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Author(s): Jacquelyn Dowd Hall

Source: *The Journal of American History*, Mar., 2005, Vol. 91, No. 4 (Mar., 2005), pp. 1233-1263

Published by: Oxford University Press on behalf of Organization of American Historians

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The Long Civil Rights Movement and the Political Uses of the Past

Jacquelyn Dowd Hall

> The black revolution is much more than a struggle for the rights of Negroes. It is forcing America to face all its interrelated flaws—racism, poverty, militarism, and materialism. It is exposing evils that are rooted deeply in the whole structure of our society . . . and suggests that radical reconstruction of society is the real issue to be faced.
>
> —Martin Luther King Jr.

> Stories are wonderful things. And they are dangerous.
>
> —Thomas King

The civil rights movement circulates through American memory in forms and through channels that are at once powerful, dangerous, and hotly contested. Civil rights memorials jostle with the South's ubiquitous monuments to its Confederate past. Exemplary scholarship and documentaries abound, and participants have produced wave after wave of autobiographical accounts, at least two hundred to date. Images of the movement appear and reappear each year on Martin Luther King Jr. Day and during Black History Month. Yet remembrance is always a form of forgetting, and the dominant narrative of the civil rights movement—distilled from history and memory, twisted by ideology and political contestation, and embedded in heritage tours, museums, public rituals, textbooks, and various artifacts of mass culture—distorts and suppresses as much as it reveals.[1]

Jacquelyn Dowd Hall is Julia Cherry Spruill Professor of History at the University of North Carolina and director of the Southern Oral History Program. This article is a revised version of the presidential address delivered to the convention of the Organization of American Historians in Boston on March 27, 2004.

Writing this essay led me to conversation with a far-flung network of friends and colleagues, and I thank them for their encouragement and generous sharing of ideas. Among them were Jefferson Cowie, Jane Dailey, Matthew Lassiter, Nelson Lichtenstein, Eric Lott, Nancy MacLean, Bryant Simon, and Karen Kruse Thomas. Laura Edwards, Drew Faust, Glenda Gilmore, Jeanne Grimm, Pamela Grundy, Bethany Johnson, Robert Korstad, Joanne Meyerowitz, Timothy McCarthy, Joe Mosnier, Kathryn Nasstrom, Della Pollock, Jennifer Ritterhouse, and Sarah Thuesen also offered astute comments on the manuscript in its various iterations. I benefited especially from Bethany Johnson's research and editorial skills, and Elizabeth More provided additional research assistance. A fellowship at the Radcliffe Institute for Advanced Study provided an ideal community in which to think and write.

[1] On civil rights autobiographies and histories, see Kathryn L. Nasstrom, "Between Memory and History: Autobiographies of the Civil Rights Movement and the Writing of a New Civil Rights History," National Endowment for the Humanities Lecture, University of San Francisco, April 29, 2002 (in Jacquelyn Dowd Hall's possession); Steven F. Lawson, "Freedom Then, Freedom Now: The Historiography of the Civil Rights Movement," *American Historical Review,* 96 (April 1991), 456–71; Adam Fairclough, "Historians and the Civil Rights Movement," *Journal of American Studies,* 24 (Dec. 1990), 387–98; Charles M. Payne, *I've Got the Light of Freedom: The*

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Centering on what Bayard Rustin in 1965 called the "classical" phase of the struggle, the dominant narrative chronicles a short civil rights movement that begins with the 1954 *Brown v. Board of Education* decision, proceeds through public protests, and culminates with the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965.[2] Then comes the decline. After a season of moral clarity, the country is beset by the Vietnam War, urban riots, and reaction against the excesses of the late 1960s and the 1970s, understood variously as student rebellion, black militancy, feminism, busing, affirmative action, or an overweening welfare state. A so-called white backlash sets the stage for the conservative interregnum that, for good or ill, depending on one's ideological persuasion, marks the beginning of another story, the story that surrounds us now.

Martin Luther King Jr. is this narrative's defining figure—frozen in 1963, proclaiming "I have a dream" during the march on the Mall. Endlessly reproduced and selectively quoted, his speeches retain their majesty yet lose their political bite. We hear little of the King who believed that "the racial issue that we confront in America is not a sectional but a national problem" and who attacked segregation in the urban North. Erased altogether is the King who opposed the Vietnam War and linked racism at home to militarism and imperialism abroad. Gone is King the democratic socialist who advocated unionization, planned the Poor People's Campaign, and was assassinated in 1968 while supporting a sanitation workers' strike.[3]

By confining the civil rights struggle to the South, to bowdlerized heroes, to a single halcyon decade, and to limited, noneconomic objectives, the master narrative simultaneously elevates and diminishes the movement. It ensures the status of the classical phase as a triumphal moment in a larger American progress narrative, yet it undermines its *gravitas.* It prevents one of the most remarkable mass movements in American history from speaking effectively to the challenges of our time.

Organizing Tradition and the Mississippi Freedom Struggle (Berkeley, 1995), 413–41; Charles W. Eagles, "Toward New Histories of the Civil Rights Era," *Journal of Southern History,* 66 (Nov. 2000), 815–48; and Kevin Gaines, "The Historiography of the Struggle for Black Equality since 1945," in *A Companion to Post-1945 America,* ed. Jean-Christophe Agnew and Roy Rosenzweig (Malden, Mass., 2002), 211–34. In contrast to the vast literature on what the movement was and did, the scholarship on how it is remembered is scattered and thin. For examples, see David A. Zonderman, review of the Martin Luther King Jr. National Historic Site, Birmingham Civil Rights Institute, and National Civil Rights Museum, *Journal of American History,* 91 (June 2004), 174–83; Kathryn L. Nasstrom, "Down to Now: Memory, Narrative, and Women's Leadership in the Civil Rights Movement in Atlanta, Georgia," *Gender and History,* 11 (April 1999), 113–44; Terrie L. Epstein, "Tales from Two Textbooks: A Comparison of the Civil Rights Movement in Two Secondary History Textbooks," *Social Studies,* 85 (May–June 1994), 121–26; William A. Link, review of the film *The Road to Brown,* by William A. Ellwood, Mykola Kulish, and Gary Weimberg, *History of Education Quarterly,* 31 (Winter 1991), 523–26; and an anthology in progress: Leigh Raiford and Renee Romano, eds., "'Freedom Is a Constant Struggle': The Civil Rights Movement in United States Memory" (in Leigh Raiford and Renee Romano's possession).

[2] Bayard Rustin, *Down the Line: The Collected Writings of Bayard Rustin* (Chicago, 1971), 111–22, esp. 111.

[3] Martin Luther King Jr., "The Rising Tide of Racial Consciousness (1960)," in *I Have a Dream: Writings and Speeches That Changed the World,* ed. James Melvin Washington (San Francisco, 1992), 67. For early protests against the tendency to idolize King and to ignore his radicalism and that of the grass roots, see "A Round Table: Martin Luther King Jr.," *Journal of American History,* 74 (Sept. 1987), 436–81. For a call for attention to the later King years, see Michael Honey, "Labor and Civil Rights Movements at the Cross-Roads: Martin Luther King, Black Workers, and the Memphis Sanitation Strike," paper delivered at the annual meeting of the Organization of American Historians, Memphis, Tenn., April 2003 (in Hall's possession).

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While the narrative I have recounted has multiple sources, this essay emphasizes how the movement's meaning has been distorted and reified by a New Right bent on reversing its gains. I will then trace the contours of what I take to be a more robust, more progressive, and *truer* story—the story of a "long civil rights movement" that took root in the liberal and radical milieu of the late 1930s, was intimately tied to the "rise and fall of the New Deal Order," accelerated during World War II, stretched far beyond the South, was continuously and ferociously contested, and in the 1960s and 1970s inspired a "movement of movements" that "def[ies] any narrative of collapse."[4]

Integral to that more expansive story is the dialectic between the movement and the so-called backlash against it, a wall of resistance that did not appear suddenly in the much-maligned 1970s, but arose in tandem with the civil rights offensive in the aftermath of World War II and culminated under the aegis of the New Right. The economic dimensions of the movement lie at the core of my concerns, and throughout I will draw attention to the interweavings of gender, class, and race. In this essay, however, racial narratives and dilemmas will take center stage, for, as Lani Guinier and Gerald Torres suggest, "Those who are racially marginalized are like the miner's canary: their distress is the first sign of a danger that threatens us all."[5]

A desire to understand and honor the movement lies at the heart of the rich and evolving literature on the 1950s and early 1960s, and that era's chroniclers have helped endow the struggle with an aura of cultural legitimacy that both reflects and reinforces its profound legal, political, and social effects. By placing the world-shaking events of the classical phase in the context of a longer story, I want to buttress that representational project and reinforce the moral authority of those who fought for change in those years. At the same time, I want to make civil rights harder. Harder to celebrate as a natural progression of American values. Harder to cast as a satisfying morality tale. Most of all, harder to simplify, appropriate, and contain.[6]

The Political Uses of Racial Narratives

The roots of the dominant narrative lie in the dance between the movement's strategists and the media's response. In one dramatic protest after another, civil rights activists couched their demands in the language of democratic rights and Christian universalism; demonstrated their own respectability and courage; and pitted coercive nonviolence against guns, nightsticks, and fists. Played out in the courts, in legislative chambers, in workplaces, and in the streets, those social dramas toppled the South's system of disfranchisement and de jure or legalized segregation by forcing the hand

[4] Steve Fraser and Gary Gerstle, eds., *The Rise and Fall of the New Deal Order, 1930–1980* (Princeton, 1989); Van Gosse, "A Movement of Movements: The Definition and Periodization of the New Left," in *Companion to Post-1945 America,* ed. Agnew and Rosenzweig, 277–302, esp. 282.

[5] The meaning of race and racism in America has always been inflected by ethnic exclusions and identities, and it has been complicated by the demographic changes in the late twentieth century. In this essay, however, I limit my focus to the black-white divide. Lani Guinier and Gerald Torres, *The Miner's Canary: Enlisting Race, Resisting Power, Transforming Democracy* (Cambridge, Mass., 2002), 11.

[6] Kevin Mattson, "Civil Rights Made Harder," *Reviews in American History,* 30 (Dec. 2002), 663–70.

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of federal officials and bringing local governments to their knees. The mass media, in turn, made the protests "one of the great news stories of the modern era," but they did so very selectively. Journalists' interest waxed and waned along with activists' ability to generate charismatic personalities (who were usually men) and telegenic confrontations, preferably those in which white villains rained down terror on nonviolent demonstrators dressed in their Sunday best. Brought into American living rooms by the seductive new medium of television and replayed ever since, such scenes seem to come out of nowhere, to have no precedents, no historical roots. To compound that distortion, the national press's overwhelmingly sympathetic, if misleading, coverage changed abruptly in the mid-1960s with the advent of black power and black uprisings in the urban North. Training a hostile eye on those developments, the cameras turned away from the South, ignoring the southern campaign's evolving goals, obscuring interregional connections and similarities, and creating a narrative breach between what people think of as "the movement" and the ongoing popular struggles of the late 1960s and the 1970s.[7]

Early studies of the black freedom movement often hewed closely to the journalistic "rough draft of history," replicating its judgments and trajectory. More recent histories, memoirs, and documentaries have struggled to loosen its hold.[8] Why, then, has the dominant narrative seemed only to consolidate its power? The answer lies, in

[7] Julian Bond, "The Media and the Movement: Looking Back from the Southern Front," in *Media, Culture, and the Modern African American Freedom Struggle,* ed. Brian Ward (Gainesville, 2001), 16–40, esp. 32. See also Robert J. Norrell, "One Thing We Did Right: Reflections on the Movement," in *New Directions in Civil Rights Studies,* ed. Armstead L. Robinson and Patricia Sullivan (Charlottesville, 1991), 72–73, 77; and Payne, *I've Got the Light of Freedom,* 391–405.

