"Neighborliness Is Nonspatial": Howard Thurman and the Search for Integration and Common Ground

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Abstract

This article, by looking at the life, career, and thought of Howard Thurman, one of the most significant African American religious thinkers of the twentieth century, argues that one way to understand the call for racial integration by Thurman and others in the mid-century is through the demand to restructure urban space in less exclusive ways. The failure to realize this, in the 1960s, led to calls for defending "black space" in cities, although this too proved to be a failure. Thurman's spatial understanding of integration is a still relevant intervention in understanding the complexities of race and racial conflict in urban areas.

Keywords

Howard Thurman, neighborliness, racial integration, neighborhoods, Fellowship Church

On the morning of February 7, 1936, the Rev. Howard Thurman found himself touring the Khyber Pass as chair of the four-person "Pilgrimage of Friendship" of the Negro Delegation (Figure 1). The American Student Christian Movement had sent them on a tour of British India. The delegation was nearing the end of an exhausting four months of speeches, sermons, and meetings. In about a fortnight, the delegation would become the first African Americans to meet with Mahatma Gandhi. As Thurman viewed the Pass, in what is now Pakistan, the great mystic had an epiphany while observing a camel caravan. He decided that the best of what he had seen in Indian religion—an openness about creed and about race—must be recreated in an American context:

> All that we had seen and felt in India seemed to be brought miraculously into focus. We saw clearly what we must do somehow when we returned to America. We knew that we must test whether a religious fellowship could be developed in America that was capable of cutting across all racial barriers, with a carry-over into the common life, a fellowship that would alter the behavior patterns of those involved. It became imperative now to find out if experiences of spiritual unity among people could be more compelling than the experiences which divide them.[1]

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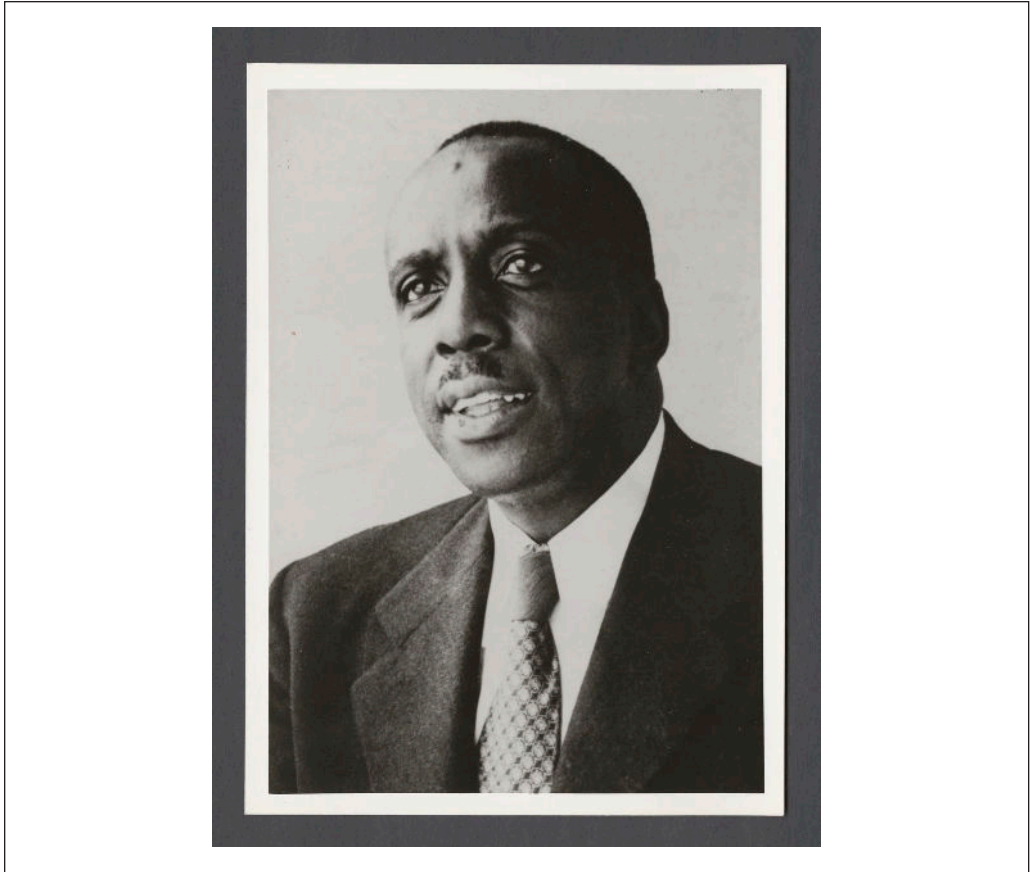Email: peisenst@gmail.com

Figure 1. Boston University photo service, Howard Thurman, 1965.
Source: Bailey Thurman Family papers, Special Collections and Archives, Robert W. Woodruff Library, Emory University, 0807-009.tif.

Thurman wanted to realize this dream in a very specific way, one suited to his talents and abilities. He wanted to create an interracial and interdenominational church, of a kind that never had existed before in the United States. In time, in 1944, this is just what he did, cofounding the Church for the Fellowship of All Peoples in San Francisco. But even if a church is dedicated to an abstraction, to achieving "spiritual unity among people," if it is to be a real church, it must have real people and be located in a real and specific location. And in America, in 1944, there were no interracial locations. There were only white or black (or other nonwhite) locations. Race was defined spatially everywhere.

Howard Thurman, in mid-twentieth-century America, was one of the nation's leading advocates of racial integration. His voice was important in its own right, and he was a mentor to a generation of civil rights activists whose profile rose higher than his own, among them James Farmer, Pauli Murray, and Martin Luther King Jr. The fight for integration was a fight to challenge the racial definition of urban space. As Thurman would write in 1949, "Every man is potentially every other man's neighbor. Neighborliness is nonspatial; it is qualitative."[2] But if neighborliness was nonspatial, American neighborhoods were quantitative. They were specific places, with a specific number of households, and a specific racial balance. All American neighborhoods were racially defined explicitly or implicitly in 1944. And this made any attempt to

realize or transcend the "nonspatial" aspects of community almost impossible. The history of the Fellowship Church for All Peoples and the ministry of Howard Thurman provides a portal to questions about race and urban space that, unfortunately, have lost none of their salience.

Integration: Where?

