Chapter 5
Rejection and Protest: An Historical Sketch

INTRODUCTION

The events of the summer of 1967 are in large part the culmination of 300 years of racial prejudice. Most Americans know little of the origins of the racial schism separating our white and Negro citizens. Few appreciate how central the problem of the Negro has been to our social policy. Fewer still understand that today’s problems can be solved only if white Americans comprehend the rigid social, economic and educational barriers that have prevented Negroes from participating in the mainstream of American life. Only a handful realize that Negro accommodation to the patterns of prejudice in American culture has been but one side of the coin—for as slaves and as free men, Negroes have protested against oppression and have persistently sought equality in American society.

What follows is neither a history of the Negro in the United States nor a full account of Negro protest movements. Rather, it is a brief narrative of a few historical events that illustrate the facts of rejection and the forms of protest.

We call on history not to justify, but to help explain, for black and white Americans, a state of mind.

THE COLONIAL PERIOD

Twenty years after Columbus reached the New World, African Negroes, transported by Spanish, Dutch and Portuguese traders, were arriving in the Caribbean Islands. Almost all came as slaves. By 1600, there were more than half a million slaves in the Western Hemisphere.

In Colonial America, the first Negroes landed at Jamestown in August, 1619. Within 40 years, Negroes had become a group apart, separated from the rest of the population by custom and law. Treated as servants for life, forbidden to intermarry with whites, deprived of their African traditions and dispersed among Southern plantations, American Negroes lost tribal, regional and family ties.

Through massive importation, their numbers increased rapidly. By 1776, some 500,000 Negroes were held in slavery and indentured servitude in the United States. Nearly one of every six persons in the country was a slave.

Americans disapproved a preliminary draft of the Declaration of Independence that indicted the King of England for waging “cruel war against human nature itself, violating its most sacred rights of life and liberty in the persons of a distant people who never offended him, captivating and carrying them into slavery in another hemisphere or to incur miserable death in their transportation thither.” Instead, they approved a document that proclaimed “all men are created equal.”

The statement was an ideal, a promise. But it ex-
cluded the Negroes who were held in bondage, as well as the few who were free men.

The conditions in which Negroes lived had already led to protest. Racial violence was present almost from the beginning of the American experience. Throughout the 18th century, the danger of Negro revolts obsessed many white Americans. Slave plots of considerable scope were uncovered in New York in 1712 and 1714, and they resulted in bloodshed—whites and Negroes were slain.

Negroes were at first barred from serving in the Revolutionary Army, recruiting officers having been ordered in July 1775, to enlist no "stroller, Negro or vagabond." Yet Negroes were already actively involved in the struggle for independence. Crispus Attucks, a Boston Negro, was perhaps the first American to die for freedom, and Negroes had already fought in the battles at Lexington and Concord. They were among the soldiers at Bunker Hill.

Fearing that Negroes would enlist in the British Army, which welcomed them, and facing a manpower shortage, the Continental Army accepted free Negroes. Many slaves did join the British, and, according to an estimate by Thomas Jefferson, more than 30,000 Virginia slaves ran away in 1778 alone, presumably to enlist. The states enrolled both free and slave Negroes, and finally Congress authorized military service for slaves, who were to be emancipated in return for their service. By the end of the war, about 5,000 Negroes had been in the ranks of the Continental Army. Those who had been slaves became free.

THE CONSTITUTION AND THE LAWS

Massachusetts abolished slavery in 1783, and Connecticut, Rhode Island, New Jersey, Pennsylvania and New York soon provided for gradual liberation. But relatively few Negroes lived in these states. The bulk of the Negro population was in the South, where white Americans had fortunes invested in slaves. Although the Congress banned slavery in the Northwest Territory, delegates at the Constitutional Convention compromised—a slave was counted as three-fifths of a person for determining the number of representatives from a state to Congress: Congress was prohibited from restricting the slave trade until after 1808; and the free states were required to return fugitive slaves to their Southern owners.

Growing numbers of slaves in the South became permanently fastened in bondage, and slavery spread into the new Southern regions. When more slaves were needed for the cotton and sugar plantations in the Southwest, they were ordered from the "Negro-raising" states of the Old South or, despite Congressional prohibition of the slave trade, imported from Africa.

The laws of bondage became even more institutionalized. Masters retained absolute authority over their Negroes, who were unable to leave their masters' properties without written permission. Any white person, even those who owned no slaves—and they outnumbered slaveholders six to one—could challenge a truant slave and turn him over to a public official. Slaves could own no property, could enter into no contract—not even a contract of marriage—and had no right to assemble in public unless a white person was present. They had no standing in the courts.

DISCRIMINATION AS DOCTRINE

The situation was hardly better for free Negroes. A few achieved material success, some even owned slaves themselves, but the vast majority knew only poverty. Forbidden to settle in some areas, segregated in others, they were targets of prejudice and discrimination. In the South, they were denied freedom of movement, severely restricted in their choice of occupation and forbidden to associate with whites or with slaves. They lived in constant danger of being enslaved—whites could challenge their freedom and an infractions
of the law could put them into bondage. In both North and South, they were regularly victims of mobs. In 1829, for example, white residents invaded Cincinnati’s “Little Africa,” killed Negroes, burned their property and ultimately drove half the Negro population from the city.

Some Americans, Washington and Jefferson among them, advocated the gradual emancipation of slaves, and in the 19th century, a movement to abolish slavery grew in importance and strength. A few white abolitionist leaders wanted full equality for Negroes, but others sought only to eliminate the institution itself. And some antislavery societies, fearing that Negro members would unnecessarily offend those who were unsympathetic with abolitionist principles, denied entrance to Negroes.

Most Americans were, in fact, against abolishing slavery. They refused to rent their halls for antislavery meetings. They harassed abolitionist leaders who sought to educate white and Negro children together. They attacked those involved in the movement. Mobs sometimes killed abolitionists and destroyed their property.

A large body of literature came into existence to prove that the Negro was imperfectly developed in mind and body, that he belonged to a lower order of man, that slavery was right on ethnic, economic and social grounds—quoting the Scriptures in support.

Spreading rapidly during the first part of the 19th century, slavery held less than one million Negroes in 1800 but almost four million by 1860. Although some few white Americans had freed their slaves, most increased their holdings, for the invention of the cotton gin had made cotton the heart of the Southern economy. By mid-century, slavery in the South had become a systematic and aggressive way of treating a whole race of people.

The despair of Negroes was evident. Malingering and sabotage tormented every slaveholder. The problem of runaway slaves was endemic. Some slaves—Gabriel Prosser in 1800, Denmark Vesey in 1822, Nat Turner in 1831, and others—turned to violence, and the sporadic uprisings that flared demonstrated a deep protest against a demeaning way of life.

Negroes who had material resources expressed their distress in other ways. In 1816, Paul Cuffee, Negro philanthropist and owner of a fleet of ships, transported a group of Negroes to a new home in Sierra Leone. Forty years later, Martin R. Delany, Negro editor and physician, also urged Negroes to settle elsewhere.

