

which it prevails is the question. In the event that the United States is able to move toward an egalitarian society, in which race no longer imposes limitations on personal fulfillment, black American intellectual life will eventually change to reflect this new ideal. If, however, future generations of black Americans remain marginalized, then we can expect that African-American intellectual life will retain its historically focused identity. In such case, African-American thought will surely continue to center on questions of race.

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Rights, Power, and Equality

The Modern Civil Rights Movement

Edward P. Morgan

THE CIVIL RIGHTS CAMPAIGN OF THE 1950S AND 1960S stands as one of the most remarkable liberation movements of modern times. Reflecting a new assertiveness among racial and other marginalized minorities in the post-World War II United States, the civil rights crusade brought the quasi-feudal American South into the liberal-capitalist American mainstream. It did so through the combination of court litigation, federal lobbying, nonviolent direct action in communities throughout the South, brilliant leadership, courageous grass-roots activism, and an American populace finally awakened to the grotesque nature of Jim Crow.

As significant as this accomplishment was by itself, the Civil Rights movement was also the catalyst for a whole era of political activism that convulsed the United States and spread to far corners of the globe. In brief, the civil rights struggle inspired others to struggle for justice. Through voter registration drives and nonviolent direct action, it generated profoundly liberating experiences that gave birth to a student movement that subsequently engulfed American campuses and, still later, the American war in Vietnam. It put equality on the nation's political agenda, evolved into a Black Power movement that revitalized black nationalism, and inspired a variety of egalitarian spin-offs—a Latino movement, the Chicano movement, the American Indian movement, the women's movement, even the gay liberation movement—each an expression of a group that perceived itself as left out of full participation in the American dream. Beyond America's shores, the Civil Rights movement inspired renewed activism within South Africa, Northern Ireland, and mainland China. Its most visible leader, Reverend Martin Luther King Jr., was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1964.

The Civil Rights movement sought a variety of objectives: the application of the Fourteenth Amendment equal protection clause and Fifteenth Amendment voting rights to African Americans in the South, who had been long denied their constitutional rights by the Jim Crow laws promulgated in the post-Reconstruction years; citizen empowerment through community-based participation; personal expression through the embrace of African-American culture; and ultimately the full and equal membership of African Americans in the fabric of American life. Together with the 1964 War on Poverty and the Poor People's campaign of 1968, the Civil Rights movement agitated for equal educational opportunity and the elimination of poverty amidst plenty. Only the first of these several objectives was fully realized during the civil rights era.

These goals, and the strategies utilized to achieve them, reflected two distinct strains of American public life, often present simultaneously. One was grounded in American liberal ideology and the institutions of a constitutional democracy and market economy. The other reflected, at least implicitly, a vision of participatory democracy—of communities of people finding and expressing their political voice by directly confronting their oppressors as well as their own internalized powerlessness. The initial and crucially important litigation strategy fully embraced the liberal model. With the introduction of direct action and community boycotts, however, civil rights activists employed strategies that began to deviate from American “politics as usual” and implicitly contained a more participatory and personally liberating dynamic. In time, especially as significant legislative victories were achieved yet deep-seated inequalities remained, the movement as a whole shifted in a more radical direction, becoming more prone to challenge, rather than to work with, prevailing national institutions. In effect, the initial Civil Rights movement utilized national political institutions to achieve goals fully justified by a national ideology of equal rights, in the process bringing a deviant South into the American mainstream. In its broader manifestations, the civil rights struggle posed a variety of challenges to the American mainstream.

BROWN V. BOARD OF EDUCATION, THE MONTGOMERY BUS BOYCOTT, AND THE BEGINNING OF THE CIVIL RIGHTS MOVEMENT

The post-Reconstruction era of the latter nineteenth century established a rigid, tripartite system of racial segregation and oppression in the South—a system reinforced by periodic waves of terror and the constant threat of violence against any blacks who failed to toe the line. Southern blacks were effectively denied the right to vote and thus a political voice; if they were fortunate enough to be employed, then they remained at the bottom position, dependent on the good graces of their white employers; and they were subjected to humiliating rituals governing everything from interracial and intergender conversation to separate “colored” and “white” drinking fountains, eating estab-

lishments, public transportation, and public accommodations. Over the years, thousands of African Americans were violently lynched and assaulted for real and imagined transgressions against the “Southern way of life.”

The impact of Jim Crow was devastating—not only in the arbitrary violence perpetrated against any African Americans deemed “uppity” by whites but also in the degree to which thousands more became resigned to the seeming inevitability of their oppressive circumstances. However, just as the abolition of slavery was the culmination of antislavery efforts spanning decades, the successful dismantling of Jim Crow was grounded in almost a century of struggle.

U.S. participation in the Second World War helped to transform the climate of race relations and foster a new assertiveness among African Americans. The struggle against the racist horror of Nazism spawned renewed efforts, particularly among Jewish and black Americans and sectors of the labor movement, to confront state-sanctioned inequities in the United States. Equally important, some five hundred thousand African-American men who fought for the United States in racially segregated units of the armed forces returned from the war to find the “old ways” of the South, including attacks on returning soldiers, doubly offensive. Finally, the war's aftermath brought the decline of European colonialism and a wave of independence movements in Africa, releasing a new assertiveness that spread contagiously back and forth between emergent nations and the American civil rights struggle.

One of the early beneficiaries of these shifts was the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), long the focal point for struggle against racial oppression in America. In 1946, NAACP special counsel Thurgood Marshall created the organization's Legal Defense Fund to accelerate prewar efforts to challenge the “separate but equal” doctrine adopted by the United States Supreme Court in its 1896 *Plessy v. Ferguson* decision. With support from Jewish and liberal organizations, the NAACP began to challenge the practice of racial segregation in the schools.

In 1950, a national conference of NAACP lawyers decided to wage an all-out assault on segregated education in the South. The five lawsuits filed in federal courts between 1950 and 1952 culminated in the landmark *Brown v. the Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas* decisions in 1954 and 1955 overturning de jure segregation and the notion of “separate but equal” education in the South. In his opinion written for a unanimous Court, Chief Justice Earl Warren asked the central question posed by the challenge to *Plessy*: “Does segregation of children in public schools solely on the basis of race, even though the physical facilities and other tangible factors may be equal, deprive children of the minority group of equal educational opportunities?” Drawing on sociological evidence and reasoning about the fundamental importance of public education in modern society, the Court answered its question unanimously, “We believe it does.”

The response to the Court's momentous pronouncement was palpable. Northern liberals were effusive in their praise. A *Washington Post* editorial anticipated that the ruling would have a “wonderfully tonic effect” in ridding the

United States of an embarrassing “incubus” and engendering a “renewal of faith in democratic institutions and ideals.” Southern whites, however, denounced the ruling as a “mere scrap of paper,” in Georgia Governor Herbert Talmadge’s phrase, and warned it would “mark the beginning of the end of civilization in the South as we have known it,” as South Carolina Governor James F. Byrnes put it. Between 1954 and 1959, whites attacked southern NAACP chapters, states contrived to impose bans on NAACP membership, and “Impeach Earl Warren” billboards began to appear along America’s highways.

Despite the forceful language of *Brown*, the Court’s follow-up implementation order in 1955 called for states to move ahead on school desegregation “with all deliberate speed,” ambiguous phrasing that reportedly reflected Warren’s concession to Justice Reed so the Court’s decision could be unanimous. It was not clear what the impact of *Brown* would be in its highly politicized wake.

Perhaps the most far-reaching effect of the Court’s decision was its impact on Southern blacks. Most were justifiably skeptical of the “paper guarantees” of the American Constitution, yet many also recognized that the *Brown* decision provided them with an institutional ally in the federal government and legitimized their cause in the national arena. The ruling generated a sense that the American political system *might* respond to their petition for an end to segregation and centuries of oppression. This ray of hope became a crucial ingredient in mobilizing popular participation at the local level in the South.

In 1955, a young black teenager, Emmett Till, was brutally killed in Money, Mississippi. A native of Chicago, Till was visiting relatives and, innocent of the norms of Jim Crow and acting on a dare, “talked fresh” to a white store clerk, saying “Bye, Baby” as he left the store. His murder and the subsequent acquittal of his killers were highly publicized in the national black press, providing fresh fuel for efforts to confront racial oppression in the South.

