African Americans and Utopia: Visions of a Better Life

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ABSTRACT
While there have been studies of individual African American writers and, recently, work on African American authors of science fiction, some of whom wrote utopias and, more often, dystopias, there has been no attempt to examine the many ways that African Americans have contributed to utopianism. To fill that gap, this article gives an overview of African American contributions to utopianism in literature, intentional communities, and utopian social theory.

KEYWORDS: utopia, African American, intentional communities, social theory, political theory

If we are dissatisfied with our situation in life, we often dream of how our life could be improved. Most basically, we want a full stomach, decent clothing and housing, and a sense of security, and millions of people in the world today do not now have these things. Throughout American history, African Americans were kept from achieving this most basic decent life, let alone the more complex needs that become possible for those who fulfill the first needs.
All the elements of this fundamental vision are included in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which was adopted in 1948 but was not ratified by the United States until 1992. Among the rights included in the Universal Declaration are

Article 4. No one shall be held in slavery or servitude; slavery and the slave trade shall be prohibited in all their forms.

Article 25. (1) Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and of his family, including food, clothing, housing and medical care and necessary social services, and the right to security in the event of unemployment, sickness, disability, widowhood, old age or other lack of livelihood in circumstances beyond his control.

Article 26. (1) Everyone has the right to education. Education shall be free, at least in the elementary and fundamental stages. Elementary education shall be compulsory. Technical and professional education shall be made generally available and higher education shall be equally accessible to all on the basis of merit. (2) Education shall be directed to the full development of the human personality and to the strengthening of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. It shall promote understanding, tolerance and friendship among all nations, racial or religious groups, and shall further the activities of the United Nations for the maintenance of peace.†

Obviously, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights is aspirational and does not reflect any reality, but it inspired institutions such as the African Court on Human and Peoples’ Rights, the Inter-American Court of Human Rights, and the European Court of Human Rights, all of which hear cases from individuals against governments and have ruled against such governments; and in some cases at least, governments have responded by changing their laws and behavior. Without such aspirational statements as the Universal Declaration, it is unlikely that such courts would have been created.

From colonial times African Americans have made clear that they should be treated better and be able to lead more fulfilling lives and, when help was not forthcoming, have worked, often collectively, to better their lot. Such visions and demands are often seen through the lens of utopianism or social dreaming, which can be expressed in literature, in choosing to live a life that
reflects their vision of a good life, and in other ways, all of which are discussed below.

In what follows, I try to show how African Americans’ visions of the better life developed and changed over time in literature, intentional communities founded for and by African Americans, and other forms. I begin with utopian literature written by African Americans, which includes both positive views where life is much better for African Americans and negative views where life is even worse than at present. I then turn to intentional communities, including colonization schemes both within the United States and in other areas, most often Africa, founded both by African Americans and for African Americans. Since these do not exhaust the ways such visions can be expressed, I end by looking at other expressions of utopianism.

There are some consistent themes in what follows, such as the desire/demand for freedom, land, education, and economic and physical security, with land somewhat less central today than in the past and security, while always a subtext, coming to the fore in this century. But given these commonalities, there is considerable variety among the visions, particularly as they are expressed in intentional communities. This is hardly surprising, but it is a useful reminder that African Americans should not be thought of as though they all thought alike, a tendency that is too common.

Utopian Literature

While there have been studies of individual African American writers and, recently, work on African American authors of science fiction, some of whom wrote utopias and, more often, dystopias, there has been no attempt to examine the many ways that African Americans contributed to American utopianism, which results in a substantial gap in the history of American political thought. This overview of the goals of such utopianism and some on how those goals might be achieved is an attempt at beginning to fill that gap.

In much U.S. utopian literature written by whites, African Americans simply do not appear. In some unexplained way, the issue of race simply disappears. For example, there are several early texts, such as Timothy Dwight’s 1794 “The Vision” and Edward Kent’s 1848 “A Vision of Bangor,” that without explanation present the country without slavery.
But the problem of slavery and, more generally, what to do about the fact of a growing African American population, both free and enslaved, was treated in some utopias and grew in importance over time. The most common answers to the issue by white authors were segregation and colonization, particularly sending African Americans to Africa. As early as 1785 one of the first U.S. eutopias noted that Negroes would be given a state of their own, a form of internal colonization—some other examples of internal colonization will be discussed below—and become “a rich, a religious, and useful people.” This is one of the most positive statements before the twentieth century, but it is paternalistic, and except for the one state, the rest of the United States would be white. In a story from 1786, all blacks, which is the word used, had returned to Africa, and others also proposed colonization outside the United States. And for much of its history, U.S. utopian fiction, whether written in the North or the South, is, until the second half of the twentieth century, racist, and in the most common scenario, all African Americans are suppressed, perhaps even reenslaved.

There were, of course, a few exceptions to the racism. For example, John Brown (1800–1859), the leader of the attack on Harpers Ferry in 1859 that was intended to start a liberation movement among slaves in Virginia, published his Provisional Constitution and Ordinances for the People of the United States (1858). His constitution was designed to be put in place after a successful slave revolt and would eliminate slavery.

Another, a hundred years later, is Warren Miller’s The Siege of Harlem (1964), which depicts a future Harlem that has declared its independence from the rest of the country. The novel focuses on the first year and the struggle, both internal and with the United States, to stay free, as told to his grandchildren by one of the men involved.

African American Authors

The first utopia so far identified as by an African American is “Blake: or the Huts of America. A Tale of the Mississippi Valley, the Southern United States, and Cuba” (1859) by Martin Robison Delany (1812–1885), not all of which has survived. It includes insurrections, failed and successful, by slaves, and the published part of the novel ends with the results of the successful insurrection
and the outlines of a nation of blacks. Given the trajectory at the end of the novel, the lost chapters may have made the utopia more explicit.14

The next three utopias are primarily religious and were published in the immediate post–Civil War period. The first, After Death: or, Disembodiment of Man (1867) by Paschal Beverly Randolph (1825–1875), who is thought to have founded the first U.S. Rosicrucian Order, is a detailed description of racially separate heavens, with the white heaven the highest but with the souls in heaven evolving from their situation at death to higher states.15 The second, The Rise and Progress of the Kingdoms of Light & Darkness (1868) by Lorenzo D. Blackson (b. 1817), is a Christian allegory reflecting the battle between good and evil on earth and in the Celestial Country from the creation onward into a future where good wins.16 The third work is the first utopia so far discovered by an African American woman. Four Girls of Cottage City (1895) by Emma D. Kelley-Hawkins (1863–1938) is a sentimental novel where the utopia is used to present the afterlife as a means of encouraging the protagonists, and the reader, to lead a better life. Heaven is not segregated and is “all light, and joy and music. A country of green hills, pleasant valleys, running brooks, beautiful flowers, singing birds, happy, loving men and women, laughing, playing children.”17 Such religious works have a long history and, in the United States, were particularly popular at the end of the nineteenth century.

The first work by an African American that fits a narrow definition of utopia, in that it depicts a better society in the world, is Imperium in Imperio (1899) by Sutton E. Griggs (1872–1933), a Baptist minister who wrote extensively on the problems brought about by the failure of Reconstruction to improve the situation in the South.18 In the novel, Griggs describes an African American government within the state of Texas that is modeled on the U.S. government with some structural changes. Much of the novel is concerned with two issues, the different treatment of the light-skinned and dark-skinned both among African Americans and by whites and the debate over violence as a means of achieving equality.19 After 1899, Griggs published novels and pamphlets that were concerned, directly or indirectly, with depicting the mistreatment of American Americans and the means of significantly improving their plight, particularly in the South.20

The first statement of this project was Griggs’s second utopia, “Dorlan’s Plan,” published as part of his 1902 novel Unfettered, where he presents a fictionalized proposal for solving racial problems in the United States.
Dorlan, an extremely wealthy African American man, proposes to establish an organization that will enable his people to become fully equal citizens of the United States. He says that it is now self-evident that “the hour has come when the race must take the matter of its salvation into its own hands.” Here, and in many of Griggs’s other works, he argues that African Americans must learn to work together cooperatively rather than remaining divided against each other as, he says, they currently are. And he holds out the hope that if they do so and follow the plan, they will also be able to work with whites for the betterment of all.

Griggs spells out what is needed, beginning with strengthening the family, which will require higher wages so that women can spend more time at home and with their children, which will encourage men to spend more time with their families. He contends that the best occupation for men is as land-owning farmers who have been educated in the latest information on good farming and helped to buy the most up-to-date equipment; in saying this, Griggs is suggesting that the agricultural extension program be extended specifically to African Americans. Also, in towns and cities, the current poor housing should be replaced with housing developments outside the control of white politicians and businesses but built close enough to population centers that work would be readily accessible.

In pamphlet after pamphlet, Griggs laid out in more or less detail, frequently illustrated with biblical quotations, “The Causes of Individual Success” and “The Causes of Racial Success,” and he says, “If the course here outlined is pursued there will come a marked softening of the feelings of the American white people toward the Negro race.” Among his pamphlets, The One Great Question (1907) includes a plea to Congress to give effect to the Fifteenth Amendment, which was intended to give African Americans the vote but, in many parts of the country, did not do so. Pointing the Way, a novel from 1908, includes a depiction of the treatment of Negroes, the beginnings of a movement joining both blacks and whites, and an argument before the U.S. Supreme Court for the enfranchisement of blacks. Griggs’s argument that the only strategy available to African Americans was some form of self-help recurs throughout U.S. history, and Griggs included political activity and recourse to the courts as well as working hard, education, and other things that took place outside the public arena.

At the beginning of the twentieth century, three utopias by African Americans, two by women, were published. Pauline Hopkins (1859–1930),
who was a prominent journalist, playwright, and novelist, published “Of One Blood” serially in the *Colored American Magazine* between November 1902 and November 1903. It includes a hidden eutopian city in Ethiopia that is based on the best of the traditions of African civilization.25 E. A. Johnson (1860–1944), who was born a slave and then graduated from Atlanta University, studied and practiced law, and became the first African American elected to the New York State legislature, published *Light Ahead for the Negroes* in 1904. The novel is set in 2006 in an improved but still segregated South, in which blacks and whites “naturally” associate with their own people, but life is much better than in the past. Unions have been opened to Negroes and train men for the jobs available, and Schools of Domestic Science train women. Southern cotton plantations have been purchased, broken up, and resold to African Americans at low prices, with the buyers given assistance and training. Thus, in his utopia, while the desire that slaves in the United States expressed for freedom, land, and education has been partially implemented, there is nothing like equality. And throughout the novel, the attitude of whites to blacks is so paternalistic that there may be an element of satire.26

Mrs. Lillian Bertha Jones Horace (1880–1965), who was an author, educator, and librarian who earned a bachelor’s degree from Simmons College in 1922 and a master’s degree in library science at the University of Chicago in 1940, self-published *Five Generations Hence* in 1916. It is mostly concerned with relations between the races in the contemporary United States, but it also includes a vision of a future Africa that is civilized and prosperous. The novel discusses the colonization of Africa by African Americans and concludes that it will be difficult because the colonists will require wealth, a willingness to do very hard work, and a new set of attitudes that look to the future, not the present. Also, U.S. capitalists will oppose their immigration because they will lose the cheap labor of African Americans, which, as noted below, did happen.27

W. E. B. Du Bois (1868–1963)28 published three utopias between 1911 and 1928, *The Quest of the Silver Fleece* (1911), *Darkwater: Voices from Within the Veil* (1920), and *Dark Princess. A Romance* (1928).29 *Quest* is mostly concerned with the mistreatment of African Americans in the South, but the protagonists, particularly a feisty woman, outwit their main opponents. The book ends by describing the beginnings of the development of a project that will include a school, a home for orphan girls, and an entire community providing a better life for its inhabitants.30 *Darkwater* is a collection of essays, poems, and short
stories that culminates in a eutopia in the story “The Comet” and the poem “A Hymn to the Peoples,” in which the importance of racial differences disappears. Dark Princess is a much more complex novel that follows the life of a young African American man who wants to be a doctor but cannot, because, as an African American, he is not allowed to complete the required section on obstetrics, a common practice in white medical schools. He flees the country and meets other people of color who hope to create a united body to work for their betterment. For personal reasons, he rejects their overtures and returns to the United States, where he becomes an up-and-coming politician married to a wealthy, well-connected woman. After numerous setbacks, he reconnects with the group, who have a plan for a better future that will be developed over the coming fifteen years. There is, though, a disagreement, which is not resolved within the novel, between those who believe in violence and those who reject it.

Fifteen years later, George S. Schuyler (1895–1977) published the first of his three utopias, Black No More (1931), under his own name, followed by “The Black Internationale” (1936–37) and “The Black Empire” (1937–38), both of which were published serially in the Pittsburgh Courier under the pseudonym Samuel I. Brooks. Schuyler was an African American journalist who wrote a column for the Pittsburgh Courier for forty years and gradually became more conservative in the years following these novels. Black No More is concerned with the personal and social effects of a process to whiten black skin. Passing as white and the advantages of lighter skin were a regular theme at the time, and Schuyler also wrote a play about it.

In the other two works, African American professionals form the Black Internationale to liberate Africa from white colonialism, including a level of violence comparable to that of the colonists. In the first work, “The Black Internationale: Story of Black Genius Against the World,” Schuyler stresses the exceptional quality of the people involved and makes clear that not all blacks are as intelligent. In “The Black Empire: An Imaginative Story of a Great Civilization in Modern Africa,” the Black Internationale is established in Liberia to carry out its mission of liberating Africa. After Liberia is attacked by European forces, much of the novel is on the war, which the Black Internationale wins. In the utopia, everyone is required to have a thorough physical exam, and if they are found to have an incurable disease, they are euthanized. On the other hand, they have developed permanent cures for many diseases. Model kitchens that will be established throughout Africa
both prepare food for the district and are used to teach people the relationship between a good diet and health.\textsuperscript{38} Thus, much of the program is concerned with producing a healthier population.

