REDEFINING BLACK POWER

Reflections on the State of Black America

Edited by Joanne Griffith
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FOREWORD

My work is a never-ending history lesson. Every day I learn something new from the thousand’s of whispers that cry out from the vault of the Pacifica Radio Archives, a unique collection that is virtually unknown to most Americans, including scholars, educators, and social justice advocates. Over the last decade, it has been my personal goal to see the awe-inspiring words, ideas, experiences, and historic moments documented by the Pacifica radio network become more accessible by way of the written page. This book and the Redefining Black Power: Reflections on the State of Black America project is the beginning of this process.

The idea of a book struck like a lightning bolt while I was listening to a single recording from the vast Pacifica Radio Archives collection.

At the time, I was unfamiliar with Fannie Lou Hamer. Her story is one I hadn’t been taught in school. Her voice was like nothing I’d ever heard before. Broadcast from a small studio above an ice cream store on University Avenue in Berkeley was the voice of this woman telling a white, albeit sympathetic interviewer, Colin Edwards, about her work for African American voting rights and her leadership role in the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party.
Her tone was soft and gentle with its Mississippi drawl and colloquial phrasing, yet it sparked with determination. It was like the heartbreaking voice of Billie Holiday singing “Strange Fruit,” but there was no sadness in it, just direct, brutal honesty. I heard the pain and promise of the civil rights movement in those headphones. Her words cut like a dagger as she described the horrific beating she endured—on the orders of a prison guard, two black inmates struck Fannie Lou Hamer with weapons, leaving her blind in one eye. Of one of the men she said, “He beat me until he was exhausted.” Sitting alone, the dam of my emotions broke there in the corner of a modest office. This interview has never been transcribed or published. Nor have countless others like it.

There has been a decades-long relationship between Pacifica station KPFA in Berkeley, California, and City Lights Books. In a 2003 interview, City Lights co-founder Lawrence Ferlinghetti recalled reading his poetry for the station in the early 1950s and having to later transcribe a poem from the tape because he had lost his printed copy. This conversation led me to City Lights Books publisher Elaine Katzenberger and editor Greg Ruggiero. Telling them the story about Fannie Lou Hamer and other watershed moments listening to Rosa Parks, James Baldwin, and Angela Y. Davis brought us together on this venture to realize the dream of preserving and sharing these extraordinary voices and adding to the conversation on the current chapter in America’s journey with its first black president.

Just as the voices from the black freedom movement held in the archives set the framework for conversations on contemporary African American society today, so I hope this book will open the door to address the many questions raised
during the Obama presidency. How will the presence of a black man in the White House change how we talk about and tackle race and racism? How will the media’s images of African Americans evolve? What impact will the First Lady, Michelle Obama, have on the psyche of African American women? What role will this historic moment play in the advancement of black America? And around the globe, how will the Obama years shape the way the world views the people of the United States?

This is not the space for answers; delve into the pages of this book to see how contributors responded to these and other questions posed by international journalist Joanne Griffith. Since 2007, following a chance visit to the archives, Joanne has championed the Pacifica Radio Archives, sharing the treasure trove of material on BBC Radio 5 Live’s Up All Night program, enlightening a new audience to the voices of the well known and the anonymous.

Over the years I’ve watched Joanne use her journalistic skill and insight to draw out information that we can all digest and discuss. With warmth, she listens loudly and interviews with insight and curiosity, bringing her global sensibility, passion for politics, and heart for the black freedom movement to every conversation. Joanne’s work is centered on one theme: not to offer information as a point of journalistic fact, but to act as a conduit for debate and conversation, especially around issues relating to the African diaspora experience. Joanne’s work on Redefining Black Power: Reflections on the State of Black America is no different. It brings together critical thinking, diverse opinions, and thought-provoking ideas and perspectives often left out of the mainstream conversation, brilliantly reflecting Pacifica’s mission of lasting
understanding of the human condition and conflict resolution through dialogue.


Brian DeShazor
Director of the Pacifica Radio Archives
INTRODUCTION

Before it actually happened, many people thought they’d never live to see an African American command the White House as president of the United States. For generations who dared to even entertain the idea, it was a dream unfulfilled.

The successful campaign and election of Barack Hussein Obama in November 2008 marked a milestone in America’s history. A past stained by slavery, discrimination, inequality, genocide, and violence made it difficult to hold out hope that a person could run for office in the United States and not “be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character.”

