

closer to racial and sexual equality. In *Lloyd Gaines v. University of Missouri* (1938), the court ruled that the State of Missouri was obligated to admit Blacks to the all-white state university graduate school, if no all-Black professional graduate school existed. Then, in *Congressmen Arthur Mitchell v. U.S. Interstate Commerce* (1941), the court required that Pullman accommodations be provided for Black Americans. Again, in a landmark case originating in Texas, *Smith v. Allwright* (1944), the court ruled that “white primary” laws were a violation of the Fifteenth Amendment to the Constitution and, as such, white primaries were declared unconstitutional.

Following closely on the court's strike against white primaries was still another blow at segregation. In *Shelley v. Kraemer* (1948), the court ruled that states could not enforce racially restrictive covenants in real estate. Again, in 1948, in *Perez v. Lippold*, the court ruled that anti-miscegenation laws were a violation of the Fourteenth Amendment. In 1950, in *Sweatt v. Painter*, the court required the all-white University of Texas Law School to admit Herman Marion Sweatt because the all-Black law school, consisting of “three small basement rooms in an office building eight blocks from the University of Texas Law School,” was unequal and inadequate. These are but a few of the landmark court cases that, along with advocacy and activist based social protest efforts, influenced the course of social reform in America, particularly in the 1940s.

Each of these court cases struck a death blow towards the demise of the *Plessey v. Ferguson* (1896) Supreme Court decision that legitimized an apartheid system in America and paved the way for the ideology of white supremacy to be codified in law as well as social practice. *Oliver Brown et al. v. Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas* was the most far reaching of the Supreme Court decisions in the twentieth century, as it built on the success and progress of each previous progressive landmark court decision. In *Brown* the Supreme Court unanimously ruled school segregation unconstitutional, declaring that “separate educational facilities are inherently unequal.” Without question, the Court's decision aided Black Americans in their quest to realize equality of opportunity.

Direct Social Action and Its Aftermath

Although Irene Morgan's treatment by Greyhound and her legal actions against the bus company that had demanded she move to the back of the bus did not mobilize a massive grass-roots level, direct-action social protest movement, Rosa Parks' treatment and actions in December 1955 effectively triggered a mobilization and grassroots-level activism for civil rights unparalleled in America's history. Beginning as a bus boycott in the wake of Rosa Parks' arrest for refusing to move

to the back of the Cleveland Avenue bus in Montgomery, Alabama, the protests quickly grew. The efforts that produced the Montgomery Improvement Association and that propelled to leadership the young minister of Dexter Street Baptist Church, the Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr., went full circle in launching a 381-day bus boycott that was effective in eliminating segregated seating. Significantly, the boycott would transform the very nature of civil rights activism, even as a movement—arising out of a tradition of a self-help and protest continuum—pushed forward in pursuit of goals and objectives long cherished and long overdue.

If the ability of Black Americans to gain the rights long denied them in law and social custom constitutes a Great Awakening for American society, then the Montgomery bus boycott produced a Southern-based protest movement and a civil rights leader who would indelibly change the course of Black American and American history. In 1955, the Interstate Commerce Commission forbade segregated buses and waiting rooms for passengers travelling interstate in response to the NAACP's legal efforts. In the midst of the Montgomery bus boycott, in the winter of 1956, the Reverend King, the Reverend Ralph Abernathy, and 87 others were indicted on charges of conspiring to orchestrate a boycott. In the same year, the NAACP took the case to federal court, and, in November 1956, the Supreme Court declared bus segregation ordinances unconstitutional. The effectiveness and success of the bus boycott and the visibility that accompanied judicial victories, press conferences, sermons, and speeches, increasingly focused attention on the movement's most forceful and enigmatic leader, Martin Luther King, Jr.

Martin Luther King, Jr. (1929–1968), was born in Atlanta, Georgia, and was educated at Morehouse College, Crozier Theological Seminary (ordained in 1947), and Boston University, where he earned his Ph.D. Martin Luther King, Jr. shared in common with James Farmer and Bayard Rustin (one of the founders along with Reverend King and Stanley Levinson of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference [SCLC]) a firm grounding in Mahatma Gandhi's teachings on non-violent direct action. During his years as the leader of the movement, King was thoroughly involved in all aspects of the movement. So clear was his commitment to the liberation of the human spirit from oppression that King was celebrated as an international spokesperson and awarded the Nobel Peace Prize on December 10, 1964.

As the civil rights activities of the movement expanded beyond Montgomery, the SCLC, an interracial organization committed to equality and full citizenship, sought to network and enhance civil rights protest actions around the country. The activities and actions of the movement's leadership captured the essence of non-violent philosophy and direct action protest. Ella Baker, previously a field secretary of the NAACP, joined SCLC at its inception in 1957 to mobilize and organ-

ize mass meetings. By 1958, she had established SCLC's Atlanta office, where she served as the executive secretary. King, Abernathy, Baker, and others noted the increasing involvement and militancy of college students in civil rights protest activities.

In February 1960, four college students at North Carolina A & T College, in Greensboro, initiated a sit-in at a segregated Woolworth lunch counter. The students employed tactics CORE had used with success. Rapidly, the student-inspired sit-in movement spread through the South and was accompanied by read-ins, wade-ins, and kneel-ins. Just after the start of sit-ins in Greensboro, 40 students from Fisk University initiated a sit-in at a Nashville, Tennessee, Woolworth lunch counter. At a landmark meeting of students, held on the campus of Shaw University in Raleigh, North Carolina, in April 1960, the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) was created to give structure and provide support and coordination to the student movement for civil rights. Although Martin Luther King, Jr. and Ella Baker both attended the student meeting and the SCLC donated monies to help offset the cost of the meeting, the student membership of SNCC insisted on remaining an independent organization although they agreed to work with the SCLC. SNCC, under its first elected chair (the same Marion Barry who would later serve as mayor of the nation's capital city), set out to raise monies and coordinate student activities in the South. So ambitious and committed were student protest activities in the South that a chronicler of the student movement estimates that over 70,000 Black and white students participated in sit-ins by 1961. Importantly, the jail-in movement began in 1961 when students arrested in Rock Hill, South Carolina, declined to pay fines and requested jail sentences.

