mainstream leaders, Jesse Jackson and Benjamin Chavis, expressed satisfaction that by demoting Muhammad, Farrakhan had put the unpleasantness to rest and simply ignored the affirmation of the 'truths by him'.¹⁸ In

¹⁵ Joe Klein, "Grieving for the NAACP", *Newsweek*, vol.CXXIII (27 June 1994), p.37.

¹⁶ Janet Hook, "Mfume Cuts Renewed Ties to Nation of Islam", *Congressional Quarterly Weekly Report*, vol.52, (5 February 1994), p.219.

¹⁷ *ibid.*, p.219.

¹⁸ Edward Alexander, "Multiculturalists and Anti-Semitism", *Society*, vol.31,(September 1994), p.61.

1994 he was invited by Benjamin Chavis, the new head of the NAACP, a traditionally peaceful and integrationist organization, to a "leadership summit" and hailed by him as "his holiness, a prophet, a freedom fighter".¹⁹ Although, Chavis had to pay the price of this gesture by losing his job, he still continued to support Louis Farrakhan and was one of the main organizers of the Million Man March.

(IV) THE MILLION MAN MARCH

Farrakhan had been coming more and more centre stage and though people had as yet not accepted him totally, he had gained enough publicity to call for the Million Man March on 16 October 1995 which consecrated him as a recognized leader of the African Americans. Louis Farrakhan exhibited a sound grasp of ground realities when he justified the call for the Million Man March, in these words,

"Today the life within our community has degenerated to a degree that the Churches are filled with old people and the funeral pallors are filled with young people.... And out of that disturbance we get the Supreme Court's decision against affirmative action, against redistricting along racial lines, the Contract with America, which we believe is a contract on black and poor America.... And so all these factors have made the training of the march absolutely perfect."²⁰

In this way, Farrakhan seemed to speak in the most balanced tone, blaming both the degeneration within the African - American community and the attack on black rights by the rightist conservatives for the deteriorating race relations. Not only did he

¹⁹ See, s.n.15.

²⁰ Interview with Scott Minerbrook in US News and World Report, vol.119,(16 Oct. 1995), p.60.

try to take a more balanced view than previously but he actually went out of his way to seek the advice of mainstream civic, religious and civil rights leaders so as to broaden the platform for the march.²¹ The activists of the Nation agreed to broaden the organizational base and to make the march "more ecumenical" in character, simply to include Jesse Jackson as one of the speakers.²² Even the purpose of the march was set out in highly moral terms, "[I]t's actually a very public call for us to atone, not to white folk, but to God for our sins. And then this gives us the high moral ground to call on America to atone and repent for her sins against us... but we can't do it under the cloak of our sins."²³ Such pronouncements not only soothed the fears of white America about a possible racial conflagration at the March, but actually seemed to recognize some justice in their position. It has been argued that it is the appropriation of this very, "high moral ground" which can account for the success of the march. This was successful because "In so doing, he spoke to the souls of black folk in a way that not even Jesse Jackson had managed to in the twenty-seven years since Dr. King's death."²⁴

Even at the march itself, the tone was peaceful and conciliatory. Farrakhan

²¹ Scott Minerbrook, "The Right Man for the Job?", *U.S. News and World Report*, vol.119,(16 oct.1995), p.58.

²² Sylvester Monroe, "The Mirage of Farrakhan", *Time*, vol.146,(30 Oct.1995), p.52.

²³ Minerbrook, n.21.

²⁴ Don Wycliff, "Touching the Souls of Black Folk", *Commonweal*, vol.122, (17 Nov.1995), p.8.

avoided the topic of "bloodsuckers".²⁵ Instead, he toned down the hatred, inviting Jews to a truce and assuring whites he meant "white supremacists", not all white people, when he spoke against them. Even more important was his message for blacks. he appealed to them to take responsibility for their predicament and he admonished them for everything from car-jacking to wife-beating, and led them in a pledge to "improve spiritually, morally, mentally."²⁶ Not only this but he had also decided to send out his volunteers in a massive voter registration drive and he changed significantly the attitude of the Nation of Islam towards elections, when he declared that he would vote in 1996 elections.