[8] Payne, *I've Got the Light of Freedom,* 391. For works that stress the events of the classical phase but also highlight the long trajectory of the movement, see *ibid.*; Manning Marable, *Race, Reform, and Rebellion: The Second Reconstruction in Black America, 1945–1990* (Jackson, 1991); Steven F. Lawson, *Running for Freedom: Civil Rights and Black Politics in America since 1941* (New York, 1997); Adam Fairclough, *Race and Democracy: The Civil Rights Struggle in Louisiana, 1915–1972* (Athens, Ga., 1995); and Greta De Jong, *A Different Day: African American Struggles for Justice in Rural Louisiana, 1900–1970* (Chapel Hill, 2002). Community studies tend to blur the boundaries of the dominant narrative, and biographies often illuminate North/South linkages and the fluidity and diversity of the movement. See, for example, George Lipsitz, *A Life in the Struggle: Ivory Perry and the Culture of Opposition* (Philadelphia, 1995). For a growing chorus of calls for a broader scholarly focus, see Robert Korstad and Nelson Lichtenstein, "Opportunities Found and Lost: Labor, Radicals, and the Early Civil Rights Movement," *Journal of American History,* 75 (Dec. 1988), 786–811; Timothy B. Tyson, "Robert F. Williams, 'Black Power,' and the Roots of the African American Freedom Struggle," *ibid.*, 85 (Sept. 1998), 540–70; Julian Bond, "The Politics of Civil Rights History," in *New Directions in Civil Rights Studies,* ed. Robinson and Sullivan, 8–16; Payne, *I've Got the Light of Freedom,* 3, 391–405, 413–41; Charles Payne, "Debating the Civil Rights Movement: The View from the Trenches," in *Debating the Civil Rights Movement, 1945–1968,* by Steven F. Lawson and Charles Payne (Lanham, 1998), 108–11; Peniel E. Joseph, "Waiting till the Midnight Hour: Reconceptualizing the Heroic Period of the Civil Rights Movement, 1954–1965," *Souls,* 2 (Spring 2000), 6–17; Jacquelyn Dowd Hall, "Mobilizing Memory: Broadening Our View of the Civil Rights Movement," *Chronicle of Higher Education,* July 27, 2001, pp. B7–B11; Nell Irvin Painter, "America Needs to Reexamine Its Civil Rights History," *Journal of Blacks in Higher Education,* Aug. 31, 2001, pp. 132–34; Brian Ward, "Introduction: Forgotten Wails and Master Narratives: Media, Culture, and Memories of the Modern African American Freedom Struggle," in *Media, Culture, and the Modern African American Freedom Struggle,* ed. Ward, 1–15; Robert O. Self, *American Babylon: Race and the Struggle for Postwar Oakland* (Princeton, 2003), 10–11, 330–31; Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham, "Foreword," in *Freedom North: Black Freedom Struggles outside the South, 1940–1980,* ed. Jeanne Theoharis and Komozi Woodard (New York, 2003), viii–xvi; Jeanne Theoharis, "Introduction," *ibid.*, 1–15; Van Gosse, "Postmodern America: A New Democratic Order in the Second Gilded Age," in *The World the Sixties Made: Politics and Culture in Recent America,* ed. Van Gosse and Richard Moser (Philadelphia, 2003), 1–36; Jack Dougherty, *More Than One Struggle: The Evolution of Black School Reform in Milwaukee* (Chapel Hill, 2004), 1–4; and Nikhil Pal Singh, *Black Is a Country: Race and the Unfinished Struggle for Democracy* (Cambridge, Mass., 2004), 4–14.

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part, in the rise of other storytellers—the architects of the New Right, an alliance of corporate power brokers, old-style conservative intellectuals, and "neoconservatives" (disillusioned liberals and socialists turned Cold War hawks).

The Old Right, North and South, had been on the wrong side of the revolution, opposing the civil rights movement and reviling its leaders in the name of property rights, states' rights, anticommunism, and the God-given, biological inferiority of blacks. Largely moribund by the 1960s, the conservative movement reinvented itself in the 1970s, first by incorporating neoconservatives who eschewed old-fashioned racism and then by embracing an ideal of formal equality, focusing on blacks' ostensible failings, and positioning itself as the true inheritor of the civil rights legacy.[9] Like all bids for discursive and political power, this one required the warrant of the past, and the dominant narrative of the civil rights movement was ready at hand. Reworking that narrative for their own purposes, these new "color-blind conservatives" ignored the complexity and dynamism of the movement, its growing focus on structural inequality, and its "radical reconstruction" goals. Instead, they insisted that color blindness—defined as the elimination of racial classifications and the establishment of formal equality before the law—was the movement's singular objective, the principle for which King and the *Brown* decision, in particular, stood. They admitted that racism, understood as individual bigotry, did exist—"in the distant past" and primarily in the South—a concession that surely would have taken the Old Right by surprise.[10] But after legalized Jim Crow was dismantled, such irrationalities diminished to insignificance. In the absence of overtly discriminatory laws and with the waning of conscious bias, American institutions became basically fair. Free to compete in a market-driven society, African Americans thereafter bore the onus of their own failure or success. If stark group inequalities persisted, black attitudes, behavior, and family structures were to blame. The race-conscious remedies devised in the late 1960s and 1970s to implement the movement's victories, such as majority-minority voting districts, minority business set-asides, affirmative action, and two-way busing, were not the handiwork of the authentic civil rights movement at all. Foisted on an unwitting public by a "liberal elite" made up of judges, intellectuals, and government bureaucrats, those policies not only betrayed the movement's original goals; they also had little effect on the economic progress blacks enjoyed in the late 1960s and 1970s, which was caused not by grass-roots activism or governmental intervention but by

[9] For a bracing look at the reinvention of the Right in the 1970s, see Nancy MacLean, *"Freedom Is Not Enough": How the Fight over Jobs and Justice Changed America* (Cambridge, Mass., forthcoming), chap. 7. I am indebted to MacLean for sharing her work with me. For the metamorphosis of conservatism in the West and South, see Lisa McGirr, *Suburban Warriors: The Origins of the New American Right* (Princeton, 2001); Anders Walker, "The Ghost of Jim Crow: Law, Culture, and the Subversion of Civil Rights, 1954–1965" (Ph.D. diss., Yale University, 2003); Anders Walker, "Legislating Virtue: How Segregationists Disguised Racial Discrimination as Moral Reform Following *Brown v. Board of Education*," *Duke Law Journal*, 47 (Nov. 1997), 399–424; Matthew D. Lassiter and Andrew B. Lewis, eds., *The Moderates' Dilemma: Massive Resistance to School Desegregation in Virginia* (Charlottesville, 1998); Matthew D. Lassiter, "The Suburban Origins of 'Color-Blind' Conservatism: Middle-Class Consciousness in the Charlotte Busing Crisis," *Journal of Urban History*, 30 (May 2004), 549–82; and Richard A. Pride, *The Political Use of Racial Narratives: School Desegregation in Mobile, Alabama, 1954–97* (Urbana, 2002).

[10] The quotation is from Ernest Van den Haag, "Reverse Discrimination: A Brief against It," *National Review*, April 29, 1977, p. 493, cited in MacLean, *"Freedom Is Not Enough,"* chap. 7.

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impersonal market forces. In fact, the remedies themselves became the cause of our problems, creating resentment among whites, subverting self-reliance among blacks, and encouraging "balkanization" when nationalism and assimilation should be our goals.[11] It was up to color-blind conservatives to restore the original purpose of civil rights laws, which was to prevent isolated acts of wrongdoing against individuals, rather than, as many civil rights activists and legal experts claimed, to redress present, institutionalized manifestations of historical injustices against blacks as a group.[12]

Germinated in well-funded right-wing think tanks and broadcast to the general public, this racial narrative had wide appeal, in part because it conformed to white, middle-class interests and flattered national vanities and in part because it resonated with ideals of individual effort and merit that are widely shared. The American creed of free-market individualism, in combination with the ideological victories of the movement (which ensured that white supremacy must "hide its face"), made the rhetoric of color blindness central to the "war of ideas" initiated by the New Right in the 1970s. With Ronald Reagan's presidential victory in 1980, and even more so after the Republican sweep of Congress in 1994, that rhetoric entrenched itself in public policy. Dovetailing with the retreat from race-specific remedies among centrist liberals, it crossed traditional political boundaries, and it now shapes the thinking of "a great many people of good will."[13]

[11] Proponents of this new racial orthodoxy differ in tone and, to a lesser extent, in ideas. I am stressing the interventions of those who present themselves as the voice of the reasoned, informed center or as "racial realists," in Alan Wolfe's phrase. I refer to them as "new conservatives" or "color-blind conservatives." For racial realism, see Alan Wolfe, "Enough Blame to Go Around," *New York Times Book Review,* June 12, 1998, p. 12; Philip Klinkner, "The 'Racial Realism' Hoax," *Nation,* Dec. 14, 1998, pp. 33–38; "Letters," *ibid.,* Jan. 25, 1999, p. 24; and Michael K. Brown et al., *Whitewashing Race: The Myth of a Color-Blind Society* (Berkeley, 2003), 5–12, 224. For the spectrum and evolution of new conservative writing on race, see Charles A. Murray, *Losing Ground: American Social Policy, 1950–1980* (New York, 1984); Thomas Sowell, *Civil Rights: Rhetoric or Reality?* (New York, 1984); Dinesh D'Souza, *The End of Racism: Principles for a Multiracial Society* (New York, 1995); Stephan Thernstrom and Abigail Thernstrom, *America in Black and White: One Nation, Indivisible* (New York, 1997); Jim Sleeper, *Liberal Racism* (New York, 1997); Tamar Jacoby, *Someone Else's House: America's Unfinished Struggle for Integration* (New York, 1998); Shelby Steele, *A Dream Deferred: The Second Betrayal of Black Freedom in America* (New York, 1998); and Abigail Thernstrom and Stephan Thernstrom, *No Excuses: Closing the Racial Gap in Learning* (New York, 2003). Critiques of color-blind conservatives, which dispute their understanding of history, interpretation of civil rights law, and research, include Brown et al., *Whitewashing Race;* J. Morgan Kousser, *Colorblind Injustice: Minority Voting Rights and the Undoing of the Second Reconstruction* (Chapel Hill, 1999); K. Anthony Appiah and Amy Gutmann, *Color Conscious: The Political Morality of Race* (Princeton, 1996); Stephen Steinberg, *Turning Back: The Retreat from Racial Justice in American Thought and Policy* (Boston, 2001); MacLean, *"Freedom Is Not Enough";* and Alice O'Connor, "Malign Neglect," *Du Bois Review,* 1 (Nov. 2004), forthcoming.

[12] This formulation is drawn from Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw, "Race, Reform, and Retrenchment: Transformation and Legitimation in Antidiscrimination Law," in *Critical Race Theory: The Key Writings That Formed the Movement,* ed. Kimberlé Crenshaw et al. (New York, 1995), 105.

[13] Gosse, "Postmodern America," 5; Brown et al., *Whitewashing Race,* 224. We have little scholarship on the mushrooming of conservative think tanks and foundations and their role in training and supporting policy intellectuals and marketers and thus in shaping the terms of American political debate. This lack of attention leaves intact the assumption that the current assault on the gains of the civil rights movement results from a more or less spontaneous shift in public opinion that proponents of racial and gender justice often feel helpless to combat. For a start, see Leon Howell, *Funding the War of Ideas: A Report to the United Church Board for Homeland Ministries* (Cleveland, 1995); Jean Stefancic and Richard Delgado, *No Mercy: How Conservative Think Tanks and Foundations Changed America's Social Agenda* (Philadelphia, 1996); David Callahan, *$1 Billion for Ideas: Conservative Think Tanks in the 1990s* (Washington, 1999); Lee Cokorinos, *The Assault on Diversity: An Organized Challenge to Racial and Gender Justice* (Lanham, 2003); and Andrew Rich, *Think Tanks, Public Policy, and the Politics of Expertise* (New York, 2004).

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Clearly, the stories we tell about the civil rights movement matter; they shape how we see our own world. "Facts" must be interpreted, and those interpretations—narrated by powerful storytellers, portrayed in public events, acted upon in laws and policies and court decisions, and grounded in institutions—become primary sources of human action. Those who aspire to affect public opinion and policy and thus to participate in "the endless struggle over our collective destiny" must always ask themselves not only "which stories to advance, contest, and accept as 'true'" but also how to discipline those stories with research and experience and to advance them with power. In the world of symbolic politics, the answers to those questions determine who will prevail.[14]

In that spirit, I will turn now to a story of my own—the story of the long civil rights movement and of the resistance to it. Throughout, I will draw on the work of a wide range of historians, tying together stories usually told separately in order to alter common understandings of the black freedom struggle (and of how we arrived at the dilemmas of the new millennium) in at least six major ways. First, this new, longer and broader narrative undermines the trope of the South as the nation's "opposite other," an image that southernizes racism and shields from scrutiny both the economic dimensions of southern white supremacy and the institutionalized patterns of exploitation, segregation, and discrimination in other regions of the country—patterns that survived the civil rights movement and now define the South's racial landscape as well. Second, this narrative emphasizes the gordian knot that ties race to class and civil rights to workers' rights. Third, it suggests that women's activism and gender dynamics were central both to the freedom movement and to the backlash against it. Fourth, it makes visible modern civil rights struggles in the North, Midwest, and West, which entered a new phase with the turn to black nationalism in the mid-1960s but had begun at least a quarter century before. Fifth, it directs attention to the effort to "make use of the reforms won by the civil rights movement" in the 1970s, after the national movement's alleged demise.[15] And finally, it construes the Reagan-Bush ascendancy not simply as a backlash against the "movement of movements" of the late 1960s and 1970s, but as a development with deep historical roots.

The Long Backlash

Two great internal migrations gave rise both to the long civil rights movement and to the interests and ideologies that would ultimately feed the most telling resistance to it: the exodus of African Americans to the cities of the South, North, and West precipitated by the collapse of the southern sharecropping system and the mass suburbanization of whites. Accelerating during World War II, those vast relocations of people and resources transformed the racial geography of the country. Each

[14] Pride, *Political Use of Racial Narratives,* 4–20, 244–72, esp. 9 and 272.

[15] Nancy MacLean, "Redesigning Dixie with Affirmative Action: Race, Gender, and the Desegregation of the Southern Textile Mill World," in *Gender and the Southern Body Politic: Essays and Comments,* ed. Nancy Bercaw (Jackson, 2000), 163.

