Civil Rights Movement

From the beginning, race has been at the heart of the deepest divisions in the United States and the greatest challenges to its democratic vision. Africans were brought to the continent in slavery, American Indian nations were subjected to genocidal wars of conquest, northwestern Mexico was invaded and annexed, Asians were imported as laborers then subjected to exclusionary laws. Black historian W.E.B. DuBois wrote that the history of the 20th Century would be the history of the color line, predicting that anti-colonial movements in Africa and Asia would parallel movements for full civil and political rights for people of color in the United States.

During the 1920s and 1930s social scientists worked to replace the predominant biological paradigm of European racial superiority (common in Social Darwinism and eugenics) with the notion of ethnicity -- which suggested that racial minorities could follow the path of white European immigrant groups, assimilating into the American mainstream. Gunnar Myrdal's massive study *An American Dilemma* in 1944 made the case that the American creed of democracy, equality and justice must be extended to include blacks. Nathan Glazer and Daniel Moynihan argued in *Beyond the Melting Pot* in 1963 for a variation of assimilation based on cultural pluralism, in which various racial and ethnic groups retained some dimension of distinct identity. Following the civil rights movement's victories, neoconservatives began to argue in the 1970s that equal opportunity for individuals should not be interpreted as group rights to be achieved through affirmative action in the sense of preferences or quotas.

**African Americans.** The abolitionist movement used the Civil War to press first for the Emancipation Proclamation in 1863, freeing slaves in the Confederate States, and then for the 13th Amendment abolishing slavery throughout the United States in 1865. A program of Reconstruction under occupation by the Union army protected the right of freed slaves to vote, and radical governments including black officials took office. The Freedmen's Bureau coordinated efforts to set up schools for blacks and establish a system of free labor for their employment, but efforts at land reform were cut short and a sound economic foundation for free blacks was not achieved. The Panic of 1873 and subsequent depression undercut the economic revival of the South. Bargaining for a majority in the electoral college after the indecisive presidential election of 1876, Republican Rutherford Hays agreed to withdrawal of federal troops from the South in 1877, assuring a return to white supremacy. The Reconstruction era constitutional amendments (the 13th, 14th and 15th) were insufficient by themselves to guarantee the protection of rights to Southern blacks. Independent black institutions -- churches, clubs, benevolent societies, schools -- survived, but gains in civil rights were rolled back after 1877 as the "Jim Crow" system of legal segregation was tightened in the South. Mob rule was commonplace; there were 4,742 documented cases of lynchings in the United States between 1882 and 1964 -- 3,445 blacks and 1,297 whites (most of the whites were lynched before 1900). Lynchings didn't drop below 10 per year until 1936. The Supreme Court's ruling in *Plessy v. Ferguson* in 1896 endorsed "separate but equal" as the legal basis of segregation.
Two contrasting approaches to black development were advanced by Booker T. Washington (1856-1915) and W.E.B. DuBois (1868-1963). Washington advocated uplift of Negroes through education and industrial training, acknowledging the strength of systematic segregation by avoiding efforts for political and social equality in the South. Washington interested Northern white philanthropists in supporting his programs, including Tuskegee Institute, and appealed to the Southern planter-industrialist class to see common interests in preparing blacks to work in Southern industry. Washington's ideas influenced the founders of the National Urban League (NUL) in 1910, established to provide assistance to blacks in Northern cities, and would find echoes in later movements for black separatism and black nationalism -- including the rapid rise and fall of Marcus Garvey's United Negro Improvement Association in the 1920s and both Leftist nationalist and black Muslim movements from the mid-1960s forward.

