

# RACE, REFORM AND REBELLION

THE SECOND RECONSTRUCTION IN BLACK AMERICA,  
1945-1982

Manning Marable

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## 2. The Cold War in Black America, 1945–1954

It is the problem of the Russian People to make changes there. We cannot advance a progressive development by threatening Russia from the outside. . . . America is incomparably less endangered by its own Communists than by the hysterical hunt for the few Communists there are here. In my eyes, the ‘Communist conspiracy’ is principally a slogan used in order to put those who have no judgment and who are cowards into a condition which makes them entirely defenseless. Again, I must think back to the Germany of 1932, whose democratic social body had already been weakened by similar means. . . .

Albert Einstein, open letter to Norman Thomas, 1954

There are class divisions among Negroes, and it is misleading to maintain that the interests of the Negro working and middle classes are identical. To be sure, a middle-class NAACP leader and an illiterate farmhand in Mississippi or a porter who lives in Harlem all want civil rights. However, it would be enlightening to examine why the NAACP is not composed of Negro porters and farmhands, but only of Negroes of a certain type.

Harold Cruse, *Rebellion or Revolution*

### I

The aftermath of any war affects those on the side of its victors even more than it does those who have lost. For many Afro-Americans who celebrated V-J Day in the late summer of 1945, there was an intense sense of joy and dread: fears that there might be another anti-black ‘Red Summer’ such as had swept the nation in 1919; hopes that the

progressive economic changes that had occurred for blacks during the wartime era could be expanded; unanswered questions about the new administration of Harry S. Truman, its commitment to the modest social democratic policies of Franklin D. Roosevelt and to the limited pursuit of civil rights. Two decades later, black social critic Harold Cruse described his feelings at that ambiguous moment in history:

World War II shattered a world irrevocably. But people who thought as I did were called upon in 1945 to treat the postwar era with intellectual and critical tools more applicable to the vanished world of the thirties – a world we had never had time to understand as we lived it. I spent the years from 1945 to about 1952 wrestling with this perplexity. . . .<sup>1</sup>

The crimes of the Third Reich against European Jews had shocked the nation, and the popular ideology which inspired public opposition to Hitler was rooted in an anti-racist and democratic context. The blatant contradiction between the country's opposition to fascism and the *herrenvolk* state and the continued existence of Jim Crow in the States after 1945 was made perfectly clear to all. Blacks and an increasing sector of liberal white America came out of the war with a fresh determination to uproot racist ideologies and institutions at home. But few at the time were precisely clear as to what measures were required to turn this egalitarian commitment into public policy.

Part of the dilemma which confronted black leaders resided in the ambiguous legacy of the late president, Franklin D. Roosevelt (1933–45). By most standards, the Democrat had been the most liberal chief executive in regard to the civil rights of national minorities in American history. The number of black Federal employees was increased from 50,000 in 1933 to 200,000 by 1946. Roosevelt had appointed a small group of prominent middle-class blacks, including lawyers Robert C. Weaver and William H. Hastie, journalist Robert L. Vann, and educator Mary McLeod Bethune, to administrative posts. Government agencies in the 'New Deal' administration of Roosevelt were organised on strictly segregated lines. Youths who worked in the Civilian Conservation Corps camps were segregated by race; provisions in the Public Works Administration which mandated certain percentages of black workers in the construction of buildings were blatantly ignored; benefits from the Agricultural Adjustment Administration were often denied to black



rural farmers through fraud and outright corruption. Roosevelt resisted blacks' demands that the Federal government should pressure defence contractors to hire greater numbers of minorities. It was only under the direct threat of a black workers' march on Washington, DC, co-ordinated by black labour leader A. Philip Randolph in 1941, that Roosevelt signed Executive Order 8802 which met the blacks' concerns in a limited respect.

In a real sense, the watershed of Afro-American history occurred during the 1940s. Thousands of black men working as sharecroppers and farm labourers were drafted into the army with the outbreak of World War II. Over three million black men registered for the service, and about 500,000 were stationed in Africa, the Pacific, and in Europe. Fighting as customary in segregated units, black troops again distinguished themselves on every front. At home, the war effort brought another million black women and men into factory lines of production. Some white workers viewed this racial turn of events with greater alarm than the spectre of fascism. Between March and June 1943, a series of 'hate strikes' against the upgrading of blacks in industries contributed to a total 100,000 man-days lost. Philadelphia street-car workers refused to work with blacks in 1944, and Roosevelt was forced to order 5000 Federal troops into the city to restore order. Partially through the militant labour-organising efforts of the American Communist Party, the number of black union members rose from 150,000 in 1935 to 1.25 million by the end of the war. Even in many Southern cities black and white workers formed biracial unions and fought for higher wages and improved working conditions. In 1943-44, 11,000 black and white tobacco workers at the R. J. Reynolds plant in North Carolina struck successfully to upgrade the salaries of black employees. In politics, blacks evinced for the first time since the demise of Reconstruction a growing leverage on state and national affairs. Northern black voters had largely shifted their political allegiances from the Republican to the Democratic party during the Great Depression. In 1934, Arthur W. Mitchell of Chicago became the first black Democrat elected to Congress in American history. Ten years later, a Harlem minister and militant political activist, Adam Clayton Powell, was elected to the House. Black Northern votes for Roosevelt in the presidential election of 1944 accounted for his margin of victory over Republican New York Governor Thomas Dewey in eight states, including Michigan and Maryland. The major civil rights organisations in the country, the

National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), founded by DuBois in 1910, more than tripled its membership in 1934–44. The NAACP Legal Defense Fund had gained considerable success in the repeal of Jim Crow state legislation through its appeals to the Supreme Court. By 1945, a growing number of white Americans in the North had concluded that the system of racial segregation would have to be modified, if not entirely overthrown.

In the months immediately following World War II, blacks made decisive cracks in the citadel of white supremacy. By 1946, there were over two dozen blacks who were serving in state legislatures in Northeastern states (New York, Massachusetts, Pennsylvania, New Jersey, and Vermont), in the Midwest (Illinois, Kansas, Nebraska), the West (California and Colorado) and even in border states (West Virginia and Kentucky). In 1945, Truman appointed a black attorney, Irvin C. Mollison, as Associate Judge of the US Customs Court. In 1946, William H. Hastie was named Governor of the Virgin Islands, and black sociologist Charles S. Johnson was appointed to the National Commission advising the US State Department on participation in the United Nations Education, Scientific, and Cultural Organisations (UNESCO). Ralph J. Bunche, a former socialist and co-organiser of the militant National Negro Congress in the 1930s, was named to the Anglo-American Caribbean Commission of the State Department. Across the country, blacks were participating openly in electoral politics in heretofore unprecedented numbers. In Harlem, black Communist Party leader Benjamin J. Davis was elected to the New York City Council. By 1947, 12 per cent of all voting-age blacks in the South were registered, up from only 2 per cent in 1940. Blacks in the upper South – Virginia, North Carolina, and Tennessee – began to be elected in small numbers on city councils and school board posts. Congress reflected this trend towards a more liberal to moderate segregationist policy. Against 1937–38, when only 10 bills which were considered favourable to desegregation and civil rights were introduced to Congress, by 1949–50, 72 bills were being proposed. After 1946, several Northern states passed local restrictions against racial discrimination in employment.

During the 1940s, there was also a marked improvement in the quality and accessibility of black education. In the 1930s, the incomes of private black colleges had decreased by 16 per cent, and private

gifts declined by 50 per cent. In October 1943, a group of black college presidents, led by Tuskegee Institute president Frederick D. Patterson, established the United Negro College Fund to save these institutions. During 1944, 1945 and 1946, about a million dollars a year was raised. Black public schoolteachers campaigned to equalise the pay schedules between blacks and whites in a number of states and cities. In 1943, black teachers in Tampa, Florida, sued successfully in Federal court to overturn unequal salary schedules. This was followed by similar legal actions by black teachers in Charleston, South Carolina, in 1944, and in Columbia, South Carolina, Newport News, Virginia, Little Rock, Arkansas, and Birmingham, Alabama, in 1945. Black parents attempted, with less success, to increase state allocations in support of black segregated public schools. On balance, greater progress in improving black educational prospects was achieved in these few years than during the previous three decades. By 1950, 83,000 black women and men between the ages of 18 to 24 were enrolled in universities, 4.5 per cent of their age group.

In the labour force, a similar picture of change emerged. Philip S. Foner notes that 'the median income of nonwhite wage- and salary-earners had risen from 41 percent of the white median in 1939 to 60 percent in 1950; the percentage of male black workers in white-collar and professional jobs had risen from 5.6 in 1940 to 7.2 in 1950, and that of craftsmen and operatives from 16.6 percent of the total in 1940 to 28.8 percent in 1950'.<sup>2</sup> By 1946, there were 450,000 black members of the American Federation of Labor (AFL) in the South, and another 200,000 in the rest of the country. Substantial numbers of blacks were in many sectors of the workforce that were unionised before the war and afterwards: 17 percent of all semi-skilled meatpacking workers were black, 9.2 percent of the coalminers, and 68 percent of the tobacco workers. By 1946, blacks were also well represented in the more progressive Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO). The largest numbers of black workers who were organised were in the Steelworkers of America-CIO (95,000 blacks); the Automobile, Aircraft, Agricultural Implement Workers of America-CIO (90,000); Hodcarriers and Common Labor-AFL (55,000); Marine and Shipbuilding Workers-CIO (40,000); and the United Electrical, Radio and Machine Workers-CIO (40,000). The nation's most influential black trade unionist, A. Philip Randolph, was a leading force for desegregation both inside the House of Labor

and within the largest society. By 1955, he was named vice-president of the merged AFL-CIO.

The growing social and economic power of the black working and middle classes seemed to many to provide the basis for an entirely new political relationship between blacks and whites. In early 1948, NAACP political theorist Henry Lee Moon predicted with stunning accuracy that the potential weight of this emerging black force could no longer be ignored by either the Democratic or the Republican parties. The ballot is 'the indispensable weapon in the persistent fight for full citizenship . . . a tool to be used [against] Jim Crow', Moon declared in *Balance of Power: The Negro Vote*. 'By 1936, after four years of the New Deal, colored voters in the urban centers of the North and East had caught up with the procession. The mass migration out of the Republican camp was in response to the Roosevelt program which . . . made an effort to meet some of their urgent needs'.<sup>3</sup> Moon observed that the black vote would be delivered in the future only to those candidates of either party who addressed civil rights issues and strengthened the social and economic reform programmes initiated by the Roosevelt administration. He also cautioned Democrats not to take the black voter for granted, and sensed that, even in any election year, blacks could easily move their allegiances. In retrospect, Moon seriously overemphasised the volatility of the black electorate; but at the time, no white candidate could be absolutely certain that blacks would remain basically Democrats. During the early post-war years, blacks had occupied positions of minor-level influence in the trade unions, in municipal and state politics, and were in many formerly all-white universities. It was apparent to every observer, particularly the national leaders of the Democratic Party, that the black electorate's interests would have to be accommodated at the expense of the South and Jim Crow.

## II

The democratic upsurge of black people which characterised the late 1950s could have happened ten years earlier. With the notable exception of the *Brown* decision of 17 May 1954, which ordered the desegregation of public schools, most of the important Supreme Court decisions which aided civil rights proponents had been passed some years before. In May 1946, for example, the high court ruled

that state laws requiring segregation on inter-state buses were unconstitutional. In *Smith v. Allwright*, delivered 3 April 1944, by an eight to one margin, the Supreme Court ended the use of the all-white primary election. By the spring of 1946, there were 75,000 black registered voters in Texas and 100,000 black voters in Georgia. Yet the sit-ins, the non-violence street demonstrations, did not yet occur; the façade of white supremacy was crumbling, yet for almost ten years there was no overt and mass movement which challenged racism in the streets. This interim decade, between World War II and the Montgomery County, Alabama, bus boycott of December 1955, has also generally been ignored by black social historians. I think that the answer to the question, 'Why were mass popular protests for desegregation relatively weak or non-existent in the period 1945–54?' is precisely the answer to the second question, 'Why have historians of the black Movement done so little research on the post-war period?' The impact of the Cold War, the anti-communist purges and near-totalitarian social environment, had a devastating effect upon the cause of blacks' civil rights and civil liberties. As this chapter will illustrate, the paranoid mood of anti-communist America made it difficult for any other reasonable reform movement to exist. The sterile legacy of anti-communism, felt even today, has so influenced many American historians that they are not even able to comment on the facts before them.

By the end of 1946, the Soviet Union and the United States had reached a clear breaking point in their relations. From the Soviets' perspective, the Americans were ungrateful for their pre-eminent role in the anti-fascist war effort, and lacked any critical understanding of their domestic and foreign requirements needed to restore peace and economic order. The Soviets had lost 20 million men and women in World War II. During the summer of 1946, the worst drought of the twentieth century dried up all the crops in the Ukraine and Volga lands, and millions were on the verge of starvation. Urban consumption declined to only 40 per cent of 1940 totals. 'In the coal-mines of the Donetz Basin men were still pumping water out of the shafts. . . . The steel mills, rattling with wear and tear, turned out only 12 million tons of ingot, a fraction of the American output. Engineering plants were worked by adolescent semi-skilled labour. People were dressed in rags; many were barefoot.'<sup>4</sup> The Soviet Union was simply in no condition to fight another war, but it did feel that its national interests had to be preserved. The Americans were driven by other motives.

For many political conservatives and emigrants from Eastern Europe, World War II had been ‘the wrong war against the wrong enemy’, writes social historian David Cauter. ‘These groups were joined after 1944 by others initially favorable to the war but subsequently appalled by the spread of Soviet Communism in Eastern Europe and by the reduction of [these] nations to satellite status. Here Catholic indignation ran high.’ Anti-communist liberals in both major political parties ‘soon developed a determination to halt Soviet encroachment by every available means and to deal roughly with elements at home – Communists, fellow travelers, Progressives – who foolishly or wickedly adopted the Soviet point of view’.<sup>5</sup> American corporate interests were concerned about expanding investments abroad and reducing or eliminating all pro-labour legislation sponsored by the New Deal at home. The anti-communist campaign permitted them to do both, as well as to flush suspected leftists out of positions of trade union authority. A great many post-war politicians, such as Wisconsin Senator Joe McCarthy and California Senator Richard M. Nixon, simply ‘recognized a good thing when they saw it, [and] cynically manipulated public hysteria for their own political purposes’.<sup>6</sup>

Noted playwright Lillian Hellman accurately describes the post-war ‘Red Scare’ period as a ‘Scoundrel Time’:

It was not the first time in history that the confusions of honest people were picked up in space by cheap baddies who, hearing a few bars of popular notes, made them into an opera of public disorder, staged and sung, as much of the congressional testimony shows, in the wards of an insane asylum. A theme is always necessary, a plain, simple, unadorned theme to confuse the ignorant. The anti-Red theme was easily chosen . . . not alone because we were frightened of socialism, but chiefly, I think, to destroy the remains of Roosevelt and his sometimes advanced work. The McCarthy group . . . chose the anti-Red scare with perhaps more cynicism than Hitler picked anti-Semitism.<sup>7</sup>

In March 1947, Truman asked Congress to spend \$400 million in economic aid and military hardware to halt leftist movements in Turkey and Greece. In the following years, five million investigations of public employees suspected of communist sympathies were held. Trade unions were pressured to purge all communists and anti-racist activists with leftist credentials. By July 1947, union leader Philip

Murray ordered the CIO executive committee, 'If communism is an issue in your unions, throw it to hell out, and throw its advocates out along with it'.<sup>8</sup> The CIO convention of 1949 expelled the 50,000-member United Electrical, Radio, and Machine Workers union for being dominated by leftists; within months, eleven progressive unions with nearly one million members were purged from the CIO. In 1949, 15 states passed 'anti-subversion laws'. 'Writing or speaking subversive words' in Michigan was a crime punishable by a life sentence in prison. In 1951, Tennessee mandated the death penalty for the espousal of revolutionary Marxist ideas. That same year, Massachusetts required a three-year term in the state prison for anyone who allowed a Communist Party meeting to be held in their homes. Georgia, Indiana, Pennsylvania and Washington outlawed the Communist Party. The US Attorney General, Tom Clark of Texas, warned all Americans in January 1948: 'Those who do not believe in the ideology of the United States, shall not be allowed to stay in the United States'.<sup>9</sup>

'The wealthiest, most secure nation in the world was sweat-drenched in fear', Cauter writes. 'Federal, state and municipal employees worried about their pasts, their student indiscretions, their slenderest associations. . . . Some hastened to save their own skin by denouncing a colleague. In schools, universities, town halls and local professional associations, a continuous, pious mumbling of oaths was heard – the liturgy of fear.'<sup>10</sup> For black America, the 'Scoundrel Time' was refracted through the prism of race, and was viewed in the light of their own particular class interests. For many black industrial and rural agricultural workers, the communists were the most dedicated proponents of racial equality and desegregation. In the 1930s, they had organised a vigorous defence of the Scottsboro Nine, a group of young black men unjustly convicted of rape in Alabama. The Party had sponsored Unemployed Councils, and provided the major force to desegregate American labour unions. For the aspiring black middle class, the image of the Communist Party was entirely different. Many black preachers had often denounced Marxism because of its philosophical atheism. Black entrepreneurs were dedicated to the free enterprise system, and sought to enrich themselves through the existing economic order. Many black leaders had condemned the Party during World War II for urging blacks to maintain labour's 'no strike' pledges. Foner notes, 'It was to be exceedingly difficult for the Communists to overcome the resentment

among blacks created by the Party's wartime policies. The Communists never completely erased the feeling in sections of the black community that they had placed the Soviet Union's survival above the battle for black equality.<sup>11</sup> In general, black middle-class leaders attempted to divorce themselves from the communists as the reactionary trend was building across the country.

The most prominent black leaders were affected in different ways by the outbreak of the domestic Cold War. Randolph was the doyen of the black labour movement. During World War I, he and his radical associate Chandler Owen had edited the militantly socialist journal the *Messenger*, and were known throughout Harlem as the 'Lenin and Trotsky' of the black movement. During the Red Summer of 1919, President Woodrow Wilson had denounced Randolph as 'the most dangerous Negro in America'. During the mid-1920s Randolph had organised the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters, and began to moderate his leftist views considerably. His fierce struggle with the Communist Party over the leadership of the National Negro Congress from 1935 and 1939 left a bitter anti-communist bias in his entire political outlook. During the war, he had continued to urge black workers to adopt a 'strategy and maneuver (of) mass civil disobedience and non-cooperation' to fight racism.<sup>12</sup> But Randolph opposed, certainly from this point onward, any co-operation or 'united front' activity with the communists. In 1947, he organised the Committee Against Jim Crow in Military Service and Training, and threatened the Senate Armed Services Committee that he would direct a massive civil disobedience effort if the US armed forces were not promptly desegregated. But in the post-war years, Randolph deliberately eschewed any political or organisational links with revolutionary Marxists. In his speeches and writings, he denounced the domestic communist 'conspiracy' at every opportunity. By clearly separating the interests of black labour from the radical left, he believed that he could gain the political support of many anti-communist liberals and the Truman Administration. As Randolph declared before a Congressional committee in 1948, racial segregation 'is the greatest single propaganda and political weapon in the hands of Russia and international communism today'.<sup>13</sup>

Although elected to Congress only in 1944, Adam Clayton Powell, Jr., quickly emerged as the most influential black public official for the next two decades. Almost twenty years younger than Randolph, Powell had acquired his reputation as a dedicated militant during the



Great Depression. As the son of the leader of one of the largest black churches in the nation, Harlem's Abyssinian Baptist Church, Powell led a series of popular boycotts which called for black jobs and greater welfare and social services. A charismatic speaker whose entire 'way of life' was 'an act of rebellion', Powell had at first no reservations about joining with the communists who defended the interests of black poor and working people.<sup>14</sup> The practical contributions of the Party were praised by Powell in a 1945 statement: 'There is no group in America, including the Christian church, that practices racial brotherhood one-tenth as much as the Communist Party'.<sup>15</sup> Once in Congress, Powell led the fight against anti-communism. In early 1947, when two Congressional contempt citations were passed against communists who refused to divulge information to the House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC) by votes of 370 to 1 and 357 to 2, only Powell and progressive New York Congressman Vito Marcantonio voted against the majority. Powell recognised that every defender of racial segregation in Congress was also a devout proponent of anti-communist legislation, and that the Negro had no other alternative except to champion the civil liberties of the left in order to protect the black community's own interests. This advanced perspective, which would prove to be correct in later years, found little support among the black middle class, despite Powell's continued personal popularity. Within Congress itself, Powell was contemptuously dismissed as a political pariah for fifteen years.

