

**TWO CONCEPTIONS OF BLACK NATIONALISM**  
**Martin Delany on the**  
**Meaning of Black Political Solidarity**

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*The essay provides both an interpretation and a theoretical reconstruction of the political philosophy of Martin Delany, a mid-nineteenth-century radical abolitionist and one of the founders of the doctrine of black nationalism. It identifies two competing strands in Delany's social thought, "classical" nationalism and "pragmatic" nationalism, where each underwrites a different conception of the analytical and normative underpinnings of black political solidarity. It is argued that the pragmatic variant is the more cogent of the two and the one to which Delany is most committed. It is also suggested that pragmatic nationalism can still serve usefully as a theoretical schema through which African Americans can understand and carry out their current political projects.*

**Keywords:** *Martin Delany; nationalism; racism; African Americans; U.S. politics*

**I**n response to new political challenges and changing social conditions for African Americans, a number of progressive political theorists have recently begun to re-envisage black politics, to modernize the social philosophy, objectives, and strategies of black freedom struggles for the post-civil rights

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era.<sup>1</sup> There are many important aspects to this rethinking, but at least part of it must involve reconstructing black politics so that it both rests on anti-essentialist and non-racialist foundations and, at the same time, maintains its commitment to defeating racism and to improving the life chances of those racialized as “black,” especially the most disadvantaged of these. However, it might seem that one obstacle to carrying this program forward is the continuing persistence of black nationalist ideas within black political thought and culture.

Black nationalism, as an ideology or philosophy, is one of the oldest and most enduring traditions in American political thought.<sup>2</sup> Black nationalists advocate such things as black self-determination, racial solidarity and group self-reliance, various forms of voluntary racial separation, pride in the historic achievements of those of African descent, a concerted effort to overcome racial self-hate and to instill black self-love, militant resistance to antiblack racism, the development and preservation of a distinctive black ethnocultural identity, and the recognition of Africa as the true homeland of those who are racially black. Some of these ideas, though perhaps not all, would seem to be at odds with the aforementioned goal of transforming black politics, for they appear to reify that dubious category “race,” to assume the existence of a transhistorical and organic “black essence,” or to imply the desirability of an authentic and unitary black plural subject called “the black community.”

Some theorists, such as Anthony Appiah and Paul Gilroy, have challenged the continuing currency of these racialist ideas by attempting to dismantle and discredit black nationalism altogether, putting forward a radical critique of what they take to be its various conceptual, empirical, and moral flaws.<sup>3</sup> However, this strategy is unlikely to be effective, for there are strains of black nationalism that are a constitutive component of the self-understanding and political orientation of a substantial segment of the African American population. These strains run so deep for many blacks that an uncompromising and comprehensive attack on them will surely be met with hostility or suspicion. If we are to avoid alienating potential allies and thereby further fragmenting the collective fight for black liberation, then we should opt for a more constructive form of critique, one that highlights the tensions and weaknesses within the black nationalist orientation but that also seeks to draw out and build upon important truths within this established outlook.<sup>4</sup> The transformation of the political consciousness of black Americans—or of any group for that matter—is more likely to come about if the new vision can be comprehended as an extension of, rather than a radical rupture with, traditional self-understandings of the group.

The discussion of black nationalism in this essay focuses primarily on its commitment to black political solidarity, as this commitment is a necessary component of all versions of the social philosophy, and some such form of solidarity arguably underpins any kind of black politics. Black nationalist discourses suggest a number of bases for political solidarity, typically organized around some particular, and always contested, conception of “blackness.” Many of these ways of conceptualizing the normative foundations and political significance of black unity are, to be sure, either unsound or impractical for contemporary African American politics. But through an examination of the work of an early and influential black nationalist theoretician, I will show that there is a conception of black solidarity, with roots in the black nationalist tradition, that is still viable and even politically necessary.

#### DELANY'S TWO NATIONALISMS

The mid-nineteenth-century militant abolitionist Martin Robison Delany (1812-85) was born free in Charles Town, in what is now West Virginia. He was not only a well-known activist, physician, novelist, journalist, African explorer, and politician, but more importantly for our purposes, he is widely regarded as the “father” of black nationalist theory.<sup>5</sup> The ancestral appellation is quite appropriate, for not only is practically every core tenet of black nationalist thought prefigured in his writings but, like Marcus Garvey and Malcolm X after him, Delany was a central spokesperson, charismatic leader, and principal architect of a movement for blacks to establish a separate nation-state. In 1852, Delany published the first book-length defense of African American emigration away from the United States, urging blacks to act collectively to form an independent republic. This influential work, *The Condition, Elevation, Emigration, and Destiny of the Colored People of the United States*, strongly encouraged free and fugitive blacks to leave the United States in order to avoid oppression and to build a sovereign nation-state that would enable blacks to live under conditions of equality and liberty.<sup>6</sup> The book was written in the wake of the draconian Fugitive Slave Law (a component of the notorious 1850 Compromise), which enabled slaveholders to pursue runaway slaves even in nonslaveholding territories and which, in effect, made free blacks (even more) vulnerable to being enslaved, as they would have no reliable legal recourse should some slaveholder falsely claim them as fugitive property. This white supremacist tactic caused a budding mass movement for black emigration to grow and be energized.

In *The Condition*, Delany famously describes blacks in the United States as an oppressed “nation within a nation.”<sup>7</sup> These subjugated internal nations

are, he claims, unjustly deprived of social and political equality by the ruling classes; they are subject to the most naked and brutal exploitation; and they are often restricted to the most devalued positions within the society in which they live and work. Moreover, in order to legitimate its dominant status, the ruling elite regards these subordinate nations as inherently inferior and thereby incapable of self-government.

Now it is clear why Delany would regard blacks in the United States as a severely oppressed people, perhaps even a stigmatized caste. However, it is less obvious, and even somewhat puzzling, why he would choose to characterize them as a "nation."<sup>8</sup> Moving beyond the pithy and influential slogan, I want to clarify Delany's conception of black nationality and his program for nation-building. I will do so by discussing two black nationalist doctrines that are advanced in Delany's writings:

Strong black nationalism: the political program of black solidarity and voluntary separation under conditions of equality and self-determination is a worthwhile end in itself, a constitutive and enduring component of the collective self-realization of blacks as a people.

Weak black nationalism: the political program of black solidarity and group self-organization is a strategy for creating greater freedom and social equality for blacks.

The two doctrines are not incompatible, since one might value black political solidarity as both a means and an end, and of course many black nationalists hold exactly this two-pronged view. But it is important to see that the two positions, if taken separately, would have quite different practical implications.

Strong black nationalism treats the establishment of an independent black republic or a separate self-determining community as an intrinsic goal of black liberation struggles. It advocates the development of a national identity, black self-reliance, and separatism, not only as a means to racial justice but as the political destiny of African Americans and perhaps of all those of African descent.<sup>9</sup> Weak nationalism, on the other hand, urges black solidarity and concerted action as a political strategy to lift or resist oppression. This could of course mean forming a self-governing black nation-state or a separate self-determining community within a multinational state, but it could also mean working to create a racially integrated society or even a "postracial" polity (i.e., a political order where "race" has no social meaning).

We might call the strong nationalist position "classical nationalism."<sup>10</sup> And let us call anyone who views black political solidarity as merely a contingent means for bringing about social justice a "pragmatic nationalist." The solidaristic commitment of pragmatic nationalism is based on a desire to live in a just society, a society that need not be, or even contain, a self-determining black community. Notice that the program of black emigration from the

United States is consistent with both forms of nationalism. On the classical view, emigration to build a black republic would be seen as desirable in itself (i.e., apart from the desire to escape the suffering caused by injustice), whereas pragmatic emigrationism would treat it as a mere means to fight or avoid oppression, a strategy that could be discarded if another one appeared more promising.<sup>11</sup>

Given these distinctions, my primary contention is that Delany vacillated between, and perhaps even confused, classical nationalism and pragmatic nationalism and that this tendency is characteristic of the black nationalist tradition in general.<sup>12</sup> While I will here focus my discussion on Delany's nationalism(s), my general hypothesis is this. Classical nationalism is often merely a defensive and rhetorical posture that is taken up so that the proponent (and the group he takes himself to represent) is not seen as merely reacting to white dominance but as asserting the equal right of blacks to collective self-determination alongside other would-be "nations." Pragmatic nationalism, on the other hand, is the more consistently defended and firmly held position of many self-styled black nationalists, despite the fact that they occasionally evince the classical form.<sup>13</sup> In support of this diagnosis, I will demonstrate that Delany exemplifies this wavering tendency. My strategy shall be to reconstruct the arguments he offers in favor of each of the two doctrines and then to show that, contrary to standard interpretations, he is most deeply committed to pragmatic black nationalism, notwithstanding his occasional lapses into the discourse of classical nationalism.

