
Sundiata K Cha-Jua
THE NEW NADIR: THE CONTEMPORARY BLACK RACIAL FORMATION

by Sundiata Keita Cha-Jua

On May 9, 1865, Frederick Douglass addressed the last meeting of the American Anti-Slavery Society. In an atmosphere bursting with excitement and pride of accomplishment, Douglass offered a cautionary note. He speculated that emancipation would witness the metamorphosis, rather than the end of "Slavery." According to Douglass:

"Slavery has been fruitful in giving itself names. It has been called 'the peculiar institution,' 'the social system,' and the 'impediment.' It has been called by a great many names, and it will call itself by yet another name; and you and I and all of us had better wait and see what new form this old monster will assume, in what new skin this old snake will come forth next."

Douglass knew slavery was merely one form through which a more fundamental and durable phenomenon manifested itself. Though he did not name it, Douglass was conceptualizing black racial oppression, the systematic, pervasive, and persistent domination of people of African descent in the United States of America.1

Black racial oppression has undergone three transformations since Douglass observed its chameleon-like capacity to transform itself.2 The contemporary black racial formation, the New Nadir is a consequence of the transformation to financialized global racial capitalism, a new stage of capitalist accumulation which is characterized by three interconnected processes: globalization of production and markets; neoliberalism social policies; and financialization, the shift of investment from production to monetary "products."3

The transformation to financial global racial capitalism has plunged African Americans into a state akin to their situation more than a century ago, a moment African American historian Rayford Logan termed the Nadir (1877-1917), a bleak period in which white supremacists used racial terrorism to drastically worsen blacks' material socioeconomic conditions, political position, and cultural representation. The New Nadir, like its predecessor, is a period characterized by several contradictory tendencies. Whereas the first nadir witnessed another form of severe exploitation of black labor, in addition to the nullification of blacks' civil rights, exclusion from the polity, escalation of racial violence, and a pronounced discursive assault in the realms of scholarship and popular culture, it also was characterized by the election of over 800 blacks to public office, including three United States Senators, the emergence of meager black petty bourgeois and bourgeois classes, and the creation of several national political organizations. The contemporary black racial formation has brought the election of an unprecedented number of black public officials, including the President of the U.S. and a genuine expansion of both the black petty bourgeois and bourgeois classes. Indeed, the most important factor underlying the New Nadir has been the restructuring of class in the black community. But whereas the incorporation of the new black petty bourgeois and bourgeois classes can be viewed as evidence of advancement its corollary, the marginalization of black workers is an even more substantial and pro-

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found regression. The New Nadir has also been characterized by the astounding escalation in incarceration and if not by spikes in racial violence, then by its continuation in perhaps even more shocking instances. Four critical events symbolize the contradictory character of the New Nadir; its dominant regressive features are reflected in: the blatant suppression of black voters in Florida during the 2000 presidential election; the social catastrophe caused by Hurricane Katrina in 2005; and the housing foreclosures engendered by the collapse of the predatory subprime mortgage market in 2007. These three instances are contrasted but not off set by the 2008 election of Barack Obama as the first African American President of the U.S. What follows is a more detailed examination of the main economic and political features of the new black racial formation.

The New Nadir: The Contemporary Black Racial Formation

From the recession of 1979 to the initial years of the new millennium, the African American community experienced the economic marginalization and political destabilization of its black working class majority and since 1992 the economic and political incorporation of its small but expanding bourgeois and petty bourgeois classes. The current recession has eroded many of the scant gains made during the Clinton years. Economic marginalization and incorporation involves the following five features and developments: Deproletarianization/Subproletarianization; Hypersegregation; New Illiteracy; Incorporation of the Black Elite; and Acceleration of Class Stratification in African America. These economic transformations are articulated, that is, they are integrated and mutually reinforcing. Collectively the acute changes in African Americans' economic situation established the foundation for a broader political destabilization and socio-cultural fragmentation of Black America along class lines.

Contemporary political policies are intertwined with current economic strategies toward African America, which they both mirror and shape. Since the election of Ronald Reagan in 1980, the U.S. State's dominant strategy toward blacks has included the following five elements, processes, and policies: 1) Racialized Incarceration; 2) Resurgence in State Terrorism and Private Racial Hate Crimes; 3) New Disfranchise- ment; 4) Demographic Diversification; and 5) Political Fragmentation. These aspects should not be viewed in isolation but seen as mutually reinforcing. It is the combination of these political and policy changes that has destabilized African American civil society and the black liberation movement.

Concomitant with the economic, social, political, and cultural changes in the system of black racial oppression has come a new rationalization, colorblind racial ideology. Colorblind racial ideology comprises the third element of the unholy trinity around which the features and processes of the New Nadir cohere. Colorblind racism represents whites' and blacks' attitudinal and rhetorical adaptation to the new racial environment created after the Civil Rights and Black Power movements dismantled the racial order that prevailed under the Plantation Economy and its Proletarian-Ghettoization corollary that reigned in the urban North. The new black racial formation required a more subtle and elastic rationale. The 1960s economic expansion and the U.S.'s competition with the former Soviet Union combined with the advancing black liberation movement to generate relatively substantial incorporation of black labor into the operative and technical-managerial sectors of the Fordist political economy. By the 1980s, these developments had made it less popular to practice racial discrimination overtly. Racial colorblindness, the new racial ideology, permits whites to assert a philosophy of racial egalitarianism while denying the ongoing existence of racial oppression. Psychologist Helen Neville discovered that colorblind racists might acknowledge past discrimination but believe that racism "is not an important problem today." Sociologists Lawrence Bobo and James Kluegel term contemporary racial ideology, laissez faire racism, which they argue, "unlike Jim Crow racism" is "an ideology that blames blacks themselves for their poor relative economic standing, seeing [it] as a function of perceived cultural inferiority." Believers in racial colorblindness explain contemporary
racial inequities as resulting from blacks’ own pathologies—allegedly broken family structures, aversion to hard work, and a predilection for criminality—plus, a failure to adopt the behaviors of American individualism. By denying the continuing significance of racial oppression, specifically its operationalization on both structural and ideological levels, proponents of racial colorblindness reject the existence of white privilege, thus they comfortably oppose race conscious remedial policies.6