Since 1930, the leader of the NAACP had been Walter White. Under his direction the organisation had grown in numbers and political influence. During the 1920s, he had written a provocative investigative report on lynchings in the South. As an assistant secretary to James Weldon Johnson, he had served tirelessly and with Johnson's retirement, White slowly moved the NAACP to the right. Internally, co-workers who resisted any of White's initiatives were soon fired. In DuBois' words, White 'was absolutely self-centered and egotistical to the point that he was almost unconscious of it. He seemed really to believe that his personal interests and the interest of the race and organization were identical. This led to curious complications, because to attain his objects he was often absolutely unscrupulous.'<sup>16</sup> In 1933-34, White feuded with DuBois over the NAACP's lack of a coherent economic policy for blacks to deal with the Great Depression. In despair and outrage, DuBois resigned as

editor of the NAACP journal, the *Crisis*, in June 1934, after 24 years of service. DuBois returned to the NAACP after an absence of ten years as research director, but with the outbreak of the Cold War, White pressured the board to fire him within three years because of DuBois' 'radical thought' and progressive activities in international peace and Pan-Africanist movements. White's bitter relationship with DuBois was manifested towards his opposition to the entire American left generally. From the beginning of his tenure at the NAACP, he had fought any influence of communists or independent radicals in the organisation. He supported the early 'witch-hunts' to exclude communists from all levels of the Federal government. When in late 1947, a poll of the NAACP national office revealed that 70 per cent of the staff intended to support former vice president Henry Wallace on the Progressive Party ticket in opposition to Truman, White warned DuBois and other Wallace-advocates not to take part in any electoral campaign. Simultaneously, White was already 'making a nationwide drive for Truman, by letter, newspaper articles, telegrams and public speech'. Like Randolph, White attempted to identify the struggle for black equality with the anti-communist impulse.<sup>17</sup>

The most prominent black supporters of progressive and leftist politics were DuBois and the famous cultural artist-activist Paul Robeson. DuBois had been an independent socialist since 1904, but had experienced a series of volatile confrontations with revolutionary Marxists. In the wake of the Bolshevik Revolution, he denounced the entire concept of the 'dictatorship of the proletariat', and told the readers of the *Crisis* that he was 'not prepared to dogmatize with Marx and Lenin'.<sup>18</sup> As late as 1944, DuBois had written that 'the program of the American Communist Party was suicidal'.<sup>19</sup> Yet after extensive travels in the Soviet Union in 1926, 1936 and 1949, DuBois' view on matters shifted considerably. He concluded that the Soviets' anti-imperialist positions promoting the necessity for African political independence from European colonial rule were genuinely progressive; he was impressed with the Soviet Union's extensive domestic educational, social and technological gains. By the late 1940s, he believed that the black liberation movement in America had to incorporate a socialist perspective, and that blacks had to be in the forefront in promoting peaceful co-existence with the Soviet bloc. Robeson was politically closer to the communist movement for a greater period of time. In the late 1930s, he supported the progressive government of Spain against the Nazi-backed Spanish fascists in that

country's bloody civil war. He recognised earlier than DuBois that the rise in domestic anti-communism would become a force to stifle progressive change and the civil rights of blacks. In early 1949, in a controversial address in Paris, he declared that US policies toward Africa were 'similar to that of Hitler and Goebbels'. The Soviet Union 'has raised our people to full human dignity'. These and other statements led to Robeson's wide public censure. His noted career as a Shakespearean actor and singer, which was described by American critics as the most gifted of his generation before 1945, crashed in short order. To muffle Robeson's impact, HUAC quickly called black baseball player Jackie Robinson before the committee to denounce him. Robeson had been a 'famous ex-athlete and a great singer and actor', Robinson admitted, but his subversive statements gave support to the communist cause. 'We can win the fight [against segregation] without the Communists and we don't want their help.'<sup>20</sup>

As the presidential election of 1948 approached, the Truman Administration recognised that the Negro electorate would play an unusually decisive role in the campaign. More than Roosevelt, Truman privately viewed the blacks' goals of social and political equality with great contempt. But the administration's aggressively anti-communist polemics could not create a sufficient electoral bloc among white voters which would guarantee victory that November. Democratic party disaffections grew on the left and right, with Wallace's Progressive Party and the Southern-based States' Rights Party, which nominated hard-line segregationist Strom Thurmond of South Carolina. The Republicans renominated popular New York governor Thomas Dewey as their standard-bearer, a politician who had run a very creditable race against Roosevelt in 1944. Presidential advisers informed Truman that he might even win the popular vote, but without critical black support in the industrial Northeast, the Midwest, and California, he would lose the electoral college count to Dewey – or, as in 1800 and 1824, a disastrous statement could occur and the House of Representatives might have to select a president in 1949. Thus, for the first time since 1876, it seemed apparent that blacks would decide the national election. Truman immediately responded to blacks' interests by publicly calling for new civil rights legislation. He promised to promote fair employment procedures and to press federal contractors aggressively to comply with desegregation guidelines. On 26 July 1948, the president issued an executive order

to the effect 'that there shall be equality of treatment and opportunity for all persons in the armed forces without regard to race, color, religion or national origin'.<sup>21</sup> Randolph promptly suspended the Committee Against Jim Crow in Military Service and Training's plans for a proposed boycott. White and his NAACP supporters exhorted blacks to reject the Wallace campaign, and urged them to vote for Truman in the interests of civil rights. White's efforts were a triumph for Cold War liberalism. In Harlem, Truman received 90,000 votes to Wallace's 21,000 votes, even though the Progressive Party's anti-racist platform was far superior to that of Truman's. In Pittsburgh, only 2000 blacks cast ballots for Wallace. In California, Ohio and Illinois, black voters provided the decisive electoral edge for Truman over Dewey. Overall, Truman carried about two-thirds of the black vote, and with that margin, he won the election. True to his campaign promises, in 1949 Truman continued to promote modest biracial reform efforts at the Federal level, while at the same time escalating the Cold War at home. Truman's victory silenced and isolated black progressives for many years, and committed the NAACP and most middle-class black leaders to an alliance with Democratic presidents who did not usually share black workers' interests, except in ways which would promote their own needs at a given moment. Accommodation, anti-communism, and tacit allegiance to white liberals and labour bureaucrats became the principal tenets of black middle-class politics for the next decade.

### III

Without much public fanfare or notice, a series of new political formations created by blacks and liberal whites began to emerge at this time. Blacks in South Carolina formed the Progressive Democratic Party to challenge the whites-only state Democratic Party. By May 1944, the Progressive Democrats had organised chapters in 39 of the state's 46 counties, and had begun an independent electoral strategy to expand the number of registered black voters in South Carolina. That same year, the biracial Southern Regional Council was formed in Atlanta, a coalition of clergy and professionals who supported the gradual but steady abolition of Jim Crow. The most important new biracial group, however, was the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE), established in 1942 by the pacifist Fellowship of Reconciliation, directed by A. J. Muste. Of CORE's 50 charter members, at least a dozen were black, including a Howard University

divinity school graduate, James Farmer. The black youth secretary for the Fellowship of Reconciliation, social democrat and pacifist Bayard Rustin, gave political purpose and direction to the young formation. One of CORE's first actions was a confrontation with barbers at the University of Chicago who in November 1942 refused to cut Rustin's hair. From these modest beginnings, CORE developed into a civil rights group which emphasised non-violent direct action, rather than the litigation and moral suasion techniques of Walter White and the NAACP. Unlike the older organisation, it was democratic, and most funds raised by chapters remained at the local level. By 1947, there were 13 CORE chapters, mostly in Ohio, New York, Illinois, Kansas, and Minnesota. CORE chapters staged a series of non-violent boycotts to desegregate lunchcounters and schools in a series of Northern and Midwest cities. White Methodist student leader George Houser and Rustin developed a plan for CORE to test desegregation laws on inter-state buses in the upper South during the late autumn of 1946. Perhaps hearing about the proposed 'Journeys of Reconciliation', NAACP leaders, including attorney Thurgood Marshall, warned that: 'A disobedience movement on the part of Negroes and their white allies, if employed in the South, would result in wholesale slaughter with no good achieved'.<sup>22</sup> Walter White, true to form, refused to provide any financial support for the effort. On 9 April 1947, a small party of 8 blacks and 8 whites left Washington, DC, determined to sit in whites-only sections of the buses. In the journeys, CORE members were repeatedly arrested and intimidated by Southern police, bus drivers, and the local courts. Rustin and other activists were sentenced to serve 30 days on North Carolina's jail gang. The Journeys of Reconciliation failed to overturn the South's racial codes, but in the process, they established a pattern of civil rights protest which would be revived with greater effectiveness as the Freedom Ride movement in the 1960s.

By the early 1950s, the progress towards civil rights began to slow down perceptibly. The number of registered black Southern voters reached 1.2 million by 1952. Yet 'in the lower South, apart from a very few cities', C. Vann Woodward writes, 'little change in Negro voting or office-holding could be detected. By one means or another, including intimidation and terror, Negroes were effectively prevented from registering even when they had the courage to try'.<sup>23</sup> On 2 June 1946, a black army veteran, Etoy Fletcher, was flogged publicly in Brandon, Mississippi for attempting to register. Senator Theodore

Bilbo of Mississippi boasted that only 1500 out of 500,000 black potential voters were registered in his state. 'The best way to keep a nigger away from a white primary is to see him the night before', Bilbo declared. The *Jackson Daily News* (Mississippi) warned the state's few registered black voters: 'Don't attempt to participate in the Democratic primary anywhere in Mississippi. . . . Staying away from the polls will be the best way to prevent unhealthy and unhappy results'.<sup>24</sup> Southern registrars employed Kafkaesque tests to determine whether blacks were 'literate' enough to vote. One white registrar in Forest County, Mississippi, asked black potential voters this question: 'How many bubbles are in a bar of soap?'<sup>25</sup> As one Alabama political leader explained, the vote of even one black person in the deep South was an intolerable threat to the entire structure of Jim Crow. 'If it was necessary to eliminate the Negro in 1901, because of certain inherent characteristics, it is even more necessary now because some intellectual progress makes the Negro more dangerous to our political structure now than in 1901. The Negro has the same disposition to live without working that his ancestors had in the jungle 10,000 years ago.'<sup>26</sup> Most of these racist politicians were still leading figures in the national Democratic Party, and were represented in powerful posts in the Truman Administration.

Truman himself was virtually silent from 1946–53 as white racist vigilante groups proliferated. As the black population in Los Angeles County, California, reached 200,000 by 1946, the Ku Klux Klan began to appear on the West Coast. Klan organisations were formed throughout the South, and were reported active in Pennsylvania and New Jersey. In New York, the state attorney general estimated that there were 1000 Klansmen in his state alone in the late 1940s. In the face of growing racist opposition, the NAACP counselled continued reliance upon the Truman Administration, legal challenges to segregation laws, and a general policy which spurned direct action. The failure and tragedy of this conservative approach to social change was in its parochial vision and tacit acceptance of the Cold War politics. By refusing to work with Marxists, the NAACP lost the most principled anti-racist organisers and activists. Instead of confronting the racists politically, with the commitment of a Robeson or a DuBois, they accepted the prevailing xenophobia of the times, and in the end undercut their own efforts to segregate society. The anti-communist impulse even affected CORE, to its detriment. A few CORE chapters, in Columbus, Ohio, and Chicago, encouraged Marxist participation

in the early 1940s. In 1949, however, when Trotskyists joined the San Francisco chapter, the national office voided its affiliation. In 1948, Houser and CORE's executive committee drafted a 'Statement on Communism', which was passed unanimously by its convention that year. CORE denounced any ties with 'Communist-controlled' groups, and CORE members were ordered not to co-operate or work with so-called communist-front organisations. As CORE's historians noted, this action did not prevent 'conservatives and racists from continuing to attack CORE as Communist-controlled. Despite its vigorous anticommunist position, CORE suffered considerably from the McCarthyite hysteria of the period. The Red Scare, by labeling radical reform groups subversive, seriously impeded CORE's growth.'<sup>27</sup> By 1954, CORE had all but ceased to exist as an organisation.

#### IV

As the Cold War intensified, the repression of black progressives increased. Aided by local and state police, a gang of whites disrupted a concert given by Paul Robeson in Peekskill, New York in 1948. HUAC witnesses declared that Robeson was 'the black Stalin among Negroes'.<sup>28</sup> In August 1950, the US government revoked his passport for eight years. Officials prevented Robeson entering Canada in 1952, although no passport was necessary to visit that country. DuBois ran for the US Senate in New York in the autumn of 1950 on the progressive American Labor Party ticket, and denounced the anti-communist policies of both major parties. Despite wide public censure, he received 206,000 votes, and polled 15 per cent of Harlem's ballots. The Truman Administration finally moved to eliminate DuBois' still considerable prestige within the black community. On 8 February 1951, DuBois was indicted for allegedly serving as an 'agent of a foreign principal' in his anti-war work with the Peace Information Center in New York. The 82-year-old black man was handcuffed, fingerprinted, and portrayed in the national media as a common criminal. Before his trial, the New York *Herald-Tribune* convicted him in a prominent editorial: 'The DuBois outfit was set up to promote a tricky appeal of Soviet origin, poisonous in its surface innocence, which made it appear that a signature against the use of atomic weapons would forthwith insure world peace. It was, in short, an attempt to disarm America and yet ignore every form of Communist

aggression.’<sup>29</sup> An international committee was formed to defend DuBois and his colleagues at the Peace Information Center. Threatened with a fine of \$100,000 and a five-year jail term, DuBois continued to denounce the Truman Administration while out on bail. In November 1951, a Federal judge dismissed all charges against DuBois, when the government failed to introduce a single piece of evidence that implied that he was a communist agent.

Despite DuBois’ acquittal, the government had accomplished its primary objectives. DuBois’ voluminous writings on Negro sociology, history and politics were removed from thousands of libraries and universities. The State Department illegally withheld his passport for seven years. Black public opinion moved even further to the right. One leading black newspaper which had carried DuBois’ essays for decades, the *Chicago Defender*, declared that ‘it is a supreme tragedy that he should have become embroiled in activities that have been exposed as subversive in the twilight of his years’. The oldest Negro fraternity, which DuBois had helped to found in 1906, Alpha Phi Alpha, did not rally to his defence. Only one of thirty Alpha Phi Alpha chapters expressed public support for DuBois. Virtually every black college president except Charles S. Johnson of Fisk University, DuBois’ *alma mater*, said nothing about the case. The NAACP was especially conspicuous in its moral cowardice. White told NAACP board members that the government had definite proof which would convict DuBois. The NAACP Legal Defense lawyers made no overtures to provide assistance. The central office contacted NAACP local chapters with strongly worded advice about ‘not touching’ DuBois’ case. Black schoolteachers’ groups and the black National Baptist Convention took no action. The entire ordeal left DuBois in bitter doubt about the political future of the Negro middle class:

The reaction of Negroes [to the case] revealed a distinct cleavage not hitherto clear in American Negro opinion. The intelligentsia, the successful business and professional men, were . . . either silent or actually antagonistic. The reasons were clear; many believed that the government had actual proof of subversive activities on our part; until the very end they awaited their disclosure. [These blacks] had become American in their acceptance of exploitation as defensible, and in their imitation of American ‘conspicuous expenditure.’ They proposed to make money and spend it as pleased them. They had beautiful homes, large and expensive cars



and fur coats. They hated 'communism' and 'socialism' as much as any white American.<sup>30</sup>

On many black college campuses, the Red Scare was reflected in a growing exclusion of radical views from classroom discourse. Any faculty member who had a history of militant activism, either in the Communist Party or in other suspicious groups, could be fired. Two examples from Fisk University can be cited. Giovanni Rossi Lomanitz had been an active Party member in the early 1940s, working in the Federation of Architects, Engineers, Chemists and Technicians. A former associate of J. Robert Oppenheimer, Lomanitz taught at Cornell and in the late 1940s began an appointment at Fisk. In 1949 HUAC subpoenaed Lomanitz, and before the committee he refused to testify against himself, citing the Fifth Amendment. In twenty-four hours, despite the support of faculty and students, president Charles S. Johnson dismissed Lomanitz without due process. Five years later, Fisk mathematics professor Lee Lorch was summoned before HUAC. Lorch pointedly denied being a member of the Communist Party during his tenure at Fisk, and refused to answer questions about his alleged Party membership before 1941 by evoking the First Amendment. Johnson issued a public statement stating that Lorch's position before HUAC 'is for all practical purposes tantamount to admission of membership (in the Communist Party)'. Out of a faculty of 70, 48 urged Fisk's Board of Trustees to retain him, as did 22 student leaders and 150 alumni. Fisk instead ended Lorch's contract, as of June 1955.<sup>31</sup>

A number of black former activists agreed to become informers against the communists. In the federal trial of twelve leading Party officials, which included two blacks, New York City Councilman Benjamin J. Davis and Henry Winston, staged in New York City during July and August 1948, one of the government's black witnesses was an autoworker, William Cummings. Cummings joined the Party in 1943 for the FBI in Toledo, Ohio, and told the jury that communists 'taught militants that one day the streets would run with blood'. The defendants received sentences ranging from three to five years in Federal prisons, and were ordered to pay fines of \$5000 each. Some of the Party's oldest black recruits turned into agents for the government. William O. Nowell, born in a Southern sharecropper's family, joined the Party in the late 1920s. Trained in the Soviet Union, he rose as a Party leader in Detroit's trade union struggles.

When he was expelled from the Party in 1936, he promptly worked as an agent in Henry Ford's 'goon squad', threatening and beating other autoworkers. From 1948 until 1954, Nowell became a 'professional anti-communist', testifying in approximately 40 trials and hearings. Manning Johnson entered the Party in 1930, and quickly climbed to its national committee in the ten years before his departure. Johnson repeatedly perjured himself at numerous trials, later claiming with pride that he would lie 'a thousand times' to protect 'the security of the government'. The US Justice Department paid Johnson \$4500 a year for his services. Ex-communist Leonard Patterson received \$3800 a year for two years, testifying against his former comrades before HUAC and in the courts. North Carolina black attorney Clayton Clontz joined the Party after the war, and covertly informed the FBI on its activities from August 1948 until February 1953. In the trial of one communist, Clontz made the astonishing claim that he was told that Soviet troops would land in the US if America 'declared war on [U.S.] communists in the revolution'.<sup>32</sup>

The purge of communists and radicals from organised labour in 1947–50 was the principal reason for the decline in the AFL–CIO's commitment to the struggle against racial segregation. In the wake of the NAACP's stampede to the right, a left of centre space on the political spectrum was open, and militant black workers took advantage of the opportunity. In June 1950, nearly 1000 delegates met in Chicago at the National Labor Conference for Negro Rights. Robeson gave a moving plenary address which condemned the Cold War and supported détente with the Soviet bloc countries. Black delegates from AFL unions noted that the federation still maintained all-white unions, and black veterans of the CIO argued that their organisation had all but abandoned the struggle for Negro rights. The Chicago conference established a steering committee for the co-ordination of future work, which included Coleman Young, a Detroit leader of the Amalgamated Clothing Workers, UAW activist William R. Hood, and Cleveland Robinson, vice president of the Distributive, Processing, and Office Workers Union. In 1950 and 1951, the committee helped to develop 23 Negro Labor Councils, each fighting to end segregated facilities at the workplace, expanding black job opportunities, and attacking racism in the unions. The militant Detroit Council, led by Hood, inspired the call for the creation of a new black progressive labour organisation. In October 1951, the National Negro Labor Council was formed in Cincinnati, Ohio. The

delegates at the convention represented unions expelled from the CIO for retaining communists, as well as members of both the AFL and CIO. Hood emerged as the president, and Young was elected executive secretary. Almost immediately, the National Negro Labor Council came under direct attack. CIO leaders denounced Hood, Young and other black labour activists as the 'tool(s) of the Soviet Union'. Lester Granger of the National Urban League criticised the Council as 'subversive'. In its brief history, the organisation pressured to desegregate jobs in major US firms; organised campaigns to increase black workers' salaries and to upgrade their job ranks; led pickets against hotels and companies practising Jim Crow; and challenged the unions to advance more black workers into leadership positions. The pressure against the Congress' pickets and protest activities was enormous. By December 1954, HUAC denounced the 'pro-Communist ideology' of the organisation. It is true that communists participated in the National Negro Labor Council, but in no way were the desegregationist programmes it carried out dictated or even directly influenced by the Party. By 1956, however, due to political pressures from the US government, corporations and white labour leaders, the National Negro Labor Council had disappeared.<sup>33</sup>

Besides Robeson, DuBois, and the militant workers of the National Negro Labor Council, few examples or models of black resistance existed, except in the Communist Party. Black communist leader Henry Winston was confined during his 1948 trial in a poorly ventilated, closet-like cell. Despite two heart attacks, and following this, the judge's denial that he be seen by his family doctor, Winston's will to fight remained strong. At the April 1952 trial of black communists Pettis Perry and Claudia Jones, Perry described himself 'as a victim of a frameup so enormous as to resemble the Reichstag Fire trial' of 1933. Secretary of the Party's Negro Commission, Perry defiantly asked the court, 'How could a Negro get justice from a white jury?' A native West Indian Marxist, Jones 'delivered a long indictment of America's treatment of black people'. Convicted, Perry received three years and a \$5000 fine; Jones, one year and one day in jail, and a \$2000 fine. Claude Lightfoot, secretary of the Illinois party, was arrested in June 1954, and had to stay in jail four months until \$30,000 bail money could be collected. Convicted in January 1955, the black World War II veteran was given five years and a \$5000 fine. Prison life for these black revolutionaries was difficult physically, but their resistance remained uncompromised. Claudia Jones' acute

asthmatic and cardiac conditions were made worse by having to work at a prison loom. In ten months she was sent to a hospital, and she died not long after her release. Prison doctors refused to treat Winston's eyesight, and as a result he became blind. Confronted with segregated accommodation in the Federal prison at Terre Haute, Indiana, Benjamin Davis filed a suit against prison officials. Despite being placed on 'round-the-clock administrative segregation', Davis refused to be defeated.<sup>34</sup>

The black middle class's almost complete capitulation to anti-communism not only liquidated the moderately progressive impulse of the New Deal years and 1945–46; it made the Negroes unwitting accomplices of a Cold War domestic policy which was, directly, both racist and politically reactionary. When paranoid librarians took DuBois' works off their shelves, they did not stop there – banned literature often included black publications such as the *Negro Digest* and the NAACP's *Crisis*, as well as the *New Republic*, *The Nation*, and other white-oriented liberal journals friendly to desegregation causes. When Robeson was blacklisted along with Lillian Hellman, director Dalton Trumbo and the 'Hollywood Ten', did blacks think their feeble voices praising American patriotism would save black actors and artists? The wife of Adam Clayton Powell, Hazel Scott, a talented singer and pianist, could not obtain employment for years. Black television actor William Marshall, stage performer Canada Lee, and others were victimised by blacklists. When Randolph defended anti-communism at home, did he not recognise that in doing so, he became a tool for American interests and power abroad? In 1952, Randolph travelled with Socialist leader Norman Thomas to Asia under the auspices of the Congress for Cultural Freedom. Speaking in Japan and Burma, he denounced Russia's 'slavery' and emphasised the progress made in US race relations. In 1967, it was revealed that the Congress for Cultural Freedom was a subsidised front for the US Central Intelligence Agency (CIA). Historian Christopher Lasch's criticisms of Thomas could be made with equal vigour of Randolph: 'He does not see that he was being used [for different purposes] from the ones he thought he was advancing. He thought he was working for democratic reform . . . whereas the CIA valued him as a showpiece, an anti-Communist who happened to be a Socialist'.<sup>35</sup> By serving as the 'left wing of McCarthyism', Randolph, White and other Negro leaders retarded the black movement for a decade or more.

