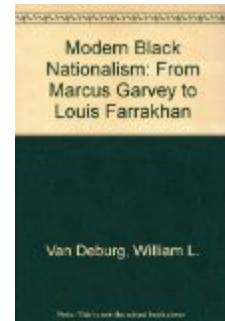


William L. Van Deburg, ed. *Modern Black Nationalism: From Marcus Garvey to Louis Farrakhan*. New York: New York University Press, 1997. xiii + 381 pp. \$21.00 (paper), ISBN 978-0-8147-8789-2; \$45.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8147-8788-5.

Reviewed by Robert J. Jakeman (Auburn University)
Published on H-Review (December, 1997)



From Garvey to Farrakhan: A Documentary History Black Nationalism in the United States

This book fills a gap in the historical literature on twentieth-century black nationalism. A number of solid monographs on various aspects of the topic appear on the shelves most research libraries, but Van Deburg provides something different—a documentary survey of modern black nationalism in all its multifaceted manifestations. Although not clear from the title, this volume offers a rich sampling of essential primary sources, from Marcus Garvey's 1920 manifesto "Declaration of Rights of the Negro Peoples of the World" to a 1992 interview with former Black Panthers Geronimo ji Jaga Pratt and Mumia Abu-Jamal. *Modern Black Nationalism* is a companion volume to Wilson Jeremiah Moses's documentary survey of the pre-Garvey era (*Classical Black Nationalism: From the American Revolution to Marcus Garvey*, N.Y.: New York University Press, 1996). Together, these works provide full chronological coverage of black nationalism in America, and they can be used separately or in tandem as supplementary readers for graduate and advanced undergraduate courses in African American history.

The scarcity of documentary histories of modern black nationalism is perhaps a product of the complexities of the subject. As Van Deburg admits at the outset of his introduction, "a clear understanding of twentieth-century black nationalism is a bit like trying to eat Jell-O with chopsticks. Just when you think the situation is under control, wisdom slips away" (p. 1). Despite such difficulties, the organization of the volume is simple and clear. The book contains fifty-two selections of source documents that the editor has organized into

thirty-seven chapters of one to four selections each. The chapters are grouped into three parts. The first part, "Foundations of Modern Black Nationalism," carries the story up to the eve of the emergence of the Black Power movement in the 1960s. The second part, "Black Nationalism in the Black Power Era," forms the heart of the work and is substantially longer than the other two parts. Most of the selections in the third part, "Black Nationalism and Contemporary Society," are from the 1980s and deal with topics such as Afrocentric education, reparations, and the Nation of Islam.

The editor sets the documents in context with an eighteen-page introduction that introduces the reader to the "basic concept of nationalism" and the "competing ideologies" of assimilationism and pluralism (pp. 2-3). Assimilationists, Van Deburg explains, "view the collective expression of grievances as a short-term strategy for ultimate absorption into a mainstream melting pot" (p. 3). Pluralists reject the idea of a melting pot and instead "view the social world as being composed of various ethnic and interest groups, all of whom are competing with one another for goods and services" (p. 3). For pluralists, the ideal society fosters "equal access to power" and the competing groups "form a multicultural society in which each component support(s) and enrich(es) all others" (p. 3). But nationalists, Van Deburg maintains, are "determined skeptics" who dismiss the idea that "radically divergent groups can live in peace and on a basis of equality while inhabiting the same territory or participating in the same societal institutions" (p. 3). Instead, the nation-

alists argue, “one component of the social matrix comes to dominate and oppress the others” (p. 3). Ever fearful of “assimilation by fiat,” nationalists separate themselves “from the body politic as much as practicable” and seek “to win and maintain sociocultural autonomy” (p. 3).

Against this framework, Van Deburg’s introduction outlines the development of black nationalism in the United States from the colonial era to the present. He argues that the Black Power era—the 1960s and early 1970s—was an important milestone in the saga of black nationalism for it “reaffirmed the teachings of those earlier generations of strivers whose determined efforts in support of nationalist agendas were held up as behavioral benchmarks” (p. 15). And despite the apparent failure of the Black Power brand of black nationalism, Van Deburg maintains that “their labors were not in vain” (p. 15). Instead, the example of Black Power militants “has informed the efforts of contemporary activists who, gifted with the same irrepressible, combative spirit, have sought self-definition through various types and degrees of separation from the white mainstream” (p. 16). The editor concludes his introduction by predicting that “(g)iven the nation’s racial history, the continuing divergence between Afro- and Euro-American cultures and experiences, and our current unresolved backlog of race-based social problems, it is likely that this ages-old contest for control of institutions and identities will continue far into the next century” (p. 16).