The spark, though, that ignited the movement toward direct action in the South was the nationally visible Montgomery Bus Boycott. The immediate catalyst for the boycott occurred on December 1, 1955, when a local NAACP Youth Council adviser, Rosa Parks, refused to surrender her seat on a city bus to a white man. When he heard of Parks’s arrest, E. D. Nixon, head of the local branch of A. Philip Randolph’s Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters, reasoned that it could be the catalyst that would break down Montgomery’s segregated bus system. Meanwhile, the Women’s Political Council organized a one-day boycott of the city’s buses; with the assistance of her students, council President Jo Ann Robinson distributed 35,000 fliers announcing the boycott.

Local groups coalesced under an umbrella organization called the Montgomery Improvement Association (MIA) and met in Reverend Ralph Abernathy’s First Baptist Church. The MIA responded to the brilliantly successful one-day action by organizing a sustained, community-wide boycott of Montgomery buses and filing a complaint against the city in federal court. They selected the twenty-six-year old preacher Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. as their president, in part because, as a local newcomer, he was not saddled with oblig-

ations to the white community. King’s powerful leadership and impressive speaking and organizational skills soon became apparent at the biweekly meeting of the boycott participants.

The Montgomery bus boycott was sustained with virtually 100 percent cooperation from the black community for thirteen months, despite sabotage efforts by white leaders and bomb attacks on the homes of King and Nixon. In addition to the economic pressure it imposed on the bus system, two factors were crucial to the boycott’s eventual success: the community-wide organizing that enabled black citizens to get to and from work, and the rousing mass meetings that sustained the spirits of boycott participants. Aided by those blacks who owned cars, along with a number of sympathetic white women who wanted to keep their maids and babysitters, the MIA organized an efficient transportation system. Meanwhile, every Monday and Thursday night, one of the local churches was filled to the rafters with gatherers singing hymns, spirituals, and freedom songs and responding enthusiastically to the oratory of Martin Luther King Jr., Ralph Abernathy, and other local preachers. The church meetings drew together blacks of all social classes and forged a sense of collective power. As Reverend Abernathy recalled later, “The fear that had shackled us across the years—all left suddenly when we were in that church together.” Martin Luther King’s blend of Gandhian principles of nonviolent resistance and Christian love convinced his audience that they were on the side of justice and inspired confidence that they would ultimately prevail.

The Montgomery boycott succeeded when the U.S. Supreme Court affirmed a lower court ruling outlawing segregation of the local buses. After December 21, 1956, when blacks in Montgomery boarded the local buses and sat in the front seats, it took whites awhile to adjust to integrated public transportation; in fact, the court decision was followed by an accelerated terror campaign by the Ku Klux Klan. Yet the boycott and its success stimulated

Rosa Parks Begins the Montgomery Bus Boycott, 1955

The next stop was the Empire Theater, and some whites got on. They filled up the white seats, and one man was left standing. The driver looked back and noticed the man standing. Then he looked back at us. He said, “Let me have those front seats,” because they were the front seats of the black section. Didn’t anybody move. We just sat right where we were, the four of us. Then he spoke a second time: “Y’all better make it light on yourselves and let me have those seats.”

The man in the window seat next to me stood up, and I moved to let him pass me, and then I looked across the aisle and saw the two women were also standing. I moved over to the window seat. I could not see how standing up was going to “make it light” for me. The more we gave in and complied, the worse they treated us.

Source: Rosa Parks with Jim Haskins, *Rosa Parks: My Story* (New York: Dial Books, 1992).

positive change. It inspired similar black actions in Birmingham and Mobile, Alabama, and Tallahassee, Florida. It also gave rise to the formation of a new organization, the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) with King at its head. Yet its most telling impact may have been local and personal. While the boycott's goals, an end to arbitrary racial segregation, were entirely compatible with American liberal ideology, the tactic of direct action energized a community-based notion of politics. From the perspective of boycott participants, the politics of desegregation were not something abstract and programmatic. They were concrete, deeply felt, and imbued with moral righteousness. The victory in Montgomery was as personally meaningful as anything could be. In Jo Ann Robinson's words, "We felt that we were somebody." A spark had been ignited, both locally and nationally.

THE PEAK CIVIL RIGHTS YEARS: 1960–1965

The years immediately following the Montgomery boycott saw a continuation of the turbulence initiated by *Brown*. National organizations like the NAACP, the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE), and the regionally based SCLC pursued various organizing strategies in the South, including voter education and registration and training young people in the discipline of nonviolence. Simultaneously, the white backlash continued unabated. School desegregation efforts burst into national visibility when the Eisenhower administration was forced to dispatch federal troops to Little Rock, Arkansas, in 1957 to protect nine youngsters from hysterical racist mobs seeking to prevent the integration of Central High School. Although little tangible change occurred in the system of southern segregation between 1956 and 1960, the momentum for change was building, and the nation as a whole was becoming more aware of conditions in the South.

In 1960, the Civil Rights movement experienced a new surge of energy when a generation of young people of college age entered the fray. The students had been exposed at a formative age to the awakening racial consciousness through church youth groups, campus YM/YWCAs, and local NAACP Youth Councils, as well as the increasingly visible leadership of Martin Luther King Jr. and his cohorts in the SCLC. Although isolated sit-ins had occurred in the late 1950s, it wasn't until 1960 that student sit-ins catapulted into public awareness.

Two students in Nashville, Tennessee, Diane Nash and John Lewis, had been attending nonviolence workshops taught by the Fellowship of Reconciliation's James Lawson, and with several others, they organized the Nashville Student Movement and planned to begin a nonviolent campaign to end segregation in Nashville. However, the first student sit-in occurred in Greensboro, North Carolina, on February 1, 1960, when four students at North Carolina Agricultural and Technical College—Ezell Blair Jr., Franklin McCain, Joe McNeil, and David Richmond—sat down at the Woolworth's

lunch counter in Greensboro in a direct challenge to southern ordinances prohibiting whites and blacks from eating together in public places. All four had been members of the NAACP Youth Council and had spent much of the previous evening discussing what could be done to break down segregation.

With the aid of national news coverage and the network of SCLC movement centers, the effect of the sit-in was immediate and electric. The original four protesters in Greensboro were joined the next day by hundreds of students from nearby colleges. One week later, the sit-ins had spread to neighboring Winston-Salem and Durham. Through the organizing efforts of the NAACP and CORE, movement activists were contacted throughout North Carolina, South Carolina, and Virginia. By the end of February, sit-ins had spread throughout these states. By the end of March, they had spread to about seventy southern locales, including the deep South cities of Birmingham, Montgomery, Baton Rouge, New Orleans, Tallahassee, and Savannah. National chains like Woolworth's found themselves targeted by picket lines in northern cities such as Boston and New York as well.

In Nashville, while local business leaders railed against "outside agitators" stirring up "our Negroes," young whites attacked the students sitting at the lunch counter. When police intervened, however, they arrested the nonviolent activists, not their attackers, for "disorderly conduct." Following futile efforts to argue their case in courts, the Nashville movement expanded its focus and virtually the entire black community joined in a boycott of downtown stores as the sit-ins continued. Eventually, after a bomb destroyed the home of the black attorney defending the students, Nashville Mayor Ben West conceded that it was not morally right for local merchants to sell goods to black customers yet deny them lunch counter service. In the aftermath of his words, the merchants proceeded with integration, knowing they could shift the responsibility to West.

The sit-ins marked the emergence into the Civil Rights movement of a new, younger generation of activists who tended to be more spontaneous, less cautious, and ultimately more committed to a participatory style of organizing. Compared to community-wide boycotts, sit-ins were a more assertive form of "putting your body on the line," requiring a greater commitment to action on the part of their participants. Caught up in the spirit of collective action and casting aside personal fears, many of the young activists experienced profound levels of personal liberation and empowerment. In fact, with the rapid spread of the sit-ins, people began speaking of "the Movement," as if they were aware they were participating in something profoundly historic.