## V

Another dimension to America's traditional racial dilemma became more prominent after the war. Blacks were by far the largest single racial minority group in the nation, but they were not alone. In the Far West, Chinese peasants were brought into California to labour in the mines and for railroad companies after the Civil War. Before the Depression of 1893 roughly 30,000 worked as lowly-paid labourers on Californian ranches and farms. In the 1890s, a trickle of Japanese immigrants expanded into a flood. By 1898, 60,000 Japanese lived in Hawaii; between 1886 and 1908 the number of Japanese on the mainland increased from 4000 to over 100,000. The 1924 immigration legislation passed under President Calvin Coolidge effectively prevented Japanese entering the US mainland, but new waves of cheap workers were found by American businesses in the Philippines. By the end of the 1920s, about 25,000 impoverished Filipino farm-workers were employed in California's Salinas and San Joaquin valleys. At the beginning of World War II, some 78,000 Chinese-Americans and 127,000 Japanese-Americans were living on the West Coast. In the eastern US, coloured workers were drawn from the Caribbean. The Puerto Rican population in New York City alone increased from barely 60,000 in 1940 to 240,000 in 1950. The majority of these newer national minority groups experienced a system of rigid racial segregation, residential discrimination, political oppression and low wages which blacks had known intimately for generations. As early as 1906-7, anti-Japanese riots erupted in San Francisco, as racist whites pillaged the Japanese community. In 1942 over 100,000 Japanese-Americans, mostly native-born US citizens, or Nisei, were forcibly removed to internment camps for the duration of World War II. Most lost their homes and all of their personal belongings. The American general who supervised their mass arrests justified US policy in bluntly racist language: 'A Jap's a Jap. It makes no difference whether he is an American citizen or not'.<sup>36</sup> Puerto Rican workers were often victimised by policies of crude racial discrimination by unions and managers alike. Compounding this problem of ethnic competition for jobs was a fresh influx of European and Asian immigrants after 1945. Between 1948 and 1953, the Displaced Persons Act brought 410,000 Slavic and Germanic people into the country. Another 50,000 Hungarians and 31,000 Dutch-Indonesians arrived several years later. Thus by the Cold War period, the problem

of the colour line was not simply a social equation of black and white.

Despite the wide diversity of the national minorities which lived and laboured in the US, there were two specific oppressed groups with which blacks had a special relationship, by both historical experience and economic status – Mexican-Americans (or Chicanos) and American Indians. The Spanish had colonised the American Southwest almost 200 years before slavery effectively took root in the Carolinas and Virginia. Slavery was officially abolished by Mexico in 1829, a move designed primarily to halt the immigration of white slaveholders into Texas. After the Mexican War of 1846–48, the United States seized roughly half of the nation of Mexico as its territory, and within a generation, thousands of Mexican peasants worked as peons and wage-labourers for white American settlers. The ‘Anglos’ systematically weakened or destroyed the Spanish-built missions and other institutions of Mexican culture. Mexican ranches were seized, usually by illegal means, and became the property of white Americans. Mexican sheep-herders were often denied access to pasture lands and water for their flocks, and in the early 1880s scores were murdered by rampaging white ranchers in the Graham–Tewksbury War in Arizona. As heavy industry moved into the region by 1900 – railroads, mining, smelting – white corporations relied upon the Mexican population as their principal reservoir of cheap labour. In times of economic expansion, Mexicans were used as strike-breakers or scabs during periodic conflicts between white labourers and managers. In periods of recession and depression, they became the ‘reserve army of labour’, the first to be fired from their jobs, as blacks were in the South. During the 1930s, almost half a million Mexicans were forcibly deported ‘as unemployed Anglos claimed Mexican jobs’.<sup>37</sup> Racist and nativist groups, including the American Federation of Labor, the American Legion, the Daughters of the American Revolution and the Veterans of Foreign Wars, fought vigorously for the exclusion of additional Mexican workers from the country. The Ku Klux Klan in Texas, New Mexico and Arizona attacked and sometimes killed Chicano men and women with legal impunity. Despite these assaults and legal restrictions, the number of Mexican-Americans continued to increase. Between 1900 and 1930, approximately 1.5 million Mexicans settled in the United States – more than the total number of Europeans who colonised the US east coast between 1607 and 1790.

Throughout the early twentieth century, the political, economic and social status of Mexican-Americans was scarcely distinguishable from that of blacks. Like Afro-Americans, Chicanos attempted to improve their economic status by joining trade unions. Mexican-Americans participated in the Knights of Labor and several, including Manuel Lopez, a master workman of the Fort Worth, Texas local, emerged as key leaders. During the Great Depression, Chicano working-class activists were part of the Congress of Industrial Organizations, and were particularly influential in fighting racial prejudice as leaders of the United Cannery, Agricultural, Packing, and Allied Workers Union. Generally, however, the social controls imposed by both capital and the Anglo political and caste system remained effectively to check Mexican-American resistance. A dual pay structure in Arizona mines and in Southwestern ranches perpetuated the income gap between Chicanos and Anglos. Chicanos were generally denied basic constitutional rights and civil liberties even when they had been born inside the US. In electoral politics, their votes were often manipulated or discounted. One typical example of this occurred routinely during the 1930s and 1940s in southern Texas. Political bosses, or 'jefes', determined whether Chicanos were 'qualified' to vote on a case-by-case basis. As political scientist V. O. Key observed in 1949, the jefe often paid the Chicano voter's 'poll taxes' and held 'the tax receipts until election day to insure discipline and orderly procedure. Economic dependency often makes the control easier, and in south Texas there are large landholdings with whole communities employed on a single ranch'. In Duval County, Texas, such regimentation of the Chicano vote ensured electoral margins for favoured Democratic Party candidates of at least 90 per cent. The Duval vote in the Democratic Party Senatorial primary of 1948, for example, was 4622 votes for the then Congressman Lyndon Johnson to 40 votes for his opponent. The common judgement among most white Texas politicians, therefore, was that the Mexican-American electorate had 'only the most remote conception of Anglo-Saxon governmental institutions'. Among Chicanos, Key wrote, one finds 'a high incidence of political indifference, ignorance, timidity, and sometimes venality'.<sup>38</sup> People subjected to such racist contempt are inevitably the victims of violence. During August 1942, Los Angeles police illegally raided the growing Latino barrio (ghetto) of that city and arrested 600 Chicanos. In June 1943, fourteen off-duty policemen established a

'Vengeance Squad' and began attacking Los Angeles Chicanos at random. Joined by hundreds of white sailors and tourists, they 'toured the barrios in convoys of taxi cabs, in bars and restaurants and movie houses' as white police officers 'looked the other way'. History records the incident as the 'Zoot Suit Riots', named for the style of clothing then worn by young Chicano males: in fact, it was a racist pogrom not unlike that waged by whites against the black community of Atlanta in 1906, or against Chicago blacks in 1919.<sup>39</sup>

The special plight of the Native Americans at the hands of European settlers pre-dated American slavery itself. A succession of colonial, state and federal government treaties with various Indian nations, from the seventeenth century to the mid-nineteenth century, were invariably violated by whites in an effort to eradicate the Indian from the frontier. By the end of President Andrew Jackson's Administration, the majority of Native American nations had been defeated militarily and forcibly removed west of the Mississippi. After the Civil War, the US government pursued a policy against the Indians of the west which can only be termed genocidal. General William T. Sherman's 1866 orders to his troops were specific: 'At least 10 Indians are to be killed for each white life lost. You should not allow the troops to settle down on the defensive but carry the war to the Indian camps, where the women and children are . . . [You] should not delay the punishment of the Indians as a people.'<sup>40</sup> The contemporary Indian nationalist movement of the 1970s and 1980s was born here, over a century ago, in the fierce determination of Native American people to resist their own extermination. The Athabascan people of the Southwest (Apaches and Navajos) waged an unrelenting campaign to maintain their way of life and culture, as did the Sioux and other Indian nations of the Great Plains. By the end of the century, however, the sheer numbers of settlers and the superiority of white military power overwhelmed and crushed the Indian resistance movement. Indian leaders and guerrilla generals – Sitting Bull, Crazy Horse, Geronimo – were imprisoned, murdered or assassinated. Women and children were butchered by government troops at the Wounded Knee massacre of 1890. Unique cultural forms of resistance, such as the Native American Church, were criticised by American officials for fostering Indian unity. The role of Afro-Americans in the political and territorial suppression of the Indian people is, at best, mixed. There were numerous instances of Black-Indian military and political co-operation along the American



frontier, most notably among the Seminoles of Florida. For several decades, runaway slaves and Indians fought successfully against federal troops, defeating white soldiers decisively in several battles, before they succumbed in the 1840s. Conversely, black soldiers in the Ninth and Tenth Regiments of the US army were used against Indians on the Great Plains in the 1870s and 1880s. At one point, about one out of five American troops ordered to 'suppress civil disorders', to chase 'Indians who left the reservation out of frustration or in search of food', 'arrest rustlers and guard stagecoaches' were black. Called the 'Buffalo Soldiers', these black troops 'paradoxically helped bring the white man's law and order to the frontier', and in doing so, aided the process of destroying Indian civilisation.<sup>41</sup> Over the entire century, the Indian population was cut from two million to barely 200,000.

A crude type of 'American apartheid' was imposed upon Indians, with the expressed purpose of destroying Indian political unity and regimenting indigenous culture. Indians were scattered across the country, designated to live in so-called tribal areas or reservations. The Dawes Act of 1887 divested Indians of huge tracts of land, 'impoverish[ing] large numbers of people who then became beggars or wards of the various states'. The Reorganization Act of 1934 'enabled tribes to achieve corporate status through charters, thereby enabling them to continue their existence in a collective form'. Still, all major power was controlled in Washington, DC by the paternalistic Bureau of Indian Affairs.<sup>42</sup> By World War II, the 350,000 Indians had become the most marginalised of all national minority groups. Alcoholism, high rates of infant mortality and severe malnutrition were prevalent in the reservations. Desperate young Indian men by the thousands left the reservation in search of work in major cities. Conditions for Native Americans became even worse with Cold War domestic policies aimed at minorities. In 1953, upon Congressional orders, the Bureau of Indian Affairs proposed the 'termination' of thirteen Indian 'groupings'. The Termination Act was a modern version of Sherman's policies towards the Indian. In brutal violation of existing treaties, thousands of Indians were swiftly relocated to specific urban enclaves or centres in Los Angeles, San Francisco, Denver, Phoenix, and Cleveland. As Indian scholar Roxanne Dunbar Ortiz notes, 'in the cities, the mostly young Indian relocatees experienced grueling urban poverty and unemployment in place of the grinding rural poverty and unemployment, with the added

inevitability of losing their homelands and their existence as people'.<sup>43</sup> Tens of thousands of Indians were 'thrown into white society without the skills or means to survive; a sizeable proportion of Indian land was again appropriated and most of it sold to whites; and those tribes that were terminated were subject to state and local taxation without an economic base from which to pay the taxes'.<sup>44</sup>

With the growth of the post-war black freedom movement, however, came a concomitant awakening of political and social consciousness among all other national minorities. Among Chicanos, the American GI Forum and the Community Service Organisation were created to register voters and to urge members of their community to take a more active role in the electoral system. The Mexican-American Political Association was founded in California in 1958, and four years later, the Political Association of Spanish-Speaking Organisations was established in Texas. The major political forum of the Mexican-American middle class remained the League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC), which had been established three decades before. Assimilationist in cultural outlook and inclined towards the liberal wing of the Democratic Party, LULAC shared many characteristics of the NAACP. LULAC members eschewed political militancy of any type. Their construction prohibited 'any radical and violent demonstrations which may tend to create conflicts and disturb the peace and tranquility of our country'. LULAC leaders 'always emphasized American citizenship, education, equality, and the use of the English language rather than the Spanish language'.<sup>45</sup> Puerto Rican immigrants had begun to establish a series of small businesses in New York City's boroughs, and Puerto Rican workers soon emerged in increasing numbers as trade union officials, civic and neighbourhood political leaders. On the West Coast, Japanese-American leaders, supported by progressive whites, led a successful fight in 1946 to defeat an anti-Nisei constitutional provision. Despite the loss of millions of dollars worth of property, Nisei pooled their meagre resources collectively to compete with whites in both business and professional fields. Between 1945 and 1960, the percentage of Japanese-American professionals among their male workforce had increased four times, reaching roughly the level among whites. Due to their strenuous opposition, Indian leaders forced the federal government to halt the Termination Act by 1961, giving Indian activists a renewed sense of their potential power. The forces of racial repression had not been halted, and like the Afro-American,

other national minorities continued to labour beneath the burden of caste oppression and economic exploitation. But between the lines, a new level of political courage and commitment among all people of colour had been achieved, even during the period of McCarthyism.

## VI

In the early spring of 1946, an event of symbolic significance occurred which, in time, would touch the lives of several million rural Afro-Americans and Chicanos. In Montgomery County, Alabama, on the 7700 acre plantation of the McLemore Brothers, black fieldhands were busy preparing for the new year's crop. The McLemores proposed to have an experiment. Setting aside a 150-acre tract, the white planters decided to see whether cotton could be processed from seed to market 'without touching human hands'. In a one-man operation, newly purchased farm machinery prepared the land, and subsequently 'planted, fertilized, chopped, weeded, defoliated and picked' every boll of cotton on the 150-acre plot. Tuskegee Institute social scientists noted, 'this is probably the first time that the human hand rarely touched the cotton from the time plans were made until the burlap-wrapped bale of cotton was delivered from the gin process'.<sup>46</sup> The South had traditionally lagged well behind the rest of the nation in agricultural technology. By 1945, 30.5 per cent of all US farmers had tractors; tractor-ownership percentages in the South were considerably lower – South Carolina, 5.4 per cent; Georgia, 5.9 per cent; Alabama, 4.5 per cent; Mississippi, 4.1 per cent. A typical Southern white owner-operated farm averaged only 122 acres; but farms owned by corporations and managed by whites averaged 2126 acres. In the past, large and small white farmers kept black farmworkers' wages at subsistence levels; but low salaries allowed them to hire the maximum numbers of black workers. As late as 1945, the average hourly salaries of non-white men on Southern farms was only 0.23 cents, compared to 0.66 cents for white males. The larger farms increasingly relied upon machines to replace black labour in the cotton fields during the 1940s. Within ten to fifteen years, the smaller white farms would follow their lead. Expensible, despite his/her low wages and long hours (an average workday of 9.7 hours), the black farmworker was rapidly becoming extinct. 'Labour-intensive' farming was giving way to 'capital-intensive' farming.

The mechanisation of Southern agriculture was a decisive reason

why the black migration north continued. From 1940–50, the number of non-Southern blacks increased from 2.4 million to 6.4 million. In most industrial cities in the Midwest, the black population growth rate was between 500 to 1000 per cent above that for whites. The drive to the North was inspired also by the promise of higher wages and better working conditions; but these factors were dependent upon the availability of employment. During the last five years of Truman's Administration, non-white unemployment averaged 6.9 per cent, compared to 4 per cent for white workers. By 1954 and 1955, non-white unemployment had jumped to 9.3 per cent v. 4.5 per cent for whites. In 1954, 16.5 per cent of all non-white youths in the job market were unemployed. The black ghettos of the North, first taking shape with the industrial demand for Negro labour a half century before, were beginning to become stagnant centres for joblessness and despair.

By the spring of 1954, nine years after Roosevelt's death, there was a feeling of unfulfilled ambitions and expectations among many blacks. The legalistic strategy of the NAACP had proved successful, yet there was still much dissatisfaction with the now elderly Walter White's authoritarian style and dependence on the anti-communist liberal wing of the Democratic party. CORE and the National Negro Labor Council had almost disappeared from public view, for very different reasons. Republican Dwight David Eisenhower had been elected president in 1952. No friend of the armed forces desegregation decision of 1948, the former five-star general wanted to slow down the pace and retard the movement for civil rights. Dewey's vice presidential running mate of 1948, California Governor Earl Warren, had been named Chief Justice of the Supreme Court. For blacks, he was best known for placing 100,000 Japanese-Americans into concentration centres during World War II. Neither Eisenhower, the NAACP, nor black America would yet discover that this same Republican politician would become the strongest defender of blacks' rights in Supreme Court history. No one could realise completely the new phase of American history that would dawn on 17 May 1954, in a legal decision which would mark the real beginning of the Second Reconstruction.

### 3. The Demand for Reform, 1954–1960

. . . a little rebellion, now and then, is a good thing. . . . It is a medicine necessary for the sound health of government.

Thomas Jefferson to James Madison, 1787

Racial integration, [is] a great myth which the ideologues of the system and the Liberal Establishment expound, but which they cannot deliver into reality. . . . The melting-pot has never included the Negro.

