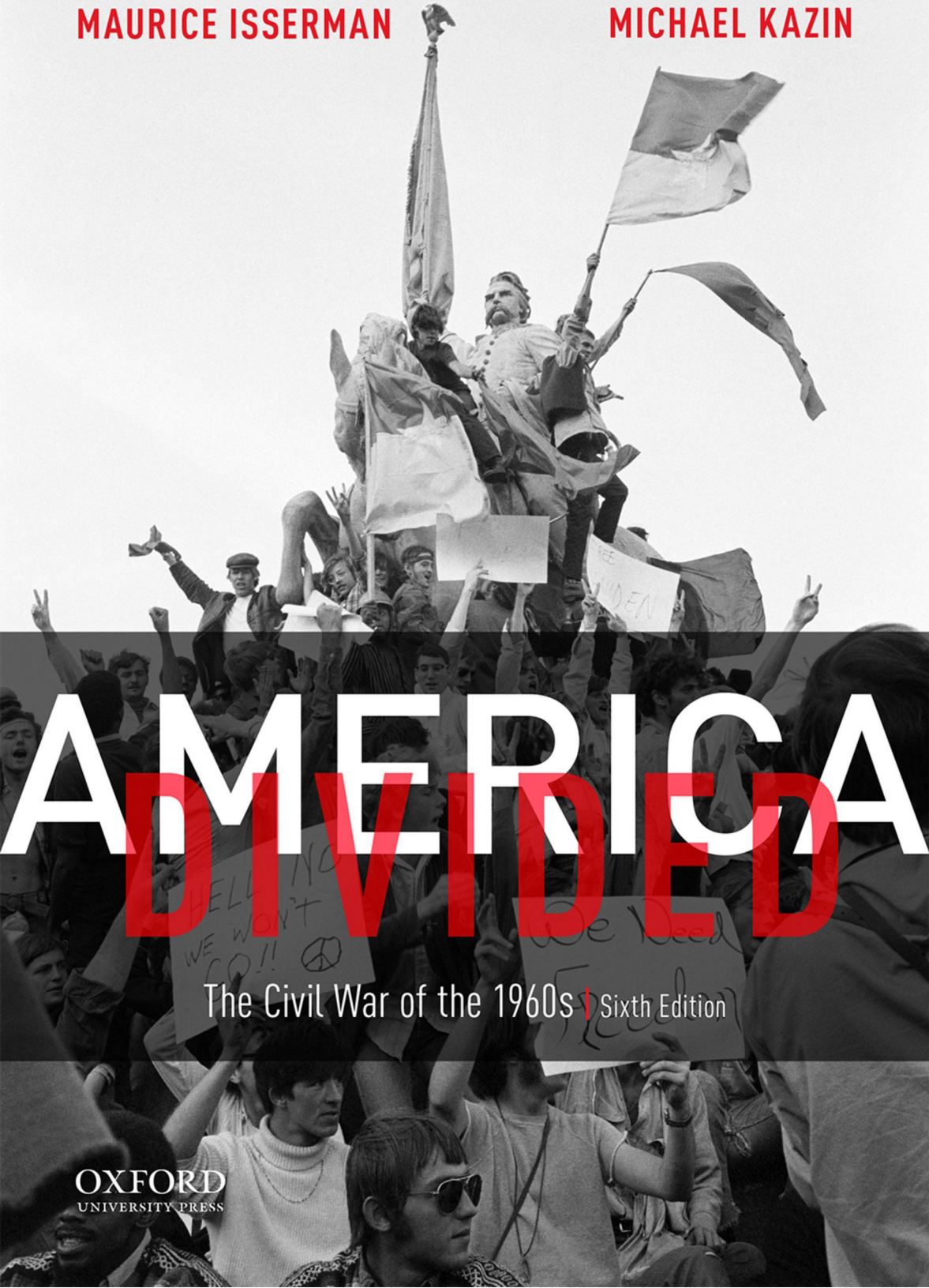
MAURICE ISSERMAN MICHAEL KAZIN



# AMERICA DIVIDED

## The Civil War of the 1960s | Sixth Edition

OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS

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## *The Civil War of the 1960s*

MAURICE ISSERMAN

MICHAEL KAZIN

SIXTH EDITION

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*To*
*Daniel Kazin*
*Ruth Isserman*
*Maia Kazin*
*David Isserman*

The eight years in America from 1860 to 1868 uprooted institutions that were centuries old, changed the politics of a people, transformed the social life of half the country, and wrought so profoundly upon the entire national character that the influence cannot be measured short of two or three generations.

—Mark Twain and Charles Dudley Warner,
*The Gilded Age: A Tale of To-Day* (1873)

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# PREFACE

"History," a great scholar once declared, "is what the present wants to know about the past." We have written this book to make sense of a period that, a half-century later, continues to stir debate, recriminations, and reminiscence in the United States and around the world. The meaning of the '60s depends, ultimately, upon which aspects of that time seem most significant to the retrospective observer. We have chosen to tell a story about the intertwined conflicts—over ideology and race, gender and war, popular culture and faith—that transformed the United States in irrevocable ways. The narrative does not remain within the borders of a single decade; like most historians, we view "the '60s" as defined by movements and issues that arose soon after the end of World War II and were only partially resolved by the time Richard Nixon resigned from the presidency.

Our own friendship is a creation of the long 1960s and its continuing aftermath. We met in 1970 in Portland, Oregon—two young college students who cared as much about changing history as we did about studying it. For a while, we lived in the same "revolutionary youth collective" and wrote for the same underground paper—signing only our first names to articles as an emblem of informality. We then left to attend graduate school on different coasts and found teaching jobs at different schools. But a passion for understanding and telling the story of the '60s brought us together as writers. In the late '80s, we coauthored an article on the failure and successes of the New Left and began to consider writing a study of the period as a whole.

That shared past animates our story but does not determine how we've told it. While still sharing a vision of democratic Left, we certainly do not endorse all that radicals like ourselves were doing in the 1960s. And, unlike some earlier scholars and memoirists, we no longer view the narrative of the Left—old, new, or liberal—as the pivot of the 1960s around which other events inevitably revolve. What occurred during those years was too important and too provocative to be reduced to the rise and fall of a political persuasion. We intend this to be a book

for people who were not alive in the ’60s as well as for those who may remember more than they can explain about that time in their life and in world history.

A number of people were indispensable to the making of this book, from the first edition in 2000 to the current one. Nancy Lane convinced us to embark on it, and Gioia Stevens inherited the task and handled the manuscript and its authors with intelligence and grace. The skill of Charles Cavaliere, Anna Russell, Katie Tunkavige, Patricia Berube, and Joseph Matson made revising the book a smooth and creative process. We are grateful to all the people who read and critiqued earlier editions, pointing out errors and places where our arguments could be strengthened and amplified.

We thank our families for continuing to persevere through yet another ’60s story. We dedicate this book to our children. Now it’s their turn.

## NEW TO THE SIXTH EDITION

For this edition, we have made a number of changes and additions reflecting new scholarship on the decade of the 1960s and its legacies for our own time. The sixth edition:

- Considers how changes in immigration laws in the 1960s sowed the seeds of future conflicts over “illegal” immigrants.
- Provides an expanded discussion of the Black Panther Party’s history.
- Offers insight into the changes in American politics that would bring such disparate figures as Barack Obama and Donald Trump into the White House.
- Offers and expanded and up to date bibliography.
- Includes a discussion of Andy Warhol’s impact on American culture.

# America Divided

# Introduction

> We have not yet achieved justice. We have not yet created a union which is, in the deepest sense, a community. We have not yet resolved our deep dubieties or self-deceptions. In other words, we are sadly human, and in our contemplation of the Civil War we see a dramatization of our humanity; one appeal of the War is that it holds in suspension, beyond all schematic readings and claims to total interpretation, so many of the issues and tragic ironies—somehow essential yet incommensurable—which we yet live.
>
> —Robert Penn Warren,
> *The Legacy of the Civil War*, 1961[1]

As the 1950s drew to a close, the organizers of the official centennial observances for the Civil War were determined not to allow their project, scheduled to begin in the spring of 1961 and to run through the spring of 1965, to become bogged down in any outmoded animosities. Among other considerations, much was at stake in a successful centennial for the tourism, publishing, and souvenir industries; as Karl S. Betts of the federal Civil War Centennial Commission predicted expansively on the eve of the celebration, "It will be a shot in the arm for the whole American economy."[2] Naturally, the shot in the arm would work better if other kinds of shots—those dispensed from musketry and artillery that caused the death and dismemberment of hundreds of thousands of Americans between 1861 and 1865—were not excessively dwelt upon. The Centennial Commission preferred to present the Civil War as, in essence, a kind of colorful and good-natured regional athletic rivalry between two groups of freedom-loving white Americans. Thus, the commission's brochure "Facts about the Civil War" described the respective military forces of the Union and the Confederacy in 1861 as "the Starting Line-ups."[3]

Nor did it seem necessary to remind Americans in the 1960s of the messy political issues that had divided their ancestors into warring camps a century earlier. "Facts about the Civil War" included neither the word "Negro" nor the word "slavery." When a journalist inquired in 1959 if any special observances were planned for the anniversary of Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation three years hence, Centennial Commission director Betts hastened to respond, "We're not

emphasizing Emancipation." There was, he insisted, "a bigger theme" involved in the four-year celebration than the parochial interests of this or that group, and that was "the beginning of a new America" ushered in by the Civil War. While memories of emancipation—the forced confiscation by the federal government of southern property in the form of four million freed slaves—were divisive, other memories of the era, properly selected and packaged, could help bring Americans together in a sense of common cause and identity. As Betts explained:

> The story of the devotion and loyalty of Southern Negroes is one of the outstanding things of the Civil War. A lot of fine Negro people loved life as it was in the old South. There's a wonderful story there—a story of great devotion that is inspiring to all people, white, black or yellow.[4]

But contemporary history sometimes has an inconvenient way of intruding upon historical memory. As things turned out, at the very first of the scheduled observances, the commemoration of the Confederate attack on Fort Sumter, the well-laid plans of the publicists began to go awry. The Centennial Commission had called a national assembly of delegates from participating state civil war centennial commissions to meet in Charleston. When a black delegate from New Jersey complained that she was denied a room at the headquarters hotel because of South Carolina's segregationist laws, four northern states announced they would boycott the Charleston affair. In the interests of restoring harmony, newly inaugurated president John F. Kennedy suggested that the state commissions' business meetings be shifted to the nonsegregated precincts of the Charleston Naval Yard. But that, in turn, provoked the South Carolina Centennial Commission to secede from the federal commission. In the end, two separate observances were held: an integrated one on federal property and a segregated one in downtown Charleston. In the aftermath of the Charleston fiasco, Centennial director Betts was forced to resign his position. The centennial observances, *Newsweek* magazine commented, "seemed to be headed into as much shellfire as was hurled in the bombardment of Fort Sumter."[5]

In the dozen or so years that followed, Americans of all regions and political persuasions were to invoke imagery of the Civil War—to illustrate what divided rather than united the nation. "Today I have stood, where once Jefferson Davis stood, and took an oath to my people," Alabama governor George Wallace declared from the steps of the statehouse in Montgomery in his inaugural address in January 1963. From "this Cradle of the Confederacy . . . 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!"[6]

Six months later, in response to civil rights demonstrations in Birmingham, Alabama, President Kennedy declared in a nationally televised address: "One

**Mock confederates fire on mock Union soldiers during the centennial reenactment of the Battle of Bull Run, July 1961.**

hundred years of delay have passed since President Lincoln freed the slaves. . . . [T]his Nation, for all its hopes and all its boasts, will not be fully free until all its citizens are free."[7] Two years later, in May 1965, Martin Luther King Jr. stood on the same statehouse steps in Montgomery where Governor Wallace had thrown down the gauntlet of segregation. There, before an audience of twenty-five thousand supporters of voting rights, King ended his speech with the exaltedly defiant words of the "Battle Hymn of the Republic":

> Mine eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the Lord, trampling out the vintage where the grapes of wrath are stored. He has loosed the fateful lightning of his terrible swift sword. His truth is marching on. . . .
>
> Glory, glory hallelujah!
> Glory, glory hallelujah!
> Glory, glory hallelujah![8]

To its northern and southern supporters, the civil rights movement was a "second Civil War," or a "second Reconstruction." To its southern opponents, it was a second "war of northern aggression." Civil rights demonstrators in the

South carried the stars and stripes on their marches; counterdemonstrators waved the Confederate stars and bars.

