



A Conversation Between Generations

*Education, Awareness,
and Empowerment for
the New Millennium*

Manning Marable
Kevin Powell

The following was excerpted from the Seventeenth Annual Conference of the Consortium of Information and Telecommunication Executives Incorporated, held in New York City, September 29 through October 1, 2000. "A Conversation Between Generations" was held before a predominantly African-American audience.

Manning Marable: Sisters and brothers, good morning.

I have the real pleasure to be here this morning communing with you and with brother Kevin Powell, who combines an important critique of contemporary culture with

the social theory and insight to draw it out and make connections with the historical terrain of the Black struggle. What I want to talk about today is what binds us together, because the dialogue with Kevin is really about one central question that African-American people should be asking within our own communities: What is the common vision that can create the future framework for our continuity and facilitate the development of our people?

I'd like to talk about three interrelated themes this morning. The first is about gener-

ations, the second is about what it means to be Black, and the third is about vision. And as people have frequently observed in the past, "without a vision the people perish."

"Generations" refers to how people see themselves through a process of common experience. If one looks at the construction of African-American people, one can see perhaps four decisive moments in the construction of worldviews that give us a sense of place, a sense of cultural identity, and also a sense of a historical relationship and kinship to each other. The first is the experience of enslavement. The second is the experience of Jim Crow segregation. The third is the experience of ghettoization in the Northeast. And the fourth is this brave new world we are encountering today, the world of postindustrial capitalism, the world of globalization, the world of cyberspace—moving from the codes of text to the dynamic interfacing of multimedia templates, of cultural discourses that are transforming how we work and also how we think about ourselves and our culture.

African-American people, we must always remember, we were not invited here. We did not receive engraved invitations to come to the United States, and yet our labor power produced the foundation of this country. And it was the struggles of our foremothers and forefathers that created the foundation for what we think of today as Black culture and Black history. Their stories and their culture and their music tell us much about who they were, how they loved each other, how they saw themselves as connected to the continent of Africa, and how they saw their lives here. And so music is a way—and here this is again speaking to Generation X, or the hip-hop generation—music is a way that we can measure the cultural, the spiritual, the psychological character of that generation. So when you listen to Robert Johnson, when you listen to the spirituals, when you listen to the music of field hollers from Mississippi and Alabama and

Georgia, you are listening to the voice and the spirit and vision of a generation of our people who were engaged in struggle and sacrifice. It gives you a window on the making of the generations trapped in this oppressive leviathan of slavery. You can hear and feel brothers and sisters like Nat Turner and Henry Highland Garnett and Sojourner Truth and Harriet Tubman, who were struggling to destroy structural racism.

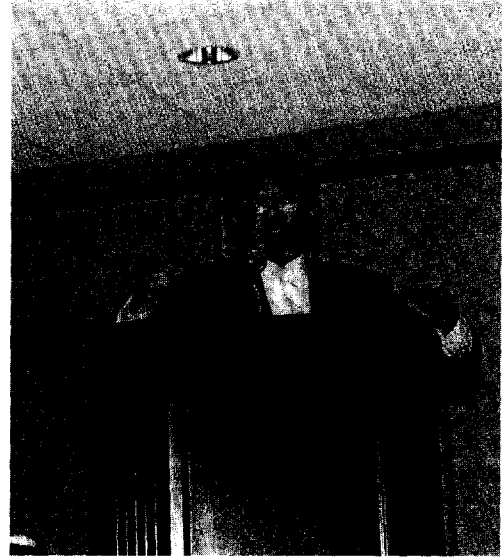
It is through their art, their language, and their song that we can measure and understand the experience of that particular generation of Black people. The generation of Black people who lived and went through Jim Crow segregation in the South, you can feel what it was like to be a sharecropper—in their music, in the blues. In the delta blues of Mississippi, you can feel what it was like to be Jim Crowed. You can feel what it was like to have 5,000 Black people lynched across the South, as we did between 1882 to 1927.

And so the music and the art reflects the materiality, the basis of what another generation lived through—the generation of Black folk who traveled North in the Great Migration of the 1910s to the 1960s that created the great Black metropolises of Harlem, of Bed-Stuy, of Cleveland, of Detroit, of the South Side of Chicago, of south central Los Angeles. They created a cultural and social context of Black residences that spawned Black-based cultural institutions. They created a new kind of music and sensibility for an urban-based Black generation. We can hear that in the cutting edge of bebop, of Charlie Parker. We can hear that in the provocative cultural expressions of what Motown represented for my generation in the 1960s. One can trace the spirit and cultural sensibility of what it meant to be Black and living in an urban area by measuring the cultural products of that generation.

Finally, we are now in a postindustrial age. We are in an era of deindustrialization and globalization. The cultural discourse changes

services, the quality of care that you receive will be inadequate and substandard. To be Black means that your children will not have the same academic experiences and access to higher learning resources of those children in the white suburbs or exclusive urban enclaves. To be Black means that your mere physical appearance that is the reality of your being can trigger surveillance cameras at shops, supermarkets, and malls. To be a Black male and living in central Harlem today, according to a 1991 *New England Journal of Medicine* report, means your life expectancy is only forty-nine years.