But before proceeding to that account, let me briefly address the following concern. Some might think that pragmatic nationalism, as here defined, is not strictly speaking a form of *nationalism* at all, since this form of black politics isn't necessarily tied to claims of territorial sovereignty or collective self-government, as many, perhaps most, nationalisms are.<sup>14</sup> As Eddie Glaude has convincingly shown, however, the meaning of the language of "nation" in early-nineteenth-century black political thought was intensely contested (as it still is today), with several prominent black leaders advocating what I'm here calling a pragmatic conception of "black nationhood."<sup>15</sup> Delany, the widely acknowledged progenitor of black nationalist theory, was among those struggling to define a conception of black nationality that could be used for emancipatory purposes, and his "nationalism," as I will demonstrate, sometimes fell short of a demand for black sovereignty. Accordingly, I maintain that when the idiom of nationhood is deployed to define a "people," to identify its collective interests and will, and to create bonds of political solidarity among those in this would-be community, the label of "nationalism" is appropriate, even if the political goal is not necessarily the creation of a separate self-determining corporate unit.

*POLITICAL AND MORAL IDEALS:  
"WHAT DO BLACKS WANT?"*

One way to get a handle on what really drives Delany's black nationalism is to examine the moral and political values that he defends or assumes in the course of developing his nationalist program. There are four core principles that undergird his political philosophy: social equality, democratic citizenship, self-government, and "manly" virtue.

Like all liberals, Delany believes that, as a matter of justice, all members of society should be accorded *equal respect* within social, political, and economic life and that every citizen should possess the same basic rights and duties.<sup>16</sup> He also maintains, however, that blacks will not have true social equality with whites unless blacks (more or less) match them in cultural and economic achievement, as accomplishment engenders the respect of others and self-respect.<sup>17</sup> Thus, only with proportionate black and white attainment in the central spheres of life can the two races truly live together on terms of mutual respect.

Delany also believes that blacks must have *democratic citizenship* within their country. The rights of a citizen should not only include the equal protection of the laws but also the right to enjoy positions of honor and public trust. Citizenship, then, is not merely a matter of having the right to vote for members of the dominant group but, on possession of the requisite merit, having a fair opportunity to occupy positions of authority within the country in which one permanently resides.<sup>18</sup>

Closely related to the principle of democratic citizenship is the right of *self-government*. Delany maintains that true political freedom requires that each adult citizen form an indispensable part of the sovereign authority of the republic:

A people, to be free, must necessarily be *their own rulers*; that is, *each individual* must, in himself, embody the *essential ingredient*—so to speak—of the *sovereign principle* which composes the *true basis* of his liberty. This principle, when not exercised by himself, may, at his pleasure, be delegated to another—his true representative.<sup>19</sup>

Delany argues that self-government is necessary for self-defense, since one cannot be secure in one's life, welfare, or liberty without an equal and effective say in matters of public concern.

In addition to these familiar liberal principles, Delany values the moral virtue, if one might call it that, of *manhood*. Despite the unfortunate term, "manhood," as Delany understands it, is a quality of character that is not peculiar to men, as many women also value and fully embody it. No doubt, Delany was not using "manhood" in a purely gender-neutral way, and I am

not at all suggesting that he did not embrace many traditional patriarchal values (e.g., a belief in a conventional domestic sexual division of labor and the “practical” education of women to equip them for child rearing).<sup>20</sup> He certainly did hold such views, as of course did most at the time.<sup>21</sup> But it is also important to recognize that, despite these typical but inexcusable sexist prejudices, Delany clearly wanted women to cultivate this “manly” character, though perhaps not to the same extent or in quite the same ways as men. “Vigor” would perhaps have been a more appropriate and less masculinist term to describe the relevant ensemble of traits.

One of the most important of these qualities is autonomous thinking. Delany is particularly dismayed when blacks allow whites, even those sympathetic to black interests, to think for them, and thus he consistently urges blacks to resist white paternalism.<sup>22</sup> He makes this point repeatedly with regard to religion, claiming that blacks have unthinkingly accepted their oppressors’ interpretation of Christianity, an interpretation that encourages passivity in the face of subordination and exploitation.<sup>23</sup> Moreover, he finds it disgraceful, and a sure sign of degradation, when blacks slavishly imitate the conduct of their oppressors. Thus, he urges blacks to be creative and imaginative in their individual and collective endeavors. This of course requires a degree of self-confidence and faith in one’s own abilities, which Delany believes blacks are sorely lacking and must make a concerted effort to develop. This confident and innovative spirit is to be joined with laudable ambition. According to Delany, as soon as they are able to acquire a few conveniences and some leisure, blacks too often become complacent about their second-class status in American society. But he insists that “manhood” requires a constant, though moderate, striving for superior achievement in every central sphere of life. Courage is also among the traits of a vigorous character, as it engenders the respect of others, even sometimes the respect of one’s oppressor. Perhaps more importantly, courage, along with independence of mind, is a sign of self-respect. He especially values and urges the cultivation of a courage that expresses itself in the fight for freedom and equality under conditions of domination.<sup>24</sup> Closely related to this is the trait of determination: that earnest resolve that doesn’t falter when confronted with adversity. Finally, vigor involves self-reliance. Delany holds that, rather than expecting the burden of racial oppression to be lifted by some other agency, blacks should realize that they must rely on themselves, as individuals and as a collective, in their effort to rise above their low position in U.S. society and within the international community.<sup>25</sup> It is not that he holds blacks responsible for their subordinate position; he simply believes that self-respect and prudence suggest that self-help is the surest road, if not to freedom, at least to a dignified existence.

Delany vividly represents the qualities of a vigorous character through the main hero of his novel *Blake; or, the Huts of America* (1859), a fictional slave narrative written as a critical response to Harriet Beecher Stowe's depiction of slaves as docile, ignorant, and helpless, in her immensely popular antislavery novel *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1852).<sup>26</sup> The Afro-Cuban Henry Blake, in stark contrast to Stowe's character Uncle Tom, is an intelligent, brave, and visionary runaway slave who organizes a general slave insurrection throughout the United States and in Cuba. Blake risks his life and freedom to work for the abolition of slavery in the New World. In an effort to develop an independent mind, he throws off the degrading religion of his oppressors, urging other people of color to do the same. He cleverly and successfully devises schemes to free his family and friends from slavery and repeatedly outwits those who would return them to bondage. He is defiant in the face of oppression and always self-assured. And he is tireless in his effort to enlighten the oppressed and to motivate them to concerted action for their liberty and uplift. Indeed, with the help of his cousin Placido, Blake manages to infuse vigor into an entire community of would-be revolutionaries in Cuba. Notice how Delany describes a gathering of this group, composed of both men and women:

There was no empty parade and imitative aping, nor unmeaning pretensions [*sic*] observed in their doings, but all seeming fully to comprehend the importance of the ensemble. They were earnest, firm, and determined; discarding everything which detracted from their object, permitting nothing to interfere. Thus intelligently united, a dangerous material existed in the midst of such an element as Cuba.<sup>27</sup>

There is an important relationship between Delany's three political principles and the qualities of a vigorous character. Delany believes that part of the reason blacks often fail to exhibit the traits of vigor—independence of mind, creativity, self-confidence, ambition, courage, self-respect, determination, and self-reliance—is that they are severely oppressed. In particular, they lack socioeconomic equality, the rights of democratic citizenship, and political self-determination. This kind of deprivation often weakens the character of many (though not all) who suffer under it, and blacks had been acutely debased by their many years in bondage. It is also clear that vigorous persons are the ones most likely to struggle and fight for the realization of these liberal principles. Over time, subjugated persons will often become accustomed and resigned to less than full liberty and equality. Delany maintains, therefore, that blacks must find a way, through group self-reliance and solidarity, to reinvigorate themselves, if they are to overcome their oppressed condition and thus to become the “nation” they should be.

Now these political principles and moral values can be given an individualist interpretation or a collectivist one. That is, the claims of equality, citizenship, and self-government can be founded on the rights of individual persons or of peoples, and vigor is a property that can be possessed by individuals or by communities (where the “manliness” of the community is not reducible to the vigorous characters of its individual members). Delany seems aware of this distinction but remains somewhat ambiguous on whether his nationalism should be understood as ultimately rooted in individual or group claims.<sup>28</sup> Moreover, it would seem that Delany’s core values are realizable in principle—though, given the pervasiveness and persistence of racism, perhaps not in practice—within either a multiracial state or a monoracial one. And these values can be embraced on universalistic moral grounds and/or endorsed for reasons of ethnoracial loyalty. As we shall see, Delany offers arguments that support both an individualist/universalistic reading of his nationalist philosophy and a collectivist/particularistic one.

