



John Hope Franklin | Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham

Tenth Edition

# FROM SLAVERY TO FREEDOM

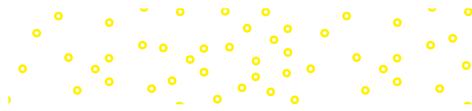
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*A History of African Americans*

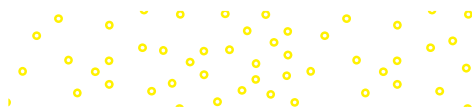
TENTH EDITION

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High School Edition

*John Hope Franklin*  
(1915–2009)

*Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham*  
*Harvard University*





## FROM SLAVERY TO FREEDOM: A HISTORY OF AFRICAN AMERICANS, TENTH EDITION

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*Dedicated to the memory of John Hope Franklin*

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# About the Authors

## John Hope Franklin

John Hope Franklin was the James B. Duke Professor Emeritus of History, and for seven years he was Professor of Legal History at Duke University Law School. A native of Oklahoma and a graduate of Fisk University (1935), he received the A.M. and Ph.D. degrees in History from Harvard University (1936 and 1941). He taught at a number of institutions, including Fisk, St. Augustine's College, and Howard University. In 1956 he went to Brooklyn College as Chair of the Department of History, and in 1964, he joined the faculty of the University of Chicago, serving as Chair of the Department of History from 1967 to 1970. At Chicago, he was the John Matthews Manly Distinguished Service Professor from 1969 to 1982, when he became Professor Emeritus.



Jim Bounds/Raleigh News & Observer/  
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Among his many published works are *The Free Negro in North Carolina* (1943), *Reconstruction after the Civil War* (1961), *A Southern Odyssey* (1971), and perhaps his best-known book, *From Slavery to Freedom: A History of African Americans*, now in its tenth edition. In 1990 a collection of essays covering a teaching and writing career of fifty years was published as *Race and History: Selected Essays, 1938-1988*. In 2005, he published his autobiography, *Mirror to America*.

During his long career, Professor Franklin was active in numerous professional and educational organizations. For many years he served on the editorial board of the *Journal of Negro History*. He also served as president of the following organizations: The Southern Historical Association, the United Chapters of Phi Beta Kappa, the Organization of American Historians, and the American Historical Association.

Dr. Franklin served on many national commissions and delegations, including the National Council on the Humanities, the President's Advisory Commission on Ambassadorial Appointments, and the United States delegation to the 21st General Conference of UNESCO. He was appointed by President Clinton to chair the President's Advisory Board for the One America initiative in June 1997.

He was the recipient of many honors. In 1978 *Who's Who in America* selected him as one of eight Americans who have made significant contributions to society. In 1995 he received the first W.E.B. DuBois Award from the Fisk University Alumni Association, the Organization of American Historians' Award for Outstanding Achievement, the NAACP's Spingarn medal. In the same year President Bill Clinton conferred on Franklin the Presidential Medal of Freedom, the nation's highest civilian medal. In addition to his many awards, Dr. Franklin received honorary degrees from more than one hundred colleges and universities. John Hope Franklin died on March 25, 2009, at the age of 94 years.

## **Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham**

**E**velyn Brooks Higginbotham is the Victor S. Thomas Professor of History and of African and African American Studies at Harvard University. She is also the national president of the Association for the Study of African American Life and History from 2014 to 2021. The first African American to chair the Department of History at Harvard University, she served in this position from 2018 to 2020. She chaired Harvard's Department of African and African American Studies from 2006 to 2013.

Professor Higginbotham earned a Ph.D. from the University of Rochester in History, an M.A. from Howard University, and B.A. from the University of Wisconsin–Milwaukee. Before coming to Harvard, she taught in the Department of History at the University of Pennsylvania. Previously she taught on the faculties of the University of Maryland and earlier Dartmouth College. In 2010–2011, she was a visiting professor at the Duke University Law School and had the distinction of being its inaugural John Hope Franklin Professor of American Legal History. She has also been a Visiting Professor at Princeton University and New York University.

Professor Higginbotham's writings span diverse fields—African American religious history, women's history, civil rights, constructions of racial and gender identity, electoral politics, and the intersection of theory and history. She is the author of the prize-winning book *Righteous Discontent: The Women's Movement in the Black Baptist Church, 1880–1920* (1993), for which she is especially recognized for conceptualizing “the politics of respectability.” The book was included among *The New York Times* Book Review's Notable Books of the Year in 1993 and 1994. She is the co-editor with Henry Louis Gates, Jr., of the multivolume reference work *African American National Biography* (2008, 2012). As a co-author with John Hope Franklin, she thoroughly revised *From Slavery to Freedom* in her writing of the ninth and tenth editions.

Professor Higginbotham has received honorary degrees and numerous other honors and awards, most notable of which is the National Humanities Medal presented to her by President Barack Obama at the White House in 2015. She was elected to membership in the American Philosophical Society and the American Academy of Arts and Sciences—the nation's oldest learned societies. In 2008 she received the Carter G. Woodson Scholars Medallion from the Association for the Study of African American Life and also the Legend Award from the National Urban League. In 2020 she was selected to be honored with the Preservation and History Award from the New England Historic Genealogical Society.



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# Preface

## ■ The Tenth Edition of *From Slavery to Freedom*

**N**early a decade has passed since the publication of the ninth edition of the “new” *From Slavery to Freedom*. In the preface of that edition, I introduced the theme “the present in history” to describe the organizing principle that informed my revision of this classic survey of African American history. The theme reflected the book’s inclusion of new chapter titles and information, new historical actors and intellectual crosscurrents, as well as new scholarly interpretations and methodologies. In the ninth edition I asserted that “historical scholarship is not only different but far more complex than in 1947 or in 1967 or in 1988 or even in 2000—the dates of some of the earlier editions, including the eighth edition.”

Those words are no less applicable today. In the intervening years between the ninth and tenth editions, a tremendous amount of new scholarship has emerged on capitalism and slavery, on African Americans and Native Americans, on abolitionism’s many forms and faces, on the nineteenth- and twentieth-century lives of the “New Negro” as a race-motivating concept, on the nonviolent protest activism of youth in the 1940s, on the health clinics of the Black Panther Party, and on the shifting views of prominent hip-hop artists on sexuality. Those are but a very few of the many fascinating new topics found in the tenth edition. The book’s new “Windows in Time” also provides unique vantage points from which to get a first-hand view of people, organizations, and community activities. Such vantage points render multiple and, equally important, conflicting voices in the past. Recent scholarship has been incorporated in every chapter of the book.

I even posit my own revisionist interpretation in chapters 19, 20, and 21, the trilogy of chapters that cover the long struggle for equality from the 1930s to mid-1970s. Historians have traditionally identified those decades as marked by four types of activism: lawyer activism in courts and legislatures; worker protest through labor unions; grassroots mass nonviolent direct action for integration and voting rights; and black power in various forms that ranged from revolution to cultural identity to mayoral office. I identified those four types of activism in the ninth edition. However, in the tenth edition I depart from that model and add knowledge-oriented, scholar activism as a distinct fifth form that operated at times independently, though more often in concert with the others.

Equally new, I have adopted a different theme—“the turns in history”—to describe the tenth edition’s organizing principle. Each turn represents a vibrant new intellectual trend and subfield in the larger discipline of history. This emphasis is unique, because it represents the opportunity to focus on influential directions recently taken by historians. The tenth edition of *From Slavery*

*to Freedom* heightens our awareness of four new directions in interpreting the past: the environmental turn, spatial turn, carceral turn, and transnational turn.

Environmental history appears in the book's first chapter. The study of ancestral Africa reveals the influence of climate and other environmental factors over many centuries. Painted and carved images on boulders, cliffs, and in caves in the Sahara Desert, date back thousands of years and testify to pastoral societies in areas that experienced progressively decreasing rainfall and later became completely arid. A number of chapters connect environmental and spatial history, while telling stories that differ over time and place. Their common thread relates to racialized spaces that signal inequality. Whether in southern slavery or in New South cities, or whether in Warren County, North Carolina in the 1980s or in Flint, Michigan in the second decade of the twenty-first century, African Americans daily experienced and strove to combat place-based health problems and challenging social ills.

The carceral turn, which focuses on mass incarceration and racial criminalization, has produced a burgeoning field of study. Thus, carceral history appears in *From Slavery to Freedom*. The tenth edition illuminates the rise of mass incarceration in the late twentieth century into the twenty-first century; it also calls attention to the imprisonment of large numbers of black men, women, and children in the southern states a century earlier, when Jim Crow laws and racist ideas fueled the system of convict leasing with a new type of bound labor, which in turn funneled revenue into state governments. The transnational turn calls attention to political, social, and cultural movements that cross nations and continents, and should be easily appreciated in our contemporary world of global networking and sharing of videos and music. The tenth edition explores transnational history from several perspectives, including abolitionism in the pre-Civil War era, Garveyism in the 1920s, and hip-hop in the present.

Finally, the cover of *From Slavery to Freedom*'s tenth edition features the Martin Luther King, Jr. Memorial, while the last chapter of the book contains the section "Monuments to History." It is fitting that the powerful sculpture of King stands in a pose with his arms crossed and his eyes focused, as if pondering the book's title. As if once again from the mountaintop view that he depicted in his very last speech on April 3, 1968, King appears to be measuring the Promised Land of freedom and, like us, to be pondering the ambiguities of our time.

Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham  
Harvard University

#### *A Note about the High School Edition*

We are excited to offer the first High School Edition of *From Slavery to Freedom*. This renowned chronicling of African American history offers high school students the rich, relevant, and meticulously-researched scholarship that has been the authoritative resource for African American History since 1947. An overview and specific learning objectives open each chapter to provide the framework for the time period, issues, and events that will be covered. A summary, list of vocabulary terms, and review questions end each chapter to support understanding and reinforce the significance of critical ideas and key historical actors and events. This comprehensive text aims to help you contextualize the black experience in America and increase your awareness and appreciation of the importance of the contributions of African Americans throughout history.



# Acknowledgments

I will always remember John Hope Franklin and thank him for the opportunity to co-author this now classic survey of African American history. Having known him since my childhood because of his regular interaction with my father in the work of the Association for the Study of African American Life and History, I came also to know the importance of *From Slavery to Freedom* at an early age.

In revising the book for the tenth edition, I continue to be grateful to all who helped me with the ninth edition because their assistance laid the foundation upon which new research and topics could emerge. Over the years since the publication of the ninth edition, however, scholars Donald Yacovone and Karen Cook Bell wrote to me with corrections as to the wording that accompanied an image and chart, respectively. Student research assistants helped to compile sources and introduced me to new topics and information. I am deeply appreciative of their research assistance and that of other persons, some of whom worked only for a few days and some for a few weeks and months. They include Amsale Amelu, Jonathon Booth, Alexa Herlands, Daniel Debois, Stephanie Garlock, Irvin Ibarguen, Samuel Klug, Elizabeth McCord, Joshua Mejia, Andrew Pope, Allison Puglisi, Jesse Rakoske, Andrew D. Segal, Brittany Smith, and Magdalene Zier. My research assistants played a variety of roles—researching, editing, proofreading, and fact checking.

Special appreciation goes to Professor Brian McCammack for enriching my perspective in regard to environmental history. Alma Medina proved invaluable in the effort to identify photographs as did Taylor Maurice, who aided in the proofreading and editing process. My daughter Nia Higginbotham stood ever ready and eager to bring a source or an idea to my attention. And I am grateful to my friend Judge Nathaniel R. Jones, who passed away in January 2020, as well as friends Sharon Harley and Thavolia Glymph for listening to me talk about the project in our summer writing retreats over the years. I also extend my sincerest appreciation to Allyson K. Duncan and Patricia Worthy for their kindness and sustenance. All faithfully offered intellectual and moral support. Finally, I thank the people at McGraw-Hill with whom I worked—Alexander Preiss, Amy Oline, Steve Rouben, Bea Benedicto, and Emma Heatherington—for their patience and for bringing the book to fruition.

# Best in Class Digital Resources

***From Slavery to Freedom: A History of African Americans*** is enriched with multimedia content including map quizzes and assessments that enhance the teaching and learning experience both inside and outside of the classroom.

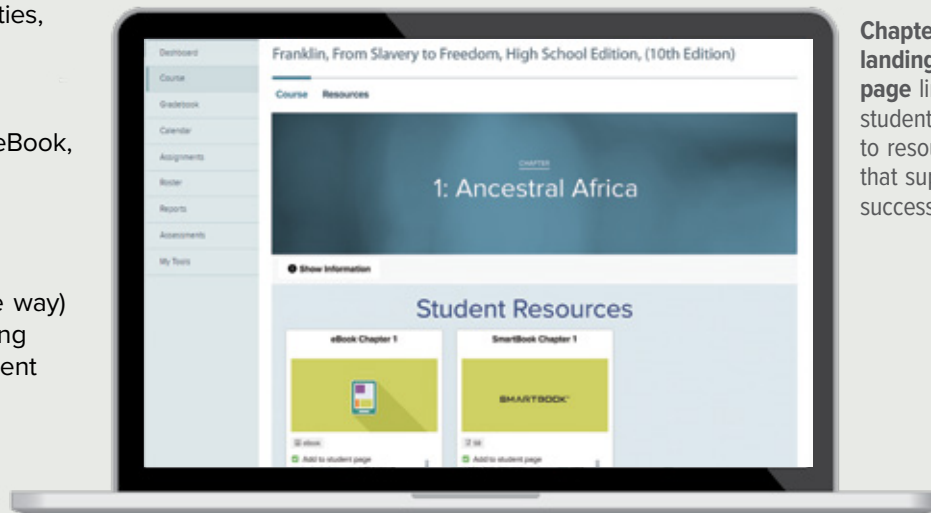
Authored by the world's leading subject matter experts, the resources provide students with multiple opportunities to contextualize and apply their understanding. Teachers can save time, customize lessons, monitor student progress, and make data-driven decisions in the classroom with the flexible, easy-to-navigate instructional tools.

## Intuitive Design

Resources are organized at the chapter level. To enhance the core content, teachers can add assignments, activities, and instructional aides to any lesson.

The chapter landing page gives students access to:

- assigned activities,
- resources and assessments,
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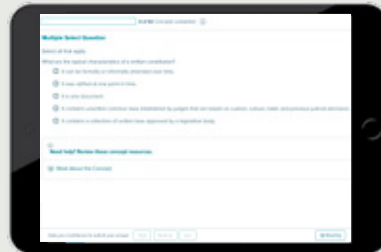
## Adaptive Study Tools

SMARTBOOK® is the assignable, adaptive study tool. The interactive features engage students and personalize the learning experience with self-guided tools that:

- assess a student's proficiency and knowledge,
- track which topics have been mastered,
- identify areas that need more study,
- deliver meaningful practice with guidance and instant feedback,
- recharge the learning with previously completed assignments and personalized recommendations,
- allow teachers to assign material at the subtopic level.



**Highlighted content** continuously adapts as students work through exercises.



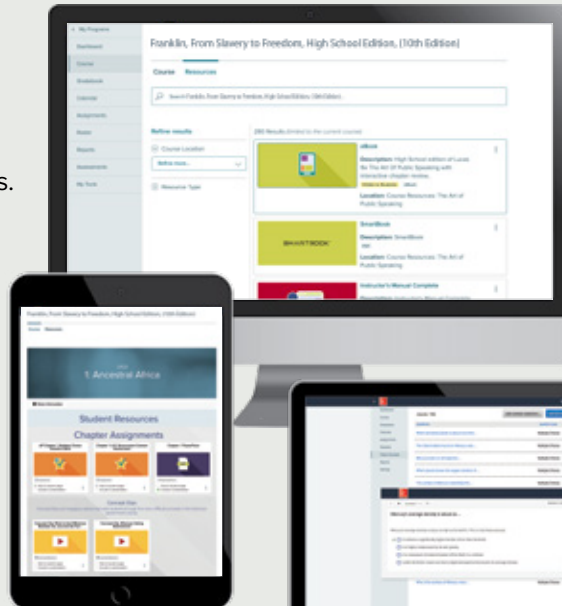
**Practice questions** measure depth of understanding and present a personalized learning path based on student responses.

## Teacher Resources

Teachers have access to the interactive eBook, adaptive *SmartBook*®, plus a wealth of customizable chapter resources and powerful gradebook tools.

Resources include:

- an online Teacher Manual with chapter overviews and themes, study strategies, and classroom activities and projects,
- actionable reporting features that track student progress with data-driven insights,
- customizable PowerPoint presentations.