The second Freedom Ride took place in 1961. Organized by James Farmer and other CORE members, and joined by the SNCC, an interracial group departed from the nation's capital en route to New Orleans to test the Interstate Commerce Commission's orders to integrate interstate travel facilities. For many Americans, the plight of the Freedom Riders emerged as a compelling issue when the media presented graphic, visual coverage of the brutal attack by white men and women at a bus station in Alabama. The intensity of the attack on the riders and the burning of the Greyhound bus they rode symbolized the white South's escalating resistance to written and interpreted law and moral persuasion. Nonetheless, the SNCC, the SCLC, and student and activist groups across the country continued the sit-ins, boycotts, and jail-ins, designed to challenge and eradicate separate and unequal segregation of public facilities.

Building on the legal strength and moral force of the sit-in movement and freedom rides, the SNCC, the SCLC, and others next moved to promote voter registration and voter participation in local, state, and federal elections. Civil rights advocates turned their attention to

working in areas of the South where Blacks had been prevented from exercising their constitutional right to vote. When Black Southerners attempted to register to vote, they were often met with economic or physical opposition. Civil rights activists learned that the reality of white violence victimized anyone intent upon changing racially maintained injustice. Three civil rights workers (Michael H. Schwerner and Andrew Goodman, both white men, and James E. Chaney, a Black man) were brutalized and murdered by whites in Mississippi in 1964. In the very next year, 1965, more white volunteers were murdered: Viola Liuzzo, a housewife who had come South compelled by her conscience, was shot in the head because she transported people who had come for the Selma March; Jonathan Daniels, a seminary student, was killed while performing voter registration work; and the Reverend James Reeb was clubbed in the head and killed as he left a Black-owned restaurant. And, in many places in the South where civil rights activists worked the blood of Black men ran from their bodies as they were murdered.

Yet, some would say that there had always been white violence aimed at intimidation, even against the young and harmless. In 1955, Emmett Till, age fourteen, was visiting Mississippi from Chicago on summer vacation. Till was abducted from his uncle's farm one night, brutally beaten, and shot through the head by white men who were then quickly acquitted in a trial that made a mockery of the judicial system. Still later, in 1963, white supremacists bombed the 16th Street Baptist Church in Birmingham, killing four Black American children and injuring over 20 people one Sunday morning.

It seemed as if each advance was met with pain—inflicted either by illegal white terrorist violence or by the betrayal and disappointment of the federal government's delayed or inadequate protection of citizens engaged in civil rights activities. Clearly, it must have been difficult for civil rights activists to maintain a commitment to non-violent social protest in the face of intense white violence. And yet, despite the killings, beatings, job firings, tenant evictions, and many other illegal and immoral violations, the movement continued pressing for enforcement of: (a) existing constitutional provisions for Black American entitlement and enfranchisement, and (b) existing and proposed civil rights legislation aimed at the protection of liberties and the eradication of discrimination and oppression.

Legislation and legal victories continued reinforcing the social transformation that was at hand in America's communities. Direct-action social protest and mass demonstrations were effective tactics for change. The March on Washington, organized by A. Philip Randolph and Bayard Rustin in August 1963, brought 250,000 people together in support of the movement. Martin Luther King, Jr. addressed the movement's supporters, from the steps of the Lincoln Memorial, with an impassioned speech that reflected his measure as the movement's

visionary: "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." Empowered by the movement's moral clarity, zeal, and effectiveness, civil rights activities intensified in the South. By the mid-1960s, an important shift was underway in the movement. When Stokely Carmichael, a student at Howard University and a field worker for the SNCC, was elected chairperson of the SNCC in 1966, he began to call for "Black Power" within the SNCC and the movement. In the following year, H. Rap Brown, national chairperson of the SNCC, articulated and intensified Black Power activities.

Increasingly, Black Americans outside the South also challenged decades of *de facto* and *de jure* segregation. Historians record the boycott of Chicago schools by 220,000 Black children in 1963 to protest the segregationist policies of school Superintendent Benjamin C. Willis as symbolizing the movement's expansion in to northern, midwestern, and west-coast cities. As Black Americans in the South were seeking fundamental human and political rights, many others in urban areas like New York, Chicago, Washington, Detroit, Philadelphia, Oakland (CA), and Los Angeles had left the South behind in the earlier waves of migration north and west from the South. Though faring better than when they lived in the South, millions of Blacks in northern cities remained poor and powerless; even when they exercised the civil rights they had struggled to effect change in the North. Throughout the decades of the twentieth century, the expansion of Black northern communities has created a leadership that addressed urban Black issues.

Malcolm X (1925–1965) was born Malcolm Little in Omaha, Nebraska. Having completed only the eighth grade, Malcolm X was largely self-taught, later becoming a Black Muslim and joining the Nation of Islam. In 1964, Malcolm X, recognized as one of the most powerful spokespersons on behalf of empowerment for Blacks, founded the Organization of Afro-American Unity, a nationalist organization. His speeches before thousands revealed the manner by which Western education and information distorted and denied the realities of African and Black American history. He called for the creation of organizations, institutions, schools, programs, research, and scholarship that would redress the deliberate mis-education of Black Americans as a first step toward self-acceptance, personal empowerment, and nation building. Malcolm mirrored the sentiments of many who were strongly influenced by the nationalist liberation movements underway in Africa in his insistence that out of a Black identified positive self-image came the strength and cohesiveness to build new realities for Black American progress.

