African-Americans and the Quest for Civil Rights

1900-1990

Sean Dennis Cashman

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1900–1990

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SEAN DENNIS CASHMAN

African-Americans and the Quest for Civil Rights, 1900–1990

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For Donald and Basha Baerman, whose friendship has sustained me over many years and whose experiences have sharpened my own vigil of American society.

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Preface and Acknowledgments

This short book charts in outline the progress of African-Americans in their quest for civil rights in the United States from 1900 to 1990. Primarily a political and social history, it is not a history of achievements on the part of African-American artists, musicians, and performers, often outstanding though these have been. However, some chapters do contain summaries of the work of African-American historians and novelists, especially where these have emphasized black consciousness or made people more keenly aware of the political, intellectual, and artistic contributions of African-Americans to American culture.

The book came to be written as a result of very particular circumstances. In the 1980s I wrote four interdisciplinary histories of the United States for New York University Press covering in sum the period 1865–1945. Having concluded the fourth book with the Japanese surrender at the end of World War II in 1945 and the onset of the Cold War, I found myself poised to begin writing about modern America as the United States moved toward the close of the twentieth century. Not only does the modern period seem remarkable for the part the United States has played and for its commitment to economic, political, and military involvement across the globe; for being an affluent society despite poverty amid plenty; and for its continuing revolutions in communications and transportation; but also for the emergence of protest for and by African-Americans at the fore of the political stage and its

later shift in emphasis from civil rights to black power. Indeed, in the recent past the story of protest by African-Americans carries a principle key to the evolving history of the United States.

The book was drafted in 1988 and 1989. However, it grew out of the many years I had previously spent in the Department of American Studies at the University of Manchester, England, several of them teaching interdisciplinary courses with my versatile colleague Godfrey Kearns. I owe a particular debt to Chris Harries, former graduate student, who had undertaken a thorough review of African-American history since slavery. He allowed me to draw from what he had written and also identified various articles and other materials for me to study. He was especially perceptive about the roots of the civil rights movement; debates over Washington, Garvey, and Du Bois; the early protests of African-Americans against Jim Crow racism in the South; and the latent political power of the African-American church. The early chapters of the book owe much to his contribution. Like many readers, I have been moved by the profound novels of Richard Wright, Ralph Ellison, and their heirs. I have also been much influenced by, and have drawn from, the works of historians and analysts Godfrey Hodgson, Manning Marable, James T. Patterson, and William Julius Wilson.

The book begins and ends with broad strokes, covering the history of African-Americans before and after the zenith of the great civil rights movement of the 1950s and 1960s in only four chapters. By comparison, the intense activity and significant achievements of civil rights at flood tide are discussed in greater detail in five chapters. Thus the book moves from long shot to close-up and back again. It borrows directly from one of its companion volumes in American history for New York University Press. This is particularly true of the first and second chapters, which are drawn from *America in the Twenties and Thirties* with some additional material from its sequel, *America, Roosevelt, and World War II.* The rest of the book, however, is new.

During the period covered in this history the preferred descriptive name for American citizens descended from both Africa and the United States has moved from Negro to colored in mid-century to black from the late 1960s to the 1980s and then, as we come to the close of the twentieth century, to African-American. We have chosen to use African-American throughout while respecting whatever term is used in the various books and articles that are quoted directly in the text.

Colin Jones, director of New York University Press, responded cou-

rageously to the idea of a short history about African-Americans and the quest for civil rights and offered helpful advice. The manuscript was typed by Mrs. Eileen Grimes of the University of Manchester and by Mrs. Lee Plaut, Mrs. Dorothy Kreppein, and Mrs. Maureen Boerner of Adelphi University. Ms. Mary Ison, Ms. Maja Felaco, and Mr. Jerry Kearns of the Library of Congress, Washington, D.C., were most helpful in the selection of illustrations, as was Ms. Terri Geeskin of the Museum of Modern Art, New York.

PART ONE

Before

Whether the task was journalism or organizing African-American associations, W. E. B. Du Bois remained a highly active radical and polemicist throughout his long life (1868–1963), continuously moving his politics to the left in the NAACP, which he served in 1910–1934 and 1944–1948. He also served in the Department of Sociology at Atlanta University in 1933–1944 and on the Council on African Affairs in 1949–1954. Carl Van Vechten's portrait brings out Du Bois's humanity towards the end of his career rather than the profound alienation from American politics that led him to renounce his U.S. citizenship and live in Ghana, where he died. (Library of Congress.)