Equality of treatment and acceptance by the society at large were myths, and Negro protest during the first half of the 19th century took the form of rhetoric, spoken and written, which combined denunciation of undemocratic oppression together with pleas to the conscience of white Americans for the redress of grievances and the recognition of their constitutional rights.

A few Negroes joined white Americans who believed that only Negro emigration to Africa would solve racial problems. But most Negroes equated that program with
banishment and felt themselves “entitled to participate in the blessings” of America. The National Negro Convention Movement, formed in 1830, held conferences to publicize on a national scale the evils of slavery and the indignities heaped on free Negroes.

The American Moral Reform Society, founded by Negroes in 1834, rejected racial separatism and advocated uplifting “the whole human race, without distinction as to * * * complexion.” Other Negro reformers pressed for stronger racial consciousness and solidarity as the means to overcome racial barriers. Many took direct action to help slaves escape through the underground railroad. A few resisted discrimination by political action, even though most Negroes were barred from voting.

THE PATH TOWARD CIVIL WAR

The 1850’s brought Negroes increasing despair, as the problem of slavery was debated by the Nation’s leaders. The Compromise of 1850 and the Kansas-Nebraska Act of 1854 settled no basic issues. And the Dred Scott case in 1857 confirmed Negroes in their understanding that they were not “citizens” and thus not entitled to the constitutional safeguards enjoyed by other Americans.

But the abolitionist movement was growing. “Uncle Tom’s Cabin” appeared in 1852 and sold more than 300,000 copies that year. Soon presented on the stage throughout the North, it dramatized the cruelty of slave masters and Overseers and condemned a culture based on human degradation and exploitation. The election of Abraham Lincoln on an antislavery platform gave hope that the end of slavery was near.

But by the time Lincoln took office, seven Southern states had seceded from the Union, and four more soon joined them.

The Civil War and Emancipation renewed Negro faith in the vision of a racially egalitarian and integrated American society. But Americans, having been aroused by wartime crisis, would again fail to destroy what abolitionists had described as the “sins of caste.”

CIVIL WAR AND “EMANCIPATION”

Negroes volunteered for military service during the Civil War—the struggle, as they saw it, between the slave states and the free states. They were rejected.

Not until a shortage of troops plagued the Union Army late in 1862 were segregated units of “United States Colored Troops” formed. Not until 1864 did these men receive the same pay as white soldiers. A total of 186,000 Negroes served.

The Emancipation Proclamation of 1863 freed few slaves at first but had immediate significance as a symbol. Negroes could hope again for equality.

But there were, at the same time, bitter signs of racial unrest. Violent rioting occurred in Cincinnati in 1862 when Negro and Irish hands competed for work on the riverboats. Lesser riots took place in Newark, and in Buffalo and Troy, N.Y., the result of combined hostility to the war and fear that Negroes would take white jobs.

The most violent of the troubles took place in the New York City draft riots in July, 1863, when white workers, mainly Irish-born, embarked on a 3-day rampage.
Desperately poor and lacking real roots in the community, they had the most to lose from the draft. Further, they were bitterly afraid that even cheaper Negro labor would flood the North if slavery ceased to exist.

All the frustrations and prejudices the Irish had suffered were brought to a boiling point. At pitiful wages, they had slaved on the railroads and canals, had been herded into the most menial jobs as carters and stevedores. Their crumbling frame tenements were the worst slums in the city.

Their first target was the office of the provost marshal in charge of conscription, and 700 people quickly ransacked the building and set it on fire. The crowd refused to permit firemen into the area, and the whole block was gutted. Then the mob spilled into the Negro area where many Negroes were slain and thousands forced to flee town. The police were helpless until Federal troops arrived on the 3d day and restored control.

Union victory in the Civil War promised the Negroes freedom but not equality or immunity from white aggression. Scarcely was the war ended when racial violence erupted in New Orleans. Negroes proceeding to an assembly hall to discuss the franchise were charged by police and special troops who routed the Negroes with guns, bricks, and stones, killed some at once, and pursued and killed others who were trying to escape.

Federal troops restored order. But 34 Negroes and four whites were reported dead, and over 200 people were injured. General Sheridan later said:

At least nine-tenths of the casualties were perpetrated by the police and citizens by stabbing and smashing in the heads of many who had already been wounded or killed by policemen. It was not just a riot but an absolute massacre by the police, a murder which the mayor and police perpetrated without the shadow of necessity.

RECONSTRUCTION

Reconstruction was a time of hope, the period when the 13th, 14th, and 15th Amendments were adopted, giving Negroes the vote and the promise of equality.

But campaigns of violence and intimidation accompanied these optimistic expressions of a new age. The Ku Klux Klan and other secret organizations sought to suppress the emergence into society of the new Negro citizens. Major riots occurred in Memphis, Tennessee, where 46 Negroes were reported killed and 75 wounded, and in the Louisiana centers of Colfax and Couthatta, where more than 100 Negro and white Republicans were massacred.

Nevertheless, in 1875, Congress enacted the first significant civil rights law. It gave Negroes the right to equal accommodations, facilities, and advantages of public transportation, inns, theaters and places of public amusement, but the law had no effective enforcement provisions and was in fact poorly enforced. Although bills to provide Federal aid to education for Negroes were prepared, none passed, and educational opportunities remained meager. But Negroes were elected to every Southern legislature, 20 served in the U.S. House of Representatives, two represented Mississippi in the U.S. Senate and a prominent Negro politician was Governor of Louisiana for 40 days.

Opposition to Negroes in state and local government was always open and bitter. In the press and on the platform, they were described as ignorant and depraved. Critics made no distinction between Negroes who had graduated from Dartmouth and those who had graduated from the cotton fields. Every available means was employed to drive Negroes from public life. Negroes who voted or held office were refused jobs or punished by the Ku Klux Klan. One group in Mississippi boasted of having killed 116 Negroes and of having thrown their bodies into the Tallahatchie River. In a single South Carolina county, six men were murdered and more than 300 whipped during the first 6 months of 1870.

The Federal Government seemed helpless. Having

\footnote{Ladler, New York’s Bloodiest Week, American Heritage, June, 1959, p. 48.}
withdrawn the occupation troops as soon as the Southern states organized governments, the President was reluctant to send them back. In 1870 and 1871, after the 15th Amendment was ratified, Congress enacted several laws to protect the right of citizens to vote. They were seldom enforced, and the Supreme Court struck down most of the important provisions in 1875 and 1876.

As Southern white governments returned to power, beginning with Virginia in 1869 and ending with Louisiana in 1877, the process of relegating the Negro to a subordinate place in American life was accelerated. Disfranchisement was the first step. Negroes who defied the Klan and tried to vote faced an array of deceptions and obstacles: Polling places were changed at the last minute without notice to Negroes, severe time limitations were imposed on marking complicated ballots, votes cast incorrectly in a maze of ballot boxes were nullified. The suffrage provisions of state constitutions were rewritten to disfranchise Negroes who could not read, understand or interpret the Constitution. Some state constitutions permitted those who failed the tests to vote if their ancestors had been eligible to vote on January 1, 1860—a date when no Negro could vote anywhere in the South.

