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Toward New Histories of the Civil Rights Era

By CHARLES W. EAGLES

THE NOTED DIPLOMATIC HISTORIAN JOHN LEWIS GADDIS HAS OBSERVED that writing in the midst of a struggle can lead to a lack of scholarly detachment and an asymmetrical approach. Cold war scholars, according to Gaddis, reflected the contemporaneous debates rather than viewing them with the detachment that comes after the end of an era; they viewed events from the inside instead of from the outside. Late in the long-running cold war, many scholars did not know how to get perspective on foreign policy because they had never experienced anything but the cold war. Gaddis also argued that writing about the cold war tended to give “one side disproportionate attention” and neglected both the interaction between the two sides and the role of ideas in the confrontation. The result, Gaddis concluded, was “*an abnormal way of writing history itself.*” With the end of the cold war, however, he expects the historiography to revert to a more normal history because historians will treat the cold war as “a discrete episode . . . within the stream of time.”¹

Cold war historiography is not unique. Before the end of the cold war, civil rights scholarship, like much of contemporary history, shared some characteristics with histories of the cold war. Writing in the midst of the ongoing struggles for racial equality, historians have often lacked detachment because of their profound and justifiable moral commitment to the aims of the civil rights movement. In addition, as Gaddis suggested about cold war experts, few scholars of the black freedom struggle have had any personal experience of a world apart from the movement; individuals born since 1940 can scarcely recall a period before the movement gained widespread publicity. Historians of the movement have also generally taken an asymmetrical approach to

¹ John Lewis Gaddis, “The New Cold War History: First Impressions,” in *We Now Know: Rethinking Cold War History* (Oxford and New York, 1997), 281–95 (first and third quotations on p. 282, and second on p. 283; italics in original).

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the campaign for equal rights. They have tended to emphasize one side of the struggle, the movement side, and to neglect their professional obligation to understand the other side, the segregationist opposition. To explain the most profound change in southern history, historians have resorted to telling the story from a vantage point within the movement; only rarely have they sought a detached view or a broader perspective that would necessarily encompass all of the South to explain the momentous changes in racial relations. They have written about the movement essentially from the perspective of the movement without fully considering the larger history of the South during the entire era. As a result, important parts of the story remain untold.²

Unlike their cold war colleagues, however, civil rights scholars have not yet developed clear schools of interpretation or consistently clashing interpretations; nothing comparable to the orthodox, revisionist, and post-revisionist interpretations of the cold war yet exists in the writings on the movement.³ Research that has covered topics for the first time has had no earlier interpretations to revise or refute. Writing on the movement has, nonetheless, involved implicit disagreement on a number of issues. Scholars have variously suggested, for example, that the movement actually began in the 1930s with the New Deal, in 1954 with the case of *Brown v. Board of Education*, or even in 1960 with the sit-ins. By the focus of their works, historians have also placed different emphases on the roles of the federal government, major protest organizations, and prominent leaders, and they have stressed the efficacy of different strategies and tactics—violent or non-violent action, litigation or mass protest, national or grassroots efforts. Students of the movement have also reached conflicting conclusions about the results of the civil rights movement. Seldom have the disagreements among scholars become explicit in their publications; more commonly they are implied or have to be inferred by their more experienced readers.

Having yet to develop thorough, critical, and radical interpretations of the civil rights struggle, historians have tended to share a sympathetic attitude toward the quest for civil rights. They also lack the advantage recently gained by diplomatic historians with the end of the

² Although the civil rights struggle occurred outside the South too, this essay will be restricted to the southern movement. Suggestions for broadening the study of the movement to include all aspects of the South could easily, and correctly, be extended to include other sections of the nation as well.

³ For a brief introduction to the vast historiography on the cold war, see Robert J. McMahon and Thomas G. Paterson, eds., *The Origins of the Cold War*, 4th ed. (Boston, 1999).

cold war, and they cannot, and do not want to, declare the struggle to be “over” because racial discord has not ended and racial justice has not been achieved. Historians will, therefore, continue to write about an ongoing movement for equal rights in which their advocacy and support seem to them important to the movement’s success. Because the struggle for racial justice has not ended, overcoming what Gaddis termed “abnormal history” will require the exercise of greater historical imagination. Trends visible in the recent outpouring of scholarship on the civil rights movement suggest that a richer historiography may soon emerge.

Historians’ scholarly interest in the southern civil rights movement has never been greater. Convention sessions, seminars, and conferences on the civil rights struggle occur with growing frequency. Books, articles, dissertations, and theses on the black freedom struggle proliferate at an amazing rate, and often studies of the movement win major prizes in the historical profession and in the larger publishing community. Historical concern for the movement seems unlikely to diminish but instead will probably continue to grow. As historians persist in their pursuit of the movement and its meanings, an assessment of the origins, development, and future of scholarship on the civil rights revolution may prove worthwhile. Surveys of the literature by George Rehin, Adam Fairclough, Steven F. Lawson, and Charles M. Payne have already made important contributions, but a more extensive analysis may further highlight the wide variety of works already produced, identify persistent problems in studying the movement, and point out possibilities for future research.⁴

Journalists, movement activists, and non-historian scholars

⁴ George Rehin, “Of Marshalls, Myrdals and Kings: Some Recent Books About the Second Reconstruction,” *Journal of American Studies*, XXII (April 1988), 87–103; Adam Fairclough, “Historians and the Civil Rights Movement,” *Journal of American Studies*, XXIV (December 1990), 387–98; Steven F. Lawson, “Freedom Then, Freedom Now: The Historiography of the Civil Rights Movement,” *American Historical Review*, XCVI (April 1991), 456–71; and Charles M. Payne, “The Social Construction of History,” in *I’ve Got the Light of Freedom: The Organizing Tradition and the Mississippi Freedom Struggle* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London, 1995), 413–41. With a few exceptions, the works referred to below will be limited to books published through 1998, but the enormous size of the literature has necessitated selective citations. Several significant collections of essays on the movement should be acknowledged: Charles W. Eagles, ed., *The Civil Rights Movement in America* (Jackson, Miss., 1986); Peter J. Albert and Ronald Hoffman, eds., *We Shall Overcome: Martin Luther King, Jr., and the Black Freedom Struggle* (New York, 1990); Armstead L. Robinson and Patricia Sullivan, eds., *New Directions in Civil Rights Studies* (Charlottesville and London, 1991); Brian Ward and Tony Badger, eds., *The Making of Martin Luther King and the Civil Rights Movement* (Washington Square, N.Y., 1996); and Cheryl Lynn Greenberg, ed., *A Circle of Trust: Remembering SNCC* (New Brunswick, N.J., and London, 1998).