Can this really be taken to mean that Farrakhan has changed his views about the racial entangle in America and the possible solutions to solving it. Should these indicators be interpreted to say that Farrakhan has become a more mature and mellow politician who wished to join the group of the integrationists rather than the separatists. The signals sent by Farrakhan are conflicting. On the one hand, he really seemed to have distanced himself from the extremism of the past and he said, "I am not the same man that I was four years ago. I have matured as a leader, and my appeal is being taken much more seriously...".²⁷ As noted above, he has made conciliatory gestures

²⁵ A remark reported by Reuters to have been applied by Farrakhan to most of the other ethnic minorities, including the Jews, Palestinians, Arabs, Koreans etc. In an interview to Newsweek, he hedged and adopted a more diplomatic tone but seemed to be firm in his views. For details see, Louis Farrakhan, Newsweek, vol.CXXVI,(30 Oct. 1995), p.52.

²⁶ "The Man and the March", *The New Republic*, vol.213, (6 Nov.1995),p.9.

²⁷ Mills, n.9.

and statements towards the Jews and other whites. However, a closer look at his speeches revealed that most of his basic assumptions about the racial problem remain the same as before.

At the march itself, he cited the Kerner Commission's conclusion that this nation was moving towards two Americas - one black, one white, separate and unequal. Even his call to the black men to become industrious, independent and responsible is the call to a separate America. Many commentators noted, the major difference between the March On Washington, organized by Dr. Martin Luther King in 1963, to integrate the races and the Million Man March of 1995 which only invited the blacks. Not only this but even his views about the place of the women remain the same since they were not invited to the March but expected to remain home. His message included references to "slave-masters"²⁸ who had always kept the blacks down, and who would go on doing so. He seemed to say that the vices of the black men exist but they exist because, "blacks have suffered 400 years of oppression, because George Washington was a slave owner... because racism is an indelible stain not just on the fabric of American society but also on the cosmic order."²⁹

Yet it is true that Farrakhan who had been largely marginalised till the last decade has emerged as a force to reckon with. Most scholars of race and commentators seemed to agree with Arch Puddington that "Farrakhan simply can no longer be written off as a marginal figure. Wherever he speaks, he draws large and enthusiastic

²⁸ Quoted in "The Other America", *Economist*, vol.337, (21 Oct.1995), p.19.

²⁹ See, n.26.

audiences...."³⁰ There is no denying the fact that in the end he was able to draw at least 400,000 blacks men to a rally at his call. Most of these men also cut across the class barriers. They were "middle-class and working class black guys"³¹ as one report put it. He was also able to impose an impressive discipline upon the marchers. The atmosphere of sociability and the "energising experience"³² of the march were also the focus of much discussion afterwards. What is equally true is that the marchers belonged to Christianity as well as to the Nation of Islam. Farrakhan, in the true tradition of Black Muslims, drew heavily upon Christian mythology and images to send his message home to the marchers. He said, "black man, I love you", speaking of God's love for his specially beloved black children and quoted their sufferings with Jesus Christ's, "But I love my son. I love Jesus more than I love any of my servants. But I had a cross for him."³³ he also quoted Dr. Martin Luther King and it was clear that the integrationist" blacks such as Jesse Jackson and Marion Barry (were) jostling to get a seat beside him".³⁴

Yet if the message of Farrakhan has not changed then how can he move towards

³⁰ Arch Puddington, "The Question of Black Leadership", *Commentary*, vol.91,(Jan.1991), p.28.

³¹ Ellen Willis, "Million Man Mirage", *Village Voice*, vol.40,(7 November 1995), p.25.

³² *ibid.*

³³ Quoted in "Towards 'More Perfect Union': A Commingling of Constitutions Ideals and Christian Precepts", *Black Scholar*,vol.25 (Fall 1995), p.30.

³⁴ Mark Cunnigham, "Soul Goes Marching", *National Review*, vol.46,(6 Nov.1995), p.47.

the centre and become more acceptable. Since he had proved his influence with the masses who had hitherto paid him little heed, the explanation must be sought in the changed circumstances, rather than in a changed man. As noted above, the white Americans seem to be suffering from a "race fatigue" which expressed itself in a growing intolerance towards programmes of help and up-lift for the poor based upon racial criteria. This intolerance clashed with a growing frustration within the inner cities of America. Black incomes were still only 60% of white ones; black unemployment was more than twice as high over 11% against less than 5% for whites. More than 60% of black families with children were headed by a single woman, and those children were increasingly consigned to impoverished schools in districts from which whites have fled. The median net worth of black households was a mere tenth of that of white ones.