DuBois rejected accommodation and urged protest and agitation for political and social equality. In 1905 he organized the Niagara Movement to restore black Americans' political and civil rights, under attack since the end of Reconstruction, and counter the vocational self-help programs of Booker T. Washington with a movement for equal rights. DuBois was a co-founder of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) in 1909, the first editor of its magazine *The Crisis*, and organizer of the first Pan-African Congress in 1919. Both the NAACP and the NUL were creations of the progressive era. The progressive white co-founders of the NAACP and the NUL, living primarily in New York, were often from families with an abolitionist background. Many would become prominent leaders of other progressive era organizations, including the Fellowship of Reconciliation and the American Civil Liberties Union. To an extent, the NAACP and NUL reflected political and economic alternatives, but they also represented a division of labor within a broader vision of political, social, and economic equality -- the NAACP emphasizing political agitation and legal action for racial equality, and the NUL emphasizing employment opportunities. The NUL not only promoted vocational guidance and training, it strongly supported an end to employment discrimination. For the first half of the 20th Century, the primary vehicle for the continuing black freedom movement was the NAACP, which conducted a three-decade campaign against lynching and began the legal work that would culminate in the Supreme Court's decision in *Brown v. Board of Education* in 1955 that overturned *Plessy's* "separate but equal" doctrine and set the stage for the civil rights movement of the mid-1950s and 1960s.

The vast migration of nearly 5 million African-Americans from the South to the North and West between 1910 and 1960 opened a new window of political opportunity for the civil rights movement. Blacks went from being non-voters in the South to voters in the North, and under the influence of Roosevelt's New Deal began to switch allegiance from the Republicans to the Democrats with the election of 1936.

Reflecting this growing political influence, A. Philip Randolph (a socialist and president of the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters) brought together several black civil rights
groups in his March on Washington Movement in 1940. The threat of the march prompted Roosevelt to issue Executive Order No. 8802 in June 1941, banning discrimination in defense industries and in government, and also setting up a Fair Employment Practices Committee – just in time to open up defense industry jobs to blacks during World War II. After the war, Randolph saw an opportunity to end segregation in the military itself. He threatened to lead a movement among blacks to refuse military service, angering President Harry Truman but convincing him to issue Executive Order 9981, ending segregation in the armed services. Black voters subsequently made the difference in several key states -- including Illinois, Ohio and California -- for Truman's upset victory in the presidential election of 1948.

Following the Supreme Court's decision in *Brown* in 1954, the border South states began desegregating school systems, but the deep South waited to see what the federal government would do about enforcing the ruling. The civil rights movement began with the Montgomery bus boycott, initiated when Rosa Parks was arrested for not surrendering her seat to a white passenger. Parks had been a state and local NAACP leader for several years, and had recently attended a workshop at the Highlander Folk School where participants discussed what they could do to foster change in their communities. Her associate in the Montgomery NAACP, E.D. Nixon (a sleeping car porter and member of Randolph's union) helped mobilize local ministers while Jo Anne Robinson, president of the Women’s Political Council and teacher at Alabama State College, mimeographed leaflets calling for a boycott. Local ministers formed the Montgomery Improvement Association, and selected newcomer Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr. as president.

The year-long bus boycott ended only when in November 1956 the Supreme Court upheld the ruling of the federal district court in *Browder v. Gayle* that Alabama’s law on racial segregation in busses was unconstitutional. This victory sparked the organization in 1957 of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC), an association of ministers committed to furthering the civil rights movement.

In the fall of 1957 the attention of the world was drawn to the effort to integrate Central High School in Little Rock, Arkansas. Arkansas NAACP president Daisy Bates led the legal strategy resulting in nine black students entering the school, protected from mobs by federal troops dispatched by President Dwight Eisenhower.

Tactics for the next stage of the movement were being developed by James Lawson and Glenn Smiley, two ministers on the staff of the Fellowship of Reconciliation, who began working with King and the SCLC in 1958 to conduct workshops on nonviolent direct action. Independently of each other, groups of black college students in Greensboro and Nashville began lunch-counter sit-ins in early 1960, and the movement spread quickly. The SCLC's staffer Ella Baker called a meeting of students involved in the sit-ins, and some 300 showed up at Shaw University in Raleigh over Eastern weekend in 1960, and ended up forming an independent organization, the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC).
The three legs of the civil rights movement in the South were the local NAACP chapter network, the black churches, and the black colleges. Each had its own organizational form -- the NAACP, the SCLC, and SNCC. But other organizations also played important roles, particularly the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE), led by James Farmer. CORE and FOR had sponsored an integrated bus trip through four upper South states in 1947, called the "Journey of Reconciliation." Reviving that idea, Farmer decided to challenge segregated transportation by a "Freedom Ride" through the deep South in 1961. In Birmingham the Freedom Riders were attacked by a mob, with police complicity, in an event that received international press coverage, but Freedom Riders persisted throughout the summer.