*CLASSICAL NATIONALISM AND  
“ORIGINAL” BLACK IDENTITY*

Delany’s most forceful defense of classical nationalism is found in his essay “The Political Destiny of the Colored Race on the American Continent.” This was the keynote address to the first National Emigration Convention (1854), of which Delany was president pro tem and for which there were delegates (both men and women) from some twelve states and from the Canadas, with (by Delany’s count) nearly sixteen hundred persons in attendance. In his address, which was adopted as the convention’s official report, he argues that blacks must constitute, in terms of sheer numbers, the “ruling element” of their body politic. The basis of such a polity, he contends, must be a shared national identity, a so-called “original” identity:

Upon this solid foundation rests the fabric of every substantial political structure in the world, which cannot exist without it; and so soon as a people or nation lose their original identity, just so soon must that nation or people become extinct.<sup>29</sup>

According to Delany, this common national identity creates strong bonds of affinity and is the principal basis upon which a people lays claim to the right of self-government.<sup>30</sup> Indeed, he maintains that without a shared national identity, the people of a republic would lose their common interest and purpose in remaining together, thus creating internal instability, which could in turn make them vulnerable to being dominated by a more cohesive national power.<sup>31</sup>

In accordance with this classical nationalist view, what then, for Delany, constitutes the original identity of black Americans? At times, Delany seems committed to *racialism*, that is, to the now defunct view that being of the same “race” is not merely a matter of sharing superficial phenotypic traits, such as skin color or hair type, but of sharing a distinctive “bio-genetic essence” that gives rise to both these morphological traits *and* a set of psychological dispositions and natural endowments.<sup>32</sup> He claims that blacks have certain “inherent traits” and “native characteristics” that distinguish them from other races.<sup>33</sup> Among these are civility, peaceableness, and religiosity. Blacks are also supposedly naturally gifted at languages, oratory, poetry, music, painting, ethics, metaphysics, theology, and jurisprudence. And they are said to be industrious, talented at agricultural development, adept at the training of horses, and adaptable to almost any climate.<sup>34</sup>

But there are two obvious problems with this “organicist” method of establishing the distinctiveness of the black “nation within a nation.” First, there are clearly lots of nonblacks who possess these traits and talents, and second, there are plenty of blacks who do not. Delany seems to recognize this. Thus, since he cannot argue plausibly that *all* or *only* blacks have these characteristics, in order to demonstrate that blacks have a distinctive and noteworthy national identity, he argues that blacks were the *first* race to display them and/or that they *best* exemplify them.

His most comprehensive attempt to build a case for black originality and superiority can be found in his relatively obscure and final work *Principia of Ethnology: The Origin of Races and Color*.<sup>35</sup> In response to influential social Darwinist and polygenetic accounts of the development of racial kinds, where blacks invariably come out as inferior stock, Delany offers a part theological and part biological account of the origin of races. He claims that God’s purpose in creating the varieties of humankind is the development and spread of civilization for His glory, where “civilization” is a matter of advanced intellectual achievements (e.g., in religion, philosophy, art, and science) and practical accomplishments (e.g., in agriculture, industry, architecture, and political organization).<sup>36</sup>

Relying on the biblical narratives of Noah’s Ark and the Tower of Babel, Delany claims that, not long after the flood, humankind divided itself into three separate groups, each marked by a different skin color—white, yellow, and black—and each set off to populate a different geographical region—Europe, Asia, and Africa, respectively.<sup>37</sup> The three groups each had their own language, which, because of the confusion of tongues, the other two groupings could not understand, causing the individual members of each group to have a special affinity for each other.<sup>38</sup>

Now Delany insists that it was the African branch of the human family that was the first to found civilized legal orders.<sup>39</sup> To show this, he sets out to demonstrate the greatness and originality of the ancient African civilizations of Egypt and Ethiopia, which he treats as a unified kingdom.<sup>40</sup> He claims that these ancient Africans were the first to establish municipal law, the first to establish and propagate the science of letters, and the first to spread intellectual civilization. They invented astronomy, astrology, and geometry; they initiated advanced architecture; they specialized in agricultural development; and they were the first to develop a monotheistic religion with a self-created and benevolent god.

Now of course this outstanding record of original achievement would be irrelevant to Delany's classical nationalist project unless he were able to show that the ancient Ethiopians and Egyptians were racially "black" or "Negroes." His main evidence is ancient paintings with representations of persons of high social standing who possess paradigmatic "black" phenotypic features—dark skin color, woolly hair, flat nose, and full lips.<sup>41</sup> He also claims that since the sphinx has the "head of a Negro woman on the body of a lion or lioness," we have indisputable evidence that the original inhabitants of Egypt were Negroes.<sup>42</sup> In order to link modern blacks to their ancient African heritage, Delany invokes racialism and Divine providence. He claims that the Ethiopians led the march of civilization because of the "inherent faculties" of the African race and that God created this race specifically for the purpose of civilizing all of humankind.<sup>43</sup>

We now have a better idea of what Delany means by the "original" identity of the black "nation within a nation." Black Americans are the descendants of a great and ancient African people. The greatness of this African civilization is to be explained, at least in part, by the "native characteristics" of the original African race. And according to Delany, modern blacks in the African diaspora, even those of "mixed blood," still possess the natural abilities and tendencies of their original identity.<sup>44</sup>

But now we must ask, in light of their original identity, what sort of "nation" should modern blacks strive to be? Delany argues that blacks can only become the self-determining nation they should through the regeneration of Africa, their original homeland. And this project of African redemption and restoration must be carried out primarily by the members of the African race themselves.<sup>45</sup>

Delany outlines the program for African regeneration in his "Official Report of the Niger Valley Exploring Party" (1860), a document that also chronicles his travels in Africa and his discussions with African leaders about possible African American settlements.<sup>46</sup> This topographic and diplomatic exploration of Africa was authorized by the Executive Board of Commis-

sioners at the National Emigration Convention in Chatham, Canada West, in 1858. In this report, Delany defends the view that if Africa is to be the nation it should be, it must have a “national” character and the effective right of self-government, and it must be comparable in level of civilization to that of other great nations in the world—morally, religiously, socially, politically, and economically.<sup>47</sup> But, he maintains, this essential development will not occur unless a “new element” is introduced into the African context, an agency that already possesses the requisite attainments of modern civilization.<sup>48</sup> This new element should possess the “natural” traits and inclinations of the African race and must share with it the special sympathies characteristic of racial kinship. This regenerative agency, as one might guess, can only be some segment of the most enlightened and vigorous of those of African descent in America. Delany would have a carefully selected African American vanguard establish social and industrial settlements in Africa, with the purpose of instituting the pursuits of modern civilized life.

Delany contends that the basis of a great nationality depends on three fundamental principles.<sup>49</sup> The nation must (1) control a geographical territory, (2) be sufficiently populated, and (3) have an immense staple production as a solid source of wealth. Africa, with its vast native population and potential for agricultural development, would thus be a natural site for the establishment of a black nation-state. It is this vision of a free, economically self-reliant, self-governing, and vigorous Pan-African nation that Delany hopes will be realized through the efforts of African Americans:

Our policy must be—and I hazard nothing in promulgating it; nay, without this design and feeling, there would be a great deficiency of self-respect, pride of race, and love of country, and we might never expect to challenge the respect of nations—*Africa for the African race, and black men to rule them*. By black men I mean, men of African descent who claim an identity with the race.<sup>50</sup>

This classical nationalist agenda is not, however, the only position Delany can be found defending. He just as often, and in fact more persuasively, makes the case for a pragmatic nationalist vision, one with quite different practical implications. I now turn to that account.

#### *PRAGMATIC NATIONALISM AND RACIAL DOMINATION*

Recall Delany’s claim that blacks must be the “ruling element” in any body politic of which they are a part. Now, on the principles of classical nationalism, the justification for this stance is that original identity must be

the basis of any national republic, for such a collective identity is allegedly needed to create lasting common interests and to ensure unity of purpose. But sometimes Delany argues that blacks must be the ruling element in their country simply as a means of self-defense against antiblack prejudice and political marginalization. Here, he urges black solidarity, group self-reliance, and mass emigration as a way to achieve social equality, democratic citizenship, self-government, and “manhood” for those oppressed on account of their “blackness.” This pragmatic nationalist strategy does not, however, require blacks to retain or regain their “original” identity, because the basis of black unity is not their glorious national past or their so-called native characteristics but their mutual recognition of their common vulnerability to white domination and their collective resolve to overcome it. In the remainder of this section, I will sketch the arguments Delany offers in favor of this weak nationalist position.

Let’s begin with the question of the relevance of “black identity” for pragmatic nationalism. That is, what, on the pragmatic account, is the distinctive nature of this oppressed “sub-nation,” and what kind of “nation” should it be? Black nationality cannot be a matter of blacks sharing a distinct culture, since, according to Delany, black Americans, for better or worse, have been stripped of their African cultural heritage and consequently have merged with the dominant culture of the United States—in religion, language, values, habits, and customs.<sup>51</sup> Moreover, he does not advise blacks to return to the “original” cultural ways of their African ancestors, or to those of any contemporary African people. That seems to leave us, as it did with classical nationalism, with “race” as a basis for modern black nationality. To explore this possibility further, let’s return then to Delany’s remarks about the nature of races.