**Searchable library** makes it easy to find and assign resources.

**Customizable assignments and quiz banks** are automatically graded and populate easy-to-read reports.



# American Dilemmas

(1935–1955)

## Chapter Overview

**W**orld War II was a catalyst for the deepening of America's social and political complexities. In the 1940s and 1950s, the country's internationalist outlook solidified and informed struggles for justice for many of its own citizens. The world became very aware of the disconnect between America's role as a global champion of justice and the American system racism and discrimination against its black citizens. Racial justice activists leveraged this to advance the cause of civil rights. In the job market, African American workers embraced organized labor, which shared their quest for equality. The Cold War and the ideological intolerance it spawned in the United States greatly complicated the fight against racism, which ironically was often characterized as “un-American” by white Americans. Despite these challenges, civil rights activists made major inroads toward correcting structural inequalities in the country, in major part through a series of legal victories.

## Learning Objectives

After reading this chapter you should understand the following:

- The significance of the strategy of seeing history as a “weapon of peace” and using scholarly research in the fight for racial justice
- The fundamental conflict between black assimilationists and black culturalists
- How artists and writers contributed to the country's conversations about race in their work
- How the United Nations was a fundamental part of the rise of internationalism among African Americans in the 1940s and 1950s
- The strategy that civil rights activists used in appealing to the United Nations on behalf of black Americans to battle injustices they were experiencing
- The complicated phenomenon of labor civil rights activism
- President Truman's relationship with the African American community
- How a series of major legal victories led to a profound level of desegregation in a relatively short period of time



UtCon Collection/Alamy Stock Photo

W. E. B. Du Bois and the Editorial and Advisory Boards of the proposed *Encyclopedia of the Negro*, 1936



**D**uring the Second World War, John Hope Franklin had come to believe that the discipline of history could be a weapon for social change in race relations. He had no doubt about the urgency for change, especially given the racist rebuff to his own attempt to aid the United States Navy after seeing an advertisement for sorely needed office personnel. He described the humiliating incident years later in his autobiography *Mirror to America* (2005): “I rushed down to the recruitment office and volunteered my services to relieve the navy of its distress. I reeled off my qualifications in the hope of overwhelming the youngish navy lieutenant.” Franklin was clearly qualified, having received three gold medals in typing, as well as the Ph.D. in history from Harvard University in 1941. None of this mattered, however. Franklin recalled the officer’s demeaning response that “I was lacking in one qualification and that was color.”

While the navy had no interest in utilizing his services, the undeterred Franklin sought to put his knowledge to good use in the service of an energized civil rights activism that emerged in the 1930s, only to escalate during the war years and into the next decade. The burgeoning movement took various forms in the 1940s. Activists tackled racial discrimination through labor organizing and court challenges. They led demonstrations and sit-ins, and engaged in other tactics of nonviolent direct action, as evidenced by the NAACP Youth Councils and college chapters, the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE), and the March on Washington Movement, which continued local demonstrations during the 1940s. It was in this 1944 wartime milieu that John Hope Franklin published the article “History—Weapon of War and Peace” in *Phylon*, the Atlanta University journal then under the editorship of W. E. B. Du Bois. Referring to the writings of nineteenth-century European and American historians, Franklin argued that history had often been used to whip up feelings of racial supremacy and national arrogance. It had served to degrade portions of humanity, foment religious intolerance, and incite greed, hatred, exploitation, and oppression. He considered the purveyors of such history to be “as much a destroyer of civilization as the war lords themselves.” Alternatively, he attributed to the discipline of history the potential to be a mighty weapon of peace—a weapon for human betterment. Referring to the race problem, he wondered why “historians of the American scene have not used their art as a weapon for the destruction of what obviously is one of our most besetting sins and which more than once has threatened our own civilization.”

In the late 1940s, Franklin embarked upon what would become a lifelong commitment to wielding the weapon of history in the struggle against racial bigotry in American laws and institutions. At the behest of the NAACP, he served as a key witness in the case of *Lyman Johnson v. the University of Kentucky* (1949). As an expert source of historical information, he strengthened the arguments of lawyers Thurgood Marshall and Robert Carter, who defended Johnson’s right as a Kentucky resident to enroll in the graduate school of the all-white state university. The U.S. District Court for the Eastern District of Kentucky ruled in favor of Johnson. The NAACP’s legal team would later turn to Franklin’s expertise in the landmark school desegregation case *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954).

Franklin was not the first or only scholar whose research and insights were sought out and cited by civil rights lawyers. Gunnar Myrdal’s highly influential opus *An American Dilemma* was published in the same year as Franklin’s 1944 essay. The white sociologist Louis Wirth at the University of Chicago and black economist Robert C. Weaver worked with the NAACP in the case *Shelley v. Kraemer* (1948). Their extensive knowledge of urban planning and racial residential housing patterns proved helpful to the legal arguments that

resulted in the Supreme Court's prohibiting state courts from enforcing restrictive covenants that disallowed blacks to move into white neighborhoods.

Yet Franklin was arguably the first scholar to suggest weaponizing knowledge in a direct, actionable way against racial injustice in American society. And the weapon of knowledge in the form of scholarly expertise across the disciplines (not merely history) figured significantly in civil rights victories to come. Sociologists, anthropologists, political scientists, legal scholars, economists, and psychologists, all used the findings and methodologies of their respective disciplines to battle racism in myriad contexts. Such scholars exhibited a knowledge-oriented civil rights activism, which proved to be an integral, socially conscious part of the movement's engagement with judges, legislators, policy makers, philanthropists, journalists, educational systems, and civic-minded organizations in the 1930s through 1950s and beyond.

While largely unified as to the goal of racial equality, scholar-activists were not at all unified as to the path to this goal. Some challenged the ideas and tactics of the older civil rights organizations, while others vociferously disagreed with one another over the use and meaning of words, conceptual frameworks, and ideological positions believed to be laden with problematic, even dangerous implications. In the pursuit of equality, such words as pathology, assimilation, African survivals, ghetto, matriarchy, miseducation, capitalism, and communism posed dilemmas and sometimes strong disagreement between blacks and whites and among blacks themselves. At the opening of the 1950s, amidst heightened Cold War hostility between the United States and the Soviet Union, antiracist dissent itself posed new dilemmas. And at a time when Red Scare politics frequently labeled many social activists subversive or un-American, those who fought for racial justice and equality often faced difficult, consequential choices concerning allies and tactics as they pursued international causes, labor protest, legal challenges, interracial alliances, political office, and even the arts.

## Intellectual Crosscurrents

The years during and after World War II were rife with expectations of a new world order. In February 1941, thus even before U.S. entry into the war, *Time* publisher Henry Luce predicted, in an editorial in his magazine, the dawning of "the American Century." By the close of the 1940s African Americans did not doubt that America stood poised to lead the free world, nor did they doubt that America's dilemmas were theirs as well. The rise of the United States as a world power cast in sharp relief the country's persistent problems of racial inequality. Aware of the ways that racism threatened America's image as a force for freedom abroad, philanthropists at the Carnegie Foundation and the Rockefeller Foundation began to invest heavily in social scientific research on the "Negro problem." During the 1930s W. E. B. Du Bois brought together a team of scholars for the purpose of publishing the *Encyclopedia of the Negro*, a proposed four-volume global study of people of African descent. With a pledge for partial funding from the Phelps-Stokes Foundation, he hoped to receive the rest from Carnegie. However, as the sociologist Aldon Morris explains in his study of Du Bois's pioneering role in the development of the field of sociology, "rumblings of discontent from influential, well-connected white scholars were being voiced behind Du Bois's back." White scholars, particularly anthropologist Melville Herskovits and sociologist Thomas Jesse Jones, questioned Du Bois's objectivity, given his

advocacy work for the NAACP and the political character of his other writings. Similar charges were made about Carter G. Woodson, who also approached foundations with his proposal for a multivolume history.

Rejecting both black and white American scholars, all of whom vied for funding for their own ambitious projects on race, the Carnegie Foundation looked outside the United States and hired Gunnar Myrdal, a Swedish sociologist with no previous background as a specialist in race relations. Myrdal, in turn, looked to American social scientists, black and white alike, for assistance. Thirty persons were commissioned to collaborate on the project, including black scholars such as political scientist Ralph Bunche, sociologist E. Franklin Frazier, psychologist Kenneth Clark, along with white scholars, including Herskovits and sociologist Guy B. Johnson. Ralph Bunche is credited with contributing book-length written sections to Myrdal's completed two-volume, nearly 1500-page tome *An American Dilemma: The Negro Problem and Modern Democracy* (1944). Bunche had even preceded Myrdal in articulating the disparity between the nation's ideals and its actions. In his book *A World View of Race* (1936), Bunche concluded that "no other subject can so well illustrate the insincerity of our doctrines of human equality and the great disparity between our political theory and our social practices as that of race."

Published when the United States and its allies waged war against fascism and Nazi racism abroad, Myrdal's exhaustive study of the "Negro problem" presented a different, yet brilliant reversal of Du Bois's characterization decades earlier. In *Souls of Black Folk* (1903), Du Bois had characterized the "Negro Problem" as the psychological dilemma of being American and Negro—a tortured mindset of dueling identities, with "two un-reconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body." Myrdal also described a psychological dilemma—no less irrational and contradictory—but one that was roiling the minds of white Americans. In a nation whose democratic creed was treasured and boasted throughout the free world, racial prejudice sustained the persistent and pervasive oppression of blacks. Racial discrimination exposed America's Achilles heel. Myrdal's interpretation became increasingly influential in the years after its publication and especially as the Cold War unfolded. Despite criticism from the Left that the root of the race problem was economic and not psychological, most black leaders in the 1940s and 1950s welcomed Myrdal's huge study, perceiving his assessment to be an affirmation of what they had long known to be racial bigotry and white supremacist ideology. Nevertheless, the story of how Myrdal's study came to be, and how Du Bois's *Encyclopedia* never did, illuminates a parallel dilemma—the dilemma of how the African American story gets told, and who gets to tell it.

Prior to Myrdal, African Americans proclaimed that racism and the creed of "liberty and justice for all" had coexisted far too easily in the history of America. Over the centuries, during peacetime and especially during wars and their immediate aftermath, countless African Americans had demanded equal citizenship as they pledged allegiance to their country through service in the armed forces and other forms of patriotism. From Revolutionary War-era poet Phillis Wheatley to Langston Hughes, who in 1938 wrote "America was never America to me" in his poem "Let America Be America Again," black writers insisted that America as a symbol contradicted American realities. That conviction only deepened in the World War II and postwar years.

Myrdal's work and that of numerous other scholars in the 1940s and 1950s emphasized the destructive effects of this dilemma on black communities. Their books, pamphlets, and

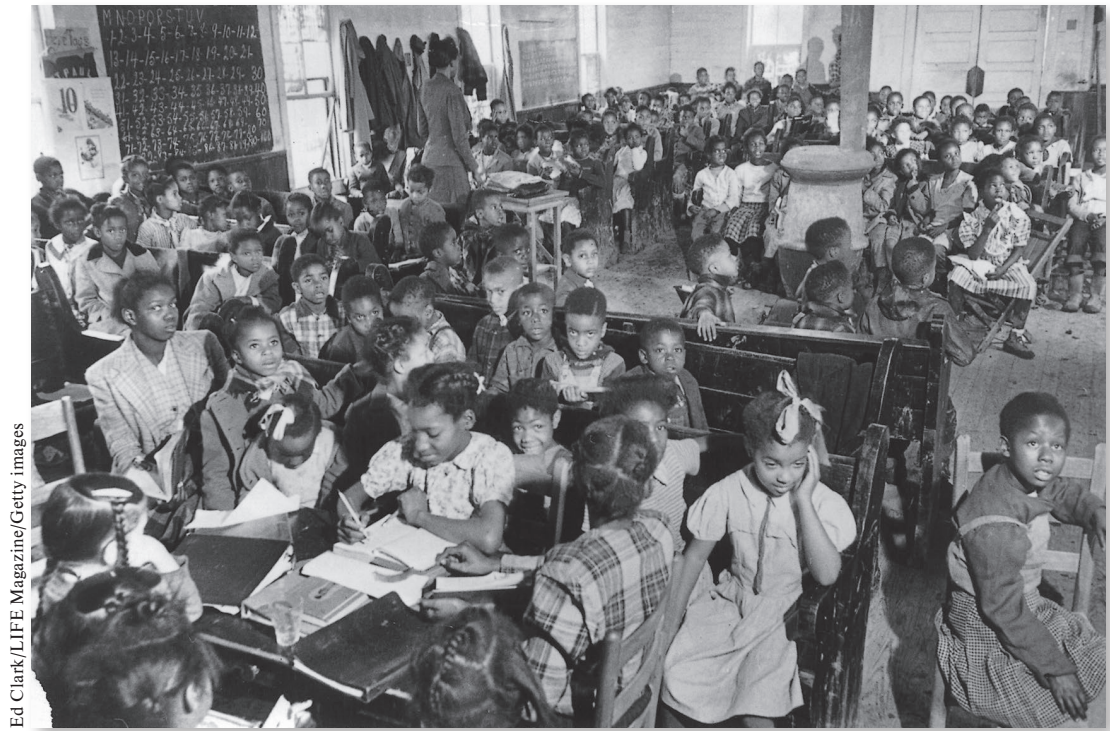
articles in such periodicals as the *Journal of Negro Education*, *Journal of Negro History*, *Phylon*, *Social Forces*, and *Journal of Land & Public Utility Economics*, provided modern, social scientific methods and evidence that refuted older explanations of biologically determined racial traits. The new scholarship blamed policies and attitudes of racial discrimination for blacks' inferior social and economic conditions. Knowledge-oriented activism took the form of conferences held in university settings for the purpose of informing a broad representation of community members. The "Conference for the Elimination of Restrictive Covenants," held at Roosevelt University in Chicago on May 10–11, 1946, brought together forty organizations. Urban historian Wendy Plotkin describes the conference program as filled with panels on the role of lawyers, churchmen, voters, property owners, and organized labor in the eradication of this racist practice.

The black economist Robert C. Weaver's book *The Negro Ghetto* (1948) along with the work of other scholars won the attention of civil rights advocates who increasingly perceived a critical role for social science evidence in convincing judges and legislators to outlaw covenants. More than this, armed with expertise on various civil rights fronts—housing, education, employment, recreation, etc.—scholar activists could be found in academia; federal departments such as the Office of Education, the Department of the Interior, and the Department of Commerce; and research centers and institutes devoted to the study and improvement of race relations. Centers of this kind included the Institute for Research in Social Science at the University of North Carolina with white sociologists Howard W. Odum and Guy B. Johnson, the Department of the Social Sciences at Fisk University under black sociologist Charles S. Johnson, and the American Council on Race Relations, founded in Chicago by white sociologist Louis Wirth. Robert C. Weaver headed the Council's Community Service division. In 1945 the American Council on Race Relations disseminated the pamphlet "Hemmed In: The ABC's of Race Restrictive Covenants," which was written by Weaver and designed to reach a broad audience, in order to educate the public as to the legal sanction given to neighborhoods of middle-class and upper-class whites. The scholarship of many black and white social scientists bolstered the civil rights cause in the 1940s and early 1950s.

In a series of significant volumes, the American Council on Education published the findings of the American Youth Commission, which described the effects of racial proscriptions on personality development among African American youth. The authors—among them E. Franklin Frazier, Charles S. Johnson, Allison Davis, John Dollard, W. Lloyd Warner, Ira D. A. Reid, and Robert L. Sutherland—revealed that the denial of equal opportunities to black youth led to behavior regarded by the larger society as misguided, irresponsible, and aggressive. Opportunities for many young African Americans to live normal lives were few, thus diminishing their hopes for achieving the American dream.

The studies often concluded with recommendations for improving the status of blacks in American life. Civil rights organizations used the information to compile reports for governmental attention. Some, like Myrdal, explicitly advocated social engineering in *An American Dilemma* and thus articulated and gave shape to a growing liberal civil rights consensus within the federal government and civil rights organization. For example, the Truman administration's civil rights report *To Secure These Rights* (1947) referred to *An American Dilemma*, as did the NAACP legal team's argumentation. Later, in its landmark case *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954), the Supreme Court cited Myrdal's book and other social science studies in striking down the legality of segregated public education.





Ed Clark/LIFE Magazine/Getty images

**School segregation. Overcrowded African-American school is really a one-room Baptist Church.**

In 1948, West Memphis, Arkansas, spent \$144.51 for the education of each white student in the classroom, while it spent \$19.51 for the education of each of the African American students.

