THE GRAMSCI MONUMENT-NEWSPAPER

Editors:
LAKESHA BRYANT
and
SAQUAN SCOTT

"A periodical, like a newspaper, a book, or any other medium of didactic expression that is aimed at a certain level of the reading or listening public, cannot satisfy everyone equally; not everyone will find it useful to the same degree. The important thing is that it serve as a stimulus for everyone; after all, no publication can replace the thinking mind."
Antonio Gramsci
(Prison Notebook 8)

N°59

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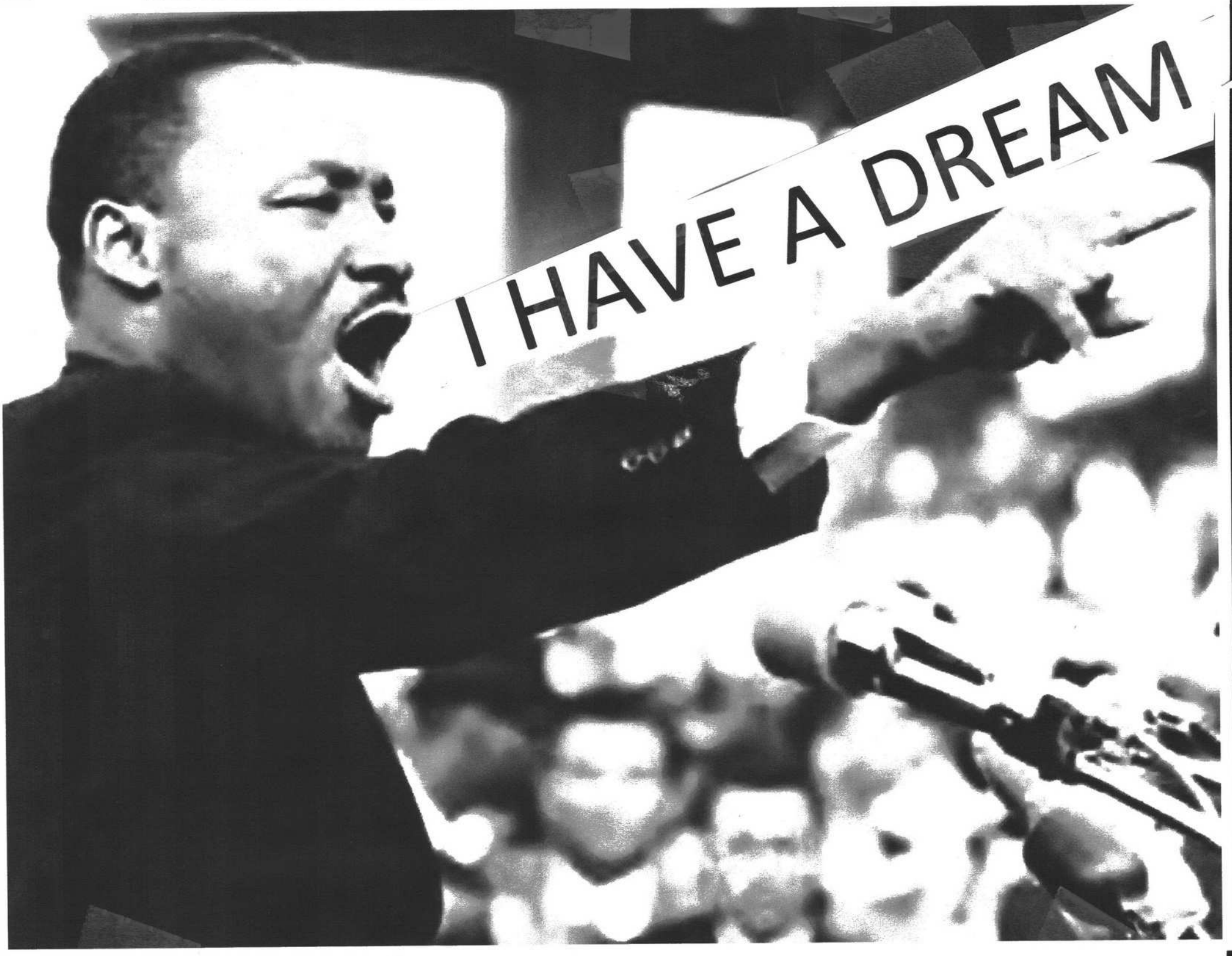
August 28th, 2013 - Forest Houses, Bronx, NY

The Gramsci Monument-Newspaper is part of the "Gramsci Monument", an artwork by Thomas Hirschhorn, produced by Dia Art Foundation in co-operation with Erik Farmer and the Residents of Forest Houses

50 YEARS =



AUGUST 28TH 1963

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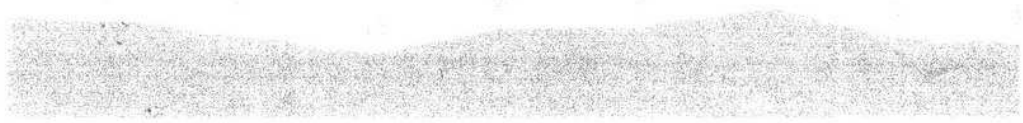
Bronx, NY 10456
Wednesday
Chance of Storm

84 °F | °C

Precipitation: 50%
Humidity: 67%
Wind: 7 mph

Temperature	Precipitation	Wind



Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat	Sun	Mon	Tue
90° 73°	84° 70°	82° 70°	86° 68°	86° 70°	84° 72°	88° 68°	81° 59°

"I HAVE A DREAM . . ."

Speech by the Rev. MARTIN LUTHER KING
At the "March on Washington"

I am happy to join with you today in what will go down in history as the greatest demonstration for freedom in the history of our nation.

Five score years ago a great American in whose symbolic shadow we stand today signed the Emancipation Proclamation. This momentous decree is a great beacon light of hope to millions of Negro slaves who had been seared in the flames of withering injustice. It came as a joyous daybreak to end the long night of their captivity. But 100 years later the Negro still is not free. One hundred years later the life of the Negro is still badly crippled by the manacles of segregation and the chains of discrimination. One hundred years later the Negro lives on a lonely island of poverty in the midst of a vast ocean of material prosperity. One hundred years later the Negro is still languished in the corners of American society and finds himself in exile in his own land. So we've come here today to dramatize a shameful condition.

In a sense we've come to our nation's capital to cash a check. When the architects of our Republic wrote the magnificent words of the Constitution and the Declaration of Independence, they were signing a promissory note to which every American was to fall heir. This note was a promise that all men—yes, black men as well as white men—would be guaranteed the unalienable rights of life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. It is obvious today that America has defaulted on this promissory note insofar as her citizens of color are concerned. Instead of honoring this sacred obligation, America has given the Negro people a bad check, a check which has come back marked "insufficient funds."

But we refuse to believe that the bank of justice is bankrupt. We refuse to believe that there are insufficient funds in the great vaults of opportunity of this nation. So we've come to cash this check, a check that will give us upon demand the riches of freedom and the security of justice.

We have also come to this hallowed spot to remind America of the fierce urgency of now. This is no time to engage in the luxury of cooling off or to take the tranquilizing drug of gradualism. Now is the time to make real the promises of democracy. Now is the time to rise from the dark and desolate valley of segregation to the sunlit path of racial justice. Now is the time to lift our nation from the quicksands of racial injustice to the solid rock of brotherhood.

Now is the time to make justice a reality for all of God's children. It would be fatal for the nation to overlook the urgency of the moment. This sweltering summer of the Negro's legitimate discontent will not pass until there is an invigorating autumn of freedom and equality —1963 is not an end but a beginning. Those who hope that the Negro needed to blow off steam and will now be content will have a rude awakening if the nation returns to business as usual.

There will be neither rest nor tranquility in America until the Negro is granted his citizenship rights. The whirlwinds of revolt will continue to shake the foundations of our nation until the bright days of justice emerge.

And that is something that I must say to my people who stand on the worn threshold which leads into the palace of justice. In the process of gaining our rightful place we must not be guilty of wrongful deeds. Let us not seek to satisfy our thirst for freedom by drinking from the cup of bitterness and hatred.