LEADING RACIAL IDEOLOGIES become dominant because they fit better with the dominant social ideology. The power of racial colorblind ideology lies in its harmonious relationship with neoliberalism. Discussing what they term symbolic racism, psychologists David O. Sears and P.J. Henry contend that it is composed “equally of racial prejudice and general conservatism.” They concluded “that symbolic racism is psychologically grounded to a significant degree in a racialized individualism, a concern that blacks do not live up to conventional individualistic values.” This marriage of anti-black racial beliefs and conservative moral and social beliefs was perhaps best exemplified in the rhetoric of Ronald Reagan. In the midst of a recession, Reagan delivered homilies on American opportunity. For instance, regarding black poverty, he alleged, “The American dream is denied to no one, each individual has the right to fly as high as his strength and ability will take him.” Addressing the issue of welfare for the poor, he argued, “Virtually every American who shops in a supermarket is aware of the daily abuses that take place in the food stamp program, which has grown 16,000 percent in sixteen years.” Reagan’s rhetoric about “welfare cheats,” “the undeserving poor,” and “pampered city people,” served as racial code language. His denial of racial discrimination and his allusions to aberrant black behavior, along with his antistatist neoliberal policies came to define the era. Colorblind racial ideology became hegemonic because it mirrored perfectly the general presumptions of neoliberalism and masked its racist character through references to individualism, self-reliance, and the free market.7

ECONOMIC MARGINALIZATION & INCORPORATION

The neoliberal retreat from racial justice in the context of capital flight, deindustrialization, plant relocation, depopulationization, and subproletarianization produced a comprehensive economic, political, social, cultural, and ideological restructuring of African Americans’ relationship to U.S. society. One of the most important trends of financialized global racial capitalism has been the exacerbation of the wealth gap, domestically and globally, as neoliberal policies dramatically redistributed wealth upward. During the 1960s, corporate executives made twenty-six times what workers made, by 1980, the differential had risen to thirty-two times; by 1997 to 326 times, and in 2007, CEOs on Standard and Poor’s 500 list received an average of $10.5 million a year or 344 times that of a typical worker! Predictably, CEOs in the financial sectors extracted an even greater share of the wealth. According to the 15th Annual CEO Compensation Survey, “the top 50 hedge and private equity fund managers averaged $588 million each,” or “more than 19,000 times as much as typical U.S. workers earned.” This extreme widening of the income gap has most negatively affected blacks.8

AFRICAN AMERICAN workers’ concentration in the inner cities of rustbelt states, where the greatest job losses occurred already in the pre-Reagan years, was a major contributing factor to their marginalization. Between 1966 and 1973, corporations relocated over two million manufacturing jobs overseas or to the South from the Northeast and Midwest. Corporations’ locational decisions affected African Americans in another negative way. According to Betsy Leondar-Wright, Communications Director for United for a Fair Economy, the movement of jobs from U.S. cities to suburbs was as dramatic as their relocation from North to South or overseas. Occasionally, corporate executives even admitted that “sometimes” a desire to evade communities with large black residents motivated their locational decisions. Even the federal government colluded with this strategy, as federal jobs in inner cities declined by more than 41,000, between 1966 and 1973. Consequently, between 1970 and
1993, African Americans lost ground in nearly every economic category. The percentage of unemployed African Americans soared from 5.6 percent in 1970 to 12.9 in 1993. After 1993, blacks’ employment and income appeared to improve as the country recovered from the 1989 recession. For instance, by 1999, African Americans’ unemployment fell to 7 percent. Black median family income rose 20 percent between 1993 and 1997, from $23,927 to $28,602. This trend occurred in the area of poverty as well. In 1997, at 26.5 percent, the percentage of blacks below the poverty line was the lowest recorded in the thirty-seven years the government had collected poverty data. Overall, during the 1990s, the economic condition of African Americans improved slightly.9

If during the 1990s, the situation was mixed, the new millennium brought a decided shift downward when “the economy began to shrink.” Initially, blacks’ poverty level continued to decline, falling to 24.1 percent in 2002, the lowest recorded in forty-two years. Yet, with whites’ at 8 percent, the racial disparity actually increased. By 2006, both white and black poverty rates had risen slightly, to 8.2 and 24.3 percent, respectively. Unemployment was also on the rise. By 2000, African American unemployment had risen to 8.4 percent from 7 percent the previous year. Within a year, it had increased sharply to 10.2 percent, twice that of whites. By 2003, blacks’ unemployment rate had grown to 10.8 percent, again double the white rate of 5.2 percent. As of April 2007, the unemployment rate for blacks had decreased to 8.2 percent, but with whites’ at 3.9 percent, the racial gap remained the same.10

According to Algernon Austin of the Economic Policy Institute, “Overall, the economic condition of African Americans has worsened since 2000.” Although worker productivity increased from 2000 to 2007 by more than 19 percent, the weekly wages of “prime aged” workers, aged 25-54, declined by $1 and that of blacks by $3. Black workers’ overall wages declined a half a percent. Moreover, a significant gender gap characterized the decline in African American wages. Black women’s weekly wages increased 2.9 percent while that of black men declined 3.4 percent. Corporate locational decisions and neoliberal State policies have disproportionately affected blacks largely by excluding large sectors from the legitimate work force.11

In December 2008, a year after the start of the recession, unemployment continued to escalate. The Bureau of Labor Statistics (BOLS) reported that an additional 632,000 persons were unemployed, raising the total number of unemployed persons to 11.1 million and the percentage of unemployment from 6.8 to 7.2, in December of 2008. In racial terms, unemployment for whites rose to 6.6, 5.1 for Asian Americans, and 9.2 for Latino/as. In January 2008, two leading economists, John Schmitt and Dean Baker estimated that by the end of 2009, African American unemployment could reach between 11.3 and 15 percent. According to the BOLS, by December 2008, black unemployment had already surpassed the lesser figure reaching 11.9 percent.12

African Americans remain on the “bottom rail” with vast economic disparities between them and whites. Income levels, the traditional measure of economic well-being reveals stark inequalities between blacks and whites. For example, in 2002, black households’ median income was $29,982, Latino/as $33,946, and whites $47,194. By 2005, white households’ median income had increased to $52,449, Latino/as $37,146, and blacks’ to $31,870. In 2000, black median household income reached a contemporary high at 65 percent that of white households, after gradually rising from 55 percent that of whites in 1988. However, after a downward trend, by 2006 it had fallen to 60.7 percent that of whites, which was lower than the percentage in 1969. This trend occurred also in per capita income. In 2001, black per capita income was 57 cents for each dollar of white per capita income. In 2006, white per capita income was $30,431; Latino/a was $15, 421; and black was $17,902. As a percentage of whites’ per capita income, blacks’ had increased slightly to 58.8 percent, only three percentage points above its 1968 level. Despite these disparities, reliance on income as the dominant measure of financial well-
being masks the true gap between the rich and the poor and especially between American of African and European descent.  