This economic frustration was further inflamed by the double standards used to judge white and black racism. David Duke had spewed a racism and an anti-semitism which were perhaps even more vitriolic than those of Farrakhan yet Duke had not been subjected to the kind of public outcry and denunciation which Farrakhan had encountered. He was accepted as a "legitimate candidate for the U.S. senatorial elections despite his ex-Klan connection but Farrakhan had been shunned as an untouchable. Many blacks seemed to feel that this was precisely because Farrakhan was black and David Duke was white. "Today the black community is victim to a national

scapegoat campaign that promises to wreck our prospects as a people, irreversibly."³⁵ This had made possible a politics of race demagoguery in which Louis Farrakhan was the player from the side of the African - Americans. A New York Times WCBS poll found that 32% of blacks believed that black politicians were being singled out for investigation, and 45% more thought that this may be true; 25% of those polled also believed that the government deliberately ensures an abundance of drugs in black neighbourhoods to harm black people and another 35% thought that this may be true; 10% of the respondents positively believed that AIDS was "deliberately created in a laboratory in order to infect black people."³⁶ Thus, when Farrakhan said, "the epidemic of drugs and violence in the black community stems from a calculated attempt (by whites) to foster black self-destruction" he found this constituency all ready to believe his words. Moreover, the moral tone of integration no longer inspires the new generation as it used to. Stacy Shears of United States Students Association said, "Most students don't think about or believe in integration."³⁷ They are too deeply affected by the economic decline and the political morass to have faith in a philosophy of construction and brotherhood. However, there was a desire for racial solidarity since the majority seemed to attack the blacks principally on racial grounds. There is "no disputing the thirst for solidarity

³⁵ Jordan, n.14, p.26.

³⁶ Cited in "Question of Leadership", op.cit.

³⁷ Quoted in Joe Klein, "Grieving for NAACP", *Newsweek*, vol.CXXIII,(27 June 1994), p.37.

and for renewal that we so effectively tapped into."³⁸ At such a time of racial crisis, the liberal and mainstream black leaders seemed to be confounded by the enormity of the disillusionment, despair and lack of solidarity from the whites, facing them. This "bankrupting of liberalism and the vacuum that gapes"³⁹ allowed Farrakhan to step in and make a bid for leadership. It allowed him to proclaim, "I am a reality in America".⁴⁰

The implications of this development are difficult to forecast. In a recent poll it was revealed that only 14% of African Americans thought he reflected the mainstream of their thought.⁴¹ While only 3% of the whites viewed him favourably before the Million Man March, 60% did so after it.⁴² As far as the intentions of Louis Farrakhan were concerned, C. Eric Lincoln, said that "Farrakhan wants to be a plain old American leader."⁴³ Since White America was increasingly accepting rightist Republicans, Farrakhan also wanted to gain legitimacy the same way. According to Prof. R.P. Kaushik of Jawharlal Nehru University, "...the church-going, peace-loving, moderate African-American wants to be part of the mainstream America.

³⁸ See, n.26.

³⁹ Willis, n.31.

⁴⁰ Quoted in "Louis Farrakhan", *Time*, vol.147 (17 June 1995), p.6.

⁴¹ *ibid.*

⁴² Minerbrook, n.21.

⁴³ Fineman and Smith, n.3.

Only when he is denied that role, he reacts with vitriolic expressions".⁴⁴ What will make it easier for him, according to Adolph Reed, Jr. is "the idea of organic representation of racial collectivity"⁴⁵ which had guided the attitudes of whites towards black leaders. It made possible the acceptance of a black leader on the bases of Charisma and "parleying media images of enthusiastic audiences into a claim to represent a mass constituency."⁴⁶ From the time of Booker T. Washington, this had been the pattern in American race relations. The whites liked to believe that the blacks as a 'race' speak naturally together in single, unified voice. The choice of the leader and the philosophy change with the prevailing mood in white America. Farrakhan fitted well into the political style of white America created by Reagan of 'antipolitical politics',⁴⁷ where he could present himself as the messiah from outside the system untainted by its corruptions. This made it possible for him to berate the black masses without being labelled a "traitor" to the race, a problem faced by Jesse Jackson, who was considered an establishment black, an insider within the system. The legitimacy of Louis Farrakhan is the symbol of a deep seated a alienation within the black community with the American system and its institutions and any gains of power for him are likely to exacerbate the segregation between the races, a reversion to the

⁴⁴ R.P. Kaushik, "Farrakhan's March to Washington", *Hindustan Times*, 26 October 1995, p.13.

⁴⁵ Adolph Reed, Jr. "All for One and None for All", *Nation*, vol.252 (28 January 1991), p.89.

