No part of the American story better captures how the contradictions and complexities of race have mattered in shaping U.S. politics than the African American story. From the eloquent but, for African Americans, false promises of American liberty written by Thomas Jefferson in the Declaration of Independence to the important but often forgotten metaphor about false promises in Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.’s “I Have a Dream” speech, Black Americans have had to contend with an American dilemma of lofty ideals but cold racial realities in their journey toward greater freedom. This is not to suggest in any way that African Americans are the only racial or ethnic minority that has been adversely racialized. The purpose of this chapter, however, is to detail the unique reasons why, when, and how race has shaped the journey of African Americans toward first-class citizenship, opportunity, and self-determination.

Understanding the African American journey provides us with an important background narrative as we seek to understand when, why, and how race and ethnicity still matter in American politics. First, from the founding of the U.S. government through the end of the twentieth century, African Americans have been the largest non-European group in the population; today, they are second only to Hispanics or Latinos of all races. Second, they have also been a group, somewhat akin to Native Americans, that has a very long
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and continuing history of challenging the imposition of race, racism, and White supremacy that at times has contributed to the creation and definition of U.S. social norms, laws, and citizenship rights. Third, and somewhat true of the early Chinese American experience, if different in severity, African Americans were used as a supply of free labor (in the slavery era) or cheap labor (in the post-slavery era). This enabled affluent and middle-class Whites who exploited their labor to amass great and disproportionate wealth that, for varying reasons, persists in some form today. Fourth, biological myths and perceived differences of color, body type, and cultural customs have led many Whites to view African Americans as racially distinct from other groups. Some of these false presumptions linger to this day. And fifth, the practice of Whites perceiving the greatest racial differences between themselves and African Americans placed African Americans near or at the lowest rung of an American racial hierarchy. When it has been perceived as an absolute political boundary, it has been called the color line. Where precisely other non-White races ranked along this hierarchy—whether they were more or less included or excluded as members of the dominant polity and the society—depended on how closely Whites morally or intellectually associated them with Blacks. Even

(Continued)

- Identify the ways in which social institutions and political organizations helped to develop African American political identity.
- Explain how Blacks at times used race as a resource for community building and collective action.
- Discuss how the African American political journey paralleled civil rights organizing by other groups in the United States.

Blacks struggled for equal rights and opportunity in America from its earliest days as a colony, when they were forcibly transported to serve as slave labor. Through the creation of a strong African American identity and collective organizing, they challenged laws and social practices to overcome racial barriers. These are participants in the March on Washington on August 28, 1963.
with the expanding racial and ethnic national diversity of American citizens, this Black/White polarity remains an important determinant of our politics and of citizen opportunities.¹

The interaction between the development of the United States and the presence of Africans as slaves is complicated and central to American politics. The American nation's political and economic development was related to the central notions of democracy, freedom, and, in the words of Jefferson and the Declaration of Independence, self-evident truths “that all men are created equal.” By the 1800s, the ability to sustain that notion of freedom and equality while simultaneously enslaving roughly 13 percent of the population was a fundamental contradiction within early American politics. Eventually, as we will explain, the political tensions between slavery and freedom became too great to sustain the existing arrangements within the polity, and the American Civil War ensued, although it failed to fully resolve the tension or the contradiction. Constitutional amendments and laws addressed the status that the Black population would have in the post–Civil War era by ending slavery and creating citizenship and the right of Blacks to vote. But the persistent tensions between the powers held by the states and the federal government as they defined citizenship and the responsibilities for addressing the status of Blacks sparked continued clashes. The lingering vestiges of slavery left the nation unable to fully overturn past patterns of discrimination, and the powers associated with state-level politics prevailed and dominated national patterns for almost a century.

However, this is not simply a story of when, why, and how race has been a barrier to fundamentally impede or slow the progress of Blacks. It is also one of Blacks politically responding to the barriers imposed by race to debate and define their group interests, as well as to meet their needs. We call this broader process African American politics. Africans arrived in North America as many ethnically and culturally diverse groups. But their racialization and enslavement in the American colonies and states compelled these many groups to define themselves as one common group. In this chapter, we trace the most significant periods of Black political history—before, during, and after the ending of slavery and through the era of Jim Crow segregation—in order to understand the breadth if not the depth of how race has affected the African American and thus the larger American political experience.²

**Race, Slavery, and the Origins of African Americans, 1500s–1790s**

We first briefly turn to an exploration of the origins and arrival of Africans into the Americas, the basis for their presence in the British North American colonies, and how they were racialized from noticeably distinct populations used for labor into a hard and permanent legal status of slaves seen as property in an institution called chattel slavery. We will examine the importance of race and slavery in the founding of the American republic and thus spend most of the chapter examining race as an absolute and/or decisive factor in American and African American politics.
African Origins and the Transatlantic Slave Trade

The group identity of African Americans evolved over centuries. For nearly three hundred years from the 1500s up to the mid-1800s, Africans were captured by Europeans or sold into slavery from populations spread over many different West and Central African linguistic and ethnic groups, including what are now the modern nations of Ghana, Sierra Leone, Senegal, and Angola (see Figure 3.1). They first arrived in the Americas as indentured servants and later were enslaved—possessing no citizenship and no rights, and with no agreed-upon notion of their common political identity and interests. From the colonial era to the 1800s, imposed processes of race and racialization compelled Blacks to blend their cultural differences into a broad, shared culture and recognize themselves as a single group. Their common ethnic name varied over eras, in popular usage as well as in the census—for example, Africans, Ethiopians, Negroes, Coloreds/Colored People,

Figure 3.1 Select Disembarkation of African Captives in the West, 1501–1866


Note: Not all categories included in the total are depicted in this figure. Categories not shown include Denmark/Baltic, France, and the Netherlands.
Blacks, Afro-Americans, and African Americans. They gradually developed vernaculars of American English, and they recognized that they had broad similar interests despite their persistent diversity. Slavery in the American context often has been framed as if it were a singular experience. In reality, the basic practices and patterns of the slave trade and slavery conducted by European nations evolved over the centuries and varied widely (see Map 3.1). The practices and patterns in the North American British colonies and the American nation differed from those of the Portuguese, French, and Spanish American colonies in how the former embraced notions of racial superiority rooted in separation (the Anglo-American view) versus notions of racial superiority rooted in assimilation (the Latin view of Portuguese, French, and Spanish). (See Chapter 1.)

Map 3.1 The Slave Trade and The American Colonies

Enslaved populations from throughout Africa embarked on a long journey from Africa’s western coast to America, where they were denied the rights of other residents.
Race and the North American Evolution of Slavery

The evolution of slavery in North America is integrally connected to evolving notions of race among the English. In order to exploit the economic resources of their North American and Caribbean colonies and to supply laborers, capital, and goods to British companies and the British Empire, the English justified the creation of a New World, racialized form of permanent, hereditary slavery. It was different from Old World or classic conceptions rooted in the possibility of slaves earning their freedom and partly assimilating into the master class. This new form of enslavement, however, was long in development.

The first Africans brought to the English Jamestown colony of Virginia in 1619 were more often indentured servants bound to a time-limited period of service rather than permanent slaves. Race had not been cemented along lines of absolute separation even as late as the mid-1600s. Slavery was first recognized as an institution by the Puritan Massachusetts Bay Colony in 1641, but no mention was made of race. In fact, non-English White workers, especially the Irish, were also indentured servants alongside Africans, and as many as 10 to 20 percent of Whites who were in servitude were slaves. Likewise, a handful of African Americans owned property and hired servants to work their lands.

The turning point, or what has been dubbed the "terrible transformation," was the racialization of slavery—the creation of an absolute color line—confined to Blacks. By the late 1660s, colonial law slowly began to redefine the status of slaves from a temporary status into one of heredity based on the status of the mother. The intersections of gender and race mattered, since slaves were property and the law allowed the owner to use his property as he willed. Black women were used not only for labor, but also for reproduction, leading to an increase in slaves and therefore in the wealth of their owners. In order to protect that property, English laws governing slaves came to emphasize legal status or descent through the bloodline of the enslaved mother, or hypodescent. Any offspring of women who were slaves thus held the status of slaves, regardless of the legal or racial status of the father.

In their most basic formulation, views of White racial superiority, or what social anthropologist Audrey Smedley considers an Anglo-American racial worldview, were fused with justifications for slavery in order to solve a labor shortage problem in the English colonies and the new Republic. Beyond its economic rationale, race also became a system of social and intellectual norms and mores to govern society. The hypodescent rule was first passed into law in Virginia in 1662, followed by a 1667 law prohibiting slaves from being freed even if they were baptized as Christians. Maryland followed suit with similar laws in 1664 and 1681, respectively, and these examples were copied in other states. At the heart of these new regulations were White colonial fears of more labor uprisings similar to a series of multiracial worker rebellions like Bacon’s Rebellion of 1676. Nathaniel Bacon, an Englishman, wanted all Native Americans eliminated from the Virginia Colony; Gov. William Berkeley feared such an effort would risk loss of support from “friendly” tribes. In the resulting conflict, Bacon generated support from White indentured servants, Black slaves, and Native Americans, threatening English colonial control.4
We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.1 Despite these words, by the nineteenth-century Thomas Jefferson, Founding Father and author of the Declaration of Independence, there are clearly noted differences in slaves’ legal status. He discussed the biological and legal status of African slaves through interracial reproduction in an 1815 letter to Francis Gray, an attorney who visited Monticello. Following a previous exchange with Gray, Jefferson addressed the legal definition of mulatto or mixed-race persons; traced the consequences of interracial reproduction over several generations; and used mathematical formulae to the point where the descendant, he argued, is no longer biologically a “Negro.” Jefferson cautioned, however, “But observe, that this does not re-establish freedom, which depends on the condition of the mother.” He continued: “But if he be emancipated, he becomes a free white man and a citizen of the United States to all intents and purposes.”

