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Summary of Michael David Cobb Bowen's Reflections on Blackness and Race

Michael David Cobb Bowen shares an introspective and nuanced commentary on the dynamics of race, identity, and blackness in America, emphasizing the **importance of transcending racial boundaries** to embrace individuality and self-determination. Bowen frames his thoughts around the ideas of two intellectuals, **Coleman Hughes** and **John McWhorter**, whom he admires for their exploration of race from a perspective he identifies with.

Key Insights and Themes

- **Personal Deracination (Racelessness):**

Bowen advocates for a philosophy of *personal deracination*, urging individuals, especially Black Americans, to step *off the "racial X"*, rejecting racial boxes and stereotypes as restrictive "swim lanes" established by societal expectations.

- **Race as a Limiting Construct:**

He critiques the societal tendency to categorize people rigidly by race, noting that people often internalize these imposed stereotypes (*textBlack = X, textAsian = Y, textWhite = Z*). He calls this a trap limiting personal growth and social unity.

- **Skepticism Toward Political and Social Narratives:**

Bowen expresses disenchantment with racial politics and the leftist narratives grounded in the civil rights era and race riot mythology. He discusses how some social scientists remain anchored to outdated frameworks regarding African American socioeconomic status.

- **Diversity Within Blackness:**

Bowen highlights significant **diversity within the Black community** across regional, cultural, religious, socioeconomic, and intellectual lines. For example, Black Americans differ widely:

- Across regions (e.g., California vs. South vs. Northeast)
 - Religiously (e.g., African Methodist Episcopal, Southern Baptist, Muslim)
 - Philosophically and psychologically (individualistic vs. group-oriented, skeptical vs. religious)
 - Professionally (blue collar, professional, academic, etc.)

- **Moving Beyond Racial Solidarity Toward Individual Identity:**
Bowen argues Black Americans should disambiguate themselves instead of expecting a monolithic racial destiny. He emphasizes the value of **individualism and cosmopolitanism** over racial unity dictated by external pressures or political figures.
- **Trust as the Fundamental Currency:**
Trust transcending racial constructs is presented as the foundation of civilization, essential for social and economic interaction.
- **Critique of “Black Culture” Stereotypes:**
He questions popular notions of black culture, contrasting the complexities of real experiences (e.g., gospel choirs, overseas identities) with caricatures seen in media or social conflicts.
- **Proposal for WWID (“What Would I Do?”) Platform:**
Bowen envisions a flexible, evolving database/platform (WWID) where individuals can define themselves and align with others based on values, priorities, philosophies, and life stages—beyond racial categories.

Timeline of Key Ideas and Reflections

Approximate Timeframe	Key Events or Concepts
Mid-late 1980s	Familiarity with Shelby Steele’s work on race and culture
Early 1990s	Idea of creating a virtual parliament to debate race issues
Around 2019-2021	Meeting Coleman Hughes and John McWhorter in the UK
After George Floyd (2020)	Reflection on “woke” culture and racial discussions among youth
Throughout personal life	Developed concept of stepping off racial “X” and personal identity
Present (undated)	Planning WWID platform to promote individuality over race

Definitions and Concepts

Term	Definition/ Description
Personal Deracination	The process of shedding racial identity to live as an individual beyond racial stereotypes.

Term	Definition/ Description
Racial “X”	A metaphorical mark or box society assigns individuals based on race, limiting their identity.
Race Masters or Ringmasters	Those who enforce racial boundaries and discourage individuals from stepping outside racial lanes.
Cosmopolitan vs. Yokel	Cultural distinction where cosmopolitan relates to worldly, broad-mindedness; yokel is locally focused, parochial.
WWID (What Would I Do?)	A proposed platform for individuals to define and evolve their identity beyond race.