Black and white scholars' rhetoric of social pathology to describe the debilitating effects of racism and segregation played a strategic role in the legal assault on Jim Crow. The emphasis on black victimization by institutionalized racial forces, it was believed, proved the lie of "separate but equal." Black scholars Horace Cayton and St. Clair Drake, for instance, attacked Chicago's racist housing policies in their book *Black Metropolis* (1945), asserting: "The Job Ceiling subordinates Negroes but does not segregate them. Restrictive covenants do both. They confine Negroes to the Black Belt, and they limit the Black Belt to the most rundown areas of the city."

**The Emphasis on Assimilation and Culture**

In the 1940s and 1950s, the dominant scholarly interpretation of black pathology and victimization tended to privilege assimilation and white normative values instead of resilience through black cultural distinctiveness. For example, the historian of slavery Kenneth Stampp overturned an earlier historiography of "happy slaves" with images of black men and women forced to remain docile and made "to stand in fear." He argued, in his groundbreaking book *The Peculiar Institution* (1956), that the oppressed condition of the enslaved had nothing to do with an innate servile or criminal character, since "innately, after all, Negroes are no more than white men with black skins." The overemphasis on black pathology and victimization due to racism's pathological environments would prove increasingly untenable to the many scholars and artists who lauded black pride and Black Power in the late 1960s. Yet, as historian Daniel Matlin shows, with a twist, damage imagery could be found even

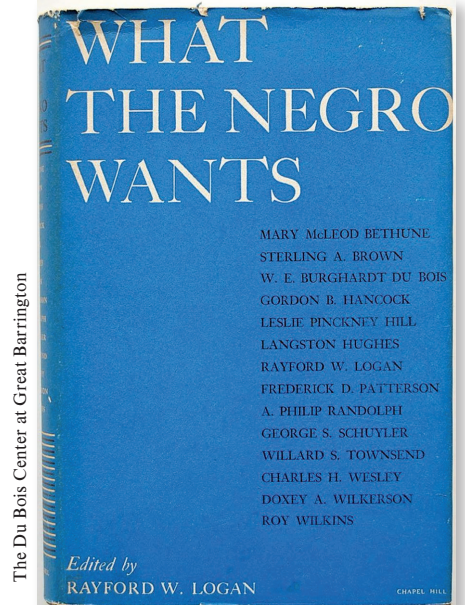
in their scholarly and artistic work. Poet and activist Amiri Baraka was hardly alone in arguing that black urban life included many “pathologies” resulting from the damaging effects of accepting “European ways of seeing and doing things.” Identifying the psychological impact of racism, then, voices of Black Power renounced those blacks who accepted white standards of beauty and thereby rejected their own natural hair and physical features. In this case, pathology was directed at black self-hatred from adhering to a white normative standard.

In the 1940s and 1950s, however, the emphasis on assimilation prevailed. It was one thing to speak assertively of racial expectations, as did the cross section of black leaders whose essays appeared in *What the Negro Wants* (1944), edited by Rayford W. Logan at the request of the University of North Carolina Press. The diverse group of radicals, liberals, moderates, and conservatives spoke in a unified demand for full citizenship and full participation in American life. Their assertiveness provoked the director of the press, W. C. Couch, to write his own introduction expressing disagreement with the black writers’ position. But it was quite another thing to speak assertively of black cultural difference in the 1940s, as did the white anthropologist and civil rights advocate Melville Herskovits. Such a position posed a difficult question in regard to individual identity and to racial representation in the fight for equality and dignity in America: Did black distinctiveness simply come down to a culture of pathology? Or were patterns of distinctiveness actually rooted in an older, African heritage?

Well before the 1940s, social scientists had begun to challenge the biological premise of race. The work of Columbia University-based anthropologist Franz Boas at the turn of the twentieth century, and later of his students (who included Herskovits, Ruth Benedict, Margaret Mead, and Zora Neale Hurston), took exception to race as a biological construct. Instead, they emphasized culture as the primary explanation of group differences. Their scientific approach to culture demanded extensive fieldwork, based on an examination of the values, mores, art, family structure, and other social institutions within the context of a specific ethnic or social group, instead of judging one group by another group’s standards for the sake of racial hierarchy.

The influence of such “culturalists” was evident in the work of those who advocated educational models that emphasized the pluralistic character of the United States. For example, in the late 1930s, the Department of Interior under New Dealer Harold Ickes promoted such ideas through the radio series *Americans All, Immigrants All*, which featured weekly programs on specific immigrant groups, as well as blacks and Jews. Historian Barbara Savage notes that phonograph recordings of individual *Americans All* programs were made available to civic organizations, libraries, and schools—elementary and secondary school teachers being among the largest targeted audiences of the show.

The implications of cultural explanations, however, led to two different conclusions about race, one toward assimilation and the other toward distinctiveness. For some scholars, the conclusion was self-evident: If race was not biologically constructed, African-descended persons in the United States had already become, or at least were on the way to becoming,



The Du Bois Center at Great Barrington

Book cover of the original printing of Rayford W. Logan's *What the Negro Wants* (1944)

little different in their cultural patterns from other assimilated ethnic immigrant groups. Assimilation, it was argued, would occur most rapidly in contexts of racially integrated, urban settings.

In the late 1920s and early 1930s, the white sociologist Robert Park and his former student, black sociologist E. Franklin Frazier, each described migration to northern and western cities as ultimately an acculturating process, despite problems of marginalization and social rupture. Even earlier, Franz Boas in the first decade of the twentieth century and his student Melville Herskovits in the 1920s, both white anthropologists, had measured the head sizes of different ethnic and racial groups (a form of study termed anthropometry) to argue that in cities over time the intellect, culture, and even physical appearance of the different groups were converging within a range of characteristics understood to be the “American type.”

In the 1920s, Herskovits had articulated this assimilationist viewpoint in a research project that used anthropometric measurement and genealogical information, in order to study African Americans in Harlem and at Howard University in Washington, D.C. Publishing his findings initially in journals and later in the short book *The American Negro: A Study of Racial Crossing* (1928), he concluded that “I do not claim the term ‘race’ for the American Negro, and I certainly do not claim that there is anything but the most striking type of mixture represented in him.” Clearly at odds with his own later work in the 1930s and 1940s, Herskovits in the 1920s stressed racial assimilation. In his chapter in Alain Locke’s edited anthology *The New Negro* (1925), he portrayed blacks in Harlem as follows:

[That] the [Negroes] have absorbed the culture of America is too obvious, almost, to be mentioned. They have absorbed it as all great racial and social groups in this country have absorbed it. And they face much the same problems as these groups face. The social ostracism to which they are subjected is only different in extent from that to which the Jew is subjected. The fierce reaction of race-pride is quite the same in both groups. But, whether in Negro or in Jew, the protest avails nothing, apparently. All racial and social elements in our population who live here long enough become acculturated, Americanized in the truest sense of the word, eventually. They learn our culture and react according to its patterns, against which all the protestations of the possession of, or of hot desire for, a peculiar culture mean nothing.

Herskovits’s chapter aroused the indignation of Locke and others who envisioned *The New Negro* as showcasing the unique heritage and genius of black culture and with it, the authentic black voice and dialect of the rural folk and urban mass. Suggesting to Herskovits that he revise his chapter, Locke asked, “Does democracy require uniformity? If so it threatens to be safe, but dull. . . . Old folkways may not persist, but they may leave a mental trace, subtly recorded in emotional temper and coloring social reactions.”

Two decades later Herskovits had made an about-face. Going against the academic mainstream, he boldly proclaimed the survival and the importance in the New World of African cultural patterns—words, names, music folklore, religion, and art. His research in Africa, South America (particularly Brazil), and the Caribbean represents the first significant exploration and analysis of what scholars today term the African diaspora. Historian Walter Jackson notes that Herskovits was “genuinely startled” by the extent

**African Survivals**

## Window in Time



### Africanisms in African American Culture

What if the cultures of Africa from which the New World Negroes were derived, when described in terms of the findings of modern scientific method, are found to be vastly different from the current stereotype? What if these cultures impressed themselves on their carriers, and the descendants of their carriers, too deeply to be eradicated any more than were the cultural endowments of the various groups of European immigrants? . . . What if the aboriginal African endowment were found, in certain respects, even to have been transmitted to the whites, thus making the result of contact an exchange of culture—as it was in the case of other groups—rather than the endowment of an inferior people with habits of a superior group? Let us suppose, in short, it could be shown that the Negro is a man with a past and a reputable past; that in time the concept could be spread that the civilizations of Africa, like those of Europe, have contributed to American culture as we know it today; and that this idea might eventually be taken over into the canons of general thought. Would this not, as a practical measure, tend to undermine the assumptions that bolster racial prejudice?

Source: Melville Herskovits, *The Myth of the Negro Past* (1941), 29–30.

of similarity between African and New World cultures. His groundbreaking book *The Myth of the Negro Past* (1941), also funded by the Carnegie Corporation, posited the strongest presence of “African survivals” in South America and the Caribbean, where slavery and the slave trade had lasted longest and where blacks had come in far larger numbers and had lived under conditions of greater cultural autonomy.

Herskovits argued that blacks in the United States, although in much more contact with whites, also exhibited identifiable “Africanisms,” as he termed behavioral patterns with traces of African worship practices and beliefs, family structure, and the arts. In the case of the United States, Herskovits did not identify specific areas of origin in West Africa as he had done of South America and the Caribbean, but he did argue for a “base line” of West African culture, with black religious life serving as a prime exemplar of African survivals.

Herskovits was not unaware of the political implications of his message, which he interpreted as a vindication of the existence of a rich cultural heritage with traditions that disproved what he perceived to be the myth that “the Negro is thus a man without a past.” Herskovits believed in the social importance of this argument—that it would develop a sense of pride in African Americans and would rid Africa of the stigma attached to it by refuting misinformation that fueled race prejudice.

For some, including historians W. E. B. Du Bois and Carter G. Woodson and linguist Lorenzo Dow Turner, the recognition of one’s African heritage and the survival of its culture was eminently worthy of study. Du Bois called *The Myth of the Negro Past*



“epoch-making.” Herskovits had drawn on Turner’s research, whose later publication in book form, *Africanisms in the Gullah Dialect* (1949), investigated African linguistic patterns among the black people on the Sea Islands off the South Carolina coast. Carter G. Woodson, too, favorably reviewed Herskovits, praising his scientific method and his refutation of the dominant scholarly assumption that blacks had no reputable history or culture to pass on.

Through his insistence on the cultural achievements of black people, Carter G. Woodson rejected educational ideas and practices that treated whiteness as the norm. His writing, teaching, and the building of a black history movement among teachers and students in segregated public schools offered an alternative framework to damage imagery. Through professional scholarship and conferences, along with his more popular publications, Woodson worked to educate the public on the contributions of African Americans to the nation, along with giving blacks a sense of pride in their heritage, including their resistance to racial oppression. According to education historian Jarvis Givens, Woodson’s textbook *The Negro in Our History*, which went through nine editions between 1922 and 1950, presented African American history to college and public school teachers explicitly as a corrective to an unhealthy, overly assimilationist education. In his polemical book *The Miseducation of the Negro* (1933), Woodson lambasted “highly educated” blacks for what he believed to be training that was devoid of racial pride and thus useless—and even dangerous—to the advancement of black people.

In the 1940s, however, the majority of black scholars did not align with the African-survivals thesis of Melville Herskovits. The most noted criticism came from the sociologist E. Franklin Frazier, who argued that the passage of time and the “force of circumstances” associated with the Middle Passage, slavery, emancipation, and later urban migration had caused blacks to adapt to new situations and contexts, leaving only “scraps of memories” of Africa. Preceding Herskovits, Frazier had already established this viewpoint in his book *The Negro Family in the United States* (1939), in which he argued that “Probably never before in history has a people been so nearly completely stripped of its social heritage as the Negroes who were brought to America.”

Most black scholars and civil rights proponents rejected Herskovits’s emphasis on culture. Some even compared him to the earlier generation of white New South thinkers

#### Abandoning the Culturalist Perspective

and writers such as Joel Chandler Harris, DuBose Heyward, Ulrich B. Phillips, and Charleston’s all-white Society for the Preservation of Spirituals. Clearly interested in and fascinated by a distinct black regional culture, the New South group held racist presumptions about the “Negro’s place” in society while simultaneously endeavoring to conserve the Old South idiosyncrasies that they deemed “authentic” to black people. For African Americans in the 1930s and 1940s, a romanticized discussion of cultural distinctiveness, including the black-inspired musings of the Harlem (New Negro) Renaissance, came under increasing scrutiny and attack from those who propounded the primacy of economic over cultural solutions to racial inequality and who perceived race relations as masking economic conflict. E. Franklin Frazier went so far as to depict the culturalist perspective as “a lot of foolish talk about the peculiar ‘contributions’ of the Negro and his deep ‘spirituality’.” Black intellectuals such as Frazier and the civil rights leaders who shared his perspective saw the focus on an African past and its cultural legacy as a distraction from the struggle for inclusion in American social, political, and economic life at the very time when racial barriers had



begun to fall in electoral politics, the New Deal, organized labor, the American Left, the armed forces, and even (with regard to Jim Crow laws) in the federal judiciary. In the social and political milieu of the 1940s, they argued, an enthusiastic reception and valorization of an African cultural inheritance posed a troubling dilemma—one that implicitly suggested, if not confirmed, the inability of blacks, unlike all other groups, to fit fully into American society.

The times were inhospitable to Herskovits's way of thinking, and his critics fretted over his interpretation. They voiced concerns about the book's political implications for the struggle for racial equality. One reviewer, the white sociologist Guy B. Johnson, whose work shared some similarity with that of Herskovits, worried openly that despite the good intentions of *The Myth of the Negro Past*, an "immensely practical problem is how to prevent this book . . . from becoming the handmaiden of those who are looking for new justifications for the segregation and differential treatment of Negroes." Ironically, Alain Locke, who years earlier had criticized Herskovits for understating black cultural distinctiveness, now maintained that the "stubborn survival" of Africanisms unwittingly created an attitude that blacks are "unassimilable."

## Literary and Dramatic Arts

Themes of black pathology due to racism were not confined to social science literature, but were carried over into the world of the arts. The social realism style of art, exemplified by the acclaimed novelist Richard Wright, vividly conveyed damage imagery. For him, the role of the black author entailed the responsibility of representing the voice and oppressive conditions of the black working class. In his introduction to *Black Metropolis* (1945) authored by the black social scientists St Clair Drake and Horace Cayton, Wright connected this important study of Chicago's black community to his own novel *Native Son* (1940), also set in Chicago.

Wright concluded that the black scholars Drake and Cayton portrayed "the environment out of which the Bigger Thomases [the protagonist in *Native Son*] of our nation come," and he noted that their sociological findings endorsed those of Gunnar Myrdal in *An American Dilemma* (1944). For Wright, the pathological imagery of the urban environment enabled readers to understand the dehumanizing effects of racial oppression. He wrote in his introduction to *Black Metropolis*: "White America has reduced Negro life in our great cities to a level of existence of so crude and brutal a quality that one could say of it in the words of Vachel Lindsay's *The Leaden-Eyed* that 'It is not that they starve, but they starve so dreamlessly.'"

In the disciplines of psychology and psychiatry, Richard Wright discovered antiracist tools for addressing the condition of urban blacks. He worked with the white psychiatrist Dr. Frederic Wertham in opening the Lafargue Clinic, which was housed in Harlem's African American church, St. Philips Episcopal, under the pastorate of the Reverend Shelton Hale Bishop. Writing in his diary in 1945, Wright expressed his conviction that "the next great area of discovery of the Negro will be the dark, landscape of his own mind, what living in white America has done to him." As historian Gabriel Mendes observes, Wright and Wertham envisioned the Lafargue Clinic, which operated from 1946 to 1958, as helping to mitigate racism's impact on mental health, a theme that pervaded much of Wright's fiction as well. Psychology and psychiatry grew rapidly in the United States during

and after the Second World War, and the LaFargue clinic was the first to associate mental illness with racial discrimination. According to Mendes, “the clinic advanced the more radical belief that psychotherapy could play an essential part in black New Yorkers’ struggles against systemic inequality.”