“Suggestions for Further Reading” completes the introductory material. Van Deburg provides those approaching the topic for the first time with twenty monographs divided into four categories. The first category, “Nationalism,” contains five selections that focus on nationalism as a general concept, such as Ernest Gellner’s *Nations and Nationalism* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1966). The remaining fifteen titles, divided evenly among pre-Garvey, Garvey, and post-Garvey black nationalism, include classics such as Wilson Jeremiah Moses’s *The Golden Age of Black Nationalism, 1850-1925* (Hamden, Conn.: Archon Books, 1978), E. David Cronon’s *Black Moses: The Story of Marcus Garvey and the Universal Negro Improvement Association* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1955), and Alphonso Pinkney’s *Red, Black, and Green: Black Nationalism in the United States* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976). For readers who wish to delve deeper into the literature of black nationalism, five excellent bibliographies complete the list of suggested readings.

The editor begins each chapter with a brief one- or

two-page essay that describes the selections for the chapter, explains their significance, and gives their sources. Some selections are predictable and can easily be found in the holdings of most research libraries. For example, the Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA) “Declaration of Rights” has been widely published in a number of documentary collections. Similarly, “Why Should We March,” A. Philip Randolph’s classic statement outlining the rationale of his World War II-era March on Washington Movement, has found its way into several standard documentary histories of the Civil Rights movement. But other selections are not as familiar and have not been widely published. For example, Robert F. Williams’s “Speech from Radio Free Dixie” appeared in a 1963 issue of the *Crusader Newsletter*, Williams’s self-published personal journal. A search of one of the major national bibliographic databases revealed that issues of *Crusader Newsletter*, which appeared irregularly during the 1960s, are scattered between eleven libraries. Other selections are taken from similarly obscure pamphlets and periodicals that are not widely available. In short, the editor has assembled an important collection of documents from a wide variety of published sources.

Despite the impressive array of material assembled for this volume, scholars studying black nationalism will not find it a substitute for collections of primary sources on black nationalism that have been published in multi-volume sets or in microform over the past two decades. The authoritative *Marcus Garvey and Universal Negro Improvement Association Papers*, edited by Robert A. Hill (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983-) is now in its ninth volume and when completed will serve as an unparalleled source of material on the UNIA and its founder. Examples of black nationalist material now available on microfilm include the four-reel set *COINTELPRO: The Counterintelligence Program of the FBI. Black Nationalist Hate Groups* (Wilmington, Del.: Scholarly Resources, 1978). Nor will this volume substitute for visits to research libraries and archives holding records and papers that have not been published or microfilmed. But that is not its purpose. It was compiled and published to provide students with an excellent compendium of both familiar and obscure primary sources on black nationalism in the twentieth century.

This excellent volume succeeds admirably as a resource that will introduce students to the vast array of material available on black nationalism and will demonstrate, as Van Deburg puts it, that “black nationalism’s attractive power has remained remarkably vital over time” (p. 2). Moreover, it will serve as a convenient collection

of documents for scholars whose research needs in the area of black nationalism are modest. I commend the editor and publisher for providing a reader that may well take its place beside other classic documentary surveys on the African American experience, collections such as Herbert Aptheker's *A Documentary History of the Negro People in the United States* (New York: Citadel Press, 1951,

1962, and 1969) and Gilbert Osofsky's *The Burden of Race: A Documentary History of Negro-White Relations in America* (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1967).

Copyright (c) 1998 by H-Net, all rights reserved. This work may be copied for non-profit educational use if proper credit is given to the author and the list. For other permission, please contact H-Net@H-Net.MSU.EDU.

If there is additional discussion of this review, you may access it through the network, at:

/reviews

Citation: Robert J. Jakeman. Review of Deburg, William L. Van, ed., *Modern Black Nationalism: From Marcus Garvey to Louis Farrakhan*. H-Review, H-Net Reviews. December, 1997.

URL: <http://www.h-net.org/reviews/showrev.php?id=1572>

Copyright © 1997 by H-Net, all rights reserved. H-Net permits the redistribution and reprinting of this work for nonprofit, educational purposes, with full and accurate attribution to the author, web location, date of publication, originating list, and H-Net: Humanities & Social Sciences Online. For any other proposed use, contact the Reviews editorial staff at hbooks@mail.h-net.msu.edu.