REVOLT OF THE BLACK AMERICANS

At 12:52 P.M., May 17, 1954, 335 years after the first Negro indentures arrived in America and 91 years after the Emancipation Proclamation, Earl Warren, Chief Justice of the United States, began reading the Supreme Court's decision in the case of *Brown* v. *the Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas.* The reading of the unanimous decision ended precisely at 1:20 P.M. The Negro civil rights movement that spanned the 1950's and 1960's can be marked from that hour.

In the past, the Court had turned away such cases. It had abided by an 1896 ruling in *Plessy* v. *Ferguson* which held that constitutional rights were not impaired if states, counties, or municipalities provided Negroes with facilities that were "separate but equal." The *Plessy* decision read in part:

> . . . If the two races are to meet on terms of social equality, it must be the result of natural affinities, a mutual appreciation of each other's merits and a voluntary consent of individuals. . . . Legislation is powerless to eradicate racial instincts or to abolish distinctions based upon physical differences. . . .[1]

In the picture on the opposite page, participants in the March on Washington in August, 1963, wait for ceremonies to begin at the Lincoln Memorial.

[1]Quoted in Henry Steele Commager, ed., *Documents of American History* (New York: Appleton, Century, 1963), p. 178.

Now the court had re-examined that doctrine. In a government in which both the president and Congress were conservative in character, the judiciary had emerged as the chief liberal force of the 1950's. The Court held unconstitutional the "separate-but-equal" doctrine and ordered the desegregation of schools everywhere "with all deliberate speed." The 1954 decision declared:

A woman on a cold day in February, chopping scrap wood to burn in her ramshackle house in an Atlanta slum. In the 1950's, more and more southern blacks preferred to face the hardships of life in the North than to remain in places that gave them no hope for the future.

> . . . Does segregation of children in Public Schools solely on the basis of race, even though the physical facilities and other tangible factors may be equal, deprive the children of the minority group of equal educational opportunities? We believe that it does.
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> . . . To separate them from others of similar age and qualifications solely because of their race generates a feeling of inferiority as to their status in the community that may affect their hearts and minds in a way unlikely to be undone.
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> . . . We conclude that in the field of public education the doctrine of "separate but equal" has no place. Separate educational facilities are inherently unequal. Therefore we hold that the plaintiffs and others similarly situated for whom the actions have been brought are by reason of the segregation complained of, deprived of the equal protection of the laws guaranteed by the Fourteenth Amendment.[2]

In the years following World War I, Negroes had migrated in increasing numbers from the South to the urban centers of the North. Resulting residential patterns made segregation not a peculiarly southern problem, but one of nationwide proportions. In the South segregation of many kinds was embedded in the legal system; in the North residential segregation became firmly rooted in custom. However, Negroes did improve their earning power by moving out of the South. By the mid-1950's, the consumption of goods and services by American blacks had reached $20 billion annually. In numbers, in demographic distribution, and as an economic force, blacks consistently advanced in the years between 1919 and 1954.

[2] Ibid., pp. 621–622.

One significant step forward in the movement toward equality was the desegregation of the armed forces, one of the quietest revolutions in racial matters the United States has ever experienced. It was not, however, a sudden revolution—black leaders had been demanding equality of treatment in the armed forces since World War I. In the spring of 1941, when American involvement in the war then raging in Europe seemed inevitable, A. Philip Randolph of the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters and other influential Negroes informed President Franklin D. Roosevelt that they would lead a massive protest march on Washington unless Roosevelt issued an executive order banning discrimination in war industries and the armed services. On March 25, 1941, the president met their demands halfway by ordering an end to discrimination in war industries and apprenticeship programs; the march was called off, although Negro leaders continued to work for the integration of the armed forces throughout the war.

Asa Philip Randolph at a rally in 1946. A labor organizer who won recognition and better working conditions for his predominantly black union through years of bitter struggle, Randolph considered nonviolent direct action like strikes and marches the best way to create mass social pressure for change. "Nothing," he said, "stirs and shapes public sentiment like physical action."

Well over a million American Negroes served in World War II, nearly all of them in segregated units commanded predominantly by white officers and most of them in menial, noncombat roles. In November, 1945, a special Army board submitted a report urging the abolition of separate Negro divisions. The board also recommended that personnel assignments be made only on the basis of merit and that the question of race be ignored; the board further urged that separate black divisions be abolished. Little was done to implement these recommendations, however, until July 26, 1948, when President Harry S. Truman issued an executive order stating, "It is the declared policy of the president that there shall be equality of treatment and opportunity for all persons in the Armed Services without regard to race, color, religion, or national origin." Truman's order was prompted by political as well as moral considerations. He had been under pressure for some time from A. Philip Randolph, who had threatened to urge Negro youth to resist induction through civil disobedience unless something were done about discrimination in the armed forces, and he needed all the minority votes he could get to beat the Republican candidate, Thomas E.

A black soldier fighting in the Mekong Delta of Vietnam in 1966.

Dewey, in that fall's presidential election. Whatever the reasons behind it, the order was largely effective in putting an end to segregation in the services. A seven-member board was appointed to make sure that the president's policy was carried out, and a desegregation deadline was set for June 30, 1954. The Korean War hastened the process, and the integration of the armed forces was accomplished with relatively few incidents of open racial conflict. In the difficult area of discrimination, however, the order was less effective, and throughout the 1950's and 1960's Negro leaders continued to complain that blacks in the military did not receive equal opportunities for training and advancement.

Another factor affecting the civil rights movement of the 1950's and 1960's was the G.I. Bill—legislation offering a variety of benefits to veterans of World War II, Korea, and Vietnam. Under the G.I. Bill, black as well as white veterans could buy houses without down payments, and many Negroes took advantage of this benefit to move their families from southern rural poverty to northern cities and suburbs where they found better employment opportunities, better schools, and better living conditions. Equally important, the bill provided a monthly stipend plus the cost of books and tuition for veterans who wished to attend a college or university. The G.I. Bill helped to produce an average of ten thousand Negro college graduates a year during the 1950's, creating, in effect, a new black leadership. The bill also helped to focus attention on the problems of school segregation.

In addition to increasing numbers, geographical redistribution, economic power, desegregation of the armed forces, and the G.I. Bill, a number of other forces contributed to racial change in the 1950's and 1960's. Among them were (1) the emergence of independent African nations, a source of pride and encouragement to black Americans; (2) the growing importance of television, a communications medium through which Negroes could publicize and dramatize their cause; and (3) the increasing role of blacks in the world of entertainment and sports. All these factors influenced the mid-century civil rights movement.

Although it was posed by a newsman, this picture expresses the renewed hope felt by many black Americans in 1954.

The event considered most significant and far-reaching in its effects, however, was the 1954 Supreme Court decision. The response in the border states was mild, and prompt. Within two years, Maryland and West Virginia had each integrated schools in all but two counties, and Missouri had moved beyond the two-thirds mark with its desegregation efforts. Kentucky had integrated all but seven of its schools by 1960.

