LIVE from the NYPL and *BOOKFORUM*

present

A New Series: CULTURAL OBITUARIES

The Death of Black Nationalist Culture?
Making Sense of Black Nationalism in the Obama Era

TA-NEHISI COATES, BAZ DREISINGER, PENIEL E. JOSEPH,

and VICTOR LAVALLE

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Trustees Room

LIVE from the New York Public Library

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PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: Good evening. My name is Paul Holdengräber and I'm the director of public programs at the New York Public library, now known as LIVE from the New York Public Library. I would like to warmly welcome everyone tonight to an evening with Ta-Nehisi Coates, Baz Dreisinger, Peniel Joseph, and Victor LaValle, an evening moderated or better yet, I hope, instigated by Chris Lehman.

A quick but timely word about supporting this extraordinary institution known as the New York Public Library. I would like to ask everyone present to consider becoming a Friend of the Library starting for as little as forty dollars a year, a cheap date, if you ask me, you are in. Please become a Friend of the New York Public Library. Your support will get you a fifteen-dollar ticket to all LIVE events instead of twenty-five dollars. That is a ten-dollar discount on each and every event. There is a membership table here outside, so please visit it after the event tonight. It will help our cause tremendously. Of course you can also do this online.

I stated that you could help our cause, and you may ask what our cause is. Quite simply and joyously, I believe, to bring you live conversations, discussions, debates, to present you with the best thinking around town, what I like to refer to as cognitive theater. From now on you will have the pleasure also of viewing the events on iTunes University, on our website, reading transcripts of past events, of past evenings, be they conversations between the now-regretted John Hope Franklin and President Clinton, Al Sharpton and Christopher Hitchens, Günter Grass and the late Norman Mailer—he actually had his last appearance here at the library—Zadie Smith, Krista Tippett and Stuart Brown, Toni Morrison, Alfred Brendel, Jan Morris, Robert Badinter, Jhumpa Lahiri and Mira Nair, Werner Herzog, Amartya Sen, Salman Rushdie, or our

recent tribute to John Updike. And the list goes on of course, so check it out and check out our blog as well.

Coming up, we will have the pleasure of presenting Andrei Codrescu who will be interviewing Henry Alford and Mark Twain—this will actually be my first impersonification of Twain. The evening is entitled How to Live Dada and includes Max rada dada and Flash, who will perform Dada. At the end of that evening, I think no doubt we will all be rather gaga. A two-part evening with Alex Ross and Barbara Isenberg, and Frank Gehry, followed that same evening by Alex Ross interviewing the composer and conductor Esa-Pekka Salonen and a festival where we are bringing together, I am trying to bring together, if you can imagine that, twenty European countries on the subject of Islam in Europe, part of a huge festival called the Muslim Voices Festival, spearheaded by BAM, NYU, and the Asia Society, which will take place between June 4th and June 14th, so look out for that.

Join our e-mail list, but also, and here's something quite new and exciting, join our new blog—it's www.nypl.org/blog. If tonight you join the Library, you will actually get two free tickets to any April LIVE event and reserved front-row seating for the month of April. After the conversation and the Q & A, please join our talent for a book signing. We are always so happy to be working with our wonderful and independent bookseller, 192 Books.

Tonight's event is the first in what will become an ongoing series entitled Cultural Obituaries. The second event will take place next Tuesday, April 14th, on the Death of Boom Culture? Always with a question mark after the death of featuring Walter Benn Michaels, David Simon,

Susan Straight, and Dale Peck. It was a pleasure to discuss and devise this series with the publisher and editors of *Bookforum*, our partner, support, copresenters tonight—Tony Corner, Charles Guarino, Chris Lehman, and the guardian angel of *Bookforum* as far as I am concerned, who brings together, my friend Danielle McConnell. Our thoughts meshed, intertwined in a most congenial fashion.

And I must make a confession to you. I start every day, every day in the morning very early on by reading the obituaries, a habit I have taken now recently to have extended to an evening here at LIVE from the New York Public Library, an evening where we discussed the pleasures of obituaries. Quite naturally, that evening was entitled LIVE from the New York Public Library presents Dead from the New York Public Library, and featured Anne Wroe, who is probably is the most preeminent obituary writer. She writes for the Economist—she only gets one dead person a week, as compared to many of her competitors, who were actually in the audience at that moment. We had more than half of the undertakers of the *New York Times* comparing how they did their dead and it was a very lively conversation that ensued, as you can imagine, and this series of cultural obituaries I hope will continue that begun tradition.

Chris Lehman, the editor of *Bookforum*, will explain to you in what way the cultural obituaries works itself very nicely into the pages of *Bookforum*. Chris will also introduce the talent tonight and ask them each to say something about themselves which is not on the flyer you have read. Chris is not only the new editor of *Bookforum* but also the senior editor of *Congressional Quarterly*, formerly deputy editor of the *Washington Post Book World*, and a former columnist for the *New York Observer*. Victor LaValle's cultural obituary, "Beyond the Skin Trade: How

Does Black Nationalism Stay Relevant in the Age of Barack Obama?" serves as the inspiration and starting point for the evening tonight. You will find it in the current April/May issue of *Bookforum*. If you don't have a copy, please pick one up on your way out. Also, prepare yourself for Tuesday's Cultural Obituary event—part II—read Walter Benn Michaels's fabulous piece, it really will make you feel at least somewhat smarter—"Going Boom" in the January/February issue of *Bookforum*. And now please welcome to this stage all the talent we already have there and to instigate them, Chris Lehman. Thank you very much.

(applause)

CHRIS LEHMAN: Thank you, I'm not sure I have all that much to add at this point, but thank you all very much for coming out. I just wanted to explain a bit the thinking behind, first of all, this column in *Bookforum* which is called Last Things. We wanted it to be a—as Paul noted, a cultural obituary, but very much a death in life kind of reflection, that is to say, you know, grabbing ahold of a movement or an idea or a trend as it appears, perhaps, to be passing from the stage but also asking what comes next and what is the legacy of this perhaps passing historical moment?

And the idea of black nationalism came to me in a very roundabout way, chiefly out of frustration with the glib meme that surfaced immediately after Barack Obama was elected president that we had entered a "postracial era," which is dumb in too many ways to enumerate right now, but there are two specific ways, that particularly set me off. One is the obvious, that, you know, the idea of race connotes a whole way of looking at the world, an ideological system,

a, you know, a deep political history, that the election—however historic—the election of a chief executive cannot magically efface from the stage.

But it struck me as dumb in another, more interesting way, perhaps, that, of course, this was an achievement that mainstream white culture could claim for itself. “Look at us,”— my people— “we have made it possible for a black person to be elected president of the United States, therefore race as an idea and an issue need no longer detain us.” Glad that’s over with. So my thinking was to try to get someone to reverse all those polarities and ask, well, what does it mean if, you know, often involuntarily, you’ve been reckoning with the idea of race your whole life and used the idea of blackness as a mode of political thinking, of resistance, of organization, and you’re confronted with, you know, a tremendous outlier phenomenon of a black person being elected president—how do you make sense of that, what is the idea, you know, again, going forward.

So I just wanted to kind of broadly set the stage for my own thinking and additionally I wanted to get someone like Victor and more precisely Victor who could reflect on it in a very personal way, in a way that we’re conditioned—one of the difficulties of talking about race in our culture is that it’s by definition a very polarizing, pat kind of proposition, often, at least in public forums, and I wanted Victor to sort of examine the idea more from the inside, more, you know, using his tremendous skills as a writer of fiction to look at this political phenomenon. And that’s all I really need to say because conveniently we have Victor here on the stage and he will be reading his piece.

VICTOR LAVALLE: Hi everybody, thanks for coming and I'm very honored to be on this panel with these people, so I'm just going to read this essay so that it can set the tone, maybe, or something, and hopefully so it can be attacked and put down and stuff.

When I was a boy, I prayed for straight hair. You have to understand, I grew up on heavy metal: Iron Maiden and Judas Priest to start, and then Anthrax and Exodus, Megadeth and Metallica. My friends and I gathered in living rooms and basements and empty lots and banged our heads to *Damage, Inc.* and *I Am the Law*. If you nearly snapped your neck, you were doing something right. We were a pretty wild mix: a Persian kid, a Korean, a couple of white guys, and me—the only one with a tight, curly Afro. The rest had straight hair, grown long, and when they thrashed to the music, their hair bounced and whipped like it was supposed to. I'd watch them pull off this casual magic and wish I'd been so blessed. But I was black, and there was no enchantment in that. It actually felt like kind of a curse. I'm so embarrassed to admit any of this.

Now, heavy metal may be to blame for any number of ills (my tinnitus, for instance), but I can't really say it spawned my self-loathing. Instead, let's head upstairs, to my family's apartment in Flushing, Queens. We won't meet the guilty party, just another link in a long chain.

My mom grew up in East Africa. Uganda. A member of a tribe called the Baganda, the largest ethnic group in the country. Daughter of a proud and courageous mother and father. They worked to eject the British colonial powers; they were one small part of the Pan-African movement. My grandfather helped oust the British and set up schools in rural Uganda. He made sure his own kids were educated. For college, my mother packed off to Canada. In Kitchener-Waterloo, she was denied housing, mistreated and maligned in school and on the street. Finally,

she moved to America to *escape* the racism. That poor woman—she didn't understand what was happening to her. What had already happened. Somewhere, flying over the Atlantic Ocean maybe, she'd stopped being a Muganda, a Ugandan, or even African. She had become black.

