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**Melissa Victoria Harris-Lacewell: Barbershops, Bibles, and BET**

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## Everyday Talk and Ideology

Say it loud: "I'm Black and I'm proud."

—James Brown, 1968

Instead of a closing-ranks mentality, a prophetic framework encourages a coalition strategy with those deeply committed to antiracist struggle.

—Cornel West, 1993

They have journeyed through the pothole-ridden road of liberal promises and found it ends in a frustrating dead end.

—Black and Right, 1997

Whoever walked behind anyone to freedom? If we can't go hand in hand I don't want to go.

—Hazel Scott, 1974

BLACK PEOPLE come together to worship; organize around communal problems; sit together to cut and style one another's hair; pass news about each other through oral and written networks; and use music, style, and humor to communicate with each other. Along with the intimacies of family and the responsibilities of work, these are the everyday spaces of black people's lives. Yet, with the exception of the church, these everyday contexts of black interactions have largely escaped the notice of social scientists studying the politics of black communities. To more fully appreciate the political thought and action of African Americans, it is imperative to understand that these interactions are more than social. They are the spaces where African Americans jointly develop understandings of their collective interests and create strategies to navigate the complex political world. These strategies are best understood as ideologies, tied to a black intellectual tradition and alive in contemporary African American public opinion. The study of everyday talk in spaces of ordinary black life provides a framework for understanding what African Americans think and the mechanisms of how black people develop political attitudes.

If we are to understand the genesis and development of political thought among African Americans it is important, but insufficient, to

study the fully articulated ideological utterances of black elites. It is important, but insufficient, to map the extraordinary instances of mass-based social movements. It is important, but insufficient, to apply, without revision, models of American public opinion primarily designed to investigate the attitudes of white Americans. It is important, but insufficient, to study the influence of family and childhood socialization on individual attitudes. Understanding African American political attitudes requires an analysis of seemingly mundane interactions and ordinary circumstances of daily black life, because it is in these circumstances that African Americans often do the surprising and critical work of constructing meaningful political worldviews. Through worship, discussion, music, laughter, and news, African Americans construct meaning from the ordinary. Therefore, one important element in understanding how black people interpret and make sense of the political world is to listen in on their everyday talk.

That discourse is central to the work of politics is an old notion. Critical theorists, largely within their work on the public sphere, have argued for the essential role of citizen conversation in cultivating democratic attitudes and action (Tocqueville 1835; Arendt 1958; Habermas 1962; Eagleton 1985; Herbst 1994; Putnam 2000). Mansbridge (1999) locates the everyday talk of citizens at the center of the deliberative political system. She calls attention to this system of interactions that anchors democratic processes and argues that everyday talk is as important as formal deliberation to producing creative and just governance. Engaging in either purely expressive or more goal-directed conversations in protected spaces allows citizens to identify conflicts, better understand their interests, and learn whether or not their interests contribute to a common good.

Gamson empirically demonstrates the significance of ordinary citizen interaction and argues that the study of American public opinion is plagued by a serious deficiency in its failure to account for these interactions. Referencing the collective knowledge of decades of public opinion scholarship, Gamson notes, “We do understand a lot about the end product—the content of opinions they [the American public] express. But on how they get there, on what the issues mean to people, and how they reach their conclusions, we are still groping” (1992, xi). For Gamson, political talk supplies the answers to these unsolved puzzles of public opinion. Listening to people talk about politics, he argues, “allow[s] us to observe the natural vocabulary with which people formulate meaning about issues” (192), and thus to explore the ways that citizens are able to make sense of political issues about which they appear to have little information. Sociologist Nina Eliaoph argues that neither the theoretical contributions of critical theorists nor the empirical work of social

scientists have gone far enough in studying the politics of citizen talk because “none of these works have analyzed actual political conversations as they unfold in real time, within existing groups, circulating across a range of everyday life spaces” (1996, 263).

This book makes progress toward the goal of better understanding how ordinary deliberative processes contribute to the work of democratic politics. Using the specific case of African Americans and employing a number of social scientific methods of inquiry, it offers both a theoretical and empirical exploration of ordinary black people’s political attitudes and the processes that contribute to their development. This study both identifies several unique patterns of public opinion among African Americans that can be understood as expressions of black political ideology and uses an analysis of black organizations, public spaces, and information networks to suggest the ways that African Americans (re)produce these ideologies when they interact with one another. Ordinary spaces of everyday talk among African Americans serve as forums for dialogue that contribute both to the development of individual ideological dispositions and to the revisions of ideologies across time. A study of ideology formation through this talk demonstrates that engaging in black community dialogue is a distinct process that affects ideology separately from the impact of socioeconomic or demographic variables and shows that black political thought can be understood more fully through an analysis of the ways that African Americans use conversation to engage in ideological construction.

#### AFRICAN AMERICAN COUNTERPUBLIC

There is no better place to begin an empirical study of the relevance of everyday talk to American politics than among African Americans. Studies of black political participation have demonstrated the historic and continued importance of a communal approach to political life among African Americans (Campbell et al. 1960; Dawson 1994; Tate 1993). African American cultural and political life is shaped by a reliance on and respect for oral communication (Henry 1990; Levine 1977). Because black politics is traditionally marked by communalism and orality, the “search for black ideology must begin with the oral tradition” (Henry 1990, 7). It must begin with the study of the conversation, shit talkin’, gab fest, rap sessions, where black people are just kickin’ it on the set. Such a study is situated squarely within the concerns raised by James Scott (1985, 1990) and Robin Kelley (1994) about the ways that subjugated members of society resist hegemony.

Scott (1990) locates resistance to political, cultural, and ideological

hegemony among the daily acts of the relatively powerless. While the social movements literature tells us about what happens in extraordinary circumstances when marginalized members of society directly confront oppressive forces,<sup>1</sup> Scott's contribution is to allow us to glimpse how normal circumstances contribute to hidden modes of resistance. Scott juxtaposes public and hidden transcripts and encourages close observation of the acts, language, and symbols of the hidden narratives acted out offstage. The study of the everyday allows entry into the world where the "ordinary weapons of powerless groups" are forged. The study of African Americans interacting with one another apart from whites is in the spirit of Scott's concerns with how the subjugated develop distinct political realities that often counter the hegemonic narratives of the powerful.

Robin Kelley takes up this project in *Race Rebels*, where he explicitly links Scott's theory of the hidden transcript to daily acts of African American resistance in the Jim Crow South and contemporary urban spaces. Kelley delineates black working-class resistance of both white domination and black middle-class cultural norms. Articulating why the everyday illuminates the politics of African Americans, Kelley firmly rejects "the tendency to dichotomize people's lives, to assume that clear-cut 'political' motivations exist separately from issues of economic well being, safety, pleasure, cultural expression, sexuality, freedom of mobility, and other facets of daily life. Politics is not separate from lived experience or the imaginary world of what is possible; to the contrary, politics is about these things" (1994, 10).

Both Scott and Kelley offer an important reconceptualization of the behavior of subjugated populations and of politics. Foot dragging, sabotage, and dissembling can be understood as weapons of resistance used by those without access to conventional forms of power and influence, rather than seen as pathological behavior by lesser members of the polity. Politics can be found hidden in the zoot suits, rap lyrics, and broken milkshake machines of the black working class. While this text is not primarily interested in *acts* of resistance per se, it is interested in discourse that occurs as part of creating the hidden transcript.

In black public spaces, in black organizations, and through black information networks, African Americans enter into dialogue with one another. Much of what they discuss is task-specific, personal, or frivolous. Church members plan choir rehearsal. Friends share stories about their families. Neighbors gossip. Sports fans argue about what team will win on Friday night. But alongside these kinds of conversations is an everyday talk that helps black people to develop collective definitions of their political interests. Embedded within conversations that are not always overtly political is language that seeks to understand American

inequality, to define the importance of race in creating inequality, to determine the role of whites in perpetuating inequality, and to devise strategies for advancing the interests of self and group. It often does so through the use of personal anecdote, urban legend, and tall tales, but the work of this everyday talk is serious. By uncovering how ideology is developed by black people talking to one another in their daily lives, we can better describe, analyze, and predict variation in African American political thought.<sup>2</sup>

Scholars have long been interested in determining the ways that political culture is created and transmitted in identifiable communities. Habermas's (1984) theory of the bourgeois public sphere, where men engage in creating the politics of our "lifeworld," has been particularly influential in shaping contemporary discourse on the role of deliberation in the development of political worldviews. Both feminist and black studies scholars have critiqued his formulation of the public sphere as inappropriate for the study of marginalized publics. Feminist scholar Nancy Fraser critiques Habermas for idealizing the liberal public sphere because of his failure to account for competing public spheres, or counterpublics, that are not liberal, bourgeois, or male. "Virtually from the beginning, counterpublics contested the exclusionary norms of the bourgeois public, elaborating alternative styles of political behavior and alternative norms of public speech" (Fraser 1989, 116). For Fraser, the assumptions of deliberation that underlie Habermas' conception of a single public sphere are exclusionary and masculinist. Stratified societies are better served by a plurality of competing publics than a single deliberative arena governed by the discursive norms of the powerful. These subaltern counterpublics are "parallel discursive arenas where members of subordinated social groups invent and circulate counterdiscourses to formulate oppositional interpretations of their identities, interests, and needs" (1989, 123).

