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Chris Hobson
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this history, regardless of the Democratic Party, Obama, and the outcome to date of Obama's presidency. We need to understand the tears on Jesse Jackson's cheeks that night: *Stony the road we trod*. We need to understand the sureness, or faith, in the idea of "pressing on the upward way." We need to understand the lack of that sureness now for the next generation—in the bitter aftermath fifty years on from the civil rights era—and what that has to do with people shooting each other over turf. It's mainly to try to contribute to this understanding that I've written this article.

At the same time, we want to recognize that this attitude of the great majority (not all) of African Americans toward life in the United States—one of wary distrust, often embittered hope, and ultimately, determination to live here as full and free citizens of a society that does not yet exist—has a positive content in our terms. Our preferred society does not yet exist either, and may never do so. We want to argue in terms of the aim of free participation, while trying to separate it from its acceptance of the framework of the US as a state, from the nationalism and often imperialism this implies, from acceptance of the Constitution as the framework for struggle, and from the very deep-seated idea of the "democratic ideals of America." What such an approach will look like in detail I don't know, but we need to move away from the rote leftism of arguing that reform efforts always fail or that African Americans should be for revolution because they can get nowhere in present society. They can and have, precisely by not accepting present society as the limit of what they are striving for. Our approach should begin from this reality.

In this article I want to expand on some points I made in a brief response to the verdict in the Trayvon Martin trial, printed elsewhere in this issue of The Utopian. I want to argue for two ideas about African Americans' viewpoint toward the United States. These are based, really, on a fairly long lifetime of thinking politically about this issue, and on experience, although they will be backed up by examples from my scholarly writing and reading. Therefore, I certainly can't say I am going to "prove" the points I make here, but rather, I want to offer my own sense of this issue for readers to consider.

The first idea is that the great majority of African Americans define themselves as Americans—notwithstanding a long and honorable minority position of Black separatism—and that this definition represents a voluntary choice made historically over (roughly) the last 225 years. It is not, as sometimes thought, a compromise with uncontrollable circumstances of enslavement and exile from Africa, or a result of the suppression of African culture, as some Black Nationalists urge. Most especially it isn't a result of a kind of defensive stance in which African-descended people imitatively embrace the ideas, culture, and/or ideals of their oppressors in an attempt to keep their heads down and survive, or of a desire to discard racial difference and blend into the surrounding, oppressing society. All these impulses have been present, of course, because everyone is complicated and contradictory, but on balance and as a whole, African Americans' self-identification as Americans represents something else. It represents a positive assertion of a right to live in the United States as free and equal citizens and to share equally in the wealth of the land, which after all was created in major part by African Americans themselves.

The second idea is related to this one. It is that African Americans' claim to a right of full freedom and full participation in US life can be described politically as integrationism, and that this integrationism doesn't mean—as Black Nationalists and some radicals tend to conceive the issue— African Americans limiting themselves to what the political system will grant, in an attempt to gain marginal rights. Rather, this integrationism means seeking full and complete rights and freedom, pushing US society to change in order to make room for these rights, and at the same time struggling to gain and hold as many rights and as much social leverage as possible, over time. It means working so that what is impossible now becomes possible in the future. I call this political outlook prophetic integrationism, and in my view it has been not only one African American view but the dominant one, for most of the 225 years I mentioned above. (Again, there has been a continuing view that this kind of change just isn't possible in a country as deeply racist and deeply hypocritical as this one, but this has been a minority view.)

I also want to be clear that by "prophetic integrationism" I don't mean "revolutionary integrationism." It should be clear that this outlook is a kind of militant reformism—a determination to change society in pieces, by continual effort—and that this militant reformism has been partly, but only very incompletely, successful. This raises special issues that I'll consider at the end of the article (without offering any definitive answers). Nevertheless, I think that this prophetic integrationism is an attitude that anarchists should respect and honor, and ally with in action. When you think about it, it is—in my view at least—the only way of thinking about African Americans' position and rights in the United States that makes real sense.