Current research shows about a thirty-year break before the next African American author turned to the utopian form. Then, between 1962 and 1973, a period that included the 1963 assassination of President Kennedy, the 1965 assassination of Malcolm X, and the assassinations in 1968 of the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. and Robert F. Kennedy, thirteen authors wrote dystopias about the current racial situation in the United States. The first of these, William Melvin Kelley’s (1937–2017) \textit{A Different Drummer} (1962) is about an individual African American in the South, his revolt against the system, and its effect on others. In the novel, a man revolts, salts his fields, kills his livestock, burns his house down, and leaves, and all the other African Americans in the town follow his example.\textsuperscript{39} In 1965 Ronald L. Fair (b. 1932) published \textit{Many Thousand Gone: An American Fable}, which is set in one dystopian county in Mississippi created through the machinations of a corrupt lawyer and an equally corrupt judge, killing or driving out the indigenous population and reestablishing what amounted to slavery after the Civil War, a system that continued to the time of the novel. When the federal government finally tries to bring change to the county, the federal marshals are thrown in jail. At this point, the Negroes revolt, burn down the town, and kill most of their tormentors while saving the white women and children. The title refers to the thousands of Negroes who had been killed previously.\textsuperscript{40} A play, “Day of Absence: A Satirical Fantasy” by Douglas Turner Ward (b. 1930), a much milder rebuke to white dominance, premiered November 15, 1965, at the St. Mark’s Playhouse, New York. It takes place in one typical small dystopian Southern town in which all the Negroes disappear for one day, showing how completely the whites are dependent on them.\textsuperscript{41} These works were followed by John Oliver Killens’s (1916–1987) ‘Sippi (1967), Sam Greenlee’s (1969–2014) \textit{The Spook Who Sat by the Door} (1969), Chester Himes’s (1908–1984) \textit{Plan B} (written 1969–72), John A. Williams’s (1925–2015) \textit{Sons of Light, Sons of Darkness} (1969), Chuck Stones’s (1924–2014) \textit{King Strut} (1970), Blyden Jackson’s (1910–2000) \textit{Operation Burning Candle} (1973), John Edgar Wideman’s \textit{The Lynchers} (1973), and Nivi-Kofi A. Easley’s \textit{The Militants} (1974), all of which present various versions of black revolt.\textsuperscript{42}

Parallel with these novels of resistance were a series of works presenting the ways in which blacks were suppressed or scenarios of future repression.
Williams’s *The Man Who Cried I Am* (1967) includes a plan to cordon off African Americans from the rest of the country. Ishmael Reed’s (b. 1938) *Mumbo Jumbo* (1969) is about a conspiracy of whites to destroy African American culture. *Count-Down to Black Genocide* (1973) by Carl L. Shears is about a plot to kill all whites in the United States. Shears also self-published other novels, stories, poems, and plays, most of which deal with the oppression of American Americans, including the establishment of concentration camps and genocide.

Except for the varied work of Samuel R. Delany and Octavia E. Butler, the late 1970s and 1980s saw relatively few utopias by African American authors. There was at least one exception, another novel by John A. Williams, *Jacob’s Ladder* (1987), which explores the process of decolonization, neocolonialism, and the struggle against corruption in the emerging independent African countries.

To one degree or another, most of Delany’s works involve outsiders, minorities, and outcasts, ethnic, racial, and/or sexual. His first published work, *The Jewels of Aptor* (1962), was a post-atomic-age dystopian quest novel with much fantasy. He then published three novels, *Captives of the Flame* (1963), *Towers of Toron* (1963), and *City of a Thousand Suns* (1965), which were revised and published together as *The Fall of the Towers* (1966), which contrasts an authoritarian dystopia with a free, communal eutopia set roughly in the same setting as *The Jewels of Aptor*.

While he started with novels, Delany’s stories are also important, and one of them, “The Star-Pit” (1962), refers directly to white supremacy. It is set in a future of space exploration in which there is a psychological barrier that, except for a few who are found to have psychological abnormalities that allow them to pass through, causes insanity in those who go farther. The story makes an explicit connection between white supremacy and those who can pass through the barrier. The next year, he published “Lines of Power: We, in Some Strange Power’s Employ, Move on a Rigorous Line,” about a society where the law requires that every community above a certain very small size must be provided with electrical power whether it is wanted or not. This brings conflict between two visions of a better life, one technologically based and one off the grid. His “Aye and Gomorrah” (1967) is set in a future in which spacers must be neutered and focuses on how this affects both the spacers and the population.
After these works, Delany’s style becomes much less straightforward and, while clearly dystopian, is open to various interpretation. In these novels his concern is with the mistreatment of all those who fall outside the dominant paradigm, particularly racially and sexually. The best-known is *Dhalgren* (1975), which is a very complicated exploration of gender and ethnicity set in Bellona, a Midwestern U.S. city that is, for an unknown reason, cut off from the rest of the world. In the novel, the protagonist, Kid or Kidd, who cannot remember his own name but knows that he had a Native American mother, wanders and is led through the city, meeting many different other people. Interpretations of the novel are varied and often contradictory.

Delany’s *Triton* (1976) is set on Triton, a moon of Neptune, and was republished in 1996 as *Trouble on Triton: An Ambiguous Heterotopia*, and like his subsequent fiction, it includes reflections on the nature of utopianism. On Triton a society has developed with nearly complete personal freedom, and technology allows people to change themselves physically and mentally. The book presents a variety of societies organized around sexuality, but insofar as these societies result from freedom of choice, it reflects on the nature and consequences of such freedom. The novel examines these issues through the eyes of different characters, particularly Bron Helstrom, an outsider recently arrived from Mars, who has difficulty adjusting to Triton, arriving as a quite traditional male and then choosing to become a woman but remaining alienated.

Delany’s *Stars in My Pocket like Grains of Sand* (1984) was to be continued in the never-published *The Splendor and Misery of Bodies, of Cities*. The title of the novel suggests the setting, a huge galaxy with more than six thousand worlds inhabited by fundamentally different intelligent beings, including, in many cases on individual planets, intelligent beings so different that a word or gesture in one culture may convey something completely opposite from the same word or gesture in another culture. The novel illustrates both the acceptance and rejection such differences can produce, from cross-cultural love to extreme bigotry. Within the context of the Federation of Habitable Worlds, although the planets differ widely on how they are governed, from what we would call extreme right to extreme left, with every variety between the two, the peoples manage to get along reasonably well, and one focus of the novel is a love story that crosses cultures and is central to the one part of *The Splendor and Misery of Bodies, of Cities* that has been published. Thus, while there are many individual utopias and dystopias among the cultures
and worlds, the basic utopia in the novel centers on the acceptance of the almost incomprehensible variety that intelligences can take.

Beginning with *Stars in My Pocket like Grains of Sand*, Delany’s next works, including his non-utopian *The Mad Man* (1994), explore the meaning of utopia. So far, since 1994 he has published two works that have explicit utopian and dystopian elements, the massive (804 pp.) *Through the Valley of the Nest of Spiders* (2012) and the novella “The Hermit of Houston” (2017). The former follows two men through their lives from about 2007 to 2077, and throughout it reflects on the nature of utopia from the perspective of black gay men and refers to a black gay utopian community that one of the men had belonged to. The latter is a same-sex love story told by one of the individuals after the other has died, although the man’s memory is not reliable. It is set in an overpopulated future where same-sex relationships are encouraged; men and women are, to some degree, kept separate; and, as the story puts it, they have “mixed up the genders,” although the story does not include any of the last. This work again problematizes the idea of utopia.

An early story by Octavia E. Butler, “Childfinder,” was written in the 1970s, accepted for the never-published *Last Dangerous Visions*, and only published in an e-book in 2014. “Childfinder” suggests that “psi could put humans on the road to utopia,” but racial prejudice gets in the way. Butler’s first published utopia, *Kindred* (1979), presents slavery as the dystopia it so obviously was through a slave narrative written by a woman who lives simultaneously in the past and the present. Toni Morrison’s (1931–2019) *Beloved* (1987) deals with the same theme. In “Speech Sounds” (1983), one of Butler’s most anthologized works, she deals with race indirectly. It is a story about the suppression of a group and has most often been read as concerning women, which may be why it has been reprinted so often, but it could equally be read as concerning race or gender and race together. At the end of the 1980s Butler published her Xenogenesis trilogy, *Dawn* (1987), *Adulthood Rites* (1988), and *Imago* (1989). The trilogy is wide ranging, with many themes and possible interpretations, and takes place after most humans were killed in a nuclear war that left the earth uninhabitable and the few humans left have been rescued by aliens, the Oankali. Given the differences of power, one interpretation sees the situation of the remaining humans, some of whom are African American, as slavery, which is how some, but not all, humans in the novels see it. In the 1990s, Butler published two volumes of an intended trilogy, *Parable of the Sowers* (1993) and *Parable of the Talents* (1998), which start in a dystopia
of complete governmental collapse and extend into the development of a new religion and a community. Earthseed, led by a young African American woman; but the third volume, which might have been a positive utopia, was never written. The closest that Butler came to writing a positive utopia is "The Book of Martha," published in 2003 on the online site Scifiction.com and reprinted in the second edition of Bloodchild. In an "Afterword," she calls this her "utopia story," adding that she always felt that one person's utopia would be another's hell, so individual utopias are created in each person's dreams, but only there.

The 1990s was a period of intense racial conflict, including the Los Angeles riots of 1992 and the rise of a white supremacist movement symbolized by the bombing of the Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building in Oklahoma City in 1995. The bomber, Timothy McVeigh, had with him a copy of The Turner Diaries, which describes a future race war in the United States. Partially as a response, there was a resurgence of explicit depictions of and attacks on U.S. racism by African American authors. In 1991, Jewelle Gomez published The Gilda Stories. A Novel, which is composed of separate stories set in different time periods beginning in Louisiana in 1850. Gilda, who is African American and a lesbian, was born a slave and becomes a vampire, and most of the novel is set in places and periods ("Yerba Buena: 1890," "Rosebud, Missouri: 1921," "South End: 1955," "Off-Broadway: 1971," and "Down by the Riverside: 1981") that allow the author to explore the situation of African Americans, gay people, and other outsiders in that time and place. The last two stories ("Hampton Falls, New Hampshire: 2020" and "Land of Enchantment: 2050") are set in a future devastated by climate change and in which outsiders remain at risk. An additional Gilda story, "Houston" (1998), is set further in the same future, and the most recent Gilda story, "Caramelle 1864," is set near the end of the Civil War.

A particularly powerful story is "The Space Traders" (1992) by Derrick Bell, who was the first African American professor of law at Harvard University, where he regularly protested the lack of faculty diversity; he then became a visiting professor of law at New York University. In the story, aliens visiting the United States offer enough gold to bail out the country, chemicals that can unpollute the environment, safe nuclear energy, and enough fuel to overcome the energy crisis in exchange for the entire African American population. The government agrees, and all African Americans are loaded onto what are obviously slave ships. LeVar Burton's 1997 Aftermath shows racial
conflict in the United States escalating into civil war, which brings about the collapse of the country. In 1992 Darius James in *Negrophobia: An Urban Parable* and in 1998 Saab Loften in stories in his *Battle Neverending* both depict the ongoing racism faced by African Americans.

The one positive utopia by an African American in the 1990s was written for children. “My Recent Visit to Xanadu” by the historian John Hope Franklin was published in *Xanadu, the Imaginary Place* (1999) and is accompanied by stories and poems about and illustrations of Xanadu by children. In the utopia, there is racial harmony, no tobacco or weapons, no crime and no police, and only “love, justice, and tolerance.”

The work of African American authors has never been solely defined by race, even though their works have often been read through that lens. And in the twenty-first century, the point has been made much more strongly that human beings have multiple dimensions, and African American science fiction writers frequently create works where race has no role or is very much in the background, with questions of gender, gender identity, religion, nationality, and so on foregrounded.

Also, in the twenty-first century, racial relations in the United States have swung wildly between hope and despair, including a brief period when some people imagined that the election of an African American president heralded a postracial America. Although some people thought that this might mean an improved distant future, African American authors knew better. Many of the works published have been about the pervasive discrimination and violence that blacks must deal with every day. Early in the century, Evie Shockley’s 2000 “separation anxiety” depicted a future United States with separate racial and ethnic communities that were supposedly designed so that each could develop as it chooses, but the power lies with the white majority. In 2001 Walter Mosley published *Futureland*, in which nine related stories describe a future dystopia. Of the stories, “Whispers in the Dark,” “Doctor Kismet,” “Angel’s Island,” “Little Brother,” “En Masse,” and “The Nig in Me” are the most explicitly dystopian, and in all of them African Americans and the poor are oppressed.

In the middle of the first decade of the century, Milton McGriff, who had been a member of the Black Panthers, published *2236. A Novel* (2007), depicting a future where race relations have degenerated and African Americans fight back against their systematic mistreatment. Also, this was a period with some powerful satires, with the strongest being Tana Hargest’s “Bitter Nigger
Inc.” (2002), which is the name of a company that sells, among other products, Tominex, the “go-along-to-get-along medication” said to be “the only over the counter medication to remove your yearning for fairness or human decency.”

In 2002 Steven Barnes (b. 1952) published Lion’s Blood: A Novel of Slavery and Freedom in an Alternate America, an alternative history in which Africans are the slave owners and whites the slaves in a North America, known as Bilalstan, that is divided among Zulus, Arabs, Aztecs, Vikings, and Native Indians. The novel focuses on the relationship between the Irish Christian Aidan O’Dere and his owner, the African Muslim Kai ibn Jallaleddin ibn Rashidand. This was followed in 2003 with Zulu Heart, in which O’Dere, now free, must accept being reenslaved for the chance of gaining permanent freedom for himself and his sister, while his former owner, now friend, struggles with the immorality of the slavery that underpins his status and wealth. A third volume was mentioned in a blog post in 2007 but has not been published.