The resurrection of the battle cries of 1861–1865 was not restricted to those who fought on one or another side of the civil rights struggle. In the course of the 1960s, many Americans came to regard groups of fellow countrymen as enemies with whom they were engaged in a struggle for the nation's very soul. Whites versus blacks, liberals versus conservatives (as well as liberals versus radicals), young versus old, men versus women, hawks versus doves, rich versus poor, taxpayers versus welfare recipients, the religious versus the secular, the hip versus the straight, the gay versus the straight—everywhere one looked, new battalions took to the field, in a spirit ranging from that of redemptive sacrifice to vengeful defiance. When liberal delegates to the 1968 Democratic convention in Chicago lost an impassioned floor debate over a proposed antiwar plank in the party platform, they left their seats to march around the convention hall singing the "Battle Hymn of the Republic." Out in the streets, meanwhile, watching the battle between Chicago police and young antiwar demonstrators, the middle-aged novelist Norman Mailer admired the emergence of "a generation with an appetite for the heroic." It pleased him to think that "if it came to civil war, there was a side he could join."[9] *New York Times* political columnist James Reston would muse in the early 1970s that over the past decade the United States had witnessed "the longest and most divisive conflict since the War between the States."[10]

Contemporary history continues to influence historical memory. And although as the authors of *America Divided* we have tried to avoid political and generational partisanship in our interpretation of the 1960s, we realize how unlikely it is that any single history of the decade will satisfy every reader. We offer this revised edition of *America Divided* in the midst of the half-century observances of the great events of the Nixon Presidency, and Americans remain as divided as ever over their meaning. Perhaps by the time centennial observances roll around for John Kennedy's inauguration, the Selma voting rights march, the Tet Offensive, the 1968 Chicago Democratic convention, and the Watergate crisis, Americans will have achieved consensus in their interpretation of the causes, events, and legacies of the 1960s. But well into the second decade of the twenty-first century, there seems little likelihood of such agreement emerging any time in the near future. For some five decades now, the United States has been in the midst of an ongoing "culture war," fought over issues of political philosophy, race relations, gender roles, and personal morality left unresolved since the end of the 1960s.

We make no claim to be offering a "total interpretation" of the 1960s in *America Divided*. We do, however, wish to suggest some larger interpretive guidelines for understanding the decade. We recognize, first of all, that the American 1960s were part of what historians now call the "global sixties," and that political

events, cultural trends, and social developments in the United States were linked to those occurring in other countries in those years. At the same time, we believe the 1960s are best understood not as an aberration, but as an integral part of American history. It was a time of intense conflict and millennial expectations, similar in many respects to the one Americans endured a century earlier—with results as mixed, ambiguous, and frustrating as those produced by the Civil War. Liberalism was not as powerful in the 1960s as is often assumed; nor, equally, was conservatism as much on the defensive. The insurgent political and social movements of the decade—including civil rights and black power, the New Left, environmentalism, and feminism—drew upon even as they sought to transform values and beliefs deeply rooted in American political culture. The youthful adherents of the counterculture had more in common with the loyalists of the dominant culture than either would have acknowledged at the time. And the most profound and lasting effects of the 1960s are to be found in the realm of "the personal" rather than "the political."

Living through a period of intense historical change has its costs, as the distinguished essayist, poet, and novelist Robert Penn Warren observed in 1961. Until the 1860s, Penn Warren argued, Americans "had no history in the deepest and most inward sense." The "dream of freedom incarnated in a more perfect union" bequeathed to Americans by the founding fathers had yet to be "submitted to the test of history":

> There was little awareness of the cost of having a history. The anguished scrutiny of the meaning of the vision in experience had not become a national reality. It became a reality, and we became a nation, only with the Civil War.[11]

In the 1960s, Americans were plunged back into "anguished scrutiny" of the meaning of their most fundamental beliefs and institutions in a renewed test of history. They reacted with varying degrees of wisdom and folly, optimism and despair, selflessness and pettiness—all those things that taken together make us, in any decade, but particularly so in times of civil warfare, sadly (and occasionally grandly) human. It is our hope that, above all else, readers will take from this book some sense of how the 1960s, like the 1860s, served for Americans as the "dramatization of our humanity."

## CHAPTER 1

# Gathering of the Forces

> We have entered a period of accelerating bigness in all aspects of American life.
>
> —Eric Johnston,
> U.S. Chamber of Commerce, 1957[1]

Seven years after it ended, World War II elected Dwight David Eisenhower president. As supreme commander of Allied forces in Europe, "Ike" had projected a handsome, confident presence that symbolized the nation's resolve to defeat its enemies. After the war, both major parties wooed the retired general before he revealed that he had always been a Republican.

In many ways, the country Eisenhower governed during the 1950s was still living in the aftermath of its triumph in history's bloodiest conflict. Millions of veterans and their families basked in the glow of a healthy economy—defying predictions that peace would bring on another depression. Years of prosperity allowed many Americans to dream that, for the first time in history, the problem of scarcity—which bred poverty, joblessness, and desperation—might soon be solved. But they also feared that a new and even more devastating world war—fought with nuclear weapons—could break out at any time. Affluence might suddenly give way to annihilation. The backdrop to the '60s was thus a society perched between great optimism and great fear.

As he prepared to leave the White House in the early days of January 1961, Ike was reasonably content with his own record in office. His final State of the Union address, read to Congress by a lowly clerk, boasted of an economy that had grown 25 percent since he entered the White House in January 1953. A recession that began in 1958 had hung on too long; over 6 percent of American wage earners still could not find a job. But, with unemployment insurance being extended for millions of workers, there seemed no danger of a return to the bread lines and homelessness of the 1930s.

Moreover, Eisenhower could claim, with some justification, that his administration had improved the lives of most Americans. During his tenure, real wages had increased by one-fifth, the system of interstate highways was rapidly expanded, and new schools and houses seemed to sprout up in every middle-class community. To counter the Soviet Union, Congress had found it necessary

to boost defense spending and create what Eisenhower, a few days later, called a "military-industrial complex" whose "unwarranted influence" citizens should check. Nevertheless, the budget of the federal government was in balance. America's best-loved modern general had become one of its favorite presidents. Ike left office with a popularity rating of nearly 60 percent.

Dwight Eisenhower's America held sway over a Western world that, since the late 1940s, had been undergoing a golden age of economic growth and political stability in which the lives of ordinary people had become easier than they had ever been before in world history.[2] U.S. political and corporate leaders dominated the non-Communist world through military alliances, technologically advanced weaponry, democratic ideals, and consumer products that nearly everyone desired—from Coca-Cola to Cadillacs to cowboy movies. At home, American workers in the heavily unionized manufacturing and construction industries enjoyed a degree of job security and a standard of living that usually included an automobile, a television, a refrigerator, a washing machine and a dryer, and long-playing records. A generation earlier, none of these fabulous goods—except, perhaps, the car—would have been owned by their working-class parents. TVs and LPs were not even on the market until the 1940s.

Most economists minimized the impact of the late-'50s recession and predicted that all Americans would soon share in the benefits of affluence. In 1962, after completing a long-term study of U.S. incomes, a team of social scientists from the University of Michigan announced, "The elimination of poverty is well within the means of Federal, state, and local governments."[3] Some commentators even fretted that prosperity was sapping the moral will Americans needed to challenge the appeal of Communism in the third world. In 1960, the *New York Times* asked, "How can a nation drowning in a sea of luxury and mesmerized by the trivialities of the television screen have the faintest prospect of comprehending the plight of hundreds of millions in this world for whom a full stomach is a rare experience?"[4]

Only the omnipresent Cold War tarnished the golden age for the comfortable majority. Beginning a few months after the end of the Second World War, the United States and the Soviet Union had employed both the force of arms and ideological conviction to persuade the vast majority of nations and their citizens to choose sides. The two superpowers fought with sophisticated propaganda, exports of arms and military advisers, and huge spy services—an ever-growing arsenal that burdened the poorer countries of the Soviet bloc more than the prosperous, industrial nations in the West. Since 1949, when the USSR exploded its first atomic bomb, the specter of nuclear Armageddon loomed over the conflict.

In preparing for that ultimate war, the overarmed combatants exacted a terrible price. The United States and the USSR tested nuclear weapons in the open air, exposing tens of thousands of their soldiers and untold numbers of

**Germans peering over the Berlin Wall during its construction, 1961.**

civilians to dangerous doses of radiation from fallout. Both powers helped quash internal revolts within their own virtual empire—the Caribbean region for the United States, Eastern Europe for the Soviets. In Guatemala and Hungary, the Dominican Republic and Poland, local tyrants received military assistance and economic favors as long as they remained servile. For the U.S. State Department, any sincere land reformer was an incipient Communist; while, on the other side, any critic of Soviet domination was branded an agent of imperialism. The two blocs were not morally equivalent: in the United States, the harassment of left-wing dissenters, many of whom lost their jobs after being branded "subversive," violated the nation's cherished value of free speech and assembly, while in the USSR, the routine silencing and jailing of political opponents conformed with Communist doctrine.

By the late '50s, the death of Joseph Stalin and the end of the Korean War had diminished the possibility of a new world war. But anxiety still ran high. The United States, a commission funded by the Rockefeller brothers reported in 1958, was "in grave danger, threatened by the rulers of one-third of mankind." Two years later, Democratic presidential candidate John F. Kennedy warned, "The enemy is the communist system itself—implacable, insatiable, unceasing in its drive for world domination. . . . [This] is a struggle for supremacy between two conflicting ideologies: freedom under God versus ruthless, godless tyranny."[5] Western European countries were rapidly shedding their colonies in Africa and Asia, and American leaders feared that native pro-Communist leaders would fill the gap.

