

A Nation within a Nation: Amiri Baraka (LeRoi Jones) and Black Power Politics. By Komozi Woodard. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999. 400 pp.

In *A Nation within a Nation: Amiri Baraka (LeRoi Jones) and Black Power Politics*, Komozi Woodard argues that through Black cultural nationalism African Americans were able to develop a collective consciousness, allowing them to combat the social forces plaguing their lives in American urban centers during the 1960s and 1970s. Woodard presents this historical narrative through the development of the political figure Imamu Amiri Baraka and the formation of the Modern Black Convention Movement (MBCM), a term coined by Woodard to define a collection of political and cultural organizations that sought Black liberation. Woodard intends to illustrate a moment in the not-too-distant past in which oppressed minorities came together to advocate for social advancement, an act that he believes can and should be repeated.

The purpose of the MBCM was to engage in nation building through political, social, and economic development amongst forgotten citizens, ultimately producing semiautonomous enclaves. As a result of societal stratification, Woodard believes, African Americans are not an ethnic group (eventually granted access into White America) but a nationality, a perpetual other denied integration into mainstream society. The effects of the consciousness African Americans developed in response to their otherness resulted in what Woodard refers to as a Black nationality formation. Woodard tracks this nationality formation throughout the African-American experience, beginning with a forced migration to America. Through rich source material, including fliers, pamphlets, photos, film, letters, and interviews, Woodard presents an intriguing image of a tumultuous past, one that is personally informed by his direct contact with many of the individuals and participation in events discussed in this text as a member of this political formation.

To establish the framework for this investigation, Woodard positions his research within an array of scholars examining different perspectives on the racialization of the African-American experience, which he uses to inform Black nationality formation and Black cultural nationalism. Woodard defines his examination of nationality in relation to scholars such as Louis Wirth and Peter Eisinger, who theorize nationality formation among people experiencing group trauma or collective suffering. He details how a collective, having undergone repeated group suffering, ultimately engages in radical action that established power structures are not ready or willing to accept. Woodard also aims to refute the premise established by academics such as Theodore Draper and Clayborne Carson, who view Black nationalism as either an escapist fantasy or an aid in the demise of the Black Revolt (an historical outpouring of political and sociocultural engagement by Black communities). Woodard counters these assessments by presenting a critique that illustrates the agency granted to Blacks through Black cultural nationalism and the Black Revolt. Further important scholarly touchpoints for Woodard include Jonathan Kozol (*Savage Inequalities*), Thomas Philpott (*The Slum and the Ghetto*), and Douglas Massey and Nancy Denton (*American Apartheid: Segregation and the Making of the Underclass*). These scholars, like Woodard, present research examining the formation of American apartheid. They illustrate the effects of racial isolation through the underdevelopment of urban centers in relation to its suburban counterpart. Woodard examines how the “benign neglect” of this area ultimately informs urban crisis, resulting in the grassroots movements of the Black Power era, further solidified in the 1960s and 1970s through political organization via the MBCM.

The MBCM is an extension of the collective consciousness presented in what Woodard calls the Classical Black Convention Movement. This movement took place in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries among African-American communities intent on defining themselves in relation to a nation also engaged in self-discovery. This rich history is presented in Eddie Glaude's *Exodus!: Religion, Race, and Nation in Early Nineteenth-Century Black America*, another exploration of Black collective consciousness not commonly recalled in contemporary historical memory.

Through a masterful framework that employs a thorough examination of nation building and collective agency, Woodard constructs his argument not only to inform his readership of a magnificent past but also to illustrate how others can engage these same oppressions in the present. Woodard states that organizations such as the MBCM, Garvey's Universal Negro Improvement Association, and Malcolm X's Organization of Afro-American Unity should not be examined in terms of whether or not they liberated Black people. They should be understood as measuring sticks, and observers should determine to what extent they continued the process of nationality formation and Black liberation, combating the effects of racial oppression and internalized colonialism. Woodard firmly states that current Black leadership must address the oppressive realities of urban neglect, specifically in relation to education, employment, and social welfare. He gives contemporary leadership a vivid history toward which to turn, in which Black communities consciously addressed their realities and forged alliances with other marginalized citizens in an effort to improve their collective plight. Woodard presents, through the rise and fall of Black cultural nationalism in the 1960s and 1970s, a blueprint for agency and nation building that need not conform to any predetermined idea of nation in American society. He demonstrates that marginalized people have the political, social, and economic power to define their own conditions as a nation within a nation.

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