



Charles P. Henry

THE QUEST FOR IDENTITY
AND AGENCY AS A BLACK
SCHOLAR AND HUMAN
RIGHTS ACTIVIST

Combatting Invisibility and
Gaining Legitimacy

Activism and Social
Movement Studies

Collection Editor
R. ANNA HAYWARD

LIVED PLACES
PUBLISHING



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To Loretta

Abstract

I have been a part of two interrelated social movements. The first movement was a search for identity that involved place, memory, family, and the creation of Black Studies. The second movement, flowing from the first, involved civil and human rights, that is, the right to know who you are. This movement includes diaspora, global community, intersectionality, and work inside and outside government. In short, how does one overcome invisibility, gain legitimacy and agency, and find community in an individualized society with few role models?

Key words

Human rights, Black Studies, identity, non-governmental organizations, social movements, cultural diversity.

Contents

Note on language	ix
Learning objectives	x
Introduction	1
Chapter 1 Buckeye Lake Amusement Park	17
Chapter 2 A child of two movements	29
Chapter 3 Washington, DC: The caucus and the capstone	49
Chapter 4 Homeward bound	63
Chapter 5 From Black Studies to African diaspora to American cultures	77
Chapter 6 Office hours	93
Chapter 7 Witnessing Black political history: Gary, San Francisco, and Chicago	107
Chapter 8 Beyond the ivory tower	123
Chapter 9 Education abroad	139
Chapter 10 From palm wine to rock and roll	153
Chapter 11 Global forums I	175
Chapter 12 Global forums II	189
Chapter 13 Conclusion	203

Discussion questions	211
Bibliography	212
Additional reading	214
Index	215

Note on language

The words Black and African American are used interchangeably.

The word Negro was used to describe Blacks until the late 1960s.

Learning objectives

- Examine how social movements become institutionalized.
- Learn the differences between positive rights and negative rights.
- Discuss how to develop a critical, but not cynical, worldview.
- Discuss the process for creating new knowledge and recovering lost knowledge.
- Learn how global networks can change power relationships.

Introduction

The focus of the memoir is my life in two movements that shaped me and that I, in turn, tried to influence. My involvement in both movements grew organically from my existence as an African American male born in mid-twentieth-century America. As I advanced in school, I increasingly looked for myself reflected in the history I read and the teachers I listened to. There was little history about African Americans and what existed was largely negative. Thus began my work in Black Studies from college to this very day.

I also continue to be involved in the movement for human rights. To be an African American youth in the 1950s and 1960s was to participate either vicariously or actively in a great awakening. It was to be a part of a struggle for human dignity and equality. I did both; that is, I participated vicariously in the Southern struggle for civil and political rights since I lived in the North and was too young to travel South on my own. Two friends and I did integrate a roller-skating rink in my hometown of Newark, Ohio, without incident during our high school years. Chapter One discusses the racism facing Blacks in the North. As I entered college in 1965, Black Power was manifesting itself in a variety of ways, including the development of Black Studies. I always saw Black Power as building on the civil rights movement rather than

competing with it. The demand for civil and political rights naturally evolved into a demand for economic, social, and cultural rights. Eventually, I would teach a course entitled "Education as a Human Right" for students preparing to tutor elementary school students in Berkeley schools. My involvement in these two movements would not have been possible without the love and support of my family and several mentors.

At age 13, I decided I wanted to become president of the United States. To do so, I also decided I would need a doctorate in political science to prevent being criticized as unqualified for the position. On reflection, I believe such audacious plans must have come from two sources. The first source was my parents, Charles and Ruth, who always expected me to go to college, although neither of them had a college education. My father left school after the eighth grade, which was probably typical for a Black youth, or any youth born in 1890, especially one that was orphaned at a young age. My mother graduated from high school with a straight-A average but no hope of going to college. After all, she was a poor African American girl in the middle of the Great Depression. Through some miracle, my maternal grandparents, Lewis and Inez Holbert, saved or borrowed enough money to purchase a hundred-acre farm in the late 1920s. Although my grandfather was legally blind from working in a glass factory in Zanesville, Ohio, he learned to farm so his eight children would not go hungry. My mother walked seven miles to school every day and washed her one good dress on weekends. As a young woman, she would serve as secretary of the local NAACP. From their example, I got the idea I could be anyone I chose to be.