Wealth unmask depths of inequality camouflaged by income. According to sociologist Lisa A. Keister, “Wealth is measured as net worth, defined as total assets... minus total liabilities.” Wealth also reveals the intergenerational transfer of assets within families, which is at the crux of the wealth differential between black and white families. Sociologist Thomas Shapiro contended, “Racial inequality appears intransigent because the way families use wealth transmits advantages from generation to generation.” By exposing inheritance and other intergenerational transfers, the wealth index calls attention to the past, to previous periods of racial domination and asset accumulation. In doing so, it reminds us that racial inequality is structural and historic.  

The wealth gap between blacks and whites, according to sociologist Dalton Conley, “is wider than the racial gap in any other socioeconomic measure.” In 1995, black households’ median net wealth, including home equity, was only $7,400, or about 15 percent of the more than $49,000 median wealth of white households. Five years later, African Americans’ net wealth increased a $100 to $7,500 compared to $9,750 for Latino/as, and $79,400 for whites. By 2002, black and Latino/a median net wealth had fallen 27 percent, while that of white’s had increased 2 percent. Based on U.S. Census Bureau data, the Pew Hispanic Center reported that in 2002 blacks median net wealth had declined to $5,998 compared to $7,932 for Latino/as, and $88,651 for whites. Much of the disparity in wealth is a consequence of the disparity in home ownership. In Being Black, Living in the Red: Race, Wealth, and Social Policy in America, Conley argues, “In contemporary America, race and property are intimately linked and form the nexus for the persistence of black-white inequality.” That before the subprime crisis less than half of African Americans owned their homes, while nearly three-quarters of European Americans did, 47.7 percent to 74.3 percent, underscores Conley’s point. Moreover, the 28-point gap in black-white homeownership in 2000 was greater than the 23-point gap in 1940.  

Furthermore, African American-owned homes averaged only $80,000 compared to $105,000 for Latino/as and $123,400 for whites. As a result of the subprime crisis, these figures have declined significantly.  

As Conley shows, close links exist between wealth, race, and residence. Resegregation also characterizes the new black racial formation. New patterns of residential segregation have replaced the move toward greater integrated housing patterns that characterized the 1960s and 1970s. Discussing the transition to the New Segregation, David Theo Goldberg identifies three historical eras of residential segregation. Residential apartheid originated during the first Nadir and lasted from about “1880 to the early 1930s, or roughly the post-Reconstruction era to the beginning of the New Deal,” according to Goldberg. In his schema, the 1930s to the late 1960s, or from the New Deal to the end of the Civil Rights movement, constituted the second period of American apartheid. The third or contemporary period covers the years from 1968 to the present,” in which, Goldberg declares, “whites and blacks tend not only to live, work, school, and die in different neighborhoods but in different cities.”  

Douglas S. Massey’s and Nancy A. Denton’s concept of hypersegregation reflects Goldberg’s thesis. Their analysis of 1980 and 1990 census data uncovered sixteen and twenty-nine metropolitan areas, respectively, which met the criteria of their hypersegregation index for blacks and whites. According to them, about 35 percent of blacks had almost no day-to-day contact with non-blacks, particularly Euro-Americans. By 1998, 31 percent of African Americans lived in suburbs, yet even after differences in family size and education are controlled for, blacks remained largely segregated. Historian Andrew Wiese, contends that “most black suburbanites in the 1990s lived in older inner-rung suburbs, which exhibited a variety of fiscal shortcomings, such as high taxes, mediocre services, low performing schools, commercial disinvestment, and anemic rates of property appreciation.” In the most extensive analysis of housing data from the 2000 Census, Rima Wilkes and John Iceland discovered no change in the number of hypersegregated communities.
For African Americans, this residential segregation trend transcends class. In a recent study, sociologists Maria Krysan, Reynolds Farley and Mick P. Couper discovered that “Black-White differences in income” explain “only a small component of residential segregation.” They concluded that “the effect of racial stereotypes on shaping neighborhood evaluations suggests that racial prejudice—and thus race per se—has a role in shaping racial residential preferences.” Summing up progress in housing desegregation, a 2007 report by the National Fair Housing Alliance concluded, “America’s metropolitan areas remain far more segregated than they were in 1980.” Not surprisingly then, there has been a 12 percent rise in housing discrimination complaints filed with the Department of Housing and Urban Development; in fact, the 10,328 complaints filed in 2006 were the highest number since HUD began keeping such data in 1990.19

The contemporary binding of class, race, and place has further isolated African Americans in inner-city neighborhoods, thereby increasing school segregation. Wealth, education, jobs, and almost all other public goods have come to correspond to the new municipal apartheid. Thus by 2005, resegregation was increasing in the Southern and Border states that had been under court order to desegregate; and segregation was growing in degree and complexity in the metropolitan areas of the Northeast, Midwest and West where desegregation had made little headway, according to Gary Orfield and Chungmei Lee. Since the Supreme Court reauthorized segregated neighborhood schools in 1991, the percent of black students in predominately non-white schools has increased from 66 to 73 percent. More significantly, the percentage of black students in “intensely segregated schools,” that is, schools with 10 percent or fewer white students, has grown nationally from 34 to 38 percent and currently stands at 51 and 46 percent in the Northeast and Midwest, respectively. “Apartheid schools,” schools with less than 2 percent white students, decreased from 19 to 17 percent, but composed 26 and 23 percent of black students’ schooling in the Midwest and Northeast. Resegregation of public education threatens the advances African Americans made in closing the attainment gap over the last forty years.20

Since the Civil Rights and Black Power movements’ destruction of the legal structure of the old racial formation, African Americans had steadily chipped away at the educational gap between themselves and whites. By 1998, 88 percent of African Americans aged twenty-five to twenty-nine had graduated from high school and approximately 15 percent had completed at least a bachelor’s degree. The latter is almost four times the percentage in 1960. By 2006, blacks had reached parity with whites in high school graduation rates, 85.6 to 86 percent, but continued to trail significantly in bachelor’s degrees, 19 to 28.1 percent. These figures revealed another more contradictory process at work. The percentage of blacks aged twenty-five to twenty-nine that had graduated from high school had slipped 2.4 percent; yet, in contrast, those completing a bachelor’s degree had grown 4 percent. The growing educational disparity reflected an underlying exacerbation of class stratification within the black community. In addition to accelerating class disparities, the gender differences are stark for both high school and college graduates. Eighty-seven point seven percent of black women have graduated from high school compared to 83.3 percent of black men. Among college graduates, the gender gap is vastly greater. While 22.4 percent of black women hold a bachelor’s degree only 15 percent for black men, do.21