When Thurman retuned to the United States in the spring of 1936, he came back to his position as dean of chapel at Howard University, an all-black college in segregated Washington, D.C. There was no opportunity to establish an interracial congregation, although this remained a matter of his surpassing concern. And when in 1943, he heard from an old friend, A. J. Muste, the director of the Fellowship of Reconciliation, about plans afoot in San Francisco to start an interracial church, he needed little prompting to take a leave of absence from his position at Howard. He left for the West Coast amid considerable fanfare—First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt spoke at his farewell dinner in May 1944—and he crossed the continent to become, along with a white colleague, co-pastor of the Church for the Fellowship of All Peoples. Depending on how one defines "church" and "interracial," it was one of the first, if not the first, interracial church in the United States and certainly was the most celebrated.[3] "How can we teach love," Thurman had written the year before, "behind the great high walls of separateness?"[4]

But the small, fledgling church faced a host of practical problems in getting started. None was more pressing than the question of its location. The nucleus of the new church was an urban cooperative of white, female, Gandhian activists who operated what amounted to a small spiritual settlement house amid San Francisco's burgeoning black neighborhood, greatly swollen by persons seeking wartime defense war work. (Until early 1942, this part of town had been San Francisco's Japanese neighborhood.) With the help of the national Presbyterian Church, the new congregation acquired a small, inadequate sanctuary. From the beginning of the church, the search began for larger quarters, and there were many possibilities, including several churches put on the market by white congregations fleeing the new black section of the city.[5]

Almost all of the original members of the church wanted to remain in the black neighborhood. Thurman adamantly disagreed. He thought it naïve to think that a church in a black neighborhood could remain interracial and integrated. He wrote in his history of the Fellowship Church that he knew "that religious institutions all over America had been made agents of segregation by virtue of their location in segregated neighborhoods." Whatever its intentions, if it was located in a segregated area, "such an institution in time will become like the district—segregated."[6]

Thurman's suggestion provoked, in his words, "almost unanimous resistance." Both white and black church members accused Thurman of being an ivory-tower intellectual, with no real connection to average black people. They asked Thurman if leaving the black neighborhood was an admission of defeat, of "running away from the social problem of separateness," and placing the church above the struggle.[7]

Both sides had strong cases. Thurman was no doubt correct that if the Fellowship Church had stayed where it was, it soon would have ceased to be integrated and would be resented as a rival by other black churches. He also felt that, however well-intentioned, the efforts of whites to "help" blacks were misguided. The Presbyterian Church wanted the new church to become a mission church, aiding local blacks, and only secondarily an interracial congregation. Thurman thought such a church would suffer from the "deadly disease of condescension," a malady that "dogged the vitality and the health of the Christian enterprise" for many centuries, rendering the church "a dumping ground for uplifters." For Thurman, the problem was that "if a man can feel sorry for you, he can easily absolve himself from dealing with you in any sense as an equal." Consequently, he argued, a noble intention to aid the less fortunate "can easily be twisted into a form of patronage under which human dignity cannot thrive."[8] The fight against white pity is perhaps the great overlooked struggle of black America in the twentieth century. It unites
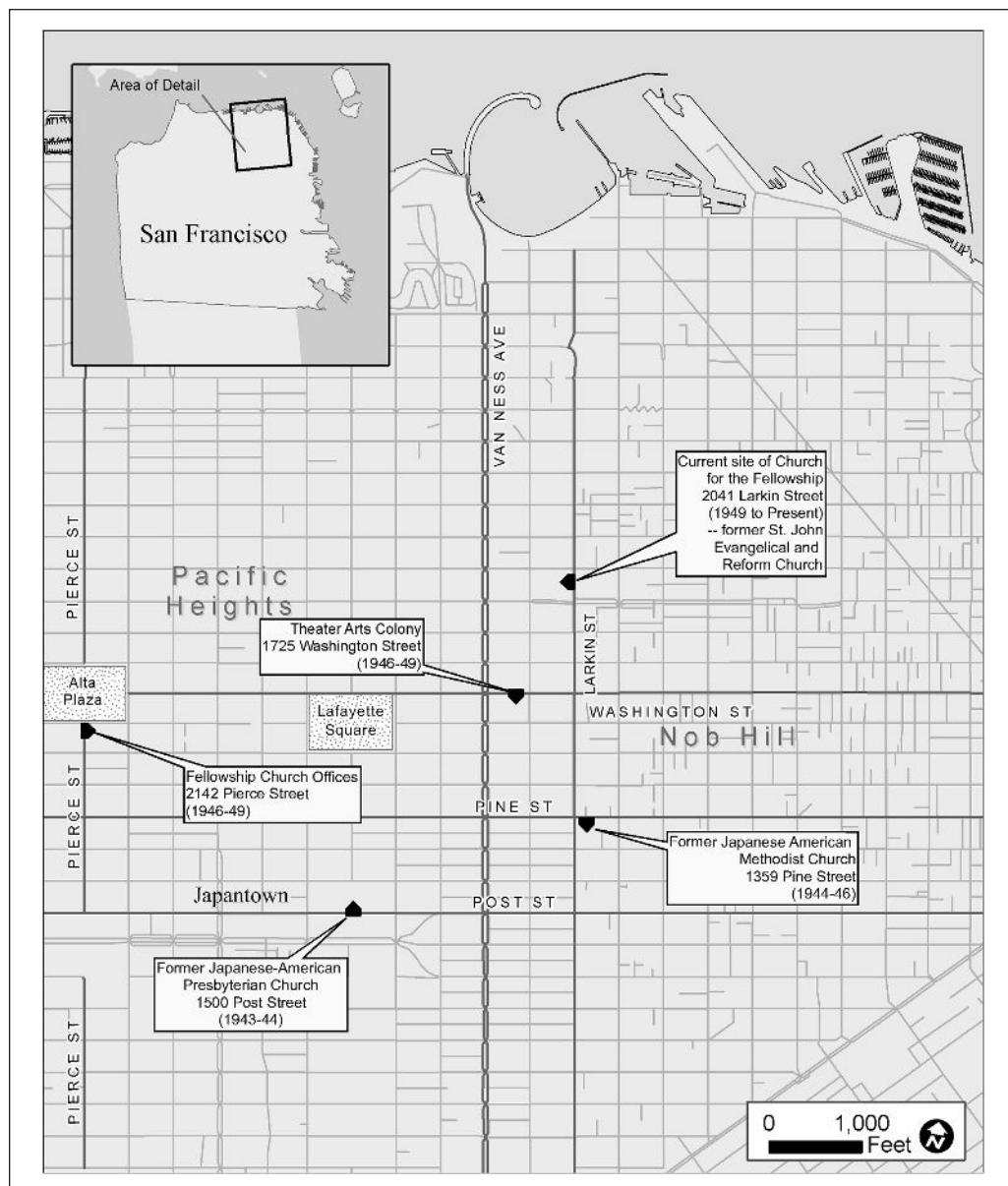
Figure 2. Marc Korpus, locations of the fellowship church in San Francisco, 1944-1949.
Source: Map ♥ Marc Korpus 2013.

ideological opposites—if Thurman, in the mid-1940s, was fighting against white pity in one way, on the other coast, the future Malcolm X was doing it another.[9] The point of integration for Thurman was black equality with whites, and he thought it a necessary precondition to helping the black neighborhood of San Francisco.