Scholars of African American politics have also leveled critiques of the exclusionary Habermas formulation. These scholars have sought to define the African American counterpublic as a "sphere of critical practice and visionary politics, in which intellectuals can join with the energies of the street, the school, the church, and the city to constitute a challenge to the exclusionary violence of much public space in the United States" (Black Public Sphere Collective 1995). For scholars of black politics, Habermas's formulation does not adequately account for the ways that inequality alters discursive relations between citizens, nor does it speak to the ways that the relatively powerless are excluded from the idealized bourgeois space. "The bourgeois public sphere has a historically specific provenance and development; it cannot be simply mapped onto contemporary African American lifeworlds" (Holt 1995, 326).

Scholars of black history, society, and politics have offered broader visions of the black counterpublic as an oppositional space composed of relatively autonomous spaces of civic life and culture.

It is incorrect to conceive of the black counterpublic as historically static or as ideologically cohesive at any given historical moment. The churches, political organizations, news outlets, fraternal clubs, mutual aid societies, barbershops, juke joints, and labor unions that constitute the black counterpublic are internally contested spaces. Identities of gender, class, color, sexuality, and privilege crosscut the terrain of a racially homogenous public sphere. Fraser reminds us that even oppositional counterpublics are not always virtuous, “even those with democratic and egalitarian intentions are not always above practicing their own modes of informal exclusion and marginalization” (1989, 124). In pursuit of racial goals, black counterpublics have often sought to suppress the internal differences of gender, class, and sexual identity that mark blackness (Cohen 1999). Jane Mansbridge (1999) warns that deliberative processes can transform the “I” into “we” through an often invisible assertion of control by the more powerful members of the group. The African American counterpublic is vulnerable to such exclusionary practices. Thus the African American counterpublic itself spawns subaltern, oppositional publics organized around gender, class, color, and sexual identity. The existence of these multiple layers complicates the task of talking about a single black counterpublic just as the existence of a black counterpublic challenges the notion of a single public sphere.

The black counterpublic is historically contingent, with different elements of the sphere emerging as relevant in distinct moments. The black press in the years before the Civil War (Hutton 1992); the clubs of middle-class black women at the turn of the century (Higginbotham 1993); the church meeting halls of the civil rights movement (Morris 1984); and the hip-hop of the late 1990s (Kelley 1994) all constitute aspects of the black public sphere that have taken on relatively greater significance as sites of political discussion in black communities at different points in American history. Although historically contingent and internally contested, it is still meaningful to speak of a black public sphere. Michael Dawson reminds us that “the black counterpublic sphere is the product of both the historically imposed separation of blacks from whites throughout most of American history and the embracing of the concept of black autonomy as both an institutional principle and an ideological orientation” (2001, 27). Within this counterpublic, African Americans produce hidden transcripts, not with a single, unchanging voice, but with many that are all distinctly shaped by the position of blackness in American society.

The promise of a unique and insurgent black politics is at stake in the contest over the contours of the black counterpublic. The hidden transcript is a collective enterprise that must be created within a public sphere that operates beneath the surveillance of dominant classes. “For that to occur, the subordinate group must carve out for itself social spaces insulated from control and surveillance from above. If we are to understand the process by which resistance is developed and codified, the analysis of the creation of these offstage social spaces becomes a vital task” (Scott 1994, 118). But, in 1994, political scientist Michael Dawson questioned whether a counterpublic still existed among African Americans in the nineties. Dawson asserts that “a black public sphere does not exist in contemporary America, if by that we mean a set of institutions, communication networks, and practices which facilitate debate of causes and remedies to the current combination of political setbacks and economic devastation facing major segments of the Black community” (1995, 201). If this pessimistic assertion is correct, then the prospects for a unique black politics forged through collective racial deliberation are bleak.

The current text takes issue with the notion that the black counterpublic was nonexistent in the 1990s. Even today, there are contemporary social sites carved out by African Americans in which African Americans create hidden transcripts by exploring ideological alternatives to dominant white discourses. These gathering places provide space for black people to engage in everyday talk. In the most contemporary formulation of the black counterpublic there are three areas of particular interest: black organizations, black public spaces, and black information networks.<sup>3</sup>

The proliferation of voluntary, formal organizations in the black community is a testament to the centrality of organizations to the black counterpublic. By the close of the civil rights movement, African Americans had established 35 national black political organizations with 3 million members, 112 predominately black colleges and universities, 37 national black professional organizations, 17 national women’s organizations, and 36 national fraternal organizations (Yearwood 1978). More importantly, African Americans have engineered and sustained a counterpublic through the creation of separate, indigenous, race-based institutions at the local and community level. These local organizations serve political, social, economic, and spiritual functions. Often a single organization serves several of these purposes simultaneously. Organizations have traditionally served as crucial sources of collective political, educational, and economic advancement for African Americans. They also serve as sites for dialogue, discussion, and dissension within the community. They are the vehicles for black political leaders to persuade



and mobilize the community and the forum where people communicate with leaders by granting or withdrawing support. Many black organizations whose primary purpose is not political in fact serve important political functions in the black community.

The church is widely acknowledged as the single most important political organization among African Americans (Lincoln and Mamiya 1990; Wilcox and Gomez 1990; Higginbotham 1993; Smith 1994). It is the oldest indigenous black institution, and it is historically and currently significant in developing African American political culture and encouraging African American political participation (Chong 1991; McAdam, 1982; Dawson 1994; Tate 1993; Holden 1973; Henry 1990; Morris 1984). But churches are not political organizations. Their sacred and spiritual functions, not their political ones, are the primary purpose of their existence. However, the historic and contemporary centrality of the black church has extended into social, political, and economic realms. Interaction in the church is particularly relevant for shaping black political ideology because the church offers individuals the opportunity to come together and discuss how to manage the complexities and rigors of life. The church is in the advice-giving business. The content of the spiritual advice it gives can shape the political perspective of those who receive it. Previous research shows that the black church fosters the networks, skills, mobilization, and contact opportunities necessary to nurture political action (McAdam 1982, Morris 1984) and contributes to the psychological resources, such as self esteem and internal efficacy, that encourage black churchgoers to engage with politics (Harris 1999; Calhoun-Brown 1996; Ellison 1993).

Black public spaces are at the heart of the black counterpublic. It is in public spaces where the potential of the black counterpublic is manifest. Public spaces are those forums where African Americans believe themselves to be exclusively in the company of other African Americans. These spaces are generally marked by a constant physical space that has regularly changing "memberships." Black public spaces are unique because African Americans come together in these arenas *because* of their blackness in a way that can, but does not necessarily, happen in other counterpublic arenas. In organizations individuals come together because of the particular mission of the organization. For example, one attends a black church both to worship God and to be with other black people. But in public spaces blackness can be a sufficient condition for membership. When black students sit together in the cafeteria, it is not because they all like each other, or because they are necessarily making a cliché stance on black unity. The conscious and voluntary creation of separate black cafeteria tables is an example of students finding that race is a sufficient condition for togetherness. There is no established

definition of what constitutes the boundaries of black public space. However, there is one type of space that would fall within any definition: barbershops and beauty salons. Black-owned and supported barbershops and beauty salons are public spaces because the shops are definite and semipermanent physical spaces even though the people who occupy the space change regularly.

Barbershops and beauty salons have both a mythic and an actual relevance among African Americans. Drake and Cayton remarked in *Black Metropolis*, "If colored undertakers have a virtual monopoly in burying the Negro dead, the colored barber and beautician have an even more exclusive monopoly in beautifying the living" (1945, 460). Barbershops are the archetype of the black public space, consisting of a relatively permanent physical space, but with constantly changing memberships. Barbers and hairstylists still constitute the overwhelming majority of entrepreneurs in the African American community. There is an informal hierarchy of the stylists and regular customers, but there is no official organization or membership. The boundaries to these spaces are permeable and unfixed, meaning that the composition and characteristics of the space are constantly shifting. The one constant is that black people in these spaces believe themselves to be free to talk to one another beyond the gaze of racial others. Usually financially autonomous, sole proprietorships, black barbershops and salons operate beyond the fiscal control and below the radar of whites.<sup>4</sup>

African Americans also make contact with one another outside of formal organizations or public spaces. African American popular culture, black literature, movies, and music as well as black news media are means through which African Americans engage with one another in a kind of everyday talk. These media convey information about black people, create interpretations of black experiences in America, reinforce shared cultural norms and actions among African Americans, and produce representations of black life. African Americans share the larger American popular culture and media but also have access to predominantly and uniquely black information sources.<sup>5</sup> African American music, movies, television, newspapers, and magazines give voice to many different elements of black American life, sometimes in ways that are controversial, problematic, subjective, or distressing.