Jefferson, who owned more than two hundred slaves whom he never freed and had children from a relationship with a fifteen-year-old slave girl named Sally Hemings, also embraced views about the racial superiority of Whites in comparison to Blacks grounded in “scientific racism.” As stated in Chapter 1, scientific racism is the misuse of science to justify beliefs of racial superiority. In a passage in his 1781 scientific treatise, Notes on the State of Virginia, Jefferson drew several curious conclusions about the characteristics and abilities of African Americans in comparison to Whites. Note how Jefferson assumed physical markers—skin color, hair texture, facial features—determine group characteristics and abilities:

The first difference [between Whites and Blacks] which strikes us is that of color. . . . The difference is fixed in nature, and is as real as if its seat and cause were better known to us. And is this difference of no importance? Is it not the foundation of a greater or less share of beauty in the two races? Are not the fine mixtures of red and white, the expressions of every passion by greater or less suffusions of color in the one, preferable to that eternal monotony, which reigns in the countenances, that immoveable veil of black which covers all the emotions of the other race? Add to these, flowing hair, a more elegant symmetry of form, their own judgment in favor of the whites, declared by their preference of them, as uniformly as is the preference of the orangutan for the black women over those of his own species.2

There has long been a debate among students of U.S. political history as to what currents of political thought most influenced the nation’s Founding Fathers. This is the why question of race and slavery. When Jefferson in 1776 penned in the Declaration of Independence “all men are created equal” and had the right to pursue “Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness,” how could he and they believe it when they also owned enslaved Blacks? More broadly, political scientists Desmond King and Rogers Smith3 ask how America’s racial order or its original arrangement of ideas and institutions emerged to create a ruling or governing coalition of interests and how and why this order changed over time. Did most of the founders believe in what Smith calls ascriptiveism, or the belief that classes and races of human beings had inherent, biologically determined (and/or God-determined) attributes and thus naturally assumed a place in a
hierarchy of characteristics, such as intelligence, physical ability, morality, and creativity? Then how do we also account for what political theorist Louis Hartz calls the liberal tradition, or many framers’ strong embrace of republicanism? This was the belief that individual citizens had inherent rights, and foremost among them was the right to a representative government, limited in its authority. Clearly, there is an expression of egalitarianism in Jefferson’s words, or the belief that all human beings are inherently equal, with God-given, “self-evident” rights; thus the reason why even Jefferson, who never freed his own slaves, still occasionally worried about the contradiction of a “free society” embracing slavery. King and Smith explain that the framers and their White descendants were often unevenly influenced by these multiple traditions.


Colonial authorities slowly increased the legal, racial distinctions they had already begun to make between workers and codified stricter dividing lines of race. Smedley notes of this period, “The first time the term ‘white’ rather than ‘Christian’ was used for Europeans appeared in a 1691 law prohibiting the marriage of any ‘Englishman or other white man or woman’ to any ‘negro, mulatto, or Indian man or woman.’” By the early 1700s, when various colonies—from New York to South Carolina—worried over the threat of slave rebellions, they were equipped with a concept of race and a new form of racialized slavery to use to make distinctions and mete out punishments in the interests of social control. In the colonial era, Africans were present in all of the thirteen colonies, but from the 1660s through the Revolutionary era, Africans remained less than 10 percent of the population in the colonies of the Mid-Atlantic and New England. Their numbers and proportions continued to increase until about the 1830s, when Nat Turner’s Rebellion in Virginia resulted in the deaths of fifty-seven Whites in 1831, and other slave uprisings precipitated more extensive controls on the growth of the free Black population and on the activities of the slave population. (See Figure 3.2.)

The Early American Republic and Black Political Resistance, 1770s–1865

The United States was formed in the context of the economic and military struggles the British Empire waged with its competitors, the Spanish and the French. With harassed British troops firing on a Boston crowd in 1770 and killing the
first American patriot, a Black man named Crispus Attucks, the American war for independence was partly instigated by an earlier series of laws the British Parliament passed to extract more taxes from the colonies to fund the armies and other infrastructure needed to maintain the empire. It was also an age of European Enlightenment, a time when innovations in science and technology as well as revolutionary sentiments about liberty, individual rights, and republican or representative government inspired educated American colonialists to press for greater rights as British subjects, and then for complete independence. African Americans contributed to this revolutionary fervor in the hope of arguing for their freedom from slavery. For example, in 1775 five groups of African Americans petitioned the Massachusetts legislature for the emancipation of the slaves, and one noted the
hypocrisy of the age when he asked the Sons of Liberty pro-independence leaders, “Are not your hearts also hard, when you hold [Blacks] in slavery who are entitled to liberty, by the law of nature, equal as yourselves? If it be so, pray, sir, pull the beam out of thine eyes.”

Although initially prohibited by General George Washington from serving in the army that the Continental Congress authorized in 1775, as many as five thousand Blacks may have served in a three-hundred-thousand-person army, many in the hopes of being granted freedom. Thousands more African Americans fled from slavery when British armies arrived and often promised emancipation to those who fought with King George’s troops. The early Black resistance to their enslavement was one of many ways in which Blacks sought to change their status within the dominant White society. The absolute barriers they faced as a result of racialization, however, were embedded into the nation’s founding documents. Only White male property owners could vote in the early decades of the republic; in contrast, free Black men had access to the franchise in only a few states, such as Rhode Island, Massachusetts, and Vermont—and even those rights eroded over time.

Why did the American war for independence, which saw “liberty” as the most cherished value, fail to argue for the freedom of all residents of the American colonies?

**Slavery and the Founding Documents**

Ratified in 1781 as the United States won its independence, the Articles of Confederation was the first U.S. Constitution, but it proved weak and ineffectual. The subsequent constitution that fifty-five White men vigorously debated and drafted in Philadelphia in the summer of 1787 contained several political compromises to form “a more perfect Union” among the thirteen states. Unlike the Declaration of Independence, which was egalitarian and revolutionary in its language—including a rejected draft in which Jefferson admonished King George’s government for upholding the slave trade—the second U.S. Constitution was a very pragmatic document that upheld the institution of slavery so that the Southern slaveholding states would remain partners in the Union. South Carolina delegate John Rutledge bluntly stated that the Convention’s decision on the slavery issue would determine “whether the southern states shall or shall not be parties to the Union.”

Most notable among the many provisions that upheld slavery in the Constitution were the Three-Fifths Clause, the Fugitive Slave Clause, and the 1808 Prohibition. (See Figure 3.3.)

Since the framers agreed that representation in the lower chamber of Congress would be based on population, the Three-Fifths Clause of Article I counted each enslaved person as three-fifths of a free (White) person for the purposes of determining how many seats each state would be apportioned in the U.S. House of Representatives. This formula also determined the number of electors each state had in the Electoral College that officially elected the president. Until the Thirteenth Amendment in 1865, when this provision was officially voided, Southern states had a political advantage over Northern states in that the former had just over 40 percent of the total U.S. population but nearly 45 percent of all seats in the House. They also
Can you identify contemporary instances of racism that link back to these original constitutional barriers?

While the Declaration of Independence announced that “all men are created equal,” the slave trade continued in the United States after it fought and won the Revolutionary War for freedom. Men, women, and children continued to be bought, sold, and forced to labor under difficult conditions by those who wanted unpaid labor and who believed that Blacks’ skin color meant that they were less intelligent and less civilized than Whites.
**Figure 3.3  Constitutional Provisions Upholding Slavery**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Provision</th>
<th>Description</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Three-Fifths Clause</strong></td>
<td>Counted “those bound to service for a term of years,” or enslaved, Africans as three-fifths (3/5s) of a person for the purposes of determining federal “direct taxes” and the number of seats a state held in the House according to population size</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Slave Trade Abolition</strong></td>
<td>Prohibited Congress from abolishing the slave trade until 1808</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Head Tax</strong></td>
<td>Interpreted as discouraging a “direct tax” or head tax upon each slave (supposed to be counted as only three-fifths of a person)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Slave Product Taxation</strong></td>
<td>Came to be interpreted as prohibiting federal and state taxation on the exports of other states, including slave products</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Fugitive Slaves</strong></td>
<td>Required the return of fugitive slaves to their masters; later reinforced by the 1793 Fugitive Slave Act and 1850 Fugitive Slave Act</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Slave Rebellions</strong></td>
<td>Guaranteed federal military assistance to states in the event of “domestic violence” or internal rebellions, including slave revolts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>The Southern Veto</strong></td>
<td>Prohibited the amendment of slave trade and tax provisions until 1808, essentially giving Southern slaveholding states a veto over any constitutional changes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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in that it was one of the few original measures that barred congressional legislation over an arena of international commerce.11

Sectional Tensions Over Proslavery Compromises

Due to sectional tensions over slavery, a series of compromises were struck in Congress to intricately delineate free and slave states. They were the 1820 Missouri Compromise, the 1850 Compromise, and the 1854 Kansas-Nebraska Act. Still, these efforts could not contain political enmities between North and South or between abolitionists and proslavery interests. Thus the decade of the 1850s was marked not only by policy and electoral struggles, including the formation of an antislavery Republican Party, but by real violence. Opposing sides physically attacked or “caned” one another in the halls of Congress while bloody struggles ensued elsewhere, from a civil war in the Kansas Territory, to John Brown’s failed raid on Harpers Ferry, in 1858, to arm and free slaves.12 What helped to fuel this incendiary period was the 1850 Fugitive Slave Act and the subsequent U.S. Supreme Court verdict in the 1857 Dred Scott v. Sandford case. The Fugitive Slave Act was part of the 1850 Compromise. It authorized and monetarily compensated federal marshals and bounty hunters to forcibly return escaped slaves to their masters, holding not only state and local governments but individual civilians liable if they did not comply with the law. It created resentment among various constituencies in the North, for it made Southern slave laws valid in the North even if a state had outlawed slavery. Black civil rights champion Frederick Douglass, often an advocate for peaceful moral suasion, uncharacteristically proposed one method for countering the act: “The only way to make the Fugitive Slave Law a dead letter is to make half a dozen or more dead kidnappers.”13 Famed abolitionist William Lloyd Garrison once even called for dissolution of the Union given the irreconcilable Southern position on slavery. Roughly four hundred slaves were returned into (or taken into) bondage under the Fugitive Slave Act, but many thousands remained in the North fearful of capture.