My "angle" for looking at this issue will be the song "Lift Every Voice and Sing," written by James Weldon Johnson (1871–1938) and set to music by his brother John Rosamond Johnson, and first performed by a school choir in the Johnsons' hometown, Jacksonville, Florida, for a Lincoln's Birthday celebration in 1900. Johnson's biography reads like a history of the race's turn from moderate accommodationism to radical integrationism in the early 1900s, particularly in his twelve years (1917–1929) as field secretary and then chief executive officer of the NAACP. He wrote poetry, a novel, his-

cratic way to gain and (weakly) defend these benefits. She is losing six days' pay this year as imposed by New York State, but not her job. She is not an activist, but does poll-watching at elections. She lives in a middle class neighborhood and her two sons serve in the armed forces. (Yet her sons, if not in uniform, are still more likely to face police violence than any white man.) She, her mother before her (who worked as a cook in New York City schools, retired, and died a few years ago at eighty-one), and her sons and now grandchildren after her, are reasons why a "marginalization" analysis of Black life is inadequate; why ideas of selfprotective isolation, Black economic enterprise, and the like have little traction in the community today; and why integration and participation, as a goal to be pursued across the generations, remains the majority outlook.

This example points, in its concrete way, to something anarchists need to take into account politically: the African American effort to win full rights as Americans—essentially a militant reform strategy, as I said at the beginning—has been partly successful. This success is not just a matter of cooptation of an elite, although that has occurred. On the ground, African Americans do have more rights now than in 1963, 1913, or 1863. So, the long-term, across the generations reform perspective—"pressing on the upward way"—is one that has produced results and that people are not ready to give up on. Thus, in addition to the ordinary skepticism that greets people who talk about revolution—and especially about an anarchist revolution that claims to replace any form of coercive government with self-management—African Americans have specific reasons for skepticism. Their road has worked, far less than anyone wants, but it has not been stupid or misguided—at least it hasn't proven itself to be. Anarchists have to work out a way to talk about this complicated reality and win people to our perspective while recognizing the reality.

Perhaps more important than any specific, we anarchists have to understand the history and culture referred to here. We need to understand why and how November 4, 2008, was a golden day in beginning—but only the beginning—of a realization of the vision sketched in the remarkable paragraph just quoted. At any rate the viewpoint of prophetic integrationism has always accompanied the African American affirmation captured in Johnson's words, "True to our native land," and is hard to separate from it.

Some Final Thoughts

It's not my purpose to try to lay out a strategy for how anarchists can approach African Americans' struggles. Indeed, I could not do this, beyond the—to me—obvious point that we should recognize that the main line of African American effort for nearly two hundred years has been (and is likely to continue to be) to seek full rights and participation in US society as Americans. The logic is inescapable: if the US is "now our *mother country*" then freedom means freedom, equality, and full participation in it, that is, integration, in the expansive sense I've discussed. This isn't a matter of political labels but what people are actually seeking, on the ground.

Beyond this I think we need to develop and concretize our analysis. It no longer is the case that African Americans are only the poorest, or fully marginalized in US society. If it's true that the continuing economic crisis has created a class of more or less permanently marginalized people, and that this development has hit African Americans, Latinos, and Native Americans the hardest, it's also true that many stand on more stable ground even if they too have taken economic losses. Taking the secretary of my academic department as an example, she represents a very large group of African Americans who hold moderately well paying jobs central to the larger society. She has the same wages and benefits as others in her job classification, and African Americans are not overrepresented in the lower classifications. There is good reason for this, as she belongs to a union, the Civil Service Employees Association, that for fifty years has worked in a stolid, typically bureau-

tory, sociology, and investigative journalism. "Lift Every Voice," despite a tricky verse form and a difficult melody, became known as "the Negro national anthem," and is still known extremely widely in the Black community. I think this song expresses some important ideas on my topic, and I've used it for my title and subheadings.