The black woman novelist and essayist Ann Petry explained her adherence to the social realism style in ways similar to Wright, although she transcended Wright’s and other writers’ largely monolithic male-focus by bringing a gender perspective to urban realism. Her attention to poor and working-class black women presented a range of personalities that affirmed her belief in the “sociological novel,” according to such literary scholars as Alan Wald, and also Farah Jasmine Griffin. Petry stated in an interview with Beth McHenry in the communist newspaper the *Daily Worker* on March 29, 1946, that “the portrayal of a problem itself, in all its cruelty and horror, is actually the thing which sets people thinking, and not any solution that may be offered in a novel.” In 1950 she maintained the importance of such an aesthetic in her essay “The Novel as Social Criticism.”

Not all black writers of the period agreed with telling tales of overarching black problems, pain, and victimization. Petry had been criticized by the Left for not offering a more affirming, hopeful ending to her book *The Street* (1946). Zora Neal Hurston criticized Richard Wright’s collection of stories in *Uncle Tom’s Children* (1938) for being a “book about hatreds.” James Baldwin also rejected the heavy literary focus on racism’s pathological manifestations. In his 1949 essay “Everybody’s Protest Novel,” Baldwin identified Wright and his *Native Son* as a style that delimits the fullness of black cultural expression and underestimates the vast capacity of personhood to reach beyond racial identity. “The failure of the protest novel,” wrote Baldwin, “lies in its rejection of life, the human being, the denial of his beauty, dread, power, in its insistence that it is his categorization [racial] alone that is real and which cannot be transcended.”

Ironically and despite Richard Wright’s introduction to Drake and Cayton’s *Black Metropolis*, this study did not dwell solely on pathology, but also discussed the positive features of Chicago’s black ghetto, which they called “Bronzeville.” Referring to blacks’ neighborhood and associational life as sources of strength, Drake and Cayton called attention to forms of social, intellectual, and artistic expression, as well as to churches, businesses, and other institutions. Indeed, Drake and Cayton had disclosed two realities, which according to scholar Mitchell Duneier brought a unique perspective missing from Myrdal. Duneier explains Drake and Cayton’s conclusions: “Racism had created the covenant, which brought about particular environmental conditions, which in turn gave rise to *both* pathological conditions *and* a rich manifestation of black life and culture.”

Years later in his essay “The World and a Jug,” which appeared in the December 1963 magazine *New Leader*, Ralph Ellison, the author of *Invisible Man* (1952), questioned a black literary style overly influenced by the damage imagery or, as he termed it, “an abstract embodiment of living hell.” More attentive to the fullness of human life, Ellison underscored the crux of the dilemma for the black literary artist, asking: “How does the Negro writer participate *as a writer* in the struggle for human freedom? To whom does he address his work? What values emerging from Negro experience does he try to affirm?” During the 1940s and 1950s, African American writers became more varied in their subject matter, but most developed their plots and poems around everyday social issues that faced members of their race, such as migration, urban life, wartime conditions, race riots, restrictive housing, and labor.

A profusion of literary writers appeared on the scene during and after the Depression. Among them was Arna Bontemps, who said that he had watched the early stages of the Harlem Renaissance from a grandstand seat. Subsequently he became one of its most productive contributors. In 1931 his *God Sends Sunday* Fiction and Other Prose appeared, followed by two historical novels, *Black Thunder* (1936) and *Drums at Dusk* (1939). Bontemps also became one of the most successful writers of children's books. Later he turned to nonfiction materials, writing with Jack Conroy *They Seek a City* (1945), an engrossing account of black urbanization. (The revised edition appeared in 1966 under the title *Any Place but Here*.) Bontemps's *They Have Tomorrow* (1945) offered a series of biographical sketches of promising young African Americans.

Two black southern writers produced novels of African American life in the Deep South: George W. Henderson wrote *Ollie Miss* (1935) and *Jule* (1946); George W. Lee shed considerable light on black life in Memphis with *Beale Street* (1934), followed two years later by *River George*. Meanwhile, Waters Turpin used life in the Upper South as material for his novels. As a native of the eastern shore of Maryland, Turpin dealt with a familiar area in his works, *These Low Grounds* (1937) and *O Canaan* (1939). The latter novel focused on migration north.

Novelist William Attaway pointed to new directions for the African American writer. In *Let Me Breathe Thunder* (1939), Attaway showed that an African American could successfully write a work made up primarily of white characters. In *Blood on the Forge* (1941), he indicated the wealth of materials to be found in industrial communities experiencing racial competition in the struggle for existence. Another African American writer known widely for novels with white protagonists was Frank Yerby. His novel *The Foxes of Harrow* (1946) remained on the best-seller list for many months and reportedly approached the million-copy mark. Chester Himes addresses the theme of racial friction in his novel, set in a wartime industrial community, *If He Hollers, Let Him Go* (1945). Himes, who had attracted attention with his short stories in black-owned and white-owned magazines alike—*Opportunity*, *Esquire*, and *Coronet*—vividly demonstrated the impact of the war on black migrants to industrial communities and the bitterness stemming from frustration and despair.

Throughout the 1940s, the best known of the younger African American writers was Richard Wright. Considered a master of the short story when his *Uncle Tom's Children* appeared in 1938, Wright won even greater acclaim for *Native Son* (1940), which immediately placed him in the front ranks of contemporary American writers. With stark, tragic realism, Wright described the literally murderous frustrations of a young black man living in a Chicago slum and the efforts of a Marxist lawyer in his defense. The book compared favorably with the best similar works in American literature. It was a Book-of-the-Month Club selection and enjoyed considerable success in general bookstores.

In 1941 Wright brought out *Twelve Million Black Voices*, a folk history of African Americans. In 1945 *Black Boy*, a quasi-autobiographical account of Wright's childhood and youth in Mississippi was also a Book-of-the-Month Club selection. Although there was disagreement over the accuracy of the work as an autobiography, there was no dissent about its power as a story of life among poor, oppressed black southerners. *The Outsider*, which appeared in 1953, did not receive the favorable critical acclaim of Wright's earlier works, but by that time he was firmly established as one of the country's major writers.

Ann Petry portrayed the lives of poor and working-class black mothers and children in her novel *The Street* (1946) and in her short stories. Literary scholar Farah Griffin reveals

that Petry observed firsthand women's living experiences in blighted sections of Harlem, their interactions, even victimization by their own men, and the effects of public policy, since she worked for the weekly newspaper, the *People's Voice*, as the women's editor, feature writer, and columnist. Winner of a Houghton Mifflin Literary Fellowship, Petry enjoyed wide circulation and recognition for *The Street*.

In the post-World War II years, a new generation of African American writers came to the attention of the public and won critical acclaim. Ralph Ellison received even greater acclaim than Richard Wright after the publication of his novel *Invisible Man* (1952). The book's complex and sophisticated rendering of race relations and their effect on blacks received the National Book Award in 1952. His volume of essays, *Shadow and Act* (1964), includes his reprinted essay "The World and A Jug."

#### Writers in the Postwar Years

John O. Killens gained popular recognition for his novel of southern life, *Youngblood* (1945), and for his film scripts for the black actor and singer Harry Belafonte. His book *And Then They Heard the Thunder* (1963), regarded by many as his most important novel, tells a story of African Americans during World War II, and his *Blackman's Burden* (1965) contains lively essays on the question of race.

James Baldwin, who showed early promise as both an essayist and novelist, followed Richard Wright into a Paris exile. Unlike Wright, however, he returned to the United States. His books received wide recognition: *Go Tell It on the Mountain* (1953), *Notes of a Native Son* (1955), *Nobody Knows My Name* (1960), and *Another Country* (1962). Through his novel *Giovanni's Room* (1956), he wrote of the love affair between two men, calling attention to his own homosexuality. Baldwin's work conveyed the social concerns of the 1950s and 1960s—racial consciousness, discrimination, and sexuality. His later work addressed the ideological cleavages between the black power and civil rights movements.

Among the poets of this period, Melvin B. Tolson, then a professor of English at Wiley College, published in newspapers and magazines during the 1930s and won numerous prizes and awards. Although his volume of poems, *Rendezvous with America*, was not issued until 1944, one of the collection's principal poems, "Dark Symphony," had been published previously in the *Atlantic Monthly*. While at the University of Michigan, Robert Hayden won the Jule and Avery Hopwood Prize for his poems. His first volume of poems, *Heart-Shape in the Dust*, was published in 1940. In 1966 his poetry won first prize at the World Festival of Negro Art at Dakar, Senegal.

#### Poets

Owen Dodson, one of the youngest of the well-known poets and playwrights, became seriously interested in writing while a student at Bates College. After writing both traditional and experimental verse for several years, in 1946 he collected his works in a volume, *Powerful Long Ladder*. Two women, Alice Walker and Gwendolyn Brooks, won recognition as poets. While on the Chicago Federal Writers' Project, Walker wrote "For My People," which later won first prize in the Yale University competition for young poets. Her novel *Jubilee*, winner of a Houghton Mifflin Literary Fellowship, was published in 1966. Meanwhile Brooks's volume *A Street in Bronzeville* appeared in 1945. Five years later in 1950 her *Annie Allen* won the Pulitzer Prize, making her the first African American recipient of the Pulitzer. In 1968 she was named Poet Laureate of Illinois. Later, in 1985–1986, she was selected poet in residence at the Library of Congress, a post that was elevated at the end of her tenure to Poet Laureate of the United States. Brooks also received acclaim for her



novella *Maud Martha* (1953) and its attention to the racial bigotry of whites and skin-color prejudice among blacks themselves.

The unfolding civil rights movement in the 1940s and 1950s spurred dramatic productions with race-related themes. In addition to Paul Robeson's success in Shake-  
**Theater**  
speare's *Othello*, other black actors to emerge in these years included Hilda Simms in *Anna Lucasta*, Gordon Heath in *Deep Are the Roots*, and Canada Lee in *On Whitman Avenue*. The last two plays dealt with two of America's most pressing social problems: the return of African American soldiers to southern communities and the housing of blacks in northern cities.

Lorraine Hansberry's *A Raisin in the Sun* in 1959 made a lasting mark in American theater. This moving story about the housing problems of an African American family won the New York Critics Circle Award. Hansberry's inspiration for the play came from her own family's experience in obtaining housing. In 1940 her father, Carl Hansberry, took a lawsuit all the way to the U.S. Supreme Court in the case *Hansberry v. Lee*. Hansberry won the case, but the technical issues on which the decision was rendered did not solve the larger question of the legality of restrictive covenants, which for decades had prevented African Americans from living in certain white neighborhoods, particularly in northern cities like Chicago that were destinations for migrants from the South.

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We want white tenants in our white community.

## Black Internationalism

When the international conference for establishing the United Nations opened in San Francisco late in April 1945, black Americans, like other peoples around the globe, hoped that the meeting would create formulas to eliminate war and its causes and to guarantee freedom and security. African Americans saw in this gathering an opportunity to air their grievances and to aid in reciprocal ways the freedom struggles of all peoples of color. In assuming this internationalist perspective, which included expressions of solidarity with the African and Asian liberation struggles, American blacks could see themselves and their struggle as more than a national problem. It placed them squarely within a world population of 400 million black people.

This perspective predated the United Nations. Howard University professor Ralph Bunche typified the sentiment of other black scholars when he analyzed and denounced French and British imperialism in West Africa in an article in the *Journal of Negro History* in 1936. For black Americans, the new global forum served to continue ongoing conversations across national boundaries that began early in the century, but blossomed in the social milieu of the 1920s, the era of Garvey's Universal Negro Improvement Association and of the American black arts renaissance—creating a virtual seedbed of diasporic and



transnational movements that in most cases continued to be active during the Great Depression and World War II. In this richly vibrant political and cultural era, blacks of varying ideological persuasions worked together across the Atlantic in numerous, often competing efforts, that included the French-speaking African and Caribbean *négritude* movement of the 1930s–1950s (launched in Paris by Léopold Sédar Senghor of Senegal, Léon Damas of French Guyana, and Aimé Césaire of Martinique); the Pan-African congresses; and various labor and left-leaning organizations in the African diaspora and on the African continent.

For generations of black Americans, Ethiopia held biblical and black nationalist meanings. From Phillis Wheatley to Marcus Garvey and beyond, black leaders quoted “Ethiopia shall soon stretch forth her hands.” The rhetorical strategy of linking the black American identity to ancient (and also modern) Ethiopia, as a metaphor for Africa, proved no less effective in the early 1930s, when Ethiopia alone had managed to remain independent after the rest of the continent succumbed to European imperialism. When Mussolini’s Italy invaded Ethiopia in October 1935, American blacks closely followed the unfolding events, which culminated in the Italian conquest and Emperor Haile Selassie’s exile in England.

The Italian aggression had the greatest effect in unifying and galvanizing into action black communities in the United States and abroad. Shocked and alarmed by the situation in the beleaguered African nation, black Americans rallied in protest demonstrations and organized Ethiopia relief drives in New York, Philadelphia, Chicago, New Orleans, Cleveland, Kansas City, and many other cities.

This was also true of cities around the world. In London, for example, in August 1935, the International African Friends of Ethiopia, which later became the International African Service Bureau, was founded. Among the members of this London group were the Trinidad-born Marxist intellectuals George Padmore and C. L. R. James, as well as Jomo Kenyatta, who would later become president of his country, Kenya. James also promoted Ethiopia’s defense as editor of the news organ *International African Opinion*.

In the United States, Ethiopian independence was ardently championed by the black scholarly community. Scholars Carter G. Woodson, W. E. B. Du Bois, Ralph Bunche, E. Franklin Frazier, Willis Huggins, and Oliver Cox, all of whom drew historical and current connections among imperialism, fascism, colonialism, and racism, thus linking the fate of subjugated colored races throughout the world.

Black New Yorkers founded the International Council of Friends of Ethiopia under the leadership of historian Willis N. Huggins, who at his own expense traveled to the League of Nations headquarters in Geneva in 1935 to plead for Ethiopia. His appeal to the League, although futile, expressed what he termed the resounding “righteous indignation by blacks in the western world who are bound by racial kinship to the ancient and illustrious Ethiopian people.”

Throughout 1935, civil rights organizations as well as individual black churches and larger denominational bodies criticized both the U.S. government and the Vatican for failing to intervene at the League of Nations on behalf of Ethiopia. During their annual conventions, leaders of these organizations particularly stressed the plight of Ethiopia. The NAACP appealed to the Secretary of State Cordell Hull and to the League of Nations to check Italian aggression. Rev. Lacy Kirk Williams, president of the National Baptist Convention, USA, Inc., with its several million members, appealed to black Baptists to aid in the cause

of Ethiopian freedom. The black ecumenical Fraternal Council of Churches passed a resolution stating that “while by sympathy, principle and ideas we are Americans to the core we cannot be deaf to the cry that comes from a menaced nation in the land of our fathers’ fathers!”

Black newspapers featured numerous pro-Ethiopia articles, editorials, and advertisements. They covered Haile Selassie’s speech before the League of Nations in June 1936. The *New York Age* urged “Africans outside of Ethiopia” to come to the defense of their “kinsfolk,” and the *Pittsburgh Courier* sent its historian-news analyst, J. A. Rogers, to cover the Italian-Ethiopian war. Upon his return, Rogers published the booklet *The Real Facts about Ethiopia* and gave lectures on the subject to many black and white groups. But not until 1940 did Great Britain, by then at war with Italy and Germany, form an alliance with Ethiopia and others to restore Ethiopian independence.

The overthrow of Spain’s democratic republic by Generalissimo Francisco Franco and his establishment of a fascist dictatorship also stirred protest in some parts of the black community during the 1930s. In 1936 and 1937 black Americans were among the international volunteers (the American contingent was called the Abraham Lincoln Brigade) who went to Spain to support the Spanish Republican forces against Franco, who was backed by Hitler and Mussolini.

In contrast to the 1930s, during the mid to late 1940s the idea of freedom from colonial rule proved a more fluid, even viable proposition. Outspoken critics of colonial oppression took a transnational approach to the color line, as can be The Rising Wind seen in the writing of the brilliant Howard University diplomatic historian Merze Tate. In a 1943 article in the *Journal of Negro Education*, Tate placed people of African and Asian descent under the descriptive rubric “peoples of color” and proceeded to connect their colonized status to the war aims of European countries in both world wars. She asserted her strong anticolonial position, stating that Africans and Asians “are no longer willing to accept the white man’s exalted view of trusteeship. . . .” She was equally critical of racial segregation in the U.S. military during World War II, and she identified the white supremacist ideology behind this policy as preceding that of Hitler’s Nazism.

The growing anticolonial activism did not escape Walter White, the executive secretary of the NAACP, who in 1945 declared: “A wind is rising—a wind of determination by the have-nots of the world to share in the benefits of freedom and prosperity which the haves of the earth have tried to keep exclusively for themselves. That wind blows all over the world.” Evidence of this “rising wind” came most notably from India. Under the nonviolent movement led by Mohandas Gandhi, India won its independence from British colonial rule in 1947.