In 1896, there were 130,344 Negroes registered in Louisiana. In 1900, after the state rewrote the suffrage provisions of its constitution, only 5,320 remained on the registration books. Essentially the same thing happened in the other states of the former Confederacy.

SEGREGATION BY LAW

When the Supreme Court in 1883 declared the Civil Rights Act of 1875 unconstitutional, Southern states began to enact laws to segregate the races. In 1896, the Supreme Court in Plessy v. Ferguson approved “separate but equal” facilities; it was then that segregation became an established fact, by law as well as by custom. Negroes and whites were separated on public carriers and in all places of public accommodation, including hospitals and churches. In courthouses, whites and Negroes took oaths on separate Bibles. In most communities, whites were separated from Negroes in cemeteries.

Segregation invariably meant discrimination. On trains all Negroes, including those holding first-class tickets, were allotted seats in the baggage car. Negroes in public buildings had to use freight elevators and toilet facilities reserved for janitors. Schools for Negro children were at best a weak imitation of those for whites as states spent 10 times more to educate white youngsters than Negroes. Discrimination in wages became the rule, whether between Negro and white teachers of similar training and experience or between common laborers on the same job.

Some Northern states enacted civil rights laws in the 1860’s, but Negroes in fact were treated little differently in the North than in the South. As Negroes moved north in substantial numbers toward the end of the century, they discovered that equality of treatment did not exist in Massachusetts, New York, or Illinois. They were crowded by local ordinances into sections of the city where housing and public services were generally substandard. Overt discrimination in employment was a general practice and job opportunities apart from menial tasks were few. Most labor unions excluded Negroes from membership—or granted membership in separate and powerless Jim Crow locals. Yet when Negroes secured employment during strikes, labor leaders castigated them for undermining the principles of trade unionism. And when Negroes sought to move into the mainstream of community life by seeking membership in the organizations around them—educational, cultural, and religious—they were invariably rebuffed.

By the 20th century, the Negro was at the bottom of American society. Disfranchised, Negroes throughout the country were excluded by employers and labor unions from white-collar jobs and skilled trades. Jim Crow laws and farm tenancy characterized Negro existence in the South. About 100 lynchings occurred every year in the 1880’s and 1890’s; there were 161 lynchings in 1892. As increasing numbers of Negroes migrated to Northern cities, race riots became commonplace. Northern whites, even many former abolitionists, began to accept the white South’s views on race relations.

That Northern whites would resort to violence was made clear in anti-Negro riots in New York City, 1900; Springfield, Ohio, 1904; Greensburg, Ind., 1906; and Springfield, Ill., 1908.

The Springfield, Ill., riot lasted three days. It was initiated by a white woman’s charge of rape by a Negro, inflamed by newspapers, and intensified by crowds of whites gathered around the jail demanding that the Negro, arrested and imprisoned, be lynched. When the sheriff transferred the accused and another Negro to a jail in a nearby town, rioters headed for the Negro section and attacked homes and businesses owned by or catering to Negroes. White owners who showed handkerchiefs in their windows averted harm to their stores. One Negro was summarily lynched, others were dragged from houses and streetcars and beaten. By the time National Guardsmen could reach the scene, six persons were dead—four whites and two Negroes. Property damage was extensive. Many Negroes left Springfield, hoping to find better conditions elsewhere, especially in Chicago.
PROTEST IN THE EARLY 1900'S

Between his famous Atlanta Exposition Address in 1895 and his death in 1915, Booker T. Washington, principal of the Tuskegee Normal and Industrial Institute in Alabama, and the most prominent Negro in America, privately spent thousands of dollars fighting disfranchisement and segregation laws; publicly he advocated a policy of accommodation, conciliation, and gradualism. Washington believed that by helping themselves, by creating and supporting their own businesses, by proving their usefulness to society through the acquisition of education, wealth, and morality, Negroes would earn the respect of the white man and thus eventually gain their constitutional rights.

Self-help and self-respect appeared a practical and sure, if gradual, way of ultimately achieving racial equality. Washington's doctrines also gained support because they appealed to race pride: If Negroes believed in themselves, stood together, and supported each other, they would be able to shape their destinies.

In the early years of the century, a small group of Negroes led by W. E. B. Du Bois formed the Niagara Movement to oppose Washington's program. Washington had put economic progress before politics, had accepted the separate-but-equal theory and opposed agitation and protest. Du Bois and his followers stressed political activity as the basis of the Negro's future, insisted on the inequity of Jim Crow laws and advocated agitation and protest.

In sharp language, the Niagara group placed responsibility for the race problem squarely on the whites. The aims of the movement were voting rights and "the abolition of all caste distinctions based simply on race and color."

Although Booker T. Washington tried to crush his critics, Du Bois and the Negro "radicals" as they were called, enlisted the support of a small group of influential white liberals and socialists. Together, in 1909-10, they formed the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People.

The NAACP hammered at the walls of prejudice by organizing Negroes and well-disposed whites, by aiming propaganda at the whole Nation, by taking legal action in courts and legislatures. Almost at the outset of its career, the NAACP prevailed upon the Supreme Court to declare unconstitutional two discriminatory statutes. In 1913, the Court struck down the Oklahoma "grandfather clause," a provision in several Southern state constitutions that, together with voting tests, had the effect of excluding from the vote those whose ancestors were ineligible to vote in 1860. Two years later, the Supreme Court outlawed residential segregation ordinances. These NAACP victories were the first legal steps in a long fight against disfranchisement and segregation.

During the first quarter of the 20th century, the Federal Government enacted no new legislation to ensure equal rights or opportunities for Negroes and made little attempt to enforce existing laws despite flagrant violations of Negro civil rights.

In 1913, members of Congress from the South introduced bills to federalize the Southern segregation policy. They wished to ban interracial marriages in the District of Columbia, segregate white and Negro Federal employees and introduce Jim Crow laws in the public carriers of the District. The bills did not pass, but segregation practices were extended in Federal offices, shops, restrooms and lunchrooms. The Nation's Capital became as segregated as any in the former Confederate States.

EAST ST. LOUIS, 1917

Elsewhere there was violence. In July 1917, in East St. Louis, a riot claimed the lives of 39 Negroes and nine whites. It was the result of fear by white working men that Negro advances in economic, political, and social status were threatening their own security and status.

When the labor force of an aluminum plant went on strike, the company hired Negro workers. A labor union delegation called on the mayor and asked that further migration of Negroes to East St. Louis be stopped. As the men were leaving City Hall, they heard that a Negro had accidentally shot a white man during a holdup. In a few minutes rumor had replaced fact: the shooting was intentional—a white woman had been insulted—two white girls were shot. By this time, 3,000 people had congregated and were crying for vengeance.