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responded to and acted on the other. They were fatefully, although often invisibly, entwined.[16]

Gender, class, region, and race all shaped both migration experiences. Because discrimination in the North shunted black men into the meanest factory jobs, women carried the burden of a double day. Relegated mainly to domestic service, they combined wage earning not only with homemaking but with kin work and social networking, practices that were rooted in the folk and family traditions of the South, bound neighborhoods together, and provided the safety net that discriminatory welfare policies denied. Such networks also helped to blur urban-rural boundaries, ensuring that struggles in the city and the countryside would be mutually reinforcing.[17]

As rural black folk grappled with the planter-dominated policies and practices that exploited their labor and drove them from the land, urban migrants fought to "keep Mississippi out of California" and the "plantation mentality" out of the cities of the South.[18] Indeed, the resonance of the plantation metaphor for blacks throughout the country suggests the depth and durability of rural memories and interregional connections. In one sense, however, the metaphor is misleading. For black migrants who made their way to the "promised land" found themselves confronting not Mississippi in California but indigenous forms of discrimination and de facto segregation—the result not of custom, as "de facto" implies, but of a combination of individual choices and governmental policies (some blatant and some race neutral on their face) that had the effect, and often the intent, of barring African Americans from access to decent jobs, schools, and homes, as well as to the commercialized leisure spaces that increasingly symbolized "making it in America" for white ethnics en route to the middle class.

Ironically, New Deal programs helped to erect those racial barriers. In tandem with the higher wages won by the newly empowered unions of the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO), the expansion of the welfare state mitigated the terrible insecurity of working-class life for blacks and whites alike. Yet the "gendered" and "raced" imagination of New Deal reformers also built racial and gender inequality into the very foundation of the modern state.[19] Those inequalities were intensified by

[16] On the reshaping of cities by the two internal migrations, see Robert O. Self and Thomas J. Sugrue, "The Power of Place: Race, Political Economy, and Identity in the Postwar Metropolis," in *Companion to Post-1945 America,* ed. Agnew and Rosenzweig, 20–43.

[17] Robert O. Self, "'Negro Leadership and Negro Money': African American Political Organizing in Oakland before the Panthers," in *Freedom North,* ed. Theoharis and Woodard, 99–100. For the long-neglected topic of women and migration, see Darlene Clark Hine, "Black Migration to the Urban Midwest: The Gender Dimension, 1915–1945," in *The Great Migration in Historical Perspective: New Dimensions of Race, Class, and Gender,* ed. Joe William Trotter Jr. (Bloomington, 1991), 127–46; Kimberley L. Phillips, *AlabamaNorth: African-American Migrants, Community, and Working-Class Activism in Cleveland, 1915–1945* (Urbana, 1999); Gretchen Lemke-Santangelo, *Abiding Courage: African American Migrant Women and the East Bay Community* (Chapel Hill, 1996); Megan Taylor Shockley, *"We, Too, Are Americans": African American Women in Detroit and Richmond, 1940–54* (Urbana, 2004); and Laurie Beth Green, "Battling the Plantation Mentality: Consciousness, Culture, and the Politics of Race, Class, and Gender in Memphis, 1940–1968" (Ph.D. diss., University of Chicago, 1999).

[18] Self, *American Babylon,* 88; Laurie B. Green, "Race, Gender, and Labor in 1960s Memphis: 'I AM A MAN' and the Meaning of Freedom," *Journal of Urban History,* 30 (March 2004), 467.

[19] Alice Kessler-Harris, *In Pursuit of Equity: Women, Men, and the Quest for Economic Citizenship in Twentieth-Century America* (New York, 2001).

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the concessions exacted both by conservative Republican congressmen and by southern Democrats, who owed their congressional seniority and thus their domination of key committees to the South's constricted electorate and one-party rule.

One manifestation of systemic inequality was a two-track welfare system rooted in a "family wage" ideal that figured the worker as a full-time breadwinner who supported children and a dependent, non-wage-earning wife at home—an ideal from which most people of color were excluded. When unemployment insurance was enacted in 1935, for example, it did not extend to agricultural and domestic workers, whom reformers did not see as independent, full-time breadwinners, and on whom the South's low-wage economy depended. As a result, 55 percent of all African American workers and 87 percent of all wage-earning African American women were excluded from one of the chief benefits of the New Deal. In lieu of such protections, African Americans were dependent on—and stigmatized by—the stingy, means-tested programs known as "welfare" today.[20]

As metropolitan populations exploded, a mad scramble for housing brought African Americans face to face with another limitation of the New Deal: white men benefited disproportionately from the G.I. Bill of Rights, a mammoth social welfare program for returning veterans passed by Congress at the end of World War II. In combination with an equally ambitious housing program, the G.I. Bill drew aspiring ethnic workers and the white middle class out of the city, away from black neighbors, and into ever-expanding suburban rims. Centuries of racial denigration, compounded by divisions built into the two-track welfare system, predisposed white urbanites to fear black migrants. But what came to be known as "white flight" was caused not just by individual attitudes but also by a panoply of profit- and government-driven policies. Local zoning boards and highway building choices equated "black" with "blight," frightening away white buyers and steering investment away from black urban neighborhoods. Blockbusting real estate agents stampeded whites into selling cheap and blacks into buying dear. Redlining banks denied mortgages to African Americans and to buyers in "mixed" neighborhoods. Most important, the Federal Housing Administration pursued lending policies that not only favored but practically mandated racial homogeneity.[21]

[20] Nelson Lichtenstein, *State of the Union: A Century of American Labor* (Princeton, 2002), 96. On gender, race, and welfare, see Kessler-Harris, *In Pursuit of Equity;* Linda Gordon, ed., *Women, the State, and Welfare* (Madison, 1990); Linda Gordon, *Pitied but Not Entitled: Single Mothers and the History of Welfare, 1890–1935* (New York, 1994); and Michael K. Brown, *Race, Money, and the American Welfare State* (Ithaca, 1999). For changes in the family-wage system as the key theme of post–World War II women's history, see Nancy MacLean, "Postwar Women's History: The 'Second Wave' or the End of the Family Wage?," in *Companion to Post-1945 America,* ed. Agnew and Rosenzweig, 235–59.

[21] My discussion of white ethnic workers, the middle class, and the spatialization of race draws on the work of brilliant urban historians, especially Kenneth T. Jackson, "Race, Ethnicity, and Real Estate Appraisal: The Home Owners Loan Corporation and the Federal Housing Administration," *Journal of Urban History,* 6 (Aug. 1980), 419–52; Kenneth T. Jackson, *Crabgrass Frontier: The Suburbanization of the United States* (New York, 1985); Thomas W. Hanchett, *Sorting Out the New South City: Race, Class, and Urban Development in Charlotte, 1875–1975* (Chapel Hill, 1998); Thomas J. Sugrue, "Crabgrass-Roots Politics: Race, Rights, and the Reaction against Liberalism in the Urban North, 1940–1964," *Journal of American History,* 82 (Sept. 1995), 551–78; Arnold R. Hirsch, *Making the Second Ghetto: Race and Housing in Chicago, 1940–1960* (New York, 1983); Thomas J. Sugrue, *The Origins of the Urban Crisis: Race and Inequality in Postwar Detroit* (Princeton, 1996); Kevin Fox Gotham, "Urban Space, Restrictive Covenants, and the Origins of Racial Residential Segregation in a U.S. City,

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Encouraged by tax incentives, highway building programs, and a desire to outflank the new unions, factories and businesses moved to the suburbs as well, eroding the cities' tax base, damaging infrastructure, and eviscerating municipal services. The growth of segregated suburbs also exacerbated the trend toward almost complete segregation in urban schools. The practice of supporting public education through local taxes and the fiercely guarded divide between urban and suburban school districts, combined with conscious, racially motivated choices regarding the siting of schools and the assignment of pupils, relegated black migrants to schools that were often as separate and as unequal as those they had left behind.[22]

This cascading process of migration, job discrimination, suburbanization, and race-coded New Deal reform had three major effects. First, over the course of the 1940s race became increasingly spatialized, rendering invisible to whites the accumulated race and class privileges that undergirded what suburbanites came to see as the rightful fruits of their own labor. Second, the "suburban frontier" spawned a new homeowners' politics based on low taxes, property rights, neighborhood autonomy, and a shrinking sense of social responsibility, all of which became entangled with racial identity in ways that would prove extremely difficult to undo.[23] Finally, African Americans, already burdened by the social and economic deprivations of slavery and Jim Crow, found themselves disadvantaged by employment practices and state policies that amounted to affirmative action for whites. In a society where a home represented most families' single most important asset, for example, differential access to mortgages and housing markets and the racial valuation of neighborhoods translated into enormous inequalities. Passed on from generation to generation, those inequalities persist to this day. Short-circuiting the generational accumulation of wealth and social capital that propelled other ethnic minorities into the expanding post–World War II middle class, those policies left a legacy of racial inequality that has yet to be seriously addressed.[24]

Southern Strategies

We now have a copious literature on postwar suburbanization and the deepening of segregation in the North and West. But too often, the already segregated, rural, backward South figures in this story only as a footnote or an exception to the rule. In fact,

1900–50," *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research,* 24 (Sept. 2000), 616–33; Self, *American Babylon;* Martha Biondi, *To Stand and Fight: The Struggle for Civil Rights in Postwar New York City* (Cambridge, Mass., 2003), 112–36, 223–49; Lizabeth Cohen, *A Consumer's Republic: The Politics of Mass Consumption in Postwar America* (New York, 2003); Kenneth D. Durr, *Behind the Backlash: White Working-Class Politics in Baltimore, 1940–1980* (Chapel Hill, 2003); and Bryant Simon, *Boardwalk of Dreams: Atlantic City and the Fate of Urban America* (New York, 2004). I am also indebted to Douglas S. Massey and Nancy A. Denton, *American Apartheid: Segregation and the Making of the Underclass* (Cambridge, Mass., 1993); and Brown, *Race, Money, and the American Welfare State.* On how veterans' benefits disadvantaged blacks, see Brown et al., *Whitewashing Race,* 75–77.

[22] Biondi, *To Stand and Fight,* 241–49.

[23] Self, *American Babylon,* 333–34.

[24] Melvin L. Oliver and Thomas M. Shapiro, *Black Wealth/White Wealth: A New Perspective on Racial Inequality* (New York, 1995).

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because southern cities grew up in the age of New Deal reform, the automobile, and suburban sprawl, the modern South might better be seen as a paradigm.[25]

Looking back from the perspective of the dominant narrative, it is easy to see a peculiar system of legal segregation as the South's defining feature. But spatial separation was never the white South's major goal. Black and white southerners engaged in constant and nuanced interactions, moderated by personal ties, economic interests, and class and gender dynamics and marked by cultural exchange.[26] Taking place as they did within a context of racial hierarchy, those interactions did not diminish segregation's perniciousness and power. Yet given the ubiquity of black-white contact and the crucial role of blacks as a source of cheap labor, what we think of as the age of segregation might better be called the age of "racial capitalism," for segregation was only one instrument of white supremacy, and white supremacy entailed not only racial domination but also economic practices. Pursued by an industrial and agricultural oligarchy to aggrandize themselves and forward a particular development strategy for the region, those practices involved low taxes, minimal investment in human capital, the separation and political immobilization of the black and white southern poor, the exploitation of non-unionized, undereducated black and white labor, and the patriarchal control of families and local institutions.[27]

That strategy created a particularly brutal and openly racialized social system, especially in the Deep South. But its basic doctrines—racial and class subordination, limited government regulation, a union-free workplace, and a racially divided working class—dovetailed seamlessly with an ethic of laissez-faire capitalism rooted deeply in American soil.[28] This is not to minimize regional differences. It is, however, to suggest that the further we move away from the campaigns that overturned the South's distinctive system of state-sponsored segregation, the easier it is to see the broader and ultimately more durable patterns of privilege and exploitation that were American, not southern, in their origins and consequences.

[25] For the argument that the South "traveled almost directly from the countryside to suburbia" and that "the southern city became the quintessential suburban city," see David R. Goldfield, *Promised Land: The South since 1945* (Arlington Heights, 1987), 153, 34.

[26] On such black-white interactions, see Diane Miller Sommerville, *Rape and Race in the Nineteenth-Century South* (Chapel Hill, 2004); and Jennifer Lynn Ritterhouse, "Learning Race: Racial Etiquette and the Socialization of Children in the Jim Crow South" (Ph.D. diss., University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, 1999).

[27] For the argument that racialism arose in feudal Europe before Europe's encounter with Africa and that capitalism and racialism evolved together to produce "a modern world system of 'racial capitalism' dependent on slavery, violence, imperialism, and genocide," see Cedric J. Robinson, *Black Marxism: The Making of the Black Radical Tradition* (1983; Chapel Hill, 2000), 2–3; and Robin D. G. Kelley, "Foreword," *ibid.*, esp. xiii. I use "racial capitalism" to emphasize that unfettered capitalism as well as racialism produced the Jim Crow system and to suggest similarities between the North and the South. For such uses of the term by southern historians, see Hall, "Mobilizing Memory," B8; Robert Rodgers Korstad, *Civil Rights Unionism: Tobacco Workers and the Struggle for Democracy in the Mid-Twentieth-Century South* (Chapel Hill, 2003), 55; and Brian Kelly, "Sentinels for New South Industry: Booker T. Washington, Industrial Accommodation, and Black Workers in the Jim Crow South," *Labor History*, 44 (Aug. 2003), 339. On the patriarchal political culture of the black belt elite, see Kari A. Frederickson, *The Dixiecrat Revolt and the End of the Solid South, 1932–1968* (Chapel Hill, 2001).