The former Confederate states moved much more slowly. By 1960, Alabama, Mississippi, Georgia, and South Carolina had not integrated at all. Louisiana, Virginia, North Carolina, and Florida, by that same date, had integrated less than one-tenth of one percent of their black school populations.

Resistance to desegregation took many forms. Some state legislatures passed resolutions declaring the Court's decision unconstitutional. Other states authorized local school boards to close the public schools and use private funds for segregated private schools. White supremacists in some communities revived the Ku Klux Klan and White

Orval Faubus at a press conference in 1958.

Citizens' Councils. Violence became commonplace—by the first of January, 1959, 530 incidents of racial violence, reprisal, and intimidation had been recorded. The list included beatings, murders, and the bombing of houses and churches, along with assorted public demonstrations.

The most spectacular conflict occurred at Little Rock, Arkansas, in September, 1957. Although the school board had approved a plan for desegregation, a group of citizens obtained a court injunction to prevent Central High School's integration. Governor Orval Faubus ordered national guard units to surround the school, ostensibly to "maintain order," and when Negro students approached, the guardsmen turned them away. After conferring with President Dwight D. Eisenhower, Faubus withdrew the guardsmen and replaced them with Little Rock police. Upon hearing that nine Negro students had been admitted, an angry crowd engaged the police in a physical confrontation, whereupon President Eisenhower nationalized the Arkansas guard and dispatched a thousand men of an airborne division to Little Rock. Order was restored and the last of the troops left in December.

Mrs. Rosa Parks in 1956, after she was arrested for having helped to organize the Montgomery bus boycott.

The Birth of Nonviolent Resistance

Heartened by the 1954 Supreme Court decision, American Negroes began a crusade against all kinds of segregation, taking action most frequently on the local level. In Montgomery, Alabama, on December 1, 1955, an act of quiet courage reshaped the career of Martin Luther King, Jr., a scholarly young minister recently installed in his first church. On that day Mrs. Rosa Parks, a black seamstress, defied a local law by refusing to obey a bus driver's order that she give up her seat to a white passenger and move to the back of the bus. To protest her arrest and to dramatize their demands for fairer treatment of Negro passengers and for the employment of Negro drivers, Dr. King and other members of the black community organized a one-day bus boycott. On December 5, fully ninety percent of the Negroes in Montgomery who ordinarily rode buses either walked, hitchhiked, or stayed home. Although this

Paratroopers sent by President Eisenhower escorted black students through the streets and into Little Rock Central High School in September, 1957.

show of solidarity was completely ignored by the white authorities, its importance did not escape black leaders. Their demands, originally limited and local in nature, escalated into an all-out campaign for desegregated public transportation. They extended the boycott, set up picket lines, solicited donations to underwrite costs, and organized a two-hundred-car motor pool for those who lived too far from work, school, or shopping areas to walk. The boycott proved too effective for the white community to ignore for long. The bus company lost money and was forced to lay off drivers and cut back schedules. The success of the boycott, and its implications for the future, frightened whites throughout the South. Ninety black leaders were indicted under an old antiunion law prohibiting conspiracy to obstruct the operation of a business; King, the first to be tried and convicted, immediately appealed the case to a higher court. Other blacks were arrested on a variety of charges, and all those who participated actively in the boycott were harassed continually by white authorities. Finally, on December 13, 1956, in a suit brought by the

This photograph was taken on the second day of the first sit-in in the history of the civil rights movement. The young men are students at North Carolina A. & T. College; the lunch counter is in the Woolworth store in Greensboro.

National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), the United States Supreme Court declared unconstitutional the Alabama state law requiring segregation on public buses. Throughout the year-long ordeal, the black residents of Montgomery had honored King's pleas for nonviolence. "Nonviolence," he had said, "is the most potent technique for oppressed people. Unearned suffering is redemptive." Nonviolent direct action, combined with litigation in the courts, had indeed proved to be a potent technique for the civil rights movement. Very quickly, King became nationally prominent and his strategy gained wide acceptance.

The great wave of "sit-ins" that began early in 1960 was in the Martin Luther King tradition. On February 1, four freshmen from the all-black Agricultural and Technical College at Greensboro, North Carolina, entered a Woolworth store and purchased some small items. Then they sat down at a white lunch counter and asked for coffee. They were not served, but they would not move. Policemen came into the store but took no action, and the four students remained quietly at the counter until the store closed. Soon Negro students were sitting-in at lunch counters all over the South. Gradually, segregated meal facilities faded from the southern scene.

The next major wave of black action came in the spring of 1961 when young "Freedom Riders," organized by the Congress for Racial Equality (CORE) and the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) began a bus tour of the South to test the Interstate Commerce Commission's 1955 ruling against segregation on trains and buses and in terminals involved in interstate commerce. Most southern bus terminals still had segregated waiting rooms, and these became the targets of protest. Freedom Riders were assaulted in Birmingham, Alabama, and many were arrested in Jackson, Mississippi, on which they finally concentrated. During the summer of 1961, white and black college students from all over the country went to Jackson to violate the local segregation laws and be jailed.

The sharpest conflict between the federal and a state government since the Civil War erupted in the fall of 1962

when James Meredith, a black Air Force veteran, attempted to enroll at the University of Mississippi. After exhausting all legal delays, Governor Ross Barnett, who had taken over the conduct of the matter from university officials, simply refused to allow Meredith to enter. The federal court of appeals at New Orleans found Barnett in contempt and on Sunday evening, September 30, federal marshals slipped Meredith onto the campus and into a dormitory room. A crowd converged, and two people were killed in the violence which followed. Regular army troops and national guardsmen dispatched from Washington finally restored order, and Meredith registered and began to attend classes.

James Meredith on September 25, 1962, after the court decision affirming his right to enroll at the University of Mississippi was announced.

Blacks did not achieve their goal, "completely free by '63"—the centennial of the Emancipation Proclamation—but they had moved a short distance upward from second-class citizenship. By the early 1960's, older Negro organizations like the NAACP and the Urban League had been overshadowed by a cluster of new bodies like CORE, SNCC, the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC), and the Negro Labor Council. One trend, disquieting to moderate black leaders, was the rapid growth of racist and extremist movements among northern urban Negroes. In New York and Chicago, groups like the Black Muslims were gaining support. For many blacks progress seemed painfully slow, and they sought more militant means to achieve their goals.

Racial strife erupted repeatedly during the spring and summer of 1963. In April and May came the conflict in Birmingham, Alabama, where Martin Luther King, Jr., had organized nonviolent demonstrations to protest segregation. National television audiences were treated to scenes of white policemen clubbing blacks, poking them with electric cattle prods, setting dogs on them, and pummeling them with high-pressure streams of water from fire hoses. A good many blacks—King among them—were arrested. Segregation died a slow death in Birmingham, but it did die, despite white violence and terrorist tactics—including the bombing of King's brother's home.