Mobs roamed the streets beating Negroes. Policemen did little more than take the injured to hospitals and disarm Negroes.

The National Guard restored order. When the Governor withdrew the troops, tensions were still high, and scattered episodes broke the peace. The press continued to emphasize Negro crimes. White pickets and Negro workers at the aluminum company skirmished and, on July 1, some whites drove through the main Negro neighborhood firing into homes. Negro residents armed themselves. When a police car drove down the street, Negroes ridled it with gunshot.

The next day a Negro was shot on the main street, and a new riot was underway. The area became a "bloody half mile" for 3 or 4 hours; streetcars were stopped, and Negroes, without regard to age or sex,
were pulled off and stoned, clubbed, and kicked. Mob leaders calmly shot and killed Negroes who were lying in blood in the street. As the victims were placed in an ambulance, the crowds cheered and applauded.

Other rioters set fire to Negro homes, and by midnight the Negro section was in flames, and Negroes were fleeing the city. There were 48 dead, hundreds injured and more than 300 buildings destroyed.

WORLD WAR I AND POSTWAR VIOLENCE

When the United States entered World War I in 1917, the country again faced the question whether American citizens should have the right to serve, on an equal basis, in defense of their country. More than 1.7 million Negroes registered under the Selective Service Act, and some 360,000 were called into service.

The Navy rejected Negroes except as menials. The Marine Corps rejected them altogether. The Army formed them into separate units commanded, for the most part, by white officers. Only after great pressure did the Army permit Negro candidates to train as officers in segregated camps. Mistrusted at home and overseas, Negro combat units performed exceptionally well under French commanders who refused to heed American warnings that Negroes were inferior people.

Negro soldiers returning home were mobbed for attempting to use facilities open to white soldiers. Of the 70 Negroes lynched during the first year after the war, a substantial number were soldiers. Some were lynched in uniform.

Reorganized in 1915, the Ku Klux Klan was flourishing again by 1919. Its program “for uniting native-born white Christians for concerted action in the preservation of American institutions and the supremacy of the white race,” was implemented by flogging, branding with acid, tarring and feathering, hanging, and burning. It destroyed the elemental rights of many Negroes—and of some whites.

Violence took the form of lynchings and riots, and major riots by whites against Negroes took place in 1917 in Chester, Pa., and Philadelphia; in 1919 in Washington, D.C., Omaha, Charleston, Longview, Tex., Chicago, and Knoxville; in 1921 in Tulsa.

The Chicago riot of 1919 flared from the increase in Negro population, which had more than doubled in 10 years. Jobs were plentiful, but housing was not. Black neighborhoods expanded into white sections of the city and trouble developed. Between July 1917 and March 1921, 38 Negro houses were bombed, and recreational areas were sites of racial conflict.

The riot itself started on Sunday, July 27, with stone-throwing and sporadic fighting at adjoining white and Negro beaches. A Negro boy swimming off the Negro beach drifted into water reserved for whites and drowned. Young Negroes claimed he had been struck by stones and demanded the arrest of a white man. Instead, police arrested a Negro. Negroes attacked policemen, and news spread to the city. White and Negro groups clashed in the streets, two persons died and 50 were wounded. On Monday, Negroes coming home from work were attacked; later, when whites drove cars through Negro neighborhoods and fired weapons, Negroes retaliated. Twenty more were killed and hundreds wounded. On Tuesday, a handful more were dead, 129 injured. Rain began to fall; the mayor finally called in the state militia. The city quieted down after nearly a week of violence.

THE 1920’S AND THE NEW MILITANCY

In the period between the two World Wars, the NAACP dominated the strategy of racial advancement. The NAACP drew its strength from large numbers of Southern Negroes who had migrated to Northern cities and from a small but growing Negro group of professionals and businessmen. It projected the image of the “New Negro,” race-proud and self-reliant, believing in racial cooperation and self-help and determined to fight for his constitutional rights. This was reflected in the work of writers and artists known as the “Harlem Renaissance,” who drew upon the Negro’s own cultural tradition and experience.

W. E. B. Du Bois, editor of the “Crisis,” the NAACP publication, symbolized the new mood and exerted great influence. The NAACP did extraordinary service, giving legal defense to victims of race riots and unjust judicial proceedings. It obtained the release of the soldiers who had received life sentences on charges of rioting against intolerable conditions at Houston in 1917. It successfully defended Negro sharecroppers in Elaine, Ark., who in 1919 had banded together to gain fairer treatment. They had become the objects of a massive armed hunt by whites to put them “in their place,” and who were charged with insurrection when they resisted. It secured the acquittal, with the help of Clarence Darrow, of Dr. Osian Sweet and his family. The Sweats, who had moved into a white neighborhood in Detroit, shot at a mob attacking their home and killed a man. The Sweats were eventually judged to have committed the act in self-defense.
Less successful were attempts to prevent school segregation in Northern cities. Gerrymandering of school boundaries and other devices by boards of education were fought with written petitions, verbal protest, and, in several cities, school boycotts. All proved of no avail.

The thrust of the NAACP was primarily political and legal, but the National Urban League, founded in 1911 by philanthropists and social workers, sought an economic solution to the Negro's problems. Sympathetic with Booker T. Washington's point of view, believing in conciliation, gradualism, and moral suasion, the Urban League searched out industrial opportunities for Negro migrants to the cities, using arguments that appealed to the white businessman's sense of economic self-interest and also to his conscience.

Another important figure who espoused an economic program to ameliorate the Negro's condition was A. Philip Randolph, an editor of the "Messenger." He regarded the NAACP as a middle-class organization unconcerned about pressing economic problems. Taking a Marxist position on the causes of prejudice and discrimination, Randolph called for a new and radical Negro unafraid to demand his rights as a member of the working class. He advocated physical resistance to white mobs, but he believed that only united action of black and white workers against capitalists would achieve social justice.

Although Randolph addressed himself to the urban working masses, few of them ever read the "Messenger." The one man who reached the masses of frustrated and disillusioned migrants in the Northern ghettos was Marcus Garvey.

Garvey, founder in 1914 of the Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA), aimed to liberate both Africans and American Negroes from their oppressors. His utopian method was the wholesale migration of American Negroes to Africa. Contending that whites would always be racist, he stressed racial pride and history, denounced integration, and insisted that the black man develop "a distinct racial type of civilization of his own and * * * work out his salvation in his motherland." On a more practical level, he urged support of Negro businesses, and through the UNIA organized a chain of groceries, restaurants, laundries, a hotel, printing plant, and steamship line. When several prominent Negroes called the attention of the Federal government to irregularities in the management of the steamship line, Garvey was jailed and then deported, for having used the mails to defraud.

But Garvey dramatized, as no one before, the bitterness and alienation of the Negro slumdweller who, having come North with great expectations, found only overcrowded and deteriorating housing, mass unemployment, and race riots.