Members of the more established groups like the SCLC, CORE, and the NAACP provided crucial support for the students, especially as they were assaulted by whites and incarcerated in southern jails. And Martin Luther King Jr.'s teachings on nonviolence and Jim Lawson's training were enormously influential in shaping the young activists's predisposition. At the same time, the civil rights groups, particularly the SCLC, also evolved toward increasingly

aggressive, nonviolent direct action campaigns aimed at eliciting strong civil rights enforcement by the federal government. These were to prove crucial in gaining passage of landmark civil rights legislation.

The nascent youth movement quickly reached a crossroads in April, 1960, when Ella Baker, the executive director of the SCLC, helped organize a meeting of SCLC and other civil rights leaders with students from the sit-in campaign. Both Martin Luther King Jr. and Jim Lawson urged the students to mobilize a nonviolent project to spread the “freedom struggle” across the South. Faced with SCLC’s hope that they would stay “in the flock” as a youth arm of the SCLC or the NAACP, the students chose, with Baker’s support, to remain independent and formed the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC, or “Snick”).

From 1960 to 1965, SNCC grew from a loosely organized network to an alliance of black and white field activists committed to mobilizing poor blacks in the deep South, what Vincent Harding called the “shock troops of the nonviolent movement.” It was from the ranks of SNCC that the first cry of “black power” was raised in 1966. Direct confrontation with the most vicious white racism, community organizing among poor rural blacks, growing impatience with delay and an uncooperative federal government, a sense of moral righteousness, and a grass-roots lifestyle—all were the trademarks of SNCC at its peak. SNCC was the only civil rights group that, in effect, “gave up” on the federal government because of its inaction in protecting civil rights workers in the line of fire. Also, SNCC’s emphasis on the psychological and community foundations of empowerment helped to push it toward disassociation from white activists. As SNCC migrated toward grass-roots organizing in the deep South, a civil rights agenda gradually began to emerge in national politics.

One factor that contributed to the growing national visibility of civil rights was the presidential candidacy of John F. Kennedy. As a candidate and later as president, Kennedy was drawn to foreign policy, leaving his brother Robert as the administration’s chief law enforcement officer in charge of civil rights. As a cautious pragmatist, Kennedy was also extremely wary of jeopardizing the Democratic Party’s strong base of electoral votes in the South. However, at numerous points, Kennedy’s path intersected that of the Civil Rights movement. During 1960, he met with Martin Luther King Jr. and expressed his belief that action was needed to ensure voting rights. In the course of his campaign, he criticized the Eisenhower administration for inaction on housing segregation and pledged that he would end public legal housing discrimination “with the stroke of a pen,” a promise he never quite fulfilled.

Civil rights leaders tended to view John Kennedy as detached, reflecting the distance between his affluent northern background and their struggles in the southern battlefield. At the same time, King was impressed by the young candidate’s “forthright and honest manner,” and Kennedy’s phone call to Coretta Scott King while her husband was jailed (and Robert Kennedy’s intercession with the judge for King’s release) carried political risks that were appreciated

by civil rights activists. More significantly, it was instrumental in swinging the black vote heavily toward Kennedy, thereby helping to ensure his narrow election over Richard Nixon in the 1960 presidential election. However, it remained to civil rights activists to force the civil rights question onto the president’s agenda. The first crucial catalyst was provided by the Freedom Rides, organized by CORE and ultimately sustained by SNCC.

THE FREEDOM RIDES

Exactly one year after the first Greensboro sit-in, James Farmer was named the new national director of CORE. In its past, CORE had concentrated on advancing civil rights outside the deep South. However, reflecting a 1947 “Journey of Reconciliation” organized by longtime civil rights advocate Bayard Rustin, Farmer hatched the idea for the Freedom Rides to confront segregation in interstate bus facilities throughout the South, from Washington, D.C., to New Orleans. Farmer intended to “create a crisis” that would require federal intervention. He reasoned accurately that the integrated bus riders would provoke a reaction from white segregationists, thereby drawing northern (and governmental) attention to the harshness of southern segregation.

On May 4, 1961, a biracial group of thirteen embarked from Washington, D.C., and traveled through Virginia, the Carolinas, and Georgia, encountering relatively mild reactions along the way. However, when the two buses left Georgia, heading toward Birmingham, they encountered mob violence in the town of Anniston, Alabama. One bus was attacked as it pulled into the depot. A mob of thirty to forty whites shattered windows, hammered the body of the bus with chains and iron bars, and dragged Freedom Riders from inside the bus and beat them. After police finally rescued the riders and escorted the bus out of town, the attackers followed in their cars. The bus was forced to stop when a tire blew out, and the mob resumed its attack, shattering more windows and throwing a firebomb into the bus. Passengers were beaten as they fled the burning vehicle. The second bus was also stopped and riders were forced to the rear of the bus. Those who refused were beaten; one suffered permanent brain injuries. Although the FBI was tipped off that there would be trouble in Birmingham, no police were visible when the second bus pulled into the depot. The riders were once again attacked by a vicious mob when they disembarked; one rider, William Barbee, was paralyzed for life. Photos of the firebombed bus were carried on the front pages of the nation’s newspapers.

When the Greyhound bus company refused to carry the Freedom Riders further, several of the original riders gave up and “completed” their journey by flying to New Orleans. However, SNCC activists felt it was critical that the rides be continued, and Nashville SNCC coordinator Diane Nash organized a group, including ten students, who traveled to Birmingham to complete CORE’s itinerary.

The Freedom Rides succeeded in creating a crisis. The Kennedy adminis-

tration began a series of negotiations with the bus company and Alabama Governor John Patterson. Robert Kennedy sought protection for the Freedom Riders (simultaneously urging them to consider a "cooling off" period), while Patterson denounced federal intervention in support of "rabble-rousers and outside agitators." Through the direct intervention of Kennedy aide John Siegenthaler, it appeared that the bus would have safe passage en route to Montgomery. In fact, police cars and helicopters escorted the bus from Birmingham to the outskirts of Montgomery, where local police were supposed to take over. However, once again, no police presence was visible as the bus arrived at the depot, and once again a hysterical mob attacked the riders. This time, as the crisis in Montgomery intensified, Kennedy sent six hundred federal marshals to the Montgomery area as protection. With an angry mob threatening the marshals and a mass meeting convening at Reverend Ralph Abernathy's church, Governor Patterson was finally forced to declare martial law and mobilize the state police and Alabama National Guard to disperse the crowd.

Subsequently, the Freedom Riders were escorted to the Mississippi border and then, with a Mississippi National Guard escort, proceeded to Jackson. Behind the scenes, Attorney General Robert Kennedy had extracted a promise of no violence against the Freedom Riders from Mississippi officials. In exchange, he agreed he would not enforce federal laws requiring integrated bus terminal facilities. Thus, when they disembarked in Jackson, the Freedom Riders were simply herded through the terminal and into police wagons and thence to jail. Subsequently, they were all found guilty of trespassing by the district judge and sentenced to sixty days in the state's maximum security penitentiary at Parchman.

Freedom Rider Hank Thomas on the Freedom Rides, 1961

The Freedom Ride didn't really get rough until we got down in the Deep South. Needless to say, Anniston, Alabama, I'm never gonna forget that, when I was on the bus that they threw some kind of incendiary device on...

It wasn't until the thing was shot on the bus and the bus caught afire that everything got out of control, and... when the bus was burning, I figured... [pauses]... panic did get ahold of me. Needless to say, I couldn't survive that burning bus. There was a possibility I could have survived the mob, but I was just so afraid of the mob that I was gonna stay on that bus. I mean, I just got that much afraid. And when we got off the bus... first they closed the doors and wouldn't let us off. But then I'm pretty sure they realized, that somebody said, "Hey, the bus is gonna explode," because it had just gassed up, and so they started scattering then, and I guess that's the way we got off the bus.

Source: "Freedom Riders," from Howell Raines's *My Soul Is Rested: Movement in the Deep South Remembered* (New York: G. Putnam and Sons, 1977), pp. 113-14.