By the end of the decade, the most immediate threat to the United States seemed to come from an island located only ninety miles off the coast of Florida. Since gaining its independence from Spain in 1898, Cuba had been an informal American colony; U.S. investors owned 40 percent of its sugar and 90 percent of its mining wealth and a major American naval base sat on Guantanamo Bay, at the eastern tip of the island. On New Year's Day, 1959, this arrangement was disrupted: a rebel army led by Fidel Castro overthrew the sitting Cuban government, a corrupt and brutal regime that had lost the support of its people. At first, the new rulers of Cuba were the toast of the region. The bearded young leader—handsome, well-educated, eloquent, and witty—embarked on a speaking tour of the United States, where he met for three hours with Vice President Nixon.

But Fidel Castro was bent on a more fundamental revolution than American officials could accept. His government soon began executing officials of the old regime and confiscating $1 billion of land and other property owned by U.S. "imperialists." When the Eisenhower administration protested, Castro signed a trade agreement with the USSR and began to construct a state socialist economy. Anti-Communist Cubans, including most of the upper class, began to flee the island. By the time Ike left office, a Cuban exile army was training under American auspices to topple the only pro-Soviet government in the Western Hemisphere.

At the time, most Americans viewed Communism as a dynamic, if sinister, force. Since the end of the world war, its adherents had steadily gained new territory, weapons, and followers. U.S. officials were also concerned over reports that the Soviet economy was growing at double the rate of the American system. The other side was still far behind, but the idea that the USSR and its allies in Cuba, China, and elsewhere might capture the future was profoundly disturbing. Another high-level commission announced that the Soviets had more nuclear missiles than did the West. And, in 1957, the USSR launched *Sputnik*, a tiny unmanned satellite that seemed to give them a huge edge in the race to conquer space. All this threatened the confidence of Americans in their technological prowess, as well as their security. The year before *Sputnik*, Soviet premier Nikita S. Khrushchev had boasted, "We shall bury you." It certainly didn't seem impossible.

Responding to the perception of a grave Communist threat, Congress did not question the accuracy of the missile reports (which later proved to be false) or the solidity of the alliance between Moscow and Beijing (which was already coming apart). Lawmakers kept the armed services supplied with young draftees and the latest weapons, both nuclear and conventional (which also meant good jobs for their districts). The space program received lavish funding, mostly through the new National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA), and positive coverage in the media. Billions also flowed into the coffers of American intelligence agencies. In the third world, any stalwart nationalist who sought to

control foreign investment or questioned the value of U.S. bases was fair game for the Central Intelligence Agency's repertoire of "covert actions."

The Cold War also chilled political debate at home. Liberals learned to avoid making proposals that smacked of "socialism," such as national health insurance, which their Western European allies had already adopted. To question the morality of the Cold War sounded downright "un-American." The need for a common front against the enemy made ideological diversity seem outmoded if not subversive.

But not all Americans at the dawn of the decade shared a worldview steeped in abundance at home and perpetual tension about the Cold War abroad. "The American equation of success with the big time reveals an awful disrespect for human life and human achievement," remarked black writer James Baldwin in 1960.[6] Emerging in the postwar era was an alternative nation—peopled by organizers for civil rights for blacks and women, by radical intellectuals and artists, and by icons of a new popular culture. These voices did not speak in unison, but, however inchoately, they articulated a set of values different from those of the men who ruled from the White House, corporate headquarters, and the offices of metropolitan newspapers.

The dissenters advocated pacifism instead of Cold War, racial and class equality instead of a hierarchy of wealth and status, a politics that prized direct democracy over the clash of interest groups, a frankness toward sex instead of a rigid split between the public and the intimate, and a boredom with cultural institutions—from schools to supermarkets—that taught Americans to praise their country, work hard, and consume joyfully. Dissenters did not agree that an expanding economy was the best measure of human happiness and tried to empathize with the minority of their fellow citizens who had little to celebrate.

To understand the turbulent events of the 1960s, one should appreciate the contradictory nature of the society of 180 million people that was variously admired and detested, imitated and feared throughout the globe. We set out a few material facts, benchmarks of what had been achieved and what was lacking in American society. Of course, the meaning of any particular fact depends upon where one stands and with what views and resources one engages the world.

A massive baby boom was under way. It began in 1946, right after victory in World War II, and was ebbing only slightly by the end of the '50s. In that decade, an average of over four million births per year was recorded. Teenaged wives and husbands in their early twenties were responsible for much of this unprecedented surge. The baby boom, which also occurred in Canada and Australia, resulted from postwar optimism as well as prosperity. None of these English-speaking nations had been damaged in the global conflict, and most of their citizens could smile about their prospects. Western Europe, in contrast, was devastated by the

war, and there people remained wary of the future. Economies there recovered quickly and then grew at a more rapid pace than in the United States—but birth rates in England, France, Germany, and Italy still lagged near prewar levels.

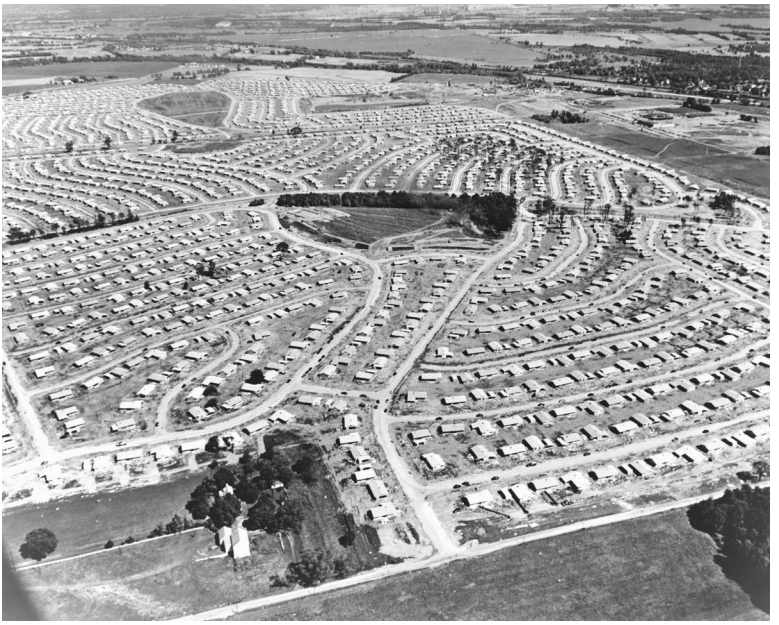
Millions of young American families settled in the suburbs—in new developments like Levittown on Long Island and in the previously agricultural San Fernando Valley adjacent to Los Angeles. Large contractors erected acres of tract houses, whose inexpensive price (about $7,000 each) and gleaming electrical appliances almost compensated for the absence of individual character. Hoping to create instant communities, developers also built schools, swimming pools, and baseball diamonds. The federal government smoothed the way by providing low-interest, long-term mortgages and new highways to get to and from work and shopping centers.

The developers of new malls, however, had only upscale consumers in mind. The huge shopping centers sprouting up outside big cities during the 1950s were invariably located in solidly white and middle-class areas. Typically, they were designed to mimic idealized small-town commercial streets—complete with flower beds, fountains, and ample room for strolling. One mall architect declared that "the shopping center is . . . today's village green." But these ultramodern villages were almost inaccessible to anyone who did not have an automobile. In northern New Jersey, home to the biggest malls in the nation, fewer than one-third of low-income residents owned a car.[7]

Still, millions of men and women who had grown up in crowded urban apartment houses or isolated, agrarian towns now possessed—if they kept up their payments—a tangible slab of the American dream. Tract names like "Crystal Stream," "Stonybrook," and "Villa Serena" lured city dwellers with the promise of a peaceful, bucolic retreat. By 1960, for the first time in U.S. history, a majority of American families owned the homes in which they lived.[8] Home ownership did seem to require an endless round of maintenance and improvements. "No man who owns his house and lot can be a Communist," quipped developer William J. Levitt. "He has too much to do."[9]

The suburbs were more diverse places than their promoters' publicity suggested. White factory workers and their families joined the migration along with "organization men" who rushed to the commuter train, ties flying and briefcases in hand. Suburbanites tended to live near and socialize with others of the same class. Status distinctions by neighborhood, lot size, and the quality of parks and schools defied the notion that every resident of a suburb belonged to the same "middle class."

However grand or humble the house, most Americans were earning enough to pay the mortgage. By 1960, the real hourly wage of manufacturing workers had doubled since the beginning of World War II. The rise in personal income, which



**An aerial photo of Levittown, Pennsylvania, the largest planned community in the United States.**

occurred despite periodic recessions, was accompanied by a steady increase in the number of women entering the paid labor force. Women over forty-five led the way, swelling the professions and the ranks of office workers. The number of married women with jobs had risen since the war. But the family "breadwinner" was still assumed to be male; fewer than 250 thousand women with small children worked outside the home. Women who worked full time earned barely 60 percent of what men did and could be legally fired if their employers judged them unattractive or if they got pregnant.

No matter their circumstances, American women were still expected to become cheerful housewives and mothers. In 1951, *Seventeen* magazine advised its young readers to be "a partner of man . . . not his rival, his enemy, or his plaything. Your partnership in most cases will produce children, and together you and the man will create a haven, a home, a way of life."[10] Women married, for the first time, at an average age of twenty, and many states had laws that enshrined the husband's power over his wife. A man could legally forbid his wife to go to college, take a job, or maintain a separate residence. And in most states, a wife was required to take her husband's name.

In 1960, CBS televised a documentary about the "trapped housewife," and the *New York Times* described a class of educated women who "feel stifled in

their homes. . . . Like shut ins, they feel left out." With more children around, even new appliances didn't lessen the time spent on housework. Family "experts" counseled every wife to help her husband "rise to his capacity." In response, journalist Marya Mannes criticized the suppression of intelligent women by calling up fears of their advancing Soviet counterparts: "We have for years been wasting one of the resources on which our strength depends and which other civilizations are using to their advantage." In 1962, the Gallup Poll reported that, while most women were generally satisfied with their lives, they also wished they had waited longer to get married and were better educated. Only 10 percent said "they would do nothing differently."[11]

In their bedrooms, some women did enjoy a new kind of freedom. The widely read Kinsey Report on female sexuality suggested that as many as half of all American women had intercourse before marriage and reported that one-quarter of married women had had sex with someone besides their husband. By decade's end, over 80 percent of wives of childbearing age were using some form of contraception; the total was higher among women with at least a high school education. And, in 1960, the federal government allowed marketing of a birth control pill—the first reliable contraceptive that did not interfere with "natural" intercourse.[12]