Racism continues to represent itself to people of color, and especially to people of African descent, as an unending series of moments of inequality, constantly challenging us, sapping and draining physical, mental, and moral resources. And perhaps this is what many white Americans have never fully understood about the reality of race—that racism is not just a social discrimination, it's not just a political disfranchisement, it's not even the acts of extralegal terror that were waged against our people with lynchings in the nineteenth century or with the death penalty in the twenty-first century. Racism in our daily lives, for both Generation X and for the Black Power generation, is manifested in the smallest areas of life. The white merchant who drops the change on the sales counter rather than touching the hand of a Black person. The white salesperson who follows you into the dressing room when you carry several items of clothing to try on because he or she suspects you are trying to steal. The white teacher who deliberately avoids the upraised hand of the Black or Latino student in class, giving white people an unspoken yet understood advantage. The white women who wraps the strap of her purse several times tightly around her arm just before walking past the brother on the street. The white taxicab drivers who speed

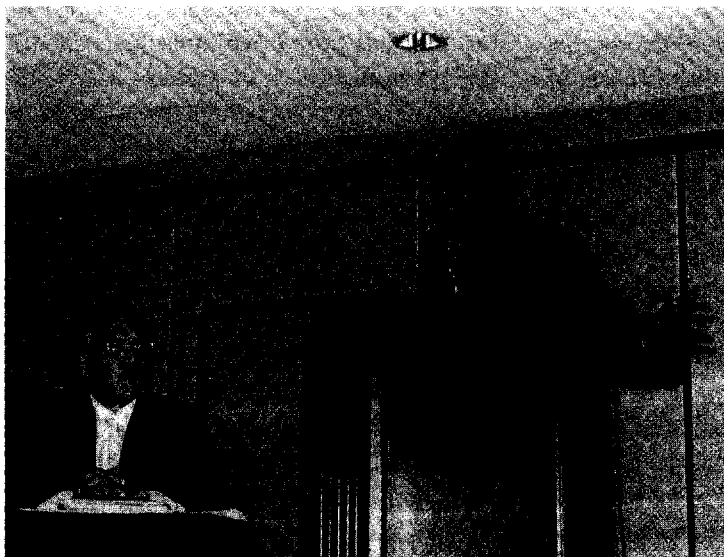


rapidly past us as we are trying to catch a ride uptown at night.

The great advantage I think that we had growing up in institutional racism during Jim Crow, speaking as somebody who's fifty, is that racism was omnipresent. We saw it every day, just like you should see it every day. I grew up in Dayton, Ohio, but every summer I went to Tuskegee, Alabama, and I spent my summers in Alabama. In Tuskegee, at the Dairy Queen, a Black person couldn't go in and buy the ice cream. You had to stand outside—there was a side window where you paid your money and you got the cone. At the dry goods store, a Black man could not go in and try on a cap or a pair of pants. You had to pick it out by sight. At the bus depot, Black people couldn't wait inside, you had to stand outside in the cold. And when you experience this, even for one moment in your life, you will never forget it. You will never forget it. And so you knew that being Black meant being part of a struggle. You knew that being Black meant that there would be obstacles and barriers, and to overcome them, a commitment to personal excellence is absolutely essential.

I think the challenge that the hip-hop generation has is that those barriers not only still

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Kevin Powell and Manning Marable in Conversation

Photo by Delphine Fuwundu

exist today but are more insidious. Racism hasn't "declined in significance." It has simply mutated into a new, far more subtle form. The signs have been taken down, and yet the reality of discrimination and inequality in terms of resources—the fact that even though the media tells us the Black community is doing remarkably well economically, Black people still make only sixty cents for every dollar that white laborers demand, or that African-American households have only one-twelfth the net wealth of the average white American household—that tells me there is still a struggle to be waged. There is still a struggle that must be waged. And it must be grounded in an appreciation of our history and culture.

The greatest lie in racism is that we are a people without a history or without a culture. Now, while it is certainly true that African Americans are survivors of a very destructive historical process—slavery, segregation, ghettoization—any understanding of Black history illustrates that we have shaped and continued to define our existence as a people.

Culture has always been a weapon through which we have made new history. What are the cultural reservoirs creating the psychological, the emotional, the cultural foundation of the strength and vision of Blackness that America has produced? Even in the shadows of slavery, we found our humanity in the gift of song. Our music tells us much about who we are. It tells us the essence of

our story. From the blues of the Mississippi delta to the soaring sounds of bebop in Harlem in the forties to hip-hop in the twenty-first century, Black music represents the pulse and sensibility of Blackness. Black history and culture reveal the gift of grace, the fluidity of motion and beauty, which an oppressed people can claim as their own. It is constantly recreated in so many ways, from the artistry of dance to the spectacular athleticism of Michael Jordan. Grace is the ability to redefine the boundaries of possibility. We as a people were not supposed to survive the crucible of segregation and slavery, and yet our very existence speaks to the power of collective imagination. That power is found in the language we speak. That power is found in the rhythms of gospel—the power of the preacher on Sunday mornings in our churches. That power is found in the creative energy of our poets and playwrights. The gift of grace can be heard in the writings of a Toni Morrison, in an Amiri Baraka, a Jimmy Baldwin, and an Alice Walker.