Just as African Americans were closing the gap in traditional educational attainment, economic restructuring, resegregation, and technological advances conjoined to undermine their educational and socioeconomic advances. Specifically, the revolution in computer technology has made the possession of higher-level mathematics and computer skills necessary for future job acquisition. Although more blacks are online than the mainstream media report, computer and Internet access have followed established racial-class niches. Suburban schools have a much higher computer-to-student ratio than inner-city schools. Disparities in school district computer ownership and Internet access tend to mirror home com-
puter ownership, which reflects race, wealth, income, and education inequities. In 1999, Thomas P. Novak and Donna L. Hoffman discovered that 44.2 percent of white households had home computers compared to only 29 percent of African Americans. Six years later in 2005, Robert Fairlie discovered that blacks' home computer ownership rates had risen substantially to 50.6 percent; nevertheless, the digital divide actually increased considerably, because whites' home computer ownership rates grew to 74.6 percent. He also uncovered a substantial difference in Internet access between blacks and whites. At 40.5 percent, blacks' Internet access lagged considerably behind whites' 67.3 percent rate. Like Novak and Hoffman, Fairlie found that "lower levels of income" accounted for the greatest portion of the difference in home computer ownership and Internet access. The gap between black and white students' acquisition of higher-level math skills reflects the existing racial-class chasm and works to accelerate the "digital divide." White high school students take calculus at two and a half times the rate of black high school students. Consequently, the race and place based inequalities in schooling have produced what black studies scholar Abdul Alkalimat has called a New Illiteracy.

Among the most significant transformations of the New Nadir have been the incorporation of the new black political-professional-entrepreneurial elite into the bourgeois establishment and the acceleration of class stratification among blacks. The major paradox of the African American predicament is that the limited political and economic incorporation of blacks has produced a powerful black elite, though largely so only in relationship to the black community. Political scientists Robert C. Smith, and Stanley Rothman and Amy E. black found that African Americans were largely excluded from the highest circles of decision-making—the major corporations, the executive branch, and public interest institutions (philanthropic foundations, educational institutions, major law firms, cultural institutions, etc.). Even with Obama's election, blacks' incorporation into the State at higher levels has been minimal. According to Smith, of the 7,314 decision-making positions within America's elite institutional network, blacks occupied only 284 or 3 percent. In the realm of electoral politics, the number of black elected officials (BEOS) has grown from 104 in 1964 to 1,469 in 1970 to 8,015 in 1990 to 9,101 in 2001 to 9,500 in 2006. Yet, they still only represent 1.9 percent of the 500,000 elected offices in the country. Moreover, incorporation has been marginal; blacks have been integrated mainly into the middle and bottom rungs (local elected office) of the U.S. government. Nonetheless, amazingly, according to sociologist Richard L. Zweigenhaft and G. William Domhoff, America's power elite is more racially diverse than ever.

The growth of the black middle and bourgeois classes, however miniscule in relative terms, has mirrored global capitalism's intensification of the wealth gap. Income and wealth has been sharply redistributed upward to the black elite. Since the end of the Civil Rights and Black Power movements, the richest quintile of African Americans has dramatically increased its share of the aggregate income of black families. Over the same thirty year period, 1968-1998, the black middle class's (the fourth quintile) share has remained roughly the same. Meanwhile, the black working class's and the poor's (the third, second, and lowest quintiles) share of black families' aggregate income plummeted. A generation ago, in 1968, the poorest fifth of black families received 5 percent, the wealthiest fifth 42.7 percent and the top 5 percent got 15 percent of the aggregate black family income. By 1998, the poorest fifth received 3.4 percent while the richest fifth received 47.6 percent and the top 5 percent of black families claimed 17.8 percent of the aggregate share of black family income. Every quintile saw its share of black aggregate income decrease except the top fifth and the top 5 percent. The surging growth of the black elite, the stagnation in the black middle class and the dramatic decline of the working class and poor has drastically exacerbated wealth disparities among black people. The concentration of African American family income and wealth into the hands of the black elite reflects a broader problem, the consolidation of power into a smaller percentage of the black community.
TABLE 1

Share of Aggregate Income Received by Each Fifth

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Number (Thousands)</th>
<th>Lowest Fifth</th>
<th>Second Fifth</th>
<th>Third Fifth</th>
<th>Fourth Fifth</th>
<th>Highest Fifth</th>
<th>Top 5 Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1998</td>
<td>12,579</td>
<td>3.1</td>
<td>8.2</td>
<td>14.8</td>
<td>24.4</td>
<td>49.5</td>
<td>19.1</td>
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<td>1988</td>
<td>10,561</td>
<td>3.3</td>
<td>7.7</td>
<td>14.6</td>
<td>24.7</td>
<td>49.7</td>
<td>18.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1978</td>
<td>8,066</td>
<td>4.0</td>
<td>8.7</td>
<td>15.6</td>
<td>25.3</td>
<td>46.4</td>
<td>16.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1968</td>
<td>5,728</td>
<td>4.0</td>
<td>9.8</td>
<td>16.3</td>
<td>25.1</td>
<td>46.7</td>
<td>15.9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Created from Table H-2B. Share of Aggregate Income Received by Each Fifth and Top 5 Percent of Households: 1967 to 1998 http://www.jointcenter.org/DB/table/databank/income/incomei/aief/aggreblack.txt

The redistributive trend favoring the elite has slowed but continues into the new present. From 2000 to 2006, blacks at the bottom, those earning $15,000 a year increased from 22.3 percent to nearly a quarter of African American wage earners at 24.4 percent. Those in the next lowest tier, $15,000-$25,000, remained unchanged at 15.2 percent, but the third lowest category, $25,000-$35,000 increased from 12.8 to 13.5 percent. The next three middle categories, $35,000-$50,000; $50,000-$75,000; and $75,000-$100,000—all experienced declines—of 1.2, 1.4, and .5 percent, respectively. Or put another way, they decreased from 16 to 14.8 percent; from 16.6 to 15.2 percent; and from 8.2 percent to 7.7 percent of in their share of black workers. Meanwhile the elite, those making more than $100,000 saw a slight expansion, by .3 percent, from 8.8 percent in 2000 to 9.1 percent in 2006.25