[28] Robert Korstad, "Class and Caste: Unraveling the Mysteries of the New South Regime," paper delivered at the W. E. B. Du Bois Institute Colloquium Series, Harvard University, Cambridge, Mass., Feb. 18, 2004 (in Hall's possession).

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Those common patterns meant that the South's postwar prosperity could narrow regional differences without eliminating racial gaps. Change began in earnest in the 1940s and accelerated in the 1950s and 1960s, as southern Democrats, responding selectively to the activist New Deal state (rather than opposing it, as observers often assume), used their congressional seniority to garner a disproportionate share of defense spending while demanding local and state control over federal programs for housing, hospital construction, education, and the like. That strategy helped raise wages and triple regional incomes in the 1940s, but it also blunted federal antidiscrimination efforts.[29] At the same time, southern industrialists, like their counterparts in other regions, reacted to rising wages and to the labor militancy that followed World War II by installing laborsaving machinery and eliminating the jobs held by blacks, while whites monopolized the new skilled and white-collar jobs, which demanded qualifications denied to blacks by both educational inequities and discriminatory practices that barred them from learning on the job. Thus even as the South prospered, racial disparities widened.[30]

Much of the South's new technical and managerial work force, moreover, was imported from the urban North. Before World War II, the chief goal of most southern politicians was to maintain the South's isolation and the captive labor supply on which the sharecropping system depended. Afterward, boosterism became these leaders' *raison d'être* and "the selling of the South" began. Low corporate taxes, low welfare benefits, and "look-the-other-way environmental policies," coupled with federally financed highway-building campaigns, attracted northern industry and an influx of northern-born, Republican-bred branch managers, supervisors, and technicians.[31] Those newcomers settled with their southern-born counterparts in class- and race-marked enclaves created by the same ostensibly race-neutral public policies that spatialized race in the North. With mushrooming suburbanization came the attitudes and advantages that would undergird the South's version of homeowner politics—the politics of the long backlash everywhere. Richard M. Nixon's "southern strategy," which attacked welfare, busing, and affirmative action in order to bring white southerners into the Republican fold, targeted such voters: middle-class suburbanites, including skilled workers from outside the South and young families who had come of age after the *Brown* decision and were uncomfortable with the openly racist rhetoric of massive resistance. Aimed also at white workers in the urban North, that strategy helped make the South a chief stronghold of the Republican party as,

[29] Bruce J. Schulman, *From Cotton Belt to Sunbelt: Federal Policy, Economic Development, and the Transformation of the South, 1938–1980* (New York, 1991), 112–73; Samuel Lubell, *The Future of American Politics* (New York, 1951), 100, 111–12; Karen Kruse Thomas, "Southern Racial Politics and Federal Health Policy in the Careers of Three Southern Senators: Allen Ellender of Louisiana, Lister Hill of Alabama, and Claude Pepper of Florida," paper delivered at the Organization of American Historians Southern Regional Conference, Atlanta, Ga., July 10, 2004 (in Hall's possession).

[30] Gavin Wright, "Economic Consequences of the Southern Protest Movement," in *New Directions in Civil Rights Studies,* ed. Robinson and Sullivan, 174–78; Brown et al., *Whitewashing Race,* 72–73. On how mechanization undercut labor and eliminated jobs for blacks, see Korstad, *Civil Rights Unionism,* 277–81.

[31] Gavin Wright, "The Civil Rights Revolution as Economic History," *Journal of Economic History,* 59 (June 1999), esp. 285. For the argument that much of the South's continuing distinctiveness rests less on its history of racism than on its devotion to the conservative economic tenets of racial capitalism, see *ibid.*

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over the next quarter century, the party cast off its moderates and set about dismantling the New Deal order.[32]

The Long Civil Rights Movement

Yet the outcome was not inevitable. It would take many years of astute and aggressive organizing to bring today's conservative regime to power. It took such effort because another force also rose from the caldron of the Great Depression and crested in the 1940s: a powerful social movement sparked by the alchemy of laborites, civil rights activists, progressive New Dealers, and black and white radicals, some of whom were associated with the Communist party. Robert Korstad calls it "civil rights unionism," Martha Biondi the "Black Popular Front"; both terms signal the movement's commitment to building coalitions, the expansiveness of its social democratic vision, and the importance of its black radical and laborite leadership. A national movement with a vital southern wing, civil rights unionism was not just a precursor of the modern civil rights movement. It was its decisive first phase.[33]

The link between race and class lay at the heart of the movement's political imagination. Historians have depicted the postwar years as the moment when race eclipsed class as the defining issue of American liberalism.[34] But among civil rights unionists,

[32] This paragraph draws on James C. Cobb, *The Selling of the South: The Southern Crusade for Industrial Development, 1936–1980* (Baton Rouge, 1982); Schulman, *From Cotton Belt to Sunbelt;* Brown, *Race, Money, and the American Welfare State;* Lubell, *Future of American Politics,* 100, 111–12; Hanchett, *Sorting Out the New South City,* 89–182, 223–56; Bruce J. Schulman, *The Seventies: The Great Shift in American Culture, Society, and Politics* (New York, 2001), 36–37; Dan T. Carter, *The Politics of Rage: George Wallace, the Origins of the New Conservatism, and the Transformation of American Politics* (New York, 1995), 326–27, 399; Lassiter, "Suburban Origins of 'Color-Blind' Conservatism," 549–82; and Jefferson Cowie, "Nixon's Class Struggle: Romancing the New Right Worker, 1969–1973," *Labor History,* 43 (Aug. 2002), 257–83. For a more sympathetic treatment of Nixon's southern policies, see Dean J. Kotlowski, *Nixon's Civil Rights: Politics, Principle, and Policy* (Cambridge, Mass., 2001), 1–43.

[33] Korstad, *Civil Rights Unionism;* Biondi, *To Stand and Fight,* 6. In this essay I use the term "civil rights unionism" to highlight the conjunction of race and class interests in black- and Left-led unions and progressive organizations. On the Popular Front, see Michael Denning, *The Cultural Front: The Laboring of American Culture in the Twentieth Century* (New York, 1996). Important early studies focused on civil rights activism in the late 1930s and the 1940s. See, for example, Richard M. Dalfiume, "The 'Forgotten Years' of the Negro Revolution," *Journal of American History,* 55 (June 1968), 90–106; and Harvard Sitkoff, *A New Deal for Blacks: The Emergence of Civil Rights as a National Issue* (New York, 1978). Still, only in the 1990s did civil rights historians begin to see the 1940s as a watershed comparable to the 1870s and the 1960s. See, for example, Michael K. Honey, *Southern Labor and Black Civil Rights: Organizing Memphis Workers* (Urbana, 1993); Patricia Sullivan, *Days of Hope: Race and Democracy in the New Deal Era* (Chapel Hill, 1996); Penny M. Von Eschen, *Race against Empire: Black Americans and Anticolonialism, 1937–1957* (Ithaca, 1997); Barbara Dianne Savage, *Broadcasting Freedom: Radio, War, and the Politics of Race, 1938–1948* (Chapel Hill, 1999); John Egerton, *Speak Now against the Day: The Generation before the Civil Rights Movement in the South* (New York, 1994); Carol Anderson, *Eyes off the Prize: The United Nations and the African American Struggle for Human Rights, 1944–1955* (New York, 2003); Risa Lauren Goluboff, "The Work of Civil Rights in the 1940s: The Department of Justice, the NAACP, and African-American Agricultural Labor" (Ph.D. diss., Princeton University, 2003); and Glenda Gilmore, "Defying Dixie: African Americans and Their Allies, 1915–1945," book in progress (in Glenda Gilmore's possession). For a contrary view of the 1940s as a decade of quiescence, see Harvard Sitkoff, "African American Militancy in the World War II South: Another Perspective," in *Remaking Dixie: The Impact of World War II on the American South,* ed. Neil R. McMillen (Jackson, 1997), 70–92.

[34] On the 1940s as the beginning of an era in which progressives elevated race over class, see Gary Gerstle, "The Protean Character of American Liberalism," *American Historical Review,* 99 (Oct. 1994), 1043–73; and Peter J. Kellogg, "Civil Rights Consciousness in the 1940s," *Historian,* 42 (no. 1, 1979), 18–41, esp. 22–25. For contrary views of the decade, see Denning, *Cultural Front,* 467; and Goluboff, "Work of Civil Rights in the 1940s."

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neither class nor race trumped the other, and both were expansively understood. Proceeding from the assumption that, from the founding of the Republic, racism has been bound up with economic exploitation, civil rights unionists sought to combine protection from discrimination with universalistic social welfare policies and individual rights with labor rights. For them, workplace democracy, union wages, and fair and full employment went hand in hand with open, affordable housing, political enfranchisement, educational equity, and an enhanced safety net, including health care for all.[35]

The realization of this vision depended on the answers to two questions. First, could the black-labor-left coalition reform the social policies forged during the Great Depression, extending to blacks the social and economic citizenship the New Deal had provided to an expanding state-subsidized middle class and an upper echelon of male workers? Second, could the coalition take advantage of the New Deal and the surge of progressive thought and politics in the American South to break the grip of the southern oligarchy in the region?[36]

Extending the New Deal and reforming the South were two sides of the same coin because seven out of ten African Americans still lived in the former Confederate states and because conservative southern Democrats possessed such disproportionate power in Congress.[37] To challenge the southern Democrats' congressional stranglehold, the movement had to enfranchise black and white southern workers and bring them into the house of labor, thus creating a constituency on which the region's emerging pro–civil rights, prolabor politicians could rely. If the project failed and the conservative wing of the southern Democratic party triumphed, the South would become a magnet for runaway industries and a power base for a national conservative movement, undercutting the northern bastions of organized labor and unraveling the New Deal.[38]

During the 1940s half a million unionized black workers, North and South, put themselves in the front ranks of the effort. The "Double V" campaign, for victory over fascism abroad and racism at home; the prolabor policies of the Roosevelt administration; the booming economy, which made labor scarce and triggered the biggest jump in black earnings since emancipation; the militancy of the black- and

[35] Korstad, *Civil Rights Unionism,* 3; Biondi, *To Stand and Fight,* 16; Self, *American Babylon,* 2–3, 6; Alan Derickson, "'Take Health from the List of Luxuries': Labor and the Right to Health Care, 1915–1949," *Labor History,* 41 (May 2000), 171–87.

[36] What Alex Lichtenstein has called the "Southern Front" was signaled by union successes in the region, a spike in National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) membership and voter registration among blacks, local activism by African Americans and white workers, and an influx into Washington of prolabor, antiracist, southern New Dealers. See Alex Lichtenstein, "The Cold War and the 'Negro Question,'" *Radical History Review,* 72 (Fall 1998), 186; Anthony P. Dunbar, *Against the Grain: Southern Radicals and Prophets, 1929–1959* (Charlottesville, 1981); Linda Reed, *Simple Decency and Common Sense: The Southern Conference Movement, 1938–1963* (Bloomington, 1991); Sullivan, *Days of Hope;* Korstad, *Civil Rights Unionism;* and Egerton, *Speak Now against the Day.*

[37] According to the U.S. census of 1940, 8,873,631 out of 12,672,971 African Americans lived in the eleven former Confederate states. University of Virginia Geospatial and Statistical Data Center, *United States Historical Census Data Browser* <http://fisher.lib.virginia.edu/census/> (Sept. 2004).

[38] Sullivan, *Days of Hope;* Michael Goldfield, *The Color of Politics: Race and the Mainsprings of American Politics* (New York, 1997), 231–61; Brown, *Race, Money, and the American Welfare State,* 99–134; Ira Katznelson, Kim Geiger, and Daniel Kryder, "Limiting Liberalism: The Southern Veto in Congress, 1933–1950," *Political Science Quarterly,* 108 (Summer 1993), 283–306; Korstad and Lichtenstein, "Opportunities Found and Lost," 786–811; Korstad, *Civil Rights Unionism,* 4–5.

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Left-led unions; the return of black veterans—all taken together "generated a rights consciousness that gave working-class black militancy a moral justification in some ways as powerful as that evoked by [Afro-Christianity] a generation later."[39]

International events deepened and broadened that consciousness. African Americans and their allies were among the first to grasp the enormity of the Nazi persecution of the Jews and to drive home the parallels between racism and anti-Semitism. In so doing, they used revulsion against the Holocaust to undermine racism at home and to "turn world opinion against Jim Crow." A "rising wind" of popular anticolonialism, inspired by the national liberation struggles in Africa and Asia that erupted after the war, also legitimized black aspirations and linked the denial of civil rights at home to the exploitation of the colonized peoples around the globe as well as to racially exclusive immigration and naturalization laws.[40]

At the same time, Popular Front culture encouraged labor feminism, a multiclass, union-oriented strand within the women's movement in which black women played a central role. Women joined the labor movement in record numbers in the 1940s, and by the end of the decade they had moved into leadership positions. The labor feminists among them fought for access to jobs, fair treatment, and expanded social supports within their unions and on the shop floor. They aimed to "de-gender" the idea of the family wage by asserting that women too were breadwinners. They also wanted to transform "the masculine pattern" of work, first by eliminating all invidious distinctions between male and female workers and then by demanding innovations, such as federally funded child care, that addressed the burdens of women's double day. Paralleling and reinforcing labor feminism, women in the Communist movement launched a women's liberation campaign. Articulated by Claudia Jones, the leading black woman leader in the Communist party, and pushed forward by the Congress of American Women, the concept of the triple oppression of black women—by virtue of their race, class, and gender—stood at the center of a tradition of left or progressive feminism that saw women's issues as inseparable from those of race and class.[41]

[39] Dalfiume, "'Forgotten Years' of the Negro Revolution," 90–106; Biondi, *To Stand and Fight,* 5; Korstad and Lichtenstein, "Opportunities Found and Lost," esp. 787; and Eric Arnesen, *Brotherhoods of Color: Black Railroad Workers and the Struggle for Equality* (Cambridge, Mass., 2001).