Stepping into the political bear pit of the 2008 presidential campaign, then–Senator Obama ignited a fire under people of all races with a simple idea: that the future of the United States could be bigger, brighter, better through hope and change. For people of color and African Americans specifically, it was a longed-for chance to level the playing field; an opportunity to seize their agency and elect a man to power with whom they experienced a profound affinity.

Figures from the Bureau of the Census speak to this political stirring and the importance of Obama’s candidacy for black America. For the first time, the historic gap between
black and white voter participation narrowed to just 4 percent. The number of African American voters aged eighteen to twenty-four increased by 8 percent from the 2004 presidential election; and in states such as Maryland, South Carolina, Nevada, Ohio, and Mississippi, black voter participation reached 70 percent; the national average for African Americans was 65 percent, compared to 60 percent in 2004.\(^1\) Obama mobilized black Americans like few candidates before him.

Just as with other key moments in political history relating to leaders like John F. Kennedy, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., and Malcolm X, people remember clearly where they were when Senator Obama became President-elect Obama. I was at home in the stillness of my apartment in Los Angeles, my husband and I glued to the television screen, hoping for the best but expecting the worst; four years of John McCain and Sarah Palin.

As we clicked between election coverage on various TV stations, seeking further confirmation of the result delivered to us by Charlie Gibson, the telephone stirred to life as news of the historic result pulsed around the world and filtered back to Los Angeles. Family and friends in the United States, London, Barbados, and Africa screamed with shock and disbelief, repeating the refrain “did he really win?” Barack Obama said “Yes we can,” and on November 4, 2008, we did.

By the night of Obama’s victory, I had been in the United States for a little over a year, a journalist transplanted from London to Los Angeles. Being so close to the action as the campaign unfolded was a dream for a politics major who inhaled news—attending campaign rallies, speaking with community organizers, even spending a day following a celebrity around Los Angeles ahead of the Obama/Clinton rally at the
Kodak Theatre—I devoured it all. Like so many other black people around the world, I felt that I could “claim” Obama politically, whether or not I was a citizen of the United States. Having followed Obama since the 2004 Democratic National Convention only compounded that sense.

For millions of people around the planet, witnessing a black man win the U.S. presidency and command the White House is profoundly powerful. Given the long history of racist enslavement and terrorism in the United States, the very fact that a black man and his black wife and black children live in the most famous house in America is in itself historically transformative. The history books have yet to be written, but President Obama will be judged on the content of his actions, not his family ancestry.

The work of building Obama’s presidential legacy began in January 2009; the eyes of the world focused sharply upon him. How would he transform inspirational rhetoric and over five hundred campaign promises into workable policies while tackling the behemoth of an inherited 1.3-trillion-dollar budget deficit, two overseas wars, and a national unemployment rate of 7.6 percent?

President Obama has answered critics with a number of policy successes in his first term to date: the signing of the Ledbetter law, requiring equal pay for women; the creation of new financial regulations; the signing of the universal health care bill; and lethal hits on Al Qaeda’s leadership.

There are, of course, promises that have been broken or remain works in progress, including the closure of Guantánamo Bay, a full removal of U.S. troops from Iraq and Afghanistan, a repeal of the Bush-era tax cuts for the wealthy, and increasing the minimum wage to $9.50 per hour.
However, jump-starting the economy and creating jobs have bedeviled the Obama administration. According to the Bureau of the Census, the percentage of Americans living in poverty in 2010 rose to the highest level in seventeen years, while median incomes for the middle class fell by 2.3 percent to under fifty thousand dollars a year. Furthermore, in August 2011, the number of unemployed African American men reached 16.7 percent, double that for white males. For black youth, unemployment hit the astonishing level of 46.5 percent.

“There are roughly 3 million African Americans out of work today, a number nearly equal to the entire population of Iowa,” said Democratic Representative Maxine Waters of California. “I would suggest that if the entire population of Iowa, a key state on the electoral map and a place that served as a stop on the president’s jobs bus tour were unemployed, they would . . . be the beneficiary of targeted public policy.”

After months spent battling with a Republican-controlled Congress over the debt crisis, in late summer 2011 President Obama finally turned his attention to jobs. Speaking before a joint session of Congress, he outlined his 447 billion dollar economic rejuvenation plan:

The purpose of the American Jobs Act is simple: to put more people back to work and more money in the pockets of those who are working. It will create more jobs for construction workers, more jobs for teachers, more jobs for veterans, and more jobs for the long-term unemployed. It will provide a tax break for companies who hire new workers, and it will cut payroll taxes in half for every working
American and every small business. It will provide a jolt to an economy that has stalled, and give companies confidence that if they invest and hire, there will be customers for their products and services.

