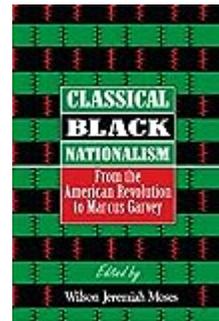


# H-Net Reviews

in the Humanities & Social Sciences



**Wilson Jeremiah Moses, ed.** *Classical Black Nationalism: From the American Revolution to Marcus Garvey*. New York: New York University Press, 1996. x + 257 pp. \$22.00 (paper), ISBN 978-0-8147-5533-4; \$65.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8147-5524-2.



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Wilson Moses continues his quest to make black nationalism intelligible to students and others interested in black Americana. Moses is presenting this work, not as a scholarly edition, but as a teaching text. It is a collection of documents illuminating the thought of representative black nationalists. As such, this volume is a welcome addition to his scholarly work on the topic. To assist in the task of teaching this sometimes controversial material, Moses has provided three useful devices that should give even those immersed in the topic some new insights. The first of these is his long introductory essay. A second useful methodological device is the chronological ordering of black nationalist spokespersons and their ideas. Finally, Moses has assembled a broad sampling of spokespersons, some expected and others novel in their inclusion.

In the Introduction Moses tries to reduce some of the confusion that seems to accompany any discussion about black nationalism. Of paramount importance to him is his definition of classical black nationalism. Moses has mined this vein before, particularly in his minor classic, *The Golden Age of Black Nationalism, 1850-1925*. This new work is a slight rethinking and modification of some of his ideas. He has broadened his definition, allowing for the inclusion of many expressions of the concept. Formerly Moses seemed committed to viewing only those

ideologies that counseled leaving the United States as authoritative black nationalism. In this new collection he expands the definition to formulate the basis for a concept of a national culture as a legitimate nationalist concern.

Despite the expanded scope of his definition, Moses is still committed to his separatist mentality. This is both an asset and a liability. In a positive vein, his commitment to classical nationalism and its separatist dimension should force readers to subject all the authors to a close and critical reading. Also, Moses provides the reader with several categories for analyzing the nationalism of a given spokesperson. Useful here is his employment of the term "protonationalism." Simply critiquing an oppressive power structure is not enough to qualify one as a black nationalist, according to Moses.

On the negative side, Moses does not allow for the multiplicity of black nationalist expressions, as encountered, for example, in Bracey, Meier, and Rudwick's work, *Black Nationalism in America*. His more narrow definition may lead some readers to overlook nuances of opinion among nationalists, and sometimes contradictory aspects of black nationalism. His basic adherence to the separatist idea sometimes obscures the fact that none of the expressions of black nationalism are mutually exclusive. Hence, a nationalist's profile tends to be more

inclusive and overlapping than Moses seems to admit.

The documents are broken into three chronological concentrations. One, "Colonization and Emigration Controversy," handles the years prior to 1850, the "Preclassical" period. Included here are the expected black activists such as Paul Cuffe, James Forten, Robert Alexander Young, and David Walker. One novel inclusion is a selection from Thomas Jefferson's *Notes on the State of Virginia*. No black nationalist, Jefferson is included here as a colonizationist contrast to black American rationales for leaving America. His inclusion will help students understand that, despite the agreement on some perspectives about black American life, Jefferson—like other white colonizationists—was motivated principally by extreme racial prejudice. Another novel but welcome inclusion in this section is an 1833 address by Maria W. Stewart. Moses, almost alone among current scholars, continues to see black women activists as legitimate nationalists.

Part two, "Classical Black Nationalism, 1850-62," constitutes the longest section of the book. By design, it includes the more noted black nationalist spokespersons. Among them are Martin R. Delany, James T. Holly, Frederick Douglass, Alexander Crummell, Henry Highland Garnet, Edward Wilmot Blyden, and Daniel Alexander Payne. But Moses also includes excerpts from President

Abraham Lincoln and from Supreme Court Justice Roger B. Taney, who handed down the racist *Dred Scott* decision. Like the Jefferson inclusion, the writings by Lincoln and Taney show stark contrasts between the conclusions blacks and whites drew about American life. Taney pronounced that black men had no rights that white men were bound to respect. Black activists, on the other hand, sought to affirm their inclusion in the human family and to advocate going elsewhere to demonstrate their capacity to master Christianity, capitalism, and constitutionalism. The documents do reveal, as Moses asserts in his Introduction, that black activists had to have more than an ideological dissatisfaction with white oppression in order to shape a nationalistic consciousness.

The last section, "Black Nationalist Revival, 1895-1925," features selections from only three activists: Henry McNeal Turner, W. E. B. Du Bois, and Marcus Garvey. The documents assembled in this work will provide students and others with a credible reference work on black nationalism, but it will not stand alone as the definitive collection.

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