To fully understand the impact of this trend it is necessary to take a longer view. A 2006 study of black income by the U.S. Census Bureau examined black income from 1970 to 2006; it divided African Americans into seven income groups—$15,000; $15K-$25K; $25K-$35K; $35K-$50K; $50-$75K; $75-$100K; and $100K and over. This study revealed the same pattern of significant change at the poles as did Table 1. The bottom income groups’ percentage of the aggregate African American income dropped from 31.8 percent in 1970 to 24.4 percent by 2006. The next to the lowest income grouping saw their percentage of African American income decline from 18.7 percent in 1970 to 15.2 percent in 2006. During this same time period, the next two groups, $15,000 to $25,000 and $25,000 to $35,000, experienced meager decreases of 1.5 and 1.8 percent as the lower group dropped from 15 to 13.5 percent and the next from 16.6 to 14.8 percent. In contrast, the three highest income groupings experienced relatively significant increases in their share of the aggregate African American income. The $50,000 to $75,000 witnessed an increase of 2.9 percent, from 12.3 to 15.2 percent, while the $75,000 to $100,000 category grew by 3.6 percent, from 4.1 to 7.7 percent; and the top grouping, $100,000 and more, saw a rather robust increase of 7.5 percent, from a modest 1.6 to 9.1 percent.26

The restructuring of African Americans’ class structure was a complicated process imbricated by ideology that was enacted by racial-class warfare. After the turbulent 1960s, neoconservative corporate leaders and politicians promoted neoliberal policies that eviscerated the Great Society and undermined New Deal-era social programs. These
transformations have pushed many socio-economic indicators back to their late 1950s or 1960s levels. Collectively, they compose the economic processes of a new racial formation, the New Nadir, which represents a drastic downward shift in African Americans' role in the political economy. However, it is not just in the political economy that African Americans are witnessing a declining presence and power. Despite the election of the first African American President, blacks are also experiencing a significant decline in their political position, social status, and cultural image.

The New Nadir: Political Destabilization & Incorporation

The transition to financialized global racial capitalism initially manifested itself in devastating neoliberal economic and political policies directed against African America. During the twelve years of Ronald Reagan's and George Herbert Walker Bush's presidencies, the federal state attacked African Americans with malignant intent. Reagan launched his war on African America with the Omnibus Budget Reconciliation Act (OBRA) of 1981. This legislation eliminated from eligibility about half of the 500,000 recipients of Aid For Dependent Children and another 40 percent of employed AFDC recipients had their benefits substantially reduced. In addition to pursuing aggressive policies aimed at destabilizing black political mobilization, the Reagan and Papa Bush regimes also ignored racial assaults, whether in employment, housing discrimination or savage acts of racial violence.

Reagan not only enacted right-wing antiblack public policies, more importantly he also effected a political realignment, and transformed the public discourse. Roger Wilkins commented that Reagan had made "racism palatable and politically potent again." One could argue that he ushered in colorblind racist ideology. Reagan perfected the use of demeaning code language that demonized the black poor in an apparently colorblind way, e.g., "Welfare Queens." The eight years of Democratic presidential leadership under Bill Clinton reversed some and slowed the pace of other deprivations visited by the Republican demagogues, but the Clinton administration also accelerated others, for example, the passage of The Temporary Assistance for Needy Families Act of 1996. The selection of George W. Bush in 2000, inaugurated another eight years of economic decline and deterioration in blacks' political position and social status. 27

In the main, during the period of financialized global racial capitalism, the State has responded to the black community with a broad strategy of destabilization and repression. Global racial capital deems large sectors of black and other communities of color as surplus populations. The major factor destabilizing African America over the last forty years has been the massive increase in incarceration. Since the early 1970s, the number of persons incarcerated has grown a staggering 500 percent! The brunt of this extraordinary increase has been borne by blacks. According to criminologist Richard Quinney, "Criminal justice is the modern means of controlling this surplus population produced by late capitalist development . . . A way of controlling this unemployed population is simply and directly by confinement in prisons." American drug policy largely accounts for the dramatic rise in U.S. incarceration rates. 28

Reagan created the policy architecture underlining the contemporary social control of people deemed superfluous. On September 14, 1986, Reagan declared a "War on Drugs." Six weeks later, on October 27, at his urging Congress passed the first Anti-Drug Abuse Act, appropriating $1.7 billion. Nearly two years after, they enacted a second anti-drug act, this time increasing the appropriation by more than a billion dollars to $2.8 billion. Law enforcement and prison construction received almost all of the monies. Global capitalism's drastic constricting of economic opportunity and social mobility necessitated a new social structure of control: the Prison-industrial Complex emerged as that edifice. Between 1979 and 2000, the number of prisons grew from 592 to 1,023, an increase of nearly 58 percent, and state spending on prisons soared from approxi-
approximately $17 billion to $29 billion, between 1990 and 1997.\textsuperscript{29}

The economic restructuring endemic to the transition to financialized global racial capitalism devastated inner-city urban communities. The neoliberal policies instituted by the new social structure of accumulation created massive permanent unemployment and the sharp curtailment of the public sphere, especially in employment, public education, and recreation. According to prison rights activists Eve Goldberg and political prisoner, Linda Evans, the prison-industrial complex, like the military-industrial complex, represents the "interweaving of private business and government interests" for the purposes of profit and social control.\textsuperscript{30}

The "War on Drugs" rationalized racial profiling, targeting of urban areas, anti-gang laws, mandatory minimum sentencing, and zero tolerance legislation that criminalized black youth and Hip Hop culture. Its focus on crack cocaine, urban neighborhoods, and street dealers, rather than suburban and rural drug abusers, importers and major distributors, distorts drug abuse by misrepresenting African Americans' involvement. The effect of this disparity in policy and enforcement served to reverse the ratio of blacks to whites in prisons. A year before Reagan's Anti-Drug Abuse Act, 21,200 white compared to 16,600 blacks were in state penitentiaries. A decade after Reagan's legislation, not only had incarceration rates skyrocketed, but they had also reversed, in 1996, 134,000 blacks compared to 86,100 whites were incarcerated in state prisons. By 2002, blacks constituted 43.7 percent of all prisoners, more than three and half times their representation in the population. In 2005, blacks composed 41 percent or 900,000 of the nation's 2.2 million incarcerated persons. This meant that 2.3 percent of all blacks were incarcerated compared to 0.4 for whites and 0.7 for Latinos/as.\textsuperscript{31}

While 8 percent of black males are incarcerated on any given day, the "War on Drugs" has de-gendered imprisonment. Some have characterized the "war on drugs" as a "war on black women." Evidence suggests that this contention has merit. Since the passage of Reagan's anti-drug laws in 1986, black women's incarceration rate has soared 800 percent. Nearly three decades ago, in 1979 only 10 percent of women in prison were incarcerated for drug offenses, in 2007, 38 percent were. In 2004, black women were incarcerated 4.5 times the rate of white women.\textsuperscript{32}