From the outset of the speech, President Obama acknowledged that for the millions of jobless Americans, their situation was further magnified by “a political crisis that’s made things worse.” Yet for those hit the hardest, namely African Americans, there was no specific mention of how they would be helped. Looking ahead, Representative Maxine Waters warns of the damage this could cause the president in 2012: “If the unemployment rates in the African American Community continue to climb . . . those African American voters who came out to the polls for the first time in 2008 but who have since lost their home and/or their job, may not return to the polls.”

Although Representative Waters does not view Obama as a president who should privilege the needs of African Americans over those of others, if under the Obama administration Washington does not acknowledge long-ignored issues faced by black America, will it ever? Will President Obama take leadership to shed light on chronic disparities in education, criminal justice, and wealth experienced in black communities? Can the Obamas as a black family, the first African American First Family, uplift the perceptions of people of color in U.S. society? What connections and continuities exist between the present moment and past generations of black freedom struggle? Now that Martin Luther King’s statue is part of the canon of official national heroes, how has the very notion of black power changed since he addressed the world
from the steps of the Lincoln Memorial, a black man at the front of a historic freedom movement?

These are some of the questions the Redefining Black Power project seeks to explore.

The concept for Redefining Black Power was born within the vaults of the Pacifica Radio Archives based in Los Angeles and borrows its name from a Defining Black Power program produced by the archives. More than 55,000 recordings are held in an unassuming, climate-controlled room, rows of white cardboard cases with blue marker reference numbers lining every available shelf.

When the director of the Pacifica Radio Archives, Brian DeShazor, approached me with the idea for the Redefining Black Power project, his vision was clear: to honor the men and women, families, and youth who drove the black freedom movements, so that their momentous work would be remembered in tandem with, and not eclipsed by, the political, social, cultural forces that gave rise to the Obamas.

Introduced to the Pacifica Radio Archives in 2007, I began to host a weekly show in the United Kingdom using material held in Pacifica’s vaults; sharing, among other things, stories of African American struggle and triumph with a whole new audience. The pleas of the well known and the anonymous reach out from the black freedom movement’s many areas of vision, advocacy, engagement, confrontation, and struggle: Rosa Parks, Fannie Lou Hamer, Malcolm X, Martin Luther King Jr., James Baldwin, Bayard Rustin, Angela Y. Davis, Kathleen Cleaver, Elaine Brown, Stokely Carmichael, Ossie Davis, Ruby Dee, Lorraine Hansberry, Paul Robeson, Muhammad Ali, Shirley Chisholm, Jesse Jackson, and so many others. Their contributions defined a generation
and built the foundation upon which the Obamas and all black Americans now stand. As a popular text that circulated during the 2008 election said:

Rosa sat so Martin could walk.
Martin walked so Obama could run.
Obama is running so our children can fly.

Just as the Pacifica Radio Archives serves as a portal to the past for those who wish to listen and learn from the people who defined a movement, *Redefining Black Power* aims to contextualize and connect the present to past struggle and offer the future an African American narrative on the Obama years.

*Redefining Black Power* is a work in progress, a wheel in motion made of many spokes—this book, a multimedia Web site, a series of radio programs, and ongoing community conversations and roundtables that address and respond to the changing political moment. During the first six months of the Obama presidency, hosts and producers across the Pacifica Radio network gathered the early thoughts of community organizers, activists, artists, religious leaders, academics, educators, and youth in a series of roundtable discussions and listener phone ins. Conversations anchored by Margaret Prescod, Lucia Chappelle, Aimee Allison, and Gloria Minnott spanned the gamut of campaign memories, election night highs, inauguration day hopes and concerns surrounding the term “post racial.”

“I’m a little afraid that I don’t understand or agree with the interpretation of the post-racial identity that has come about as a result of the election of Barack Obama,” said Karen
Spellman, a Washington DC–based former worker with SNCC, the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee. “I think that we, African Americans, have to define when we’ve reached the end of racism. I don’t think that it’s incumbent upon those who are the oppressors to tell us we no longer have race as a factor.”

As well as sharing their thoughts on the Obama White House, roundtable participants responded to issues dominating the news agenda, including Attorney General Eric Holder’s February 2009 speech in which he said, “Though this nation has proudly thought of itself as an ethnic melting pot, in things racial we have always been and continue to be, in too many ways, essentially a nation of cowards.”