The Supreme Court’s decision in Dred Scott v. Sandford further stoked the fires of anger that blazed around slavery. John Emerson was a White man who served as a U.S. Army surgeon. He traveled with his enslaved servant, Dred Scott, from Missouri (a slave state) to Illinois and then to the Wisconsin Territory (free jurisdictions). Scott eventually turned to the institutions of the White majority—the courts—to sue for his freedom because he resided in a free jurisdiction. While a circuit court ruled in his favor, the Missouri Supreme Court reversed the decision. Scott appealed his case to the U.S. Supreme Court, and in a now infamous ruling Chief Justice Roger Taney, joined by six other justices (all proslavery Democrats), declared that the U.S. Constitution did not apply to Black people because they “had no rights which the white man was bound to respect.” Furthermore, the Court declared the Missouri Compromise of 1820 unconstitutional because Congress violated the Fifth Amendment in prohibiting slavery in some territories. Race was clearly an absolute barrier to Blacks at this time.
The Antebellum Black Community and Political Resistance

Not only are race and slavery fundamental to understanding the broad details of African American political history, but they inform us of why certain ideas, issues, institutions, and interests emerged to formulate Black politics in the antebellum period—that is, before the Civil War. Historian Steven Hahn asserts that “slavery was not mere background or prologue [to Black politics]; it was formative and foundational. In countless ways, freed people built and drew on relations, institutions, infrastructures, and aspirations that they and their ancestors struggled for and constructed as slaves.” He concludes, “Without this legacy, activism and mobilization could not have taken place so rapidly after slavery had been abolished; and without consideration of this legacy, we cannot begin to understand how activism and mobilization did take place, and around what sorts of issues.” Key to this mobilization and these politics was the tiny minority of free Blacks.

Pre–Civil War Black Political Resistance

Because the United States took the path of being, in the words of Abraham Lincoln, a nation “half slave and half free,” free Blacks experienced a very precarious, in-between class of citizenship and opportunities. The Dred Scott decision confirmed that slavery was an omnipresent threat to all Blacks, so free Blacks frequently had to carry some form of documentation with them to prove they were free and permitted to travel. Under the shadow of the 1850 Fugitive Slave Act and well before it, some free Blacks, including New York–born Solomon Northup, author of Twelve Years a Slave, were actually kidnapped and taken into slavery. Others in the South often were perceived as provocateurs or possible instigators for slave rebellions within slave communities. Charleston, South Carolina, provided grounds after the rumored Denmark Vesey slave rebellion plot, for the state of South Carolina to pass the 1822 Negro Seamen Act, as well as other measures. The laws permitted the summary jailing of all Black sailors who came to port, and imposed significant constraints on all Blacks, whether slave or free. In the North, free Blacks were seen by many as an economic threat to the White working class, especially as increasing numbers of Irish and German workers immigrated into large cities like Boston, Philadelphia, and New York. Thus these African Americans often had to do the dirtiest and most unhealthy work, such as running bath houses, working in stables, and other menial jobs. In attempts to reduce racial and economic tensions by allaying White concerns, some Northern and later Western states outlawed free Blacks from entering their states and attempted to expel those present. Often, free Blacks paid taxes for public schools their children could not attend, and when all-Black schools existed, they may have had to pay fees and taxes that were redistributed to White schools.

Intersectionality or overlapping distinctions mattered even then for the citizenship rights and opportunities of free Blacks partly depended on their mix of
individual attributes such as skills, family background, and color, whether they were mixed-race mulatto or possibly the progeny of slave masters. The most important determinants of the status of free Blacks were contextual or geographical factors, including variations in local laws and customs, residence in the North or South, and residence in the Upper or Lower South. For example, African Americans in Upper South regions such as Maryland and Virginia or Chesapeake cities like Baltimore, Washington, D.C., Richmond, and Norfolk shared great commonalities with their Northern counterparts, but they also were much more at risk for enslavement, as they still resided in slave states. A handful of Northern states permitted Black men to vote for a period of time, but this was not the case in any Southern state; this illustrates the unevenness of the road African Americans traveled to equal rights. Despite the precarious state of free Blacks, they were indispensable leaders and allies in the processes of building African American communities that rallied together to resist slavery in favor of their collective freedom.

Black Politics and Forms of Antislavery Resistance

African American communities deployed a range of strategies in their determined opposition to slavery and hoped for its abolition, spanning the gamut from violent to peaceful resistance, or moral suasion; but they all demonstrated the ways in which, prior to the Civil War, African Americans developed a Black politics that strongly resisted racialization and racial oppression. Among the leading Black abolitionists of the mid-1800s, who mostly advocated the peaceful overthrow of slavery, were civil rights spokespersons and newspaper publishers such as Frederick Douglass and Mary Ann Shadd Cary; escaped slaves turned brilliant orators, such as Sojourner Truth; and activists who escaped slavery and helped scores of others to escape to freedom, such as Harriet Tubman. They joined White allies in various Northern antislavery societies. Most prominent among these groups was the American Anti-Slavery Society (AASS), cofounded in 1833 by newspaper editor Theodore Dwight Weld, philanthropist Arthur Tappan, and staunch antislavery spokesman William Lloyd Garrison. Many White abolitionists disagreed with the American Colonization Society (ACS) and its belief that Blacks must be shipped out of the United States and back to Africa or to the Caribbean for there ever to be racial peace (a view long held by Abraham Lincoln). Abolitionists believed Black Americans must not be enslaved in the United States; this did not mean, however, that they all saw Blacks as their social equals worthy of full civil rights and full leadership in the abolition movement.

Partly due to the interracial politics of cooperation between the 1830s and 1850s, free Blacks sought ways to independently articulate their opposition to slavery through a multitude of petitions to governments, often directed at state legislatures and Congress, as well as through a series of all-Black national conventions. With the conventions, delegates from various Upper South and Northern states met
in Rochester, New York; Cleveland, Ohio; Philadelphia, Pennsylvania; and many other locales. Their broad mantra was to “devise ways and means of bettering our condition.” Blacks joined in the propaganda campaign or efforts to directly move public opinion and make Whites more sympathetic to Black freedom through slave narratives, speeches, pamphlets, newspapers, public displays, and direct mass mailings, to name some of the tactics. Most effective of all was the Underground Railroad, called so in the 1830s to describe the extensive formal and informal network of agents and allies who led and assisted enslaved Blacks in their flight to Northern states, and especially to the free nation of Canada. Estimates are that forty thousand fugitives fled through Ohio alone by the mid-1800s. Harriet Tubman is among the most famous conductors of this “Underground” Railroad.\textsuperscript{18}

In this period up to the Civil War and especially the 1850s, Black political ideology—the range of ideals that determined the goals and strategies of African Americans—was wide-ranging including the main schools of Integrationism, Black Feminism, and Black Nationalism. Although each ideology was distinctly different, because of intersectionality it was and still is possible for African Americans to embrace more than one. Integrationism argued African Americans must have a strong self-pride and a consciousness of race and racism but seek full citizenship rights and opportunities in the United States. We have already discussed the critical leadership activists like Frederick Douglass as one key example, but he was joined by others such as Episcopalian priest and educator Alexander Crummell or prior to him abolitionist and orator Maria Stewart. Black Feminism entails the belief that society must be free from racism, sexism, and classism and Black women must be recognized as equal contributors to society and the Black community given the powerful examples of Black women like African Methodist Episcopal (AME) evangelist preacher Jarena Lee or abolitionists Sojourner Truth, Harriet Tubman, and Frances Ellen Watkins Harper. Black Nationalism is the belief that African Americans must seek autonomy, independence, and/or separation from White America culturally, politically, and/or economically. Such views were quite evident in this period. For example, a number of Black leaders—from sailor and businessman Paul Cuffee to physician and later Civil War hero Martin Delany—argued for the creation of an African nation(s) to become the new (or renewed) home of African Americans, so to escape White racism. Delany’s ideas of “Africa for the Africans” influenced one of the largest Black social movements of the twentieth century—Marcus M. Garvey’s United Negro Improvement Association.\textsuperscript{19}

Historian Sterling Stuckey made the controversial claim that Black Nationalism was the foundational ideology of Black America particularly when it came to the violent resistance to slavery. In 1829 David Walker, a North Carolina–born free person, wrote his \textit{Appeal in Four Articles} that called on the use of violent resistance if necessary to attack slavery. Published and distributed widely, it caused a panic in the South because slavery interests were constantly fearful of the threat—sometimes manufactured—of violent slave uprisings. From 1712 to 1838, several dozen uprisings were attempted or occurred—the most famous being those of Gabriel Prosser, Denmark Vesey, and Nat Turner. By one estimate, all of these uprisings involved more than 2,500
enslaved participants and the deaths of more than 500 Whites. But the true impact of these rebellions cannot be captured in whether they were successful or thwarted or whether they were measured in bloodshed. They laid the groundwork for the most famous armed rebellion against slavery—John Brown’s raid on Harpers Ferry in 1858, which is credited as one of the many sparks of the Civil War. To be sure, slave uprisings were simply the most visible signs of the unrest and often invisible resistance that millions of slaves demonstrated toward their oppression, from sabotage to suicide.\footnote{20}

**The Civil War and its Aftermath, 1860–1877**

One of the most extraordinary periods in American and African American political history is the period during and after the Civil War, when the U.S. government made a reluctant but radical departure from its tacit support of the institution of slavery and came closer to a multiracial democracy than ever before. As explained previously, the tensions that sparked the war grew out of the uneasy relationship between the North and South that became more untenable with each successive compromise. While the war divided White Americans by region, most African Americans saw it as a war for their freedom, the anticipated moment that they referred to as the Day of Jubilee.

