

The Civil Rights Movement in the Urban South

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Abstract and Keywords

The civil rights movement in the urban South transformed the political, economic, and cultural landscape of post-World War II America. Between 1955 and 1968, African Americans and their white allies relied on nonviolent direct action, political lobbying, litigation, and economic boycotts to dismantle the Jim Crow system. Not all but many of the movement's most decisive political battles occurred in the cities of Montgomery and Birmingham, Alabama; Nashville and Memphis, Tennessee; Greensboro and Durham, North Carolina; and Atlanta, Georgia. In these and other urban centers, civil rights activists launched full-throttled campaigns against white supremacy, economic exploitation, and state-sanctioned violence against African Americans. Their fight for racial justice coincided with monumental changes in the urban South as the upsurge in federal spending in the region created unprecedented levels of economic prosperity in the newly forged "Sunbelt."

A dynamic and multifaceted movement that encompassed a wide range of political organizations and perspectives, the black freedom struggle proved successful in dismantling legal segregation. The passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965 expanded black southerners' economic, political, and educational opportunities. And yet, many African Americans continued to struggle as they confronted not just the long-term effects of racial discrimination and exclusion but also the new challenges engendered by deindustrialization and urban renewal as well as entrenched patterns of racial segregation in the public-school system.

Keywords: Jim Crow, segregation, sit-in, Civil Rights Act of 1964, Montgomery Bus Boycott, Birmingham, urban renewal, housing

A week after Republican Senator Warren G. Harding won the 1920 presidential election in a landslide victory over Governor James M. Cox of Ohio, the New York headquarters of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) received a disturbing letter from Dr. Charles A. McPherson, a resident of Birmingham, Alabama, who served as the general secretary of the local NAACP chapter. The disgruntled activist detailed how registrars had altered their office hours without notice, subjected civil rights organizers to verbal assault and threats of violence, and expunged voter registration applications filed by African Americans. "It seems to be the policy of those in authority,"

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McPherson raged, “to discourage registration and voting among our people.”¹ Of the many civil rights violations endured by African Americans during the 1920 election season, the discriminatory treatment of newly franchised African American women troubled McPherson the most. Five thousand black women in Birmingham applied for voter registration cards in the weeks preceding the election, but only one hundred had their applications approved. In the coming weeks, McPherson assisted the national office of the NAACP in its efforts to reapportion southern representation in Congress.

Over the next two decades, McPherson remained a fearless champion of African Americans’ civil rights. Well respected among blacks within and beyond Birmingham, McPherson tackled a wide range of political issues, including racial discrimination in the labor arena and police brutality. His most profiled activity involved the legal defense of Willie Peterson, a World War I veteran accused of the murder of two white women, and this was also his most courageous. On August 4, 1931, a gunman fatally shot two white women, Jennie Wood and Augustus Williams, and wounded another, Nell Williams, near the woods of Shades Mountain. Even though the lone survivor, Nell Williams, initially described the suspect as a large, light-complexioned African American man, she would later identify Peterson, a dark-skinned man barely 125 pounds, as the assailant. Peterson was arrested and tried for murder. The first trial, which included testimonies from witnesses who confirmed Peterson’s alibi that he was home at the time of the murders, ended in a mistrial as jurors failed to reach a verdict. The prosecution’s case at the second trial was equally weak, yet the jury found the defendant guilty. Peterson was sentenced to death, but Governor Benjamin M. Muller commuted his sentence to life in prison. Throughout his trial and sentencing, Peterson found an invaluable ally in McPherson, who spearheaded the local NAACP’s legal strategy and raised funds for retaining one of the state’s most respected lawyers, John Altman. To intimidate McPherson and the local black community, the Ku Klux Klan paraded through Peterson’s neighborhood. The determined activist pressed ahead in his goal of securing justice for Peterson. “We are not deterred by anything they may do,” McPherson informed the *Norfolk Journal and Guide*. For his efforts in the Peterson case, the NAACP awarded McPherson the Madame C. J. Walker gold award for demonstrating “exceptional loyalty, devotion, and courage in the face of prejudices, handicaps, and dangers of a southern city.”² Thanks to his arduous efforts, the Birmingham chapter boasted a membership of more than one thousand in 1940, no easy feat for a city in the deep South.³

The national office of the NAACP depended heavily on McPherson, who remained a faithful servant of the organization well into his sixties. Unfortunately, on December 9, 1948, McPherson died in a car accident. Four days after his death, mourners packed St. Paul Episcopal Church to pay their respects to the courageous activist who had been at the forefront of the local civil rights struggle for nearly three decades.⁴

The same year local blacks mourned the death of McPherson, the newly formed States Rights Democratic Party, also known as the Dixiecrats, convened in Birmingham for its first convention. On July 17, six thousand people poured into the Birmingham Municipal Auditorium to pledge their allegiance to the Dixiecrats as well as voice their outrage with

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the Democratic National Party (DNP). At its nominating convention in Philadelphia, the DNP put forth a platform endorsing the abolition of the poll-tax, the passage of anti-lynching legislation, and a fair employment practices bill. Under the leadership of South Carolina Governor Strom Thurmond and Governor Fielding Lewis Wright of Mississippi, the Dixiecrats stated in unequivocal terms their opposition to civil rights:

We stand for the segregation of the races and the racial integrity of each race; the constitutional right to choose one's associates; to accept private employment without governmental interference, and to earn one's living in any lawful way. We oppose the elimination of segregation employment by federal bureaucrats called for by the misnamed civil rights program. We favor home rule, local self-government and a minimum interference with individual rights.⁵

Pledging to defend their way of life, Dixiecrats predicted that the civil rights platform of the DNC "would be utterly destructive of the social, economic and political life of the Southern people." Their activism reflected not just their frustration with the direction of the Democratic Party but also their fear of the growing militancy of African Americans during and immediately after World War II. With the entry of the United States into war, African Americans intensified their struggle for freedom, justice, and equality in all areas of public life. "Double Victory" emerged as a central rally cry from African American communities across the nation as blacks insisted that the US government commit itself to the defeat of not only Nazism abroad but also stringent white racism within its borders, particularly in the Jim Crow South. The slogan "Double V" also encompassed the anticolonial perspectives of African American activists, along with those of black newspapers like the *Chicago Defender* and the *Pittsburgh Courier*, who were committed to the decolonization struggles led by oppressed groups in India, Asia, and Africa.⁶ The rising militancy of African Americans was not lost on many high-ranking officials in the Democratic Party, which had become increasingly dependent on the black vote.

A year before the DNC convention, President Harry Truman appeared on the verge of pushing the nation closer to its democratic ideals. "It is my deep conviction that we have reached a turning point in the long history of our country's efforts to guarantee freedom and equality to all of our citizens," noted Truman in his historic address at the NAACP's 1947 convention. "Our immediate task is to remove the last remnants of the barriers which stand between millions of our citizens and their birth right. There is no justifiable reason for discrimination because of ancestry, or religion, or race or color."