[40] Nikhil Pal Singh, "Culture/Wars: Recoding Empire in an Age of Democracy," *American Quarterly,* 50 (Sept. 1998), 474; Norrell, "One Thing We Did Right," 68–69. For the statement on "world opinion," see Gilmore, "Defying Dixie." Brenda Gayle Plummer, *Rising Wind: Black Americans and U.S. Foreign Affairs, 1935–1960* (Chapel Hill, 1996); Von Eschen, *Race against Empire.*

[41] This discussion of labor feminism is drawn from Dorothy Sue Cobble, "Lost Visions of Equality: The Labor Movement Origins of the Next Women's Movement," paper delivered at the annual meeting of the Organization of American Historians, Washington, D.C., April 13, 2002 (in Hall's possession), esp. 13; and Dorothy Sue Cobble, *The Other Women's Movement: Workplace Justice and Social Rights in Modern America* (Princeton, 2004), 8–9, 94–144, esp. 8. For an earlier use of the term "labor feminism," see Jacquelyn Dowd Hall, "O. Delight Smith's Progressive Era: Labor, Feminism, and Reform in the Urban South," in *Visible Women: New Essays on American Activism,* ed. Nancy A. Hewitt and Suzanne Lebsock (Urbana, 1993), 166–98. For left feminism more generally, see Kate Weigand, *Red Feminism: American Communism and the Making of Women's Liberation* (Baltimore, 2001); Gerald Horne, *Race Woman: The Lives of Shirley Graham Du Bois* (New York, 2000); Amy Swerdlow, "The Congress of American Women: Left-Feminist Peace Politics in the Cold War," in *U.S. History as Women's History: New Feminist Essays,* ed. Linda K. Kerber, Alice Kessler-Harris, and Kathryn Kish Sklar (Chapel Hill, 1995), 296–312; Daniel Horowitz, *Betty Friedan and the Making of* The Feminine Mystique: *The American Left, the Cold War, and Modern Feminism* (Amherst, 1998), 50–152; and Gerda Lerner, *Fireweed: A Political Autobiography* (Philadelphia, 2002), 256–74.

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Spurred by this broad insurgency, as well as by the turn of black leaders from "parallelism" (the creation of black institutions and the demand for separate but equal public services) to a push for full inclusion, black political activism soared and barriers to economic and political democracy tumbled. The Wagner Act and the National War Labor Board helped workers temper the power of corporations and forward the dream of workplace democracy that had animated American reform consciousness since the Progressive Era. In response to pressure from below, led mainly by A. Philip Randolph and the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters, President Franklin D. Roosevelt established a Fair Employment Practices Committee (FEPC) in 1941, putting racial discrimination on the national agenda for the first time since Reconstruction. In 1944 the Supreme Court brought a half century of acquiescence in political exclusion to an end when it declared the white primary unconstitutional. Rivaling in importance the later and more celebrated *Brown* decision, *Smith v. Allwright* sparked a major, South-wide voter registration drive. Other victories included the desegregation of the military, the outlawing of racial restrictive covenants and segregation in interstate commerce and graduate education, and the equalization of the salaries of black and white teachers in some southern states.[42]

The Chill of the Cold War

Those breakthroughs contributed to the movement's momentum, but they also met fierce resistance, as the long backlash accelerated. In the late 1940s, northern business interests joined conservative southern Democrats in a drive to roll back labor's wartime gains, protect the South's cheap labor supply, and halt the expansion of the New Deal. Their weapon of choice was a mass-based but elite-manipulated anticommunist crusade that would profoundly alter the cultural and political terrain.

The chief target was New Deal labor law. Like antidiscrimination and affirmative action programs in the 1960s and 1970s, the FEPC had enraged the conservative alliance, which defended the employer's right to hire and fire at will and equated fair hiring practices with quotas. After the war, probusiness conservatives quashed the campaign for a permanent FEPC, the chief item on the black-labor-left legislative agenda, in part by framing their opposition in the powerful new language of the Cold War. Sen. Strom Thurmond of South Carolina, for instance, painted the FEPC

[42] Lichtenstein, *State of the Union,* 4–11; Dalfiume, "'Forgotten Years' of the Negro Revolution," 90–106; Biondi, *To Stand and Fight,* 4; Darlene Clark Hine, *Black Victory: The Rise and Fall of the White Primary in Texas* (Columbia, Mo., 2003); *Smith v. Allwright,* 321 U.S. 649 (1944); Amilcar Shabazz, *Advancing Democracy: African Americans and the Struggle for Access and Equity in Higher Education in Texas* (Chapel Hill, 2004). On "parallelism," see Darlene Clark Hine, "Black Professionals and Race Consciousness: Origins of the Civil Rights Movement, 1890–1950," *Journal of American History,* 89 (March 2003), 1280. On salary equalization and the improvement of black schools in the 1940s and early 1950s, see Sonya Ramsey, "More Than the Three R's: The Educational, Economic, and Cultural Experiences of African American Female Public School Teachers in Nashville, Tennessee, 1869–1893" (Ph.D. diss., University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, 2000); Adam Fairclough, *Teaching Equality: Black Schools in the Age of Jim Crow* (Athens, Ga., 2001), 58–60; Sarah Caroline Thuesen, "Classes of Citizenship: The Culture and Politics of Black Public Education in North Carolina, 1919–1960" (Ph.D. diss., University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, 2003); and James J. Heckman, "The Central Role of the South in Accounting for the Economic Progress of Black Americans," *American Economic Review,* 80 (May 1990), 242–46.

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as a violation of the "American" principle of "local self-government" by a "federal police state" reminiscent of the Soviet Union. By demonizing the Communists in the labor movement, conservatives also pushed the Taft-Hartley Act through Congress. Under Taft-Hartley's restrictions, the CIO expelled its left-wing unions, tempered its fight for social welfare programs that would benefit the whole working class, and settled for an increasingly bureaucratized system of collective bargaining that secured higher wages and private welfare protections for its own members, mainly white male workers in heavy industries. Despite this so-called labor-management accord, American corporations remained fundamentally hostile toward both unions and the regulatory state, leaving even the workers who profited from the constricted collective bargaining system vulnerable to a renewed corporate offensive in the 1970s and 1980s, an offensive that, in combination with economic stagnation, deindustrialization, and automation, would cripple the trade-union movement for years to come.[43]

To be sure, even as domestic anticommunism helped drive labor to the right and weaken civil rights unionism's institutional base, it gave civil rights advocates a potent weapon: the argument that the United States' treatment of its black citizens undermined its credibility abroad. At a time when the State Department was laboring to draw a stark contrast between American democracy and Soviet terror, win the allegiance of the newly independent nations of Asia and Africa, and claim leadership of the "free world," competition with the Soviet Union gave government officials a compelling reason to ameliorate black discontent and, above all, to manage the image of American race relations abroad. As a result, civil rights leaders who were willing to mute their criticism of American foreign policy and distance themselves from the Left gained a degree of access to the halls of power they had never had before. On balance, historians have emphasized the effectiveness of this strategy and viewed the movement's successes in the 1950s as "at least in part a product of the Cold War."[44] Seen through the optic of the long civil rights movement, however, civil rights look less like a product of the Cold War and more like a casualty.

That is so because antifascism and anticolonialism had *already* internationalized the race issue and, by linking the fate of African Americans to that of oppressed people everywhere, had given their cause a transcendent meaning. Anticommunism, on the other hand, stifled the social democratic impulses that antifascism and anticolonialism encouraged, replacing them with a Cold War racial liberalism that, at best, failed to deliver on its promise of reform (with the partial exception of the judiciary, the federal government took no effective action throughout the 1950s) and, at worst, colluded with the right-wing red scare to narrow the ideological ground on which civil rights activists could stand. To take just one example: Both left-wing and centrist black leaders seized the opportunity offered by the 1945 founding of the United Nations (UN) to define the plight of African Americans as a "human rights" issue, a

[43] Frederickson, *Dixiecrat Revolt,* 7; Lichtenstein, *State of the Union,* 114–40; Nelson Lichtenstein, "Union Strategies," *Dissent,* 49 (Summer 2002), 75. For the battle over the Fair Employment Practices Committee (FEPC), see also Merl E. Reed, *Seedtime for the Modern Civil Rights Movement: The President's Committee on Fair Employment Practice, 1941–1946* (Baton Rouge, 1991).

[44] Mary L. Dudziak, *Cold War Civil Rights: Race and the Image of American Democracy* (Princeton, 2000), 12.

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concept that in UN treaties denoted not just freedom from political and legal discrimination but also the right to education, health care, housing, and employment. Although eager to convince emerging African nations of America's racial progress, the State Department blocked that endeavor, insulating the internal affairs of the United States from the oversight of the UN while carefully separating protected civil liberties from economic justice and branding the whole campaign for a robust human rights program a Soviet plot. Thwarted in its efforts, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) abandoned both economic issues and the battle against segregation in the North and devoted its considerable resources to clear-cut cases of de jure segregation in the South, thus severing its ties to the black Popular Front and increasingly weakening the link between race and class.[45]

The presidential campaign of 1948 marked both the high point and the demise of the postwar black-labor-left coalition. The coalition found a national voice in Henry Wallace, a New Dealer who broke with the Democratic party and ran for president on a third-party ticket. Courting the black vote with a progressive civil rights platform, Democratic party candidate Harry S. Truman trounced Wallace but alienated the Dixiecrats, conservative southern congressmen who bolted the Democratic convention and formed their own party—a way station, as it turned out, on a road that would lead many conservative white southerners to support George C. Wallace briefly and then, with the election of Richard M. Nixon in 1972, move in large numbers to the Republican party.[46]

The Dixiecrats also left another legacy. They perfected a combination of race- and red-baiting that defeated the South's leading New Deal politicians in the critical election of 1950 and, ten years later, allowed segregationists to claim that the civil rights movement was "communist inspired." Red-baiting thus got a second lease on life, spawning a dense network of "little HUACs" and "little FBIs," local imitations of the House Committee on Un-American Activities and the Federal Bureau of Investigation, throughout the South. Led by some of the region's most powerful politicians, notably Mississippi's James Eastland, those agencies hounded "subversives" of every sort, from veterans of the black-labor-left alliance, to local NAACP officials, to gay teachers, to national civil rights leaders, thus extending McCarthyism well into the 1960s, long after it had fallen into disrepute at the national level.[47]

[45] Anderson, *Eyes off the Prize;* Von Eschen, *Race against Empire;* Gerald Horne, *Communist Front? The Civil Rights Congress, 1946–1956* (London, 1988); U.S. Civil Rights Congress, *We Charge Genocide: The Historic Petition to the United Nations for Relief from a Crime of the United States Government against the Negro People,* ed. William L. Patterson (1951; New York, 1970); Mark V. Tushnet, *The NAACP's Legal Strategy against Segregated Education, 1925–1950* (Chapel Hill, 1987); Goluboff, "Work of Civil Rights in the 1940s."

[46] Frederickson, *Dixiecrat Revolt;* Carter, *Politics of Rage.*

[47] Jeff Woods, *Black Struggle, Red Scare: Segregation and Anti-Communism in the South, 1948–1968* (Baton Rouge, 2004); Catherine Fosl, *Subversive Southerner: Anne Braden and the Struggle for Racial Justice in the Cold War South* (New York, 2002); Chris Myers, "The Senator and the Sharecropper: James O. Eastland, Fannie Lou Hamer, and the Struggle for Freedom at Home and Abroad" (Ph.D. diss., University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, in progress, in Hall's possession); Stacy Braukman, "Anticommunism and the Politics of Sex and Race in Florida, 1954–1965" (Ph.D. diss., University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, 1999); Stacy Braukman, "'Nothing Else Matters but Sex': Cold War Narratives of Deviance and the Search for Lesbian Teachers in Florida, 1959–1963," *Feminist Studies,* 27 (Fall 2001), 553–75. For a prescient study of the 1950 election, "the first trial runs of a Republican-Southern political alliance," in which North Carolina's Frank Porter Graham and Florida's Claude Pepper were defeated, see Lubell, *Future of American Politics,* 100–128, esp. 108.