Urban Black communities intensified cultural and political activities, generating a leadership that reflected the many issues that needed articulation. The Black militancy that emerged as the Black Power Move-

ment promoted positive self-image and Black input into the formulation of solutions for the many issues and problems confronting Black communities. The Black Panthers, organized in October 1966 by Huey P. Newton and Bobby Seale in Oakland, developed a ten-point program that was strongly influenced by Stokely Carmichael's call for Black Power and by the effective organized mechanisms used by the SNCC. As the Black Panthers were effective at mobilizing a significant following especially in urban areas blighted by poverty and police brutality, in 1967 FBI director J. Edgar Hoover outlined a new "counterintelligence" (COINTELPRO) operation that effectively sought to infiltrate and neutralize the Black Panthers. Other voices of militancy were Gloria Richardson of the Cambridge Non-Violent Coordinating Committee and Cecil Moore of the Philadelphia NAACP.

Urban inner city riots, arising from the despair, anger, and powerlessness that oppressed most Blacks, erupted in scores of American cities in the 1960s. While the Civil Rights Act of 1964 was the most far reaching civil rights bill ever passed, the differences between the letter of the law and the time and persistence it would take to implement and enforce its measures was still unknown. The act's provisions dealt with: (a) prohibiting discrimination in public accommodations—desegregating public facilities, (b) strengthening voting rights and protecting citizen access to participation in federal elections, (c) prohibiting discrimination in education, (d) prohibiting discrimination in federally funded programs, and (e) prohibiting discrimination in employment and establishment of the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (in Blumberg, *Civil Rights: The 1960s Freedom Struggle*).

In addition, the Voting Rights Act of 1965 was ushered through a joint session of Congress by President Lyndon Johnson one week after the massive civil rights march of 40,000 people from Selma to Montgomery. The act banished poll taxes and literacy tests and required federal registers to register Black American voters. The impact of legal and civil rights activism was clearly discernible; no court cases were needed. Within a year, over 50 percent of the population of the South registered to vote. As the movement peaked in the 1960s, activists continued civil rights activities by challenging the right of the right-wing of the Democratic Party to represent the Southern states, particularly because Southerners controlled eleven of the sixteen committees in the House of Representatives. In Mississippi, one of the movement's most forceful and eloquent leaders, Fannie Lou Hamer, articulated the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party's challenge to the Democratic Party leadership at the National Democratic Party Convention.

It has been several decades since the movement's peak in the 1960s, which produced unprecedented advances. Civil rights activists and the legal enactment and enforcement effectively dismantled racial segregation in public accommodations. The federal government expanded

its powers to protect the civil rights of Black Americans. Blacks, in unprecedented numbers, exercised their right to enfranchisement by voting and developed a sophistication and assertiveness likely to sustain their continued efforts to remedy the still unfulfilled promises of equality and justice. Many, many Black Americans have participated in the processes of legal enforcement of existing laws, and made gains in education, employment, and housing.

However, the ill effects of 245 years of enslavement, 100 years of Jim and Jane Crow segregation, discrimination, and disadvantage could not be resolved and remedied in so little time, and so much remained to be done. Enforcement resources at various federal agencies and offices charged with investigating violations and pursuing compliance sometimes faltered and did not match the enforcement mandate. Also, because residential segregation proved to be linked with school segregation, efforts to desegregate schools confronted an enormous challenge in dealing with strategies to effect school integration, and thereby dismantle separate and unequal education.

While the movement made it more difficult for political leaders to ignore civil rights, the white racial backlash that fueled conservative victories in the late 1960s put civil rights advocates on notice that liberal changes would be met with growing resistance. In the main, conservative federal administrations have given civil rights a low priority. The record of the Supreme Court on race and rights has produced mixed results. In *Swann v. Charlotte-Mecklenburg Board of Education* (1971), the Court approved of busing as a tool to achieve school integration. The Court's ruling on *Griggs v. Duke Power Company* (1971) addressed the issue of workplace discrimination by placing the burden on employers to prove the relationship between hiring criteria and a job applicant's qualifications. In the 1970s, Affirmative Action programs emerged as the remedy for employment and workplace discrimination. The term "Affirmative Action" was developed in 1965 when President Johnson issued Executive Order 11246 which prohibited discrimination by firms doing business with the federal government. Johnson's order gave federal agencies, namely, the Labor Department, a directive to investigate and take "Affirmative Action."

Affirmative Action, initially an enforcement measure, also suggested standards and protocols, and was in time validated by federal courts. Most Black Americans supported Affirmative Action efforts, because, in many cases, it represented a challenge to the protocols and practices established by decades of white male control over hiring criteria and employment qualifications. Affirmative Action was defended as a remedy for past discrimination and disadvantage experienced by racial minorities and women. Many Black Americans benefitted from the Affirmative Action programs developed by government contracting and private industry. Clearly, political leadership at the national level,

corporate interest in enlightened social responsibility, and the continued activism and advocacy of civil rights organizations contributed to the survival of Affirmative Action as a tool for social transformation.