In his *Principia of Ethnology*, Delany stresses the fact that all humans, of whatever race, have common ancestors—Adam and Eve, and then later Noah and his wife. Moreover, the separation of Noah’s offspring into three distinct groups did not give to each resulting population any special attributes except a common language, and, on Delany’s account, linguistic peculiarities just *happened* to correspond to differences in skin color. He insists, furthermore, that God did not change the physical constitution of the three groups; thus, any biological differences that existed between them would have been the result of normal physiological processes.<sup>52</sup> Indeed, it is quite telling that, despite his use of racist language, the entirety of his discussion of the biological peculiarities of the different races concerns the explanation of differences in skin color. But even here Delany maintains that different shades of skin are merely the result of more or less concentrations of pigment or what he sometimes calls “rouge.”<sup>53</sup> Each of Noah’s sons was supposedly born with

different degrees of pigmentation—Shem the same as Noah, Ham a little more, Japheth a little less. According to Delany, God did not need to effect a miracle to create these color differences, for as we know, parents of similar complexion, eye color, and/or hair type often produce offspring who differ from them with respect to these phenotypic traits:

The Divine Creator had but *one plan*; so in the human races, running through all the *various shades of complexion*, there is but *one color*, modified and intensified from negative to the extremest [*sic*] positive, as seen from the purest white, in *all intermediate colors*, to the purest black. This is the solution of the problem which reveals to us the great mystery of the races of man.<sup>54</sup>

Since languages no longer—if they ever did—correspond to complexional hue, skin color turns out to be the only distinguishing characteristic by which the “original races” can be reliably identified over time. True, these differences in skin color could have been reinforced by the continental separation of the three “racial” populations, but even granting this, there still would be little reason to believe in the truth of racialism. And, given global migration patterns, these color differences themselves would likely fade in the absence of a strong norm against complexional exogamy. Thus, it seems that Delany *should* say, though he sometimes does not, that “race” is only skin-deep.

This “thin” account of racial identity is consistent with other things Delany says about race. For instance, he claims that blacks and whites share a common inner life, despite their different exterior physical traits: “So is it with the whole class of colored people in the United States. Their feelings, tastes, predilections, wants, demands, and sympathies, are identical, and homogeneous with those of all other Americans.”<sup>55</sup>

Moreover, though Delany presents a detailed account of the origin of color differences between the “original” continental populations, he provides no argument or evidence for the existence of a racial essence that causally explains both skin color and native behavioral dispositions. On the contrary, he sometimes emphasizes that Africa’s natural environment and physical peculiarities were especially conducive to the rapid development of human faculties, which could explain why the African race was the first to establish civilization.<sup>56</sup> Indeed, pushing a racialist argument about black native characteristics would be incompatible with his vision of spreading the positive values of African civilization throughout the world.<sup>57</sup> How could he expect other races to properly emulate the black race if the intellectual and practical achievements of the latter were the result of an innate endowment that they did not share with other racial groups?

Furthermore, Delany does not appear to be particularly disturbed by so-called miscegenation. He does not suggest that interracial reproduction compromises or retards the "black essence." Nor does he view "race-mixing" as a practice that has negative biological consequences, neither for the "mixed-bloods" nor for the would-be pure races.<sup>58</sup> *Blake* portrays many mixed-race persons as heroic and as race leaders, and in *The Condition*, Delany lists with pride the many accomplishments of blacks with varying degrees of black ancestry. Indeed, his wife Catherine Richards was herself biracial, a so-called "quadroon."<sup>59</sup>

Now some would argue that Delany must be a committed racist, since he speaks with such pride about the achievements of so-called "pure" blacks.<sup>60</sup> However, I maintain that his praise for "unmixed blackness" is just a rebuttal to those whites who charge that whenever blacks achieve anything of note, their success must be due to their possession of some "white blood."<sup>61</sup> Also in this regard, he maintains that the subordinate status of mixed-race persons depends on the stigma attached to "pure" blackness.<sup>62</sup> This is made quite clear in *Blake*, where in the context of a secret meeting among slaves and their free colored allies, arranged for purposes of discussing a general slave insurrection in Cuba, a woman from among their number objects to the emphasis being placed on obtaining equality for those of African descent with "unmixed blood." A "mulatto" hero of the novel, Placido,<sup>63</sup> offers the following reply:

The whites assert the natural inferiority of the African as a race: upon this they premise their objections, not only to the blacks, but all who have an affinity with them. You see this position taken by the high Court of America [in the *Dred Scott* decision], which declares that persons having African blood in their veins have no rights that white men are bound to respect. Now how are the mixed bloods ever to rise? The thing is plain; it requires no explanation. The instant that an equality of the blacks with the whites is admitted, we being the descendants of the two, must be acknowledged the equals of both. Is not this clear?<sup>64</sup>

Thus, Delany's commitment to racialism was, at most, halfhearted, invoked merely to lend credence to his claims of black national distinctiveness and to link modern blacks to their symbolic ancient progenitors. But this romantic racialism is wholly unpersuasive, and, in any case, he makes no serious attempt to defend it. However, as Delany was certainly aware, a merely skin-deep conception of race is a rather superficial basis for black identity, hardly an inspiring foundation for a black national consciousness and a new independent black republic. So, again, what is the significance of black identity for black politics? Ultimately, for Delany, it has to do with the peculiar character of racial subjection as a form of oppression.

According to Delany, the ruling class of America wanted a subservient class to do their drudgery, a group too powerless to successfully resist being enslaved.<sup>65</sup> Such a group would be even more easily exploited if they were to share some distinguishing physical mark, since the dominant group would then have a basis for differential sympathy. And this exploitative relationship would be firmly secured and buttressed if the dominant group were to successfully spread an ideology of inherent inferiority based on the saliency of this mark, for this would reduce the sympathy of powerful outsiders who might intervene on behalf of the oppressed. Thus, after the genocide of indigenous peoples in the attempt to make them slaves and to strip them of their land, Africans were selected. Delany contends that the latter were not chosen because whites hated African peoples or those with dark skin, or because blacks were “inferior” in some way; rather, they were selected for purely pragmatic reasons—to increase commercial profit and leisure-time for a slaveholding elite. It is in this way that dark skin (and other paradigmatic “black” phenotypic traits) came to have immense social significance: it became a physical sign of degradation.

Delany maintains that once this association of black skin with low social status had been established, there was virtually nothing blacks could do (short of extensive “race-mixing” or passing for white) to elevate themselves to social equality.<sup>66</sup> Advancing an argument made famous by Alexis de Tocqueville, Delany insists that even the abolition of slavery would not end black oppression or racial antagonism, because the stigma of servitude would have become attached to their easily observable “distinguishing mark.”<sup>67</sup> Thus, the skin color of blacks would remind not only whites but also blacks of their former slave status, causing many whites to have contempt for blacks and some blacks to have self-contempt.

Delany thinks that this association of skin color with forced servitude could perhaps be broken if blacks were to rise to positions of honor and status within society. This is why he implores blacks to avoid taking on menial labor and service roles, an injunction that some commentators have wrongly reduced to a form of conservative elitism.<sup>68</sup> However, Delany is not critical of those blacks who are forced to take such positions out of material necessity; he simply insists that no self-respecting person would do so, as some have, just to buy ostentatious clothes and modern conveniences.<sup>69</sup> Indeed, he argues that when an *individual* performs the role of servant, this is not necessarily degrading at all, but when a great number of a recognizable social group do, they inevitably come to be viewed as a “naturally” subservient people.<sup>70</sup>

Delany becomes convinced that blacks cannot erase the stigma attached to their color while remaining in the United States, and thus he urges them to emigrate elsewhere. He mounts a powerful case, on pragmatic nationalist

grounds, in support of this radical conclusion. The Fugitive Slave Law of 1850 effectively denied full citizenship to even “free” blacks, a denial that was later solidified and made explicit in the *Dred Scott* decision of 1857.<sup>71</sup> He maintains that whites cannot be rationally or morally persuaded out of their prejudice because they have a material stake in black subordination and because they have too little sympathy for what they consider a degraded race.<sup>72</sup> Blacks certainly cannot compel whites to treat them as equals, because whites greatly outnumber and have significantly more power than blacks.<sup>73</sup> Blacks cannot achieve economic parity with whites while living among them, since whites all but monopolize land, capital, and political influence.<sup>74</sup> Living under such oppressive conditions also fosters servility and resignation among the oppressed.<sup>75</sup> Thus, if blacks were to remain in the United States, they would not only be sacrificing their right to equal respect, democratic citizenship, and self-government but would also be forgoing the cultivation and expression of a vigorous character, which no group can do and retain its dignity. And even if blacks were to gain *legal* equality with whites in the United States, the antiblack attitudes of the latter, along with their overwhelming power and sheer numbers, would make it quite difficult, if not impossible, for blacks to fully exercise their civil rights.<sup>76</sup>