While Abraham Lincoln won only 40 percent of the popular vote, his election and that of his nominally antislavery Republican Party in 1860 prompted Southern
rebellion. South Carolina seceded from the Union in December of that year, and more states followed to form the Confederate States of America. The Confederacy was ultimately comprised of eleven states: Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, and Virginia. Historian Darlene Clark Hine notes, “Slavery caused the War. Yet when the war began in 1861, neither the Union nor the Confederacy entered the conflict with any intention or desire to change the status of black Americans. It was supposed to be a white man’s war.”

Lincoln was compelled and reluctantly agreed to enlist Black troops into the fight in April 1862. More than 40,000 Black men answered his call, fought, and died as Union soldiers by the time the conflict ended in April 1865, and all together more than 600,000 died on both sides. Among the 180,000 Black Union soldiers who enlisted were men such as those in the 54th Massachusetts Volunteer Infantry Regiment, whose bravery is partly immortalized, despite some historical inaccuracies, in the 1989 film *Glory*.

Lincoln was eventually immortalized as the Great Emancipator for finally agreeing that this White man’s fight to preserve the Union was ultimately a fight about slavery, but the Emancipation Proclamation for which he is credited, which took effect January 1, 1863, only freed slaves who resided behind Confederate lines that did not recognize his authority as U.S. president. Not until after Lincoln’s assassination and the passing of the Thirteenth Amendment in 1865 were all slaves freed, and then the fight for full citizenship began.

### The Reforms of the First Reconstruction

The program of Southern Reconstruction was one in which the U.S. federal government formulated policies and programs to reintegrate the South into the Union and grant citizenship rights to Blacks. In place from roughly 1867 to 1877, Reconstruction was a complex, turbulent, often violent, but also progressive period of American history. For the first time since Africans were brought to North America, they were freed, granted citizenship and universal male suffrage, and elected to public office. Yet White scholarship and attitudes in the years following Reconstruction often portrayed it as a period of mob rule in which corrupt, lazy, and ignorant Black politicians subjected innocent White Southerners to destructive legislation. In one example of such attitudes, the 1915 film *The Birth of a Nation* portrayed the Ku Klux Klan as the savior of the South, as well as protectors of the virtue of White womanhood against attacks from arrogant Black men. (This was a falsehood long perpetuated by White Southerners to justify anti-Black violence.) In his seminal work *Black Reconstruction in America, 1860–1880*, scholar and civil rights leader W. E. B. Du Bois argued against this persistently negative attitude toward African Americans. Du Bois conceded that there was some corruption during Reconstruction, but in part it was a period that saw many policy reforms and hinted at the promise of an empowered Black working class. In this section, we briefly summarize the real story of Reconstruction.

Political sociologist Manning Marable refers to this period from 1867 to 1877 as the First Reconstruction because he saw great similarities between it and
Major parallels exist between what political sociologist Manning Marable calls the First Reconstruction, the period from 1867 to 1877 that saw the nation struggling and adapting to the new rights granted to now-freed Blacks, and the civil rights movement of the 1950s and 1960s, which Marable calls the Second Reconstruction. The parallels include the following:

- The involvement of states’ rights debates and the federal government as a reluctant ally to African Americans
- Public pressure on the federal courts and Congress to act
- The role of the federal courts and Congress in fundamentally shaping Black politics through their involvement in public debates and mobilizations around Black citizenship status
- Subsequent growth of significant Black voter empowerment and the election of Black officials
- Expansion of the Black middle class and the creation of a new leadership
- Collapse or constraint on the movements’ efforts by Northern collusion with renewed White Southern opposition

Similarities also exist in the civil rights laws passed under the First and Second Reconstructions. For instance, the Civil Rights Act of 1875 anticipated the 1964 Civil Rights Act by declaring discrimination in public accommodations—such as hotels and street cars—a federal crime.

Considering This Crossroad

- What do the similarities between the First and Second Reconstructions, despite the nearly one hundred years separating them, say about the persistence of racialization and the barriers that existed for African Americans?
- Based on what you’ve read in this chapter, what constraints in the dominant society and polity are present in both Reconstruction eras, and how were they perpetuated?
- Why was it so difficult for the South and Southern Whites to recognize Blacks’ rights as citizens—civil rights, the right to vote, to own property, and to earn a living—and for Northern political interests to protect those rights?

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responsibilities were carried out by its roughly one thousand nearly all-White Army officers and agents, who were empowered to establish freedmen schools; settle land, labor, and other legal disputes; provide direct food, medical, and other social aid; monitor elections and the right for Blacks to register and vote; and assist in the transportation needs of Black and White refugees. The bureau, operating for only four years, with a budget based on receipts from rental of lands to former slaves, was unable to address the complex range of problems included in its charge. The Civil Rights Act of 1866 was the first law of its kind and stated that all persons born in the United States were citizens of their state and of the nation. It also outlawed the Black Codes, which many Southern governments enacted in an effort to control and possibly re-enslave freed African Americans by fundamentally curtailing their economic and political rights. This law preceded the Fourteenth Amendment (1868) that enshrined the above standard of citizenship within the Constitution, extended equal protection of the laws to all, and provided sanctions against state governments that did not comply with new civil rights standards in their constitutions and laws. A few years later, the Fifteenth Amendment (1870) prohibited state governments from denying a citizen the right to vote based on race or former enslavement. These legislative changes helped, at least institutionally, to remove significant barriers from African Americans obtaining the same rights and opportunities as the White majority.

Much of this legislation stemmed in part from the efforts of the Radical Republicans in Congress, a wing of the Republican Party that believed in full Black equality. They fought Lincoln’s successor, Andrew Johnson—a strongly anti-Black, Tennessee Democrat—on the scale and breadth of Reconstruction. Johnson was not particularly concerned about repairing the economic, social, and political status of former slaves. In the Senate, the radical faction was led by Charles Sumner of Massachusetts, and in the House of Representatives by Thaddeus Stevens of Pennsylvania.

From 1867 to 1877, the Radical Republicans enacted their vision of civil and social reforms by overriding President Johnson’s objections, authorizing military governments to rule Southern states until they reformed their constitutions, and passing a bevy of new laws. Political scientist Linda Williams notes that “White skin privilege” still fundamentally mattered in how benefits were bestowed on Black and White war veterans, as well as the Black and White poor, and there was extensive anti-Black violence as White Southerners continued to rebel. But in a very short period of time, Reconstruction transformed Black politics to such an extent that even after its decline and fall in the late 1870s, generations of African American leaders and organizations remembered how they or their ancestors were empowered under it and continuously mobilized for greater self-determination and reform.

Black Politics and the First Reconstruction

Reconstruction aimed at racial democratization of Southern society and politics by passing voter and other citizenship laws that were race neutral. In a number of ways, it involved or mobilized large numbers of African Americans in processes that permitted them to deliberate and to make decisions about their futures at levels not
previously possible including protesting unfair work conditions, sitting on juries, and participating in community meetings about revised state constitutions. Because of widespread Black mobilization, the size of Reconstruction-era Black populations (in three states Blacks comprised a majority of eligible voters), and the temporary denial of the vote to White ex-Confederates who had not yet sworn loyalty to the Union, an unprecedented 1,465 Black men were elected to public office between 1867 and 1877. True to our assertion that the journey of African American political freedom has many twists and turns, more Blacks held office in the United States in 1873 than did ninety years later, in 1963. The range of offices held under Reconstruction is impressive. Fourteen Blacks were elected to Congress, and one—Hiram Revels of Mississippi—served as a U.S. senator. In addition, P. B. S. Pinchback served briefly as governor of Louisiana, and six Blacks served as lieutenant governors. In Mississippi and South Carolina, a majority of the state legislatures were Black for a time, including 112 senators and 683 representatives. Four Blacks served as state superintendents of education, and at least one—Jonathan Wright of South Carolina—sat upon a state supreme court. There were forty-one Black sheriffs, five Black mayors, thirty-one Black coroners, and even four Black police chiefs. Black state legislators discussed and attempted to enact a number of reforms in these states, including compulsory public education for the first time, land reforms that
would redistribute former plantation properties, and civil rights laws. More often than not, their proposals and actions were blocked or reversed by White lawmakers who regained state political control, as well as by federal officials who did not enforce fairness, illustrating that despite changes in federal policy, discrimination and racialization continued. For this period, race was no longer an absolute barrier to equal opportunity, but it did remain decisive. As Chapter 4 will show, there were important parallels and contrasts between the journey of African Americans in the South and Latinos in the Southwest. Despite the rights of Latinos as citizens and landholders in Texas, New Mexico, and California being strongly guaranteed under the 1848 Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo that ended the 1845 Mexican-American War, in reality many of these rights were not upheld at all.