Affirmative Action has had its detractors—those who have argued that Affirmative Action constitutes “reverse discrimination.” Spurred on by the Supreme Court’s decision—in *Regents of the University of California v. Allen Bakke* (1978)—that the university had violated the equal protection clause of the Constitution and Bakke’s civil rights, opponents of Affirmative Action celebrated. But many agreed with Justice Thurgood Marshall’s assessment that the civil rights act and the equal protection clause had been designed to dismantle America’s dualistic and separate racial caste system and to remedy the continuing effects of previous discrimination. Many rightly feared that the Equal Protection Clause would be used as a weapon to shield white privilege as it is protected by the practice of white supremacy, thereby blunting the short period of commitment that employers—and, in Bakke’s case, a medical school—were willing to make to eradicating the systematic underdevelopment of Black Americans caused by enslavement, disenfranchisement, separate and unequal segregation, and inequality.

Along with greater enforcement of existing federal statutes, revision of racially prescriptive state laws and enactment of progressive and forward-looking legislation designed to promote and protect human, civil, and legal rights provided significant measures toward participatory democracy. Likewise, the bold and innovative measures embodied in Affirmative Action objectives and goals produced concrete, if not large-scale economic change. Many believed that several hundred years of enslavement, followed by legal, economic, and political disenfranchisement, followed still by legalized and unequal segregation could be redressed in the few short years following the movement. Still many others understood that the progressive changes brought about by the movement created another opportunity for Black Americans to assert self-help and self-determination, particularly in the political arena.

Between the passage and enforcement of the *Brown* decision and the emergence of Affirmative Action efforts to alter discrimination in the workplace, some Black Americans significantly altered their material, political, and social standing in America. Unquestionably, by pulling the specter of legalized segregation down, Black Americans spearheaded the removal of the greatest barrier to access, and hence participation in American society. At stake were concepts of significance, such as the right to an equitable share of society’s bounty in exchange for the responsibilities of citizenship. But there were also economic, social, and political matters of pressing importance, and material matters like the right to vote, the right to literacy, and the economic and political pay-offs those rights bring.

Even by 1980, in *Fullilove v. Klutznick*, the Supreme Court validated programs that made a place for “minorities” (including women). In the 1980s President Reagan insisted that Affirmative Action be used only for actual victims of discrimination. But, a majority of the justices on the Court saw things differently and for a few years insisted that Affirmative Action retain a proactive dimension—*Local 93 of International Association of Firefighters v. City of Cleveland* (1986), *Local 28 of Sheet Metal Workers v. EEOC* (1986), *U.S. v. Paradise* (1987), and *Johnson v. Transportation Agency of Santa Clara County* (1987). Relatively short lived, the government’s commitment to proactive as well as damage control Affirmative Action wavered as by the end of the decade in *Richmond v. J. Croson and Co.* (1989) the Court ruled that the Fourteenth Amendment does not support set-asides for minority contractors. Later, in *Adar and Constructors* (1995) the Court ruled that a congressional mandate for a 10% minority set-aside was unconstitutional. Still later, a change of view in the Court in *Grutter v. Bollinger* (2003) determined that the University of Michigan Law School was right to use a racial preference standard to diversify its student body.

Most of the urban poor missed out on the opportunity wagon that offered some measure of vertical social mobility access to primarily middle-class Black Americans. The intense inner-city riots in Watts, Newark, and Detroit in 1965 demonstrated the anguish, despair, and anger impoverished urban Black folks experienced, as nearly one-third of Black households lived below the poverty level (compared to just under eight percent of white households). Black unemployment was double white unemployment. The intensity of the riots made it apparent that civil rights laws alone were not enough to reach and change deeply entrenched inner city poverty. In 1968, a presidential commission came to the same conclusion in its published report. The Kerner Commission Report pointed to white racism as the cause of the riots as it warned that America was “moving towards two societies, one white, one Black.” News of a racially divided apartheid state was hardly news to Black folks.

Already in place prior to the riots and the Kerner Commission’s Report, an unprecedented federal intervention into what had become two separate societies emerged as President Johnson’s vision of the “Great Society” with its War on Poverty, the Economic Opportunity Act of 1964. In the aggregate, during his presidency Johnson responded to the groundswell of pressures coming from the most disadvantaged in America by enacting the Medicare Program, government aid to all levels of education, Head Start, Upward Bound, Volunteers in Service to America (VISTA), and Community Action Programs (CAPs). But, the staggering cost of the Vietnam War at approximately \$140 billion undermined the availability of resources for the Great Society at home.

In the wake of the increased personal, organizational, and institutional agency stirred up by civil rights activism, Black artists poignantly expressed their quests and visions for Black liberation. The Black artist and their art emerged as the centerpiece of the Black Arts Movement (BAM), with Imamu Amiri Baraka, founder of the Black Arts Repertory Theatre (1965), Sonia Sanchez, Nikki Giovanni, Haki Madhubuti, James Baldwin, Lorraine Hansberry, Maya Angelou, Gwendolyn Brooks, Miles Davis, Thelonious Monk, Pharoah Sanders, Aretha Franklin, Ray Charles, James Brown, Stevie Wonder, Marvin Gaye, Nina Simone, The Last Poets, Ossie and Ruby Davis, Romare Bearden, and many others opening a way to bridge the personal aesthetic with the political and cultural. The Black Arts Movement linked decades of Black cultural renaissances predating the 1960s with the decade's Black Power, nationalist, and revolutionary fervor.