dominated much of the early writing on civil rights, which often focused on school desegregation. In 1961, for example, political scientist J. W. Peltason examined the role of southern federal judges in implementing the *Brown* decision. In 1964 the New York *Times*'s Anthony Lewis wrote one of the earliest books that surveyed the decade after *Brown*, Charles E. Silberman of *Fortune* assessed the state of American race relations, and *Newsday*'s Michael Dorman provided an "eyewitness account" of the movement. Freelance writers William Bradford Huie and Walter Lord each had books published in 1965 on events in Mississippi, and two years later journalists Pat Watters and Reese Cleghorn analyzed the arrival of blacks in southern politics. Sociologist James W. Vander Zanden and attorney Albert P. Blaustein contributed noteworthy early studies of desegregation, and Benjamin Muse and Robbins L. Gates reported on massive resistance in Virginia. Muse of the Southern Regional Council and Reed Sarratt of the Southern Education Reporting Service each wrote about the first ten years of school desegregation.⁵

"Many of the early accounts of the rise of the civil rights movement and the bitter defense of segregation by white southerners," Dan T. Carter has observed, "are marked by emotional commitment and righteous indignation." None of the early reports on the movement added passion to the story as well as did the participants' own memoirs, which provided vivid recollections of events. The Little Rock school crisis of 1957 yielded the first-person accounts of school superintendent Virgil T. Blossom and Daisy T. Bates, president of the local chapter of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). In the mid-sixties, significant memoirs also appeared by Howard Zinn, Len Holt, and Anne Moody. As would be true

⁵ J. W. Peltason, *Fifty-Eight Lonely Men: Southern Federal Judges and School Desegregation* (New York, 1961); Anthony Lewis, *Portrait of a Decade: The Second American Revolution* (New York, 1964); Charles E. Silberman, *Crisis in Black and White* (New York, 1964); Michael Dorman, *We Shall Overcome: A Reporter's Eyewitness Account of the Year of Racial Strife and Triumph* (New York, 1964); William Bradford Huie, *Three Lives for Mississippi* (New York, 1965); Walter Lord, *The Past That Would Not Die* (New York, Evanston, Ill., and London, 1965); Pat Watters and Reese Cleghorn, *Climbing Jacob's Ladder: The Arrival of Negroes in Southern Politics* (New York, 1967); James W. Vander Zanden, *Race Relations in Transition: The Segregation Crisis in the South* (New York, 1965); Albert P. Blaustein and Clarence Clyde Ferguson Jr., *Desegregation and the Law: The Meaning and Effect of the School Segregation Cases* (New Brunswick, N.J., 1957); Benjamin Muse, *Virginia's Massive Resistance* (Bloomington, Ind., 1961); Robbins L. Gates, *The Making of Massive Resistance: Virginia's Politics of Public School Desegregation, 1954-56* (Chapel Hill, 1962); Muse, *Ten Years of Prelude: The Story of Integration Since the Supreme Court's 1954 Decision* (New York, 1964); and Reed Sarratt, *The Ordeal of Desegregation: The First Decade* (New York, 1966).

of the entire movement, the personal reminiscences of people in the movement added unusual intimacy and drama to the story of the civil rights struggle.⁶

Professional historians, even though they may have tried to bring to their work a greater degree of fairness and impartiality than did the activists or the journalists, nonetheless have exhibited great sympathy for the black freedom struggle. For some of the first historians of the movement, direct personal participation preceded writing about the movement. August Meier and Howard Zinn provide two examples. The involvement of few equaled that of Meier. In the late 1940s Meier taught at all-black Tougaloo College in Mississippi and enlisted in the NAACP while a graduate student at Columbia University in the early 1950s. In 1960, while teaching at Morgan State College in Maryland, Meier joined black students in direct action protesting racial discrimination at Baltimore lunch counters. He attended some early conferences of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) and was particularly active in the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE). Meier later described his role in the movement as a “participant-observer,” but by the mid-1960s, as his participation declined, he had begun his extensive writing about the civil rights movement that would include many essays and a major study of CORE.⁷

One of Meier’s contemporaries, Howard Zinn, also worked in the movement. Zinn’s civil rights efforts grew out of his radical politics and his experience in Atlanta where he taught black women at Spelman College, met black men from Morehouse College, and lived in the black community for seven years in the late fifties and early sixties. With others, including some of his students, he demonstrated in Atlanta to integrate public libraries, the gallery of the state legislature, and a

⁶ Dan T. Carter, “From Segregation to Integration,” in *Interpreting Southern History: Historiographical Essays in Honor of Sanford W. Higginbotham*, ed. by John B. Boles and Evelyn Thomas Nolen (Baton Rouge and London, 1987), 422–23; Virgil T. Blossom, *It Has Happened Here* (New York, 1959); Daisy T. Bates, *The Long Shadow of Little Rock: A Memoir* (New York, 1962); Howard Zinn, *The Southern Mystique* (New York, 1964); Len Holt, *The Summer That Didn’t End* (New York, 1965); Anne Moody, *Coming of Age in Mississippi* (New York, 1968). Other valuable memoirs, too numerous to mention, are beyond the scope of this essay.