The cry for national independence resounded at the Pan African Congress, held in Manchester, England, in 1945, which was chaired by Du Bois. The meeting was attended largely by Africans and Caribbean blacks, reflecting the anticolonial protests during the 1940s of such working-class activists as Nigerian trade unionists, South African miners, and laborers in the Gold Coast Colony (the future Ghana) and Jamaica. The Pan African Congress in 1945, unlike earlier congresses that emphasized cultural kinship, stressed instead a unified black internationalism based on the similar condition of racial economic oppression.

Within the U.S. black community, the Council on African Affairs (CAA) kept the American public apprised of anticolonial activities in Africa. Founded in 1937 by

Paul Robeson and Max Yergan, formerly a YMCA director in South Africa and a leader in the National Negro Congress, the Council on African Affairs was particularly vigilant in alerting African Americans to political and trade union activism in South Africa, collecting food products and money to relieve famine in Africa, and bringing educational information about Africa to the American public. Paul Robeson headed the organization. William Alphaeus Hunton, Jr., served as its educational director and eventually its executive director. Other important early figures in the life of the organization included Yergan, Du Bois, Mary McLeod Bethune, Eslanda Goode Robeson (Paul Robeson's wife), scholar E. Franklin Frazier, and California newspaper publisher Charlotta Bass. Historian Penny Von Eschen notes that the CAA was widely supported in black communities, hosting fundraising concerts for Africa and India that featured Robeson, Marian Anderson, Lena Horne, Duke Ellington, and other popular black artists. Its rallies drew thousands of people and were held in large stadiums, such as Madison Square Garden. The CAA rally in 1946 was held at the Abyssinian Baptist Church and supported by the Reverend Adam Clayton Powell, Jr., the church's pastor and newly elected New York congressman. The rally drew a crowd of 4,500.

In the postwar world, however, the United Nations functioned as the most important forum of international deliberation and, in the decades to follow, would grow more influential as a voice for independent African nations. The founding conference of the United Nations was held in late April 1945, two weeks after the death of President Roosevelt. This meeting to establish the UN charter convened three thousand delegates, representing fifty-one countries. The Great Powers—the United States, the Soviet Union, Great Britain, France, and China—wanted to create the diplomatic machinery that would, once and for all, put an end to aggression. Colonial peoples wanted independence, or at least guarantees against further encroachments by the imperial powers.

#### The United Nations Charter

Among American observers accredited by the State Department to attend the organizational meeting at San Francisco were several African Americans, including Mary McLeod Bethune of the National Council of Negro Women, Mordecai W. Johnson, president of Howard University, and W. E. B. Du Bois and Walter White of the NAACP. Ralph Bunche, acting chief of the division of dependent territories of the Department of State, went as a member of the official staff.

African Americans maintained a keen interest in the delegates from the African and Asian countries, especially those from India, Liberia, Ethiopia, and Haiti. Most black newspapers with national circulations sent reporters to cover the conference. "Small Nations Demand Race Plank" and "British Evasive on Colonial Question" were typical headlines in the black press. When it became known that the black people of South Africa protested the treatment they were receiving at the hands of their government, the black press in the United States referred to South Africa's apartheid system as "Nazi-like domination."

No previous international document had given as much attention to human rights as had the United Nations Charter. Its preamble reaffirmed "faith in fundamental human rights, in the dignity and worth of the human person, in the equal rights of men and women and of nations large and small." Another passage in the Charter asserted that the United Nations would promote human rights and fundamental freedoms "without distinction to race, language, or religion."

Of the agencies provided for by the charter, African Americans took the greatest interest in the Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), whose purpose, according to UN guidelines, was “to contribute to peace and security by promoting collaboration among nations through education, science and cul- UNESCO’s Work ture.” At the first meeting of UNESCO in Paris, in 1946, one of the U.S. delegates was the African American sociologist Charles S. Johnson, formerly the editor of the National Urban League’s magazine *Opportunity* and soon to become the president of Fisk University. In 1951 the black sociologist E. Franklin Frazier was appointed the director of UNESCO’s Division of Applied Sciences, based in Paris. In this position, he traveled throughout Africa, establishing research projects and seminars at UNESCO-funded institutes.

UNESCO boldly took on as one of its early projects the effort to debunk the concept of race. Scholars were acutely conscious of the importance of this task after a war in which Nazi ideas of Aryan superiority had led to the murder of millions of Jews. In the early 1940s, school textbooks in the United States and elsewhere continued to differentiate by races and racial traits according to a hierarchy of different European ethnicities, with Anglo-Saxons on top and Jews, Asians, and Negroes at lower levels. The UNESCO Statement on Race, published in 1950, sought to expose and eradicate not only the fallacy of Nazi doctrine but also the widespread popular understanding of race as biologically determined and inherited. (At this time, for example, 71 percent of white Americans surveyed by an opinion poll said that they believed racial identity determined intelligence and that in this regard blacks were inherently inferior to whites.)

The panel called attention to such popular misconceptions and to outdated science, citing instead the most recent academic thought. For example, in 1935 the British biologists Julian Huxley (who served as director-general of UNESCO from 1946 to 1948) and A. C. Haddon had asserted in their co-authored monograph *We Europeans: A Survey of “Racial” Problems*: “With respect to existing populations, the word ‘race’ should be banished, and the descriptive and non-committal term *ethnic groups* should be substituted.” Swedish scholar Gunnar Myrdal used the term *caste* in his landmark study *An American Dilemma* (1944), explaining that “the term *race* is . . . inappropriate in a scientific inquiry, since it has biological and genetic connotations which . . . run parallel to widely spread false racial beliefs.” Anthropologist Ashley Montagu, a vociferous opponent of race as a biological concept, took the leading role in the preparation of UNESCO’s first statement on race in 1950, which pronounced race a “social myth.”

However, as historian Michelle Brattain reveals, Montagu’s efforts evoked both praise and condemnation. The controversial UNESCO statement of 1950 was overturned just two years later, fueling debates over the link between presumed racial differences (biological or cultural) and racial disparities in the form of income, education, and other social markers. In its second statement on race, published in 1952, UNESCO presented different conclusions from the first. Although not written in the language of the scientific racism of the 1910s and 1920s, the new UNESCO statement rejected the idea of race as “social myth” and, according to Brattain, despite its “more politically and scientifically palatable definition,” returned to biological premises that “also affirmed older scientific traditions (and languages) by noting differences between ‘non-literate’ and ‘more civilized’ people on intelligent tests.”

African American leaders expressed disappointment at the failure to end colonialism outright, and some, such as Howard University historian Rayford Logan, called America’s

attention to the Soviet Union's anticolonialist statements. Yet blacks were heartened to see Ralph Bunche join the UN Secretariat as director of the Trusteeship Division. Because of his persistent stand against racial discrimination in the United States, blacks trusted Bunche

#### The Trusteeship Council

to use his scholarly expertise in advancing the welfare and interests of peoples unable to represent their own interests in the United Nations. He was appointed to the UN Special Committee on Palestine and drafted the 1947 reports proposing a partition of the land between Palestinians and Jews and recognizing the State of Israel. Bunche mediated the armistice that halted the Arab-Israeli war in 1948, for which in 1950 he became the first African American recipient of the Nobel Peace Prize.

African Americans also turned to the United Nations in the hope of getting a hearing for their own petitions for human rights and fundamental freedoms. They knew that the

#### The South Africa Resolution

United Nations had no authority to eliminate racial discrimination in the United States, but they also recognized the moral leverage they wielded as an oppressed minority in the nation that deemed itself leader of the free world. Black Americans were not oblivious of the UN General Assembly's acknowledgment, in the autumn of 1946, of India's charges that Indian nationals and their descendants in South Africa were victims of discrimination. By a two-thirds majority, the General Assembly passed a resolution requiring South Africa to report at the next meeting the steps that it had taken to rectify the situation. The United States, along with Great Britain, voted against the resolution, which made its success even more meaningful.

India's resolution became a signal victory for domestic minorities in other nations. The General Assembly also approved a resolution branding as a crime under international law the extermination of minorities and racial and ethnic groups, such as the Nazis had done. This resolution seemed to be further recognition of the rights of minorities. In an editorial in the *Crisis*, Du Bois correctly observed that the UN discussions on race were "far ahead of Versailles when President Wilson and the British would not even permit race to be discussed formally even in a committee meeting."

Encouraged by the charter and the early actions of UN agencies, the National Negro Congress (NNC)

**The June 1946 Petition** in June 1946 filed a petition with the UN's Economic and Social Council on behalf of black people in America, seeking United Nations aid in the struggle to eliminate political, economic, and social discrimination. Opponents of the petition stressed that the treatment of African Americans in the United States was purely a domestic matter and that the UN charter prevented its intervention. African Americans countered by arguing that one of the UN's main purposes was international cooperation in solving problems of an economic, social, cultural, or humanitarian character.



**Charles H. Houston**

Houston, a lawyer who worked closely with the NAACP on the court cases that eventually ended segregation, was the architect of many successful strategies.



Writing on the subject, the distinguished African American lawyer Charles Hamilton Houston admitted that the United Nations did not have jurisdiction to investigate every lynching in Georgia or every denial of the ballot in Mississippi—but, he continued, “where the discrimination and denial of human rights reach a national level or where the national government either cannot or will not afford protection and redress for local aggression against colored peoples, the national policy of the United States itself becomes involved.” Arguing that the NNC petition did not fall outside the UN jurisdiction, Houston concluded: “A national policy of the United States which permits disfranchisement in the South is just as much an international issue as elections in Poland or the denial of democratic rights in Franco’s Spain.”

In October 1947, the NAACP submitted to the United Nations a petition authored by W. E. B. Du Bois, which among other charges accused the United States of violating the human rights of its black citizens. Entitled *An Appeal to the World*, the document called on the nations of the world for redress. As with the NNC petition, jurisdictional objections were raised against the *Appeal*’s legal validity. In 1948 the NAACP published the *Appeal* as a ninety-four-page booklet. With the Cold War ongoing, the Truman administration and other government leaders felt offended and embarrassed by its unflattering statements, especially the accusation that the racism in Mississippi was more of a threat to the nation than was the Soviet Union. Believing that the Soviets would use the booklet for propaganda purposes, U.S. government officials—and even NAACP head Walter White—viewed unsympathetically Du Bois’s wish that the United Nations consider the petition. Former First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt, who was also a UN delegate and member of the NAACP’s board of directors, declined Du Bois’s request that she bring the document before the UN General Assembly. It never got a hearing on the floor of the UN General Assembly.

*The Appeal*

The timing of the *Appeal* could not have been worse. In the previous year, on March 12, 1947, Truman had gone before a joint session of Congress to outline his position defining the United States as the free world’s leader and protector, in the form of offering military and economic assistance to nations threatened by what the president considered pro-Soviet communist forces. Specifically, Truman called for military and economic aid to the beleaguered pro-Western governments of Greece and Turkey. To play this new and active role in the protection of democratic nations under communist threat, the United States assumed a global stature it had not held before.

As the Cold War continued into the 1950s, antiracist and anticolonial efforts on the part of African American leftists and American leftists in general came under heavy governmental and popular attack and curtailment. The government’s harsh anti-communist stand created fatal fissures in the Council on African Affairs in the late 1940s, similar to the divisions in other organizations that initially comprised traditional liberals and leftists, such as the National Negro Congress, the Civil Rights Congress, and the Southern Negro Youth Congress—all of which were disbanded. Red-baiting, witch-hunts, and wild accusations by the influential Senator Joseph McCarthy of Wisconsin whipped the nation into near-hysteria about an alleged ubiquity of subversive communist activities.

*The Red Scare*

The federal government revoked Robeson’s passport in 1950. At eighty-four years of age in 1952, Du Bois was denied his passport, one year after he won an acquittal for an indictment against him for activities deemed sympathetic to communism. In 1961 Du Bois

moved to the African nation of Ghana (independent in 1957), where he died in 1963. Many activists of the 1930s abandoned their former leftist positions. Ralph Bunche embraced liberal anticommunism, and in this camp continued to work ardently for racial equality in the United States and anticolonialism in Africa. Max Yergan not only recanted communism but also moved far to the right, becoming an anticommunist black conservative. Thoroughly disillusioned with communism, the novelist Richard Wright lived as an expatriate in Paris but remained a firm adversary of colonialism in Africa.

Joseph McCarthy was eventually censured by the U.S. Senate for his methods. But even after his downfall in 1954, the House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC), the FBI under its director J. Edgar Hoover, and other practitioners of what came to be called McCarthyism hauled thousands of ordinary men and women before government or private-industry panels, committees, and agencies for investigations of their pasts. Statements deemed to be in any way sympathetic to the Soviet Union were outlawed by the Smith Act. Most of the people charged with disloyalty or subversion were not members of the Communist Party or had long since abandoned communist sympathies. Journalists, writers, scientists, movie stars and Hollywood writers, musicians, politicians, teachers, and certainly labor unionists and civil rights advocates were routinely investigated and labeled “Red” by intelligence agencies. As a result, many lost their careers and were subjected to social ostracism; some were even jailed and deported, or driven to suicide. (Only in the latter half of the 1950s did the American people increasingly discredit McCarthyism.)

On the domestic front the NAACP leaders grew increasingly silent on the government’s repressive Cold War policies and distanced themselves from the Leftist-identified denunciations of such groups as the National Negro Congress. On the international front, however, those same NAACP leaders appeared to be “bourgeois radicals,” according to historian Carol Anderson. The NAACP monitored actions that did not meet UN requirements of international accountability, and it called attention to the abridgement of human rights principles in the administration of colonies that did not meet the standards of education, healthcare, housing, and self-government required under the United Nations Charter. NAACP leaders protested vigorously against anticolonialism in Africa and Asia. As Anderson illustrates, the organization’s human rights activism rallied international opinion during the Cold War and tenaciously kept before the UN actions of the South African government, which sought to annex the territory known as Namibia today. The NAACP also denounced Italian rule in Libya, Somalia, and Eritrea.

The 1940s through the 1960s remained periods of active black internationalism. Over the course of those decades, African American leaders increasingly witnessed a change in their self-image as defenders of the black world. Historically, they had seen themselves as enlightened advocates and agents in the rescue of downtrodden Africa. This would change with the mounting success of independence movements in Africa, particularly when in the late 1950s and early 1960s newly independent African nations joined the United Nations. In 1961, Du Bois, then living in Ghana, described this attitudinal shift: “American Negroes of former generations had always calculated that when Africa was ready for freedom, American Negroes would be ready to lead them. But the event was quite opposite. The African leaders proved to be Africans. . . . Indeed, it now seems that Africans may have to show American Negroes the way to freedom.”

## Labor Civil Rights

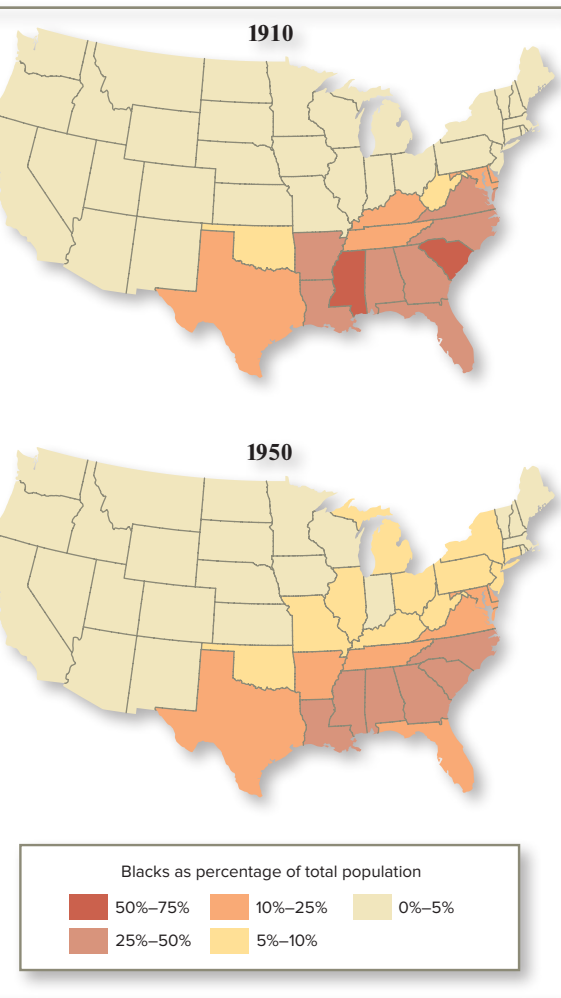
The history of the labor movement in the 1930s and much of the 1940s, and particularly the unionization of white and black workers during these years, is tied to the history of the American Left. Some labor leaders in this period, but certainly not all, were communist sympathizers or active members of the Communist Party, USA. Before the late 1940s and the Cold War between the United States and the Soviet Union, the Left played a visible role in the antiracist labor movement. In those years, leftists were integral and influential members of labor unions and civil rights organizations. Even the older, traditionally liberal civil rights organizations, such as the NAACP and the National Urban League, had begun to emphasize the need for greater class consciousness, not simply race consciousness, as well as to advocate black-white unity within the working class. Three young, left-oriented Howard University professors—political scientist Ralph Bunche, economist Abram Harris, and sociologist E. Franklin Frazier—were primarily responsible for the NAACP's new economic focus. At the NAACP's America Conference in 1933, they declared the organization's traditional racial strategies out of date in an era when social forces demanded an antiracist labor movement.