Photo 1 Parents Charles and Ruth Henry (circa 1966)

The second source of self-belief was external. I turned thirteen in 1960, a year that witnessed Black college and high school student sit-ins across the South and the election of a young president asking what you could do for your country. I thought politics offered a way to help the most people achieve equality and social justice. As I grew older, I retained my belief in politics as a source of social betterment; however, I decided being a politician required compromises I was unwilling to make. I got my doctorate in political science, but my desire to be president shifted toward the pursuit of facts through research and social justice through activism.

One person who listened to my dreams about studying politics and trying “to save the world” was Loretta Jean Crenshaw. We met at a summer’s night yard party at the home of a girl I had dated. I was sixteen, and she was eighteen and not happy

to be in Newark. Her parents, Roy and Virginia Crenshaw, her younger sisters, Rosalyn and Delores, and her brother, Roy, Jr., had recently moved to Newark from Dayton, Ohio. Mr. Crenshaw was a civilian employee of the Air Force, and his job had moved from Dayton to Newark. In the process, the Crenshaws had given up the lifestyle of a thriving Black community in Dayton for Newark's small working-class Black community. Loretta, however, was off to Wilmington College that fall and only had to endure Newark during the summer and school vacations.

It was not until I started college a couple of years later that I had any real chance of pursuing a relationship with Loretta.

I did pursue and persist and found myself happily and surprisingly married a week before my twenty-first birthday. There were doubters that the marriage would last, but as of this writing, some 56 years later, it has.



Photo 2 Loretta and Charles (1968)

Loretta taught elementary school in Newark while I finished my senior year at Denison University in Granville, six miles from Newark. When we tried to rent a house in Granville, the realtor told us someone had just taken it. The minister who married us, Reverend Charles Daugherty, sent a White couple as a test to the same realtor to ask about the rental. When they were told it was available, we had all the evidence we needed to charge them with discrimination. The realtor quickly agreed to rent to us. It would be the first of nine homes in our first fourteen years of marriage. Small wonder we have chosen to stay in the ninth home for the last forty-two years.

We decided to wait until I finished my doctorate and had a job before we had children. After a period when Loretta didn't get pregnant, we decided to adopt a newborn. There is no waiting list for Black babies, and Adia Jean entered our lives the same weekend I received my doctorate in political science from the University of Chicago in June 1974. As the first grandchild in either family, she was immediately and happily spoiled. Four years later, and still without conceiving on our own, we decided to adopt a boy. Charles Wesley, named for his two grandfathers, joined the family in the summer of 1978. Our family seemed complete when Loretta became pregnant with Laura Anne, born in August 1980. I think Loretta would agree with me that being a good parent is by far the hardest thing either of us has ever tried to do. Every child is different and presents different challenges. We have been blessed with three grandchildren. Adia has two daughters, Ashlyn and Michael, and Wes has a son, Tyler. All six have enriched our lives. My brother, Oren, and his wife, Lisa, have been supportive throughout my career.



Photo 3 The Henry Family (2017)

In addition to the support of my family, three mentors stand out among the many people who have helped me along the way. Julius Richardson was one of the Black professionals, like Roy Crenshaw, who moved from Dayton to Newark with the Air Force. Born in 1921 in Blythdale, Pennsylvania, he had joined the Tenth Cavalry at an early age and remained for twenty years supporting his family of wife Margaret and four daughters. Mr. Richardson had learned golf while in the military, played on the all-army team, and won several tournaments. He would have pursued a career as a golf professional if discrimination against Blacks had made such dreams impossible. After working on the civilian side of the military in Newark for twenty years, he began working for Metropolitan Life Insurance Company and became a full-time golf instructor.

I met Mr. Richardson at Trinity AME Church, where he taught Sunday school. My best friend, Ed Folds, lived on the same street as the Richardsons, so it was easy to visit him outside the church. He became a sort of godfather to us both. My father was raised in a generation when children were seen but not heard. According to my mother, he was not enthusiastic about having children at age 57. In short, while my brother and I knew Dad loved us, we didn't bring our problems to him or ask for advice. Ed's father was also a little remote. Mr. Richardson was from a younger generation and helped fill that gap. Since he had spent time in the Tenth Cavalry, he enjoyed talking with my father about his experience with the famous "Buffalo Soldiers" as well as his activities in the Masonic lodge.