Race is a social construct that adjusts through time and space, and American blackness is constantly subject to redefinition both within and outside the group. Popular culture is one of the ways that African Americans engage in the creation of a definition of blackness.<sup>6</sup> Black popular culture in the form of music, media, and entertainment communicates what is "acceptable and authentic" in terms of fashion, speech patterns, personal style, and personal behavior.<sup>7</sup> Similarly, these infor-

mation sources communicate what political ideas are considered “acceptable and authentic.” In their mammoth study of Chicago’s Bronzeville community in the early twentieth century Drake and Cayton explained that as a black newspaper, “The *Defender*, like all other Negro weeklies, has the dual function of reporting news and stimulating race solidarity” (1945, 411). Then and now, the black media maintains an African American readership, viewership, or clientele by carving out a role as a racial institution.

The Chicago *Defender* is typical of America’s three hundred Negro weeklies in tone and format. Some may be more or less belligerent or sensational, but all conceive of themselves as “Race papers.” Despite the fact that these papers are businesses, they like to define their role as did Fernand Barnett in the Eighties: “The *Conservator* is a creature born of our enthusiastic desire to benefit our people rather than any motive of self-aggrandizement or pecuniary profit.” Bronzeville people know that this is only a half-truth, but they do not expect the Negro press to be Simon-pure; they merely expect it to be interesting and to put up a fight while it tries to make money.” (1945, 412)

It is difficult to provide explicit boundaries for the definition of black media. Black media certainly includes newspapers, magazines, and radio stations that are owned by African Americans and marketed to a predominantly black audience, but it also includes books and novels by black authors and radio stations that are not owned by, but are staffed by and promoted to African Americans. To the extent that African Americans perceive a media source (television show, radio station, novel, magazine, movie, or Internet website) to be something that “belongs” to black people, it can be considered a black media space. Although impossible to quantify, to the extent that there is a broad sense among blacks that “this is *our* show,” it is a part of everyday black talk. When African Americans perceive a media source as a medium for expression of racial humor, information, entertainment, or values, then it is proper to understand that source as part of black media. Actual fiscal ownership is less important than a sense of psychic ownership in defining a media source as a part of the black counterpublic.

Jordan’s historiography of the role of the black press in World War I describes black newspapers as occupying “a parallel public sphere, not fully a part of the mainstream of public opinion and debate that links society and state but a separate arena where African Americans have worked out among themselves alternatives to the dominant culture’s views of their identities and interests” (2001, 4). This description situates the black press squarely at the center of the black counterpublic during the war years. The contemporary independent black press is sub-

stantially weaker than the one Jordan chronicles. But if we expand our understanding of the black press to include publications like *Essence*, *Ebony*, *Jet*; Internet sites like Black Voices; cable television stations like BET., popular black novels like those by E. Lynn Harris, and nonfiction self-help texts like those by Iylana Vanzant, then it is still possible to identify a parallel public sphere where African Americans are doing the work of identity and interest formation.

The black counterpublic is not solely or even primarily constituted as a political realm. African Americans do not necessarily enter into racialized discourse for the explicit purpose of developing public, participatory strategies. There are aspects of the counterpublics that are formed for these purposes. For example, civil rights organizations have as their main organizing purpose the articulation of black public interests and agitation for political, economic, and social rights, but much of the black counterpublic is a response to exclusion from high politics of traditional participation (voting, office seeking, political organizing). These spaces exist as an assertion of African American uniqueness in cultural, artistic, epistemological, and spiritual frames. Everyday black talk asserts a need for a separate black sphere that nurtures multiple facets of African American intellect and spirit.

#### IDEOLOGICAL DEVELOPMENT THROUGH EVERYDAY TALK

Think of an African American woman who comes to her Bible study class on Wednesday evening after leaving her office job. She sits down in the pew and starts chatting with other group members as they wait for the minister to arrive. She shares several stories illustrating how verbally abusive and condescending her white male supervisor has acted toward her this week. Upon hearing the stories, one man shakes his head in disgust, calls the supervisor a Godless racist, says that African American cannot trust whites, especially those in positions of direct authority over blacks, and suggests that the woman sabotage the supervisor on one of the work assignments with which he has recently overburdened her. Another woman, listening to the narrative, brands the brother's response as un-Christian and advises the woman that it is her responsibility to complete her job tasks to the best of her ability regardless of the discomfort she may experience in this situation. She argues that God will fight the battle for his people as long as they are living by the right moral standards. By the time the minister arrives, the three congregants are engaged in a heated discussion about whether, as Christians, black people should confront racist whites. This exchange may seem to be about private and theological matters, but debating strate-

gies of resistance or acquiescence in the private sphere of employment is relevant for deciding when to employ these tactics in the political world. By discussing the relationship of God to black people and their struggle with whites, these Bible study participants are expressing judgments of deep political relevance. And potentially they are helping one another form answers to questions that are central to the development of political ideology.

The theory of everyday talk posits that although none of the individuals engaging in the conversation will be instantly convinced by the arguments of others, all will be affected by their participation in this conversation. Each person who has shared in this interaction will adjust his or her political attitudes to the extent that she or she is convinced by the various arguments being made. It is possible that if this kind of discussion occurred regularly in the Bible study class, and if the advice of the class had a consistent ideological bent, then the individuals who regularly meet in this space are likely to develop similar approaches to addressing discriminatory circumstances.

Everyday talk may operate in this way, allowing African Americans to use their interactions in the counterpublic to construct hidden transcripts. One way to understand this process is the production and reproduction of political ideologies. The term political ideology is a contentious one in the study of American politics from at least two perspectives. First, there is a strong tradition within political theory that connotes ideology negatively as the fictions of ruling elites used to deceive the masses of their true interests (Horkheimer 1972; Rorty 1994; Arendt 1958). Second, a related but distinct tradition in empirical public opinion research argues that mass publics are largely incapable of the sophisticated reasoning necessary to define attitudes as ideological (Converse 1964; Kinder 1983; Zaller 1992).

Ideology is contested terrain among critical political theorists, particularly those working in a Marxist tradition. For these scholars, ideology is a largely pejorative term used to describe the deceptive illusions that do the oppressive work of promoting false consciousness, masking class interests and social cleavages, and usurping the potential for democratic debate (Arendt 1958; Horkheimer 1972; Habermas 1989). Ideology represents illusory rationalizations for inequality and injustice. It is maligned for its deceptive disconnection from the material world, its false essentializing influence in the face of historical contingencies, and its mystifying effect on the relatively powerless. Reviewing the Marxist approach to ideology, Eagleton asserts that ideology is understood in this tradition as a “set of discursive strategies for legitimating a dominant power, . . . a coherent bloc of ideas, which effectively secures the power of a governing group” (1994, 8). There are at least two strands of

Marxist critique of ideology: on the one hand is the notion that ideologies, as systems of ideas, are themselves internally false or deceiving, but on the other hand, and more central to Marx's own concern in early writings, is the notion that ideologues, by functioning in the realm of ideas, ignore the concrete world of material conditions. By this argument, the system of ideas itself may be unobjectionable, but it is superfluous to the work of real politics. Arendt's critique of ideology is among the most scathing. In her estimation, all ideologies contain totalitarian elements. Totalitarian movements are often necessary to bring these characteristics into fruition, but the seeds of domination are inherent in all ideological projects. "The real nature of all ideologies was revealed only in the role that the ideology plays in the apparatus of totalitarian domination" (1958, 470).

Viewed from this scholarly tradition, it is difficult to imagine why one would evoke ideology to describe political attitudes created as part of the resistant hidden transcripts of subordinate peoples such as contemporary African Americans. To the extent that ideology conjures images of hegemonic domination, it is hard to appreciate the desirability of ideology as a descriptor for the work of everyday black talk. However, Dawson rightly asserts that the Marxist tradition in the study of ideology cannot fully account for the complicated ways that ideology operates among African Americans. "A common feature of all these critiques of ideology is their assertion that a single, universal ideology dominates society. Many scholars critique Habermas' treatment of the public sphere on the grounds that he assume a single bourgeois sphere, it is equally incorrect to assume that a single ideology operates within societies that have heterogeneous populations and multiple public spheres" (2001, 50).