Notwithstanding Truman's optimistic outlook, as well as his landmark executive orders that outlawed segregation in the armed forces and federal employment, African Americans faced an uphill battle in their struggle for racial and social justice. Nowhere was this battle more visible than in the urban South, where courageous women and men not only challenged the legal, political, and economic underpinnings of Jim Crow segregation and racial exclusion but also provided the nation and the larger world with alternative visions of justice, freedom, and human possibility.

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No analysis of the civil rights movement's dismantling of the Jim Crow system would be complete without serious engagement in broader regional trends, particularly the growing power of white racial moderates. As historian Matthew Lassiter argues in his seminal study, *Silent Majority: Suburban Politics in the Sunbelt South*, "While civil rights activism and federal intervention proved to be necessary ingredients in the process of dismantling Jim Crow, the actions of white moderates were critical in undermining the defiant politics of white supremacy and constructing a grassroots alternative to the racial caste system." These racial moderates played a significant role in the fall of Jim Crow, but they also contributed to the erection of new racial barriers. As Lassiter rightly points out: "The political economies of southern metropolises such as Atlanta and Charlotte and Richmond increasingly resembled their sprawling counterparts in the North and West, with pervasive structures of racial and class segregation imbedded in the built environment rather than enforced by Jim Crow legislation."⁷ The successes and failures of the civil rights movement in the urban South not only represent one of the most important social revolutions in 20th-century history but also explain many of the social and political inequalities of our contemporary moment.

The Urgency of Now: The Montgomery Bus Boycott

If we embrace historian Vincent Harding's metaphoric rendering of the black freedom struggle as a river, then 1955 was a year in which its tributaries roared with renewed intensity. On the heels of the Supreme Court's historic *Brown v. Board of Education* decision (1954) declaring the separate but equal segregationist doctrine unconstitutional, thousands of black southerners launched individual and collective challenges against the racial status quo. Across the urban South, African Americans confronted city officials to desegregate the public-school system, demanded an end to discriminatory hiring practices, and challenged Jim Crow practices on public and private conveyances. One place in which local whites definitely noticed an upsurge in black activism was Montgomery, Alabama. A destination spot for thousands of black Alabamians migrating from the countryside to the city, Montgomery witnessed a substantial increase in its African American population in the postwar period. Many of these migrants performed critical roles in one of the most impressive campaigns in modern US history: the Montgomery Bus Boycott.

On Thursday afternoon, December 1, 1955, Rosa Louise McCauley Parks, a seamstress at Montgomery Fair department store, boarded the Cleveland Avenue bus with plans for a quiet evening dinner with her husband, Raymond, and her mother, Leora McCauley, who lived with the couple. During the previous months, public transportation had been a site of political protest as several African Americans had refused orders to vacate their seats for white passengers. In fact, local civil rights leaders had contemplated using two of the protesters, Claudette Colvin and Mary Louise Smith, as possible test cases in challenging the constitutionality of the city's segregation laws. Like most African Americans in the city, Rosa Parks detested the treatment of African Americans on the city buses. Moreover,

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the seasoned activist, who was actively involved in the local National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), had experienced her share of run-ins with local bus drivers. Even though African Americans constituted 75 percent of the Montgomery Bus Line's customers, they were subjected to the draconian regulations of Alabama's segregation laws as well as the whims of white bus drivers, who had been granted police power to arrest anyone in violation of the law.

One bus driver who readily exercised his police powers was James Blake. On December 1, he demanded that Rosa Parks and three other black passengers relinquish their seats after the white section had filled to capacity. Seated in the middle section of the bus, the four African American passengers occupied what historian Jeanne Theoharris refers to as liminal space.⁸ The passengers initially ignored Blake's orders, but after he repeated his demands three of the riders exited their seats. Forty-two-year-old activist Rosa Parks, however, remained seated in a moving act of political defiance and self-determination. "Are you going to stand up?" Blake queried Parks as she remained in her seat. To his query, the determined seamstress replied, "No."⁹

Angered by her defiance, Blake exited the bus and called his supervisor, who recommended throwing Parks off the bus. Instead of simply discharging her from the bus, Blake pushed for her arrest by summoning nearby police. Upon their arrival on the scene, police officers F. B. Day and D. W. Mixon consulted with Blake and then arrested Parks (see photo of her booking). Once fingerprinted and booked at the city jail, Parks phoned home and informed her mother of her arrest. Her mother relayed the news to her husband, who rushed immediately to the jail. Within a matter of minutes, civil rights activist and labor leader E. D. Nixon, who served as president of the local chapter of the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters, received word of Parks's arrest. So, too, did JoAnn Robinson, head of the Women's Political Council and longtime opponent of Montgomery's segregated bus policies. Once they secured Parks's release from jail, Robinson, Nixon, and other local activists put in motion a plan to challenge the city's segregation laws.

Robinson, a professor at Alabama State University, immediately sprang to action, enlisting students to distribute thirty thousand leaflets informing the black community of Parks's arrest and requesting them to stay off the buses Monday morning.

Don't ride the buses to work, to town, to school, or anywhere on Monday. You can afford to stay out of school for one day if you have no other way to go except by bus. You can also afford to stay out of town for one day. If you work, take a cab, or walk. But please, children and grown-ups, don't ride the bus at all on Monday. Please stay off all buses Monday.

The leaders created the Montgomery Improvement Association (MIA) to better coordinate their efforts. They appointed as president a recently arrived minister from Atlanta: Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. At the boycott's outset, the MIA did not call for an end to segregated seating but simply improved and more courteous service for black passengers, the hiring of African American drivers on black routes, and a first come, first served seating pol-

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ity. Over time, however, the movement's goals included the total elimination of segregated accommodations.

Lawyer Fred Gray soon filed a suit against Mayor William Gayle on behalf of Aurelius Browder, challenging the constitutionality of the city's segregation ordinance. As the case made its way through the courts, black Montgomery continued the boycott of public buses. To ensure the movement's success, local leaders held public meetings filled with dynamic singing and preaching, as well as powerful speeches on what their movement meant for not just the local community but all of black America.

The personal sacrifices of black working women and men were as deeply moving as the fiery speeches delivered by the well-known leaders of the boycott. For more than a year, black laborers endured long walks to work, economic reprisals from their employers, and the general inconveniences experienced by all protesters during a boycott. Their sacrifices would not be in vain, as the Supreme Court declared Montgomery's segregation law unconstitutional. On November 13, 1956, the Supreme Court upheld the District Court's ruling in *Browder v. Gayle* and mandated that Alabama and Montgomery desegregate their buses. Five weeks after the ruling, on December 20, the Montgomery buses were desegregated. A monumental event in US political history, the Montgomery Bus Boycott demonstrated the political potency of nonviolent direct action, catapulted Martin Luther King Jr. into the national spotlight, and inspired a new generation of civil rights activists to fundamentally transform the political and economic structures of the country.