Throughout Black history there has been the strength of our faith. During slavery, prayer was in many ways an act of resistance. When we sang "Steal Away to Jesus," our eyes

looked to the North Star, to the faraway promised land of freedom. From the courage of Martin Luther King Jr. to the activism of Jesse Jackson to the militancy of Nat Turner, who was a preacher, Black faith has always reinforced the struggle for Black humanity. And finally, Black history reveals the strength of heritage and tradition. I want to close with two observations. For any oppressed people, the greatest challenge is the struggle for memory and identity. What is the meaning of what our people have experienced in this long sojourn in this country? We have endured and we continue to endure by having a knowledge of our culture and history. And it's on that basis that one generation can engage in a productive and constructive dialogue with another.

Finally, I'll conclude with some advice from a brother who, I think, speaks to both the hip-hop and the "We Shall Overcome" generations, brother Bob Marley. Bob Marley said, "Until the color of a man's skin is of no greater consequence than the color of his eyes, there'll be war." Brother Marley was correct. But what we must ask ourselves is, "How do we get there?" We don't get there by pretending that racism has magically declined in significance, because it hasn't. We can't get there by pretending that affirmative action is no longer necessary, because it is. We cannot get there by pretending that all of us share in the same material and economic abundance, because that doesn't exist when you go into a neighborhood like Harlem, where you can measure the social inequality in terms of asthma and low birth weights. Or you can measure the underfunding of our predominantly Black and Latino public schools and compare it with the prison budget, which in New York state in the past ten years has doubled to \$700 million.

And so the struggle continues. It is a cultural struggle. It is an economic struggle for empowerment. It is an ideological struggle. But it is also a struggle of faith and spirit and

culture. And it's on that basis, sisters and brothers, that people across the generational divide can find unity, divergence, and continuity.

Kevin Powell: Good Morning. I want to say, first of all, it is a great honor to be here.

Dr. Manning Marable is one of my intellectual mentors, going back to when I was a college student in the 1980s during the anti-apartheid movement. I went to Rutgers University, where we had a Black/Latino newspaper, and Dr. Marable's column was one of the columns that we ran. He sent it all over the country, and I would read this thing religiously every week.

It's important to say that, because a lot of times people think there is such a huge disconnect between my generation, what we call the hip-hop generation, and the civil rights generation—that a lot of us are not paying attention to the elders that came before us—and that's not completely true.

I was listening to Dr. Marable talk, and I think the only way we can begin to bridge this generation gap is to start with what he said to me a couple years ago about what we as a generation needed: some deep background. And it's important to say that even though I'm a product of the North, of the urban environment, I was born and raised in Jersey City by a single mother. We were poor, tremendously poor. You know the clichéd stories about welfare and food stamps and roaches—that was us. My mother did what a lot of Black folks have done, coming from the South and the Caribbean to somewhere where we think there's going to be promise of a better day. And then we found ourselves bunched up in Brooklyn or Harlem and Jersey City and Newark. You know the story.

But my mother, who's from the same generation as Manning Marable, even though she wasn't an active participant in the civil rights movement—I mean a lot of Black folks just

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was trying to live from day to day, let's be real about it—the energy of that period affected her. My mother showed me her birth certificate when I was a child—she's born in the 1940s—her birth certificate was marked "Colored." And so she said to me, it's significant that we've gone from Colored to Black to Afro-American to African-American. The symbolic thing meant something to her. It's significant that her grandparents and parents, my grandparents, were illiterate, never given the opportunity to get an education. My mother and her two sisters and brother, they all lived in a two-room shack and managed to get to school up until about the eighth grade. But they really had the equivalent of like a fourth- or fifth-grade education. But even so, what was instilled in my mother was that education could be one way of advancing our people.

When my mother came North and had me, unfortunately my father did what a lot of us have internalized: Make babies, keep stepping. And I want to be the man that my father wasn't. She thought that the best thing for me was to go to integrated schools—that was one of the victories of the civil rights movement. A lot of us forget that part of the civil rights movement was that we could get the opportunity to go to some of these historically white colleges and universities. You can go to Rutgers University, Columbia University.

We couldn't afford to pay for private schools growing up. We went to mixed schools in Jersey City—public schools. I think my mother made about \$5,000 a year while she was raising me, working in factories, working as a homemaker, sweeping—whatever she had to do, she did it, you know, the way Black women have always done. And so my mother thought that us going to a school system that had white folks in it—because unfortunately a lot of us confuse access into these institutions with success—was doing the best that she could.