The second decade of the century saw about an equal mixture of negative and positive utopias, with, so far, a turn toward the dystopian since 2017, but given the process of publication, it is rarely possible to know when a work was written or last revised, so the dystopian turn may or may not reflect the 2016 election. On the positive side, Alexis Pauline Gumbs’s “Evidence” from 2015 is set in a future utopia in which everyone is encouraged to develop in their own unique way, but it looks back to a dystopia that existed in a period called “Before Silence Broke,” with the period “Breaking the Silence” seen as the beginning of the changes that brought about the eutopia. Since the author is an African American woman and a gay rights activist, what constitutes “Breaking the Silence” has more than one dimension. Gumbs’s M Archive: After the End of the World (2018) is a complex work that explores black life after an undescribed catastrophe through stories and poems that explore black feminism and its ramifications with both positive and negative outcomes. Nisi Shawl’s Everfair (2016) presents a flawed, multiracial utopia established by a combination of British Fabian socialists and African American missionaries within the Congo at its worst in the nineteenth century. And Walter Mosley’s Folding the Red into the Black (2016) is a detailed nonfiction utopia based on the melding of capitalism and socialism. In it, he says that there must be a fundamental right to what a twenty-first-century person needs to survive, including clean water, healthy food, safe housing, free access to “education though six years of college or technical school,” and medical care.
This work, while clearly directed at current conditions, can also be read as a response to Mosley’s own dystopian *Futureland* from 2001.

On the negative side, Bayo Ojikutu’s “Reservation 2020” (2012) is a dystopian projection of U.S. inner cities that have become walled compounds. Andaiye Reeves’s “Othello Pop” (2013) is a brief vignette set in a racist dystopia in which it is illegal to educate anyone not white and “yellow” girls are supposed to be killed at birth. Walidah Imarisha’s “Black Angel” (2015) is about a future Harlem where both official and unofficial violence is endemic. Tananarive Due’s 2016 “Reformatory” presents the dystopia of life for African Americans in the South at an unspecified date. Nana Kwame Adjei-Brenyah’s 2016 “The Finkelstein 5” is a powerful story in which an all-white jury acquits a man who beheaded five black children. And Rivers Solomon’s *An Unkindness of Ghosts* (2017) is a dystopia set on a multigeneration starship organized like a slave ship, with the dark-skinned on the lower decks with little support.

There is also a satire from 2015, Paul Beatty’s *The Sellout*, which in 2016 won the Man Booker Prize for best novel, the first novel by any American to do so, and the National Book Critics Circle Award. In it a man tries to reintroduce slavery and segregation to his local school in a poor small town in Southern California. His goal is to improve education and provide for the homeless.

It is hardly surprising that the works by African American authors have been primarily dystopian. These negative depictions take two forms: one reflects the current dystopia in which African Americans live projected into the near future, the other is set in a future that is much worse. The relatively few positive utopias depend on African Americans working together to bring about a better future, and they depict many different positive futures that such cooperative work might produce. One way that some groups of African Americans have tried to work together in their present to bring about a better life was and is through intentional communities.

### African Americans and Intentional Communities

Until the twentieth century, intentional communities in the United States were overwhelmingly white, although there were exceptions with individual African American members. For example, there were quite a few African Americans in pre–Civil War Shaker communities, some of which
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purchased the freedom of slaves. And the only urban Shaker community, in Philadelphia, was predominantly African American.100 Also, Sojourner Truth, an ex-slave who was an abolitionist and feminist, joined or was affiliated with four communities: the Kingdom of Matthias, the Northampton Association of Education and Industry, Harmonia, and Freedman’s Village.101 There may have been more African American individuals in early communities, but, so far, the evidence is limited.

As early as the 1790s, plans were made by blacks in Massachusetts and Rhode Island to send people back to Africa, but nothing came of any of the schemes.102 In 1815 a Negro merchant in Massachusetts transported thirty-eight people to Africa,103 and in the 1820s, there was a movement to send people to Haiti.104 Beginning in the late 1830s, proposals for emigration to Africa, Canada, the Caribbean, and Central and South America were developed by Lewis Woodson (1806–1878), who was born a slave, and his better-known student Martin R. Delany (1812–1885) that they connected to what came to be called black nationalism.105

In 1852, an African American woman, Mary Ann Shadd, published a pamphlet arguing for emigration to Canada and later moved there herself before returning after the Civil War.106 These plans for emigration and colonization put forward by African Americans have largely been forgotten, and the best-known program is that of the American Colonization Society founded by whites in 1816 to send emancipated slaves to Africa and often thought of by blacks as racist, an accusation that certainly has some truth in it.107 In the 1870s it again revived these proposals with considerably less success.108

Communities for African Americans Founded by Whites

Communities that were primarily or entirely black but established by white philanthropists existed from the late eighteenth century until shortly after the Civil War. There were four in Canada at the terminus of the Underground Railway: Wilberforce (1830–40), named after William Wilberforce (1759–1833), who led the British parliamentary campaign to end the slave trade; Dawn (1842–63); Elgin (1849–73); and the Refugee Home Society (1850–58).109

Within the United States, prior to the Civil War four communities created for African Americans by white philanthropists managed to get established, and another three had a very brief existence. The earliest such community appears to have been Israel Hill, which was founded by ex-slaves who had
been freed under the will of Richard Randolph (d. 1796), a strongly worded abolitionist document, and championed by his widow. Although delayed for some years by those opposed to it, Israel Hill was founded in the 1790s and survived until the end of the Civil War. The best-known community is Nashoba in Tennessee, founded in 1825 by Frances Wright (1795–1852), a white woman, with the avowed purpose of freeing slaves. The community bought slaves and intended, through cooperative labor plus education, to let the slaves buy their freedom, with the slaves then able to migrate to Haiti. If it had worked, it would have provided a pool of labor and money to keep the community alive while continuing to purchase more slaves. Wright also hoped that plantation owners would join with their slaves, with the slaves able to free themselves through labor, but there were few applicants.

Whites ran the community, so helping ex-slaves learn skills necessary for living a free life by participating in decision making did not happen. And Wright did not stay at Nashoba but left the running of the community to James Richardson, who believed that free love and miscegenation were the real bases for social reform and abolition. While Wright certainly believed in free love, she knew that miscegenation would not do in Tennessee in the 1820s, and Richardson was foolish enough to publicize his sexual relations with slaves. As a result, Nashoba came to an end in 1828, but in 1830 Wright helped some of the ex-slaves settle in Haiti.

There were two other prewar communities established by white philanthropists that had some success: Carthagena in Ohio, founded by Augustus Wattles (1807–1876), and Silver Lake in northern Pennsylvania, founded by Robert Hutchinson Rose (1776–1842) in association with the African Methodist Episcopal Church. Carthagena consisted of thirty thousand acres owned in small parcels by African Americans on land originally purchased by Wattles. It was communal only in the sense that most small villages were at the time, with people cooperating as needed, and while never welcomed by its white neighbors, it lasted from about 1836 to at least 1846. Silver Lake existed from 1836 to about 1838, with nine families and five or six single men arriving in 1836. The community was well planned, with specifications of what Rose was to provide and what was to be provided by the “Association of Coloured People at Silver Lake,” with the resulting harvest split fifty/fifty between Rose and what were, in effect, his tenant farmers. For all that organization and effort, the community failed, but there is no record that allows a conclusion about why.
There were communities involving African Americans in Mississippi from before the war until well after it that were the result of Joseph Davis (1784–1870) being inspired by Robert Owen (1771–1858) and the community in New Harmony, Indiana. Davis had read Owen’s *A New View of Society* (1813) and spent time with Owen in 1825. Davis created the first community for his slaves at Hurricane Plantation, on land in a bend in the Mississippi River, now known as Davis Bend. He provided better living quarters and more food than usual for his slaves, and much more unusually, he sought to get their cooperation by involving them in a form of self-government. Even more unusually, he established a court that met once a week where a jury of slaves heard complaints against other slaves and their defense, and no slave was punished unless convicted by this court. Davis served as judge and frequently found the sentences too harsh and reduced them. Even the overseers could not punish a slave “without court permission.” Davis’s younger brother, Jefferson Davis (1808–1889), who became the president of the Confederate States of America, followed the same practices on his adjoining Brierfield Plantation.

During the war a community was formed by occupying Union forces for the former slaves on the same land at Davis Bend, with the now-free African Americans organizing the community under the leadership of one of the ex-slaves, Benjamin Montgomery (1819–1877). In 1866, after the war, Joseph Davis sold the land to Montgomery for $300,000 on a long-term loan, but in 1876 floods badly damaged the plantation, and with Montgomery unable to make payment, the land reverted to the Davis family as the contract stipulated. Somewhat later an all–African American community, which is discussed below, was established in Mississippi by Montgomery’s son.

Also during the war, the Port Royal Experiment began when the Union Navy liberated the South Carolina Sea Islands, an area famous for the quality of its cotton, and the white landowners fled, leaving behind thousands of slaves. The now-free people attracted the interest of Northern philanthropists who in 1862 sent teachers and doctors to create schools and hospitals and help the ex-slaves educate themselves and provide medical care. Two distinct approaches guaranteed a clash: one wanted to help the African Americans purchase their own land, the other bought up plantations and hired the ex-slaves to work as tenant farmers; one saw the people as independent entrepreneurs and the other as employees. In 1863 President Lincoln was convinced to support the former. After Lincoln’s assassination, Andrew Johnson, the new president, was determined to return the land to its previous white
owners, and the experiment came to an end. But not all the previous landowners returned, and some land remained in the hands of ex-slaves; some is still owned by their descendants.119

The priority for slaves was freedom, followed by land and education.120 The communities that were founded by white philanthropists did not always offer even the first and rarely provided the other two. Nashoba intended to provide a route to freedom in Haiti, no land, and a limited education. Carthagena provided freedom, land, and a limited education but did so in a hostile context in which free blacks were sometimes kidnapped, sent south, and enslaved. Davis Bend did not grant freedom but did provide a significant improvement in living conditions, including a degree of autonomy and self-rule, and after the war it became an all–African American community. Then nature intruded. Perhaps if Joseph Davis had still lived when the floods came, he would have been willing to renegotiate the loan, but his descendants were less sympathetic. It has been argued that the Canadian communities were more successful in part because they provided access to all three desired conditions and did so in a less hostile environment.121

Communities Founded by African Americans

The visions of the African American founders and members of intentional communities, all of which were established after the Civil War, first focused on their long-held desire for land and freedom, but with the failure of Reconstruction, freedom from oppression became the foremost motivation. Later, such communities came to reflect the many interests of those searching for a better life, and no single generalization can capture that range.

There were at least two intentional communities created by ex-slaves in the immediate aftermath of the Civil War. The Kingdom of the Happy Land in the mountains on the border between North and South Carolina originated in 1864 or 1865, and it appears to have been religious and communal and to have lasted until around 1900.122 About the same time the Coe Ridge community was established in the mountains on the Kentucky/Tennessee border and lasted until the 1950s.123

Another early community, Mound Bayou, was the last community to have descended from the Davis Bend experiment. It was established farther north in Mississippi by Benjamin Montgomery’s son, Isaiah (1847–1924). The younger Montgomery was a member of the Mississippi constitutional
convention in 1890 that disenfranchised blacks, for which Frederick Douglass condemned him. Montgomery described his position as accommodationist, like that of Booker T. Washington in the Atlanta Compromise.124

The community of about four thousand blacks became the center of a flourishing agricultural area. Schools were provided for community children. The government and economy of the town were under black control. Prohibition was enforced. Unmarried couples living together had to marry or leave, and most chose to marry. Prostitutes who frequented the town on payday were dealt with by prohibiting anyone from providing them with a place to stay and putting them on the next train out of town, and as word got around, they stopped coming.125

Communities in the South were uncommon because, as early as the 1870s, Reconstruction fell apart. Southern whites tried, with considerable success, to reinstitute slavery as tenant farming and sharecropping. As one author put it, “After the Civil War, sharecropping replaced slavery,”126 and many poor whites were also sharecroppers and tenant farmers. Under sharecropping, “the tenant was totally dependent. He was told what crop to plant, how it should be cultivated, where to process and where to market it. He just hoped that he ‘paid out’ at the end of the year—that his share of the crop covered the cost of his ‘furnish.’ The tenant was bound to the creditor until the debt was paid, and as a rule the best he could hope for was to break even.”127

As a result, there was an exodus from the South, mostly to Kansas, with smaller numbers to Oklahoma, discussed below, and a variety of programs by both African Americans and whites to send African Americans to Africa, particularly to Liberia but also to Sierra Leone and the Gold Coast (now Ghana). In these schemes, Africa was often described as a paradise by people with no idea what the real Africa was like and who had rarely made adequate preparations to help the immigrants get established. Many of the hopeful colonizers returned to the United States, but others stayed in Africa, and some of those prospered.