The place where knowledge is mined and minds are shaped, academia did not remain outside the struggle for an accountability that fueled institutional transformation. It was the Black Student Movement (BSM) that in the late 1960s actualized a vision of Black Power in instigating and prompting the creation of Black Studies programs at predominantly white colleges and universities around the country. Black Studies programs infused the study of and research about people of African descent and other people of color, including those living in the global South, into a previously Eurocentric curriculum. As time passed all graded levels of learning have been and continue to be transformed and made more accountable to reality by including the study of people of African descent as active subjects, not passive objects on the stage of history. It really is important to sit with the profound if at many times painful changes prompted by Black Americans and their progressive allies as their *thought and action* transformed American society; it truly was a Great Awakening.

The historical record reveals that significant social transformations—especially those that elevate the condition of Black folks—which cut against the grain as significantly as the Civil Rights, Black Arts, and Black Student Movements, are met with a backlash sooner or later. The issue is not whether as the decade of the 1960s closed, a conservative, white backlash—the response to the dramatic changes underway in American society—fueled the election of Richard Nixon on his promise to restore law and order. While Nixon was impeached by the actions of his own hands, Black Americans were busy getting a living and changing the political terrain of especially the South by using the Justice Department's enforcement of their right to vote to elect Black men and women to public office-holding. Not since the early years of Reconstruction had Black folks in the South exercised such constitutional rights unfettered by white violence. While many persons had paid dearly for the rights exercised by a Black electorate by the 1970s,

no one missed the fact that the enforcement provisions of the Voting Rights Act of 1965 made it the most powerful and effective twentieth century civil rights legislation ever enacted. The power of Black ballots meant that Blacks were elected to local, state, and congressional level office-holding; while there were a small number of Black elected officials when the National Black Political Convention met in Gary in 1972, by 2001 there were 9,101 Black men and women public officeholders in the nation according to the Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies.

White backlash deepened in the decades following the progress of the Civil Rights Movement as various conservative coalitions attempted to dismantle or curtail Great Society commitments. Dating from the 1970s, this New Right lodged itself in the Republican Party, electing and maintaining leadership of the executive, and by its appointment of federal judges, the judicial, and for much of the time the congressional levels of national governance. Viewed from the perspective of the poor who were and are disproportionately Black American, the ascent of the New Right meant a collapse of federal support for civil rights, and the diminution of social services programs. Poor inner city communities were destabilized by this abandonment of rights oriented programs and services. The recent New Right ascent has included the appointment of middle-class professional Black conservatives who support an ideological agenda that has proffered the conservative notion that the lack of government support for social development is good, and that everyone should be able to make it if they just work hard. Putting a Black face on attempts to rationalize betrayal and abandonment has not muted the pain, it has only diffused the discourse about why only poor people of color are the only ones who should be ready to go it alone (the middle class and elites have the tax code and other meaningful and important institutional financial supports to lean on).

By January 1985, the nation celebrated Martin Luther King, Jr. holiday despite conservative resistance. In 1986, after a decade of anti-apartheid activism, spearheaded by Randall Robinson (founder of TransAfrica), the Congressional Black Caucus, ever growing in its strength and influence, led congressional colleagues in enacting a trade embargo against apartheid South Africa. Within five years Nelson Mandela was released from prison, and the African National Congress (ANC) was allowed to legally function in South Africa. Apartheid collapsed, paving the way for the creation of Africa's most successful democracy. Later in 2000, Randall Robinson published *The Debt: What America Owes to Blacks* and joined with high-profile colleagues in a series of challenges that echoed back to the ideas about reparations to people of African descent who endured captivity and enslavement (James Forman's *Black Manifesto* in 1969).

Black intellectuals and artists kept their eyes on the prize, advancing essential discourses about culture, identity politics, community, resistance, nationality, and self-determination. Alice Walker, Toni Morrison, August Wilson, Henry Hampton, Bob and Ziggy Marley, and Molefi Kete Asante among others transformed literary canons, documentary filmmaking, and musical expressions, and Afrocentricity advanced cultural interpretations of the centrality of Black people's African cultural as opposed to Eurocentric influenced past.

While there was much to commend about President William Jefferson Clinton's engagement with issues near and dear to Black Americans, saving food stamps, creating empowerment zones that generated jobs and economic activity in cities and rural areas, taxing higher income Americans, in 1996 Clinton caved into pressure from Republicans in control of both houses of Congress. New Right conservatives advocated a "Contract with America" and shortly before his second term reelection Clinton signed the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act, thereby ushering in dramatic welfare reform that among other things ended federal assistance to poor children. According to a report published in *The State of Black America, 2003*, entitled "Race, Gender and Welfare Reform: The Need for Targeted Support," by Walter Stafford, with Diana Salas, Melinda Mendez, and Angela Dews, largely voiceless in America's political arena, the very poor, disproportionately women and children, dropped off the bottom into painful desperation (according to the 2000 Census 30.9% of Black children were living in deep poverty compared to 9.4% of white children). As poverty deepened, drugs and crime increased, the disparity between Black and white health and wellness widened, and rates of communicable infections increased, especially HIV rates. Also, racial incarceration rates continued accelerating in a criminal justice system that has historically engaged in the disparate and unequal administration of justice, particularly towards Black men.