Among those deeply inspired by the Montgomery Bus Boycott was a courageous minister who pastored Bethel Baptist Church in Birmingham, Alabama: Fred Shuttlesworth. Fiercely independent, strong in his Christian faith, and unwavering in his commitment to redeem the soul of the nation, Shuttlesworth emerged from his humble beginnings in Mount Merger, Alabama, to become one of the movement's most prophetic voices. At the age of three, he moved with his family to Birmingham, where he experienced the sting of second-class citizenship, honed his leadership skills within the institutional matrix of the black church, and eventually graduated from Rosedale High in 1940. The valedictorian of his class, Shuttlesworth worked briefly as a handyman at a local doctor's office, converted from Methodist to Baptist, and moved around the state in search of his vocation. Widening economic opportunities in the defense industry brought him to Mobile in 1943. Five years later, he moved to Dallas County, where he enrolled at Selma University and served as pastor of the First Baptist Church of Selma.

A year before the *Brown v. Board* decision, Shuttlesworth returned to Birmingham, where he accepted an offer to pastor Bethel Baptist Church. Sensing that the political moment was ripe for radical change, he sought to build on the political momentum created by *Brown* and later the Montgomery Bus Boycott. On June 5, 1956, Shuttlesworth and a group of local ministers formed the Alabama Christian Movement for Human Rights with the twin objectives of desegregating the city and ending racial discrimination in employment. On December 26, a day after the bombing of Shuttlesworth's home, he and two hundred African Americans engaged in civil disobedience by sitting in the white section

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of the public buses. For their actions, they were arrested for violating the city's segregation law, despite the recent Supreme Court decision in *Gayle v. Browder*.

Concurrent with the upsurge in protest among African Americans was the growing visibility of white racial moderates based largely in the metropolitan Sunbelt. Tempting as it might be to portray the white South as a political monolith, this was not the case. According to historian Matthew Lassiter, "the metropolitan Sunbelt replaced the rural Black Belt as the center of political power in the South, and a two-party system dominated by the interests of large corporations and the priorities of white-collar suburbs supplanted the traditional culture of white supremacy that governed the Jim Crow era."¹⁰ One arena in which racial moderates most clearly articulated their vision was public education. The late 1950s witnessed the growing power of groups like the Southern Regional Council, which, after the passage of the *Brown v. Board* decision, fought against massive resistance with the hopes of building a moderate South. Unlike their massive resisters, who denounced the *Brown* decision and promoted the closing of public schools, politically liberal and moderate suburban white residents countered with a class-based desegregation compromise that emphasized "freedom of choice" and "neighborhood schools," a formula that was described as "race-neutral."¹¹ The organizational vehicles through which racial moderates sought to implement their vision of civil rights included the Virginia Committee for Public Schools, the Southern Regional Council, the New Orleans-based Save Our Schools, the Women's Emergency Committee in Arkansas, and Help Our Public Education in Georgia.¹²

White racial moderates may have been a thorn in the side of the ultra-segregationists in the South. Yet, they were hardly ally material for many African American civil rights activists calling for immediate change. In fact, the political limitations of white racial moderates became a topic of increasing concern as African Americans embarked on another phase of the black freedom struggle.

A New Day is Coming: The 1960 Sit-In and the Birth of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee

Sit-ins were a potent political weapon for labor activists during the late 1930s. The civil rights movement, however, did not fully embrace this strategy until February 1, 1960. On this historic day, at approximately 4:30 p.m., four college students from North Carolina A&T conducted a sit-in at the F. W. Woolworth store in downtown Greensboro. With anything but haste in their efforts to segregate the lunch counter, Joseph McNeil, Franklin McCain, Ezell Blair, and David Richmond had frequently discussed civil rights issues during their heated debates in their dorm room at Scott Hall. Convinced that the black freedom struggle mandated courageous action against the white power structure, the four students decided to launch their own campaign against segregation on February 1. That day, the young men entered the Woolworth, sat down at the "whites only" lunch counters,

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and placed an order for coffee. The shocked waitress denied their request and ordered them to leave immediately. Nervous but determined, McNeil, McCain, Blair, and Richmond remained seated until the store closed at 5 p.m.

News of their actions emboldened twenty-five other students, who converged on Woolworth's segregated lunch counter the next day, asking to be served. The students remained at Woolworth from 11 a.m. to 3 p.m., despite the presence of rowdy white hecklers threatening bodily harm on the orderly protesters. Their campaign quickly attracted the attention of local media, which struggled to make sense of the protest. On the third day, the sit-in campaign expanded to include students from nearby Bennett College as well as Dudley High School. Not even the presence of the local Ku Klux Klan undermined their protests, which by the fourth day had three white supporters, Eugenia Seaman, Marilyn Lott, and Ann Dearsley. By this time students were also targeting the Kress chain store, which, like Woolworth, had segregated lunch counters. White officials pressured college administrators to put an end to the protests, to no avail. Early Saturday morning, more than 1,400 students assembled in North Carolina A&T's Harrison Auditorium to reiterate their opposition to Jim Crow segregation and racial exclusion as well as their commitment to direct-action protest. Later that day, more than one thousand protesters packed Woolworth as angry whites pledged to defend their way of life.

The Greensboro sit-in quickly sparked demonstrations in nearby Winston-Salem and Durham. On Monday, February 8, students in these cities conducted sit-ins at their local Woolworth and Cress stores. Shortly thereafter, protests erupted in Charlotte, Raleigh, and Fayetteville. By the third week of February, the sit-in wave had spread to cities in South Carolina, Florida, Tennessee, Virginia, and Georgia. On February 5, in Nashville, Tennessee, nearly five thousand volunteers packed First Baptist Church to launch their own sit-in movement. Theologian James Lawson provided crash courses on nonviolence. "White Nashville," writes historian Taylor Branch, "awoke slowly to a kind of invasion force it never had encountered before, as rows of neatly dressed college students filed into the downtown stores to wait for food service."¹³ College students in Atlanta were also impressive. On March 15, campus activists from Morehouse, Spellman, and Clark Atlanta launched several sit-ins at segregated eating establishments in the capital city. The protesters faced opposition not just from hostile whites but black conservatives who questioned their emphasis. The black weekly, *The Daily World*, advised students to focus their attention on voter registration, school desegregation, and civil rights legislation rather than desegregating lunch counters. Undeterred by their critics, students in Atlanta and elsewhere pressed ahead in their goals.¹⁴

To build on the momentum of the student sit-ins, Ella Baker called a meeting at Shaw University on April 1 to institutionalize already developing networks among young black activists across the South, map out a plan by which students could have a greater degree of autonomy from established groups like the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) and Dr. Martin Luther King's Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC), and discuss the best strategies for particular local conditions. Few, if any, were more qualified to assist the students in their democratic endeavors than Baker.

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The Norfolk-born organizer was a human rights activist whose political work brought her into leadership roles with most of the major civil rights organizations, including the NAACP, the SCLC, and the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC). These experiences proved critical as she shepherded the SCLC during its formative stages in the 1950s and shaped the organizing philosophy of the organization that emerged at the Shaw meeting: the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee. Under the influence of Baker and Bob Moses, among others, the SNCC initiated direct action protests and voter registration drives throughout the deep South, catapulted local leaders like Fannie Hamer into the national spotlight, and influenced the political development of future politicians like Julian Bond, John Lewis, and Marion Berry.