1

Southern Efficiency and Northern Charm

The story of African-Americans and their quest for civil rights in the twentieth century, the subject of this book, is a story with deep resonances. It is about nothing less than the transformation of African-American citizens' place in American society—constitutional, social, and cultural—and it tells us something of the transformations white society had to ask of itself.

In a century where one of the primary themes of art has been the relationship of the individual and society, the continuously shifting fortunes of African-American citizens in American society have proved fertile subjects for argument and discussion. Moreover, the experience of African-Americans makes a stark comment on a central paradox of American history—how a nation composed of such diverse ethnic groups and beliefs could endure and survive. Thus novelist James Baldwin declared, "The story of the Negro in America is the story of America, or, more precisely, it is the story of Americans." His most fundamental point seems to have been that, as the African-American experience moved from slavery and incarceration to freedom and citizenship, African-Americans were, ironically enough, especially privileged to articulate the problems and preoccupations of men and women in modern society.

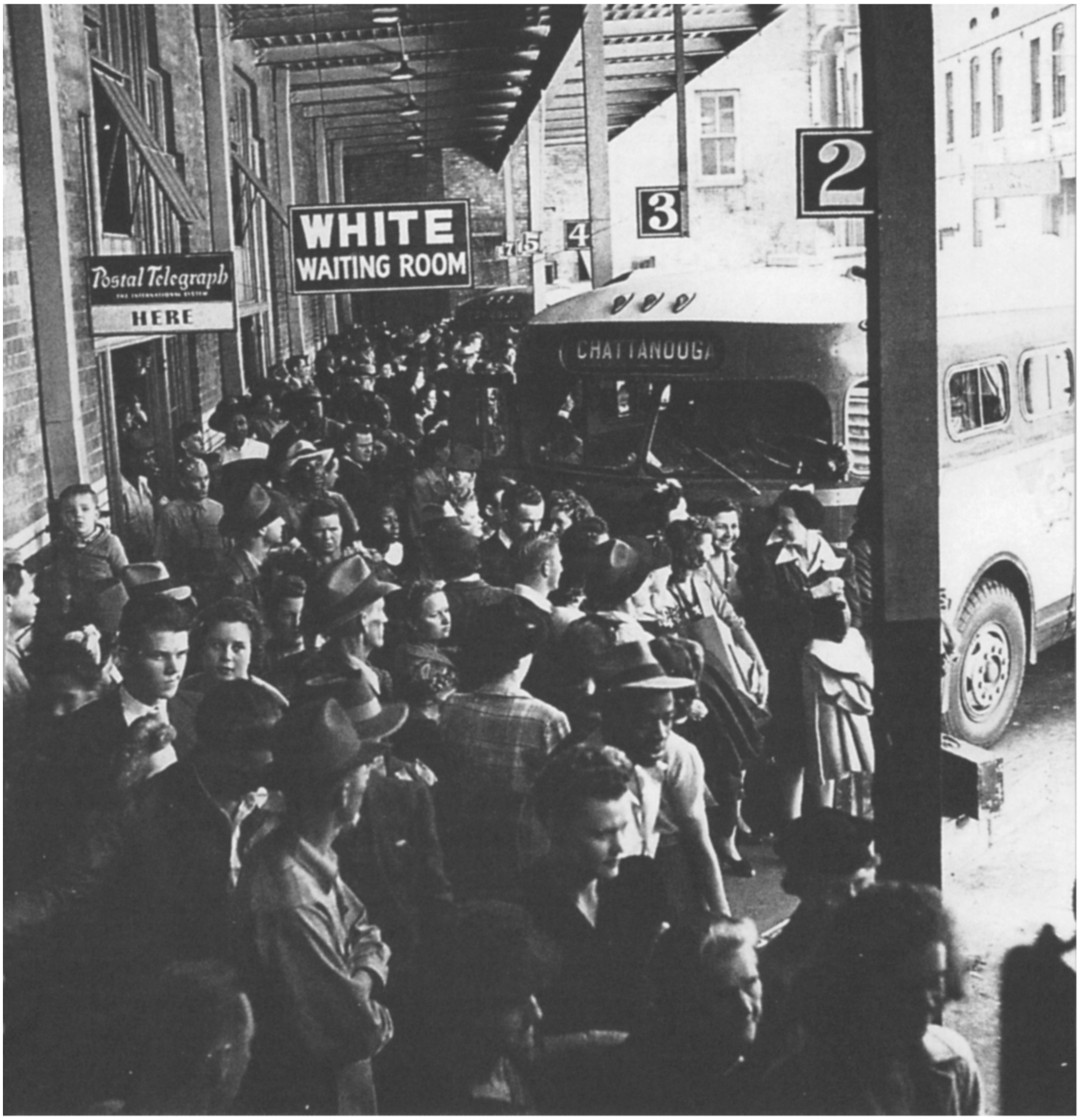
The history of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries has included