The Great Depression had devastated the economy, leaving many Americans more conscious than ever before of a widening chasm between society's haves and have-nots. To be sure, the communists often clashed with labor liberals and other left-oriented activists. White labor leader Walter Reuther of the United Auto Workers and the CIO remained staunchly anticommunist, despite the presence of leftist-influenced locals in his organization. Black socialist A. Phillip Randolph demanded that the planned 1941 March on Washington be all-black precisely to exclude communist infiltrators (who would have been overwhelmingly white).

Unionized blacks owed their growing numerical strength to the unprecedented black migration from the southern states, due primarily to the North's booming wartime economy. In the 1940s, 1.5 million black southerners and an even larger number of whites from the region moved to industrial cities in the Northeast, Midwest, and West—areas that historian James Gregory calls the “southern diaspora.” Race riots, such as the Detroit riot of 1943, highlighted the boiling urban cauldron of racial and economic tensions spawned by this massive migration. Yet migration also highlighted the politicization and empowerment of black workers. In Detroit tens of thousands of black workers entered the automotive industry, and many of them in Ford's River Rouge factory. Through the United Auto Workers (UAW), an affiliate of the CIO, they demanded racial equality in the workplace, in housing, and in other aspects of life in the city.

### Blacks in the CIO

The CIO's adherence to the industrial principle of labor organizing rather than organizing by specific crafts allowed blacks to enter the ranks of organized labor, since the great majority of them were concentrated in unskilled jobs. Although racial prejudice and reluctance to support equal opportunities for blacks existed among white industrial workers, the CIO articulated the official policy of racial diversity in its affiliate unions. Under the leadership of John L. Lewis, the CIO announced its position in 1938 of “uncompromising opposition to any form of discrimination, whether political or economic, based on race, color, creed or nationality.”



### Black Migration

Maps showing a comparison of the declining percentage of blacks in the South

Detroit, and Los Angeles, labor activism included a concerted effort by black and white workers, left-to-center member unions, and left-to-center civil rights organizations. All worked together, as historian Michael Honey notes, in “a broad-based, interracial, and interclass popular alliance.” Black union workers had no doubt that their fight for jobs, promotions, better working conditions, and higher pay were as much racial issues as labor issues.

Despite real limitations from many racist white workers, “labor civil rights,” or what historian Robert Korstad terms “civil rights unionism,” represented a visible form of grassroots activism in the struggle for racial equality in the 1940s. As studies of Winston-Salem, North Carolina, of Memphis, Tennessee, and of other southern communities have revealed, CIO activism in support of black voting rights during the 1940s offered an early model for voting rights campaigns in later decades. Labor civil rights constituted an early, crucial part of the unfolding civil rights movement that would peak in the 1960s.

In the 1940s, African Americans became an integral part of the urban industrial workforce and a prominent part of organized labor. The pro-labor policies of the New Deal (such as the National Labor Relations Board), the formation of the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO) and its inclusion of African Americans, the black community’s World War II Double V campaign, and the federal government’s establishment of the Fair Employment Practices Commission (FEPC) together fueled the surge for unionization and labor activism in the civil rights movement.

### Union Civil Rights Activism

In the 1940s, many working-class blacks and some whites engaged in the civil rights struggle through labor unions, since in the CIO labor leftists and labor liberals cooperated, if not always smoothly, toward the shared goals of economic justice and racial equality. Labor unions worked with moderate, liberal, and radical civil rights organizations in united-front campaigns—temporary alliances forged around targeted issues. For example, it was through such alliances that fifty-five bills against discrimination in employment were introduced in states with large industrial populations in 1945.

### Labor Unions Civil Rights Activism

CIO unions often worked with such civil rights groups as the left-leaning Southern Negro Youth Congress and the National Negro Congress, as well as with local branches of the NAACP. CIO leaders endorsed those groups’ agendas, which included the fight for a permanent Federal Employment Practices Commission (FEPC) at the state and national levels, passage of antilynching legislation, and abolition of the poll tax. In much of the 1940s, the success of the CIO in cities with sizable black populations was attributed to such coalitions.

In such southern cities as Memphis, Richmond, Charleston, Birmingham, Baltimore, Louisville, and Winston-Salem, as well as in northern cities such as Pittsburgh, New York, Chicago,





Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division, Farm Security Administration - Office of War Information Photograph Collection [LC-DIG-ppmsca-01617]

#### Labor activism

Picket line in front of Mid-City Realty Company. South Chicago, Illinois Picket line in front of the Mid-City Equipment Company in South Chicago in the 1940s.

Black labor organizers played key roles in attracting nonunionized workers in industries with heavy concentrations of their own racial group. Such was the case in Winston-Salem, North Carolina, where black workers outnumbered whites by a large margin at the R. J. Reynolds Tobacco Company but found themselves relegated to the dirty, physically demanding jobs. Racial disparities in pay, work conditions, and treatment served not only to privilege all white workers but also to discourage interracial unity at the anti-union company. According to Korstad, CIO efforts to unionize the Reynolds plant succeeded after two years of undetected persuasion by two black organizers from the leftist Southern Tenant Farmers Union. The organizers' message of black dignity and the right to unionize as an act of racial self-determination paid off in 1943, when black women stemmers revolted. The women, tired of their low wages and worsening conditions caused by a work speedup during a period of labor shortage, launched a work-stoppage and strike.

**R. J. Reynolds in  
Winston-Salem**

The strike proved so successful that eight thousand black workers joined the United Cannery, Agricultural, Packing and Allied Workers of America (UCAPAWA). By 1944 blacks won the fight to become Local 22 of the Food, Tobacco, Agricultural and Allied Workers (FTA), the new name of the UCAWAWA. In the FTA, black women, such as Moranda Smith, became union leaders and representatives and sat at the bargaining table with their white employers.



Black labor empowerment in Winston-Salem awakened a sense of assertiveness in the city's black residents. Leftist-influenced Local 22 mobilized a black voter registration drive in 1944 through the CIO Political Action Committee with the demand that black veterans be given the right to vote. Union members argued that black voting rights were a prerequisite to economic and racial advancement in a region where most blacks were disfranchised. A reporter from the black newspaper, the *Pittsburgh Courier*, was so impressed by the union's success in Winston-Salem that he wrote, "If there is a New Negro, he is to be found in the ranks of the labor movement." Local 22 also contributed to the growth in NAACP membership. For the first time, workers supported en masse the NAACP's membership campaign. The Winston-Salem branch grew from a hundred members (largely from the black middle class) in 1942 to nearly two thousand in 1946, becoming the largest branch in North Carolina.

In the 1930s, most blacks in Detroit had been reluctant to join unions and in fact had often functioned as strikebreakers, even though by 1939 the overwhelmingly white UAW had succeeded in forcing all the major automobile manufacturers (except Ford) to recognize it as the legal collective bargaining agent. A massive strike at Ford in April 1941, which in the following month culminated in Ford's recognition of Local 600 of the UAW, led the union to adopt aggressive efforts to unionize black workers. Nearly 9,000 blacks worked in Ford's mechanically efficient River Rouge factory. Their numbers were too large to ignore, but the task of incorporating them into the union posed a dilemma.

#### Ford Auto Workers in Detroit

Black workers perceived a different relationship to Ford than did most whites. The company had sent recruiters into the South, luring black migrants to Detroit with the promise of job opportunity. Ford worked closely with black churches. According to historian Angela Dillard, "black ministers and churches functioned as agents of the Ford employment office." Ford workers and their families made up a sizable portion of every black church congregation, and the recommendation of a black minister determined the fate of a black job applicant. Although some white union members opposed equal opportunities for blacks, the UAW worked hard and strategically, joining forces with the few black ministers who did not feel beholden to Ford.

One such minister, Rev. Charles A. Hill, the pastor of the large Hartford Avenue Baptist Church (present-day Hartford Memorial Baptist Church), boasted of his earlier refusal to accept a large donation from the Ford Company during his church's building campaign—a position he took so that both he and the church could remain independent. Indeed, Hill's church of over 1,200 members became a hub of clandestine union-recruitment meetings. The establishment of Local 600, which by mid-decade boasted 60,000 members, drew ever-increasing numbers of African Americans into its ranks, with blacks serving as UAW staff, as delegates to UAW conventions, and one, Shelton Tappes, as the recording secretary of Local 600.

The UAW began to work closely with the local NAACP, in which pro-union supporters such as Hill were also leaders, as well as with the left-influenced National Negro Congress and Civil Rights Congress. In 1942 the NAACP and CIO eventually became key partners in campaigns for the FEPC and for black occupancy in the Sojourner Truth Housing Project, which would otherwise have become "whites-only" public housing. The concerted effort won blacks the right to live in the housing project, but the victory was met with a

violent white backlash when they attempted to move in. This racial violence was a precursor of the three-day Detroit race riot in June 1943 that brought federal troops to restore peace. The new labor committee of the NAACP contributed to a dramatic growth in working-class members. Nearly 20,000 new members joined the Detroit branch of the NAACP in 1943, surpassing all other branches in the nation. In the 1940s, nearly 100,000 black Detroit workers held union membership.

In New York, labor unions with large black memberships similarly addressed issues of housing discrimination, police brutality, and racial disparities in hiring. They campaigned against the large number of blacks fired from their jobs immediately after the war. Historian Martha Biondi notes that the most actively antiracist unions were led by black leftists in the United Electrical Workers, United Public Workers, National Maritime Union, and Hotel and Restaurant Workers of America. New York did not have a single all-powerful industry that attracted black labor, unlike Pittsburgh (steel), Winston-Salem (tobacco), Detroit (automobiles), or Los Angeles (aircraft). Yet Ferdinand Smith, the vice president of the racially integrated National Maritime Union, was the highest ranking black person in the CIO.

The recruitment of Jackie Robinson to the Brooklyn Dodgers in 1947 occurred against the backdrop of the united-front effort of blacks and whites, leftists and moderates, and labor and civil rights organizations in various parts of the city. Robinson's recruitment is exemplary of labor civil rights activism **Integrating Baseball** over the integration of job sectors—in this case baseball. Although Dodgers owner Branch Rickey recalled the year 1942 as the time when he decided to hire a black player, his recruitment of Robinson occurred later, amid a broad-based community campaign.

The first person to make public the idea of bringing a black player into the major leagues in this most American of sports was the black Harvard Law School graduate Benjamin J. Davis. Ben Davis (as he was generally called) in 1943 ran on the Communist Party ticket to win the vacated City Council seat of Adam Clayton Powell, Jr. (Powell's election to the U.S. Congress had made him the first African American from New York in the House of Representatives.) In 1945, then-incumbent Ben Davis made a second successful bid for the City Council seat, using the baseball theme in his campaign literature to boldly urged hiring of a black player by one of New York's three major-league teams. The cover of Davis's campaign pamphlet presented two photographs side by side: a dead black soldier, obviously killed in action during World War II somewhere in Europe, and a baseball player with one leg raised in a pitcher's stance and his arms wound up for a throw. At the bottom appeared the compelling words: "Good enough to DIE . . . but not good enough to PITCH!"

In May 1945 Davis introduced a resolution, which was unanimously endorsed by the City Council, calling for baseball's integration. According to Martha Biondi, the City Council sent copies of the resolution to the owners of New York's then-three teams, the Dodgers, the Yankees, and the Giants. The Metropolitan Interfaith and Interracial Coordinating Committee and the National Maritime Union made similar demands. Rickey recruited Robinson that summer and signed him with the team in the fall of 1945. However, Robinson started with the Dodgers's minor league club, the Montreal Royals, leading it to the International League championship in 1946. At the opening of the 1947 season, he joined the Dodgers and thus major league baseball, starting at first base. Robinson kept his dignity despite racist taunts from white ballplayers and spectators.



MLB Photos via Getty Images

#### Jackie Robinson in 1947

Jackie Robinson broke the racial barrier in America's favorite pastime and thrilled millions with his dazzling plays.

In 1947 Congress dealt labor a direct blow when it passed, over Truman's veto, the Labor-Management Relations Act (generally known as the Taft-Hartley Act from its cosponsors, Republican Senators Robert Taft of Ohio and Fred Hartley of New Jersey). The Taft-Hartley Act strengthened employers' hands against labor, outlawed a variety of strikes and the "closed shop" (the requirement that workers had to join a union in order to hold a job), and cracked down on other union practices disliked by conservatives. It also required union officials to declare that they were not communists.

The legislation proved sufficiently antagonistic toward labor interests that AFL president George Meany and CIO president Walter Reuther, both staunch anticommunists, overcame their institutional rivalry and merged their organizations. With the formation of the AFL-CIO in 1955, two African Americans, A. Philip Randolph and Willard Townsend, were elected vice presidents of the new organization.

Government policies and growing anticommunist popular sentiment doomed the leftist component of the southern labor and civil rights movements. The CIO purged its leftist white and black workers. After 1947, Winston-Salem's Local 22 of the Food, Tobacco, Agricultural and Allied Workers lost its standing with the National Labor Relations Board. This turn of events, plus the mechanization of tobacco production and black

layoffs, led to Local 22's downfall. Nor did the CIO's much-heralded "Operation Dixie" unionization drive between 1946 and 1953 fare any better in the Cold War South. After a few early successes, Operation Dixie's drive to unionize an interracial southern workforce proved to be an uphill, ultimately unsuccessful battle. The rhetoric of anti-unionism, anti-communism, and anti-integration was interchangeably used to defeat the CIO effort.

White southerners noticed that the most successful interracial organizing had occurred in leftist CIO unions—for example, the FTA among tobacco workers, which had a racially integrated leadership and promoted racially integrated picket lines. Thus southern state and local governments, employers, churches, police, news media, white supremacist organizations, and in general white public opinion all sought to preserve and protect the racial and economic status quo of segregation. CIO organizers, who often relied on strategies effective in the North, did not fully understand the limits of those strategies in the context of the South's racial culture and labor conditions. Operation Dixie's demise left African Americans in that region without a vigorous protagonist in the house of labor. The perception

was sufficiently widespread for any white person in the South who supported black rights to be associated automatically with communism even if not a communist. This presented a serious dilemma to any white supporter of integration in the South, as well as to any organization that challenged Jim Crow laws. In southern states, fighting segregation was cause enough to be branded un-American.

Amid the national anticommunist uproar of the late 1940s and early 1950s, prominent New York leftists lost leadership positions in the labor movement. Ferdinand Smith was ousted from the National Maritime Union and consequently from his high-ranking office within the national CIO leadership. The FBI **The Demise of Left-Labor Civil Rights** arrested Smith in 1949 and deported him back to his native Jamaica in 1951. In July 1948, eleven national leaders of the Communist Party, including New York City Councilman Ben Davis (who had just run for re-election) were arrested under the Smith Act. In the fall of 1949, the NAACP made clear its anticommunist position while planning a national mobilization for congressional passage of civil rights legislation. The successful mobilization brought more than 4,000 delegates from organizations across the nation to Washington. However, the leftist Civil Rights Congress was barred from participating. In response to the disgruntled CRC chairman William Patterson, Roy Wilkins of the NAACP made clear that leftist politics were unwelcome and a detriment. Wilkins stressed that “in the present Civil Rights Mobilization we have no desire for that [leftist] kind of cooperation, or that kind of unity.” The NAACP was also advised by the CIO to exclude certain unions. At its annual meeting in 1950, the organization took a firmer stand. NAACP membership overwhelmingly voted for a resolution that would empower its board of directors to investigate local branches and suspend any dominated by communists. Warning against “wild accusations,” Walter White told his members “we do not want a witch hunt . . . but we want to be sure that we, and not the communists, are running [the NAACP].”