The historic gathering at Shaw injected a great deal of confidence and energy into student activists as they returned to their communities and commenced their protests. Slowly but surely, African American students began to win concessions. In May, Nashville businesses agreed to integrate lunch counters and other public arenas. Then on July 21, 1960, the launching pad for the sit-ins, F. W. Woolworth in Greensboro, ended its segregated policy and agreed to serve all customers regardless of race.

This was but one victory in an ongoing war. Across the South, African Americans maintained their pressure on the white establishment as they fought against the policies of racial segregation and exclusion. Though Jim Crow remained the way of life for many, the legal edifice of white supremacy had noticeable cracks. The sit-ins desegregated lunch counters in several major centers of the urban South. Then on December 5, 1960, the Supreme Court ruled in *Boynton v. Virginia* that racial segregation in bus terminals violated the Interstate Commerce Act. This decision effectively banned segregation on interstate buses and at the terminals servicing such buses, setting in motion one of the most dramatic dramas of the civil rights movement: the Freedom Rides of 1961.

The Freedom Highway

On May 4, 1961, an interracial coalition of six whites and seven blacks departed from the nation's capital for New Orleans. Organized by CORE, the group aimed to challenge segregated interstate travel, which was outlawed by the Supreme Court. On their travels, "Freedom Riders" defied the South's Jim Crow laws and customs by attempting to use "whites-only" restrooms and lunch counters at bus stations and terminals.

The original thirteen riders split into two groups. One group traveled on with Greyhound and the other with Trailways. The possibility of death lingered in the minds of the Freedom riders, and on Mother's Day, the courageous activists teetered dangerously close to a tragic end. That day, a white mob converged on the Trailways bus station in Birmingham, anxiously awaiting the arrival of a bus from Atlanta carrying Freedom riders James Peck, Walter and Frances Bergman, Charles Person, and Ike Reynold. Upon leaving Atlanta, Klansmen began an endless round of verbal assaults on the riders. "You niggers will be taken care of once you get in Alabama," one Klansman promised. On their stop in Anniston, the civil rights activists received news that the Greyhound bus carrying their com-

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rades had been burned and that the injured parties were hospitalized. Fearful but determined, the Freedom riders commenced with their tradition of ignoring Jim Crow custom and sitting wherever they pleased. Their actions enraged the Klansmen on the bus, who then roughed up Person and Peck. Even amid the violence, the driver proceeded on his route to Birmingham. By the time the bus arrived at the Trailways bus station in downtown Birmingham, “the Klansmen and their police were all in place, armed and ready” to do what had to be done to protect the southern way of life.¹⁵ With the approval of the Commissioner of Public Safety, Bull Connor, and the knowledge of the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), law enforcement officials cleared the target area for fifteen minutes to allow the local Klan to inflict as much physical terror as possible within the agreed-upon amount of time. Upon the bus’s arrival, the white supremacists wasted no time in attacking the freedom fighters along with innocent bystanders. Within moments of entering the waiting room and approaching the lunch counter, Peck and Pearson met a steady round of blows from the white supremacists. “Get that son of a bitch,” Edward Fields yelled as “several burly men” pummeled Person with their fists. Their violence would not be limited to the African American riders. When Peck came to his comrade’s rescue, an enraged group of whites, armed with pipes and oversized key rings, violently punched and kicked him.¹⁶ The next day, photos of the bloodied face of Peck and the ransacked bus station appeared in newspapers across the country.

Even with the brutal images coming out of Birmingham and the recalcitrance of white supremacists across the South, President John Kennedy and his administration refused to commit themselves fully to the civil rights causes. Throughout 1961 and 1962, Dr. King and other civil rights leaders’ demands for an executive of all public facilities fell on deaf ears. Thus, black southerners and their small army of white allies had no choice but to press ahead in their massive demonstrations and acts of civil disobedience.

Why We Can’t Wait: The Battle against Jim Crow Continues

One city where the protests continued was Durham. National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) youth chapters and CORE organizers launched a series of attacks against segregated lunch counters in 1962. Belying its image as a progressive southern city, Durham was racist to its core. In fact, even when the white power structure appeared to bend in favor of African Americans, its actions proved more symbolic than substantive. The conflict between the city’s racial moderates and more direct-action oriented activists reached a fever pitch in the summer of 1962. Late in July, CORE and the NAACP picketed Eckerd’s Drug Store and Howard Johnson Ice Cream Parlor. Eckerd’s had refused to hire African American clerics, despite the fact that blacks constituted half of its customers. Howard Johnson, similarly, opposed hiring African Americans in clerical positions. It had also refused to desegregate its lunch counter, even after the sit-ins of 1960 led other stores to reverse their segregation policies. Taking the lead in the fight against Howard Johnson were black students from North Carolina Central, who en-

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dured verbal assaults from whites and arrest in their fight to implement change. For their refusal to pay a trespass fine for protesting Howard Johnson, students Guytana Horton and Joycelyn McKissick would be sentenced to thirty days in jail.

The arrest and subsequent jailing of Horton and McKissick galvanized the community. A large rally was held at one of the city's movement centers, St. Joseph African Methodist Episcopal Church. Shortly after the rally, 1,500 African Americans headed to Howard Johnson to continue their protests. These protests continued throughout the summer as part of the "Freedom Highways project," a CORE-directed campaign that extended from Maryland to Florida, which eventually forced Howard Johnson to desegregate more than half of their lunch counters in North Carolina. One holdout was the Howard Johnson restaurant in Durham; in 1963 it became the site of one of the largest demonstrations in North Carolina.

Frustration gripped the black South as protesters lost patience with whites and African Americans who counseled against acts of civil disobedience and encouraged backroom negotiations with the power structure. "Go slow—go slow—go slow," said Miles College student Frank Dukes, after many unsuccessful attempts to break the back of Jim Crow in Birmingham. "That's what you all advise us to do," he lamented to conservative black leaders who embraced the philosophy of gradualism. No longer could African Americans place their faith in the promises of white liberals or sit and wait for God to intervene on their behalf. "God helps those who help themselves. You pray to God but when you get off your knees, you got to go out and work if you want to eat. God will help you start if you start off things yourself."

In 1961, Dukes and his colleagues were involved in numerous demonstrations to desegregate the city's public accommodations and expand African Americans' employment opportunities. Students at Miles issued "This We Believe," a statement on their principles and their political demands in which students vowed to "use every legal and nonviolent" weapon at their disposal to "secure for ourselves and our unborn children these God-given rights guaranteed by the Constitution of the United States." A month later, Dukes and his colleagues organized the Anti-Injustice Movement, which launched a boycott of selective downtown stores. In their view, African Americans were foolish to patronize businesses in which they were treated like second-class citizens. Concerned about loss in sales and outside interference, a few businesses voluntarily desegregated temporarily, but for the most part Jim Crow remained the order of the day in the city.