In the end, Thurman prevailed. In the fall of 1944, the church moved to a former Filipino Methodist church not that far from the original site, but, crucially, two blocks west of Van Ness Avenue, which in 1944 served as the local racial dividing line. "Moving outside of the ghetto gave to our beginning a freedom and a challenge which never would have been had we remained" (Figure 2).[10] And in 1945 because of Presbyterian insistence on the creation of a mission church,

the Fellowship Church dropped the denominational affiliation and became fully independent and autonomous.[11]

But his critics argued that Thurman was sacrificing the real, pressing wants and needs of black San Franciscans to the ideal and abstraction of interracialism and that "the church belonged in the midst of the greatest need."[12] The critics made a good point. Looking at the subsequent history of the church, the move of the church cut it off from the black masses. It confirmed its status as a church with a middle-class membership, with a relatively small number of worshippers, despite Thurman's charisma and celebrity. And the move effectively limited its membership to those interested in a conscious experiment in interracial worship.[13]

The dispute over the location of the Fellowship Church was in part rooted in different perceptions of the geography of racial segregation. Those who wanted the church to stay in the black neighborhood were concerned about the fact of interracial contact. For Thurman, the location of interracial contact and cooperation was as important as its existence. And for him, if interracial contact was to matter, it had to occur outside of black neighborhoods. The question was not whether whites could go to church in a black neighborhood. The question was whether blacks could go to church (or anywhere else) in a white neighborhood.[14] If the church did not move, he would later write in his history of the Fellowship Church:

> It does not matter what the intent and purpose of an institution is in its dedication to brotherhood, if it is a geographically segregated district, and if it accepts as its assignment the meeting of the needs of the people in that district, such an institution in time will become like the district—segregated. In the light of this fact I knew if we did not move, we would become a Negro church in a comparatively short time or disappear entirely.[15]

The interracial goodwill generated by the Fellowship Church in a black neighborhood would be too small and too new to challenge what Thurman called the "will to segregation." This will was so powerful that it was entwined and imbricated into every American institution, and made physically manifest on every American block and street corner.[16] This conviction is at the heart of the belief of integration: Thurman was convinced that unless the spatial boundaries limiting black presence were changed and transformed, trying to help blacks confined to segregated spaces was doomed to failure.

Geographies of the Possible

Thurman, like all African Americans, was an expert in navigating the geographic complexities and spatial consequences of racial separation. Howard Thurman was born in Florida in 1899 and grew up in Daytona as Jim Crow was being ratcheted ever tighter in the cities and towns of the South. New state constitutions in the 1890s dramatically limited black voting power and were followed by new efforts to separate and stigmatize blacks spatially and geographically. This process received its imprimatur from the U.S. Supreme Court in the 1896 *Plessy v. Ferguson* decision (although the push to segregation was well underway in Florida and other southern states before Plessy). In Florida, schools of all kinds, public and private, were legally segregated. State laws were passed in 1907 and 1909 requiring separate accommodations for whites and blacks on all common carriers and in waiting facilities. But Jim Crow operated through informal rules as well as legal mandates—rules that governed conduct by blacks in their dealings with whites, the jobs and occupations that were open to blacks, and the places where blacks could and could not live.[17]

The young Howard Thurman soon learned the basic lessons of racial separation in Daytona, a town where "white and black worlds were separated by a quiet wall of quiet hostility and overt suspicion." Daytona, separated from the Atlantic coast by the Halifax River, had a substantial black population. The two posh beachfront communities, Seabreeze and Daytona Beach, had no black residents: they were "sundown towns" where blacks were not permitted at night. "I could

work in Sea Breeze and Daytona Beach, but I was not allowed to spend the night there, nor could I be seen after dark without being threatened," wrote Thurman. The white section of Daytona was little better. It was "no place for loitering. Our freedom of movement was carefully circumscribed, a fact so accepted it was taken for granted."[18]

For a city in the Deep South at the height of the Jim Crow era, Daytona had a reputation for relatively moderate race relations. Blacks could and did vote in significant numbers; they helped shape local politics, and they obtained such benefits for the black neighborhoods as paved streets, storm sewers, and streetlights, and in the black neighborhoods, a few black policemen. Wealthy, white, vacationing "snowbirds" paid for a black kindergarten; they "tempered" contact between blacks and whites and made it "less abrasive than it might have been otherwise."[19] Thurman certainly benefited from the examples of proud and successful black men and women in Daytona, such as his lifelong friend Mary McLeod Bethune.

However, in no way was Daytona exempt from the harsher aspects of Jim Crow. Black storeowners who catered to whites were forced from their downtown locations and moved their businesses to the black neighborhoods. One black resident remembers that it was between 1902 and 1906 that the apparatus of Jim Crow, the ubiquitous and minatory "white only" signage, sprouted on local institutions.[20] And blacks in Daytona were acquainted with the ultimate enforcement mechanism of the white South. There was a lynching in 1907, and the dead man was carried through the black neighborhoods as a reminder for blacks "not to get out of their place."[21] All of this meant that Thurman grew up with an acute appreciation of racial boundaries, geographic and otherwise.

When Thurman, sometime around 1940, returned to Daytona to visit his mother, he arrived with his two young daughters in tow. He gave them a walking tour of familiar haunts, and passed the playground of a white school. His daughters wanted to play on the swings. This was "the inescapable moment of truth that every black parent in America must face sooner or later. What do you say to your child at the critical moment of primary encounter?" When Thurman brought his daughters home, this is what he told them in his mother's house:

> It is against the law for us to use those swings, even though it is a public school. At present only white children can play there. But it takes the state legislature, the courts, the sheriffs and policemen, the white churches, the mayors, the banks and businesses, and the majority of the white people in the state of Florida—it takes all these to keep two little black girls from swinging in those swings. That is how important you are!

He went on to tell his daughters that their own "importance and self-worth can be judged by how many weapons and how much power people are willing to use to control you and keep you in the place they have assigned to you."[22]

The invisible army of white America, and their collective "will to segregation," policed every geographic boundary and barrier. The proof of your importance, he told his daughters, was the extent to which white America was intent on denying it. It was a lesson he had no doubt told himself many times as a young man.