One African American program in South Carolina to send people to Liberia was opposed by whites afraid of losing cheap labor.128 And as late as 1914, another scheme, again by African Americans but this time to the Gold Coast, sent a ship, rather oddly called the Liberia, with a small group of colonists chosen from the substantial number who wanted to go. The governments of both Great Britain and the United States opposed the scheme, and the British government put roadblocks in its way in Africa. As with other
such proposals, the scheme was oversold to the intending settlers, inadequate preparations were made in Africa, and many intending colonists returned to the United States.129

But others choosing to leave the South at this time established all-Negro towns in the United States outside the South to live with other African Americans, free of the oppression and danger that were part of their everyday life,130 and many of these towns were created through the use of the Homestead Act of 1862 (12 Stat. 393).131 All such communities were intentional, a few practiced some degree of community property, and others were partially or wholly cooperative, but given the yearning that ex-slaves had for their own land, mostly land was held privately. And the desire for education led many of the communities to put a high priority on establishing a school. Segregation throughout the country created unintentional all-Negro towns, which, in some places, provided a sense of community. Federal policy destroyed some of these successful communities by building the interstate highway system directly through them, Saint Louis being one of many examples, and desegregation eliminated others.132

The best-known communities are those of the so-called Exodusters,133 but there were others, most of which have simply disappeared or, in some cases, remained for many years as African American enclaves. One early one that is no longer African American but is remembered as such is Africatown in southern Alabama, which has been designated a U.S. Historic District and is on the U.S. Register of Historic Places. Africatown is remembered because it was formed by a group of recently emancipated ex-slaves who were the survivors of what appears to have been the last slave ship to bring Africans to the United States, even though the importation of slaves had been outlawed in 1808. It is also remembered because one of the men who founded the town lived to 1935 and was interviewed by the famous African American author Zora Neale Hurston, who published an article about him in the Journal of Negro History, made a short film about him, and wrote a book about him that has only recently been published.134 And even more recently, another “last” survivor was found.135

The Exodusters dramatically increased the number of African Americans in Kansas and produced several primarily or entirely African American communities.136 The first, Singleton, named after Benjamin or Pap Singleton (1809–1900), the self-described leader of the Exodusters, appears to have been established in 1873. What happened is in dispute. It is clear that significant
local opposition damaged and probably destroyed the community, but one scholar says that Singleton was successful by 1878, while another says that no such community ever existed. Other Exoduster communities include the Dunlap Colony founded in 1873, Nicodemus in 1877, and the Hodgeman community or Morton City in 1878. Votaw, named after Daniel Votaw, a Quaker who wanted to help the Exodusters, was established in 1881 in southern Kansas. After initial struggles, it was quite successful, lasting until around 1900, when it was brought to its end by a flood. All of the communities had to build houses while living on the land, often in dugouts followed by sod houses before being able to afford to build more substantial buildings. They also all struggled with poor land, inadequate financing, and local opposition.

Reflecting the regularly expressed desire by ex-slaves to own land, these communities were based on private property and practiced the cooperation that was the norm in most small towns at the time. The other most frequently expressed desire, for an education, was also a concern in many of these communities, so Nicodemus’s first school was established in 1877–78 and Dunlap’s in 1883, with an African American principal and an African American woman as the primary school teacher.

The Oklahoma communities experienced the same issues, with particularly strong opposition from both the white and Indian populations. According to one scholar, the Oklahoma communities emphasized “political, economic, and social exclusiveness” that was “based on a new political consciousness and racial pride.” Oklahoma was also the site of a movement to declare Oklahoma an all-Negro state, led by Edwin P. McCabe, who had come to Nicodemus from Chicago and rose to become the state auditor of Kansas and later of the Oklahoma Territory.

In 1895, a private colonization scheme in Mexico attracted quite a few would-be colonists. This scheme was based on sharecropping, but unlike sharecropping in the South, it was designed so that the colonists could end up owning their own land. In practice, the colonists arrived in the winter and found inadequate housing; disease, including smallpox, struck; and most of them fled with the assistance of the U.S. government. In the early twentieth century, the Allensworth community was established in the Central Valley of California and lasted as an all-Negro town from 1908 to around 1920, though today it has very few African American residents. The community was within a predominantly white county whose officials did what they could to impede its development, and the railroad that the community depended on built a
new line away from the area, thus radically reducing the number of trains that stopped at Allensworth. Because of these actions and the pervading racism of the area, the community had little chance of succeeding.150

Also in the early twentieth century, an all–African American community, Whitesboro, was founded in 1901 on two thousand acres in Cape May County, New Jersey. It was named after one of its founders, George Henry White (1852–1918), who served two terms in the U.S. House of Representatives from North Carolina and was the last African American to serve in Congress until 1929 and the last from a Southern state until 1973. In 1912, Whitesboro was reported to have “nearly 300 inhabitants, a good school, two churches, a railway station, a hotel owned by White, a post office and telephone.”151 Whitesboro survived as an African American community until after the Great Depression, but with a location close to the ocean, it is now over 50 percent white.

Another all–African American community was established in Colorado on land that was obtained through the Homestead Act. Dearfield had a slow start because the people who wanted to live there were poor and struggled to come up with the money to pay for the land and the material necessary to meet the requirements of the act, which included building a house and fencing the land, with that requirement bringing tensions with cattle ranchers used to freely grazing their cattle. In addition, the land had limited access to water and was, therefore, difficult to farm, requiring dry farming methods. But with the coming of World War I, which produced an increased demand for agricultural products, the community briefly flourished. After the war and the growing demand for better-paid labor by industry, the community collapsed, going from five hundred members to a very small number within a few years.152

Two wholly or predominantly African American religious groups, one little known, one very well known, established intentional communities in the first half of the twentieth century: the so-call Black Israelites or Black Jews and Father Divine and his followers. According to James E. Landing, the author of the most substantial study, the first person self-identified as a Black Jew did so in Boston in 1666, but the first groups that identified themselves as such did so in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, with, since then, other groups doing so both in the United States and in other countries.153 Few of the groups were particularly Jewish, but they were based on an interpretation of the Old Testament that was “strongly influenced by Holiness,
Fundamentalist, and Pentecostal beliefs." There was also a strong millen-

nial element that held out hope during threatening periods in U.S. history

that included the end of Reconstruction, the rise of the Ku Klux Klan, and

the era of lynching. The first such group was the Church of the Living God

founded in Arkansas in 1889 by William Christian (b. 1856), an ex-slave. He

taught that the Old Testament prophets and Christ were black, which led him
to preach racial harmony. Despite several schisms, the church spread rapidly,

and a version is still quite active.

Only a few of the groups that identified as Black Jews were commu-
nal, with the best-known being the Church of God and Saints in Christ, founded in Lawrence, Kansas, in 1896 by William Saunders Crowdy (1847–1908), who had been born a slave and escaped in 1863 and joined the Union Army. When discharged, he bought land in Oklahoma and lived there near some of the all-Negro towns for about twenty-five years. In 1893 he came to believe that he was receiving instructions from God about the "true church" and its beliefs. As well as being an ex-slave and a veteran, "Crowdy was a respected elder, a husband, father, farmer, Mason, and an exemplar of the best of his race and his generation. Crowdy was a leader of his church and Masonic lodge." He preached in the Midwest, in Texas, and on the East Coast, where major centers were established in Philadelphia, where he and his followers established several businesses, and Washington, D.C., where he established choirs in churches and developed an emphasis on music and where he laid out specific rules for the clothing his follow-
ers were to wear. After his death, his followers moved to Virginia, where Crowdy had purchased land beginning in 1901. The church spread interna-
tionally, and today there are branches in Africa, the Caribbean, and Europe,
as well as in North America. There was one significant schism with a group that left and established headquarters in Cleveland, revering Crowdy but differing in other ways from the original group.

Crowdy taught that African Americans were descended from the Israelites, who were black, as was Christ. More than many Black Jews, the Church of God and Saints of Christ added Jewish practices to the basic mix of Holiness Christianity and millennial thinking. The church required temperance and marriage only with the faithful. The communal expression was on the land purchased in Virginia, originally just forty acres, but over the years, it grew to more than a thousand acres. In addition to farming and some small industries, such as a sawmill, the community housed the national
headquarters of the church, a primary school, an industrial school, and homes for both orphans and the elderly.164

In 1900, Warien Roberson (d. 1932),165 who was deeply influenced by Crowdy, founded the Temple of the Gospel of the Kingdom in Virginia, and he moved first to Philadelphia and then to New York, Chicago, Detroit, and other cities.166 His followers lived in communal households, known as kingdoms, and shopped in their communally owned stores. Like the later followers of Father Divine, they practiced celibacy, except for Roberson and his closest associates. Roberson had several run-ins with the law. He served time in prison for burglary, and later charges of corruption and reports of poor treatment of the children born in the community led to Roberson being sent to federal prison.

While the group identified with Jewish traditions, there was little Jewish in their practices. Landing says that what Roberson taught was based on his “black Holiness Christian background,” biblical prophecy, and healing through prayer, which Roberson extended to living without pain or disease and, ultimately, overcoming death.167 Roberson taught that he was divine and would rise from the dead after three days. When he failed to do so, his kingdoms disintegrated.168 The connection to Judaism was made through the group’s belief that American blacks were descended from Esau, the older son of Isaac.

In 1960, William Alexander Lewis founded the House of Judah in Chicago. According to Landing, Lewis’s message was antiwhite, with the corollary that in order to protect themselves, his followers needed to grow their own food. He taught “the literal interpretation of the Old Testament; that he, as the Prophet, is God’s representative on earth; that membership in the House of Judah is a prerequisite to salvation; that the members of his cult, black Hebrews, are the only legitimate chosen people and the true historical Israelites.”169 The group began purchasing land in Michigan in 1970, and by 1983 they held twenty-two acres. A small group, including Lewis, lived on the land, while most of the members remained in Chicago.170 In 1983, authorities removed sixty-six children and arrested Lewis and others. Landing notes that Lewis and most of the others who were arrested on charges of child abuse were acquitted, but he does not refer to a 1986 federal case where they were found guilty of slavery (United States v. Lewis, 644 F. Supp. 1391). After the 1983 case, the community moved to central Alabama, where it continued for some years.171
While other groups formed intentional communities, only two appear to currently exist in more than fragmentary form. The Hebrew Israelite Community, mostly from Chicago and Detroit, left the United States for Liberia and then for Israel, where, after years of conflict with the government and some deportations, in 2003 their community in Dimona in the Negev Desert was given permission to remain. Their vegan diet and practice of polygamy set them well apart from most of Judaism.\footnote{172}

The Nation of Yahweh was founded in Miami in 1979 by Hulon Mitchell Jr. (1935–2007), who renamed himself Yahweh ben Yahweh. The community was, for a time, immensely successful, with a temple, apartment buildings, restaurants, stores, and houses, along with additional buildings and followers in Atlanta. While he taught that African Americans were descended from the Israelites, Yahweh ben Yahweh attacked all those who were not black, including Jews, as infidels and oppressors. He also demanded complete allegiance to himself.\footnote{173} But in 1991, he was arrested together with some of his followers on charges that included multiple murders. Yahweh ben Yahweh was found guilty on some of the charges and sentenced to eighteen years in prison but released on parole in 2001.\footnote{174} A remnant of what was a substantial community still exists.\footnote{175}

Recently groups calling themselves Hebrew Israelites, some of which apparently trace their roots back to Crowdy, have gained notoriety through their demonstrations. There appear to be several groups with different names, one being the House of Israel. So far, there is very little evidence available about how they live, whether within their own communities or as individuals within the wider society.\footnote{176}

Father Divine (1879–1965), whose birth name is not known with certainty but is generally assumed to have been George Baker, was known to his followers as the Reverend Major Jealous Divine or just the Reverend M. J. Divine.\footnote{177} He was probably the most successful of the New Deal–period African American leaders of a new religious movement. His Peace Mission movement, which still exists, was “interracial, interdenominational, nonsectarian, and nonpartisan.”\footnote{178} He married the second Mother Divine in 1946.\footnote{179} She was white and born in Canada in 1925, was said to have taken on the spirit of the first Mother Divine, and led the movement from his death until her death in 2017. During that time the movement’s headquarters were at the Woodmont estate, which has been declared a National Historic Landmark, in Gladwyne, Pennsylvania, an affluent community northwest of Philadelphia.
The movement established intentional communities and rural cooperatives, mostly in the New York area, with others throughout the country and a few outside the United States. The first community, which was all black and mostly women, was established in Manhattan in 1914, moved to Brooklyn in 1917, and relocated to Sayville, Long Island, in 1919. There were about twelve members by 1924 and about thirty by 1930, including some white members. Although local businesses were pleased that Divine bought locally and paid in cash and the Sayville house has been declared a local historic landmark, there was significant opposition among locals who accused the group of disturbing the peace, based, in large part, on the fact that in 1931 Sunday lunches were served to as many as a thousand people of all races. The community then moved to Harlem in March 1932. In all the communities, members who worked outside pooled their wages to support the community and those who worked within it. During the mid-1930s, Divine’s Peace Mission movement was “the largest realty holder in Harlem, with three apartment houses, nine private houses, fifteen to twenty flats, and several meeting halls with dormitories on the upper floors.” In addition, there were other holdings throughout the country.

In 1935, the first of what by 1939 became some thirty communities in Ulster County, north of New York City, was established in New Paltz, with the last of the communities sold in 1985. The communities were “experimental, cooperative, and nonviolent” as well as requiring sexual abstinence and allowing no alcohol. The interracial nature of the Peace Mission movement can be seen in the fact that at the banquets the communities provided to large numbers of people, racially integrated seating was mandatory.

Divine required that every community use “voluntary, unpaid labor, to shop with cash, not credit; and to sell their goods or services at less than market prices.” In addition, they had to be nonviolent and not designate anyone by race; men and women had to be segregated; and everyone had to be treated equitably, with the result being that many women held supervisory roles.

Initially, the influx of African Americans produced considerable local opposition, but because all the communities purchased locally and with cash and brought prosperity to their areas during the depression, hostility from local businesses waned. Still, while local opposition dissipated, quite a few buildings on the properties were destroyed by fire, mostly thought to have been set.
Other African American Communities

In the twentieth century, while U.S. intentional communities remained mostly white, with various communities having one or a few African American members, some predominantly African American communities, mostly religious, were established. One the most important African American religious groups, the Moorish Science Temple of America, has been called “the first mass religious movement in the history of Islam in the United States.” It was first established in 1913 by Noble Drew Ali (born Timothy Drew, 1886–1929), who was deeply influenced by Marcus Garvey (who is discussed below), Freemasonry, and Theosophy and who incorporated elements of Islam into his teachings. His followers were required to change their names by adding the suffix El or Bey, although in some cases it appears to have been used as a surname. In his *The Holy Koran of the Moorish Holy Temple of Science* (1927), Ali gives advice to young men and women; married couples; and men, women, and children separately, all of which reflects traditional patriarchal gender roles. He also gives advice to servants and masters, the first to be obedient and the second to be reasonable, and reflecting the same acceptance to hierarchy, to rich and poor and magistrates and subjects.

Throughout the 1940s, the FBI set out to break the Moorish Science Temple and other black Muslim groups, and as a result, by the 1980s, incarcerated members of the Temple had established programs in many federal prisons. In 1942 the national headquarters was established at an intentional community in Virginia, with other communities in Massachusetts and Connecticut, with one, in Kansas, now surviving as a retirement home.