One incident shows Mr. Richardson's laid-back style. Ed and I had recently gotten our driver's licenses and wanted to go to



Photo 4 Julius Richardson, Julieanna Richardson, and Charles (2003)

Columbus to cruise for girls. My car wasn't running as was often the case, so we decided to ask Mr. Richardson if he would loan us his car. We went to his home early on a Saturday night. Rather than say no, he invited us in, made some small talk about sports and school, and got us to play some games. By the time we had finished, Mr. Richardson said it was too late to go to Columbus. As I grew older, I appreciated his calm demeanor and sage advice. He knew my ambitious plan for politics and was always encouraging. I only wish I had been more interested in golf as a teenager. He took Ed and me to the professional World Series of Golf in Akron, but I never expressed a desire to take it up. *Golf* magazine would later name him one of the hundred best golf instructors in the country.

I'm not sure when I first met Ginetta Sagan. She probably invited me to her home in Woodside, south of San Francisco, shortly after I was elected to the board of Amnesty International USA so she could lobby me. Of course, I accepted because Ginetta was a human rights legend. As a teenage Ginetta Moroni, she had been a part of the Italian resistance to Mussolini during World War II. Both of her parents, who were physicians, were killed, and Ginetta was eventually captured and tortured. One night before her scheduled execution, a matchbox was dropped in the cell with the word *coraggio* (courage) written inside. The next day, resistance fighters disguised as Nazi soldiers spirited her away to freedom. Her experiences led her to spend the rest of her life fighting for human rights.

After the war, Ginetta came to the United States to study, met her future husband, Leonard Sagan, and moved to the Bay Area. As an activist, researcher, and human rights educator, she founded the

first West Coast Amnesty International USA (AIUSA) group and then went on to establish 75 other groups around the country. Ginetta was named honorary board chair of AIUSA and awarded the Presidential Medal of Freedom in 1996. When I returned to Oakland after my brief work with the State Department, she asked me to chair the newly established AIUSA Ginetta Sagan Fund (GSF).

The objective of GSF was to grant an award each year to a woman working for the rights of women and children in dangerous conditions. It was hoped that in addition to the cash award, the publicity might give the recipient some protection to enable them to continue their work. A group of Ginetta's friends comprised the fund's steering committee, and Cosette Thompson (who reminded me of a young Ginetta) served as a staff liaison.

Ginetta, herself, was our greatest resource. She was a champion fund-raiser for the entire human rights movement and often reminded me that there would be no programs if we were not willing to raise the funding. One clear memory is a call from Ginetta, who was going to lunch with the philanthropist Ann Getty, asking me whether to ask for \$10,000 or \$100,000. I replied I had no experience in dealing with billionaires', but you might as well ask for the \$100,000 because the worst outcome would be \$10,000. On another occasion, a wealthy donor handed her a check for \$5,000. She immediately handed it back and said he could do better!

One of my fondest memories of Ginetta is our trip to the Czech Republic. My old friend John Shattuck had become the U.S. ambassador and invited her to a luncheon in her honor with Czech human

rights activists. Ginetta asked me to accompany her, and I happily agreed. We toured the old Jewish cemetery in Prague, where Ginetta and Joan Baez had transferred cash they had smuggled into the country to Polish Solidarity activists years earlier.

We had lunch at a restaurant at the foot of the Charles Bridge and sat at a hidden table where a young Ginetta had had her last meal with her father. John took us to a concert, and I later played tennis with him on a court at the ambassador's residence where we were staying. He had neglected to tell me he had been taking tennis lessons from a former Wimbledon champion. The day before the luncheon, a concert in her honor took place on the lawn. The luncheon, however, produced some tension. Members of the old Communist regime were there as well as leaders of the new Havel administration. The Czech Republic had not gone through a truth and reconciliation process, and it was clear the privileges the old elite enjoyed were still resented.

After chairing GSF for several years, I suggested the group should have a female chair. Ginetta disagreed, and we settled on a female co-chair. When she passed away in 2000, it felt safe to turn the leadership over to a female chair. Loretta and I visited a bed-ridden Ginetta at the end of her life. Before we left, she insisted I take the painting of Port Elizabeth, South Africa, on the wall over her bed. She and Leonard had purchased it in South Africa many years earlier. The painting, along with an African sculpture that had belonged to her parents, which she had given me some time earlier, is among my prized possessions.