As Southern resistance to integration stiffened, A. Philip Randolph led a coalition of civil rights groups that called for a March on Washington for Jobs and Justice in August 1963 to demand passage of the Civil Rights Act. Randolph's colleague Bayard Rustin -- who had worked on the staff of FOR, SCLC and the War Resisters League -- served as the deputy director of the March, which drew a quarter-million people to the reflecting pool between the Washington Monument and the Lincoln Memorial.

Mississippi proved to be a heartland of segregationist resistance. President Kennedy had to federalize the state National Guard to protect James Meredith, who enrolled at Ole Miss in 1962. In June 1963 the NAACP's state field director Medgar Evers was assassinated at his home in Jackson; President Kennedy was killed in Dallas in November. The NAACP, SCLC, SNCC and CORE worked together under the umbrella of the Conference of Federated Organizations (COFO) to conduct a Freedom Vote mock election in 1963 and sponsor the Mississippi Summer Project in 1964. Freedom Summer began with the kidnapping and murders of project volunteer Andrew Goodman and two civil rights workers, Michael Schwerner and James Chaney. President Johnson signed the Civil Rights Act in July 1964.

The Mississippi volunteers persisted, and the summer ended with the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party's widely-publicized unsuccessful challenge to the regular white delegation to the Democratic Party convention in Atlantic City (future delegations would be integrated). It took further demonstrations, violence by police at the Edmund Pettus Bridge in Selma, Alabama, and the march from Selma to Montgomery early in 1965 to build pressure for Congress to pass the Voting Rights Act.

A watershed event in the civil rights movement occurred with the 16-day "walk against fear" from Memphis to Jackson announced in June 1966 by James Meredith, the first black student at the University of Mississippi. Meredith was shot from ambush and hospitalized on the second day of his march, and SCLC and SNCC leaders agreed to take up his march. At evening rallies and during the march, Stokley Carmichael raised the slogan "black power;" SCLC and SNCC led competing chants of "Freedom Now!" and "Black Power!" Separatist sentiment in SNCC pushed young whites out of the movement -- back to campuses and the anti-Vietnam War movement. The rise of black nationalism strained relations between black movement leaders and old allies, including many Jews who had long been strong civil rights supporters. Women were prompted to
reexamine their roles in the civil rights struggle -- reflections which gave a powerful push to the emerging women's liberation movement.

Several of the organizations that emerged in the 1950s and 60s -- including CORE, SCLC, and SNCC -- either failed to survive the next decade or continued with diminished influence. CORE and SNCC both moved entirely to black nationalism, SNCC disintegrating and CORE reduced to marginality. Indeed King's program had floundered when he entered the North, with his Chicago campaign out maneuvered by Mayor Richard Daley. The Poor People's Campaign attempted to address the roots of poverty, but ended in disarray. After King's assassination in Memphis in 1968, SCLC never regained more than regional influence.