During the summer, however, more than three hundred additional Freedom Riders traveled through the deep South, trying to force the integration of all interstate transportation facilities. Eventually, at the attorney general's urging, the Interstate Commerce Commission adopted explicit regulations requiring the desegregation of bus terminals. In the interim, Kennedy felt the direct action campaign had forced the administration into the politically untenable position of choosing between the civil rights activists and the Democratic Party's southern base. As an alternative, he began urging civil rights groups to shift their energies to voter registration drives, reasoning that a political voice within local politics would give southern blacks leverage against resistant local officials. Despite their skepticism toward what looked like a self-serving administration effort to deflect growing civil rights momentum, some civil rights leaders began to see voter registration as a potentially effective path of empowering southern blacks. For SNCC, voter registration was a natural focal point for its participatory approach to community organizing, while SCLC leaders saw the potential national appeal of black citizens seeking their voting rights. Many were relieved that the violent confrontations seemed over. However, the path to voter registration would prove at least as dangerous and violent as the direct action campaigns.

The Freedom Rides propelled the struggle for civil rights to the center of the nation's political agenda. While the Kennedy administration may have preferred a quieter process of gradual black voter registration in the South, this was not to be the case. In fact, while the Freedom Rides were occurring, and while SNCC's Bob Moses joined with others to begin a voter registration campaign in McComb, Mississippi, the NAACP's Mississippi field director, Medgar Evers, was helping a black veteran by the name of James Meredith apply to the University of Mississippi. Later, after the university rejected Meredith, a federal court ruling ordered the decision reversed. In response,

Robert Moses on Community Organization in Mississippi, 1961-62

I accompanied about three people down to Liberty in Amite County to begin our first registration attempt there. One was a very old man, and then two ladies, middle-aged. We left early morning of August 15, it was a Tuesday, we arrived at the courthouse at about 10 o'clock...

The first person who filled out the form took a long time to do it and it was noontime before he was finished. When we came back, I was not permitted to sit in the office, but was told to sit on the front porch, which I did. We finally finished the whole process at about 4:30; all of the three people had had a chance to register, at least to fill out the form. This was victory, because they had been down a few times before and had not had a chance to even fill out the forms.

Source: Bob Moses, "Mississippi: 1961-1962," *Liberation*, 14 (January 1970).

Mississippi Governor Ross Barnett denounced the court order and called upon white Mississippians to defend white supremacy in the South. Stirred up by Barnett's words, white youths rioted on the "Ole Miss" campus, eventually forcing the Kennedy administration to send army troops to bring the crowd under control—although not until two men, a French reporter and a bystander, were killed in the melee. Meredith subsequently attended the university.

THE ALBANY MOVEMENT, BIRMINGHAM, AND THE MARCH ON WASHINGTON

The violence in Oxford, Mississippi, not only heightened public awareness throughout the nation (it was the subject of the Bob Dylan song, "Oxford Town") but also it was a significant civil rights victory that again placed the Kennedy administration on the side of civil rights enforcement. In 1961, SNCC volunteers began to spread out throughout the deep South in their drive to register and organize black voters. Two veterans of the Freedom Rides, Charles Sherrod and Cordell Reagon, arrived in Albany, Georgia, to open a SNCC office. Their objective was to live and work among the "common people" of Albany, to organize a community-wide movement to confront segregation and register black voters. With the help of students from Albany State College, a sit-in at the "white" bus terminal galvanized the support of the entire black community, leading to the formation of an umbrella organization called the "Albany movement," with Reverend William Anderson as its president. In the wake of student arrests, a mass meeting at the Mount Zion Baptist Church generated a sense of collective strength through song, prayer, and inspirational speech.

Mass arrests and jailings followed. Unknown to SNCC, Police Chief Laurie Pritchett had studied the nonviolent tactics of Gandhi and Martin Luther King Jr. and had determined to avoid the provocative violence exhibited elsewhere. Pritchett planned to defuse quickly the community mobilization by rapidly and nonbrutally arresting the protesters and transporting them to vacant jail space throughout the surrounding countryside. With vast numbers stuffed into overcrowded jails, Pritchett's arrests began to take the steam out of the movement, especially since the absence of police brutality helped to keep the Kennedy administration at bay. The arrival of Martin Luther King Jr. posed the momentary threat of national media exposure, especially when King and Ralph Abernathy were also arrested. However, the white segregationists checked King's tactic by secretly arranging to bail him out of jail and then obtaining a federal court restraining order against further "unlawful" protest. King was unwilling to flout the order of a crucial civil rights ally, the federal courts, and thus was rendered politically impotent. The city held out until the energy and enthusiasm of the movement waned. SNCC worker Bill Hansen observed, "We ran out of people before [Chief Pritchett] ran out of jails."

The Albany movement ignited protracted local activism that continued for years, but it failed to create a spark that would advance the civil rights agenda nationally. It also represented a low point in the personal prestige of Martin Luther King as the movement's most visible and inspiring leader. However, circumstances changed when, learning from its Albany experience, the SCLC leadership decided to locate its next direct action campaign in Birmingham, Alabama. Not only did Birmingham have a long history of racist violence, including the vicious attack on the Freedom Riders two years before, but the SCLC had a strong organizational presence led by the fiery Reverend Fred Shuttlesworth. Birmingham had also recently experienced a division between business leaders seeking a new mayor/council form of government and the forces who led the attack on the Freedom Riders, including Commissioner of Public Safety Eugene "Bull" Connor. Amid confusion over which duly elected government was legitimate, the SCLC campaign came to town.

The Birmingham movement sought the complete elimination of local segregation, starting with the integration of downtown lunch counters, and encompassing public facilities, parks, and playgrounds; the establishment of fair hiring procedures in all retail stores; and the creation of a biracial commission and timetable for desegregating the city schools. SCLC leaders developed a three-stage strategy aimed at splitting the white economic elite from political officials and the racist white "rednecks." The first stage involved a boycott of downtown stores, the second revolved around mass marches on City Hall, and the third so-called "project" for confrontation involved students of all ages getting arrested and going to jail in massive numbers.

Phase one began slowly, although arrests were a catalyst for massive turnout at nightly meetings in the city's churches. As was the case in other locales, the church meetings were full of inspiring oratory and rousing singing, and the growing sense of collective confidence and determination. Yet, sensing that the white businesses were not likely to respond without additional pressure, the SCLC leaders gave the green light to phase two, the mass marches. As arrests mounted and the jails began to fill, the boycott gained momentum. Martin Luther King Jr. and Ralph Abernathy led a march in violation of a court injunction obtained by Bull Connor, and both were arrested. In a full-page ad in the *Birmingham News*, eight white clergy labeled King's actions "unwise and untimely." While in jail, King penned his distinguished defense of civil disobedience, later published "Letter from a Birmingham Jail." "We know from painful experience that freedom is never voluntarily given by the oppressor," King wrote, "it must be demanded by the oppressed. Frankly, I have yet to engage in a direct-action campaign that was 'well timed' in the view of those who have not suffered unduly from the disease of segregation. For years now I have heard the word 'Wait!' It rings in the ear of every Negro with piercing familiarity. This 'Wait' has almost always meant 'Never.'"

The demonstrations began to lose their steam as King's time in jail dragged on. Finally, King and Abernathy were released on bail and met with other

SCLC leaders to plan "Project C" using black children. After viewing *The Nashville Story*, a film about the student sit-in movement, the children gathered in the Sixteenth Baptist Church to hear Reverend King tell them they were fighting for their parents and the future of America. They proceeded toward downtown where they were met by police who began to arrest them. Still singing and marching in large numbers, the children were soon herded into school buses and dispatched to jail. More than nine hundred were arrested on the first day.

On the second day of Project C, as more than one thousand children stayed out of school, Bull Connor sought to thwart the march by calling out the city's police dogs and firefighters. While dogs attacked several demonstrators, the fire hoses, which packed more than 100 pounds of pressure per square inch, were trained on the youngsters, knocking many off their feet. The attack so enraged the entire black community that it united behind SCLC's campaign. Some blacks were so furious that it took James Bevel, a veteran of the Nashville sit-ins and mastermind of Project C, to quiet them and avoid a riot.