The original American slaves weren't black, either. They were Ashanti and Ewe and Fanti, among others. The slaves' path to Christianity has been told and retold as the great conversion story of Africans in the Americas. But that's not the only conversion story. There's the legal conversion: from human being into chattel. And there's the cultural conversion: A wealth of ethnicities become one black race. This must have shocked those Africans as much as it did my mother.

With the earliest instance of rebellion against the slave system—whether armed insurrection or covert escape or the liberation of literacy—black nationalism was born. Even before it had a name, it was a practice. Just staying alive was an act of defiance. Thus every black person was a part of the resistance. Up, you mighty race!

My father is white.

As the decades passed, black nationalism created and re-created itself in this country. David Walker and Harriet Tubman's role in shaping abolitionism; Marcus Garvey's model of separate but formidable black entrepreneurship; the civil rights struggle; Black Power; the Nation of Islam; the Nation of Gods and Earths. Each one can be categorized as a form of black nationalism. But no matter which era or organization, whether they were capitalists or Marxists or advocates of repatriation, they all seemed to assume one basic truth: We're all in this together.

Rich or poor, southerner or northerner, dark skinned or light, black folks are on the same side. Remember Marcus Garvey's call: "Africa for the Africans!" And Malcolm X's line: "When I speak of the South, I mean south of Canada. The whole US is the South." (Though my mother could've schooled him on that.) Our own schools, our own churches; maybe someday even our own state. But check out the sleight-of-hand America had managed. What really held us together besides the system we opposed? What would black nationalism be without a common enemy?

It seems all Americans are now contractually required to bring up Barack Obama at least once a week. In either wonder or disgust, cynicism or cloudy-eyed glee. As a black person, it's actually common courtesy to mention my man at least once a day. But right now, I'm more concerned with Obama's mother, Ann Dunham Soetoro. The white woman from Kansas reminds me of my own mother, the black woman from Uganda. It's not the wanderlust or the tenacity (though those are comparable, too). Instead, it's a choice each woman made. About who would father her child. And why.

In *Dreams from My Father,* Obama recounts going to see *Black Orpheus* with his mother. Halfway through the movie, he's pretty tired of it, the depiction of black folks being far from complex or interesting. But then he looks at his mother: "Her face, lit by the blue glow of the screen, was set in a wistful gaze. At that moment, I felt as if I were being given a window into her heart, the unreflective heart of her youth. I suddenly realized that the depiction of childlike blacks I was now seeing on the screen, the reverse image of Conrad's dark savages, was what my mother had carried with her to Hawaii all those years before, a reflection of the simple fantasies that had been forbidden to a white middle-class girl from Kansas, the promise of another life: warm, sensual, exotic, different."

My own mother's life strikes me as a fair capsule summary of the black experience in America. Reaching these shores as an African, not so much proud of this fact as unaware she should feel ashamed. Then made aware. While she didn't take over any buildings or arm herself, my mother did bring my ailing grandmother over from Uganda to care for her. She worked as a legal secretary while helping her brother get through college. I count these as her years of resistance. But eventually her resistance ran out.

My mother and I have always had a good relationship, very forthright, and whenever I used to ask her why she married my father, she would only offer one answer: "So you would be light-skinned."

My mom is going to beat my ass if she ever sees this. I can't imagine anything that would embarrass her more. It's not that she never said it, not that it isn't true, but to say it out loud. To print it. And in a place where white folks might read it! These expressions of self-loathing go on, but you don't admit them in mixed company. If you do, well, what the hell kind of black person are you?

And here's Ann Dunham Soetoro—here's why she reminds me of my mother: Blackness was more of an idea than a reality for both, yet one of the most important choices of each woman's life was based on it. One woman yearned for it, while the other wished to escape. Either way, blackness (and whiteness) defined them.

I'm not saying my mother, or Obama's, made her choice consciously. My mother's answer to my paternity question always seemed like insight she'd gained after the fact. Maybe a way to recast loss as a kind of victory. But consciously or not, she wanted her child to be lighter than she was.

She believed my life in America would be easier that way. And she was right. It has been.

Faced with her life's evidence, she couldn't have imagined a rat-fuck, heartless, shit-stain system like this country's would ever die. Resist or surrender: Those were a black person's only choices in these United States. That would never change.

But then it did.

I remember watching Obama's victory speech on a JumboTron out on 125th Street. I watched him at that podium in Grant Park while I stood in a mixed-race crowd in the middle of a revitalized Harlem. *What world is this?* I wondered even as I hooted and hollered. *Who could've imagined such sights and wonders?* When I finally reached my mother on the phone, she sounded even more awestruck than I was.

I'm sick of discussing black nationalism. I'm tired of all the dourness and doomsaying; of the grimace that's required whenever we discuss it and blackness in general; of the countless humorless men and women who scold every impulse toward comfort or laughter or, dare I say it, optimism. I'm sick of the same old forecast for blackness: gloom followed by clouds of hail.

On January 20, 2009, the president of the United States was a black man, or blackish if you want to nitpick. On January 30, 2009, the head of the Republican National Committee was a black man. And in the 2008 election race, a black woman ran as the presidential nominee of the Green Party. What is black nationalism to make of all this? A system of thought, a method of living, that sought empowerment through opposition now looks a lot like the leaders of the system it opposed. I'm not suggesting that the existence of these few black leaders indicates the end of

hard times for black Americans. What I'm wondering is this: If a disempowered black person opposes an empowered black person, which one is the black nationalist?

This essay was supposed to be an obituary, a eulogy, for black nationalism, but I've spent a good deal of it going on about my mother. She might not believe me, but I mean all these admissions and revelations as a testament to her and, by extension, to black nationalism. Who can judge what he can't understand? Not me. And our elders battled through some genuinely incomprehensible shit.

But if the final goal of black nationalism is freedom and autonomy for black folks, then maybe that even means becoming liberated from our debts to our forebears. Not to forget them, but to bury them with honor. Then maybe we'll get to devise new solutions to old problems. Even my silly little headbanging woes turned out to have a pretty simple solution, one I figured out only years later. I didn't need straight hair to thrash, I just grew dreadlocks. Voilà—free to be a black metalhead.

I imagine telling all this to my mother. I can see us in her living room, on her powder-blue couch. She listens to my desire, my need, to think differently about our place in the world. To set the old burdens down. She nods, and when I'm done, she reaches out to touch my cheek. She smiles, but not with joy, just wistfulness. I see the back of her dark brown hand in contrast to the side of my honey-colored face. She sighs. Then she speaks. Only five words: "Easy for you to say."

(applause)

CHRIS LEHMAN: You can see why I wanted Victor to address this subject. And I think, you know, there are a couple very simple ways to move the debate about whether black nationalism is something to be eulogized forward and one way to address it is just to go around and ask everyone here whether that's a credible claim, and I also want to correct a lapse in manners, I neglected to introduce everyone, so I'm going to do that as I go. On my left here is Peniel Joseph, Associate Professor of Afro-American studies and History at Brandeis University. He's the author of Waiting *'Til the Midnight Hour: A Narrative History of Black Power in America* and a forthcoming anthology, *Neighborhood Rebels: Black Power at the Local Level*. His book *Dark Days, Bright Nights: From Black Power to Barack Obama*, will be published in 2010. So, first, Peniel, is it impertinent to speak of Black Nationalism as, if not dead, in metamorphosis right now?

PENIEL JOSEPH: I don't know if it's impertinent. I would say it's definitely provocative. And I think that Victor's essay is very thought provoking in the sense that in the aftermath of the 2008 election, one of the most interesting aspects about talking about race in America is how do we talk about the discussion of institutional racism given the fact that we have an African American president. One thing that Victor's essay reminded me of is August 1, 2008, because Obama was in St. Petersburg, Florida, and he was heckled by a group of black nationalists, and what was interesting about this is that Obama was giving a town speech and there were about two dozen activists who were part of a group called Uhuru who had a huge sign that said, "What about the Black Community, Obama?" Right? They actually—they were *heckling* him. And this was the first time we had seen this—this was live on TV and what was interesting about this, I mean, he was flustered, he let them speak. They basically were asking why wasn't he more forthright

about race, even though in March of 2008 he had the famous race speech. They wanted race-specific solutions. Obama basically said, well, he had been a civil rights attorney, he had helped black people, and he wanted equality for all, but in the aftermath of that, what I found very interesting about that exchange was that there were really two visions of black power there. On the one hand, you had these community activists in St. Petersburg, Florida, who wanted then-Senator Obama to have a very race-specific vision of social and political change. And then on the other hand, you had Obama himself, whose vision was much more multicultural and multiracial.

Now, some people might see these two as being diametrically opposed to each other. What I saw was really two different competing versions of black power. On one level, the grassroots activists in St. Petersburg were really drawing from a very 1960s definition of black power: they want community empowerment, but they want a very explicit confrontation with the system. Obama's vision of—and I'll say this again—vision of black power, because people want to put Obama as just being a part of the legacy of the civil rights movement, when I think he's an aftermath of a legacy and a by-product of both civil rights and black power activism. Obama's vision was the vision of black power that wanted black empowerment in the highest spaces in American politics and corporate America, and so it's just very interesting—we think about do we need to have a post-mortem on black nationalism.

I would say in general, no, I would say that there's probably a certain kind of very, very narrow black nationalism that's really a caricature at this point. I don't think that that narrow type of black nationalism really ever existed in a very expansive way that certainly you can strike a

death knell for. That doesn't mean that the politics of self-determination and the cultural politics of race and racial unity and pride that are connected to black nationalism have to be eulogized, just maybe a very, very specific narrow caricature of it, maybe.