THE DEPRESSION

Negro labor, relatively unorganized and the target of discrimination and hostility, was hardly prepared for the depression of the 1930's. To a disproportionate extent, Negroes lost their jobs in cities and worked for starvation wages in rural areas. Although organizations like the National Urban League tried to improve employment opportunities, 65 percent of Negro employable were in need of public assistance by 1935.

Public assistance was given on a discriminatory basis, especially in the South. For a time, Dallas and Houston gave no relief at all to Negro or Mexican families. In general, Negroes had more difficulty than whites in obtaining assistance, and the relief benefits were smaller. Some religious and charitable organizations excluded Negroes from their soup kitchens.

THE NEW DEAL

The New Deal marked a turning point in American race relations. Negroes found much in the New Deal to complain about: discrimination existed in many agencies; Federal housing programs expanded urban ghettos; money from the Agricultural Adjustment Administration went in the South chiefly to white landowners, while crop restrictions forced many Negro sharecroppers off the land. Nevertheless, Negroes shared in relief, jobs and public housing, and Negro leaders, who felt the open sympathy of many highly placed New Dealers, held more prominent political positions than at any time since President Taft's administration. The creation of the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO), with its avowed philosophy of nondiscrimination, made the notion of an alliance of black and white workers something more than a visionary's dream.

The depression, the New Deal and the CIO reoriented Negro protest to concern with economic problems. Negroes conducted "Don't-Buy-Where-You-Can't-Work" campaigns in a number of cities, boycotted and picketed commercial establishments owned by whites and sought equality in American society through an alliance with white labor.
The NAACP came under attack from some Negroes. Du Bois resigned as editor of the *Crisis* in 1934 in part because he believed in the value of collective racial economic endeavor and saw little point in protesting disfranchisement and segregation without more actively pursuing economic goals. Younger critics also disagreed with NAACP’s gradualism on economic issues.

Undeterred, the NAACP broadened the scope of its legal work, fought a vigorous though unsuccessful campaign to abolish the poll tax, and finally won its attack on the white primaries in 1941 through the Supreme Court. But the heart of its litigation was a long-range campaign against segregation and the most obvious inequities in the Southern school systems: the lack of professional and graduate schools and the low salaries received by Negro teachers. Not until about 1950 would the NAACP make a direct assault against school segregation on the legal ground that separate facilities were inherently unequal.

**WORLD WAR II**

During World War II, Negroes learned again that fighting for their country brought them no nearer to full citizenship. Rejected when they tried to enlist, they were accepted into the Army according to the proportion of the Negro population to that of the country as a whole—but only in separate units—and those mostly noncombat. The United States thus fought racism in Europe with a segregated fighting force. The Red Cross, with the government’s approval, separated Negro and white blood in banks established for wounded servicemen—even though the blood banks were largely the work of a Negro physician, Charles Drew.

Not until 1949 would the Armed Forces begin to adopt a firm policy against segregation.

Negroes seeking employment in defense industries were embittered by policies like that of a West Coast aviation factory which declared openly that “the Negro will be considered only as janitors and in other similar capacities. * * * Regardless of their training as aircraft workers, we will not employ them.”

Two new movements marked Negro protest: the March on Washington and the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE). In 1941, consciously drawing on the power of the Negro vote and concerned with the economic problems of the urban shanty dweller, A. Philip Randolph threatened a mass Negro convergence on Washington unless President Roosevelt secured employment for Negroes in the defense industries. The President’s Executive Order 8802, establishing a federal Fair Employment Practices Commission, forestalled the demonstration. Even without enforcement powers, the FEPC set a precedent for treating fair employment practice as a civil right.

CORE was founded in 1942–43, when certain leaders of the Fellowship of Reconciliation, a pacifist organization, became interested in the use of nonviolent direct action to fight racial discrimination. CORE combined Gandhi’s techniques with the sit-in, derived from the sit-down strikes of the 1930’s. Until about 1959, CORE’s main activity was attacking discrimination in places of public accommodation in the cities of the Northern and Border states, and as late as 1961, two-thirds of its membership and most of its national officers were white.

Meanwhile, wartime racial disorders had broken out sporadically—in Mobile, Los Angeles, Beaumont, Tex., and elsewhere. The riot in Detroit in 1943 was the most destructive. The Negro population in the city had risen sharply and more than 50,000 recent arrivals put immense pressures on the housing market. Neighborhood turnover at the edge of the ghetto bred bitterness and sometimes violence, and recreational areas became centers of racial abrasion. The Federal regulations requiring employment standards in defense industries also angered whites, and several unauthorized walkouts had occurred in automobile plants after Negro workers were upgraded. Activities in the city of several leading spokesmen for white supremacy—Gerard L. K. Smith, Frank J. Norris and Father Charles Coughlin—inflamed many white southerners who had migrated to Detroit during the war.

On Sunday, June 20, rioting broke out on Belle Isle, a recreational spot used by both races but predominantly by Negroes. Fist fights escalated into a major conflict. The first wave of looting and bloodshed began in the Negro ghetto “Paradise Valley” and later spread to other sections of the city. Whites began attacking Negroes as they emerged from the city’s all-night movie theatres in the downtown area. White forays into Negro residential areas by car were met by gunfire. By the time Federal troops arrived to halt the racial conflict, 25 Negroes and nine whites were dead, property damage exceeded $2 million and a legacy of fear and hate descended on the city.

Again, in 1943, a riot erupted in Harlem, New York, following the attempt of a white policeman to arrest a Negro woman who was defended by a Negro soldier. Negro rioters assaulted white passersby, overturned parked automobiles, tossed bricks and bottles at policemen. The major emphasis was on destroying property, looting and burning stores. Six persons died, over 500 were injured and more than 100 were jailed.
THE POSTWAR PERIOD

White opinion in some quarters of America had begun to shift to a more sympathetic regard for Negroes during the New Deal, and the war had accelerated that movement. Thoughtful whites had been painfully aware of the contradiction in opposing Nazi racial philosophy with racially segregated military units. In the postwar years, American racial attitudes became more liberal as new nonwhite nations emerged in Asia and Africa and took increasing responsibilities in international councils.

Against this background, the growing size of the Northern Negro vote made civil rights a major issue in national elections and, ultimately, in 1957, led to the establishment of the Federal Civil Rights Commission, which had the power to investigate discriminatory conditions throughout the country and to recommend corrective measures to the President. Northern and Western states outlawed discrimination in employment, housing and public accommodations, while the NAACP, in successive court victories, won judgments against racially restrictive covenants in housing, segregation in interstate transportation and discrimination in publicly-owned recreational facilities. The NAACP helped register voters, and in 1954, Brown v. Board of Education became the triumphant climax of the NAACP's campaign against educational segregation in the public schools of the South.