“I really don’t think that Obama’s racial makeup and discussions around race should have anything to do with one another,” said Mayra Jimenez, who sat on the Youth Panel held at KPFK in Los Angeles. “What he’s going to do for the country is one thing; his ethnicity and background are another.”

Eric Holder’s comments on race were viewed differently by Oakland-based arts activist Marc Bamuthi Joseph: “There is a signpost in the presidency of Barack Obama that points folks of all races into a conversation on race. Now, whether that conversation is a cursory one or whether it leads to widespread transformation is a whole other thing.”

In addition to a series of roundtables at the community level, over a two-year period I conducted a series of in-depth conversations with noted scholars, revolutionaries, organizers, authors, and activists representing several generations of progressive black intellectuals. Michelle Alexander, the author of *The New Jim Crow*, sheds light on the criminal
justice system and the impact of mass incarceration on African American communities, while economist and Bennett College president Dr. Julianne Malveaux calls for targeted assistance to address rising levels of long-term unemployment within black communities. During our conversation Malveaux insists that if black America wants more, they need to demand more from their leaders and the Obama administration. “The relationship between President Obama and the black community reveals the weaknesses in African American leadership. You don’t see the same thing with the gay and lesbian community or with the Latino community. People are going and asking for what they want and they’re clear about it. African Americans are not doing that.”

For Van Jones, founder of Rebuild the Dream and the former White House Green Jobs adviser, black civic leadership, not elected officials or President Obama, directly address the needs of black America: “it’s the NAACP’s job to deal with the question of black leadership. It’s the Urban League’s job, Al Sharpton’s job. It’s not the president’s job. It’s not his job to fix black America.”

One issue that influences and threads through all of the discussions is the media; from political campaigns to how the Obama girls wear their hair, the media is ever present, and what it chooses to show and not show, and how, directly influences public consciousness and the national narrative itself.

“One of the problems that I see with the American media and the Obama presidency is that the rise of President Obama runs parallel to the continuing decline in the press,” explains veteran journalist and Philadelphia Tribune columnist Linn Washington. “We have more shallow and sensationalistic coverage versus more probative coverage. On the campaign
trail, there were numerous examples of a glaring lack of in-depth coverage, and I think that helped him in some ways, but further polluted the coverage as it affected the deep and insidious issue of race in America.”

While *Redefining Black Power* is focused on the impact of the first black president of the United States and its significance in the context of black freedom struggle, in every conversation, we also took time to explore the profound importance and meaning of the fact that the First Family is a black family, and how it projects a glowing example of black love, dignity, and family values.

“When Michelle Obama got to be the cover girl on *Vogue*, every brown girl who was told she was too brown, too tall, butt too big, too this, too that, got to be a cover girl in that moment,” says WBAI host and producer of the *Emotional Justice* series, Esther Armah. “The history of those images, in the future, may be more powerful than whatever policy was or was not mastered in the time that Barack Obama was in the White House.”

Dr. Vincent Harding, veteran civil rights activist and colleague of Martin Luther King, says that understanding the historic power and possibilities that the First Family and President Obama present to black Americans involves understanding the full trajectory of black history in the United States as a “movement for the expansion and deepening of democracy in America.”

Hundreds of years of enslavement, abuse, and denial of rights by white society set the course for race relations in the United States. When the first Africans arrived in Jamestown, Virginia, in 1619, the white people who enslaved them did not consider them to be human; they were commodities,
livestock, meant to be bought, sold, bred, and used for work. Over the lifetime of the trans-Atlantic slave trade, twelve million Africans would be herded across the ocean in cramped boats like cattle. These people were beaten, abused, and traded; women raped and their children consigned to lives of oppression, forced labor, and misery. Adding to the horror is the fact that the U.S. legal system long enforced the right of whites to enslave people of color; in fact, one in four U.S. presidents were directly involved in human trafficking.

Black history has been shaped and defined by resistance to the reality of these facts and the relentless, multigenerational effort to abolish the injustices perpetuated over the ages. Early efforts to redress the issue include the signing of the Emancipation Proclamation and the adoption of the Thirteenth and Fourteenth Amendments in the 1860s to the attempts to “recognize the equality of all men before the law” via the Civil Rights Act of 1875 during the Reconstruction Era.