A consequence of this situation for blacks in America is that they had to rely on their own internal resources. Thurman always had a deep appreciation for the strength of the ties of the black community of his birth, and all communities that were obliged to define themselves in part through the actions of their external oppressors. Thurman told an interviewer in 1969 that in Daytona,

> there was communal sharing all the way down the line. I, for instance, belonged to all the neighbors. Any adult in that little world, functioned in loco parentis, and this gave to me as a little boy a sense of stability and structure, which even if it were not provided by my primary social unit, my immediate family, the collective provided it for me.[23]

But there were, for Thurman, two negative consequences with obtaining on one's security and affirmation solely from the strength of one's own community and one's own people. The first was that it reduced white people to ciphers, to something less than fully human. When blacks spoke to whites, neither side expected honesty, intimacy, or sincerity from the other party. Nothing could be more dangerous or confusing than thinking that whites had the same range of feelings, emotions, and needs as real people. It was not until he was in his twenties that this thought occurred to him, while studying and living among whites. Using a spatial metaphor, he realized "that my magnetic field of ethical awareness extended to other than my own people." In Thurman's personal geography, growing up, white people were off the map, in hostile uncharted territory.[24] And the limitations on his freedom of movement became internalized self-imposed, and self-reinforcing.

Second, communities defined by exclusion often become expert in excluding others and demanding conformity from its members. The most shattering experience of Thurman's young life was not at the hands of whites, but from his local church, when at age eight, at the funeral of his stepfather, Saul Solomon Thurman, the presiding minister called the deceased an evil man, a nonbeliever, a man who was already burning in the fires of hell. This painful episode shaped his subsequent religious life and gave him a lifelong antipathy to Calvinist notions of the "saved" and the "damned." Indeed, he argued that this most fundamental distinction in evangelical Christianity provided a blueprint for all invidious divisions of humanity—especially, in America, the division between whites and blacks.[25]

Thurman's education, especially his undergraduate experiences at Morehouse College in Atlanta, Georgia, from 1919 to 1923, reinforced his sense of the chasm between white and black worlds. At Morehouse, one of the most prestigious black colleges in the South, President John Hope and his faculty tried to give a sense of importance and self-value to their students. But this required, as much as possible, shutting out the white world beyond the campus borders. Thurman would later write about Atlanta in the early 1920s:

> we were black men in Atlanta during a period when Atlanta was infamous for its racial brutality. Lynchings, burnings, unspeakable cruelties were the fundamentals of existence for black people . . . Any encounter with a white person was inherently dangerous and frequently fatal.

Morehouse was a haven, a place where young black men were treated as "young gentlemen," where their self-worth could be nurtured.[26] But a haven can become a trap. Black colleges, Thurman thought, often did not prepare their graduates for the realities of life outside of their quads.[27] And to remain entirely within the world of black colleges, churches, and institutions was to remain just where whites wanted blacks to stay.

In 1923, after graduating from Morehouse, Thurman entered Rochester Theological Seminary, an all-white institution in upstate New York. He once again thrived, graduating as valedictorian and proving to himself that he was anyone's intellectual equal.[28] But he knew, as did every black graduate of his generation, that however stellar his accomplishments at white colleges, universities, or seminaries, that there would be no place for him on their faculties or in their churches. Thurman's career in black churches and colleges reached its apex from 1932 to 1944 when he taught at Howard University in 1944, serving as a professor in the School of Religion and dean of chapel.

Howard University in the 1930s was a remarkable place, with a faculty that was perhaps as distinguished a group of black intellectuals ever assembled in one academic institution, all of them knowing that their race prevented them from teaching elsewhere. At the so-called "capstone of Negro education," there was a revolt against the very notion of Negro education or, phrased differently, a challenge to the idea that black intellectual life could or should be contained by them.[29] Thurman's onetime mentor and boss at Howard University, President Mordecai Wyatt

Johnson, no doubt spoke for Thurman and many members of his faculty when he was quoted in 1938 as saying that "the philosophy of working out our future within a segregated sphere as 'dangerous and illusory.'" But out of necessity, he would "support segregated institutions just as long as it was necessary to keep up the fight for the complete integration of the Negro in American life."[30] The segregated space of Howard University was less a defensive redoubt than a place to plan an offensive strategy, bringing the fight to the enemy.

The question in the 1930s, for many black intellectuals, was how to begin the struggle for the complete integration of the Negro in American life. Thurman and many of his colleagues at Howard such as his good friend Ralph Bunche were upset at the slow progress of the legal and political efforts of the NAACP (National Association for the Advancement of Colored People) and similar organizations. As an alternative, an interracial labor movement led by the CIO (Congress of Industrial Organizations), was a great hope. As Thurman would write in 1940, "for a group [that] lives on the periphery of the national life . . . being a member of a union immediately states the Negro in the labor world" and this would be one step toward "churches, schools, governing boards of all kinds, political, secular, and religious guarantee[ing] the Negroes' right as a citizen to belong and participate in the common life." All of this was part of the battle, the war to be waged, Thurman would write in 1943, against "the will to segregation."[31]

Integration: What?

By the 1940s, integration was becoming a watchword for black journalists, intellectuals, and activists. It was, in its racial context, a relatively new term. "Integration" first came into wide after 1934. In that year, W. E. B. Du Bois, in a series of articles in *The Crisis*, the journal of the NAACP, called for blacks to adopt segregation. Separation would be a less loaded term for what he was advocating, but his articles set off a firestorm. His critics, who thought full inclusion in American society was necessary, started to use the term integration to describe their position.[32] James Weldon Johnson, one of the first and most eloquent defenders of integration, wrote a book-length response to Du Bois in late 1934. He argued in this powerful text, *Negro Americans, What Now?*, that the choice for black Americans was between "isolation or integration." This, he acknowledged, was not an easy choice. There were times, Johnson wrote, "when the most persistent integrationist becomes an isolationist, when he curses the White world and consigns it to hell," and fighting for equality becomes an exercise in wishful thinking, "shooting at the stars with a pop-gun." But Du Bois and other racial isolationists were "apostles of the obvious." Calling on Negroes to "realize that prejudice is an actuality" is to place an "emphasis on what has never been questioned." The problem for Negroes, Johnson concluded, was not a failure to acknowledge "that we are segregated, but in acknowledging it too fully." Much like his namesake, Mordecai Wyatt Johnson, James Weldon Johnson urged blacks to consider separate institutions "as a means, not an end." The strength gained from them "should be applied to the objective of entering into, not staying out of the body politic."[33]

From 1934 through the remainder of the decade, the pros and cons of integration were vigorously debated in the black press. Although Du Bois had many defenders, integration increasingly became a shorthand term for the black fight for equality, especially for supporters of the Roosevelt administration, like Mary McLeod Bethune. (It did not come into wide use by whites until the end of World War II.)[34] By September 1941, Rebecca Stiles Taylor, a columnist for the *Chicago Defender*, reported, "Integration Versus Disintegration Is Question of Hour." She wrote, "The word integration has become so popular today it has almost become a byword." Its popularity, she noted, had been heightened by military preparedness campaigns. Like many of the advocates of integration, Taylor saw integration as a two-stage process: integration within and among blacks, and then into American society as a whole. There was no time to waste. "The time is now for Negroes to pool their strength and, everything that is theirs for the proper recognition of their

citizenship rights."[35] Or in other words, as the war loomed, Stiles—and the many African Americans who agreed with her—believed that integration and an assertion of a national identity were fully complementary rather than contrary to one another. Only by collective assertion could blacks be fully included in America, and only with full inclusion in America could the separate destiny of black people be realized. Integration was the opposite of assimilation.