CHRIS LEHMAN: I'm curious though, because Victor discusses in his essay, too, the sort of specifically separatist if you will vein of black nationalism—the idea that you found your own schools, your own neighborhoods, your own churches, even, you know, in theory your own state. That seems to be an—and you were talking about the institutional struggle between black nationalist protest and the white mainstream. It seems there's an inherent tension there in what you're calling the Obama vision of black power where you're basically elevating individuals to positions of influence in the existing structure. Is there still an element in the community-based resistance you're describing of building separate institutions, or is that part of the caricature?

PENIEL JOSEPH: Well, no, I think at the community level, there's always going to be black nationalism and ethnic politics. There's the famous essay I guess it's by Matt Bai, who talked about was Obama's election signaling the end of black politics? And I think it really signals the evolution of black politics. Certainly, we have the Deval Patricks, the Barack Obamas, these different leaders who can aspire to national office or even statewide office. At the same time, at the local side, in South Side—Jamaica, Queens, or South Side Chicago, the politics of ethnic community activism and organizing are really alive and well. So I think black people are looking at Obama on multiple levels. On one level, very, very proud—95 percent voted for him. On another level, all politics are local, to paraphrase Tip O'Neill and at the local level the notion of black bookstores and community activism and churches like Trinity are still going to thrive. It's

just at the national level, black people understand that politicians can now code-switch at the national level, meaning that you can actually go from the South Side of Chicago to the presidency of the United States.

CHRIS LEHMAN: Very good. And moving on I want to put the same basic question to Baz Dreisinger, who is the author of *Near Black: White to Black Passing in American Culture*. She teaches at John Jay College of Criminal Justice and is a freelance journalist for outlets such as the *New York Times* and the *Village Voice*. Together with the Oscar-nominated filmmaker Peter Spirer she produced and wrote the documentary *Black and Blue: Legends of the Hip-Hop Cop*, which investigates New York Police Department's monitoring of the hip-hop industry and they're working on another film out later this summer called *Rhyme and Punishment* about hip-hop and the prison-industrial complex, so Baz, what's your sense of the big question we're putting here?

BAZ DREISINGER: The big question. Well, I think that funny enough for the past couple of years I worked on a project about a subject that everybody said was dead and that's the subject of racial passing, the famous phrase was passing is passé, it doesn't—you know, it's not relevant anymore, people don't need to pass, there's no motivation for blacks to pass as white. My book is actually about white people passing for black, which is the other, the other form of passing, so to speak, but—so I'm pretty attuned to categories of race and how they've operated in the country and so and I'm also attuned to the idea of taking everything with a grain of salt, when we talk about big pronouncements of death, especially when it comes to race.

But I think that I would say yes to the extent that black nationalism is defined around essences and the idea of a univocal blackness, because I think that the black in black nationalism is something that is not due to Barack Obama—I think if anything he is a part of a momentum that had been in effect for some years already, but I think there is an unraveling of the kind of reified categories of both black and white in this country, and so it becomes difficult to talk about the category which Victor's essay, you know, so greatly addresses. He uses a term in there actually that I'm going to steal, and that's the term "blackish," and he applied it to Barack Obama but I feel as if it's applicable across the board in the sense of every racial identity is in some way an approximation, it's an "ish," you know, it's not the actual thing itself—it's some—there's a level of performance and a level of—sort of simulacrum involved in any kind of racial identity, and so I think that from the White House on down through from highbrow to lowbrow culture, there's a lot of unraveling going on in terms of the notion of what it is to be black, what it is to be white, and a sort of public discussion of this in a way.

I think even in looking at Michelle and Barack as representing two very different strains, two different ways to "be black" in this country, is incredibly significant. Michelle having come from one particular tradition and in some sense having been, you know, handed a strong sense of cultural heritage and identity at birth and Barack having to approximate his, figure his out, play with categories and see where he fits in, represents in and of itself, and all the way down through hip-hop culture, which I think is also reflecting of a change—a shifting of boundaries that allows for a kind of broader sense of what it is.

CHRIS LEHMAN: Yeah, there's a very genuine sense in which Obama has always struck me as, you know, the mythology of American presidents always are the, you know, kind of preeminent self-made man, and they have all been men so far. But it seems Obama embodies that trait much more vividly and viscerally than, you know, the Abraham Lincoln, William Henry Harrison kind of up from poverty version of that myth and I think that you're suggesting that it's a very postmodern kind of contingent sense of, you know, and I was talking with Peniel in the back room earlier, and you have the sense of you know Obama can give a speech in Turkey and proclaim himself a relative of Muslims and embrace that identity and two days later he's hosting a seder at the White House. There's a very—and he feels this tremendous—it's a very familiar thing, it's not the traditional kind of what we're used to seeing from a lot of white ethnic American politicians where you adopt—you eat a kielbasa in a Polish neighborhood or something. It's something you pick up somehow that he's lived and I do think one of the interesting dimensions of this question which I think Victor hinted at and this gives me a very good segue to Ta-Nehisi as well, there's a generational difference here—you know, the idea of a univocal blackness is something that as you were saying, loses traction in the culture as all these other ideas of you know authentic identity based on race or anything else kind of give way.

BAZ DREISINGER: Well, I think for me the key word is choice and the crafting of it because I think for so long, and by no means—am I saying this is no longer the case but I think for a lot of people conception of racial identity involves something you're again you're handed at birth, whereas with Barack Obama what you see is a labored crafting of an identity and that type—the type of person who has in some way craft an identity and make choices and sees race as something that involves choice making is especially interesting on all sides of the racial line.

CHRIS LEHMAN: And it does pose problems, as you suggested, for the black half of black nationalist thinking, but I think the nationalist component is still there as well, that, you know, he can and you mentioned the March race speech in the primaries and that was a very striking moment where he, you know, very overtly, you know, was embracing a community-based black identity, saying, you know, that I can't disown Reverend Wright because here is the history that has shaped me and him and brought me into his congregation, but with that I want to throw the same I bet you can't guess what I'm going to ask you—this is Ta-Nehisi Coates, who's a contributing editor for the *Atlantic* and the author of *A Beautiful Struggle: A Father, Two Sons, and an Unlikely Road to Manhood*. And so what do you think? Black nationalism up or down. I feel like I'm hosting, you know, *Talk Soup* or something.

TA-NEHISI COATES: It's a weird thing being here. Whenever you talk about movements originating in black people you always feel the need to defend yourself. I think I'm the only person here on the panel who actually grew up in a quasi-black nationalist home. I think I've got the only African name up here, too, right? Not Victor? Maybe Baz—just checking. I didn't get the full deal. My dad hated Maulana Karenga, and we didn't celebrate Kwanzaa, so I'm not the authentic prototype here, but, having said that, I often thought of myself as a kind of lapsed black nationalist, because even though I probably wouldn't describe myself that way today, it exerts an influence over me that for all of my willpower I simply can't shake.

Barack Obama does this thing—I think, I guess, I hope he still does this thing. I don't have a TV anymore, so I don't see too much anymore, but when he first started running he would do this

thing whenever he was at a campaign event, and no matter who was on the stage with him, black or white, that was introducing him, he would greet the person with a pound, give him the solid thing and a hug. It was the most shocking thing I had ever seen in my life. Who's running for president and greets somebody with a pound? That really, really struck me and I'll come back to that in one second.

There are all sorts of things that you can pull out of black nationalism, some of them defensible and some of them less so. The thing that always attracted me and has stuck with me, that I can't shake, is the idea of agency, of, as my dad used to say, doing for self. That's a line from Garvey, from Malcolm X, even up through hip-hop, up through now. I'm not going to sit here and wait for somebody else to do for me, I can do it myself, and not only that, I can do it in my way, I can walk how I walk, I can talk like I talk, I don't have to change for you. And so when I saw Barack Obama giving a handshake like that, he didn't have to change. It was okay that he played basketball, that was completely fine, that great moment when he goes into Ben's Chili Bowl and tells the woman, "naw, we straight." That's fine, that's all right, I can do that.

So to me I have to say, the question of is black nationalism dead is fundamentally ridiculous to me and I'll come back to that in a second. It's fundamentally ridiculous to me. But beyond that, the whole point of black nationalism and black power was to assert yourself in the most powerful way possible and what I mean by that is we're past the days when you have to sloganeer and throw up your fist. Now it's power in the way white people exercise power. When people talk like you, it's like the way everybody else exercises power, it doesn't have to declare itself, it just

is. So, to see him give that handshake, to see him talk the way he talks, to see it be okay to play basketball to me is almost the ultimate in black power as far as I'm concerned.

The reason why it's ridiculous to me, just to get back to that declaration is, the real question is is the other wing dead, is integration dead? We're forty, fifty years after the Civil Rights Movement. African Americans are the most segregated minority in this country. No one asks is integration dead, though, that's the real question, have we given up on that?

CHRIS LEHMAN: I had it on my list here, Ta-Nehisi.

TA-NEHISI COATES: I'll give you credit, I'll give you credit. Is that dead? If nationalism—anybody who's seen—as crazy as this is gonna sound—any of, you know, these speeches Bill Cosby has been giving. It's pretty clear nationalism is not dead. It's very much implicit in what he's talking about and his audience's response is very nationalistic. Anybody that spends any time walking up and down 125th Street, it's very clear that nationalism is not dead. Integration, on the other hand, the idea that the government and that Americans in general will have some sort of declared interest in living up to Martin Luther King's dream, that's another question. And Barack Obama may end that, that to me is the bigger question.