⁴⁶ *ibid.*

⁴⁷ *ibid*

'caste' status of black America. Hence, Farrakhan's views and objectives appeared to suit a new credo in the resurgence of African-Americans wherein race still loomed large as a social dichotomy.

CONCLUSION

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With the withering away of the cold war, the world had entered, what Arthur Schlesinger, Jr. had called " a possibly more dangerous era of ethnic and racial animosity"¹. In the case of the United States this phenomenon had translated itself into a tremendous exacerbation of the age old conflict between the two major "races". Though from the very beginning America was known as a nation of immigrants, the Negro always remained beyond the pale, never even expected to be assimilated. The history of the United States is not only the saga of the assimilation of diverse peoples to form a "new race of men" but simultaneously runs the story of the ostracization and oppression of the African - Americans.

The Africans formed a group of mostly reluctant immigrants to the United States. Brought forcibly from their homelands, they were made to work on the plantations in the South. Their status was recognized even by the law and the constitution of the United States as not being equal to the other citizens. They were not even recognized as full human beings by the laws of most of the states of the land. Almost absolute powers were given to the owners of the unfortunate slaves to regulate the lives of their human chattles. Historians have put together painstakingly detailed accounts of their lives on the plantations. The entire existence of the slaves

¹ Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr, *The Disuniting of America: Reflections on a Multicultural Society* (New York, 1992), p.10.

revolved around the impossibly long hours of labour which they put on the plantation. There was no shelter accorded to them from the harsh punishments which the masters handed out fairly frequently for minor or even imaginary mistakes. These could include whipping, branding, beating or any other form of humiliation which may suit the master. Not all the masters were inhuman, however, the very grant of such absolute sovereignty of one man over another tended to give rise to feelings of superiority amongst the power holders. Even the most liberal of whites were not free from it. Jefferson, who wanted to employ the authority of the new constitution to condemn the institution of slavery, found the idea of equality between the Negro and the white unfathomable. He expressed his feelings on the subject as

I advance it therefore, as a suspicion only, that the blacks whether originally a distinct race, or made distinct by time and circumstances, are inferior to the whites in their endowments both of body and mind. ²

The status of the free blacks was also only slightly better. Even they remained merely as third class citizens under the law. In practice also widespread prejudice kept them lowly and oppressed. The north was not averse to giving legal equality to the coloured minority but there also the contact between the races was studiously avoided, except by some strongly religious communities like the Quakers.

The practice of slavery in the south made it imperative, over a period of time, to build up an ideological defence for an institution so obviously out of place in a democracy. Historians and thinkers came forward to fulfill this requirement. Not

² *ibid.*, p.25

surprisingly, the defence was highly racist in character. It justified slavery on the specious grounds of the inherent inferiority of the negro race. It was propagated that the negro was a slave because he was inferior by nature and not in an inferior position as a result of slavery. In their view it was divine will that the irresponsible and child like negro be directed and guided by his white superiors. This view came to acquire a powerful hold upon the imagination of the southern populace. In the end, even the majority of the white population, who happened to be non-owners of slaves, fought a war in defence of slavery.

Put in such circumstances, the slaves were called upon to make superhuman efforts at accommodation. Most of them resigned themselves to the situation with a somber fatality. However, as Prof. Gunnar Myrdal noted much later, accommodation was "practically never wholehearted in any American Negro."³ Most of them acquiesced in their situation simply because they saw no alternative to this course of action. As a result they turned more and more to God and religion. Though most of them had become Christians, they added to the sedate form of Church worship an entirely original emotional content. The church came to acquire a central place in the lives of the slaves. Naturally, the priest also shared in the special reverence accorded to the church. The special informal mode of Negro worship ensured that he communicated with his flock deeply and intimately. He was also the source of spiritual solace which was the only comfort the slave could have. Most of the priests were other

³ Gunnar Myrdal, *An American Dilemma* (New York, 1972) vol. 2, p. 720.

worldly in their outlook and teachings. They became major instruments of accommodation to the reality of slave life. Consequently, the masters were also careful to grant them a few concessions from time to time and treat them as the spokespersons for their community.

This pattern served to concretise a major element of race relations which continues till the present day, viz. the treatment of the entire black population as an organic whole and expecting "organic representation"⁴ from one or two members of the community.