various national struggles for liberation, mass migrations, and both freedom of political expression and the lack thereof. The fragmentation of society and the alienation of the individual from society and from himself or herself are also important cultural phenomena. Because of their experiences, African-Americans have been deeply involved in and have become identified with these things. They have expressed their responses in words, in music, and in their political struggle for recognition and rights. They benefitted from their double alienation from Africa and from American society at a time when America was responding to them and becoming ready to meet them, at least culturally, on their own terms.

What is meant by civil rights? For the generations who witnessed the apogee of the drama in the Second Reconstruction of the 1950s and 1960s, civil rights had a very precise meaning: they were the political, social, and economic rights of African-American citizens to vote and to enjoy equality of opportunity in education, employment, and housing. This also entailed free access to places of public accommodation such as parks, bars, cafes and restaurants, and public transport. The essential means of the loose coalition we call the civil rights movement to address its ends were litigation and demonstration, whether by rallies and marches, economic boycotts, or debate in the mass media. However, such a precise definition of civil rights and of the tactics of the civil rights movement must also take into account the social and cultural condition of African-Americans—their location and dispersal following the Great Migration and their work, economic prospects, and play.

The original circumstances for the development of a civil rights movement to restore their due dignity to African-American citizens had not been promising at the turn of the century and for several decades thereafter. Of the total American population of 76,094,000 in 1900, 8,833,000 were African-Americans—about 11.5 percent of the whole. Over 85 percent of them lived in the South—the eleven states of the old Confederacy and five others, Oklahoma and Kentucky to the west and Delaware, Maryland, West Virginia, and the District of Columbia to the north. Of the total population of 24,524,000 of this "Census South," 7,923,000 were African-American. Thus, whereas the ratio of African-Americans to whites across the country as a whole was, approximately, one in nine, in the South it was one in three. In two states, Mississippi and South Carolina, they predominated.

The abolition of slavery and the destruction of the rebel Confederacy



Although the crowding throng waiting for a bus at the Greyhound Bus Terminal in Memphis, Tennessee, in September 1943, mixes white and African-American citizens, the waiting room in the bus station is clearly designated for whites only. In a century that witnessed several remarkable revolutions in transportation, it was the continuing presence of segregation in interstate transport facilities that reminded the United States that the deep South had barely entered the twentieth century with appropriate social values. As public pressure upon transportation resources increased, it was inevitable that segregation of interstate transportation facilities would be among the first targets of the civil rights movement. (Photograph taken for the Office of War Information by Esther Bubley; Library of Congress.)

in the Civil War (1861–1865) had led to the granting of equal social and political rights to African-Americans in the period of Reconstruction (1865–1877). The Thirteenth Amendment (1865) proscribed slavery. The first section of the Fourteenth Amendment (1866) defined American citizens as all those born or naturalized in the United States. It enjoined states from abridging their rights to life, liberty, property, and process of law. The second section of the amendment threatened to reduce proportionately the representation in Congress of any state denying the suffrage to adult males. Congress determined to protect African-American suffrage in the South by the Fifteenth Amendment (1869–1870), according to which the right to vote was not to be denied "on account of race, color, or previous condition of servitude." Yet forty years later these rights had been assailed or eroded by white racists. The abject position of African-Americans was such that historian Rayford Logan in *The Betrayal of the Negro* (1954; 1969) described the turn of the century as "the nadir" of African-American history, notwithstanding the existence of slavery up to 1865.

The Tyrant Custom—Race Relations at Their Nadir

The regular intimacy of contact under slavery was being superseded by a caste system with next to no sustained contact, which resulted in an inexorable gulf between African-Americans and whites. Although African-Americans were the largest of America's ethnic minorities, they were segregated in schooling, housing, and places of public accommodation, such as parks, theaters, hospitals, schools, libraries, courts, and even cemeteries. The variety and fluidity of access of the late nineteenth century were abandoned as state after state adopted rigid segregation in a series of so-called Jim Crow laws. ("Jim Crow" was the title of a minstrel song of 1830 that presented African-Americans as childlike and inferior.)