Once we allow that the African American counterpublic is operating beyond the reach of powerful whites, we must allow for the possibility that the ideological work being done in that counterpublic is distinct from the hegemonic work of elite discourse.<sup>8</sup> Certainly, there are individual African Americans whose political attitudes reflect an embrace of hegemonic elements of American ideology such as meritocracy, individualism, and uncritical patriotism. But ideological projects within black discourse specifically counter these notions. Reclaiming ideology as a way of understanding contemporary black political attitudes is not so much grounded in the work of critical theorists on the left as it is responsive to the elitist literature of empirical, public opinion researchers who, in a parallel tradition, have wrested ideology from ordinary citizens.

At the root of this tradition is Converse's study of mass belief systems, which demonstrated that the American electorate fails to hold meaningful beliefs on many fundamental political questions. Converse

avoided the term ideology but defined belief systems as “a configuration of ideas and attitudes in which the elements are bound together by some form of constraint or functional interdependence” (1964, 207). Constraint, for Converse, is the predicative capacity of one belief in the system with respect to other beliefs in the system. An individual demonstrated constraint if a conservative perspective on social security was predicative of a conservative position on federal aid to education and if a change in one belief forced reevaluation of other beliefs in the system. His empirical evidence suggested that mass belief systems lacked the constraint, stability, and range he associated with ideological thinking and showed that individuals professed agreement with multiple, contradictory positions; professed different and often opposing attitudes over time; and failed to apply general political concepts to specific, concrete instances. His research mounted a serious challenge to earlier assumptions about the nature of public opinion.

Scholars wondered what were the implications for democracy if average men and women are guided by no identifiable ideological dispositions. Such findings call into question the capacity of ordinary citizens to make democratic decisions. Political psychologists have attempted to revive ordinary citizens by suggesting that individuals process large amounts of information and make difficult political decisions by using heuristics, schemas, and other rational cognitive tools (Popkin 1994; Conover and Feldman 1981; Feldman 1988, Lau and Sears 1986, Dawson 1994). Citizens may not have complete recall of political figures or events, but they are remarkably capable of creating order and meaning both in low-information and information-saturated environments. This research renewed faith in the ability of citizens to handle the complexities of democratic participation, but little contemporary work has attempted to revive the notion of ideology per se as a way of describing the political worldviews of ordinary African Americans.

The recent work of Michael Dawson is an exception. Dawson critiques both Converse and his later proponent Don Kinder as having proscribed an overly narrow and elitist definition of ideology that “is removed both from the considerations of social groups and from other aspects of everyday life. . . . This is an extraordinarily elitist and misguided view of the connection between ideology and politics. . . . Converse and Kinder’s vision of ideology is so abstract that it is removed from the field of politics” (2001, 62).

Dawson goes on to criticize Zaller’s *The Nature and Origins of Mass Opinion*. Perhaps the most influential contemporary work on American public opinion, Zaller’s is a deductive model accounting for how individuals respond to survey questions. Zaller proposes a “Receive-Accept-Sample” or RAS model composed of four axioms: reception, resistance,

accessibility, and response, and he accounts for elements of ambivalence and unevenness in public opinion. His model tells a story that explains inconsistencies in the constraint and stability of mass opinion by delineating the role of political awareness in connecting ordinary citizens with elite discourse. While these are significant contributions, Zaller's theories further remove ideology from the everyday. For Zaller, ideology is only "a mechanism by which ordinary citizens make contact with specialists who are knowledgeable on controversial issues and who share citizen predispositions" (1992, 327). Thus, ideology is removed from its historical context and is, by definition, outside the capacity of ordinary men and women. Borrowing the language of Dawson's critique, "the rupture between social and political theory on the one hand, and empirical research on the other is complete. . . . Conservative economic policy is what conservative economists say it is, and conservative foreign policy becomes what conservative foreign policy experts say it is" (Dawson 2001, 63) While formally rejecting the notion of elite manipulation, Zaller continues to locate ideology exclusively within the ranks of specialists who set the terms of discourse. Common men and women are able only to sample from these elite discourses; there is no reproduction or revision of ideology on the ground. For many public opinion researchers of the second half of the twentieth century, the capacity to reason ideologically rests solely with elites.<sup>9</sup> This is a strikingly different conception of ideology from that which emerges from an investigation of the everyday, which asserts the value of uncovering ideology in the messier attitudes of ordinary citizens.<sup>10</sup>

#### RESTORING IDEOLOGY

Borrowing from literatures in social psychology, public opinion, and discourse studies, ideology in this text is understood as public discourse that is rooted in the life and thoughts of ordinary men and women. Ideology is both a cognitive structure that exists in the minds of individuals and a social construct that binds individuals to social groups. For individuals, ideology is an organized system of beliefs, values, and attitudes (Rokeach 1968). Beliefs are those aspects of thought that individuals associate with deeply held convictions about truth. To say someone believes something is to suggest that they hold that particular piece of information to be true. Beliefs are the "cognitive components that make up our understanding of the way things are" (Glynn et al. 1999, 104). Values are an expression of how things ought to be. Like beliefs, values are rooted in deeply embedded notions of truth. Values can be either terminal ends or instrumental means (Rokeach 1973). Some are articu-



lated and reinforced by family during childhood; created and disseminated by religious teachings and morality systems; and presented as ideals specific to the society, nation, cultural, or racial group.

Ideology is composed of attitudes, which are individual orientations toward objects and are recognizable as personal choices rather than absolutes (Glynn et al. 1999). Public opinion scholars measure and predict mass attitudes toward candidates, parties, policies, and issues. Pollsters predict the outcome of elections based on the expressed attitudes of registered voters in the months and weeks preceding the election. Social scientists describe the continuing or decreasing relevance of racial animosity by exploring the attitudes of whites toward African Americans and Latinos. Representatives gauge the mood of their constituents by asking for their attitudes toward economic and social issues. Although attitudes are the most directly observable and measurable element of political thought, they are derived from systems of beliefs and values, which guide their development and expression. Together, beliefs, values, and attitudes create a *knowledge structure*. The particular order that these beliefs, values, and attitudes take is the framework for individual ideology.

Ideology can be understood in its social form as a language because, like language, ideology is a social construction created and accessed by individuals. As Mannheim's early study of ideology asserts, "only in a quite limited sense does an individual create out of himself the mode of speech and thought that we attribute to him. He speaks the language of his group; he thinks in the manner in which his group thinks" (1936, 5). In this way, ideologies are like natural language. Languages such as English, Chinese, or Kiswahili are also systems that are essentially social and shared by the members of a group—the speakers of those languages. But that does not keep the members of such a speech community from using the language individually (van Dijk 1998). Scott's understanding of the hidden transcript is also illuminated by the language metaphor. "The hidden transcript has no reality as pure thought; it exists only to the extent that it is practiced, articulated, enacted, disseminated within these offstage social sites . . . not unlike the way in which a distinctive dialect develops. A dialect develops as a group of speakers mixes frequently with one another and rarely with others. Their speech patterns gradually diverge from those of the parent language" (1990, 119, 135). So too, does a distinct ideological language develop among "speakers" in the black counterpublic.

Like language, ideology gives group members a way of communicating by beginning with a set of critical, shared assumptions that govern interaction. These assumptions are not explicitly discussed; instead they

structure the way that group members talk to one another. Additionally, ideology is like language because individual use and expression of both ideology and language are subject to wide variation and even contradictory or wrong usage. Just as we recognize both the distinct Boston accent and the Southern drawl as individual expressions of American English, we also should be willing to accept that individual political attitudes can have a distinct accent and still be guided by an ideological construct. Just as individual grammar can be wrong by the official standards of the English language and still be recognizable as English (and not Chinese or Kiswahili), so too can some individual expressions of political attitudes be “wrong” by the standards of the ideology and still be recognizable as part of that ideological language.

Socially, ideology is composed of a set of problems and the solutions to those problems. Socially, what ideology *is* is closely related to what ideology *does*. Ideology poses a set of dilemmas, provides the answers to those questions, and simultaneously constructs an interpretative narrative of the world and of the group. Scholars of political ideology have offered a number of possibilities for the question and answer structure of ideology. Lane (1962) states that political ideology deals with the questions of who will be the rulers, how will the rulers be selected, and by what principles will they govern. Hinich and Munger (1996) assert that ideology answers what is good, who gets what, and who rules. Van Dijk (1998) writes that ideology answers who are we, what do we do, why do we do this, what are our values, what is our social position, and what are our resources. With specific application to black political ideology, Dawson (2001) argues that ideology responds to the questions who or what is the enemy, who are friends, what is America like, what is the nature of whites, and what strategies with regard to whites are necessary or desirable.

Throughout this text, black political ideology is understood as serving six related functions: interpreting truth, reducing complexity, linking individual experiences to group narratives, identifying friends and foes, defining what is desirable, and providing a range of possible strategies for achieving desired outcomes.

