

The Journey to the Promised Land

*The African American Struggle
for Development since the Civil War*

DICKSON A. MUNGAZI

Foreword by Diane Brooks Taylor

PRAEGER

Westport, Connecticut
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To the memory of Medgar Evers, humble man of determination whom I was privileged to meet and know and whose contribution to the development of African Americans is invaluable

I'll see you in the morning, safe in the promised land.

Harriet Tubman, 1850

I have looked over, and I have seen the promised land. I may not get there with you, but I want you to know that we as a people will get to the promised land.

Martin Luther King, Jr., 1968

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Foreword

In this historical account, Dr. Dickson A. Mungazi examines key dimensions in the African American struggle for development during the period from the Civil War to the present. Considering four aspects of this struggle, this study examines the areas of social, economic, political, and educational barriers experienced by African Americans in their quest for equality in the United States.

The issues in this struggle resulted in great debates among key stockholders. Central to the debate are opposing beliefs, juxtaposed between the identity thrust upon African Americans as slaves by their white owners and the manner in which they sought a new identity as a free people.

In this instance that identity is used to represent group identity and rights of individuals as members of the African Americans as a group; aided by the Thirteenth, Fourteenth, and Fifteenth Amendments to the U.S. Constitution, which liberated African Americans from human bondage as slaves, and defended their right to life and liberty without fear of deprivation of due process and the right to become voting citizens. Nowhere else in the world has the institution of slavery been dealt with in a more forthright matter more than in these constitutional amendments.

Although originally intended to promote the development of African Americans, these constitutional amendments served the interests of all Americans. To deny African Americans basic rights to freedom and equal status in society would require the Constitution of the United States to be reframed, an action not likely to occur. These amendments would

not have been necessary were it not for the strong resentment expressed by a large number of whites, particularly in the southern states, who wished to maintain slavery to ensure their profitable economic lifestyles.

How are this journey and the ensuing circumstances revealed in this study? Dr. Mungazi discusses the social climate that was prevalent around the time of the Civil War, specifically the divergent attitudes about African Americans adopted by whites in the northern and southern United States. Because the federal courts enjoy unrestricted freedom of thought and action, their rulings became the law of the land. The waxing and waning of progress in the court system reflected the social climate of this period.

The Supreme Court's decision in the Dred Scott Case in 1857 set a precedent that did not change until 1938—a long time for a struggling people to wait. As African Americans struggled to define their place in the emerging American society, the battle lines were at first out of their hands entirely. To reinstitutionalize slavery in a new form, laws were passed under Jim Crow sanctions where previously there were none. Once the framework of these laws was created, the system facilitated the import of African Americans into a new life of slavery to meet the increasing physical needs of the society.

As the need arose, a new law or code of laws was enacted as a further attempt to control and maintain the level of servitude by African Americans. Consequences for any violation were severe and swift. This study discusses the positions of the Supreme Court and the decisions it rendered over the decades, supporting the continued repression of African Americans—that is, until the late 1920s.

In the context of a people struggling for development, education is a highly important variable that helps determine the success and potential contribution of the individual in the future. In the postslavery era, whites were as concerned about educating African Americans as they were allowing them to bear arms in times of war. In each case the fear of revolt was imminent, which had the potential to equalize the social status of African Americans. When education was finally provided in the late 1800s, a law was passed enforcing segregation of the schools, allowing a withdrawal of federal funding.

Dr. Mungazi comprehensively details the struggles faced by African Americans at this period in history. This debate about access to educational resources continued to be discussed today. There has been not shortage of obstacles faced by African Americans since the Civil War. Each obstacle has served to prevent, diminish, control, or direct the lives of African Americans in the areas of social, economic, political, and educational issues.

Leadership is of particular importance in a journey of this kind. Dr.

Mungazi highlights influential persons and their contributions to leadership of the journey. His presentation and discussion of differences of opinion about the course of the journey, especially between Booker T. Washington and William E. B. Du Bois, are not intended to show that there were irreconcilable differences within the leadership itself, but to sharpen the parameters of the struggle.

It must also be remembered that when people launch a campaign for their salvation, differences of opinion become inevitable regarding various aspects of it. To assume that there is ready agreement on all aspects of that endeavor is to forget the imperatives and lessons of history. Each leader discussed in this book, from Frederick Douglass to Julian Bond, made a unique contribution to the quality of leadership that African Americans needed to make the journey.

