

JUSTICE FOR BLACKS: SHOULD THEY CHOOSE ASSIMILATION?
APARTHEID?

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Apartheid is just if you like it that way, if that's the way you choose to live. Orthodox Jews in Brooklyn, eg. Assimilation is just if you choose to assimilate. Secular Jews, eg. Of course forced assimilation (as some social engineering in the USA) & forced apartheid (as now eroding in S.Africa) are unjust. The issue, it seems, is freedom. But does maximizing freedom maximize justice? Are justice & freedom always & everywhere simple functions of each other, or do they sometimes exact costs from each other (less freedom, so more justice; less justice, so more freedom)?....I saw all 14 segments of PBS's "Eyes on the Prize" (an up-from-slavery black USA history). And I've been praying for evolution, & against revolution, in today's S.Africa....This Thinksheet is a caution against the heady wine of "Free at last!" as a drug fogging rational considerations of justice.

1. Evangelical religion teaches that "Red & yellow, black & white, we're all sinners in God's sight" (to parody, to another truth, "Jesus loves the little children of the world"). This religion, my religion, teaches that nobody deserves what everybody's offered on condition only of repentance & faith, viz **justification**, which we human beings need more than we need **justice**: justice is secondary, though it's very nice to have, & you're a hypocrite if you claim to be a recipient of God's redeeming grace & aren't committed to justice for everybody. But what are these two realities? Justification is forgiveness & restoration to fellowship with God through Jesus Christ our Lord, & it commits us to living the Lord's Prayer. In broad outline, that's clear. Justice is...what? If I say "fairness," I've only used a synonym that requires as much explaining as my original word. How about "freedom" as a defining synonym for justice? No better. But a good defining synonym for justification: "free from sin, death, & the devil" as an old baptismal formula has it. It will come as a shock to some: justice is harder to define than justification.

2. W.E.B.DuBois' THE SOULS OF BLACK FOLK should be on the required reading lists even though he influenced what some black folks (in the U.S.A., S.Africa, & some other places) are against, viz assimilation. Let's glance at his three stages or moments of liberation from oppression:

(1) The feeling & action of **revolt** & revenge, to establish an independent & authentic identity. Terrified whites clamped down harder on blacks after Nat Turner's revolt in 1831 slaughtered some whites, including women & children. The terror was the greater for the fact that in many areas of the South--as now in S.Africa--whites were fewer than blacks. Can Mandela lead a peaceful revolt? Nobody knows. In the 1960s I favored violent black revolt in the USA & said in the N.Y.TIMES "not enough cities are burning": I had no doubt the fire was containable, would not burn up our Anglo-Saxon base of culture & power. I'm against black violence in S.Africa for two reasons: (1) It would certainly result in a horrendous slaughter of blacks, & (2) It might sweep away the European (Dutch & English) power & culture, which hasn't been as open to blacks as (thank God) it's becoming.

(2) The attempt to **adjust** thought & behavior to the emergent culture, now (after the revolt) free to develop along its own lines. Booker T. Washington's UP FROM SLAVERY may serve as a metaphor of this moment or stage. Black folk are free to form their own communities & create a new order with its own symbols & stories. The dangers of this stage are uncritical romanticism & the submergence of the individual in the community.

(3) What I may call the second revolt, viz the upthrust of the **individual** in self-realization & self-development. As housing outside the black communities becomes available, this black middle-class has left, resulting in what I may call desertification of America's black communities. Will this happen in S.Africa? (Will the Mandelas continue to live in Soweto?) Individual assimilation, but at what cost to community?

(4) DuBois doesn't mention the moment of cultural **renewal**, the recovery of indigenous religious & esthetic resources, the stage expounded in Jas.H.Evans,Jr.'s SPIRITUAL EMPOWERMENT IN AFRO-AMERICAN LITERATURE (Edwin Mellen Press/87). Faith being both communal & personal, can the expatriot black middle-class "keep the faith" outside the black community? The question is mine, as is its sequel: What faith? Why not the faith of the community they've assimilated into?

3. Justice for blacks in the USA (& in S.Africa) may take the form of assimilation or of apartheid as chosen options. What form can it take for inner-city blacks who have so little freedom/justice they can't imagine having options?