Ideology is an interpreter of truth. Ideology is what groups believe and claim to know. For the social group, the truths created by ideology are its core ideas, not its specific policy prescriptions. Ideological adherents may diverge on a number of specific opinions, but they must agree on the basic truths of the ideology.<sup>11</sup> In the process of asserting and maintaining truth, ideology also reduces complexity. Socially, ideology functions similarly to how schemas work for individual thinkers. Ideology reduces complexity by working as a perceptual screen. The *a priori*

truth assumptions of ideology give individual adherents a way to filter information in the political world. In this way, ideology is a social decision rule that provides a road map for navigating the political world.

Ideology also gives meaning to ambiguous personal and historical circumstances. Ideology provides a lens through which individuals give political meaning to occurrences in their lives. Just as individuals are linked to their social group through a shared language, so too are they linked to an ideological group by a shared interpretation of personal experience. Individual lives are filled with a number of unambiguous circumstances; things that people know are good or bad. Other life experiences are less clearly endowed with social meaning. How these experiences are understood is largely a result of ideological position.

Further, ideology proscribes rules for membership in the group, thereby defining who is in and who is out. By identifying friends and foes, ideology provides answers to the questions who are we and what do we stand for? Friends and enemies are then defined with respect to this self-definition and goal statement. Ideology not only provides a statement of the problems facing a social group; it also suggests a vision for the future. Ideology defines what is desirable for the social group. The definition of desirable outcomes is central to popular understandings of ideology. When the average American speaks about liberals or conservatives, he or she means people who either do or do not envision government involvement in a range of policy areas as desirable. But definition of “the good” is only a part (albeit an important part) of what ideology does. Defining the good is an extension of the basic truths that ideology rests on and is intimately linked to the conceptions of friends and foes. We want to be with our friends and triumph over or at least be separate from our enemies, and we want the truth to be reflected in our daily lives. Defining the desirable is also part of how ideology functions to reduce complexity. By determining which outcomes are good and which are bad, ideology helps adherents to better understand the political world by defining actions, people, and policies with respect to the ideologically defined good.

Finally, ideology offers a range of possible strategies for achieving desired outcomes. Not only do ideologies provide a definition of the good and a vision for the future; they offer some prescriptions for achieving it. Each ideology offers a range of possibilities. There is no single strategy for achieving each desired goal. Ideologies offer adherents a variety of strategies for achieving desired goals. In addition to narrowly defined political approaches, many of these strategies are reflected in the way that individuals live their daily lives. Ideology not only shows up in people’s electoral and policy decisions, it also can be evidenced in the schools where they send their children, the places

where they buy their cars, and even the way they style their hair. Because ideology is grounded in core beliefs, it has an extensive impact on people's daily lives.

Ideology for the individual is an organized set of values, beliefs, and attitudes; for the social group, ideology is language. For both the individual and the group, ideology interprets truth, reduces complexity, links individual experiences to group narratives, identifies friends and foes, defines what is desirable, and provides a range of possible strategies for achieving desired outcomes. Because it acts as a language that provides these answers to individuals and groups, ideology can be understood as a narrative. Ideology is the story we tell ourselves and others about how the world works. The narrative encompasses historical events, personal experiences and collective realities. This narrative then directs interpretation of the political world and structures expressions of political attitudes.

#### AFRICAN AMERICAN POLITICAL IDEOLOGY

If ideology functions as a social narrative that interprets problems and offers solutions, it is reasonable to understand African American political attitudes as resulting from a limited number of identifiable black political ideologies. Building on the definition that ideology interprets truth, reduces complexity, links individual experiences to group narratives, identifies friends and foes, defines what is desirable, and provides a range of possible strategies for achieving desired outcomes, there are four continua relevant for understanding black political ideology. These dimensions assert that black ideology must be understood beyond a traditional left-right continuum. African American ideology cannot be easily constrained in a state-in vs. state-out dichotomy or an accommodation vs. militancy dichotomy that marks some traditional ways of approaching the study of black political thought. Existing in multiple dimensions, black ideology takes on several interrelated tasks:

1. It helps individuals determine what it means to be black in the American political system. This can range from an attitude that race is a relevant characteristic but not one that hampers life chances to the belief that race is an immutable characteristic that overdetermines life chances. It attempts to understand the extent to which blackness constrains life chances. Black Conservatism and Nationalism are on the extremes of this scale, with Liberal Integrationism and Feminism staking out positions in between these extremes.<sup>12</sup>
2. It helps individuals identify the relative political significance of race compared to other personal characteristics. Ideological approaches to this

question range from a belief that race is only one of several characteristics that are of political importance—for example, Feminism at one end of the continuum asserting that gender, class, sexual orientation, age, and ability are as important as race in determining position in American society—to a belief that race is the most important, relevant political characteristic. Nationalism sits at this end of the scale, asserting, in its most extreme manifestations, that all internal divisions within the black community must be subordinated so that African Americans can concentrate political and economic struggles on behalf of racial interests alone.

3. It helps individuals determine the extent to which blacks should “solve their own problems” or look to the system for assistance. At one end of this scale is Conservatism, advocating the idea that African Americans must be entirely self-sufficient, and demanding no official recognition of or redress for any historical or contemporary inequalities stemming from racial discrimination. At the other end is Liberal Integrationism’s attitude that African Americans have a morally and historically justified obligation to seek specific, race-based or race-targeted benefits from the American system. Between these extremes, Nationalism and Feminism contain varying degrees of advocacy of the extent to which blacks should make demands on the American political, legal, and economic system.

4. It helps individuals determine the required degree of tactical separation from whites necessary for successful advancement of group interests. At one end is the belief that maximum integration of African Americans into the American society is the most desirable outcome of reducing black inequality. Conservatism and Liberal Integrationism share space near this pole, with both traditions perceiving whites as appropriate political partners for African Americans who are interested in achieving personal and public success. At the other end of the continuum is the belief that African Americans must achieve complete social, political, and economic independence from whites. At its most extreme, this end of the continuum can include a Nationalist belief that African Americans can achieve an equal society only in a nation state that does not include white citizens.

Each of the four ideologies occupies space at different points along these continua by offering various responses to these four racial dilemmas. There is no single dimension along which one might array these ideological approaches. At times it is Nationalism and Feminism at the poles, while at other times Liberal Integrationism and Conservatism take up the extreme positions. By identifying solutions to these four dilemmas, black political ideology functions as a social narrative that explains the sources of black inequality, justifies action on behalf of the group, provides strategies for addressing black inequality, and provides a vision of a different future. By addressing these questions, black

ideologies allow African Americans to understand persistent social and economic inequality, to identify the significance of race in that inequality, to determine the role of whites in perpetuating or eliminating that inequality, and to devise strategies for overcoming that inequality. As social narratives, black political ideologies justify themselves as methods of addressing racial inequality in America.

Individuals then make use of these ideological traditions by sampling from the menu of available belief patterns. No individual African American, not even from the political elite, is likely to fit perfectly and neatly within any of these categories, but each individual thinker is likely to have a central ideological tendency that is moderated by elements of other ideological dispositions. In the empirical chapters that follow, we will meet a Baptist minister who is an Integrationist and a Feminist with touches of Nationalism. We will listen in on a Nationalist owner of a barbershop who makes occasional use of Conservative ideological arguments. We will hear how mostly Conservative students from a community college temper their own Conservatism with elements of Nationalist thought when discussing welfare reform, and how mostly Nationalist students from a historically black university are able to move toward Feminist critiques of the Million Man March. Finally, we will see how even black public figures like Colin Powell and Kweisi Mfume can be classified within a single ideological tradition while still displaying strong elements of competing political worldviews.

This sampling of ideological choices by individual thinkers has led to a rich ideological diversity within the tradition of African American political thought. Michael Dawson's *Black Visions* is the most important, comprehensive, contemporary text on black political ideology. It maps constellations of belief among African American mass publics across the twentieth century and provides careful and textured descriptions of the ideologies that reveal their nuance and complexity. It is important to understand the ways that the empirical study that follows intersects with and departs from the work in *Black Visions*. Both texts are engaged with reclaiming ideology as a useful framework for understanding black political thought. Both texts understand ordinary African Americans as central actors in the reproduction of these ideologies, and both are interested in understanding black political attitudes as heterogeneous and complex. However, there are some important differences in the emphasis and content.

First, *Black Visions*, by its title and content, reflects a deep engagement with the historical roots of black political thought. Dawson's project is, in part, to draw together a fragmented intellectual history and to link that history to current strands in public opinion. Thus *Black Visions* is intent on presenting a historically textured description of each

ideological project that reflects its changing emphases and proponents over the course of the twentieth century. Alternatively, this text can only nod to those historical complexities and will paint each ideological position with broader strokes. The ideological traditions this text addresses are necessarily less fine grained with respect to their history. In some ways this book takes up where *Black Visions* leaves off, by directing attention to the most contemporary manifestations of these traditions and their reproduction in ordinary black discursive spaces. Dawson convincingly argues for the historical relevance and complexity of black political ideologies. He also offers initial evidence for their persistence in black public opinion. This text marshals a broad range of empirical strategies to uncover the ways that contemporary black ideology is created through processes of everyday black talk.