Even in the eye of the storm swirling around Black people's lives, voices emerged—some not previously heard—expressively articulating personal agency, collectivity, meaningful vision, focus, cultural renewal, resistance, and self-determination. Long inextricably connected with all of Black people's struggles—indeed, holding up one-half of the sky—Black women's voices have in recent decades called forth and asserted "feminism is a Black thing" (bell hooks, 1995). In the formation of the National Black Feminist Organization (founded by Eleanor Holmes Norton and Margaret Sloan in 1973), and the Combahee River Collective (founded by Barbara Smith and others in 1974) both founded in the Black Power Era, and the Black Feminist Caucus of the Black Radical Congress (founded in 2000), Black feminists have sought "to end sexism, sexist oppression, and oppression" (hooks, 2000, p. 1). Working to advance Black women's personal agency, the well-being of Black

families, and the self-determination of Black communities, increasing numbers of Black women have come to articulate a standpoint that reflects a reality of multiple and intersecting discriminations, including racism, sexism, classism, discrimination based on sexual orientation, ageism, and discrimination based on disability. Importantly, Black feminists understand that Black women are not already “liberated,” and whether Black women name their experiences Womanist, Black Feminist, or Afrocentric Feminist there is much work to be done to resist the corrosive effects of intersecting discriminations (see the Andrea Hunter and Sherrill Sellers, *The National Survey of Black Americans* (NSBA) on the feminist attitudes of Black women and men).

The fusion of civil rights reform and the ethos of Black self-determination derived from the Black Power Movement have opened avenues of expression for marginalized gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender Black Americans who have increasingly given voice to the discrimination and marginality they experience. Though always a part of the Black community, LGBTQ folks are now more visible as they seek a place of respect in American society at large, but especially in Black families, institutions, and communities.

As of the 2000 Census, Hispanic Americans became the nation's largest racial/ethnic minority, easing Black Americans from their historic role as the largest racial/ethnic minority in the country. The United States is a settler nation, occupied over time primarily by people who have come from other shores. With the exception of the indigenous population and Americans descended from captive Africans, everyone else is either an immigrant or is descended from immigrants. As such, immigration can be understood to have added many different peoples to the nation. It has always been a contentious issue as nativist influences have fanned the flames of fear and distrust concerning who should and should not become an American. Race and ethnicity have always played a role in immigration access and restriction, as immigration restriction frequently targeted people of color in the twentieth century. However, in 1965 Congress enacted the Hart-Cellar Act, which eased racial restrictions and opened the door for increased numbers of people from the Caribbean, Africa, Asia, and South America to migrate to the United States. The numbers of Black people from the West Indies and Africa have increased substantially and left an indelible mark on the cultural meaning of “Blackness.”

In 2005 Hurricane Katrina devastated New Orleans and the Gulf Coast, killing more than 2,000 people. Majority Black New Orleans was hit particularly hard, and the nation watched as those in the federal government most responsible for helping abandoned the tens of thousands of people who were too poor to flee. Literally left to make it in whatever way they could—betrayed, many thousands sought refuge wherever they could find it, in the Superdome and Convention Center.

Many caring individuals, churches, relief organizations, and companies stepped up where government was missing, delivering food, clothing, water, and medical assistance. Volunteers from around the country travelled to New Orleans and transported thousands to safe places in other cities; places where shelter, jobs, and new lives waited.

In the midst of the worst financial crisis—irresponsibility in the financial services and banking industries, collapsing real estate market values, heavy mortgage foreclosure losses for millions of Americans, business closings, joblessness and the highest unemployment rates since the Great Depression, and 47 million Americans without health insurance, a hardworking, optimistic United States senator, Harvard-trained constitutional lawyer and community activist, a Black man—Barack Obama was elected the 44th president of the United States. Running on a platform that engaged America's many challenges, Barack Obama accomplished something few older Black Americans ever thought they would see in their lifetimes.

Importantly, Barack Obama was not the first Black American candidate to seek the nation's highest office. Having earned experience in Congress, Congresswoman Shirley Chisholm threw herself into the race for the Democratic Party's nomination in 1972. Twelve years later and again in 1988, the Reverend Jesse Jackson, seasoned by his many years at the heart of the Civil Rights Movement, entered the presidential race seeking to represent the Democratic Party's bid to unseat New Right Republicans. Identified through issues that impacted Black communities and cultivating and supporting Black community empowerment as central themes in their campaigns, Congresswoman Chisholm and Reverend Jackson were wildly popular in Black communities but only mildly supported in white communities. Also, Reverend Jackson lost ground to the New Right's effective use of the "race card" in American electoral politics. While reactionary individuals and groups attempted to use the "race card" to derail Senator Obama's presidential aspirations, he astutely dodged that and many other political bullets in part by building cross racial alliances, organizing the youth vote, insisting that Americans pay attention to the real issues dragging so many folks down, and representing himself in terms of his biracial, not just Black heritage. Between occupying the White House, seats in Congress, appointments to the Supreme Court, the Office of Secretary of State and the Attorney General, governorships, and a small number of the senior leadership positions at Fortune 500 companies, Black Americans are finally changing the leadership tapestry in the United States.

A timeline of Barack Obama's measure as an intellectual and his ascent to the presidency is useful: in 2000 as George W. Bush was finally elected president, Bobby Rush (the former Black Panther) defeated a young Barack Obama's bid for the House of Representatives; in 2002, Obama delivered a speech entitled "What I Am Opposed to Is a Dumb

War” in Chicago; in 2004, Obama was elected to the United States Senate and delivered a keynote address at the Democratic National Convention entitled “The Audacity of Hope”; in 2008, in the midst of a global financial meltdown, Obama was elected president of the United States and infused those listening to his messages with a message of hope and needed persistence and perseverance—he presented several landmark speeches: “Yes, We Can,” the New Hampshire Primary Concession Speech, “A More Perfect Union,” Speech at the National Constitution Center, “Change Happens,” his acceptance speech at the 2008 Democratic Convention, and “This Is Your Victory,” his election night victory speech, and promised to stabilize the nation's economy; in 2009, Obama articulated a commitment to “A New Era of Responsibility” in his first Inaugural Address and quickly set about surrounding himself with advisors and appointments who were charged with creating solutions intended to stabilize financial markets. The outcome of President George W. Bush's attempt to shore up the economy was the Troubled Asset Relief Program (TARP); its price tag was \$70 billion and it was a rescue package for financial institutions, particularly banks, and loans to General Motors and Chrysler to save them from going out of business. While big business got a check to bail it out of the hardship of the Great Recession, unemployment increased, mortgage foreclosures skyrocketed, and many businesses failed; TARP failed to help the millions of everyday Americans who were falling into a financial void created in large measure by the financial institutions TARP was bailing out. Obama's response was the creation of The American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) of 2009 that provided \$814 billion in expanded unemployment, tax cuts and incentives, and social welfare benefits.

