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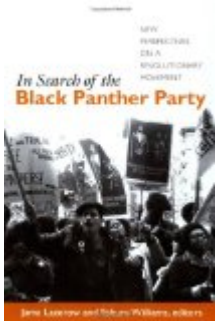
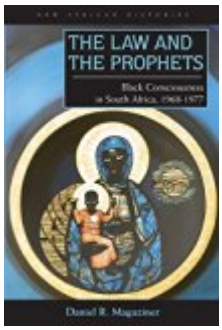
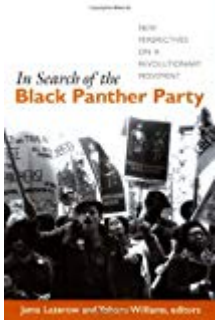


David Goldberg, Trevor Griffey, eds. *Black Power at Work: Community Control, Affirmative Action, and the Construction Industry.* Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2010. x + 265 pp. $24.95, paper, ISBN 978-0-8014-7431-6.



Daniel R. Magaziner. *The Law and the Prophets: Black Consciousness in South Africa, 1968–1977.* Athens: Ohio University Press, 2010. 298 pp. $26.95, paper, ISBN 978-0-8214-1918-2.



Yohuru Williams, Jama Yazerow, eds. *In Search of the Black Panther Party: New Perspectives on a Revolutionary Movement.* Durham: Duke University Press, 2006. x + 390 pp. $23.95, paper, ISBN 978-0-8223-3890-1.

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Reconsidering Black Nationalisms: Black Power, Black Consciousness, and the Black Panthers

On a highway in Mississippi Stokely Carmichael called for Black Power. In Northern California Bobby Seale and Huey Newton raised their fists and wielded their guns as Black Panthers. And in South Africa Steve Biko rose to fill the space of a quiescent anti-Apartheid movement by calling for Black Consciousness.

These images are not inaccurate as representations of their respective movements. But they fall woefully short of providing a full picture of the struggles against white supremacy in the United States and South Africa that emerged in the late 1960s. And the passage of time has allowed for the emergence of mythology in the place of history.

This mythology has in turn flattened and warped the past. Thus, in the United States, "Black Power" and the Black Panthers have come to represent a shameful rejection of the nonviolent path embodied by Martin Luther King Jr. In South Africa, Black Consciousness has too often been seen as representing the ineffectual and star-crossed aftermath of the crushing of the African National Congress (ANC) in the wake of the 1960 Sharpeville Massacre. If in the United States, Black Power and the Black Panthers represent a rejection of the integrationism of King and his followers, Black Consciousness is usually seen as a natural, but ill-fated, outcropping of the suppression of legitimate protest embodied in the ANC. To be sure, the image of Black Power, the Black Panthers, and similar movements carry a negative stigma in the American popular consciousness more than does Black Consciousness in South Africa. But in both the American and South African examples, various strains of black nationalism inevitably emerge as being subservient to (and even destructive of) a larger and perhaps more palatable movement. If King casts a heavy shadow in the United States, a shadow deepened by his martyrdom, Nelson Mandela and other members of the struggle generation tend at least to shroud the popular understanding of Black Consciousness and its main adherents.

In the last few years, historians have granted Black Power, in its myriad forms, a good deal of attention. Always a current in the historiography of race, civil rights, and African American history, the trickle in recent years has become a flood. Much of the credit for this wave is the result of Peniel E. Joseph's fine book, *Waiting 'Til the Midnight Hour: A Narrative History of Black Power in America* (2007), a wide-reaching and expansive exploration of black nationalist alternatives to the prevailing nonviolent civil rights movement. Unwilling to accept narrow labels or to limit views of Black Power to its most visible adherents, and certainly seeing beyond the Black Panthers, Joseph manages to convey the richness of Black Power: the call for cultural and intellectual autonomy derived from within the black community; the demand for more than simply overcoming the worst of Jim Crow in the South but rather demands for a better life in northern cities as well; calls for Black Power, yes, but also for black pride; and an insistence that black was indeed beautiful. Joseph both built on and wrote in the midst of a surge of works emphasizing that in many circles in the South as well as the North self-defense was considered fully legitimate, revealing how the use of violence for protection was far more common than the King-centered narrative of civil rights recognizes. Furthermore, Joseph reminds us of the holistic nature of Black Power, which encouraged artists, provided meals and books for children, and pursued community organizing far from the media's glare.

Providing evidence both that Joseph was not alone in his pursuit of a richer understanding of these trends and that Black Power was about more than simply the rhetoric and images that journalists frequently used to capitalize on the fears of white America are the essays in David Goldberg's and Trevor Griffey's ***Black Power at Work.*** Their title is to be taken literally, for Black Power was often about economic opportunity and providing jobs, especially for the urban working class and working poor. The authors who contribute to this collection investigate a wide array of case studies showing how employment, unionism, affirmative action, and Black Power melded to try to provide economic opportunity for construction workers.