Other important differences in focus distinguish these projects. Dawson is centrally concerned with the effect of structural issues such as poverty and racism on the genesis of black ideological traditions; this study takes these structures as a given and asks about the unique contribution of discourse within these structures. Dawson's story is mostly about organizers, activists, and thinkers; this narrative is about more ordinary citizens.<sup>13</sup> Dawson's story is historical; this one is contemporary. In many ways this text assumes the work done by Dawson. It is neither feasible nor desirable to retell the history of black ideology in this volume, but it is important to note that this text grounds its assumptions in the historical contingencies and internal heterogeneity that Dawson explicitly outlines.

Dawson's constellation of black ideologies includes six historically rooted traditions of black thought: black Marxist, black Nationalist, black Feminist, black Conservative, Activist Egalitarian, and Disillusioned Liberal ideologies. Here the framework for black political thought is constructed from four distinct African American political ideologies: black Nationalism, Conservatism, Feminism, and Liberal Integrationism. Black Marxism is not under investigation because of the contemporary focus of this inquiry. Dawson acknowledges that black Marxism coheres poorly in contemporary black opinion and is only marginally responsible for shaping and directing African American political attitudes in the nineties. Dawson's Radical Egalitarianism is defined very closely to this text's Liberal Integrationist ideology.<sup>14</sup> These four ideologies are not meant to be an exhaustive or exclusive formulation of black ideologies, but each has important historical traditions and particular contemporary significance to African Americans. Each has its own complex history that leads to diversity within each of the ideological approaches.<sup>15</sup>

### *Common Sense*

Research in black public opinion has done the important work of asserting that African Americans are engaged members of the political system, not apolitical, uninvolved participants at the margins. In particular this research has pointed to the unique historical and cultural factors that contribute to a black politics that is distinguishable from white political traditions in the United States (Marable 1995, 1995b; Morris 1975; Walton 1985; Henry 1990). Unfortunately, the emphasis of much of this scholarly work on a unique black politics has obscured the heterogeneity within this black politics. Whether it's Levine's (1977) assertions of a single black cultural tradition or Dawson's (1994) description of a single heuristic for black political decision making, these scholars have often inadequately captured the ways that politics is a contested terrain within blackness. More recent work, most notably Cohen's *Boundaries of Blackness* (1999), challenges these notions of a unitary black politics and draws attention to the cross-cutting identities and communities within African American politics.

African American political thought can be understood as simultaneously heterogeneous and bound by important commonalities. Black Nationalism, Feminism, Conservatism, and Liberal Integrationism each represent distinct approaches to politics, but all are indigenous ideologies in that they are located in the black American experience. Each of these ideologies is part of a unique black politics because each is rooted in a notion of *black common sense*. Defined by Lubiano as "ideology lived and articulated in everyday understanding of the world and one's place in it" (1998, 232), by my definition, black common sense is the idea among African Americans that blackness is a meaningful political category. Rootedness in black common sense sets black political ideologies apart from political ideologies more generally. Adherents to a black common sense tradition perceive blackness as identifiable, persistent over time, and relevant to making personal life decisions. Political attitudes informed by black common sense are held by African Americans who consider the statement "I am a black person" to have political, not just personal, meaning.

Blackness is an insufficient condition for inclusion in a black ideological tradition. Instead, black ideology rests on a fundamental, underlying attitude shared by many, but not all, African Americans. It is the implicit notion of "we-ness" that defines black common sense. Zora Neale Hurston's autobiography *Dust Tracks on a Road* includes a chapter titled "My People! My People!" As an anthropologist, Hurston was an intent observer of human behavior, and particularly of the lives of Afri-



can Americans. For Hurston, “My people! my people!” is sometimes a cry of disgust, at times of pride, at times of shame, but always, it is a cry of recognition. The feeling “My people! my people!” conveys the essence of black common sense. Hurston writes, “Our lives are so diversified, internal attitudes so varied, appearances and capabilities so different, that there is no possible classification so catholic that it will cover us all, except My people! My people!” (1942, 189). Thus, black common sense is not an inability or unwillingness to recognize or cope with diversity among African Americans; it is an assertion that even within this diversity, there is a sense both of belonging and of ownership that links African Americans in a way that defies clear articulation.

Common sense here employs multiple definitions of common. Common sense is common not only in the sense of “ordinary” but also in the sense of “shared.” Arendt’s discussion of loneliness is useful here. Arendt claims that totalitarianism exists by generating terror and that terror is created through the production of human loneliness. Loneliness locks human beings in isolation and hampers social intercourse. For Arendt this loneliness is the antithesis of common sense, by which she means shared sensual experience. “Only because we have common sense, that is only because not one man, but men in the plural inhabit the earth can we trust our immediate sensual experience” (1958, 476). By logical extension, nurturing commonality of sensual experience counteracts loneliness, reduces the power of terror, and resists totalitarianism. Although not anticipated by Arendt herself, one way to understand the black counterpublic is as a set of spaces used for the purpose of building this shared sensory experience, or common sense.<sup>16</sup> Philosopher Charles Mills (1998) reminds us that in the face of anthropological and scientific evidence that race is neither essential nor biologically real, the persistence of race as a significant social category for African Americans is baffling to many liberal theorists. Shared sensory experiences, reinforced through participation in the counterpublic, account for part of the answer.<sup>17</sup> Common sense is both the act of and product of shared racial experiences.

This notion of black common sense is closely related to the familiar social psychological concept of group identification. Scholars Tajfel and Turner established that group identification is both a cognitive awareness of belonging to an identifiable group and a normative evaluation that group membership is meaningful (Tajfel 1982; Tajfel and Turner 1979). Self-awareness of membership and affective attachment to the group is the traditional psychological model of group identification (Gurin, Miller, and Gurin 1980; Conover 1984). This designation of black common sense is informed by the idea of group identification because it argues that ascriptive membership in the black race is not

necessarily an indication of a sense of attachment to the race. Black common sense, like group identification, indicates a psychological tie to the group that is distinct from, yet precipitated by, a biological or cultural attachment.

Common sense, while an important step to understanding black ideology, is only a point of departure. Common sense does not lead to only one set of ideological conclusions. Black common sense informs adherents: "I am black and you are black, and that matters." Ideology explains how and why it matters that we are both black. The Integrationist might believe "I am black and you are black and this matters because we were once subjected to the same set of discriminatory laws that make our present situation more difficult." The Nationalist may believe "I am black and you are black and this matters because it means I have a responsibility for protecting you and you owe the same to me." Thus, black common sense structures African American political thought while still leaving space for variation in political approaches.

### *Contemporary Black Nationalism*

Twentieth-century black Nationalism has its foundations in the theories and organizing efforts of Marcus Garvey.<sup>18</sup> Garveyism, promoted through the Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA), was the largest mass-based movement of African Americans in the twentieth century, eclipsing even the modern civil rights movement. By 1920 the UNIA had hundreds of chapters worldwide; hosted elaborate international conventions; operated the Black Star Line, the first black-owned steamship company; and published *Negro World*, a controversial weekly that frequently critiqued the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). Garveyism identified the international and historical bases of black subjugation and declared the right and necessity of black separation from oppressive polities by developing separate political representation, cultural icons, and economic institutions.<sup>19</sup> Few contemporary black Nationalisms share Garvey's fully articulated internationalism and separatism, but all are rooted in an insistence on some form of cultural, social, economic, and political autonomy for African Americans.

It is more accurate to speak of black Nationalisms than a single Nationalism. These approaches differ strategically but share common assumptions about the nature of race in America. Garvey asserted that blacks required a separate state, but many midtwentieth-century Nationalisms looked to a kind of racial self-determination within the American state. Growing out of black demands for full citizenship

rights articulated by African Americans midcentury, black Nationalists from organizations such as the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) and the Black Panthers advocated the development of distinct, black-controlled centers of politics, economics, and culture as the central strategy for addressing black inequality. In 1966 the SNCC produced a position paper on black power asserting that SNCC should be “black-staffed, black-controlled and black-financed. . . . If we continue to rely upon white financial support we will find ourselves entwined in the tentacles of the white power complex that controls this country” (SNCC 1966). The position paper reflects a common suspicion among Nationalists that alignment with outsiders, particularly whites, compromises the integrity of black struggles (Pinkney 1976; Henderson 1978; Lincoln 1961).<sup>20</sup>

Pinkney identifies at least four manifestations of black Nationalism: cultural, educational, religious, and revolutionary.<sup>21</sup> Dawson adds a fifth, community Nationalism, which employs both economic and electoral strategies and is articulated through a language of self-determination and racial pride. Although different in emphasis and taking on significance at various points in the past century, Nationalism has some consistent elements, including an emphasis on the immutable and unique relevance of race, a perception of whites as actively resisting black equality, and an insistence on African American self-reliance through the creation of separate institutions. Nationalists tend to privilege race over other identities, such as gender, class, and sexual identity. “Black nationalist theoretical vision of black liberation continues to be based on the contention that understanding the plight of blacks and achieving black salvation must be based on taking race and racial oppression as the central feature of modern world history” (Dawson 2001, 86). It is these common threads that identify it as an ideological approach.