Dr. Mungazi's admiration of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. is evident in this study as he devotes an entire chapter to King's contributions to the plight of African Americans specifically and to oppressed people generally. Dr. King had been recognized all over the world as a person of rare and unusual qualities, both as a man and as a leader. The opportunity that Dr. Mungazi had to interview Dr. Martin Luther King, Sr. in Atlanta, Georgia, in May 1962, when the author was only a sophomore in college, has served well in writing this book.

The social and political climate was right when Dr. King emerged as a leader of the nonviolent movement to equalize the treatment of African Americans in the United States. One must not minimize the leadership role that Harriet Tubman played. It made all the difference in the course and success of the journey. The underground railroad that she organized was in effect a form of leadership as were other forms.

Many black and white supporters encouraged Dr. King to follow his calling. Although efforts were made to tarnish his reputation, Dr. King proved that he was a man and leader without reproach. The benefits were considerable and have implications for all mankind. For each of the leaders identified in Dr. Mungazi's study, there were countless others with less notoriety working to effect desired social change.

In this study, Dr. Mungazi chronicles the events that added dimension to the historical complexities of the United States and Africa during the colonial period. He asks his readers to respond not with guilt for past events in the treatment of both African Americans and Africans, but to recall the journey and work collectively in a new direction inclusive of all peoples, circumnavigating past approaches resulting in deleterious results.

The insights in this study will be important to students of African American history, educators, politicians, and the general reading public alike. As participants in this great country, each has a vested interest in

the overall well-being of all its peoples, regardless of racial category. Eliminating strife in matters of racial equality requires ongoing attention, but in doing so, has the potential to strengthen the bonds between citizens in the United States.

Dione Brooks Taylor

Preface

THE PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this study is to trace the struggle of African Americans for development from the end of the Civil War to the present. In seeking to fulfill this purpose the study focuses on social, economic, political, and educational aspects as definite forms of development. These are the principal factors that make it possible for any group of struggling people to launch a journey to the promised land. It also discusses the implications which that journey has had on the national character of the United States as a result of the kinds of programs that have been initiated in these four areas. In order to adequately present components of this struggle, the study begins with a discussion of activities that were initiated relative to the search by African Americans for a new identity from 1865 to 1896.

In this approach the study focuses on specific areas of critical importance, such as the effect of Reconstruction, the role of the courts and the leaders who have been part of it. These are conditions of development that African Americans took into account in searching for that new identity. The influence of political and educational institutions that emerged during this period, the action of the North and the reaction of the South to Reconstruction programs, the efforts African Americans made, the inception of formal education, the nature of American society—all combined to form the thrust for the search of that identity in a way that had meaning to African Americans as they traveled on an uncharted course to the promised land.

By the very nature of that struggle, African Americans were trying to influence American society to address various components of an emerging national character in response to their search for a new identity. They also expected to influence the formulation of a new set of national goals and objectives based on new social values unfamiliar to the existing American social practices, not only for themselves, but also for the country as a whole.

The implementation of these goals and objectives was expected to determine the kind of society that they expected to emerge in which African Americans were cast. This aspect of the African American struggle for development forms a critical component of the study. The effectiveness of their endeavor in seeking to meet their developmental needs and in serving national purpose must be determined by how well African Americans were doing after the end of slavery, especially in areas of economic life, political activity, educational achievement, and social adjustment. These activities form the passageway to the promised land. In this way African Americans hoped to influence the United States to build a society based upon the foundation of that passageway.

The question is whether the United States as a nation and white America as a people could comprehend the magnitude of the problems that they were about to face in responding to a call to regard African Americans as their social equals. Given the spirit of the U.S. Constitution, African Americans had every reason to expect nothing less than what it was intended to accomplish. Whether white America recognized it or not, the fact of the matter is that both the U.S. Constitution and Emancipation set the stage for a new beginning of a new relationship between the two races based on mutual respect for the good of the country.

THE APPROACH

The study begins with an examination of major developments that took place soon after Emancipation. The adoption of the Thirteenth Amendment in 1865, the granting of amnesty by President Andrew Johnson to rebellious southern states, and the adoption of the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments, in 1868 and 1870, the action that was taken by President Ulysses Grant from 1869 to 1877 giving effect to Reconstruction, and that taken by his successor, President Rutherford B. Hayes, to terminate it are among events that would determine the course of that development and the course of that journey.

The ratification of the Fifteenth Amendment in 1870, and the passage of civil rights legislation in 1875 gave new hope to African Americans that the future would be better than the past. However, African Americans fully recognized that in the pursuit of their journey to the promised land, they would encounter major problems that only they would solve

to ensure their arriving there. This study is a story of a people struggling for a better future than the past and the transformation of society as a rare dream for all.