During the summer of 1963, more than fourteen thou-

Martin Luther King, Jr., in jail in Florida, in 1962. He and others had been arrested for trespassing while attempting to integrate an all-white motel. During his later stay in the Birmingham jail, Dr. King wrote a now-famous letter in which he examined the moral basis of law and of civil disobedience.

sand demonstrators were arrested throughout the South for marching, sitting-in, and praying-in at churches. On June 11, Medgar Evers, an NAACP leader in Jackson, Mississippi, was gunned down from ambush and killed. In a televised address to the nation that month, President Kennedy called attention to the events in Birmingham and to protests and demonstrations elsewhere. It was time, he said, for America to fulfill its obligation to provide freedom for everyone:

> The fires of frustration and discord are burning in every city, North and South, where legal remedies are not at hand. Redress is sought in the streets, in demonstrations, parades, and protests which create tensions and threaten violence and threaten lives.
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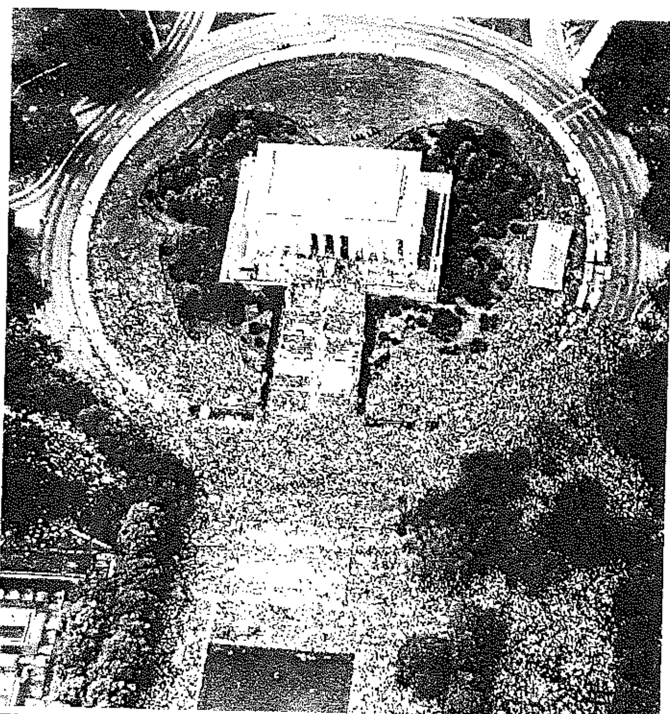
> We face, therefore, a moral crisis as a country and as a people. It cannot be left to increased demonstrations in the streets. It cannot be quieted by token moves or talks. It is a time to act in the Congress, in your state and local legislative body and, above all, in all of our daily lives. . . .
>
> A great change is at hand, and our task, our obligation, is to make that revolution, that change, peaceful and constructive for all.
>
> Those who do nothing are inviting shame as well as violence. Those who act boldly are recognizing right as well as reality.

The civil rights program that Kennedy sent to Congress for consideration required desegregation of all public facilities. It also required school districts which had not complied with the 1954 decision to file desegregation plans, and provided for a cut-off of federal funds to schools which failed to desegregate.

Demonstrations continued throughout the summer. The largest and most dramatic of these was a march on Washington, D.C., organized by A. Philip Randolph and Bayard Rustin. On August 28, more than two hundred thousand people gathered to hear speeches at the Lincoln Memorial. Martin Luther King, Jr., was the last to speak:

> Now is the time to make real the promises of democracy. Now is the time to rise from the dark and



The Lincoln Memorial, seen from the air, on August 28, 1963.

desolate valley of segregation to the sunlit path of racial justice. Now is the time to lift our nation from the quicksands of racial injustice to the solid rock of brotherhood. Now is the time to make justice a reality for all of God's children.

There will be neither rest nor tranquility in America until the Negro is granted his citizenship rights. The whirlwinds of revolt will continue to shake the foundations of our nation until the bright day of justice emerges.

And that is something that I must say to my people who stand on the threshold which leads to the palace of justice. In the process of gaining our rightful place we must not be guilty of wrongful deeds.

Again and again, we must rise to the majestic heights of meeting physical force with soul force. The marvelous new militancy which has engulfed the Negro community must

Dr. King telling the marchers at the Lincoln Memorial of his dream for them, for black people, and for all Americans.

not lead us to a distrust of all white people, for many of our white brothers as evidenced by their presence here today have come to realize that their destiny is tied up with our destiny.

There are those who are asking the devotees of civil rights, "When will you be satisfied?" We can never be satisfied as long as our bodies, heavy with the fatigue of travel, cannot gain lodging in the motels of the highways and the hotels of the cities.

We can never be satisfied as long as our children are stripped of their selfhood and robbed of their dignity by signs saying "for white only." We cannot be satisfied as long as the Negro in Mississippi cannot vote and the Negro in New York believes he has nothing for which to vote.

No, we are not satisfied and we will not be satisfied until justice rolls down like water and righteousness like a mighty stream.

Now, I am not unmindful that some of you have come here out of great trials and tribulations. Some of you have come fresh from narrow jail cells.

Continue to work with the faith that honor in suffering is redemptive. Go back to Mississippi, go back to Alabama, go back to South Carolina, go back to Georgia, go back to Louisiana, go back to the slums and ghettos of our Northern cities, knowing that somehow this situation can and will be changed. Let us not wallow in the valley of despair.

Now, I say to you today, my friends, so even though we face the difficulties of today and tomorrow, I still have a dream. It is a dream deeply rooted in the American dream. I have a dream that one day this nation will rise up and live out the true meaning of its creed: "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal."

I have a dream that one day on the red hills of Georgia the sons of former slaves and the sons of former slaveowners will be able to sit down together at the table of brotherhood.

I have a dream that one day even the state of Mississippi, a state sweltering with the people's injustice, sweltering with the heat of oppression, will be transformed into an oasis of freedom and justice.

I have a dream that my four little children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin, but by the content of their character.

This is our hope. This is the faith that I go back to the South with—with this faith we will be able to hew out of the mountain of despair a stone of hope.[3]

George Wallace.

The civil rights bill made slow progress through Congress, but it was eventually passed in February, 1964. In the decade which had begun with the Supreme Court's 1954 decision banning school segregation and which ended with the enactment of the far-reaching Civil Rights Act of 1964, virtually all the legal bulwarks of racial discrimination were swept aside. Yet despite these legal and moral victories, won at great cost, the gap between black and white America remained tragically wide and seemed to be widening.

In the spring of 1965 came another massive march. Early in the year, Martin Luther King, Jr., called for street demonstrations in Selma, Alabama, to hasten voter registration. In February, King and several hundred Negro pickets were arrested. Dr. King then organized a march from Selma to Montgomery, the state capital, as a symbolic gesture. Alabama Governor George Wallace attempted to prevent the march, but a federal court overruled him and President Lyndon B. Johnson called out units of the national guard to protect the marchers. In late March the followers of Dr. King walked the fifty-four miles and some twenty-five thousand of them entered Montgomery. Among the marchers were many whites, and clergymen of all faiths.