Meanwhile, television, newspaper, and news magazine pictures of the fire hose and police dog attacks carried the Birmingham story across the country and throughout much of the world. The public and the president were shocked. While the SCLC and local business leaders sought to hammer out a desegregation agreement through the mediation of the Justice Department's Burke Marshall, a bomb exploded at King's headquarters at the Gaston Hotel. In response, an angry black mob rampaged through the streets. At his brother's urging, President Kennedy dispatched federal troops to the outskirts of Birmingham and affirmed his determination to preserve order and "uphold the law of the land." Peace was restored. After the Alabama Supreme Court officially recognized the new city government, it, in turn, affirmed the settlement negotiated between business leaders and the SCLC.

In the immediate aftermath of the Birmingham movement, Alabama Governor George Wallace boldly squared off against Deputy U.S. Attorney General Nicholas Katzenbach in a doorway of the University of Alabama. Wallace was defying the court-ordered desegregation of the university. After denouncing the unconstitutionality of the federal court order, Wallace stepped aside and the two black students were allowed to register. The next night, President Kennedy went on national television to call for passage of historic civil rights legislation he was introducing in Congress, the most far-reaching of any since Reconstruction. His words had a new tone of moral urgency: "We are confronted primarily with a moral issue. . . . The heart of the question is whether all Americans are going to be afforded equal rights and equal opportunities; whether we are going to treat our fellow Americans as we want to be treated." Kennedy's bill banned segregation in all interstate public accommodations and enabled the U.S. attorney general to initiate lawsuits to integrate local schools and cut off federal funds to any programs that practiced discrimination.

"I Have a Dream"

I say to you today, my friends, that in spite of the difficulties and frustrations of the moment, I still have a dream. It is a dream deeply rooted in the American dream.

I have a dream that one day this nation will rise up and live out the true meaning of its creed: "We hold these truths to be self-evident: that all men are created equal."

I have a dream that one day on the red hills of Georgia the sons of former slaves and the sons of former slaveowners will be able to sit down together at a table of brotherhood.

I have a dream that one day even the state of Mississippi, a desert state, sweltering with the heat of injustice and oppression, will be transformed into an oasis of freedom and justice.

I have a dream that my four children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character.

I have a dream today.

I have a dream that one day the state of Alabama, whose governor's lips are presently dripping with the words of interposition and nullification, will be transformed into a situation where little black boys and black girls will be able to join hands with little white boys and white girls and walk together as sisters and brothers.

I have a dream today.

I have a dream that one day every valley shall be exalted, every hill and mountain shall be made low, the rough places will be made plain, and the crooked places will be made straight, and the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together.

This is our hope. This is the faith with which I return to the South. With this faith we will be able to hew out of the mountain of despair a stone of hope. With this faith we will be able to transform the jangling discords of our nation into a beautiful symphony of brotherhood. With this faith we will be able to work together, to pray together, to struggle together, to go to jail together, to stand up for freedom together, knowing that we will be free one day.

This will be the day when all of God's children will be able to sing with a new meaning, "My country, 'tis of thee, sweet land of liberty, of thee I sing. Land where my fathers died, land of the pilgrim's pride, from every mountainside, let freedom ring."

And if America is to be a great nation this must become true. So let freedom ring from the prodigious hilltops of New Hampshire. Let freedom ring from the mighty mountains of New York. Let freedom ring from the heightening Alleghenies of Pennsylvania!

Let freedom ring from the snowcapped Rockies of Colorado!

Let freedom ring from the curvaceous peaks of California!

But not only that; let freedom ring from Stone Mountain of Georgia!

Let freedom ring from Lookout Mountain of Tennessee!

Let freedom ring from every hill and every molehill of Mississippi. From every mountainside, let freedom ring.

When we let freedom ring, when we let it ring from every village and every hamlet, from every state and every city, we will be able to speed up that day when all of God's children, black men and white men, Jews and Gentiles, Protestants and Catholics, will be able to join hands and sing in the words of the old Negro spiritual, "Free at last! free at last! thank God Almighty, we are free at last!"

Source: Delivered on August 28, 1963, by Martin Luther King Jr. during the March on Washington.

Leaders from the SCLC, CORE, the NAACP, SNCC, and their allies sought to mobilize public pressure for passage of the civil rights bill by organizing a mass march and rally in Washington, D.C. Inspired by A. Philip Randolph's plan for a 1941 fair-employment march, the 1963 march was not at first universally favored by all civil rights leaders. The NAACP's Roy Wilkins and Whitney Young of the Urban League were initially fearful that the march might spawn violence; John Lewis of SNCC and James Farmer of CORE felt the march was a rather docile tactic. However, through the organizing efforts of Randolph, the movement's elder statesman, and Bayard Rustin, the march organizer, the civil rights leaders rallied around a march focusing on passage of the civil rights bill, fair employment, job training, and public school integration.

Concerned that the march might undermine tenuous congressional support for his legislation, President Kennedy initially tried to discourage Randolph and Rustin from moving ahead with their plans. Convinced that the march was going to occur anyway and that it would be peaceful, Kennedy endorsed the "peaceful assembly for the redress of grievances." For its part, SNCC was becoming increasingly skeptical of administration sympathies for the civil rights cause, given the lack of federal attention to SNCC's grass-roots campaign in the deep South. Initially, John Lewis had planned a militant speech for the march, but after the intervention of Randolph himself, he agreed to tone down parts of his speech.

The march on August 28 exceeded even the most optimistic expectations of civil rights leaders. Internal divisions faded from view as more than a quarter of a million people, some 60,000 of them white, descended on Washington via "freedom buses" and "freedom trains" from all over the nation and marched to the rally that spread from the steps of the Lincoln Memorial around the reflecting pool to the Washington Monument. The mass of people listened to gospel and folk music performed by Odetta, Mahalia Jackson, Josh White, Joan Baez, Bob Dylan, and Peter, Paul & Mary; they sang and swayed to the movement anthem, "We Shall Overcome." They were repeatedly aroused to cheers and acclamation by inspiring oratory from A. Philip Randolph, John Lewis, and other leaders, but especially by Martin Luther King Jr.'s "I Have a Dream" speech. Randolph described the march as "the advance guard of a massive moral revolution for jobs and freedom," while King's cadence of "I Have a Dream" and "Let Freedom Ring" rang out over the crowd and television airwaves, powerfully stirring those who heard it. The march was unprecedented spectacle that brought a glimpse of civil justice to millions of Americans.

Nonetheless, civil rights advocates were brought back to harsh reality just eighteen days after the march when a bomb exploded in the Sixteenth Street Baptist Church in Birmingham, killing four children who were attending Sunday school. Once again, white violence had struck, and once again, in the towns and cities of the South, in churches and synagogues in the North, and at a benefit concert at Carnegie Hall, the movement summoned its determi-

nation to move ahead. The young president never saw his civil rights bill passed into law as he, too, was struck down by an assassin's bullet less than three months later. It remained for Lyndon Johnson, the nation's first southern president since Reconstruction, to bring historic civil rights legislation to fruition.

MISSISSIPPI AND THE ROAD TO BLACK POWER

From its origins in 1960, SNCC was drawn to grass-roots organizing among local communities in the deep South, with a particular emphasis on voter education and registration. The tactic was classic community organizing: live and work among the local "common people"; provide organizing skills, political education, and the inspiration of courageous personal action; gain the people's trust by respecting their political voice—all with the aim of enabling the people to become a political force in their own right. The courage of SNCC field-workers was matched by the courage of individual poor blacks who rose to the challenge and often risked death in the struggle for their liberation.

For most of its early years, SNCC's political style was the embodiment of the "participatory democracy" ideal that was articulated in the founding *Port Huron Statement* of the other major student group organized in the early 1960s, the Students for a Democratic Society (SDS). In effect, SNCC was simultaneously trying to transform areas of the South—to bring democracy to the South—and to discover and create a more democratic mode of living among SNCC staffers themselves. The early SNCC experience, like that of SDS, was enormously energizing, creative, intimate, and demanding. The fact that black and white students struggled together to break down barriers meant that the SNCC experience was charged with the energy of liberation—what SNCC workers described as a "freedom high." Indeed, SNCC was such a natural draw for college students that several dropped out of college to become full-time SNCC staffers. It was also no coincidence that one of the first expressions of what later became the women's liberation movement emanated from women in SNCC.