In *The Strange Career of Jim Crow* (1955; 1974) historian C. Vann Woodward argues that cast-iron segregation was a product of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and that the avalanche of Jim Crow laws began when poor white farmers came to power. Moreover, a new generation of African-Americans had grown up who had never known slavery. Previously, aristocratic southerners had shown a paternalistic attitude to African-Americans, protecting them from some overt racist attacks by poor whites. They knew that they did not need segre-

gation laws to confirm their own privileged social position. Nevertheless, none of the states passed a single comprehensive segregation law. Instead, they proceeded piecemeal over a period of thirty to fifty years. Thus South Carolina segregated the races in successive stages, beginning with trains (1898) and moving to streetcars (1905), train depots and restaurants (1906), textile plants (1915 and 1916), circuses (1917), pool halls (1924), and beaches and recreation centers (1934). Georgia began with railroads and prisons (1891) and moved to sleeping cars (1899) and, finally, pool halls (1925), but refused to segregate places of public accommodation until 1954.

Another factor in turning the tide of white resentment was the move of African-Americans to new mining and industrial communities where, for the first time, white hillbillies were not only thrown into daily contact with them but also into competition for the same low-caste jobs at rockbottom wages. For low-class whites, social segregation was a means of asserting their superiority. As C. Vann Woodward puts it in his *The Origins of the New South* (1951), "It took a lot of ritual and Jim Crow to bolster the creed of white supremacy in the bosom of a white man working for a black man's wages." The South had made sure that African-Americans were socially and academically inferior by denying them a decent education. Southern legislatures starved African-American schools of adequate funds, thereby making it impossible for them to approach anywhere near the same standards. In 1910 the eleven southern states spent an average of $9.45 on each white pupil but only $2.90 on each African-American pupil.

The South reacted against the natural tide of resentment by African-Americans to its new restrictive policies with more repression. Mississippi was the first state effectively to disfranchise African-American citizens by a constitutional convention in 1890. It was followed by South Carolina in 1895, Louisiana in 1898, North Carolina (by an amendment) in 1900, Alabama in 1901, Virginia in 1901 and 1902, Georgia (by amendment) in 1908, and the new state of Oklahoma in 1910. Four more states achieved the same ends without amending their constitutions: Tennessee, Florida, Arkansas, and Texas. Three pernicious and sophistical arguments were advanced by the proponents of disfranchisement. The removal of the African-American vote, they said, would end corruption at elections. It would prevent African-Americans from holding the balance of power in contests between rival factions of whites. Moreover, it would oblige African-Americans to abandon their false