Harold Cruse

#### I

Black parents and civil rights lawyers in Virginia, Kansas, Washington, DC, South Carolina, and Delaware had challenged the legality of segregated public school systems during the early 1950s. By late 1952, all these cases had reached the Supreme Court. After a year and a half of hearings, the high court finally handed down a unanimous decision in what was popularly known as *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas*. The Court ruled that ‘we cannot turn the clock back . . . to 1896 when *Plessy vs. Ferguson* [the decision which validated the separate-but-equal principle] was written. We must consider public education in the light of its full development and its present place in American life’. Chief Justice Earl Warren and other justices were persuaded by the writings of black sociologists that racial segregation did irreparable damage to black schoolchildren both socially and psychologically. ‘In the field of public education the doctrine of “separate but equal” has no place. Separate educational facilities are inherently unequal.’ Warren and his colleagues thus over-

turned the legal justification for one of the principal pillars of white supremacy.<sup>1</sup>

The *Brown* decision marked the end of a long phase in the legal war of attrition between the NAACP and the defenders of racial inequality. As early as 1938, the Supreme Court had ordered Missouri to guarantee its black residents who applied to state schools that equal educational provisions would exist. In 1948, the Court voided any real estate agreements which racially discriminated against purchasers. One year later, *Sweatt v. Painter* ruled that Texas' segregated law school for blacks was inherently unequal and inferior in every respect to its law school for whites. *McLaurin v. Oklahoma* declared in 1950 that Oklahoma had to desegregate its law school. The Supreme Court stated that racial restrictions of this type 'impair and inhibit' the Negro student's 'ability to study, engage in discussions and exchange views with other students and, in general, to learn his profession'.<sup>2</sup> Thus, even before *Brown*, a pattern of desegregation had been set into motion by the Court. By 1953, blacks attended 10 formerly all-white public colleges and 23 graduate schools in the South. By Truman's second term, many Southern Democrats understood that they could forestall court-ordered desegregation only if they spent millions of dollars in upgrading all-black public schools. Expenditures soared 800 per cent between 1939 and 1952 in the South's futile efforts to build new black schools. After *Brown*, it became apparent that the all-black public school system was legally intolerable. Upper South states led the way in desegregation efforts. Baltimore, Washington, DC, cities in Delaware and West Virginia desegregated their public schools by September 1954. On 31 May 1955, the Supreme Court ordered boards of education to draw up desegregation plans 'with all deliberate speed'. Within the next twelve months 350 school boards representing nine Southern states had desegregated without much white opposition. By January 1956, the Supreme Court had overturned segregation laws in Tennessee, Arkansas, Florida, and Texas. Lower courts generally tried to cater to Southern whites by interpreting the timeframe for desegregation as indefinite; but they had no legal recourse except to carry out desegregation mandates of the high court. By the 1956–57 school year, 723 Southern school districts had been desegregated, and 300,000 black children were either attending formerly white schools or were part of a 'desegregated' school district. Despite these gains, there were at this point 2.4 million black Southern children still

enrolled in Jim Crow schools, and 3000 white school boards expressed every intention of maintaining the colour line in spite of the Supreme Court's mandates.

Within several years Congress reinforced the Supreme Court's desegregation initiatives with the passage of the first civil rights legislation since the demise of Reconstruction. The Civil Rights Act of 1957, as first designed, was a fairly strong federal commitment to blacks' rights. One section of the Act required federal guarantees for the voting rights of blacks, and authorised the Justice Department to sue states and local interests which supported segregated schools or perpetuated racial restrictions in elections. The Democratic majority leader in the Senate, Texas Senator Lyndon B. Johnson, a former segregationist, was chiefly responsible for manoeuvring the bill through fierce Southern and conservative opposition in the upper house. In the weakened version which was eventually passed, federal judges were permitted to arrest state and local officials who kept blacks from voting. The act also mandated a Commission on Civil Rights which developed an agenda for federal action. In May 1960, a second Civil Rights Act was passed over bitter opposition and a filibuster led by Southern Democrats, or Dixiecrats. Federal judges were now permitted to select 'referees' who could by-pass local white registrars who kept blacks from voting. These referees were empowered to register black voters. The law also included federal sanctions and penalties for racists who used violent measures to disrupt the orderly process of voting and desegregation.

## II

For many blacks, the drive for desegregation still seemed agonisingly slow. In Deep South cities steeped in *apartheid*-style social relations, the black population was humiliated and exploited to the breaking point. In Montgomery, Alabama, the median annual income for the average black worker was under \$1000 in 1956; only 2000 black adults were registered to vote. In early December 1955, when Mrs Rosa Parks was arrested for sitting in a 'whites-only' section of a municipal bus, black civic leaders led by E. D. Nixon decided to act. A boycott of local buses was held to protest against the city's segregation code, and this challenge to racism blossomed into an international event. Emerging as the principal leader of the boycott was a young black doctor of divinity, the Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr. Ably

assisted by the Reverend Ralph David Abernathy and activist Bayard Rustin, King urged local blacks to employ non-violent protest tactics. Throughout 1956, approximately 95 per cent of Montgomery's blacks refused to use the buses. White police and local officials arrested 92 black organisers on a variety of charges in the effort to frustrate the boycott. Black and white liberal activists were vindicated by a Supreme Court ruling of 13 November 1956, which outlawed segregation on Montgomery buses. Overnight, King became the charismatic symbol of the political aspirations of millions of coloured people across the world. Domestically, the success of the Montgomery bus boycott reinforced a similar effort begun in Tallahassee, Florida, and sparked a fresh boycott in nearby Birmingham, Alabama.

In Little Rock, Arkansas, blacks seemed to be making greater progress towards desegregation. Integration had occurred in some of the state's schools, and the capital city of Little Rock had begun to implement plans for a gradual, grade by grade desegregation of its public schools. The state governor was a racial moderate, Orval E. Faubus, who had defeated a rigid racist named James D. Johnson in the 1956 Democratic primary elections. Indeed, Faubus's greatest electoral support came from blacks and middle-to-upper-class whites. Less than a week before the schools opened, the Arkansas state court ordered Little Rock not to initiate the desegregation plan. A federal court overruled the state jurists, but Governor Faubus ordered the state's national guard to forbid nine black children to enter the high school. Armed with automatic rifles, the soldiers and a mob of unruly whites pelted and pushed blacks away from the schoolhouse before national television cameras. Arkansas's militant defiance of federal authority forced Eisenhower reluctantly to support the civil rights of blacks. In late September 1956, the president ordered the state's 10,000 guardsmen to submit to federal authority, and US army troops were called to disperse the angry whites blocking the high school. Little Rock schools were closed in 1958–59, and blacks did not actually attend the high school until August 1959.

By 1956, Southern white opposition to desegregation had begun to mushroom at every level of society. In Congress, North Carolina Senator Sam Ervin, Jr., drafted a racist polemic, the 'Southern Manifesto', on 12 March 1956, which vowed to fight to maintain Jim Crow by all legal means. Ervin succeeded in obtaining the support of 101 out of 128 members of Congress from the eleven original



Confederate states. In electoral politics, rabid segregationists attacked moderate to liberal New Deal Democrats as the white public shifted increasingly to the far right. Two moderate Democrats in Congress from North Carolina who did not support the Southern Manifesto were thrown out of office in the 1956 election. That same year, the white supremacy States' Rights Party collected 7.2 per cent of the popular vote in Louisiana, 17.3 per cent in Mississippi, and 29.5 per cent in South Carolina. National and state politicians in both the Democratic and Republican Parties catered to the militantly white racist trend. In a crass attempt to win some segregationist votes, Eisenhower campaigned throughout Dixie. In one South Carolina appearance, he evoked 'rebel yells' by standing smartly to attention when the band played the Confederate anthem 'Dixie'. A few Southern populists tried to resist the racist tide. In 1958, circuit judge George C. Wallace ran for governor of Alabama as a moderate on racial issues and a progressive on economic policies. His opponent, Attorney General John Patterson, campaigned as an advocate of an American-version of *apartheid*, and won easily. Wallace had received the support of the meagre black electorate, and had even won the quiet backing of the state's NAACP. In the wake of his defeat, Wallace swore, 'they out-niggered me that time, but they'll never do it again'. Four years later, Wallace won the state's gubernatorial election by taking the most extreme racist position since the capitulation of populist Tom Watson to racism a half century before. Ironically, by the 1960s, it was Wallace who personified the white South's commitment to racial bigotry, more than any other major public figure.<sup>3</sup>

A reign of white terror was hurled at the proponents of black freedom in the guise of new organisations and regulations. In 1955–59, White Citizens' Councils were initiated in almost every Southern city, comprised chiefly of middle-to-upper income whites in business, white-collar professions and the clergy, who vigorously opposed desegregation. In early 1956, five Southern legislatures passed at least 42 Jim Crow laws reinforcing separate black public schools. In Mississippi, state laws declared that it was illegal for a black child to enter a white primary, elementary, or secondary school. Georgia laws required that 'any school official of the state or any municipal or county schools' which 'spend tax money for public schools in which the races are mixed' was committing a felony. South Carolina's legislature publicly condemned 'the illegal encroachment

of the central government' by its demands for black equality. Alabama politicians overwhelmingly voted to 'nullify' the Supreme Court's *Brown* decision for any schools within its borders. Mississippi and Louisiana even 'amended their state constitution to provide that to promote public health and morals their schools be operated separately for white and Negro children'.<sup>4</sup>

As the movement towards desegregation gained momentum, the measures employed by white supremacists and terrorists became more violent. In December 1951, civil rights proponents received a foretaste of events to come with the bombing in Miami, Florida, of the home of state NAACP leader Harry T. Moore. Moore was murdered in the attack, and many Christian, veterans' and civil rights agencies asked the Truman Administration to investigate the killing. But Truman, who could not be a candidate in the next election, had little political motivation to co-operate, so the Federal government did nothing. Thousands of local black leaders were threatened, arrested, intimidated and harassed. Mississippi assumed its traditional role in this respect as the South's crucible for racist violence. NAACP leaders were bludgeoned, pistol-whipped and shot at. The president of the Belzoni, Mississippi, NAACP chapter was assassinated on the city's courthouse lawn in 1955. In other Southern states, a similar pattern of overt violence occurred. Louisiana courts ordered the NAACP to halt all public meetings in the state. South Carolina legislators declared the NAACP a 'subversive organisation'. The Ku Klux Klan re-asserted itself as a powerful secret organisation, committing a series of castrations, killings, and the bombing of black homes and churches.

Woodward accurately describes this period as a time when 'all over the South the lights of reason and tolerance and moderation began to go out':

A fever of rebellion and malaise of fear spread over the region. Books were banned, libraries were purged, newspapers were slanted, magazines disappeared from stands, television programs were withheld, films were excluded. Teachers, preachers, and college professors were questioned, and many were driven out of the South. . . . Words began to shift their significance and lose their common meaning. A 'moderate' became a man who dared open his mouth, an 'extremist' one who favored eventual compliance with the law, and 'compliance' took on the connotations of treason.

Politicians who had once spoken for moderation began to vie with each other in defiance of the government.<sup>5</sup>

Desegregation across the South ground to a standstill. In 1958, 13 school systems were desegregated; in 1960, only 17. Despite their concessions, white racists in the government and other institutions began to perceive dimly that the forces for biracial democracy could be defeated, and that legal segregation in most civic relations might continue for many decades to come.

### III

Beyond the civil rights battlefield, new trends in black culture and intellectual thought began to reveal themselves during the 1950s. For some white sociologists and cultural historians, the decade under Eisenhower and the Cold War has seemed a sterile and vacuous period of social conformity. The 'Silent Generation' of the white middle class began moving from the urban centres to the suburbs; the populace and politicians alike were preoccupied with televisions, automobiles, and other mass consumer goods. For black America, however, this conservative cultural description does not apply. In the creative arts, in literature, in intellectual work, there was a significant outpouring of energy, talent and hope for the future.

Some of the most provocative contributions to black culture occurred in literature. As early as 1937, black novelist Richard Wright, who was at the time a member of the Communist Party, predicted the new cultural directions which black writers would later pursue, in the essay, 'Blueprint for Negro Writing'. Wright declared that the real goal of black writing was political and social advocacy, 'molding the lives and consciousness of [the black] masses towards new goals'. It should not simply be 'the voice of the educated Negro pleading with white America for justice'.<sup>6</sup> Wright would become in many respects the seminal new Negro intellectual: breaking with the Communist Party in 1944; authoring the searing *Native Son* (1941), *Black Boy* (1945), and *The Outsider* (1953). Turning bitterly against the left during the Cold War, Wright was increasingly influenced by the European existentialist movement. From his exile in Paris during the 1950s, Wright spoke through his character Cross Damon on his fears for the oppressed:

There is no escaping what the future holds. We are going back to something earlier, maybe better, maybe worse, maybe something more terrifyingly human? These few hundred years of freedom, empire building, voting, liberty, democracy – these will be regarded as the *romantic* centuries in human history. There will be in that future no trial by jury, no writs of habeas corpus, no freedom of speech of religion – all of this being buried and not by Communists or Fascists alone, but by their opponents as well. All hands are shoveling clay onto the body of freedom before it even dies, while it lies breathing its last. . . .<sup>7</sup>

Most black intellectuals did not share Wright's pessimistic and even nihilistic vision of a world thrown into political chaos. Yet the generation of black writers born during the 1920s and coming into maturity during the post-war era were all influenced by his sweeping style and idealism.

The two black intellectuals most affected by Wright were undoubtedly Ralph Ellison and James Baldwin. Ellison's *Invisible Man* (1952), which evoked the existential tones of Dostoevsky and Camus, was viewed by many white critics as the most powerful fiction work written by an American in the post-war period. In *Go Tell It on the Mountain* (1953), Baldwin described the black exodus from the rural South into the North's ghettos. After the *Brown* decision, Baldwin's considerable talent as a political critic was revealed in *Notes of a Native Son* (1955), *Nobody Knows My Name* (1960), and *The Fire Next Time* (1963). Other black novelists began to find a new audience for their work. Chester Himes' *If He Hollers, Let Him Go* (1945) discussed the intense racism of white workers levelled against blacks during World War II. Arna Bontemps, a veteran novelist of the Harlem Renaissance, a productive period of black cultural creativity in the 1920s, wrote a moving study of black adjustment in the North in *They Seek a City* (1945). Harlem novelist and cultural critic John Oliver Killens' novel of black Southern society and struggle, *Youngblood* (1954), won critical praise. As in the Harlem Renaissance, black women writers also played a critical cultural role in the 1950s. Ann Petry, a journalist in Harlem during the war, described the outrage and frustrations of inner city black youth in her first novel, *The Street* (1946). Petry subsequently produced two more novels, *Country Place* (1947), and *The Narrows* (1953), as well as a series of works for children and black teenagers.

In the field of black poetry, the two most popular intellectuals were Langston Hughes and Gwendolyn Brooks. Hughes, like Bontemps, was a product of the Harlem Renaissance, and his position as the 'poet laureate' of the Afro-American people was secure well before the 1950s. As a political progressive, Hughes could scarcely tolerate the growing climate of fear and repression which existed during the Cold War. In one poem entitled 'Un-American Investigators', Hughes revealed his long commitment to human freedom and democracy:

The Committee's fat,  
 Smug, almost secure  
 Co-religionists  
 Shiver with delight  
 In warm manure  
 As those investigated –  
 Too brave to name a name –  
 Have pseudonyms revealed  
 In Gentile game  
 Of who,  
 Born Jew,  
 Is who?  
 Is not your name Lipshitz?  
 Yes.  
 Did you not change it  
 For subversive purposes?  
 No.  
 For nefarious gain?  
 Not so.  
 Are you sure?  
 The committee shivers  
 With delight in  
 Its manure.<sup>8</sup>

Brooks' first collection of poetry appeared in 1943, *A Street in Bronzeville*. Her second collection, *Annie Allen* (1949), won a Pulitzer prize in literature. Brooks' other works of the period include a short novel, *Maud Martha* (1953), two poetry volumes, *The Bean Eaters* (1960) and *Selected Poems* (1963), and a children's book, *Bronzeville Boys and Girls* (1956). Other significant black novelists and poets of the 1940s–50s included Margaret Walker; Melvin B. Tolson, author of

*Heart-Shape in the Dust* (1940) and *Rendezvous with America* (1944); the witty and prolific Zora Neal Hurston, author of the autobiographical *Dust Tracks on a Road* (1942), and the novels *Moses, Man of the Mountain* (1942) and *Seraph on the Suwannee* (1948); novelist Paule Marshall, *Browniegirl*, *Brownstones* (1959); and poets Robert Hayden and Sterling A. Brown.

An even younger group of black writers emerged during the mid-to-late 1950s, born in the Depression, and developed politically during the outbreak of the Second Reconstruction. Chief among them was Lorraine Hansberry. The daughter of a prosperous, upper-middle-class black Chicago household, Hansberry attended school at the University of Wisconsin, Mexico's University of Guadalajara, and Chicago's Roosevelt University. In the mid-1950s she became a young writer for Harlem's radical *Freedom* newspaper. Her meteoric rise to prominence came with the production of her acclaimed play on the struggle of a poor black Chicago family seeking to move into a white neighbourhood, *A Raisin in the Sun* (1959). Hansberry described herself as part 'of the generation that grew up in the swirl and dash of the Sartre–Camus debate of the postwar years. The silhouette of the Western intellectual poised in hesitation before the flames of involvement was an accurate symbolism of some of my closest friends, some of whom crossed each other leaping in and out, for instance, of the Communist party'. Hansberry had come to reject Wright's existentialism as an exaltation of 'brutality and nothingness', because he had abandoned 'the reality of our struggle for freedom'. For her, and for many other young black intellectuals, the decisive human conflict was not against communism, but with Jim Crow and America's racial stereotypes of black life. Ironically, her call for a politically relevant black art echoed Wright's own 1937 essay.<sup>9</sup>

In black music, the post-war era also brought powerful changes to many aspects of popular culture. During the war, several 'poor, unknown and unprepossessing' black musicians developed a group that played in Harlem nightclubs – a set whose members included trumpeter Dizzy Gillespie, saxophonist Charlie Parker, and pianist Thelonius Monk. These men would revolutionise America's most creative indigenous music tradition, jazz. Before his death at the age of 35, Parker would become a living legend among musicians. As critic LeRoi Jones wrote in 1963, 'Parker was the soul and fire of the bebop era. After Parker, trumpet players, piano players, guitar players, bass players, etc., all tried to sound like him, in much the

same fashion as all kinds of instrumentalists had once tried to sound like Louis Armstrong'. Both Gillespie and Monk developed popular bands which featured, at different times, Parker's worthy successor on the saxophone, the innovative stylist John Coltrane. Other brilliant black musicians making their stamp on jazz in the 1950s included trumpet soloist Miles Davis, tenor saxophonist Sonny Rollins, also saxophonist Ornette Coleman, and pianist Cecil Taylor. It cannot be emphasised too strongly that jazz played a powerful role in the cultural education of millions of young blacks and whites during this time. Listening to the beauty of Coltrane and Parker, established critics were often at a loss for words. The 'bebop' of the 1940s had given way, by the late 1950s, to an *avant-garde* described by some as 'the new music'. Coltrane was viewed in the last ten years of his brief life as a musical 'James Joyce', a man whose pre-eminence as an artist was 'being acclaimed great by fellow artists, critics and the public . . . not only while he [was] alive, but when he [was] also just *beginning* to prove that greatness concretely'.<sup>10</sup> For white American youth, especially from the suburban homes of the upper classes, jazz symbolised a cultural creativity they could not find within their own placid lives. It inspired the literature and lifestyle of a white 'beat' subculture which consciously rejected the 'Silent Generation's' crass materialism and political apathy. For blacks, jazz represented on the 'cultural front' what the Montgomery boycott, demonstrations and the new militant mood were in politics. It shattered established conventions; it mocked traditions; in form and grace, it transcended old boundaries to life and thought. It became the appropriate cultural background for their activities to destroy Jim Crow.

In the 1950s, the image of Africa as a cultural and political entity began to reassert its impact upon Afro-American intellectuals and artists. Prior to 1950, the general relationship between black Americans and Africans had taken three very different forms. Black Christian missionaries from the Congregationalist American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions had been sent to Liberia by 1821. During the nineteenth and early twentieth century, hundreds of black Baptists, Episcopalians, Methodists and Presbyterians were sent to proselytise across the continent. These religious missions served as a bridge for young Africans who came to the United States to attend universities and professional schools. During the 1920s, the militant black nationalist movement of Marcus Garvey embraced Africa as the symbolic home of all New World blacks. Garvey's

organisation of several millions, the Universal Negro Improvement Association, attempted unsuccessfully to establish a beachhead in Liberia for the emigration of US and West Indian blacks. Two decades earlier, DuBois had initiated a series of political meetings between Afro-Americans, West Indians and Africans, the Pan-African Conferences of 1900, 1919, 1921, 1923, 1927 and 1945. The final conference, held in Manchester, England, brought DuBois together with some of the African intellectuals who would soon become the leaders of their nations' anti-colonialist movements. By the late 1950s, economic and political pressures had finally forced France, Belgium and England to end their direct rule over the continent. Many of the new African leaders were familiar to black American intellectuals, politicians, and civil rights leaders: Nnamdi Azikiwe of Nigeria had attended Howard University, and in 1932 received an MA degree in philosophy and religion at Lincoln University of Pennsylvania; Ghana's Kwame Nkrumah, another Lincoln University graduate, was the protégé of New World Pan-Africanist scholar/activists C. L. R. James, George Padmore and, to a lesser extent, DuBois.