### *Contemporary Liberal Integrationism*

Liberal Integrationists want a society in which African Americans enjoy the political, economic, and social freedoms and rights of other citizens. They locate the source of black inequality in corrupt institutions but believe that individuals can have good intentions and that cross-racial alliances are both possible and necessary. Integrationist thought accepts that liberal democratic tenets of representative democracy, liberalism, and capitalism are the most appropriate ways to order American society. Integrationists suggest that the American system works in theory; the problem is that, in practice, it only works for privileged members of society. Integrationism is an ideology that seeks to access that privilege

for African Americans. Further, it argues that the most effective way to pursue the interest of blacks is to link black interests to those of the larger American society.

Liberal Integrationism must be understood within the context of American liberalism.<sup>22</sup> Although closely aligned with the liberal tradition in American political thought, black Liberal Integrationism contains inherent critiques of the American system. Among the most important divergences in these traditions are Liberal Integrationism's greater emphasis on equality, the notion of collective rather than individual rights, and the reliance on a strong central state.

Liberty and equality are benchmarks of the American creed, but within white public opinion liberty is often professed as the most important. This pattern is reversed among African Americans, who tend to rank equality as the guiding principle of political action (Rokeach 1968). This trajectory within African American thought emphasizes not only equality of opportunity, but also a strong notion of equality of outcome. Schuman, Steeth, and Bobo (1997) demonstrate that even when whites and blacks are supportive of general notions of equal opportunity, black Americans are consistently more likely than whites to support specific policies designed to create equality of outcome. Black Liberal Integrationism is not about taking on a junior partnership in American democracy, it is about full and equal participation in the polity. Martin Luther King, Jr., whose philosophies are more often understood as theories of freedom, understood that for African Americans freedom was possible only under conditions of material equality. "When millions of people have been cheated for centuries, restitution is a costly process. Inferior education, poor housing, unemployment, inadequate health care — each is a bitter component of the oppression that has been our heritage" (1983).

Not only are black Liberal Integrationists attentive to equality as a guiding political principle, they also perceive the state as the best tool for achieving this goal. In his classic text on black politics, Hanes Walton asserts, "The struggle of black people in America has been one of seeking to bring the federal government to their side. In fact, the basic thrust of blacks in the American political system has been one of having their rights defined by law" (1972, 31). Dawson concurs, writing, "Since the end of World War II, the economic status of African Americans has been powerfully linked to the economic policies of the federal government" (1994, 44). Since Reconstruction, black political and economic fortunes have been tied to the strength of the federal government, and contemporary Liberal Integrationism continues to focus on government strategies for ensuring black progress. Electoral participation, federal litigation, pressure for state-based economic redevelopment, and

support for race-targeted government programs are the hallmarks of Liberal Integrationist strategy. The contemporary civil rights movement was largely initiated within a Liberal Integrationist ideological framework.

Finally, Liberal Integrationism is less individualistic than traditional American liberalism. Harold Cruse asserts that African Americans shun notions of individual meritocracy because they recognize that “this dilemma rests on the fact that America, which idealizes the rights of the individual above everything else, is in reality, a nation dominated by the social power of groups, classes, in-group and cliques” (1984, 7). African American Liberal Integrationism has generally framed its discourse as an agitation for the rights of African Americans as a group.<sup>23</sup> Citing the historic, categorical exclusion of blacks as a race, they claim that redress can come only through similarly collective-oriented strategies and policies. Although King is now often painted as an individualist by citing the “content of their character” line from his “I Have a Dream” speech, he was in fact deeply attuned to the collective realities of black life. Not only did he seek to employ mass-based strategies for change, he was aware that race in America was a collective experience. “Being a Negro in America is not a comfortable experience, it means being a part of the company of the bruised, the battered, the scarred, and the defeated. . . . It means the ache and anguish of living in so many situations where hopes unborn have died” (1967).

Liberal Integrationism is an internally heterogeneous and contingent ideology. It is an ideological tradition that encompasses aspects of the political philosophy of Frederick Douglass, Martin Luther King, Jr., Ralph Bunche, and W.E.B. DuBois, among many other thinkers. Although contingent and contested, it remains an identifiable and coherent ideology linked to and critical of traditional American liberalism.

### *Contemporary Black Conservatism*

Black Conservatives locate the source of black inequality in the behavioral or attitudinal pathologies of African Americans and stress the significance of moral and personal rather than racial characteristics to explain unequal life circumstances. They stress self-reliance, hope for a colorless society, and shun government assistance.<sup>24</sup> Core concepts of black Conservatism include an appeal to self-help, an attack on the state as an overly intrusive institution that retards societal progress, and a belief that the free market is nondiscriminatory. Black Conservatives stress that political strategies are inferior to strategies of economic development for addressing the problems of blacks in America. Conserva-

tism includes a rejection of policy strategies that diminish the honor of African Americans by allowing a perception of undeserved benefits for blacks (i.e., affirmative action). Black Conservatism is rooted in a history of racial uplift, a belief that African Americans must fortify their moral and economic strength in order to compete in the American meritocracy (Dawson 1995; Washington 1969; Hamblin 1996; Williams 1996; Loury 1990).

Twentieth-century black Conservatism is grounded in the work of Booker T. Washington. His accommodationist philosophy found institutional expression in the Tuskegee method of industrial education, designed to instill work ethic and manual skills in post-Reconstruction blacks with the promise of making African Americans profitable and pliable members of society (Washington 1895). Many contemporary black Conservatives trace their ideological roots to the emphases on thrift, industriousness, and moral character that are infused in Washington's writings.

Many Conservatives are willing to acknowledge that there is a history of racial discrimination in the United States, but most argue that the external factors of black inequality have been largely addressed and that in contemporary America, black pathology is the true perpetrator of inequality. Conservative Mike Green captures the spirit of this aspect of black Conservatism in an analysis of the relationship among the federal government, black behavior, and the contemporary state of African American communities.

The notion that we are still victims of slavery is a ploy designed to influence us and apologetic whites to support liberal causes such as expanded government. It's a bogus claim. Our ancestors recovered quickly from the despair of slavery. Communities were built, businesses were started and colleges were constructed by freed slaves and their immediate descendants. In 1964, when Southern Democrats lost their fight against the Civil Rights Act, blacks progressed at a phenomenal rate. Albeit poor, we were moving in the right direction. . . . What sent the black out-of-wedlock birth rate soaring into the stratosphere? In 1965, liberals began introducing hundreds of government programs creating a massive welfare state now in dire need of reform. The dirty secret is that, under the guise of government assistance, those wishing to suck from the federal cash nipple must remove the male provider from a household or find their cash cut off. As a result, black illegitimacy skyrocketed. Between 1965 and 1975, the implementation of these programs more than doubled in the black community. No other factor in the history of black Americans has produced such devastation in such a short time. Out-of-wedlock births and fatherless homes go hand-in-hand. Women are sometimes ill-equipped to raise boys, and ram-

pant crime originates from these uncontrollable boys without fathers who grow into ignorant and dangerous men. The cycle of violence escalates with each new generation of black bastards. Should black America assume some responsibility for this mess? You bet.<sup>25</sup>

In black communities, black Conservatism is often critiqued as an alien ideology, and Conservatives are maligned as “Uncle Toms,” but it is important to remember that black Conservatism is a part of the indigenous intellectual tradition within black America. Conservatism may not enjoy a substantial popular following, but it is an ideological tradition with deep roots in African American history. Because Conservatives are often caricatured, it is easy to forget that Conservatism, like other black ideologies, is a contested space. Dawson (2001) points to the diversity in approaches between Conservative black economists, arguing that Glen Loury is atypical among Conservative leaders in his analysis of the continuing legacy of racism operating in the lives of African Americans and his belief that the government bears some responsibility for African American inequality. Economist Thomas Sowell is on the other extreme of this spectrum, arguing that, even historically, racism is not a significant explanatory variable in black life chances. In an introduction to a volume on contemporary black Conservatism, editors Stan Farnya, Brad Stetson, and Joseph Conti emphasize the heterogeneity and continuities of black Conservative thought. “There is no single ideology ‘black conservatism.’ Conservative African Americans speak in many different voices, hold a variety of sometimes divergent opinions and ideas. But they are all characterized by the sanguinity about the American prospect and humanist—as opposed to race-centered—consciousness that leads them to manifest social, political, and economic concerns that are not tinged with the hue of racial victimization which is so pervasive in the discourse of conventional black advocates” (1997, xiv).