Delany concludes, therefore, that blacks must leave the United States. Notice, though, that emigration is necessary, not because Africa is the “fatherland” to which blacks must return to reclaim and develop their original identity but because they must go where they can realize the principles of equality, citizenship, self-government, and vigor. In fact, Delany doesn’t even advocate mass black emigration to Africa. Rather, he urges the vast majority of blacks to remain in the New World. He tells us many times over that the Western Hemisphere is the “home” of blacks and that they are fully entitled to remain there.<sup>77</sup> And in response to William Lloyd Garrison’s critique of his racial separatism, Delany says, “I would as willingly live among white men as black, if I had an *equal possession and enjoyment* of privileges,” but, he explains, “I have no hopes in this country—no confidence in the American people—with a *few* excellent exceptions.”<sup>78</sup> His principled position, then, is that blacks should live wherever they do not infringe upon the rights of others; self-government and citizenship on terms of social equality are possible; and a vigorous character can be developed and freely expressed.<sup>79</sup> Thus, he suggests, somewhat surprisingly perhaps, that blacks emigrate from the United States to Central and South America, for these locations have all the resources needed for building a democratic and free nation.<sup>80</sup>

Delany strongly encourages blacks to cultivate solidarity with American Indians and Latin American peoples.<sup>81</sup> This suggests that his primary con-

cern is with undermining or avoiding white domination, not with creating an exclusive black national polity. He believes that there is no legally sanctioned race prejudice in Latin America, except in Brazil, and that the peoples of those countries are ready and eager to receive U.S. blacks.<sup>82</sup> Delany is particularly concerned to combat U.S. and European imperialism, and thus he urges all “colored” peoples to work together in an effort to defend themselves against white hegemony.<sup>83</sup> He even hopes blacks and other people of color will eventually create a United States of South America.

It is important to see that this new self-reliant and sovereign people could not be held together by their common racial identity, as they would be a racially heterogeneous and hybrid population. Nor would this be a country committed to black cultural nationalism, as some have suggested.<sup>84</sup> Instead, Delany advocates cultural syncretism among the new population, strongly urges blacks to become bilingual by learning Spanish, and evinces firm support for religious tolerance and non-sectarianism.<sup>85</sup> This would not, therefore, be a nation built on the edifice of “original identity.” Rather, “practical necessity,” that is, self-preservation and common defense, would be the social bonding agent among this newly emerging, anti-imperialist, “colored” people.<sup>86</sup> Most importantly, this multiracial “nation” would be committed to social equality, democratic citizenship for all, self-government, and the cultivation of a vigorous citizenry.<sup>87</sup>

Still, the following challenge is surely appropriate: if Delany was “really” a pragmatic black nationalist, what then are we to make of his project of regenerating Africa; that is, how can this romantic program be understood without relying on classical nationalist principles? In response, I would argue that Delany views this project as primarily a strategy to combat domination, one that has the, admittedly ambitious, goal of undermining white supremacist ideology, the African slave-trade, and Euro-American imperialism. Here, he provides an argument that is analogous to the one he offers in defense of the emphasis on the achievements of so-called “pure” blacks. He suggests that if Africa were to remain underdeveloped and associated with slavery, then this would contribute to the stigma attached to blackness. In addition to their dark color, the fact that blacks are of African descent would be a “sign” of their degradation so long as Africa is viewed as a place where primitive, savage, and dependent peoples reside. Thus, he believes Africa’s redemption and civilization must be a part of any general effort to bring about racial equality and true freedom for those of African descent.<sup>88</sup>

But, again, in advocating African development, Delany does not suggest that all or even most African Americans should settle there but only a select few.<sup>89</sup> And he insists that the fact that black Americans will not relocate to Africa is no more a sign of disrespect for their original homeland than the fact

that many whites consider America their home is a sign of disrespect for their European origins.<sup>90</sup> Moreover, Delany does not recommend a nostalgic return to African ways of old. Rather, he suggests that Africans retain what is good in contemporary Africa and try to improve upon it, that they incorporate what is valuable in the civilizations of other races, and that they reject whatever is inimical to modern progress, regardless of its national roots.<sup>91</sup>

Delany does not, however, view the regeneration of Africa as simply a means to improve the condition of blacks living in the New World. This is clear from the fact that he implores *all* civilized nations to help in Africa's modernization.<sup>92</sup> This call, which he claims is a "duty," could hardly be expected to motivate nonblacks to action if it were merely based on racial loyalty or the need to improve the position of blacks in the diaspora. Instead, it must be premised on common humanity, social justice, and perhaps mutual economic advantage. Hence, the program for Africa's redemption is, for Delany, a cause worthy of universal endorsement, quite apart from its advantages for black Americans.

#### CONCLUSION

I have been urging that we read Delany as a pragmatic nationalist who sometimes misleadingly expressed himself as if he were a committed classical one. The justification for this somewhat nonstandard interpretation is that it makes the best sense of his various seemingly inconsistent statements.<sup>93</sup> But perhaps the clearest evidence in support of the claim that Delany was "really" a pragmatic nationalist is that after the Civil War, he ceased to advocate mass black emigration and instead worked for "a union of the two races" in the United States.<sup>94</sup> If we read him as a pragmatic nationalist, then this change is perfectly consistent with his fundamental political and moral principles. Black solidarity and separatism were never ends in themselves but merely strategies for realizing his most cherished values—equality, citizenship, self-government, and "manhood." These goals obviously would have seemed to him more achievable within the United States after the war. Indeed, in less than a decade, slavery was abolished by constitutional amendment (1865), blacks born in the United States were declared citizens and constitutionally guaranteed equal protection under the law (1868), and black men were granted the franchise (1870). During Reconstruction, many blacks held public office, even as high as the U.S. Senate. And Delany himself became the first black commissioned field officer in the U.S. Army, served as an administrator for the Freedmen's Bureau, and later ran, though unsuccessfully, for lieutenant governor of South Carolina. Under these improving con-

ditions for blacks (and for Delany), it is not surprising that he would have abandoned his program for black emigration. Though he dropped this radical approach and later took up what some might consider rather conservative positions,<sup>95</sup> we should not conclude that Delany had thereby rejected pragmatic nationalism, since it was quite clear to him that much work remained to be done in the cause for racial equality and that, in the meantime, blacks still needed the self-protection provided by their political solidarity.

I have discussed Delany's social philosophy at length, not only because it is intrinsically interesting and often neglected by students of American political thought but because it can help us better appreciate the need to rethink the foundations of contemporary black solidarity, and it might even aid us in developing a more suitable black (post)nationalist philosophy. Within much of current black political thinking there is still a tendency to vacillate between, and at times to confuse, classical and pragmatic forms of black nationalism. This is understandable, since no subordinate group would want to think of itself as merely reacting to, or as naively accepting, the dictates and ideology of the dominant group. Instead, they quite naturally want to express self-directed agency, to feel as if they are forging their own path, against the grain if necessary. Ironically, as others have argued, classical black nationalism, rather than exposing the more dangerous elements in the nationalist ideologies of the United States and Europe, further buttresses them by reproducing them in a black-inflected form.<sup>96</sup> True vigor, though, should go beyond this insufficiently self-critical and superficial emulation. It should entail the courageous, determined, and creative pursuit of the highest ideals, which may require critiquing and even transcending many of the beliefs, values, and practices that we inherit from previous generations, a reflexive stance that is surely a sign of vigorous independent thinking. Moreover, this creative reevaluation ought not be limited to the expression of individuality but should also extend to the political realm, where matters of social justice are at stake. So, while pragmatic nationalism, too, draws on Western nationalist ideas, it does so with a critical eye and an improvisational spirit, riffing on them to be sure, but with a healthy suspicion of politicized ethnoracial identities and a steadfast commitment to justice for all.