We must forever conduct our struggle on the high plane of dignity and discipline. We must not allow our creative protests to degenerate into physical violence. Again and again we must rise to the majestic heights of meeting physical force with soul force. The marvelous new militancy which has engulfed the Negro community must not lead us to distrust all white people, for many of our white brothers, as evidenced by their presence here today, have come to realize that their destiny is tied up with our destiny.

They have come to realize that their freedom is inextricably bound to our freedom. We cannot walk alone. And as we walk we must make the pledge that we shall always march ahead. We cannot turn back. There are those who are asking the devotees of civil rights, "When will you be satisfied?" We can never be satisfied as long as the Negro is the victim of the unspeakable horrors of police brutality.

We can never be satisfied as long as our bodies, heavy with the fatigue of travel, cannot gain lodging in the motels of the highways and the hotels of the cities.

We cannot be satisfied as long as the Negro's basic mobility is from a smaller ghetto to a larger one. We can never be satisfied as long as our children are stripped of their adulthood and robbed of their dignity by signs stating "For Whites Only."

We cannot be satisfied as long as the Negro in Mississippi cannot vote and the Negro in New York believes he has nothing for which to vote.

No, no, we are not satisfied, and we will not be satisfied until justice rolls down like waters and righteousness like a mighty stream.

I am not unmindful that some of you have come here out of great trials and tribulation. Some of you have come fresh from narrow jail cells. Some of you have come from areas where your quest for freedom left you battered by the storms of persecution and staggered by the winds of police brutality. You have been the veterans of creative suffering.

Continue to work with the faith that unearned suffering is redemptive. Go back to Mississippi, go back to Alabama, go back to South Carolina, go back to Georgia, go back to Louisiana, go back to the slums and ghettos of our Northern cities, knowing that somehow this situation can and will be changed. Let us not wallow in the valley of despair.

I say to you today, my friends, though, even though we face the difficulties of today and tomorrow, I still have a dream. It is a dream deeply rooted in the American dream. I have a dream that one day this nation will rise up, live out the true meaning of its creed: "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal."

I have a dream that one day on the red hills of Georgia sons of former slaves and the sons of former slave-owners will be able to sit down together at the table of brotherhood. I have a dream that one day even the state of Mississippi, a state sweltering with the heat of injustice,

sweltering with the heat of oppression, will be transformed into an oasis of freedom and justice.

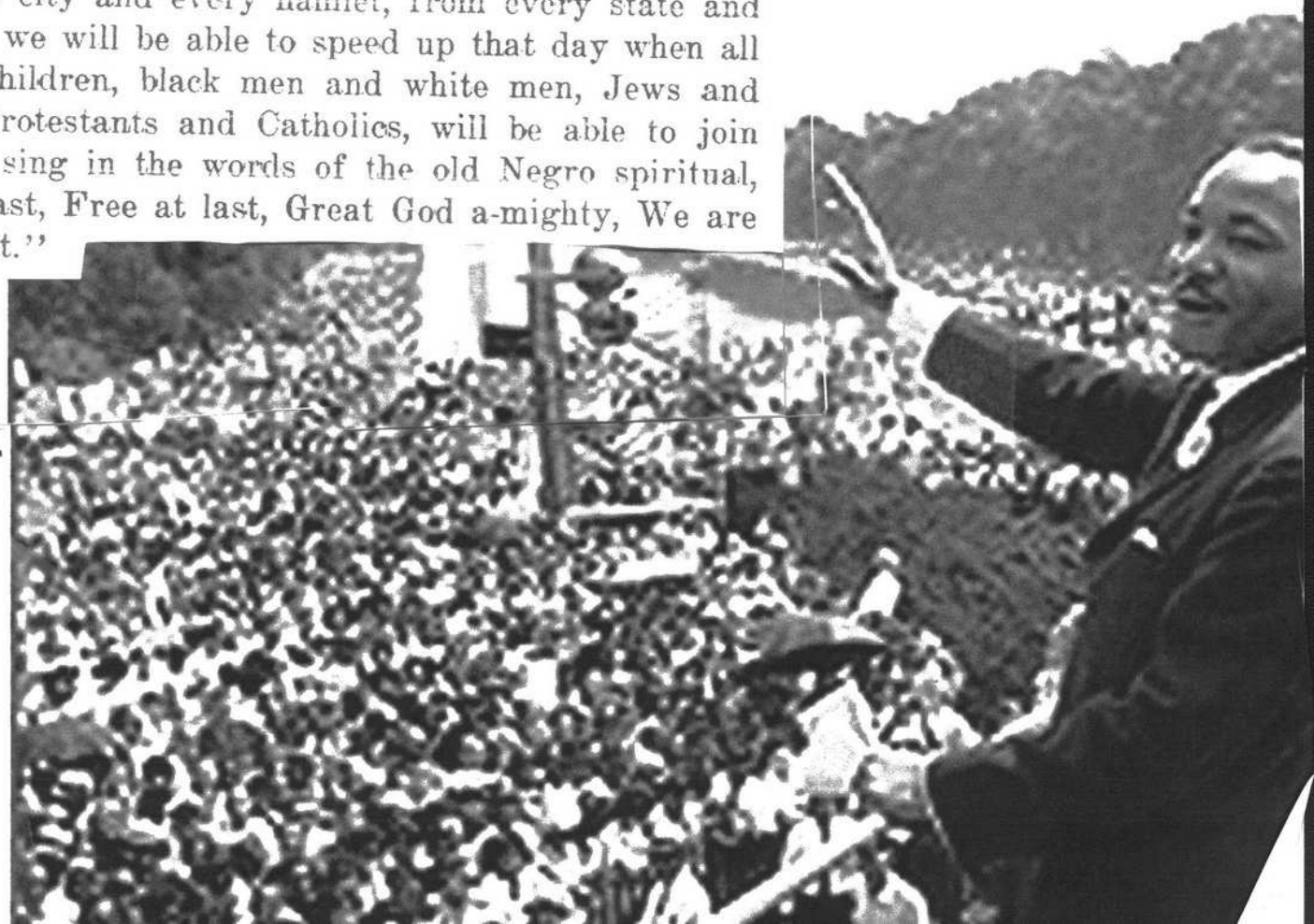
I have a dream that my four little children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character. I have a dream . . . I have a dream that one day in Alabama, with its vicious racists, with its governor having his lips dripping with the words of interposition and nullification, one day right there in Alabama little black boys and black girls will be able to join hands with little white boys and white girls as sisters and brothers.

I have a dream today . . . I have a dream that one day every valley shall be exalted, every hill and mountain shall be made low. The rough places will be made plain, and the crooked places will be made straight. And the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together. This is our hope. This is the faith that I go back to the South with. With this faith we will be able to hew out of the mountain of despair a stone of hope. With this faith we will be able to transform the jangling discords of our nation into a beautiful symphony of brotherhood. With this faith we will be able to work together, to pray together, to struggle together, to go to jail together, to stand up for freedom together, knowing that we will be free one day.

This will be the day when all of God's children will be able to sing with new meaning. "My country, 'tis of thee, sweet land of liberty, of thee I sing. Land where my fathers died, land of the pilgrim's pride, from every mountain side, let freedom ring." And if America is to be a great nation, this must become true. So let freedom ring from the prodigious hilltops of New Hampshire. Let freedom ring from the mighty mountains of New York. Let freedom ring from the heightening Alleghenies of Pennsylvania. Let freedom ring from the snowcapped Rockies of Colorado. Let freedom ring from the curvaceous slopes of California.

But not only that. Let freedom ring from Stone Mountain of Georgia. Let freedom ring from Lookout Mountain of Tennessee. Let freedom ring from every hill and molehill of Mississippi, from every mountain side. Let freedom ring . . .

When we allow freedom to ring—when we let it ring from every city and every hamlet, from every state and every city, we will be able to speed up that day when all of God's children, black men and white men, Jews and Gentiles, Protestants and Catholics, will be able to join hands and sing in the words of the old Negro spiritual, "Free at last, Free at last, Great God a-mighty, We are free at last."



Martin Luther King, Jr. delivering "I Have a Dream"

on August 28, 1963,

at the Washington D.C. Civil Rights March.