Initially, many readers might think this focus on construction jobs to be narrow, even parochial, but instead the book's contributors demonstrate how in just this one area Black Power proves far

more complex and varied than traditional historiography, never mind the popular perception, has understood. These case studies "unsettle assumptions," as the editors assert, and feed long civil rights movement concepts through their emphasis on local politics in the North, Midwest, and West, emphasizing how local actors often wanted to work within existing systems (p. 5). Far from demanding separatism, these activists actually wanted to work within existing labor frameworks and to be integrated into existing (and white-dominated) labor unions. Perhaps not surprisingly, the white unions became part of the problem for advocates of jobs for black construction workers.

These demands were not easily met, and when Black Power adherents ran into intransigence, protests and sometimes riots (or at least "riots") emerged, especially in the summer and fall of 1969, when demands for access, often in the form of affirmative action, resulted in large-scale protests at least in part because organizers wanted to "capitalize on white people's fears in the wake of urban rebellions" (p. 10). In linking Black Power with labor, economic demands, and affirmative action, the contributors to this volume further challenge the declension narrative in which the noble nonviolent armies of the classic phase of the civil rights movement gave way to angry, radical black men and women. But rather than romanticize their subject, the authors are almost universally aware that the windows that Black Power activists forced open tended to close quickly, and "while African American movements to desegregate the construction industry made affirmative action politically possible, that moment of possibility was exceptionally brief" (p. 20).

That the window was open at all is important and reveals the shortcomings of the simplistic declension narrative. The authors of ***Black Power at Work*** focus, largely effectively, on protest movements that were often at least loosely affiliated in Brooklyn, Newark, and Philadelphia in the Northeast; Chicago and Detroit in the Midwest; and the Bay Area out West. The authors emphasize labor and affirmative action, but also the often intertwined roles of class and masculinity. If traditional histories of civil rights place Dwight Eisenhower, John F. Kennedy, and Lyndon Johnson at the center of national fights, these essayists, looking as they do at the late 1960s and the 1970s, tend to locate their national political center of gravity in Richard Nixon. Additionally, they highlight the complexities of affirmative action while, in the end, busting a range of myths on this front too. They show how white workers and the politicians who have over the years found black workers useful as political props have blamed affirmative action for various difficulties with virtually no evidence.

None of this analysis is as sexy as dashikis and raised fists, perhaps. But it may well be more representative of what Black Power meant to many of those individuals in the middle of the movement. The theater of struggle was great. Jobs, subsistence, and opportunity, however, lay at the heart of Black Power for the many people whose blackness kept them from opportunity and thus politicized them to seek some kind of power.

A 2003 conference held at Wheelock College provided the genesis for the essays in Jama Lazerow and Yohuru Williams's fine collection ***In Search of the Black Panther Party.*** If the contributors to ***Black Power at Work*** see their topic through the lens of the construction industry and the limited economic opportunities that it represented, the authors of these essays cover wider terrain and tackle familiar elements of the Black Panthers. While providing new perspectives on these well-worn tropes, they seemingly caution readers against trusting what they think they know about the Panthers without rejecting all of that inherited knowledge either. The collection is thus not as focused as Goldberg and Griffey's, but its eclectic and far-reaching ambitions are a strong point and will open new, and revive some old, avenues for investigation.

In their introduction, Lazerow and Williams emphasize the theme of "dynamism" in the history of the Black Panther Party, and after reading the book as a whole it is hard to disagree with their conclusion. For while the Black Panthers may in the popular mind represent the apogee of black radical separatism, the party in fact rejected the rejectionists. In other words, they denounced the expelling of whites from black nationalist movements, a trend that Carmichael had perpetuated as chairman of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee and had embraced as prime minister of the Panthers. The images of the Black Panthers can sometimes overshadow both their words, which are far more complex than their imagery would suggest, as well as their deeds, which were multitudinous.

Lazerow and Williams organize the book thematically, a decision that allows connected essays to feed off of one another while allowing for depth and breadth of coverage. Robert O. Self's lengthy essay effectively places the Black Panther Party within the framework of long civil rights movement historiography. His essay stands alone. The sections that follow each contain between one and three essays preceded with an "Introductory Comment" from a scholar that serves as a synthetic essay. Although the book has its genesis in a conference, the editors make clear that each contribution saw substantial revision and reordering so that the introductory chapters are not simply regurgitations of conference comments; rather, they serve as serious springboards to themes ranging from the question of violence to local studies to individual players within the party to the Panthers as actors within larger coalition politics to a concluding section entitled "The Black Panthers in the American Imagination."

The contributors come from a range of disciplines and thus methodological approaches. But they share a desire to view the Black Panthers on their own terms, within their specific historical and political context. The most fascinating essays place their investigations against the backdrop of the myth making that surrounded the Panthers, eventually revealing the truth within the myths. Thus rather than reject, say, the idea that the Black Panthers believed in the use of guns, Bridget Baldwin places the presence of guns within the context of discourses of self-defense. Rather than emphasizing racial tension, essays by Joel Wilson, David Barber, and Jeffrey O. G. Ogbar reveal the ways the Panthers worked with and learned from white and brown radicals.

Lazerow and Williams have done an important service by pulling together a range of essays that expand on what we know and reveal a great deal that we did not know about the Black Panther Party. This book will be a source for scholars and students of Black Power for a generation and should fuel waves of future research.