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The Classical Phase of the Movement

In the South, perhaps more than anywhere else in the country, the Cold War destroyed Popular Front institutions and diverted the civil rights movement into new channels. When the so-called classical phase of the movement erupted in the late 1950s and 1960s, it involved blacks and whites, southerners and northerners, local people and federal officials, secularists and men and women of faith. It also extended far beyond the South, and throughout the country it drew on multiple, competing ideological strands. But on the ground, in the South, the movement's ability to rally participants, stymie its enemies, and break through the fog of the Cold War came largely from the prophetic tradition within the black church. Cold War liberals counseled patience while countering international criticism by suggesting that racism was not woven into American institutions; it was limited to the South, a retrograde region that economic development would eventually bring into line with an otherwise democratic nation. By contrast, southern civil rights activists, mobilizing the latent themes of justice and deliverance in an otherworldly religion, demanded "freedom now," not gradual, top-down amelioration. That prophetic vision gave believers the courage to engage history as an ongoing process of reconstruction, to risk everything for ideals they might never see fulfilled.[48]

Those ideals have often been misconstrued, not only by those on the right who reduce them to color blindness but also by those on the left who stress the southern movement's limitations. In their zeal to make up for inattention to the freedom struggle in the North and West, for instance, urban historians sometimes draw a misleading contrast between a northern embrace of economics and black power and a southern commitment to a minimalist program of interracialism and integration. That dichotomy ignores both the long history of nonviolent struggles against segregation in the North and the fact that black southerners were schooled in a quest *both* for access and for self-determination that dated back to emancipation, a quest that called forth strategies ranging from tactical alliances across the color line, to the building of separate institutions, to migration, to economic boycotts and direct action.[49] In both regions, the success of the movement depended not just on idealism and courage, but on a keen understanding and ready use of the fulcrums of power.

There was, moreover, nothing minimalist about dismantling Jim Crow, a system built as much on economic exploitation as on de jure and de facto spatial separation. In the minds of movement activists, integration was never about "racial mingling" or

[48] David L. Chappell, *A Stone of Hope: Prophetic Religion and the Death of Jim Crow* (Chapel Hill, 2004); Richard Moser, "Was It the End or Just a Beginning? American Storytelling and the History of the Sixties," in *World the Sixties Made,* ed. Gosse and Moser, 37–51. For an emphasis on the relative quiescence of the institutional black church and the strategic brilliance, rather than the idealism, of the movement's grass-roots participants, see Payne, *I've Got the Light of Freedom.* See also Aldon D. Morris, *The Origins of the Civil Rights Movement: Black Communities Organizing for Change* (New York, 1984). For conflicting perspectives on the religious basis of segregationist thought, see Chappell, *Stone of Hope;* and Jane Dailey, "Sex, Segregation, and the Sacred after *Brown,*" *Journal of American History,* 91 (June 2004), 119–44.

[49] Steven Hahn, *A Nation under Our Feet: Black Political Struggles in the Rural South, from Slavery to the Great Migration* (Cambridge, Mass., 2003).

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These women protesters at the August 1963 March on Washington forthrightly issued demands that had a long history in the long civil rights movement: decent housing, equal rights, voting rights, and jobs for all. *Photograph by Wally McNamee. Courtesy Corbis.*

"merely sitting next to whites in school," as it is sometimes caricatured now.[50] Nor did it imply assimilation into static white-defined institutions, however much whites assumed that it did. True integration was and is an expansive and radical goal, not an ending or abolition of something that once was—the legal separation of bodies by race—but a process of transforming institutions and building an equitable, democratic, multiracial, and multiethnic society.[51]

The 1963 March on Washington, which came at the height of what figures in the dominant narrative as the good, color-blind movement, is a case in point. Today's conservatives make much of Martin Luther King's dream that "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." But virtually nothing in the dominant narrative would lead us to expect an image of the march that showed women carrying signs demanding jobs for all, decent housing, fair pay, and equal rights "*NOW!*," thus asserting both their racial solidarity and their identities as activists and workers and thereby the equals of men.[52]

[50] For examples of the caricature, see *Wall Street Journal,* July 21, 1999, p. A22; Tamar Jacoby, "A Surprise, but Not a Success," *Atlantic Monthly,* 289 (May 2002), 114; Raymond Wolters, "From *Brown* to *Green* and Back: The Changing Meaning of Desegregation," *Journal of Southern History,* 70 (May 2004), 321; and Ann Coulter, "Racial Profiling in University Admissions," *Human Events,* April 9, 2001, p. 7. For a contrary view, see *Los Angeles Sentinel,* March 31, 1994, p. A4.

[51] john a. powell, "A New Theory of Integrated Education: *True Integration,*" paper delivered at the conference "The Resegregation of Southern Schools? A Crucial Moment in the History (and the Future) of Public Schooling in America," University of North Carolina Law School, Chapel Hill, N.C., Aug. 30, 2002 (in Hall's possession).

[52] For an example of the "content of our character" mantra, see *Wall Street Journal,* Jan. 19, 1998, p. 1. For

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Nothing in the dominant story reminds us that this demonstration, which mobilized people from all walks of life and from every part of the country, was a "march for jobs and freedom"—and that from early on women were in the front ranks, helping to link race, class, and gender and thus foreshadowing both black feminism and the expansive movement of movements the civil rights struggle set in motion.[53]

In recent years we have learned more and more about the continuities between the 1940s and the 1960s, especially about the civil rights activists who came to political consciousness in the earlier period and then groomed and guided the young men and women who stepped forward in later years. E. D. Nixon, the stalwart NAACP leader who recruited King for the Montgomery bus boycott, was a veteran of the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters, the black-led union that was central to the movement in the 1940s. Ella Baker passed on to the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) the radical pedagogy and organizing style she had learned both from her upbringing in the rural South and from the left-wing politics of Harlem in the 1930s and 1940s. Bayard Rustin, one of the movement's most brilliant strategists, had been "an eager young explorer of the American left, broadly defined." Anne Braden, a white southerner who became, as Angela Y. Davis put it, a "legend" to young radicals, worked for Left-led unions in the late 1940s and continues to carry the banner of antiracism to this day. Frances Pauley got her start working for the New Deal in Georgia, helped mobilize white women on behalf of desegregation, and spent the rest of her life in the fight for civil rights and against poverty.[54]

The differences and discontinuities, however, were critical as well. The activists of the 1960s relied on independent protest organizations; they could not ground their battle in growing, vibrant, social democratic unions. They also suffered from a rupture in the narrative, a void at the center of the story of the modern civil rights struggle that is only now beginning to be filled. Many young activists of the 1960s saw their efforts as a new departure and themselves as a unique generation, not as actors with much to learn from an earlier, labor-infused civil rights tradition. Persecution, censorship, and self-censorship reinforced that generational divide by sidelining independent black radicals, thus whitening the memory and historiography of the Left and leaving later generations with an understanding of black politics that dichotomizes nationalism and integrationism. The civil rights unionism of the 1940s—

more accurate views of the March on Washington, see Higginbotham, "Foreword," viii–xiv; Theoharis, "Introduction," 1–15; and Juan Williams, "A Great Day in Washington: The March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom Was America at Its Best," *Crisis,* 110 (July–Aug. 2003), 24–30.

[53] My gloss of this photograph draws on Green, "Race, Gender, and Labor in 1960s Memphis," 465–89; and Nasstrom, "Down to Now." On the recent literature giving attention to women and the cultural work of gender in the movement, see Michele Mitchell, "Silences Broken, Silences Kept: Gender and Sexuality in African-American History," *Gender and History,* 11 (Nov. 1999), 433–44; and Steven F. Lawson, "Civil Rights and Black Liberation," in *Companion to American Women's History,* ed. Nancy A. Hewitt (Malden, 2002), 397–413.

[54] Payne, *I've Got the Light of Freedom,* 404–17; Barbara Ransby, *Ella Baker and the Black Freedom Movement: A Radical Democratic Vision* (Chapel Hill, 2003); John D'Emilio, *Lost Prophet: The Life and Times of Bayard Rustin* (New York, 2003), 36; Kathryn L. Nasstrom, *Everybody's Grandmother and Nobody's Fool: Frances Freeborn Pauley and the Struggle for Social Justice* (Ithaca, 2000). For Angela Davis's statement, see Fosl, *Subversive Southerner,* x. Other black radicals, sidelined by McCarthyism, took up artistic endeavors that influenced the political and aesthetic imagination of generations to come. See Rebeccah E. Welch, "Black Art and Activism in Postwar New York, 1950–1965" (Ph.D. diss., New York University, 2002).

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which combined a principled and tactical belief in interracial organizing with a strong emphasis on black culture and institutions—was lost to memory. As the movement waned and contrary political forces resumed power, that loss left a vacuum for the current dominant narrative to fill.[55]

Beyond Declension

In the dominant narrative, the decline of the movement follows hard on the heels of the Civil Rights and Voting Rights acts, and the popular struggles of the 1970s become nothing more than identity politics, divisive squabbles that promoted tribalism, alienated white workers, and swelled the ranks of the New Right.[56] The view of the 1970s as a tragic denouement belittles second-wave feminism and other movements that emerged from the black freedom struggle and institutionalized themselves even as they served as the New Right's antagonists and foils. It also erases from popular memory the way the victories of the early 1960s coalesced into a lasting social revolution, as thousands of ordinary people pushed through the doors the movement had opened and worked to create new, integrated institutions where none had existed before.[57]

The literature on the post-sixties is still in its infancy, and except in accounts of the women's and gay rights movements, scholars left, right, and center have told stories of declension. A burst of new work on the black power movement, however, has departed from that model, documenting "an African American . . . political renaissance" in the 1970s, in which advocates of black political power put forth a program of urban reform that echoed the demands raised thirty years before.[58] Studies of other aspects of the black freedom movement in the North also offer powerful evidence that the civil rights movement did not die when it "went north" in the late 1960s, in part because it had been north all along. Still needed is more research on all aspects of the movement of movements in the post-sixties that rivals in nuance and complexity what we know about the classical phase.[59]

[55] Korstad, *Civil Rights Unionism,* 413–19. For the suggestion that such historical amnesia extended to early voter registration drives, sit-ins, and legal battles, see August Meier, "Epilogue: Toward a Synthesis of Civil Rights History," in *New Directions in Civil Rights Studies,* ed. Robinson and Sullivan, 214–15; and Nasstrom, "Down to Now." For an example of southern movement activists seeking out the radical history they had been denied, see the thematic issue "No More Moanin': Voices of Southern Struggle," *Southern Exposure,* 1 (Winter 1974). The black studies and women's history movements were, in part, outcomes of this search for historical roots.

[56] For an influential expression of this view, see Todd Gitlin, *The Twilight of Common Dreams: Why America Is Wracked by Culture Wars* (New York, 1995). For a rejoinder, see Gosse and Moser, eds., *World the Sixties Made;* and Gosse, "Movement of Movements," 278.

[57] Sara M. Evans, "Beyond Declension: Feminist Radicalism in the 1970s and 1980s," in *World the Sixties Made,* ed. Gosse and Moser, 52–66, esp. 63; MacLean, *"Freedom Is Not Enough,"* introduction, chaps. 5, 7, and epilogue.

[58] Robert Self, "'To Plan Our Liberation': Black Power and the Politics of Place in Oakland, California, 1965–1977," *Journal of Urban History,* 26 (Sept. 2000), 759–92, esp. 787. See Charles E. Jones, ed., *The Black Panther Party (Reconsidered)* (Baltimore, 1998); Komozi Woodard, *A Nation within a Nation: Amiri Baraka (LeRoi Jones) and Black Power Politics* (Chapel Hill, 1999); Kathleen Cleaver and George Katsiaficas, eds., *Liberation, Imagination, and the Black Panther Party: A New Look at the Panthers and Their Legacy* (New York, 2001); Peniel E. Joseph, "Black Liberation without Apology: Reconceptualizing the Black Power Movement," *Black Scholar,* 31 (Fall–Winter 2001), 2–19; and Self, *American Babylon.*

[59] Theoharis and Woodard, eds., *Freedom North;* Gosse, "Movement of Movements," 277–302.

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The studies that we do have reveal overlapping grass-roots struggles. One struggle involved the move from token to comprehensive school desegregation in the South, which took place not during the turbulent short civil rights movement, but in the 1970s, after the media spotlight had swung away from the region. Another involved the desegregation of the workplace and the widespread acceptance of fair employment practices as a worthy goal. Like civil rights unionism, both of those advances have been forgotten or distorted. Both deserve to move from the margins to the center of the civil rights saga. Both, moreover, belong not to the past, but to the present, not to a story of right-wing triumph and over-and-done-with declension, but to an ongoing project whose key crises may still lie ahead.

The *Brown* decision and the rock-throwing mobs of Little Rock occupy pride of place in the popular narrative of school desegregation in the South. Barely noted is another critical turning point, a case in which black and white southerners grappled directly with the spatialization of race in the region. In *Swann v. Charlotte-Mecklenburg Board of Education* (1971), a case originating in North Carolina, civil rights lawyers exposed the artificial distinction between de jure and de facto segregation by demonstrating beyond a doubt that governmental policies, not benign-sounding customs, had created an almost totally segregated school system. "'I lived here for twenty-four years without knowing what was going on,'" commented Judge James McMillan, who handed down a historic decision ordering two-way busing of black children to wealthy white suburbs and suburban children to city schools. A vigorous white homeowners' movement fought the decision tooth and nail, couching its opposition, not in the discredited rhetoric of massive resistance that surrounded the Little Rock debacle, but in a language of color blindness that resonated nationwide.[60]

More surprising, given how busing has come to symbolize all that went wrong with the dream of integration, a coalition of blue-collar activists, women's groups, white liberals, and black parents arose to defeat the homeowners' movement. Moreover, Charlotte took the unusual step of maintaining one of its historically black high schools rather than tearing it down and putting the burden on black students to sink or swim in hostile, white-dominated institutions. That school—West Charlotte High School—launched an experiment in true integration that reverberates to this day. Although many of the city's white students decamped to private schools, as they did throughout the South, Charlotte's success became such a point of civic pride that when the presidential candidate Ronald Reagan announced, during a campaign stop in 1984, that court-ordered busing "takes innocent children out of the neighborhood schools and makes them pawns in a social experiment that nobody wants," his largely Republican audience responded with an "awkward silence" that spoke louder than words.[61] Twenty years later, interviews conducted separately by the Southern Oral

[60] *Swann v. Charlotte-Mecklenburg Board of Education,* 402 U.S. 1 (1971); Lassiter, "Suburban Origins of 'Color-Blind' Conservatism," 555.