Black American newspapers during the Cold War gave prominent coverage to the battle to end European colonialism. Richard Wright travelled across Africa to observe the groundswell of activism, and produced his strongest political statement from his experiences in *Black Power*. Black politicians, including Adam Clayton Powell, writers and journalists went to the conference of Third World and non-aligned nations at Bandung, Indonesia, in 1955. Hundreds of black professionals trained in the natural and social sciences emigrated to African nations to support the cause. The most significant African political events during the decade, the development of Nkrumah's Convention People's Party of Ghana and that nation's independence in 1957, and the rise of Egypt's Gamal Nasser as the leader of the Third World, influenced almost every Afro-American intellectual and activist. For King, Egypt's 1956 defiance of England seemed to have direct parallels to the US struggle for desegregation. 'They have broken loose from the Egypt of colonialism and imperialism, and they are now moving through the wilderness of adjustment toward the promised land of cultural integration', King wrote in 1957. 'As they look back they see the old order of colonialism and imperialism passing away and the new order of freedom and justice coming into being.'<sup>11</sup> DuBois saw Africa quite differently. In his



private correspondence with Nkrumah in 1957, he urged that Ghana's leader should 'avoid subjection to and ownership by foreign capitalists who seek to get rich on African labor and raw material, and should try to build a socialism on old African communal life'. An independent, non-aligned Africa could 'teach mankind what Non-violence and Courtesy, Literature and Art, Music and Dancing can do for this greedy, selfish, and war-stricken world'.<sup>12</sup> Even black middle-class groups such as the NAACP, who had traditionally eschewed any programmatic links with black Africa, began to perceive the necessity for close co-operation. The contradiction of a 'free' Africa and their 'unfree' descendants in the US was an immediate and important parallel which was reiterated by many civil rights advocates.

#### IV

In the aftermath of the destruction of the National Negro Labor Council, black workers had few organisational tools to protest against the AFL-CIO's institutional racism. At the founding convention of the merged AFL-CIO in 1955, delegates ratified Article 11 to their constitution, which declared that the organisation would 'encourage all workers, without regard to race, creed, color, national origin or ancestry, to share equally in the full benefits of union organization'. Another section of the constitution mandated the creation of a Committee on Civil Rights which would have 'the duty and responsibility to bring about at the earliest possible date the effective implementation of the principle . . . of non-discrimination'. Black delegates led by Randolph fought to obtain a greater commitment to racial equality from the labour bureaucrats. Many pointed out that the constitution authorised the AFL-CIO's Executive Council to expel any labour affiliate which was 'dominated, controlled or influenced in the conduct of its affairs' by Marxists, yet made no comparable statement on unions which deliberately excluded blacks from membership. AFL-CIO president George Meany opposed the ban of overtly racist unions, and the proposal was easily defeated. At the convention, Michael J. Quill, president of the Transport Workers Union - CIO, condemned the constitution as 'a license for discrimination against minority groups'.<sup>13</sup> The delegates did attempt to make token concessions to blacks, however, by appointing Randolph and Willard S. Townsend, president of the United Transport Service

Employees – CIO as the only two blacks on the Executive Council. James B. Carney, Secretary-Treasurer of the CIO, was appointed to chair the AFL–CIO Committee on Civil Rights. Carney was not permitted, however, to deliver a blistering address on desegregation before the convention.<sup>14</sup>

In public, the white leaders of the AFL–CIO gave liberal ‘lip-service’ to desegregation. In April 1960, for example, Meany criticised the moderate Civil Rights Bill before Congress as an insult to ‘the will of the vast majority of Americans who believe in, and wish to implement, the basic constitutional rights which properly belong to all Americans regardless of race or color or national origin’. Meany demanded that the federal authorities ‘press forward vigorously in the full enforcement of civil rights laws, both old and new’.<sup>15</sup> Privately, it was clear to black trade unionists that Meany and many other white labour leaders would do virtually nothing to support the desegregation struggle both within organised labour and within the general society. Apologists for Meany argued that the AFL–CIO could not expel racist unions, because in the words of socialist Gus Tyler, ‘the power of the Federation is moral, resting on consensus and persuasion’.<sup>16</sup> Even if this was the case – and the rigidly anti-communist directives on expulsion proved that it was not – it did not explain the AFL–CIO’s tepid stance towards the desegregation campaigns in the South during the 1950s. The only unions which actively assisted the Montgomery bus boycott of 1955–56 were Randolph’s Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters; several small United Auto Workers locals; the United Packinghouse Workers, District 65; and Local 1199 of New York. Southern union members played visible and active roles in the Massive Resistance. In Montgomery, the all-white Bus Drivers Union and the Montgomery Building Trades Council took part in the vigilante attacks against civil rights leaders. Southern locals refused to process grievances of black members. When AFL–CIO unions were invited to participate in Martin Luther King’s ‘Prayer Pilgrimage for Freedom’ in Washington, DC, in May 1957, most refused or simply ignored the event.

Inside the AFL–CIO, the lack of union support for desegregation led Carney and another black member of the Civil Rights Committee to resign from their positions. The AFL–CIO did nothing, they complained, effectively to combat union racism even in the North. In Detroit, for example, a city with a major black working class population, less than 2 per cent of all apprentices in craft unions were

black. Kansas City, Missouri, blacks were effectively barred from employment as steam fitters, plumbers, electricians, operating engineers, and sheet metal workers. In 1957, a black electrician in Cleveland, Ohio, was forced to sue Local 38 in an unsuccessful attempt to gain admittance. Unions aggressively removed black activists on the grounds that they were Communists or subversives. In March 1952, UAW leader Walter Reuther, a liberal proponent of desegregation, purged five militant anti-racists from leadership of Detroit's Local 600 and barred them from seeking re-election. Several industrial unions, including the Communications Workers of America and the Steelworkers Union, concluded blatantly segregationist provisions in their contracts with many factories. A number of unions continued to exclude blacks from membership, such as the Brotherhood of Railroad Trainmen, or deliberately kept black participation to a minimum. In December 1958, NAACP leader Roy Wilkins issued an open memorandum to Meany, declaring that:

Three years after the merger agreement there is clear evidence that many unions continue discriminatory practices. . . . [Some] AFL-CIO affiliates limit Negro membership to segregated or 'auxiliary' locals. . . . Increasingly, we are receiving complaints against trade unions from our members and from Negro workers throughout the country charging racial discrimination and segregation. Careful investigation by our staff has in most instances sustained these individual charges and, in addition, has revealed a pattern of racial discrimination and segregation in many affiliate unions.<sup>17</sup>

Under considerable attack, Meany and other racist labour officials' actions became even more outrageous towards desegregation proponents within the unions. At the 1959 San Francisco convention of the AFL-CIO, Randolph urged that the Brotherhood of Railroad Trainmen and the Brotherhood of Locomotive Firemen and Engineers be ordered to remove their anti-black exclusion clauses from their constitutions. Randolph also demanded that the AFL-CIO expand the programmes and effectiveness of their Civil Rights Commission. These and other anti-discrimination measures were promptly defeated. During the debate, Meany was so enraged with Randolph that he shouted, 'Who in hell appointed you as guardian of

the Negro members in America?’ Willie Baxter, vice president and director of civil rights of the Trade Union Leadership Conference of Detroit, responded, ‘Brother Randolph was accorded this position by the acclamation of the Negro people in recognition of his having devoted almost half a century of his life in freedom’s cause’.<sup>18</sup> Relations between Meany and Randolph, long sour, reached a new low two years later. On 12 October 1961, the Executive Council censured Randolph for creating a ‘gap that has developed between organized labor and the Negro community’. In a classic instance of blaming-the-victim, Meany explained to the press that Randolph was too impatient, and that he had ‘gotten close to those militant groups’. Roy Wilkins’ response to Randolph’s censure was shared by virtually every black American:

The NAACP believes that the AFL–CIO’s ‘censure’ of A. Philip Randolph is an incredible cover up . . . a refusal to recognize the unassailable facts of racial discrimination and segregation inside organized labor, as well as an evasion on the part of the AFL–CIO leadership of its own responsibility in fighting racism within affiliate unions. . . . Meany and the AFL–CIO Executive Council have not taken the required action to eliminate the broad national pattern of anti-Negro practices that continues to exist in many significant sections of the American labor movement, even after five and a half years of the merger and the endless promises to banish Jim Crow.<sup>19</sup>

The struggle of Randolph to uproot racism within organised labour assumed special significance in the 1950s, as the political economy of black America was being rapidly transformed. Between 1950–60, the black civilian labour force increased from 5.8 million to 6.7 million workers and 83 per cent of all black males and 48 per cent of black females over the age of 16 in 1960 were actively seeking jobs. Between 1940–60, the percentage of blacks involved in farm labour had declined sharply, 32 per cent to 8 per cent: 38 per cent of all black workers were classified as blue-collar workers, up 10 per cent in twenty years. By 1960, 9 per cent of all construction workers were black, as were 7 per cent of all manufacturing workers and 34 per cent of all employees engaged in personal services. Unions which practised a deliberate policy of racial exclusion thwarted blacks’ efforts to find employment suitable to their training and talents. Blacks in unions

which excluded them from leadership positions had little incentive to support their unions during strikes.

Many rural black families had left the South during the decade with the expectation that their incomes and standard of living would improve dramatically. Incomes for blue-collar jobs were higher in Northern states, to be sure, but membership and apprentice positions in many unions were not readily available to all black workers. In the early post-war years, black families nationwide experienced a rise in real incomes. Non-white median income in 1947 was \$3563; by 1952, the median income figure reached \$4344, 57 per cent of white median income of \$7643. Between 1952 and 1959, the trend was towards greater income inequality. By that later year, the black median income of \$5156 was only 52 per cent of the white median income level – roughly where it had been in 1948. In 1959, 19 per cent of all white American families earned over \$15,000 annually, compared to 4 per cent of all non-white families: 51 per cent of all white families earned \$7000 to \$15,000 each year; for non-whites in that income range, only 29 per cent. One-fifth of all non-white families earned a meagre median income in 1959 of \$1207, and one-third of all black families earned less than \$3000 annually, compared to 7.5 per cent for whites. Even as late as 1962, the median income of all non-white males was below the 1960 figure.

The AFL-CIO's refusal to desegregate unions contributed in some degree to the growing rates of unemployment among black workers in the North in these years. During the Truman Administration, non-white unemployment rates peaked at 9 per cent in 1950, dropping to 5.4 per cent by 1952. Under Eisenhower, the unemployment rates for non-whites reached new highs. In the 1958 recession, 12.6 per cent of all non-white workers were unemployed, more than twice the level experienced by whites. In 1960, 24.4 per cent of all non-white youth in the labour force were without jobs; 802,000 non-white workers were unemployed during the year, 30 per cent of them being laid off for more than 15 weeks. A growing army of idle and desperate black men and women began to appear in the industrial centres of the nation, driven to the edge of poverty. In 1960 55.9 per cent of all non-whites lived below the 'poverty level', a Federal government index which indicates a severe lack of the income necessary to provide food, clothing and shelter for any family. For the 1.5 million black families without a husband present, the situation was even more severe: 65.4 per cent of such families in 1959 were

below the poverty level. Of all black female-headed households in rural areas, 82.2 per cent were also under the poverty level. Increasingly, as the economic situation worsened, blacks began to demand the inclusion of specific economic reforms within the overall goals of the civil rights struggle. It was no victory for black men to be allowed to sit in a formerly whites-only theatre or to rent hotel accommodation which had been segregated, when they had no jobs. It was cruel to permit black children to sit in all-white schools, when their mothers had no money to provide their lunches.

## V

For most historians, the struggle for Negro equality since the Civil War has been characterised as an attempt at cultural assimilation on the part of blacks, into the great social mainstream of American life. Certainly part of the Afro-American struggle involved a fierce belief by many, particularly within the middle classes, that any form of racial separation was intolerable. But it would be a mistake to equate the battle against Jim Crow with a cultural affinity for the aesthetics and social norms of the Anglo-Saxon, Protestant majority. Almost every black person resisted segregation, because it was imposed upon him/her by a powerful white capitalist order. Beyond that, the black consensus for building alternative institutions which addressed the critical needs of black workers and the poor fell apart. Since the 1850s, a significant portion of the Afro-American people have tended to support the ideals of black nationalism, defined here, in part, as: a rejection of racial integration; a desire to develop all-black socio-economic institutions; an affinity for the cultural and political heritage of black Africa; a commitment to create all-black political structures to fight against white racism; a deep reluctance to participate in coalitions which involved a white majority; the advocacy of armed self-defence of the black community; and in religion and culture, an ethos and spirituality which consciously rejected the imposition of white western dogmas. At certain historical moments, such as in the 1850s and the 1920s, a majority of the black working class, rural farmers and the poor were in their political and social behaviour extremely nationalistic. Marcus Garvey was only one of a great tradition of black leaders who expressed that nationalistic tendency, and developed a political programme which won the support of thousands and in some instances millions of

advocates. By the 1950s, Garveyism had long since disappeared from the black urban North, except in a handful of ghetto communities. Yet the vision of Garveyites remained long after their institutions had crumbled. Many blacks could clearly separate the fight for desegregation from a NAACP-promoted policy which might lead to the eventual cultural and ethnic extinction of their national minority group. Black nationalists of the post-war era were both *anti-racist and anti-integrationist*, in the sense that they opposed Jim Crow laws and simultaneously advocated all-black economic, political and social institutions.

The Nation of Islam was the dominant black nationalist formation of the period. Born in Detroit's black neighbourhoods during the Great Depression, its creator and first 'divine' prophet was an obscure pedlar of uncertain racial identity, W. D. Fard. After preaching for four years an eclectic mythology of Sunni Islam doctrine and black racial supremacy, Fard succeeded in recruiting 8000 blacks. He established the Fruit of Islam, a para-military force; the Muslim Girls Training Class, a school specifically for women members of the Nation; and a University of Islam. After Fard's somewhat mysterious disappearance, his chief lieutenant Elijah Muhammad became the leader of the religious movement. During the 1930s, the Nation declined in membership, and by 1945 only four Muslim temples and about 1000 adherents were still followers of Muhammad. At this point, an event intervened which greatly accelerated the growth of the Nation. Muhammad was convicted and imprisoned briefly during World War II for resisting the draft. While in a federal penitentiary, Muhammad recognised that black churches and civil rights organisations had no programmes to recruit and to transform the most oppressed members of the race: convicts, dope addicts, pimps, young delinquents, prostitutes, criminals, and the permanently unemployed. During the post-war period, the efforts of the Nation shifted towards these lower-income strata. The results were astonishing: by 1960, the Nation's membership was between 65,000 to 100,000 nationwide. Under Muhammad's tight discipline and pro-black nationalist creed, thousands of drug addicts quit their dependence on narcotics; prostitutes in the Nation were transformed into so-called 'respectable women'. Educational and social programmes directed at ghetto youth also produced similar results. By 1960, over three-fourths of the Nation's members were between 17 to 35 years-old. Members donated one-quarter to one-third of their

annual incomes to the Nation, which was used to construct Islamic schools, temples, and businesses. In Chicago alone, the Nation owned half a million dollars' worth of real estate by 1960. The political programme of the group provided a striking contrast to that of the NAACP: racial separation; the ultimate creation of an all-black nation state; and capitalist economic development along racial lines.

The Nation's success during these years was also attributable to Muhammad's recruitment of a gifted and very charismatic spokesman named Malcolm Little. Converted to the Nation of Islam while in prison, Little had been a pimp and small-time criminal in the Boston and New York City ghettos. Leaving prison in 1952, Little was renamed Malcolm X – the 'X' symbolically repudiating the 'white man's name'. Muhammad carefully nurtured Malcolm X's career upwards into the organisation's hierarchy. By 1954 Malcolm X became the minister of Harlem's Temple No. 7. Travelling across the country, Malcolm X was the articulate mouthpiece, as Aaron was for Moses, in a sense, to deliver the 'truth' to the race. Political leaders began to relate to the Muslims, recognising that Muhammad's absolute control over so many thousands of voters represented an important political bloc. Adam Clayton Powell attended a 'Leadership Conference' staged by Malcolm X in Harlem in January 1960. The leader of the Cuban Revolution, Fidel Castro, met with Malcolm X in a private discussion during his travels to the US that same year. Simultaneously, the FBI, and state and local police began to infiltrate the Nation, keeping closer surveillance of its actions.

As the Nation of Islam prospered, white liberals and Negro integrationists alike became fearful of the movement's stunning success in attracting lower-class blacks. Scholars studied the Nation, and drew parallels with the rise of fascism and anti-semitism in Europe. White sociologist Gordon W. Allport described the Nation as 'the hate that hate produced', a racial supremacist cult similar to 'Hitler [and] the White Citizens' Council'. In C. Eric Lincoln's *The Black Muslims in America*, the black social philosopher expressed concern that 'the Black Muslims' virulent attacks on the white man' might 'threaten the security of the white majority and lead those in power to tighten the barriers which already divide America'.<sup>20</sup> Civil rights leaders committed to racial assimilation were appalled by the Nation. In August 1959, Roy Wilkins of the NAACP declared that the Muslims had a 'hate-white doctrine' which was 'as dangerous as [any] group' of white racists. The Nation was clearly 'furnishing ammuni-



tion for the use' of white supremacists. NAACP chief counsel Thurgood Marshall, speaking at Princeton University, stated that the Nation of Islam was 'run by a bunch of thugs organized from prisons and jails, and financed, I am sure, by Nasser or some Arab group'.<sup>21</sup> James Farmer of CORE denounced the Nation as 'utterly impractical' and dangerous. 'After the black culture was taken away from us, we had to adapt the culture that was here, adopt it, and adapt to it.' By rejecting integration, Farmer reasoned, the Muslims were aiding Jim Crow. With a surer grasp of racial history, Malcolm X responded to these criticisms. 'We who are Muslims, followers of the honorable Elijah Muhammad', he explained, 'don't think that an integrated cup of coffee is sufficient payment for 310 years of slave labor.' Malcolm X made the simple distinction between desegregation and integration which Farmer, Randolph, Wilkins, Marshall and other Negro leaders could never grasp. 'It is not a case of [dark mankind] wanting integration or separation, it is a case of wanting freedom, justice, and equality. It is not integration that Negroes in America want, it is human dignity.'<sup>22</sup>

The black nationalist current which Elijah Muhammad and Malcolm X had generated could not be contained in the Nation of Islam. Within a few local branches of the NAACP, similar tendencies developed. Robert Williams, an ex-marine and black militant, had become the leader of the Monroe, North Carolina, NAACP chapter. Viewing King's non-violent campaigns as ineffectual, he preached that the racist order would have to be overthrown with force. Blacks must 'convict their attackers on the spot. They must meet violence with violence', he told the press in May 1959. Within one month, the NAACP suspended Williams for six months for making statements which could 'be used by segregationists to spread the false impression that the NAACP supported lynching and violence'. Williams' response was that 'Negroes should have the right of armed self-defense against attack'.<sup>23</sup> Eventually expelled by Wilkins from the NAACP, Williams organised a militant local group. He saved the lives of 17 passive demonstrators who were threatened at Monroe's county courthouse by armed gangs of white racists. After a series of confrontations, Williams and his family fled to Canada, and finally received political asylum in Cuba. For many young blacks, Williams' bitter denunciations of racism and the placid Negro middle-class leadership were inspirational and provocative. As Williams observed, 'the forces with a vested interest in the equilibrium of the US

master-slave society . . . are more than willing to point out to our miserably exploited and dehumanized masses that violent resistance and self-defense will mean total annihilation and extermination. This is in itself an unwitting admission of the beastly nature of the oppressor.’<sup>24</sup> The NAACP could banish Williams, but they could not silence him; neither could they stop the escalation of nationalist sentiment within the black rural South and urban North. With every white racist atrocity, the black nationalists’ supporters grew; for every failure of the Federal government in protecting blacks’ lives and liberties, the black reaction to white authority became more refined; with every press statement of Wilkins and Randolph calling for black passivism and restraint, more blacks were recruited into the Nation of Islam.

## VI

It is not an historical accident that the demand for racial reform in the late 1950s paralleled the temporary decline of the Cold War. Civil rights workers in the South were constantly ‘red-baited’, but by Eisenhower’s second presidential term in office (1957–61) the international climate of superpower confrontation had diminished to a degree. Desegregation advocates were not generally anti-capitalists, and the fierce anti-communism of Wilkins, Randolph and other Negro spokespersons made their views somewhat more acceptable to corporate and political power brokers. The Red Scare had silenced the black left, and had made the NAACP and Urban League less ‘relevant’, to use the expression current at the time, to many younger black activists. Eisenhower had done little to advance the cause of desegregation, activists argued, and moderate civil rights organisations had indirectly contributed to the reaction against racial justice by failing to advance a more ‘direct-action’ oriented programme.