And so like many people born in the sixties and seventies going to these integrated schools, I got straight As grades K through 12. But there was so much I didn't know about until I got to college—and not because I went to college, but because of what I walked into in college. The anti-apartheid movement was going on then on college campuses. Someone said, South Africa, and, I mean, I could barely tell you where South Carolina was at the time. It really opened my head up. Because unfortunately, what happened somewhere between the civil rights generation and the hip-hop generation was a gap in terms of the understanding of the struggle we had come from, which Dr. Marable alluded to. When I grew up, I didn't know who Harriet Tubman was. Sojourner Truth? Nat Turner? All I knew about Dr. King was Montgomery bus boycott 1955, he had a dream 1963, 1968 he's dead. That was it. George Washington Carver experimented with some peanuts, no big deal to me. I had no idea how profound it was. Again, with Harriet Tubman, I thought it was a real railroad—I didn't know what they were talking about. So of course, if you're not learning anything about your history, your culture, your struggle, you're not going to think there's anything to struggle for.

And so that's the world that I came up in. Luckily, I got a little bit of residue in the 1980s, when I started encountering people who had been a part of the civil rights movement, and I started reading King's writings. Now I'm in my early thirties. I didn't know anything about our history until I was eighteen years old—I was basically a self-hating Negro the first eighteen years of my life. Imagine the cats coming up behind me who are teenagers today. The great schools I went to, they always seemed to stop history in those social studies classes right after World War II. You hear a little bit about Rosa Parks, but that was it. So I had no context other than the stories that my

mother told me about how racist the South was, how people called her the “N” word instead of her name, how they called my grandfather Pearly “Uncle Pearly,” how they called my grandmother Lottie “Aunt Lottie.” And I had no idea until I was an adult that that’s where Aunt Jemima came from—that white people were so racist they could not call an elder Black person Mr. or Ms., they called him or her uncle or aunt. I’ve been thinking about how they call it progress because they took the

handkerchief off Aunt Jemima’s head. Now I realize the symbolism of that.

I think a lot of times that we as Black people, as African people, don’t like to raise critical questions. We don’t like

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to rock the boat, so to speak. But I’ve got to ask the questions: What did we win with the civil rights movement? What did we lose with the civil rights movement? People have said to me, “Oh, Kevin Powell, you’re being blasphemous. How dare you disrespect the legacy of the people who came before you and made it possible for you to stand here.” That’s not what I’m saying. But if I consider myself a son of Ella Baker, Fannie Lou Hamer, of Malcolm and Dr. King—and not the Dr. King that’s watered down but the Dr. King who, one year before he was assassinated, critiqued capitalism, the Vietnam War, why we’re sending working-class, poor people to Vietnam to fight poor people in Vietnam—if I consider myself a son of that, then I have to raise some critical questions.

A lot of us, brothers and sisters, confuse access into mainstream America with success. I heard it thrown around a lot when I was being introduced: “Well, you’re a very successful young, Black man.” To me, success means nothing if my community’s not doing well. It means nothing. I mean, I could easily be very individualistic. I got my book deals, I got my career, blah, blah, blah. But that means nothing to me if in a community like Fort Greene, Brooklyn, where I live, I see working-class people being pushed out as gentrification kicks in, just like it’s happening in Harlem. Even our own people are saying, “Well, great, we got a Starbucks on 125th Street.” I’m not going to pay \$3.50 for a cup of coffee when you had a Mom-and-Pop store over there that was Black owned, and they only charged you 50 cents for it.

This is the nature of capitalism. Dr. Marable alluded to it. It’s like tricknology—makes you think there’s progress when there hasn’t been as much progress as you’d like to think. What did we win? I mean, I got to be the first person in my family, my immediate family, to go to college. That was a blessing. I felt this huge burden on my back when I went to college because I wasn’t just going for myself, I was going for my momma, my aunts and uncle, you know, my grandparents, my great-grandfather, who, I found out a couple years ago, was lynched. I was going to college for the people in South Carolina, in Barbados, Jamaica, Trinidad, and Africa. I was going to college for all those people. But even when I got to college, I noticed that a lot of us who are college educated and become Black professionals seem to think we made it there all by ourselves. We seem to think, “Man, what do I got to participate in the Black organization in my company for? Why are those Black folks even getting together? What’s the point of that?”

You know what I’m talking about. Some of us are so self-hating—because what else is it,

brothers and sisters?—that we don't want to have anything to do with Black folks. How many of you all in your positions now got there because there was no struggle? As Dr. Marable suggested, I think one of the things that we've lost is a sense of "the struggle consciousness," as I call it. A lot of us lost that as we moved out from the Brooklyns and Harlems of the world. You can live anywhere you feel like today, but when your mind-set begins to live somewhere else, there's a problem. When you think, as you become a part of the Black middle class, that the way to raise your children is to give them the material trappings that white Americans give their kids and then wonder why when your kids are grown they're completely confused, there's a deep problem. I've been to places like Baldwin Hills in California, PG County in Maryland, Atlanta, the Cascades—I mean, there are so many levels of confusion within my generation. And I'm talking about the college-educated ones. What did we lose?