But for Birmingham: The South's Most Segregated City

To push the movement forward, the Rev. Fred Shuttlesworth solicited the assistance of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) and Dr. Martin Luther King. Still reeling from its losses in Albany, Georgia, the SCLC exercised caution in deciding whether to launch a desegregation campaign in what many regarded as the most danger-

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ous city in the country. After much deliberation and planning, King arrived in Birmingham on April 3. Over the next week, the movement held a series of mass meetings and hundreds engaged in acts of civil disobedience and protests. To stymie the protests, Bull Connor and the Chief of Police, Jamie Moore, secured a temporary injunction from state circuit court Judge William A. Jenkins prohibiting civil rights protesters from engaging in any demonstration or activity that would cause a breach of peace. On April 12, two days after the injunction, King and other activists decided to participate in a march in clear violation of Judge Jenkins's orders. King was quickly arrested and sent to the city jail. During his confinement, he wrote one of the most important documents in civil rights and 20th-century history, "Letter from Birmingham Jail." The document laid out the distinction between a just law and an unjust law, insisted that civil rights activists had a Christian duty to challenge and overthrow Jim Crow, and challenged the silence of white moderates, particularly white clergymen. As religious studies scholar Jonathan Rieder notes, "Letter from Birmingham Jail" brilliantly showcased King the preacher, the prophet, and the activist:

He took aim at the core of American culture, the vast universe of people who imagined themselves to be decent but never dwelled on the shame of American racism. He was not naïve about the power of soaring moral rhetoric to change hearts. King did not rest his optimism on faith in the American dream or the ordained nature of freedom in America. Instead, he found solace in his deep love of black people and the exceptional spirit of the slave ancestors. In all these ways, the "Letter" anticipates the King of the later years who thundered against poverty racism, and war before he was assassinated in 1968.¹⁷

King resumed his activities upon his release from jail. But despite the release of the civil rights movement's most recognized leader, the Birmingham campaign appeared to be on the road to the same dead end as the Albany protest of 1962. Problems included a severe shortage of volunteers, low morale among the faithful few, and declining media interest. "The image of Martin Luther King had failed to attract the needed new blood to keep the campaign in the public's eye," explained historian Glenn Askew. Moreover, "a divided black community further complicated matters as the traditional Negro leadership class publicly repudiated the authority of King and Fred Shuttlesworth." To maintain the movement, James Bevel and Ike Reynolds called for the recruitment of African American school children. Their suggestion met firm resistance from many local leaders, including Authur G. Gaston. Notwithstanding opposition to the idea, the Alabama Christina Movement for Civil Rights ACMHR and the SCLC prepared to enlist more school children, several of whom were already involved in the movement. Details were still in the works, but a decision was made to have the students march downtown on Thursday, May 2.

Much like the college students of 1960, the young people of Birmingham willingly embraced their role as foot soldiers in the movement, ready to put their bodies on the line for freedom. On the morning of the scheduled march, thousands of black students headed for 16th Street Baptist Church rather than school to register their discontent with the status quo and push the movement for racial justice forward. As scheduled, the students

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headed toward downtown a little after noon. Freedom songs pierced the air as the students marched toward City Hall. Anger engulfed Connor, who ordered fire engines to the intersection of 4th Avenue and 17th Street to impede the students' path. By rush hour, the number of children arrested exceeded one thousand. With pride and determination, they willfully submitted to arrest without protest or violence. Moved by the students' courage, two thousand African Americans packed 6th Avenue Baptist Church to salute the children's courage as well as prepare for the next day's protest.

The next morning, Connor prepared for his showdown with the protesters. Determined to put an end to the protest, he stationed the local police on the eastern side of Kelly Ingram Park while deploying fire trucks at several major thoroughfares downtown. Not long after taking instructions from Dr. King and other leaders, the nonviolent protesters filed out of their meeting place and commenced with their march for freedom. Shortly thereafter, Connor unleashed a reign of terror on the children. Within minutes of the march's start, he ordered the Fire Department to turn its hoses on the children. "Disperse or you'll get wet," police chief Glenn Evans shouted to the young protesters. When they refused to obey his orders, the firemen aimed their high-powered hoses at the children. "The sheer force of the water sent students spinning down the streets, dreadfully skinning exposed flesh," historian Glenn Eskew writes.¹⁸

The harrowing image of firemen assaulting African American children with high-powered firehoses circulated throughout the national and international media. So, too, did photographs of Connor's canine team of German Shepherds attacking African American children. If civil rights leaders were waiting for the perfect picture of racial hatred and violence in an American city, Connor and his team of safety officials readily supplied it.

The spectacle of Birmingham shook the nation. The Birmingham protests also elicited a great deal of outrage from the international community of human rights activists. Fearful of the implications for the city, racial moderates begged for an end to the protests and invited civil rights leaders to the bargaining table. On May 8, civil rights leaders struck a compromise agreement with city leaders. "We must now move from protest to reconciliation," King told the African American community, which included some who were disappointed with the deal.

"Mississippi Goddamn: A Season of Violence"

A month after the Children's Crusade in Birmingham, the civil rights movement suffered a devastating loss. On June 12, 1963, white supremacist Byron De La Beckwith assassinated the Jackson, Mississippi-based civil rights activist Medgar Evers, whose wife, Myrlie heard the gunfire and dashed out of their house. To her horror, she found her badly wounded husband staggering to reach the front door. An hour later, he was pronounced dead at the University Hospital. One of the nation's most dynamic organizers, Evers galvanized thousands of blacks in Mississippi with his indefatigable work ethic, his fearlessness, and his unwavering commitment to racial justice. His death dealt a devastating blow to his family and the civil rights movement. "We all knew the danger was increas-

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ing,” Myrlie Evers wrote in a moving tribute published in *Life Magazine*. “Threats came daily, cruel and cold and constant, against us and the children. But we had lived with this hatred for years and we did not let it corrode us.”¹⁹ Evers’s death weighed heavily on the minds of civil rights activists as they prepared for the imminent March on Washington for Freedom and Jobs. The planned march was designed to pressure President Kennedy into passing a civil rights bill to end Jim Crow. Across the South, black women and men made preparations for the historic march. Two hundred miles from the nation’s capital in the city of Norfolk, the local National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) branch and the Youth Council secured six air-conditioned, restroom-equipped buses for the trip to Washington. On the day of the march, at approximately 5 a.m., the DC-bound caravan buses departed Norfolk with hundreds of elated African Americans. The highlight of the day-long event was Martin Luther King’s dynamic “I Have a Dream” speech, in which he fused the prophetic vision of the black church with hardcore political analysis to not only inspire the 250,000 attendees but also to remind the nation’s leaders of what he called the “urgency of now.” “This is no time to engage in the luxury of cooling off or to take the tranquilizing drug of gradualism. Now is the time to make real the promise of democracy. Now is the time to rise from the dark and desolate valley of segregation to the unlit path of racial justice.”²⁰

Moved by the day’s events, Kennedy issued a statement praising the “deep fervor and the quiet dignity that characterizes the thousands who gathered in the Nation’s Capital from across the country to demonstrate their faith and confidence in our democratic form of government.” Though noting that “this summer has seen remarkable progress in translating civil rights from principles into practices,” the president admitted that the nation had “a very long way yet to travel.” Ignoring the integration of public facilities, Kennedy focused his attention on economics:

The executive branch of the Federal Government will continue its efforts to obtain increased employment and to eliminate discrimination in employment practices, two of the prime goals of the March. In addition, our efforts to secure enactment of the legislative proposals made to the Congress will be maintained, including not only the civil rights bill, but also proposals to broaden and strengthen the manpower development and training program, the youth employment bill, amendments to the vocational education program, the establishment of a work-study program for high school age youth, strengthening of the adult basic education provisions in the administration’s education program, and the amendments proposed to the public welfare work-relief and training program.²¹

Kennedy concluded on an optimistic note. In the coming weeks, however, it would be hard for many in the civil rights movement to remain optimistic.