CHRIS LEHMAN: And, you know, the way I was thinking of approaching that question is, you know, you can sort of tweak everything we've been saying tonight and what you were just saying about Obama, you know, being very comfortable and not apologetic or deferential in just being black in the traditional sense of it, but you can also say, you know, Barack Obama, you

know, comes from a biracial family, grew up in a—in perhaps one of America's most integrated states, Hawaii, where race is not as fraught and doesn't have—it has its own colonial history but it's a very different resonance. So you can say, you know, Obama represents, you know, a version of an integrated past that is dying and that white communities are nearly as segregated as well as—you know, I live in Washington, where my neighborhood is predominantly black, but if I go, you know, one mile west, you know, it's fluffy lily white.

TA-NEHISI COATES: I would throw out two things—the first being not for reasons of any degree of morality, but just because of power dynamics, the whole concept of biracialism and biracial black people isn't particularly new to African Americans and it's not really seen as a threat. The second thing is I think we can talk about the death of black nationalism when our presidential candidate doesn't have to base his campaign out of the South Side of Chicago. When he can go to Iowa and launch it, you know, directly from a small town there, I think then we'll be somewhere else.

CHRIS LEHMAN: He did launch it in Springfield, technically.

TA-NEHISI COATES: He did, he did. But he had to build his power on the South Side before he could go to Springfield.

CHRIS LEHMAN: He's also I think in the past century one of the only presidents elected from an urban political base, which is a whole different discussion. But I wanted to throw back to

Victor at this point because you hoped that people would be attacking you, and I wanted to make sure that we could check that off.

VICTOR LAVALLE: Wasn't just about me—but actually I would like to maybe take issue with, one of the things that I think is fascinating about Obama is that—as the point is constantly made. Any argument about him, the exact opposite argument can be made just as validly, right, all the time. And feeling like in some ways what's interesting about Obama to me is that in fact in another realm he is actually the dream of integration, I think, fulfilled, because what he is a fully invested capitalist member of a capitalist system. I shouldn't say fully invested—but I should say that feeling like what he—the journey it seems like he wants people to be able to make is to move fully into the center of an American capitalist system, that everyone can become middle class and that in the past the argument for integration seemed to say that basically if everyone becomes white, everything will be okay, and but that—but what they were really also saying was if everybody becomes middle class everything will be fine, and if you look at later generations—I feel like in the things that do with whatever teaching people in high school and college now whatever like that, that the desire to dismantle the system is a waning desire. The desire to be in the system and to get the most *use* out of that system that you can is an enormous desire on the part of kids of *every* race and so feeling in that way is what I'm excited about Obama is we get to see basically if—well, I guess if he destroys integration or if he destroys black nationalism, and I can't wait to find out, because frankly that's better I think than being stuck in stasis, where you don't—where the only thing you can be sure of is nothing is going to change at all, you know, but I feel like he's just as much—I mean, I voted for him, I love him, all

those various things that you're supposed to say, but that he is absolutely, it seems like anyway at times, saying, Let's get in versus let's destroy.

CHRIS LEHMAN: Peniel has a response.

PENIEL JOSEPH: Yeah, no, I understand what you're saying, Victor, but I think it's not a polarity in terms of like is he going to save or destroy integration or black nationalism and I actually am converging with what Ta-Nehisi was saying earlier as well. But it's really I think when you look at Obama's election, the fact that he's elected for a lot of people proves that integration works, and I'm not saying this I'm saying what it proves for many people, because remember, the politics of integration was always like, you know, James Meredith in 1962, a person dies in Oxford, Mississippi, because one black man was trying to go to the University of Mississippi. They riot, there's white folks rioting for three days in Oxford, Mississippi, because he's trying to integrate Ole Miss, and once he's in, they say, look, Ole Miss is integrated, we don't really have a racial problem anymore.

So the problem with Obama—he's such a huge global cultural signifier. Is that we can all sort of pretend that African Americans now have broken this glass ceiling and it's shattered forever, and it's going to be fun—it'd be fun to be able to live another two hundred years to see how many more black presidents we're going to have in the next two hundred years, and I wouldn't be shocked if it was just him, right, because of this social movement that built up around him, so I think he's not going to end black nationalism or be the decider about integration. But there's two ways to look at him going to Turkey and then hosting the seder. He's a walking ad for a very

specific type of racial rapprochement. And even black people have bought into it. Sixty-three, 65 percent are saying Martin Luther King's dream of a beloved community is fulfilled just because he got elected. And King was talking about ending poverty at the end of his life, and ending the Vietnam War, and he both—he's such a huge cultural and political signifier that in respect to race, we're so effusive, all of us, in terms of what's happened, we're not seeing the downside.

Because I agree with Bas about race and more choices now but, at the same time, that's an intellectual exercise, in terms of black people who are poor, race is very fixed—so the politics of Katrina race is fixed, for the politics of Obama, at Harvard and Princeton, I agree, it's very, very mutable, where Obama can sit around a table even when he was thirty-five, thirty-six, and everybody left the conversation saying "man, what a great guy," that black guy who just left. They do say that, "what a great guy," they don't say that about me, because I'm too strident. Ta-Nehisi said he grew up in a black nationalist household. I grew up the son of a Haitian immigrant, a trade unionist in New York City, 1199, born and raised in New York City, so when I would leave the room and the conversation, no one said, "wow, what a nice black guy," they said, "Who invited that guy? Who invited that guy?" So it's a very interesting thing in terms of Obama and race, because we're all patting ourselves on the back now but it's really an unearned victory if we look at socioeconomic indicators because race is so fixed.

CHRIS LEHMAN: And we even forget Obama's own running mate had that gaffe when he was running against him of "what a clean, articulate black man," you know, and these are just things that—again, just the impact of this moment has, I think, really distorted people's vision and that was kind of the whole idea in commissioning the piece, as I explained

BAZ DREISINGER: It really comes down to the gap between theory and practice, you know, and this is always the issue when, you know, we can talk about all the ways in which race is artificial—in my classroom, it's a big topic of conversation and race is all put it all in quotation marks at all times but it's something that's both very real and very fake at the same time.

CHRIS LEHMAN: Just because something's a social construction doesn't mean it's less real.

BAZ DREISINGER: So it's the same thing in this scenario because there are very real ways. I mean, I think it was fitting that Eric Holder came along right after you know Obama was in office to basically put a little footnote on Obama's speech on race, however he said it.

CHRIS LEHMAN: Which interestingly was not something that Obama himself could say, you know. Once you've sort of made all the kind of—and this is another thing that doesn't often get talked about but, you know, he bartered a big part of that black identity he could express informally to acquire power. And so someone like Eric Holder comes along and says, you know, "we're all cowards," which in a sense is true. We're using Obama as a shield for that cowardice, which again it does—it makes me dizzy at times.

VICTOR LAVALLE: Probably no modern president could get away with calling a segment of the American population cowards. You know, I think that's also just the reality—

CHRIS LEHMAN: Holder was calling everyone cowards, if I recall, for not talking honestly.

BAZ DREISINGER: A nation of cowards for not engaging in—you know, most people don't engage in real conversations about race and most people live segregated existences.

CHRIS LEHMAN: And I guess what makes it weird is I feel like Obama's election has made it harder in some ways to have that conversation. I mean—because there is this this, you know, kind of enraptured sensation you were describing of like, "well, we were a racist country for four hundred years but then we elected this guy," so—and that's sort of a good question looking forward of whether you call it, you know, politics of self-organization or autonomy or black nationalism per se, is how do you get that—the conversation that Eric Holder wants to have started again, anyone?

TA-NEHISI COATES: I'm not in that conversation. I'm into this conversation. This idea that we're going to get all these black people and white people to sit around a table saying, "here's what I don't like about you," and "here's what I love about you," and "I really do like Michael Jackson," and it just seems—and I listened to his speech and I would love to embrace his speech and say, "yeah," I mean, no one more than me, would say, "yeah, he said what Obama couldn't say and he told these white folks the truth and he did." But it was a boring, vague speech. Obama's speech was better, for whatever it was a much clearer, better speech, I still have to say.

I don't know that what's needed is conversation. What's needed is policy. And that's the real question. What policies are we going to have? I don't know that you can legislate integration, but

you can probably legislate away, like, the wealth gap in this country, you can legislate things like that, so this sort of idea that there's going to be a grand talk around a table, excepting this table—

CHRIS LEHMAN: Which is not at all a grand table.

TA-NEHISI COATES: Right, it's not grand at all. It just seems like ridiculous to me. I mean, tangibly, what does that look like?

BAZ DREISINGER: I think it looks like a classroom, I mean, I personally, you know, I work with students everyday and I think that—I agree policy is of primary importance, but so is conversation in the sense of—I love my students dearly, but I'm always amazed at the things that come out of their mouths when it comes to various issues pertaining to race, and I teach at the City University of New York—I mean, it's as diverse as could possibly be. So I think there's a lot of conversation that has to happen. People need to, you know, undo some seventeenth-century notions about race and identity that I think are prevalent everywhere, so I think it's both.

CHRIS LEHMAN: Because I was just remember when you were describing how dull Holder's remarks were—

PENIEL JOSEPH: I disagree with that. I think the Eric Holder speech. We're talking about the Attorney General of the United States, first black attorney general, made a speech February 17th of this year about race called A Nation of Cowards, it's a very specific speech, more sophisticated than Obama's March 4, 2008, speech. He talks about the reasons for Black History

Month. He talks about the politics and practices of white supremacy and institutionalized racism and how Black History Month can be the font to start conversation nationally that we haven't seen since the Kerner commission. So Holder's speech was a much more sophisticated speech about race. Because what Obama did was what King Solomon did—he parsed. Right, so he said we're going to split the baby down the people, so black people are to blame and so are white people. There's a problem there because black people didn't start slavery and black people didn't institutionalize Jim Crow. So the idea is if we want to have an honest conversation about race, it's not about parsing and saying, "well, we're both to blame, fifty / fifty," so the politics of Katrina are "because your mom smoked crack and George Bush was a jerk, fifty/fifty." That's just not the truth empirically. And I'm saying this as a historian.