So I think, brothers and sisters, we have to understand why the hip-hop generation is the way it is. I mean, my mother hates hip-hop, hates it. I understand, she's in her fifties, she grew up when you had Al Green, Otis Redding, Marvin Gaye, The Temptations. My mother loved Smokey Robinson. I mean, he was Shakespeare for her. He'll come on the radio today, she'll stop everything and smile. I understand if you're from that generation and you heard Marvin Gaye singing these incredible love songs, "I Want You," or Eddie Kendricks leading The Temptations in "Just My Imagination," and then you turn on the radio today and you get "The Thong Song," you're going to think that my generation has lost its mind. You're going to be like, "What happened to them? How did we go from that to this?"

I was speaking to some teenagers yesterday, and every time I said something, the kids were screaming out, "cha-ching." It's like this obsession with materialism and riches. When did

that happen? My theory, going back to the failures of the civil rights movement, is that it did not necessarily help all of us. It helped some of us. It definitely did not help a lot of us who were working class or who were poor. Hip-hop was created by working-class, Black and Latino people, in New York City. There was an intersection of African American, West Indian, Puerto Ricans in the Bronx. Most of them were males, and there's a reason for that. A lot of these males felt completely disenfranchised, left out of whatever we were supposed to have won from that great movement. So they took nothing and made it into something. Kool Herc came from Jamaica in 1967 and started throwing parties in 1969. It was the tail end of the civil rights movement, and he took the great sound systems of Jamaica and brought it to the streets of the Bronx. People were like, "Wow, where is this coming from?" A cat named Tracy 168 started tagging on walls as early as 1969. "Why are these young kids writing their names on walls?" Well, if you feel disempowered, if you feel like no one sees you, think about how empowered you feel if your name is in big, bold, bubble letters on the subway going across the city. What some people call vandalism to us is just a way of saying, "I'm here."

When you look at the names of some of the people to have come out of the hip-hop generation—Grandmaster Flash, Afrika Bambaata, Big Daddy Kane—these names have everything to do with self-empowerment. I need to feel good about myself. I need something to hold on to. This is what created us.

Let's keep in mind, too, when we talk about the hip-hop generation, people like Hurt, Bambaata, and Flash are now over forty. People in my age range, late twenties, early thirties, we're the second hip-hop generation. Then you got the cats coming up behind me who think that L'il Kim and JayZ are the be-all-end-all, and that hip-hop started with Tupac and Biggy, you know? So even

within a generation, there are disconnects that we struggle against.

When crack hit our communities in the eighties, cats who were broke all of a sudden were driving Cadillacs, wearing fur coats, saying "Yo, they got this new thing on the streets, I'm making a lot of money off this." People were losing weight quick, you know? Cats were becoming crackheads. I remember the guns came after that. When I was growing up, we fought with our hands. It was a big deal if someone got stabbed. Next thing you know, you can get a gun at the corner store. And as Dr. Marable talked about, what was going on in our community began to be reflected in our music. The materialism—everybody wanted to be a thug, a baller, a shot-caller, a player, a pimp. The sex and violence—I mean, let's not mistake this, you can go back and listen to the blues and see that we've always talked about sex and violence in our music. Dr. Marable mentioned Robert Johnson. But it's a whole other thing when you have a generation growing up on videos, where there's no more coded language, just visuals to reinforce in people's heads that we're nothing without our SUVs, our "ice," or what we call our jewelry.

So we created this incredible cultural movement called hip-hop out of nothing. But to me, it's the first movement we've created where there's no political backbone to it. I can point to the 1920s and say, wow, you had the Harlem Renaissance going on, this incredible explosion of art and culture, Langston Hughes, Zora Neale Hurston, Aaron Douglas, all these incredible people, but you also had this man who came from Jamaica named Marcus Garvey, who said "Up you mighty race!" And he helped to inform people of the antilynching activities of organizations like the NAACP. That's why Langston Hughes, his entire life, when you read his poetry from the twenties until when he died in '67, it always dealt with the people. It's the same thing with the civil

rights era. There's no way you can talk about the civil rights era without talking about James Brown saying, "Say it loud, I'm Black and I'm proud." Or without talking about Marvin Gaye's album, *What's Going On?* Would that album have existed without the civil rights movement, without the Black Power movement?

But my generation has grown up in this void of Black leadership. In the eighties, we had Jesse and Farrakhan inspiring us, but in the nineties—I'm not dissing, but in the nineties, I mean let's be real about it. You wonder why so many Black kids in inner-city areas aspire to be rappers, ball players, or hustlers—that's what we see on a daily basis. We don't see a Malcolm walking through Harlem, as he did a generation ago. We don't see a Dr. King interacting with the people. We feel that a lot of those folks who came out of the civil rights generation who went on to become elected officials completely turned their backs on us. We just had an election in New York where a young brother named Barry Ford, who's only thirty-five years old, ran for Congress against Ed Towns, who's been in office for eighteen years. So you have these career Black politicians now, you get to be a congressperson forever and ever—is this what the civil rights movement created?