A Change of Character

By the mid-1960's the civil rights movement was changing in important ways. Whereas the main focus of the black struggle had been on the South, the center of attention

[3]Martin Luther King, Jr., "I Have a Dream," a speech made in Washington, D.C., on August 28, 1963. © 1963 by Martin Luther King, Jr. Reprinted by permission of Joan Daves.

was shifting to northern and western cities. The thrust of the movement had been for voting and political rights, but now it was beginning to include a drive for greater economic opportunity. And while at first the movement had been directed toward the goal of racial integration, there were increasing doubts among blacks about the possibility of achieving this goal and even about the desirability of integration. Black separatism was growing. There were, at the same time, increasing numbers of blacks who rejected nonviolence as a philosophy, or at least doubted its effectiveness as a tactical weapon. Some blacks advocated violence, or the threat of it, as a means to attain their goals. Organizations such as the NAACP, CORE, and SNCC underwent significant splits and white membership began to dwindle.

Many young militants had been in the movement from childhood and they could not agree that their activities had produced significant results. Expectations had exceeded reality, and disappointment and disillusion triggered bitter impulses of retribution. The Negro temper was changing from a demand for full political participation in a democracy to a bristling revolt against conditions in the ghettos. The slogan "black power," which became popular in 1966, both excited and confused the movement. It symbolized different things to different people, but on the matter of glorifying black there was growing consensus—"cultural nationalism," "soul," and "black is beautiful."

The riot in the Watts section of Los Angeles in 1965 was a pivotal point for the whole movement. Few events had ever shaken the nation so deeply. For 144 hours, from August 11 to August 16, Watts was a battlefield. John A. McCone, the former director of the Central Intelligence Agency, headed the Governor's Commission on the Los Angeles Riots. He filed the following report:

> On August 11, 1965, California Highway Patrolman Lee W. Minikus, a Caucasian, was riding his motorcycle along 122nd Street, just south of the Los Angeles City boundary, when a passing Negro motorist told him he had just seen a car that was being driven recklessly. Minikus

gave chase and pulled the car over at 116th and Avalon, in a predominately Negro neighborhood, near but not in Watts. It was 7:00 P.M.

The driver was Marquette Frye, a 21-year-old Negro, and his older brother, Ronald, 22, was a passenger. Minikus asked Marquette to get out and take the standard Highway Patrol sobriety test. Frye failed the test, and at 7:05 P.M., Minikus told him he was under arrest. He radioed for his motorcycle partner, for a car to take Marquette to jail, and a tow truck to take the car away.

Ronald Frye, having been told he couldn't take the car when Marquette was taken to jail, went to get his mother so that she could claim the car. They returned to the scene about 7:15 P.M. as the second motorcycle patrolman, the patrol car, and tow truck arrived. The original group of 25 to 50 curious spectators had grown to 250 to 300 persons.

Mrs. Frye approached Marquette and scolded him for drinking. Marquette, who until then had been peaceful and cooperative, pushed her away and moved toward the crowd, cursing and shouting at the officers that they would have to kill him to take him to jail. The patrolman pursued Marquette and he resisted.

The watching crowd became hostile, and one of the patrolmen radioed for more help. Within minutes, three more highway patrolmen arrived. Minikus and his partner were now struggling with both Frye brothers. Mrs. Frye, now belligerent, jumped on the back of one of the officers and ripped his shirt. In an attempt to subdue Marquette, one officer swung at his shoulder with a night stick, missed and struck him on the forehead, inflicting a minor cut. By 7:23 P.M., all three of the Fryes were under arrest, and other California Highway Patrolmen and, for the first time, Los Angeles Police officers had arrived in response to the call for help.

Officers on the scene said there were now more than 1,000 persons in the crowd. About 7:25 P.M., the patrol car with the prisoners, and the tow truck pulling the Frye car, left the scene. At 7:31 P.M., the Fryes arrived at a nearby sheriff's substation.

As the officers were leaving the scene, someone in the

crowd spat on one of them. They stopped withdrawing and two highway patrolmen went into the crowd and arrested her.

Following these arrests, all officers withdrew at 7:40 P.M. As the last police car left the scene, it was stoned by the now irate mob. The young woman arrested for spitting was wearing a barber's smock and the false rumor spread that she was pregnant and had been abused by the police.

Between 8:15 P.M. and midnight, the mob stoned automobiles, pulled Caucasian motorists out of their cars and beat them, and menaced a police field command post which had been set up in the area. By 1:00 A.M., the outbreak seemed to be under control, but until early morning hours, there were sporadic reports of unruly mobs, vandalism, and rock throwing. Twenty-nine persons were arrested.

A young man injured in the Watts riot tells a police medical officer what happened to him.

On Thursday morning, there was an uneasy calm, and this continued throughout the day, yet the worst day of the riot was Friday. The riot moved out of the Watts areas and burning and looting spread over wide areas of Southeast Los Angeles several miles apart. At 1:00 A.M. Saturday, there were 100 engine companies fighting fires in the area. Snipers shot at firemen as they fought new fires. That night, a fireman was crushed and killed on the fire line by a falling wall, and a deputy sheriff was killed when another sheriff's shotgun was discharged in a struggle with rioters.

By midnight, Friday, another 1,000 National Guard troops were marching shoulder to shoulder clearing the streets. By 3:00 A.M. Saturday, 3,356 guardsmen were on the streets, and the number continued to increase until the full commitment of 13,000 guardsmen was reached by midnight on Saturday.

The final statistics are staggering. There were 34 persons killed and 1,032 reported injuries, including 90 Los Angeles police officers, 136 firemen, 10 national guardsmen, 23 persons from other governmental agencies, and 773 civilians; 118 of the injuries resulted from gunshot wounds. Of the 34 killed, one was a fireman, one was deputy sheriff and one a Long Beach policeman.

It has been estimated that the loss of property attributed

Newark, New Jersey, during the riot that followed Dr. King's death in 1968.

to the riots was over $40 billion. More than 600 buildings were damaged by burning and looting. Of this number, more than 200 were totally destroyed by fire. The rioters concentrated primarily on food markets, liquor stores, furniture stores, clothing stores, department stores, pawn shops. Arson arrests numbered 27 and 10 arson complaints were filed. Between 2,000 and 3,000 fire alarms were recorded during the riot, 1,000 of these between 7:00 A.M. on Friday and 7:00 A.M. on Saturday.

There were 3,438 adults arrested, 71% for burglary and theft. The number of juveniles arrested was 514, 81% for burglary and theft. Of the adults arrested, 1,232 had never been arrested before; 1,164 had a "minor" criminal record; 1,042 with "major" criminal records. Of the juveniles arrested, 257 had never been arrested before; 212 had a "minor" criminal record; 43 had a "major" criminal record. Of the adults arrested, 2,057 were born in 16 southern states whereas the comparable figure for juveniles was 131.[4]

[4]John McCone, *A Report by the Governor's Commission on the Los Angeles Riots* (Los Angeles, 1965), pp. 10–15.