During Reconstruction African Americans demonstrated their capability in making adjustments to new situations. Senators, civic leaders, community leaders, and leaders in education all came forth to show that African Americans, if given an opportunity, could be effective and successful in whatever they did. The termination in 1894 of federal funds that were used since Emancipation to support federal marshals, the disenfranchisement of African Americans, the curtailment of the educational opportunity that they had utilized to advance themselves as part of a strategy to shape the course of the journey, and the reversal of social and political progress that they had made—all combined to create a new situation that compounded the problems that African Americans had not anticipated.

Suddenly the national climate that African Americans thought Emancipation had created to enable them to launch their journey to the promised land became a mirage, a phantom figure seen only through the eyes of fantasy. Ten years following the end of the Civil War, African Americans recognized that they had a rough road ahead on that journey. This study traces these developments in relation to the response from white America. It then gives an account of the role of leadership among African Americans themselves. In doing so it answers the following questions: Who are these leaders? What qualifications did they hold? What views did they hold and utilize in trying to become effective leaders? What direction did that leadership take? What was the effect of that leadership? How did white America respond to that leadership?

The study then goes on to discuss the obstacles that African Americans encountered on their journey to the promised land. Among these obstacles are the negative attitudes of some white Americans, the lack of opportunity in important areas of national life, continuing discrimination and segregation, apathy among some African Americans themselves, and a difference of opinion among leaders about programs to adopt and strategy to follow. While the formation of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People in 1909 was a highly positive development of a new strategy, it also brought division among African Americans themselves because one of its founding fathers, William E. B. Du Bois, wanted its leadership to come out of what he called talented tenth. According to Du Bois the NAACP must be led by intellectuals like himself. However, the NAACP has to this day provided needed leadership for African Americans in their struggle for development without embracing Du Bois's idea of the character of its leadership.

The study then goes on to discuss the era of the civil rights legislation beginning with the Civil Rights Act of 1875 and the effect it had on

African Americans and the nation as a whole. It discusses also the role that national leadership played in that endeavor. The Civil Rights Acts of 1957 and 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965 stand out as monuments to the struggle of African Americans for development. One must not forget that the federal courts, especially the U.S. Supreme Court, played an important role in mapping out the passageway to the promised land. The study also provides a comparative perspective of the struggle of Africans during the colonial period and that of African Americans to see some differences and similarities.

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, IMPLICATIONS

The last chapter summarizes the preceding main features and arguments. It also draws some conclusions and presents some implications. Some of these conclusions are the following: (1) The struggle of African Americans for development came out of the conditions following the conclusion of the Civil War in 1865. (2) The difference between success and failure of Reconstruction, between relevant education and irrelevant instruction for African Americans, between mediocrity and a dynamic system leads to the conclusion that characterized the struggle of African Americans. (3) The response of white America to the struggle of African Americans became a critical determining factor of all national programs, because whatever programs were initiated, they had to take the position of African Americans into account. It was virtually impossible to initiate any national undertaking in any area of human endeavor without initiating response to the position of African Americans. (4) The development of education for African Americans required special attention because it was important to other forms of development. (5) In its efforts to improve technological superiority in a competitive world, the United States had to strengthen its system of education for all students. The thrust for educational development of individuals lay in the thrust for national development. (6) The struggle of African Americans to secure an education must be seen in the context of the belief that education was good for the country because it was good for all people. National development cannot be achieved in a climate of discrimination and segregation.

Acknowledgments

In the process of writing a book that covers the struggle of a group of people over an extended period of time, one must rely on historical materials obtained from different sources. Therefore, the author wishes to thank the Interlibrary Loan System at Northern Arizona University (NAU) for making it possible for him to secure the materials he needed to produce this study; the Library of Congress, the National Archives, and Double Delta Industries for additional materials and photographs included in the study; the Arizona Public Library for allowing him access to public documents that he needed to complete the study; and the NAACP for materials and access to some historical photographs that appear in the book.

The author extends special appreciation to the staff at Cline Library at NAU for readiness to help in securing a variety of materials, and to the Office of Regents Professors at NAU for the financial support he needed to travel to collect materials for the study. Several of the author's colleagues at NAU and members of the National Science Association are thanked for support and encouragement while he was producing the study and presenting papers at professional conferences during the past several years. The idea for the study came out of these papers.