Labor civil rights reached a highpoint in the mid-1940s, but worker activism did not disappear. The labor movement in Detroit challenges the interpretation that anticommunism and racial conservatism everywhere silenced the voice of **Detroit's Labor Civil Rights** workers in the civil rights movement of the 1950s through 1960s.

Indeed, historian Heather Anne Thompson argues for the continuation of labor civil rights in Detroit during the Cold War era. Thompson's analysis of black caucuses within labor unions, and particularly the inner-workings and at times radical confrontational strategies of the black Trade Union Leadership Council (TULC) within the larger, predominantly white United Auto Workers (UAW), reveals the ways Detroit's black workers continued to engage in civil rights issues of police brutality and their own mistreatment by racist white foremen during the Cold War era. The TULC also organized black voters at the workplace. Thompson writes: “Detroit—arguably more than cities usually thought to epitomize the 1960s, such as Berkeley—witnessed militant left-wing activism in virtually every realm of civic and labor life. Detroit experienced the same intense conflicts over housing, education, and law and order as those that raged nationally during this decade, but it also exploded in countless battles at the point of production.”

## Truman and Civil Rights

In 1946 President Truman appointed several interracial committees of distinguished Americans to inquire into the condition of civil rights and of higher education, as well as



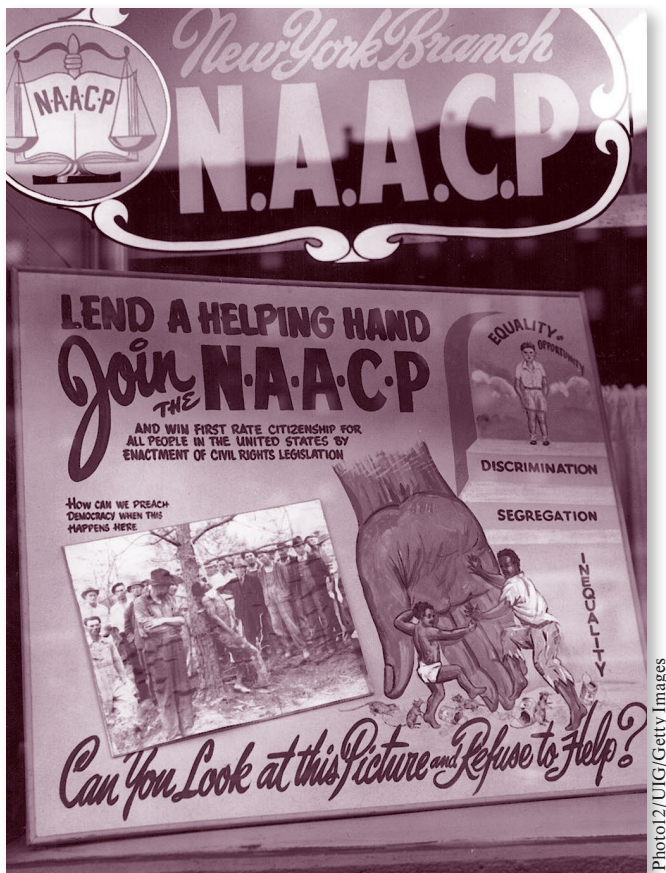


Photo 12/UiG/Getty Images

#### 1948 NAACP poster

In the postwar years, the NAACP launched annual campaigns to recruit members. This 1948 poster is typical of their appeal.

to recommend improvements. The higher education committee's report, published in 1947, called for eliminating inequalities in educational opportunities and for ending all forms of discrimination in higher education. That same year, the civil rights committee's report, *To Secure These Rights*, demanded "the elimination of segregation, based on race, color, creed, or national origin, from American life"—that is, ending discrimination and segregation in public education, employment, health care, housing, the military, public accommodations, and interstate transportation.

News of the civil rights committee's report and excerpts from it were featured in black and white newspapers throughout the United States. African Americans read its strongly worded condemnation

of lynching and its denunciation of various forms of racial discrimination. Radio stations devoted time to discussing it. More than a million copies of the published report were distributed and sold. Civic groups held workshop discussion groups and forums on the report. NAACP lawyer Thurgood Marshall described *To Secure These Rights* as having an unparalleled and historic impact. "The problem of the Negro and other minority groups," he declared, "is now before the public in a manner never equaled before."

In the same years that Truman proclaimed it America's duty to lead and defend the free world

internationally, he charted a new racial agenda at home. Speaking from the Lincoln Memorial in June 1947, he declared: "We must make the Federal Government a friendly, vigilant defender of the rights and equalities of all Americans. . . . Our National Government must show the way." Impressed with the president's words, the Committee on Civil Rights quoted them in *To Secure These Rights*. Never before had there been such fervent executive advocacy of racial equality; even Abraham Lincoln, who ended slavery, did not support racial equality.

Through Executive Order 9980, Truman required fair employment in the federal government. "The principles on which our Government is based require a policy of fair employment throughout the Federal establishment without discrimination because of race, color, religion, or national origin," he declared. Truman also publicly committed himself to integrating the armed services, and in 1948, he issued Executive Order 9981, abolishing racial discrimination in the United States military. Acting on this, the Army adopted a new policy in 1949, opening all positions to qualified personnel without regard to race or color and abolishing the racial quota. The Navy and Air Force adopted similar policies. In 1948, Truman had appointed a committee to study how integration was to be achieved. The



## Window in Time



### The Right to Equality of Opportunity

It is not enough that full and equal membership in society entitles the individual to an equal voice in the control of his government; it must also give him the right to enjoy the benefits of society and to contribute to its progress. The opportunity of each individual to obtain useful employment, and to have access to services in the fields of education, housing, health, recreation and transportation, whether available free or at a price, must be provided with complete disregard for race, color, creed, and national origin. Without this equality of opportunity the individual is deprived of the chance to develop his potentialities and to share the fruits of society. The group also suffers through the loss of the contributions which might have been made by persons excluded from the main channels of social and economic activity.

Source: *To Secure These Rights*, the Report of the President's Committee on Civil Rights, 1947, p. 9.

committee's report, *Freedom to Serve* (1950), outlined the plan. With very few incidents to mar the transition, the armed services of the United States moved steadily toward integration, which was implemented during the Korean War (1950–1954).

Conservative southern Democrats were outraged with many of Truman's liberal Fair Deal policies, and especially with the steps he was taking to advance desegregation. In 1948 some of these southerners walked out of the Democratic Party convention and formed the States' Rights Democratic Party, promptly labeled the "Dixiecrats" by the press and the public. The Dixiecrats nominated South Carolina governor J. Strom Thurmond for the presidency, hoping that he would siphon off enough southern electoral votes to throw the election into the House of Representatives, where the South could bargain with the Republican and Democratic candidates to back off supporting civil rights.

Truman's prospects in the 1948 election looked dim. The Republicans had swept the 1946 midterms, and polls showed that the president's popularity had dwindled. For president, the Republicans nominated the bland but competent governor of New York, Thomas E. Dewey, who had a good record of support for civil rights. In the run-up to the election, Dewey seemed far ahead of Truman in the polls. Not only did Truman face the defection of southern Democrats, but there was also an insurgency on the left.

Liberal and left-wing Democrats were split, with Henry Wallace—Roosevelt's secretary of agriculture in the 1930s and his vice president for one term—advocating a strongly liberal agenda at home and opposing the Cold War with the Soviet Union abroad. Wallace also staunchly supported civil rights. Especially because of his views on foreign policy, he was often portrayed by his opponents as a "Red" sympathizer. After being fired from Truman's cabinet for opposing the Cold War, Wallace was nominated for the presidency by a revived Progressive Party. But Wallace did win considerable support among black

voters—many of whom were not leftists—because of his anti-segregation and anticolonialism positions.

When the votes were counted on Election Day 1948, however, Truman was the surprise winner, confounding pollsters and pundits who had almost unanimously predicted Dewey's victory. So confident of that outcome had the experts been that polling stopped two weeks before the election. Thus the polls missed a massive, last-minute shift of labor, farm, and liberal Jewish voters back to Truman as the heir of FDR's New Deal. But the black vote was also decisive—and Truman got more than two-thirds of it. He had been the first presidential candidate in history to campaign in Harlem, and African Americans embraced Truman's liberal civil rights program for the future and gave him their votes, deserting both Wallace and Dewey. Blacks had come to believe in Truman's rhetoric for confronting the dilemma between national creed and practice and endorsed his liberal civil-rights agenda. In great measure, his victory was due to black support.

In 1952, after announcing his retirement from office, Harry Truman gave the Howard University commencement address, in which he called for a civil rights program backed "by the full force and power of the Federal Government" to end discrimination against minorities. He declared that the more the nation practiced the belief in equality, "the stronger, more vigorous, and happier" it would become.

#### The Howard University Address

Civil rights liberals applauded the president but nonetheless admonished him that America could assure its global credibility as leader of the free world only with laws and policies that refuted charges of bigotry and discrimination—as the NAACP's leader Walter White told Truman, with laws and policies that showed the world that "we were constantly at work to narrow the margin between our protestations of freedom and our practice of them." America was on trial.

Legal historian Mary Dudziak has linked the Truman Administration's Cold War policies to civil rights advances in the courts. Correspondence between the leaders of the State Department and the Attorney General's office disclose their discomfort with the Soviet Union's ridiculing of American hypocrisy on the world stage—in fact, with the American dilemma, described earlier by Gunnar Myrdal. Truman's President's Committee authored the report *To Secure These Rights*, which exhorted: "Our foreign policy is designed to make the United States an enormous, positive influence for peace and progress throughout the world. We have tried to let nothing, not even extreme political differences between ourselves and foreign nations, stand in the way of this goal. But our domestic civil rights shortcomings are a serious obstacle." In several amicus curiae (friend of the court) briefs, the Justice Department quoted from *To Secure These Rights* as it provided arguments in support of the position of NAACP's lawyers in key civil rights Supreme Court cases, beginning first with the government's amicus brief in the restrictive covenant case of *Shelley v. Kraemer* (1948) and continuing through various higher education cases such as *McLaurin v. Oklahoma State Regents* (1950) and the integration of the University of Texas Law School in *Sweatt v. Painter* (1951) to the desegregation of public education in *Brown v. Board* (1954).

## Fighting for Civil Rights in the Courts

In the 1930s and 1940s, the NAACP legal team of Charles Houston, Thurgood Marshall, Robert L. Carter, and other black attorneys fought case by case in the courts for voting

rights, equality in teacher salaries, integrated schools and public transportation, employment equality, and equal access to housing.

The individual most responsible for developing the strategy for this all-out legal attack was Charles Hamilton Houston. One of the nation's earliest prominent black lawyers, Houston graduated from Harvard Law School in 1919, having been the first black student to be elected to the editorial board of the elite *Harvard Law Review*. He returned to his native Washington, D.C., where he practiced law with his father in the firm Houston and Houston from 1924 until his death in 1950. Houston taught and held a deanship at the Howard University Law School. His students Thurgood Marshall, Oliver Hill, and others joined him in civil rights litigation after he became special counsel to the NAACP.

Houston is credited with developing the long-range legal strategy that eventually overturned the “separate but equal” doctrine of the Supreme Court’s *Plessy v. Ferguson* (1896). His biographer Genna Rae McNeil argues that he weighed two choices—to attack the doctrine head-on or to take a long-range approach that would lay the groundwork for the final assault. Houston decided on the second strategy.

As counsel to the NAACP from 1935 to 1940, Houston successfully argued numerous racial discrimination cases before the Supreme Court. After returning to private practice in Washington, D.C., in 1938, Houston assisted Thurgood Marshall, now the head of the NAACP legal team. Some of the famous civil rights cases in which Houston continued to be involved included *Smith v. Allwright* (1944), a voting rights case that led to outlawing the Texas white primary; *Shelley v. Kraemer* (1948), the housing case that overturned restrictive covenants; and the employment cases *Steel v. Louisville and Nashville Railroad* (1944) and *Tunstall v. Brotherhood of Locomotive Firemen and Enginemen* (1944), which tackled the racial discriminatory practices of unions, certified by government agencies, toward their black members.

Houston’s inspiring leadership was based on his belief in the lawyer as “social engineer.” The black lawyer, Houston told his students and colleagues, had a duty to be an advocate and instrument for racial equality. Indeed, historian Patricia Sullivan’s comprehensive study of the NAACP reveals that Houston and his protégé traveled throughout the South—functioning much like field workers. They attracted members into the branches, worked with local lawyers, mobilized residents to target discriminatory practices for local protest, and built support for the national NAACP agenda. In newspaper articles and in the *Crisis* Houston offered instruction with such titles as “How to Fight for Better Schools.” He also advised communities about finding suitable plaintiffs for cases, raising funds, and launching suits.

Community mobilization of this sort could be seen in Texas around the issue of voting rights. The courtroom contest that finally culminated in *Smith v. Allwright* was preceded by other cases led by the NAACP in the state over the course of several years. In preparation for *Smith v. Allwright*, twelve hundred delegates met in Corpus Christi to discuss and pledge monetary and other support for this voting rights challenge.

Of particular interest to local communities in the 1930s and 1940s was the legal assault on segregated public higher education. In communication with NAACP lawyers, African American communities in the South began to strategize around the problem of graduate level and professional school programs of public (state) universities that refused to admit their own black

Battling Jim Crow in Higher Education

residents. As legal victories mounted, Houston and Marshall felt ever more emboldened to challenge Jim Crow. Sullivan writes:

Local groups in communities around the South were investigating expenditures on education, appearing before local and state education boards to protest inequities. In some cases they secured additional funding for facilities and bus transportation; in others, such as Muskogee, Oklahoma, and Baltimore County, Maryland, legal challenges to discrimination at the elementary and secondary level were under way. Local groups in Jacksonville, Florida; Mobile, Alabama; and Atlanta, Georgia, were working to equalize teachers' salaries, and Thurgood Marshall spent time in Virginia and North Carolina at the request of several groups preparing to test salary differentials in those states.

In 1936 Houston and Marshall won a case against the University of Maryland in which the Maryland Court of Appeals ordered that a black student, Donald Gaines Murray, be admitted to the university's law school. Murray, a resident of Baltimore, sued Raymond A. Pearson and other officers and members of the Board of Regents of the University of Maryland to admit him into the law school. Murray had graduated with a bachelor of arts degree from Amherst College in 1934 and met all the standards for admission to the law school except color. Drawing on an argument that Gunnar Myrdal's



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Thurgood Marshall, Donald Gaines Murray, and Charles Houston

*An American Dilemma* would make a decade later, Marshall argued: “What’s at stake here is more than the rights of my client. It’s the moral commitment stated in our country’s creed.”

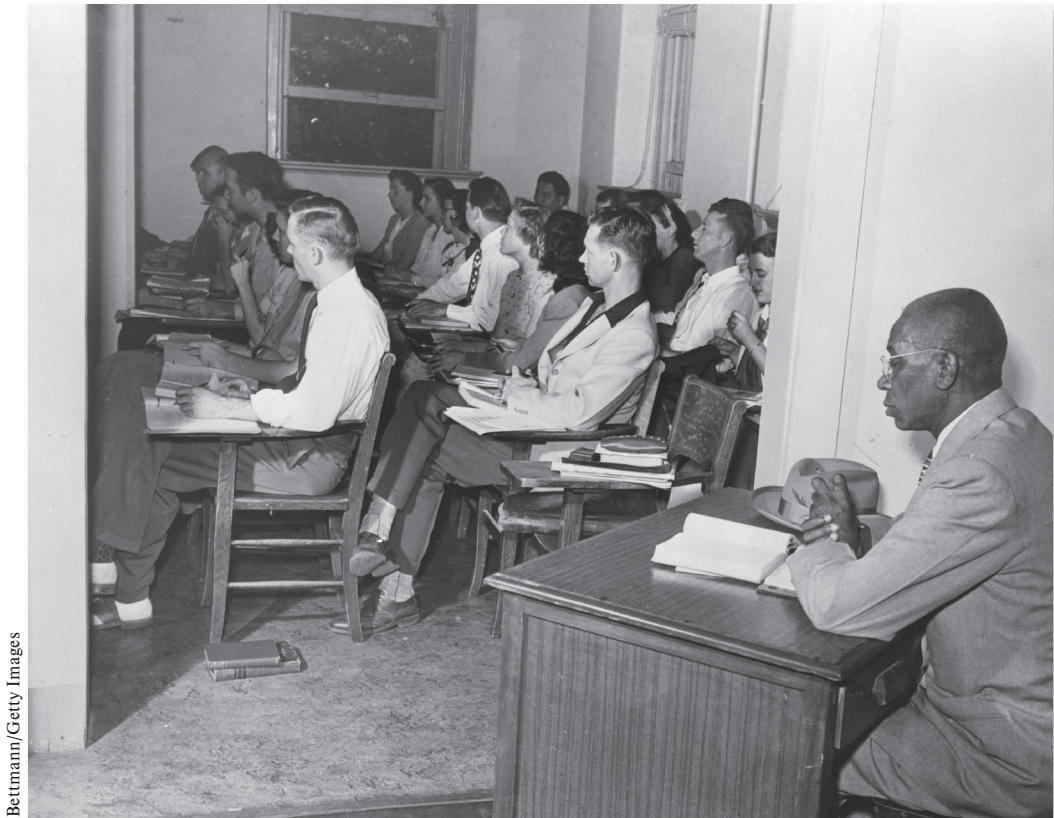
The university’s lawyers argued that the admission of blacks was not required, since the Fourteenth Amendment permitted the segregation of races in the realm of education, and it was the stated policy and practice of the state of Maryland to segregate blacks. The university sought to remedy the case by promising in the future to build a separate law school for blacks. The court ordered Murray’s immediate entrance, however, noting that the state at that time had only one law school. The Murray case, like others to follow, referred to the specific state under litigation, and thus the fight against Jim Crow in higher education had to be waged on a state-by-state basis.