CORE, which had been conducting demonstrations in the Border states, its major focus on public accommodations, began experimenting with direct-action techniques to open employment opportunities. In 1947, in conjunction with the Fellowship of Reconciliation, CORE conducted a "Journey of Reconciliation"—what would later be called a "Freedom Ride"—in the states of the upper South to test compliance with the Supreme Court decision outlawing segregation on interstate buses. The resistance met by riders in some areas and the sentencing of 2 of them to 30 days on a North Carolina road gang dramatized the gap between American democratic theory and practice.
The Montgomery, Ala., bus boycott of 1955–56 captured the imagination of the nation and of the Negro community in particular, and led to the growing use of direct-action techniques. It catapulted into national prominence the Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr., who, like the founders of CORE, held to a Gandhian belief in the principles of pacifism.

Even before a court decision obtained by NAACP attorneys in November, 1956, desegregated the Montgomery buses, a similar movement had started in Tallahassee, Fla. Afterward, another one developed in Birmingham, Ala. In 1957, the Tuskegee Negroes undertook a 3-year boycott of local merchants after the state legislature gerrymandered nearly all of the Negro voters outside of the town's boundaries. In response to a lawsuit filed by the NAACP, the Supreme Court ruled the Tuskegee gerrymander illegal.

These events were widely heralded. The "new Negro" had now emerged in the South—militant, no longer fearful of white hoodlums or mobs and ready to use his collective strength to achieve his ends. In this mood, King established the Southern Christian Leadership Conference in 1957 to coordinate direct-action activities in Southern cities.

Nonviolent direct action attained popularity not only because of the effectiveness of King's leadership, but because the older techniques of legal and legislative action had had limited success. Impressive as the advances in the 13 years after World War II were, in spite of state laws and Supreme Court decisions, something was still clearly wrong. Negroes remained disfranchised in most of the South, though in the 12 years following the outlawing of the white primary in 1944, the number of Negroes registered in Southern states had risen from about 250,000 to nearly a million and a quarter. Supreme Court decisions desegregating transportation facilities were still being largely ignored in the South. Discrimination in employment and housing continued, not only in the South but also in Northern states with model civil rights laws. The Negro unemployment rate steadily moved upward after 1954. The South reacted to the Supreme Court's decision on school desegregation by attempting to outlaw the NAACP, intimidating civil rights leaders, calling for "massive resistance" to the Court's decision, curtailing Negro voter registration and forming White Citizens' Councils.

REVOLUTION OF RISING EXPECTATIONS

At the same time, Negro attitudes were changing. In what has been described as a "revolution in expectations," Negroes were gaining a new sense of self-respect and a new self-image as a result of the civil rights movement and their own advancement. King and others were demonstrating that nonviolent direct action could succeed in the South. New laws and court decisions and the increasing support of white public opinion gave American Negroes a new confidence in the future.

Negroes no longer felt that they had to accept the humiliations of second-class citizenship. Ironically, it was the very successes in the legislatures and the courts that, more perhaps than any other single factor, led to intensified Negro expectations and resulting dissatisfaction with the limitations of legal and legislative programs. Increasing Negro impatience accounted for the rising tempo of nonviolent direct action in the late 1950's, culminating in the student sit-ins of
1960 and the inauguration of what is popularly known as the "Civil Rights Revolution" or the "Negro Revolt."

Many believe that the Montgomery boycott ushered in this Negro Revolt, and there is no doubt that, in its importance, by projecting the image of King and his techniques, it had great importance. But the decisive break with traditional techniques came with the college student sit-ins that swept the South in the winter and spring of 1960. In dozens of communities in the upper South, the Atlantic coastal states and Texas, student demonstrations secured the desegregation of lunch counters in drug and variety stores. Arrests were numbered in the thousands, and brutality was evident in scores of communities. In the Deep South, the campaign ended in failure, even in instances where hundreds had been arrested, as in Montgomery, Orangeburg, South Carolina, and Baton Rouge. But the youth had captured the imagination of the Negro community and to a remarkable extent of the whole Nation.

**STUDENT INVOLVEMENT**

The Negro protest movement would never be the same again. The Southern college students shook the power structure of the Negro community, made direct action temporarily preeminent as a civil rights tactic, speeded up the process of social change in race relations, and ultimately turned the Negro protest organizations toward a deep concern with the economic and social problems of the masses.

Involved in this was a gradual shift in both tactics and goals: from legal to direct action, from middle and upper class to mass action, from attempts to guarantee the Negro's constitutional rights to efforts to secure economic policies giving him equality of opportunity, from appeals to the sense of fair play of white Americans to demands based upon power in the black ghetto.

The successes of the student movement threatened existing Negro leadership and precipitated a spirited rivalry among civil rights organizations. The NAACP and SCLC associated themselves with the student movement. The organizing meeting of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) at Raleigh, North Carolina, in April, 1960, was called by Martin Luther King, but within a year the youth considered King too cautious and broke with him.

The NAACP now decided to make direct action a major part of its strategy and organized and reactivated college and youth chapters in the Southern and Border states.

CORE, still unknown to the general public, installed James Farmer as national director in January, 1961, and that spring joined the front rank of civil rights organizations with the famous Freedom Ride to Alabama and Mississippi that dramatized the persistence of segregated public transportation. A bus-burning resulted in Alabama. Hundreds of demonstrators spent a month or more in Mississippi prisons. Finally, a new order from the Interstate Commerce Commission desegregating all interstate transportation facilities received partial compliance.
ORGANIZATIONAL DIFFERENCES

Disagreement over strategy and tactics inevitably became intertwined with personal and organizational rivalries. Each civil rights group felt the need for proper credit in order to obtain the prestige and financial contributions necessary to maintain and expand its own programs. The local and national, individual and organizational clashes stimulated competition and activity that further accelerated the pace of social change.

Yet there were differences in style. CORE was the most interracial. SCLC appeared to be the most deliberate. SNCC staff workers lived on subsistence allowances and seemed to regard going to jail as a way of life. The NAACP continued the most varied programs, retaining a strong emphasis on court litigation, maintaining a highly effective lobby at the national capital and engaging in direct-action campaigns. The National Urban League under the leadership of Whitney M. Young, Jr., appointed executive director in 1961, became more outspoken and talked more firmly to businessmen who had previously been treated with utmost tact and caution.

The role of whites in the protest movement gradually changed. Instead of occupying positions of leadership, they found themselves relegated to the role of followers. Whites were likely to be suspect in the activist organizations. Negroes had come to feel less dependent on whites, more confident of their own power, and they demanded that their leaders be black. The NAACP had long since acquired Negro leadership but continued to welcome white liberal support. SCLC and SNCC were from the start Negro-led and Negro-dominated. CORE became predominantly Negro as it expanded in 1962 and 1963; today all executives are Negro, and a constitutional amendment adopted in 1965 officially limited white leadership in the chapters.

A major factor intensifying the civil rights movement was widespread Negro unemployment and poverty; an important force in awakening Negro protest was the meteoric rise to national prominence of the Black Muslims, established around 1930. The organization reached the peak of its influence when more progress toward equal rights was being made than ever before in American history, while at the same time the poorest groups in the urban ghettos were stagnating.