I met Bertram Gross in the mid-1980s. My research and teaching of race and public policy had led to an interest in the



Photo 5 Ginetta Sagan and Charles in Prague (circa 1997)

Hawkins-Humphrey Full Employment Act. Having worked on the staff of both Senator Humphrey and the Congressional Black Caucus, I knew the act was a key piece of legislation advancing Black economic equality in the 1970s. When I mentioned to someone that I was writing an article on the act, they said you should interview Bert Gross; he lives near Berkeley in Moraga. I did interview Bert, and by the end of the interview, he had asked me to co-author an article or book on full employment with him.

By that time, Bert was in semi-retirement while his second wife, Kusum Singh, taught at St. Mary's College. Born in Philadelphia in 1912, he had a BA and MA in English from the University of Pennsylvania. Graduating from college with no job prospects during the Great Depression, Bert joined a pro wrestling tour of South America billed as the "Jew Boy". He was not the fan favorite in Argentina. Following World War II, he worked on the Senate staff of Robert Wagner, drafting what would become the Full Employment Act of 1946. Although he lacked a degree in economics, Bert served as the first director of the president's council of economic advisors. He also worked as an economic advisor to the young Israeli government and eventually taught public administration and public policy at Hebrew University, Syracuse University, CUNY, and Wayne State University. Bert had drafted the new full employment bill at the request of Representative Augustus Hawkins and was greatly disappointed when the Carter administration failed to fully implement it. Bert's 1980 book, *Friendly Fascism*, gained him an audience on the left and an invitation to visit Cuba. The work continues to be relevant today.

I was fortunate to become one of Bert's honorary sons. There were at least eight of us who had worked with Bert over the years. He had four sons with distinguished careers by his first wife, Nora Faine Gross, and three distinguished stepdaughters by Kusum. A typical visit to Bert and Kusum would involve me giving Bert something I had written. He would look it over, say it was the best thing he had ever seen on the subject, and then offer a few suggestions for improvement. This process would repeat itself four or five times before he deemed the piece acceptable.



Photo 6 Oren Henry, Bert Gross, and Charles (1991)

‘Bert was interested in my human rights work with AI and quickly absorbed most of the literature on the subject. We decided to cast full employment within the context of the larger quest for economic rights. One product of that approach is discussed in chapter 12.

This work is a memoir of my life in two social movements. My research is not discussed, but it is related to my activism. Movements have goals and methods of achieving those goals. Research can inform movements both by examining the past and predicting the likelihood of success. Social science research is less reliable than natural sciences because it has human beings as its subject. Objectivity, while often desirable, is not possible because the researcher is also a human being. The reverse is also true; an insider’s view of a movement can inform those who study it. At best, one can collect as much information from as

many sources as possible before reaching a conclusion. Given these limitations, I want to mention four of my publications and why I chose to write about the subject.

Culture and African American Politics was my first single-authored book. I was inspired by Lawrence Levine's *Black Culture and Black Consciousness*, an examination of antebellum and post-bellum Black culture using folklore and popular culture. The dominant schools of history in the early twentieth century used the writings of slaveowners to provide a perspective on slavery. That perspective presented the slave master as a benevolent figure and the enslaved as ignorant and lazy. An image that is still reflected in the views of some conservatives, for example, the welfare queen. There was no comparable body of work from the enslaved perspective because they were not permitted to read or write. Levine used folklore, music, and even jokes to present that perspective. To my knowledge, no one had attempted that approach in political science. My book uses those oral sources to uncover a distinct Black politics.

Another historian, John (Jack) Kirby, had written a book about Blacks in the New Deal in which he briefly mentions Ralph Bunche. In all my political science education, I had not come across his name or work despite Bunche being the first Black political scientist, the president of the American Political Science Association, the principal researcher for Gunnar Myrdal's classic *An American Dilemma*, and the first Nobel Laureate of African descent. He filled a gap in my education between the early twentieth-century debates between W. E. B. DuBois and Booker T. Washington and the modern civil rights movement. I asked Jack for biographical references on Bunche, and he said there were no biographies.

I decided to write *Ralph Bunche: Model Negro or American Other?* and edit *Ralph Bunche: Selected Speeches and Writings*.

In 2000, Randall Robinson wrote *The Debt*, an examination of the demand for racial reparations. I was surprised to find a book on this controversial subject at my local Costco. It helped revive a movement that had been around since the Civil War and General Sherman's call for 40 acres and a mule for the freedmen. When former civil rights leader and Washington insider Vernon Jordan visited Berkeley to promote his own autobiography, I asked him what he thought about the newly reenergized movement. He said he didn't think about it because it wasn't going to happen. I thought this dismissive attitude was a bit shortsighted since the same argument could have been applied to the abolition of slavery or many movements since then. I decided to write what became *Long Overdue: The Politics of Racial Reparations*.