There were riots in 1966, but none as serious as the Watts upheaval. Then in 1967 came worse ones in Newark and Detroit. The assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr., in Memphis, Tennessee, in April, 1968, touched off still more, in Chicago and other cities, including the nation's capital.

Late in 1967, President Johnson appointed a special panel chaired by Illinois Governor Otto Kerner to analyze the causes of the riots. The evidence did not suggest that the riots were instigated by black militant organizations or that they were anything but spontaneous. The Kerner report concluded: "Our nation is moving toward two societies, one black, one white—separate and unequal."

> This course would lead to the permanent establishment of two societies; one predominantly white and located in the suburbs, in smaller cities, and in outlying areas, and one largely Negro located in central cities.[5]

Here the report seems to have missed the point. The nation had never been one society. Americans had always coexisted in a dual society, one black and one white.

Pluralism or Assimilation?

Historically, societies have struggled with the problem of minority groups with varying success. Solutions have ranged from "pluralistic" societies in which each group retained its identity and heritage to those societies that have attempted to absorb or "assimilate" all minorities into a common whole by integrating diverse traditions and dissimilarities. It has made little difference which solution societies elect—both courses have generally led to violence.

In *The Souls of Black Folk,* written nearly three quarters of a century ago, W. E. B. Du Bois provided a moving portrait of a dispossessed people in search of themselves in an alien world.

[5] *Report of the U.S. National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders* (New York: Bantam Books, 1968), p. 398.

> . . . The Negro is a sort of seventh son, born with a veil, and gifted with second-sight in this American world—a world which yields him no true self-consciousness, but only lets him see himself through the revelation of the other world. It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One ever feels his twoness—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.
>
> The history of the American Negro is the history of this strife—this longing to attain self-conscious manhood, to merge his double self into a better and truer self. In this merging he wishes neither of the older selves to be lost. He would not Africanize America, for America has too much to teach the world and Africa. He would not bleach his Negro soul in a flood of white Americanism, for he knows that Negro blood has a message for the world. He simply wished to make it possible for a man to be both Negro and an American. . . .[6]

The historic aim of the civil rights movement in America had been the achievement of equal liberties, rights, and status for all Americans, irrespective of race or color—a goal loosely described by the term integration. The Swedish social scientist Gunnar Myrdal, in his massive study of American race relations, *An American Dilemma*, published in 1940, provided the classic definition of the faith that underlay the integrationist program. Although his studies documented the prevalence of racism in every aspect of American life, Myrdal maintained that the American commitment to equality was the stronger force and would ultimately prevail:

[6]W. E. B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk* (New York: Fawcett Books, 1961), pp. 16–17.

> The bright side is that the conquering of color caste is America's own inherent desire. The nation early laid down as the moral basis for its existence the principles of equality and liberty. . . . The great reason for hope is that the country has a national experience of uniting racial and cultural diversities and a national theory, if not a consistent practice of freedom and equality for all. What America is constantly reaching for is democracy at home and abroad. The main trend of its history is the gradual realization of the American creed.[7]

Hope in the potential fulfillment of that American creed heartened members of the civil rights movement during its dramatic confrontation with the forces of institutionalized racism during the 1950's and the early 1960's. It inspired the stirring dream of the movement's most striking figure, Martin Luther King, Jr., "that one day this nation will rise up and live out the true meaning of its creed: 'We hold these truths to be self-evident; that all men are created equal. . . .'" It also sustained King's belief that prejudice could be conquered by nonviolent pressure on the conscience of the nation:

> When, for decades, you have been able to make a man compromise his manhood by threatening him with a cruel and unjust punishment, and when suddenly he turns upon you and says: "Punish me, I do not deserve it, I will accept it so that the world will know that I am right and you are wrong," you hardly know what to do. You feel defeated and secretly ashamed. You know that this man is as good as you are.[8]

The Technique of Nonviolence

In his account of the Montgomery boycott, *Stride toward Freedom,* Martin Luther King, Jr., traced his intellectual antecedents to a number of philosophers and religious

[7] Gunnar Myrdal, *An American Dilemma: The Negro Problem and Modern Democracy* (New York: Harper & Row, 1944), p. 1021.
[8] King, "I Have a Dream."

thinkers, including Reinhold Niebuhr, the theologian, and Mahatma Gandhi, the Indian nationalist leader who was assassinated in 1948. King stated that since nonviolence played such a positive role in the Montgomery movement, he felt obligated to discuss the basic characteristics of his philosophy.

Mohandas K. Gandhi. "Mahatma" was a title of honor and affection given him by his followers. It meant "great soul."

First, he said, "It must be emphasized that nonviolent resistance is not a method for cowards; it does resist. Gandhi often said if cowardice is the only alternative to violence, it is better to fight."[9]

Second, King asserted, an outstanding characteristic of nonviolence is that it does not seek to defeat or humiliate the opponent, but to win his friendship and understanding. The nonviolent resister, King went on to say, must often express his protest through noncooperation or boycotts. But these are merely means to awaken a sense of moral shame in the opponent—the end is redemption and reconciliation. The aftermath of nonviolence is the creation of the beloved community, while the aftermath of violence is tragic bitterness.

A third characteristic of this method, according to King, is the directing of the attack against *forces* of evil rather than against *persons* who happen to be doing evil. It is evil that the nonviolent resister seeks to defeat, not the person victimized by it. Elaborating on this concept, King told the people of Montgomery:

> The tension in this city is not between white people and Negro people. The tension is at bottom, between justice and injustice, between the forces of light and the forces of darkness. And if there is a victory, it will be a victory not merely for fifty thousand Negroes, but a victory of justice and the forces of light. We are out to defeat injustice and not white persons who may be unjust.[10]

Fourth, King said, nonviolent resistance is characterized by the fact that it avoids not only external physical violence

[9]Martin Luther King, Jr., *Stride toward Freedom: The Montgomery Story* (New York: Harper & Row, 1958), p. 101.
[10]Ibid., pp. 106–107.

but also internal violence of spirit. Until his death, King believed that little had been accomplished by the violence in Watts:

> Negroes contend that the 1965 Watts riot and the other riots in various cities represented effective Civil Rights action. But those who express this view always end up with stumbling words when asked what concrete gains have been won as a result. At best the riots have produced a little additional anti-poverty money. Nowhere have the riots won any concrete improvement such as have the organized protest demonstrations. Fewer people have been killed in ten years of nonviolent demonstrations across the South than were killed in one night of rioting in Watts.[11]

In another of his books, *Why We Can't Wait,* King asserted that the Negro method of nonviolent direct action by its very nature challenges the myth of inferiority. Even the most reluctant were forced to recognize that no inferior people could choose and successfully pursue a course involving such extensive sacrifice, bravery, and skill.