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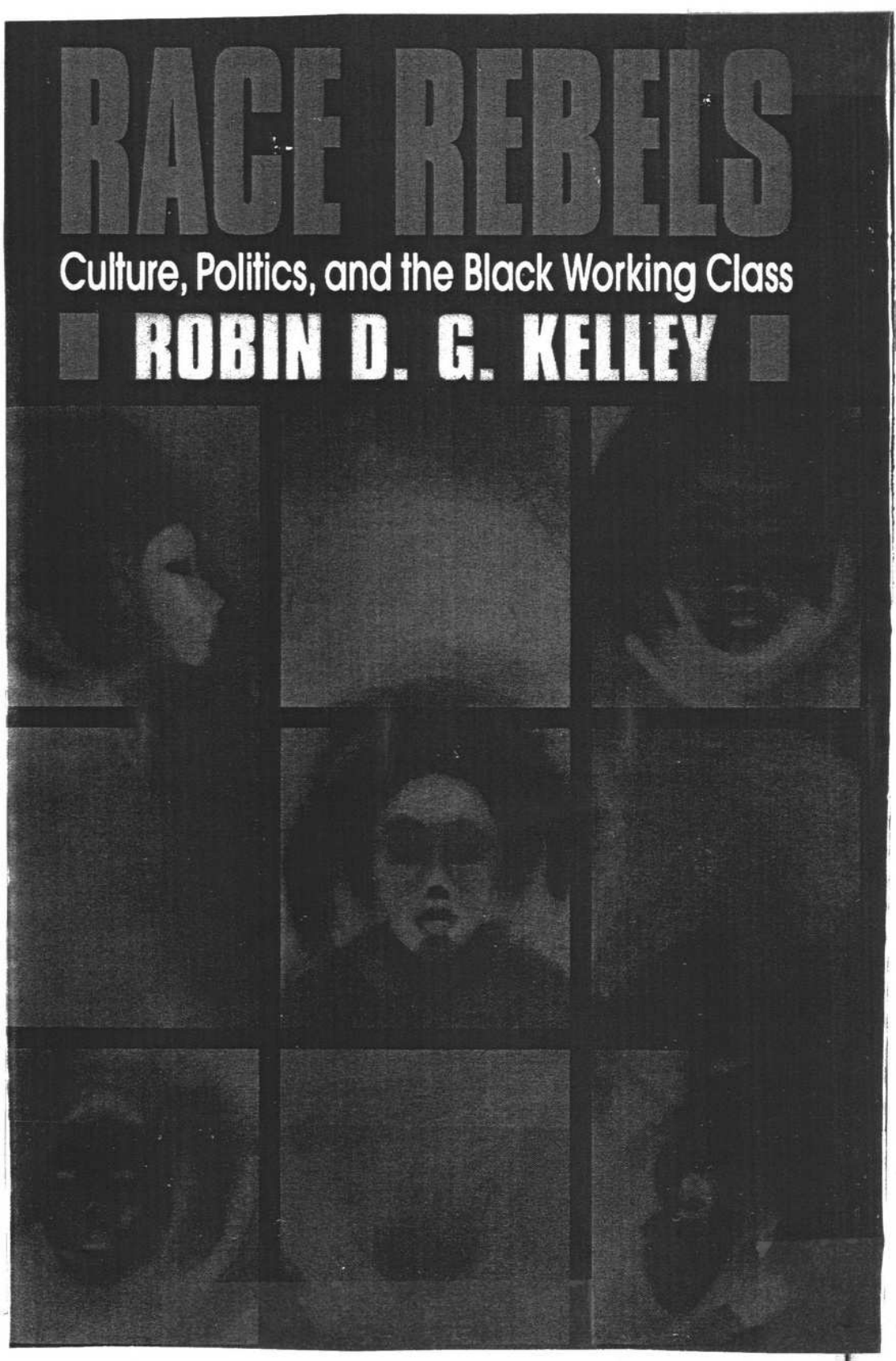
TODAY AUGUST 28TH,

LECTURE

FROM 3:30PM TO 5:00PM

AT THE

<GRAMSCI MONUMENT>



Chapter 2

"We Are Not What We Seem"

The Politics and Pleasures of Community

Each day when you see us black folk upon the dusty land of the farms or upon the hard pavement of the city streets, you usually take us for granted and think you know us, but our history is far stranger than you suspect, and we are not what we seem.

—RICHARD WRIGHT, *Twelve Million Black Voices*[1]

[T]he Negro, in spite of his open-faced laughter, his seeming acquiescence, is particularly evasive. You see we are a polite people and we do not say to our questioner, "Get out of here!" We smile and tell him or her something that satisfies the white person because, knowing so little about us, he doesn't know what he is missing.

—ZORA NEALE HURSTON, *Mules and Men*[2]

"In the dark, we vented our rage. But in the bright of day and out in the open, we were often well-behaved and cooperative." The darkness to which Gloria Wade-Gayles is referring was a segregated movie theater in Memphis, Tennessee. The "rage" she and her friends vented took the form of popcorn raining from the "Negroes Only" balcony, on to the unexpectant heads of "white people who sat beneath us in cushioned chairs, secure, they thought, in their power."[3]

This passage is more than a revealing anecdote about resistance; it is a metaphor for the pleasures and politics of black communities under segregation. Like the passages from Richard Wright and Zora

Neale Hurston, the crucial lesson she offers us is that in order to "know" the history of black working people we must slip into the darkness. We must strip away the various masks African Americans wear in their daily struggles to negotiate relationships or contest power in public spaces, and search for ways to gain entry into the private world hidden beyond the public gaze. For it is here, in the homes, social institutions, cultures, thoughts, actions, and language that one finds an essential component of Southern black working-class consciousness and politics in the Age of Jim Crow.

Building Community in the Bright of Day

Several Southern labor and urban historians have already begun to unveil the hidden social and cultural world of black working people and assess its political significance. A number of recent studies have established that during the era of Jim Crow, black working people carved out social space free from the watchful eye of white authority or, in a few cases, the moralizing of the black middle class. These social spaces constituted a partial refuge from the humiliations and indignities of racism, class pretensions, and wage work, and in many cases they housed an alternative culture that placed more emphasis on collectivist values, mutuality, and fellowship.[4]

This is not to say that there were no vicious, exploitative relationships within Southern black communities, or that black institutions were immune from the tentacles of Jim Crow. Black working-class *families*, for example, were sites for internal conflicts as well as key institutions for sustaining a sense of community and solidarity.[5] If patriarchal families are, at the very least, a system by which exploited male wage earners control and exploit the labor of women and children, then one would presumably find a material basis for a good deal of intrafamily conflict, and perhaps an array of resistance strategies, all framed within an ideology that justifies the subordinate status of women and children.[6] We might ask, therefore, how do conflicts and the exploitation of labor power within the locus of the family and household shape larger working-class politics?

Surprisingly, very few U.S. labor and African American historians have asked this question. Indeed, the role of families in the formation

not been sufficiently explored, in part because most scholarship continues to privilege the workplace and production over the household and reproduction. Critiquing E. P. Thompson's oft-cited formulation of class formation, feminist labor historians Carolyn Steedman and Elizabeth Faue remind us that class identities and ideologies are not simply made at work or in collective struggles against capital. Steedman, for example, points out that because radical histories of working people are so invested in a materialist, workplace-centered understanding of class, it leaves very little space "to discuss the *development* of class consciousness (as opposed to its expression), nor for an understanding of it as a learned position, *learned* in childhood, and often through the exigencies of difficult and lonely lives." Likewise, Elizabeth Faue asks us to look more carefully at the formation of class, race, and gender identities long before young people enter the wage labor force. She adds that "focusing on reproduction would give meaning to the relationship between working class family organization and behavior and working class collective action and labor organization."[7]

Such a reexamination of black working-class families should provide richer insights into how the hidden transcript informs public, collective action. We might return, for example, to the common claim that black mothers and grandmothers in the Age of Jim Crow raised their boys to show deference to white people. Were black working-class parents "emasculating" potential militants, as was argued by several black male writers in the 1960s, or were they arming their boys with a much more sophisticated understanding of the political and cultural terrain of struggle?[8] And what about the recollections of black women who remember their mothers teaching them values and strategies that helped them survive and resist race, class, and gender oppression?[9] Once we begin to look at the family as a central (if not *the* central) institution where political ideologies are formed and reproduced, we may discover that the households themselves hold the key to explaining particular episodes of black working-class resistance. A brilliant example is Elsa Barkley Brown's essay on African American families and political activism during Reconstruction. She not only demonstrates the central role of black women (and even children) in Republican Party politics despite the lack of female suf-

cans constructed a notion of citizenship in which the franchise was the collective property of the whole family. Men who did not vote according to the family's wishes were severely disciplined or ostracized from community institutions.[10]

While the politics of family life remains elusive, the role that community organizations played in shaping black working-class politics, culture, and ideology is much clearer. Grass-roots institutions such as mutual benefit associations, fraternal organizations, and religious groups not only helped families with basic survival needs, but created and sustained bonds of fellowship, mutual support networks, and a collectivist ethos that ultimately informed black working-class political struggle. Fraternal and mutual benefit societies, in particular, provided funds and other resources to members in need and to the poor generally, including death benefits (mainly to cover burial costs) and assistance for families whose members became seriously ill or lost their job.