[61] Lassiter, "Suburban Origins of 'Color-Blind' Conservatism," 549–82, esp. 576. See also Frye Gaillard, *The Dream Long Deferred* (Chapel Hill, 1988); and Davison M. Douglas, *Reading, Writing, and Race: The Desegregation of the Charlotte Schools* (Chapel Hill, 1995). For the closing of black schools and other results of white control of the process of school desegregation, see David S. Cecelski, *Along Freedom Road: Hyde County, North Carolina,*

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History Program and by researchers at Columbia University's Teachers College suggested that, especially for students at West Charlotte High during the peak years of integration, confronting racial differences and crossing racial boundaries was life changing in ways that test scores and statistics cannot capture. They treasured the experience, felt that it had dissipated "the hostility and the hate" of early years, and struggled to maintain a degree of diversity in their later lives.[62]

By the 1980s aggressive court supervision plus ongoing pressure from black parents and students and their white allies had done what no one could have predicted: they had endowed the South with the most integrated school systems in the country, an achievement that has virtually disappeared from the master narrative and barely registers even in scholarly accounts of the movement. The era of desegregation was marked by other forms of political and economic progress as well, most notably the surge in black voter registration and the election of black officials after the Voting Rights Act of 1965 and the desegregation of the work force, as grass-roots activists took advantage of Title VII of the Civil Rights Act, which barred employment discrimination by race and sex. Each of those advances reinforced the other. Black voters acquired a leverage with school boards and access to public employment they had never enjoyed before. As black students escaped from schools of concentrated poverty and took advantage of preschool and after-school programs, smaller classes, superior facilities, and other benefits long monopolized by suburban schools, a growing percentage attended college and entered managerial and professional positions. In a society in which economic status was increasingly determined by education, the black middle class expanded.[63] Nothing, perhaps, reflects the success of this push for political representation, jobs, and education more vividly than the phenomenon of return migration to the South. In the 1970s African Americans, who for more than half a century had fled or been pushed from the region, began answering a "call to home."

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and the Fate of Black Schools in the South (Chapel Hill, 1994); Barbara Shircliffe, "'We Got the Best of That World': A Case for the Study of Nostalgia in the Oral History of School Segregation," *Oral History Review,* 28 (Summer–Fall 2001), 59–84; and James Leloudis, George Noblit, and Sarah Thuesen, "What Was Lost: African American Accounts of School Desegregation," paper delivered at the annual meeting of the Organization of American Historians, Boston, Mass., March 2004 (in Hall's possession).

[62] *Charlotte Observer,* Oct. 9, 1999, p. 19A; Pamela Grundy, "A Sense of Pride: Segregation, Desegregation, and Community at West Charlotte High School," paper delivered at the conference "Listening for a Change: Transforming Landscapes and People," Southern Oral History Program/North Carolina Humanities Council Teachers' Institute, June 24–30, 2001, Chapel Hill, N.C. (in Hall's possession); Pamela Grundy, "Race and Desegregation: West Charlotte High School" <http://www.ibiblio.org/sohp/research/lfac/lfac_31b.html> (July 2004); Amy Stuart Wells et al., "How Desegregation Changed Us: The Effects of Racially Mixed Schools on Students and Society: A Study of Desegregated High Schools and Their Class of 1980 Graduates" <http://cms.tc.columbia.edu/i/a/782_ASWells041504.pdf> (Nov. 2004); and Amy Stuart Wells et al., *In Search of* Brown (Cambridge, Mass., forthcoming, 2005). For the quotation about West Charlotte High School graduates' experiences, see Arthur Griffin interview by Pamela Grundy, May 5, 1999, "Listening for a Change: West Charlotte High School Project," series K, Southern Oral History Program Collection, Southern Historical Collection (Wilson Library, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill). A collection finding aid is available at <http://www.lib.unc.edu/mss/inv.html> (Sept. 2004).

[63] For this dynamic in one southern county, see Pride, *Political Use of Racial Narratives,* 244. For the reciprocal relationship between jobs and education, see Wright, "Civil Rights Revolution as Economic History," 280. On black political advances, see Steven F. Lawson, *In Pursuit of Power: Southern Blacks and Electoral Politics, 1965–1982* (New York, 1985).

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Drawn by new opportunities, they returned in droves, not just to the cities, but to the small towns and rural areas of the region.[64]

As blacks sought to reclaim the South and the South rejoined the country, however, the country was moving, seemingly inexorably, toward resegregation. In 1973 and 1974 the Supreme Court made two fateful decisions, each of which "insulated predominately white suburban school districts from the constitutional imperatives of *Brown* . . . and offered white parents in urban districts fearful of school desegregation havens of predominately white public schools to which they could flee." Ignoring the public policies that had created the white enclaves in the first place, the Supreme Court in *Milliken v. Bradley* (1974) exempted the suburbs around Detroit from desegregation plans on the grounds that they had not engaged in recent, intentional acts of discrimination. In *San Antonio Independent School District v. Rodriguez* (1973), the Court ruled that the states faced no obligation under the federal Constitution to equalize funding among school districts. By the early 1990s, the Reagan-Bush courts were lifting the court-ordered desegregation plans of the 1970s, even in states where dual school systems had been required by law. After only two decades, the courts effectively abandoned the effort to enforce desegregation. By the late 1990s, judges had gone so far as to prohibit school boards from voluntarily using considerations of race (and thus of history and social reality) to maintain their hard-won progress toward integration.[65]

Throughout the South and the country, except in the Northeast, which never experienced significant desegregation, resegregation is now proceeding apace. Often blamed on the reflexive racism connoted by the all-purpose term "white flight" or, more recently, on black disillusionment with integration, that reversal can be better understood as the outcome, in an atmosphere of judicial hostility, of long-term failures to limit residential segregation, halt the decay of inner cities, prevent urban sprawl, address growing class divisions, and alter school-funding arrangements that favor suburban schools. Under such circumstances, it is no wonder that middle-class parents of both races feel acute pressure to buy homes in neighborhoods with reputable, well-financed schools and that parents in now hypersegregated inner cities sometimes demand the resources they hope will provide their children with a separate but equal education. Those pressures, moreover, have intensified as the No Child Left Behind Act, passed in 2002, has shifted the focus of educational policy away from

[64] Carol B. Stack, *Call to Home: African Americans Reclaim the Rural South* (New York, 1996); Wright, "Civil Rights Revolution as Economic History," 281.

[65] Sheryll Cashin, *The Failures of Integration: How Race and Class Are Undermining the American Dream* (New York, 2004), esp. 212; *Milliken v. Bradley*, 418 U.S. 717 (1974); *San Antonio Independent School District v. Rodriguez*, 411 U.S. 1 (1973); Gary Orfield, Susan E. Eaton, and the Harvard Project on School Desegregation, *Dismantling Desegregation: The Quiet Reversal of* Brown v. Board of Education (New York, 1996); Gary Orfield and the Harvard Civil Rights Project, "Schools More Separate: Consequences of a Decade of Resegregation," July 2001 <http://www.civilrightsproject.harvard.edu/research/deseg/Schools_More_Separate.pdf> (July 2004); James T. Patterson, Brown v. Board of Education: *A Civil Rights Milestone and Its Troubled Legacy* (New York, 2001), 191–205; Richard Kluger, *Simple Justice: The History of* Brown v. Board of Education *and Black America's Struggle for Equality* (New York, 2004), 751–89; John Charles Boger, "Education's 'Perfect Storm'?: Racial Resegregation, High Stakes Testing, and School Resource Inequities: The Case of North Carolina," *North Carolina Law Review*, 81 (May 2003), 1375–1462, esp. 1379; John Charles Boger, "Willful Colorblindness: The New Racial Piety and the Resegregation of Public Schools," *ibid.*, 78 (Sept. 2000), 1719–96.

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funding and onto accountability and assessment in ways that often punish resource-poor schools, drive away the best teachers and better-off students, and deepen poverty and segregation. And yet, in spite of everything, large majorities of both whites and blacks maintain a commitment to integration—a commitment that public policy makers and pundits have done nothing to promote and are doing their best to squander.[66]

If the continuing story of school desegregation has been obscured by a narrative of post-1965 declension, the struggle for economic justice has been erased altogether. That struggle took many forms. In Seattle, Washington, the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE) launched its first direct-action campaign against employment discrimination in 1961 and followed up in 1964 with one of the most ambitious campaigns in the nation. In Memphis, Tennessee, black workers persisted in seeing civil rights and workers' rights as two aspects of the same struggle; the 1968 sanitation strike—best known as the context of King's assassination—was part of a decades-long push by black workers to attain better workplace conditions and fair wages. In Oakland, California, and other places, the Black Panthers called for a redistribution of economic and political power in cities devastated by four decades of failed metropolitan policies.[67]

More likely to be included in the prevailing narrative is President Lyndon B. Johnson's War on Poverty, an ambitious effort not only to join the issues of economics and civil rights, but also to expand the New Deal in order to address the economic inequalities embedded in American institutions. Launched in 1965, the program fell far short of its goals, not, as conservatives would have it, because it "threw money" at problems that only private enterprise and individual effort could solve, but because it did not go nearly far enough and because the minimally funded initiatives it did launch focused so heavily on "supply side" solutions such as job training, rather than on full employment, unionization, and the redistribution of economic resources. Nevertheless, the Great Society yielded lasting and important results (Medicaid and Head Start come immediately to mind), and it turned many activists in the direction of structural economic solutions.[68]

By contrast, the grass-roots movement set in motion by Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 has been among the least noted of the movement's economic dimensions. Thousands of men and women, including a persistent and evolving network of labor feminists, pursued their rights under that historic law by signing peti-

[66] Cashin, *Failures of Integration,* 232–36, 11–12; Boger, "Education's 'Perfect Storm'?"

[67] Quintard Taylor, "The Civil Rights Movement in the American West: Black Protest in Seattle, 1960–1970," *Journal of Negro History,* 80 (Winter 1995), 4–5; Green, "Race, Gender, and Labor in 1960s Memphis," 465–89; Honey, "Labor and Civil Rights Movements at the Cross-Roads"; Honey, *Southern Labor and Black Civil Rights;* Michael K. Honey, *Black Workers Remember: An Oral History of Segregation, Unionism, and the Freedom Struggle* (Berkeley, 1999); Steve Estes, "'I AM A MAN!': Race, Masculinity, and the 1968 Memphis Sanitation Strike," *Labor History,* 41 (May 2000), 153–70; Self, *American Babylon,* 227, 291–327; Gaines, "Historiography of the Struggle for Black Equality since 1945," 229; Self and Sugrue, "Power of Place," 30–31.

[68] For an astute overview, see William H. Chafe, *The Unfinished Journey: America since World War II* (New York, 1995), 236–43. For a critique of the Great Society's limitations, see Ira Katznelson, "Was the Great Society a Lost Opportunity?," in *Rise and Fall of the New Deal Order,* ed. Gerstle and Fraser, 185–211. See also Jill Quadagno, *The Color of Welfare: How Racism Undermined the War on Poverty* (New York, 1994).

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tions, filing class-action lawsuits, seeking affirmative action policies that specified hiring goals and timetables, and stepping forward to become courageous pioneers, the first of their race or sex to brave the minefields of long-segregated occupations. Once on the job, black workers became the most avid of new union members, and the understanding of workplace rights they brought with them inspired a surge of organizing in the public sector, which became one of the brightest spots in an otherwise-bleak landscape for organized labor. In combination, government intervention and grass-roots action made 1965–1975 the breakthrough period for black economic progress, especially in the South. That victory inspired Latinos and other to make similar demands and adopt similar strategies. As a result, legal protection of individuals from workplace discrimination was extended to a large majority of Americans, including not only people of color and all women, but also the elderly and the disabled.[69]

In the early 1970s, moreover, a remarkable union democracy movement sought to revitalize the labor movement, and a wave of strikes swept the country, suggesting that the white workers now seen as preordained "Reagan Democrats" were by no means united, and that their allegiance was "up for grabs."[70] At the same time, a little-noticed cohort of civil rights veterans threw in their lot with the labor movement and launched labor support campaigns. As rank-and-file workers, rising labor leaders, labor lawyers, and the like, they joined other civil rights activists in an effort to "raise issues of economic equality . . . to the moral high ground earlier occupied by the assault against de jure segregation."[71]

Like the battle to desegregate the public schools, the struggle for economic justice met formidable barriers. Some were deep-seated, such as American individualism, the intensification of capital flight, and the legacy of anticommunism, which, in combination with the New Right's "war of ideas," tainted all attempts at redistribution. Others were produced by the unique economic crisis of the 1970s. Brought on by the simultaneous rise of unemployment and inflation known as "stagflation," the crisis galvanized a corporate offensive against unions and accelerated an ongoing process of economic restructuring that forwarded the emergence of a service economy

[69] This discussion of the struggle for economic inclusion is drawn from Nancy MacLean, *"Freedom Is Not Enough"*; Timothy J. Minchin, *Hiring the Black Worker: The Racial Integration of the Southern Textile Industry, 1960–1980* (Chapel Hill, 1999); Timothy J. Minchin, *The Color of Work: The Struggle for Civil Rights in the Southern Paper Industry, 1945–1980* (Chapel Hill, 2001); Wright, "Civil Rights Revolution as Economic History"; Heckman, "Central Role of the South in Accounting for the Economic Progress of Black Americans," 242–46; Lichtenstein, *State of the Union,* 3; Cobble, *Other Women's Movement,* 180–205; and Thomas J. Sugrue, "Affirmative Action from Below: Civil Rights, the Building Trades, and the Politics of Racial Equality in the Urban North, 1945–1969," *Journal of American History,* 91 (June 2004), 145–73.