⁷ See August Meier, *A White Scholar and the Black Community, 1945–1965: Essays and Reflections* (Amherst, Mass., 1992), especially “Introduction: ‘A Liberal and Proud of It,’” 3–38 (quoted phrase on p. 24); August Meier and Elliott Rudwick, *CORE: A Study in the Civil Rights Movement, 1942–1968* (New York, 1973). For other autobiographical discussions of the impact of race on the careers of historians, see Paul A. Cimbala and Robert F. Himmelberg, eds., *Historians and Race: Autobiography and the Writing of History* (Bloomington, Ind., and Indianapolis, 1996).

department store cafeteria. Zinn's long association with SNCC led to his later study of that organization's "new abolitionists."⁸

Few historians were active in the movement as early and as extensively as Meier or Zinn, but many American historians did participate. One signal event of 1965 demonstrated their widespread concern. In the spring of that year, when the Reverend Martin Luther King Jr. called for clergy of all faiths to march from Selma to Montgomery in support of federal legislation to protect the right to vote, Walter Johnson of the University of Chicago spearheaded an informal effort to rally historians for the march. From across the nation, more than forty historians—"all of liberal persuasion," according to Johnson—traveled to Alabama to join clergy and others on the last day of the famous march to Montgomery. The group included luminaries Richard Hofstadter, C. Vann Woodward, John Hope Franklin, John Higham, and Kenneth M. Stampf, as well as younger historians such as Robert Dallek, William E. Leuchtenburg, Lawrence W. Levine, Louis R. Harlan, and Samuel P. Hays. The group included several—Rembert W. Patrick, Bennett H. Wall, and Seldon Henry—teaching at southern colleges.⁹

Unlike Meier and Zinn, none of the Montgomery marchers turned his scholarly research to the movement though many of the historians present did write about slavery, black history, and other race-related subjects (Woodward did survey the movement in two chapters that he added to later editions of his study, *The Strange Career of Jim Crow*.) The presence of a large contingent of historians in Montgomery indicated pervasive moral support within the discipline for the civil rights movement, especially among the leaders in the profession. The historians who marched in Alabama included five presidents of the Southern Historical Association and eight of the Organization of American Historians.¹⁰ At least from the mid-1960s, therefore,

⁸ August Meier and Elliott Rudwick, *Black History and the Historical Profession, 1915–1980* (Urbana and Chicago, 1986), 164–65; Zinn, *Southern Mystique*, 3–5; and Zinn, *SNCC: The New Abolitionists* (Boston, 1964).

⁹ Walter Johnson, "Historians Join the March on Montgomery," *South Atlantic Quarterly*, LXXIX (Spring 1980), 158–74 (quoted phrase on p. 160).

¹⁰ C. Vann Woodward, *The Strange Career of Jim Crow*, 2d ed. (New York, 1966), 149–91, and 3d ed. (New York, 1974), 149–220; Johnson, "Historians Join the March on Montgomery," 160–61. Past or future presidents of the Southern Historical Association were John Hope Franklin, Louis Harlan, Rembert W. Patrick, Bennett H. Wall, and C. Vann Woodward; in addition to Franklin, Harlan, and Woodward, similar leaders of the Organization of American Historians included John Higham, Richard Hofstadter, William E. Leuchtenburg, Lawrence W. Levine, and Kenneth M. Stampf.

members of the historical profession have rather clearly been committed to equal rights for black Americans.

For a younger generation of historians, the civil rights movement often played a more formative role in their early lives. Many who later wrote about the movement actually took part in it during their college years or early in their scholarly careers. For example, Clayborne Carson, who would later write a major study of SNCC and edit the papers of Martin Luther King Jr., traveled to the South to witness civil rights action in the early 1960s and soon thereafter took part in civil rights demonstrations while at the University of California at Los Angeles. Harvard Sitkoff, who has since written a popular survey of the movement in addition to a study of blacks in the New Deal, joined the NAACP while in college in New York and went south briefly “to march, to picket, to sit-in.” The author of a Bancroft Prize-winning book on Mississippi, John Dittmer taught for a decade in the sixties and seventies at Tougaloo College, where he met many civil rights veterans and became part of the later stages of the movement. In each case and in many others, professional interest in the movement grew in large part out of personal involvement with the campaign for civil rights.¹¹

Trying to identify the “first” scholarly book on the civil rights movement by a historian may be as unwise as it is impossible, but around 1970 professional historians began to address the topic when half a dozen important books appeared. Several of them addressed opponents of the movement. Hugh Davis Graham’s analysis of Tennessee press opinion on school desegregation in 1967 demonstrated the virtues of the scholarly approach, even though Graham treated the opponents of the movement more than the movement itself. Three other early works dealt more with the opponents of the movement: Numan V. Bartley’s study of “massive resistance,” Neil R. McMillen’s examination of the white Citizens’ Councils, and I. A. Newby’s exploration of social scientists’ defense of racial segregation. At the same time, Richard M. Dalfiume and William C. Berman studied events before the *Brown* decision in books on desegregation of the armed forces and the civil

¹¹ Meier and Rudwick, *Black History*, 192, 193, and 200 (both quoted phrases on p. 193); Clayborne Carson, *In Struggle: SNCC and the Black Awakening of the 1960s* (Cambridge, Mass., and London, 1981); Harvard Sitkoff, *The Struggle for Black Equality, 1954–1980* (New York, 1981); Sitkoff, *A New Deal for Blacks: The Emergence of Civil Rights as a National Issue* (New York, 1978); and John Dittmer, *Local People: The Struggle for Civil Rights in Mississippi* (Urbana and Chicago, 1994).

rights policies of the Truman administration. A major book by a historian directly addressed the movement itself when in 1970 David Levering Lewis, a specialist in modern European history, wrote a pathbreaking critical biography of Martin Luther King that focused explicitly on the movement. After the burst of books around 1970, the civil rights movement increasingly became a subject for historical study. Even though journalists, participants, and others continued to write about it too, historians along with other academics began to dominate the field.¹²

At first largely unaffected by the emergent social history, scholarly works during the 1970s (and, in a few instances, later) employed traditional political, institutional, and biographical approaches to the study of the movement. Harvard Sitkoff, Donald R. McCoy, Richard T. Reutten, Robert F. Burk, and Carl M. Brauer, following the lead of William Berman, studied the civil rights policies and practices of national administrations from Franklin D. Roosevelt through John F. Kennedy. In a broader study, Hugh Davis Graham traced the development of civil rights policy within the federal government during the Kennedy, Johnson, and Nixon years. Journalist Victor S. Navasky plumbed the Kennedy administration more closely by analyzing the Justice Department under Robert F. Kennedy, and in 1987 law professor Michal R. Belknap evaluated the federal legal and constitutional implications of violence against the civil rights movement. Historian Darlene Clark Hine investigated the end of the white primary in Texas, and political scientist David J. Garrow, beginning his long-term study of Martin Luther King Jr., concentrated on the connection between the Selma-to-Montgomery march and the passage of the Voting Rights Act of 1965. Former congressman Charles Whalen and his journalist wife Barbara Whalen traced the legislative history of the landmark Civil Rights Act of 1964. The Federal Bureau of Investigation's surveillance of the movement has been illuminated by Garrow's study of the