Eighteen days after the historic March on Washington, a bomb rocked the 16th Street Baptist Church in Birmingham, killing four school-aged girls, Denise McNair, Carole Robertson, Addie Collins, and Cynthia Wesley. Outraged gripped the nation as white supremacists proved that African Americans were not safe in even the most sacred of

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spaces. “Those four children did not die in vain,” the Reverend Edward Gardner told a crowd of 1,500 blacks gathered at a rally about one mile from the site of the bombing. “There will be a better tomorrow.” Taking a page from the prophet Jeremiah, Gardner promised divine retribution for the evils of segregation and racism. “Birmingham is going to pay for every evil deed because God is watching what is going on down here.”²²

More violence rocked the nation in November when President Kennedy was assassinated in Dallas, Texas. Weary but determined, millions of African Americans joined the nation in mourning the death of its beloved leader. Noting that Kennedy’s assassination “killed not only a man but a complex of illusions,” Martin Luther King situated the president’s death within the larger context of the nation’s violent culture. “Negroes tragically know political assassination well. In the life of Negro civil-rights leaders, the whine of the bullet from ambush, the roar of the bomb have all too often broken the night’s silence . . . Nineteenth sixty-three was a year of assassinations. Medgar Evers in Jackson, Mississippi, William Moore in Alabama, six Negro children in Birmingham—and who could doubt that these too were political assassinations?”²³

In the wake of Kennedy’s assassination, calls for national civil rights intensified among activists, who hoped the slain leader’s successor, Lyndon Baines Johnson, would move the nation closer to its democratic ideas. The degree to which Johnson responded to the needs of African Americans garnered serious attention in the January 1964 issue of the black community’s premier monthly, *Ebony*. Under a full-sized picture of Johnson read the title of Lerone Bennett’s insightful article: “What Can Negroes Expect from President Lyndon Johnson? America’s First Southern Born President since Wilson.” “There will be differences in pace, style, and touch,” Bennett predicted when discussing the shift from Kennedy to Johnson. Though maintaining a healthy degree of skepticism, Bennett delicately suggested that Johnson might be better on civil rights than his predecessor. “The new president has been talking for several years about civil rights. As he climbed the runs of power—from the House to the Senate to the Vice-Presidency—he became increasingly militant.”²⁴

The Passage of the Civil Rights and Voting Rights Acts

A decade after the *Brown v. Board* decision, a Democratic-controlled Congress with guidance from the president passed the Civil Rights Act (CRA). On July 2, 1964, Lyndon Johnson signed the act into law. Immediately affecting the fields of education, health care, and labor, the CRA outlawed discrimination on the basis of race, sex, religion, and national origin in public accommodations and employment.

A year after the passage of the CRA, Johnson signed the Voting Rights Act of 1965 (VRA), sweeping legislation that outlawed educational requirements for voting in states and counties where less than half of the voting population were registered on November 1,

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1964. The law also empowered the Civil Rights Commission to assign federal registrars to enroll voters. The bill passed in the Senate by a vote of seventy-five to nineteen.

The two most immediate results were the expansion in the black electorate in the South and the growing number of African Americans on local city councils and school boards. The election of Moon Landrieu as the first black mayor of New Orleans was a watershed event in the history of not just the “Crescent City” but throughout the urban South. In keeping with his campaign promise, the percentage of African Americans working in the city government jumped from 10 percent to 40 percent during his two terms. Two years after Landrieu, Atlanta elected Maynard Jackson as mayor. His election, according to Robert Bullard, “marked the coming of age of black Atlanta, in that nine of the eighteen city council members were black and five of the nine school board members were black.”²⁵

The passage of the civil rights and voting acts were watershed events in the nation’s history. These legislative decrees, however, hardly marked the culmination of the black freedom struggle. Instead, African Americans’ historic quest for racial justice entered a new phase as black women and men tackled such complex issues as housing, deindustrialization, underemployment and unemployment, voter dilution and annexation, and school desegregation. In many parts of the South, the civil rights movement moved decidedly to the left as African Americans intensified their critique of the maldistribution of wealth in US society, the shortcomings of President Johnson’s Great Society programs, and the failure of the state to respond to the social maladies caused by the intransigence and persistence of white supremacy.

Inner-City Blues: African Americans and the Urban Crisis

One issue of great importance for many African Americans who called the urban South home was the deleterious effects of urban renewal and downtown revitalization programs on African American families. Throughout the region, urban renewal exacted a heavy toll on African Americans as the nation’s bulldozer revolution uprooted families, razed historic neighborhoods, destroyed or compromised historic landscapes within the African American community, and contributed to greater levels of wealth disparities across racial lines. The case of Richmond was particularly instructive. Here, the city government, with financial backing from the federal government, engaged in what landscape architect Ian Grandison refers to as “punitive planning.” Shortly after the passage of the Federal Housing Act of 1949, the city of Richmond and the Richmond Redevelopment and Housing Authority (RRHA) applied for a \$1.3 million grant for slum clearance and an additional \$33,000 to survey prospective land for public housing units. During the 1950s, officials commenced the process of relocating poorer African Americans from tenements to public housing units. The RRAA demolished hundreds of dilapidated homes, displaced more than seven thousand of the city’s most economically vulnerable citizens, and intensified patterns of racial segregation. To advance its modernization agenda and meet the needs of

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white suburbanites, the city completed the construction of the /I-64-95 freeway in 1958. The I-95/I-64 connector sliced through two of the largest and most historically rich neighborhoods in the city—Jackson Ward and Navy Hill. One of the major casualties of the interstate was Virginia Union University, a center of black intellectual life that claimed such distinguished alums as Charles Johnson, Abram Harris, Spottswood Robinson, and Douglass Wilder. It had also been a central training ground for many civil rights activists in the city. The highway's construction through the heart of Richmond was part of the city's larger political agenda. "The freeway," Ian Grandison argues, "not only blocked, physically and symbolically, Virginia Union University's access to Richmond's official civic and commercial centers; it also devalued sites of other important black institutions—schools, churches, banks, funeral homes, fraternal lodges—by razing them or razing their surroundings their fronts and backs up against the highway." Simply put, this was another manifestation of the punitive planning that characterized urban renewal in the South. "The freeway was used as a racial weapon to put African-Americans, and their dreams for inclusive citizenship, back in their proper place. Either obliterated by the freeway, or pressed up against it, through the glaring disrespect for their homes and institutions, African Americans were being told in the most flagrant way imaginable that, despite hopeful new interpretations of civil rights law, they still did not belong on the right side of tracks."²⁶ Urban renewal not only compromised historically black institutions, but it also worsened the city's severe housing shortage.