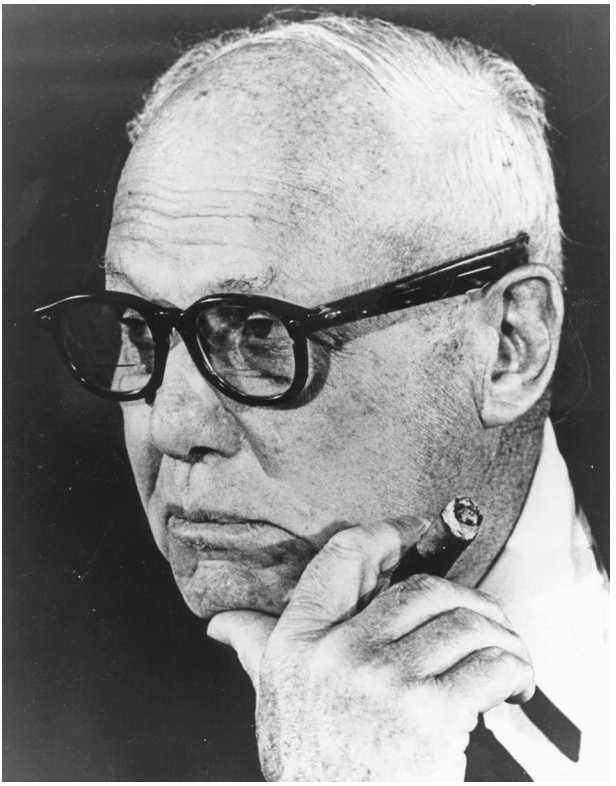
The spread of prosperity encouraged most citizens to identify themselves with the "middle class." The mass media and leaders in business and government assured Americans that the days of backbreaking labor for little reward were over. Supposedly, getting to and from the job was now more arduous than anything one did while at work. In 1960, *Time* published a cover story entitled "Those Rush-Hour Blues" in which a psychiatrist stated that commuters (their maleness assumed) actually enjoyed traffic jams and crowded trains. "The twice-daily sacrifice of the commuter to the indignities of transportation satisfied something deep within the husband's psyche," explained Dr. Jose Barchilon. "In modern society, there are few opportunities for the breadwinner to endure personal hardship in earning the family living, such as clearing the forest or shooting a bear."[13]

In reality, for millions of workers—in mines, in factories, and at construction sites—work remained hard and dangerous. But thanks to newly powerful labor unions, it was better compensated than ever before. The labor movement helped lift millions of wage earners into the middle class. A third of nonagricultural workers belonged to unions, nearly all of which represented employees in the private sector outside the South. Smart employers learned that the best way to stave off pesky labor organizers was to improve the pay and benefits of their own workers before unions could gain a foothold. From the late 1940s through the 1960s, wages rose in tandem with gains in productivity (the hourly output of workers). Even the mighty barons of the steel industry could not humble Big Labor. In 1959, industry spokesmen announced they would no longer permit the United Steel Workers to

block technological changes that would have eliminated thousands of jobs. But the union called a strike, and after a four-month walkout its members prevailed.

Heavy industries like steel were still the core of the American economy. Metals and automobiles produced in the United States dominated world markets—although the West Germans were beginning to pose some serious competition. And the technological auguries were excellent. Such new inventions as digital computers and Tupperware were propelling electronics, aircraft, and chemical firms to growth rates superior to those of older companies like Ford and U.S. Steel.

The Cold War was also helping transform the economic map. Military contracts pumped up the profit margins of such high-tech firms as Hewlett-Packard and General Electric. Opportunity shone on entrepreneurs and skilled workers alike in a vast "Gunbelt" stretching from Seattle down through southern California and over to Texas. This was the civilian half of the military-industrial complex Eisenhower had warned about—and it was drawing population and federal money away from the old manufacturing hub in the East and Midwest.



**George Meany, the first president of the AFL-CIO and a symbol of the power and pragmatism of organized labor.**

And all over the country, more and more Americans were working in "white-collar" jobs. Gradually but surely, the economy was shifting away from the industrial age toward an era dominated by service and clerical employment. In 1956, for the first time, jobs of the newer kind outnumbered blue-collar ones.

The term "white collar" masked huge differences of pay, skill, and the autonomy afforded to a worker on the job. A kindergarten teacher's aide lacked benefits most college professors took for granted, such as a comfortable salary or the freedom to teach what and how she liked. And sharing an employer was less significant than whether one managed investments for a huge commercial bank or, instead, handed out deposit slips or cleaned its offices. "My job doesn't have prestige," remarked bank teller Nancy Rodgers, "It's a service job . . . you are there to serve them. They are not there to serve you."[14]

In any economy, however successful, there are losers as well as winners. For a sizable minority of citizens, the American dream was more a wish than a reality. State university branches multiplied, as the number of college students increased by 1960 to 3.6 million, more than double the number twenty years before. Yet fewer than half the adults in the United States were high school graduates.

Lack of schooling did not disqualify one from getting a job in a factory or warehouse, but the future clearly belonged to the educated. Already, a man who had graduated from college earned about three times more than his counterpart who had dropped out at the lower grades. Where union pressure was absent, wages could be abysmally low. In 1960 farm workers earned, on average, just $1,038 a year.[15] In the Appalachian Mountains and the Mississippi Delta, many poor residents owned a television and a used car or truck—but lacked an indoor toilet and a year-round job.

The central cities many Levittowners had quit were already on the road to crisis. African Americans who moved to the metropolises of the North seeking jobs and racial tolerance often found neither. Black unemployment stubbornly tallied nearly double the rate for whites. Following World War II, black migrants filled up old industrial cities like Detroit and Chicago that were steadily losing factory jobs to the suburbs. Few white settlers on the crabgrass frontier welcomed blacks as prospective neighbors. In 1960, not one of eighty-two thousand Long Island Levittowners was an African American—even though New York State had passed a civil rights law in the mid-1940s.

That year, immigrants made up only 5 percent of the population, but Mexican Americans—the nation's second largest minority—were struggling to achieve a modicum of the economic fruits that most whites enjoyed. Less than one-fifth of Mexican American adults were high school graduates (a lower number than for blacks), and most held down menial jobs—in the cities and the

fields. During World War II, to replace citizens drafted into the military, the federal government had allowed U.S. farmers to import workers from Mexico, dubbed *braceros* (from the Spanish word for "arms"). The end of the war alleviated the labor shortage, but the political clout of agribusiness kept the *bracero* program going—and it severely hampered the ability of native-born farmworkers to better their lot.

These problems remained all but invisible in the business and political centers of the East. Outside the Southwest, most Americans regarded themselves as living in a society with only two races—white and black. The federal census did not even consider Mexican Americans a separate group.

A growing chorus of intellectuals blasted the hypocrisies of the era. In their eyes, America had become a "mass society" that had lost its aesthetic and moral bearings. Critic Lewis Mumford condemned suburbia, too broadly, as "a treeless, communal waste, inhabited by people in the same class, the same income, the same age group, witnessing the same television performances, eating the same tasteless pre-fabricated foods from the same freezers." Sociologist C. Wright Mills indicted a "power elite" for fostering a system of "organized irresponsibility" in which "the standard of living dominates the style of life."[16] Mills joined with radical economists Paul Sweezy and Seymour Melman in arguing that "a permanent war economy" geared to fighting the Cold War was imperiling democracy even as it promoted growth. But such criticisms did not engage most Americans, for whom private life was all consuming.

Nor did they convince the most powerful politicians in the land. The primary business of government, Democratic and Republican leaders agreed, was to keep the economy growing and the military strong. Conservatives and liberals in both parties squabbled over details: whether, for instance, to fund a new wing of B-52 bombers or more science programs in the public schools. But rarely did any senator question the wisdom of policing the world (as had Robert Taft, the GOP's leading conservative, in the late '40s).

The previous generation of lawmakers had fought bitterly over the social programs of Franklin D. Roosevelt's New Deal and Harry Truman's Fair Deal. But the first Republican president since Herbert Hoover accepted a limited welfare state as the new status quo. Dwight Eisenhower wrote from the White House to his conservative brother Edgar: "Should any political party attempt to abolish social security and eliminate labor laws and farm programs, you would not hear of that party again in our political history."[17]

By the end of the decade, FDR's party was making something of a comeback. In the 1958 congressional election, Democrats gained their biggest margins since the beginning of World War II. Amid the recession, Republicans who ran against union power went down to defeat in the populous states of Ohio and

California. Liberals in Congress and in such advocacy groups as Americans for Democratic Action (ADA) got busy drafting plans for higher minimum wages, government health insurance for the elderly, and other extensions of the New Deal. Meanwhile, the Supreme Court—headed, ironically, by a chief justice (Earl Warren) whom Eisenhower had appointed—was aggressively expanding the definition of individual and group "rights" to favor demonstrators against racial inequality and persons convicted on the basis of evidence gathered illegally. A public that, according to polls, admired Eleanor Roosevelt more than any woman in the world seemed amenable to another wave of governmental activism.

But despite the Democrats' surge, the party remained an uneasy coalition of the urban, pro-union North and the small-town, low-wage South. Big city machines, originally established by Irish Catholics, continued to wield a measure of power in the two largest cities—New York City and Chicago—as well as in Pittsburgh, Cleveland, and Buffalo. Below the Mason-Dixon line, most whites still voted against the ghost of Abraham Lincoln—although in 1956, Eisenhower, who assured southerners he wanted "to make haste slowly" on civil rights, did win the electoral votes of five former Confederate states.[18] In 1960, the GOP could count only seven congressmen from the South—and virtually no state or county officials. American women had won the vote in 1920, but rarely did they figure significantly as candidates or campaign managers.

Republicans were still the party of Main Street and Wall Street—of American business, large and small, and of voters who cherished the rights of private property and were leery of "big government." Party allegiance tended to follow class lines. The wealthiest stratum of Americans voted heavily for the GOP, as did most voters with college degrees and professional occupations. Blue-collar workers, particularly those who harbored bitter memories of the Great Depression, favored the Democrats by a four-to-one margin. The legacy of old battles over restricting immigration and instituting Prohibition also played a part. Outside the white South, native-born Protestants tilted toward the Republicans, while Catholics and Jews—who were closer to their foreign-born roots—usually favored the Democrats.

The result of these alignments was a legislative system unfriendly to serious change—whether in a liberal or conservative direction. Key posts in Congress were held by southern or border state Democrats who had accrued decades of seniority: the Speaker of the House, the majority leader of the Senate, and the chairmen of committees with power over tax and appropriations bills. Howard Smith of Virginia, who had first been elected to Congress in 1930, headed the mighty Rules Committee. Smith was able to block most proposals he disapproved from even coming to the House floor. And he *despised* civil rights bills. Like all

but a handful of southern congressmen, Smith represented a district in which few blacks were allowed to vote—and he intended to keep it that way.

Not every southerner was so uncompromising. Both House Speaker Sam Rayburn and Senate majority leader Lyndon Johnson were shrewd Texas moderates who retained their power by balancing demands from different wings of their party. But most southern Democrats and nearly all Republicans routinely united to defeat new programs to aid big cities, racial minorities, and the poor. The mechanisms of government were purring along nicely, so why disturb them? As even liberal McGeorge Bundy, then a Harvard dean (and soon to become a federal policymaker), intoned, "If American politics have a predilection for the center, it is a Good Thing."[19]

If mainstream politics in the 1950s lacked fire and daring, the same could not be said of popular culture. The postwar absorption with leisure generated a feverish search for new ways to spend all that free time and disposable income. In the past, Americans had fought major battles over who would control the workplace and how to distribute the fruits of their labor. Mass movements of small farmers and wage earners had pressured the powerful to recognize unions, subsidize crop prices, and establish Social Security and a minimum wage. Cultural differences motivated some earlier mass movements, the prohibitionists being a prime example. But after World War II, public conflicts often turned on matters of cultural taste—in music, in styles of dress and hair, slang, drugs, and sexual behavior.