Jim Crow laws establishing “separate by equal” would strangle attempts for equality for almost one hundred years until the landmark United States Supreme Court case Brown v. Board of Education in 1954 which ended segregation, at least on paper. Out of this grew the broad black freedom movement of which struggles for civil rights and black power were part. Only sixty years ago, much of the country enforced a state of racial apartheid. Blacks, people of color, and progressives organized, marched, and confronted the white-dominated system. They fought for dignity, equal rights, voting rights, and fairness for all across the full spectrum of life—housing, education, health, employment, and cultural expression. Their voices, vision and victories gave birth to yet new struggles.

Progress, of course, has been made and greater freedoms
are enjoyed today. But there are almost constant reminders that entrenched racial injustice persists at many levels. In addition to well-known flashpoints like the 1992 Los Angeles Riots, the 1999 shooting of Guinean immigrant Amadou Diallo in New York City, the Jena Six case, and the execution-style killing of Oscar Grant in Oakland, California, in 2009, people of color in the United States continue to suffer greater rates of incarceration, unemployment, housing discrimination, and significantly lower levels of wealth than do whites. A study published by the Pew Institute in July 2011 revealed, “Median wealth of whites is now 20 times that of black households and 18 times that of Hispanic households, double the already marked disparities that had prevailed in the decades before the recent recession.”9 “We have not ended racial caste in America,” writes Michelle Alexander, “we have merely redesigned it.”10

Further studies focusing on education, child poverty, and home foreclosure offer little respite from the gloomy forecast for black America. A 2010 report from the Schott Foundation revealed just 47 percent of African American males graduated from high school in the 2007/8 academic year.11 The poverty rate for black children is 36 percent, compared to 12 percent for non-Hispanic whites; and on the housing front, African American and Latino homeowners are expected to lose an estimated 350 billion dollars in wealth due to the ongoing foreclosure crisis.13 It’s clear that more needs to be done to address the “unfinished task of emancipation.”14 How, if at all, will the first African American presidency help the United States to better address that task and the many challenges outlined through our roundtable discussions and the conversations presented in this book?
Historians, community organizers, activists, and others will likely continue to ask that question for years to come. It is, however, a point of discussion today, and it is this national and global conversation of which the Redefining Black Power project is a part.

Just as the voices in the Pacifica Radio Archives provide an audio connection to the hearts, minds, and voices of the black freedom movement over fifty years ago, it is our vision that this project will begin to build connections around the issues being faced today with an awareness of the possibilities, history, concerns, and expectations of a cross section of progressive black intellectuals and community activists.

This book is not, and never set out to be, a work of academic rigor or an anthology of the key players in the black freedom movement. Instead, this book, coupled with the roundtable discussions and audio documentaries produced and aired on the Pacifica Radio Network, provides a marker in history, a snapshot in time, and a starting point for ongoing conversations about the past, present, and future of black America.

As a voice for social change, the final chapter and the third phase of the Redefining Black Power project belongs to you. Technology and social media changed the dynamic of the 2008 election, and this project, too, is embracing the Internet's power as a tool for organizing, movement building, and contributing to the unfinished task of emancipation.

We invite you, the reader, to participate in the conversation. Lay down your marker in history by sharing your stories, thoughts, and opinions at www.redefiningblackpower.com or join us on Facebook or Twitter.

All of the conversations held support a common vision:
we have come a long way, we’ve had great victories, but we are far from living in a post-racial society. Social change comes from the people, from the bottom up, from the community out. If the Obama White House uplifts our communities, ultimately it will be because the people organized, spoke out, and pushed for the changes that are so urgently needed. Historic opportunity exists side by side with economic, political, cultural injustice, a crisis of unemployment, and ongoing violence against and within the black community. As Jay-Z and Kanye West rap on their album, *Watch the Throne*:

And I’m from the murder capital, where they murder for capital
Heard about at least 3 killings this afternoon
Lookin’ at the news like damn I was just with him after school,
No shop class but half the school got a tool,
And I could die any day type attitude
Plus his little brother got shot reppin’ his avenue
It’s time for us to stop and re-define black power

Joanne Griffith
ONE

The Movement for the Expansion and Deepening of Democracy in America

A Conversation of Context with Dr. Vincent Harding

What is the definition of civil rights? According to the Merriam-Webster dictionary, civil rights are “the nonpolitical rights of a citizen; especially: the rights of personal liberty guaranteed to United States citizens by the 13th and 14th amendments to the Constitution and by acts of Congress.”