The demand for integration, for Taylor and those who thought similarly, was a form of race pride, and a demand for the transformation of white as well as black America. Roi Ottley, the black journalist who wrote the path-breaking study of Harlem, *New World A-Comin'*, wrote in 1944, "Negroes may quarrel among themselves about minor issues, but on the question of their rights—which mean to them the right to integration in American life, they form a solid bloc, each member of it being fiercely group conscious."[36] The new congressman from Harlem, Adam Clayton Powell Jr., in his book, *Marching Blacks*, declared himself in 1945 to be a radical and revolutionary. He claimed that "Civil War II" began on December 7, 1941, and that, once again, the white South would be on the losing side. He also claimed that, "today there is not a handful of Negroes in America who believe in any other way to solve the problem than by way of integration." After making clear that integration was not the same as assimilation, fobbing off Negroes with vague promises, toothless legislation or token gestures, the favorite nostrums of the "case-study crack pots," "social-work mercenaries," or "swivel-chair liberals," he stated, "the Negro mass almost to a man today insists on integration."[37]

Like many black defenders of integration during the war, Thurman's belief in integration had relatively little to do with faith in the goodwill of white people or an underestimation of the tenacity of racism. Rather, integration was necessary for blacks to escape the boundaries imposed by others. Thurman, and many others, white and black, alternately read the war years as either the opening act in the coming race war, or an indication that America just might be capable of taking tentative first steps toward racial justice and equality. The Fellowship Church was Thurman's effort to push America in the latter direction.[38]

"Neighborliness Is Nonspatial"

Thurman's fight against the spatial confinement of Jim Crow and racism shapes the logic and structure of his most influential book, *Jesus and the Disinherited*, published in 1949. It is one of the era's most powerful calls for integration, although the word itself does not appear in the text. Instead Thurman offers on one hand a passionate plea against racial isolation, and insists on the other that only African Americans can determine their destinies.[39]

Thurman devotes the center chapters of the short book to fear, deception, and hatred, with each topic given a chapter apiece. He describes them as spiritual hellhounds, haunting and tormenting the lives of black Americans, keeping them dogged, forever on the run, deracinated, and disinherited. But the way to reverse this, for Thurman, was not to identify one's turf and defend it against all comers, but to insist that one's home could be anywhere. "Every man is potentially every other man's neighbor. Neighborliness is nonspatial; it is qualitative. A man must love his neighbor directly, clearly, permitting no barriers between." This is a hard kind of love, strong enough to destroy Jim Crow and its artificial geography.[40]

Thurman argued that the rationale of integration was to ensure that blacks, their institutions, and their social and affectionate lives would not be confined by barriers or limited to specific neighborhoods. But progress toward integration was slow. During the apex of the "era of integration"—from the 1940s through the 1960s—there never was the radical, space-transforming reconfiguration of urban space that would have enabled a boundary shattering transformation of racial segregation. And integration, throughout this period, was overwhelmingly about the movement of blacks into white schools and neighborhoods, and not the reverse. By 1952, social scientists were using a new term, desegregation, as an intermediate stage between segregation

and integration: "Desegregation—i.e., the mere admission of Negro students to existing institutions for white people—does not constitute integration."[41] The notion of de facto segregation, informal racial separation operating without legal sanction, came into wide use in the late 1950s, first appearing in the *New York Times* in 1957. And it was increasingly apparent that whatever progress was being made toward integration was leaving urban ghettos untouched. In 1955, Langston Hughes's Harlem everyman, Simple, made this blunt reply when told that Negroes were "being rapidly integrated into every phase of American life, from the army to the navy to schools to industry, advancing, advancing." He said, "I have not advanced one step. Still the same old job, same old salary, same old kitchenette, same old Harlem, and the same old color."[42]

Still, through the early 1960s, integration remained one of the most important political demands for many, even most African Americans. In New York City, as in many cities, integrated schools and integrated housing were central to political action by blacks across a wide political spectrum. On February 3, 1964, at the behest of the New York Citywide Committee for Integrated Schools, some 464,000 children boycotted their classes for the day, including almost all African American students, in one of the largest civil rights protests of the decade.[43] Several months later, shortly after the Harlem riots in July, the *New York Times* took a poll of black opinion on many issues. On the question of whether "having a Negro society that is completely separate from all whites," 81 percent were opposed. On whether to live in an all-Negro or integrated neighborhood, 44 percent opted for integration, 10 percent for "all-Negro neighborhoods," with 39 percent stating that they "don't care, doesn't matter." For education, 62 percent wanted their children to attend integrated schools, 30 percent wanted "just a good school," and just 4 percent opted for "all-Negro" schools.[44]

Black supporters of integration knew what they were fighting for, and it was not just the right for race mixing. As one of the persons most closely associated with the cause of integration, and a leader for its realization in New York City's public schools, social psychologist Kenneth Clark argued throughout the 1950s and early 1960s that segregation was not merely a matter of "racial gerrymandering" but consisted of a whole range of policies that reinforced the inferior status of black schools and held back the educational attainments of black students. And integration meant more than reversing "racial gerrymandering." It meant transforming all of the conditions of segregation. And as whites left cities in large numbers during these decades, "integration" was as much about transforming all-black schools as ending their existence. Clark argued in 1964 that integration also meant giving every black child the best education possible, and that "total desegregation of all schools" was simply not possible for the foreseeable future. As Charles Silberman, a Clark supporter, wrote, "integration is a moral imperative—the greatest moral imperative of our times. But integration should not be confused with the mere mixing of whites and blacks in the same classroom, in the same school, or in the same neighborhood."[45]

But the broader ideals of integration were increasingly overlooked by the mid-1960s. The nationalist turn in black politics in the 1960s was largely built upon the vituperative dismissal of integration, starting with Malcolm X. "We don't want to be wiped out with the white man, we don't want to integrate with him, we want to separate from him," he said in 1962.[46] In 1967, Stokely Carmichael and Charles V. Hamilton claimed in their book, *Black Power*, that integration as an ideal was both "unrealistic" and "despicable," that integration requires that "black people must give up their identity," and that integration "is a subterfuge for the maintenance of white supremacy."[47] Robert S. Browne, in dialogue with Bayard Rustin, raised things a notch in 1969 by calling integration "a painless genocide."[48]

But in the haste to reject integration, the idea was almost willfully misunderstood and misconstrued. When blacks such as Thurman advocated for integration, they were not issuing a call for assimilation, or a simple-minded celebration of interracial contact for its own sake. The point was to expand the field of black possibility, to fight for full inclusion of blacks in every area of public and private life. Freedom, Thurman always argued, was the ability to choose, the right to

possibilities. Supporters of integration saw their cause in a geographic frame, both cartographically and metaphorically. White America had mapped blacks into a corner, with all sorts of places deemed off-limits, from entire neighborhoods and entire professions to smaller, more intimate locations— where to go the bathroom, how to sit on a bus, who to marry. Opponents of integration developed a theory of "internal colonization," where the goal was to liberate and control black neighborhoods in an analogy drawn from Franz Fanon and other theorists of national liberation.[49] However, supporters of integration such as Thurman were surely correct that the problems of black poverty, isolation, and sense of disinheritance could not be challenged by solutions that were limited to the amelioration of conditions within black neighborhoods.[50] But the critics of integration were also correct to think that there was little evidence, in America's cities in the mid-1960s, that white America was really willing to let blacks out of their urban ghettos.