One final publication is worth mentioning because it underlines the difficulty of objectivity in social science research. Shortly after Tom Bradley's unsuccessful bid to become governor of California in 1982, I tried to publish an article in which I claimed race was the major factor in his defeat. Bradley had lost despite the election of White Democrats to other statewide offices. Even exit polls were unreliable because some White voters were telling pollsters they voted for Bradley when the results demonstrated they had not. A *Los Angeles Times* article in 2013 concerning the role of race in the 2012 presidential election credited me as the first to write about the "Bradley effect". There was no Bradley effect for me to write about at that time; however, later writers would refer to what happened to Bradley. More interesting from my

perspective was the difficulty in getting my research on Bradley published. I had called on my colleague Percy Hintzen, an expert in quantitative methods, for help in running computer regressions controlling for all the other possible factors in Bradley's defeat. In short, the research was solid, and I thought the quantitatively oriented *American Political Science Review (APSR)*, the discipline's most influential journal, might publish it. After sending it to them, I received the redacted responses from three reviewers: one said publish it, another said it should be published but not in the *APSR*, and the third said don't publish it. I sent the manuscript to another political science journal, and the reviews were almost identical to the *APSR* reviews. I then decided to send it to a Black Studies journal, which immediately agreed to publish it. Later at professional conferences, I was asked by two Black political scientists what happened to my Bradley piece. When I told them my story, they said they had reviewed it and urged publication. A lesson learned on objectivity.

1

Buckeye Lake Amusement Park

Before Six Flags, Great America, or even Disneyland, there was Buckeye Lake Amusement Park. Started in 1902, it was only about 10 miles from Newark. In fact, the interurban electric train ran from Newark to Buckeye Lake and Columbus in the early twentieth century and helped make the place a popular resort. A trip to Buckeye Lake Park was the highlight of my summer (and maybe Oren's too) for most of my youth.

The first thing you saw on leaving the parking lot (\$2 admission) was a big merry-go-round, my mother's favorite ride. To its right was the big Skateland arena, but I never learned to skate, and close to it was the Pink Elephant nightclub. Once you got past those, there was a series of rides and games. My favorite ride was the bumper cars, where I loved crashing into my mom and brother. They also had a small train and children's rides in the center of the park. There was a small midway with games like darting the balloons or knocking over the pins. My favorites were a horse racing game where you competed against other players and a Skee-Ball machine that gave you coupons you could collect and cash in for big prizes like stuffed animals. It was also the first place I played miniature golf, and they had great cotton

candy and caramel corn on the midway. Finally, you got to the water, where there was a giant Big Dip wooden roller coaster, a picnic point, a huge pool, and the famous Crystal dance hall.

I could never get anyone to go on the roller coaster with me, but I did make it to the Crystal dance hall years later as a college student. Many famous bands and entertainers had performed there, like Louis Armstrong, Glenn Miller, Tommy Dorsey, and Bob Hope. I saw Chuck Berry there around 1966 or 1967.

Another thrill was getting on the paddlewheel boat “Queen of the Lake”. It was the largest boat I had ever been on, but I was always nervous because I couldn’t swim. Still, the lake was beautiful at night with all the twinkling lights on the shore and the sound of the paddlewheel going through the water.

The origins of Buckeye Lake go back 12,000 years to the last ice age. The retreating glaciers left behind a large swamp, later named Buffalo Swamp. When the Ohio & Erie Canal was created in 1826, a reliable source of water was needed for the canal, and Buckeye Lake was dug and dammed. After the canal became obsolete, the state took over and helped develop Buckeye Lake as a tourist resort. With 35 miles of shoreline and 20 islands (one eventually owned by Wendy’s founder Dave Thomas), the lake had 22 hotels and averaged thousands of visitors a day at its peak.

And therein lies the dark side of Buckeye Lake. I had always wondered why we only went to the lake once a year, no matter how much I pleaded to go more often. I also wondered why there were so many African Americans there. My father said it was his Masonic (Prince Hall) lodge that had a picnic there once a year. Only later, as an adult, did I learn that it was a segregated park