Popular music—especially rock and roll and the rhythm and blues from which it sprang—became a major arena of generational strife. The young people who listened to, danced to, and played rock and rhythm and blues were implicitly rejecting the notion that creativity obeyed a color line. Leaping over racial barriers were such black artists as Willie Mae (Big Mama) Thornton and Chuck Berry, the Mexican American singer Richie Valens (born Valenzuela), the Greek American bandleader Johnny Otis (who identified himself as black), the white Southern Baptist Elvis Presley, and the Jewish American songwriters Mike Stoller, Jerry Lieber, and Carole King. Lieber and Stoller wrote "Hound Dog" for Big Mama Thornton, who made it a hit with black audiences in 1954 before Elvis covered it in 1956—and sold millions of copies.

Established record companies tried to resist the onslaught. National music awards usually went to more innocuous recordings, despite the higher sales of rock. In 1960 Percy Faith's "Theme from *A Summer Place*," a string-filled waltz, won the Grammy for best song of the year—beating out Roy Orbison's "Only the Lonely," the Drifters' "Save the Last Dance for Me," "Stay" by Maurice Williams and the Zodiacs, and Chubby Checker's "The Twist." Faith's music would soon be heard mainly in elevators, while the other songs became rock classics and are still played by disc jockeys throughout the world.

Satire also appealed to growing numbers of adolescents. *Mad* magazine published clever putdowns of advertisements, Hollywood movies, television shows, suburban culture, and the military. Edited by Harvey Kurtzman (who had once drawn cartoons for the Communist *Daily Worker*), *Mad* ridiculed nearly everything that established middlebrow magazines like *Life* and *Reader's Digest* took for granted—particularly the mood of self-satisfaction. "What, Me Worry?" asked Alfred E. Neuman, the gap-toothed idiot with oversized ears and freckles whose comic image beamed from every issue of *Mad*. High school readers also snapped up novels about alienated youth. One of the most compelling was *The Catcher in the Rye* (1951), J. D. Salinger's tale about a teenager named Holden Caulfield who drops out of his prep school to wander dyspeptically around New York City. "Phonies," Caulfield called the adults who plagued his unhappy, if materially privileged, life.

Even World War II was becoming grist for farce. Joseph Heller's best-selling 1961 novel, *Catch-22*, signaled a new eagerness to question the logic of established authority. The protagonist, Yossarian, is an American bombardier in Europe who wants to be grounded after having risked his life flying dozens of missions over enemy territory. But according to military regulations, he can opt out of the war only if he is crazy. So Yossarian goes to his unit's medical officer, Doc Daneeka, asking to be grounded on that basis. But the rules don't permit it. "You mean there's a catch?" Yossarian asks:

> "Sure there's a catch," Doc Daneeka replied. "Catch-22. Anyone who wants to get out of combat duty isn't really crazy. . . . Yossarian was moved very deeply by the absolute simplicity of this clause of Catch-22, and let out a respectful whistle."
>
> "That's some catch, that Catch-22," he observed.
>
> "It's the best there is," Doc Daneeka agreed.[20]

Some young whites were attracted to a more extravagant style of alienation. They sought refuge among and enlightenment from America's most dispossessed and despised groups—tramps, migrant laborers, black criminals—as well as jazz musicians. In 1957, the novelist Norman Mailer published a controversial essay, "The White Negro," in which he celebrated hipsters of his own race who "drifted out at night looking for action with a black man's code to fit their facts." Mailer romanticized black men who "lived in the enormous present . . . relinquishing the pleasures of the mind for the more obligatory pleasures of the body." He predicted that "a time of violence, new hysteria, confusion and rebellion" would soon come along to "replace the time of conformity."[21]

Cultural innovation is usually the province of the young. But prime-time television, perhaps the most significant cultural force in the 1950s, was an

infatuation that bridged the generations. During that decade, TV developed from a curiosity into a staple of the American home. By the end of the '50s, close to 90 percent of families owned at least one set, and the average person watched about five hours per day. In 1960, the most popular shows were westerns starring male characters who were strong, violent, and just (*Gunsmoke* and *Have Gun, Will Travel* headed the list) and a crime show about the 1920s whose heroes were latter-day gunslingers in suits (*The Untouchables*). Dominating the medium were the three national networks—CBS, NBC, and ABC—whose evening offerings provided the only entertainment experience most Americans had in common.

Not all was right in TV land, however. In 1959, Charles Van Doren, a handsome young English professor who had thrilled viewers with his victories on the quiz show *Twenty-One*, admitted to Congress that the program had been fixed. The show's producer had given Van Doren the answers in advance. President Eisenhower remarked that the deception was "a terrible thing to do to the American people," revealing how strong a grip the relatively new medium had over the nation.[22] The exposé, that same year, of disc jockeys who accepted "payola" (bribes) from record companies for playing their records on the air was, by comparison, a minor matter. Television was admired as clean family entertainment that promoted "togetherness." Rock and roll had an outlaw reputation; one almost expected it to be tarred with corruption.

Sports, too, had an occasional scandal—college basketball players shaving points or boxers throwing fights. But in 1960, the world of gifted athletes and their fans was still conducted on a rather simple scale and did not yield large profits. College football got more attention than the grittier professional variety; major league baseball had recently placed its first two teams on the West Coast, and there were a scant eight teams in the National Basketball Association and only six in the National Hockey League. Although baseball was the most popular spectator sport, the average major league player earned only about twice the salary of a skilled union worker—and seldom, if ever, was asked to endorse a product.

The sports world was more racially integrated than American neighborhoods and schools, yet it, too, often mirrored the attitudes of the larger society. During the 1960 Cotton Bowl game, a fight broke out after a player on the all-white Texas team called one of his Syracuse opponents "a big black dirty nigger." Syracuse won the game and, with it, the national championship. Magazine headlines about "A Brawling Battle of the Hard-Noses" implied that racist taunts were just part of a manly game.[23]

For solace from the imperfections of the secular world, millions of Americans turned to organized religion. A majority of Americans were affiliated

with a church or synagogue—the highest total ever. The popular evangelist Billy Graham staged televised revivals in major cities where he preached a fusion between godliness and Americanism. In best-selling books, the Reverend Norman Vincent Peale counseled that "positive thinking" could release the potential for spiritual joy and worldly success that lay inside every Christian soul. Not all Roman Catholics accepted the conservative views of the church hierarchy, but most basked in a new legitimacy secured by the stalwart anti-Communism of their bishops and their own rising fortunes. It even seemed possible that a Catholic could be elected president. For their part, many Jews, now relocated to prosperous suburbs, turned to Conservative and Reform synagogues to find a substitute for the vigorous community their parents had found either in the Orthodox faith or in the socialist left. In the "return to God," one could glimpse elements of both the pride and the anxiety emblematic of the United States at the dawn of the '60s.

No area of national life was more highly charged than the relationship between black and white Americans. Racial segregation was still firmly established in much of the United States in 1960. Across the South, thousands of public schools had closed down rather than allow black children to sit alongside whites.

Official racism had many faces—all of them immoral, some also ludicrous and petty. South of New Orleans, a local political boss named Leander Perez told a rally of five thousand people that desegregation was a conspiracy by "zionist Jews" and the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). "Don't wait for your daughter to be raped by these Congolese," warned Perez. "Do something about it now." The next day, a race riot broke out. The city fathers of Montgomery, Alabama, sold off the animals at their municipal zoo rather than obey a court order to allow black people to enjoy them. Meanwhile, in the nation's capital, the *Washington Post* routinely printed want ads that specified, "Stenographer—White, age 20 to 30 . . ." and "Short-order cook, white, fast, expert."[24]

The movement that would lift this burden—and catalyze many other jolts to American culture and politics—was gathering force in black churches, schools, and homes. Its funds were meager, and it had, as yet, little political influence. But the sounds of hope, preached in an idiom both militant and loving, were swelling up from picket lines outside Woolworth stores in New York City, in the small towns of the Mississippi Delta, and from a Masonic temple in Richmond, Virginia—former capital of the Confederacy.

On New Year's Day, 1960, Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. came to Richmond to speak to a mass rally against the closing of the public schools. "It is an unstoppable movement," the thirty-year-old King informed segregationists.

"We will wear you down by our capacity to suffer, and in the process we will win your hearts. . . . Nothing is more sublime than suffering and sacrifice for a great cause."[25] Before that movement—and King's own life—had run their course, the self-satisfied tones of Dwight Eisenhower's last State of the Union address would seem a murmur of lost illusions. The greatest social upheaval in America since the Civil War was about to begin.

## CHAPTER 2

# Black Ordeal, Black Freedom

I've got the light of Freedom, Lord,
And I'm going to let it shine,
Let it shine, let it shine, let it shine!

—Traditional Spiritual

One morning in July of 1944, a civilian bus driver at Fort Hood, Texas, ordered a black army lieutenant to "get to the back of the bus where the colored people belong."[1] The lieutenant refused, arguing that the military had recently ordered its buses desegregated. MPs came and took him into custody. Four weeks later, the black officer went on trial for insubordination. If convicted by the court martial, he faced a dishonorable discharge—which would have crippled his job opportunities for the rest of his life.

The lieutenant's name was Jackie Robinson. Three years later, Robinson would don the uniform of the Brooklyn Dodgers to become the first African American in the twentieth century to play major league baseball.

Robinson's bold defiance of racial custom, his appeal to federal authority, and his acquittal by that military court in 1944 all indicated that significant changes were in spin. World War II was a watershed in African American history, raising the hopes of people who, with their children, would build the massive black freedom movement of the 1960s.

The urgent need for soldiers to fight abroad and for wage earners to forge an "arsenal of democracy" at home convinced a flood of African Americans to leave the South. Mechanized cotton pickers shrank the need for agrarian labor just as the lure of good jobs in war industries sapped the will to stay in the fields. Metropolises from Los Angeles to New York filled up with dark-skinned residents—and after the war the flow persisted. Between 1940 and 1960, 4.5 million black men and women migrated out of Dixie; African Americans were fast becoming an urban people.

This second great migration (the first occurred during and just after World War I) helped pry open some long-padlocked doors. Before the war, all but a few blacks were excluded from access to good "white" jobs and the best educational institutions. After the war, increasing numbers of blacks finished high school and

**Jackie Robinson being tagged out on an attempt to steal home.**

gained entrance to historically white colleges; the number of African Americans in the skilled trades and in such professions as medicine and education shot up.

Before the war, the black freedom movement was a small and fragile entity, repressed by southern authorities and shunned by many African Americans fearful of reprisals if they took part. In 1941, labor leader A. Phillip Randolph vowed to bring masses of demonstrators to Washington, DC, unless the government opened up jobs in defense plants to black workers. His threat persuaded President Franklin D. Roosevelt to establish the Fair Employment Practices Committee (FEPC) and to bar discrimination by unions and companies under government contract. During the war, the NAACP, the oldest national civil rights organization, increased its membership by 1,000 percent. Many a black veteran returned from overseas with a new determination to fight the tyranny under which he'd been raised. "I paid my dues over there and I'm not going to take this anymore over here," stated a former black officer.[2]

Centuries of bondage and decades of rigid segregation (called "Jim Crow," after a bygone minstrel character) had taught African Americans hard lessons about the barriers they faced. Decades of routine discrimination in housing,

education, and employment had built racism deep into the structures of American society. A maxim of Frederick Douglass, the nineteenth-century abolitionist who had freed himself from slavery, seemed self-evident: "Power concedes nothing without a demand. It never did and it never will."[3] The demand in the post–World War II era was for "freedom." But what did that mean?