By the 1960s, Thurman was dean of chapel at Boston University, the first African American to obtain this prestigious position at a predominantly white university. He taught his last class in 1962 and retired in 1965. He maintained a busy schedule in his retirement, teaching, preaching, and lecturing until shortly before his death in 1981. Distressed by the nationalist turn in black politics in the 1960s, he wrote about it at length in *The Luminous Darkness: A Personal Interpretation of the Anatomy of Segregation and the Ground of Hope*, published in 1965. And he was also distressed by the evident lack of progress toward a true overthrow of segregation. By the mid-1960s, proponents of integration, like Thurman, Martin Luther King Jr., and Thurman's protégé, James Farmer, did not turn from their older ideals but perhaps better understood that the quest for integration was less a political goal than an animating, utopian vision, an asymptote to be approached and not fully reached.[51] In "Desegregation, Integration, and the Beloved Community," from 1966, Thurman called Black Power an "unreflective slogan." But at the same time, he argued that segregation "has become so ingrained in the structure of our society," so "guaranteed by economic, political, social, and religious sanctions" that to challenge segregation "most often seems to be futile and irrelevant." For the challenge "to be meaningful and effective [it] has to involve revolution, social upheaval."[52] But this involved blacks expanding their geography. In 1969, Thurman called all-black neighborhoods "pseudo-ghettos" precisely because they were not self-sustaining and thus could really be self-contained. Blacks were caught between two worlds, one inadequate, the other unwelcoming or unavailable. "This is where we are caught and this is a part of our frustration; we have no sense of belonging anywhere."[53]

Cities, Suburbs, and Boundaries

In 1971, Thurman wrote his last full-length study, *In Search of Common Ground*. He wrote about the nationalist turn in black politics, stating that while it was understandable and perhaps, in the short term, necessary and unavoidable, ultimately, it was self-limiting.

> It was only within fixed boundaries, self-determined—and that is their word—that the goals of community could be experienced, achieved, or realized. The natural lines along which the boundaries should be set would be to separate those who had been historically victimized by society from those who had victimized them. The bankruptcy of trust stood fully revealed.

In writing these words, Thurman no doubt thought of how much and how little things had changed since his Daytona boyhood. What was needed, he argued, is common ground—an imagined location of an encompassing wholeness where "against all that fragments and shatters, and against all things that separate and divide within and without, life labors to med together into a single harmony."[54]

J. Anthony Lukas quoted Thurman's words in the foreword that he wrote to the 1986 edition of *In Search of Common Ground*. The year before Lukas had published his history of the Boston

bussing and desegregation struggles in the 1970s, and he called it *Common Ground*, borrowing the title from Thurman. Recognized as a classic from the time of its publication, it remains one of the best and most vivid studies of how difficult it was to implement the goals of racial equality and integration in a city that was tensely divided by race into tightly defined neighborhoods that had in common only their mutual suspicions.[55] One of the three families profiled by Lukas were disciples of Thurman (they embraced his views on the spiritual need for integration), and they provided the moral core of the book.

In the thirty years since *Common Ground* appeared, not much has changed in America's urban neighborhoods. Or rather, they change and stay the same. There was a dramatic decrease in crime in the early 1990s, and the not unrelated phenomena of gentrification, which saw an influx of well-heeled white households to some urban black neighborhoods, such as Harlem and Bedford-Stuyvesant. There was what has been called the "reverse migration" of northern blacks to southern cities such as Atlanta. There was a substantial move of black families to inner-ring suburbs. There was, paradoxically, as the great post-1960s crime wave ebbed in the early 1990s, a new push to put in place harsh laws that greatly increased the country's prison population. And there was a new wave of immigration from Central America and Mexico, with many families moving to less expensive neighborhoods of America's cities. And through it all, little changed in America's poorest urban neighborhoods.[56]

And attitudes toward integration have changed little since the nationalist turn of the 1960s. In recent decades, especially among African Americans, integration has had more detractors than defenders. Michelle Adams has written, "Integration no longer captivates the progressive imagination."[57] Many, black and white alike, if often for different reasons, are "integration weary" or suffer from "integration exhaustion."[58] (Although integration has had some liberal supporters, some of the most vocal recent defenders of integration have been conservatives who, falsely, blame nationalism for integration failure.)[59] But in the academy, integration has been given little respect. To give one example of many, the late legal theorist Derrick Bell argued that like "slavery and segregation," integration is "one more device by which the majority can maintain control over blacks."[60] Recent tragic events in Ferguson, Missouri, and Baltimore, Maryland, have reminded many, who have not been paying close attention, which unfortunately includes the majority of the American people, how segregated American society is, and how this is enforced, directly and indirectly, with the complacent complicity of white America. We have learned anew, as Thurman wrote in 1966, that such separation is still "so ingrained in the structure of our society, that it is guaranteed by economic, political, social, and religious sanctions," and that it endures generation after generation. But if the American public as a whole is only now catching up to the persistence of spatially based segregation, it has been no secret to the segregated and a small army of social scientists, historians, and journalists who have written about its persistence. As George Lipsitz has argued, America's cities are still largely defined by the clashing visions of what he calls the "white spatial imaginary" and the "black spatial imaginary."[61]

By one estimate from 2004, only about 10 million Americans—or about 4 percent of the population—lived in relatively stable integrated communities.[62] Sheryll Cashin gives an incisive description of the current state of segregation in her recent book, *Place, Not Race*:

> In the geographic sorting that goes on in metropolitan areas, everyone aspires to live in a neighborhood that helps them to get ahead. The children of parents who can't afford to escape to quality are stuck in segregated, high-poverty neighborhoods. This is the modern meaning of *Brown v. Board of Education*. Those who can afford to integrate will, assuming the cost is worth it to them. Those who can't are relegated to less opportunity or, in some ghetto neighborhoods, no opportunity. Our nation did not pursue a transformative integration in which institutions and neighborhoods were redesigned to make opportunity broadly available to everyone. Place, although highly racialized, now better captures who is underprivileged than skin color.[63]

These reflections are an extension of Thurman's insights. The goal of integration was to lift the burden that "always, under any and all circumstances" placed black lives (and black places) "utterly at the mercy of the white world," as he wrote in *The Search for Common Ground* (emphases in original). And this could not be done by keeping blacks and other racial minorities in their defined spaces, and white in theirs because "community cannot long feed on itself; it can only flourish where always the boundaries are giving way to the coming of others beyond them."[64] For Thurman, it was precisely because white America insisted on defining race and racially defined institutions and neighborhoods in geographic terms that he always insisted that neighborliness demanded genuine and mutually enhancing inclusion and integration. Neighborliness required more than physical proximity. Integration, like neighborliness, required a moral commitment that was to be performed in the physical world but was ultimately nonspatial.