The Black Muslims preached a vision of the doom of the white “devils” and the coming dominance of the black man, promised a utopian paradise of a separate territory within the United States for a Negro state, and offered a practical program of building Negro business through hard work, thrift and racial unity. To those willing to submit to the rigid discipline of the movement, the Black Muslims organization gave a sense of purpose and dignity.
“FREEDOM NOW!” AND CIVIL RIGHTS LAWS

As the direct-action tactics took more dramatic form, as the civil rights groups began to articulate the needs of the masses and draw some of them to their demonstrations, the protest movement in 1963 assumed a new note of urgency, a demand for complete “Freedom Now!” Direct action returned to the Northern cities, taking the form of massive protests against economic, housing and educational inequities, and a fresh wave of demonstrations swept the South from Cambridge, Maryland, to Birmingham, Alabama. Northern Negroes launched street demonstrations against discrimination in the building trade unions, and, the following winter, school boycotts against de facto segregation.

In the North, 1963 and 1964 brought the beginning of the waves of civil disorders in Northern urban centers. In the South, incidents occurred of brutal white resistance to the civil rights movement, beginning with the murders of Mississippi Negro leader Medgar Evers, and of four Negro schoolgirls in a church in Birmingham. These disorders and the events in the South are detailed in the introduction to Chapter 1, the Profiles of Disorder.

The massive anti-Negro resistance in Birmingham and numerous other Southern cities during the spring of 1963 compelled the nation to face the problem of race prejudice in the South. President Kennedy affirmed that racial discrimination was a moral issue and asked Congress for a major civil rights bill. But a major impetus for what was to be the Civil Rights Act of 1964 was the March on Washington in August, 1963.

Early in the year, A. Philip Randolph issued a call for a March on Washington to dramatize the need for jobs and to press for a Federal commitment to job action. At about the same time, Protestant, Jewish and Catholic churches sought and obtained representation on the March committee. Although the AFL-CIO national council refused to endorse the March, a number of labor leaders and international unions participated.

Reversing an earlier stand, President Kennedy approved the March. A quarter of a million people, about 20 percent of them white, participated. It was more than a summation of the past year of struggle and aspiration. It symbolized certain new directions: a deeper concern for the economic problems of the masses, more involvement of white moderates and new demands from the most militant, who implied that only a revolutionary change in American institutions would permit Negroes to achieve the dignity of citizens.

President Kennedy had set the stage for the Civil Rights Act of 1964. After his death, President Johnson took forceful and effective action to secure its enactment. The law settled the public accommodations issue in the South’s major cities. Its voting section, however, promised more than it could accomplish. Martin Luther King and SCLC dramatized the issue locally with demonstrations at Selma, Alabama, in the spring of 1965. Again the national government was forced to intervene, and a new and more effective voting law was passed.

FAILURES OF DIRECT ACTION

Birmingham had made direct action respectable; Selma, which drew thousands of white moderates from the North, made direct action fashionable. Yet as early as 1964, it was becoming evident that, like legal action, direct action was of limited usefulness.

In Deep South states like Mississippi and Alabama, direct action had failed to desegregate public accommodation in the sit-ins of 1960–61. A major reason was that Negroes lacked the leverage of the vote. The demonstrations of the early 1960’s had been successful principally in places like Atlanta, Nashville, Durham, Winston-Salem, Louisville, Savannah, New Orleans, Charleston, and Dallas—where Negroes voted and could swing elections. Beginning in 1961, Robert Moses, of SNCC, with the cooperation of CORE and NAACP, established voter registration projects in the cities and county seats of Mississippi. He succeeded in registering only a handful of Negroes, but by 1964, he had generated enough support throughout the country to enable the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party, which he had created, to challenge dramatically the seating of the official white delegates from the state at the Democratic National Convention.

In the black ghettos of the North, direct action also largely failed. Street demonstrations did compel employers from supermarkets to banks, to add Negroes to their work force in Northern and Western cities, and even in some Southern cities where the Negroes had considerable buying power. However, separate and inferior schools, slum housing, and police hostility proved invulnerable to direct attack.
NEW DIRECTIONS

Although Negroes were being hired in increasing numbers, mass unemployment and underemployment remained. As economist Vivian Henderson pointed out in his testimony before the Commission:

No one can deny that all Negroes have benefited from civil rights laws and desegregation in public life in one way or another. The fact is, however, that the masses of Negroes have not experienced tangible benefits in a significant way. This is so in education and housing. It is critically so in the area of jobs and economic security. Expectations of Negro masses for equal job opportunity programs have fallen far short of fulfillment.

Negroes have made gains. There have been important gains. But the masses of Negroes have been virtually untouched by those gains.

Faced with the intransigence of the Deep South and the inadequacy of direct action to solve the problems of the slumdwellers, Negro protest organizations began to diverge. The momentum toward unity, apparent in 1963, was lost. At the very time that white support for the protest movement was rising markedly, militant Negroes felt increasingly isolated from the American scene. On two things, however, all segments of the protest movement agreed: (1) Future civil rights activity would have to focus on economic and social discrimination in the urban ghettos; and (2) while demonstrations would still have a place, the major weapon would have to be the political potential of the black masses.

By the middle of the decade, many militant Negro leaders of SNCC and CORE began to turn away from American society and the "middle-class way of life." Cynical about the liberals and the leaders of organized labor, they regarded compromise, even as a temporary tactical device, as anathema. They talked more of "revolutionary" changes in the social structure and of retaliatory violence, and increasingly rejected white assistance. They insisted that Negro power alone could compel the white "ruling class" to make concessions. Yet they also spoke of an alliance of Negroes and unorganized lower class whites to overthrow the "power structure" of capitalists, politicians, and bureaucratic labor leaders who exploited the poor of both races by dividing them through an appeal to race prejudice.

At the same time that their activities declined, other issues, particularly Vietnam, diverted the attention of the country, and of some Negro leaders, from the issue of equality. In civil rights organizations, reduced financing made it increasingly difficult to support staff personnel. Most important was the increasing frustration of expectations that affected the direct-action advocates of the early 1960's—the sense of futility growing out of the feeling that progress had turned out to be "tokenism," that the compromises of the white community were sedatives rather than solutions and that the current methods of Negro protest were doing little for the masses of the race.

As frustration grew, the ideology and rhetoric of a number of civil rights activists became angrier. One man more than any other—a black man who grew up believing whites had murdered his father—became a spokesman for this anger: Malcolm X, who perhaps best embodied the belief that racism was so deeply ingrained in white America that appeals to conscience would bring no fundamental change.

"BLACK POWER"

In this setting, the rhetoric of Black Power developed. The precipitating occasion was the Meredith March from Memphis to Jackson in June, 1966, but the slogan expressed tendencies that had been present for a long time and had been gaining strength in the Negro community.

Black Power first articulated a mood rather than a program: disillusionment and alienation from white America and independence, race pride, and self-respect, or "black consciousness." Having become a household phrase, the term generated intense discussion of its real meaning, and a broad spectrum of ideologies and programmatic proposals emerged.