"True to Our Native Land"

The song's last line will serve to get us into the first of the two main points I am exploring. What does it mean for African Americans to sing—about the United States, not Africa—a prayer to be "True to our native land"?

A short answer is that the attitude of US nationality reflected in these words was so deep and so settled among the majority of African Americans that, in 1900, Johnson didn't even have to think about it. The United States was "our native land" in their view and that was that. A longer answer would pick out signposts of this attitude's development going back for more than a century before Johnson's time, to the early days of the republic, and beyond his time to ours. These are some that seem important to me.

●In September 1789, an organization in Newport, Rhode Island, called the Union Society of Africans, addressed a letter to the Free African Society of Philadelphia on the subject of emigration to Africa. (Black people in the United States at that time called themselves Africans.) The Newport letter mentioned the "calamitous state" of Africans in the US, as "strangers and outcasts in a strange land," together with growing evangelical work in Africa. The Newport group proposed a day of prayer on which "to acknowledge the righteousness of God in bringing all these evils on us and on our children and brethren" while asking God's assistance to "prosper the way of our returning to Africa." In reply, the Philadelphians took a hands-off position on emigration, saying, "we have at present little to communicate on that head, apprehending every pious man is a good citizen of the whole world." And they offered a distinct idea of God's intentions. Omitting any reference to deserved suffering, the Philadelphia society called for daily prayer "that the Lord thereby may be pleased to break every yoke, and let the oppressed go free… A happy day that will prove to us of the African race, and mankind in general; then captivity shall cease, and buying and selling mankind have an end." (The statement paraphrased Isaiah, chap. 58:6.)

I will look at this religious point later, but for now the important difference is on emigration. The Newport group assumed that the proper home of Africans in the US was in Africa itself. The Philadelphians' reply, while not taking a definite position, actually assumed the opposite idea. If "every pious [person] is a good citizen of the whole world," then s/he is fully entitled to be a citizen of the United States. This early exchange of views summed up the difference that has continued to exist between separatists and nonseparatists on whether African-descended people elsewhere naturally belong in Africa or, on the contrary, belong by right wherever they may choose to live.

●In January, 1817, a representative of the newly formed American Colonization Society met with leaders of Philadelphia's free Black community. The ACS's purpose was to promote resettlement of free Negroes in Africa (in what soon became Liberia). The Philadelphians—Bishop Richard Allen of the African Methodist Episcopal (AME) Church and sailmaker and community leader James Forten—later convened a meeting of 3,000 persons in Allen's Bethel Church. At the meeting, Forten later wrote, there was "not one sole that was in favour of going to Africa." The meeting approved several resolutions saying in part, "Whereas our ancestors (not of choice) were the first successful cultivators of the wilds of America, we their descendants feel ourselves entitled to participate in the blessings of her luxuriant soil, which their blood and sweat manured," and adding, "[W]e will never separate ourselves voluntarily from the slave population in this country."

tled in the abstract. Is integrationism an act of perpetual cowardice, a decision to limit African American hopes to what "the system" is willing to grant? So I and other radicals assumed in the 1960s, when we preferred the revolutionism of Malcolm X and the Panthers. Or is it an assertion of a right to live as equals in a society not yet built? As I've learned more about the integrationists I once scorned, I have realized that they were "pressing on the upward way," as Grimké put it in 1919—their eyes were on a transformed United States, not the existing one. Here is AME Bishop Reverdy Ransom, writing in 1935:

> "Under the white heat of denial and persecution, he [God]is fashioning them [African Americans] with sledgehammer blows into a new pattern for American civilization. His mission is to spiritualize it, make it pulsate with emotion until throughout the whole range of our social, economic, and political life it shall level the walls of wealth and privilege, of bigotry and pride, of color and race. Fifty million unborn Americans of African descent shall, a few generations hence, lead America to achieve that brotherhood which transforms the children of men into the spirit and likeness of the children of God."