The social links created through organizations such as the Knights of Pythias, the Odd Fellows, the Masons, the Elks, and the Independent Order of St. Luke occasionally translated into community and labor struggles. In Atlanta, for example, benevolent and secret societies among black women constituted the organizational structures through which washerwomen waged a citywide strike in 1881. Organized under the auspices of the "Washing Society," a secret protective association that operated much like a mutual benefit society, the strikers not only demonstrated incredible solidarity (in some cases prompting other domestic workers in the city to demand higher wages) but raised money to pay fines and post bail when strikers were arrested. In addition to relying on their own treasury, they received donations from churches and fraternal orders with which many of the strikers were also affiliated. In West Virginia, where black membership in fraternal orders reached nearly 33,000 in 1922, the black rank and file entered the United Mine Workers with considerable organizational experience. The bonds of fellowship developed in these fraternal orders played an important role in consolidating black union support, even if some of the orders' middle-class leadership opposed unionization.[11]

Although the balance of power within these organizations was not always equal, at times leaning toward male dominance and the mid-

dle class exercising more influence than their numbers, benevolent societies were structured in a democratic manner that allowed all voices to play some kind of role in constructing a vision of the community.[12] Black workers, therefore, entered the workplace or the labor movement with their own political culture. Anchored in a prophetic religious ideology, these collectivist institutions and practices took root and flourished in a profoundly undemocratic society.

Yet, while black institutions were built and maintained on fairly democratic principles, we need to acknowledge that cross-class alliances, fellowship, and mutuality were constructed in the context of intraracial class and gender tensions. There was a hidden transcript of mutual disdain, disappointment, and even fear which occasionally found its way into the public transcript. For some middle-class blacks, for example, the black poor were regarded as lazy, self-destructive, and prone to criminal behavior. Geraldine Moore, a black middle-class resident of Birmingham and author of *Behind the Ebony Mask*, wrote that many poor African Americans in her city "know nothing but waiting for a handout of some kind, drinking, cursing, fighting and prostitution."[13] From the other side, in his study of a small Mississippi town during the late 1930s, sociologist Allison Davis found that "lower-class" blacks often "accused upper-class persons (the 'big shots,' the 'Big Negroes') of snobbishness, color preference, extreme selfishness, disloyalty in caste leadership, ('sellin' out to white folks'), and economic exploitation of their patients and customers."[14]

To understand the significance of internal conflict among African Americans, we need to examine how communities are constructed and sustained rather than begin with the presumption that a tight-knit, harmonious black community has always existed (until recently) across time and space. This sort of romantic view of a "golden age" of black community—an age when any elder could beat a misbehaving child, when the black middle class mingled with the poor and offered themselves as "role models," when black professionals cared more about their downtrodden race than their bank accounts—is not only disingenuous but has stood in the place of serious historical research on class relations within African American communities. As a dominant trope in the popular social science literature on the so-called "underclass," it has hindered explanations of the contemporary crisis

in urban America by presuming a direct causal relationship between the disappearance of middle-class role models as a result of desegregation and the so-called moral degeneration of the black jobless and underemployed working class left behind in the cities.[15]

The concept of "role models" overstates the extent to which notions of respectability, morality, and community responsibility are passed down by individual example. It not only presumes that these values originate solely with the black middle class, but it obscures the role that community institutions play in determining and instilling modes of behavior, beliefs, expectations, and moral vision. When we begin to look at, say, black churches as places where cultural values were enacted, taught, and policed, we discover that the so-called "lower class" was not always on the receiving end.[16] Occasionally it was the wealthier black folk who violated Christian principles—especially those who did not help the less fortunate or whose tithe was insufficient. Working-class women demonstrated as much vigilance as their middle-class counterparts in enforcing the general principle that cleanliness is next to Godliness. Baptist women of all classes distributed small pamphlets published by the National Baptist Convention bearing titles such as "How to Dress," "Anti-Hanging Out Committee," and "Take a Bath First."[17]

More importantly, working people built and sustained black churches with their own hard earned wages. In West Virginia, black coal miners raised thousands of dollars to construct and maintain churches, and when money was tight during the Depression, they held rallies and fundraisers to pay debts and retain ministers. Black religious leaders understood the crucial importance of their working-class congregations, especially the women. In 1915, a report from the Women's Convention of the National Baptist Convention acknowledged that it was "the poor washer-woman, cook and toiler [who] has built up nine-tenths of all our institutions and churches."[18]

Black church members also helped build Southern labor unions, especially during the era of industrial unionism in the 1930s and 1940s, when the Congress of Industrial Organizations sought to organize industries that employed large numbers of African Americans. Unions such as the Food, Tobacco, Agricultural, and Allied Workers (FTA), the Steel Workers Organizing Committee (SWOC), and the International Union of Mine, Mill and Smelter Workers often held

meetings in black churches and actively recruited sympathetic black ministers to their cause.[19] And when black working people entered the house of labor, they brought the spirit, culture, and rituals of the house of God with them. Southern CIO organizer Lucy Randolph Mason had vivid memories of how black workers turned union gatherings into revival meetings: "Those meetings were deeply religious. A colored member would pray and lead in singing and dismiss the gathering with a blessing. In one group there was an elderly Negro who 'lined out' the Lord's prayer verse by verse while others repeated the words after him. They were praying for more of the Kingdom of God on earth."[20] At a meeting of the Mine, Mill and Smelter Workers' union in Bessemer, Alabama, journalist George Stoney witnessed a similar scenario:

> It was an "open meeting," and Brother Harris (formerly minister) was there to preach a sermon on the goodness of unions and why people ought to join them. His was the shouting, epigrammatic style of the evangelist. If you substitute "God" for "union," "devil" for "employer" and "hell" for "unorganized" you would have had a rousing sermon. The illustrations, minus their profanity, might well have been used to show the power and goodness of God instead of the union. And his "why not join" was so much in the church tone, I was afraid he was going to have us sing the hymn of invitation.[21]

During the late 1930s in Birmingham, black gospel quartets turned out to be crucial for the expansion and legitimation of unionism. The Steel Workers' Organizing Committee even had its own vocal group known as the Bessemer Big Four Quartet. Made up of former members of the West Highland Jubilee Singers, a popular quartet active in the 1920s, the Bessemer Big Four Quartet performed at union meetings and were heard occasionally on local radio broadcasts. Like most other quartets, the Bessemer Big Four did not simply use the gospel form to create secular union songs. Rather, they performed deeply religious compositions that sanctioned, or rather sanctified, unionism. Here are some lines from a song they recorded entitled "Satisfied":

> Well you read in the Bible,
> You read it well.
> Listen to the story,

That I'm bound to tell.
Christ's last Passover,
He had his Communion.
He told his disciples,
Stay in the union.
Together you stand,
Divided you fall.
Stay in the union,
I'll save you all.
Ever since that wonderful day my soul's been
satisfied.