### *Contemporary Black Feminism*

Black Feminism is an ideology rooted in recognition of the unique intersections of race, class, and gender faced by African Americans. Black Feminism focuses on the intersection between race and gender and seeks gender equality within the African American community as well as racial equality within the American state. It is concerned with resisting both patriarchy and racism. While Feminists are often willing to form coalitions with black men on questions of racial justice and with non-black women on gendered issues, they resist the racism and classism of the white women’s movement and reject the sexist element of black

liberation discourse and activism (Collins 1991; Hull, Bell, and Smith 1982; hooks 1992).

Black Feminism as a fully articulated ideology is built on the realities of African American women in the middle of the twentieth century who were engaged in resistant political action. Black women confronted patriarchal domination by men in the black liberation movement and the paternalist racism in the women's movement. Black women found that their political agenda was sacrificed on the altar of "unity." Black Feminism as an ideology derives from an attempt to address real material circumstances, to create a way to understand how race, gender, class, and sexuality intersect in black people's lives to create unique forms of political, economic, and social oppression. Feminism has emerged as a critical theory employed in academic work and as a political ideology engaged in the work of political mobilization.

Black Feminism is not an essentialized identity that automatically accrues to black women: "Being a biological female does not mean that one's ideas are automatically Feminist. Self-conscious struggle is needed" (Collins 1991, 27). Nor is black Feminism simply an articulation of white feminist thought by black women. It is a unique intellectual contribution to the understanding of relations of power, domination, and resistance. Black Feminism marks its contemporary roots in the 1977 Combahee River Collective "Black Feminist Statement." Staking out a place for unique black women's politics, this group of activist African American women wrote: "We are actively committed to struggling against racial, sexual, heterosexual, and class oppression and see as our particular task the development of integrated analysis and practice based upon the fact that major systems of oppression are interlocking. The synthesis of these oppressions creates the condition of our lives. As Black women we see Black feminism as the logical political movement to combat the manifold and simultaneous oppressions that all women of color face" (Combahee River Collective 1977). The Collective's statement reflects many of the central tenets of black Feminist ideology: a blurring of identity politics, an unwillingness to ignore either race or sex in pursuit of political goals, an insistence on insurgent political action aimed at liberation of broad categories of people, and a centering of marginalized persons within political movements. Kimberle Crenshaw argues that only an intersectional approach to political action can adequately address the multiple sources of domination that face black women.

An intersectional framework suggests the ways in which political and representational practices relating to race and gender interrelate. This is relevant because the separate rhetorical strategies that characterize antiracist and feminist politics frequently intersect in ways that create new dilemmas



for women of color. For example, political imperatives are frequently constructed from the perspectives of those who are dominant within either the race or gender categories in which women of color are situated, namely white women or men of color. These priorities are grounded in efforts to address only racism or sexism—as those issues are understood by the dominant voices within these communities. Political strategies that challenge only certain subordinating practices while maintaining existing hierarchies not only marginalize those who are subject to multiple systems of subordination, but also often result in oppositionalizing race and gender discourses. (1997)

Black Feminism both stakes out a new intellectual ground and maps a unique political strategy. It would be incorrect to understand Feminism as an entirely unified political approach. Like all intellectual traditions within black thought, Feminism is contested terrain. Patricia Hill Collins's *Black Feminist Thought* (1991) is a central text in the Feminist tradition, but its insistence on “presenting feminist thought as overly coherent” has drawn criticism from more recent scholars of the Feminist tradition who are intent on exploring the contradictions and tensions in contemporary black Feminist thought (White 2001). Some scholars in this tradition reject the term Feminism in favor of Womanism.<sup>26</sup> Black Feminisms are variously attentive to issues of class, religion, private/public dichotomies, interracial alliance, and sexual identity.<sup>27</sup> Although these contestations are critical for understanding the nuance of black Feminism, it is also clear that all Feminism is “concerned by the negative impact that interactions between categories of identity, such as sexuality, race, class, and gender, have on black women's lives” (White 2001, 80).

These four ideologies represent important alternate political worldviews available to African Americans through the process of everyday talk. The ideology-as-language metaphor instructs us that these ideologies exist in pure form only in ideal types. Individual Nationalists, Feminists, Conservatives, and Integrationists will express a broad range of attitudes within these political worldviews. For most adherents, individual political ideology is some combination of elements from these four ideologies. Comprehending black political ideology is a complicated process of both knowing the central building blocks of black thought patterns and understanding how these ideologies work in combination with one another. An important way to grasp black political ideology is to study everyday black talk.

There are a number of a priori conditions that influence the kind of community dialogue an individual will engage in and the type of space she or he will use to engage other African Americans. These conditions

include class, gender, age and religiosity. For example, black men often consume different public spaces from those occupied by black women. Only those who attend church are exposed to church-centered spaces. Poorer African Americans are less likely to have opportunities to interact in organization-based spaces. While African Americans are guided by these characteristics and preferences when making choices about where to spend their time and energy, these preferences are not the whole story of political attitudes. Within each of these spaces, African Americans discuss issues of personal and public concern. As they do so, they express opinions about what it means to be black in America, how important blackness is as a personal characteristic, the extent to which blacks should make demands on the American system, and the extent to which whites are friends or foes in the struggles of African Americans.

### INTRODUCTION TO FINDINGS

The remainder of this project uses multiple methods of academic inquiry to provide evidence to test the everyday talk theory of black ideology advanced above. It begins with a case study of a Southern, black Baptist church; moves to a statistical analysis of national survey data and experimental data; and follows with an ethnography of an urban barbershop and a textual analysis of the writings of several black public figures.

Chapter 2 presents findings from a case study of a black, Baptist church in Durham, North Carolina. Evidence gathered from interviews with church membership, content analysis of the minister's writing and speaking, and participant-observer experiences shows how a black organization self-consciously presents its ideological messages to its members. This case study explores how members receive and process elite messages, how they use them to build individual political worldviews, how they understand and express their political and religious ideologies, and how they use these ideologies to make sense of the world.

Chapter 3 builds on the argument that there are identifiable political ideologies operating as social and individual knowledge structures among African Americans. This chapter makes a case that ideology exists among black Americans and that individual worldviews are derived from combinations of the four ideologies. Using survey data from the 1993–1994 National Black Politics Study, it provides evidence for the existence of ideology among African Americans and specifies the ways that everyday talk influences ideological development. Using statistical analysis of this national data, the chapter provides measures of ideologies, for the core beliefs that contribute to their development, and for

elements of the black counterpublic. It demonstrates that these ideologies exist in the black population and gives a sense of their distribution among African Americans. It further shows that membership in black organizations, participation in politicized black churches, and exposure to black media sources are important sources of discourse that African Americans use to inform their political and racial attitudes.

The book then turns to an analysis of two experimental studies in chapter 4. The 1998 North Carolina Central University Political Attitudes Study and the 2001 Kennedy-King College African American Attitudes Study both offer evidence that some political attitudes are encouraged and others are policed within African American dialogue. The studies focus on receptivity to Feminist and Conservative sentiments in a variety of settings and specify the ways that these often unpopular ideologies find space in the everyday talk of African Americans.

Chapter 5 is a participant-observer ethnography of a black-owned barbershop in Southside Chicago. Co-authored with Quincy T. Mills, who spent several months hanging out with the men of Truth and Soul, the barbershop study demonstrates the rich political content of African Americans talking with and for themselves. The ethnographic work adds nuance and texture to the understanding of the ways individuals use racial and political reasoning in their daily lives.

In the final empirical chapter, textual analysis demonstrates how representatives of four black ideologies use claims of racial authenticity to gain adherents among African Americans. Bell hooks and the black Feminist criticism of the 1995 Million Man March; Colin Powell and the Conservative appeal of the 1996 presidential race; Kweisi Mfume and the battle to integrate network television; and Tom Joyner and the fight to save Tavis Smiley serve as examples of how ideological elites use claims of authenticity to gain credibility among black masses. These cases show how black elites tap into African American messianic beliefs; assert themselves as part of the defiance tradition; make claims of morality; and use appeals to the American promise. This chapter inspects the use of each of these cultural elements in the narratives of black public figures and demonstrates how elites are constrained by the expectations of everyday talk.

The concluding chapter draws together the findings from the statistical evidence, experimental research, and ethnographic studies into a coherent whole. It discusses the unique contributions of this book to the studies of political ideology and African American political thought. This chapter also traces the emergence of everyday black talk as a matter of public notice in popular culture in 2002 during the controversy surrounding the movie *Barbershop*.