Bayard Rustin urged the movement in another direction with his influential *Commentary* article "From Protest to Politics" in 1965, away from protest demonstrations and into politics at every level. Controversial at first, in the end Rustin's logic and advice prevailed; there were 7,500 black elected officials in 1991, who remain an important focus of black political activity. The Congressional Black Caucus (42 black Representatives and one Senator, including 13 women, as of 2007) is the most progressive group of elected officials in American public life. Black elected officials now have a think tank, the Joint Center for Economic and Political Studies, directed by Eddie Williams. The Leadership Conference on Civil Rights, organized in 1950, has emerged as the powerful Washington umbrella lobby organization for the movement. Whitney Young and Vernon Jordan pulled the National Urban League firmly into the civil rights coalition, and the NUL's research department serves as another black think tank. Several black officials have emerged as powerful elected officials in majority white jurisdictions - - Tom Bradley as mayor of Los Angeles, David Dinkins as mayor of New York, and Douglas Wilder as governor of Virginia. Jesse Jackson's Rainbow Coalition pointed the way toward a revival of interracial progressive populism, particularly during his presidential primary campaign in 1988. There are approximately 39.2 million African-Americans in the United States (11.5% of the population in 2004).

**American Jews.** American Jews have made contributions to social reform and Left politics far out of proportion to their numbers (estimated at 5.2 million, under 2% of the population in 2002). Recently they have also contributed to the vital core of neoconservative intellectuals. German Jews were predominant among early immigrants, settling widely across the South and West as well as in the East. Over 2 million Eastern European Jews -- mostly from Russia -- were among the 35 million immigrants who came to the U.S. between 1885 and 1920. Jews were prominent among early socialist and labor leaders: Morris Hillquit of the Socialist Party, Sidney Hillman of the Amalgamated Clothing Workers, and David Dubinsky of the ILGWU.

American Jews have taken a leading role fighting discrimination, helping found the NAACP and the National Urban League (Joel and Arthur Spingarn and Kivie Kaplan together served as presidents of the NAACP for 60 years, from 1915 to 1975). The 1913 trial of Leo Frank in Georgia (and his subsequent lynching in 1915) fueled development of the Anti-Defamation League of B'nai B'rith (ADL); rooted in the experience of anti-
Semitism by Jewish Americans, ADL has opposed all varieties of bigotry in America. The American Jewish Committee (founded 1906) and the American Jewish Congress (1918) are two other important organizations promoting civil rights. Before the end of World War II, Jews were restricted by informal enrollment quotas in private colleges, and few Jews could obtain tenured faculty appointments in American colleges and universities (giving "quotas" a repugnant resonance to this day). Jews also had very limited access to professional firms, businesses, and private clubs controlled by non-Jews. The war against Nazism awakened most Americans to the danger of anti-Semitism, which declined sharply in post-war period. Nevertheless, the resurgence during the 1970s and 1980s of Klan groups, the Aryan Brotherhood, skinhead gangs and other extremists has kept the ADL busy researching hate groups and promoting legislation combating hate crimes.

Just as black nationalism was pushing many whites out of the civil rights movement, the importance of Israel became highlighted for American Jews by the Six Day War in June 1967. Faced with an Egyptian naval blockade and an Arab alliance, Israel destroyed the air forces of its Arab neighbors and occupied Egypt's Sinai Peninsula and Gaza Strip, Jordan's West Bank, and Syria's Golan Heights. In October 1973 Egypt and Syria staged a coordinated attack which left Egypt with a foothold in the Sinai -- and led eventually to the Camp David accord between Israel and Egypt brokered by President Jimmy Carter, and the 1979 peace treaty that returned Sinai to Egypt.

Despite disagreements over Israeli policy toward the Palestinians in the Occupied Territories and the basis for an eventual peace settlement, most American Jews maintain a strong commitment to Israel's survival. Support remained strong for the powerful lobby, American Israel Political Affairs Committee (AIPAC), as well as various political action committees supporting U.S. military and economic assistance to Israel. Despite their economic prosperity, a majority of American Jews remain committed to liberalism, the Democrats, and an inclusive vision of social justice.