One issue on which all major tendencies of the black movement could agree was the importance of the forthcoming presidential election of 1960. The two major candidates, Republican Vice President Richard M. Nixon of California and Democratic Senator John F. Kennedy of Massachusetts, were both remarkably alike. Elected to Congress in 1946, both became militant red-baiters on the House Committee on Education and Labor, chaired by McCarthyite Fred Hartley. Nixon excelled Kennedy in his opportunistic denouncement of the red menace, and as a result, rose to political

power much more rapidly than the Cold War Democrat. In his successful bid for a California senate seat in 1950, Nixon pilloried liberal Democratic Congresswoman Helen Gahagan Douglass as a Communist Party sympathiser. From 1953–61 he served as vice president under Eisenhower. During his fourteen years in national politics, he acquired the popular epithet 'Tricky Dick' for his endless attacks against liberals, leftists, and the trade unions. In his central position at HUAC, for example, he fumed at one point that one suspected 'red' ought to be 'boiled in oil'.<sup>25</sup> Kennedy was only marginally to the left of Nixon on most issues, and in his actual international policies was more of an anti-communist.

Most political observers in the fall of 1960 thought that Nixon, who was the more widely known, should defeat the two-term Democratic Senator. Kennedy was 'a member of an emergent Irish upper class in America'. A Catholic, he was close to certain Eastern corporate interests, including the influential Committee for Economic Development, and the 'Ivy League'-trained intelligentsia.<sup>26</sup> The white South was traditionally anti-Catholic, and Kennedy's failure to protest against the Civil Rights Acts of 1957 and 1960 undermined traditional Democratic support he would have received in the region.

Black staff workers in Kennedy's campaign urged the Senator to assume Truman's strategy of 1948 by appealing directly to black voters. The Senator attacked the Republicans for perpetuating segregation in public housing, although as president, Kennedy would not pursue this issue for almost two years. He campaigned in urban areas with heavy concentrations of black voters. As in 1948, most civil rights leaders favoured the Democratic candidate, and the NAACP actively registered thousands of black voters. Several weeks before the election took place, King was sentenced to four months in prison for leading a non-violent protest in downtown Atlanta. Kennedy wisely telephoned King's wife, Coretta, and offered his support. Robert F. Kennedy, the Senator's chief strategist, used his influence to obtain King's release. This event, more than anything else, won the presidency for Kennedy. In most cities and states, three-fourths of all black votes went to the Democratic nominee. In Mobile, Alabama, 72.2 per cent of the blacks voted for Kennedy, while only 36.2 per cent of upper-income whites had supported him. In Houston, 85.3 per cent of all blacks and 50.8 per cent of the low-income whites favoured Kennedy, compared to only 16.7 per cent of the suburban white voters. In several states, the overwhelming black mandate made the

difference in the electoral vote. In Illinois, for example, with black voters casting 250,000 ballots for Kennedy, the Democrat carried the state by merely 9000 votes. Since Kennedy's popular margin over Nixon was only 100,000 votes out of 68.8 million total votes, it seemed clear that the new administration would have to commit itself aggressively to the cause of desegregation.

Given America's racist history, it is not surprising that Kennedy fell far short of blacks' expectations. Kennedy pleased the black élite by nominating Thurgood Marshall to the New York Circuit Court. Black journalist Carl Rowan was named Deputy Assistant Secretary of State. Other blacks in the new administration included Robert Weaver, director of the Housing and Home Finance Agency; Mercer Cook, Ambassador to Norway; and George L. P. Weaver, Assistant Secretary of Labor. Publicly, Kennedy supported the gradual desegregation of American society, but he took few concrete steps at first to promote civil rights. Indeed, almost all of Kennedy's initial appointments to federal district courts in the Southern states were either uniformly hard-line racists or quiet proponents of Massive Resistance. This action made it difficult if not impossible for Southern blacks and civil rights activists to appeal to the federal courts for prompt justice. The administration did little to attack the South's opposition to blacks voting or registering. Cold War Liberalism, under Truman and later Kennedy, offered blacks only token concessions in the battle with Jim Crow. This recognition, by 1960, led to a new and more militant campaign to end racist hegemony over black people.

## 4. We Shall Overcome, 1960–1965

We will soon wear you down by our capacity to suffer, and in winning our freedom we will so appeal to your heart and conscience that we will win you in the process.

Martin Luther King, Jr.

Ain't gonna let nobody turn me 'round  
turn me 'round, turn me 'round,  
Ain't gonna let nobody turn me 'round  
I'm gonna keep on walkin', keep on a-talkin'  
Marching up to freedom land.

SNCC workers' song, summer, 1962

When the Constitution said all men are created equal, it wasn't talking about niggers.

J. B. Stoner, white racist leader

### I

The Second Reconstruction actually began in earnest on the afternoon of 1 February 1960. Four young black students from North Carolina Agricultural and Technical College, Joseph McNeil, David Richmond, Franklin McCain and Izell Blair, sat at a drugstore lunchcounter in the 'whites only' section. Politely, but firmly, they refused to move until the store was closed. The next day about 30 students joined the desegregation protest, in what would become known as a 'sit-in'. On 3 February, over 50 black students and 3 white students participated in the demonstration. News of this form of non-violent, direct action protest spread quickly across North

Carolina, and then over the country. Within a week, sit-ins were being staged or planned in High Point, Charlotte, Winston-Salem, Elizabeth City, Concord and other North Carolina cities and towns. By the last week of February black students held sit-ins in Richmond, Virginia; Tallahassee, Florida; Baltimore, Maryland; Nashville and Chattanooga, Tennessee, and in two dozen or more cities in Southern and border states. The student revolt of February 1960 was, for the NAACP leadership, a completely unpredicted event. As historians August Meier and Elliott Rudwick observed, the early sit-ins

speeded up incalculably the rate of social change in the sphere of race relations; broke decisively the NAACP's hegemony in the civil rights arena and inaugurated a period of unprecedented rivalry among the racial advancement groups; and made nonviolent direct action the dominant strategy in the struggle for racial equality during the next half-decade.<sup>1</sup>

With the spring of the year, the number of sit-ins rapidly increased. New forms of non-violent direct action protests using the Greensboro strategy developed: stand-ins at theatres refusing to sell tickets to blacks; wade-ins at municipal pools and segregated beaches; pray-ins at Jim Crow churches. By April 1960, 50,000 black and white students had joined the sit-in movement. A core of new activists emerged from the campuses in the process. The son of a noted black educator, Julian Bond, co-ordinated a major sit-in action, by closing down ten of Atlanta's major restaurants on 15 March. A Harvard graduate student majoring in mathematical logic, Bob Moses, travelled south to become part of the demonstrations in Newport News, Virginia. Ruby Doris Smith, a 17-year-old undergraduate at Spelman College in Atlanta, quickly assumed a leadership role among her peers. Marion Barry, Paul LePrad, Diane Nash and John Lewis left Fisk University's campus to lead the desegregation campaign in Nashville. Other prominent student leaders included Charles Jones of Charlotte, North Carolina; Charles Sherrod of Virginia Union University, Richmond, Virginia; and Chuck McDew of South Carolina State College, Orangeburg, South Carolina. Northern students responded favourably to the demonstrations by holding sympathy rallies. The students who engaged in the protests evoked different kinds of responses from local whites. In some cities, whites offered little or no direct resistance, and after a period of

demonstrations, agreed to modify or abolish segregation practices in public accommodations. In many other instances, however, whites were bewildered and outraged. Non-violent black protestors were beaten and cut with razors and knives; hot cigarettes and cigars were burned into their arms and faces; they were spat upon and kicked to the floor; policemen locked them by the thousands into cramped, unsanitary jails. What is truly astonishing, given the white South's near-universal commitment to Massive Resistance, is that the number of students who were permanently injured or crippled was comparatively small.

It was inevitable that the leaders of the growing student movement would attempt to co-ordinate strategies and tactics on a national scale. Ella Baker, the perceptive and courageous executive director of King's Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC), sponsored the founding meeting of what became the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) on 16–18 April 1960, in Raleigh, North Carolina. Barry was elected chairman of the new group, and in the next four months, Moses, Bond, and the other Fisk student leaders became dominant figures in SNCC. Like most of the NAACP and Urban League leaders, SNCC members were afflicted with an anti-leftist political bias which influenced them to resist any aid from socialists or radicals. At the 14–16 October SNCC conference in Atlanta, for instance, Bayard Rustin's 'radical' identification with social democracy so worried key student organisers that his invitation to speak there was rescinded. It was only in mid-1961 that SNCC accepted a grant of \$5000 from the progressive Southern Conference Educational Fund through the intervention of socialist Southern activist Anne Braden. Coming of political age ten years after the silencing of DuBois and Robeson, the mostly lower-to-middle-class black students in SNCC had no identification with traditional black working-class struggles. They could not comprehend the meaning of the Cold War, the capitulation of the NAACP to the anti-communist Red Scare, and the devastation of legitimate black activism during the 1950s. They were, at this point, militant reformers and not revolutionaries, much like the black freedmen and politicians of the First Reconstruction. As participant Debbie Louis writes, 'their perspective was toward ending segregation. Their involvement from the very beginning was based on a decision that this equality was important enough to suffer heavily for. . . .' The students 'were motivated by a determination to secure the means for their own

economic and social mobility, which in the circumstance clearly necessitated a direct assault on the tradition and law which limited them absolutely'.<sup>2</sup>

From other quarters, the NAACP was also challenged into action by the renaissance of CORE. At the high point of the Cold War, CORE had almost ceased to exist. Gradually, local chapters began to be restructured, new members were recruited, and some level of activism developed. CORE's Los Angeles chapter, which contained only ten members in 1955, initiated a modest but successful local effort to win jobs for black barbers and clerks. In 1958 Nashville's CORE provided leadership in the city's school desegregation efforts. In 1959 CORE co-sponsored a non-violent protest in Richmond, Virginia. Small CORE chapters in South Carolina had staged boycotts against racist local merchants. In St. Louis, CORE activist William Clay led the black community's efforts to win desegregation in public accommodations. From 1958 to 1960 the number of CORE locals increased from 8 to 19, and the number of individuals providing financial support to the organisation had grown from 4500 to 12,000. When the sit-in movement began, therefore, CORE was in a position to provide immediate support and direction. On 12 February, just twelve days after the first Greensboro demonstration, every CORE chapter across the country picketed drug and retail stores who allowed segregated services in their Southern-based facilities. North Carolina CORE activist Floyd McKissick led non-violent workshops across the state. Unrestrained by the gradualistic directives of the NAACP, Tallahassee CORE leaders led local blacks to wage the first 'jail-in' – filling the city's jails with large numbers of black and white demonstrators, during February 1960.

CORE's next move was to revise its tactics of 1948 to the 1960s – the 'Freedom Rides'. In December 1960, the Supreme Court ruled in *Boynton v. Virginia* that racial segregation was illegal on all interstate buses and trains, and in transportation terminals. James Farmer assumed the post as CORE's national director in February 1961, and soon began to plan for another 'journey of reconciliation'. Thirteen persons, including Farmer and SNCC activist John Lewis, travelled into the South, leaving Washington, DC on 4 May 1961. Predictably, the biracial group encountered violent resistance. Lewis and another Freedom Rider were assaulted in Rock Hill, South Carolina on 9 May. White mobs in Anniston, Alabama, attacked and burned one bus. In Montgomery, Alabama, white racists pulled Freedom Riders



off the bus and administered a brutal beating. In Jackson, Mississippi, Farmer and a group of 26 other Freedom Riders representing SNCC and SCLC were given 67-day jail sentences for sitting in the whites-only sections of the city's bus depot. Farmer's jail term served to mobilise every CORE chapter; hundreds made the journey south to join the Freedom Rides. By July, CORE had spent almost \$140,000 on bail and legal fees. Despite the legal burden, the Freedom Rides established CORE's credentials as a militant force for desegregation, winning for the group the enthusiastic support of SNCC and the grudging respect of the NAACP. From fiscal 1960–61 to 1961–62, CORE's national income soared from \$240,000 to over \$600,000; membership climbed from 26,000 in May 1961 to 52,000 in December 1962. By late 1961, CORE had established chapters in the most segregated counties of the Deep South, and the organisation was mounting a series of non-violent protests, pickets and activities in dozens of rural areas.

The desegregation battles of the early 1960s were conceived, planned, and carried out by young people – and all the impatience and idealism which characterises youth was an organic and integral aspect of this campaign for racial justice. Farmer, 41-years-old when the Freedom Rides began, was viewed by black students as a veritable sage and 'distinguished elder'. King was only 31, but even he seemed rather remote from the mind and mood that simmered across the black college campuses. The vast majority of black youth who were arrested, imprisoned and beaten were teenagers, or scarcely into their twenties. They viewed the legalistic manoeuvres of the NAACP with a politely hidden contempt, and judged the Urban League as being in the 'enemy's camp'. They knew little, if anything, of DuBois, the National Negro Congress, the 1941 March on Washington Movement, or Randolph's futile battles in the AFL–CIO. Many young whites who joined the sit-ins came from parents who had been members of the Socialist and Communist Parties. Others came from upper-class suburban homes, and had turned against the pampered affluence which their parents had showered upon them as children. They saw what blacks had always understood: the hypocrisy, the contradiction of America's democracy which was based upon the continued subjugation of the Negro. 'They captured and held on to the traditional democratic ideals they had been taught, eliminating the inconsistencies between doctrine and reality that they felt had crept into the preceding generation's practical values in relation to

those ideals.’<sup>3</sup> Thus, racial reform in the South was not an aberration of bourgeois democracy; it was its fulfilment. Sit-ins were no rejection of the American Dream; they were the necessary although ambiguous steps taken towards its culmination. Historian Vincent Harding writes of this generation in the following manner:

They were believers. When they sang in jail, in mass meetings, in front of policemen and state troopers, ‘We Shall Overcome,’ they meant it. Few were certain about details, but they *would* overcome. Vaguely, overcoming meant ‘freedom’ and ‘rights’ and ‘dignity’ and ‘justice’, and black and white together, and many other things that people in a movement feel more than they define. But they knew they were part of a revolution, and they believed that if they only persisted in courage, determination, and willingness to suffer, they would make it over.<sup>4</sup>

## II

If the movement seemed at times to be a modern great awakening, or revival of the spirit, this was due in part to the religious character of its leadership. At every level of organisation, and in almost every small town where sit-ins or jail-ins occurred, black ministers were at the very centre of the struggle. In Tallahassee, the Reverend C. K. Steele had founded the Inter-Civic Council, a desegregation coalition which was designed after King’s original Montgomery Improvement Association. Black minister and historian Vincent Harding led a prayer vigil at Atlanta’s City Hall to protest against the vicious beating of Mrs Coretta Scott King, which resulted in her miscarriage. The Reverend C. T. Vivian of Chattanooga was a prominent SCLC organiser across Tennessee. The Reverend Walter Fauntroy supported desegregation activities by directing SCLC’s Washington, DC bureau office. The Reverend Wyatt Tee Walker, the articulate black Baptist leader of Petersburg, Virginia, served as SCLC’s executive director for a time, and was a constant thorn in the sides of his state’s racist politicians. Fred Shuttlesworth of Birmingham; William Holmes Borders of Atlanta; Ralph David Abernathy of Montgomery and Atlanta, Kelly Miller Smith of Nashville; and Matthew McColum of Orangeburg, South Carolina, were only a small part of the hundreds of black preachers and divinity students who repeatedly,

sometimes daily, risked their lives in the concerted effort to destroy Jim Crow.

Despite the vital contributions of the black clergy, SNCC stood alone in its unselfish determination to confront the segregationist power structure. By the early summer of 1960, at the suggestion of Rustin, Bob Moses led the development of a voter registration project in Pike County, Alabama. In 1961–62 SNCC joined forces with the NAACP, SCLC and other black groups in Albany, Georgia, to create the Albany Movement for desegregation. Despite the prominent participation of King, Abernathy and other SCLC leaders, the young SNCC workers – James Forman, Norma Collins, Bill Hansen, Charles Sherrod, Cordell Reagon, and many others – distinguished themselves by their willingness to defy the segregation laws, to mobilise poor and working-class blacks in non-violent demonstrations and to go to jail for their principles. It is very difficult, in retrospect, to comprehend the sheer courage of these black teenagers and young adults. Veterans of the Freedom Rides and the bloody Albany campaign, tested repeatedly, freely acknowledged the pre-eminent will to resist that fashioned SNCC members into the ‘True Believers’ of the struggle. Let two examples illustrate this. On 30 April 1962, Diane Nash Bevel, who had married activist James Bevel the year before, stood before a Mississippi court on charges of contributing to ‘juvenile delinquency’ – she had taught black teenagers in McComb, Mississippi, techniques needed for non-violent demonstrations. Deliberately, she sat in the ‘whites-only’ section of the courtroom. The angry judge sentenced the pregnant woman to serve ten days in the local jail for that single act of defiance. Nash responded, ‘I believe that if I go to jail now it may help hasten that day when my child and all children will be free – not only on the day of their birth but for all of their lives’.<sup>5</sup> Deep in the heart of Mississippi, Bob Moses helped to create the Council of Federated Organizations (COFO), a coalition of CORE, NAACP and SNCC organisers. Tirelessly, Moses organised voter registration drives in the face of tremendous white resistance. As one black Mississippi resident stated: ‘Poor Bob took a lot of beatings, I just couldn’t understand what Bob Moses was. Sometimes I think he was Moses in the Bible. He pioneered the way for black people. . . . He had more guts than any one man I’ve ever known.’<sup>6</sup>

After Albany and the Freedom Rides, the focus of political struggle shifted back towards implementing desegregation in the universities.

Black Mississippi resident James Meredith was refused admission into the segregated University of Mississippi in January 1961. Supported by NAACP attorneys, Meredith managed to overturn the state's segregation restrictions in the federal court of appeals. Supreme Court Justice Hugo L. Black, a native of Alabama, ordered Mississippi governor Ross Barnett and the state courts to allow Meredith to enrol. On 24 September 1962, Barnett declared to the press that any federal officers attempting to assist Meredith would be arrested by state police. The next day, the governor personally blocked Meredith from gaining admission to register in the university. The Kennedy Administration was finally compelled, in the light of this blatant defiance of federal authority, to call 320 federal marshals into Oxford, Mississippi, to gain Meredith's enrolment. On Sunday afternoon, 1 October, the marshals escorted Meredith into a dormitory hall on the campus. Within hours, several thousand racists attacked the federal marshals with shotguns, clubs, broken glass, and home-made bombs. Kennedy had seriously underestimated the brutality of the South, and that night he commanded 1400 troops at Fort Dix and Fort Bragg to disperse the white vigilantes. By dawn, almost 2500 soldiers were stationed in Oxford, but the damage done by the mob was considerable. Two people were killed, 166 marshals and 210 demonstrators were injured, and dozens of automobiles had been destroyed. To ensure the peace, 300 soldiers were stationed at 'Ole Miss' for a year. Meredith was finally allowed to attend the institution. To white Southerners, the 'Battle of Oxford' was a grievous insult and a gross example of federal intervention over the states' traditional rights to segregate 'niggers' from their institutions of higher learning. They blamed King, SNCC, and other so-called 'Communist-inspired' groups for the violence. Northern Democrats and many liberal Republicans were now more repulsed by the South's Massive Resistance, and urged the Kennedy Administration to develop legislation which would force the South to accept desegregation. After the Battle of Oxford, it was clear that Kennedy, who had at first tried to placate both the racists and the desegregationists simultaneously, had to make a decision which side to support.

Meanwhile, the successes achieved by the civil rights forces spawned new types of protest manoeuvres in the North as well as the South, and in turn, generated serious disagreements over strategies and tactics necessary to win desegregation. In the South, CORE locals co-operated closely with SNCC in mounting voter education

and registration campaigns. In New Haven, Connecticut, CORE activists led by a 27-year-old worker, Blyden Jackson, staged the first 'sit-outs' – demonstrations wherein blacks in dilapidated public residential units and slums blocked the city's sidewalks in efforts to obtain adequate housing reforms. Seattle, Washington, CORE members picketed a local supermarket in October 1961, and secured employment for five blacks. CORE locals in East St Louis, Illinois, Kansas City, Missouri, Rochester, New York and other cities mobilised blacks to protest against police brutality in their cities. As the focus of CORE shifted towards 'non Southern issues' such as housing and police violence in the North, many members began seriously to question the formation's long-held commitment to Gandhian non-violence. CORE chapters in Cleveland, Ohio and Greensboro, North Carolina, rejected Farmer's protests by supporting a defence committee for Robert Williams. CORE chapters in Hartford, Connecticut, Baltimore, Maryland, New Orleans, Louisiana and at least four other major locals developed close organisational and programmatic links with the Nation of Islam and its fiery spokesperson, Malcolm X. San Francisco CORE held workshops discussing black nationalism in 1962, and many new black recruits of CORE were not sympathetic to the ideal of cultural integration with whites. Partially because of CORE's internal shift in priorities, it soon came under the criticism of the NAACP for being too aggressive and unwilling to compromise with white corporate and political leaders. With some desperation, Farmer admitted at the 1962 CORE convention: 'We no longer are a tight fellowship of a few dedicated advocates of a brilliant new method of social change; we are now a large family spawned by the union of the method-oriented pioneers and the righteously indignant ends-oriented militants'.<sup>7</sup> Black attorney Floyd McKissick was elected national chairman of CORE in 1963, and new CORE leaders Ruth Turner of Cleveland and Harold Brown of San Diego revealed clear sympathies towards a Malcolm X-type militancy and nationalism. The biracial pacifist collective was becoming rapidly more black in constituency and ideology.