Audience Member: "Access does not equal success"—that to me is a very profound comment. But if access does not equal success, then how are we going to bridge the gap created by the digital divide? This is now this new economy—how do we bridge the gap there?

MM: In answering that question, I would really focus on a couple things: First, how do we really talk about opportunity? I think we have to talk about leadership and leadership development. I always say to my students—and they occasionally get angry with me about it—

people get the leadership they deserve or demand. One way or the other. If there are problems with leaders, if there is a crisis in Black leadership, then the crisis isn't just the fault of that individual leader, it's our crisis.

What does it mean to be a leader? I always say that leadership is about power. And power, narrowly defined, is the capacity of any group to realize its specific objective interest and to affirm its values. Now, that presumes that you know what your interests are and you know what you're about in terms of your values. So leadership is a capacity to achieve. It is not the achievement, it is a capacity. It's like a muscle. And the more that you develop and cultivate a muscle, the stronger it grows. The same thing is true with leadership. It is the ability, the capacity to realize specific objective interests. We need to build Black institutions that create leaders. Leaders are not born, they are made. They are constructed. Leaders do not make history. It is history that produces leaders. That is to say, the conscious struggles of a people for power produce a leadership that speaks to the crisis that people are going through. But that is a carefully constructed process.

Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. did not invent the civil rights movement. Young people see Martin on a platform, on a pedestal, the mantle of leadership. But it is not taking anything away from Martin by saying that the Montgomery County bus boycott of 1955 wasn't his idea. It came from others in the community. We all know about Rosa Parks, the sister who refused to get up for the white man, who was jailed and charged a \$10 fine. But many of us don't know about E. D. Nixon, the brother who lived in Montgomery, the brother who was a part of the brotherhood of sleeping car porters, A. Phillip Randolph's all-Black union, who said, "Let us organize in this city." We don't know about Jo-Ann Robinson, the sister who taught at Alabama State, who on a mimeograph—the young

people don't know what a mimeograph machine is—they ran off 15,000 copies of flyers over the weekend telling Negroes not to ride the buses on Monday morning. Ninety-five percent of all Black folk in Montgomery County refused to ride the bus. And it was that evening at Dexter Avenue Church that people got together and Martin, quite by accident, was chosen to be the spokesperson for the Montgomery Improvement Association. That's the history. And so, Martin became the voice, and what a great voice he was. But he was a voice of a people in struggle. And so if we want to talk about new leadership, we have to talk about reviving the struggle and capacity building in Black organizations and institutions that cultivate leaders.

That we have this contradiction that Kevin correctly pointed to, of a kind of leadership caste that is cut off from the struggles of the people, is not the problem of that individual, it's our problem. People get the leadership they deserve. If you don't like your leaders, whose fault is it? If you don't like the misleadership in our community, then we have to change the process of how we think about our own business. The second thing we have to do is talk seriously about the relationship between leadership development and resource management. In the civil rights movement, we understood that there was a relationship between struggle and institution building. Think about the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, the SCLC. It was constructed in 1957 around a series of African-American churches. It was the churches, the Black institutions, that provided the resource base to mount a political campaign of desegregation. Today, we have to identify resources within the African-American community, devise creative and innovative structures that permit capacity building—that is, power, the ability to achieve your specific interests—and link that up with innovative ways to get into the media, get into the financial institutions,

get into the political leadership. There's a connection between institutions and activism, and that kind of discussion rarely occurs. A part of that is wealth creation, looking at innovative models of resource management and the cultivation of resources so that we can have power within public policy. That kind of discussion is what we should be having here.

Audience Member: Hello. I'm a part of the young cat generation that you spoke of earlier. I'm only seventeen, and I just want to know what can be done. I go to Penn State, and a lot of us there, we say we're there to get education. But a lot of the people there, like you said, are thinking about driving Beemers. They're not even dedicated to their schoolwork. So what do you think that we could do as a people to stop focusing on the cars and the jewelry, and focus on our education so that we can come together as a generation. Because I feel that my generation right now is very confused. I don't see us maturing and coming to a point where we can come together like they did in the fifties and the sixties. What do you suggest we can do so that we can succeed in a way that we can be proud of? How do we come back into our community and help?