In politics, Black Power meant independent action—Negro control of the political power of the black ghettos and its use to improve economic and social conditions. It could take the form of organizing a black political party or controlling the political machinery within the ghetto without the guidance or support of white politicians. Where predominantly Negro areas lacked Negroes in elective office, whether in the rural Black Belt of the South or in the urban centers, Black Power advocates sought the election of Negroes by voter registration campaigns, by getting out the vote, and by working for redrawning electoral districts. The basic belief was that only a well-organized and cohesive bloc of Negro voters could provide for the needs of the black masses. Even some Negro politicians allied to the major political parties adopted the term "Black Power" to describe their interest in the Negro vote.

In economic terms, Black Power meant creating independent, self-sufficient Negro business enterprise, not only by encouraging Negro entrepreneurs but also by forming Negro cooperatives in the ghettos and in the predominantly black rural counties of the South.
In the area of education, Black Power called for local community control of the public schools in the black ghettos.

Throughout, the emphasis was on self-help, racial unity, and, among the most militant, retaliatory violence, the latter ranging from the legal right of self-defense to attempts to justify looting and arson in ghetto riots, guerrilla warfare, and armed rebellion.

Phrases like “Black Power,” “Black Consciousness,” and “Black is Beautiful” enjoyed an extensive currency in the Negro community, even within the NAACP and among relatively conservative politicians, but particularly among young intellectuals and Afro-American student groups on predominantly white college campuses. Expressed in its most extreme form by small, often local, fringe groups, the Black Power ideology became associated with SNCC and CORE.

Generally regarded today as the most militant among the important Negro protest organizations, they have developed different interpretations of the Black Power doctrine. SNCC calls for totally independent political action outside the established political parties, as with the Black Panther Party in Lovandas County, Ala.; rejects the political alliances with other groups until Negroes have themselves built a substantial base of independent political power; applauds the idea of guerrilla warfare; and regards riots as rebellions.

CORE has been more flexible. Approving the SNCC strategy, it also advocates working within the Democratic Party, forming alliances with other groups and, while seeking to justify riots as the natural explosion of an oppressed people against intolerable conditions, advocates violence only in self-defense. Both groups favor cooperatives, but CORE has seemed more inclined toward job-training programs and developing a Negro entrepreneurial class, based upon the market within the black ghettos.

OLD WINE IN NEW BOTTLES

What is new about Black Power is phraseology rather than substance. Black Consciousness has roots in the organization of Negro churches and mutual benefit societies in the early days of the Republic, the antebellum Negro convention movement, the Negro colonization schemes of the 19th century, Du Bois’ concept of Pan-Africanism, Booker T. Washington’s advocacy of race pride, self-help, and racial solidarity, the Harlem Renaissance, and the Garvey Movement. The decade after World War I—which saw the militant, race-proud “new Negro,” the relatively widespread theory of retaliatory violence and the high tide of the Negro-support-of-Negro-business ideology—exhibits striking parallels with the 1960’s.

The theme of retaliatory violence is hardly new for American Negroes. Most racial disorders in American history until recent years were characterized by white attacks on Negroes. But Negroes have retaliated violently in the past.

Black Power rhetoric and ideology actually express a lack of power. The slogan emerged when the Negro protest movement was slowing down, when it was finding increasing resistance to its changing goals, when it discovered that nonviolent direct action was no more a panacea than legal action, when CORE and SNCC were declining in terms of activity, membership, and financial support. This combination of circumstances provoked anger deepened by impotence. Powerless to make any fundamental changes in the life of the masses—powerless, that is, to compel white America to make those changes, many advocates of Black Power have retreated into an unreal world, where they see an outnumbered and poverty-stricken minority organizing itself entirely separately from whites and creating sufficient power to force white America to grant its demands. To date, the evidence suggests that the situation is much like that of the 1840’s, when a small
group of intellectuals advocated slave insurrections, but stopped short of organizing them. The Black Power advocates of today consciously feel that they are the most militant group in the Negro protest movement. Yet they have retreated from a direct confrontation with American society on the issue of integration and, by preaching separatism, unconsciously function as an accommodation to white racism. Much of their economic program, as well as their interest in Negro history, self-help, racial solidarity and separation, is reminiscent of Booker T. Washington. The rhetoric is different, but the ideas are remarkably similar.

THE MEANING

By 1967, whites could point to the demise of slavery, the decline of illiteracy among Negroes, the legal protection provided by the constitutional amendments and civil rights legislation, and the growing size of the Negro middle class. Whites would call it Negro progress, from slavery to freedom and toward equality.

Negroes could point to the doctrine of white supremacy, its persistence after emancipation and its influence on the definition of the place of Negroes in American life. They could point to their long fight for full citizenship when they had active opposition from most of the white population and little or no support from the Government. They could see progress toward equality accompanied by bitter resistance. Perhaps most of all, they could feel the persistent, pervasive racism that kept them in inferior segregated schools, restricted them to ghettos, barred them from fair employment, provided double standards in courts of justice, inflicted bodily harm on their children and blighted their lives with a sense of hopelessness and despair.

In all of this and in the context of professed ideals, Negroes would find more retrogression than progress, more rejection than acceptance.
Until the middle of the 20th century, the course of Negro protest movements in the United States, except for slave revolts, was based in the cities of the North, where Negroes enjoyed sufficient freedom to mount a sustained protest. It was in the cities, North and South, that Negroes had their greatest independence and mobility. It was natural, therefore, for black protest movements to be urban-based—and, until the last dozen years or so, limited to the North. As Negroes migrated from the South, the mounting strength of their votes in northern cities became a vital element in drawing the Federal Government into the defense of the civil rights of Southern Negroes. While rural Negroes today face great racial problems, the major unsolved questions that touch the core of Negro life stem from discrimination embedded in urban housing, employment, and education.

Over the years the character of Negro protest has changed. Originally, it was a white liberal and Negro upper class movement aimed at securing the constitutional rights of Negroes through propaganda, lawsuits, and legislation. In recent years, the emphasis in tactics shifted first to direct action and then—among the most militant—to the rhetoric of “Black Power.” The role of white liberals declined as Negroes came to direct the struggle. At the same time, the Negro protest movement became more of a mass movement, with increasing participation from the working classes. As these changes were occurring, and while substantial progress was being made to secure constitutional rights for the Negroes, the goals of the movement were broadened. Protest groups now demand special efforts to overcome the Negro’s poverty and cultural deprivation—conditions that cannot be erased simply by ensuring constitutional rights.

The central thrust of Negro protest in the current period has aimed at the inclusion of Negroes in American society on a basis of full equality, rather than at a fundamental transformation of American institutions. There have been elements calling for a revolutionary overthrow of the American social system or for a complete withdrawal of Negroes from American society. But these solutions have had little popular support. Negro protest, for the most part, has been firmly rooted in the basic values of American society, seeking not their destruction but their fulfillment.