The religious groundings of the Southern labor movement not only provided a cultural and moral basis for working-class solidarity, but gave its members a reason for interracial unity beyond basic utilitarianism, or what the Industrial Workers of the World called "stomach equality." Black and white workers were all "children of God together in a collective struggle."[22]

Even if religious ideology, spiritual values, and gospel music united Southern working people and offered a moral justification to fight the bosses, Southern black church leaders were, more often than not, hostile or indifferent to organized labor. Part of their reluctance to support trade unions had to do with organized labor's rather mixed record on racial equality (which is why the CIO's explicit attempt to attract black workers gained the support of some ministers who had been hostile to unions in the past). A few ministers opposed unions because they either benefited from white patronage, or were simply intimidated by local authorities and corporate interests.[23]

No matter where individual clergy stood in relation to unionism, the faith of most black congregations seemed unshakable. The church was more than an institution. In addition to providing fellowship, laying the foundation for a sense of community, and offering help to those in need, churches were first and foremost places of reflection and *spiritual empowerment*. By spiritual empowerment, I do not simply mean a potential site for political organizing. Rather, the sacred, the spirit world, was often understood and invoked by some African Americans as veritable weapons to protect themselves or to attack others. How do we interpret divine intervention, especially when

one's prayers are *answered*? How does the belief that God is by one's side affect one's willingness to fight with police, leave an abusive relationship, stand up to a foreman, participate in a strike, steal, or break tools? How do historians make sense of, say, conjure or "hoodoo" (magic) as a strategy of resistance, retaliation, or defense in the daily lives of some working-class African Americans? Can a sign from above, a conversation with a ghost, a spell cast by an enemy, or talking in tongues unveil the hidden transcript? If some worker turns to a root doctor or prayer rather than a labor union to make an employer less evil, is this a case of "false consciousness"? These are not idle questions. Most of the oral narratives and memoirs of Southern black workers speak of these events or moments as having enormous material consequences.[24]

Of course, the divine and netherworlds of conjure were rarely, if ever, the only resistance or defense strategies used by black working people, but in their minds, bodies, and social relationships this was real power—power of which neither the CIO, the Populists, nor the NAACP could boast. With the exception of Vincent Harding, no historian that I know of since W.E.B. DuBois has been bold enough to assert a connection between the spirit and spiritual world of African Americans and political struggle.[25] Anticipating his critics, DuBois's *Black Reconstruction* boldly considered freedpeople's understanding of divine intervention in their narratives of emancipation and, in doing so, gave future historians insight into an aspect of African American life that cannot be reduced to just "culture":

> Foolish talk, all of this, you say, of course; and that is because no American now believes in his religion. Its facts are mere symbolism; its revelation vague generalities; its ethics a matter of carefully balanced gain. But to most of the four million black folk emancipated by civil war, God was real. They knew Him. They had met Him personally in many a wild orgy of religious frenzy, or in the black stillness of the night.[26]

Building Community in the Dark

Not every nighttime "frenzy" was sacred. Many African American working people pierced the stillness of the night with the sounds of

blues and jazz, laughter and handclapping, moans and cries. These were times when they had hoped God looked the other way.

These secular nights are key to understanding the hidden transcript, the private worlds of black working people where thoughts, dreams, and actions that were otherwise choked back in public could find expression. These secular spaces of leisure and pleasure are no less important than churches or mutual benefit societies. But what can we know about this side of community? After all, the places of rest, relaxation, recreation, and restoration rarely maintained archives or recorded the everyday conversations and noises that filled bars, dance halls, blues clubs, barber shops, beauty salons, and street corners of the black community. However, folklorists, anthropologists, oral historians, musicians, and writers fascinated by "Negro life" preserved a relatively large body of cultural texts which have allowed scholars access to the hidden transcript. A handful of pioneering scholars and critics, including Amiri Baraka, Lawrence Levine, and Sterling Stuckey, demonstrate that African American working people created a rich, dynamic culture that served as both a window into a hidden consciousness and a "weapon of the weak." These authors not only insisted that black culture represents at least a partial rejection of the dominant ideology, but that it was forged within the context of struggle against class and racial domination. As archaeologists of African American rural and urban working-class culture whose site/sight extends widely, they have exhumed and interpreted an array of materials. A few scholars in literature, folklore, even political science, have re-examined much of this material to reinterpret historically the politics of race, gender, and class. The challenge for Southern labor historians is to determine precisely how this rich expressive culture—which was frequently in conflict with formal working-class institutions—shaped and reflected black working-class infrapolitics.[27]

Of course, not all blues or gospel lyrics spoke to oppression, nor could one assign political meaning to the entire body of folklore, jokes, and various other oral texts. Black working-class culture was created more for pleasure, not merely to challenge or explain domination. But people thought before they acted, and what they thought shaped, and was shaped by, cultural production and consumption. Besides, for a working class whose days consisted of backbreaking wage work, low income, long hours, and pervasive racism, these so-

cial sites were more than relatively free spaces in which the grievances and dreams of an exploited class could be openly articulated. They enabled African Americans to take back their bodies for their own pleasure rather than another's profit.

Studies conducted during the 1920s and 1930s of public recreation in Southern cities reveal that opportunities for *whites* were meager, which meant that facilities for African Americans were woefully inadequate. Movie theaters, parks, recreational centers, swimming pools, and beaches were either segregated, available to African Americans on designated days, or completely off limits. Few Southern cities had outdoor amusement parks, but they, too, were either completely segregated or for whites only.[28] Although African Americans were less than pleased with third-rate segregated facilities, they nevertheless made the most of Jim Crow's parks, theaters, and nickelodeons. In the shadow of "Whites Only" signs and police officers aggressively monitoring the color line, they found pleasure and fellowship, fun and games, in these segregated spaces. Historian Earl Lewis put it best: Southern black folk turned segregation into "congregation." Congregation, Lewis writes, "symbolized an act of free will, whereas segregation represented the imposition of another's will. . . . [African Americans] discovered, however, that congregation in a Jim Crow environment produced more space than power. They used this space to gather their cultural bearings, to mold the urban setting."[29]

But these secular forms of congregation frequently drew the wrath of black sacred congregations. The church's strict moral codes and rules for public behavior often came into conflict with aspects of black working-class culture, particularly their engagement with commericalized leisure. Baptists and Methodists disciplined members for patronizing gin joints, for wild dancing, and for gambling. Through newspaper colums and leaflets, male and female activists in the church railed against a range of improprieties, such as "gum chewing, loud talking, gaudy colors, the nickelodeon, jazz," to name but a few. A leader of the Baptist church warned that "The sure way to ruin is by way of the public dance hall."[30]

Indeed, the moral panic over commercialized leisure among black middle-class spokespersons had reached crisis proportions by the eve of World War I. In 1914, W.E.B. DuBois and Augustus Dill surveyed several hundred leading African Americans about the state of "man-

ners and morals" among young people, and many pointed to popular culture as the root cause of moral degeneracy. "Movies, I believe," replied one informant, "have an unwholesome effect upon the young people. Roller skating, ragtime music, cabaret songs, and ugly suggestions of the big city are all pernicious. The dancing clubs in the big cities are also vicious." Another respondent feared that young people "assemble in dives and hang around the corners in great numbers, especially the boys. Many of them are becoming gamblers and idlers."[31]

Women were scrutinized much more closely than men. They were told how to dress and warned not to even venture into "unwholesome" amusements. Both men and women of the church insisted that the home sphere is where the female belongs—unless, of course, she is performing the worthy labors of organizing for the church, helping the community, or earning money to put food on the table. As Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham points out,

> the competing images of the church and the street symbolized cultural divisions within the mass of the black working poor. . . . [T]he church and the street constituted opposing sites of assembly, with gender-laden and class-laden meanings. The street signified male turf, a public space of worldly dangers and forbidden pleasures. . . . Women who strolled the streets or attended dance halls and cheap theaters promiscuously blurred the boundaries of gender.[32]

But resistance from ministers, middle-class leaders, upright working-class congregants—not to mention white employers—did not stop African American working people from "hanging out"; nor did it stop them from showing up in church on Sunday morning. "Every Friday and Saturday night," recalls Atlanta blues musician Roy Dunn, "somebody in a different place had what you call an open house. They'd give some kind of party, a barbecue or something, in order to give people somewhere to go. Cause there wasn't nowhere until Sunday, and that was church." Aside from house parties, some of the most popular sites of Friday and Saturday night congregation were dance halls, blues clubs, and "jook joints."[33] In darkened rooms ranging in size from huge halls to tiny dens, black working people of both sexes shook and twisted their overworked bodies, drank, talked, engaged in sexual play, and—in spite of occasional fights—reinforced their sense of community. Whether it was the call and response of a

blues singer's lyrics or the sight of dozens of sweaty brown bodies in motion, doing the "slop," the "snake hips," or any of the familiar dances of the day, the form and content of such leisure activities were unmistakably collective.[34]