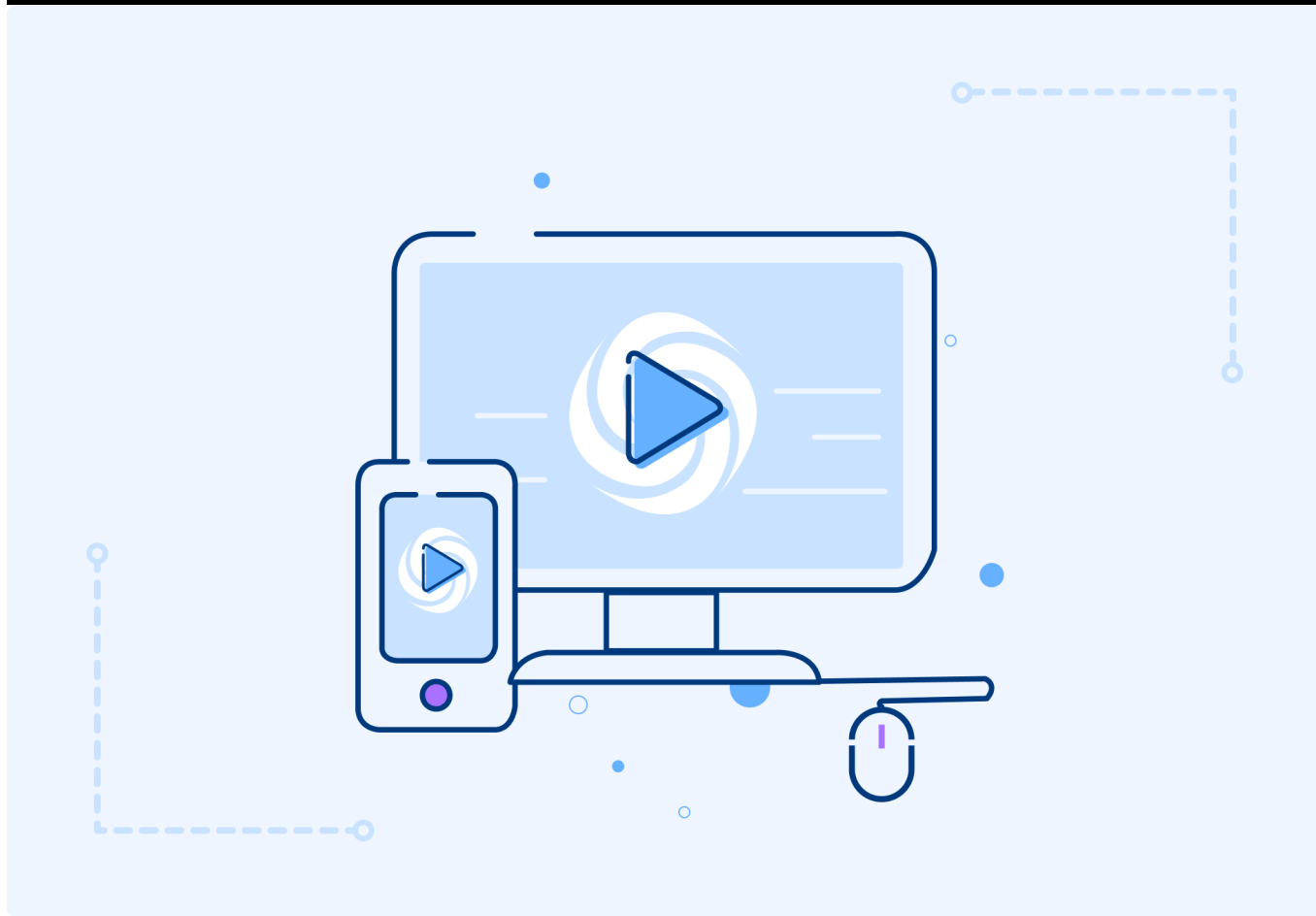
Summary of Arguments

- **Race as a social construct shouldn’t define individual identity or potential.**
 - **True self-determination involves rejecting imposed racial identities and stereotypes.**
 - **Blackness is not a monolith; diversity of experiences and identities thrives within the community.**
 - **Racial essentialism undermines personal growth and societal trust.**
 - **The future of blackness in America lies in a willingness to abandon rigid racial characterizations while practicing inclusive brotherhood that transcends race.**
 - **Personal evolution, including changes in beliefs, practices, and associations, is natural and encouraged.**
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Closing Remark

Bowen’s message is ultimately **one of empowerment through individual authenticity**, urging people to **embrace their complex identities** and **reject simplistic racial categorizations** that curtail freedom and progress. His envisioned WWID project embodies this philosophy by helping people navigate and express their evolving selves beyond race.