The situation was equally bleak in the city of Atlanta, where urban renewal devastated the predominantly black neighborhoods of Vine City, Summerhill, and Dixie Hills. Due to years of governmental neglect, the predominance of slumlords, and racist lending policies of the Federal Housing Authority, these inner-city neighborhoods were plagued by overcrowding, substandard housing, and rodent infestations. The construction of the Atlanta Stadium in 1965 on the site of the old Washington Rawson neighborhood ravished the adjacent community of Summerhill. The razing of slums in Summerhill displaced ten to twelve thousand residents. One hundred and twenty miles south of Atlanta, Birmingham witnessed the clearance of several downtown residential neighborhoods surrounding the rapidly expanding Medical Center. The southside neighborhoods slated for demolition had a population of 2,750, of which 2,000 were African Americans. A remarkably similar pattern of downtown rehabilitation and massive black displacement also characterized the housing situation in New Orleans, where between 1957 and 1967 urban renewal projects led to the demolition of twenty-one thousand housing units.

Clashes over housing rocked Durham in 1967 and 1968. In 1966, when the Redevelopment Commission announced plans for the construction of the East-West Expressway, two hundred predominantly black and low-income families were threatened with eviction. That same year, black working women in Durham formed the United Organizations for Community Improvement (UOCI), a federation of low-income neighborhood. By 1967, the UOCI had grown to sixteen neighborhood councils. A year later, the organization had one thousand members. The founding of the UOCI proved critical in mobilizing low-income and other African Americans: the neighborhood federation was soon identified as the major protest organization in the city.²⁷ Shunning the politics of backroom negotiations, the

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organization and its leaders confronted the city's powerbrokers in the most dramatic fashion. On July 17, 1967, for example, 150 African Americans stormed a city council meeting in a moving display of political solidarity and self-determination. Their purpose was to oppose a public housing project and to demand that the city enforce its housing codes.

Concurrent with their efforts to address the problem of housing, African Americans in the urban South also turned their attention to the labor arena. Long-standing practices of racial discrimination in the public and private sectors had excluded African American women and men from clerical and administrative positions, confined them to the lowest paying and most physically grueling jobs, and rendered them more subjected to the vicissitudes of the capitalist system. To make matters worse, deindustrialization dealt a devastating blow to many blue-collar workers in cities like Durham and Birmingham. Small surprise given these realities, African Americans intensified their battle against employment discrimination, pushed for greater access to skilled and clerical positions in the service sector, and sought to empower themselves through unionization.

This rising militancy of black workers was especially visible in the city of Memphis, where the death of two sanitation workers, Robert Walker and Echol Cole, fueled one of the most impressive labor campaigns of the late 1960s: the Memphis Sanitation Strike of 1968. This three-month strike fused the social-movement ethos of the civil rights revolution with the bread-and-butter concerns of organized labor. Subpar pay, terrible working conditions, and the anti-union impulses of the local government had long been a concern for African Americans. In February 1968, when supervisors ordered black workers home during a rainstorm without pay while whites remained on the job, 1,300 African Americans declared themselves on strike. Aligning themselves with the American Federation of State, County, and Municipal Employees, the workers called for wages starting at \$2.35 an hour, safety programs, overtime pay, and union recognition. Several weeks into the strike, the sanitation workers successfully convinced Dr. Martin Luther King to come to the city as a way to draw national attention to their plight. As labor historian Peter Levy explains in his coverage of the strike, King's presence had three important benefits: (1) it drew national attention to the problems of black sanitation workers; (2) it helped AFSCME in mobilizing more of black Memphis behind the strike; and (3) it provided traditional civil rights organizations with the opportunity to galvanize around a central concern of black communities across the nation: improving the life chances and experiences of African American blue-collar workers. The success of the strike galvanized not just sanitation workers in other parts of the South but public employees in other occupations.

Conclusion

The 20th-century civil rights movement inaugurated a new era in American public life and paved the way for an expansion in African American political power and influence. The post-civil rights era witnessed African Americans rise to the highest offices in such southern cities as Atlanta, Birmingham, New Orleans, Richmond, Charlotte, Dallas, and Mem-

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phis. Then in 2008, with heavy support from African Americans and liberal whites, Barack Hussein Obama became the 44th president of the United States. His election, particularly his success in the states of Florida, Virginia, and North Carolina, occasioned critical debate in some circles over whether the United States was a post-racial society. His political rise signaled for some that race no longer determined an individual's social, economic, or political status. To such claims, opponents of the idea of a post-racial society pointed to the racial disparities in health and wealth, the problem of mass incarceration, and the disproportionate number of African Americans and Latinos represented in the criminal justice system. As has long been the case, the US South will be a key battleground in the ongoing quest for racial justice.

Discussion of the Literature

The scholarly literature on the civil rights movement in the urban South has expanded tremendously over the past twenty-five years as historians have challenged conventional chronological frames, focused more attention on the ideological diversity within the black freedom struggle, adopted a more transnational perspective on African Americans' fight for racial justice, shifted focus more to the critical contributions of black women, and explored the links between the civil rights movement and the Black Power movement.

Four foundational studies, published in the 1980s, include: Clayborne Carson's *SNCC and the Awakening of the 1960s*, William Chafe's *Civilities and Civil Rights: Greensboro and the Black Struggle for Freedom*, David Garrow's *Bearing the Cross: Martin Luther King and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference*, and Taylor Branch's *Parting the Waters: America in the King Years 1954–1963*.²⁸ Each, in their own distinctive fashion, broadened our understanding of key individuals, events, organizations, and phases of the civil rights movement. Carson's book provided the first comprehensive study of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), which in recent years has received detailed attention from historians Wesley C. Hogan, Cheryl L. Greenberg, and Emilye Crosby. Taking a more local approach, Chafe's *Civilities and Civil Rights* did much more than illuminate the importance of the Greensboro sit-in to the success of the larger movement; it added a more nuanced perspective on the regional differences within the South and the ways in which the polite racism of the upper South could be as debilitating to the freedom struggle as the vitriolic racism of the deep southern states of Alabama and Mississippi. The sweeping narratives of Branch and Garrow added complexity to the dominant image of Dr. Martin Luther King and offered a broader and more national view of the civil rights movement.