Ransom's prophetic integrationism, plainly, is integration into a United States that does not yet exist, but that he is sure will come to exist. (At the same time, as noted above, he affirms a distinct African American culture, growing into certainty of "the worth, strength, and beauty of its ideals.") And Ransom's integrationism is prophetic in a second, specific sense: he predicts a movement that actually did begin in the middle-term future, a few decades after he spoke, and that even without achieving all he hoped, was the main force for democracy in the second half of the twentieth century. In the events of that half-century, I think, Ransom would see the of slavery in every state in the American Union" (*My Bondage and My Freedom*, 396–98). Douglass of course knew that several articles of the constitution indirectly recognized slavery, but, in an act of authority-taking similar to what African Americans did with the Bible, he simply declared that the Preamble ought to take precedence over these.

Douglass's reasoning—supported by the post-Civil War amendments that did outlaw slavery—became the basis for the next century and a half of African American struggle. Not only were the NAACP's arguments in *Brown v. Board of Education*, the case that outlawed school segregation, based on the 14th Amendment, but more broadly, the civil rights movement itself was based on the idea of realizing, through on-theground struggle, the rights (supposedly) already guaranteed in the Constitution. Historically, Douglass's view of the Constitution became the majority African American view.

Seen one way Douglass's argument is a remarkable act of intellectual dishonesty. Who says the generalities in the Preamble govern the whole Constitution? Didn't the compromises that let slavery in through the back door determine its real, historical meaning? Seen another way, Douglass's act of authority-taking treated the Constitution as a document whose meaning was still being determined, and he put forward his view as one pole in the struggle over that meaning. This act of authority-taking was not only social in scope—Douglass asserted that African Americans could help determine the law of the whole nation— but was also prophetic. Douglass asserted not so much what the Constitution did mean in 1855 but what African Americans determined that it must come to mean in the historical future. In miniature, Douglass's argument contained the idea of prophetic integrationism, the creation of a future country in which integration would be accomplished.

In reality, just as the meaning of the Constitution couldn't be determined in the abstract but only over a century and a half of struggle, so the meaning of prophetic integrationism can't be set-

●Ten years later, in 1827, Allen was asked to write his views on "colonization" for *Freedom's Journal*, the first African American newspaper published in the United States. (It lasted only about a year.) Allen, the founder and first bishop of the AME Church, then the largest and today still one of the largest independent African American churches, was an enormously important person in African American history and culture. His letter in *Freedom's Journal* rejected "colonization," partly repeating the language of the 1817 meeting:

> "We were *stolen* from our mother country, and brought *here*. We have *tilled* the ground and made fortunes for thousands, and still they are not weary of our services… Africans have made fortunes for thousands, who are yet unwilling to part with their services; but the free must be sent away, and those who remain, must be *slaves*? I have no doubt that there are many good men who do not see as I do; and who are for sending us to Liberia, but they have not duly considered the subject—they are not men of colour. This land which we have watered with our *tears* and *our blood*, is now our *mother country* and we are well satisfied to stay where wisdom abounds, and the gospel is free."

The 1817 resolutions and Allen's 1827 letter contain several different points. One is that the "colonization" movement was meant to preserve slavery by siphoning off free Negroes (the ACS leaders included Henry Clay and other prominent pro-slavery people). Far more important, one can see the developing idea that Africans in the US have built up the wealth of the United States and now have a full right to what they have built. Even more fundamental is the idea of belonging by birth to the United States. Allen's letter transfers the idea of "mother country" from Africa to the US, and states, in simple and resounding terms that others echoed for the next century, that the "land which we have watered with our *tears* and *our blood*" is "now our *mother country*." It was at about this time, in fact, that the people who had referred to themselves as Africans began, in public resolutions opposing "colonization," to call themselves "AfricAmericans" and similar terms.