¹² Hugh Davis Graham, *Crisis in Print: Desegregation and the Press in Tennessee* (Nashville, 1967); Numan V. Bartley, *The Rise of Massive Resistance: Race and Politics in the South During the 1950's* (Baton Rouge, 1969); Neil R. McMillen, *The Citizens' Council: Organized Resistance to the Second Reconstruction, 1954-64* (Urbana, 1971); I. A. Newby, *Challenge to the Court: Social Scientists and the Defense of Segregation, 1954-1966* (Baton Rouge, 1967); Richard M. Dalfiume, *Desegregation of the U. S. Armed Forces: Fighting on Two Fronts, 1939-1953* (Columbia, Mo., 1969); William C. Berman, *The Politics of Civil Rights in the Truman Administration* (Columbus, Ohio, 1970); David L. Lewis, *King: A Critical Biography* (New York, 1970).

Bureau's pursuit of King and by Kenneth O'Reilly's revelations of its broader pattern of spying.¹³

Others began to study the impact of racial changes on electoral politics, particularly in the South. Relying heavily on quantitative data, for example, Numan V. Bartley and Hugh Davis Graham in 1975 charted the changes in southern politics during the "Second Reconstruction." The following year political scientist Earl Black explained more specifically how segregation played out in southern gubernatorial elections, and James W. Ely examined how segregation affected Virginia's politics in the 1950s. Of all the books dealing with the movement and politics, however, Steven F. Lawson's 1976 work, *Black Ballots: Voting Rights in the South, 1944–1969*, may have been the most important because it provided an in-depth examination of the campaigns for black voting rights from the overturn of the white primary to the enactment of the 1965 Voting Rights Act. Lawson later extended his study with two books on black voting and political power.¹⁴

To understand the development of the civil rights movement, some scholars stressed the role of decisions handed down by federal courts. The premier work in the field was *Simple Justice* (1976) by Richard

¹³ Sitkoff, *A New Deal for Blacks*; Donald R. McCoy and Richard T. Reutten, *Quest and Response: Minority Rights and the Truman Administration* (Lawrence, Manhattan, and Wichita, Kan., 1973); Robert Fredrick Burk, *The Eisenhower Administration and Black Civil Rights* (Knoxville, 1984); Carl M. Brauer, *John F. Kennedy and the Second Reconstruction* (New York, 1977); Hugh Davis Graham, *The Civil Rights Era: Origins and Development of National Policy* (New York and Oxford, 1990); Victor S. Navasky, *Kennedy Justice* (New York, 1971); Michal R. Belknap, *Federal Law and Southern Order: Racial Violence and Constitutional Conflict in the Post-Brown South* (Athens, Ga., and London, 1987); Darlene Clark Hine, *Black Victory: The Rise and Fall of the White Primary in Texas* (Millwood, N. Y., 1979); David J. Garrow, *Protest at Selma: Martin Luther King, Jr., and the Voting Rights Act of 1965* (New Haven and London, 1978); Charles Whalen and Barbara Whalen, *The Longest Debate: A Legislative History of the 1964 Civil Rights Act* (Cabin John, Md. and Washington, 1985); Garrow, *The FBI and Martin Luther King, Jr.: From "Solo" to Memphis* (New York and London, 1981); and Kenneth O'Reilly, "Racial Matters": *The FBI's Secret File on Black America, 1960–1972* (New York and London, 1989). See also Allan Wolk, *The Presidency and Black Civil Rights: Eisenhower to Nixon* (Rutherford, Madison, and Teaneck, N. J., 1971), and two short monographs by James C. Harvey, *Civil Rights During the Kennedy Administration* (Jackson, Miss., 1973) and *Black Civil Rights During the Johnson Administration* (Jackson, Miss., 1973).

¹⁴ Numan V. Bartley and Hugh D. Graham, *Southern Politics and the Second Reconstruction* (Baltimore and London, 1975); Earl Black, *Southern Governors and Civil Rights: Racial Segregation as a Campaign Issue in the Second Reconstruction* (Cambridge, Mass., 1976); James W. Ely Jr., *The Crisis of Conservative Virginia: The Byrd Organization and the Politics of Massive Resistance* (Knoxville, 1976); Steven F. Lawson, *Black Ballots: Voting Rights in the South, 1944–1969* (New York, 1976), *In Pursuit of Power: Southern Blacks and Electoral Politics, 1965–1982* (New York, 1985), and *Running for Freedom: Civil Rights and Black Politics in America Since 1941* (Philadelphia, 1991).

Kluger, an experienced novelist, journalist, and publisher. His superlative and compelling narrative study of *Brown v. Board of Education* explained comprehensively the landmark court decision and its historical background. Four years later law professor J. Harvie Wilkinson III followed up Kluger's narrative with a more prosaic analysis of the Supreme Court's involvement with school integration in the quarter century after *Brown*. Mark V. Tushnet traced the NAACP's litigation that led to the *Brown* decision, while Tony Freyer chronicled the effects of *Brown* in Little Rock and Bernard Schwartz explained the court's decision on busing in Charlotte. E. Culpepper Clark focused on the University of Alabama in the single major work on the desegregation of higher education.¹⁵

The federal judiciary itself has also received consideration. Charles V. Hamilton and Jack Bass each emphasized the role of the federal courts in the South. Hamilton, a political scientist, assessed the role of the southern judges in the campaign for voting rights, while journalist Bass described the crucial work of the judges of the Fifth Circuit Court of Appeals. Tinsley Yarbrough's biography of Frank M. Johnson Jr. dealt with a federal district judge who was involved in many major civil rights cases in Alabama and who was later appointed to the Fifth Circuit Court of Appeals. Yarbrough also later recounted the controversial story of South Carolina's Judge J. Waties Waring.¹⁶