Michelle Adams, in a trenchant article from 2006, "Radical Integration," sees radical integration as "unlocking" integration's "powerful promise" while "simultaneously addressing the challenges of black identity."[65] But I would argue that radical integration does not need to be reinvented so much as rediscovered. Integration, as Howard Thurman understood it, has always been a radical idea: the goal of full inclusion of America's racial minorities in every aspect of the nation's civic, political, social, and economic life.

It is interesting to note that in the past few years, the term "diversity" is being seen as too narrowly quantitative, counting bodies, satisfied with race mixing rather than the true extirpation of racism. The newly fashionable term is "inclusion." Ava DuVernay, the film director, was quoted in 2015 as saying of diversity, "I hate that word so much." She hates the word because "it's a medicinal word that has no emotional resonance and this is a really emotional issue." DuVernay suggested as substitutes, "inclusion," or "belonging." John Eligon, reporting on campus discussions on race relations in early 2016, pointed out that activists are stating, "diversity is one thing, inclusion another."[66] Inclusion is in many ways the return of the original meaning of integration in more acceptable form. Diversity, all too often, is what integration devolved into in the postintegration era, a mechanical measuring of race mixing as an end in itself.

Inclusion, true inclusion, on the contrary, is the real meaning of integration. This is what Thurman tried to create, as a "footprint of a dream" in the Fellowship Church. He wanted it to be a sacred space where one can experience

> the immediate awareness of the pushing out of the barriers of self, the moment we flow together into one, when I am not male or female, yellow or green or black or white or brown, educated or illiterate, rich or poor, sick or well, righteous or unrighteous—but a naked human spirit that spills into other human spirits as they spill into me.[67]

What Howard Thurman and other integration advocates wanted and wished for was a political, social, and economic reorganization of America's cities and a transformation of those who live in them, neighborhood by neighborhood, soul by soul.

Declaration of Conflicting Interests

Funding

Notes

1. Howard Thurman, *Footprints of a Dream: The Story of the Church for the Fellowship of All Peoples* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1959), 24. For Thurman's trip to India, see Quinton Dixie and Peter

Eisenstadt, *Visions of a Better World: Howard Thurman's Pilgrimage to India and the Origins of African American Nonviolence* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2011), 85-150.

2. Howard Thurman, *Jesus and the Disinherited* (New York: Abingdon-Cokesbury, 1949), 29.

3. Thurman's involvement in the Fellowship Church is traced in Walter Earl Fluker, ed., *The Papers of Howard Washington Thurman* (hereafter PHWT): *The Bold Adventure*, vol. 3 (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2015). For the history of interracial churches, see Dixie and Eisenstadt, *Visions of a Better World*, 164-81.

4. "The Will To Segregation" (August 1943), reprinted in PHWT 2: 337–344, at 342

5. Fluker, PHWT, vol. 3, xxiii-xxvi.

6. Thurman, *Footprints of a Dream*, 43-45.

7. Thurman, *Footprints of a Dream*, 44.

8. Thurman, *Footprints of a Dream*, 47-48.

9. Manning Marable, *Malcolm X: A Life of Reinvention* (New York: Penguin Books, 2011).

10. Thurman, *Footprints of a Dream*, 46.

11. Thurman, *Footprints of a Dream*, 47-51.

12. Thurman, *Footprints of a Dream*, 44.

13. Fluker, PHWT, vol. 3, xliii.

14. Howard Thurman, *With Head and Heart: The Autobiography of Howard Thurman* (hereafter WHAH) (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1979), 23.

15. Thurman, *Footprints of a Dream*, 44.

16. Howard Thurman, "The Will to Segregation"

17. Pauli Murray, *States' Laws on Race and Color* (1951; repr. Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1997), 77-88; C. Vann Woodward, *The Strange Career of Jim Crow* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1955), 102.

18. Thurman, WHAH, 10. See James Loewen, *Sundown Towns: A Hidden Dimension of American Racism* (New York: Touchstone Books, 2006).

19. Leonard R. Lempel, "The Mayor's 'Henchmen and Henchwomen, Both White and Colored': Edward H. Armstrong and the Politics of Race in Daytona Beach, 1900-1940," *Florida Historical Quarterly* 70, no. 3 (Winter 2001): 267-96, esp. 273-74; Thurman, WHAH, 9.

20. "Biographical Essay," in PHWT, 1: xxxix.

21. Lempel, "The Mayor's 'Henchmen and Henchwomen, Both White and Colored,'" 274.

22. Thurman, WHAH, 97.

23. "Interview with Roberta Byrd," Howard Thurman Collection, Howard Gotlieb Archival Research Center, Boston University

24. Howard Thurman, *The Luminous Darkness: A Personal Interpretation of the Anatomy of Segregation and the Ground of Hope* (New York: Harper & Row, 1965), 3.

25. Thurman, *Footprints of a Dream*, 15-16; Thurman, WHAH, 3-6; Howard Thurman, "The Fascist Masquerade" (1946), in P*HWT*: vol. 3, 145–162, at 157–58.

26. For Morehouse and John Hope, see Leroy Davis, *A Clashing of the Soul: John Hope and the Dilemma of African American Leadership and Black Higher Education in the Early Twentieth Century* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1998). For Thurman at Morehouse, see Thurman, WHAH, vol. 1, 8–31

27. "Commencement Address Delivered at the Tennessee A & I State College," (June 1938), in PHWT 2, 156–164, at 160; "The Integration of the Ethical, Social, and Educational Program" (April, 1938), in PHWT, 149–154, at 153.

28. For Thurman at Rochester Theological Seminary, see Thurman, WHAH, 46-61.

29. For Howard University in the 1930s and its mood of anti-institutionalism, see Jonathan Scott Holloway, *Confronting the Veil: Abram Harris, Jr., E. Franklin Frazier, and Ralph Bunche, 1919-1941* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002); Walter Dyson, *Howard University, the Capstone of Negro Education: A History, 1867-1940* (Washington, D.C.: Howard University, 1941).