Dr. King also noted that one aspect of the civil rights struggle that received little attention was its contribution to the whole society. In winning rights for himself the Negro produced substantial benefits for the nation. The revolution for human rights opened for scrutiny unhealthy areas in American life and permitted a new and wholesome healing to take place. Eventually, King believed, the civil rights movement would contribute infinitely more to the nation than simply the eradication of racial injustice. It would enlarge the concept of brotherhood to a vision of total interrelatedness. Nonviolence, the answer to Negroes' need of a means to achieve equality, wrote King, might become the answer to the most desperate need of all humanity.

Whitney Young.

Whitney Young, the head of the Urban League who died in 1971, suggested that there must be people who in the interest of justice and equality walk the picketlines in

[11]Martin Luther King, Jr., *Where Do We Go from Here: Chaos or Community?* (New York: Harper & Row, 1967), pp. 27–28.

front of restaurants, hotels, theaters, and business establishments. But, he added, those same people and others, with equal zest and determination, must walk to the libraries, to the adult education classes, and to the voting registrar's office. And they must take time to serve on policy-making bodies of agencies and institutions. Reality dictates, said Young, that those who enter the new doors of opportunity must have the skills to qualify, the money to pay, and the confidence and security of knowing that they are, in fact, equal citizens.

An Alternate Technique—Militancy and Separatism

In the mingled optimism and frustration of the mid-1960's, black nationalism, the radical alternative to integration, made a powerful appeal to the black community, and the black protest movement took a decisive turn in the summer of 1966. James Meredith, the Negro activist who had broken the color bar at the University of Mississippi four years earlier, was shot and wounded while attempting a "walk against fear" through the heart of the segregationist Mississippi Delta region. Shortly thereafter, several civil rights groups organized a protest march on Jackson, Mississippi, Meredith's original goal. During the course of the march, young Stokely Carmichael, the newly elected head of SNCC, riveted the attention of the nation on his demand for "black power." Thrusting aside the counsels of established spokesmen like King and Roy Wilkins, head of the NAACP, Carmichael galvanized his black rural audiences with appeals to racial pride and with demands for separatist black economic and political action. Before the march ended, Carmichael had sparked a national controversy over the opposing concepts of black nationalism and integration.

Stokely Carmichael.

In *Where Do We Go from Here,* Martin Luther King, Jr., described the march in Mississippi and how the phrase "black power" became a national slogan. Stokely Carmichael contended that the inclusion of whites in the march should be de-emphasized and that the main appeal should be for black participation. King surmised that much of the change had its psychological roots in the experience

Some of the organizers of a black power conference talk with the press. Seated, from left, are comedian Dick Gregory, who later ran for president on the Peace and Freedom party ticket; Ron Karenga, head of a Los Angeles group called US; and H. Rap Brown of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee. The conference, held in Newark in July, 1967, attracted more civil rights activists, from more diverse groups, than any other in the history of the movement to that point.

of SNCC in Mississippi during the summer of 1964, when a large number of northern white students had come to help in the civil rights struggle there. That summer Carmichael and others in SNCC concluded that white help was not beneficial to Negroes because it simply increased their sense of inadequacy.

According to King's account, he and others had been discussing the need of new slogans in the movement. King suggested "black consciousness" or "black equality," and

Carmichael came up with the phrase "black power." SCLC officials sided with King, insisting that "black power" not be projected nationally, but CORE and SNCC officials agreed with Carmichael and insisted that it be used. Those who had spoken for SCLC were wrong; the slogan caught on instantly.

King called "black power" a cry of disappointment stimulated by the great dissatisfaction with the federal government and its timidity in implementing civil rights laws. Black power, he further commented, was in its broad and positive meaning a call to black people to amass their political and economic strength to achieve legitimate goals. He also described black power as a call for pooling black financial resources to achieve economic security. Implicitly—and often explicitly as well—it indicated a belief in black separatism. The black power movement, according to King, represented black conviction that the Negro could never win and that the ghetto was infinite.

Martin Luther King, Jr., was skeptical, at best, of the efficacy of black power. Just as the Negro cannot achieve political power in isolation, he said, neither can he gain economic power through separation. Black power alone, he thought, was no more insurance against social injustice than white power. And, he asserted, probably the most unattractive feature of black power was its unconscious and sometimes conscious call for retaliatory violence.

On one side of the debate, integrationist-minded Negro leaders and their white liberal sympathizers continued, as novelist James Baldwin put it, to "point to a new day which is coming in America." But, Baldwin said,

> this day has been coming for nearly one hundred years. Viewed solely in the light of this country's moral professions, this lapse is inexcusable. Even more important, however, is the fact that there is desperately little in the record to indicate that white America ever seriously desired—or desires—to see this day arrive.[12]

[12] James Baldwin, *Nobody Knows My Name* (New York: Dial Press, 1961), p. 70.

The black nationalists' assertion that it was the material substance of racism and not the rhetoric of equality that defined the reality of American life had, Baldwin suggested, "all the evidence on its side." Other observers shared that somber view. Charles Silberman, reviewing the racial scene in the mid-twentieth century, wrote that it was no longer possible to believe in the "American Dilemma" as Myrdal had defined it.

> The tragedy of race relations in the United States is that there is no American Dilemma. White Americans are not torn and tortured by the conflict between their devotion to the American creed and their actual behavior. They are upset by the current state of race relations, to be sure. But what troubles them is not that justice is being denied but that their peace is being shattered and their business interrupted.[13]

In its forthright acceptance of that situation, the black power movement found its most fundamental strength. It was, black nationalists argued persuasively, foolhardy and degrading for black people to continue to place their trust in the eventual fulfillment of America's egalitarian ideals. "Being born here in America doesn't make you an American," said Malcolm X, a Black Muslim and perhaps the most effective of the black nationalist spokesmen. "Why, if birth made you an American, you wouldn't need any legislation, you wouldn't need any amendments to the constitution."[14]

The proponents of black power argued that the black community should reject integration as a goal and nonviolence as a tactic, arguing that blacks must achieve control of their own lives and the institutions which affect them. The advocates of the many variants of black power and black nationalism included mystical religious seers, pragmatic students of traditional American interest-bloc

[13] Charles Silberman, *Crisis in Black and White* (New York: Random House, Vintage Books, 1964), pp. 9–10.

[14] Quoted in Fred Powledge, *Black Power, White Resistance* (Cleveland: World Publishing Co., 1967), p. 241.

politics, and radical exponents of revolutionary socialist theories. Their combined influence in the American Negro community, particularly among the younger generation, expanded enormously.