That's not the truth empirically so when we think about the Holder speech, Holder gave us an actual raison d'etre to have a national conversation about race and guess what? People got mad and pissed off and the same day Holder has his speech, the *New York Post* had that cartoon with the monkey and Obama that sparked all this outrage. So the notion that we don't need a conversation, I *do* think we need a national conversation and we haven't had a conversation again since the Kerner Commission.

The Kerner Commission comes out in March of 1968, end of February, March of 1968 and that's the very famous Lyndon Johnson riot commission—Otto Kerner was governor of Illinois. They basically said America was two nations, black, white, separate and unequal and we had over 350 civil disturbances in the United States between 1964 and 1968 and they said the reason for those civil disturbances was poverty related to institutional racism. The reason for the ghetto was the

politics of white supremacy. Guess what? Lyndon Johnson refused to meet with his own commission. End of conversation. And then Bill Clinton had a national conversation that got usurped by Monica Lewinsky. End of conversation. And Dr. John Hope Franklin—the late Dr. Franklin—was one of the people who was trying to start up that national conversation. So we certainly need a national conversation, and I think again Eric Holder's speech—it's a brilliant speech that a lot of people found too distasteful because he was being so provocative by talking at least more bluntly about race.

TA-NEHISI COATES: I'm sorry, I strongly disagree with that characterization of Eric Holder's speech. We just—because I don't want to get sidetracked on that. That speech got a lot of attention because he called—and I didn't find it impolite. I didn't find it, you know—I wasn't offended. I don't think anybody should be offended. I have no sympathy with people who were offended. I just didn't think it was a good speech. I thought that that line got a lot of heat, but I didn't see much light in it. I didn't, and again I admire Obama's speech quite a bit. I actually don't think he split the baby down the middle. I think to say to white ethnic people, you know, "if you want to leave a neighborhood because you're thinking about crime, that doesn't necessarily make you a racist." I didn't think that was wrong. There are plenty of black people who don't want to live in those neighborhoods that he's talking about would say the same thing.

Now, I didn't agree with everything in that speech, but I actually thought, if you talk about presidents, or presidential candidates, even, not even presidents, presidential candidates, people who have something to lose, making a statement. I thought it was quite daring. And I don't say that as a guy drinking the Kool-Aid or anything. I think another part of this, though is again, not

to be narcissistic here but my own status as a lapsed nationalist again. Because one of the things nationalism says is that we don't sit around talking about stuff, you know, we're going to go do it, what are we going to do and we don't necessarily.

I just—I mean, I have, like everybody else, in my heart the idea that one day this will be an integrated country—I think that's a great thing, but I think the immediate results after the conversations that Peniel just listed are in themselves damning of having a conversation and the idea that that will somehow lead to something. I think many of the things that may lead us to that actual dream are things that you don't necessarily even have to—I don't want this to come out wrong—but explicitly address race about. So many of our problems are problems of wealth and poverty and schools and that sort of thing. These are problems that we share across the board in this country.

VICTOR LAVALLE: I think Holder's—the other thing to think about when we're talking about Holder and what he said is also to think specifically about his most recent famous action, which was to drop the lawsuit against Ted Stevens and as much as they're touting like this means clearly he wasn't corrupt and obviously it doesn't mean that it just means that the case wasn't sound but what I took from Holder's action in that specific case and that idea of going forward was that what he was saying is the rule of law will actually hold no matter who it is, even if it's an enemy of my party so to speak, I mean, and the fact that he turns over this case for this—for this person who maybe was probably not beloved, I'm guessing, in the Holder household, or in the Obama administration, but the fact that what he said was it doesn't matter who this person was. What matters is that the law says the lawyers on the government side acted improperly and

for that reason we have to overturn this case. And, for me, I thought that was the greatest of all the things Holder's done recently.

I thought that was the greatest step because it was an action that exactly as you're saying could in theory also—I began to think maybe I could trust that the Justice Department when some other case came up that was obviously a miscarriage of justice in the other direction that this Justice Department might say, the rule of law holds for Ted Stevens, it holds for this dude in Queens, it holds for you, it holds for me, everyone. And that that was not the case for the Justice Department in the previous administration, certainly, if not in many other administrations. And just thinking that we—mixing both what he said with what he did I feel like in that way what he did is as important—if not, I mean I would argue actually *more* important because when he's dead and gone, hopefully that will still be a case that will be—that we can go back to the history that his justice department sets up will be one that creates a sense of greater legal justice in administrations that come after it and that that's more helpful to black people, white people, Latinos, Asians, Muslims, whatever, than any talk.

CHRIS LEHMAN: Because it affirms an impersonal standard of justice that is you know perhaps we could say transracial rather than postracial, that, you know, applies, meaning it applies equally.

VICTOR LAVALLE: Well, I mean, if the constant rhetoric since however long ago was that we are supposed to all be equal under the law, I like that he said, like, well, it was a bad trial, we have to let this dude go.

CHRIS LEHMAN: The question then becomes how do you apply that standard, say, to mortgage lenders or to, you know, school districts that have—thanks to bad prior Supreme Court rulings—have been allowed to segregate themselves outside of metropolitan school districts. You know, those are—Obama will have the power in some indirect way to address such questions by appointing Supreme Court justices—but I guess the question of like, you know, we have conversation here and we have policy here. I guess my question is how do you get from there to here?

I mean, if you need at the very least to elect representatives who reflect a transracial or, you know, an agenda that opposes wealth inequality and to get those people you have to organize. You do have to go to the South Side of Chicago or wherever it may be and put together coalitions that will, you know, work in general elections, which often involves, and again to return to the inevitable topic, Obama represents those bargains struck and has been amazing, you know—I guess I come down on—not that it matters—I found Obama's speech sort of more compelling because it was, you know, him laying out, you know, these kind of, you know, what for him were intimate questions of, you know, "my white grandmother often you know acts in a way that reflects a racist culture," and to just put that out there and he got predictably—Republicans said ad nauseum that he was throwing his white grandmother under the bus—even if, you know, I didn't even know what the phrase "under the bus" means, but as though she somehow—and of course they subsequently attacked him for using his white grandmother's death as a shield to avoid the last stage of the campaign, so we can just stipulate they're deranged.

BAZ DREISINGER: Those two are, you know, I guess these speeches have become touchstones for us, but Holder's speech, Obama's speech, I like them both, I see them as two sides of the same coin. One is a personal discussion. I think that Obama's was about his own—you know, and, again, the fact that he had to address you know the race issue is itself you know depressing and no white—when was the last time a white politician gave a speech about my racial identity? Didn't happen.

CHRIS LEHMAN: George Wallace, I guess.

(laughter)

BAZ DREISINGER: But I think that one is his addressing of that personal identity and the other is much more, you know, about the nation and kind of where we stand.

CHRIS LEHMAN: And I also I guess I'm siding with Ta-Nehisi in the sense that he refused to disown Reverend Wright, even though he subsequently left the congregation for obvious political reasons, but in that moment when, you know, the entire weight of the punditocracy was saying, you know, "oh my God, he has to get rid of this guy if he ever hopes to get nominated." And you know, many, many Democrats and liberals in this chorus. And he did not go there. And I just felt like—

BAZ DREISINGER: There would have been complications if he went there, too, though, because I mean—I think the issue also is one of sort of—I think masculinity is important there, too, you can't just run and turn your back and say, "ah, forget it, we were never, that's not my boy, forget it." That would violate all kinds of standards as well.

CHRIS LEHMAN: Though I can think of all sorts of white politicians who have done just that, you know.

VICTOR LAVALLE: But we don't like them.

BAZ DREISINGER: Exactly, they didn't win.

CHRIS LEHMAN: Plenty of them won, believe me. Plenty of them won. So it's, you know, and again I guess I'm just saying like, you know, I think it is a both/and question. We do need to have some sort of honest discussion about race. I'm skeptical that the government can do that, I'm, you know—and I do think—and one of the reasons I don't believe or I also believe the question, the oversimplified question is ridiculous that, you know, as long as there's a need to organize communities there will be a form of nationalism that will have racial inflections.

TA-NEHISI COATES: That's a great answer. I was struggling to say that. That's great. You should have grown up in a black nationalist household.

VICTOR LAVALLE: But there's also the danger of asking black people to give up more than other people are asked to give up, as well, right? Just the other day in the paper there was a piece about in L.A. Koreatown now has a Little Bangladesh in it, right? And the people of Little Bangladesh are working to get it zoned or called—the area that is Little Bangladesh being recognized legally in the city as Little Bangladesh and the Koreans of Koreatown were like, wait, wait, wait, this is in Koreatown. But the problem was that they hadn't actually worked to incorporate it, because it had been—frankly, their point was "nobody ever wanted to be here so it was just ours and everyone accepted that it was ours," and then this other group showed up and like, they were like "let's just name it," or whatever, and it caused this big brouhaha, well, some brouhaha, but the point was that both nowhere in the article did it suggest, and no part of the debate was maybe they should just stop being Bangladeshi or Korean, you know what I mean, the point instead was just somehow they have to find a way to exist here together, to hold on to what is their culture and also at the same time to enter into the American discussion.