KP: The only thing I can say in response, sister, is that when I was in college, it always seemed to be a handful of people doing the work. What's really important is for you to continue to grow and study and build your value system and your level of consciousness in terms of the struggle. Even if people say, "You know what, she's just a radical. She thinks she's Angela Davis." It doesn't matter what people are going to say about you, it's about how much you develop. When I was in college, like I said, I read everything I could get my hands on—Frantz Fanon, Angela Davis, bell hooks, Manning Marable, Chancellor Williams. I said, I have to absorb everything, because I need to know where I came

from. Even if other cats don't want to hear it now. I would say to cats, you might think college is a big party? I guarantee you when you get into the work world and go into some of these corporations, you will begin to deal with the institutionalized racism that you didn't want to deal with at Penn State or Rutgers or Columbia, NYU. All you can do really is kind of ring the bell for people, so to speak. Let them know, you know? But you have to continue to be the kind of leader that we need on these college campuses. Because it's sad to me when I go to college campuses to a Black history month program, and there are more white people there than Black people.

There's an illusion that because there's been this economic boom in America, it's been an economic boom for all of us. Not true. A lot of us believe that we've made progress, but I have too many friends who are journalists in some of the mainstream places who have hit that glass ceiling.

It's sad to say, but as Dr. Marable was saying, a lot of us in this younger generation, because there's no "Colored" here and "Whites" there, we actually think nothing's wrong. How did we get to this mind-set? The key is to ask yourself, what do I have to do in these times to raise the consciousness of my generation?

MM: I've got a response for the sister, too. We often think in history that there were moments, golden moments when all Black folk were united, and we wanted to move forward. And some of us in the sixties had a false formulation. They said, before there can be white-Black unity, or unity say with Latinos, or unity with poor folk, there had to be all-Black unity.

I'm going to tell you something. Blackness is not biological, it is not genetic, it is only indirectly related to color. It is a history, it's a culture, it's a mentality, it's an identity with struggle, and there will be Black people who are typically Black like Clarence Thomas, who

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is actually the whitest man in America today. That whiteness is a social construct, and it is located in what I call the three Ps: prejudice, power, and privilege. Prejudice, the stereotyping of people based on their physical appearance. Power, the utilization of resources to carry out your prejudice. And privilege, that is a hierarchy of rights and resources simply by being white that you have access to.

So this is, in part, the nature of the struggle that we have to wage—we have to unmask the structure of preference and privilege that exists. Part of our struggle is to develop and devise mechanisms that first let us know what is actually occurring in the country and marshal resources that provide the foundation of a new social movement. Culture can be such a resource.

Audience Member: Good morning, and thanks both of you for the information that was shared. For the young lady that's sitting over there, my daughter is a student at Penn State. She's on the SGA, on the appropriation committee, so perhaps you can have Mr. Powell come and address the students at Penn State, because that committee has over \$10 million, and like you, there are a lot of students who are not informed, and they are out of the loop when it comes down to Black awareness. It's a generation gap, and I suppose we as parents have not really enlightened them. I think he could open a door, where we can begin to step in afterward.

But my question to you is—I have only one child—how do you reach out to your nieces, your nephews, other kids in your community who seem to be lost and have no hope and appear to say, "I'm just going to die tomorrow." They look forward to the institutions rather than looking forward to living.

KP: One thing: Don't limit yourself to Penn State. One of the things we did at Rutgers, we connected to students at Columbia, Princeton, UCLA. I think that's one of the things

that a lot of college students do today—they go to state college, you know, they go to these schools and they think the struggle is only there. You have to connect to college students who are like-minded, around this country, at least. And that's where the Internet can come in handy.

I mentor young people from six to fourteen and even twenty-somethings, even though I'm in my early thirties. Because I think it's important for us to show some examples that there's another lifestyle, to show people other options. A lot of us talk a good game, and we'll say, I do my Big Brother/Big Sister thing once a month. And I don't think that's enough. Think about the fact that music videos have become the primary way a lot of young people are educated today—what they see on TV is what they want to be. And if you don't present any options—you wonder why cats see prison as a status symbol, not realizing this is a prison-industrial complex they're going into. And so I think it's very important for us to get back out there. And it kills me when I see people who are "professional" or "successful," they don't even reach out to their own family members. They're the first ones to say, "These damn kids."

I think you have to make an effort if you're serious about our communities. And it's not just the women, because I see a lot of women doing it—brothers have to do it, too. Because a lot of the young Black males out here, they need mentoring. I knew the hole that I felt in my life when I was growing up without a father. Which is why when I got older and I saw people like Manning Marable and Jesse Jackson and those kind of folks, I was like, "Black men can do this stuff." I didn't know we could be like this. So it's important for people to see examples.

Audience Member: I see a lot of younger people who seem to be involved politically, who are excited about the political process. I

just wanted to get your opinion if that's really happening, because I'm sure you guys see a lot more young folks than I do.

MM: There is a lot of activism among young people right now. Everything from SLAM at Hunter College, which is a student organization taking up police brutality issues and forming coalitions here in the city with activists who are combating anti-Asian violence. There are coalitions and political organizations throughout the country—the Black Radical Congress was founded a couple years ago in Chicago, we have a chapter here in New York, and we're organizing an "Education Works, Prisons Don't" conference in Harlem at the end of October. So there are a variety of formations that young people have hooked up to.