In addition to racialized incarceration, police brutality and hate crimes seemed to mount in the era of global capitalism. The murders of Oscar Grant (Oakland), Kathryn Johnson (Atlanta), Sean Bell (New York), and Bobby Russ and Latanya Haggerty (Chicago) indicate that race remains the central factor in the police use of excessive and deadly force. The recent mini-rebellion in Oakland, California protesting the New Year's Day execution of Grant by BART transit authority police officer Johannes Mehserle and the case of the Jena Six and the scourge of hanging nooses serve to remind us of the prevalence of police brutality and hate crimes. In the current era, police brutality and racial hate crimes along with racialized incarceration should be understood as a strategy of racial repression. The Bureau of Justice reported that in 2002 police used force in 3.5 percent or 172, 660 instances against blacks, compared to 373, 850 cases or 1.1 percent of incidents in which police used force against whites. That is 3.2 more times than they used force against whites. By 2005, the racial gap in the police use of force had increased to 3.7 times. Police used force in 401, 610 instances or 1.2 percent against whites and 186, 060 occurrences or 4.4 percent of cases involving blacks. Blacks composed 39 percent of the 370 persons killed by police in 2006. The extent of state sanctioned brutality and murder underscores the superfluousness of African American life.\textsuperscript{33}

Racial violence is not the exclusive preserve of the State. Racially motivated violence increased at an alarming rate in the 1990s. During the 1990s, hate crimes surged 58 percent from 4,558 in 1991 to a high of 8,759 in 1996 and closed the decade with 7,876 incidents. The vast majority of hate crimes in the U.S. are motivated by racial
antipathy. Racially motivated incidents (2,963) composed 62.3 percent of all hate crimes in 1991. Predictably, the vast majority of racially motivated crimes resulted from anti-black racism. The 1,689 anti-black incidents composed 35.5 percent of all hate crimes and 58 percent of racially motivated crimes in 1991. Although the frequency of hate crimes has declined since the enactment of the Hate Crimes Statistics Act of 1990, alarmingly, anti-black incidents as a percentage of racially motivated offenses increased nearly 10 percent, rising from 58 to 67 percent during the period. Finally, in the wake of the Jena Six protests, the Lynch noose is rapidly replacing the Klan’s burning cross as the preferred symbol of racial terrorism. The increase or intensification of anti-black hate crimes represents the failure of government to control private racial violence.34

What Stephen Steinberg calls “the white backlash and liberal retreat” from racial equality has occurred not only throughout the U.S. “injustice” system, but in other areas as well. Concerning political representation, the suppression of the African American vote in Florida, in 2000 was only the most blatant example of government efforts to undermine black political participation and representation. In the area of voting rights the State has not simply retreated from racial justice, it has accelerated the judicial assault on the gains from the Civil Rights and Black Power phases of the black liberation movement. After 1994, black and Latino majority voting districts became special sites of attack. In 1998, Winnett Hagens and Ellen Spears reconceptualized the term, New Disenfranchisement, to describe how redistricting and white bloc voting has diluted the black vote and denied African Americans the right to elect representatives of their choice. They contrasted its subtle and apparently color-blind techniques with the crude racist policies of the “old” disenfranchisement of the Reconstruction and Nadir eras.35

The New Disenfranchisement is the result of conservative white voters’ successful challenge to the increase of minority-majority congressional districts from twenty-seven to fifty-two, as a result of the 1990s’ reapportionment and redistricting process. Correspondingly, the number of black and Latino/a elected officials reached their highest numbers ever, over 8,000. Majority-minority legislative districts also increased substantially, this was particularly apparent in the South where the number of majority-minority congressional districts grew by seventeen, the number of blacks elected to state senates rose from forty-three to sixty-seven and state representatives increased from 159 to 213.36

White voters responded to the growth of black and brown political power by challenging the constitutionality of majority-minority districts. In City of Mobile v. Bolden (1981), Shaw v. Reno (1993) and Miller v. Johnson (1995), the Supreme Court initiated a process that undermined the Fifteenth Amendment and the Voting Rights Act. By ruling that plaintiffs must prove “discriminatory intent” as well as “discriminatory effect,” Mobile v. Bolden imposed a difficult, although not impossible, standard of proof. However, in Shaw the Supreme Court did not require white conservatives to demonstrate “discriminatory effect.” A majority of the justices accepted the plaintiffs’ allegation that “racial gerrymandering” was the “only” explanation for the “bizarre shape” of a North Carolina district. Miller extended the attack on majority-minority districts. Here the court ruled that plaintiffs only had to demonstrate that race was a substantial factor in redistricting. Since the success of Shaw v. Reno, white voters have extended their attack to state legislative districts and the lower courts have joined the attack dismantling ten majority-minority districts in seven states. Collectively, these decisions not only restrict the growth of black and brown political power, but also seem aimed at denying African Americans and Latinos their right to self-representation.37

This New Disenfranchisement steals from the voters not their ballot but their choice of candidates and representatives. It also steals the power of the vote through dilution. In essence, the New Disenfranchisement nullifies the longstanding principle that “The right to have one’s vote counted is as open to protection... As the right to put a ballot in a box.” Established in United States
v. Mosley, 238 U.S. (1915), this principle was reaffirmed in Gomillion v. Lightfoot, 364 U.S. 339 (1960) and Thornburg v. Gingles 478 U.S. 30 (1986). Gomillion ruled that Tuskegee, Alabama’s racially motivated gerrymandering was unconstitutional because it diluted blacks’ votes. In addition, Thornburg determined that North Carolina’s 1980 redistricting undermined blacks’ ability to “participate in the political process and to elect representatives of their choice.” Opposing the principle that a person’s vote must count white minority voting districts.37

Another major aspect of the new black racial formation is demographic diversification, as the immigration of black people from the Caribbean and Africa and the emergence of significant numbers of people claiming a bi or multi-racial identity are remaking the U.S. black population. Until recently, the percentage of foreign-born blacks remained minuscule. As late as 1960, foreign-born blacks constituted only 1 percent of the U.S. black population. During the mid-1990s, their percentage soared to 7.4 percent; however, by the 2000 census it had declined to 6.1 percent. Equally as important as increasing numbers are their relations with African Americans and engagement with U.S. racial politics. Most new immigrants come to the U.S. with the immigrant’s traditional optimism. They also arrive with a poor comprehension of U.S. anti-black racism and generally accept racist stereotypes of African Americans as lazy and violent. Also, many immigrants, especially those from African countries are middle-class and possess valuable human capital. Describing the typical African immigrant, Sylviane A. Diouf, a historian and researcher at the Schomburg Center for Black History and Culture commented, “They are better educated, they’re here to work, to prosper, they’re more compliant and don’t pose a threat.” Elaborating on Diouf’s comments, Howard Dodson, Director of the Schomburg Center stated, “They’re not politically mobilized as yet and not as closely tied to the African-American agenda.” Nonetheless, political scientist Reuel Rogers anticipates that racial discrimination will radicalize black immigrants and linguist Flore Zephir finds supporting evidence for this thesis among second-generation Haitian immigrants.38

Though important, ethnic diversification has not been the primary factor causing political fragmentation in Black America. At the heart of political fragmentation, however, has been accelerating class stratification. A major consequence of class stratification has been emergence of a small but significant class of African Americans who reside in predominately white neighborhoods and whose children if not largely assimilated into mainstream white American civil society, certainly are alienated from black civil society. It is mainly among these relatively affluent African Americans that right-wing recruitment initiatives have had some success, especially among second-generation suburbanites and religious fundamentalists. Black neconservatives, however, have had much greater success in gaining a presence in the media than in obtaining elected office or creating social movements.