In the 1930s, a small community of African American Muslims called Jabal Arabiya was established in Upstate New York not far from Buffalo. Although the founder and leader for many years died in 1995, a small group appears to remain. In 1983, a small group of African American Muslims established New Medinah on sixty-three acres in Georgia and later added more land. The community grew and reported more than two hundred members in 2006. In the 1980s, Islamberg, New York, was settled by African American Muslims who called themselves Muslims of America, who initially came from areas of New York City that were experiencing high levels of crime and violence. There are now more than twenty such communities in the United States, with Islamberg, with some two hundred residents, serving as the national headquarters of the group; probably due to its name, it has attracted vilification.
and attacks from the far Right. After the September 11 attacks, one Muslims of America community in Red House, Virginia, attracted the attention of the authorities, who connected the community with a group called Al Fuqra, a connection the members of the community denied and which some scholars thought unlikely. Still, arrests were made, and some convictions were obtained. Also, in 1983, some Muslims bought land in Mississippi, originally as an Islamic retreat center, but it became a community as people decided to settle there permanently. In 2002, there were twenty families living there. The Oyotunji African Yoruba Village in South Carolina practices its own version of African and Haitian religions and has about fifty members.

New Deal Communities

During the New Deal, there were somewhat half-hearted attempts to help tenant farmers and sharecroppers. Under the Agricultural Adjustment Administration, after white farmers who were encouraged to take land out of cultivation did so by eliminating the land worked by both black and white sharecroppers, some communities were established for those who were displaced. Of these, Aberdeen Gardens, near Newport News, Virginia, opened in November 1936, had a screen of trees to isolate/segregate the races, but it was the only such project that was run by an African American without a white supervisor. Under the Federal Emergency Relief Administration (FERA) (1933–35), there were plans for five projects that included African Americans. Tilley (black)/Halifax Farms (white) in Roanoke, N.C., had 149 furnished houses, a barn, a poultry house, a smokehouse, a tobacco barn, and community buildings. These two communities later joined to form Roanoke Farms, thus creating one of the few mixed communities. There was also a program to establish scattered farms rather than communities in Alabama (all black) and Arkansas and Florida (both black and white communities), but little was achieved. One of the more successful communities for African Americans was the Lakeview Community in Arkansas. It was established in 1936 on 8,163 acres and divided into 142 lots in Lee and Phillips counties near the location of the 1919 Elaine Massacre, where hundreds of African Americans had been killed. In about 1937, Transylvania Farms was established near Tallulah, Louisiana, on 10,725 acres divided into 160 lots. The African Americans who had been working the land as sharecroppers were evicted, and the land was used to resettle white farmers.
The Resettlement Administration responded to complaints about the evictions by using nearby Mounds Farm, which had 11,896 acres, to resettle 145 African American families. In 1944, when the program was under attack, Transylvania Farms was accused of extreme inefficiency because cotton production had dropped from what it had been under the sharecroppers. This turned out to be false, for, as the Resettlement Administration responded, whereas before cotton had been the only crop, it no longer was. The current farmers had been encouraged to diversify what they grew and to add livestock, thus coming closer to being able to live off the land. It is not clear whether the same was done at Mounds Farm.

Under the Farm Security Administration, there were nine all-black projects, some that were interracial, and others that were all-white in Alabama, Arkansas, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi, South Carolina, and Texas. As a result, by 1940, 1,393 black families were in resettlement projects. But one example illustrates the preference given to white farmers. The Phillips Plantation in Greenwood, Mississippi, was purchased by the Farm Security Administration in 1942. It was already occupied by African Americans, many of whom had lived there all their lives and were now old and frail. As at Transylvania Farms, they were evicted, and their houses were rented to fifty white farmers. In congressional testimony in 1944, it was said that the African Americans had been found “more suitable places to live,” but without further detail.

These settlements served the purpose of providing places for some people displaced by the reduction of acreage to live and work during the years of the depression and, in some cases, longer. While some of the advocates of the programs thought of the settlements as permanent, they were rarely, if ever, adequately funded; many were on poor, difficult-to-farm land; and the African American communities regularly faced opposition from the surrounding areas as well as minimal support from the programs that had established them.

The Mount Zion Overcoming Body of Christ–The True Bride community was founded in New York City in 1946 by Mother Essie Mae MacDonald. When very sick, she had been “healed by the Lord,” and as a result she began to preach and attract followers. She refused to wear a coat, cape, or shoes and carried a staff with a cross and dove at the end. Initially, she was affiliated with the Church of God in Christ, the largest of the African American Pentecostal denominations, but it rejected her due to her eccentricities.
She moved to Los Angeles in the early fifties and then to Crescent City, Florida, in the mid-fifties, where her mother gave her land on which she built a one-hundred-room “ark.” She invited anyone who needed help to move in, and others, who became her followers, joined the community. Members lived in the ark and, as vegetarians, grew their own food. “The ark has four kitchens, four worship areas, an upper room, and a prayer tower,” and there was an emphasis on healing: “Mother Macdonald believes in the ‘Female Principle’; that is, that women have a leading role on this earth. The land and the earth are called ‘her’ beauty, not a man’s beauty. Women raise and nurture the children and help determine the religious growth of the family members. Women are the silent leaders of the world. The men in Mount Zion Overcoming Body of Christ are ministers and care for the women. The men and women go on the streets to witness and ‘save souls.’” The community was still in existence as recently as 2015.

In the late 1960s, Ralph Borsodi (1886–1977), a back-to-the-land enthusiast who established a few successful experiments and influenced many more, and Robert Swann (1918–2003), a follower of Gandhi, a pacifist, and an advocate of land trusts, established the Institute for Community Economics to help create land trusts. At about the same time, the SNCC (Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee) and the Southwest Georgia Project had been successfully advocating for black political empowerment and voter registration in the area. One of the results of their success was that sharecroppers and tenant farmers who tried to register were evicted from the land they had been working. As a result, they decided to focus on developing farms, and the Southwest Georgia Project disbanded and became New Communities Inc. (NCI). Charles Sherrod (b. 1937), who had been the SNCC director in southwest Georgia, concluded “that the homes and livelihoods of people fighting for their rights would be less at risk individually if the underlying land was owned and farmed collectively.” Swann appears to have met the civil rights activist Slater King (1927–1969) at Koinonia Farm, an interracial community discussed below, and they began to discuss cooperation as a means of helping displaced farmers. Swann, King, Sherrod, and others then traveled to Israel to study its two main forms of cooperatives, the kibbutz and the moshav, and found the latter more likely to be acceptable to the people in Georgia, because children were raised collectively in most kibbutzim but not in the moshav and the moshav combined individual and collective ownership in the way Sherrod had imagined.
The farm they planned to use to resettle those who were evicted and others wanting to leave the dead-end life of sharecropping and tenant farming was called Featherfield Farm, and the history of Featherfield Farm reflects the deep racism of Georgia and the federal bureaucracy at the time. Land was purchased, 4,800 acres near Albany, Georgia, and a plan was developed that envisioned the phased construction of four villages, each of which would eventually house up to two hundred families in both single-family and multifamily buildings. Other lands were set aside for agriculture, recreation, and forest conservation. A day care center and an elementary school were planned. Major circulation routes were sketched out for both pedestrians and cars.221

Initially, Featherfield Farm appeared to be on the road to success. In planning for the community, the people intending to join met to develop a plan for its governance, and in 1982 Featherfield Farm was said to be “the largest Black-owned single-tract farm in America”222 but no housing was ever built, because Lester Maddox (1915–2003), the racist governor of Georgia, refused to sign off on their application to the Office of Economic Opportunity, which had funded the feasibility study.223

Still, it is reported that “for nearly fifteen years, the leaders, paid staff, and summer volunteers, for New Communities ran a diversified, ever-expanding farm operation,”224 and “during NCI’s heyday, two-dozen adults and children lived on the land year round.”225 But for all of that, they never made a profit, never got the promised grants, and lost the land in 1985.226 Much later, class action lawsuits, known as Pigford v. Glickman 1 and 2, over racial discrimination against black farmers by the U.S. Department of Agriculture resulted in payouts of billions of dollars, $12,000,000 of which went to New Communities Inc.227 With the money from the settlement, NCI bought Cypress Pond Plantation, a rundown plantation of 1,638 acres that had been most recently used for hunting and fishing, and it is currently being used by NCI and others as a retreat center.228

In 1964, the National Council of Churches created the Delta Ministry as “a ten-year program of relief, literacy, voter registration, economic development, and community mobility” in the Mississippi Delta.229 As part of its mission, in 1966, the ministry began work to create Freedom City on four hundred acres. The first group of African American families to reside there are said to have “hoped to create a model community. The ninety-four residents intended to pioneer a viable alternative to black migration to northern ghettos by developing a self-sustaining agricultural and industrial cooperative.”230
The history of Freedom City is one where if something could go wrong, it did. Some of this was due to poor planning and, perhaps most important, making commitments before the money had been raised to fund them. Applications to the Office of Equal Opportunity (OEO) were rejected, refiled, and rejected again, followed by new applications and foot-dragging by the OEO to such an extent that it was probably deliberate. The Department of Agriculture rejected an application to guarantee loans for the project. Some money did come from the Ford Foundation, but most came from supporters in the North. The community members were also obviously ripped off by a company that sold them temporary housing that turned out to be of very poor quality and immediately collapsed. Later, a storm destroyed all the houses.

There were, though, positive results. The residents, both children and adults, were taught to read and write, with many children receiving their first formal schooling. Some then were able to get high school diplomas and, in a few cases, even enter university. Many of the community members had their first medical examination, and thirty-nine people got glasses for the first time. Used to taking orders from overseers, many of the residents had to develop self-confidence, and many did, becoming capable of speaking up in meetings. And in 1967, two white couples joined the community, having been voted in by the current members after a substantial discussion.

In 1970, the community became a nonprofit cooperative controlled by the residents and was renamed Freedom Village. They had some successes, including getting attached to the water and sewage systems in 1972. But at that point, support for the Delta Ministry had mostly been withdrawn, and by 1980 it was effectively defunct.

The Black Panthers, which was originally founded to oppose police brutality, established several intentional communities, primarily in Northern California. Members lived in their communities while working on the many activities that the Panthers undertook among African Americans living in the area, and in the early 1970s, members from throughout the country moved to California. These communities were intended to be egalitarian but struggled with both hierarchical differences, with the leaders living well and the average workers just barely getting by, and gender, as they struggled to change the socialization of both the men and the women. Small businesses were created that brought in some much-needed cash, but never enough.

Bobby Seale (b. 1938), one of the co-founders of the Black Panthers, described his ideal communal housing as including day care and a health
Clinic, which the actual Panther communities included.²³⁵ Seale, though, stressed housing structured around a communal yard that would provide a safe place for children to play as well as a gathering place for formal and informal interactions among community members.²³⁶

The Ansaru or Ansaaru Allah Community, which has had a few different names, such as the Nuwaubian Community (or Nation) and Tama Re, was initially established by Isa Muhammad (b. 1954 as Dr. Dwight or Malachi Z. York) in Brooklyn in the late 1960s, with the group giving the official date of its founding as 1970. During the life of the movement, Isa Muhammad’s teachings moved “from racist doctrines” to a dedication to Islam and his reading of the Qur’an.²³⁷

Branch communities were established in many U.S. cities as well as in Canada, Africa, the Caribbean, Europe, and other regions. Housing, where men and women, including married couples, and children lived separately, and businesses were in Brooklyn, and a large mosque opened there in the early 1980s. The mosque included schools where children were taught to recite the Qur’an. Men were expected to beg, and they were reported to be required to collect at least $50.00 a day.²³⁸ Women were expected to fully cover themselves, including a veil, and were assigned traditional gender roles.²³⁹

The headquarters of the movement then relocated to Georgia in 1993, where they established Tama-Re village on 476 acres.²⁴⁰ The community attracted the attention of the authorities, and York was arrested and tried on a variety of charges related to sexual offenses. He is serving a 135-year sentence in a “supermax” prison. While there is considerable evidence that he was framed, there is no way at present of being certain.²⁴¹

One community that received widespread publicity for all the wrong reasons still exists. MOVE was an urban community in Philadelphia. All its members adopted the surname Africa and practiced an extreme version of naturalism, refusing to exterminate vermin in their house, wash with soap, or get vaccinations for themselves or their pets. The police raided the house in 1978; the inhabitants fired on the police, killing one; some members were convicted of murder; and the dwelling was razed. The other members regrouped and established a heavily fortified house, and during another confrontation with the police in 1985, the building was bombed, destroying an entire city block, displacing everyone in the neighborhood, and killing eleven MOVE members. Some of the remaining members still live communally in Philadelphia.²⁴²
Interracial Communities

There were a few mid-twentieth-century interracial communities. One of the earliest, founded in Mississippi in 1936, was Sherwood Farm, which then became the People’s Plantation and finally the Delta Cooperative Farm, which established Providence Farms nearby; then in 1942 Delta closed and joined Providence, which itself closed in 1956: “Its long-term objectives were to create an example of interracial Christian harmony and to demonstrate that a collective cooperative farm was a better system of labor relations than the oppressive landlord-tenant arrangement.”243 A pamphlet from 1937 described the farm as a democratically run producer and consumer cooperative established in response to sharecropping and tenant farming. At the time, it had substantial support from people in the North, with a Board of Trustees led by the well-known theologian Reinhold Niebuhr and including Norman Thomas, the most prominent socialist in the country.244 The principles on which it was to operate were “Efficiency in Production and Economy in Finance Through the Cooperative Principle,” “Participation in the Building of a Socialized Economy of Production,” and “Realistic Religion as a Social Dynamic.”245 Profit was to be distributed to the members based on “the amount and quality of work done,” and there was “a large common garden in which vegetables are produced for consumption and canning” as well as hog and poultry farms and a sawmill. Temporary housing had been built, and permanent housing was planned. A nurse was on-site, and there was a plan for a medical cooperative.246

In 1937, there were some thirty families on the farm, with about equal numbers of blacks and whites, and the organizers, while asking for donations, were quite optimistic about the future.247 But the poor soil in the area meant that it was never self-sufficient but depended on support from people involved in the Social Gospel movement.248 Local opposition and internal social and racial tension, particularly involving whites not wanting to take direction from blacks, caused problems. But a white sharecropper argued that black children were given the same education as white, which was more than that mandated by the state.249

A better-known, important interracial community still in existence is Koinonia Farm, founded in Georgia in 1942. It was regularly attacked by locals, including the Ku Klux Klan.250 It renamed itself Koinonia Partners to emphasize its outreach programs, one of which, building housing for low-income people, inspired the creation of Habitat for Humanity International.
But in 2005, it returned to the name Koinonia Farm and reemphasized its function as a Christian, pacifist community.251

The best-known of the interracial communities is Peoples Temple of the Disciples of Christ, which, while predominantly African American, had many white members. But the Peoples Temple, which was founded in 1955, is notorious for the suicides of 918 of its members at Jonestown in Guyana in 1978.252

Among the many Jesus People communities, one, Youth for Truth in Sacramento, California, in the 1970s, was interracial and interethnic, with African Americans, Mexican Americans, and Latin Americans as well as whites.253 The community owned or rented a number of buildings, and it provided training for young people, most of whom had been in trouble with the law.254 As such, it had very strict rules on expected behavior for those living in the community.255 In the mid-1970s a community in Chicago, New Life, an African American Christian group of fifteen married couples, learned of Jesus People USA, and the two communities discussed merging. Initially the communities exchanged one couple as an experiment and then merged in early 1978.256 And today there are individual African Americans in some predominantly white communities, but it is impossible to know how many.