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Introduction

THE SETTING

No one has read Alex Haley's *Roots* or watched David L. Wolper's TV production of it without getting an inside story of slavery in the United States. The story of slavery has been told in so many ways. One wonders if it needs to be told any more. However, other aspects of African American struggle for development have not been told as well as the story of slavery. This is why reading Nicholas Lemann's *The Promised Land: The Great Black Migration and How It Changed America* (1991) aroused in this author an intense interest in conducting a study on the metaphor of the promised land as it relates to that struggle. Lemann's book and this study are very different in their treatment of the metaphor of the promised land. Lemann discusses the migration of African Americans from conditions of economic oppression imposed by the South to the more tolerant North. This study addresses the struggle of African Americans for development since the Civil War. Areas of that development are specifically identified as political, economic, social, and educational. These areas collectively form the metaphorical expression of the promised land. In short Lemann's book is a sociological approach to the metaphor of the promised land, while this study is a historical approach. One can say that while the two studies supplement each other they are also quite different.

When President Abraham Lincoln issued the Emancipation Proclamation on September 22, 1862, to take effect on January 1, 1863, people

in the United States knew that it was the beginning of a new hope for a major social change for African Americans and the country. Rapidly moving events began to take place in the context of the fact that none of the Confederate States had, at that point, accepted the offer of immunity from legal action if they laid down their arms.

Americans also knew that in the president's initiative the country was set for an unprecedented social, economic, and political conflict caused by the journey to the promised land initiated by African Americans. In 1865, when the Thirteenth Amendment was adopted to abolish slavery, things began to happen in the direction of change that African Americans envisaged for the future. These events provided a climate that proposed the Fourteenth Amendment, stating that it was illegal to deprive any persons of life, liberty, or property without due process of law. The Thirteenth Amendment was quite precise in its provision and left no room for doubt as to what its intent was. In stating, "Neither slavery nor involuntary servitude, except as a punishment for crime whereof the party shall have been duly convicted, shall exist within the United States, or any place subject to their jurisdiction. Congress shall have power to enforce this article by appropriate legislation." This amendment served as a warning of more action to come from the federal government against the South unless it complied with new conditions.

When, on June 13, 1866, the Congress passed a resolution proposing the Fourteenth Amendment, it put in place a series of events that the South was unable or unwilling to understand and accept as its people tried to maintain the social status quo. This amendment extended equal constitutional protection to former slaves. Then on February 26, 1869, the Congress passed another resolution proposing the adoption of the Fifteenth Amendment, which was ratified by 29 states on March 30, 1870. This amendment extended the right to vote to former slaves, stating: "The right of citizens of the United States to vote shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any state on account of race, color, or previous condition of servitude." These three amendments made it possible for the United States to approach the question of the development of African Americans in a radical way in order to give effect to the end of slavery. Reconstruction programs came out of these amendments. They were an enormous undertaking in political, educational, and social areas designed to promote the development of African Americans. Reconstruction programs were also intended to bring about a change of attitude among southern whites in an effort to influence their acceptance of African Americans as citizens with equal rights. Extending citizenship rights to African Americans required equal treatment and equal opportunity. Were the whites able to make this rapid adjustment? How was the United States going to accomplish this task?

In order to initiate any programs under Reconstruction, Congress had

to pass special legislation. That is why in 1867 a series of laws was enacted under the Reconstruction Act to divide the ten unstructured states into five military districts, each with a major general to command it for purposes of helping the states under his charge for return to the Union. But African Americans and white Americans were moving in opposite directions in response to Reconstruction programs.

THE PLIGHT OF AFRICAN AMERICANS AND THE ROLE OF THE COURTS

The position of African Americans in the country did not improve significantly during Reconstruction, in spite of efforts made by themselves and by northern whites. Having found elements of a new identity they wished to promote and protect if their journey to the promised land was to be successful, they tried all they could to give structure to the journey. As part of their effort to realize their destination, African Americans turned to the courts, especially the federal courts, to help them find the passageway. But from the *Dred Scott* case of 1857 to the *Gong Lum* case of 1927, the Supreme Court was not helpful at all. However, it began to change its attitudes in 1938 with the *Gaines* case.

Section III of the Constitution defines the Supreme Court as the third branch of the U.S. government and defines its function as relating to the exercise of its functions and power as the Congress may from time to time direct. From this constitutional provision it is quite clear that the courts had tremendous jurisdictional power to decide on all cases. In terms of constitutional provisions, the functions of the Supreme Court were mainly as a court of appeal. There is no doubt that its power was extended beyond that of the executive branch and the legislative branch.

The Supreme Court has original jurisdiction only in cases involving ambassadors, public ministers, and consuls. In all other cases, the Supreme Court has appellate jurisdiction. These cases come either from the lower federal courts or from the higher courts in various states. The Supreme Court may take cases from the states only when a federal law or constitutional issue is in question.