**The Fall of Reconstruction and the Rise of Jim Crow**

What Du Bois called this “experiment in democracy” was derailed in the early 1870s and entirely reversed by the end of the decade. Though the federal administration of President Ulysses Grant applied pressures for reform, White Southerners vehemently resisted and White Northerners never fully supported the full equality of Black citizens. After nearly five years of the painful Civil War, the end of slavery, and the creation of African American citizenship and voting, the North was unwilling to continue to struggle to uphold Black citizenship rights. “White redemption” became the mantra of the conservative, Southern wing of the Democratic Party, with the explicit intention of returning Southern state governments to the control of White men. One newspaper declared, “Mississippi is a white man’s country, and by the eternal God we’ll rule it!” By the mid-1870s, White Democrats and their allies successfully carried out a campaign of mass intimidation and violence through a number of methods. They ignored federal laws and mandates; organized vigilante organizations like the White League; and threatened, beat, and in several cases murdered Black voters, jurors, and officials, as well as sympathetic White Republicans. They also refused to seat duly elected Black officials or charged them with misconduct and removed them from office. From 1870 to 1877, White Democrats regained control of Southern state legislatures and governorships from Blacks. All of this set the context for the 1876 presidential election. Republican Rutherford B. Hayes and Democrat Samuel Tilden negotiated a compromise in the U.S. House of Representatives that permitted Hayes, who won fewer popular votes, to assume the presidency if he agreed to withdraw all federal troops from the South. The Republicans in the House and Hayes did agree and thus, with the end of federally enforced martial law, Reconstruction collapsed.

By the turn of the twentieth century, Black political, economic, and social gains nearly evaporated with the emergence of Jim Crow politics—the official government sanction of anti-Black racial discrimination, racial separation, and violence. Historian Rayford Logan called this era the lowest point of postbellum Black history. In the political realm, state constitutions and electoral laws were rewritten with the expressed intent of reasserting a “White man’s government.” New methods
of disenfranchisement, such as the Grandfather Clause or the literacy test, were put in place to circumvent the Fifteenth Amendment. Older ones, such as the poll tax, were also effective in constraining the vote by the new citizens. As a result, one million Black voters were removed from the voting rolls by the turn of the century. The few Black voters who were still permitted to vote were severely harassed, or their votes were nullified by White electoral fraud. In 1901 North Carolina representative George White became the last African American to serve in Congress for a generation. White segregationists openly gloated over their victory, with South Carolina governor Ben “Pitchfork” Tillman stating, “We have done our level best [to prevent Blacks from voting] . . . we have scratched our heads to find out how we could eliminate the last one of them. We stuffed ballot boxes. We shot them. We are not ashamed of it.”28 With such words giving an official impunity to the mob violence of White vigilante groups, it is no wonder that the late nineteenth century witnessed the highest rates of anti-Black lynching of any era. Lynching was the extralegal use of torture and murder, including hanging, burning, castration, and dismemberment of victims, most often Black, who were accused of alleged and most often false crimes. (See Figure 3.4.) The ultimate motive was to use fear to exert social control over the victim’s group. The Ku Klux Klan, founded in 1866, was among the leading White supremacist vigilante organizations using methods of racial terror like lynching. Between 1882 and 1925, more than 3,200 African Americans, mostly men but also some women and children, were lynched. It is important to note, however, that this period was a high point of American xenophobia overall, and 1,266 White persons also were lynched—many of whom were European immigrants who were not considered White, Anglo-Saxon Protestants.29

In the economic realm, Jim Crow criminal justice and employment practices devised a convict lease system through which millions of Black inmates (many arrested on false charges or even kidnapped) were deliberately given extraordinarily long and harsh sentences. In turn, local sheriffs and state prison departments leased the labor of these convicts to industrial firms and planters—an effort at re-enslavement—with no regard for the inhumane exploitation and treatment these men experienced inside mines or out in fields. Black farmers were exploited under a system of sharecropping. Landless Blacks farmed land owned by Whites and earned their pay from a proportion of the crop—hence “sharecropping”—and those who participated were called sharecroppers. This system, like a form of feudalism, tied them to the land and cheated them out of a fair share of the crop revenues they produced while sometimes renting land and tools from White owners. In the North and South, other Black workers had little recourse against blatant discrimination and everyday racial indignities, whether they were domestics, stevedores, or factory workers.

In the social realm, Southern racial customs as well as state and local laws eventually dictated the separation of Blacks and Whites in public facilities such as railroad cars, schools, theaters, libraries, parks, water fountains, and sometimes places
Figure 3.4 Total Lynchings by Race and Year, 1882–1968

of employment. The popular term for this collection of informal norms and formalized law was *Jim Crow*. The origins of Jim Crow—both the name and the language for laws and politics—can be traced to the 1820s, when Thomas Dartmouth Rice, a White performer with artificially darkened skin, portrayed a stereotypical Black man onstage; the response was highly favorable and brought him fame. The name of the character “Jim Crow” then began to be used after the Civil War and Reconstruction as the informal name for the complex array of racial caste systems and laws and policies that stigmatized and controlled the status of Black Americans. Jim Crow laws and politics therefore symbolized the uneven roads to which Blacks were restricted. One Jim Crow law went so far as to require Black and White jurors to use separate Bibles when being sworn to give truthful testimony in court.

The federal government turned a blind eye to many of these violations of the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments. As we explained in Chapter 1, the U.S. Supreme Court delivered the infamous 1896 *Plessy v. Ferguson* decision, which declared the practice of “separate but equal”—or the segregation of public facilities—constitutional. Despite Homer Plessy’s charge that the Fourteenth Amendment’s Equal Protection Clause had been violated when he, a mixed-race man, was forced to sit in the Colored section of a railway car, the Court’s majority disagreed with Plessy. For more than two generations, this precedent solidified the walls of segregation in many respects before a Second Reconstruction tore them down.

### Black Politics in the Jim Crow Era, 1880–1940

Because of the reconfiguration of White supremacy in the South and continued discrimination in the North, African American communities refocused their attention on Black self-help and the development of Black civil society to press for greater citizenship rights and opportunities. Leaders and organizations enumerated wide-ranging strategies for Black progress, including the political accommodation and economic self-help model promulgated by the conservative race leader and head of the Tuskegee Institute, Booker T. Washington; the conservative newspaper writer George Schuyler; and the civil rights protest and direct agitation model advanced by scholars and civil rights leaders like W. E. B. Du Bois and Mary McLeod Bethune. Other strategies included a separatist model that encouraged movement to all-Black towns, advocated by Benjamin “Pap” Singleton and his forty thousand Exodusters, and emigration from the United States and the building of an independent Black nation, advanced by Black Nationalist leader Marcus Garvey and later Elijah Muhammad of the Nation of Islam.

This was a period of expansive growth for Black civil society, including groups and institutions with varied educational, religious, economic, and political purposes, all of whom played key roles in the shaping of Black politics. Despite class and other differences among African Americans, segregation fostered a strong racial group consciousness because the system of separation, somewhat akin to slavery, made many Blacks painfully and intensely aware of their second-class citizenship.
In the context of our framework, however, Black racialization during this period was not an absolute bar against Black citizenship rights and opportunities. Race mattered—significantly so—and Blacks had only weak empowerment to advance their interests. They possessed limited citizenship rights and opportunities, and the barriers they faced remained decisive.

**Black Civil Society**

Throughout Black political history, Black teachers played a pivotal role in the development of Black communities and political leadership. During Reconstruction a number of all-Black colleges and universities, such as Howard University, Fisk University, Morehouse College, and Spelman College, were founded because various Christian denominations sent missionaries South or Congress authorized land grants. Out of these institutions came leaders who would shape the course of Black America.32

The most intense political debate of the early 1900s was over the role that education should play in the racial uplift of African Americans. On one side was the Tuskegee Model of Booker T. Washington, a brilliant former slave who amassed enormous contributions from White philanthropists. In public, Washington advocated for Black industrial and mechanical education so that Black workers could passively assume their place in the racial order of the New South. In private, he supported civil rights lawsuits. On the other side was W. E. B. Du Bois, who received his doctorate from Harvard and advocated for a classical liberal arts education for Blacks that could in part develop a Talented Tenth, a leadership class to guide others. Several scholarly and activist conferences were created and helped to debate the way forward, from 1898 through 1945, in charting Black self-determination in the United States and abroad.33 Along the other lines of civic life, various Black Protestant denominations greatly expanded—Methodist (AME and AME-Zion) and Baptist; or took root—Holiness and Pentecostal churches during this era. AME, Baptist, and Holiness and Pentecostal churches became the three dominant churches of Black America by the end of the twentieth century. Methodist and Baptist ministers in particular were among the leaders of the civil rights movement of the 1950s and 1960s, although there was considerable disagreement among some ministers and churches about supporting this movement. Added to this educational and religious basis for Black politics was the founding of various Black fraternal organizations on college campuses (such as Alpha Phi Alpha and Alpha Kappa Alpha) and Black professional associations, like those for Black physicians (the National Medical Association) and lawyers (the National Bar Association).

One set of civic affiliations easily overlapped with others to create broadening networks of Black leadership. Business associations and labor unions were equally important in shaping elite and grassroots agendas. Booker T. Washington encouraged the spread of Black entrepreneurship in founding the National Negro Business League in 1900. Madam C. J. Walker, formerly Sarah Breedlove, founded a cosmetics empire that employed thousands of Black women and made her a millionaire, and she used her enormous wealth to support civil rights and other political causes. Black workers struggled to defend their right to fair wages and working conditions.
When they were unable to receive fair treatment and were relegated to segregated locales, as was the case with the American Federation of Labor, they created their own powerful unions, such as A. Philip Randolph's Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters, or they joined unions that had made more concerted efforts (or that they could compel to make such efforts) at nondiscrimination, such as the United Auto Workers or the Congress of Industrial Organizations.34

The Early- to Mid-Twentieth-Century Civil Rights Movement

Black civil society undergirded the efforts that African American leaders and groups made to pursue Black self-determination strategies, especially the Du Bois civil rights approach of pressing against the strictures of Jim Crow segregation in the South and de facto segregation in the North. Domestic tensions and two unique global conflicts in the early twentieth century affected African Americans and contributed to these strategies.