A contemporary community that is transitioning from a family farm is Soul Fire Farm in Upstate New York. According to its website,

**Soul Fire Farm is a BIPOC [Black and Indigenous People/Person(s) of Color]-centered community farm committed to ending racism and injustice in the food system.** We raise and distribute life-giving food as a means to end food apartheid. With deep reverence for the land and wisdom of our ancestors, we work to reclaim our collective right to belong to the earth and to have agency in the food system. We bring diverse communities together on this healing land to share skills on sustainable agriculture, natural building, spiritual activism, health, and environmental justice. We are training the next generation of activist-farmers and strengthening the movements for food sovereignty and community self-determination.257

And in a recent interview, one of the founders, Leah Penniman, makes the point that from the beginning she has reached out to Asians.258

The members of Soul Fire Farm have built a house and education center, and since it was established on marginal land, one of their first projects is to
reinvigorate the land. They run a CSA (Community-Supported Agriculture) that began with about twenty members and has grown to about one hundred families. They also run a training program in farming, building, and wilderness skills.259

Soul Fire Farm is involved in the Northeast Farmers of Color Land Trust, which is “a collaboration between over a dozen northeastern Indigenous tribal communities, northeast Indigenous bands, and Black and Latinx and Asian and Indigenous farmers” who have been “dispossessed from land, or reduced to a very small part of their ancestral territories.” Therefore, in addition, politically Soul Fire Farm is working on policies that return the land to its original inhabitants or pay reparations for “stolen land.”260

Since one of the attributes of many intentional communities, black and white, is the desire to withdraw from mainstream society to practice their beliefs without interference, there are probably more African American communities that are little known or unknown. This is undoubtedly true in those periods such as the early twentieth century when safety had to be a major concern; quite simply, if no one knew of your existence, you were likely to be left alone and survive.

Much has been written about the “success” or “failure” of intentional communities, a lot of it based on longevity as the measure of success.261 But many past and present members of communities think that longevity is the wrong measure. And scholars have come to agree or at least complicate the definition of success by asking such questions as “Did the community fulfill the needs of its members during the time they were members?” It appears that a few of the African American communities met the older longevity measure, and that many have met or are currently meeting the standard of fulfilling the current needs of their members.

Other Utopianism

Neither of the best-known ways in which utopianism is expressed exhausts the ways African Americans dreamed of bettering their lives, and the history of arguments over how to improve their situation and attempts to do so are part of their story. The first African American community developed when the Spanish explorer/colonizer Lucas Vázquez de Ayllón (1475–1526) established the short-lived San Miguel de Guadalupe colony in 1526, the first
non-Indian settlement in what became the United States, with more than five hundred Spanish settlers and about one hundred African slaves. Disease and rebellion by the slaves led to the abandonment of the site, with the ex-slaves joining the local Indians and establishing a permanent settlement.262

Later such settlements by runaway or rebellious slaves were identified as maroons, a term derived from the Spanish for “wild” and most often used regarding the Caribbean,263 and there is evidence that between 1672 and the Civil War there were many such settlements in the United States, although few lasted long. The people lived by raiding nearby towns and plantations as well as trading with Indians and some nearby whites. Such communities provided a temptation to slaves to run away or revolt and so were a constant irritant to slave owners. Thus, while there were constant attempts to reenslave or kill their inhabitants, a study from 1939 said that there were at least fifty or more settlements that “built homes, maintained families, raised cattle, and pursued agriculture.”264

Recent research based on better sources has radically changed that picture, showing that slaves constantly ran away, and many of them did not try to escape to the North but stayed near whatever plantation still held family members or traveled deeper into the South to find family members who had been sold away. They tried, sometimes successfully, to reunite broken-up families and in some cases established communities that combined such families with other runaways. One study reports, “As they reunited their families, the runaways became de facto maroons, living secretly in the woods by the plantations and farms close to the world of slavery but free from white control,”265 but, of course, at great danger to themselves: “Most runaways and maroons were caught and subjected to barbaric punishments administered in public as a deterrent.”266 In addition to the maroons who stayed near plantations, there were others who moved deeper into the forests and swamps, where they sometimes settled for long enough to grow at least some of their own food.267

As a result, throughout American history there were temporary communities of African Americans who had freed themselves but stayed in the South.

It is possible to so oppress people that the most they can imagine is improvement within the bounds of their oppression, but there are always a few who hope for more. For some slaves, the end of slavery appeared an unimaginable dream,268 but there were always some free blacks, some whites who opposed slavery, and some slaves who dreamed of freedom—some of whom escaped; some, black and white, who helped others escape; and some who
found other ways to resist. As early as 1774 some slaves in Massachusetts sent a petition to Thomas Gage, the British-appointed governor of Massachusetts, asking for their freedom. In 1791, Benjamin Banneker (1731–1806), a freeman who published astronomical almanacs that also contained material regarding slavery and the treatment of freemen, wrote to Thomas Jefferson criticizing his ownership of slaves and appealing to him to use his influence to help. Since little help was forthcoming even from their strongest supporters, not to mention, later, the willful failure to enforce laws that were designed to improve their position, the best, often the only, option, and one that remains relevant today, was acting on their own.

An early example that dealt with an immediate issue was the Free African Society, established in Philadelphia in 1778 to provide mutual support; and in 1787 the members agreed to donate a monthly stipend to provide such support. Such organizations often grew out of black churches, where allowed, and the churches and organizations like the Free African Society have provided a basis for mutual aid ever since.

African American soldiers fought both alongside white troops and in separate regiments (with white officers) in the Civil War. During the war, Lincoln issued the Emancipation Proclamation on January 1, 1863, which freed slaves in the ten states that were in rebellion. While it had no immediate effect in those states or in the states not in rebellion where slavery still existed, it was an immensely important symbol for slaves everywhere, putting pressure on states to end slavery, freed slaves as Union forces advanced, and led many slaves to flee to the North, with some joining the Union Army. In his 1978 The Last Days of the Sunshine People, Carl Lee Shears includes a poem entitled “January 1863” about a slave walking away from the plantation after the Emancipation Proclamation.

In December 1865 the Thirteenth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution abolished slavery, and because there was concern that ex-slaves were being denied their rights, the Civil Rights Act of 1866 (19 Stat. 27), which passed over the veto of President Johnson, stated that everyone born in the United States is a citizen and shall have all the rights of any other citizen. Women were not mentioned in the act, but since white women did not have such rights, it did not apply to black women.

During the war, the American Freedmen’s Inquiry Commission had been established to examine the situation of freed slaves and make proposals for the postwar period. The proposals were based on the belief that while slaves
had been trained to obedience and experienced the forced breakup of their families, with help during a transition period they would be able to adjust quickly to freedom.

The Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Land, which became known as the Freedmen’s Bureau, was established by Congress over the veto of President Johnson, and the bureau set out to provide land and education.273 The specific proposals included education for both ex-slaves and poor whites and land reform so that both would have the opportunity to make a living independently. An order was made in March 1865 to set aside forty-acre tracts for ex-slaves, but this was reversed by President Johnson a few months later.274 Some progress was made, particularly in South Carolina, but lasted only briefly.275 Education was something of an exception, in that during Reconstruction, Southern legislators provided funding for schools that substantially benefited the black population, with more black children enrolled than white children, black children spending more days in school than white children, and black teachers paid the same as or more than white teachers.276 But this bright picture did not last long.

If the proposals had been implemented, the postwar period would likely have been very different, but what happened was that as early as 1865, Southern states began to put laws in place to limit the ability of ex-slaves to be at all independent. Laws curtailed their ability to marry and their ability to work at anything other than farming, as a servant, or as an apprentice, with the former owner preferred as the person to whom the apprentice was bound. And, of course, education was limited, voting was impossible, and moving away was made very difficult.

The Fourteenth Amendment of 1868 was designed to undo the Dred Scott decision, to stop states from denying equal rights, and to undo the constitutional provision that counted slaves as three-fifths of a person in establishing the number of representatives each state had; but except for the change in the formula, it was not enforced, and the Supreme Court interpreted the amendment as applying only to property questions. The Fifteenth Amendment guaranteed the right to vote,277 but given the lack of enforcement, in 1873 the National Convention of Colored Persons petitioned Congress to protect their civil rights. Congress responded with the Civil Rights Act of 1875 (18 Stat. 335-37), which stated that all citizens must be treated equally regarding public accommodations, public transportation, and jury service. Again, the law was not enforced, and in 1883 the Supreme Court ruled the law
unconstitutional on the grounds that Congress did not have the authority to regulate private affairs (109 U.S. 3). Justice John M. Harlan dissented. And in *Plessy v. Ferguson* (163 U.S. [1896]), the Supreme Court made segregation legal, with Justice Harlan dissenting. As Southern states were reintegrated into the Union and whites took control, all governmental attempts to mitigate the position of African Americans in the South ended.278

Before the war and as a result of court action and social conditions after the war, most blacks found that mutual aid was the only way to mitigate their circumstances. For example, in the 1830s, Lewis Woodson, who has been described as “the first to articulate a genuine nationalist-emigrationist creed and place it in a coherent ideological framework,” argued that blacks themselves needed to address specifically black issues.279 He also encouraged blacks to learn trades, to leave the cities to farm, and to form all-Negro towns.280 In 1848, Frederick Douglass (1817–1895) published “What Are the Colored People Doing for Themselves?” where he stressed the need to develop character and to educate the next generations.281 In the South, mutual aid was also a survival strategy, a way to keep one’s head down and not attract attention. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Booker T. Washington (1856–1915), who was born a slave, supported African American businesses, which gradually helped to create a black middle class, and was one of the founders of the National Negro Business League, but today he is most remembered for the Atlanta Compromise of 1895, in which he argued against directly challenging discriminatory laws and stressed education and entrepreneurship.282

Washington raised the funds to establish thousands of small, rural schools and some colleges throughout the South, and he founded the Tuskegee Normal and Industrial Institute (later shortened to the Tuskegee Institute and now Tuskegee University) in 1881 and led it until his death. There was no building for the school, so the students and teachers built it themselves, providing the students with both a school building and a set of skills that they could use in later life; and all students, both men and women, were required to learn a trade as well as take academic courses.

In the North, African Americans initially supported Washington’s approach but later concluded that discriminatory laws should be directly challenged; and in 1909, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) was formed as a biracial organization to campaign for full civil rights and political representation. The best-known of the founders of the organization is W. E. B. Du Bois,283 who, in what is still
consider his most important book, *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903), coined the term “double-consciousness” to indicate that all blacks have to be constantly aware of how the world sees them as well as how they see themselves. He argued that, under these circumstances, they must help themselves, primarily through education, which, he noted, was the main positive legacy of the Freedmen’s Bureau. In an article entitled “The Talented Tenth,” he elaborated on this, writing that “the Negro race, like all races, is going to be saved by its exceptional men,” and went on to say that the best of the race must be provided the opportunity to get the best education possible.

The modern Civil Rights Movement, which at least partially vindicated the approach of Du Bois and the NAACP to use law and the courts to bring about change, was inspired by the 1954 *Brown v. Board of Education* (347 U.S. 483) decision, which overturned *Plessy v. Ferguson*. The unanimous decision applied only to public education, but it spurred years of efforts to enforce the decision and extend it to other public facilities and services. Southern politicians responded with “The Southern Manifesto: Declaration of Constitutional Principles,” in which they claimed the decision to be “abuse of judicial power” and defended *Plessy*.