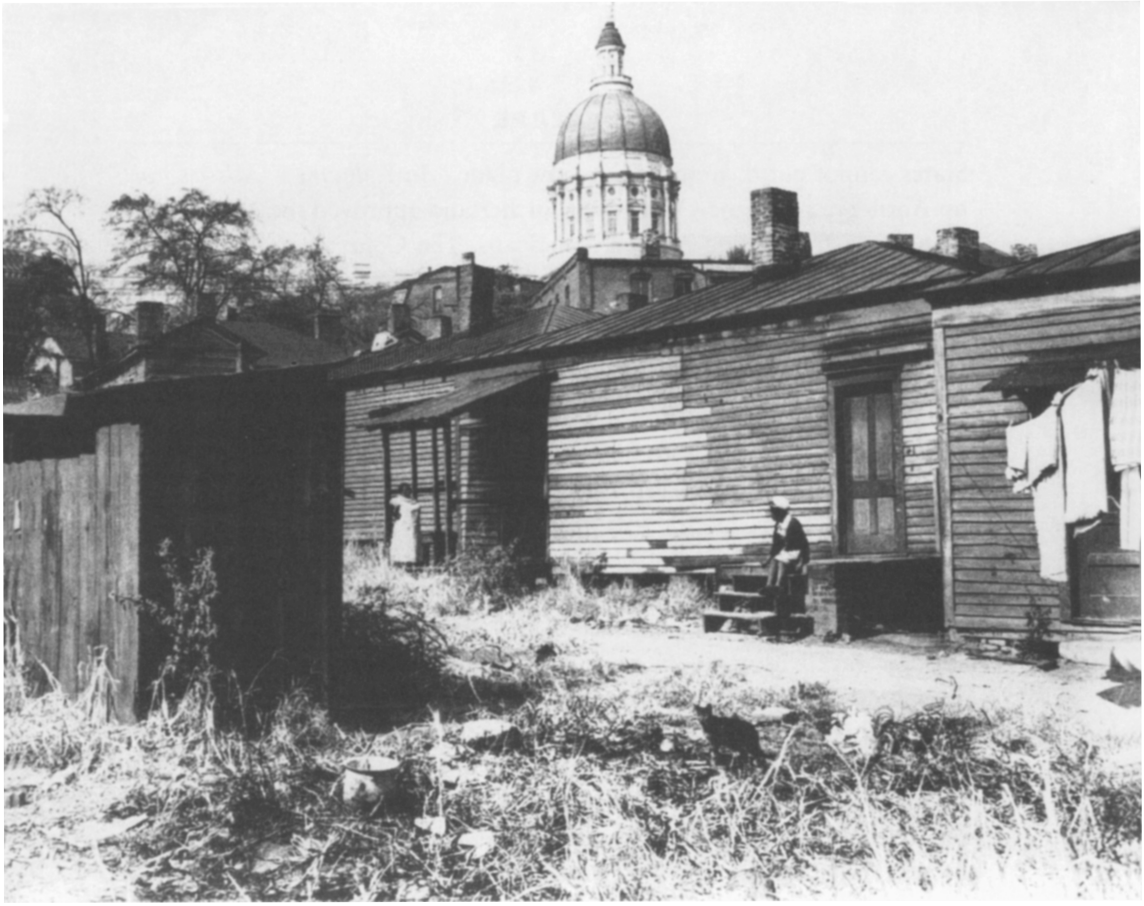
hopes of betterment and, instead, make them accept their true social place. As a result, race relations would steadily improve.

The Mississippi Constitution of 1890 set the pattern. It required a poll tax of two dollars from prospective voters at registration. Those who intended to vote at elections had to present their receipt at the polls. Thus anyone who mislaid his receipt forfeited his vote. More insidious was the requirement that, in order to register, prospective voters had to be "able to read the Constitution, or to understand the Constitution when read." It also excluded those convicted of bribery, burglary, theft, and bigamy. Racist officials used the various ordinances to discriminate in favor of poor, illiterate whites and against African-Americans.

The ruling elites in other states approved of the new Mississippi plan and several states borrowed from one another. In so doing they improved on previous attempts to disfranchise African-Americans. For example, Louisiana believed that the understanding clause was so obviously suspect that it could be invalidated in a court case. Thus it hit on the grandfather clause as being, legally, more secure. Only those who had had a grandfather on the electoral roll of 1867 could vote.

These devices were nothing if not effective. In Louisiana 130,344 African-Americans were registered to vote in 1890; in 1900 there were 5,320. In 1909 there were only 1,342. In Alabama there were 181,000 African-American voters in 1890; in 1900 there were three thousand. In the South as a whole African-American participation fell by 62 percent. In 1900 Ben ("Pitchfork") Tillman of South Carolina boasted on the floor of the Senate, "We have done our best. We have scratched our heads to find out how we could eliminate the last one of them. We stuffed ballot boxes. We shot them. We are not ashamed of it." Despite concessions to poor whites, white participation in elections also declined —by 26 percent. Thus while, on average, 73 percent of men voted in the 1890s, only 30 percent did so in the early 1900s. Opposition parties dwindled away and the Democrats were left undisputed champions of the South.

Social segregation was also upheld by the Supreme Court. Its most notorious decision came in *Plessy* v. *Ferguson* in 1896. Louisiana state law required "separate but equal" accommodations for African-American and white passengers on public carriers and provided a penalty for passengers sitting in the wrong car. Homer Plessy was an octoroon so pale that he usually passed for white, but when he sat in a white car he was arrested. He argued that the state law of Louisiana violated the



The Georgia Capitol in Atlanta rises above nearby slums in the block between Fair and Hunter Streets at the corner of Fraser Street. Buildings to the left are white dwellings; those in the center are occupied by African-Americans. (Photograph taken for the Federal Public Housing Authority, October 1938, by Oliver; Library of Congress.)

Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments. Justice John Marshall Harlan of Kentucky agreed with him, maintaining, "Our constitution is color-blind and neither knows nor tolerates classes among citizens." Moreover, "What can more certainly arouse race hate, what more certainly create and perpetuate a feeling of distrust between these races, than state enactments which in fact proceed on the ground that colored citizens are so inferior and degraded that they cannot be allowed to sit in public coaches occupied by white citizens?" However, he was overruled by the other eight justices, who approved of the doctrine of "separate but equal." Justice Henry Billings Brown of Michigan, speaking for the majority on May 18, 1896, ruled with corrosive racial candor, "If one race be inferior to the other socially, the Constitution of the United

States cannot put them upon the same plane." In *Williams* v. *Mississippi* on April 25, 1898, the Court went further and approved the Mississippi plan for disfranchising African-Americans. The Court unanimously upheld the opinion of Justice Joseph McKenna that "a state does not violate the equal protection clause of the fourteenth amendment when it requires eligible voters to be able to read, write, interpret, or understand any part of the Constitution."

Edgar Gardner Murphy, a humanitarian journalist, reported in *The Basis of Ascendancy* (1909) how extremists had moved "from an undiscriminating attack upon the Negro's ballot to a like attack upon his schools, his labor, his life—from the contention that no Negro shall vote to the contention that no Negro shall learn, that no Negro shall labor, and [by implication] that no Negro shall live." The result was an "all-absorbing autocracy of race," an "absolute identification of the stronger race with the very being of the state." In 1903 analyst Charles W. Chestnutt said that "the rights of the Negroes are at a lower ebb than at any time during the thirty-five years of their freedom, and the race prejudice more intense and uncompromising."

Racist scientists tried to prove that African-Americans were inferior to whites. In 1929 Lawrence Fick in the *South African Journal of Science* declared that Africans showed "a marked inferiority" to European whites and that the number who could benefit from education was limited. Americans measured intelligence on the basis of a test first developed by Frenchman Alfred Binet in 1905 and based on the skills expected of, and acquired by, educated children from the middle class. Not surprisingly, such a test found undereducated children, whether poor white, immigrant, or African-American, less intelligent. The final, conclusive "proof" of the inferiority of African-Americans came when African-American soldiers scored worse than whites in intelligence tests given in World War I. Subsequent investigation showed that African-Americans from the North scored higher than southern whites. Here was disturbing proof of the inferiority of southern education as a whole.

The Early Contours of Civil Rights

The response by African-Americans to raw oppression was confused. The most rigorous leaders struggled to obtain equal rights for African-Americans. But, as they were trapped half in and half out of American

society, this struggle alternated between a desire for assimilation with white society and a desire to assert independence for African-Americans. W. E. B. Du Bois described the dilemma of African-Americans in *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903): "One feels his twoness, an American, a Negro, two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings in one dark body." Novelist James Baldwin observed years later how the African-American was often "gloomily referred to as that shadow that lies athwart our national life." That shadow began to take shape and impose its will on American society despite the considerable obstacles in the way.

As far as the quest for civil rights is concerned, we can interpret the period 1900–1945 as a journey over a giant suspension bridge across a turbulent river, the dark waters of racism. On near and far sides, the bridge is suspended between the poles of two very different Supreme Court decisions. The first is the notorious "separate but equal" ruling in *Plessy* v. *Ferguson* of 1896, symbol of the heinous institutional racism of the period 1890–1910; the second is the ruling that separate is unequal in *Brown* v. *Board of Education* of 1954, the most momentous post-World War II court decision yet and a mighty symbol of the victories of the great civil rights movement of the 1950s and 1960s. The outlying buttresses of the bridge are provided by the enduring civil rights or separatist groups that were formed in the period: in 1910 the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP); in 1911 the Urban League; in 1931 the Nation of Islam; and in 1943 the Committee, later the Congress, for Racial Equality (CORE). The apex of the suspension bridge is provided by the great flowering of cultural talent of the 1920s, known variously as the "Black" or "Negro" or "Harlem Renaissance." During these years four charismatic leaders guided their followers across a bridge, albeit to different destinations beyond the river: Booker T. Washington, W. E. B. Du Bois, Marcus Garvey, and Asa Philip Randolph.

Although there were specific political organizations that focused their attention upon the quest of African-Americans for civil rights in the period 1900–1945, there was no mass civil rights movement. What existed from the variety of groups—the NAACP, UNIA, the Nation of Islam, and others—was the potential for one. Thus the story of the preface to the civil rights movement is composed of a tissue of factors. These include not only the latent political power of African-American

people but also the power of their arts to raise national consciousness about the contribution of African-Americans to the social fabric and provide poignant expressions of their dilemmas.