Their history as a nation within a nation left most black people both with a deep sense of alienation from the society of their birth and an intense longing for full and equal citizenship. The black activist and intellectual W. E. B. DuBois wrote, in 1903, that the black American "ever feels his two-ness—an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings. Two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder."[4]

The thousands of men and women who joined the freedom movement in the two decades after 1945 continued to live in perpetual tension between the two ideals. They demanded equality under the law—to be judged as individuals and not as members of a minority race. Yet, at the same time, their strength rested on ideas, relationships, and institutions that sprang from their own African American community—one in which illiterate laborers and a small core of black professionals were bonded (not always happily) by race. The result was that a black individual—whether cook or physician—would rise from the community or not at all. The cause of civil rights was thus always, by necessity as much as design, also a demand for black power.

The legal effort that culminated in the most famous court ruling of the twentieth century illustrated the dual longings that DuBois described. In 1950, Thurgood Marshall and his talented team of NAACP lawyers decided to challenge the principle of segregated schools. But they were not acting from an abstract belief that black children should mix with whites. NAACP attorney Robert Carter later explained, "I believe that the majority sentiment in the black community was a desire to secure for blacks all of the educational nurturing available to whites. If ending school segregation was the way to that objective, fine; if, on the other hand, securing equal facilities was the way, that too was fine."[5]

Marshall's team was convinced that white authorities would always treat all-black schools as neglected stepchildren, denying them needed funds and other support. Research by psychologists Kenneth Clark and Mamie Phipps revealed that black children confined to segregated schools "incorporated into their developing self-image feelings of racial inferiority."[6] Young African Americans, the couple insisted, would never learn to respect themselves if they were barred from learning alongside members of the dominant race. On May 17, 1954, the Supreme

Court unanimously agreed with NAACP attorneys who argued that separate schools violated the Fourteenth Amendment's guarantee of "equal protection of the laws."

The case that gave the ruling its name—*Oliver Brown, et al. v. Board of Education of Topeka, Shawnee County, Kansas, et al.*—illustrated the kind of demeaning irritations that marked daily life for most American blacks. In Topeka, training and salaries were roughly equal for teachers of both races. But black children had to ride buses to classrooms located miles away; their white peers could simply walk to school.

As DuBois understood, "two-ness" often entailed a painful bargain. Thousands of black teachers lost their jobs after school systems were desegregated. And when Jackie Robinson began playing the infield for the Dodgers, the two Negro baseball leagues made up one of the largest black-owned and -operated enterprises in America. Black fans took pride in the fact that sluggers like Josh Gibson and pitchers like Satchel Paige had skills equal or superior to those of white stars like Joe DiMaggio and Bob Feller.

But Robinson's success with the Dodgers (he led the team to the World Series in two of his first three years), followed by the gradual integration of other clubs, destroyed the Negro leagues. Their demise left an ironic legacy: it is likely that fewer black men earned a living as baseball players in the late 1950s and 1960s than during the era of Jim Crow. But not many African Americans mourned the old order. "Nothing was killing Negro baseball but Democracy," wrote journalist Wendell Smith in 1948.[7]

The changes that occurred during World War II and in the decade immediately following it were, by and large, encouraging ones. As black people filled the workplaces and streets of urban America, whites were finally beginning to grapple with "the problem of the color-line," which DuBois had predicted would be "the problem of the twentieth century." Academics and journalists increasingly condemned the belief in and practice of white supremacy. In 1948, President Harry Truman ordered the armed forces to desegregate. At its nominating convention that summer, the Democratic Party, for the first time in its long history, took an unambiguous stand for civil rights. Most of the southern delegates walked out in protest.

Still, such advances were only a first step toward liberating black people from the lower caste to which law, custom, economic exploitation, and vigilante violence had confined them. At midcentury, the income of black families averaged only 55 percent that of white families (and black women went out to work at higher proportions than did white women). Segregation remained the rule in most of America. After the war, African Americans began to have a realistic hope that their long night of hatred and economic abuse might end. But it would

require two more decades of arduous, heroic effort—and intermittent support from sympathetic authorities—to bring about serious change.

In the South, the odds remained particularly formidable. By the 1950s, slavery had been dead for almost a century, but its legacy remained disturbingly alive in the hearts and minds of most white southerners. They had always treated black people as their social inferiors and saw no reason to change. Few members of the majority race questioned the demeaning etiquette that accompanied this tradition. When greeting a white person, black southerners were expected to avert their eyes. Blacks were required to address all whites, even adolescents, as "Mr.," "Miss," or "Mrs.," while whites routinely called blacks, whatever their age, by their first names or used such demeaning terms as "boy" or "aunty."

A large number of fiercely guarded prohibitions and exclusions defined the Jim Crow order. Whites and blacks were not supposed to drink or dine together, in private homes or restaurants. They did not attend the same schools or churches or live in the same neighborhoods. Public toilets and drinking fountains were restricted by race. And in nearly every industry there were strict lines dividing "white" jobs from "black" ones.

Behind such rules was a lurking dread of interracial sexuality. Many southern whites viewed black men as possessed of an insatiable desire for white women. Segregated institutions were designed to keep intimate contacts across the color line to a minimum. A black man who made a sexual comment to a white woman was considered tantamount to a rapist. The slightest transgression of the code might lead to a lynching tree.

The hypocrisy was glaring. In fact, many white men patronized black prostitutes, and those who could afford it sometimes took black mistresses—practices resented by black men and by women of both races. For white women, the pedestal of purity could be an emotional cage. Willie Morris, a white writer from Yazoo City, Mississippi, was shocked during World War II when he encountered a woman of his own race who actually enjoyed sex. "I had thought that only Negro women engaged in the act of love with white men just for fun."[8]

Segregation enforced injustices that were economic as well as interpersonal. In rural areas, black elementary schools were usually open only during the winter months (when there was no planting or harvesting to be done) and suffered from ill-trained teachers, a paucity of supplies, and crowded classrooms that mixed students of different ages. The main housing available to blacks was cheaply built and distant from most sources of employment and commercial recreation. Interracial labor unions were rare in the South, and blacks could seldom find jobs that paid a secure income and held out the possibility of advancement. A black laborer could teach himself to master a craft such as carpentry or

machine building, only to see a younger white with little or no experience gain a skilled position and the coveted wage that went with it.

As before the Civil War, when whites blamed abolitionists for stirring up their slaves, southern authorities after World War II claimed "their Negroes" were a contented lot, that only "outside agitators" with Communist proclivities sought to overturn the status quo. But belying such confident words were the measures taken to keep black people from voting, especially in Deep South states where they were most numerous. Poll taxes were raised or lowered, depending on the race of the applicant. Alabama gave county registrars the power to determine whether prospective voters could "understand and explain any article of the Constitution of the United States" and were of "good character and [understood] the duties and obligations of good citizenship under a republican form of government." Mississippi officials came up with ludicrous questions for aspiring registrants such as "How many bubbles in a bar of soap?"[9]

As the authorities in rural areas, white registrars set their own working hours, bent election laws at will, and made it as difficult as possible for blacks to acquire the necessary documents. In 1946 a black army veteran from McComb, Mississippi, testified to a congressional committee that a county voting clerk had required him to describe the entire contents of a Democratic primary ballot. The prospective voter was not allowed to see the ballot and so had to decline. The clerk disdainfully rejected his application, telling him, "You brush up on your civics and come back."[10]

Throughout the long decades of Jim Crow, southern blacks had fashioned many ways to cope with such outrages. In crossroads towns, "juke joints" offered the thrills of liquor, conversation, and a blues whose bent chords and bittersweet lyrics expressed the pains and joys of life at the bottom of society. Sharecroppers moved frequently to find a better landlord or a larger piece of land; a hardy minority saved their money and purchased their own acres. In cities, the protection of numbers led to sporadic street protests and some threats of violence against recalcitrant white authorities.[11]

For a fortunate few, upward mobility was more than a dream. Segregated educational institutions—poorly financed by individual states and white philanthropies—trained a black elite. At places like Tuskegee Institute in Alabama and Morehouse College in Atlanta, men and women studied to be engineers and pharmacists, preachers and social workers, historians and linguists—excited about using their talents but rueful about the restricted sphere allotted to their race.

The most durable force in the shaping of the black community was the church. Since emancipation, Protestant congregations had been meeting in converted barns or more prosperous brick structures, the only durable institutions

owned and controlled by black people themselves. Free from dependence on white benefactors, black ministers often spoke more freely than did the administrators of black colleges; from the pulpit, they could mobilize their congregations for protest. On the other hand, many a preacher avoided speaking out against injustice, lest it jeopardize his hard-won status. Black churches also helped sponsor a number of black-owned small businesses—community banks, mutual insurance companies, funeral parlors, and newspapers. And it was within church bodies like the National Baptist Convention of America that thousands of black people learned such skills as fundraising and political campaigning that were denied them in secular society.

Driving church activities, of course, were matters of the spirit. Black Protestantism mingled West African styles of worship with texts and denominational creeds initiated by English colonists—particularly Baptism and Methodism. From Africa sprang the distinctive emotional tenor of a southern church service. The shouts from the pews, the call-and-response ritual that made the sermon a participatory event, and the synchronized movements and singing of the choir all had their origins on the black continent. But ministers drew their moral lessons and social metaphors from the King James Bible and Reformation theology.

The content of sermons was closely tethered to the black ordeal in America. Since the days of slavery, the story of Exodus had held a special significance; black people, like the children of Israel, were sorely tested. But someday they would escape to freedom and see their oppressors, like Pharaoh, humbled and scorned. The Crucifixion symbolized the suffering of the righteous, especially those who dared to criticize the powerful; while the Resurrection was glorious proof of divine justice.[12]

Regardless of whether or not a black minister favored open resistance against Jim Crow, the texts on which he relied gave his people hope for collective redemption. A favorite passage came from Paul's Epistle to the Ephesians: "Put on the whole armor of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against spiritual wickedness in high places." (Ephesians, 6:11–12) Given their worldly status and mastery of Christian discourse, it naturally fell to black preachers like Martin Luther King Jr. and such pious laypeople as John Lewis, who had attended a seminary, and Fannie Lou Hamer to lead the freedom movement in many parts of the South. In contrast, well-educated activists from the North, such as Stokely Carmichael and Bob Moses, tended to draw their inspiration from secular sources.

The black freedom movement arose at different times and unfolded at different paces in thousands of communities across the South. Television broadcast

only brief, episodic glimpses of the insurgency. But its remarkable local presence gave the movement the power to transform the nation's law and politics—and to catalyze every other social insurgency that followed it through that decade and into the next.

The Supreme Court's ruling in the *Brown* case gave black people and their northern white allies a jolt of confidence, but it was up to the executive branch, under the reluctant leadership of Dwight Eisenhower, to enforce the ruling "with all deliberate speed." The first sign that a grassroots movement could make headway against Jim Crow appeared in 1955, in Montgomery, Alabama—the original capital of the Confederacy.

On December 1 of that year, a forty-two-year-old seamstress and longtime NAACP activist named Rosa Parks refused to give up her seat on a municipal bus to a white patron. Bus segregation was a particularly odious feature of urban life in the South. Blacks were the majority of customers in Montgomery (most whites had cars), but none were hired to drive buses, and they typically had to pay their fares at the front of the vehicle and then get off and enter again through the back. Rosa Parks, who supported her family on $23 per week, had defied the law on several occasions—as had a scattering of other black riders, to no avail. But this time would be different.