In 2009 President Obama was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize and delivered a lecture entitled “A Just and Lasting Peace” in Oslo. In 2010, Obama signed into law the Dodd-Frank Wall Street Reform and Consumer Protection Act, which sought to re-regulate the financial sector. Also in 2010, Obama signed a health care reform bill even as Republicans (including Tea Party ultra nationalists) gained seats in the U.S. Senate and a majority of seats in the House of Representatives and opposed his proposal; from that point much of what Obama proposed was rejected as racist, and ideologically reactionary forces in Congress went to great lengths to oppose the man and his message. But, in early 2010, Obama sought to restructure the health care system with passage of the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act. Immediately, the Tea Party Movement adversaries mobilized to oppose Obama, accusing him of attempting to impose socialism or communism on Americans. The consequence was that President Obama was often curtailed in his leadership efforts; Obama used executive orders (numbered from 13489–13764, dating from January 2009 to January 2017) to manage the

affairs of the government and to undertake initiatives that Republicans in Congress opposed, including preventing the deportation of some youth immigrants in 2012.

In 2011, President Obama ordered all U.S. military out of Iraq, and he also ordered the seizure of Osama bin Laden, head of Al Qaeda in his compound in Pakistan; bin Laden was killed by U.S. Special Forces. In the same year, Obama authorized gays and lesbians to serve openly in the nation's Armed Forces. During the run-up to his reelection, President Obama enjoyed historically high approval ratings on the eve of his being re-elected to a second term in 2012. Obama's second Inaugural Address, "We, the People" reflected his belief in the possibilities of America as he called to us to embrace our democracy as an enduring creation by the people, for all of the people. In 2014, Obama created the My Brother's Keeper Program at the White House as Black youth mobilized #Black Lives Matter in response to escalating police violence against unarmed Black men. In 2015, President Obama appointed Loretta Lynch as Attorney General of the United States, making her the first African American woman ever appointed to the position. In 2015, President Obama commenced diplomatic relations with Cuba. He also signed the Ledbetter Fair Pay Act that helps combat pay discrimination against women; signed the Hate Crimes Prevention Act, making it a federal crime to assault someone based on their sexual orientation; and boosted fuel efficiency standards for cars, thereby helping the environment.

President Barack H. Obama has become a pivotal figure in American history. His many achievements designate him as one of the most transformative leaders the nation has ever had. Obama has compared himself to Lincoln, trying to govern a nation in crisis: The Great Recession, two wars, civil turmoil as lone gunmen walked into schools, theatres, a church, and a nightclub and murdered people in cold blood; mounting racial tensions as Black communities protest increasing police violence, especially against unarmed Black men, women, and children; and, other major issues bearing on our society. Obama's legacy is one of achievements towards strengthening democracy against great odds. President Barack Obama, an African American man who sought to be the change we seek to see in America, was America's president, president of "We the People," as in his farewell address delivered in Chicago in 2017, he noted that "It falls to each of us to be those anxious, jealous guardians of our democracy.... Because for all our outward differences, we all share the same proud title: Citizen."

In conclusion, in the long struggle to be treated as first class citizens in the America built in large measure by the sweat and blood of Black people's ancestors, there is much unfinished business. Much more needs to be done as there are many more Black Americans who remain locked in poverty, and, hence, in need of greater participation

in the nation's economic development. Black communities have long protested the excessive use of police force in Black communities. In recent years the very troubling pattern of police violence against unarmed Black men has ignited Black protests in many areas of the country, giving rise to the Black Lives Matter Movement. At the same time, the longtime prison reform advocate Angela Davis, and more recently Michelle Alexander, author of *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness*, and Kahlil Gibran Muhammad, author of *The Condemnation of Blackness*, are signaling an alarm about the runaway escalation of incarceration of Black and Brown men and increasingly women. They point to the gross disparity between population numbers and racial incarceration rates, pointing out the historic patterns of the criminal justice system criminalizing blackness.

Unprecedented numbers of Black Americans *can* now vote, and Blacks elected as city council members, mayors, governors, senators, representatives, and other recognized public officials across the country attest to the increasing viability of Black empowerment. The next challenge of forging business and economic development strategies is already at hand. As more Black Americans use the access that has come with the victories of the Civil Rights Movement to further their options and alternatives, it bears remembering that the Black community as a whole needs to care for all its members. There is a mandate that has arisen out of the collective experiences of struggle for economic self-determination and human and civil rights, which requires that Black Americans shape the individual experience so that commitment to a whole community as a collective entity sustains the ongoing struggle for inclusion and access.

Summary

In recent decades, scholars of Black American Studies have been challenged to reconsider the ideological perspectives that shaped much of the scholarship on Black American history in the past. Black Americans have insisted on the inclusion of perspectives that emphasize their efforts to promote self-help and self-reliance, instead of perspectives that deny or trivialize initiative and creativity. Black American values, attitudes, behaviors, and achievements more regularly serve as the focal point for scholarship, which offers an assessment of Black American historiography. Black American inspired institutions and organizations emerge as viable, useful efforts to promote self-determination and development. In such scholarship, Black American resistance and antipathy to enslavement is clearly identified, as are attempts by Black Americans to forge new opportunities and possibilities in the aftermath of the Civil War. Hence, a responsible rendering of Black American history brings to light and explores both a Black self-help heritage

and a Black protest tradition, even as it identifies white opposition to Black progress and self-determination.