The repudiation of “blackness” or African American identity is another significant aspect of the political fragmentation occurring within African America. The ideological assault “blackness” is rooted in colorblind racial ideology and its desire to promote a post-black identity or allegedly to move beyond race. The push to transcend racial identity is a joint project of two overlapping sets of political actors, neconservatives and the bi- or multiracial identity movement. This collective enterprise has alternatively challenged the use of racial categories in public policy, research, college admissions, and in employment. Yet they have also labored to expand the racial categories on the census and throughout U.S. society, further undermining racial political solidarity. The mixed-race identity movement casts African American identity as an atavistic essentialism, a fiction based totally on the notion of hypodescent or the “one drop rule.” Mixed-race philosopher Naomi Zack and other leaders of the multiracial movement suggest that African Americans have colluded with Euro-Americans to suppress “mixed-race” persons’ right to “self-identifi-
cation" and "selfhood," by denying them the right to embrace the fullness of their parental background or "racial" heritage. Rather than constitute a move to destroy racial categories, the creation of a bi- and multiracial classification represents an attempt to construct a new "racial" group. To shift the U.S. bi-racial classificatory schema and racial order to a multiracial system would locate light-skinned persons of mixed race in a space above African Americans, and perhaps Latinos/as, Asian Americans, but definitely below whites. It would represent what sociologist Eduardo Bonilla-Silva has called "the Latin Americanization of racial classification in the USA." 

Given its aspirations, it is ironic that the multiracial identity movement is a consequence of the Civil Rights movement, specifically three of its partial successes, Loving v. Virginia (1967), Affirmative Action, and the 1968 Fair Housing Act and its 1988 enhancements. The Loving decision abolished miscegenation law. Affirmative Action provided a generation of African Americans greater access to education and to newly created positions in the expanding technical-managerial sectors of the U.S. political economy or business set-asides for their entrepreneurial ventures. The 1968 Fair Housing Act provided a mechanism for exacerbating the class-based spatial division within African America. It also owes much to the 1965 Immigration and Nationality Act, which eliminated the nationality quotas that were legislated by the 1924 Immigration Act. According to historian Minkah Makalani: Following 1967, when anti-miscegenation laws were declared unconstitutional, more than one million persons were born of mixed parentage in the United States. In the 1990s alone, these births (more than 300,000) were 1.4 percent of total U.S. births, 8.9 percent of all births with at least one black parent, and 43 percent of all births with parents from two different racial groups. On the 2000 U.S. census, only 784,764 persons (0.6 percent of the U.S. population) marked black and white as their racial designation. In 2000, the census identified only 784,764 individuals as having one black parent and one non-black parent. Additionally, bi- or multiracial-identified individuals constituted only about 2.1 percent of the 36.4 million African American people. This meager figure is not surprising, since exogamy among blacks is extremely low—6 percent for men and 2 percent for women. Nor is it surprising that 43 percent of such individuals are the product of a relationship between a black and a white person. Asians and Latinos/as, regardless of nationality, rarely marry or have children with African Americans or other blacks in the United States. Sociologist Steven Steinberg discovered that 40 percent of the children of Asian immigrants and a third of U.S. born Latinos/as between ages twenty-five and thirty-four marry non-Latino whites. In truth, the African American and black communities in the U.S. remain shockingly inassimilable. Generally, only other blacks find African Americans, West Indians, and Africans worth marrying. Given the smallness of their numbers, why has the contemporary mixed-race phenomenon received so much scholarly and popular attention?

The mixed-race issue among African Americans derives its significance from its class and ideological implications for the new black racial formation, not its size. The fact is that a disproportionate number of those adopting this designation or having it thrust upon them are middle-class. Like Africans and Caribbean blacks, individuals identified as mixed-race seem to be supplanting those designated as African American in high profile economic, social, and political positions. This is especially so with student admissions at the nation’s elite universities and increasingly so among the professoriate and the intelligentsia. In many ways, it represents a return to a pre-Black Power intraracial class hierarchy. Given the material conditions of black racial oppression and the contemporary racial ideology of colorblindness, this move would result in further solidifying the historic relationship between light skin color and class in the African American community. Correspondingly, it would further fracture its already frayed class relations. Several scholars have documented the legacy of the color-class connection in African American history. Richard Seltzer and
Robert Smith, for instance, have demonstrated that, “the black community continues to exhibit a degree of class stratification based on color, with lighter-skin blacks exhibiting higher education and occupational attainments.” A successful multiracial identity project would make it easier for a comparably wealthy sector of African American society to adopt conservative political positions supporting their privileged economic status, rather than policies more closely linked to that of the black majority. 42

Although conservatism is a long stream in the river of the Black Intellectual Tradition, the roots of contemporary black neoconservatives originate in the incorporative mechanisms of the Reagan regime. Black neoconservatives relate better with their white ideological colleagues than with any other African American ideological group. Like their white conservative colleagues, black neoconservative philosophy advocates: the rule of the market, deregulation, privatization, decimating public expenditures for social services, and shifting the discourse from the “public good” or “community well-being” to arguments about personal responsibility. Black neoconservatives blame the dislocations endemic to poverty on welfare and government subsidies. According to them, the Great Society created dependent personalities and an anti-achievement oriented culture in the black community. Thus, they contend the African American poor are afflicted by a “culture of dependency” and that they practice a politics of victimology. Although conservatives compose a disingenuous portion of the African American population, since the Reagan administration, their Republican patrons have conveyed visibility and prestige upon them far out of proportion to their numbers or influence in the black community. 43