Civil rights organizations also began to receive significant scholarly attention during the 1970s. August Meier teamed with Elliott Rudwick to write in 1973 a history of CORE, which was the first major organizational study of the movement, and the next year Nancy Weiss published a partial history of the National Urban League. Although no comprehensive history of the NAACP has yet been written, Robert

¹⁵ Richard Kluger, *Simple Justice: The History of Brown v. Board of Education and Black America's Struggle for Equality* (New York, 1976); J. Harvie Wilkinson III, *From Brown to Bakke: The Supreme Court and School Integration: 1954-1978* (New York and Oxford, 1979); Mark V. Tushnet, *The NAACP's Legal Strategy against Segregated Education, 1925-1950* (Chapel Hill and London, 1987); Tony Freyer, *The Little Rock Crisis: A Constitutional Interpretation* (Westport, Conn., and London, 1984); Bernard Schwartz, *Swann's Way: The School Busing Case and the Supreme Court* (New York and Oxford, 1986); E. Culpepper Clark, *The Schoolhouse Door: Segregation's Last Stand at the University of Alabama* (New York and Oxford, 1993).

¹⁶ Charles V. Hamilton, *The Bench and the Ballot: Southern Federal Judges and Black Voters* (New York, 1973); Jack Bass, *Unlikely Heroes* (New York, 1981); Tinsley E. Yarbrough, *Judge Frank Johnson and Human Rights in Alabama* (Tuscaloosa, 1981) and *A Passion for Justice: J. Waties Waring and Civil Rights* (New York and Oxford, 1987). See also Jack Bass's biography of Judge Johnson, *Taming the Storm: The Life and Times of Judge Frank M. Johnson, Jr., and the South's Fight over Civil Rights* (New York and other cities, 1993).

Zangrando has studied its early anti-lynching campaign, Genna Rae McNeil has written a biography of its chief legal strategist, Charles Hamilton Houston, and Mark V. Tushnet has produced a two-volume study of Thurgood Marshall, the chief lawyer for the NAACP Legal Defense Fund. In 1981 Clayborne Carson described the rise and fall of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee during the 1960s, but only in the late 1980s did the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) receive full treatment by Adam Fairclough. In 1988 Gerald Horne recounted the controversial history of the Civil Rights Congress.¹⁷

Biographical works have proved, from the beginning and throughout the 1990s, perhaps the most popular form of study of the civil rights movement among scholars and other writers. In addition to studies of NAACP lawyers Thurgood Marshall and Charles Houston and Judges J. Waties Waring and Frank Johnson, biographers have written on a range of individuals active in the movement. Martin Luther King Jr. has, of course, drawn the most scholarly attention, with a comprehensive biography by David Garrow, a popular account by Stephen Oates, a brief scholarly study by Adam Fairclough, and a "work of biocriticism" by Michael Eric Dyson, while James H. Cone wrote a dual biography of King and Malcolm X. Other important individuals have also been investigated, including A. Philip Randolph, Ella Baker, Whitney Young, Adam Clayton Powell, Clarence Mitchell Jr., Bayard Rustin, and Robert Moses, as well as compelling minor figures such as Harry T. Moore. Setting the standard for research, however, the encyclopedic *Bearing the Cross* by Garrow won the Pulitzer Prize for biography in 1987.¹⁸

¹⁷ Meier and Rudwick, *CORE*; Nancy J. Weiss, *The National Urban League, 1910–1940* (New York, 1974); Robert L. Zangrando, *The NAACP Crusade Against Lynching, 1909–1950* (Philadelphia, 1980); Genna Rae McNeil, *Groundwork: Charles Hamilton Houston and the Struggle for Civil Rights* (Philadelphia, 1983); Mark V. Tushnet, *Making Civil Rights Law: Thurgood Marshall and the Supreme Court, 1936–1961* (New York and Oxford, 1994) and *Making Constitutional Law: Thurgood Marshall and the Supreme Court, 1961–1991* (New York and Oxford, 1997); Carson, *In Struggle*; Adam Fairclough, *To Redeem the Soul of America: The Southern Christian Leadership Conference and Martin Luther King, Jr.* (Athens, Ga., and London, 1987); Gerald Horne, *Communist Front? The Civil Rights Congress, 1946–1956* (Rutherford, N. J., and other cities, 1988). See also Thomas R. Peake, *Keeping the Dream Alive: A History of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference from King to the Nineteen-Eighties* (New York and other cities, 1987).

¹⁸ David J. Garrow, *Bearing the Cross: Martin Luther King, Jr., and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference* (New York, 1986); Stephen B. Oates, *Let the Trumpet Sound: The Life of Martin Luther King, Jr.* (New York and other cities, 1982); Adam Fairclough, *Martin Luther*

In 1981 Harvard Sitkoff wrote the first scholarly synthesis of the literature on the movement in *The Struggle for Black Equality, 1954–1980*. In seven chapters, it laid out the story from the NAACP and *Brown* through Little Rock, Montgomery and King’s emergence with SCLC, the sit-ins and SNCC, the Freedom Rides and CORE, Albany and Birmingham, the March on Washington, Freedom Summer in Mississippi, Selma and the Voting Rights Act, to black power and King’s assassination. Sitkoff’s work necessarily mirrored the traditional biographical, organizational, and political approaches that had dominated the early literature on the movement. Even as he wrote this synthesis, however, scholarship had begun to move in many important new directions.¹⁹

Influenced by larger trends in the historical profession but especially the new social history and its emphasis on women, minorities, the “inarticulate,” and others whose presence was usually omitted from traditional histories, students of the civil rights struggle in the 1980s widened their view and dropped their gaze to see many previously overlooked stories. By applying the interests and concerns enriching women’s history, women historians of the movement in particular played significant roles in the diversification of civil rights scholarship. Even though national figures and events continued to attract scholarly attention, researchers increasingly looked at events at the local level and examined different aspects of the movement. Three influential studies heralded the broader, more innovative approaches. In 1979 Sara Evans connected women in the civil rights struggle to the women’s liberation movement, and she thereby helped move scholars away from

