



DEMOCRACY



REMIXED

BLACK YOUTH  
AND THE FUTURE OF  
AMERICAN  
POLITICS

★ CATHY J. COHEN ★

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*Democracy Remixed*

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CATHY J. COHEN

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## CHAPTER I

## “My Petition”

*Black Youth and the Promise of  
Democratic Citizenship*

**M**Y INITIAL INSPIRATION for this book was my nephew Terrance, or Terry as our family calls him. Terry was the first grandchild, which meant that all the hopes and dreams of earlier generations were entrusted to him. Yet, despite the best efforts of his mother, his stepfather, and the rest of his family, Terry’s life trajectory was different from what we’d hoped. Terry never graduated from high school, and by the time he was 25 he had seen two of his best friends killed by other young black men. Terry spent time in prison and fathered a number of children, while having difficulty finding and holding a job. To an unsympathetic reader, Terry might be the stereotypical black youth, without direction and doing harm to responsible black people trying to get ahead. For many who do not know him, Terry might seem like the young black men and women who appear briefly on the evening news: those young black people who many believe have chosen a “deviant” lifestyle immersed in a culture of poverty, sex, violence, and consumerism.

While researching and writing this book, I came to realize that Terry’s story, while special to me, in many ways epitomizes the experiences of many young black people who are living lives of alienation, marginality, and confusion. The idea of young black Americans as