What I'm suggesting here, then, is rather than continue this ambivalent embrace of classical nationalism—with its emphasis on inherent racial characteristics, primordial ethnic origins, cultural purity and distinctiveness, an ancient "homeland," and national self-determination—blacks should consider abandoning this misleading discourse altogether, despite its evocative and symbolic resonance. However, contrary to what some critics have supposed, forsaking this ideology would not necessarily mean giving up black solidarity as a strategy for overcoming (or at least ameliorating) antiblack

racism. Indeed, what holds blacks together as a (more or less) unified “people” with shared political interests is the fact of their racial subordination and their collective resolve to triumph over it. The “racial” blackness of blacks, then, while in one sense only skin-deep—constituted as it is by relatively superficial phenotypic traits—has tremendous social importance, as these somatic traits carry the stigma of subordinate social status. But blacks need not cherish or valorize this peculiar ascribed identity in order to see that it makes them all vulnerable to various forms of mistreatment. Building on this recognition and their shared goal to break down all unnecessary barriers to social equality, this culturally diverse, intergenerational, and globally dispersed community can firmly and consistently embrace pragmatic black nationalism. This program would treat black solidarity as a strategy for bringing about substantive racial equality and as a means of collective self-defense against racial oppression.<sup>97</sup> Pragmatic nationalism is, therefore, in principle compatible with interracial cooperation, and indeed it is perfectly consistent with the goal of bringing about a world where “racial” identities—hegemonic or oppositional—are no longer thought useful or appealing, even to those who have historically been most disadvantaged by racism. It should be viewed as just one among a number of possibly effective programs for ending, or at least surviving, racial injustice.<sup>98</sup>

### NOTES

1. See, for example, Robin D. G. Kelley, *Freedom Dreams: The Black Radical Imagination* (Boston: Beacon, 2002); Lani Guinier and Gerald Torres, *The Miner's Canary: Enlisting Race, Resisting Power, Transforming Democracy* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002); Adolph Reed Jr., *Stirrings in the Jug: Black Politics in the Post-segregation Era* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999); Robert Gooding-Williams, “Race, Multiculturalism and Democracy,” *Constellations* 5 (1998): 18-41; Clarence Lusane, *Race in the Global Era: African Americans at the Millennium* (Boston: South End, 1997); Manning Marable, *Beyond Black and White: Transforming African-American Politics* (London: Verso, 1995); Cornel West, *Race Matters* (New York: Vintage, 1994); Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993); and Bernard R. Boxill, *Blacks and Social Justice*, rev. ed. (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 1992).

2. In a comprehensive empirical analysis of contemporary black political ideologies, Michael Dawson has shown that among African Americans there is broad support for (and very little hard opposition to) several core nationalist ideas, including the creation and control of separate institutions within the black community, black economic and political self-determination, and a belief that African Americans constitute an “internal black nation” within the United States. See Michael C. Dawson, *Black Visions: The Roots of Contemporary African-American Political Ideologies* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001), esp. chap. 3. Also see Robert A. Brown and Todd C. Shaw, “Separate Nations: Two Attitudinal Dimensions of Black Nationalism,” *Journal of Politics* 64 (2002): 22-44; Dean E. Robinson, *Black Nationalism in American*

*Politics and Thought* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2001), chap. 7; and Jennifer L. Hochschild, *Facing Up to the American Dream: Race, Class, and the Soul of the Nation* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1995), chaps. 4-6.

3. See Kwame Anthony Appiah, *In My Father's House: Africa in the Philosophy of Culture* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1992); Paul Gilroy, *Against Race: Imagining Political Culture beyond the Color Line* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000). Also see Clarence E. Walker, *We Can't Go Home Again: An Argument about Afrocentrism* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2001). It is worth pointing out that, in recent years, Appiah has softened his critical stance toward certain black nationalist ideas about social identity. See, for example, his "Race, Culture, Identity: Misunderstood Connections," in *Color Conscious: The Political Morality of Race*, by K. Anthony Appiah and Amy Gutmann (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996).

4. This more constructive approach to black nationalism—intensely critical yet sympathetic engagement—is exemplified by the essays in *Is It Nation Time? Contemporary Essays on Black Power and Black Nationalism*, edited by Eddie Glaude Jr. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002).

5. In his influential discussion of the nationalist and integrationist strains within black political thought, Harold Cruse traces the nationalist strain back to the writings of Delany. See his *The Crisis of the Negro Intellectual* (New York: Quill, 1984), 4-6. Also see Floyd John Miller, "The Search for a Black Nationality: Martin R. Delany and the Emigrationist Alternative" (Ph.D. diss., University of Minnesota, 1970); Victor Ullman, *Martin R. Delany: The Beginnings of Black Nationalism* (Boston: Beacon, 1971); and Dorothy Sterling, *The Making of an Afro-American: Martin Robison Delany* (New York: Da Capo, 1971).

6. Martin R. Delany, *The Condition, Elevation, Emigration, and Destiny of the Colored People of the United States, Politically Considered* (Baltimore: Black Classic Press, 1993).

7. *Ibid.*, 11-13.

8. If we use Kymlicka's well-known criteria for a "national minority"—a previously self-governing, territorially concentrated, institutionally complete, culturally cohesive group that has been incorporated (forcibly or otherwise) into a larger state but that maintains its cultural distinctiveness and independence from the majority culture—then it is not at all clear that black Americans in Delany's time (and even less so now) should be described as an internal "nation." But given the forced migration to the New World caused by the trans-Atlantic slave trade, nor are the vast majority of blacks properly described as immigrants or descendants of immigrants. See Will Kymlicka, *Multicultural Citizenship: A Liberal Theory of Minority Rights* (Oxford, UK: Clarendon, 1995), 10-26. For a useful discussion of how North American blacks (both U.S. and Canadian) fit into recent debates over nationalism and multiculturalism, see Kymlicka, *Politics in the Vernacular: Nationalism, Multiculturalism, and Citizenship* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2001), chap. 9. For two quite different views, see Iris Marion Young, *Justice and the Politics of Difference* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1990), chap. 6; Brian Barry, *Culture and Equality: An Egalitarian Critique of Multiculturalism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001), chap. 8.

9. E. U. Essien-Udom usefully summarizes the strong nationalist position (though he does not label it as such) as follows:

The belief of a group that it possesses, or ought to possess, a country; that it shares, or ought to share, a common heritage of language, culture, and religion; and that its heritage, way of life, and ethnic identity are distinct from those of other groups. Nationalists believe that they ought to rule themselves and shape their own destinies, and that they should therefore be in control of their social, economic, and political institutions.

See his *Black Nationalism: A Search for an Identity in America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1962), 6. For similar conceptions of nationalism, see Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, rev. ed. (London: Verso, 1991), 6-7; E. J. Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism since 1780: Programme, Myth, Reality* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 9-13; and Ernest Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1983), 1-7.

10. On this definition, prominent contemporary “classical” black nationalists in the United States would include Maulana Karenga (founder of the cultural nationalist group US and creator of the African American holiday Kwanzaa), Molefi Kete Asante (central theorist and spokesperson for the Afrocentric approach to the study of history and culture), and Minister Louis Farrakhan (leader of the Nation of Islam and principal organizer of the Million Man March, the largest assemblage of blacks in U.S. history). See, for example, Maulana Karenga, *Introduction to Black Studies* (Los Angeles: University of Sankore Press, 1982); Molefi Kete Asante, *The Afrocentric Idea*, rev. ed. (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1998); and Joseph D. Eure and Richard M. Jerome, eds., *Back Where We Belong: Selected Speeches by Minister Louis Farrakhan* (Philadelphia: PC International Press, 1989).

11. Bernard Boxill makes a similar set of distinctions within the traditional integrationist/separatist framework. See his “Two Traditions in African American Political Philosophy,” *Philosophical Forum* 24 (1992-93): 119-35; also see Howard McGary, *Race and Social Justice* (Oxford, UK: Blackwell, 1999), chap. 3.

12. The intellectual historian Wilson Jeremiah Moses usefully distinguishes the “classical” age of black nationalism (1850-1925)—marking the 1850 Compromise to the imprisonment of Marcus Garvey—from its “modern” period (1925-present). See his *The Golden Age of Black Nationalism, 1850-1925* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1978). The modern period could be viewed as roughly marking the decline of Garveyism through the rise of the Nation of Islam and the Black Power movement in the early postwar period to its various contemporary manifestations, such as Afrocentricity and hip-hop nationalism. My distinction between “classical” and “pragmatic” nationalism, as a way to distinguish two related doctrines, is meant to cut across this historical periodization, and unlike Moses, I consider a nationalist position “classical” even if its call for self-determination falls short of a call for statehood. Cf. John T. McCartney, *Black Power Ideologies: An Essay in African-American Political Thought* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1992); Robinson, *Black Nationalism*.

13. This is a view about the internal tensions and shifts within black nationalist theory development; it is not an attempt to explain black nationalism as a social movement or social tendency. My interest in black nationalism (in this essay at least) is primarily as a social philosophy or political theory, and only secondarily as a sociohistorical phenomenon. In this way, my project differs from that of intellectual historians. The historian August Meier, for example, claims that “nationalist tendencies tend to be salient during periods when conditions were becoming worse and white public opinion more hostile, while the integrationist became salient when the blacks’ status was improving and white public opinion becoming more tolerant.” August Meier, *Negro Thought in America, 1880-1915: Racial Ideologies in the Age of Booker T. Washington* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1988), ix. Meier’s thesis may very well be correct, and the hypothesis stated above in the main text is, I believe, perfectly compatible with it. But I am attempting to understand the *logic* of black nationalism and the ways in which nationalist ideas get developed and shaped within the *thinking* of its principal exponents, not with the social shifts between nationalism and integrationism within the larger black population—though the two are no doubt related.