But my point is that you can never look to the majority to change history. It is always the dedicated minority. It is always a small number of people who dedicate themselves to knowing the history, the culture, and committing themselves to struggle. Malcolm X said years ago, he said that there's a story in East Africa, when they were launching the Mau Mau revolution, you know with 300 people in the audience, and the brother steps forward and says, "How many people want Uhuru—freedom?" Everybody raised their hand. "How many people are willing to die to achieve freedom?" Fifty people raised their hand. He said, you fifty people, you go over here. And the folks you're going to have to deal with first are the 250 people over here—they'll be your husbands, your wives, your fathers, your mothers, your sisters, your brothers. And you're going to have to go around them or under them or through them to achieve freedom. Freedom is not given to the oppressed, it must be fought for and it must be won. And the history and the culture of our people and the knowledge base that goes back to Africa through slavery, through segregation, that is a weapon of power

that can empower the hip-hop generation. But you cannot achieve your destiny if you do not have a sense of your history, because without a history there can be no possible vision for the future.

Audience Member: Just a brief comment. I'm a mother, and as my children were growing up, they used to call me The Mean Mother. But my daughter—she just graduated from Lincoln University—she told me recently, "Mom, I am so glad that you set the foundation for me, because I could be like some of my other friends who have babies and stuff like that." I really appreciated that she came to me about that. And I wanted to ask your opinion about disciplining children. I discipline my children. I don't take any mess from them, and they know that. And with the courts making it so hard for parents to discipline their children the way that they think they should—how do you feel about that?

MM: I hear what you're saying, sister, but I think that the greatest obligation of a Black parent to Black children is twofold: It's to provide the resources for the flowering of their full human potential, and to have the courage and strength to make real choices in their own lives. That's what a parent does. You teach by example, but not through coercion. You should try to create the framework—this is especially important for Black men. We must assume the responsibility that Black women often bear by themselves, of creating the resource base to allow the flowering of their personalities, their intellects and abilities. And then have the strength to lead by example. Then get out of the way and let them make the choices in their lives, because people then grow by assuming responsibility. And that's part of the problem in this crisis of leadership. People must assume responsibility and take the lead. And you can

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check this out because two of my three children are here, and I'm very proud of them. There's Joshua Marable, right up front, and Malaika Marable, who is a graduate student at the University of Maryland, she's also right up front. My kids can tell you, and my students can tell you, that I think people grow by being challenged, by being reinforced, but by being free to make choices. That's how young people grow—that's leadership development. That's what a leader does.

Audience Member: My comment is more of a statement, and any input that you guys can give would be greatly appreciated. I know some of us here work jobs where we feel like we put in a lot of time. We don't have the time to go back to the communities and do mentoring and stuff like that. But helping out the community does not necessarily mean your time—any financial help that you can give—maybe going back to our community center or whatever and helping them out with a computer—I'm sure is also appreciated.

KP: Thank you. I agree with you. I think it's important to say the struggle is multidimensional, you know. Not everyone's going to be on the front line. Not everyone's going to be an Ella Baker or a Fannie Lou Hamer or a Malcolm or a Dr. King. To me, the struggle means that if you're working at Verizon and you know a position is open that a Black person's qualified for, you make sure you let Black folks know about it. That's part of the contribution. Dr. Marable's the head of African-American studies at Columbia University, and the struggle for him is making sure that Black students know about the program. The struggle for me is, as a journalist, I made a conscious decision that I'm a Black journalist, not a journalist who happens to be Black. So I'm going to make sure I try to balance out some of the negative things that

come in the media in terms of our people. Those are all contributions to the struggle.

I want to respond to the other question regarding the disciplining of your kids. I'm real torn about that issue. I was raised up in the church—the Pentecostal's division, the holy rollers, that was us. And you know, I remember, time and time again, "Spare the rod, spoil the child." But I have to say this—and this may step on some people's toes—I don't think we can ever underestimate the level of self-hatred in our communities. Why do I say that? Because I've seen so many Black parents, and now I have my peers who are parents, who think that the way to treat their children is to intimidate them, to make them afraid of them, to beat them in their sleep. I mean, this stuff goes on. And when I see Black parents beating their children in public, I close my eyes, and I start thinking back to the plantations when the slaves would be flogged by the slave master in front of the other slaves. What am I saying here? I think we need to think about some different disciplinary approaches.

I'm not saying you shouldn't be disciplining, because what your daughter said to you, I said to my mother. When I first learned what the word dictator meant, I was like, that's my mamma right there: dictator. A lot of us are so unwhole that we take out a lot of stuff on our kids, and a lot of insanity gets passed from one generation to another, and we think that's the way you raise children. Then you wonder why your kid grows up, if he's a boy, to be irresponsible, violent toward women, etc. Because if he came from a violent household, that's what he learned. We need to think about that sort of stuff. I think we have to love our children holistically and, like Dr. Marable said, try to let them go at a certain point. If you really feel like you're a good parent, you will let them go. And I think my mother can say I'm not messed up. I got issues, but I'm not messed up.