I am not suggesting that parties, dances, and other leisure pursuits were merely guises for political events, or that these cultural practices were clear acts of resistance. Instead, much if not most of African American popular culture can be characterized as, to use Raymond Williams's terminology, "alternative" rather than oppositional.[35] Most people attended those events to escape from the world of assembly lines, relief lines, and color lines, and to leave momentarily the individual and collective battles against racism, sexism, and material deprivation. But this is still only part of the story, for seeking the sonic, visceral pleasures of music and fellowship, the sensual pleasures of food, drink, and dancing, was not just about escaping the vicissitudes of Southern life. Black patrons went with people who had a shared knowledge of these cultural forms, people with whom they felt kinship, people to whom they told stories about the day or the latest joke, people who shared a common vernacular filled with a grammar and vocabulary that struggled to articulate the beauty and burden of their racial, class, and gender experiences in the South. They were often spaces which allowed for freer sexual expression, particularly for women whose sexuality was often circumscribed by employers, family members, the law, and the fear of sexual assault in a society with few protections for black women. One scholar of black dance wrote, "In the atmosphere of increasing urban anonymity and the pleasures of a good time, dance in the honky-tonk became more directly associated with sensation and sexual coupling." Coot Grant, a performer who grew up in Birmingham watching dancers through a "peephole in the wall" at her father's honky-tonk, remembers that the popular dances of the turn of the century bore provocative titles like "the Fanny Bump, Buzzard Lope, Fish Tail, Eagle Rock, Itch, Shimmy, Squat . . . and a million others."[36]

Knowing what happens in these spaces of pleasure can help us understand the solidarity black people have shown at political mass meetings, illuminate the bonds of fellowship one finds in churches and voluntary associations, and unveil the *conflicts* across class and gender lines that shape and constrain these collective struggles. Fur-

thermore, when we consider the needs of employers and the power of the Protestant work ethic in American culture, these events undermined labor discipline while, in many cases, reinforcing black working-class ties to consumer culture. Black working people who spent time and their precious little money at the dance halls, blues clubs, and house parties, cultural critic Paul Gilroy astutely observes, essentially

> see waged work as itself a form of servitude. At best, it is viewed as a necessary evil and is sharply counterposed to the more authentic freedoms that can only be enjoyed in nonwork time. The black body is here celebrated as an instrument of pleasure rather than an instrument of labor. The nighttime becomes the right time, and the space allocated for recovery and recuperation is assertively and provocatively occupied by the pursuit of leisure and pleasure.[37]

Yet, we must keep in mind that places of leisure were also places of work for some segments of the black working class, particularly women for whom there existed few opportunities outside of domestic service. Local singers and dancers, for instance, frequently held day jobs, turning to performance as both a means of artistic self-expression as well as an additional source of income. Besides waitresses, barmaids, coat checks, and assorted service workers whose tips derived largely from the wages of black working-class male consumers, we must also consider the work experiences of a wide range of "sex workers" and escorts. Some dance halls employed young women to dance with unescorted men for a small "per-dance" fee of a nickel or dime. Sexual liaisons and companionship could be purchased by men, and the men and women involved in the trafficking of female bodies made their living selling women's sexuality. To look at the urban pleasure/sex industry in the South by exploring labor relations and the labor process would yield some interesting results, no doubt.

Given the coercive and illicit nature of this part of the underground economy, the hazards involved, the particular gender and racial dimensions, a labor history approach alone has obvious limitations. For instance, while prostitution offered women a means of income to supplement wage labor or enable them to escape domestic service, we must consider the extent to which anonymous sex or dancing was a source of pleasure, especially compared to cleaning and cooking. So

much so that women who traveled unescorted at night in public were frequently assumed to be prostitutes, especially if they were anywhere near the places of amusement. In Atlanta, for example, the police had what was called "a sundown law with women." Often it did not matter if the woman was a known prostitute or not; if she was by herself in a restaurant or club, she was likely to be arrested.[38] Furthermore, in light of the ways in which black women's sexual expression or participation in popular amusements (especially in heterosocial public places) has been constrained, not only by Jim Crow but by Victorian mores, black women's involvement in the pleasure industry might be seen as both typical and transgressive. Typical in that black women's bodies have historically been exploited as sites of male pleasure; transgressive in that women were able to break the straightjacket of what Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham calls the "politics of respectability" in exchange for the possibility of female pleasure. It is also potentially empowering since it turn labors not associated with wage work—dancing, sexual play, intercourse—into income.[39]

While Friday and Saturday nights in Southern cities were moments set aside for the "pursuit of leisure and pleasure," some of the most intense skirmishes between black working people and authority erupted after weekend gatherings. During World War II in Birmingham, for example, racial conflicts on public transportation on Friday and Saturday nights were commonplace; many of the incidents involved black youth returning from dances and parties. This should not be surprising since these young men and women who rode public transportation in groups were emboldened by a sense of social solidarity rooted in a shared culture, common friends, generational identity, not to mention a level of naiveté as to the possible consequences of "acting up" in white-dominated public space. Leaving social sites which ultimately reinforced a sense of collectivity through shared culture, combined possibly with the effect of alcohol and reefer, emboldened many young black passengers. On the South Bessemer line, which passed some of the popular black dance halls, white passengers and operators dreaded the "unbearable" presence of large numbers of African Americans who "pushed and shoved" white riders at will. As one conductor noted, "negroes are rough and boisterous when leaving downtown dances at this time of night."[40]

The nighttime also afforded black working people the opportunity

to become something other than workers. In a world where clothes constituted signifiers of identity and status, "dressing up" was a way of shedding the degradation of work and collapsing status distinctions between themselves and their oppressors. As one Atlanta domestic worker remembers, the black business district of Auburn Avenue was "where we dressed up, because we couldn't dress up during the day. . . . We'd dress up and put on our good clothes and go to the show on Auburn Avenue. And you were going places. It was like white folks' Peachtree."[41]

Seeing oneself and others "dressed up" was enormously important in terms of constructing a collective identity based on something other than wage work, presenting a public challenge to the dominant stereotypes of the black body, and reinforcing a sense of dignity that was perpetually being assaulted. Many poor black parents dressed their children in a manner that camouflaged class differences. "Only by our address," Gloria Wade-Gayles recalls, "could our teachers identify many of us as residents of the project. We wore starched hand-me-downs or inexpensive clothes bought on time and in basement sales at stores on Main Street. Shinola polish kept our shoes white or shiny, and shoe repairmen on the corner kept them soled." Ironically, "better class Negroes," who often criticized working-class African Americans for their slovenly appearance, sometimes found their efforts to dress stylishly annoying and unproductive. In his book, *The Georgia Negro: A History* (1937), Asa Gordon admonished the state's black working-class population for spending more on clothes "than circumstances demanded and income suggested." African Americans "insist on wearing clothes, that, for them, represent extravagant luxury. Negroes with small incomes insist on wearing the best clothes 'money can buy.'"[42]

These efforts to re-present the body through dress were a double-edged sword since the styles African Americans adopted all too frequently reinforced rather than challenged bourgeois notions of respectability. Indeed, by ridiculing black efforts to appear "respectable," white elites secured their own status as the measure of taste and respectability. Minstrelsy and popular film commonly lampooned African Americans who dressed stylishly for public outings, recasting this black version of the bourgeois promenade as another example of Rastus aping "better-class" white citizens.[43]

Nevertheless, the political implications of dress as an assertion of dignity and resistance should not be dismissed as peripheral to the "real" struggles of Southern black working people. Clothes have their own social meanings, depending on the context in which they are worn. Understandably, clothing could serve as a badge of oppression or a sign of transgression.[44] The obvious and most extreme cases involved returning black veterans who were beaten and lynched for wearing their military uniforms in public. In Georgia alone, where twenty-two African Americans were lynched in 1919, it was clear that black soldiers were singled out. One veteran was beaten to death by a mob in Blakely, Georgia, "for wearing his uniform too long." There are several cases during the Second World War in which black uniformed soldiers—most of them stationed in the South—were beaten or shot by white civilians or police officers. As military personnel representing a higher authority, the uniforms emboldened some African Americans to challenge segregation (see chapter 3). More often than not, however, the uniforms turned black soldiers into moving targets. To ensure their safety, many African American soldiers chose to wear only their civilian clothes when out on furlough "on account of intimidation."[45]

Protecting the Veil

Culture and community are essential for understanding black working-class infrapolitics. Hidden in homes, dance halls, and churches, embedded in expressive cultures, is where much of what is choked back at work or in white-dominated public space can find expression. "Congregation" enables black communities to construct and enact a sense of solidarity; to fight with each other; to maintain and struggle over a collective memory of oppression and pleasure, degradation and dignity; to debate what it means to be "black," "Negro," "colored," and so forth.