The domestic tensions partly stemmed from burgeoning economic and demographic shifts when, between 1910 and 1930, nearly two million African Americans migrated out of the rural South during the first Great Migration. These migrants underwent urbanization as they created or expanded new communities in Northeastern and Midwestern cities such as New York, Chicago, Philadelphia, Detroit, St. Louis, Cleveland, and Pittsburgh, while others moved to Southern cities like Atlanta and Birmingham to gain greater opportunities within industrial and commercial labor forces. Given continued White racial animus toward African Americans, as evidenced by the continuance of lynching, a wave of race riots ignited in cities ranging from Atlanta (1906) to Chicago (1919), followed by even bloodier riots in the 1920s. These conflicts were mostly driven by persistent racist stereotypes of Blacks as well as White/White ethnic resentment of the changing civic and economic status of Black Americans.

One particularly bloody riot in Springfield, Illinois, in 1908 prompted the formation of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored (NAACP), created to advance the status of the Black population. The NAACP was preceded by W. E. B. Du Bois's 1905 Niagara Movement. Du Bois predicted, “The problem of the twentieth century is the problem of the color-line—the relation of the darker to the lighter races of men in Asia and Africa, in America and the islands of the sea.”35 To challenge this divide and the conservative approach of Booker T. Washington, Du Bois invited twenty-eight other delegates to a conference in upstate New York. They decried the indignities of segregation and called for a number of reforms, including improved housing, health care, and schools for African Americans, as they challenged White racial prejudice. Although this conference and its subsequent meetings garnered the support of hundreds of people, the internal disagreements among its Black leaders, combined with the attacks of Washington and his powerful allies, led
to its demise. As the Niagara Movement dissipated and race riots continued, a group of forty White philanthropists, moderates, and leftists, as well as Du Bois, met and established the NAACP four years later.

Over the next four decades, African Americans increasingly assumed the leadership of the NAACP, built an organizational membership of roughly three hundred thousand, and established hundreds of state and local chapters. It became a leading, if not the leading, organization of the Black civil rights movement up to the 1950s. Some of the many ways it challenged racial discrimination and Jim Crow segregation included confronting anti-Black racial stereotypes in art and popular culture in the early 1900s and 1920s including D. W. Griffith’s pro–Ku Klux Klan film *The Birth of a Nation* (1915), waging a long period of public protests and demonstrations over the film, and lobbying Congress to have lynching declared a federal crime. The NAACP also assembled a brilliant legal team through its affiliate, the NAACP Legal Defense Fund (LDF), and from 1940 to the 1950s waged an incremental but eventually successful battle to overturn segregation and discriminatory laws with regard to voting, housing, public accommodations, and education. (See Figure 3.5.) It investigated and pursued hundreds of cases of anti-Black racial violence and discrimination through the work of its state and local chapters, often helping to provide legal counsel and support for victims. The NAACP also worked with other civil rights groups during the Great Depression of the 1930s, and during President Franklin D. Roosevelt’s administration, it objected to the exclusion of Black farmworkers and domestics from the social and employment insurance portions of the 1935 Social Security Act. Additionally, the NAACP used scholarly research, the arts, and literary avenues to keep Black America and its allies informed about the advances and barriers to racial progress through the publication of its national magazine *The Crisis*, founded and edited by W. E. B. Du Bois.36

**Black Politics From the Great Depression to World War II**

While Black civil rights leaders pressed for expanded citizenship rights and opportunities through the courts, a handful of African Americans who retained or held elected or appointed office helped to advance these concerns. In 1929 U.S. representative Oscar De Priest of Chicago became the first African American elected to Congress in nearly thirty years. In addition, a group of African Americans such as educator Mary McLeod Bethune and an economist with a Harvard PhD, Robert Weaver, held limited and sometimes advisory posts in President Franklin D. Roosevelt’s administration. They became known as Roosevelt’s “Black Cabinet.” Roosevelt assumed office in 1932 during the Great Depression, when national income dropped by half and 25 percent of all Americans were unemployed. As many as 50 to 60 percent of African Americans were unemployed in certain cities, and Blacks were particularly hard-hit as agricultural workers, given the economic and climate devastation that farms endured in the 1930s.

While Roosevelt proposed and Congress launched numerous new federal agencies and programs to rescue the economy, Blacks faced intense discrimination in
Box 3.4 Road Sign

African American Women Organize for Civil Rights

While the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) is properly credited as the first major national civil rights organization of the twentieth century, the deep roots of the early civil rights movement are connected to the leaders of the national Black Women's Club Movement. In 1896 two rival organizations merged and formed the National Association of Colored Women (NACW) in Washington, D.C., with influential spokesperson Mary Church Terrell as its first president. In 1914, this association had approximately one thousand affiliates (clubs) under its umbrella and fifty thousand members. At times, ideological tensions existed among the women regarding endorsing Washington’s approach to Black progress, and the clubs also faced issues over class and skin-color politics associated with the “racial uplift” philosophy of some of the lighter-complexioned, elite women who founded the association. The group called for a host of social reforms, such as kindergarten and day care facilities, better working conditions and employment services for urban women, and better health services and community clinics, that preceded the agenda of a second great civil rights organization, the National Urban League, founded in 1910.1

1. For an excellent discussion of the Black Women’s Club Movement, refer to Paula Giddings, When and Where I Enter: The Impact of Black Women on Race and Sex in America (New York: Perennial, 2001), 95–117. Historian Kevin Gaines argues that there was a shared, elitist “uplift” philosophy that many Black leaders embraced at the turn of the century, including W. E. B. Du Bois, as influenced by American thinking about the Protestant work ethic, intelligence, and culture. It is also true that despite these ideals, the various Black leaders and White allies who established the movement, even in their moderate views, were fundamentally challenging prevailing ideas about race and the racialization of African Americans as second-class citizens. Refer to Kevin Kelly Gaines, Uplifting the Race: Black Leadership, Politics, and Culture in the Twentieth Century (Chapel Hill and London: University of North Carolina Press, 1996).

New Deal programs. Title I of the 1933 National Industrial Recovery Act, which was later ruled unconstitutional by the Supreme Court, set minimum wage standards and hours, but it exempted domestic workers and farmers—which made up 70 percent of the Black workforce. Southern Democrats in Congress deemed this provision necessary to protect planter interests and the White middle and upper classes affluent enough to hire Black domestics. Title II of the Public Works Administration was important to U.S. economic recovery but initially only provided a handful of jobs to African Americans because of local, discriminatory hiring practices. Black recipients of federal poverty relief were likewise shortchanged because of discrimination in local county offices.37 The NAACP and the National Urban League engaged in intense lobbying for Black workers to be included under the provisions of the Social Security Act, finally winning modest gains in the 1950s. With regard to economic rights, the New Deal was a period of militant left and labor activism in which White communists and other leftist organizers briefly made in-roads among African
American communities, from Harlem, to Birmingham, Alabama, for some African Americans perceived these anti-racist, White radical organizers as advocates for the poor and unemployed. The famous Scottsboro Boys case was a touchstone for this activist period when nine young Black men from Alabama were falsely accused of...
raping two White women. Court proceedings continued from 1931 to 1937, even though the women had admitted the story was not true. This was a period in which Black radical activists, both socialists and communists, who challenged the economic and racial inequalities of Jim Crow through groups like the National Negro Congress gained some respect and support among ordinary African Americans.  

On the political front, Roosevelt's economic reform agenda began the transformation of the Democratic Party from its base in the conservative, anti-civil rights South to a more liberal, national coalition comprised of labor and the White working class, Catholics and Jews (or some White immigrants), the elderly, women, and minority voters, including African Americans. It became known as the New Deal (or Democratic) Coalition. African Americans slowly began to switch loyalties from the Republican Party (formerly the “Party of Lincoln”) to the Democratic Party between 1932, when Roosevelt beat incumbent Republican president Herbert Hoover, and 1964, when incumbent Democratic presidential candidate Lyndon B. Johnson roundly beat Republican candidate Barry Goldwater. Despite the strong objections of White Southern Democrats, especially in Congress, Roosevelt, influenced by Black civil rights leaders and First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt, also embraced more Black policy interests. Between 1935 and 1941, Roosevelt made small but important strides to appeal to Black voters: he openly denounced the practice of lynching and announced support for a federal antilynching bill, hired forty-five African Americans to federal posts, and conceded to some Black demands of nondiscrimination directives in New Deal as well as war production agencies. This was especially true in 1941, when civil rights leader A. Philip Randolph protested that Blacks were not being hired in those industries that received federal contracts and subsidies for producing World War II armaments and supplies. Randolph threatened to have as many as one hundred thousand marchers converge on Washington, D.C., to press the point. Roosevelt ultimately issued Executive Order 8802 in July 1941, establishing broad antidiscrimination guidelines as well as a Fair Employment Practices Committee (FEPC) that had limited powers to monitor hiring practices in war industries. It was a modest effort, but it was the first successful, federal civil rights initiative since Reconstruction; and, arguably, it was the beginning of what became affirmative action.  

From the time the United States entered World War II in 1941 until the end of the conflict in 1945, more than five hundred thousand African Americans enlisted and served, supposedly in a war for freedom and democracy against the Axis powers of Nazi Germany, Italy, and Japan. The great irony is that similar to the generations that preceded them, African Americans served loyally in segregated military units despite intense racial discrimination. Units such as the Tuskegee Airmen and the 99th Flying Training Squadron illustrate that as in the past, African Americans fought with valor. Black leaders and groups supported the fight to defeat fascism abroad, but they also demanded racial justice at home. Other groups, such as Japanese Americans, served in similar group-based units in the military. The demands for racial reform bore fruit when, in 1948, Roosevelt’s successor, Harry Truman, issued Executive Order 9981, which desegregated the armed forces. While this won wide acclaim from the African American community, it intensified the fight within the Democratic Party.
with anti–civil rights Southern Democrats like Strom Thurmond, otherwise known as Dixiecrats.  