King, Jr. (Athens, Ga., and London, 1995); Michael Eric Dyson, *I May Not Get There With You: The True Martin Luther King, Jr.* (New York and other cities, 2000) (quoted phrase appears on p. 4); James H. Cone, *Martin and Malcolm and America: A Dream or a Nightmare* (Maryknoll, N.Y., 1991); Paula F. Pfeffer, *A. Philip Randolph, Pioneer of the Civil Rights Movement* (Baton Rouge and London, 1990); Joanne Grant, *Ella Baker: Freedom Bound* (New York and other cities, 1998); Nancy J. Weiss, *Whitney M. Young, Jr., and the Struggle for Civil Rights* (Princeton, 1989); Dennis C. Dickerson, *Militant Mediator: Whitney M. Young, Jr.* (Lexington, Ky., 1998); Charles V. Hamilton, *Adam Clayton Powell, Jr.: The Political Biography of an American Dilemma* (New York and other cities, 1991); Denton L. Watson, *Lion in the Lobby: Clarence Mitchell, Jr.’s Struggle for the Passage of Civil Rights Laws* (New York, 1990); Jervis Anderson, *Bayard Rustin: Troubles I’ve Seen: A Biography* (New York, 1997); Daniel Levine, *Bayard Rustin and the Civil Rights Movement* (New Brunswick, N. J., 2000); Eric Burner, *And Gently He Shall Lead Them: Robert Parris Moses and Civil Rights in Mississippi* (New York and London, 1994); Ben Green, *Before His Time: The Untold Story of Harry T. Moore, America’s First Civil Rights Martyr* (New York, 1999).

¹⁹ Sitkoff, *Struggle for Black Equality*.

their restricted focus on men. The next year, two studies shifted attention to the local level in an effort to tell history “from the bottom up.” William H. Chafe’s study of the movement in Greensboro, *Civilities and Civil Rights* (1980), supplemented documentary sources with oral histories to recount the story of the sit-ins in that North Carolina city two decades earlier. In a similar way, J. Mills Thornton III began his exploration of the Montgomery bus boycott in a lengthy 1980 essay. Though Chafe and Thornton each wrote about a major event with national significance, their emphases on relatively unknown people in their local contexts marked a significant departure in the historiography of the movement.²⁰

Three other books in the early 1980s also exemplified these new approaches. Eighteen years after she had been accepted but did not serve in Freedom Summer, Mary Aickin Rothschild published the first scholarly appraisal of the northern volunteers and their activities during 1964 and 1965. Although she discussed Robert Moses and other leaders, she devoted most of her attention to more anonymous participants. In a volume that same year edited by Elizabeth Jacoway and David R. Colburn, more than a dozen scholars assessed the role of local white business leaders in the desegregation of cities across the South; the essays assessed for the first time the positive and negative contributions of a major group usually ignored in previous treatments of the movement. In yet a different approach the following year, Catherine A. Barnes produced a thematic study of the desegregation of southern transportation. Ranging from the turn of the century through the Freedom Rides, she brought together apparently disparate strands of the civil rights story.²¹

Following the examples of Chafe and Thornton, historians have increasingly used the techniques of the new social history to examine the struggle for civil rights at the grassroots in specific communities.

²⁰ Sara Evans, *Personal Politics: The Roots of Women’s Liberation in the Civil Rights Movement and the New Left* (New York, 1979); William H. Chafe, *Civilities and Civil Rights: Greensboro, North Carolina, and the Black Struggle for Freedom* (New York and Oxford, 1980); J. Mills Thornton III, “Challenge and Response in the Montgomery Bus Boycott of 1955–1956,” *Alabama Review*, XXXIII (July 1980), 163–235. For the origin of the phrase “[history] from the bottom up,” see Peter Novick, *That Noble Dream: The “Objectivity Question” and the American Historical Profession* (Cambridge, Eng., and other cities, 1988), 442 n. 36.

²¹ Mary Aickin Rothschild, *A Case of Black and White: Northern Volunteers and the Southern Freedom Summers, 1964–1965* (Westport, Conn., and London, 1982); Elizabeth Jacoway and David R. Colburn, eds., *Southern Businessmen and Desegregation* (Baton Rouge and London, 1982); Catherine A. Barnes, *Journey from Jim Crow: The Desegregation of Southern Transit* (New York, 1983).

An early and influential study of the movement's origins by sociologist Aldon D. Morris emphasized the importance of local organizing. A few have attempted comprehensive accounts of the movement in individual towns or states while others have emphasized only one event or aspect of the movement within a community. Robert J. Norrell wrote the best of the local studies in his *Reaping the Whirlwind* (1985) on Tuskegee, Alabama, but other valuable works in this vein were written by David Colburn on St. Augustine, Florida; sociologist Charles M. Payne on Greenwood and the Mississippi Delta; Kim Lacy Rogers on New Orleans; Glenn T. Eskew on Birmingham; and Glenda Alice Rabby on Tallahassee. Two books took a multi-community approach: in an unusual study, political scientist James W. Button looked at the impact of the movement on six Florida communities during the 1970s and 1980s, while Richard A. Couto examined four southern communities to evaluate the movement's effects on the lives of ordinary rural blacks. In two recent state studies, John Dittmer chose to consider the movement in Mississippi while Adam Fairclough produced a state study on Louisiana.²²

Instead of attempting to tell the complete story of the freedom struggle in particular places, historians have also employed the methods of social history to examine specific topics, particularly school desegregation, within local contexts. In one of the earliest examples, Raymond Wolters assessed the impact of the *Brown* decision in the five communities covered in the original school desegregation cases. More detailed accounts have been written by Robert A. Pratt on education in Richmond, Davison M. Douglas on Charlotte desegregation, David S. Cecelski on the schools of Hyde County in eastern North