The decision most African Americans made (there was always an emigrationist minority) has to be understood as a decision, a choice, rather than an accommodation to an overwhelming and uncontrollable reality. It is perhaps a surprising choice: why should a people so hated and scorned not wish to return to their original homeland? One can see in this choice several intertwined ideas: Allen's "tears and blood," the idea that those who have built the soil are entitled to its fruits; the 1789 Philadelphians' belief that "every pious man is a good citizen of the whole world"; and the positive assertion of an equal birthright in the United States, the new "mother country." In any case, the possibly paradoxical fact is that the very moment when emigration aided by ostensibly well-meaning whites became a real possibility, in the first third of the nineteenth century, is the time when majority African American opinion first defined the race for certain as American.

●Skipping to Johnson's time, an "Episcopal Address" signed by seven of the eight bishops of the AME Church, symbolically issued on July 4, 1895, argued: "Though deeply interested in the welfare of Africa, we are citizens of the United States. The accumulations of our preceding generations are, our valor and our skill; our honor and our experiences bind us to this country." The letter was meant to counter the views of the eighth bishop, Henry McNeal Turner, a staunch emigrationist. Turner—whom I mention in my Trayvon Martin article—was a universally respected figure, who did major work building the AME Church both throughout the South and in Africa. Nonetheless, there is little doubt that his emigrationism was a minority view, both in his church and among African Americans generally.

Americans to claim authority over the meaning of their religion. These attitudes implied a belief that, under pressure from African Americans themselves, change was possible in the United States, though it would occur over many decades, even hundreds of years, and that the change would bring the United States closer to what African Americans assumed was God's purpose of a world in which those "of one blood" would live together. True or not, many African Americans have lived by this idea.

In a more specific way, and parallel to their taking authority over the Bible and Christianity, African Americans also took authority over another "sacred" document (the phrase is Ralph Ellison's, and not meant sarcastically), the US Constitution. The key role here was played by that towering nineteenth century intellect, Frederick Douglass.

As students of the period know, Douglass came to prominence, starting in 1841, as a political disciple of William Lloyd Garrison, who believed that the Constitution supported slavery and, in consequence, the anti-slavery movement should repudiate the Constitution, seek the breakup of the federal union (Garrison hoped slavery would collapse without federal support), and accomplish this through "moral suasion." Douglass followed this reasoning for ten years, but increasingly faced challenges from non-Garrisonians who believed the constitution did not support slavery. Eventually, "upon a reconsideration of the whole subject," Douglass came to believe that the Constitution, inaugurated "to form a more perfect union, establish justice, insure domestic tranquillity, …and secure the general welfare" (Douglass is quoting the Preamble), "could not well have been designed at the same time to maintain and perpetuate a system of rapine and murder like slavery." Douglass further argued that 'the declared purposes of an instrument are to govern the meaning of all its parts"—in other words, that the purposes in the Preamble determined the true meaning of the whole Constitution. Finally, he drew the conclusion that if this were true, then "the constitution of our country is our warrant for the abolition

> our rights, civil and political, under the Constitution, must never be relinquished,—what it means is, that in the midst of the conflict, while we are doing all we can, while we seek to make the most of ourselves and of our opportunities, we are at the same time to lay fast hold of the Almighty, to keep ourselves and our wants ever before Him, and to look to him for help in every time of need."

African Americans, in sum, from the beginning *took authority* over the Bible and Christianity, contested the whites' idea of God and Jesus with their own, and created a Christianity that had not existed before, one focused on God's promise, "I have surely seen the affliction of my people…and have heard their cry by reason of their taskmasters" (Exodus 3:8), on Paul's teaching that God "hath made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth" (Acts 17:26), and on other texts that they *chose*, as also they chose to become Americans. If, today, very many people would affirm that Christianity does not accept racism or slavery, they are not saying something that was true historically, but are reflecting an African American conception of Christianity, one African Americans put forward, struggled by, and today in many cases still live by.