Because of the flamboyant utterances of many of their members and the free publicity given them by the mass-communications media, the Black Muslims had become familiar to most white Americans by 1961. Some people found them frightening, others found them merely bizarre, but to careful observers of the American scene they were a significant manifestation of the growing alienation of the Negro masses in the midst of the civil rights revolution. The Muslims' chief spokesman was Malcolm X. In 1963, a conflict over power within the cult led to his withdrawal, and later he seemed to be softening his stand on separation. No one knows the course Malcolm X finally would have followed, for he was shot and killed while making a speech in New York City on February 21, 1965. His earlier position, however, epitomized the Negro's alienation from American society. In his autobiography, he wrote that the word "integration" had been invented by a northern liberal:

> The word has no meaning. The truth is that "Integration" is an image; it's a foxy Northern liberal's smokescreen that confuses the true meaning and wants of the American black man. Here in these fifty racist and neo-racist states of N. America the word "Integration" has millions of white people confused and angry, believing wrongly that the black masses want to live mixed up with the white man.[15]

In another book, Malcolm X wrote:

> I myself would go for Nonviolence, if it was consistent, if everybody was going to be nonviolent all the time I'd say, okay, let's get with it, we'll all be nonviolent. But I don't go along with any kind of nonviolence unless everybody's

[15] Malcolm X, *The Autobiography of Malcolm X* (New York: Grove Press, 1964), p. ii. Copyright © 1964 by Alex Haley and Malcolm X. Copyright © 1965 by Alex Haley and Betty Shabazz. Reprinted by permission of Grove Press, Inc.

going to be nonviolent. If they make the Ku Klux Klan nonviolent, I'll be nonviolent. But as long as you've got somebody else not being nonviolent, I don't want anybody coming to me talking any nonviolent talk.[16]

Malcolm X was one of the most brilliant of black leaders, and certainly one of the most charismatic. The son of an outspoken black minister, Malcolm Little was born in Omaha, Nebraska, in 1925, the seventh of nine children. When he was quite young, Malcolm moved with his family to Milwaukee and then to Lansing, Michigan. There the Reverend Little's belief in equal rights got him into serious trouble, and he was found one night on some streetcar tracks, his skull crushed and his body cut nearly in half. The family drifted apart after the father's death, and Malcolm spent some time in a foster home. At the age of fourteen he went to live with a sister in Boston, where he quickly learned big-city ways. A job on the New Haven Railroad took him to New York, and he lived in Harlem working at various occupations—waiter, dope peddler, numbers runner, petty thief. When his activities began to attract the attention of the police, Malcolm returned to Boston, where he became a member of a robbery gang. Finally caught, he was tried, convicted, and sentenced to ten years in prison.

Elijah Muhammed.

It was in prison that Malcolm Little learned about the Black Muslims, or Nation of Islam, and their separatist doctrine. The Muslims' insistence on blacks going their own way appealed to him, and he also approved of their strict, almost puritanical moral code—members were forbidden to smoke, drink, gamble, or curse. It was in prison, too, that Malcolm educated himself, reading everything he could obtain on philosophy, politics, literature, and history. In 1953, upon his release, Malcolm became a follower of Elijah Muhammad, the Black Muslim leader. Following the Muslim custom, he dropped his "slave name," or surname, and was known as Malcolm X. He rose quickly in the organization.

[16] Malcolm X, *Malcolm X Speaks* (New York: Merit Publishers, 1965), p. 12. Reprinted by permission of Pathfinder Press.

Malcolm X, photographed in April, 1964.

From Elijah Muhammad's point of view, Malcolm X became too popular, too powerful a leader. When in 1963, following President Kennedy's assassination, Malcolm snapped to a newsman that the tragedy was a case of "the chickens coming home to roost," Elijah summoned him to the group's Chicago headquarters and silenced him for ninety days. Relations between the two men had been cool for some time, and long before the ninety days were up Malcolm left Elijah Muhammad to form his own group, the Organization for Afro-American Unity. He made the Hajj—the traditional Islamic pilgrimage to Mecca—and traveled extensively in several black African nations before returning to the United States. His experience in the Arab world, where it seemed to him that blacks and whites lived peacefully together, changed his attitude toward black-white relations. It now seemed to him that there might be hope for racial peace in America.

However, as an apostate to Elijah Muhammad's organization and still a popular leader, Malcolm X was hardly safe. He was followed in numerous cities, and on February 13, 1965, his Long Island home was fire-bombed. On Sunday, February 21, he was to be the main speaker at a Muslim gathering in the Audubon Ballroom in Manhattan. That is where he met his death at the hands of three assassins armed with pistols and shotguns.

Charles G. Hurst, Jr., president of Malcolm X College in Chicago, wrote in May, 1971:

> For the youth, Malcolm came to represent renewed manhood in a society which systematically brutalizes black manhood. He was symbolic of an unquenchable desire for freedom. His unrelenting stance on questions of justice, equality, and freedom, appealed to their fierce indignation over their frustrating condition. . . .
>
> A realist of the first order, Malcolm was still a romanticist who loved people while appreciating life. Youth could sense this. Youth could also sense his identification with idealistic principles no longer prominent in the philosophies of most American leaders. Here was a deeply religious man who always maintained the symbol of his ministry while he pointed a piercing finger of accusation at racist-dominated institutions eroding the foundations of the nation's existence.
>
> Above all, young blacks today continue to identify with Malcolm's determined humanism. His belief that every man's right to be human is nonnegotiable confirmed the rightness of their suspicions that the yoke of their oppression was an injustice that should be thrown off even if their alternatives were reduced to violence.[17]

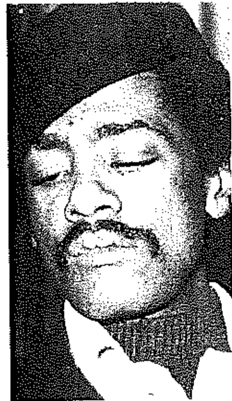
Stokely Carmichael and Charles V. Hamilton in their *Black Power* explain the concept as a call for black people in this country to unite, to recognize their heritage, and

[17] Charles G. Hurst, Jr., "Malcolm X—The Meaning of His Life," *Chicago Tribune*, 16 May 1971. Reprinted by permission of the author.

to build a sense of community, to begin to define their goals, lead their own organizations, and support them:

> Before a group can enter the open society, it must first close ranks. By this we mean that group solidarity is necessary before a group can operate effectively from a bargaining position of strength in a pluralistic society. The point to be made is obvious: Black people must lead and run their own organizations; only black people can convey the revolutionary idea—and it is a revolutionary idea—that black people are able to do things themselves. Black power means, for example, that in Lowndes County, Ala., a black sheriff can end police brutality. A black tax assessor and tax collector and county board of Revenue can lay, collect, and channel tax monies for the building of better roads and schools serving black peoples. When black people lack a majority, Black Power means proper representation and sharing of control. It means the creation of power bases of strength, from which black people can press to change local or nation-wide patterns of oppression instead of from weaknesses.
>
> The ultimate values and goals are not domination or exploitation of other groups, but rather an effective share in the total power of the society. Nevertheless, some observers have labeled those who advocate Black Power as racists; they have said that the call for self-identification and self-determination is "racism in reverse" or "black supremacy"—This is a deliberate and absurd lie. The goal of the racists is to keep black people on the bottom, arbitrarily and dictatorially, as they have done over three hundred years. The goal of black self-determination and black self-identity—Black Power—is full participation in the decision making processes affecting the lives of Black people, and recognition of the virtues in themselves as Black People.[18]

[18] Stokely Carmichael and Charles V. Hamilton, *Black Power: The Politics of Liberation in America* (New York: Random House, 1967), pp. 34–35. Copyright © 1967 by Stokely Carmichael and Charles V. Hamilton. Reprinted by permission of Random House, Inc.