It was also no coincidence also that SNCC workers were drawn to the areas where racial oppression was most pronounced—rural parts of Georgia, Lowndes County of Alabama, and the state of Mississippi, known for its virulent "Mississippi justice." With the highest percentage of blacks (45 percent) of any state in the nation, Mississippi also had the most racial lynchings, assaults, and "disappearances." It also had the lowest percentage of registered black voters and was the poorest state in the nation. Several NAACP leaders in Mississippi were killed during the postwar civil rights years, among them George Lee, Gus Courts, and Medgar Evers.

A twenty-six year-old-schoolteacher from New York named Robert Moses had been drawn to the South after seeing a photograph of the Greensboro sit-ins. Traveling through the deep South for SNCC in 1960, Moses met Amzie

Moore, a Mississippi NAACP leader who encouraged Moses to bring SNCC workers to Mississippi. The following summer, Moses brought the SNCC campaign to McComb, located in the impoverished Mississippi Delta. Together with members of the NAACP voter registration campaign, the SNCC workers began to provide weekly voter education classes, traveling door-to-door in the effort to persuade black residents to take Mississippi's registration test. SNCC also trained local teenagers in nonviolent direct action techniques, and a handful held sit-ins at the local Woolworth's lunch counter. Local enthusiasm for the voter project grew, as did the number of SNCC field-workers.

However, white resistance also heated up. Bob Moses was arrested while accompanying three local residents to the registrar's office and later beaten up by the local sheriff's cousin. NAACP worker Herbert Lee was murdered. Arrests mounted. In a pattern that was to repeat itself over the next several years, SNCC appealed to the Justice Department for protection but was rebuffed.

Nonetheless, the voter registration movement grew and spread through Mississippi. In 1962, the diverse civil rights groups combined their forces to form an umbrella organization called the Council of Federated Organizations (COFO) to coordinate the statewide voter registration drive. Under the direction of Bob Moses, and aided by white students recruited from Yale and Stanford Universities, COFO launched its "Freedom Vote" campaign in 1963, designed as an open mock-election alternative to the state's closed gubernatorial election. White violence continued. On the night in June that President Kennedy announced his civil rights bill on national television, NAACP leader Medgar Evers was shot and killed outside his home. During the Freedom Vote campaign, the homes of black residents who registered to vote were shot up and firebombed, and a car carrying Bob Moses and two associates was bombarded by gunfire while driving on a state highway. Nonetheless, the Freedom Vote campaign was a success; 93,000 people "elected" Aaron Henry and Edwin King, the COFO nominees for governor and lieutenant governor.

The Deaths of Goodman, Chaney, and Schwerner— Mississippi Freedom Summer

Como, August 3

About three weeks ago there was a flying rumor that they had been found in a rural jail. Tonight it was said that three graves had been found near Philadelphia. How the ghosts of those three shadow all our work! "Did you know them?" I am constantly asked. Did I need to?

Source: Elizabeth Sutherland Martinez, *Letters from Mississippi* (New York: McGraw Hill, 1965).

In the aftermath of the Freedom Vote, COFO planned an even bigger voter registration drive for the following summer, aided by the recruitment of students from across the nation. This time "Freedom Summer," as it was called, aimed at registering black voters statewide for the 1964 elections, electing an open "Freedom Democratic Party" delegation that would challenge the whites-only regular Mississippi Democratic Party at the 1964 presidential convention, and establishing "freedom schools" to teach reading and math to black children who were neglected by the state's public schools. White politicians promised that they would be ready for the upcoming "invasion" and beefed up their police forces accordingly.

The Freedom Summer volunteers enrolled in an intensive weeklong training and orientation session in Oxford, Ohio. On the day after the first wave of volunteers left for Mississippi, three of them were reported missing while on the road investigating the burning of a black church. The ominous disappearance of Andrew Goodman, James Chaney, and Michael Schwerner—two of whom were white students from the North—aroused the attention of the national media and the Johnson administration. Federal personnel were dispatched to Mississippi to search for the missing men, who were later discovered (along with several other missing black Mississippians) to have been murdered. Despite casting a pall over the beginning of Freedom Summer, the disappearances heightened the determination of the student volunteers. Throughout the summer about one thousand volunteers engaged in door-to-door canvassing, taught in freedom schools, and provided legal and medical assistance in "freedom clinics." By the end of the summer, some eighty thousand black Mississippians had joined the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party (MFDP), along with a handful of whites.

When the bodies of Goodman, Chaney, and Schwerner were discovered just eighteen days before the start of the national Democratic Party convention, the national media again scrutinized the events in Mississippi, raising the stakes for the Johnson administration. With the support of northern liberals, the MFDP mobilized to challenge the regular state Democratic delegation at the August convention. At the tumultuous Credentials Committee hearing to determine the legitimacy of the MFDP's claims, the American public witnessed the stirring testimony of Fannie Lou Hamer, a Mississippi sharecropper. "Is this America?" she asked. "The land of the free and the home of the brave? Where we have to sleep with our telephones off the hook, because our lives be threatened daily?" Hamer's graphic account of Mississippi violence upstaged the president who preempted live television coverage by calling an impromptu press conference. The administration quickly offered a "compromise" plan that would seat Aaron Henry and Ed King as "at large" delegates along with the regular state delegation. Infuriated that they were being asked to "betray" their constituents back in Mississippi, the MFDP rejected the compromise. As SNCC's Charles Sherrod put it, "we want much more than token positions. . . . We want power for our people."

Although much of the MFDP worked for the reelection of President Johnson that fall, many in SNCC were alienated by the national Democratic Party's disinterested, detached stance, which compounded their sense of federal abandonment during Freedom Summer. The SNCC field-workers brought a profound moral commitment to their cause, a commitment that was reinforced by their sense of intense solidarity in standing together, by themselves, against racist violence in the deep South. As SNCC's James Forman recalled, "Bob Moses said we had to bring morality into politics. That's what's wrong with the country now. There is no morality in politics, otherwise we wouldn't be here."

While the MFDP challenge cracked opened a crucial door in Democratic Party politics, SNCC was moving in a different direction, more critical of the political system as a whole. Reflecting long-simmering tensions, one SNCC contingent, inspired by the quiet, egalitarian leadership of Robert Moses, held to their belief that SNCC should break free from traditional top-down, centralized politics; the other, including SNCC's James Forman, believed that political power for black people required more effective and centralized organization. The SNCC that continued its community organizing, notably in Alabama's Lowndes County, became essentially an all-black organization attuned to the independence struggles in Africa and influenced by the charismatic Malcolm X. Soon, the chant "Black Power" would emerge from its militant ranks.

Freedom Summer thus marked a major turning point in the southern Civil Rights movement. However, it was also an enormously significant formative experience for hundreds of white student volunteers who came south for the summer. Few had experienced conditions anything like what they observed in Mississippi, not only the Jim Crow discrimination that was readily visible but also the depth of rural sharecropper poverty, the brutal lawlessness of the white power structure, and perhaps most of all the degree of federal complicity in southern racial oppression. It was a stunning awakening that shook their political beliefs to their foundations.

At the same time, the Freedom Summer volunteers experienced the powerful liberating effect of working and struggling together in the "beloved community" of SNCC. Tensions between students who were free to return to their northern campuses and Mississippi fieldhands who would remain behind to continue their struggle, between whites and blacks, and between women and men lay just beneath the surface, only to erupt from time to time in long soul-searching community sessions. Yet many of the volunteers said years later that they found such a profound sense of community and idealistic moral action in their Freedom Summer experiences that they would continue to seek these for the rest of their lives. Indeed, quite a few returned to their college campuses in the fall of 1964 and began to question and challenge the hypocrisies of their college educations. As demonstrated by Berkeley's Free Speech Movement, the seeds of liberation sown during Freedom Summer

were soon to prosper on college campuses, especially as the war in Vietnam began to heat up.