CHRIS LEHMAN: Which, again, is the ideal of integration, right?

VICTOR LAVALLE: Well, and see, but sometimes it seems like it's worth, making sure that like in this question of like is black nationalism dead, that the request isn't just stop being black and everything will be cool, anymore than it would be to the Koreans of Koreatown or whatever place you want to name. I just feel like that's the fear sometimes of this idea of the either/or, of black nationalism or integration, is that it for specifically for black people it comes with like, "would you just—if we let you in, would you stop being such a pain in the ass," right, and the your pain in the ass is that you have to hold onto your aspects of your culture that you consider

solely yours, and that is not necessarily something that is asked, I think, of so many other groups and that that's an important thing to keep in mind—you shouldn't have to give up everything to—

CHRIS LEHMAN: Peniel and Ta-Nehisi can both speak to this. The original nationalist critique of integration was you know, "why do we need to assimilate to a white culture that has you know, enslaved and oppressed us for four hundred years?" and, you know, it's a good question.

PENIEL JOSEPH: Right, and what's interesting about Obama, is where was he—if you saw like Black History Month in February. You know, George Bush would always do some little—even if it was having some black singers, just something ridiculous. **(laughter)** But there was no real—there was a little op with Michelle Obama and Sweet Honey in the Rock, but you didn't see the president, at least not this past Black History Month. So black people are kind of in a quandary with him. Especially—there's been real critics of him on the Left—black progressive who are very, very critical of the Obama administration, but the black community as a whole has been very protective, famously Tavis Smiley had the criticism of him and was really, was really, really—

CHRIS LEHMAN: Shouted down.

PENIEL JOSEPH: Yeah, he was shouted down in a way and what we're seeing is how do you criticize the first black president, and that's going to be a very interesting development over the next four years because there is a black political agenda at the grassroots level that if the

president was not black, he'd have to meet with different representatives, and some people would instantly think it's Jesse Jackson and Al Sharpton, but that's not necessarily true, it's just different representatives, or sometimes people are going to call it brokerage politics, leverage politics, where you meet with a go-between and you sort of promise and exchange certain things. Here you don't see that as much, even though he's got T. D. Jenks, he's got—he's got a group of black people who are surrounding him but I think there's a fear when you think about it at the grassroots level—how do you both criticize this president and how do you extract goods and services from this president?

TA-NEHISI COATES: I just want to just throw out there. I think that whenever you publicly criticize somebody you shouldn't expect it to be easy. I think you criticize him by criticizing him. And you don't expect to be rewarded for that, to the extent that African Americans are—and I'm not sure I subscribe to this but to the extent that it might be true, that black folks are drinking the Kool-Aid, it's always been the job of people who fashion themselves as intellectuals to turn people along. I mean it's always been that way. I don't know how many people were with Martin Luther King when he was against the Vietnam war. I'm not sure, I'm not sure that there were a crowd of people saying, Yes, you're right, that's the right thing to do. I know that there were a lot of people who didn't want Malcolm X criticizing Martin Luther King.

So that sort of comes with the territory—I mean, I think you just come out and say it. I do my best. I think his gay marriage position is bigoted. I didn't appreciate how he laughed off that marijuana question the other day and I think you come out and say it and you don't expect people to applaud you for criticizing. Even black people—

PENIEL JOSEPH: I'm not talking about intellectuals. I'm talking about groups that certainly want access to the White House, for example, for black grassroots political agenda, and how are they going to have the leverage to get that across? Because the pundits and the black intellectuals they think they're going to have a voice, but they're not necessarily leading the black masses, as we all know, right? So it's going to be like, how do those groups that have real partisan politics on behalf of the black community. Again, Katrina's a great example. The President hasn't come out with a plan to rebuild New Orleans, and it becomes how do you have a plan that addresses poverty? I mean, the person with the best plan for poverty was John Edwards, right, and so poverty is not even on this administration's—

CHRIS LEHMAN: No, I actually remember in the early—because I live in Washington and cover Congress for my day job. The early stages of Obama's candidacy, it was very striking that the Congressional Black Caucus was very divided on his candidacy. There were a lot of people who subsequently switched, like John Lewis, from Hillary to Obama, but precisely for this reason, you know—CBC members are very—because they're in the House, they're very responsive to their districts' specific policy needs and they weren't seeing a whole lot in the Obama platform in the early stages of the primaries and eventually, I guess like everyone else, they got swept along, but it is, you know, I do think it is, you know, it is a sign of the health of any democracy to distrust its chief executive. And if you want to, you know, go back into the history of our constitution, our founders did not intend the presidency to be this powerful and, you know, it is very difficult to exert any kind of pressure from the grassroots level on up to the Oval Office and I do think, you know, the idea of organizing something around poverty is, you

know, both a, you know, as you were saying earlier both a transracial agenda and, you know, it's also for obvious reasons a ripe historical moment to make this, you know, Topic A and which gets into another dilemma of how, you know, for a long time the discussion of race—or of poverty was bound up with race and how do you move beyond that?

TA-NEHISI COATES: I'd say also you've got to go a little easy on people—not on Obama, you can be hard on Obama—but you've got to go easy on black people. You've go through eight years of George Bush, the dude's flying over Katrina, then the president's black, I think people are a little shell-shocked, about, okay, I mean, you get a little whiplash there with that, so people have not quite figured out, and I think maybe that's what you were hinting at. But folks haven't quite figured out how to approach this, I mean, no one. Maybe there were people on this panel that did, but no one I knew *expected* this, no one was like, "yeah, he's going to do it," until maybe later in the primary it became a little clearer, but certainly not early on. I think people really liked him, thought he was great, da-da-da-da-da, but it wasn't until really after Iowa that people were like, "yeah, this actually could happen," so I think people are a little stunned, I mean, even now, sometimes I catch myself and I'm a little stunned, hopefully what will happen as this thing goes on is that people will get their legs under them and start throwing some punches.

VICTOR LAVALLE: I remember there was a picture of him when he was addressing—when in Turkey and he was addressing this room full of Turkish officials, and I was just looking like, "wait, where is the American president," **(laughter)** "oh, it's that dude," and it's the same thing like, I feel like it still is this sort of ingrained—like the picture that is ingrained is not the same as

the reality and it still takes time for the picture to disappear and for that reality to actually have its power, and there's nothing wrong with celebrating for a little while.

BAZ DREISINGER: Which is. yeah, and that is usually powerful in and of itself, people said, "oh, he's a figurehead, that doesn't affect this," and all the naysayers kept—but figureheads mean a hell of a lot, whether they're President Obama or Kanye West—I mean, they represent, you know, different identities as options and that's huge. The Europe trip I think probably was blissful for many of us, just the idea of not having to worry that our president was out there going to make a tremendous ass of all of us at any given moment was like a gift.

CHRIS LEHMAN: Or accidentally invade a country or something when he was over there.

PENIEL JOSEPH: Well, I think the Turkish trip was great, because since he became president, that's the most he's talked about race, you know, in that speech, but what was interesting was the wire services didn't talk about race. So in the speech there's a paragraph or two where he says, you know, he says this as a president of a country cause he's talking about the evolution of American democracy or just democracy in general that not long ago made it so hard for him to vote, he invoked Lincoln, he did all these different things and then in the wire service reports, they just blotted that out completely, so that's interesting, because that's the most explicit he's been since the inauguration.

CHRIS LEHMAN: And what would be your—why do you think they did that?

PENIEL JOSEPH: Well, I think, I mean, one thing we saw during the campaign. The AP is becoming aggressively interpretive. The AP used to just report the news with no opinion and after his—after his DNC speech, the AP was just basically, "That speech sucked," and that was the Associated Press, that was a wire service that said that, so I think it's ideological, not seeing that, the BBC reported on it, but in terms of American newspapers, you just didn't see the talk about race in that speech before the Turkish parliament, and that was April 6.

CHRIS LEHMAN: Not to belabor the point, but you would think, you know, if there is some sort of desire for an official conversation about race, the press would be a natural venue for it.

PENIEL JOSEPH: Well, certainly, Just a month ago, people were saying, What happened to race, they were asking the CBC and they were asking people when are we going to talk about race, and Jim Clyburn and different people were saying, "well, you know, eventually we will, but the president has a lot on his plate," and it's like just like what the president has said—he's trying to tackle all these problems at once, because now's the time to do it. This is not the time to not talk about race, if you're trying to say this is the new new deal, because if you remember the problem with the old New Deal was two-tiered liberalism; there was a New Deal for blacks and there was a New Deal for whites and this is empirically—

This is one of the reasons I don't admire the March 2008 speech that much, because—and I think it's a very compelling speech, but the white ethnics he's talking about and saying, "you know, you're scared of crime in your neighborhoods," the reason they're in the neighborhoods they're in, in the 1930s and '40s and '50s and '60s from Long Island to Chicago to Oakland and Los

Angeles is the New Deal. The New Deal built sky rise projects for African Americans and it builds houses for white people. And black people cannot use the GI Bill at the same rate as white people. There's a great book by Ira Katznelson, When Affirmative Action Was White, that chronicles this meticulously, empirically. Stuyvesant Town in New York City, twenty-five thousand homes were built, and only and this was supervised by the federal government even though MetLife was the private owner, right, so how do you like that sweet deal, and MetLife sells it decades later for five billion dollars, but Stuyvesant Town, twenty-five thousand units, and it was only after protests from the NAACP and other activists that sixty blacks could move into Stuyvesant Town in the late 1940s. Sixty out of twenty-five thousand, and that was subsidized homes for GIs in the postwar movement.