### The Second Reconstruction: Postwar and Civil Rights Movement Era, 1950s–1960s

Among other scholars, sociologist Charles Payne concludes that when African American World War II veterans, like Amzie Moore of Mississippi, returned to the United States having fought to preserve democracy abroad, their expectations helped fuel Black hopes for greater rights and opportunities at home. It was veterans like Moore who rolled up their sleeves and helped to revive the grassroots activist tradition of Black politics that had persisted long before and after the First Reconstruction. They joined younger generations of Black activists to help develop a mass protest wing to what political sociologist Manning Marable labels the beginning of the Second Reconstruction—the 1950s and 1960s civil rights movement. Prior to this grassroots mass mobilization movement, groups like the NAACP had mainly (but not exclusively) conducted the movement in the courts and inside the normal channels of government.

The postwar 1950s was a period of both prosperity and prejudice. The prosperity was evident from the American middle class growing in leaps and bounds. The economy during the war years had resulted in tight savings that were unleashed in the 1950s and greatly expanded the consumer economy, while federal subsidies and loans rewarded the service of veterans and their families, who in turn sought homeownership and higher education. But the Black middle and working classes experienced intense prejudice and racial discrimination when, for example, they sought to move into White suburban neighborhoods made accessible by the construction of the federal highway system, or when they applied for federally subsidized home loans and college scholarships. Scholars have framed these publicly supported programs as “White affirmative action.” Moreover, the 1950s was a period of mainstream political conservatism partly due to the anticommunist fervor that emerged in the United States with the onset of the Cold War, the global competition between the communist Soviet Union and its allies versus the democratic, capitalist nations of the United States and the West. Sen. Joseph McCarthy (R-WI) led an anticommunist, moral panic, dubbed McCarthyism, which led to a series of public and private investigations. Like others, it pressured some mainstream Black leaders to prove their patriotism by “red-baiting” or denouncing communist or socialist sympathizers in their ranks. The legendary civil rights attorney and first Black U.S. Supreme Court justice, Thurgood Marshall, felt compelled to hand over a list of potential sympathizers within the ranks of the NAACP-LDF to the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI). Famed baseball player Jackie Robinson publicly denounced world-renowned singer and activist Paul Robeson before McCarthy’s House Un-American Activities Committee for the latter’s pro-Soviet comments. Despite this political upheaval, the 1950s and 1960s were an opportune time for a Black-led mass movement. This was
for several reasons. First, African American activists and their allies witnessed a new political consciousness and benefited from new leaders, resources, and networks. Second, Southern governments and civil societies remained racially oppressive but did not have (or could not as frequently use) the same tools of suppression and violent retaliation that were available decades earlier. Third, the federal government and Northern public opinion were compelled to give greater scrutiny to the actions of Southern governments as they attempted to hide behind states’ rights justifications in the postwar period. Finally, activists were able to form coalitions with or be the beneficiaries of actions by powerful external allies, including the courts. The high period of the civil rights movement, which was complex and vibrant, was roughly between 1955 and 1965. For the purposes of this chapter we will briefly summarize a few of its key events to illustrate the unique ways that these activists challenged mid-twentieth-century barriers to African Americans enjoying full citizenship and expanded opportunities.

One way in which scholars have categorized the high and low points of social movements is through a concept that sociologist William Gamson calls protest cycles, the dynamic peaks and valleys of a movement’s actions. If we break the 1950s and 1960s civil rights movement into broad but unique periods, one would be roughly from 1955 to 1960, beginning with the Montgomery bus boycott and ending with the new student protest movement. The next is from 1960 to 1965, from the new student protest movement to the passage of the 1965 Voting Rights Act. This precedes the beginning of the competing Black Power movement in 1966.


The U.S. Supreme Court’s 1954–1955 decisions with the Brown v. Board of Education case illustrate how external influences mattered. The Court’s unanimous decision in Brown that separate but equal accommodations in public schools are unconstitutional gave the budding protest movement enormous leverage. The ruling disrupted the normal flow of business in the South, which was arranged around keeping Whites and Blacks separate, and firmly placed the U.S. Constitution and the Court on the side of the Black protesters. Although Southern governments strongly reacted to the ruling and to subsequent federal actions by appointing commissions to introduce measures to resist the decision and intimidate protesters, a substantive victory had been won.

The Brown ruling was one of several high-profile events providing momentum to the civil rights movement. The new consciousness, resources and networks, and external pressures necessary to begin a successful movement are illustrated in the events surrounding the murder of Emmett Till and the Montgomery, Alabama, bus boycott. Emmett Till was a fourteen-year-old boy from Chicago, Illinois, who in the summer of 1955 went to visit relatives in the rural town of Money, Mississippi. Unaware of the racial norms of the deep Jim Crow South, he boyishly flirted with a White woman. In retaliation, at least three men took him from his uncle’s house and
murdered him. They shot Till, mutilated his body, and threw it in the Tallahatchie River with a cotton gin fan tied around his neck with barbed wire. Till's murder received extraordinary public attention, particularly within the Black press, precisely because it occurred in this post–World War II period when Black expectations for fairness had markedly increased (new consciousness). The United States was also attempting to win a propaganda war with the Soviet Union by projecting itself as a bastion of equality and democracy (external pressures), and the civil rights movement's decades-long antilynching campaign had helped to significantly reduce the number of reported lynchings by this time (resources and networks). Additionally, technological changes in the production of agriculture connected to the second Great Migration of African Americans who moved from the South to the North—roughly five million people from 1940 to 1970—put pressures on Southern planters, employers, and law enforcers to shift their tactics lest they increase the number of Blacks fleeing to Northern opportunities and lose access to that labor. While the men were tried for Till's murder, they were found not guilty by an all-White jury after an hour of deliberation. Later, in a Look magazine article, the men revealed to journalist William Bradford Huie that they had killed Till. In the wake of the Till murder, the Montgomery bus boycott illustrated many possibilities, but especially the prospect for the rise of new leaders, networks, and resources. When Rosa Parks, a professional seamstress, decided in December 1955 not to move to the back, Colored section of a city bus to obey a segregation law, an entire movement sat down with her. Parks was strongly connected to the networks and resources of Black civil society, civil rights leadership, and the Black church in Montgomery, Alabama. She was a leader in the Women's Political Council, which became an indispensable group in conceiving, advertising, and promoting the bus boycott. Parks was also an officer in the local NAACP, which connected her to a larger local, state, and national network of activism; and she was a colleague of E. D. Nixon, the president of the local chapter of the NAACP and the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters, an influential and national African American labor group.

Parks's act helped to move the agenda of and provide a protest opportunity for the newly formed Montgomery Improvement Association (MIA), an activist coalition of church, labor, and other civil society leaders and groups dedicated to using an African American economic boycott of riding city buses as a tactic to challenge segregation. During the boycott, tens of thousands of Blacks in Montgomery either walked or carpooled to their destinations. It was Nixon who in turn recruited a young Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. to become the president of the MIA, and King's leadership became an undeniable source of charisma for the movement as it was joined by many other pivotal leaders. A discouraging, yearlong stalemate between the MIA and White city leaders and Alabama courts that refused to desegregate buses was broken by an external development. The U.S. Supreme Court ruled in the 1956 *Browder v. Gayle* decision that segregation in transportation (as sanctioned by the *Plessy* decision) was unconstitutional. As a result, the bus company hired many Black drivers and pledged to treat, as well as seat, all passengers with dignity on an equal, first-come, first-served basis.
The period of the late 1950s witnessed more victories: the founding of a leading civil rights organization, the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC), headed by Dr. King; the Dwight D. Eisenhower administration enforcing the Brown decision and, in 1957, sending in the National Guard to help nine Black students desegregate the all-White Little Rock High School in Arkansas; and the passage of the historic but modest 1957 Civil Rights Act. It also witnessed significant setbacks stemming from a White backlash against these changes: Southern White retribution, including the rise of White Citizens’ Councils—middle-class-oriented, White supremacist organizations; and the state prosecution and persecution of the NAACP and other civil rights groups, especially Black schoolteachers. But the movement moved farther down the road of greater equality due to the second cycle of protests.45


It is not an exaggeration to say that without the development of the second protest cycle of the civil rights movement, the major laws that resulted from it—the 1964 Civil Rights Act and the 1965 Voting Rights Act—may have not have been as strong in content and may have been passed much later. After the Southern segregationist backlash of the late 1950s, the civil rights movement was revived in part by the efforts of thousands of Black and some White youth and young adults, who brought new energy and innovations to the movement. When four Black male students from North Carolina Agricultural & Technical (A&T) State University sat down at a Woolworth lunch counter in Greensboro, North Carolina, in February 1960 to protest segregation in public and private facilities, they ignited a new form of protest—the sit-in—and sparked a new wing of the movement. Shortly thereafter a new student organization, advised by veteran activist Ella Baker, formed at Shaw University. The Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) helped spark the hundreds of sit-ins that spread explosively across the South, and leaders such as Robert “Bob” Moses, Diane Nash, Ruby Bates, and later John Lewis and Stokely Carmichael, along with hundreds of others, became the new foot soldiers of civil rights activism in the Deep South. They often challenged the older generations and more established organizations like the NAACP and SCLC to understand the need for more grassroots organizing.

President John F. Kennedy and his brother Attorney General Robert Kennedy urged SNCC and the Council of Federated Organizations (COFO) to invest their energies in voter registration drives in the Deep South. They believed this was a less dangerous activity than non-violent protests and would lessen federal involvement, especially of the FBI, in local affairs with pro-segregationist interests. But the 1964 murder of three civil rights workers engaged in voter registration activity in Freedom Summer in Philadelphia, Mississippi, combined with the

Would African American efforts to attain greater equality have been as successful if activists had engaged in more violent protest?
enormous FBI resources required to find their bodies and apprehend the murderers, proved this assumption unfounded.