Prophetic Integrationism

The belief (attitude would be a better word) that I am calling *prophetic integrationism* draws on all the ideas I have so inadequately sketched above. It draws on Johnson's "True to our native land" and on "Stony the road we trod"—on African Americans' belief in a long road stretching back to their capture and enslavement, and forward to an as yet unrealized future. And it draws on "Thou who has brought us thus far on the way," if this is understood to include the intellectual revisionism that allowed African

●The same critical yet definite belief in a US destiny, finally, is shown in fiction in James Baldwin's 1979 novel *Just Above My Head*, Baldwin's last novel. The novel's protagonist, a Gospel singer, reflects on his identity as he sits in a French outdoor cafe with a companion:

> "If Guy [the companion] is saying that he does not like being a Frenchman, what would he think of Arthur if Arthur proclaimed that he did not like being a black American? And, indeed, for the very first time, and almost certainly because he is sitting on this unknown avenue, he puts the two words together *black American* and hears, at once, the very crescendo of contradiction and the unanswering and unanswerable thunder and truth of history—which is nothing more and nothing less than the beating of his own heart, his song."

My students find "the very crescendo of contradiction" easy to interpret—certainly, for a Black man to call himself an "American" in a country that still only half, or one quarter, accepts him is a contradiction. They are less sure about "the unanswering and unanswerable thunder and truth of history." Surely, some say, it is referring to the same point, the contradiction? But then, why would it be "unanswering" and "unanswerable"? If history's truth is the contradiction, then it would be a confirming answer. Doesn't Baldwin's phrase suggest, instead, that the "truth" provides no answer to the "contradiction" and yet is also absolutely undeniable? And so, some students realize, Baldwin's "truth" is that yes, Arthur is a *black American* with all the contradiction that implies, as the outcome of two hundred years of history that are also the beating of Arthur's heart.

Of course there is a crucial other side to Baldwin's phrase. Arthur is a *black* American, and the adjective implies a whole history (including the history of becoming American, paradoxically enough) as well as a culture. Arthur is a Gospel singer. His songs, transcribed frequently in the book, include Gospel and hymn classics like "Savior, Don't You Pass Me By," "The Comforter," and "Daniel Saw the Stone (Rolling into Babylon)"—the last a message of the apocalyptic downfall of empire. All this is part of African American culture, so that Arthur's "song" in the quotation above is the lifeblood of a distinct culture that has meaning for the whole world, yet originally is a reflection of the unique experience of African Americans. (Today, the equivalent would be the hiphop culture, which has spread across the world yet remains based in African American experience.) This culture represents one half of the "contradiction" that is also the "thunder and truth" of Arthur's history. So Baldwin (like Ralph Ellison a little earlier) sees African Americans as a group with a double existence, American and African American at the same time.

The same was true of others before Baldwin. Writing in 1935, the then seventy-four year old Reverdy Ransom, an AME bishop whom I've studied extensively, argues that exclusion and denial "are causing Negroes in America to develop a culture of their own. I have watched it unfolding for fifty years. Certainly, it has much of the general features of the culture and ideals by which it is surrounded, but is becoming less and less imitative, becoming more sure of itself, of the worth, strength, and beauty of its ideals."

And yet this point doesn't deny what for Ransom is also thunder and truth: "America is ours," he contends in the same book, "and the Negro is a fool who does not stand erect, hold his head high, and claim everything in it from *My Country, 'tis of thee, to The Star Spangled Banner*."