Moreover, certain of the phenomena that account for the way civil rights moved to the center of the political stage in the 1950s and then shifted emphasis to black power in the course of the 1960s were already present early in the century. These include the Great Migration of African-Americans from countryside to city and from the South to the North, making African-American problems known to the North and transforming African-Americans into a potentially potent political force to be courted by both main parties and by radical groups; increasing literacy among African-Americans and their awareness of the discrepancy between the ideals of the American Constitution and the blatant practice of racism, most notably in World War II; the development of nonviolent tactics to protest discrimination, initially by religious groups; and various Supreme Court and lesser court hearings that provided forums for such eloquent African-American attorneys as Moorfield Storey, Walter F. White, and Thurgood Marshall to press for rulings on racial equality that exposed discrimination, established the legal principle of equality before the law, and legitimized the civil rights movement. Furthermore, the later tension between civil rights and black power was anticipated in the 1920s by the controversy between W. E. B. Du Bois and A. Philip Randolph on one side and Marcus Garvey and his short-lived United Negro Improvement Association (UNIA) organization (1914) on the other.

Before 1900, protest by African-Americans existed only in local groups, apart from a series of conventions summoned to endorse presidential candidates. Nevertheless, state and local conventions debated the new laws on public accommodation and disfranchisement. Their protests were handicapped by poverty, illiteracy, and fragmentation. Leaders found it almost impossible to develop consciousness among African-Americans and unity on a scale to combat the considerable white forces arrayed against them, notably the adverse political climate, the indifference of the Supreme Court, and white intimidation and violence. Their political voice was silenced. There was no African-American congressman for twenty-seven years, between 1901, when George H. White of North Carolina left Congress, and 1928, when Oscar De Priest was elected for Chicago.

Booker T. Washington and W. E. B. Du Bois

Since African-Americans were being displaced from their traditional trades and confined to menial jobs in the towns, those who did succeed in entering the worlds of business and the professions were obliged by white society to adopt its attitudes in order to retain their hard-won position. Their undeclared leader was Booker T. Washington, head of Tuskegee Industrial Institute, Alabama.

Booker Taliaferro Washington was born at Hale's Ford, Franklin County, Virginia, in 1856, the son of a white father and an African-American mother who was enslaved. At the end of the Civil War he worked in a coal mine and salt furnace at Malden, West Virginia, while he attended school. From 1872 to 1875 he studied at Hampton Institute, the Negro vocational school in Virginia, where he earned his keep by working as a janitor. He also taught school at Malden (1875–1877) and subsequently studied at Wayland Seminary, Washington, D.C. In 1879 he returned to Hampton Institute, where he was in charge of the Indian dormitory and night school. In 1881 he was selected to organize an African-American normal school at Tuskegee chartered by the Alabama legislature.

Thereafter, his name was practically synonymous with African-American education. In fact, Booker T. Washington created three major institutions: the Normal and Industrial Institute for Negroes, the college in rural Alabama devoted primarily to agricultural and technical education; the Tuskegee Machine, a lobby of African-American intellectuals, politicos, and educators and white philanthropists who supported Washington's political and economic aims; and the National Negro Business League, committed to establishing and consolidating a system of African-American entrepreneurs within the existing framework of white capitalism. Washington believed that the optimum strategy for the rural masses of African-Americans was to concentrate as much as possible on economic independence by thrift and the acquisition of property. For the time being they were to disregard disfranchisement and Jim Crow social segregation. The encouragement Washington and his school of thought gave to a new generation of African-American entrepreneurs and their clients to "buy black" and to think in terms of black nationalism allowed them to rise commercially at the expense of a different group of artisans, caterers, and porters who were essentially integrationists and

who had had the lion's share of the market among African-Americans in the 1870s and 1880s.

Washington was as well known as a propagandist and polemicist as he was as an educational leader. He was invited to speak at the opening of the Cotton States and International Exposition in Atlanta on September 18, 1895, by businessmen who recognized his remarkable powers of expression. His address was one of the most effective political speeches of the Gilded Age, a model fusion of substance and style.