Turning to the other side of the world, black nationalist movements in South Africa antedated the rise of Biko and Black Consciousness by more than a generation. From the rise of the ANC Youth League in the 1940s that saw Anton Lembede articulate a truly black nationalist ideology and Mandela, Oliver Tambo, Walter Sisulu, and other Young Turks take over the ANC, to the Pan Africanist Congress and its rejection of the ANC's post-Freedom Charter embrace of non-racialism, to Black Consciousness, innumerable South Africans embraced black nationalisms of varying intensities and scopes. The best treatment of this history has for more than three decades been Gail M. Gerhart's seminal ***Black Power in South Africa: The Evolution of an Ideology***, a book that remains in many ways as vibrant today as it was when the University of California Press published it in 1978.

And yet while its endurance speaks to the quality of Gerhart's work, the book also serves as a reminder that investigations of African nationalism in South Africa still have ample room for exploration. While there is abundant work on Biko, whose vibrant life and tragic death, along with the profusion of his writings, continue to fascinate

(note, for example, Lindy Wilson's ***Steve Biko*** (2012), one of the first volumes in the promising new Ohio University Press Short Histories of Africa series), the larger black nationalist movements have not seen the explosion of work that Black Power in the United States has enjoyed in the last decade or so. While Daniel R. Magaziner's marvelous and inventive book ***The Law and the Prophets*** maintains its focus on what he acknowledges as the largely inchoate "movement" of Black Consciousness, it also points a way for future scholars to revisit the legacies of black nationalism, Black Consciousness, and Biko in the years to come.

Magaziner emphasizes the intersection of ideology and theology that he sees at the heart of Black Consciousness during its heyday. He also explicitly acknowledges the ways that the literature on Black Power in the United States influenced his own work: "I take cues from new literature on the Black Power movement in the United States that emphasizes process, not politics, and the contingent moments around which political movements cohered and fractured, thus moving beyond grand narratives that make the story triumphantly legible but less historical" (p. 5). Through this emphasis on process, Magaziner enriches our understanding of Black Consciousness in its time, even if it occasionally means that the story he tells is a bit diffuse and not for beginning students of South African history.

Magaziner argues that his study's "signature contribution" is that "as intellectual history, it asserts the importance of both thinkers and their ideas" (p. 6). While these thinkers (many of whom Magaziner interviewed in one of the book's signal contributions) were certainly interested in the end of Apartheid and racial oppression, they thought about larger questions, namely, "whither are we going?" This query leads to one of Magaziner's central arguments: "South African black thought during the early 1970s was frequently less about explicit resistance to apartheid and more about fundamental ethical questions regarding how one should live in service of the future" (p. 9). As a consequence, these thinkers reveal the importance of theology to Black Consciousness, a form of faith that emerged not because of but rather "in spite of" the racial conditions that prevailed particularly in the period leading to the Soweto Uprising (p. 11). The result was an ironic outcome by which engagement with the anti-Apartheid resistance limited the revolutionary promise that Christianity might offer.

Some readers may find this assertion problematic in as much as it trades abstractions of unfulfilled and idealized revolutionary promise for the very real fight against a very real foe for very real goals, and it might be easy for critics to use the last sentence of Magaziner's book against him: "Prophecy, history teaches, always looks clearer from a distance" (p. 190). But Magaziner is a scrupulous historian who marshals evidence and puts forward arguments well. His conclusions should certainly transform the way we think about black nationalist philosophies and liberation theologies.

One of the most frustrating components of the historian's task is that it takes a long, long time for changing scholarly perceptions to enter the general public, if they ever do. Quite literally decades of scholarship exist, for example, pointing out Kennedy's reluctance and dithering on the question of civil rights and yet the popular perception is that he was a stalwart supporter of the movement. With regard to Black Power, in the United States, the perception of King's nonviolent civil rights movement, embodied in the "I Have a Dream" speech, giving way to angry and violent black men with raised fists is likely to continue to endure. So too the smoothed public perception of South African history whereby Mandela went nobly off to prison, and Biko emerged to present a predestined-to-fail program of Black Consciousness before he was killed by South African security forces. It is not that these stories lack elements of

truth, but they reduce history to aphorism, with easy solutions and obvious good guys, while creating false bad guys and reducing any complexity that might disrupt the easily digestible narrative. History is at least as much about the rough edges as it is about the smooth surfaces, as these books so ably show.

The books under consideration here take on these longstanding tropes and in so doing create a historiographical challenge that may or may not eventually filter down to the general public. But they should at least begin to shift the conversation, however slightly, so that complicated truths can begin to emerge. Black Power, the Black Panthers, and the many African nationalists embodied in the fluid concept of Black Consciousness represented the culmination of myriad political and intellectual movements. They manifested themselves in a multiplicity of ways, whether in demands for jobs or the establishment of soup kitchens; or the emergence of a prophetic form of African nationalism; or, yes, in the form of angry men with raised fists or Biko's death somewhere in the Eastern Cape in 1977. The old myths themselves can contain considerable truth and gain more depth from a true understanding of the contexts within which those myths developed.