This summary presents Michael David Cobb Bowen’s reflections on race and identity, strictly based on his discourse without inference beyond the source content.



00:03

This is Michael David Cobb Bowen with a dye job. I just had another birthday. And to surprise my wife and also to pay off a bet, I've decided to dye my face and hair. And I tell you, it's very weird looking at me. So I hope you don't mind so much.

00:33

So today I wanted to do something new for Raceman's Home Companion because I haven't been working on it much lately. But there are two people, I think, who more than any other two people living that I can think of are saying the things that I think I would say.

01:01

when it comes to being a black American. And in a certain way, it's to be expected because, well, anyway, I'll just name them. And I met them both for the first time about two years ago, maybe three, in the UK. And they are Coleman Hughes and John McWhorter.

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Now I'm familiar with John McWhorter because he was a member of the Manhattan Institute. And when I was the black Republican,

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when I put on that hat, I found that it was City Journal and the reporting and ideas of the Manhattan Institute that I felt more aligned with than just about anybody else or any other place that represented a right side of the political spectrum

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You know, like most people I think, like me, I found Thomas Sowell and Shelby Steele appealing. And I was familiar with Shelby Steele all the way back in the mid-late 80s when he wrote his seminal article for Harper's Magazine. At any rate, I don't think about race very often

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I think the times that I think about it most of all are when I'm in the presence of my kids who are millennials and they talk about it. And they don't talk about it so very seriously other than saying, you know, that's racist, that's racist, or that's so racist.

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And they do it playfully sometimes, and sometimes they do it more seriously. But I think it's something that they have to work through, so I don't ever preach to them. I just let them know when I get bored of hearing it.

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And that happened recently when we were playing a game. It's a fun game about stereotypes where you take a set of cards and you have about 30 characters and how they look. And you're supposed to answer negative questions about them, like which of these people still lives with

their mother or which of this person would you think is lactose intolerant? Questions like that. At any rate,

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McWhorter and Coleman Hughes, who I also met that same weekend at Cambridge University with the...

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The project, I forget the name of the project. Sorry about that. But anyway, I talked to Coleman Hughes. I said, I'm so glad that a young person like you is out there energetic writing because you and I agree pretty much on everything. And now I don't have to do it. I don't have to repeat myself ad infinitum. You can say some of the things that I've said and I think you're on the right track.

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And it doesn't surprise me at all that he was a philosophy major and I minored in philosophy, but I'm more of a practical philosopher. And so those two talked about several items.

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And one of the things that I've wanted to talk about is the future of blackness in America. And it's not necessarily political because I don't live in politics. I think I explored the limit of politics in terms of where I would center myself and how I would organize my thinking. And politics, you know, it violated me.

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It got to a point where I'm saying this is not logically consistent. This is not ethically consistent. And all I can do is take these things that people are saying and fight back against them. And you have this back and forth over issues that I think may never, ever be settled. And, you know, as early as the 90s,

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like 91, 92, I was thinking about a project that I would build a virtual parliament so people could have these arguments with the people they think that they hate. And now that I have AI to help me out, I still may build that. But anyway, I want to talk about the future of black culture. And this is nothing that I wouldn't say to anybody else.

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I think one of the problems with race in America is that we have succumbed to it. We have stepped into the circle. We put our foot on the X of race. And it says, okay, you're black, you

stand on that X. You're Asian, you stand on that X. And we just said, okay.

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And then at the same time, we're like, man, why do they treat me like every other black person? Or why do they think these negative stereotypes about Asians? Or why do you think this, that, and the other thing? And I'm like, your job is to get off the X. And it might move with you. And you'll get onto another X. But then you've got to get off the X. And the question is, do you want to move your butt or stand there and be a target and say, oh, poor, pitiful me, right?

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So I am pretty far along in this idea of something I used to call personal deracination, which is racelessness, which has gone through other ways, non-racial. And the simple bottom line is that there is a racial philosophy. They say things about black people.