As soon as she heard of Parks's arrest, Jo Ann Robinson, leader of the local Women's Political Council, a black group, wrote a leaflet calling for a boycott of city buses and then stayed up all night to run off fifty thousand copies. The enthusiastic response she got convinced E. D. Nixon, a union official who led the local NAACP chapter and had bailed Parks out of jail, to help organize the protest.

Robinson and Nixon recognized that Rosa Parks was an ideal symbol of the injustices of Jim Crow. She had a high school education but could find only menial work and, despite a courteous and reserved demeanor, was still called "nigger." Most important, Parks, after more than a decade of activism, was determined to break the back of Jim Crow. "Having to take a certain section [on a bus] because of your race was humiliating," she later explained, "but having to stand up because a particular driver wanted to keep a white person from having to stand was, to my mind, most inhumane."[13]

The bus boycott began on Monday, December 5—a day after black ministers had endorsed the idea from their pulpits. That evening, a twenty-six-year-old preacher who had been in town for little more than a year assumed leadership of the embryonic movement, whose main arm was the new Montgomery Improvement Association (MIA). Martin Luther King Jr. told thousands of black people packed inside the Holt Street Baptist Church and an equal number listening on loudspeakers outside that the boycott would be a "protest with love," a peaceful, if aggressive, way to oppose centuries of official, frequently violent

coercion. If the boycott succeeded, he predicted, "when the history books are written in future generations, the historians will have to pause and say, 'There lived a great people—a black people—who injected new meaning and dignity into the veins of civilization.' This is our challenge and our overwhelming responsibility."[14]

King himself had been raised in segregated comfort, son of one of Atlanta's leading black ministers. His mother's father and grandfather had also been prominent preachers. After considering a career in either medicine or law, the young King decided to enter the family profession. He went north to study theology at Boston University and spent part of his first year in Montgomery writing his dissertation. On summer jobs, he had experienced the harshness of racism and, in the North, had patronized integrated restaurants. While studying for the ministry, King had read such radical texts as *The Communist Manifesto* and pro-socialist essays by the theologian Reinhold Niebuhr. Such writings, bolstered by observing the harsh conditions faced by menial laborers, convinced him that a system that took "necessities from the masses to give luxuries to the classes" was unjust and un-Christian.[15]

As an idealistic student in the wake of World War II, King came to believe that the church should throw itself into the fight against injustice. In 1956, King

**Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., Coretta Scott King, and their baby daughter in the 1950s.**

told a convention of his fellow black Baptists that the United States had a responsibility to deploy its vast wealth "to wipe poverty from the face of the earth." But he was nominated to be leader of the MIA for less glorious reasons: as a newcomer in town, he had no enemies, and older ministers feared that taking the post might weaken their positions and endanger their lives.[16]

Over the winter, the mass protest slowly gathered force. Adopting an approach used two years before by bus boycotters in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, blacks in Montgomery organized mass carpools or walked to their jobs. Some white women, out of conviction or reluctance to clean their own houses, helped drive domestics to and from work.

It wasn't easy to keep spirits high or to persuade people to adhere to the principle of civil disobedience. Montgomery police arrested numbers of boycott organizers on the pretext that they were "intimidating" passengers. The White Citizens' Council held big rallies that stiffened the resolve of the authorities. Early in 1956, a bomb planted at King's house almost killed his wife, Coretta, and their children. When the young minister rushed home, he heard an angry black resident snarl to a policeman, "Now you got your .38 and I got mine; so let's battle it out."[17] A race riot was barely averted.

But, supported by every institution and leader in their community, the black citizens of Montgomery stayed off the buses through the spring, summer, and early fall. Finally, in mid-November, the U.S. Supreme Court came to their aid; segregation on Montgomery buses was ruled unconstitutional. "Praise the Lord," cried a black Alabamian, "God has spoken from Washington, DC."[18]

Federal assistance to the fledgling black movement enraged a growing number of southern whites, ordinary citizens and politicians alike. Echoing their Confederate forebears, they accused the Supreme Court and liberals in Congress of trying to destroy a cherished way of life. In 1957, after Congress passed a rather toothless civil rights bill, Young Democrats in one Texas town wrote to their senator, Lyndon Johnson, "The boys at the barber shop understand what [this] . . . bill has done to them and they don't like it. They will not long stand for a federal dictatorship."[19]

During the late '50s, following the *Brown* case and the Montgomery boycott, southern state legislatures moved quickly to block any efforts toward school desegregation. They attempted to ban literature issued by the NAACP and other civil rights groups. Several legislatures voted to insert a replica of the old Confederate battle standard into the flags of their states. In 1959 the Alabama legislature even authorized the burning of a children's book. The inflammatory volume, seized from public libraries, was *The Rabbits' Wedding*; it featured a marriage between a white bunny and a black one.[20]

Nearly all white southern politicians began to preach an undiluted version of the gospel of white supremacy. When Orval Faubus ran for governor of

Arkansas in 1954, he had promised to boost spending on public education and to give blacks more state jobs. But in the fall of 1957, the governor publicly defied a court order to integrate Little Rock's Central High School. Faubus became a hero to whites when President Eisenhower—who privately disagreed with the *Brown* decision but could not allow a deliberate defiance of federal authority—called in the 101st Airborne Division to protect the constitutional rights of nine children threatened by a rock-throwing mob. In other parts of the South, local governments avoided integration by transferring school property to private academies reserved for whites. This move left thousands of black children with no schools at all.

The growth of "massive resistance" by whites presented the black freedom movement with a challenge. In 1957 King and other leaders of the Montgomery boycott had founded the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) to coordinate the political activities of black churches. But how would black activists, preachers or not, push forward their agenda of integration and economic justice against what seemed a solid front of southern whites and the ambivalence of both the president and a majority in Congress?

A big part of the answer came from the prosperous city of Greensboro, North Carolina. To most of its white citizens, Greensboro seemed one of the least likely places to become a hotbed of civil rights activity. The thriving textile and insurance center boasted excellent public schools, two of the best black colleges in the South, and a reputation as a "progressive" island in a Jim Crow sea. African Americans were free to vote and run for office. In 1951, a black candidate had been elected to the city council, with substantial support from white neighborhoods. One day after the Supreme Court's ruling in the *Brown* case, the Greensboro Board of Education voted to implement desegregation. "It is unthinkable," said the superintendent of schools, "that we will try to abrogate the laws of the United States of America."[21]

Still, the whites who controlled Greensboro had no more intention of disrupting the racial status quo than did Orval Faubus. Only a thin trickle of black students entered previously all-white schools, and separation remained the rule nearly everywhere else. Relegated to "Negro jobs," African American residents earned, on average, only 40 percent of what whites did.

Greensboro city fathers prided themselves on maintaining a pleasant, civil environment. Good manners were expected of both races, and violence was abhorred. But such civility among unequals was clad, as elsewhere in the South, in a fabric of deception. Prominent whites, hearing no protests from their black maids and janitors, assumed they were content. A white attorney acknowledged the contradiction: "We're just like Georgia and Alabama," he said, "except we do it in a tuxedo and they wear suspenders."[22]

Early in 1960 four freshmen at North Carolina Agricultural and Technical (A&T), the local black state college, took a daring step away from a system based on lies. Ezell Blair Jr., Franklin McCain, Joseph McNeil, and David Richmond had been debating for several weeks about the best way for a "moral man" to resist injustice. Their discussions were inspired by the oratory of Martin Luther King Jr. and the example of Mohandas Gandhi, the pacifist leader of India's struggle for independence from British rule. On the first day of February, the four students walked downtown to a Woolworth's department store. They bought toothpaste and a few other sundries. Then they sat down at the lunch counter and politely tried to order something to eat. They were refused service and, after waiting for forty-five minutes, left the store.

The next day, they came back with twenty-three of their fellow students. The following day, they returned with enough supporters to occupy every seat in the store. By the end of the week, a group of white students from a local women's college joined in. And when the protestors were heckled and jostled by a knot of young, white working-class men brandishing Confederate flags, burly members of the A&T football team, American flags in hand, rushed to their defense. "Who do you think you are?" asked the astonished whites. "We the Union Army," came the response.[23]

The concept of mass civil disobedience spread quickly. By April, lunch counter sit-ins were under way in fifty-four different southern cities. And, before the year was over, most had achieved their limited objective. All over the country, young black people heard about the sit-ins and decided to join the movement. "Before, the Negro in the South had always looked on the defensive, cringing," remembered Bob Moses, then a twenty-six-year-old math teacher in a New York City high school. "This time they were taking the initiative. They were kids my age, and I knew this had something to do with my own life. It made me realize that for a long time I had been troubled by the problem of being a Negro and at the same time being an American. This was the answer."[24]

That April, 200 young activists came to Raleigh, North Carolina, from all over the South to discuss the future of their infant crusade. They applauded Martin Luther King Jr., who counseled them to force the authorities to fill the jail cells with demonstrators or relax the grip of segregation. But their highest regard went to two little-known figures: Ella Baker, a veteran organizer in her mid-fifties, who was critical of black ministers (including King) who sought to control the sit-inners; and James Lawson, a former missionary, who denounced the NAACP for focusing on the courts and representing only the interests of "the black bourgeoisie." Lawson urged the participants to behave as "a people no longer the victims of racial evil, who can act in a disciplined manner to implement the Constitution." And, following Baker's lead, he called for a new,

independent student group to mount disruptive campaigns all over the South. The participants responded by forming the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC).[25]

The organization that became known as "Snick" was an innovation in the black freedom struggle. Never before had college students possessed the numbers or the confidence to take a leading part, nor had nonviolent action been viewed as the chief device with which to dismantle the Jim Crow order. And, as during the heyday of the abolitionist movement, thousands of young whites signed up for the cause. SNCC's vision was of a "beloved community" that would gradually replace a culture of hatred and inequality. Only through an integrated movement could an integrated society be built.

In the late spring of 1961, a few SNCC workers took part in the Freedom Ride, a courageous argument for the efficacy of nonviolent interracial protest. Thirteen people—seven black, six white—boarded a southbound interstate bus in Washington, DC, to begin an effort planned by the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE). They were aiming to test a recent Supreme Court ruling that prohibited the segregation of bus terminals. "At every rest stop, the whites would go into the waiting room for blacks, and the blacks into the waiting room for whites, and would seek to use all the facilities, refusing to leave," CORE leader James Farmer recalled. "We felt that we could then count upon the racists of the South to create a crisis, so that the federal government would be compelled to enforce federal law. That was the rationale for the Freedom Ride."[26]

It proved a most perilous voyage. At a terminal in Rock Hill, South Carolina, John Lewis of SNCC was clubbed and beaten. In Anniston, Alabama, white vigilantes set upon a bus carrying nonviolent protestors. They pelted it with rocks, then set it on fire as the riders fled. In Montgomery, a mob kicked and pummeled everyone involved, including a cameraman for NBC television. Officials of the Kennedy administration pleaded with CORE and SNCC to call off the bloody affair lest it damage America's image at a time of rising tensions with the Soviet Union. But the rides continued into the summer, ending only when Attorney General Robert Kennedy quietly negotiated an end to separate facilities.