However, the impulse of revolt perpetually militated against the impulse of accommodation in the hearts of the black men. The history of slavery in United States is riddled with the stories of slave revolts. These could take the form of impulsive individual violence, planned desertion and escape or large scale conspiracies. The punishment for failure was always cruel and many-a-times death itself but the rebels were not deterred. They symptomised the other element which later went into defining the nature of race relations. The protest or the resentment of the blacks often decided the attitude of the community towards the whites in an effort to assert a more positive and respectable identity.

Economic factors combined, in time, with a more humane interpretation of christianity in the north to bring about the American civil war (1861-1865). The war marked a watershed in the history of the American negro. It abolished slavery and the

⁴ Adolph Reed, Jr, "The False Prophet-II: All for One and None for All", *Nation*, vol.52 (28 January 1991), p.92.

freed slave was given the rights of a citizen. Though these gains began to be offset by a white reaction within ten years, they were still important. For the first time since independence the moral validity of the black man's claim to equality were recognized by the highest law of the land. From now on equality between the races became an American ideal. In practice, however, the return of the Democrats to power and the rise of white terrorist organizations like Ku Klux Klan successfully subordinated the entire negro community to the entire white community. This time there was no facade of slavery to prove the negro's inferiority; 'race' became the outright criterion for his subordination. The north also acquiesced as it was suffering from almost a fatigue with the negro question by now. The southern society enacted Jim Crow laws and the northern society practiced separation informally. The result was the same everywhere; the relations between the whites and the blacks became minimal and the relationship of superior to inferior continued.

At this time, black churches and white philanthropic societies came forward to provide spiritual and material succour to the black community. But it was Booker T. Washington who reestablished the old pattern of race relations by providing a 'conduit'⁵ between the two races. This contact affirmed the old pattern when the slaves could communicate with their masters through a few trusted men who promised the obedience of their people in return for a few concessions. The affirmation of this pattern also underlined the continuing depressed condition of the blacks. This condition

⁵ Myrdal, n.3, p.730.

was marked by virtual socio-economic segregation and an undemocratic political representation. The blacks continued to be dependent on the goodwill of the whites for the grant and enforcement of their rights. Despite the civil war the blacks failed to be accommodated into the system and race relations continued to be the relations between unequals.

The impulse of protest spread slowly but surely. Since the entire white race had now become the 'master' so running away from them meant leaving America itself. Back-to-Africa movements, the strongest being Marcus Garvey's, were concrete manifestations of this impulse of rejecting America as a whole. The second form of this rejection of the American society took the form of a separatist tendency as symbolised most strongly by the Nation of Islam. It countered rejection by rejection and sought voluntary segregation within America itself.

From the time of slavery itself the mood of the white community largely defined the course of race relations at any given time. The blacks, for most part, only reacted in various ways. Whenever conservatism reigned supreme the community withdrew within itself and concentrated on internal reforms. The effort at these times was to follow the path of the other immigrant groups to the United States who had struggled through prejudice and poverty to gain a better place. However the feelings of having been wronged in the past continued to grow and protest organizations and movements continued to flourish on the periphery.

They burst onto the mainstage, however, in the 1950s. The way to this development had again been paved by a radical change in the national sentiments. The

spread of the democratic ideals during the two world wars, the services of the blacks in these wars and growing scientific evidence in favour of racial equality served to liberalize the prevailing opinion. The tallest leader of the movement, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., aided by a host of organizations like the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE), Students Non Violent Coordination Committee(SNCC), National Association for Advancement of Colored People(NAACP), and Southern Christian Leadership Conference(SCLC) took America by storm.His method of protest was novel and his approach combined the self respect of the protest leaders with the conciliatory tone of the accommodationists. He relied upon the show of superior moral courage to persuade the white society into dismantling the legal edifice of discrimination.

The task did not prove to be easy but finally it was achieved. The law actually became an ally by extending special rights to the blacks to make amends for past discrimination. This struggle gave rise to an elite consensus that the integration of the races was a desirable end.This consensus also recognised that the centuries of discrimination against the African- Americans could only be offset by special legal protection and help for the community.The American elite, therefore,supported efforts to advance the socio-economic interests of the blacks at all levels.They also began to exercise their voting rights for the first time on a considerable scale. The 1970s and the 1980s witnessed the growth of a class of political elite amongst the blacks who had been elected to various offices at the local and state levels.