[70] Cowie, "Nixon's Class Struggle," 257–83, esp. 264; Jefferson Cowie, "'Vigorously Left, Right, and Center': The Crosscurrents of Working-Class America in the 1970s," in *America in the Seventies,* ed. Beth Bailey and David Farber (Lawrence, 2004), 75–106; Joshua B. Freeman, "Labor during the American Century: Work, Workers, and Unions since 1945," in *Companion to Post-1945 America,* ed. Agnew and Rosenzweig, 202; Richard Moser, "Autoworkers at Lordstown: Workplace Democracy and American Citizenship," in *World the Sixties Made,* ed. Gosse and Moser, 289–315. For a remarkable instance of 1970s labor insurgency (the basis for the Academy Award–winning film *Norma Rae*), see James A. Hodges, "J. P. Stevens and the Union: Struggle for the South," in *Race, Class, and Community in Southern Labor History,* ed. Gary M. Fink and Merl E. Reed (Tuscaloosa, 1994), 53–64.

[71] Peter B. Levy, *The New Left and Labor in the 1960s* (Urbana, 1994); Keiran Taylor, "A Turn to the Working Class: The New Left, Black Liberation, and the Struggle for Economic Justice, 1968–1979" (Ph.D. diss., University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, in progress, in Hall's possession); Korstad and Lichtenstein, "Opportunities Found and Lost," esp. 811.

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and destroyed not only the strongholds of organized labor in the rust belt, but the South's traditional industries as well. At the same time, economic change in Latin America and the alteration of immigration restrictions in the 1960s sent millions of Latinos searching for work in northern cities. This wave of Third World immigration created new hybrid identities and spawned new liberation movements. But as the labor supply swelled and the blue-collar jobs opened up by Title VII evaporated, communities of color suffered from shocking rates of unemployment, and inner cities turned into burnt-out wastelands from which few could hope to escape.[72]

As layoffs skyrocketed, moreover, increasing numbers of white male workers, influenced by conservatives' pseudopopulist claims, blamed affirmative action, despite conclusive evidence that employers' efforts to hire and promote blacks and women did not lead to significant "reverse discrimination." As Thomas Sugrue has noted, "Long-term economic restructuring was inscrutable to most white workers. But affirmative action was an easy target"—in part because powerful stories and storytellers made it so.[73] The struggle for the equal rights amendment and abortion rights had a similar impact on some working-class wives. Dependent on men in an atmosphere of deepening economic insecurity and inundated with New Right attacks on the women's movement as an antifamily, elitist plot, they opposed reform in part out of fear that feminism would "free men first," leaving women with no claim to male protection and support.[74]

These developments helped to propel the New Right to power and encouraged the Reagan administration's efforts to gut antidiscrimination enforcement mechanisms. This deregulation of the labor market forwarded a resurgence of antiblack discrimination based on "hidden preferences and stereotypes" that are well documented but almost impossible to prove and thus helped reverse almost two decades of black economic gains.[75] Still, as Nancy MacLean argues, the right wing's triumph was by no means complete, in part because Reagan's efforts aroused a storm of opposition from

[72] See MacLean, *"Freedom Is Not Enough,"* chap. 7; Lichtenstein, *State of the Union,* 195; Jefferson Cowie, *Capital Moves: RCA's Seventy-Year Quest for Cheap Labor* (Ithaca, 1999); Cowie, "'Vigorously Left, Right, and Center,'" 99–100; Thomas Byrne Edsall, *The New Politics of Inequality* (New York, 1984), 107–40; and Mae M. Ngai, *Impossible Subjects: Illegal Aliens and the Making of Modern America* (Princeton, 2004), 228–70.

[73] Brown et al., *Whitewashing Race,* 164–92; Sugrue, "Affirmative Action from Below," 172.

[74] Deirdre English, "The Fear That Feminism Will Free Men First," in *Powers of Desire: The Politics of Sexuality,* ed. Ann Snitow, Christine Stansell, and Sharon Thompson (New York, 1983), 477–83. Studies of women and the New Right include Jane J. Mansbridge, *Why We Lost the ERA* (Chicago, 1986); Donald G. Mathews and Jane Sherron De Hart, *Sex, Gender, and the Politics of ERA: A State and the Nation* (New York, 1990); Susan Faludi, *Backlash: The Undeclared War against American Women* (New York, 1991); Jane Sherron De Hart, "Gender on the Right: Meanings behind the Existential Scream," *Gender and History,* 3 (Autumn 1991), 246–67; Kristin Luker, *Abortion and the Politics of Motherhood* (Berkeley, 1984); Rebecca E. Klatch, *Women of the New Right* (Philadelphia, 1987); and Marjorie Julian Spruill, "Countdown to Houston: The 1977 International Women's Year Conferences and the Polarization of American Women," paper delivered at the annual meeting of the Southern Historical Association, Houston, Tex., Nov. 8, 2003 (in Hall's possession).

[75] Brown et al., *Whitewashing Race,* 80–85, 185–92, esp. 185. See also William A. Darity Jr. and Samuel L. Myers Jr., *Persistent Disparity: Race and Economic Inequality in the United States since 1945* (Northampton, 1998); and William A. Darity Jr. and Patrick L. Mason, "Evidence on Discrimination in Employment: Codes of Color, Codes of Gender," *Journal of Economic Perspectives,* 12 (Spring 1998), 63–90. Recent Supreme Court decisions on minority contracting programs have gone a long way toward gutting Title VII. See *Richmond v. J. A. Croson Company,* 488 U.S. 469 (1989); and *Adarand Constructors v. Pena,* 515 U.S. 200 (1995). Cf. Brown et al., *Whitewashing Race,* 187–88.

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advocacy groups, and in part because many large corporations, after years of resistance, embraced affirmative action, albeit in the new, watered-down form of "diversity"—a move designed, not to forward redistributive justice, but to help businesses reach new consumers and operate in global markets. The result is a stalemate that underscores both the ground won by advocates of economic access and the need for broader federal action to promote full employment, tame corporate power, and protect unions. On the one hand, government policy, driven by grass-roots pressure, succeeded in cracking the edifice of racial discrimination erected over time by both employers and white-dominated unions. On the other, economic restructuring drove home how far beyond the reach of governmental protections against discrimination workers' dilemmas often lay. Without a strong collective voice, workers had no means of defending themselves against unfair labor practices (as opposed to willful bias against individuals) or of countering corporate control of the state. Nor could they build on and expand the legacy of civil rights unionism by transforming the fight for fair employment into an antiracist, antisexist, social democratic project for the twenty-first century.[76]

Conclusion

The challenges faced by the civil rights movement stemmed from what Martin Luther King Jr. called "evils that are rooted deeply in the whole structure of our society," evils that reflected not just the legacy of slavery but also the perpetuation of that legacy during subsequent generations by racialized state policies that wove white privilege into the fabric of American culture and institutions.[77] Despite the movement's undeniable triumphs, those evils persist and in some ways have been compounded. The resegregation of the public schools; the hypersegregation of inner cities; the soaring unemployment rates among black and Latino youths; the erosion of minority voting rights; the weakening of the labor movement; the wealth and income gap that is returning the United States to pre–New Deal conditions; the unraveling of the social safety net; the ever-increasing ability of placeless capital to move at will; the malignant growth of the "prison-industrial complex," which far outstrips apartheid-era South Africa in incarcerating black men—those historical legacies cannot be waved away by declaring victory, mandating formal, race-neutral public policies, and allowing market forces to rule.[78]

[76] MacLean, *"Freedom Is Not Enough,"* chap. 9; Lichtenstein, *State of the Union,* 178–211. For a critique of the focus of civil rights organizations on enforcement of Title VII, which argues that job-training and antidiscrimination programs were poor substitutes for economic planning to preserve well-paying blue-collar jobs, see Judith Stein, *Running Steel, Running America: Race, Economic Policy, and the Decline of Liberalism* (Chapel Hill, 1998). For a black labor leftist's view of the movement's trajectory, 1950–1980, see J. Hunter O'Dell, "Notes on the Movement: Then, Now, and Tomorrow," *Southern Exposure,* 9 (Spring 1981), 6–11.

[77] Martin Luther King Jr., "A Testament of Hope," in *A Testament of Hope: The Essential Writings of Martin Luther King, Jr.,* ed. James M. Washington (San Francisco, 1986), 315. See also David Halberstam, "The Second Coming of Martin Luther King," *Harper's Magazine,* 235 (Aug. 1967), 39–51.

[78] Craig Haney and Philip Zimbardo, "The Past and Future of U.S. Prison Policy: Twenty-Five Years after the Stanford Prison Experiment," *American Psychologist,* 53 (July 1998), 714; Joy James, ed., *The Angela Y. Davis Reader* (Malden, 1998), 29–110.

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Nor, of course, will understanding how the past weighs on the present in itself resolve current dilemmas. But it can help cut through the miasma of evasion and confusion that cripples our creativity from the start. For many white Americans have moved through what the critical theorist Walter Benjamin termed "this storm . . . we call progress" without coming to terms with the past.[79] That lack of accounting opens the way to a color-blind conservatism that is breathtakingly ahistorical and blind to social facts. It impoverishes public discourse, discourages investment in public institutions, and undermines our will to address the inequalities and injustices that surround us now.

The narratives spun by the new conservatives maintain a strong hold on the public imagination, in part because they have been repeated so often and broadcast so widely, and in part because they avoid uncomfortable questions about the relationship between cumulative white advantage and present social ills. Yet there is reason to hope that countervailing stories could make themselves heard and could even, under the right circumstances, prevail. Opinion poll after poll indicates that white racial attitudes have changed dramatically since World War II, that support for the principles of integration and equal treatment remains high (even as approval of governmental intervention to accomplish those goals has declined), and that most white as well as black Americans continue to favor the keystones of the New Deal order.[80] Those attitudes should not be underestimated. They do not mean that hidden or even overt biases have disappeared or that sedimented, institutional inequalities have been eliminated. But they are the ground in which new understandings of today's problems can take root. Those understandings must grapple both with history, which explodes the notion that racial disparities are caused by black failings, and with the abundant evidence that the distress of people of color today is indeed "the first sign of a danger that threatens us all." That danger—whose signs range from the every-family-for-itself scramble for "good schools" to the high cost of "prisons, police, mopping-up health care services, and other reactive measures"—if amplified by public storytellers, could combine with antiracist principles to create a climate in which fresh solutions to social problems can emerge.[81]

Historians can and must play a central role in a struggle that turns so centrally on understanding the legacy of the past. But how can we make ourselves heard without reducing history to the formulaic mantras on which political narratives usually rely? To tell our stories both truly and effectively, we need modes of writing and speaking that emphasize individual agency, the *sine qua non* of narrative, while also dramatizing the hidden history of policies and institutions—the publicly sanctioned choices

[79] Walter Benjamin, "Theses on the Philosophy of History," in *Illuminations,* ed. Hannah Arendt (New York, 1969), 258.

[80] For white attitudes as revealed in survey data, see Lawrence D. Bobo and Ryan A. Smith, "From Jim Crow Racism to Laissez-Faire Racism: The Transformation of Racial Attitudes," in *Beyond Pluralism: The Conception of Groups and Group Identities in America,* ed. Wendy F. Katkin, Ned Landsman, and Andrea Tyree (Urbana, 1998), 182–220; Brown et al., *Whitewashing Race,* 248–49; Pride, *Political Use of Racial Narratives,* 238; Cokorinos, *Assault on Diversity,* 6. For evidence that the Reagan administration's effort was not driven by, but drove, a change in public opinion, see Thomas Ferguson and Joel Rogers, *Right Turn: The Decline of the Democrats and the Future of American Politics* (New York, 1986), 3–39.

[81] Guinier and Torres, *Miner's Canary,* 11; Brown et al., *Whitewashing Race,* 249.

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that continually shape and reshape the social landscape and yet are often invisible to citizens trained in not seeing and in thinking exclusively in ahistorical, personal terms. We cannot settle for simple dichotomies (especially those that pit race against class, race-targeted against universalistic remedies, and so-called identity politics against economic policy and unionization), no matter how seductive they might be. Finally, we must forego easy closure and satisfying upward or downward arcs.

Only such novel forms of storytelling can convey what it means to have lived through an undefeated but unfinished revolution, a world-defining social movement that has experienced both reversals and victories and whose victories are now, once again, being partially reversed.[82] Both the victories and the reversals call us to action, as citizens and as historians with powerful stories to tell. Both are part of a long and ongoing civil rights movement. Both can help us imagine—for our own times—a new way of life, a continuing revolution.

[82] Gosse, "Movement of Movements," 277–78.

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