Congregation can also be a dangerous thing. While Jim Crow ordinances ensured that churches, bars, social clubs, barber shops, beauty salons, even alleys, would remain "black" space, segregation gave African Americans a place to hide, a place to plan. When white ruling groups had reason to suspect dissident activities among African Americans, authorities tried to monitor and sometimes shut down

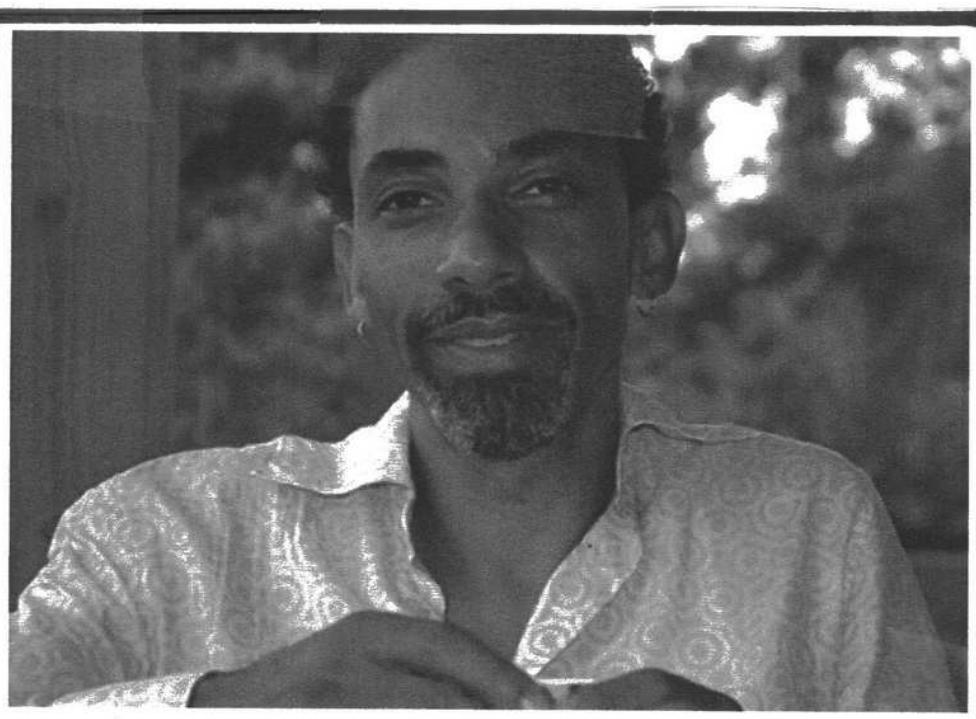
black social spaces—usually swiftly and violently. Mere rumors of black uprisings made any black gathering place fair game for illegal, often brutal, invasions.[46]

To penetrate the other side of the veil, employers and police officials actively cultivated black "stool pigeons" or informers to maintain tabs on the black community. According to Hosea Hudson, a black labor organizer and Communist Party member in Alabama during the 1930s and 1940s, police and welfare agencies often relied on "stool pigeons" to inform on their neighbors. "Many times when these welfare officials came into a community, first thing they do, was going to a [stool pigeon's] home before they go round to see anybody else on this block." The agent would then proceed "from house to house, and could near about tell you if you had done anything to earn any money from last week until this time, because that's what these stooges in the community would do."[47] The success of stool pigeons often depended on the same strategies black working people used to resist exploitation. Black informers had to maintain a low profile and don a mask in front of other black folk since they were less effective as spies without entry into the community of workers.

That stool pigeons can exist in black communities, and that their reasons for turning informant might be motivated by the same circumstances that led many of Hosea Hudson's comrades into the Communist Party (i.e., joblessness and poverty), reinforce the idea that neither mutual oppression nor common skin color alone explain black working-class solidarity. The bases and forms of resistance were not only a product of their experiences with racism, wage labor, and sexism, but were also rooted in African American communities' conversations, cultural practices, and collective efforts to make their lives better. When we search for the locus of working-class opposition, we ought to look not only at antiracist activities or workplace conflicts but at the dynamic processes by which social and cultural institutions were constructed and time and space for leisure appropriated.

The culture of African American working people shaped and was shaped by black community institutions, constantly recreated and reinforced a sense of collective identity, and was itself passionately contested. Individual and collective experiences, grievances, and dreams were talked about and reflected upon in the hidden social spaces that tend to fall between the cracks of political history—spaces as diverse

as barber shops, bars, and benevolent societies. By ignoring or belittling these shared practices and privileging the public utterances of black middle-class leadership, several race relations scholars, like Lester Lamon in his study of Tennessee, decided that black working people "remained silent, either taking the line of least resistance or implicitly adopting the American faith in hard work and individual effort."[48] If they had looked deeper beyond the veil, beyond the public transcript of accommodation and traditional protest, they would have found more clamor than silence.



Robin D. G. Kelley

1. The question of the subject – "*Who am I*?", "*What is a human being*?" – is always flanked by the question as to meaning, the meaning and origin of human existence.

2. Philosophy lives from the phastasm of the prescriptive securing of the essence of the subject in a substantial subjectivity, subjectivity being the ontological name of the ontic singularity, which constitutes the individual (empirical, particular) subject.

3. The subjectivity of the subject means the universal being of the human being, insofar as it precedes its singular appearance, its empirical nature and its ontic manifestation in real space.

4. This being has been given various names in the history of the question of the subject, in other words the history of philosophy.

5. Sometimes people said *psyché*, sometimes *ens creatum*, sometimes *res cogitans*, sometimes *homo ectypus*, sometimes *reason*, sometimes *self-awareness*.

6. Friedrich Nietzsche brought movement into this ontological nomenclature.

7. He opened the subject into an exterior, a subject-exterior, which – instead of being the noumenal sphere of its ontological prescription – indicates the impossibility of substantial or teleological certainty.

8. The subject, the human being, is the animal *not bound by its instincts*.

9. Evidently this definition of the human being, which lies precisely in his not being ontologically defined, is still in the tradition of the onto-zoological definition of the human being as an *animal rationale* (or *irrationale*), as *zoon logon echon*, as a living organism defined by the *logos*, the ability to speak and to encompass meaning.

10. Nietzsche's definition of the human subject opens the subject up to a *logos*, which does not simply confront non-meaning as its opposite.

11. Nietzsche says: The subject has the *logos* as the essentially undefined, his capacity for language and meaning is the opening-up to non-meaning and the margins of language, to the dimension of an unchained, out-of-kilter *logos* no longer assured in any principle, a crazy or errant *cogito*; to its truth as substantial desert and as a desert of the substantial, and of substance itself.

12. The substance, the essence, the meaning and the nature of the subject is found by Nietzsche in its lack of substance and essence, in non-meaning and in its ontological artificiality.

13. Instead of according with a divine plan and a substantial order, the subject marks the non-existence of such a plan and such an order: the ontological nakedness of human subjectivity.

14. Twentieth-century thought made the exploration of this nakedness, of this desert-situation of the subject, its task.

15. Martin Heidegger opens up human existence to its historicity and to the world as a universe "present for a purpose" ("zuhanden"), in which it sojourns and by which it orients itself practically at first, rather than reflexively or theoretically.

16. Jean-Paul Sartre urges the subject to assert its ontological nakedness as a desert of freedom for self-determination. In contemporary thought, Giorgio Agamben insists on the contentlessness of the subject as *l'uomo senza contenuto*.