**American Indians.** There are some 5.3 million American Indians, Alaskan Natives, and Pacific Islanders (1.6 percent of the population in 2004), who belong to at least 500 tribes (the number currently recognized by the federal government), 307 in the lower 48 states and 197 in Alaska. Understanding the unique situation of Native Americans requires a look at the complex field of Indian law, which has oscillated between sovereignty and dependency in its view of tribal rights. As Europeans colonized North America, they recognized Indian tribes as independent societies capable of defining political and legal relationships through treaties. In a series of Supreme Court opinions written from 1823 to 1832, Chief Justice John Marshall described Indian tribes as quasi-sovereign "domestic dependent nations" subject to federal authority but free of state control. The reality of the unequal relationship would be another matter. Andrew Jackson was elected president in 1824 and proposed a program of voluntary removal of Indians east of the Mississippi to lands in the West. The Indian Removal Act of 1830 compelled Indians to move, with the Cherokee walking the "Trail of Tears" from Georgia to Oklahoma under harsh conditions, and the Choctaw abandoning many millions of acres of traditional lands.
Reversing its position on quasi-sovereignty, the federal government adopted a policy of assimilation with the General Allotment (Dawes) Act of 1887, establishing individual ownership of tribal lands and resulting in millions of acres shifting from Indian to white ownership. Between 1887 and 1934 Indian lands were reduced from 138 million to 48 million acres, of which 20 million acres were arid and economically useless. In a new series of cases between 1882 and 1903, (1882), *U.S. v. Kagama* (1886), and *Lone Wolf v. Hitchcock* (1903) the Supreme Court interpreted tribes as societies without power, essentially wards of the federal government.

As a New Deal reform, Interior Department critic John Collier was named commissioner of Indian Affairs, and supported the Indian Reorganization (Wheeler-Howard) Act of 1934 (IRA), which ended the allotment policy and fostered Indian self-government by authorizing tribal councils with formal, federally approved constitutions and bylaws. Indian traditionalists objected to the Anglo-American form of tribal government under the IRA; when votes were taken, 181 tribes accepted IRA provisions and 77 tribes (including the Navajo) rejected the act.

Reversing field again after World War II, the federal government adopted a policy of termination in 1954, arguing that Indians would do better without federal regulation and paternalism. Termination was halted in 1958, and during the 1960s and 1970s tribes benefited from a new round of federal anti-poverty and economic development programs.

Frustration with federal policy led Indians to seize Alcatraz Island in San Francisco Bay in 1969; the occupation ended with no clear gains in 1971. The militant American Indian Movement briefly occupied BIA offices in Washington in 1972, and staged a major campaign in Wounded Knee, South Dakota -- but failed to oust the elected tribal leaders after battles with the FBI. From the federal legal services program the Native American Rights Fund emerged in 1970 to become the leading authority on Indian law and the primary legal force behind the movement to reclaim the doctrine of tribal sovereignty and confront continuing problems of poverty, discrimination and racism.

**Latinos.** There are 41.3 million people in the U.S. of Latino descent (12.2 percent of the population in 2004), of whom some 60 percent are of Mexican heritage. Latinos (or Hispanics as some activists prefer) have been difficult to organize as a unified constituency because of their diversity of national backgrounds and the scattered geographic locations of different groups. Until recently, Mexican Americans had been concentrated in the Southwestern states of California, Texas, New Mexico, Arizona, and Colorado. Puerto Ricans on the mainland live primarily in New York and New Jersey. Cubans are concentrated in south Florida around Miami, and in New Jersey. Illinois is home to both Mexican Americans and Puerto Ricans. Other Central and South Americans are scattered on the East and West Coasts.

The League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC) was founded in 1929 in Texas as a Mexican American organization emphasizing education for citizenship; in recent years it has reached out to include other Latinos in its membership. LULAC has never established a strong lobbying office in Washington. The American GI Forum was
founded in Texas by Mexican American veterans in 1948 to work for civil rights and voter registration. Political action and voter registration was also emphasized in California by the Community Service Organization formed (CSO) in the early 1950s and the Mexican American Political Association (MAPA) founded in 1958, and in Texas by the Political Association of Spanish Speaking Organizations (PASSO).