SNCC also began to experience ideological and programmatic growing pains at this juncture. The essence of any social theory evolves from concrete practice. Since SNCC was, admittedly, the real vanguard of the gritty desegregation and voter registration efforts, it was inevitable that the most advanced theoretical positions would

emerge from these young people. The idealism of the early years had worn away quickly. By mid-1962, some SCLC leaders in Albany, Georgia, were attempting to moderate SNCC's militant role in the town's desegregation actions. SNCC activists complained about the overwhelming television attention riveted on King, at the expense of local conditions and personalities. King was privately termed 'De Lawd' at this time, a symbolic media figure who actually did little nuts-and-bolts organising at the constant risk of his own life. By 1963, SNCC activists had repeatedly been the targets for murder across the region. SNCC offices were firebombed; SNCC workers were attacked with shotgun blasts, pistols and chains; SNCC organiser Jimmy Travis was attacked by whites armed with machine guns in Greenwood, Mississippi. Southern legislators proclaimed wildly that SNCC was simply a Marxist revolutionary formation, determined to destroy American capitalism and the social institutions of order. Increasingly, Forman urged SNCC leaders to engage in the study of socialist texts, and to learn more about the Cuban revolution and the concurrent African liberation struggles. Rapidly, SNCC lost its initial reluctance to work with avowed Marxists, although few students had ever really read or understood socialist or communist doctrines. In 1963, when King dismissed a key white aide, Jack O'Dell, when the FBI discovered and publicised his previous connections with the Communist Party, many SNCC radicals were outraged. One rising SNCC activist, Stokely Carmichael, charged that King and other Negro moderates must 'stop taking a defensive stand on communism'.<sup>8</sup> Like CORE's militants, many blacks began to question the utility or even the necessity of white participation in their organisation. SNCC's repeated attacks on the milktoast Kennedy Administration embarrassed and humiliated the older and more conservative civil rights leaders. As SNCC matured, it became clear that the students would have to confront their own theoretical and organisational dilemmas at some future point.

### III

The dramatic highpoint of the desegregation movement was achieved in 1963. In three difficult years, the Southern struggle had grown from a modest group of black students demonstrating peacefully at one lunchcounter to the largest mass movement for racial reform and civil rights in the twentieth century. Between autumn 1961 and the spring

of 1963, 20,000 men, women and children had been arrested. In 1963 alone another 15,000 were imprisoned; 1000 desegregation protests occurred across the region, in more than 100 cities. Above all else, two significant actions during that year stand out – the desegregation campaign in ‘America’s Johannesburg’, Birmingham, Alabama; and the March on Washington, DC.

For decades, Birmingham had represented the citadel of white supremacy. No black resident was ever secure from the wide sweep of white terrorism – institutional and vigilante. White police officers in the city casually picked up black women pedestrians and raped them at gun-point. Throughout the 1950s, black homes and churches were bombed. In April 1959, a black Baptist preacher was kidnapped by the Klan and beaten senseless with tyre chains. Every aspect of cultural, social and economic life in the town was strictly segregated. Birmingham itself ‘conjured up all the worst images of southern white urban racism’, Vincent Harding notes. ‘Unyielding white supremacy, blatant segregation, brutal police, easily organized white mobs, and unresponsive elected officials. . . . Every black person seemed to know someone who had been beaten, bombed, raped, or murdered in Birmingham.’<sup>9</sup> For years, civil rights activists had conceived the plans for attacking Birmingham’s Jim Crow laws. In May 1961, Freedom Riders had been threatened and arrested by the city’s unrelenting, segregationist police chief, Eugene ‘Bull’ Conner. Conditions had become even worse with the election of Wallace as the state’s governor in 1962. Upon taking his oath of office, the populist-turned-white-supremacist vowed that the Federal government would never dictate racial policies in his state. ‘I draw the line in the dust and toss the gauntlet before the feet of tyranny and I say segregation now, segregation tomorrow, segregation forever.’<sup>10</sup> In May 1962, the Reverend Fred Shuttlesworth convinced other SCLC leaders that the time to tackle the most segregated city in the nation had now arrived.

The first organisational tasks in preparing for the demonstrations were given to Wyatt Walker. In January and February, he took careful notes on almost every public building, commercial establishment, and street in the downtown area. Wyatt also recruited 250 persons who were committed to engage in non-violent actions and to go to the city jail. On 3 April 1963, the desegregation campaign began. Sit-ins were held at department stores and restaurants. On 6 April, the Reverend A. D. King and 42 other marchers were arrested

for holding a vigil at the town hall. ‘Bull’ Conner attempted to undercut the actions by closing all public parks and playgrounds. On 10 April, four days before Easter, King, Abernathy and other leaders spoke to a massive church rally. King openly castigated the black preachers who had ignored the demonstrations. ‘I’m tired of preachers riding around in big cars, living in fine homes, but not willing to take their part in the fight. If you can’t stand up with your people, you are not fit to be a leader!’ King urged every black person to stand up for freedom now. ‘We are winning the struggle for which we have sacrificed, but we must even be ready to die to be free, if that is what’s necessary. Birmingham must put its house in order’, King declared. ‘It’s better to go to jail in dignity than accept segregation in humility.’ Abernathy rose to his feet, asking the congregation, ‘Who’ll volunteer to go to jail with me and Martin. . . ?’<sup>11</sup> Men, women and children surged forward, hands upraised, tears in their eyes, singing and praying. King and Abernathy were arrested on Good Friday; marchers on Easter Sunday were clubbed and taken into custody. On 2 May, Bevel co-ordinated a children’s march involving 6000 black youngsters from the ages of 6 to 16. Before national television cameras, Birmingham police let loose vicious police dogs on children as they knelt to pray; 959 children were arrested and jailed. Police used firehoses, dogs and clubs against pregnant women, children, and the elderly. Across the world, humanity was repulsed by the sickening spectacle of American racism, the reality of white democracy.

In April, eight moderate white Birmingham ministers denounced King for what they perceived as his ‘impatience’ with white segregationists. They went so far as to applaud ‘Bull’ Conner and his armed thugs for employing ‘restraint in maintaining order’. The ministers ‘strongly urged our own Negro community to withdraw support from these demonstrations’.<sup>12</sup> King’s response was one of the most eloquent essays written in American history, the famous ‘Letter from Birmingham Jail’. Writing from his jail cell on 16 April, King observed that the ministers and other white moderates were contributing to segregation by their blind inertia. ‘The Negro’s greatest stumbling block in the stride toward freedom is not the . . . Ku Klux Klanner, but the white moderate who is more devoted to “order” than to justice . . . who constantly says “I agree with you in the goal you seek, but I can’t agree with your methods of direct action”’; who paternalistically feels that he can set the timetable for another man’s freedom’, King declared. The purpose of non-violent action was not



to evade or to defy the law. 'One who breaks an unjust law must do it openly, lovingly', King insisted. 'I submit then an individual who breaks a law that conscience tells him is unjust, and willingly accepts the penalty by staying in jail to arouse the conscience of the community over its injustice, is in reality expressing the very highest respect for law.' Perhaps King's most effective criticism was his insistence that the Negro could no longer 'wait' to be freed by benevolent whites:

We have waited for more than 340 years for our constitutional and God-given rights. The nations of Asia and Africa are moving with jetlike speed toward gaining political independence, but we still creep at horse-and-buggy pace toward gaining a cup of coffee at a lunch counter. Perhaps it is easy for those who have never felt the stinging darts of segregation to say, 'Wait.' But when you have seen vicious mobs lynch your mothers and fathers at will and drown your sisters and brothers at whim; when you have seen hate-filled policemen curse, kick and even kill your black brothers and sisters; when you see the vast majority of your twenty million Negro brothers smothering in an airtight cage of poverty in the midst of an affluent society; when you suddenly find your tongue twisted and your speech stammering as you seek to explain to your six-year-old daughter why she can't go to the public amusement park that has just been advertised on television, and see tears welling up in her eyes when she is told that Funtown is closed to colored children, and see ominous clouds of inferiority beginning to form in her little mental sky, and see her begin to distort her personality by an unconscious developing bitterness toward white people; when you have to concoct an answer for a five-year-old son who is asking 'Daddy, why do white people treat colored people so mean?'; when you take a cross-country drive and find it necessary to sleep night after night in the uncomfortable corners of your automobile because no motel will accept you; when you are humiliated day in and day out by nagging signs reading 'white' and 'colored'; when your first name becomes 'nigger', your middle name becomes 'boy' (however old you are) and your last name becomes 'John,' and your wife and mother are never given the respected title 'Mrs.'; when you are harried by day and haunted by night by the fact that you are a Negro, living constantly at tiptoe stance never quite

knowing what to expect next, and are plagued with inner fears and outer resentments; when you are forever fighting a degenerating sense of 'nobodiness' – then you will understand why we find it difficult to wait. There comes a time when the cup of endurance runs over, and men are no longer willing to be plunged into the abyss of despair. I hope, sirs, you can understand our legitimate and unavoidable impatience.<sup>13</sup>

Protests were mounting across the country, demanding that the Kennedy Administration resolve the battle of Birmingham. A. D. King's home was bombed, and other bombs exploded in black-owned buildings in the city. Republican liberal Senator Jacob Javits of New York and other members of Congress demanded that the Justice Department intervene in the crisis. 100,000 people marched in San Francisco and thousands more demonstrated in Detroit to express solidarity with Birmingham blacks. Tens of thousands of whites who had up to now stood outside the Civil Rights Movement – teachers, lawyers, labourers, elected officials, clergy – were recruited into the cause for justice. Thousands of telegrams were sent to the administration demanding action. Finally, after the brutal beatings and arrests of black children, the Kennedy Administration went into motion. On 10 May 1963, Assistant Attorney General Burke Marshall, Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara and Treasury Secretary C. Douglas Dillon reached an agreement with Birmingham's corporate leaders and elected officials. The terms included local hiring policies on a 'nondiscriminatory basis' and the immediate release of all black prisoners. Kennedy warned Wallace that federal troops would be called in to enforce desegregation and civil order if necessary.

Despite the victory in Birmingham, the racist violence continued unabated. In Americus, Georgia, local police were using electric cattle prods and clubs against unarmed citizens; in Plaquemines, Louisiana, 900 marchers were tear-gassed and clubbed, 400 were arrested and 150 hospitalised. In June, Mississippi asserted its rightful place as the most racist state with particular vigour: in Biloxi, 72 blacks were arrested; in Tchula, activist Willie Joe Lovett, 23-years-old, was killed; in Winona, civil rights leader Fannie Lou Hamer and others were viciously beaten and imprisoned by police. On the night of 11 June, NAACP state leader Medgar Evers was executed by racists in front of his Jackson, Mississippi, home.

Kennedy was not unmoved by the carnage and the ordeals of blacks, but the racial crisis alone would not have prompted him to act. Many corporate leaders, always looking at the social costs of doing business in the South, had concluded that desegregation was inevitable; that the Federal government's appropriate role was to ensure the civil order which was essential to business expansion. For both moralistic and economic reasons, then, big business had come to accept the death of Jim Crow, and a number of corporate and financial leaders urged the administration to do the same. On 12 June, Kennedy announced that he would deliver to Congress a strong civil rights bill. Later, promoting its passage, the president defended it 'not merely for reasons of economic efficiency, world diplomacy and domestic tranquility – but above all because it is right'.<sup>14</sup> Kennedy instantly became recognised as a powerful friend of civil rights. In later years, millions of poor and working-class black families framed photos of the late president, alongside those of his brother Robert, and Martin Luther King, and displayed them proudly in their homes. It is critically important to understand Kennedy's motivations for embracing desegregation at this relatively late date. Like Lincoln before him, Kennedy personally felt no great discomfort with racial segregation. In 1956, many Southern delegates to the Democratic national convention favoured his nomination as the party's vice-presidential candidate over that of a rival Southern senator, because of Kennedy's moderate reputation on race and his outspoken anti-communism. The Cold War had again accelerated in the early 1960s: communist forces were winning in Laos and Vietnam; Castro was in power in Havana; a bloody civil war raged in the Congo; and in October 1962, the Cuban Missile Crisis had threatened the total destruction of world civilisation. Kennedy and his advisers, notably Robert Kennedy, had to view Birmingham in a worldwide context, within the greater struggle for hegemony with the Soviet Union over the Third World. The image of battered and bloody black children in the streets of the American South could not help but undermine the US government's image in non-aligned countries. Kennedy's subsequent actions were directly influenced more by cold geopolitical facts than by warm idealism.

As the Birmingham struggle climaxed, another major protest was being planned. Among several leaders, the idea of reviving Randolph's 1941 March on Washington Movement had been discussed. Randolph and Rustin assumed leadership in the planning stages,

with the latter doing most of the actual co-ordination. SNCC and a few CORE militants insisted that the march should become a massive civil disobedience demonstration, which would paralyse the nation's capital. But white liberals from labour, religious and political groups would not tolerate this radical approach. The SCLC, the Urban League and the NAACP explained that the demonstration should be planned without any arrests, with the complete co-operation of the federal authorities. This conservative position, backed by Kennedy, eventually became the dominant theme of the march. Instead of a massive, non-violent army of black students and workers – which ironically closely paralleled Randolph's 1941 project – the new march was almost a festive affair, used to promote the Kennedy civil rights bill pending before Congress. 'To orchestrate and guarantee the civility of the new march on Washington, the movement spent tremendous amounts of manpower, energy and money – all of which were diverted from the thrusts of direct action and voter registration in the South and elsewhere.'<sup>15</sup> The result was a biracial audience of 250,000 or more, standing before the Lincoln Memorial, on 28 August 1963. Many movement radicals who attended the gathering agreed with Malcolm X that the event was nothing but a 'farce on Washington'. But for whites and many Negro moderates, the ceremony was the highpoint of their lives.

Televised before a national audience, most of the speakers endeavoured to strike a moderate tone. Shuttlesworth declared: 'We came here because we love our country, because our country needs us and because we need our country'. Randolph, as was his custom, represented black labour. 'We are the advance guard of a massive moral revolution for jobs and freedom', the veteran socialist observed. 'Our white allies know that they cannot be free while we are not.' Roy Wilkins, who was introduced erroneously as 'the acknowledged leader of the civil rights movement', gave vigorous support to the proposed civil rights bill. Whitney M. Young, director of the Urban League, Matthew Ahmann of the Catholic Conference for Interracial Justice, and others gave moderate and unsurprising testimony. Problems surfaced when the contents of John Lewis' speech became known prior to his address. The Catholic Archbishop of Washington, Patrick A. O'Boyle, declared he would leave the podium unless others deleted and rearranged the SNCC leader's presentation. Protesting, but in the end acquiescing, Lewis delivered a 'sanitized' speech which still expressed key elements of his organisation's radical posture. 'We

are tired of being beaten by policemen. We are tired of seeing our people locked up in jail over and over again!' Lewis dismissed the Kennedy civil rights bill as 'too little and too late'. King came to the speaker's platform last, and gave what many in the audience declared was a rhetorical 'miracle', his 'I have a Dream' speech. King began by terming the march 'the greatest demonstration of freedom' in American history. He illustrated in resounding oratory his vision of society: a land where freedom rang 'from every mountainside', and where blacks and whites could join hands together to proclaim the words, 'Free at last, free at last; thank God Almighty, we're free at last!' Historians of the movement were struck by the fact that a portion of King's speech was originally delivered in 1956, at the first anniversary ceremonies for the Montgomery Bus Boycott movement. Other parts were derived from political speeches and sermons he had given for over seven years.<sup>16</sup> Militants were bitterly disappointed that King had chosen not to include extensive critical remarks on the recent racist violence in the South, and the failure of most white liberals to respond concretely or adequately to the Negro's economic plight. But before a predominantly white viewing audience in the US, King represented a reasonable and even admirable spokesman for the cause of civil rights. The speech mirrored, in a sense, Booker T. Washington's Atlanta Compromise of September 1895: both were delivered to primarily white audiences; both were self-consciously restrained in their demands; both captured the dominant political trends in white civil society at that point in American racial history. Washington of course championed 'separation of the races', while King called for 'integration' and 'civil rights'. Yet across the gulf of history, the two black men personified a body of public policies which dealt directly with the present and future status of the Negro. Both won the grateful support of their respective Presidential Administrations; both proposed the implementation of their racial policies in the South. King and Washington were catapulted after their respective speeches into international fame.

If the Negro moderates thought that a non-violent celebration would pressure the Congress to adopt the civil rights proposals, they were sadly mistaken. Not a single vote changed in Congress after the march. If anything, the mood among grassroots blacks had swung towards greater defiance. In July 1963, one month before the march, writer Lerone Bennett argued that 'the burning militance of the Birmingham leaders . . . pin-pointed a revolutionary shift in the

attitudes of blacks'. CORE militants in San Francisco declared that 'Birmingham brought a drastic revision in our thinking. You can nibble away at the surface for a thousand years and not get anywhere'.<sup>17</sup> CORE chapters across the country began to set firm and short 'deadlines' for white businesses to hire certain numbers of blacks, promising to disrupt commercial traffic and to protest repeatedly unless goals were reached. Many black nationalists targeted King and other more conservative Negro leaders with personal and even physical abuse. In Harlem, black separatists tossed eggs at King after his appearance in a local church. When A. D. King addressed a Harlem rally of 3000 in May 1963, a section of the audience jeered: 'We want Malcolm, we want Malcolm!'<sup>18</sup> Dissatisfied with the mildly reformist policies and practices of the Negro Old Guard, SNCC leaders increasingly looked overseas for ideological direction. In December 1963, staff members had a fruitful discussion with Kenya's socialist Vice President, Oginga Odinga, when he visited Atlanta. Nine months later eleven SNCC leaders, including Fannie Lou Hamer, Julian Bond, Ruby Doris Robinson, John Lewis and James Forman travelled across Africa, and met with national leaders. In Africa the SNCC delegation met Malcolm X, and the beginning of an influential relationship was established. Domestically, SNCC moved closer to the organised left. In December 1963, Lewis urged Congress to abolish HUAC; the following year, SNCC accepted the legal assistance of the leftist National Lawyers Guild, over the vigorous objections of NAACP Legal Defense Fund director Jack Greenberg, a Cold War liberal.<sup>19</sup> Even the SCLC and NAACP experienced a bewildering sense of 'What Next?' after the March on Washington. Rustin was disturbed by the 'talk of violence' and growing sympathy for Malcolm X's nationalism. 'We cannot get our freedom with guns', Rustin wrote in October 1963. 'You cannot integrate a school or get a job with a machine gun.' But Rustin admitted that Kennedy still 'reassures the segregationists' and privately 'bows to the Dixiecrats and gives them Southern racist judges'.<sup>20</sup>

Ever-present in the post-march discussions were certain questions: 'once desegregation is legally won, what is the next objective?'; 'what does freedom actually mean in terms of public policies?'; and 'are integration and nonviolence the only possible methods to wage the Second Reconstruction?' Sadly, with the growing exceptions of SNCC and CORE, the majority of Negro leaders were poorly

equipped theoretically even to grapple with these social and economic contradictions, for at their roots they signified the reality of America's racist and capitalist state. The one black theorist and activist who could have provided the answers had been banished from political discourse. In October 1961, DuBois applied for membership in the Communist Party, and late that year left the US to relocate in Nkrumah's Ghana. He died at the age of 95, hours before the March on Washington. Yet before his final departure, in one of his last public addresses, delivered at Johnson C. Smith College in Charlotte, North Carolina, on 2 April 1960, DuBois predicted the dilemmas which would later confound and confront the civil rights leadership. Long before his critics, DuBois recognised that the struggle for desegregation would be victorious in the end, but that this effort to abolish Jim Crow would not destroy the economic prerogatives of private capital over black lives, which was the basis for all the exploitation and racism which existed in the nation. Further, he warned the sit-in demonstrators not to confuse desegregation as a political goal with cultural assimilation into the white majority. The desegregation struggle in America should not force Negroes ever to forget slavery and 'the whole cultural history of Africans in the world. No! What I have been fighting for . . . is the possibility of black folk and their cultural patterns existing in America without discrimination, and on terms of equality.' Political equality with whites would eventually occur, the black scholar stated, but without an economic programme of socialism, and 'the preservation of African history and culture' among Afro-Americans, a truly biracial democracy was impossible.<sup>21</sup> Few noted or cared for DuBois' remarks; but within five brief years, the words of his predictions would resound throughout the black movement in many ways.