As Black American activity and not passivity is exposed, the enormity of what Black Americans have accomplished becomes clearer. Significantly, Black Americans have been principally responsible for their own empowerment. By so doing, they have been the catalyst for human and civil rights activism in this country at large. In essence, because the Black protest tradition has focused on securing rights under the law, every positive gain for Blacks has meant a positive gain for America's other ethnic/racial groups, and for participatory democracy. Black American women and men have persistently struggled to achieve justice, inclusion in economic development, and political equality.

Black Americans have faced tremendous challenges in their quest to realize a first-class citizenship. The betrayal of the Reconstruction era made the acquisition of post-Civil War goals virtually impossible. Nearly 4.5 million Black American men and women were emancipated with no compensation for their or their ancestors' 245 years of unpaid laboring. Without money, education, land, or access to unions and jobs, the vast majority of Black Americans confronted unparalleled obstacles; only indigenous peoples in this country confronted a more destitute reality. The ideology of white supremacy dominated many white people's thinking in the South and in many places in the North as well. The emergence of white terrorist hate groups like the Ku Klux Klan threatened the livelihood and life-blood of individual Blacks. Between the 1860s and 1960s, over 5,000 Black men, women, and children were lynched in America. Black men were systematically excluded and disenfranchised from the right to exercise their Fifteenth Amendment right to vote in the South, as were Southern Black women excluded from their Nineteenth Amendment right to vote. It took nearly 100 years of protest and struggle to bring the Voting Rights Act and federal enforcement of that law into existence.

By far, the most pervasive and destructive oppression Black people experienced in the aftermath of enslavement was the legally sanctioned creation of an apartheid system of racial segregation and subordination in the form of racially separate and unequal nations of people on one soil. Segregation meant that white people expropriated only for themselves quality education, technology, union industrial and manufacturing jobs, health care innovations, philanthropic giving, segregated religious worship services, status and rank in the military, elective enfranchisement as the basis for democratic participation, paths to entrepreneurial growth via access to bank credit, and legal and civil rights protection under the law.

Ida B. Wells and many other African Americans who came to adulthood during the tumultuous decades following the Civil War (1865–1917) created and promoted an ideology of racial uplift that pursued an

important ideal of democratic inclusion, equal rights, and collective advancement for all Black people. Self-help and public service to the welfare of all Black people were core beliefs guiding Wells' view of her mission in life. Kevin K. Gaines, a National Humanities Center Fellow, has noted that "race uplift" "was a call to elites to embrace ideals of self-help and service to the race in building educational, reformist social gospel churches, civic, fraternal/sorority organizations, settlement houses, newspapers, trade unions and other public institutions whose constructive social impact exceeded the ideological limitations of uplift" (formerly at <http://www.nationalhumanitiescenter.org/teacherserve/racialuplift.html>).

Even as Black Americans have pressed for human and civil rights, they have consistently fought in America's military excursions. Indeed, as Black Americans helped make the world safe for democracy, they were often unsafe at home. Even what had been home underwent a transformation as the great migrations of Black Americans from rural areas of the South to the urban areas of the North and Southwest changed the demographic racial landscape of America. Since early in the twentieth century, the Black experience, as it is sometimes called, has increasingly become an urban experience. The Southern-based Civil Rights Movement, one of the "great awakenings" of the twentieth century, effectively used massive direct action protest to bring down *de jure* segregation and to call attention to gross violations of the civil rights of Black Americans. The movement forced the country to confront the reality of legalized economic, political, social, and cultural disparity in the richest nation on Earth.

In reflecting on the decades following the Civil Rights Movement it is clear that it served as a catalyst for other ethnic/racial movements for civil rights. Many white women later active in the women's movement learned how to effectively challenge unequal treatment while activists in the broad-based coalition fashioned during the movement. Unprecedented numbers of Black Americans now vote, and interventions like Affirmative Action have made a positive difference when and where they have been welcomed as a remedy for past and even continuing racial discrimination and disadvantage. Urban social movements have also challenged any residual *de jure* and continuing *de facto* segregation that has characterized life in northern cities. And, in the tradition of enigmatic Black American leadership, elected Black leaders have tried with varied success to implement measures that strengthen Black business development, as the next necessary step toward Black economic development is furthered. Black Americans have accomplished significant progress in just over 144 years since the end of enslavement. While there is still a long road ahead, and many obstacles, much that is empowering and good has been attained and should be remembered and celebrated.

Study Questions and Activities

1. What issues were important to Black Americans during Reconstruction?
2. Trace the significance of Court rulings and legislation in effecting changes in the status of Black Americans.
3. Define and trace Black American efforts to promote self-reliance and self-help initiatives.
4. Identify and discuss Black American male and female leadership since the late 19th century.
5. Discuss the impact of white opposition to participatory democracy for Black Americans.
6. Identify the contributions Black Americans have made to military wars, and discuss the paradox of fighting for democracy abroad but being deprived of civil rights at home in the United States.
7. Identify the role of Black people in creating and sustaining the recent Civil Rights Movement.
8. Identify key Black institutions that have fostered self-help, mutual assistance, charitable giving, and Black Nationalism.
9. Assess the changes that have taken place in the collective experience of Black Americans since Emancipation.

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