(applause)

CHRIS LEHMAN: I got nothing.

BAZ DREISINGER: Well, I'll say, though, that that's just evidence of how much a conversation needs to happen on local levels and on government levels. See, I don't see that conversation as being—I don't know that I want to talk about race with almost anyone in the current government, almost anyone, but I think that on a local level, too, because most people are not aware of that, and again, when I think about, you know, my students in the classroom, they have no idea, you know, in *American Apartheid* talks about the segregation scales of cities, and it's a great book and it talks about all the different—you know, how segregated each city is, and I always ask students, okay, how segregated is New York? And they say, "oh, no, no, no, it's not

segregated, that's not us," it ranks I mean, the book's some years old, but it ranks very highly on that scale, and so most people don't have this awareness. I think there's this basic awareness of structural inequality and of even of racial categories.

I mean, referring to Barack Obama as black is true on a level and untrue on a level. I mean, it comes from a legacy of the one-drop rule, which comes from slavery. That's what that's born of, and if we don't at least recognize that on a level with a caveat that, of course, you know, being, it's a lot more complicated than that, as well, because that is what he identifies with, but if we don't at least take racial categories with a grain of salt, then, you know, we're really not going to be able to progress forward as far as policy and as far as institutional racism.

TA-NEHISI COATES: Just really quickly. This gets at one of the reasons why I'm suspicious of and I have two forces warring within me because I really hope I'm wrong about what I'm about to say. There's no doubt in the history Peniel just laid out—it's true, it's true, it's true. But I think people are willfully ignorant. I don't think there's any conspiracy. I think people have figured out it's not in their interest to know. It's just that simple. It's not like the wool's being pulled over their eyes, it's not like, you know, and I'm sitting up here inveighing against a conversation on race when on my blog I daily have a conversation about race. And you can—like much of the history Peniel just laid out, we spend so much time talking about why the wealth gap is the way it is, because that really is the root of so much of what's going on right now. Just a historic attack against black wealth building, right? People will deny it, it's just like you can lay out the evidence right in front of them and they will pull the wool over their own eyes.

There is some part amongst folks that has deduced that it is not in their interests to know. I am not particularly hopeful that—I'm not particularly optimistic that that will change. I hope I'm wrong, I really do, I really hope that there's a bigger way of seeing this stuff, but I don't know, I think people operate in their interests, I really do. And the only way to get past this point is to somehow convince a suitable percentage of white people that it is in their interest to do certain things. They're not going to do it because it makes them feel better. I think white guilt is overrated.

PENIEL JOSEPH: I don't think there ever was such a thing as white guilt.

TA-NEHISI COATES: I would agree with that, too. I would not dispute that at all.

PENIEL JOSEPH: We talk about the politics of backlash, but historically, backlash was going on even during the 1930s and '40s, during the New Deal, people were trying to leave neighborhoods. FHA housing if they tried to even move one black person and that's federal housing authority, Kenneth Jackson's great book *Crabgrass Frontier* shows how FHA wouldn't build where one single black person was, and that's were you get the all-white suburbs in Long Island. I went to school in Long Island, Stony Brook. And you know Stony Brook, the three village area, was all white. There were pockets where black people were, Wyandanch and different sort of suburban sprawl ghettoes in quotes, but it was all white, and I always try to tell my students this is for a reason, it's not just white people gathered up and it was just by accident and they chose the best homes and manicured lawns in Chicago and New York and Delaware

and everywhere. This is the federal government subsidized segregation, we've all got to come to terms with that, and they've done it over the last seventy-odd years.

TA-NEHISI COATES: But Peniel, what if they are to terms with it? Like, what if the federal government was accurately representing its citizens?

PENIEL JOSEPH: What I will say is this, I will say that in terms of democracy and its evolution, I think they were accurately representing a strain of its citizens, and there has always been a clash, and I think what's interesting about Obama's win when we look at it empirically, 43 percent of whites voted for him, right, so it's this multiracial, multicultural coalition, but it doesn't include a majority of whites, it includes a robust minority, including young people, along with 95 percent of blacks and 66 percent of Latin Americans. Latinos, people kept saying, "well, they don't like black people, they hate us," but two out of three, and including in Florida, right, so I think there's always a democracy.

I agree with the president, democracy is always an evolution in process, a work in progress, and I think that it's accurately reflecting only a certain group. Even if it is we can argue a majority of whites, there's a robust minority of whites who do see that it's in their interest to have a healthier democracy, and even the notion of the wealth gap that you were talking about, which I completely agree with you, I think you're completely spot on, where this gap between black and white wealth goes back to the antebellum slavery period and what's great about that is that we've talking about reparations since Callie House, Mary Frances Berry has a great book on Calley House, *My Face is Black, My Face is True*, about the first movement for reparations by people

who were slaves. Everybody says, you know what, statute of limitations, it's over. This was a black woman who said—she gathered thirty thousand people in the 1880s and 1890s and said what about a pension for those of us who labored? And the federal government said no, but legally we've got that on the books, where black people didn't—reparations weren't invented by black nationalists in the sixties with dashikis and it was a way to pull the wool over the eyes of whites and white guilt. People knew even in the 1870s and 1880s that something needed to be done.

TA-NEHISI COATES: I want to make this very, very quick.

CHRIS LEHMAN: Very quickly. Then we've got to close up.

TA-NEHISI COATES: That significant minority came after arguably the worst president in history. I think that just bears in mind in terms of—

VICTOR LAVALLE: The other beauty of the twenty-first century, though, is that you don't have to win over the majority of whites to change the system and that that was one of the beautiful things that Obama figured out—but like seriously talk about this idea of self-interest. There was an article I forget how long ago talking about how now the largest minority population in prisons is Latinos. Right? They beat blacks to number one on the list, right? But the idea was just like with black people getting arrested for what were essentially misdemeanor crimes, but the laws in place forcing judges to put them in jail. A lot of the Latinos who had caused this surge were in jail for citizenship issues, but it nonetheless caused their numbers to

swell. So purely on the level of you're talking about the Rockefeller laws in New York, you're talking about other states, you just go to blacks and Latinos and say, "it is actually in your self-interest for both groups to work together to change this law," you would only need that robust minority of white people to change that law.

CHRIS LEHMAN: On that realistic yet hopeful I have to bring the proceedings to a close—

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: But only to a close to continue the conversation.

TA-NEHISI COATES: I'm not answering any questions. No conversation.

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: So all questions should be directed to Ta-Nehisi.

Q: What about black nationalism? We kind of stopped talking about black nationalism at a certain point, and I think one reason was it would be helpful to have sort of a definition of terms, and also one thing I kept thinking of is not is black nationalism dead but black nationalism is the walking wounded, and to think about, like, the way that black nationalism like started dying in the sixties and seventies and was co-opted into the government by the eighties and so those impulses that are still with us and that those of us who have African names and are able to live out our lives in a way that's informed by that movement, it's very much with us, even as we're able to lodge a critique. If you could talk a little bit more about the history, so we can kind of think about how we got to where we are and why we're talking about it dying.

PENIEL JOSEPH: Certainly, and I agree with Ta-Nehisi in terms of like there is a kind of absurdity to say is it dying or not but this was a provocation, so that's one thing that there's something—there's some stagecraft there to entice a great conversation. But I'm into conversation so unlike Ta-Nehisi, I want to have the dialogue. When we think about black nationalism, a working shorthand definition would be just three things I'll talk about briefly and then expand. Unity, self-determination, which Ta-Nehisi talked about very well, and the cultural politics of race.

When we say cultural politics of race, beyond Marcus Garvey and just race pride, it's really a notion of epistemologically what does race mean? It's really a notion that tries to critique aspects of Western civilization's notion of blackness and black people. So black nationalism is something that comes both as a response to the politics of white supremacy and antebellum slavery but beyond that it also has its own institutional structure, meaning its own intellectual, political, cultural institutions that it builds up, as a way of being and a way of seeing. In the United States, but also when we're talking about South America, wherever Africans were, in the diaspora, there's going to be black nationalism.

Sometimes people will connect that with pan-Africanism, and when we think about pan-Africanism, that's sort of we can almost say black nationalism on steroids, on a global, more expansive vision of black nationalism. Now, that being said, the history of nationalism in this country is very interesting, because we have a history from slavery to freedom in this country, and that's to paraphrase John Hope Franklin, the late Dr. John Hope Franklin, where people will

talk about integration and nationalism almost as two separate poles that aren't paralleling and intersecting with each other.

So they'll say there's this integrationist, a Frederick Douglass, and then they'll say there's maybe a Martin Delany, they'll say there's Du Bois and then there's a Booker T. Washington or a Marcus Garvey. They'll say Malcolm and they'll say Martin. They'll set up a teleology of black nationalism in a trajectory that's very male, that's very angry, and that's not complex. In fact, black nationalism always parallels and intersects with the idea of liberal integrationism, or we've called it integration here. So someone like Frederick Douglass was an integrationist, but there's a point where Fred Douglass is ready to move to Haiti when he's thinking Lincoln isn't down for the cause, right. And when we think about somebody like Booker T. Washington, Booker T. Washington is a small-c conservative black nationalist. He was more complicated than sort of the Uncle Tom people say that he was even though he's got his own flaws. We think about Du Bois as both an integrationist and a pan-Africanist. He's both an integrationist and leading—

TA-NEHISI COATES: A separatist at one point.