17. What is true of the artist is what is true of the human being, insofar as the subject is an autopoietic subject, the subject of self-invention and *autoerectio* in the desert of its non-substantiality and ontological indefiniteness: "He finds himself in the paradoxical situation of having to find his essence precisely in the non-essential, his content in mere form."[1]

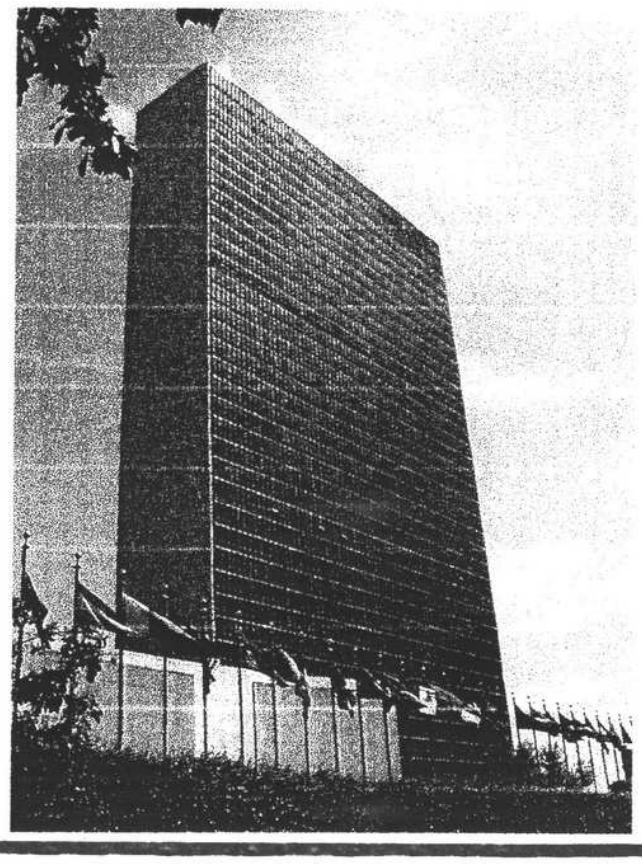
18. That is the ontological situation of the subject today, and always was: having to give oneself a form and a purpose (one's subjectivity), because it is a subject without subjectivity, the subject of freedom: purposeless, faceless, identityless, nameless, contentless, naked.[2]

1 Giorgio Agamben, *L'Homme sans contenu*, Paris: Circé 1996, p. 74.
2 Cf. M. Steinweg, "La nudité d'Antigone", in *Failles N° 2 (spring 2006): Situations de la philosophie*, p. 148ff.

«GRAMSCI MONUMENT» SPECIAL FIELD TRIP

ON **THURSDAY, AUGUST 29**:

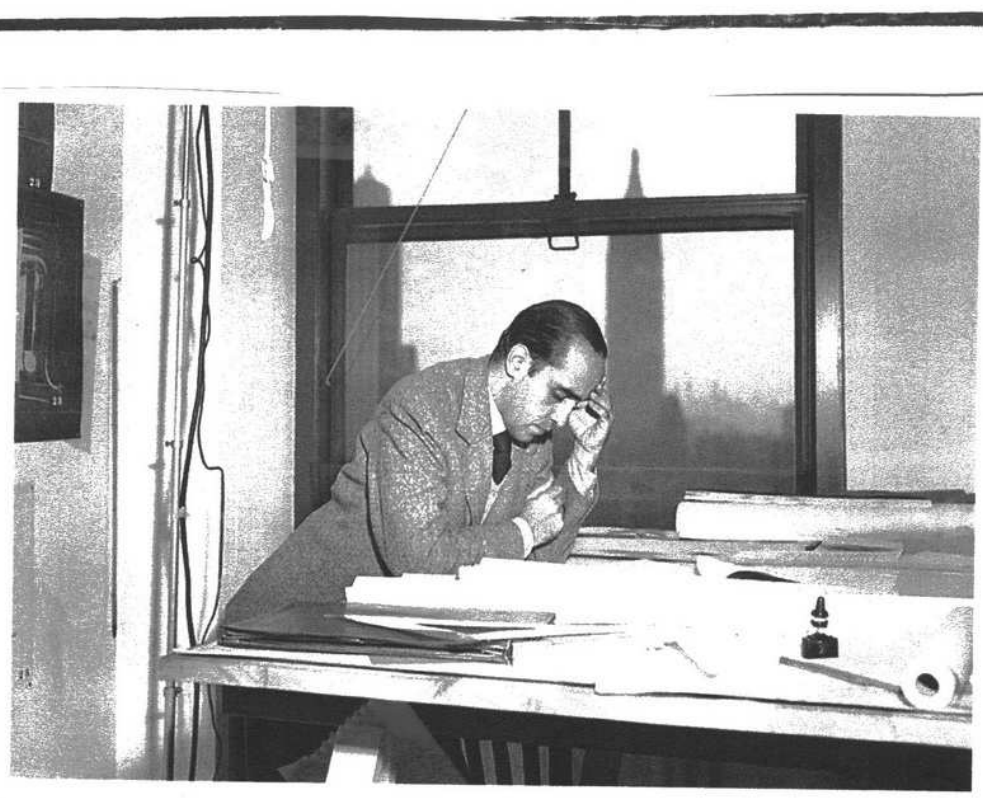
UNITED NATIONS HEADQUARTERS



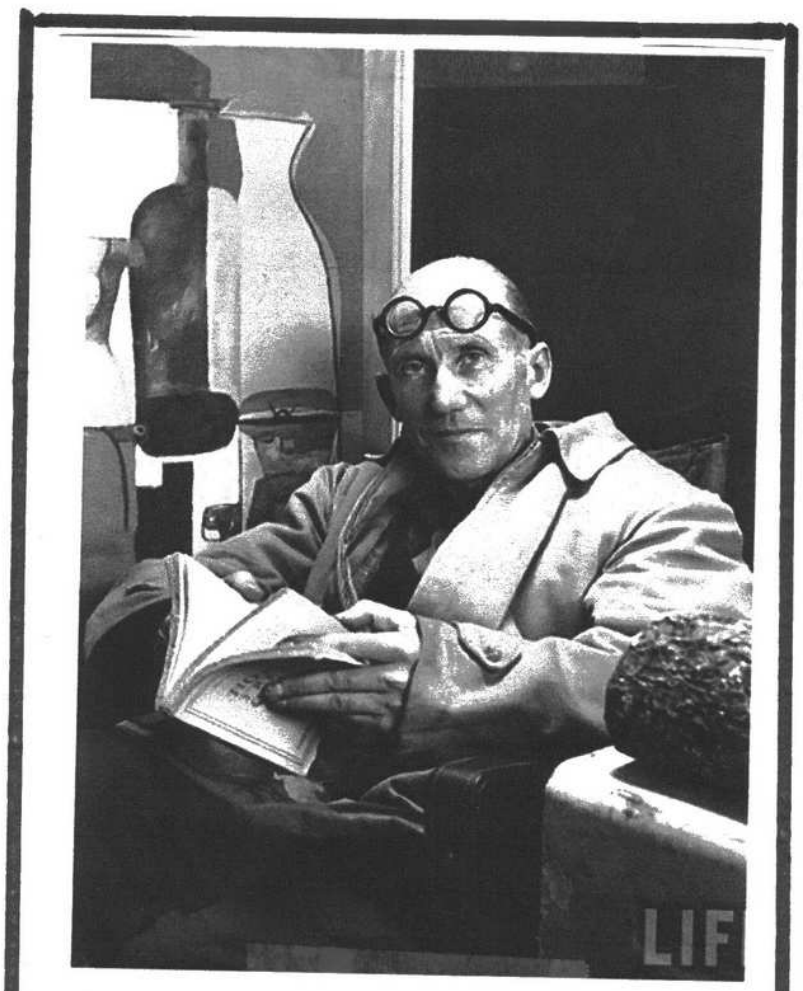
777 United Nations Plaza, New York, NY 10017

(42nd – 44th Street and 2nd Avenue)

ARCHITECTS: Le Corbusier and Oscar Niemeyer



Oscar Niemeyer



Le Corbusier

Oscar Niemeyer, one of the original architects of United Nations Headquarters in New York, going over plans for the building on 18 April 1947. UN Photo

RESIDENT OF THE DAY

ALEX GARCIA