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And you know what those things are. They say things about Mexicans. And you know what those things are. They say things about Asians. And people are like, well, what does that mean for Indians? Why are they Asians or Arabs Asians? That's the Middle East. Okay, what? And they say things about white folks. And you know what that is. So these stereotypes...

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are pretty standard. They're like swim lanes. So the question is, are you gonna stay in your racial lane? There's a theory about you and your race. And if you're intellectually lazy,

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And or maybe you just don't care. Then you just say, OK, yeah, sure. Blacks are X. Asians are Y. White people are Z. And there are people who are going to try to whip.

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those swim lanes into shape. Like, don't get out of your lane, right? Those are the race masters, let's call them that, like ring masters. And you have to understand, if you know the first thing about American history, that black people in America, African Americans, have tried to get out from under that.

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And that's the history of liberation. You look at the Constitution, you look at the Declaration of Independence, and you say, yeah, that means me. I like that idea. That's an American idea. Yeah, I can get behind. If I could only get these fools over here.

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to believe it. And sometimes you just have to say, OK, well, I'm just going to be the American I want to be. And if you don't like it, tough luck. And at some point, you really have to make that decision. You have to make the decision that, yes, I'm going to compete and I'm going to be an All-American.

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I'm going to be an all-American sprinter. I'm going to be an all-American singer. I'm going to be an all-American swimmer. I'm going to be an all-American bowler or luge, right? I'm going to be a Jamaican bobsled team, you know? You decide what you want to do and you get busy doing it. And you get busy living or you get busy dying. That's how it goes. So if you have fought for that,

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If you have fought for that, if you said, that is a value that I find. And as a child of God, there's nothing on this earth that's going to stop me from getting there. Because I report to that guy. I don't report to that guy over there. If that's your orientation, if you've got that purpose and that self-determination, then why would you step into the bucket of race?

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Why would you say, oh, it doesn't matter where I come from. It doesn't matter what my family has done or not done. I am Trayvon Martin. I am Rodney King. I am the falsely accused OJ Simpson. Whatever. All right. You don't have to put on that black makeup, even though that's kind of just what I did to hide the gray.

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But you don't have to step in that racial box. And you don't have to live in that racial box. And you don't have to eat the food that they put in that box. Your job is to get outside the box. And the first thing you don't do when you get outside the box is punch the first person in the nose that says, oh, you came from the box, huh?

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No, you just can't assume those things about other people because they didn't put you in that box. You put you in that box. You stepped on the X. You check the checkbox. And now the checkbox says, I decline to specify. So are you declining to specify? Or do you think that you signing this form is going to give you some racial unity and solidarity in everything you do? No, it doesn't work. It doesn't work. So

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What happens to a black family when they say, well, we're not black like other people? Or whenever you say black, I don't really pay attention to that. And then you get to this point of apathy or annoyance where you're just like, don't bother me with that nonsense. I don't think that way.

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So, in certain way, if you read some of my essays, then you know that I have this kind of, I wouldn't say a cynical look at blackness, but I would say a skeptical look. It's like, okay, you could say that, and that's fine, but do you mean this? Or do you mean that? Or do you mean this and that?

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or a combination of those things. And it's really easy because I think all of us at some point in our lives, or many points in our lives, when it was important, somebody said, well, you're not like the rest of the black people, or you're not like the black people on TV, or you're not like the black people in my hometown.

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Or I never met any person like you like that. Or maybe I meet you in London. Or I meet you in Paris. And you say, hey, American. I've never seen a black American over here.

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Or you speak French, you know, they say, I thought you were an Algerian. I'm like, no, man, I'm from California. Je viens de Californie. And people will play with identity, and you should feel like that. That's one of the quotes I have from James Baldwin, which I won't re-quote here. I'll just put it in the description, I guess. And so the future. What is the future? The future is...

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It's a willingness to abandon the racial characterization

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It's a willingness to give a what's up to somebody on the street and call them brother. But you equally do that for somebody else in the same way of you. That is to say, maybe you like wearing polo shirts. And you say, hey, you look good in that polo shirt. Or let me help you straighten your tie. All right, brother. Or you see somebody in a car that you like. Hey, you're looking good, brother.