SELMA, ALABAMA, AND THE VOTING RIGHTS ACT

Buoyed by passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, civil rights leaders turned their attention to voting rights. As Freedom Summer demonstrated, effective black voter registration across the South demanded federal enforcement. Working with liberal allies in Congress, the SCLC began to hatch plans to push for voting rights legislation. For their part, however, Johnson administration officials were advocating a breathing period to demonstrate publicly the impact of the new Civil Rights Act.

SCLC's Birmingham experience had demonstrated that nonviolent direct action was most effective when it stood in visible contrast with violent repression by racist forces in the South. Since Sheriff James Clark of Selma, Alabama, was known for his violent temper in dealing with blacks, Selma seemed like an opportune locale in which to focus a direct action campaign for voting rights. The SCLC campaign could also profit from two years of prior local organizing by SNCC in the Selma-Dallas County and Lowndes County to the South. In fact, while mobilizing the local black population, SNCC had been so brutally harassed by Clark that the federal government had intervened in court to restrain Clark's forces. Martin Luther King Jr.'s instinct that Selma would provide the needed catalyst for federal legislation was, indeed, accurate.

Thus, in 1965, following a direct action protest in St. Augustine, Florida, King and the SCLC brought their new campaign to Selma, where they once again joined forces with SNCC. The Selma campaign was the last large-scale civil rights effort involving both SCLC and SNCC, and it was the last major direct action campaign of the southern Civil Rights movement. The new Nobel Peace Prize winner announced plans to "march by the thousands" to the places of registration. With national attention focused on Selma, Mayor Joseph Smitherman, who was eager to bring new industry to the city, urged Sheriff Clark to avoid violence in handling civil rights protests. At first, he succeeded. A group led by King ate at a white-only restaurant and then marched to the courthouse without arrest. The next day, however, Clark forcefully pushed Selma activist Amelia Boynton away from the courthouse door, and his actions were caught by national news photographers.

With King out of town on speaking engagements, the marchers continued their activities. Black teachers risked disciplinary action by marching to the courthouse door where they, too, were halted by a nightstick-wielding Clark. A subsequent march produced arrests of some three hundred schoolchildren, along with Reverend King. Again, the news media carried photographs of mass arrests and of King kneeling in prayer before being arrested. A visiting congressional delegation issued a call for voting rights legislation at the federal

level. Following another attack by Clark's men—this time against C. T. Vivian of the SCLC—blacks marched in nearby Marion after an evening speech by Vivian. With the streetlights suddenly turned off, local and state police and angry whites attacked the marchers. One participant, Jimmie Lee Jackson, was followed into a nearby cafe and shot by police as he tried to defend his mother from a policeman's club. Jackson died a week later.

Following the Jackson shooting, SCLC announced it would take the protest to Montgomery to confront Governor George Wallace. The 50-mile march would begin in Selma, cross the Edmund Pettus Bridge and continue along Route 80 to Montgomery. Wallace announced that the state would not permit the march and put the state highway patrol on alert. While Johnson administration officials conferred with civil rights leaders over language for a new voting rights bill and Reverend King was delivering a sermon in Atlanta, the march began. About six hundred people, led by Hosea Williams of SCLC and SNCC chairman John Lewis, marched in pairs across the Edmund Pettus Bridge, where they were met by a phalanx of Alabama state troopers. The marchers were ordered to disperse in two minutes. The police then charged into the marchers, firing tear gas and swinging billy clubs at anyone they could reach. Police on horseback charged after the fleeing marchers, cracking heads with their billy clubs as they burst through the crowd. News and vivid accounts of "Bloody Sunday," as the event became known, spread instantly across the country. ABC interrupted its broadcast of the movie *Judgment at Nuremberg* with a news flash of the police attack.

Two days later, King led a second march across the bridge, and again state police blocked the path. This time, the marchers were temporarily enjoined by the federal court from marching; so, after being led in prayer by Reverend Abernathy, King turned the marchers around, much to the consternation of many participants. Later an angry white mob attacked and beat three ministers leaving a black restaurant; one of these, James Reeb, a white thirty-two-year-old Unitarian from Boston, died from a blow on the head.

A national outcry followed. White Americans denounced the violence and wrote members of Congress urging federal action. Congressional leaders demanded progress on voting rights legislation. SNCC leaders were embittered by the contrast between the vehement national response to Reeb's death and the lack of response to Jimmie Lee Jackson's death. The situation in Selma remained tense. President Johnson pressured Governor Wallace to help protect the marchers and then went on national television to announce his voting rights legislation, concluding with the movement's own theme. "Their cause must be our cause, too," Johnson urged. "Because it's not just Negroes, but it's really all of us who must overcome the crippling legacy of bigotry and injustice. And, we *shall* overcome."

At a tense church rally the next night, it was announced that federal Judge Frank Johnson had issued an injunction protecting the march to Montgomery from obstruction by state officials. Bolstered by a fresh wave of volunteers

arriving from all over the nation, and protected by the federalized National Guard and U.S. army troops, the march proceeded to cover the 50 miles to Montgomery without any violence. Ten years after the culmination of the Montgomery bus boycott, some 25,000 marchers celebrated their arrival in the capitol city with an inspiring rally. Afterward, a white homemaker from Detroit, Viola Liuzzo, was killed by white gunmen while helping to transport people home from the rally.

The Selma march achieved precisely what King had hoped it would: swift passage of strong voting rights legislation. The SCLC had applied its Birmingham lesson in practicing effective protest politics. In effect, the national audience was moved to action by the picture of African Americans marching for the fundamental constitutional right to vote. The universality and dignity of their cause stood in stark contrast to the brutal attacks by Alabama state troopers and redneck racists. President Johnson signed the Voting Rights Act into law in early August 1965. By the following summer, some nine thousand blacks had registered in Dallas County, leading to the subsequent electoral defeat of Sheriff Jim Clark. In the aftermath of the Voting Rights Act, southern blacks in large numbers registered and voted and began to win election to public office. The face of the old South began to change.

BLACK POWER AND THE NORTHERN MOVEMENT

In just more than ten years, the Civil Rights movement had accomplished its most pressing objectives: passage of civil rights and voting rights legislation. Through direct action, voter registration, and eventual federal intervention and enforcement, the courageous actions of thousands of civil rights participants had begun to eradicate Jim Crow oppression throughout the South.

As remarkable as this achievement was, however, it only succeeded in removing the more blatant forms of racism and racial oppression from American life. Its very success—and the violent response it sometimes aroused—inspired a broader struggle against forces that overlapped with race in depriving millions of Americans of full membership in the larger social order. Absent the more overt Jim Crow racism, millions of African Americans were effectively trapped in the inner-city ghettos of the North—suffering from woefully inadequate schools and crowded, substandard housing; high unemployment rates and little opportunity for meaningful employment; drug trafficking and high levels of criminal activity; and an often oppressive police presence.

These conditions, of course, predated the Civil Rights movement and were exacerbated by the migration of tens of thousands of African Americans in the immediate pre- and postwar years. Civil rights leaders were conscious of the need to address the more intractable conditions and institutional (rather than overt) racism of the northern cities. Martin Luther King Jr. led the SCLC into Chicago in 1966 in an unsuccessful effort to force the federal government to act on the issue of housing desegregation, and in 1968 he helped to mobilize

the Poor People's Campaign. The SCLC Chicago effort failed in part because the movement encountered what King termed the "worst racism" he had ever witnessed, in part because the scale of poverty and misery was so overwhelming, and in part because the Johnson administration's "mandate" following the 1964 election had been depleted by Republican gains in the midterm election of 1966. Johnson failed to gain passage of his 1966 Civil Rights Bill which bolstered previous legislation by targeting housing segregation.