This definition provides a legal foundation upon which rights can be built. Just look at the Thirteenth and Fourteenth Amendments. The former abolished slavery; the latter established citizenship rights and due process of law to all those born on U.S. soil. But can simplistic explanations of civil rights ever fully define the profound interpersonal intricacies of a movement?

Just like any good student, I spent many weeks rereading well-thumbed civil rights reference books in my collection, going over newspaper articles, speaking with scholars and listening to audio archives as I approached guests for interview. The schedule set, I arrived in Denver, Colorado, for my first conversation armed with questions, reference points, a
I was ready to absorb the life lessons of Dr. Vincent Harding.

I was a fan of Dr. Harding’s work long before the journey of this book began. I didn’t know him personally, but felt I knew the concerns of his heart from the words he wrote as a speechwriter for Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. In preparing for my time with Dr. Harding, I listened to some of the oratory works he penned for Dr. King, including the famous antiwar speech, “A Time to Break Silence,” which King delivered on April 4, 1967, at Riverside Church in New York City.

Unlike many of King’s speeches before it, “A Time to Break Silence” stands out for confronting the inconsistencies of U.S. foreign policy and militarism. Dr. King’s voice is both weary and urgent as he outlines his opposition to the U.S. war in Vietnam and the need to defeat “the giant triplets of racism, extreme materialism, and militarism.”15 This issue clearly weighed heavily on Dr. King’s heart, a burden shared by Dr. Vincent Harding, the man who scribed those words and felt the pain of every one. Dr. Harding was Dr. King’s friend, confidante, and brother at arms.

I first made contact with Dr. Vincent Harding while working on a show for the BBC to mark the fortieth anniversary of Dr. King’s assassination. It was only then I realized I was speaking with the man who wrote those powerful words unleashed by Dr. King at Riverside Church that so moved me and opened my eyes to another dimension of this icon of the civil rights era.

Although not the first name to be mentioned in conversations about the black freedom movements, Dr. Harding has been an ever present force in the struggle since the 1950s.
and a significant voice and contributor in the fight for African American agency. As representatives of the Mennonite Church, Harding and his wife, fellow activist Rosemarie Freeney Harding, moved to Atlanta, Georgia, in 1960 and founded Mennonite House, a refuge for activists and fellow supporters of nonviolent protest. Their work stretched beyond Mennonite House to supporting ant segregation campaigns with the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, the Congress of Racial Equality, and the Southern Christian Leadership.

A man of many dimensions, Dr. Harding was the first director of the Martin Luther King Jr. Memorial Center and taught at Spelman College, Temple University, and the University of Pennsylvania. Continuing a lifetime of service, the theologian, historian, and activist is currently chairperson of the Veterans of Hope Project, an educational initiative on religion, culture, and participatory democracy based at Iliff School of Theology in Denver, Colorado. Titles mean little to Dr. Harding, but the importance of accuracy as it pertains to the civil rights movement and its goals are of paramount importance to him, including what the term “civil rights movement” really means.

We met in his office at Iliff. The room was lined on almost all sides with books; Dr. Harding’s own works, materials for research purposes, and other papers. Ever the educator, he gave me homework before we met: to read a paper he wrote in 1968 entitled “The Religion of Black Power.” It examines the intersection of faith and the black power movement, the rejection and deep-seated mistrust of Christianity, and the installation of faith-based principles to achieve equality. As Harding states in the piece:
In spite of the tendency of Black Power advocates to repress any reference to the earlier Afro-American religious expressions—especially as they were found in the non-violent movement—the most familiar word of the past remains available to set the stage for an exploration of the religious exploration of the current themes. At a forum on Black Power in Atlanta during the fall of 1966, while discussing love, a spokesman for Black Power was heard to say “Martin Luther King was trying to get us to love white folks before we learned to love ourselves, and that ain’t no good.”16

Our original plan was to discuss religion, black power, and the civil rights movement. We did, but our conversation went further. With careful consideration and a slow, deliberate exhalation of words, Dr. Harding laid the foundation of Redefining Black Power.

Vincent: “The civil rights movement” is a convenient journalistic term, but the longer I live, the more I am certain that “the civil rights movement” is an absolutely inadequate way of talking about this great, transformative movement that many of us were deeply involved in and that many of us continue to be deeply involved in. I prefer “the movement for the expansion and deepening of democracy in America.” And so, whenever you say “civil rights movement,” I’m going to be hearing “the movement for the expansion and deepening of democracy in America,” that was manifested, at one point, in something we called “the civil rights movement.”