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And you're willing to call somebody brother who's not in your quote unquote racial category. And that's what it was all about. So whereas my kids grew up after college, but some of the youngest was still in college when the Wokie stuff happened. But certainly after college,

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there in the workforce after George Floyd, thankfully. But when I was in high school, it was the bicentennial. And people were worn out. I'm telling you, they were worn out about race riots in Detroit, in Atlanta. Anywhere there were race riots, it was like, oh, it's going to be a long, hot summer.

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And we've had some. We've had Wildin, you know, we have Waffle House, Worldstar, and people got the nerve to call that black culture for kids you know have never gone to church in their life and never sang in a gospel choir.

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but you know in 76 for the bicentennial it was a big deal because we were right in the middle of crossover and it was like people were sick of the racial conflict because it was places burning down I mean

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Now, the worst race riot I think we've had was Ferguson, Missouri, and that was nowhere near as bad as the watch riots.

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And we had some, it's also nowhere near as bad as the Detroit riots. And I think sometime people were just like, oh, remember the Watts riots or remember the Detroit riots and they make another movie about it. And then I didn't see Chirac and I didn't see Three Little Girls. I didn't see Spike Lee's diatribes about those things. But I understand that millennials work their way through the woke stuff

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And we also worked our way through the white liberal palimony. I guess that's the best thing I can come up with. The posters and the murals with the different colored hands, shaking hands, and thinking it's all about friendship. It's not about friendship. It's about participation in the broader society.

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economically speaking, politically speaking, culturally speaking, every way. Every way that we can do it. And, you know, the old question is, what do black people want? Well, we want everything that's worth wanting. And we want to do it as black people, except when we don't want to. Right?

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And that's like, well, that makes you just like everybody else. You're damn skippy. And sometimes I want to be black and sometimes I won't want to be black. And you don't get to know that until you get to know me. Until I'm calling you brother.

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And if I'm calling you brother, that's because you may be good on the baseball field. And I like baseball and I like playing that with you. Or I like to play ultimate frisbee with you. Or I like to play racquetball or golf with you. You're my brother there. Elsewhere we may compete.

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And that's entirely on me. But it's not something for Jesse Jackson to answer for 50 million black people in America. It's not something for Ibram X. Kendi to project over hundreds of millions of people from Africa around the world with this complexion. So black Americans have to disambiguate themselves from each other

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unless they accept that they have a singular racial destiny. And it's very simple to walk away from that. It's like, my family is from Connecticut. And my other part of my family is from Louisiana. And my wife's family is from Michigan.

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And, you know, I have cousins in New York. I have cousins in Maryland. I have cousins in Texas. I have cousins in South Dakota. I have cousins in, you know, I have a brother in Turkey. I have a cousin who worked in Singapore. I have in-laws in Belize. I have in-laws in France.

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It's like I'm a big family, and I pay attention to my family because they're family. And I'm not, you can't abstract that to, well, this is what black people are. And the easiest way to think about it is I was born and raised in California. Only 13% of African Americans are in California. So 54%, I think, are in the South, if I remember that number correctly. But I'm a minority of a minority of a minority.

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I'm the one with the computer science background. How many black people from California do you know like that? Who can surf? Who eats sushi? Whatever, right? Some of those things are regional. So I always talk about regional. Some of these things are a split that I call yokel versus cosmopolitan.

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Cosmopolitan wants to be worldly wise. Yokel wants to know everything that's happening right here, right now. I'm repping my neighborhood. Some people are Christians. Some people are Muslim. Some people are skeptical. Some people are philosophical. Some people like astrology. You're from the south or the northeast or the midwest or the far west or the coasts.

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Lots of differences. We could talk about politics. We're not going to talk about politics. You could be short or tall. You can be blue collar. You could be white collar. You can be a first responder or in the service. Or you could be a professional. You could be an academic. You could be in the medical field. You could be in agriculture. You could be a truck driver. You could be a civil service worker.

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We're covering all kinds of bases. You could be African Methodist Episcopal. You could be Southern Baptist. You could be Seventh-day Adventist. You could be Presbyterian. Lots of ways to split up that. And then you have your own psychological profiles. You could be group-oriented. You could be individual-oriented. You could be self-motivated. You may need people to motivate you. You may be introverted. You may be extroverted.