However, by placing equality on the nation's agenda, the Civil Rights movement also helped to trigger the wave of poverty-related reforms that emerged from the Johnson administration in 1964 and 1965. These included the various programs within Johnson's "War on Poverty," Head Start, the Job Corps, Community Action, and Title I of the 1965 Elementary and Secondary Education Act, which targeted federal funds for remedial educational programs in low-income school systems. Although these programs later came under fire during the conservative retrenchment of the 1970s and '80s, they succeeded in providing inner-city (and other poor) populations with improvements in their life opportunities. The Community Action Program was the most daring, since it placed federal funds at the disposal of impoverished community activists themselves, at least until their newfound assertiveness caused local political officials too many headaches and the program was collapsed back under the control of city governments.

In this midst of this volatile environment, a newly assertive black voice was emerging in the North. Reflecting the urban scene, it was an angrier voice than that of the nonviolent Civil Rights movement, one less rooted in the stabilizing influence of strong community ties. In fact, part of its anger reflected the lack of the strong community institutions and religious traditions that sustained the movement in the South, for it seemed as if one's racial identity, one's blackness, had to be denied in order to gain access to the white treadmill to success. Witnessing photographs of the violence meted out to the southern civil rights activists only fueled the anger of some young blacks. One outlet for this wounded anger was to withdraw from the struggle and embrace (or seek) one's own culture, drawing wherever possible on non-mainstream roots. Another was to strike out in rage.

The writings and speeches of Malcolm X played a crucial role in enhancing black consciousness, not only throughout the cities of the North but also, after Malcolm addressed the activists gathered in Selma, throughout the ranks of SNCC. Influenced by his ministry in the Nation of Islam, Malcolm's fiery oratory shocked and terrified the white establishment. At the same time, it engendered a sense of selfhood and racial pride in his black audience. Those who had led a lifetime of accommodating to being beaten down by the system were heartened by Malcolm's own transformation from a self-destructive street hustler to a powerful figure who demanded to be dealt with on his terms. Young blacks drawn to activism and self-assertion found in Malcolm an inspiration for their own struggles.

Nonetheless, the growing assertiveness and rising expectations that the times would get better ran into contrary signals from the political system. White violence in the South against civil rights activists had become rampant. And while the Community Action program provided an impetus for local participation, thereby awakening a new awareness of empowerment, federal funding began to fall well short of urban needs—especially with the commitment to war in Vietnam growing exponentially. With control of Community Action funds being withdrawn from local groups and turned over to city halls, the fuse of black frustration grew shorter. In this context, a random act of police harassment or brutality was enough to make the inner cities explode. In 1964, Harlem, Rochester, and North Philadelphia experienced fiery insurrections. The following year, a massive riot erupted in the Watts section of Los Angeles, generating a frenzy of national media attention. Riots broke out in Chicago, Omaha, Cleveland, and several smaller cities in 1966, and then the summer of 1967 saw the two largest eruptions of the decade in Newark and Detroit. Black rage spilled out violently across the country in the wake of Martin Luther King Jr.'s assassination in April 1968.

The "long, hot summers" were only the most dramatic and visible evidence of self-conscious black anger. By 1966 both SNCC and CORE were moving toward excluding white participants to better ensure black self-determination. During a "march against fear" held in Mississippi in 1966—in the aftermath of an assassination attempt against James Meredith—SNCC's Stokely Carmichael and Willie Ricks aroused the marchers with the rousing cry for "black power." The national media instantly picked up on the slogan as an expression of antiwhite sentiment among younger black activists. In reality, black power meant many things to many people. In its tamer version, it simply reflected an age-old American tradition of ethnic solidarity at election time; black voting power could be mobilized just as Irish or Italian voting power were regularly mobilized in city elections. In its more aggressive version, it meant black nationalism—from the embrace of African and African-American cultural expression (music, hairstyle, dress, names, and so forth) to Pan-Africanism and identification with the world's people of color who were exploited by Euro-American imperialism.

Black power also meant community power: direct participation by the black community in running the political institutions that affected their lives. Thus there were calls for "civilian review boards" for mostly white city police departments, and New York City's school system embarked on a turbulent experiment in "community control" of schools. In both cases, community control was an alternative to the apparent futility of trying to integrate city schools or police departments. Schools seemed at best unresponsive, at worst hostile to the particular cultural background and learning needs of inner-city minority populations; to many youngsters, they felt like alien environments that judged them on how well (or badly) they shed the manifestations of home, community, and race. Largely white and often arbitrarily violent, police began

to feel like an outside “occupying army” to the young black males who were constantly harassed on street corners of the big cities. The faces of authority were almost always white and often seemingly hostile. Absent real economic and educational opportunities, inner city blacks were as effectively trapped as their counterparts in the South, and the remedy was not as readily apparent.

One group that experimented with various forms of black power was the Black Panther Party for Self-Defense, organized by Huey Newton and Bobby Seale in Oakland, California, in 1966. Drawing on door-to-door canvassing of Oakland residents, Newton and Seale issued a ten-point program of party goals and demands, which included the “power to determine the destiny of our Black community,” full employment of black Americans, business reparations and an end to “robbery” of the black community, an end to police brutality and murder, and a call for armed self-defense against the outside occupying power. Using Newton’s legal studies, the pair produced an initial strategy that proved highly inflammatory yet effective. Aimed at the common practice of police cruisers arbitrarily stopping and harassing young blacks who gathered on street corners, Newton and Seale created a system of legal “patrol cars” in which Panthers in black berets and leather jackets would follow police cars throughout the inner city, armed with guns and lawbooks to ensure the constitutional rights of young blacks were not violated. The patrol cars infuriated the Oakland police, generating an instantaneous effort to change California’s gun laws, but they had a palpable effect on ghetto youth, especially as the incidents of police harassment declined.

A year later, the Panthers dropped the “self-defense” part of their title, a change which not only reflected their broadened political agenda but also their initiation of a variety of community programs: rent eviction protests, welfare rights education, black-history schools, and free breakfasts for children—echoing the spirit of the community control movements in other parts of the nation. Yet the Panther’s early embrace of guns to create an intimidating presence against police brutality became a crucial part of their public image both among inner-city youths and in the wider audience of white America. In effect, the party became captive to this image. Some of its recruits were drawn to the party because of the guns and berets, while much of the mainstream media and their audience never saw past the guns and angry rhetoric to the Panther’s substantive politics or programs.

In fact, with its systematic counterintelligence program (COINTELPRO) that began in 1968, the federal government began to provoke, undermine, marginalize, and eventually eliminate the more militant expressions of dissent among African Americans, the New Left, and the American Indian movement. Among these groups, the Panthers were a high priority. FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover termed them the “number one threat” in the nation. Whenever a Panther chapter was organized, local police cooperated with federal officials in infiltrating, harassing, and in some cases killing members of the party in a series of violent ambushes and shoot-outs. At least ten Panthers were

killed between 1967 and 1969, among them Chicago’s charismatic leader Fred Hampton. Eventually, the Black Panther Party faded from view, as did the public agenda for liberating the inner-city populations from the chains of hopelessness.

CONCLUSION

By the end of the 1960s, the South was well on its way toward becoming the “new South” in which black and white Americans mingled freely in the formerly segregated spaces of Jim Crow. The Civil Rights movement had liberated millions of black Americans from the psychological residues of racial oppression. The Civil Rights Act of 1964 and Voting Rights Act of 1965 were historic reforms that unleashed a campaign of effective federal enforcement. In addition, the South shifted away from an agriculture-based economy in which blacks were relegated to dependent poverty. Black Americans of at least middle-class status had far greater access to the rewards of the American political and economic system, and nowhere was this more apparent than in the symbolic arena of popular culture, particularly television and movies.

Yet a subtler form of racism persisted, reflected in everyday black experience. Particularly where prejudiced whites conflate race with class, black Americans regularly find themselves viewed with suspicion, ignored, or even denied service or access available to whites. In fact, as the black middle class became more pervasively visible in mainstream institutions, racial inequality increasingly became class inequality compounded by racism. Meanwhile, in the aftermath of a conservative backlash against the “excesses of the sixties,” public officials at best ignore and at worst scapegoat America’s poor. Nonetheless, within the history of the Civil Rights movement, one can find an inspiring grass-roots movement that not only spread contagiously to other sectors of society in the 1960s but can continue to inspire struggles to realize the dream of full democratic empowerment for all Americans.

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