



Black Identity: Rhetoric, Ideology, and Nineteenth-Century Black Nationalism

Professor Dexter B Gordon

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Exploring the role of rhetoric in African American identity and political discourse

Dexter B. Gordon's *Black Identity: Rhetoric, Ideology, and Nineteenth-Century Black Nationalism* explores the problem of racial alienation and the importance of rhetoric in the formation of black identity in the United States. Faced with alienation and disenfranchisement as a part of their daily experience, African Americans developed collective practices of empowerment that cohere as a constitutive rhetoric of black ideology. Exploring the origins of that rhetoric, Gordon reveals how the ideology of black nationalism functions in contemporary African American political discourse.

Rooting his study in the words and works of nineteenth-century black abolitionists such as Maria Stewart, David Walker, and Henry Garnet, Gordon explores the rapprochement between rhetorical theory, race, alienation, and the role of public memory in identity formation. He argues that abolitionists used language in their speeches, pamphlets, letters, petitions, and broadsides that established black identity in ways that would foster liberation and empowerment. The arguments presented here constitute the only sustained treatment of nineteenth-century black activists from a rhetorical perspective.

Gordon demonstrates the pivotal role of rhetoric in African American efforts to create a viable public voice. Understanding nineteenth-century black alienation—and its intersection with twentieth-century racism—is crucial to understanding the continued sense of alienation that African Americans express about their American experience. Gordon explains how the ideology of black nationalism disciplines and describes African American life for its own ends, exposing a central piece of the ideological struggle for the soul of America. The book is both a platform for further discussion and an invitation for more voices to join the discourse as we search for ways to comprehend the sense of alienation experienced and expressed by African Americans in contemporary society.

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