SNCC was never intended to be a mass membership organization like the NAACP; it was a fellowship of the dedicated few. Soon after setting up their headquarters in Atlanta and electing the group's first chairman—twenty-two-year-old Marion Barry, the son of a Mississippi sharecropper—SNCC workers fanned out to small towns and rural counties across the Deep South. They survived on salaries of $10 per week, boarding with black families and confronting the rage of local whites. Like a band of peaceful guerillas, SNCC would assist black people to free themselves from the shackles of segregation—by challenging Jim Crow laws, registering to vote, and educating themselves and their children.

Mississippi became the main testing ground. Most whites in the still largely rural Magnolia State were averse to any hint of racial equality, indeed to any black person who meant to advance beyond the status of field hand or manual laborer. Fewer than 5 percent of black Mississippians were high school graduates; about the same number were registered to vote. In 1950 there were but five black lawyers and sixty-four black doctors in the entire state.

In contrast to Greensboro, whites in Mississippi neither preached nor practiced a gospel of civility. The state's most powerful politician was Senator James Eastland, a rich landowner from Sunflower County. Eastland regularly accused the civil rights movement of wanting to destroy "the American system of government" and to promote "the mongrelization of the white race."[27]

Acts of terror enforced such savage words. In 1944, near the town of Liberty, the Reverend Isaac Simmons was lynched because he refused to sell a local white man his 220 acres of land, on which oil had been discovered. In 1955 Emmett Till, a fourteen-year-old Chicagoan who was visiting relatives in Money, Mississippi, was mutilated and killed after he either whistled at a young white woman or called her "baby." Till's murderers, who were positively identified, won acquittal after their attorney prodded the jurors (all white and male), "I am sure that every last Anglo-Saxon one of you will have the courage to free these men."[28]

SNCC workers believed that if they could crack Mississippi, the more permeable barriers in the rest of America would follow. It seemed an urgent task, as well as a moral one. Since World War II, thousands of black Mississippians had abandoned the state for points north, and the political impotence of those who remained only deepened their poverty. Children and the elderly—those who could not easily get out—outnumbered able-bodied adults.

Into this cauldron stepped a team of young organizers, headed by Bob Moses. Moses was not the typical activist, hard-driving and exhortatory. His manner was precise, gentle, almost shy. Brought up in a housing project on the fringe of Harlem, Moses had excelled in mostly white schools and earned a master's degree in philosophy from Harvard. He spoke with quiet authority about the problems of southern blacks, and no one doubted his absolute dedication to the cause.

During the summer of 1961, Moses moved into Amite County—a particularly violent corner of the state where Isaac Simmons had been murdered and where only a single black person was a registered voter, although African Americans were 55 percent of the population. There and in a number of towns in the Mississippi Delta, Bob Moses began a campaign to win back the constitutional right to the franchise.

Fortunately, Moses and his fellow crusaders did not have to fight alone. For decades, local activists, inside and outside the NAACP, had waged a lonely battle to register voters. Gaining access to the ballot was a direct way to pressure the

white establishment—and one that did not raise sensitive issues of sexual purity. SNCC organizers gradually gained the support of black Mississippians who enjoyed the respect of their communities—particularly independent farmers and small businessmen whose modest economic success was itself a challenge to the system. "The importance, the quality of the person, the local person, that you go to work with, is everything in terms of whether the project can get off the ground," Moses learned.[29] Black churches provided the movement with space for meetings, mimeograph machines, and occasionally a refuge from violence.

One of the local people Moses came to admire most was Fannie Lou Hamer. Born in 1917, the youngest of twenty children, Hamer had spent most of her life working on Delta cotton plantations in conditions little better than those of slavery. Her mother had gone blind after an accident in the fields because no doctor was available. A similar case of medical neglect had left Hamer herself with a bad limp. She and her family had no working toilet; one day, while cleaning her boss's house, Hamer noticed that the family pet had his own bathroom. "Negroes in Mississippi," she concluded, "are treated *worse* than dogs."[30]

But Hamer determined not to remain a victim. She was active in her Baptist church and, like countless African Americans before her, converted her faith into a sword of redemption. In a deep, strong voice, Hamer led movement gatherings in "freedom songs" set to such spiritual tunes as "This Little Light of Mine" and


**Fannie Lou Hamer, arguing for the seating of the interracial delegation of the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party, at the Democratic National Convention, August 1964.**

"We Shall Overcome." And her experience as a lay preacher helped make her a memorable orator in a movement filled with fine speakers. "God is not pleased with all the murdering and all the brutality and all the killing," she told a 1963 gathering. "God is not pleased that the Negro children in the state of Mississippi [are] suffering from malnutrition. God is not pleased because we have to go raggedy and work from ten to eleven hours for three lousy dollars!"[31]

The collaboration between SNCC organizers and local people in Mississippi yielded mixed results. Together, they mobilized thousands of rural blacks to learn about and attempt to exercise their legal rights. "Freedom schools" taught reading, math, and history while advising students how to surmount the various hurdles erected by white voting registrars. Led by activists like Hamer and Moses, farmers and laborers trooped repeatedly down to the county courthouse to take tests designed to frustrate them.

Mississippi whites did their worst to dissuade potential black voters from exercising their rights. In the summer of 1962, armed men attacked a SNCC office in Greenwood; organizers had to escape through a second-story window. The next year, SNCC's Jimmy Travis was shot in the head while driving with Bob Moses on a Delta highway, and Fannie Lou Hamer was badly beaten with thick leather straps by jail guards in the town of Winona. The number of black registrants barely inched upward. By 1963, the transformation of Mississippi—and of the South—had just begun.

The North was supposed to be different. African Americans who flocked to cities like New York and Chicago, Philadelphia and Cleveland, Oakland and Los Angeles had expected, if nothing else, an end to routine indignities. In certain ways, the promise was fulfilled. Northern blacks were free to vote, run for office, and sit next to whites in buses and at lunch counters. They could also discard the demeaning etiquette required of blacks in Mississippi. Some found work in department stores as well as city and state governments, expanding sectors of the economy that usually paid double the wage earned by an agricultural laborer or domestic back in Dixie.

A number of powerful white liberals joined in pushing for further improvements. Walter Reuther, head of the 1.5-million-member United Auto Workers, which had a sizable black membership, frequently denounced racism and contributed union funds to the SCLC and NAACP. Prominent figures in both major parties spoke out for equal employment and an end to all segregationist laws and practices. Although most blacks voted Democratic, some, like Jackie Robinson, stuck to the GOP, where Governor Nelson Rockefeller of New York was a strong advocate for civil rights.

To black newcomers, the North represented progress, a place where the swift changes that symbolize modernity might work for them (unlike the mechanical

cotton picker). In a 1948 essay, novelist Ralph Ellison wrote from Harlem, "Here it is possible for talented youths to leap through the development of decades in a brief twenty years, while beside them white-haired adults crawl in the feudal darkness of their childhood. Here a former cotton picker develops the sensitive hands of a surgeon, and men whose grandparents still believe in magic prepare optimistically to become atomic scientists."[32]

A few achieved such lofty goals. Local black newspapers and black magazines like *Ebony* and *Jet* heralded every success story they could find, particularly when the first member of the race achieved some cherished honor: Ralph Bunche, the UN diplomat who was the first black to win a Nobel Peace Prize (in 1950); poet Gwendolyn Brooks, the first black to win a Pulitzer Prize (also in 1950); Lorraine Hansberry, the first black dramatist to have a play produced on Broadway—*A Raisin in the Sun* (in 1959).[33]

Life in the North, however, remained difficult for the mass of African Americans. The rhetoric of liberal tolerance did little to pry open the tight network of institutions—the Catholic Church, building trades unions and apprenticeship programs, and downtown law firms—that groomed many young white men in cities like Chicago and Boston for good jobs and professional careers. It was still entirely legal for employers and unions to bar black people from taking advantage of such opportunities.

Moreover, a terrible irony greeted those African Americans who migrated from the rural South to the industrial heartland. Manufacturing plants were no longer hiring large numbers of unskilled workers, and new factories tended to be built in the suburbs, close to interstate highways and subdivisions, where few blacks lived. Most migrants could find work in the thriving economy, but jobs of the kind available to men and women without much formal education paid low wages and promised little or no advancement.

Nor could hopeful rhetoric persuade white homeowners to open their neighborhoods to newcomers of a different race or white politicians to jeopardize their careers for the cause of racial equality. Residential segregation meant that the public schools were also divided by race (despite the ruling in Brown), and whites who dominated school boards tended to channel funds disproportionately to schools attended by children who looked like them. The small but growing black middle class—made up largely of schoolteachers and other public employees—kept trying to push back the boundaries. But no breakthrough was yet forthcoming.

Dashed hopes fueled a resentment that burned even hotter than in the South where no illusions were possible. Lorraine Hansberry, who grew up in Chicago, borrowed the title of her prize-winning Broadway play from a Langston Hughes poem that asked, "What happens to a dream deferred? Does it dry up like a

raisin in the sun? Or does it explode?" Ralph Ellison compared Harlem dwellers to "some tragic people out of mythology" who "aspired to escape from its own unhappy homeland to the apparent peace of a distant mountain; but which, in migrating, made some fatal error of judgment and fell into a chasm of mazelike passages that promise ever to lead to the mountain but end ever against a wall."[34]

In Harlem, that wall had many faces. The starkest was segregated housing, which remained ubiquitous even where new local and state laws prohibited it. In New York City, the measures needed to prove a case of housing discrimination were lengthy, precise, and cumbersome. As two sociologists explained:

> One needs a respectable-looking white friend to find out first that the apartment is available; a Negro who really wants it and is ready to take it then asks for it and is told it is not available; a second white is then required in order that he may be told that the apartment is still available, so as to get a sure-fire case; then direct confrontation plus rapid action in reporting all the details to the City Commission on Human Rights is required.[35]

Not surprisingly, few landlords were ever found guilty.

In Chicago, resistance to open housing took a nastier form. From the late 1940s on, white mobs regularly attacked black families who attempted to move out of slums and into private homes and public housing developments. "A working man purchases a home . . ., secures a mortgage, improves the property and enjoys the fruits of his labor and then . . . city planners and do-gooders decide to dump a project in his back yard," complained one white community newspaper in Chicago.[36]

Mayor Richard Daley, to avoid antagonizing his white base, sought to preserve what one critic called a "cordon of hostility." Tall, fortress-like projects were erected where black people already lived, a cluster of neighborhoods that everyone began calling "the ghetto." African Americans were not legally confined, as were Jews in the seventeenth-century Italian cities where the term originated. But whenever they managed to move into a white neighborhood, the most they could hope for was that the other residents would refrain from violence and hurry to move out.

Black people in the North could never escape the psychic dilemma W. E. B. DuBois (who was born and bred in Massachusetts) had so memorably identified. They saw the dream of equal citizenship and opportunity dangled before them, yet every day their skin color marked them as individuals to be mistrusted, feared, and/or pitied.

Some African Americans in the expanding ghettos turned this image on themselves, "processing" (straightening) their hair and bleaching their skin with chemicals to look more like members of the dominant race. They were well aware that, since the days of slavery, privileges had accrued to Negroes of a paler hue.