Behind these aspects of the Civil Rights Movement there was a general utopianism, such as that in “Letter from Birmingham Jail” (1963) by the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr., which defended civil disobedience in the name of moral law. The best-known of King’s speeches, “I Have a Dream,” delivered during the 1963 March on Washington, suggests the utopia that the Civil Rights Movement sought. While the speech contained few specifics and was a general vision of freedom and equality, it had a utopian spirit and was and is thought of as a utopia. The “Letter from Birmingham Jail” is, in part, about the steps needed to transform an unjust society into a just one.
Black Nationalism

A different approach was taken by Marcus Garvey (1887–1940) and his followers. Garvey, who proposed that African Americans living in the United States should emigrate to Africa, has often been considered a failure. Although success and failure are notoriously difficult to judge, what has come to be called “Garveyism” has revived interest in him.289 In 1920, Garvey published his “Declaration of Rights of the Negro Peoples of the World,” which suggests racial separation, with Africa for Negroes, Europe for Europeans, and Asia for Asians.290

Throughout his career, Garvey emphasized the importance of mutual aid and education.291 But throughout his speeches and writings he argued that to fully develop all their abilities, Negroes must be completely free of white and colonial oppression, which could only be achieved in an independent nation. He said that “until the Negro reaches this point of national independence, all he does as a race will count for naught, because [of] the prejudice that will stand out against him even with his ballot in his hand.”292

Various forms of black nationalism flourished in the civil rights era. The best-known are those that affiliated themselves with Islam, such as the Moorish Science Temple of America, discussed above. After the death of Noble Drew Ali, his followers were split over his successor, and the movement ended up deeply divided, but some of the schismatic groups still exist. One, the Nation of Islam (popularly known as the Black Muslims), was founded in 1930 by Wallace Fard Muhammad (1877?–1934). Under its best-known leader, Elijah Muhammad (1897–1975), the Nation of Islam combined traditional Islamic teachings with seeing whites as the devil. While he was leader, Elijah encouraged his followers to grow their own food, and by 1975 the Nation owned farms in Alabama, Georgia, and Michigan totaling fifteen thousand acres that produced vegetables and raised livestock that helped to feed the Nation’s members and partially freed them from relying on white farmers and merchants.293 After his death, one of his sons, Warith Deen Mohammad (b. 1933), changed the name from Nation of Islam to the American Muslim Mission, rejected the racial message of his father, and encouraged African American Muslims to join mainstream Islam. The best-known contemporary descendant of the Nation, Louis Farrakhan (b. 1933), kept both the name Nation of Islam and at least some of its racial message. Farrakhan tried to follow Elijah Muhammad’s example and bought fifteen thousand acres in
Georgia to establish a farm to help feed his followers, but the land was unsuitable for growing vegetables or raising livestock and was a complete failure.294

After his hajj, or pilgrimage to Mecca, in 1964, Malcolm X (1925–1965), who had been a follower of Elijah Muhammad, stressed autonomy within the United States, saying, “The political philosophy of black nationalism means that the black man should control the politics and the politicisms of his own community.” And he went on to say, “The economic philosophy of black nationalism is pure and simple. It only means that we should control the economy of our community.”295

This was like the Black Panther’s attempts to improve the lives of the people they lived among. The first item in their program stated, “We want freedom. We want power to determine the destiny of our Black Community.” And specifically, they wanted “full employment,” “decent housing,” “education” that reflected the reality of black life, and radical reform of the justice system.296

Frustrated by the current situation of African Americans and the very slow progress being made and inspired by the Nation of Islam and, especially, Malcolm X, two brothers, Milton R. Henry (1919–2006)297 and Richard Henry (1930–2010), founded the Malcolm X Society in 1967. The next year the two brothers changed their names to Gaidi Obadele and Imari Abubakari Obadele and advocated the establishment of an independent black republic,298 the Republic of New Africa, comprising the states of South Carolina, Georgia, Alabama, Mississippi, and Louisiana, which they called “the subjected territory,”299 as well as $400 billion in reparations for the past treatment of blacks.300

In 1970, Milton gave a talk entitled “An Independent Black Republic in North America” at the conference “Problems of the Black Liberation Movement” held in Guelph, Ontario, in which, in addition to discussing the evils of the past, the characteristics of the area they demanded, and the aspects of U.S. law that he said supported reparations, he laid out the basic elements of their vision of the future. Milton said,

We want to build a new and better society in a new and better world. . . . We want to be able to deal with other nations of the world, diplomatically, representing the interests of our black nation. . . . We want our sons and daughters to have open commerce with all the peace-loving peoples of the world. . . . [W]e want to end the crime, the social dislocation, the unemployment, the spiritual degradation among our own people at home. Government can plan an overall
economy. Government can get rid of unemployment. Government can operate the relevant schools and eliminate illiteracy and ignorance. Government can, in fact, eliminate poverty.301

Economically, they intended to practice what Julius K. Nyerere (1922–1999), the first president of Tanganyika and then of Tanzania, called *ujamaa*, a Swahili word meaning “familyhood,” a form of socialism that treats the community as if it were an extended family.302

The talk took place after a shoot-out between the police and New Republic of Africa militants at the New Bethel Baptist Church in Detroit in which a young policeman was killed. After the shooting, the brothers took different directions, with Milton staying in Detroit and his brother leading his followers to Mississippi, where they intended to purchase land where, ultimately, the capital of New Africa would be located.303 Richard, then known under his new name, Imari, and as president of the Republic of New Africa, was jailed “on dubious conspiracy charges,”304 but in 1973, his “Republic of New Africa: The Struggle for Land in Mississippi” was published in *Black World*.305 And in some form or other, the Republic of New Africa continued, for at Milton’s funeral there were “representatives of the Tuskegee Airmen, an honor guard of the Republic of New Africa and a phalanx of prominent lawyers, judges and clergy.”306

Black Power

The expression “Black Power” appears to have been first used in Richard Wright’s book *Black Power* (1954),307 after which the phrase came to be used by many individuals and groups, mostly without any utopian implications. But there were groups in the 1970s, mostly connected with black separatism or black nationalism, that took the concept in a utopian direction. For example, the African People’s Party, like the Republic of New Africa, demanded “self-determination and independent nationhood,” with its territory being what are now “the states of Mississippi, Georgia, South Carolina, Alabama and Louisiana.”308 The other points in the organization’s program did not assume that they would be successful in their first demand and were concerned with black communities gaining greater control over their lives through such things as overseeing housing and community development and education. And most other groups took this approach rather than the separatist one.309
Black Women

Many of the utopias discussed here were written by African American women, and at least since the mid-twentieth century, most have stressed gender equality, while the various communities and movements either assumed that traditional gender roles would continue or struggled, with varying degrees of success, to bring about change. And as stated in the well-known essay “Double Jeopardy: To Be Black and Female,” black women have to deal with racism and sexism in their interactions with whites, so the sexist attitudes of black men do not help.\(^{310}\) Black lesbians have had to deal with additional levels of discrimination, and this situation led to a group of black lesbians known as The Combahee River Collective issuing “A Black Feminist Statement.” The statement is a critique of racism, sexism, and class discrimination in the black community and racism within the white community. The statement also says that “material resources must be equally distributed among those who create the products and not for the profit of the bosses” and goes on to declare that “a socialist revolution that is not also a feminist and antiracist revolution will not guarantee our liberation.”\(^{311}\) Neither of these statements includes much of a vision of what a better society would look like, and there are hundreds of such statements, manifestos, and the like that analyze the current situation, pointing out the evils inflicted on African Americans. Some of them include statements about what needs to be done in the immediate future, from organizing politically and voting to revolution, but few provide much more than a vague sense of an egalitarian future, rather than a more detailed utopia.

Black Lives Matter, a movement initially founded by Alicia Garza (b. 1981), Patrisse Cullors (b. 1984), and Opal Tometi (b. 1984), in which many black women became involved because it is black men being killed by police, has evolved into the Movement for Black Lives, which, as well as issuing statements critiquing the current situation, has gone further and produced a non-fiction statement about the institutions of a better society in which current evils could be overcome. Its platform is inclusive and reflects the growing recognition of intersubjectivity, or the awareness that everyone has multiple identities, saying, “We believe in elevating the experiences and leadership of the most marginalized Black people, including but not limited to those who are women, queer, trans, femmes, gender nonconforming, Muslim, formerly and currently incarcerated, cash poor and working class, disabled, undocumented, and immigrant.”\(^{312}\) And the statement stresses that while it is focused
on the United States, the issues involved “know no borders,” and the move-
ment specifically recognizes the concerns of “descendants of African people
all over the world” and “our Indigenous family.”

Its actual demands range from the short-term to the very long-term,
beginning with “End the War on Black People,” “an end to the criminaliza-
tion, incarceration, and killing of our people,” with ten specific proposals.
Next, as was the case for the Republic of New Africa, is “reparations for past
and continuing harms,” with five specific proposals. This is followed by a
demand that investments be made “in the education, health and safety of
Black People” and for “divestment from exploitative forces including prisons,
fossil fuels, police, surveillance and exploitative corporations,” with six spe-
cific proposals that include “Real, meaningful, and equitable universal health
care” and “A constitutional right at the state and federal level to a fully-funded
education.” Then comes “Economic Justice,” with nine specific proposals,
including “A right to restored land, clean air, clean water and housing and
an end to the exploitative privatization of natural resources—including land
and water.” “Community Control” is mentioned in a number of the above
demands but is also included separately, saying: “We demand a world where
those most impacted in our communities control the laws, institutions, and
policies that are meant to serve us—from our schools to our local budgets,
economies, police departments, and our land—while recognizing that the
rights and histories of our Indigenous family must also be respected,” with
three specific proposals. And finally, “Political Power” encompasses five spe-
cific proposals, which include “Public financing of elections,” protection and
expansion of the right to vote, “Full access to technology” and net neutral-
ity, and “Protection and increased funding for Black institutions.” While all
these demands and the specific proposals have been made by others, they
have rarely been put together as an overarching vision or utopia.

Conclusion

Here I have tried to pull together an important history that has been forgotten,
neglected, and willfully ignored. A people’s hopes and fears reflect their iden-
tity and are a part of their heritage, which should be known and not forgotten,
because it helps define who they are and who they could be. What African
Americans have wanted and struggled three centuries for is the chance to have
the life that many others consider their birthright. Once that is achieved, the next generation wants more, or different, but this is the way of utopianism.

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**Notes**

Two friends, Hoda Zaki and Tim Miller, twice read all or a large part of the essay, and they saved me from many errors, infelicities, and gaps in my analysis. Also, Dr. Sibyl E. Moses arranged for me to present a shortened version at the Library of Congress, and the response of the audience both during the question time and afterward was both useful and encouraging.

2. Such visions are most often called utopias and can be expressed in many ways, the main ones of which will be discussed here. For an overview, see my *Utopianism: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010).
3. The definitions I use, taken from my “Three Faces of Utopianism Revisited,” *Utopian Studies* 5, no. 1 (1994): 9, are

*Utopianism*—social dreaming—the dreams and nightmares that concern the ways in which groups of people arrange their lives and which usually envision a radically different society than the one in which the dreamers live.

*Utopia*—a non-existent society described in considerable detail and normally located in time and space. In standard usage utopia is used both as defined here and as an equivalent for eutopia (below).

*Eutopia* or *positive utopia*—a non-existent society described in considerable detail and normally located in time and space that the author intended a contemporaneous reader to view as considerably better than the society in which that reader lived.

*Dystopia* or *negative utopia*—a non-existent society described in considerable detail and normally located in time and space that the author intended a
contemporary reader to view as considerably worse than the society in
which that reader lived.

4. The definition, from ibid., 14–15, is “a group of five or more adults and their
children, if any, who come from more than one nuclear family and who have chosen to
live together to enhance their shared values or for some other mutually agreed upon
purpose.”

5. For a study of the general subject, see Alex Zamalin, Black Utopia: The History of an

6. For a study of early utopias by African American authors, see Adenike Marie
Davidson, The Black Nation Novel: Imagining Homeplaces in Early African American
Literature (Chicago: Third World Press, 2008), which discusses Martin R. Delany, Sutton
Griggs, Pauline E. Hopkins, and W. E. B. Du Bois. For studies of race in science fiction
that include reference to some early utopian material, see Sharon DeGraw, The Subject
of Race in American Science Fiction (New York: Routledge, 2007); and Isiah Lavender III,
of recent African American authors include Marleen S. Barr, ed., Afro-future Females:
Black Writers Chart Science Fiction’s Newest New-Wave Trajectory (Columbus: Ohio State
University Press, 2008); Edward K. Chan, The Racial Horizon of Utopia: Unthinking the
Future of Race in Late Twentieth-Century American Utopian Novels (Oxford: Peter Lang,
2016); Sandra M. Grayson, Visions of the Third Millennium: Black Science Fiction Novels
Write the Future (Trenton, N.J.: Africa World Press, 2003); and Ingrid Thaler, Black
Atlantic Speculative Fictions: Octavia E. Butler, Jewelle Gomez, and Nalo Hopkinson (New
York: Routledge, 2010). A wide-ranging exploration of race in popular literature,
including some utopias, is Mark C. Jerng, Racial Worldmaking: The Power of Popular

Parts. I. The Prospect. II. The Flourishing Village. III. The Burning of Fairfield. IV. The
 Destruction of the Pequods. V. The Clergyman’s Advice to the Villagers. VI. The Farmer’s
Advice to the Villagers. VII. The Vision, or Prospect of the Future Happiness of America (New
York: Childs and Swaine, 1794), 148–68; and [Edward Kent] (1802–1877), “A Vision of
Bangor, in the Twentieth Century,” in Voices from the Kenduskeag (Bangor, Me.: David
Bugbee, 1848), 61–73.

8. Celadon [pseud.], The Golden Age: or; Future Glory of North-America Discovered by An
edu/e/evans/N34108.0001.001/1:3?rgn=div1;view=fulltext.

9. “[Chronicle of the Year 1850],” Columbian Magazine or Monthly Miscellany
(Philadelphia) 1, no. 1 (September 1786): 5–6.

10. See, for example, [Mary Griffith], “Three Hundred Years Hence,” in Camperdown;
or, News from Our Neighborhood: Being Sketches, by the Author of “Our Neighborhood”
pseud. (Philadelphia: Carey, Lea and Blanchard, 1836), 88; Mrs. Sarah J[osepha Buell] Hale (1788–1879), ed. [written by], Liberia; or Mr. Peyton’s Experiments (New York: Harper
and Brothers, 1853); and Arthur Bird, Looking Forward; A Dream of the United States of the

12. [John Brown], *Provisional Constitution and Ordinances for the People of the United States* ([St. Catharines, Canada: William Howard Day], 1858).


22. The U.S. program, which funded support for farmers through programs at state land-grant universities, was established in 1887 under the Hatch Act (chap. 314, 24 Stat. 440, enacted March 2, 1887, 7 U.S.C. § 361a et seq.).