²² Robert J. Norrell, *Reaping the Whirlwind: The Civil Rights Movement in Tuskegee* (New York, 1985); David R. Colburn, *Racial Change and Community Crisis: St. Augustine, Florida, 1877–1980* (New York, 1985); Payne, *I've Got the Light of Freedom*; Kim Lacy Rogers, *Righteous Lives: Narratives of the New Orleans Civil Rights Movement* (New York and London, 1993); Glenn T. Eskew, *But for Birmingham: The Local and National Movements in the Civil Rights Struggle* (Chapel Hill and London, 1997); Glenda Alice Rabby, *The Pain and the Promise: The Struggle for Civil Rights in Tallahassee, Florida* (Athens, Ga., and London, 1999); James W. Button, *Blacks and Social Change: Impact of the Civil Rights Movement in Southern Communities* (Princeton, 1989); Aldon D. Morris, *The Origins of the Civil Rights Movement: Black Communities Organizing for Change* (New York and London, 1984); Richard A. Couto, *Ain't Gonna Let Nobody Turn Me Round: The Pursuit of Racial Justice in the Rural South* (Philadelphia, 1991); Dittmer, *Local People*; Adam Fairclough, *Race and Democracy: The Civil Rights Struggle in Louisiana, 1915–1972* (Athens, Ga., and London, 1995). See also the studies of Panola County, Mississippi, by political scientist Frederick M. Wirt, *Politics of Southern Equality: Law and Social Change in a Mississippi County* (Chicago, 1970) and “*We Ain't What We Was*”: *Civil Rights in the New South* (Durham and London, 1997). For an incisive critique of the prize-winning books by Payne and Dittmer, see Alan Draper, “The Mississippi Movement: A Review Essay,” *Journal of Mississippi History*, LX (Winter 1998), 355–66.

Carolina, William Henry Kellar on Houston, and Robyn Duff Ladino on Mansfield, Texas. A distinct local perspective also informed studies of some of the most dramatic and tragic events of the movement. Three books on Mississippi exemplify the method. In 1986 Howard Smead described the 1959 lynching of Mack Charles Parker, and two years later Stephen J. Whitfield wrote about the Emmett Till lynching in the Delta. Also in 1988, two journalists chronicled the Neshoba County murders of James Chaney, Andrew Goodman, and Michael Schwerner in 1964. Seth Cagin and Philip Dray, however, went beyond a mere description of the events involving the Freedom Summer murders to provide a sweeping narrative account of Mississippi in that troubled summer. Similarly, Charles W. Eagles grounded the story of the 1965 killing of a white civil rights worker in the local context of the Alabama black belt.²³

In addition to the plethora of community studies of various types, historians of the freedom struggle also turned in the 1980s to consider relatively new subjects such as religion, women, and labor. Although the importance of religion to the movement had always been recognized, few scholars had paid much direct attention to it until the late 1980s. In fact, a major 1993 bibliography of the civil rights movement did not even contain a section on religion or churches, and its subject index contained only a handful of entries under clergy, one under Jews, and a couple for individual ministers. In the ten years following 1987, however, at least eight books appeared, some of which relied on traditional biographical and institutional approaches. Andrew Michael Manis opened the subject in 1987 by examining the reactions of southern Baptists to the early stirrings of the civil rights movement from 1947 to 1957. Seven years later Joel L. Alvis briefly surveyed the southern Presbyterian church and race in the four decades after World War II, and more recently Gardiner H. Shattuck Jr. has described the

²³ Raymond Wolters, *The Burden of Brown: Thirty Years of School Desegregation* (Knoxville, 1984); Robert A. Pratt, *The Color of Their Skin: Education and Race in Richmond, Virginia, 1954–1989* (Charlottesville and London, 1992); Davison M. Douglas, *Reading, Writing, and Race: The Desegregation of the Charlotte Schools* (Chapel Hill and London, 1995); David S. Cecelski, *Along Freedom Road: Hyde County, North Carolina, and the Fate of Black Schools in the South* (Chapel Hill and London, 1994); William Henry Kellar, *Make Haste Slowly: Moderates, Conservatives, and School Desegregation in Houston* (College Station, Tex., 1999); Robyn Duff Ladino, *Desegregating Texas Schools: Eisenhower, Shivers, and the Crisis at Mansfield High* (Austin, 1996); Howard Smead, *Blood Justice: The Lynching of Mack Charles Parker* (New York and Oxford, 1986); Stephen J. Whitfield, *A Death in the Delta: The Story of Emmett Till* (New York and London, 1988); Seth Cagin and Philip Dray, *We Are Not Afraid: The Story of Goodman, Schwerner, and Chaney and the Civil Rights Campaign for Mississippi* (New York, 1988); Charles W. Eagles, *Outside Agitator: Jon Daniels and the Civil Rights Movement in Alabama* (Chapel Hill and London, 1993).

involvement of Episcopalians in civil rights from the Civil War to the 1970s. From a more national perspective, James F. Findlay Jr. assessed the relationship between the National Council of Churches and the movement in the fifties and sixties, but he also included a careful discussion of the Council's activities in the Mississippi Delta.²⁴

Scholars of the movement and religion also employed various biographical approaches. Stephen L. Longenecker described the early 1960s ministry of Ralph Smeltzer in Selma, a minister with the Church of the Brethren, while in 1997 Mark K. Bauman and Berkley Kalin edited a quite unusual and helpful volume of biographical essays on southern rabbis and the movement. Two other biographical treatments in the 1990s described Martin Luther King Jr. not in traditional ways but specifically as a minister and preacher. In an important, innovative study, *Voice of Deliverance* (1992), Keith D. Miller, a professor of English, analyzed King's sermons. After showing how King used language and constructed his sermons, Miller located their sources in black and white homiletics. Three years later divinity school professor Richard Lischer addressed King as preacher and orator not just in the pulpit but in the larger public arena to explain how King used his rhetorical powers to lead a movement and the nation. In 1998 Michael B. Friedland presented a fresh approach by using collective biography to compare clergy involvement in the movement with their antiwar activities.²⁵

The most valuable contribution concerning religion and the movement, however, came in 1997 from Charles Marsh, a professor of theology. Looking at his home state of Mississippi, Marsh combined biography and the grassroots approach to probe the connections between religion and racial attitudes at the height of the movement. In separate chapters in *God's Long Summer*, he described the faiths of

²⁴ Paul T. Murray, ed., *The Civil Rights Movement: References and Resources* (New York and other cities, 1993); Andrew Michael Manis, *Southern Civil Religions in Conflict: Black and White Baptists and Civil Rights, 1947–1957* (Athens, Ga., and London, 1987); Joel L. Alvis Jr., *Religion and Race: Southern Presbyterians, 1946–1983* (Tuscaloosa and London, 1994); Gardiner H. Shattuck Jr., *Episcopalians and Race: Civil War to Civil Rights* (Lexington, Ky., 2000); James F. Findlay Jr., *Church People in the Struggle: The National Council of Churches and the Black Freedom Movement, 1950–1970* (New York and Oxford, 1993).