However, it became clear that the essential representation of the blacks in the polity still remained in the hands of charismatic and paternal leaders.The role of the

'conduits' continued to be valid signifying the persistence of the 'organic' perceptions of the black community. The man who was accepted to fill this role was Jesse Jackson. He stood out as the pre-eminent leader of the blacks. Though he never held any elected office accountable to the people, his show of popular support and his efforts at the uplift of the African-American community served to concretize him as the outstanding leader of his people. The importance given to his words and ideas by the white establishment and media gave him a fair amount of influence in defining race relations since his words were heeded by both the communities. In this capacity he continued to champion integration of the races. He was also able to win greater economic rights for his people in several cases. His priority was to correct societal neglect though internal reform was also given an important place. His influence became so great that he ran two highly impressive campaigns for the office of the President in 1984 and 1988.

The 1990s, however, saw a decline in his influence. Though he was courted by nearly all the Democratic candidates in the Presidential elections of 1992, he was marginalised in 1996. Even within the community his methods and ideals were more widely challenged. He was not seen to be as effective as before. When he grappled to maintain his lessening influence, the controversial leader of the Nation of Islam, Louis Farrakhan, began to move centre stage. His efforts to project himself as a more mellow and legitimate American politician culminated in the Million Man March of 1995. Though Farrakhan was never known to be an integrationist, Jesse Jackson shared a platform with him. Even before this Jackson's rhetoric had shifted in emphasis from

societal reform to internal reform as the primary objective of the community. He had severely criticised the spread of violence and drugs amongst blacks. Rev. Jesse Jackson seemed to share the view of 92% blacks and 84% whites who believed that race relations in America today are only fair or poor. He certainly seemed to be discouraged by the actions of the Democratic party in fulfilling the dream of Dr. Martin Luther King. As a result, he seemed to be moving towards a militant stance vis-a-vis White America, while telling Black America to adopt greater self-help policies for its own advancement. Farrakhan also, like Jackson, condemned the ills of the community only he has been far more forthright in doing so. Yet he has been finding greater acceptance than Jackson.

The pre-eminence of Louis Farrakhan confirms the prognosis of Professor Adolf Reed, Jr. of Harvard, that the white elite pick and choose from amongst the contenders for race leadership and at their own discretion, confer 'authenticity'.⁶ Though Farrakhan has not retracted completely from his anti-white and anti-semitic stance, his self-help philosophy echoes the current mood of the white establishment. As noted earlier the rhetoric of separatism and self help finds favour with the black leaders in a conservative national environment hostile to them. The fact that Jesse Jackson had become more critical of the failures of the blacks and exhorted them to rectify these failures themselves suggests a harsher political environment than the 1960s and 1970s. With the ascendancy of the conservative reaction from the 1980s onwards, black

⁶ Reed, Jr, n.4, p.88.

failures to control growing crime, broken families and drug abuse had come in for sharp criticism. Even affirmative action programmes were looked upon as discrimination in reverse. Farrakhan's rhetoric accommodated these concerns easily and effortlessly.

Yet amongst the blacks his influence was due to his 'racial assertiveness' invoking racial pride amongst blacks and blaming white racism for the sorry condition of the blacks. Prof. R. P. Kaushik recognized this as the symptom of "a minority resurgence .. visible in the US which may have far-reaching consequences in the years to come."⁷ This process of gaining legitimacy in the eyes of one race by attacking another, or, the 'politics of racial resentment'⁸ proves the deep chasm in race relations by its very success.

The rise of Louis Farrakhan through such rhetoric and periodical display of popular support through rallies and gatherings followed in the footsteps of Jackson. It showed that from the time of Booker T. Washington till today, the whites prefer to confer legitimacy on a single, charismatic and paternal spokesperson for the black community. It reflected the perceptions of both communities that the other was an organic whole which could be represented by a single spokesperson. This essentially 'racial' criterion of 'choosing' representatives speaks volumes about the lack of black assimilation in the American society. They are represented to the ruling elite

⁷ R.P.Kaushik, "Farrakhan's March to Washington", *Hindustan Times*, 26 October 1995, p. 13.

⁸ Arch Puddington, "The Question of Black Leadership", *Commentary*, vol.91 (January, 1991), p.28.

even now on the basis of 'race'. And the choice of Louis Farrakhan, with his separatist, racist and reactionary perspective, can only reflect a definite deterioration in the race relations in America. It seemed, that despite two centuries of efforts, "the two worlds of race",⁹ to quote Prof. John Hope Franklin, refuse to integrate in an American whole.

⁹ John Hope Franklin, *Race and History: Selected Essays* (Baton Rouge, 1989), p. 136.

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