24. Ibid., 88.


28. Du Bois was the first African American to receive a doctorate from Harvard University and was one of the most prominent African American thinkers in the United States in the early twentieth century.

29. In 1905, Du Bois established Moon Illustrated Weekly, the first weekly for African Americans, which lasted for eight months, and, in 1907, The Horizon: A Journal of the Color Line, which lasted until 1910. Later he also established The Brownies Book, the first magazine for African American children, which was published monthly from January 1920 through December 1921.


In 1959, the white John Howard Griffin went through a process to darken his skin and then for six weeks traveled as a black man throughout the segregated South. He then published *Black like Me* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1961).


On the theme in Schuyler, and in Asian literature, where “yellow” has a different resonance, see Hee-Jung Serenity Joo, “Miscegenation, Assimilation, and Consumption: Racial Passing in George Schuyler’s *Black No More* and Eric Liu’s *The Accidental Asian,*” *MELUS* 33, no. 3 (Fall 2008): 169–90.


Butcher (Boston: Harcourt, Brace, 1966), which is about the shooting of an unarmed black man by two Chicago policemen, one black, one white. It was made into the 1975 film Cornbread, Earl, and Me.


An early satire on the issue by a white author that also connects to the World War II concentration/extermination camps is George P. Elliott, “The NRACP,” Hudson Review 2, no. 3 (Autumn 1949): 381–417. NRACP refers to the National Relocation Authority: Colored Persons.

44. Ishmael Reed, Mumbo Jumbo (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1972).


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60. See Samuel R. Delany, “*From The Splendor and Misery of Bodies, of Cities,*” *Review of Contemporary Fiction* 16, no. 3 (Fall 1996): 103–15.


64. Octavia E. Butler, “*Childfinder,*” in *Unexpected Stories*, e-book (New York: Open Road, 2014). Currently the book is not available online except through purchase or through a library that gives access to its readers through log-in.


69. For interpretations focusing on race, see Jeffrey A. Tucker, “‘*The Human Contradiction*: Identity and/as Essence in Octavia E. Butler’s *Xenogenesis*


79. For example, see three items from The Feminist Utopia Project: Hannah Giorgis, “Not on My Block: Envisioning a World Without Street Harassment,” a story that reflects the title; Suzanna Bobadilla, “Interview with Miss Major Griffin-Gracy,” an interview where Griffin-Gracy describes her utopia as a world where transgender people are considered


83. Tana Hargest, “Bitter Nigger Inc.,” Social Text 20, no. 2 (71), Summer 2002: 121.


89. Nisi Shawl, Everfair (New York: Tor, 2016). The Fabian Society was found in 1884.


98. For basic information on African American communities, see Timothy Miller, The Encyclopedic Guide to American Intentional Communities, 2nd ed. (Clinton, N.Y.: Richard W. Couper Press, 2015), which gives a list at 495.
99. The Shakers, or the United Society of Believers in Christ’s Second Appearing, established more than twenty communities in the United States starting in the late 1770s. For a study of the experience of one such African American, see Rebekah Brummett, “‘Blacksmith by Trade’: The Journey of African-American Shaker Justinian Cartwright,” American Communal Studies Quarterly 13, no. 2 (April 2019): 101–12.


101. The best study of Sojourner Truth (d. 1883) is Margaret Washington, Sojourner Truth’s America (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2009).


104. Miller, Search for a Black Nationality, viii–ix.


106. Mary Ann Shadd, A Plea for Emigration, or Notes on Canada West, in its Moral, Social, and Political Aspect with Suggestions Respecting Mexico, West Indies, and Vancouver Island, for the Information of Colored Emigrants (Detroit: ptb. by George Pattison, 1852).


113. For the plan, see Benjamin Lundy, *A Plan for the Gradual Abolition of Slavery in the United States, Without Danger of Loss to the Citizens of the South* (Baltimore: ptd. for Benjamin Lundy, 1825); rpt. in “Slavery,” *New-Harmony Gazette*, October 1, 1825, 4–5. Rather than Lundy, Frances Wright is thought to be the author. See also her “Frances Wright’s Establishment for the Abolition of Slavery,” *Genius of Universal Emancipation* 2, no. 18 (February 24, 1827): 440–41; rpt. from the *Memphis Advocate*, 1827.


116. Ibid., 41–44. On Silver Lake, see also “Dr. Robert H. Rose’s Colony,” *Colored American* 2, no. 96 (August 18, 1828): 102, where it is stated that “colonization in all instances with which we are acquainted, in this or any other country, has proved fatal to our people.”


122. All the information is based on oral history. For what is known about the community, see Sadie Smathers Patton, *The Kingdom of the Happy Land* (Asheville: Stephens Press, 1957).

124. For more information on Mound Bayou and Montgomery’s reasons for voting as he did, see Rosen, From New Lanark to Mound Bayou, 139–46; and Norman L. Crockett, The Black Towns (Lawrence: Regents Press of Kansas, 1979), which discusses the constitutional convention and Montgomery’s role at 95–97.


127. Ibid., 8–9.


130. One study of all-Negro towns limited the ones included to those with a population of more than one thousand people, which, except for Mound Bayou, excludes all the ones discussed. See Harold M. Rose, “The All-Negro Town: Its Evolution and Function,” Geographical Review 55, no. 3 (July 1965): 362–81. Again, except for Mound Bayou, none of the communities fit the definition of an intentional community but grew over time rather than being founded at a particular time.


132. One study has shown a significant degree of nostalgia for one of these lost communities. See Michelle R. Boyd, Jim Crown Nostalgia: Reconstructing Race in Bronzeville (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008). Bronzeville was an area of Chicago.

133. I use the term to refer to the exodus, primarily to Kansas and Oklahoma, that occurred as Reconstruction was being dismantled in the South. Nell Irvin Painter, Exodusters: Black Migration to Kansas After Reconstruction (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1977), uses “Exodusters” to refer specifically to the 1879 exodus.


136. See Painter, Exodusters; and Crockett, Black Towns, which discusses towns in Kansas and Oklahoma as well as Mound Bayou in Mississippi. Roy Garvin, “Benjamin or ‘Pap’ Singleton and His Followers,” Journal of Negro History 33, no. 1 (January 1948): 7–23, is mostly on those who joined Singleton’s exodus and what happened to them. Garvin refers to the Little Coney Colony in Chautauqua County (founded 1881), which was not a
Singleton community, as the last of the “Exoduster” communities (16) in his “Wyandotte and the First ’Exodusters’ of 1879,” *Kansas Historical Quarterly* 26, no. 3 (Autumn 1960): 233–49. Since the community was adjacent to the town of Caney and the Little Caney River, Caney is most likely the correct name (thanks go to Tim Miller for pointing this out). Glen Schwendemann, “The ’Exodusters’ on the Missouri,” *Kansas Historical Quarterly* 29, no. 1 (Spring 1963): 25–40, discusses the difficulties the first Exodusters encountered.


There is a dispute over the name. It was named after either Nicodemus in the New Testament or an African prince called Nicodemus who was brought to the United States in 1692 and enslaved. He was the first slave to buy his freedom and is supposed to have predicted that whites would come to regret slavery. On Nicodemus, see Kenneth Marvin Hamilton, “The Origins and Early Promotion of Nicodemus: A Pre-exodus, All-Black Town,” *Kansas History* 5, no. 3 (Winter 1982): 220–42; and Glen Schwendemann, “Nicodemus: Negro Haven on the Solomon,” *Kansas Historical Quarterly* 34, no. 1 (Spring 1968): 10–31.


142. Schwendemann, “Nicodemus.”


155. Landing, Black Judaism, 436–42.

156. The Church of the Living God Brotherhood traces its origins to Christianity and appears have dropped any direct reference to Judaism. See http://www.ctlgcwff.org/history.html.


158. Dorman, Chosen People, 36.

159. Landing, Black Judaism, 57–68.

160. For a study of one branch of the movement as it existed in the 1980s, see Sara M. Stone, “Song Performance, Transmission, and Performance Practice in an Urban Black Denomination: The Church of God and Saints of Christ” (Ph.D. dissertation, Kent State, 1985), which focuses on the music of the church but covers the church organization, doctrine, and practice as well.

161. Landing, Black Judaism, 51.

162. Ibid.

163. Ibid., 53.


165. The spelling of both his first name and surname is uncertain, but the main sources agree on Warien Roberson.

166. On Roberson and the Temple of the Gospel of the Kingdom, see Landing, Black Judaism, 121–29; Ruth Landes, “Negro Jews in Harlem,” Jewish Journal of Sociology 19, no. 2 (1967): 178–79; and Dorman, Chosen People, 115–17. Although the Landes piece was only published in 1967, it is based on a longer article reporting research from the late 1920s and early 1930s and written in 1933.

168. Ibid., 128.


175. See http://www.yahwehbenyahweh.com/.


179. It is not known when he married the first Mother Divine, an African American woman whose given name was Penninah, who was one of his followers and much older than Father Divine, with the official date being 1882 and others giving dates as late as the late 1910s. Dates for her death sometime in the 1940s vary. They asserted that the relationship was never consummated.


182. Ibid., 9, 16.


185. Ibid., 128.

186. The spring 2018 issue of Communities: Life in Cooperative Cultures is devoted to the theme “Class, Race, and Privilege” but has relatively little on race.


188. For his teachings, see Drew Ali, The Holy Koran of the Moorish Holy Temple of Science (n.p.: n.p., 1927), 32–35.

189. Ibid., 36–39.


198. For overviews, see Paul K. Conkin, Tomorrow a New World: The New Deal Community Program (Ithaca: published for the American Historical Association, Cornell University Press, 1959); and Holley, Uncle Sam’s Farmers.


200. Conkin, Tomorrow a New World, 201.

205. Ibid., 112–13, 183–85.
208. Ibid., 187.
209. Holley, *Uncle Sam’s Farmers*, 264.
210. Ibid., 266.
218. King was killed in a traffic accident in 1968, and Stewart E. Perry says that “the new community of Featherfield Farm was never built” due, in part, to Slater King’s death. Stewart E. Perry, *Communities on the Way: Rebuilding Local Economies in the United States and Canada* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1987), 87.
225. Davis, Arc of Justice, 15.
226. Ibid., 16.
230. Ibid., 127. Since most of the residents were illiterate, this statement seems, at best, to be an exaggeration. Some people undoubtedly had the dream, which they then tried to instill in the residents.
231. Ibid., 127–48.
235. The best description of the Panther communities is Spencer, “Communalism and the Black Panther Party in Oakland, California,” 92–121: on childcare and education, see 108–11; on the clinic, see 100–107.
237. Haddad and Smith, Mission to America, 106. For the changes in his teachings over time, see 111–26.
238. Ibid., 127–28.
239. On women in the community, see ibid., 127–31.


245. Ibid., 31–34.

246. Ibid., 50–51.

247. Ibid., 59.


254. See Ward, *Far-Out Saints of the Jesus Communes*, 182–85, for the backgrounds of the residents.

255. The rules are available at ibid., 176–79.

257. See http://www.soulfirefarm.org/.


259. Ibid., 11–12. As part of that project, Leah Penniman has written a book, Farming While Black: Soul Fire Farm’s Practical Guide to Liberation on the Land (White River Junction, Vt.: Chelsea Green, 2018). In addition to practical advice, the book includes chapters titled “Honoring the Spirits of the Land,” “Healing from Trauma,” “Movement Building,” and “White People Uprooting Racism.”


264. Herbert Aptheker, “Maroons Within the Present Limits of the United States,” Journal of Negro History 24, no. 2 (April 1939): 16. Almost all the evidence is drawn from reports on raids and attempts to eliminate the settlements. See also Aptheker’s "Additional Data on American Maroons," Journal of Negro History 32, no. 4 (October 1947): 452–60. Here the evidence is based on material from South Carolina.


266. Ibid., 83.

267. Ibid., 10.


272. This was the first time that Congress voted to override a veto by the president. On the bureau in various states, see the essays in Donald G. Nieman, ed., The Freedmen’s Bureau and Black Freedom (New York: Garland, 1994).

275. In New Orleans, the streetcars were simply taken over, and, briefly, integrated public transportation became the norm. In 1865 there was a sit-in in streetcars in Charleston, South Carolina, which were then integrated. And uniquely, the University of South Carolina was fully integrated in the 1870s (Foner, *Reconstruction*, 22–32, 282). South Carolina “was the only Southern state to promote the redistribution of land for the benefit of the freedmen.” Carol K. Rothrock Bleser, *The Promised Land: The History of the South Carolina Land Commission 1869–1890* (Columbia: pub. for the South Carolina Tricentennial Commission by the University of South Carolina Press, 1969), xiii.


277. Although women had been deeply involved in the abolition movement, many abolitionists, both black and white, opposed referring to women in the amendment, arguing that if women were included, it would not pass, and as a result, the Fourteenth Amendment referred specifically to “male inhabitants.” All women were denied the franchise until the Nineteenth Amendment was ratified in 1920, and after 1920 black women remained effectively disenfranchised in the same way as black men.


280. Ibid., 98–100.


282. For the address, see http://p1cdn4static.sharpschool.com/UserFiles/Servers/Server_10640642/File/bugge/Chapter%2017/washingtonvsdubois.PDF.

283. Du Bois edited *The Crisis*, the magazine of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, from 1910 to 1933.


297. Milton Henry, a Tuskegee Airman, Yale Law School graduate, and, later, graduate of the Ashland Theological Seminary, was a Detroit lawyer who also preached at the Christ Presbyterian Church in Southland, Michigan, a church he founded. He had been a friend of Malcolm X, had traveled with him to Africa, and was a pallbearer at his funeral. For information on Milton’s life, see his New York Times obituary: Francis Wilkinson, “Segregationist Dreamer,” *New York Times Magazine*, December 31, 2006, https://www.nytimes.com/2006/12/31/magazine/31henry.t.html.

298. Milton continued to practice law as Milton R. Henry.

the planned governmental structure can be found at 60–66. Rpt. from New African (Cape Town), December 1969, 5–6.


304. Ibid.


313. Ibid.

314. Ibid.