I can make these same points about my students—and do, with some of them: they don't necessarily like being black Americans, but are. They have their specific culture and celebrate it, yet are also part of general American culture. And, in their hearts, aware that their rights are still worth less than the blink of a policeman's eye, knowing that many of their countrymen still are uncomfort-

In part Christianization can be seen as a universalizing conception: by doctrine, the Christian God was one God for all humans. Further, embracing Christianity involved the idea of equality. This is true in the superficial sense that Christians at least give lip service to the belief that all Christians, Black as well as white, poor as well as rich, are children of God. At a far deeper level however the Christian ideas of universal sinfulness and possible salvation recognize the basic human equality: we all, Black and white, fall short of what in some sense we are truly capable of (the Bible premise, after all), and this is really all that humanly matters—what matters in life is the coming into it, its graces and betrayals, the going out of it, and for many a hope beyond it; and certainly not race. Something like this idea, I believe, lay behind the rush of African Americans into Christian belief.

Nor were African American Christians focused on passive hope for heaven. Of course, African American Christians did and do believe in heaven, something that authoritarian materialists cannot forgive them for. But for many, Christianity was not a religion of passivity. Frederick Douglass tells us, " 'He can't go to heaven with our blood on his skirts' is a settled point in the creed of every slave"; and on reaching New York after escaping, Douglass reflected, "God and the right stood vindicated" (both quotes from *My Bondage and My Freedom*, 1855). In other words, slaves used Christianity to judge their oppressors, and believed in a God who stood behind their struggles for freedom. Francis Grimké put this simply and eloquently in a sermon preached after white massacres in 1898:

> "I believe that our case can be helped by prayer. This doesn't mean that we are to do nothing but pray, that we are to fold our arms and expect God to fight our battles for us: nor does it mean that we are not to stand up for our rights, that we are not to agitate, and protest against wrong,—the agitation must go on; the demand which we are making for equal recognition of

to the United States and the wealth they had built in it—made it their own.

As demonstrated by historians like Albert J. Raboteau (*Slave Religion*, 1978), Mechal Sobel (*Trabelin’ On: The Slave Journey to an Afro-Baptist Faith*, 1979), and above all Sylvia Frey and Betty Wood (*Come Shouting to Zion: African American Christianity in the American South and British Caribbean to 1830*, 1996), and as confirmed by memoirs such as Allen’s *The Life, Experience, and Gospel Labours of the Rt. Rev. Richard Allen* (1833), slave owners did not make strong efforts to convert slaves to Christianity, and the few who did met indifference because of the authoritarian, emotionally cold Anglicanism they preached. Rather, African Americans responded on their own to the waves of white (and a few Black) Baptist and Methodist itinerants that spread over the American colonies, the Indian frontier, and the British Caribbean in the middle and later 1700s, preaching to Black and white alike a doctrine of universal love. Here is an account by one of these, Elhanan Winchester, who was preaching in South Carolina in 1779:

> “About this time I began to find uncommon desires for the conversation [conversion] and salvation of the poor negroes, who were very numerous in that part of the country… [O]ne evening seeing a great number of them at the door of the house where I was preaching, I found myself constrained as it were, to go to the door, and tell them, That Jesus Christ loved them, and died for them, as well as for us white people, and that they might come and believe in him and welcome. And I gave them as warm and pressing an invitation as I could, to comply with the glorious gospel. This short discourse addressed immediately to them, took greater effect than can well be imagined… From that very evening they began to constantly pray to the Lord, and so continued; and he was found of them.”

able when they are in the room, they still—like Allen and Ransom—claim the country and everything in it as their own.

“Stony the Road We Trod”

It’s no secret that African Americans have lived through—and sometimes not lived through—appalling suffering in the 225 years since the Philadelphia-Newport exchange. These extend from the whipping and murder of slaves through to today, to the aftermath of the acquittal in the Trayvon Martin murder case, when Sybrina Fulton, Martin’s mother, told the National Urban League, “My message to you is please use my story, please use my tragedy, please use my broken heart to say to yourself, ‘We cannot let this happen to anybody else’s child’ “ (July 26, 2013). By and large, African Americans have walked their road with stoicism and grace. As Baldwin wrote in *The Fire Next Time* (1963), African Americans’ long struggle to snatch, “each day,” their “identity, out of the fire of human cruelty that rages to destroy it,” helps to explain “how they [Negroes] have endured and how they have been able to produce children of kindergarten age who can walk through mobs to get to school.”