The power that gives unique distinction to the Supreme Court is its authority to render final decisions on the constitutionality of any legislation passed by the Congress. In fulfilling this function the Supreme Court acts as guardian of the Constitution. It is the final arbiter of all constitutional matters. Beyond the Supreme Court there is no other recourse. However, the authority of the Supreme Court to review the constitutionality of legislation passed by Congress is not stated in the Constitution.

In 1803 the Supreme Court asserted this power in *Marbury vs. Madison*. Since that time the Supreme Court has exercised this power as part of

its functions. Although some people have protested the use of this power, none have succeeded in bringing it to an end. During the New Deal, President Franklin D. Roosevelt tried to bring about change in the use of this power because he thought that its exercise was infringing heavily upon the economic recovery programs he initiated to combat the Great Depression. But he was unsuccessful. A discussion of representative cases is done in Chapter 2 to give the reader an idea of how the courts first derailed the efforts of African Americans and then helped them in shaping their journey to the promised land.

THE ROLE OF LEADERSHIP

A critical component of the journey to the promised land is leadership among African Americans. One can say that among the most important results of the Supreme Court decisions from the *Gaines* case to the *Brown* case was that those decisions aroused a new sense of purpose and destiny, a new perspective in which African Americans viewed their journey to the promised land. The support that the Court gave them and the success that they achieved in these cases gave them new vision, new hope of arriving in the promised land without spending another 40 years in the wilderness.

African Americans now summoned new courage to stage new endeavors in other aspects of their lives that included housing, equal employment opportunity, and securing political and social rights. They lost these gains during the years following the end of Reconstruction in 1877. They now wanted to know whether it was possible for them to secure education without first securing the right to it. To fulfill these goals which they now identified, African Americans decided that leadership was essential to the attainment of their objectives, to arriving at their destination, the promised land.

With the Supreme Court decisions going against them from 1857 to 1937, how would they find the passageway to the promised land? Even before the *Brown* decision African Americans needed a Moses to lead the long journey from the land of slavery and denial of equal rights to the promised land of freedom and equality in society.

The task was not easy, but it was one that had to be undertaken if African Americans ever hoped to move from the wilderness and find a passageway to the promised land. Leadership is born out of dedication to serve the interests of the group, to put the development of the people above their own security. Leadership demands a willingness to take risks of failure, personal injury or death, or rejection and controversy. Effective leadership comes also from commitment, the strength of personal character, unwavering decision, and thorough knowledge of the issues that need to be resolved.

It is not easy to select persons who, as individuals, have determined the course to be followed. In this book material is presented on several individuals who assumed positions of leadership by virtue of positions they held in other organizations. Others became leaders by their ability to define positions on issues in ways that the people could identify with and support. There are also African Americans who exerted considerable influence on leadership by the quality of their work. All of these individuals will be presented in the chapters that follow.

In spite of dedicated leadership, African Americans encountered serious problems on their journey to the promised land. These obstacles included conflict within the leadership itself, such as the one that broke out between W.E.B. Du Bois and William Trotter and Booker T. Washington. Opposition from white America, activities of the Ku Klux Klan, the indifference of federal officials, and outright resistance to efforts to promote the progress of the journey to the promised land—all made it very difficult for African Americans to reach their destination. But in engaging in these activities, white Americans did not know that they were working against their own interests and those of the country as a whole.

THE PERIOD OF CIVIL RIGHTS

The period of civil disobedience and militant confrontation was born during the months following the Grand March on Washington, D.C. in August 1963. African Americans were particularly sensitive to the reality that 1963 marked the centennial of President Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation. The United States Civil Rights Commission, which was established under the 1957 Civil Rights Act, celebrated the occasion with its report to President John F. Kennedy, stating that the United States needed to do more to promote the advancement of African Americans to avoid major national conflict in the future along the line that Gunnar Myrdal had predicted in 1944 in *An American Dilemma*. The substance of this report was included in the 1968 Kerner Commission on Civil Disorders report presented to President Lyndon B. Johnson, that the country was moving in opposite directions, one white and rich, the other black and poor.

Following the crisis caused by the desegregation order in Little Rock, Arkansas, in 1957, the need for congressional action was dramatized by the Montgomery, Alabama, bus boycott two years earlier. Congress responded by enacting in 1957 a Civil Rights Act, which was the first civil rights legislation since the ineffective Civil Rights Act of 1875. Although the 1957 Civil Rights Act was not far reaching in its provisions, it clearly indicated that Congress was at last beginning to wake up to its responsibilities. The Kerner Commission also raised serious concerns about the