The Chicano movement of the mid-1960s developed around student organizations inspired by several new organizing efforts -- Cesar Chavez's United Farm Workers in California; Reies Tijerina's land grant movement in northern New Mexico, Alianza Federal de Mercedes; and Rudolfo "Corky" Gonzalez's Crusade for Justice in Denver. Young Chicanos organized La Raza Unita Party in Texas and the Chicano Moratorium in Los Angeles during the late 1960s, evoking a vision of the legendary land of Aztlan in the U.S. Southwest. What remains of this period are numerous influential community organizations in cities throughout the Southwest, and the National Council of La Raza (NCLR) established as a coordinating body, lobby and think tank in 1968. The Mexican American Legal Defense and Education Fund (MALDEF) was also founded in 1968, and a corresponding Puerto Rican Legal Defense and Education Fund (PRLDEF) in 1972. The Cuban American National Foundation (CANF), founded by Jorge Mas Canosa, is patterned after AIPAC's successful lobbying for Israel; CANF is concerned primarily with U.S. policy toward Cuba, and until recently had been strongly anti-Castro and pro-Republican. CANF may be becoming more moderate as a younger generation, including the late Mas Canosa’s son, Jorge Mas Santos, move into positions of leadership in the Cuban American community.

The Congressional Hispanic Caucus had 21 members as of 2007, all Democratic Representatives, including 4 women (two other women had resigned or suspended membership).

Asian Americans. Some 14 million people of Asian descent (just over 4 percent of the population in 2004) live in the U.S. The widespread stereotype of the "model minority" overlooks the vast variety of individual backgrounds, diverse cultures, languages, educational traditions, and economic classes of at least ten major national or ethnic clusters: Chinese (themselves divided by long-time residents and recent arrivals, dialect groups, and by background from the mainland, Taiwan, or Hong Kong), Japanese, Korean, Filipino, South Asian-Indian (also divided by religion and culture -- Hindu, Muslim and Sikh), Vietnamese, Cambodian, Hmong, Laotian, and Thai. Pacific Islanders include Polynesians, Melanesians, and others. Of the Asian Americans in 1990, 23 percent were Filipino, 19 percent Chinese, 11.7 percent Japanese, 11.2 percent Asian Indian, and 10.9 percent Korean. About 40 percent of all Asian Americans live in California.

The Japanese American Citizens League (JACL) is the Asian American organization with the longest participation in the liberal civil liberties and civil rights network. JACL's sensitivity to civil liberties was heightened during World War II, when many Japanese Americans were evacuated from the West Coast and relocated to internment camps. JACL has led a movement for redress, which obtained an act of Congress in 1983,
providing each former internee with $20,000 in compensation. The Asian American Legal Defense and Education Fund was organized in New York in 1974.

**Arab Americans.** There are some 1.2 million Arab Americans (half of 1 percent of the population in 2000). The first wave arrived with the great immigration around the beginning of the century, mostly Christians from Lebanon and Syria who sought assimilation. A second wave arrived after World War II, from throughout the Middle East, most ethnically conscious and with a greater proportion of Muslims. Many have settled in Dearborn and Detroit, Michigan. Organizations include the National Association of Arab Americans (NAAA), the American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee (ADC) headed by former South Dakota Senator James Abourezk, the Arab American Institute founded by James Zogby in 1985. The Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR), founded in 1994, has a broader constituency than Arab Americans, but they have an important voice in the group.

**Annotated Bibliography**


A number of important autobiographies by leading figures in the civil rights movement are now available, including Ralph Abernathy, *And the Walls Came Tumbling Down* (Harper & Row, 1989); James Farmer, *Lay Bare the Heart* (Arbor House, 1985); John Lewis, *Walking with the Wind* (Harcourt Brace and Co., 1998); and Andrew Young, *An Easy Burden* (HarperCollins, 1996).


For a neoconservative view, see Linda Chavez, *Out of the Barrio: Toward a New Politics of Hispanic Assimilation* (Basic Books, 1991). Following the example of the National Urban League, *The State of Hispanic America* was begun as an annual publication by the National Council of La Raza.