#### IV

Between 1962 and 1965, Martin Luther King was the acknowledged moral and political leader of millions of Americans, black and white. After the March on Washington, King became one of the three or four most influential figures in the world. His books and articles were read by millions; his speeches were memorised; he was honoured with the 1964 Nobel Peace Prize; he was celebrated by artists and poets of all races and cultures. King's personal achievements and acclaim gave the domestic struggle for biracial democracy an international audi-

ence. For the historian, King represents a series of paradoxes, each of which obscures the real meaning of his greatness. Some commentators suggest that without King, the civil rights cause would have faltered, and certain major legislative victories – particularly the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965 – would not have been won. This idealist interpretation misses the actual relationship between the individual and the dialectical evolution of history. Other social movements throughout human history are often characterised by the singular actions of one prominent figure: Cromwell in the English Civil War; Lenin, during the Russian Revolution of 1917; Mao in China; Robespierre during the French Revolution. But history creates humanity, as well as the conscious choices which are possible for any political leader to select. G. Plekhanov's *The Role of Individual in History* sheds considerable light on this issue. If a social movement for reform or revolution is broad enough, Plekhanov insisted, any series of individuals can arise who can articulate the vision of that movement. 'If the accidental fall of a brick had killed [Robespierre] . . . his place would, of course, have been taken by someone else; and although that other person might have been inferior to him in every respect, events would have nevertheless taken the same course as they did with Robespierre.' A great politician 'sees farther than others and desires things more strongly than others', but he/she cannot overturn the basic direction of struggle.<sup>22</sup> Reconsidering the black movement from 1954 to 1965, King appears 'indispensable' because in retrospect, his great gifts for oratory and his dynamic use of non-violent direct action techniques appear to stand alone. But King did not create the Second Reconstruction; the movement made the young minister its own spokesperson, and could have done the same for others if he had not existed. Had King been killed in Montgomery in 1956, Abernathy was fully equipped to carry out the boycott. Randolph and Wilkins were far better-known; Farmer of CORE was more willing to go to jail and to lead non-violent actions; Shuttlesworth, C. T. Vivian and others would have created an organisation like King's SCLC by the late 1950s; the sit-ins, Freedom Rides, and jail-ins had nothing directly to do with King, and they would have occurred without his input.

King's powerful influence must be explained, therefore, by factors other than his indispensability. First, and probably foremost among his credentials was his identity as a black preacher. Among his contemporaries in the black clergy, King had no peer as an orator.



From small towns in the rural South, to his father's Ebenezer Baptist Church in Atlanta, King delivered sermons with a grace, cadence and power unmatched since the great preachers of the A. M. E. church and other black denominations from the late nineteenth century. Author Louis Lomax describes a typical sermon:

'I got my marching shoes!' Martin would shout.  
 'Yes, Lord, me too,' the people answered back.  
 'I woke up this morning with my mind on freedom!'  
 'Preach, doctor, preach.'  
 'I ain't going to let nobody turn me around!'  
 'Let's march, brother; we are with you. . . .'  
 'The struggle is not between black and white!'  
 'No, no,' the people confirmed.  
 'But between good and evil.'  
 'That's it; that's it.'  
 'For God is not dead; I know because I can feel him. . . .'  
 'Deep in my soul!' the people shout completing the line from the Negro spiritual.

Then, arm in arm with the local leader, Martin led the people into the streets to face dogs, tear gas, fire hoses, and, frequently, brutality and additional jailing.<sup>23</sup>

Black novelist James Baldwin described King as a 'great speaker' whose 'secret lies in his intimate knowledge of the people he is addressing', by keeping 'his hearers absolutely tense'. On the church pulpit, King personified their own best hopes, their desire for human equality, their love of God, their will to resist. 'Once he had accepted the place they had prepared for him, their struggle became absolutely indistinguishable from his own, and took over and controlled his life. He suffered with them and, thus, he helped them to suffer.'<sup>24</sup>

King appealed to white liberals for other reasons. He had none of Lewis' or Carmichael's fiery political rhetoric; but this allowed him to be judged as a moderate and reasonable counsellor in a time of racial crisis. He lacked Randolph's peerless credentials as a leader of black workers; but this gave the black minister access to corporate directors and many conservatives who still viewed Randolph with some suspicion. King's SCLC had none of the organisational clout or prestige of Wilkins' NAACP; yet this permitted King to be viewed not as a desegregation bureaucrat, but as a moral and spiritual leader.

Writing in 1965, historian August Meier explained that King's 'religious terminology and the manipulation of the Christian symbols of love and nonresistance are responsible for his appeal among whites. To talk in terms of Christianity, love, nonviolence is reassuring to the mentality of white America'. King made white liberals feel guilty every time they saw him lead a non-violent prayer group or march that was assaulted by Southern police, armed with firehoses, dogs and clubs. But King's faith in the essential humanity of even the worst white bigot gave other whites the sense that this black leader valued and respected law and order, tempered with justice. Whites could love King, because King had 'faith that the white man will redeem himself'.<sup>25</sup>

In politics, King tried to strike a balance between protest and accommodation. Inside his own closed coterie of supporters, he listened to the advice of radicals like Bevel and gradualists like Andrew Young. When President Kennedy was assassinated on 22 November 1963, King immediately issued a statement which blamed all American blacks and whites equally, for creating 'a climate where men cannot disagree without being disagreeable, and where they express their disagreement through violence and murder'. King was ready to support Lyndon Johnson as he assumed the presidency, in return for the former segregationist's vigorous endorsement of the Civil Rights bill. Congress passed the legislation on 2 July 1964; King repaid the new president by campaigning for his election throughout that year. In *Why We Can't Wait*, released in July 1964, King praised 'Johnson's emotional and intellectual involvement' in the desegregation campaigns.<sup>26</sup> King urged civil rights leaders to diminish their protest actions during the campaign, in the fear that any black boycotts or jail-ins would undercut Johnson's chances for election. When black urban rebellions erupted in Rochester, Philadelphia, and Harlem – brought about by decades of economic exploitation and Federal government apathy – King took a law-and-order posture. Travelling to New York City's burning ghettos, even without contacting local black leaders in advance, King insisted that the black underclass should return quietly to their rat-infested slums. 'Lawlessness, looting and violence cannot be condoned whether used by the racist or the reckless of any color', King declared, to the popular acclaim of white politicians and police.<sup>27</sup> Johnson was elected in November over right-wing challenger Barry Goldwater with a massive majority; indeed, had every black voter stayed home, or had

voted for Goldwater, Johnson still would have triumphed. Nevertheless, even after the November 1964 elections, King attempted to moderate the activism of the movement in order to maintain the president's support.

King's compromised and contradictory politics were revealed tragically in Selma, Alabama, in 1965. SNCC workers had been organising in that section of black-belt Alabama for two years. One young black man, Jimmy Lee Jackson, was clubbed to death by police officers as he tried to protect his mother. SCLC and SNCC organisers agreed to schedule a march from Selma to Montgomery beginning on 7 March 1965, to protest against the Wallace regime's brutality. On the morning of the march, SNCC leaders were shocked that King was inexplicably absent. Walking across Selma's Pettus Bridge, the 2000 non-violent demonstrators were attacked and brutally beaten by hundreds of state troopers and local police. On 10 March, King agreed to lead a second group of 3000 protestors across the bridge – but secretly made an agreement with Johnson's Attorney General, Nicholas Katzenbach, that the marchers would not confront the Alabama state police again. With King at the head of the march, the demonstrators sang and prayed as they walked over the bridge. As the police barricade approached, King ordered everyone immediately to retreat. In subdued anger, the amazed SNCC leaders and others walked back into Selma, singing 'Ain't Gonna Let Nobody Turn Me 'Round'. Later, after hard bargaining, the march to Montgomery was finally held; but the damage to King's reputation was incalculable. Harding expressed the sense of betrayal which characterised the moment:

When the time came to assert their right to march for freedom, there is every evidence that King backed off. Listening to mediators from President Johnson, he refused to press the movement into so harsh and predictably bloody a confrontation. Many sagging spirits were finally broken with that act of retreat, and the distrust that had been building against King, SCLC, and the Johnson Administration poured out in deep anger and disgust. The powerful, forward thrust of the Southern civil rights struggle had now been finally broken, and that turned out to be the last traditional, major march of the Southern movement.<sup>28</sup>

For five difficult years, King had been the glue which kept the civil

rights united front intact. Leaders to his right – Young, Randolph, Wilkins – could accept his activism without personally becoming involved in street demonstrations on a daily basis. He had been a mentor to the left wing of the movement: speaking at SNCC's founding conference, urging teenagers to be arrested for their ideals; writing a powerful fund-raising letter for CORE in 1956, which helped to subsidise its activities; joining CORE's Advisory Committee in 1957, and protecting and aiding Freedom Riders in Montgomery in 1961. Now the myth was shattered, and the politician was something far less than what many True Believers had hoped he was. Robert Allen bitterly denounced King as 'a reluctant accomplice of the white power structure'. King was manipulated by 'the liberal establishment . . . to restrain the threatening rebelliousness of the black masses and the young militants'.<sup>29</sup> Even before Selma, Meier levied the harshest criticisms:

In a movement in which respect is accorded in direct proportion to the number of times one is arrested, King appears to keep the number of times he goes to jail to a minimum. In a movement in which successful leaders are those who share in the hardships of their followers, in the risks they take, in the beatings they receive, in the length of time they spend in jail, King tends to leave prison for other important engagements, rather than remaining there and suffering with his followers. In a movement in which leadership ordinarily devolves upon persons who mix democratically with their followers, King remains isolated and aloof. In a movement which prides itself on militancy and 'no compromise' with racial discrimination . . . [King] seems amenable to compromises considered by some half a loaf or less, and often appears willing to postpone or avoid a direct confrontation in the streets.<sup>30</sup>

## V

Reason and right seemed to triumph. NAACP activist Clarence Mitchell declared that Johnson had 'made a greater contribution to giving a dignified and hopeful status to Negroes in the United States than any President including Lincoln, Roosevelt, and Kennedy'.<sup>31</sup> Johnson committed his Administration to the goal of 'the full assimilation of more than twenty million Negroes into American life'. The Civil Rights Bill of 1964 outlawed Jim Crow in public accommo-

dations of every kind, in every city and state. The Voting Rights Act of 1965, prompted by events at Selma, had even greater scope. By votes of 328 to 74 in the House of Representatives, and 79 to 18 in the Senate, bill H.R. 6400 was signed into law by Johnson on 6 August 1965. 'I pledge we will not delay or we will not hesitate, or will not turn aside until Americans of every race and color and origin in this country have the same rights as all others to share in the progress of democracy', Johnson declared. Federal examiners were sent into the South with the full powers of the government to safeguard the registration and voting of blacks. Within five years, the effects of the Voting Rights Act were apparent to all. Between 1964 and 1969, the percentage of black adults registered to vote in the South soared: Alabama, 19.3 per cent to 61.3 per cent; Georgia, 27.4 per cent to 60.4 per cent; Louisiana, 31.6 per cent to 60.8 per cent; Mississippi, 6.7 per cent to 66.5 per cent.<sup>32</sup> Older blacks, for the first time in their lives, were permitted to cast votes. Black children could shop in department stores, eat at restaurants, and even go to amusement parks which were once off-limits. The left wing of the Civil Rights Movement applauded these legislative achievements, but with a grain of cynicism born from hard experience. 'The Civil Rights Bill was designed to answer three elements at once', Debbie Louis noted. White liberals were pleased with 'the Administration [for] fulfilling its campaign promises'. The black community was placated and its 'explosive' sentiment diffused. Most important of all, the 1964 bill pleased 'the business community whose survival depended on quelling minority unrest and unprofitable white resistance to moderate black demands'.<sup>33</sup>

If anything, the adoption of the 1964 Civil Rights Act increased the institutional, political and vigilante violence against blacks across the South. As Johnson swung the Democratic Party behind the moderate tendency of the desegregation movement, white Southern Democrats abandoned the party by the thousands. An opponent of the Civil Rights Act, Goldwater carried 54.6 per cent of the black belt South's popular votes in 1964, and was the first Republican candidate to receive all the electoral votes of Mississippi, Alabama, Georgia, South Carolina and Louisiana. Dixiecrat Strom Thurmond campaigned for Goldwater, and joined the Republican Party in 1966. The new 'racist-Republicans' won seven additional House seats, elected three Senators and two governors in 1966. Many Southern politicians who remained Democrats shifted to the far right. In Georgia, a racist

Atlanta restaurant owner, Lester Maddox, acquired a widespread following. Maddox was a leader of Georgians Unwilling to Surrender (GUTS) and the White Citizens' Councils. After the Civil Rights Bill was passed, Maddox threatened black would-be patrons with axe handles and physical threats. In 1966, this bizarre yet very American defender of 'God, liberty, free enterprise, and states' rights' was elected governor of Georgia. No one, however, surpassed Wallace of Alabama in crude political ability, fiery demagoguery, or defence of white supremacy. Wallace recognised that the South could not defeat the Federal government's racial policies alone; he knew that many Northern white workers hated and feared blacks, and that this fear could be harnessed into a national political movement. Campaigning against Johnson in the Democratic Party primaries of early 1964, Wallace took his anti-communist, anti-black and quasi-fascist programme to Northern factories, churches and suburbs. In Indiana, he polled 30 per cent of the Democratic popular vote, 34 per cent in Wisconsin, and 43 per cent in Maryland. Legally barred from running for re-election in Alabama, Wallace proposed that his apolitical wife, Lurleen, be elected governor in his place. On a campaign completely dominated by the racist rhetoric of her husband, Mrs Wallace carried 54 per cent of the Democratic primary vote, and subsequently became governor.<sup>34</sup> The startling success of the Wallaces and Maddoxes created the conditions for racist violence to continue unchecked. During the Mississippi Summer Project of 1964, a joint effort of the NAACP, CORE, SCLC and SNCC to register blacks, there were 6 blacks who were murdered, 1000 arrested, 30 buildings were bombed and three dozen black churches were gutted by fire. Racist attacks still occurred in every Southern city: in Birmingham, blacks at one restaurant were clubbed with baseball bats; in Gransville, Louisiana, the town's leader of the NAACP Youth Council was viciously beaten by white terrorists supervised by the local sheriff; in St. Augustine, Florida, black youths were assaulted by whites with chains and knives. SNCC and CORE activists began to protest that voting rights and desegregated public facilities were not enough. Somehow, the Federal government must halt the racist violence against all blacks.

It was only then that some black activists recognised, at last, the limitations of reform. America's political economy was still profoundly racist, and Johnson's legislation had erased only the crudest manifestations of racial suppression. Beyond allowing the Negro the

opportunity *not* to be restricted by colour *per se*, Johnson and the Congress would not go. Even as Wallace was becoming a national voice for prejudice, bigotry and modern American fascism, white liberals expressed the view that blacks had no more obstacles to confront. Freedom, for them, was achieved by the Voting Rights Act. Woodward explains their joyful mood:

American institutions were responding effectively to the most serious domestic problem the country faced. Jim Crow as a legal entity was dead. Congress had fulfilled its role, the courts were vindicated, and the executive furnished inspired leadership. Granted that discrimination and segregation still flourished in spite of the law, nevertheless the means were now at hand to deal with all these problems. . . . With the powerful new laws on the books, with public sentiment behind them, and an Administration thoroughly committed to the cause, a new era of progress was about to dawn.<sup>35</sup>

Virtually none of the black leaders, from left to right, shared this gross misconception. Even Whitney Young of the Urban League, a group distinguished by its conservatism and pro-corporate views, had to offer some dissent. 'I think the white community makes a real mistake in reminding the Negro of the possibility of alienating white people because he pushes for his rights. A Negro mother whose husband is unemployed', Young noted, 'whose children are bitten by rats, who are living in a house without heat, couldn't care less about alienating some white person.'<sup>36</sup>

If the tepid Young could feel hostility towards white liberals, the anger of blacks to his left was tenfold. By the autumn of 1963, as we have seen, many CORE members had begun to re-evaluate their historic commitment to non-violence. In 1964, many blacks were forcing white veterans of CORE to resign their posts as chairs of local chapters. Late that same year, CORE's national membership became, for the first time, predominantly black. Long Island CORE was seized by black nationalists under the direction of militant Lincoln Lynch. In 1965, a black men's caucus was created and led by the egotistical yet charismatic Roy Innis, with the specific political goal of black nationalism. Farmer was increasingly isolated and challenged. In mid-1964, he became fearful that Rustin would be named to replace him. McKissick denounced Farmer for misman-

agement and lack of effective leadership. Farmer resigned in January 1966, and was replaced by McKissick. Politically, CORE was increasingly at odds with the Johnson Administration, especially with its policies in Vietnam. Many CORE chapter leaders were among the earliest critics of American involvement in Southeast Asia. McKissick and Farmer co-signed an official condemnation of the war, stating that US money sent to the South Vietnamese regime could be better spent at home to end poverty and institutional racism. CORE had begun to redefine itself, into becoming an all-black formation, although still quite petty bourgeois, which promoted radical reforms and racial pride. Robert Allen described this metamorphosis from biracial pacifism to black militancy in CORE as an attempt 'to respond to and organize the new militancy which had infected certain parts of the black middle classes, as a result of the rebellions initiated by the black masses'.<sup>37</sup>

SNCC was again at the vanguard of change. White liberals watched with horror and dismay as an assertive black nationalist trend became more pronounced in the group. The most articulate voice for nationalism was young Stokely Carmichael. Once a proponent of Rustin's form of gradualist socialism, Carmichael became a SNCC worker on a full-time basis after graduating from Howard University in 1964. Widely praised as a natural organiser of rural workers and farmers, Carmichael registered black voters in Mississippi. From the beginning, however, he could not accept the religious and non-violent tenets of many SNCC activists. Jailed repeatedly with his co-workers, he refused to participate in the prayers with others in his cell. During organising efforts in Lowndes County, Alabama, in 1965, Carmichael usually carried a loaded pistol for protection, and advised his friends to do the same. Carmichael and others organised a militant, all-black political formation, the Lowndes County Freedom Organization – better known in the state as the Black Panther Party – to oppose the Wallacites electorally. Earlier than CORE, SNCC also publicly denounced Johnson's war policies. Bob Moses spoke at an anti-war rally of 25,000 in Washington, DC on 17 April 1965. Other SNCC leaders, notably Bond, urged the organisation to emphasise the issue. By July 1965, SNCC members produced their first uncompromising statement of the war, declaring that blacks should not 'fight in Vietnam for the white man's freedom, until all the Negro people are free in Mississippi'.<sup>38</sup>



In the process of social transformation, there are always bitter seeds of defeat hidden within the fruit of victory. Jim Crow was legally finished, yet black workers and sharecroppers were still the victims of bombings, lynchings and rapes. Thousands had been imprisoned, and their jailers were still at large; Wallace was now a dangerous national figure to be reckoned with; white liberals were demanding that the Negro 'quiet down' and 'accept' the gains that he/she had gained. Black Southerners had the electoral franchise; but what of economic security, housing, childcare, medical care, and the right to live without fear? So much had been won, but the greatest expectations of the black poor and working class had not yet been achieved. The 'echoes from Paul Robeson and W. E. B. DuBois were sounding in Mississippi', writes Harding. 'Every movement forward had been purchased at great cost. Bleeding ulcers, nervous breakdowns, mysterious, incurable ailments took their toll on young lives.' Yet what of freedom? Was this too simply an illusion? 'Every time they smashed away some obstacle to black freedom and equality, another larger, newly perceived hindrance loomed before them, challenging the last ounce of their strength and their spirit.'<sup>39</sup> The idealistic teenagers of 1960 had become the steely veterans of racial reform. If white liberals blocked proposals for gaining a decent material life for the masses of poor blacks, then they would have to leave our organisations. If Johnson persisted in sending off young black men to die in an Asian war, his Administration would have to be toppled. If non-violence could not win the white racists to biracial democracy and justice, then their brutal terror would be met, blow for blow. If equality was impossible within the political economy of American capitalism, that system which perpetuated black exploitation would have to be overturned. No more compromises; no more betrayals by Negro moderates. Rebellion would supplant reform.