Yet, the class and ideological schism expressed through the presence of black neoconservatives may be growing. The escalating class differentiation in the black community is generating greater fragmentation. According to a 2007 PEW Research Center survey, 61 percent of blacks surveyed thought the cultural values of middle-class and impoverished blacks had become “more different” over the last decade. Thirty-one percent claimed the two classes shared “only a little” (22 percent) or “almost no values in common” (9 percent). Constructed around these class perspectives, 37 percent of those surveyed claimed blacks were “too diverse” to be considered a “single race.” It is unclear how the respondents conceptualized race, but even allowing that they confused it with ethnicity or other attributes, it remains that nearly 40 percent believe blacks have too little in common to constitute a singular racial group. In contrast, that 96 percent of the black electorate voted for Barack Obama suggests the existence of what political scientist Michael Dawson terms the “black utility heuristic.” According to Dawson, the black utility heuristic means that “African American political behavior remains powerfully influenced by African Americans’ perceptions of group interests.” This apparent contradiction can be explained by the difference between the respondents’ interpretation of vast differences in cultural values among “blacks” and the continuation of racial oppression. The PEW survey also revealed that most blacks identify racial discrimination as “a pervasive fact of life.” Importantly, about two-thirds of blacks believe blacks “often or almost always experience” racial discrimination in the areas of jobs and housing. This suggests that the present class fragmentation in the African American community is largely confined to the cultural and social arenas. That is, antiblack racial oppression is still too prevalent for class fragmentation to manifest itself strongly in electoral politics beyond the ward and municipal levels. 44

Conclusion

The current economic downturn has helped reveal the extent of the crisis facing the United States and especially African Americans. In the first of twelve articles on the wealthiest Americans published in the New York Times in 2007 (before the massive economic downturn), reporter Louis Uchitelle termed the contemporary moment, “the New Gilded Age.” Through
this phase, Uchitelle compared the contemporary period to the era of transition from an agricultural to an industrial political economy. The New York Times series seems to capture adequately the tremendous economic restructuring of U.S. society, particularly the escalating wealth gap; yet, like the original phrase, coined by Mark Twain and Charles Dudley Warner in 1874 to describe the period of the robber barons, massive immigrant influx, and rapid industrialization, the New Gilded Age as depicted fails to capture the African American experience. Because Uchitelle’s New Gilded Age misses the particularity of the black sociohistorical experience under financialized global racial capitalism, following Logan, I have offered an alternative, racially-specific conceptualization of blacks’ current predicament.

The New Nadir is the current form Douglas’s “old snake” of racial oppression and violence has assumed. It is the result of financialized global racial capitalism. The growing impoverishment and accelerating class stratification in African America must be understood in relation to the marginalization of black workers, resurgent segregation, a new illiteracy, the construction and incorporation of a new black elite, racialized incarceration, intensifying State and private racial terrorism, a new disfranchisement, and a growing social and cultural fragmentation via demographic diversification, in form of transnational black immigrants, black neoconservatives, and the mixed-race movement. Operating through the processes of economic marginalization and incorporation, and political destabilization and incorporation, financialized global racial capitalism and the neoliberal socioeconomic policies it spawned have restructured U.S. society and the African American community’s role in the political economy, position in the polity, social status, and cultural representation. The transformation to this new social structure of accumulation has generated a decided downturn in African Americans’ quality of life. On most social indicators, since the demise of the Civil Rights and Black Power movements, African Americans’ progress has stagnated and in significant areas, regressed.

What is needed is a political strategy and a social movement that seek to coordinate and redeploy blacks’ social capital to rebuild, revitalize, and democratize black civil society. It is time that black radicals struggle to lead the black community. It is time to walk the razor’s edge of the dialectic of leading a class struggle in the black community and building black unity under a radical agenda. This is not the proverbial “turning inward,” but rather a call for reconstructing the black community to forge it into a model and a base for an alternative oppositional democratic politics that fights for black liberation and socialist transformation.

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Endnotes

1. Speech by Frederick Douglass, May 9, 1865 in Lerone Bennett, The Shaping of Black America (Chicago: Johnson Publishing Company, 1983), 207.


4. African American racial formations articulate with the accumulation structures of U.S. capitalist development. Transformational change, economic restructuring, political realignments, new racial discursive matrices, and new regimes of racial terror generally occur in specific U.S. structures of accumulation and then proceed to enact transformations upon the black racial formation, albeit in a dialectical dance with historically specific black liberation movements. In the immediate aftermath of the Civil War, the former masters of slave labor imposed a new oppressive regime, the Plantation Economy. The new black racial formation was rooted in the exploitation of African American labor as sharecroppers enmeshed in the Plantation Economy (1865-1965) by the tentacles of debt peonage and the Black Codes. The Great Migration to the urban North inaugurated the construction of a third black racial formation, Proletarianization and Ghettoization (1910-1979). By 1940, economic restructuring and the second Great Migration had drastically reduced the number of blacks trapped in the semi-capitalist economic relations of the southern Plantation Economy. Partly due to their own initiative and partly due to economic necessary and political expediency, northern-based industrial capitalism rapidly incorporated African Americans directly into its production relations. Additionally, industrialization was spreading throughout the South. The Great Depression and World War II destroyed the economic viability of the Plantation Economy, and the Civil Rights movement cracked the remaining legal remnants of its apartheid superstructure. By the late 1970s, with the transformation toward global capitalism, African Americans' dominant role in the U.S. economy as a superexploited industrial proletariat was ending. Deindustrialization, deproletarianization and their reconversion into non-unionized low paying menial jobs would come to symbolize African Americans' dominant experience in the restructured global capitalist economy. The transition to global capitalism and the inauguration of neoliberalism under the presidency of Ronald Reagan plunged African Americans into a new black racial formation, the New Nadir (1980-P).


8. Rachel’s Environment & Health Weekly #654—Wealth and Health, June 10, 1999: 3; Sarah Anderson, John


23. Robert C. Smith, We Have No Leaders: African Americans in the Post-Civil Rights Era (Albany: SUNY Press,
24. In 1998, 23 percent of African American women and 17 percent of African American men were employed in the traditional professions or in the new managerial and technical class. Between 1987-1992, African American owned-businesses increased from 424,165 to 620, 912 or 46 percent. And their revenue jumped 63 percent from $19.8 billion to $32.2 billion. See http://www.joincenter.org/databank/databank/income.html. Salim Muwakil, "So Goes the Movement," In These Times, September 6, 1998, 17, 17-18.


35. The concept was initially used by Abdul Alkalimat in 1979 to characterize the use of the census undercount to reduce blacks' voting power. Winnett Hagens and Ellen Spears, "The 'New' Disenfranchise-ment," Southern Changes, Vol. 20, No. 3, 1998: 3-4.