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My job, one of my jobs to do is to get people so uncomfortable with race that they have to start discovering other things about themselves and give those things precedence. And I don't think that should be very hard. It's just that we don't get an opportunity to say that because stupidly, most of our social scientists

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are leftists, and they have a civil rights era, race riots era idea of the socioeconomic position of African Americans, right? And they're still looking at, if we don't make these concessions to black people, there's going to be a long, hot summer, and they're going to be wilding like they did at Central Park.

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like they did after Rodney King, right? That's part of a political mythology of people on the left. And a lot of people live with that. And so you have to deal with

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the political baggage, the ideological consequences of thinking a certain way for your loyalties to a party that you believe has got your best interests in heart. Maybe they do, maybe they don't. But also, I know that there are black folks that, for whatever reason, they just say, America's not my home. My mind is someplace else. Maybe in ancient Egypt,

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It might be in Sunni Islam. It might be in transcendental meditation. It might be, you know, any number of ways of thinking that black Americans have traditionally and contemporarily gotten out of the American box. So they just say, I'm not a patriot here. I just live here. I just make my money here. I feel more at home when I'm doing a concert in Japan. Or I feel more at home when I'm hanging out in Rome.

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And I know a number of black Americans who have gone to live in Europe and feel perfectly comfortable about that. And I've been in touch with a guy I knew from Finland, Walter. Wow, I haven't talked to that guy in a while. But also in the Caribbean. And I know there's a lot of Nigerians who have come here to the United States who are just like, you know, I'm a Nigerian. I'm from Igbo. I'm from Fon. And that's where their mind is at.

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even though they work and live and they look exactly like any other black American. And you're like, wait, whoa. You find out when you dig below the surface that there's a lot of intellectual and viewpoint diversity under the skin. So I think a lot of

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you know, the failure of Jesse Jackson to have a Jesse Jackson legacy. And all of those people in the civil rights era who we used to respect and admire have kind of fallen off. And a new generation, which is more diverse of Blackness, because you can't put, oh my goodness, Kirk Franklin

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in the same box with jay-z okay you can't put quarterback mahomes in the same box as will chamberlain all right completely different uh you can't put

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the black gold medal volleyball player in the same box as Muhammad Ali. Both of them won Olympic gold medals, but they're very different people. And you have to acknowledge that America is producing those very different people. And so it is a matter of getting out of the racial box and then being more comfortable with your individuality

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and being more comfortable that you can, if you decide to be cosmopolitan, that you can overcome these artificial barriers between us that undermine our trust, because trust is the fundamental currency of civilization. And this, I think, ought to be obvious.

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And I think this ought to be something in the back of your mind that you know that successful Black folks or successful Americans have internalized. Because if you can't do business with everybody, then you might as well just run a lemonade stand, right? If you can't sell cell phones to everybody, then you're going to be a little bitty provider that goes out of business.

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And that's how it works. Now, I'm not saying commercial success is everything. I'm just saying your ability to transcend racial boundaries, which are the most fake of them all, should be as easy as your ability to say, I would never...

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I can date a Capricorn or I can date a Pisces or I can date an Aries. I can't even tell you when the birthdays are, right? Because that's not central to myself. So this is in certain ways an advertisement for WWID. And WWID is what would I do?

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And it's an opportunity to put your values and your priorities and your ethics and your philosophy and your religious discipline and your personality and psyche and your daily hygiene

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into a format that whatever you decide in plain English to say, this is me, then I can have a database that allows you to find other people, but also to find yourself as you change yourself.

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You will have epiphany points in your life where you say, suddenly, you know, there's been something wrong with my pastor and I can't quite put my foot on it, can't put my finger on it, but I think I'm going to change churches. And this is a big deal for me because I have so many friends at this church, but I find that he says certain things about homosexuals and my cousin is

a homosexual and none of that stuff applies to him. And I don't like the way he talks about him. And that's going to cause me...