PENIEL JOSEPH: He's even a racial separatist and even this idea of separation and separatism. There's going to be Amy Jacques Garvey, and there's a whole line of black women who are nationalists and pan-Africanists, too, including somebody like Lorraine Hansberry, so when we think about how do we get to this point, short answer, in the 1960s and early seventies, black nationalism is on an uptick, probably from the late fifties to the early seventies, so Malcolm X and *The Hate That Hate Produced* in '59 sort of introduces a version of black

nationalism to American audiences. Now that version is sectarian, and it is talking about racial separatism, but Malcolm X is also secular, so he's a very interesting nationalist, so he doesn't necessarily believe the line that he's saying even in the late 1950s. The '64 conversion that everyone talks about, the Paul at Damascus moment is also a literary invention just so he can tell people, look, I changed, even though he didn't necessarily. Look, even if you're a Democrat, you don't necessarily believe everything the Democratic party says, right? Or if you're a republican, so that's how I equate it when he was a part of the NOI.

Sixties, there's a big uptick in nationalism, even to the point where nationalism becomes a caricature, so you do have on certain college campuses, you do have in certain contexts, you have the brother who's in a dashiki with an Afro blowout who is actually—Ta-Nehisi was talking about sloganeering, right. But that's a fringe. When we think about nationalism, it's much more complicated than that, even to the point where we have nationalists who are feminists, we are going to have nationalists who are literary authors like Toni Cade Bambara and *The Black Woman*, we're going to have people like Fran Beal, who are talking about double jeopardy, sexism and racism. We're going to have nationalists like Congressman Charles Diggs from Michigan who's talking about Africa in a dashiki but who also is on a house subcommittee towards Africa? Long story short, has it been commodified in a sense with the notion of Afrocentrism, late eighties, early 1990s. Absolutely. Is it on its death knell? I say no, because so many nationalists are so inspired by Obama as well.

Q: I wanted to thank you so much for the fiery words. Two things, first, small comment, I think next time for this conversation to actually have a practicing black nationalist on stage would be

helpful. Charles Barron, Malachi Shabazz, there are so many people who actually live that life and I think that their words could come from that place, could add to the conversation rather than an objective, scholarly point of view.

Second, this is a question. Has black nationalism transformed to become hip-hop? In the sense that if the need for agency to control your life and to control your future is no longer sustainable where is then the idea of a nation-state of your own, then has it become translated in "I can own my own musical image, my own clothing line, my own perfume, my own hood, can I act out my sense of agency there?"

And yet at the same time I sense a contradiction because so many of those images are also incredibly self-destructive and it seems that there's a split between the aesthetics of black nationalism which has become like a middle-class, upper-class affectation and working-class, working poor, you know, hardcore grind hip-hop which is also a source of agency but it's also, like I said, there's a contradiction. So has nationalism become—that need for agency been translated into hip-hop and is it separated from the aesthetics of sixties, seventies, eighties Afrocentrism, black nationalism?

CHRIS LEHMAN: So, Baz, you've done a lot of work on hip-hop, do you have any—

BAZ DREISINGER: Well, I mean I think I—I don't know if it's become that, but I certainly think we live in the most—it's such a commercialized moment. Everything has its commercial arm. And I think that hip-hop is in many respects a commercial, you know, the commercial

representation of that. I mean, I see it referred to in one way or another in those terms by hip-hop historians. I mean, I reviewed a book that had "From Black Power," in the title and it was a history of hip-hop, so I think there is this sort of natural association between those things, but I don't know that that's—like you said, there is this split between the man on the street and the man in the academy or wherever the case may be but I think you can't have a conversation about race and representation without talking about hip-hop, or thus you can't have a conversation about black nationalism without talking about hip-hop because it's the most commercialized form of—the most commercialized discussion of race is happening there, and so we have to address it, we have to talk about it, in the same way that we have to talk about Barack Obama as a figurehead.

CHRIS LEHMAN: What about that paradox of it simultaneously embodying what you were calling the do-for-yourself idea and having, you know, an often—a destructive element as well?

TA-NEHISI COATES: I think various representations of black nationalism have had a do-for-self idea and a destructive element, also, so it's not so shocking. A direct answer to the question is it's not—nationalism has not so much been transformed into hip-hop as hip-hop has been influenced clearly by nationalism, as one of many art forms that has.

CHRIS LEHMAN: Anyone else?

VICTOR LAVALLE: No, I mean, I agree. I think sometimes—sometimes I get afraid like the conversations about hip-hop; it's almost like hip-hop gets stretched too thin, I think sometimes,

and is asked to do too much work, and that for all the wonder that does fit into hip-hop, I would personally think that black nationalism is actually still bigger and actually still more relevant, despite my essay, and still more alive that I mean, people who have nothing to do with hip-hop, categorically, black people who have nothing to do with hip-hop, still can filter into black nationalism, even if it's just by starting their own business in their neighborhood or another neighborhood and doing whatever they do and they never have listened to an ounce of hip-hop and are beyond whatever they inevitably come across in daily life and in that way I would say they're not excluded from black nationalism just because they don't have much influence from hip-hop and so I don't think the two—I don't think the one has become the other. I think it's like one is the very promising child of the other.

PENIEL JOSEPH: Very quickly, one thing that did occur, when you think about black nationalism and this brother's question, is that you know, Public Enemy, Tribe Called Quest, late eighties, sometimes people call it Golden Age of Hip-Hop. When the medium was coming into its own, black nationalism for a time before gangster rap dominated, right, and it was sending out those messages, and you could have "Fight the Power," and you could have "Burn, Hollywood, Burn," and so certainly I do think that there was a specific reason why gangster rap becomes a mode of transmission for hip-hop. Not only is it popular and people are listening to it but I think people start to see the tremendous force and power for social change potentially that black nationalist–inflected hip-hop music could have and it's certainly been marginalized over the last twenty years, so you have people like Dead Prez, or even a Mos Def, or a Talib Kweli, who you could say are nationalists, but I think you're right, there is a nationalist ethic to people whether it's Jay-Z or whoever wants to—you know, FUBU, For Us By Us. That's Marcus Garvey,

Booker T. Washington, and aspects of Du Bois. For Us, By Us, like, you know, we're not just talking about it, but we're going to build it and own it.

The only slight irony of this is that there are different versions of black nationalism in terms of economic nationalism. You've got the brother who owned BET said he founded it just for himself and his family, so he had nothing to do with the black community, you know, so he had nothing to do with the black community, even though Johnson—Bob Johnson gained because of affirmative action and his ability to sort of navigate in that context. And then you have other people like the Johnsons who own *Ebony* and *Jet*, that would be black economic nationalism, where they're at least going to say "we're going to help the Chicago community, we're capitalists, but we also want to help people." And the Nation of Islam is a similar kind of capitalist operation—"we want to make money, but we want to help the community."

BAZ DREISINGER: And it's also just Americanism. I mean, we were talking about it as nationalism, but it's the American ethos, it's American capitalism. "I'm going to get mine." Get Rich or Die Trying is the American—is pretty much the American motto.

PENIEL JOSEPH: Yeah, but in the black nationalist ethos, that get rich or die trying is subverted in this way, saying that there's going to be some kind of community empowerment. In this sense they're not talking about socialism. There were socialists during the black power movement. But the black economic nationalists are saying, "we're going to fill black cities where we're making profits but at the same time helping the community," which is different from unfettered American capitalism. Unfettered American capitalism says "we're going to make

money by any means necessary, even if we have to poison the water your children are drinking, as long as we're legally not liable." That's unfettered—now we can argue whether or not.

BAZ DREISINGER: I think there's a lot of that ethos in hip-hop as well.

PENIEL JOSEPH: Well, absolutely, but we're talking about the black economic development context of hip-hop. So I agree with you, I agree with you, it's just that the nationalist at least claims that they can help the community and make a lot of money. We can argue whether you can do that or not.

Q: So aside from the question of whether black nationalism is alive or dead, and everyone more or less seems to agree that it's alive in some form or another—Is it the most effective means for black people to overcome the problems that are—that disproportionately affect black people? And if it is what does effective black nationalism look like in terms of actually getting some kind of social or political change?

PENIEL JOSEPH: I think it's effective to the extent that we always have multiple strategies, but if you see the way different ethnic groups in the United States have done historically, there has been a politics of racial solidarity, whether we're talking about Jewish Americans, Irish Americans, Italians—so sometimes people say, "well, black nationalism is just a form of sort of ethnic pluralism, right?" Certainly when you look at the Obama administration, some of the people who are in there, in terms of Valerie Jarrett and some of the sort of power brokers who Obama hung out with in Chicago. I think you have people who are straddling both strategies.

They are both robust integrationists with Ivy League degrees, multiracial friends, but at the same time, there's a nationalist component to what they're doing, even if they're not going to say that it is, where they kept a group of black folks who they were vacationing with and hanging out with for sustenance in Chicago, culturally politically. Michelle Obama's OB-GYN is a family friend who delivered both kids, right? These were high-powered Negroes, for lack of a better word, in the sense that these were folks who were Ivy League–degreed, and you had to be—these are the Boulet folks in a way. You had to have a certain kind of cachet at least culturally or politically if not economically to hang out with these folks, you couldn't just knock on their doors and say, invite me to the barbeque too, because I'm black, but at the same time they weren't such robust integrationists that they were almost proud—you have the black folks who are proud that they don't have any other black friends on the block. "It's just us and all our white friends," you know, and then they're proud of that. So it's the effect of black nationalism in the twenty-first century probably looks or a version of it looks like what not just Obama, but aspects who are behind Obama, people who are part of that brain trust, where they straddle both fences of integration on the one hand but keeping a robust black community on the other.

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: I think the conversation could easily go on and on. I'd like to thank our panel.

(applause)