14. For a compelling defense of the view that nationalism should not be understood as necessarily tied to claims of political sovereignty, see Rogers Brubaker, “Myths and Misconceptions

in the Study of Nationalism,” in *The State of the Nation: Ernest Gellner and the Theory of Nationalism*, edited by John A. Hall (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 272-306.

15. I should say, however, that Glaude chooses to speak of the pragmatic conception of the black “race” instead of the pragmatic conception of black “nationalism.” But despite this largely terminological disagreement, I take it that we have a similar view about the substance and value of pragmatic black politics. See Eddie S. Glaude Jr., *Exodus! Religion, Race, and Nation in Early Nineteenth-Century Black America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000). For a comprehensive critical discussion of competing conceptions of “nation” and theories of nationalism, see Anthony D. Smith, *Nationalism and Modernism: A Critical Survey of Recent Theories of Nations and Nationalism* (London: Routledge, 1998).

16. Delany, *The Condition*, 14-15.

17. *Ibid.*, 41-43.

18. Martin R. Delany, “The Political Destiny of the Colored Race,” in *The Ideological Origins of Black Nationalism*, edited by Sterling Stuckey (Boston: Beacon, 1972), 196-97.

19. *Ibid.*, 197-98.

20. Paul Gilroy goes so far as to call Delany “the progenitor of black Atlantic patriarchy.” *The Black Atlantic*, 26. However, not only is this statement anachronistic, but it also underplays the progressive elements of Delany’s thought with regard to gender, for as Robert Levine points out,

Delany wrote of the need for women to take up business enterprises, he encouraged the participation of women (including his wife) at all the emigration conventions he sponsored, and, true to his sense of women as political entities in their own right, he presented the reader of *Blake* with actively engaged women revolutionaries.

Robert S. Levine, *Martin Delany, Frederick Douglass, and the Politics of Representative Identity* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997), 14. Also see Tolagbe Ogunleye, “Dr. Martin Robison Delany, 19th-Century Africana Womanist: Reflections on His Avant-Garde Politics Concerning Gender, Colorism, and Nation Building,” *Journal of Black Studies* 28 (1998): 628-49.

21. For useful discussions of pre-emancipation conceptions of black masculinity, see Darlene Clark Hine and Earnestine Jenkins, eds., *A Question of Manhood: A Reader in U.S. Black Men’s History and Masculinity*, vol. 1 (Bloomington: University of Indiana Press, 1999). Some have argued that patriarchal conceptions of gender identity are a constitutive component of black nationalist discourses. See, for example, E. Francis White, *Dark Continent of Our Bodies: Black Feminism and the Politics of Respectability* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2001), chap. 3; Wahneema Lubiano, “Black Nationalism and Black Common Sense: Policing Ourselves and Others,” in *The House That Race Built*, edited by Wahneema Lubiano (New York: Vintage, 1998), 232-52.

22. Delany, *The Condition*, 10, 25-30, 170-71, 190-91.

23. *Ibid.*, 39-40.

24. *Ibid.*, 62, 182-83.

25. *Ibid.*, 45-46.

26. Martin R. Delany, *Blake; or, the Huts of America* (Boston: Beacon, 1970). Werner Sollors aptly describes the novel as “an unusually radical book, both in its creation of a black and beautiful protagonist who is an aristocratic hero, revolutionary superman, and slave conspirator and instigator and in a more or less continuous opposition to American national symbolism.” See his *Beyond Ethnicity: Consent and Descent in American Culture* (Oxford, UK: Oxford Univer-

sity Press, 1986), 51. For a rich and insightful discussion of Delany's place in the development of the American literary tradition, see Eric J. Sundquist, *To Wake the Nations: Race in the Making of American Literature* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993), chap. 2. Also see Levine, *Martin Delany*, chap. 5; Moses, *The Golden Age*, chap. 7.

27. Delany, *Blake*, 252.

28. For instance, when he defends the principle of self-government, he emphasizes that it is a right of the *individual*, but then he goes on to say in this regard, "what is true of an individual is true of a family, and that which is true of a family is also true concerning a whole people." See his "Political Destiny," 197. Cf. Robert M. Kahn, "The Political Ideology of Martin Delany," *Journal of Black Studies* 14 (1984): 415-40.

29. Delany, "Political Destiny," 201.

30. We get a hint of this doctrine in *The Condition* as well, as when he approves of the Jewish people "maintaining their national characteristics, and looking forward in high hopes of seeing the day when they may return to their former national position of self-government and independence." Delany, *The Condition*, 12.

31. Delany, "Political Destiny," 201.

32. Kwame Anthony Appiah calls this doctrine "racialism" in his *In My Father's House*, 13. I follow his practice here, realizing that others may use the term differently. There has of course been much recent philosophical debate about whether we should think of "races" as real. See, for example, Lawrence Blum, *"I'm Not a Racist, But . . .": The Moral Quandary of Race* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2002), chaps. 5-9; Bernard Boxill, "Introduction," in *Race and Racism*, edited by Bernard Boxill (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2001), 1-42; Sally Haslanger, "Gender and Race: (What) Are They? (What) Do We Want Them to Be?" *Noûs* 34 (2000): 31-55; Philip Kitcher, "Race, Ethnicity, Biology, Culture," in *Racism*, edited by Leonard Harris (Amherst, NY: Humanity Books, 1999), 87-117; Charles W. Mills, "'But What Are You Really?' The Metaphysics of Race," in *Blackness Visible*, by Charles W. Mills (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1998); Appiah, "Race, Culture, Identity"; Lucius T. Outlaw Jr., *On Race and Philosophy* (New York: Routledge, 1996); Naomi Zack, *Race and Mixed Race* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1993). My sympathies are largely with the antirealists, but I do not rely on racial antirealism as a premise here. I only assume that racialism, as defined above, is false, which few political theorists, I take it, would want to deny. This is not to rule out, then, the possibility of defensible non-essentialist ways of conceptualizing "race."

33. Delany, "Political Destiny," 203.

34. Delany, *The Condition*, 62-66, 214.

35. Martin R. Delany, *Principia of Ethnology: The Origin of Races and Color, with an Archeological Compendium of Ethiopian and Egyptian Civilization* (Baltimore: Black Classic Press, 1991).

36. *Ibid.*, 14-15.

37. *Ibid.*, 18.

38. *Ibid.*, 27.

39. *Ibid.*, 38.

40. *Ibid.*, 42-59.

41. *Ibid.*, 62, 70.

42. *Ibid.*, 69-71.

43. *Ibid.*, 86-89.

44. Delany, "Political Destiny," 203.

45. Delany, *Principia*, 81-82.

46. Martin R. Delany, "Official Report of the Niger Valley Exploring Party," in *Search for a Place: Black Separatism and Africa, 1860*, by M. R. Delany and Robert Cambell (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1969).
47. *Ibid.*, 111.
48. *Ibid.*, 110. Also see the appendix of Delany, *The Condition*, 210-13.
49. Delany, "Official Report," 112. The claim is also repeated in Delany, *Blake*, 262.
50. Delany, "Official Report," 121.
51. Delany, *The Condition*, 209-10.
52. Delany, *Principia*, 15.
53. *Ibid.*, 22-24.
54. *Ibid.*, 35.
55. Delany, *The Condition*, 8.
56. Delany, *Principia*, 60-61.
57. Sterling Stuckey, *Slave Culture: Nationalist Theory and the Foundations of Black America* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1987), 229.
58. Delany, *Principia*, 91-94.
59. Sterling, *The Making of an Afro-American*, 79-80.
60. See, for example, Levine, *Martin Delany*, 6-7, 13.
61. Delany, *The Condition*, 91-92.
62. *Ibid.*, 87.
63. "Placido" is the pen name of a famous Cuban poet, Gabriel de la Concepcion Valdes (1809-44), who was, according to Delany, a mulatto "gentleman, scholar, poet, and intended Chief Engineer of the Army of Liberty and Freedom in Cuba," and who was executed on the charge of high treason and inciting slave insurrections. *Ibid.*, 203. Also see Floyd J. Miller's note to text in Delany, *Blake*, 319. Delany also named one of his sons after the Cuban revolutionary and poet. See Sterling, *The Making of an Afro-American*, 86.
64. Delany, *Blake*, 261.
65. Delany, *The Condition*, 12-21.
66. Delany, "Political Destiny," 199.
67. See Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, translated by George Lawrence and edited by J. P. Mayer (New York: HarperPerennial, 1988), 341; Delany, "Political Destiny," 198-99.
68. Nell Irvin Painter, "Martin Delany: Elitism and Black Nationalism," in *Black Leaders of the Nineteenth Century*, edited by Leon Litwack and August Meier (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1988).
69. Delany, *The Condition*, 187-88, 197-99.
70. *Ibid.*, 200-201.
71. *Ibid.*, 147-59.
72. Delany, "Political Destiny," 102-3. In the history of black political thought, there is a recurring debate over whether white racism will yield to persistent moral criticism, and it is one of the issues that has divided the more militant nationalists (e.g., Delany, Marcus Garvey, and Malcolm X) from those in the black protest tradition (Frederick Douglass, W. E. B. Du Bois, and Martin Luther King Jr.). For an illuminating discussion of Delany's views on the ineffectiveness of moral suasion to weaken white prejudice, see Boxill, "Two Traditions," 120-21, and "Douglass against the Emigrationists," in *Frederick Douglass: A Critical Reader*, edited by Bill E. Lawson and Frank M. Kirkland (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 1999), 21-49.
73. Delany, "Political Destiny," 103-4.