The next decade witnessed more interventions within the field of civil rights historiography as Charles Payne's *I've Got the Light of Freedom* and John Dittmer's *Local People: The Struggle for Civil Rights in Mississippi* embraced a more bottom-up approach to the study of the black freedom struggle.²⁹ With their rich archival research and elegant writing styles, Payne and Dittmer challenged scholars to focus more on grassroots organizing and the centrality of ordinary people in the movement's success. Their work coincided

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with and fueled the development of more locally oriented studies that focused on one specific city or state. With regards to the urban South, some of the most valuable of those studies include Glenn T. Eskew's *But for Birmingham: The Local and National Movements in the Civil Rights Struggle*, Winston A. Grady-Willis's *Challenging U.S. Apartheid: Atlanta and Black Struggles for Human Rights, 1960–1977*, Christina Greene's *Our Separate Ways: Women and the Black Freedom Movement in Durham, North Carolina*, and more recently Julian Maxwell Hayter's *The Dream Is Lost: Voting Rights and the Politics of Race in Richmond, Virginia*.³⁰

Not all but many of these local studies embrace the “long civil rights” framework, a concept coined and popularized by historian Jacquelyn Dowd Hall in 2005. This framework both complicates and challenges conventional narratives of the black freedom struggle in three significant ways: (1) it emphasizes the connections between the civil rights insurgencies of the 1950s and 1960s and the labor activism of the 1930s and 1940s; (2) it includes movements and activists whose political goals extended beyond the desegregation of public schools and public accommodations; and (3) it accentuates the ideological continuities between the civil rights revolution and the Black Power movement without ignoring important distinctions in terms of political ideas and goals. More recently, several scholars, most notably Clarence Lang and Sundiata Cha-Jui, have criticized the “long civil rights” perspective for exaggerating the continuities in African American social movement history and overlooking important differences in the Black Power and civil rights movements.³¹

A growing body of scholarship on the civil rights movement has also broadened our understanding of the contributions of women. Fortunately, the vibrant field of black women's history along with new directions in civil rights historiography have deepened our knowledge of the lives, politics, and intellectual labors of key figures like Rosa Parks, Ella Baker, and Fannie Lou Hamer; the critical work of local chapters of the National Welfare Rights Organization; and the intense debates around gender between black women, white women, and black men. Barbara Ransby's landmark study, *Ella Baker and the Black Freedom Movement: A Radical Democratic Vision*, is a tour de force that traces Baker from her early upbringing in Virginia and North Carolina to her education at Shaw, to her intellectual maturation within the institutional matrix of 1930s Harlem, to her organizing work with the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) in the 1940s and 1950s, and to her critical guidance of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) in the 1960s.³² Through the life and political legacy of Baker, Ransby forces her readers to grapple with the complex intersections of race, class, and gender in American public life, the meaning of democracy and integration, and the limitations of charismatic leadership. Important questions regarding the gender politics of the civil rights movement also emerge from such studies as Jeanne Theoharris's *The Rebellious Life of Mrs. Rosa Parks*, Danielle McGuire's *At the Dark End of the Street: Black Women, Rape and Resistance; A New History of the Civil Rights Movement from Rosa Parks to the Rise of Black Power*, and Chana Lee's *For Freedom's Sake: The Life of Fannie Lou Hammer*.³³

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Increasingly, scholars of civil rights history have also sought to examine the movement within the context of the rise and fall of liberalism and the major transformations within the nation's political economy. These works include Adolph Reed's *Stirring in the Jug*, which includes incisive critiques on Atlanta's civil rights politicians and urban regime politics, Nathan Matthew Lassiter's *Silent Majority: Suburban Politics in the Sunbelt South*, and Devin Fergus's *Liberalism, Black Power, and the Making of American Politics, 1965–1980*, which centers primary on urban North Carolina.³⁴

Primary Sources

Valuable information on the civil rights movement in the urban South can be gleaned from the personal papers and autobiographies of the key participants; the administrative papers of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), CORE, and other activist organizations; black newspapers and monthlies; and oral histories. Housed at the Library of Congress and digitized by ProQuest, the papers of the NAACP, for example, provide detailed accounts of the major legal battles, judicial decisions, and protests during the civil rights movement, as well as extensive information on litigation and organizing around housing discrimination, urban renewal, employment discrimination, and the entrenched racism within the criminal justice system.

To gain a day-to-day perspective on the movement, it is also important to engage the major black newspapers, weeklies, and monthlies of the era: the *Atlanta Daily World*, the *Norfolk Journal and Guide*, the *Pittsburgh Courier*, the *Chicago Defender*, the *Florida Star*, and the *Birmingham World*, among others. Other critical sources are the Johnson publications, *Jet* and *Ebony*, which often sent their reporters and photographers to the South.

If seeking to gain a deeper understanding of the civil rights movement's most recognized leader, Martin Luther King Jr., as well as the battles he waged in the urban South, the *Martin Luther King, Jr. Papers*, edited by Clayborne Carson, and which now consist of fourteen volumes, should be consulted.³⁵ These papers contain correspondence, newspaper clippings, his sermons and speeches, and his writings. Equally important are the books King published during his lifetime, most notably, *Why We Can't Wait*, *Stride for Freedom*, and *Where Do We Go from Here: Chaos or Community?*³⁶ These readings provide the reader with his unique perspective on such highly publicized events as the Montgomery Boycott, the Children's Crusade in Birmingham in 1963, and the March on Washington, as well as his philosophy on the social responsibilities of the clergy, his views on Black Power, and his firm belief in the inextricable connection between economic injustice and racial injustice.

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- (2.) *Norfolk Journal and Guide*, January 21, 1933.
- (3.) *Chicago Defender*, June 1, 1940.
- (4.) *Norfolk Journal and Guide*, December 18, 1948.
- (5.) "Platform of the States Rights Democratic Party," in *The American Presidency Project*, ed. Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, August 14, 1948.
- (6.) Matthew Lassiter, *Silent Majority: Suburban Politics in the Sunbelt South* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2006), 41.
- (7.) Lassiter, *Silent Majority*, 41.
- (8.) Jeanne Theoharris, *The Rebellious Life of Mrs. Rosa Parks* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2013), 62.
- (9.) Theoharris, *Rebellious Life*, 63.
- (10.) Lassiter, *Silent Majority*, 3.
- (11.) Lassiter, *Silent Majority*, 13–14.
- (12.) Lassiter, *Silent Majority*, 40.
- (13.) Taylor Branch, *Parting the Waters: America in the King Years 1954–1963* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1988), 274.
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- (15.) Raymond Arsenault, *Freedom Riders*, 103.
- (16.) Arsenault, *Freedom Riders*, 107.
- (17.) Jonathan Rieder, *Gospel of Freedom: Martin Luther King, Jr.'s Letter from Birmingham Jail and the Struggle that Changed A Nation* (New York: Bloomsbury Press, 2013), xvi.
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- (27.) Christina Greene, *Our Separate Ways: Women and the Black Freedom Movement in Durham, North Carolina* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005), 11.
- (28.) Clayborne Carson, *SNCC and the Awakening of the 1960s*; William H. Chafe, *Civilities and Civil Rights: Greensboro, North Carolina, and the Black Struggle for Freedom* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980); David Garrow, *Bearing the Cross: Martin Luther King and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference* (New York: William and Morrow Company, 1986); and Taylor Branch, *Parting the Waters: America in the King Years, 1954–63* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1988).
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