In what was later called the Atlanta Compromise he abandoned the postwar ideal of racial equality in favor of increased economic opportunity for African-Americans. "The wisest among my race understand that the agitation of questions of social equality is the extremest folly and that progress in the enjoyment of all the privileges that will come to us must be the result of severe and constant struggle rather than of artificial forcing." He preached patience, proposed submission, and emphasized material progress. Those African-Americans who rejected the Atlanta Compromise, such as rising activist W. E. B. Du Bois, considered his stance a capitulation to blatant racism. But Washington was telling white society exactly what it wanted to hear—that African-Americans accepted the Protestant work ethic. His most widely reported remark was a subtle metaphor about racial harmony: "In all things social we can be as separate as the fingers, yet one as the hand in all things essential to mutual progress."

Washington's emphasis on racial pride, economic progress, and industrial education encouraged white politicians and businessmen, such as steel tycoon Andrew Carnegie, to subsidize the institutions for African-Americans that he recommended. Through his close connections with business he was able to raise the funds necessary to create the National Negro Business League in 1900. Moreover, he used money not to advance acquiescence by African-Americans but to fight segregation. Others sought a more open insistence on racial pride. In 1890 T. Thomas Fortune, a journalist of New York, persuaded forty African-American protection leagues in cities across the country to join in a national body, the Afro-American League. Historian C. Vann Woodward assesses Washington's work thus: "Washington's life mission was to find a pragmatic compromise that would resolve the antagonisms, suspicions, and aspirations of 'all three classes directly concerned—the Southern white man, the northern white man, and the Negro.' It proved, he admitted 'a difficult and at times a puzzling task.' But he moved with consummate

One of the most controversial of all African-American leaders, Booker T. Washington, the wizard of Tuskegee, not only created an agricultural and technical institute to educate and train African-Americans to achieve economic self-sufficiency but also created an effective bloc of political and financial backers. (Library of Congress.)

diplomacy, trading renunciation for concession and playing sentiment against interest."

Five weeks into his presidency (1901–1909), Theodore Roosevelt invited Booker T. Washington to the White House on October 18, 1901. Roosevelt was also committed to trying to reconcile the South to the Republican party. His invitation was intended as a symbolic gesture to African-Americans and was widely interpreted as such. There was terrible logic in the subsequent outrage of racist southerners when the story broke. The New Orleans *Times-Democrat* thought Roosevelt's action mischievous: "When Mr. Roosevelt sits down to dinner with a negro, he declares that the negro is the social equal of the White Man." Senator Benjamin ("Pitchfork") Tillman declared, "The action of President Roosevelt in entertaining that nigger will necessitate our killing a thousand niggers in the South before they will learn their place again."

Despite Washington's insistence on patience, some African-Americans began to agitate for desegregation on trains, a prime target of the protest movement that was the forerunner of civil rights. They reckoned that railroads would realize that it was more expensive to have segregated seating and would thus yield, if only for the sake of economy. In 1898 the Afro-American League called for a boycott of trains in protest of Jim Crow laws. In 1904 the Maryland Suffrage League began campaigning against the new Jim Crow law there and financed a successful lawsuit against segregated travel in 1905. Also in 1905, the Georgia Equal Rights League declared that African-Americans should be able "to travel in comfort and decency and receive a just equivalent for our money, and yet we are the victims of the most unreasonable sort of caste legislation." In 1909 the National Negro Conference denounced segregation and the oppression of African-Americans. Whites were taken aback by the effectiveness of boycotts when African-Americans either simply stopped using white-owned transport or established small companies of their own. White streetcar companies either ended segregation or went out of business, such as the streetcar company in Richmond, Virginia. However, the wave of protests was short lived.

Washington's approach of so-called gradualism could be justified as a necessary complement to the fearful atmosphere of prejudice and violence in the South. However, African-American intellectuals in the North grew impatient with his time-serving and ambiguity. William Trotter, son of Cleveland's recorder of deeds and a graduate of Harvard, founded

The Niagara Conference of 1905 drew together African-American and white activists to promote the due civil rights of African-Americans and led in 1910 to the founding of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), the most venerable of all civil rights organizations. In this historic photograph taken in a studio before a backdrop of Niagara Falls, W. E. B. Du Bois is seated in the middle row second from the right. (Library of Congress.)

the most vehemently critical paper, the *Boston Guardian,* in 1901, and roundly abused Washington for his association with Roosevelt, calling him a "self seeker" and a "skulking coward." Trotter criticized Washington at the 1903 annual convention of the Afro-American Council and created uproar at a meeting of the Boston Business League later the same year when he heckled Washington as he tried to speak. The uproar resulted in "the Boston riot" that ended with the imprisonment of