Unfortunately that’s not all. The fire Baldwin speaks of, the bitterness of contempt, the lack of real opportunity, the consistent social judgment of people of color as less, and the selfserving logic of a society that claims to have solved the race problem—if so, it can only be African Americans’ own fault that they lag behind—produce an answering self-contempt, a torturing negation of one’s own dignity and that of everyone else in sight. I walk past two men on my street bellowing at each other from a distance of fifteen feet. The distance shows how serious this altercation is: they are both being careful not to come closer. “What are you coming round here for, nigger?” one screams, and the other shouts, “Get out of my face, nigger.” They are both Afro-Dominicans. The word nigger, said by some to have been "desensitized," even reclaimed as a positive badge of identity in hiphop lyrics, keeps all its raw meaning of "Black" as well as "low, mean, contemptible." My friend Nicholas Powers writes about his own neighborhood:

> "In Bed-Stuy, the fear of violence never fades but throbs under the surface of everyday life… Many of our young men are like open barrels of kerosene. One wrong look or word and they ignite into a blind fury that ends with death in the streets. And we who knew them, raised them, are also at times scared of them… The sad truth is that the way George Zimmerman profiled Trayvon Martin is the same way that many of us, men of color, profile each other." (*The Indypendent*, Brooklyn, August 17, 2013).

Much in the community's life today can make James Weldon Johnson's assurance, "Have not our weary feet / Come to the place for which our fathers sighed?" sound unintentionally ironic nearly a century and a quarter after it was given. The situation Powers describes is obviously the end product of the country's failure to solve the civil rights dilemma: how to advance beyond equal legal rights (themselves still intermittent and precarious) to real equality on the street, on the job, in the courtroom. Martin Luther King, offering his "dream" speech fifty years ago at what was officially called The March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom, didn't have an answer to this riddle, nor did Malcolm X or the Black Panther Party, and I don't, beyond the obvious point that we must all fight together for (yes) jobs and freedom. I don't know how to get them, and I can't define an anarchist strategy for getting them. But, returning to the focus of my article, this is a specifically American riddle. No one is thinking, in 2013, about emigration as a solution to the race's problems, about a separate state or portion of a state, or even about a distinct, self-sufficient Black economy. The "stony road" lies here.

Thou Who Hast Brought Us Thus Far on the Way

By any standards the strong Christian belief held by very many African Americans is remarkable. After all, Christianity was the religion of those who kidnapped Africans and brought them across the sea as slaves; why would slaves or free Africans in America want to touch such a filthy doctrine? Further, when one thinks about it, for Africans in America to embrace the religion of Americans in the eighteenth century—when this shift occurred—was, in effect, to pre-decide to become Americans themselves, in a period when this choice hadn't yet been made.

There are two impressions that many Marxists and anarchists have about African American Christianization that are important to examine. The first is that Christianity was forced on Africans in America as a means of social control; the second is that Christianity as well as other religions has functioned to damp down social struggle against oppression, by offering a compensating hope of future bliss in heaven.

Both points are basically wrong, although they contain some true points. It is true, for example, that in the nineteenth century—well after most African Americans had become Christians on their own—slave owners and the ministers they controlled would preach obedience as a religious duty. (The slaves would mock among themselves: "If I go in to prayer, the mistress will only just read 'Servants obey your masters,' she will not read 'Break every yoke and let the oppressed go free.'") And the Newport Union Society of Africans, as quoted above, did see slavery as a just punishment by God (presumably for not being Christians in Africa); others did use Christian hope as a substitute for rebellion (especially when rebellion would have been suicidal). By and large however, African Americans came to Christianity on their own, and—as with their attitude