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change I'm gonna pivot and it's my life I can pivot all right I just think this guy's interpreting the Bible wrong and and so you change or you just say you know I just turned 47 and I can't run on the basketball court like I used to my doctor says I got to take it easy on my knees so now I'm gonna try cycling

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I'm going to get on a bicycle and I've never done that before. And I don't know if there's people in my neighborhood who do that. Everybody has points in their lives where they change their priorities. And this is not something that's supposed to stick you in a box. It's supposed to let you be flexible as an individual to change your priorities and help you align yourself with what you say you're aligned with.

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You say, I want to be an Epicurean, which means I want to experience the finer things in life. And I am happy living in a walled garden with people like me. That's what I want to know, the best Thai restaurant in my city. And I'm going to be there. Or I want to find the bar where they play this kind of music. And I'm going to be there. And I'm going to enjoy that stuff because that's what my life gives me zest and gusto.

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But then you may change. And you're going to say, well, I wonder how many people will be interested in doing this as well. So I want to build that kind of database for you where I would not sell this out because there's nothing. If you say philosophically, I'm stoic, as I do, or philosophically, I'm Epicurean, as some people do, or philosophically, I like the essays of Montaigne,

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Then this is more like a book club. It's a book club that pays attention to all the different aspects of you. And I think it's important for people of all ages so they can say, okay, there's somebody like me. Because social media is not helping you. Social media is farming you. Social media is grooming you for them to sell ads. And that's how Google works.

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was evil and still remains to be evil. But that's a little bit beside the point. The point is, how do I get you out of the racial box into a you box? And how do you get more confidence in your self-

determination

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with all the diversity of interests that you have and be comfortable in your own skin. When you shed this racial thing, a lot of people feel like, well, I'm giving up my identity. Why should I do that? No, you're not. You're stepping out of a predefined box that was used to shackle you, literally.

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that was used to deprive you of your rights, literally, even while there were others who were not in the same box, who had the same skin color as you. And so that has been the history of America. It's been the history of the world. And now we have an opportunity, one by one, for every person to say, this is me.

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I'm an individual. I have individual rights that are defended in this country. It would be foolish for me to stay in that racial box and expect people to just come to me. It doesn't happen. I have been, well, don't worry about what I've done.

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But it just doesn't happen. Take it from me. Anyway, I think I have got my message across. And WWID is coming. So hit like and subscribe. And that's my thing for Human Race Man today.

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He critiques the societal tendency to categorize people rigidly by race, noting that people often internalize these imposed stereotypes (Black = X , Asian = Y , White = Z). He calls this a trap limiting personal growth and social unity.

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Throughout personal life	Developed concept of stepping off racial "X" and personal identity
Present (undated)	Planning WWID platform to promote individuality over race

Definitions and Concepts

Term	Definition/ Description
Personal Deracination	The process of shedding racial identity to live as an individual beyond racial stereotypes.
Racial "X"	A metaphorical mark or box society assigns individuals based on race, limiting their identity.
Race Masters or Ringmasters	Those who enforce racial boundaries and discourage individuals from stepping outside racial lanes.
Cosmopolitan vs. Yokel	Cultural distinction where cosmopolitan relates to worldly, broad-mindedness; yokel is locally focused, parochial.
WWID (What Would I Do?)	A proposed platform for individuals to define and evolve their identity beyond race.

Summary of Arguments

- **Race as a social construct shouldn't define individual identity or potential.**
- **True self-determination involves rejecting imposed racial identities and stereotypes.**
- **Blackness is not a monolith; diversity of experiences and identities thrives within the community.**
- **Racial essentialism undermines personal growth and societal trust.**
- **The future of blackness in America lies in a willingness to abandon rigid racial characterizations while practicing inclusive brotherhood that transcends race.**

- **Personal evolution, including changes in beliefs, practices, and associations, is natural and encouraged.**
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Closing Remark

Bowen's message is ultimately **one of empowerment through individual authenticity**, urging people to **embrace their complex identities** and **reject simplistic racial categorizations** that curtail freedom and progress. His envisioned WWID project embodies this philosophy by helping people navigate and express their evolving selves beyond race.

This summary presents Michael David Cobb Bowen's reflections on race and identity, strictly based on his discourse without inference beyond the source content.

Smart Summary

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