Despite the threats and realities of violence, younger and older civil rights activists used external pressures like the U.S. Justice Department to enforce new court decisions against segregation, public scrutiny of Southern state-sanctioned violence, and the weight of Northern White public opinion to force reforms. For instance, the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE) and its 1961 Freedom Rides campaign tested the limits of the federal government's readiness to enforce anti-segregation rulings regarding interstate bus transportation. And in a 1963 Birmingham campaign, young Black people protesting the city's segregation ordinances were met with police dogs and fire hoses by the city's infamous Public Safety Commissioner T. Eugene “Bull” Connor and his officers. Along with King's passionate criticism of White indifference with his “Letter from a Birmingham Jail” and the mediation of a U.S. Justice Department official, it was the adverse publicity garnered from nightly newscasts of such state-sanctioned brutality against innocent young Black people that helped turn the tide of events and made modest reforms possible. These images in national magazines, showing Southern resistance to African American efforts to exercise routine citizenship rights, spread across the nation and the entire world.

The historic 1963 March on Washington, attended by over two hundred thousand marchers and where King delivered his iconic “I Have a Dream” speech, created broad-based, public pressure for the passage of the 1964 Civil Rights Act in July. Activists also directly confronted political inequalities and drew others into their fight during the whole year. During the SNCC Freedom Summer, hundreds of young people went South to register disenfranchised African Americans to vote and confronted intransigent local authorities. And, at the 1964 Democratic National Convention in August, Fannie Lou Hamer and the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party's protest of the seating of an all-White delegation drew President Johnson, Dr. King, and the party leadership into a fight about fairness. By the time the Selma to Montgomery, Alabama, march took place in the spring of 1965—after a bloody episode in which police bludgeoned and initially turned back marchers on the Edmund Pettus Bridge—the movement had nearly perfected the use of an expanded consciousness, new resources and networks, regime constraints, and external influences to marshal effective protests. It was clear that this march and the movement swayed a very powerful ally when President Johnson introduced the 1965 Voting Rights bill to Congress and used the civil rights movement's own anthem, “We Shall Overcome,” to demonstrate the intensity of his support. After the successful passage of the Voting Rights Act in August 1965, as soon as 1966 these advantages had shifted toward another set of activists.

These people, inspired by the example of Black Nationalism, revolutionary violence, and pan-Africanism as preached by Malcolm X, called for Black Power as opposed to racial integration. The term, used by Stokely Carmichael in a march in which Martin Luther King and other, more traditional, protest stalwarts walked and debated goals and tactics, was very different from previous efforts. It also heralded
the growth of new groups, including the Black Panthers, and awareness of others such as the Nation of Islam. The growth of new groups, including the Black Panthers, and awareness of others such as the Nation of Islam. Table 3.1 provides a snapshot of how the 1950s and 1960s civil rights movement—both its legal and mass mobilization wings—influenced the percentage of Black Southerners registered to vote. In the early 1950s, only 20 percent of Black Southerners were registered to vote, but that number more than doubled by the mid-1960s. These are voters who by the early 1970s elected record numbers of Blacks to public office, much in the same way newly emancipated Black voters did a hundred years earlier. The 1944 Smith v. Allwright decision by the U.S. Supreme Court appreciably increased the percentage of registered Black voters in states like South Carolina, Arkansas, Tennessee, Louisiana, and Georgia. But not until the registration efforts of SNCC and its allies, as well as the passage of the 1965 Voting Rights Act, were large majorities of eligible African Americans registered and able to cast votes.

By this point in 1965, racialization had reached the third level in our framework: Insufficient—“Race Is Not Enough.” Fundamental citizenship rights, particularly the right to vote, and protections against discrimination in the public sector were agreed upon during the 1964 Civil Rights, 1965 Voting Rights, and 1968 Fair Housing Acts. Despite these rights and opportunities, many inequalities persisted and persist to

Martin Luther King Jr.’s “I Have a Dream” speech, delivered on the steps of the Lincoln Memorial before over two hundred thousand demonstrators during the 1963 March on Washington, created public pressure that led to passage of the 1964 Civil Rights Act.
Economic status based on income, unemployment, and wealth remains of considerable concern. Yet the road to participation and political empowerment has been significantly upgraded, smoothed, and broadened from previous eras of slavery and de jure segregation. We’ve also noted the growing interest in similar tactics and strategies of other groups traveling other roads, such as Native Americans, Latinos, and Asian Americans. They began to use similar strategies and tactics, including protest, legal campaigns, group identity, and the legal protections provided by the 1960s legislation. While the civil rights protest grew out of Southern and slavery-based patterns of discrimination, the legislation rapidly was implemented to provide protections to the other groups as well. In other instances—for example Native Americans—sovereignty issues provided them with distinctive and very different legal foundations for their journey.

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Conclusion: The Road to Black Politics Up To 1965

Central to the main framework of this book, this chapter has argued that the Black political journey from roughly 1619 to 1965 was one of frequent attempts by African Americans and their allies to develop a free Black civil society. At the same time, they challenged or reformed the polity in the hopes that African Americans would become less subject to the stark dividing lines of race and racialization. African Americans confronted a particular racialization journey from the period prior to the 1600s and the emergence of chattel slavery, past the Civil War and its abolition of slavery, through de jure segregation, and to the end of the civil rights movement era of the 1950s and 1960s.

The toppling of segregation became the chief political goal framed by Black civil rights groups during the first decades of the twentieth century. They were successful in overcoming the legal structures of segregation and barriers to political participation by the latter half of the century, especially with the long anti-segregation campaign that ended with the 1954 Brown decision, and triumphed in the 1950s and 1960s civil rights movement. But despite these successes, figuring out how to reframe their goals and deciding how to use their enhanced political resources while living in an increasingly complex racial and ethnic polity have become the most difficult issues in recent decades.

The Road Since 1965

Contemporary Black politics is frequently seen as a story of what has occurred since 1965, because this year or period is such a pivotal turning point in the African American journey. As we have detailed, it was in this period that the Black civil rights movement made a fundamentally effective challenge to generations of the absolute and/or decisive racialization of Black Americans. It witnessed the ushering in of the 1964 Civil Rights Act, the 1965 Voting Rights Act, affirmative action policies, and the 1968 Fair Housing Act, among other key reforms. Because of this movement and these reforms, increasing numbers of African Americans gained educational and economic opportunities that grew the ranks of the middle class; increasing numbers of Africans had their right to vote secured, and larger numbers of them registered and turned out to vote; increasing numbers of African Americans were elected to public office; and there were a number of ways African Americans overcame barriers in the larger society—from living in more racially integrated neighborhoods to securing top positions in corporate America. Yet, legal scholar Derrick Bell wrote a book in 1989 that paraphrased a Judeo-Christian scripture in describing the persistent barriers and bumps on the African American Journey—And We Are Not Saved: The Elusive Quest for Racial Justice. Bell’s main point is that even despite all of the above gains there are a number of ways racial inequalities and disparities persist as to the citizenship rights and opportunities Blacks enjoy as compared to their White counterparts. Review
Chapter 1 to understand some of these persistent barriers and bumps. Sociologist Eduardo Bonilla-Silva refers to them as a form of “New Racism.” It is the idea that for racism and racial discrimination to still matter they need not be overt in a “Jim Crow” segregation sense where a segment of White politicians and other public figures publicly advocate the view that African Americans are not deserving of equal treatment or equal protection under the laws. If certain racial inequalities—that is, educational gaps, wealth gaps, and rates of arrests and imprisonment—persist without being fundamentally addressed, it is possible for a structural form of “racism” or racial inequality to persist “without racists.”

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. How did economic concerns contribute to the creation of racial distinctions in colonial America?

2. In what ways did the barriers in the U.S. Constitution contribute to long-term institutionalized racism against African Americans?

3. Compare the perspectives of the North and South in their treatment of Blacks. How did they contribute to Blacks’ differing access to equal rights and opportunities?

4. How are the barriers that existed at the time of Reconstruction and during the civil rights movement similar, and how are they different? What are the reasons for these similarities and differences?

5. To what degree did social institutions and political organizations focused on race contribute to the creation of an African American political identity?

6. How did African Americans’ long-standing collective identity and institutions benefit other racial and ethnic groups during the civil rights movement?

KEY TERMS

1808 Prohibition (p. 90)  color line (p. 82)  Freedmen's Bureau (p. 99)
African American politics  Dred Scott v. Sandford (p. 91)  Fugitive Slave Act (p. 93)
(p. 83)  Executive Order 8802 (p. 111)  Great Migration (p. 107)
Black Power (p. 113)  external pressures (p. 114)  hypodescent (p. 86)
Brown v. Board of Education  Fifteenth Amendment (p. 100)  indentured servant (p. 84)
(1954–1955) (p. 113)  Fourteenth Amendment  Jim Crow (p. 83)
Civil Rights Act of 1866 (p. 100)  lynching (p. 103)
National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) (p. 107)
new consciousness (p. 114)
New Deal (or Democratic Coalition) (p. 111)
Plessy v. Ferguson (1896) (p. 105)
resources and networks (p. 114)
sit-in (p. 115)
Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) (p. 115)

NOTES


15. The experiences of Solomon Northup were recently revisited in the film 12 Years a Slave, released in 2013; this was originally published by Northup in 1853 as *Twelve Years a Slave: Narrative of Solomon Northup, a Citizen of New-York, Kidnapped in Washington City in 1841, and Rescued in 1853* (Auburn, NY: Derby and Miller, 1853).


32. For the discussion of a documentary that discusses the vital roles historically Black colleges and universities have played in American and African American history (Stanley Nelson’s *Tell Them We Are Rising: The Story of Black Colleges and Universities*), see http://www.hbcuring.com/.


42. Marable, Race, Reform, and Rebellion, 13–39.


46. Marable, Race, Reform, and Rebellion, 61–85.