The next significant step toward providing graduate and professional training for African Americans grew out of the decision of the Supreme Court in the case of *Missouri ex rel. Gaines v. Canada, Registrar of the University et al.* In 1936 Lloyd Gaines, a state resident, applied for admission to the University of Missouri’s law school. When rejected, he took his case to the courts, and when the state courts denied him relief he appealed to the federal courts. In the decision of the Supreme Court in 1938, Chief Justice Charles Evans Hughes stated that it was the duty of the state to provide education for all its citizens and provisions must be made within the state. To provide legal education for white residents within the state and to fail to do so for blacks “is a denial of the equality of legal right to the enjoyment of the privilege which the State has set up, and the provision for the payment of tuition fees in another State does not remove the discrimination.” The Supreme Court gave Houston the victory. Unfortunately, Gaines disappeared before ever attending the law school.

But legal victories continued to mount. In 1946 Ada Sipuel sought admission to the law school of the University of Oklahoma. The U.S. Supreme Court ordered the state to provide facilities for her, and the university regents arranged for the establishment of a separate law school. But she declined to attend this institution, which had been set up within two weeks, and began the litigation all over again. Finally, in 1949 Sipuel won admission to the university law school. Meanwhile George W. McLaurin, who already held a master’s degree, was admitted as a Ph.D. candidate to the University of Oklahoma’s graduate school of education. His case drew public attention, because he was not treated equally. He was required to sit separately and away from the other students and assigned to special tables in the library and the cafeteria. McLaurin sued to remove those restrictions, since they handicapped his efforts to study, learn, and interact with other students.

Black communities across the nation closely followed the McLaurin case. According to Robert Carter, a crucial member of the NAACP legal team, a complication arose when certain sections of the black community began to question whether the NAACP should take the case. A columnist for the *Pittsburgh Courier* editorialized for the newspaper’s national black readership that McLaurin’s case might be considered too insignificant by the Supreme Court, given that he was already enrolled in the school. The reporter worried that the Court might rule against him, thus setting back another pending case as well as breaking the string of victories. In response, Marshall called a conference at Howard University to alert the public that the case would continue. On June 5, 1950, the Supreme Court ordered an end to the University of Oklahoma’s segregation practices.





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**George W. McLaurin, a 54-year-old African American student, sits in an anteroom, apart from other students, as he attends class at the University of Oklahoma in 1948.**

This victory solidified even greater respect for the NAACP Legal Defense and Education Fund, Inc. (LDF), as the legal team was now identified.

On the same day as the *McLaurin* decision, the Supreme Court ordered the law school of the University of Texas to open its doors to Heman Sweatt, a black applicant. Texas, along with several other southern states, had begun creating separate law schools for African Americans, hoping to get around the problem of equalization. The Court was persuaded otherwise by Marshall. Chief Justice Fred M. Vinson's opinion indicated that the Texas plan to create a new, well-equipped but separate law school for blacks did not make the school equal to its older white counterpart because of the latter's alumni, reputation, and other "relevant intangibles." *McLaurin*, and to a greater extent *Sweatt*, revealed the beginning of a shift in the NAACP's legal strategy—away from arguments based on equalization (the sheer denial of equal facilities) to an attack on the very premise behind segregated education.

To white southerners, these Court rulings were frightening. The legal assault on Jim Crow left little doubt that, in time, all public institutions of higher education would open to African Americans. The University of Arkansas had already voluntarily admitted its first black in 1947. In 1951 the University of Louisville absorbed the Municipal College for Negroes and hired one black professor. Within a few years, either voluntarily or by court order, several southern state universities were admitting African Americans.

Wherever it was maintained, separate and unequal education had immeasurable effects on both white and black populations. In 1951 nine southern states revealed a glaring disparity between per pupil expenditures for blacks and whites. In Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Maryland, Mississippi, North Carolina, Oklahoma, and South Carolina, the average expenditure was \$135.60 per white student and \$74.50 per black student. The differential for school property was even greater. Both friends and foes of segregation in education conceded that the bitterest fight would be waged on the level of elementary and secondary schools—and that fight was not long in coming. Perhaps no question in twentieth-century America aroused more interest at home and abroad than the debate about the constitutionality of segregated public schools.

The Battle against Separate  
but Equal

Black schools in the South had suffered horribly during the Depression, when construction of new school buildings stopped almost entirely, teaching staffs were cut to the point where effective teaching was impossible, and miserably low salaries were slashed even further. While no southern community could afford to cut its educational expenditures without seriously impairing the effectiveness of its program, the slightest cut in African American education often had the effect of taking away the barest essentials in the educational program, including the teacher.

As migrants moved north and west in the twentieth century, their children continued to find segregated schools. Few states followed the lead of New York, which in 1900 prohibited separate schools. New Jersey, Ohio, Illinois, and Indiana had some integrated high schools but not elementary schools. Most northern states were inclined to provide separate schools for blacks, especially where white patrons brought pressure to bear on school officials. In Kansas and Arizona, racially separate education was mandatory only on the elementary level, but in both these states, separate schools at the secondary level were common.

Where separate high schools were established in large cities, such as Gary and Indianapolis, Indiana, the schools constructed for the use of African Americans were modern and adequate in almost every detail. Some suggested that equalization through meticulous care in the construction of exclusive schools for blacks occurred mainly to counter the claim of unequal education, thus forestalling indefinitely the admission of blacks to white elementary and secondary schools. Support for segregation hardened also as white students engaged in strikes and violence to prevent African American students from attending schools open to all, and as white parents kept their children away from school in an effort to force the authorities to set aside separate facilities for blacks.

The South's determination to provide better public schools for African American youths highlighted two dilemmas. First, black schools were so inadequate that it would take years of significant funding to achieve even a semblance of equality; and second, the fight in the courts indicated the Supreme Court's incremental move away from the doctrine of separate but equal.

In 1952 the NAACP took to the Supreme Court five school segregation cases arising in South Carolina, Virginia, Kansas, Delaware, and the District of Columbia. Many organizations entered briefs on behalf of the black students' position, and the Attorney General of the United States urged in his amicus brief that the separate but equal doctrine be struck down, using a foreign policy argument. "Racial discrimination," he declared, "furnishes grist for the Communist propaganda mills, and it raises doubt even among friendly nations as to the intensity of our devotion to the democratic faith."

Scholarly research proved especially useful in litigating the *Brown* decision, for example, when black psychologist Kenneth Clark's doll-test findings served as evidence to show the debilitating psychological effects of segregation on black children's self-esteem.

#### Scholar Activism

NAACP lawyer Robert Carter, who had argued *Brown* at the lower court level in Topeka, Kansas, had been chiefly responsible for encouraging the lawyers' collaboration with social scientists. The partnership between the NAACP litigators and knowledge-oriented scholar activists blossomed in the detailed report "The Effects of Segregation and the Consequences of Desegregation: A Social Science Statement," which was published under Carter's name in the *Journal of Negro Education* in 1953. The report provided a compilation of the most advanced findings from leading social scientists from a number of disciplines. Focused on the effects of segregated schools on individual children along with the effects of the transition to racially integrated schools, the report debunked earlier scholarship. The report's conclusion also listed the many contributors, their sources, and their consensus on the subject matter presented. Through this article in 1953, the *Journal of Negro Education* attested to the importance of scholars in preparing lawyers and other academics, along with black parents and teachers for the upcoming Supreme Court litigation.

The NAACP threw down the gauntlet in *Brown v. Board of Education* and won a historic victory in the Supreme Court on May 17, 1954. *Brown* comprised four cases before the

#### The Brown Decision

Supreme Court—from South Carolina, Virginia, and Kansas, whose district courts held public school segregation to be constitutional, and from Delaware, whose state supreme court took the opposite position, holding that the "equal protection" clause of the Fourteenth Amendment invalidated segregation provisions in the state constitution. On the same day, a second Supreme Court victory went to the NAACP's separate but related case *Bolling v. Sharpe*, which challenged segregated schools in the District of Columbia. In each of the cases that constituted *Brown*, local black lawyers (often leaders in state and regional NAACP chapters) worked closely with Thurgood Marshall, Robert Carter, and others from the New York national office. Most noteworthy was the tremendous courage and sacrifice of the parents of the children who served as plaintiffs in the local cases. They lived under physical threats, and some lost their jobs.

In 1954, however, and after deliberation under the skillful guidance of its newly appointed chief justice, Earl Warren, the Court rendered its historic *Brown* decision, unanimously and unequivocally declaring racially separate public education to be inherently unequal. Segregated public schools, the *Brown* decision stated, deprived African Americans of the equal protection of the laws guaranteed by the Fourteenth Amendment. "Separate educational facilities are *inherently* unequal," Warren wrote for the Court, thus overturning after more than a half-century the separate-but-equal doctrine of the 1896 *Plessy* decision.

The chief justice then conceded that formulation of the integration decrees would present problems of "considerable complexity" because of the great variety of local conditions and thus left the task to the state courts. In its May 31, 1955, ruling that called for "all deliberate speed" in desegregating schools, referred to as *Brown II*, the Supreme Court refused to mandate a timetable for carrying out desegregation, and it disregarded the Justice Department's original recommendation that local officials develop desegregation plans within ninety days after notification. By 1956 integration seemed to be underway in the border states of Maryland, Delaware, Missouri, and Oklahoma. However, in the majority of southern states "all deliberate speed" served to slow down rather than hasten the actual

process of integration. Since the Supreme Court made the federal district courts primarily responsible for oversight of the implementation process, desegregation was thus placed in the hands of white southern federal judges at the district and appellate levels, many of whom fully shared local white prejudices.

Many white southerners expressed virulent and outspoken opposition to *Brown v. Board*. An editorial in a Richmond newspaper called the Supreme Court justices an “inept fraternity of politicians and professors” and declared that the Court had “repudiated the Constitution, spit upon the Tenth Amendment, and rewrote the fundamental law of this land to suit their own gauzy concepts of sociology.” Southern leaders fought school desegregation with numerous plans to avoid compliance, including turning over the public schools to private organizations, criminalizing anyone who attended or taught mixed classes, and encouraging “voluntary segregation.” Early in 1956, the governors of Virginia, South Carolina, Georgia, and Mississippi called on the southern states to declare that the federal government had no power to prohibit segregation, and they demanded the right to “protest in appropriate language, against the encroachment of the central government upon the sovereignty of the several states and their people.” Virginia’s Prince Edward County went so far as to close down its public school system between May 1959 and 1964. White children were educated in private schools, such as the Prince Edward Academy, supported by tuition grants from the state and by tax credits. Black students had no such option and could receive education only by leaving the county or through the efforts of churches that tried to approximate classroom learning, often in their basements.

#### Southern White Opposition

Since the NAACP had led in the fight for desegregation, it soon came under furious attack. The organization was widely denounced in the South as subversive, and in 1956 several states found various legal devices to virtually stop its operations. In Louisiana an injunction was granted that restrained the NAACP from holding meetings until it had filed with the secretary of state a complete list of its membership. A local judge in Alabama granted an injunction against any further activities by the NAACP. The South Carolina general assembly, along with a member of the U.S. Congress called for its classification as a subversive organization.

The late 1950s and the 1960s ushered a new generation of activists onto the civil rights stage. They continued the struggle to end legal (*de jure*) and customary (*de facto*) racial discrimination. This younger, more impatient generation took to the streets, employing to a greater extent than ever before mass but nonviolent confrontational tactics, such as demonstrations, freedom rides, sit-ins, boycotts, marches, and voter registration drives. Local communities throughout the nation refused to wait for court decisions and laws to change. One by one, communities mobilized and together produced a national movement insistent upon freedom now.

## Chapter Summary

In the years during and after World War II, African Americans continued to re-examine the question of black identity, both within the country and with regard to blacks around the world. African Americans became champions of blacks experiencing oppression abroad, even as they continued to fight for equality at home. Much of this forward movement was strengthened by the ties between black workers and organized labor; this fruitful alliance strengthened the position of black workers and therefore black communities. Black writers and artists explored race, which helped keep the cause of racial justice at the forefront of the country's consciousness. Even as the Cold War atmosphere cast suspicion on those who pushed back against the status quo of segregation and inequality, civil rights activists navigated the political and legal systems skillfully and often successfully. The result was major victories in desegregation of the military and in education, which collectively changed the course of America's future.

## Vocabulary Terms

**creed:** a set of beliefs which guides one's actions

**covenant:** an agreement

**social engineering:** the use of centralized planning to manage social change and guide the development of a society

**anthropologists:** people who study of human cultures and their development

**stigma:** a mark of disgrace associated with something or someone

**unassimilable:** incapable of assimilation

**valorization:** to give validity to something



## Chapter Review Questions

1. In 1940s America, what was the prevailing focus of race relations?
  - A) assimilation
  - B) agitation
  - C) separation
  - D) black power
2. What Harvard-trained scholar, who founded the *Journal of Negro History*, is today known as the Father of Black History?
  - A) Walter White
  - B) W.E.B. Du Bois
  - C) Carter G. Woodson
  - D) Lorenzo Dow Turner
3. Why did so many black leaders, many of them intellectuals, so firmly dismiss the culturalist perspective advocated by Herskovits, Woodson, and others?
  - A) They saw it as a distraction from the struggle for inclusion in American life.
  - B) They thought its scientific foundation, established by Herskovits, was unsound.
  - C) They thought it was a “white” idea.
  - D) They feared it would increase white fears of “miscegenation.”
4. What document of the early postwar era included language that referenced the promotion of human rights and fundamental freedoms “without distinction to race, language, or religion”?
  - A) UNESCO’s charter
  - B) the UN charter
  - C) the Universal Declaration of Human Rights
  - D) the Yalta Agreement
5. What American was appointed to serve as director of the Trusteeship Division of the UN and was also the first African American to win the Nobel Peace Prize for his work in mediating the armistice that halted the 1948 Arab-Israeli War?
  - A) Charles Hamilton Houston
  - B) Ralph Bunche
  - C) Julian Huxley
  - D) Ashley Montagu
6. How did the *Appeal*, a 1948 NAACP booklet, characterize racism in Mississippi?
  - A) as a larger threat to the U.S. than the Soviet Union was
  - B) as comparable to apartheid in South Africa
  - C) as violating international law
  - D) as a problem of people of color all over the world.

7. Black workers perceived a different relationship to what automaker than most whites did? (This automaker had actually recruited black workers in the South and worked closely with black churches.)
  - A) Ford
  - B) General Motors
  - C) Chevy
  - D) Chrysler
  
8. When was integration of the U.S. armed forces implemented?
  - A) in 1948
  - B) in 1949
  - C) during the Korean War
  - D) during the Cuban Missile Crisis
  
9. When was the historic *Brown v. Board of Education* case decided?
  - A) 1950
  - B) 1952
  - C) 1954
  - D) 1956
  
10. What did the *Brown II* decision require?
  - A) that schools be desegregated with “all deliberate speed”
  - B) that schools be desegregated immediately or the states in which they were located would lose federal funding
  - C) that federal troops be used to forcibly desegregate schools
  - D) that the Justice Department oversee the “management” of desegregation in the South