30. Holloway, *Confronting the Veil*; "Johnson Views Race Problem at NAACP Meet," *New York Amsterdam News*, July 16, 1938.

31. Howard Thurman, "A 'Native Son' Speaks," (May 1940)in PHWT 2, 246-52; Thurman, "The Will to Segregation"

32. James Weldon Johnson, *Negro Americans, What Now?* (New York: Viking Press, 1934), 1.

33. Johnson, *Negro Americans, What Now?* 12.
34. Before the Du Bois controversy over segregation in 1934, "integration" had rarely appeared in the black press. In major black newspapers, the *Baltimore Afro-American* (from 1893), the *Chicago Defender* (from 1910), the *New York Amsterdam News* (from 1922), and the *Pittsburgh Courier* (from 1911), the word "integration" appeared only twenty-two times before 1934. It appeared twenty-seven times in 1934, and then 309 times between 1935 and 1940, and 1,227 times between 1941 and 1945. Until the latter years of the war, integration was largely a term used by blacks, and only slowly made its way into mainstream white awareness. There were only thirty-four articles in the *New York Times* that included both the words "integration" and "Negro" before 1940, and forty-two between 1941 and 1945, with the takeoff in usage occurring after World War II."
35. Rebecca Stiles Taylor, "Integration versus Disintegration Is the Question of the Hour," *Chicago Defender*, September 13, 1941.
36. Roi Ottley, "New World A-Comin'," *New York Amsterdam News*, April 1, 1944; Roi Ottley, *"New World A-Comin'": Inside Black America* (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1943).
37. Adam Clayton Powell Jr., *Marching Blacks: An Interpretive History of the Rise of the Common Black Man* (New York: Dial Press, 1945), 3, 204.
38. See Dixie and Eisenstadt, *Visions of a Better World*, 151-82.
39. Thurman, *Jesus and the Disinherited*, 29; Dixie and Eisenstadt, *Visions of a Better World*, 194).
40. Thurman, *Jesus and the Disinherited*, 89.
41. Martin D. Jenkins, "Problems Incident to Racial Integration and Some Suggested Approaches to these Problems," *Journal of Negro Education* 21, no. 3 (Summer 1952): 413. See also Lester B. Granger, "Some Tactics Which Should Supplement Resort to the Courts in Achieving Racial Integration," *Journal of Negro Education* 21, no. 3 (Summer 1952): 344-49.
42. Langston Hughes, "No Civil War without an Atom Bomb, Says Simple," *Chicago Defender*, May 28, 1955.
43. See Clarence Taylor, *Knocking at Our Own Door: Milton A. Galamison and the Struggle to Integrate New York City Schools* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997).
44. "Attitude of Negroes on Key Questions," *New York Times*, July 27, 1964.
45. Quoted in Peter Eisenstadt, *Rochdale Village: Robert Moses, 6,000 Families, and New York City's Great Experiment in Integrated Housing* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2010), 157.
46. Malcolm X and James Farmer, "Separation or Integration: A Debate" (1962), repr. August Meier, Elliot Rudwick, and Francis L. Broderick, *Black Protest Thought in the Twentieth Century* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1971), 39-56.
47. Stokely Carmichael and Charles V. Hamilton, *Black Power: The Politics of Liberation in America* (New York: Vintage Books, 1967), 54.
48. Robert S. Browne and Bayard Rustin, *Separatism or Integration: Which Way America?* (New York: A. Philip Randolph Educational Fund, 1969), 10.
49. For the theory of internal colonialism, see Robert Blauner, *Racial Oppression in America* (New York: Harper & Row, 1972), 82-110; Robert O. Self, "The Black Panther Party and the Long Civil Rights Era," in *In Search of the Black Panther Party: New Perspectives on a Revolutionary Movement*, ed. Jama Lazerow and Yohuru Williams (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006), 40-42.
50. James Baldwin expressed similar sentiments in *The Fire Next Time* (1962); see James Baldwin, *The Price of the Ticket: Collected Nonfiction, 1948-1985* (New York: St. Martin's/Marek, 1985), 375-76.
51. Thurman, *The Luminous Darkness*.
52. Thurman, "Desegregation, Integration, and the Beloved Community" in PHWT, Vol. 5 (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, forthcoming)
53. "'A Creative Encounter'—An Interview with Roberta Byrd."
54. Thurman, WHAH, 269.
55. J. Anthony Lukas, "Foreword," in Howard Thurman, *The Search for Common Ground* (Richmond, IN: Friends United Press, 1986), ix-xi; J. Anthony Lukas, *Common Ground: A Turbulent Decade in the Lives of Three American Families* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1985).
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57. Michele Adams, "Radical Integration," *California Law Review* 94, no. 2 (March 2006): 264.

58. Cashin, *The Failures of Integration*, xiii; Chester Hartman and Gregory D. Squires, "Integration Exhaustion, Race Fatigue, and the American Dream," in *The Integration Debate: Competing Futures for American Cities*, ed. Chester Hartman and Gregory D. Squires (New York: Routledge, 2010), 1-8.

59. For liberal views, see Cashin, *The Failures of Integration*; and Tom Wicker, *Tragic Failure: Racial Integration in America* (New York: William Morrow, 1995). Wicker argues that integration failed "because too few white Americans wanted it or were willing to sacrifice for it" (3). For a neoconservative perspective, see Tamar Jacoby, *Someone Else's House: America's Unfinished Struggle for Integration* (New York: Free Press, 1998).

60. Richard Delgado and Jean Stefancic, eds., *The Derrick Bell Reader* (New York: New York University Press, 2003), 225.

61. Thurman, "Desegregation, Integration, and the Beloved Community"; George Lipsitz, *How Racism Takes Place* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2011), 25-72. See also Angel David Nieves and Leslie M. Alexander, eds., *"We Shall Independent Be": African American Place Making and the Struggle to Claim Space in the United States* (Boulder: University Press of Colorado, 2008).

62. Cashin, *The Failures of Integration*, 42.

63. Sheryll Cashin, *Place, Not Race: A New Vision of Opportunity in America* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2014), 20. See also Patrick Sharkey, *Stuck in Place: Urban Neighborhoods and the End of Progress towards Racial Equality* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013); Robert J. Sampson, *Great American City: Chicago and the Enduring Neighborhood Effect* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013).

64. Thurman, *The Search for Common Ground*, (New York: Harper and Row, 1971) 92, 104.

65. Adams, "Radical Integration," 267.

66. Cara Buckley, "Ava DuVernay on Hollywood's Inclusion Problem," *New York Times*, January 25, 2016; John Eligon, "After Racist Episodes, Blunt Discussions on Campus," *New York Times*, February 3, 2016.

67. "The Commitment" (March 1949) in Fluker, ed. PHWT, vol. 3, 309.

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