74. *Ibid.*, 94; Delany, *The Condition*, 205.
75. Delany, *The Condition*, 206-8.
76. *Ibid.*, 191.
77. *Ibid.*, 48-49, 168, 171, 178; Delany, *Blake*, 287.
78. Quoted in Sterling, *The Making of an Afro-American*, 149-50.
79. Delany, *The Condition*, 184, 186-87, 192.
80. *Ibid.*, 178-88.
81. *Ibid.*, 62, 173, 181.
82. *Ibid.*, 179-81.
83. *Ibid.*, 36-37, 182-83; Delany, "Political Destiny," 96-97.
84. Cyril E. Griffith, *The African Dream: Martin R. Delany and the Emergence of Pan-African Thought* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1975), 21. Also see Stuckey, *Slave Culture*, 226-31.
85. Delany, *The Condition*, 178 footnote, 189; *Blake*, 257-58. For an interesting and provocative discussion of Delany's commitment to cultural syncretism, see Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic*, 27-29.
86. Delany, *Blake*, 182.
87. This vision is not unlike what David Hollinger has called "civic nationalism," which he usefully contrasts with "ethnic nationalism." See his *Postethnic America: Beyond Multiculturalism*, rev. ed. (New York: Basic Books, 2000), 133-35. It is also compatible with the forms of nonracialist Pan-Africanism (from both the continent and the diaspora) that Appiah would find politically acceptable. See Appiah, *In My Father's House*, 179-80.
88. Delany, *The Condition*, 160-62; *Blake*, 260-62; and *Principia*, 81. Cf. Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic*, 23.
89. It is often claimed that Delany either is inconsistent or changes his mind about Africa as the ultimate destination for black Americans. (See, for example, Painter, "Martin Delany," 155; Kahn, "The Political Ideology," 434-36; and Boxill, "Douglass," 26-29.) However, Delany never advocates a general return of African Americans to Africa but just a select number of the "enlightened freedmen" from the United States in the hopes that they might help in the regeneration of their ancestral homeland. This position is not inconsistent with holding that the vast majority of American blacks should relocate to Latin America, or wherever they might best flourish. In a supplement to the Constitution of the African Civilization Society (written by Delany) this view is made quite clear:

The Society is not designed to encourage general emigration, but will aid only such persons as may be practically qualified and suited to promote the development of Christianity, morality, education, mechanical arts, agriculture, commerce, and general improvement; who must always be carefully selected and well recommended, that the progress of civilization may not be obstructed.

See Delany, "Constitution of the African Civilization Society," in *Negro Social and Political Thought, 1850-1920*, edited by Howard Brotz (New York: Basic Books, 1966), 191-96. Also see Delany, "Official Report," 77-80, 110-11.

90. Delany, *The Condition*, 172.
91. Delany, *Principia*, 83; "Official Report," 108-10; and *Blake*, 262.
92. Delany, *Principia*, 81-82.
93. Gilroy has also recently examined Delany's nationalism, and my analysis is, in some ways, quite congenial to his and owes much to its creative engagement with Delany's philosophy. (See Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic*, 19-29.) That said, my discussion differs significantly from

Gilroy's in its aims, focus, and argumentative strategy. Since Gilroy's is a familiar and influential account, it may be useful to briefly contrast our approaches to this seminal figure. Gilroy is primarily concerned with critiquing ethnocentric and nationalist conceptions of black cultural production and replacing them with a conception of "black Atlantic" modes of cultural expression, which are transnational, dynamic, and thoroughly hybrid. He is against a "narrow" focus on national cultural politics in our increasingly global world, where migration and ethnoracial intermixing are commonplace. For him, Delany functions largely as a metaphor for the "rootlessness" and syncretic character of black culture, and he uses Delany's life and thought to illustrate the alleged ambivalence of blacks from the diaspora toward the West (their would-be new "home") and Africa (their original "homeland"). By contrast, the thin conception of blackness that I defend and to which I think Delany is ultimately committed is not a mode of *cultural* blackness at all, at least insofar as "culture" has to do with aesthetic expression, language, or religion. I think the "ambivalence" that Delany sometimes seems to express is not about "ethnic roots" but about the ever-changing prospects for realizing black equality, freedom, civil rights, and "manly" virtue in this or that geographical locale. While I think the context and details of Delany's life are useful for understanding his social philosophy, my primary concern is with the contours and plausibility of his thought, taking care to avoid the all too common tendency to flatten out the thinking of black writers by reducing their thought to their sociohistorical context. While Gilroy is largely concerned to show how nationalist thinking negatively affects black political culture, I'm primarily concerned with how such thinking (negatively and positively) affects black political solidarity as this relates to an antiracist progressive agenda. And ultimately I am interested (as I think Delany was) in "narrow" American politics, even as I recognize its interconnections with, and indeed its hegemonic influence on, global processes. For while the political significance of the nation-state may be dramatically changing, this does not translate into it being insignificant; nor does it mean, I contend, that black collective activism directed toward the U.S. government on behalf of its racialized citizens necessarily demonstrates a lack of concern with others who are racially or otherwise oppressed.

94. Quoted in Painter, "Martin Delany," 168.

95. During Reconstruction, Delany opposed the confiscation of slaveholders' land for redistribution to freedmen and argued against government subsidies for the former slaves; instead, he advocated a "triple alliance" of capital, land, and labor, a profit-sharing scheme that would have left the means of production largely in white hands and would have favored the interests of employers over workers. He lectured on the virtues of temperance, marriage, and hard work. And he pledged his support for the southern Democrats over the northern Republicans in the 1876 federal and state elections, a decision that many blacks at the time considered a tragic betrayal. For a discussion of Delany's "conservatism," see Painter, "Martin Delany."

96. Frederick Douglass made this point against the classical nationalists of his time. He argued that by claiming Africa as the national homeland of all blacks, American-born black nationalists were giving comfort and ideological support to white supremacists who would deny blacks U.S. citizenship on classical nationalist grounds. Frederick Douglass, "African Colonization Society," in *Classical Black Nationalism*, edited by Wilson Jeremiah Moses (New York: NYU Press, 1996), 135-41.

97. It should be noted that pragmatic black nationalism, as a philosophy for the black liberation struggle against antiblack racism, is not a form of "strategic essentialism," at least not in the sense that the latter is usually understood, that is, within a poststructuralist theoretical framework. See Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy: Towards a Radical Democratic Politics*, 2d ed. (London: Verso, 2001); Gayatri Spivak, *In Other Worlds: Essays in Cultural Politics* (New York: Routledge, 1989), 205-11. For one thing, pragmatic black nationalism is not skeptical about our ability to understand empirically the structure and

dynamics of modern racism; nor is it hesitant to embrace certain moral principles as universally applicable. Indeed, it presupposes that such understanding of, and principled ethical opposition to, the current racial order is absolutely necessary for the coherence of the outlook. Pragmatic black nationalism forthrightly rejects racial and ethnic essences and has no need to deploy them, strategically or otherwise, in order to carry out its emancipatory aims. It does not require idealizing fictions about race, nationality, or primordial origins but just a recognition that antiblack racism negatively affects the lives of millions in the United States and across the globe. Pragmatic black political consciousness, while certainly self-consciously strategic and aimed at transforming the oppressive conditions that make it possible and necessary, does not ultimately seek the destruction of all black identities, just those that are stigmatizing, rigid, and reactionary, and in this way it is not "necessarily self-alienating." But at the same time, pragmatic black solidarity does not require those who are racialized as black to embrace "blackness," of any genre, as a valued or necessary component of the "self" at all. For a trenchant and thorough critique of the theoretical underpinnings of "strategic essentialism," see Norman Geras, *Discourses of Extremity: Radical Ethics and Post-Marxist Extravagances* (London: Verso, 1990). And for a discussion of the limitations of strategic essentialism with respect to politicized social identities, see Linda Martín Alcoff, "Who's Afraid of Identity Politics," in *Reclaiming Identity: Realist Theory and the Predicament of Postmodernism*, edited by Paula M. L. Moya and Michael R. Hames-García (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), 322-25.

98. I develop and further defend this conception of black solidarity in Tommie Shelby, "Foundations of Black Solidarity: Collective Identity or Common Oppression?" *Ethics* 112 (January 2002): 231-66.

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