Bobby Seale.

Eldridge Cleaver.

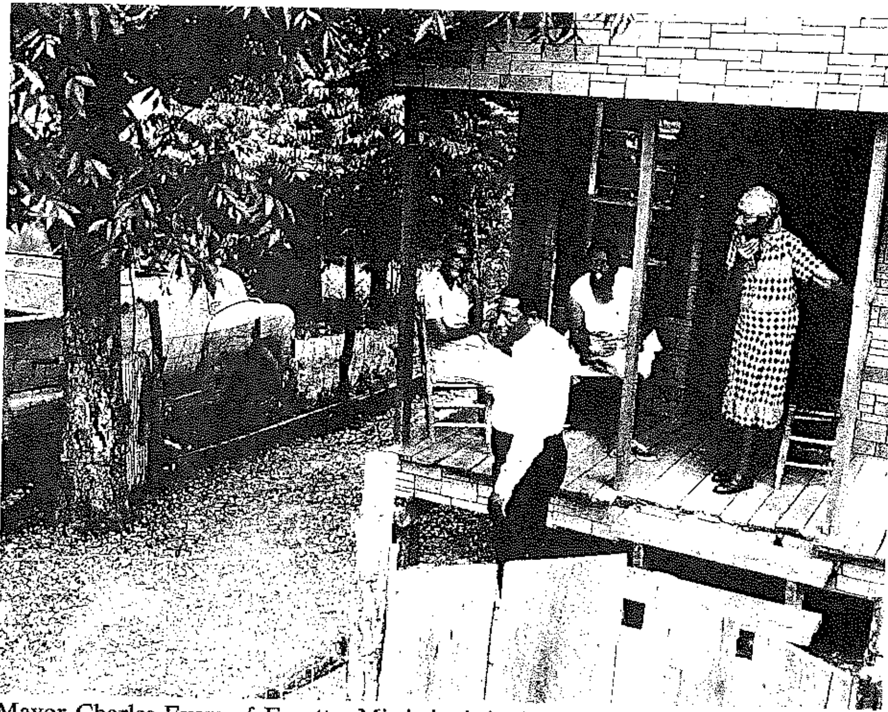
To whites at least, the most frightening aspect of the black power movement was represented by the Black Panthers. A quasi-military organization, the Panthers in the late 1960's and early 1970's were in almost constant conflict with the authorities. Numerous Panthers were killed in shoot-outs with police, two being gunned down in a predawn raid on a westside Chicago apartment in December, 1969, which was allegedly staged to collect reported illegal weapons. Black Panther Bobby Seale was one of the original "Chicago Eight" tried in Chicago in 1970 for conspiracy to foment riots. One Panther leader, Eldridge Cleaver, went into exile in Algeria after warrants for his arrest were sworn. Others, Cleaver included, were tried for murder in New Haven, Connecticut, and freed in May, 1971, after the jury could not agree on a verdict.

Panthers were completely separatist, representing a bloc of blacks that wanted nothing to do with whites, and they were much more militant than the Black Muslims. Generally they insisted that their recourse to arms was a reaction to police harassment and cold-blooded intent to eliminate the organization. Police argued a diametically opposite point of view, contending that the Panthers always started trouble and police simply reacted to it.

More than a century after the Civil War and nearly twenty years after the Supreme Court's school desegregation ruling, despite marches, demonstrations, acts of Congress, burning, looting, beating, and killing, American blacks had still not achieved complete justice or equality.

There had without question been some gains. Public facilities had been desegregated. Many—but far from all—schools had been desegregated in the South. Federal voting laws had thrown the national government's weight behind registration drives in the South and the number of black registrants had increased dramatically. And blacks by and large found it somewhat easier to get jobs than they had before. In the North especially, blacks began to use their political power and elected mayors in Gary, Indiana, in Cleveland, and in Newark, New Jersey, and sent numerous members of their race to Congress.

A particularly dramatic instance of black political power



Mayor Charles Evers of Fayette, Mississippi, in 1969, surveying a poor section of town in order to make good a campaign promise—a cleanup of the area.

occurred in Mississippi, where Charles Evers, brother of the slain Medgar Evers, was elected mayor of Fayette, a small town that contained a two-to-one black majority. Evers, a businessman, had taken over his late brother's NAACP duties in 1963, and in the late 1960's, believing that blacks could and should achieve both political and economic power, he began to campaign for public office. In 1968 Evers ran for Congress. During the campaign he led a drive that registered 75,000 black voters in his district and more than 200,000 in the whole state of Mississippi. He received 43,000 votes, not enough to win the election but enough to be encouraging. In the spring of the following year he won the Democratic primary for mayor of Fayette and during the summer the general election. Evers' campaign and election attracted national attention, and it

Walter Washington, the presidentially appointed mayor of Washington, D.C., in 1970.

Carl Stokes became mayor of Cleveland in 1967. He was the first black man to be elected mayor of a major American city.

came at a time of rising political consciousness among blacks throughout the South. By the end of 1969 a total of 460 blacks had been elected mayors, supervisors, commissioners, sheriffs, and school board members in eleven southern states. In 1965 there had been only 72 black office-holders in the entire region.

Despite numerous gains, blacks still had some way to go before they could call themselves ordinary Americans. By 1970 the median income of black families had risen to about $5,000 but that of white families had surpassed $9,000. The rate of black unemployment during the recession that began in 1969 was twice that of whites, and the rate was much higher among Negro teenagers, reinforcing —at least in black minds—"the last-hired-first-fired" handicap under which they had labored for so long. The much-discussed "southern strategy" of the Nixon administration—part of which was allegedly a plan to go slow on school integration in the South as a reward for southern votes—was criticized at best as retrogressive, at worst a sell-out to bigoted whites. Much concern as the 1970's opened centered on northern ghettos—rat-infested, unhealthy slums to which Negroes were confined. Whites in most cities—and with few exceptions in suburbs—resisted residential integration and in a 1971 decision allowing referendums on the placement of public housing, the Supreme Court seemed to encourage such an attitude. Ghetto schools—nearly or completely all-black—tended to be treated as stepchildren by school boards and were as bad in many respects as the residences from which their pupils came. Equipment was lacking, most teaching was poor, and learning often at best accidental. In some cities the busing of white and black schoolchildren to overcome patterns of residential—de facto—segregation created bitter controversy, making its effectiveness difficult to evaluate.

The 1970's opened relatively quietly. Blacks took little part in antiwar demonstrations or student protest movements during the late 1960's. Panther leadership as well as black leadership in general was fragmented. The movement seemed without focus.