²⁵ Stephen L. Longenecker, *Selma's Peacemaker: Ralph Smeltzer and Civil Rights Mediation* (Philadelphia, 1987); Mark K. Bauman and Berkley Kalin, eds., *The Quiet Voices: Southern Rabbis and Black Civil Rights, 1880s to 1990s* (Tuscaloosa and London, 1997); Keith D. Miller, *Voice of Deliverance: The Language of Martin Luther King, Jr., and Its Sources* (New York and other cities, 1992); Richard Lischer, *The Preacher King: Martin Luther King, Jr. and the Word That Moved America* (New York and Oxford, 1995); Michael B. Friedland, *Lift Up Your Voice Like a Trumpet: White Clergy and the Civil Rights and Antiwar Movements, 1954–1973* (Chapel Hill and London, 1998).

five individuals, who included male and female, white and black, clergy and laity, the famous and the not so well known, and activists on both sides of the freedom struggle. Marsh's work set a new and higher standard for scholars studying not just religion but all aspects of the movement.²⁶

Civil rights literature on women also experienced a major increase after 1980. Much of the new work was biographical. In 1990 Vicki L. Crawford, Jacqueline Anne Rouse, and Barbara Woods edited a volume of original biographical and topical essays on "women in the civil rights movement." The subjects included Gloria Richardson, Septima Clark, Modjeska Simkins, Ella Baker, and Fannie Lou Hamer, as well as women in the Montgomery bus boycott, at Highlander Folk School, and in the Mississippi Delta. Individual biographies have since appeared on Ella Baker, Fannie Lou Hamer, and Ruby Doris Smith Robinson. The first book to assay the contributions of black women generally to the freedom struggle came from sociologist Belinda Robnett in 1997, but its heavy theoretical concerns limited its appeal and utility for historians.²⁷

Diverse later works further expanded coverage and broadened understanding of the black freedom movement beyond the traditional major events, individuals, and institutions. For example, Alan Draper examined the relationship between organized labor and the black freedom struggle, and Michael K. Honey focused on blacks and organized labor in Memphis before the *Brown* decision. Merl E. Reed probed the Fair Employment Practices Committee (FEPC) of the 1940s, and Brian K. Landsberg charted the history of the Civil Rights Division of the Department of Justice. Frank R. Parker assessed the impact of the Voting Rights Act of 1965 on Mississippi politics, while Chandler Davidson, Bernard Grofman, and others studied the effects of black voting in southern elections generally. J. Morgan Kousser has provided an in-depth and more pessimistic analysis of the effects of the Voting Rights Act. The precursors and the earliest years of the movement received attention from Patricia Sullivan and John Egerton, who studied liberals in the New Deal period and the early postwar era. Richard

²⁶ Charles Marsh, *God's Long Summer: Stories of Faith and Civil Rights* (Princeton, 1997).

²⁷ Vicki L. Crawford, Jacqueline Anne Rouse, and Barbara Woods, eds., *Women in the Civil Rights Movement: Trailblazers and Torchbearers, 1941–1965* (Brooklyn, 1990); Grant, *Ella Baker*; Kay Mills, *This Little Light of Mine: The Life of Fannie Lou Hamer* (New York, 1993); Chana Kai Lee, *For Freedom's Sake: The Life of Fannie Lou Hamer* (Urbana and Chicago, 1999); Cynthia Griggs Fleming, *Soon We Will Not Cry: The Liberation of Ruby Doris Smith Robinson* (Lanham, Md., and other cities, 1998); Belinda Robnett, *How Long? How Long? African-American Women in the Struggle for Civil Rights* (New York and Oxford, 1997).

Lentz, Nicolaus Mills, and Herbert H. Haines assessed the treatment of Martin Luther King by national news magazines, surveyed Freedom Summer, and analyzed black radicals and the movement. Brenda Gayle Plummer, Penny M. Von Eschen, and Michael L. Krenn extended scholarly interest to blacks and American foreign policy.²⁸

Competing to supplant Harvard Sitkoff's 1981 volume, new surveys and syntheses of movement history poured forth in the 1980s and 1990s. They ranged from brief textbook treatments to the sweeping narratives of Taylor Branch's *Parting the Waters* (1988) and *Pillar of Fire* (1998). Although none could rival Branch's volumes for breadth and drama, several scholarly studies nonetheless made signal contributions. In 1984 sociologist Manning Marable stressed the importance of the cold war, black nationalism, and economic class in the Second Reconstruction. Three years later Jack M. Bloom, another sociologist, applied a class analysis more rigorously to the movement's history. In *Black, White, and Southern* (1990), David R. Goldfield developed a fresh view of postwar southern race relations that interpreted the civil rights struggle as a religious movement stressing redemption.²⁹

²⁸ Alan Draper, *Conflict of Interests: Organized Labor and the Civil Rights Movement in the South, 1954–1968* (Ithaca, 1994); Michael K. Honey, *Southern Labor and Black Civil Rights: Organizing Memphis Workers* (Urbana and Chicago, 1993); Merl E. Reed, *Seedtime for the Modern Civil Rights Movement: The President's Committee on Fair Employment Practice, 1941–1946* (Baton Rouge and London, 1991); Brian K. Landsberg, *Enforcing Civil Rights: Race Discrimination and the Department of Justice* (Lawrence, Kan., 1997); Frank R. Parker, *Black Votes Count: Political Empowerment in Mississippi after 1965* (Chapel Hill and London, 1990); Chandler Davidson and Bernard Grofman, eds., *Quiet Revolution in the South: The Impact of the Voting Rights Act, 1965–1990* (Princeton, 1994); J. Morgan Kousser, *Colorblind Injustice: Minority Voting Rights and the Undoing of the Second Reconstruction* (Chapel Hill and London, 1999); Patricia Sullivan, *Days of Hope: Race and Democracy in the New Deal Era* (Chapel Hill and London, 1996); John Egerton, *Speak Now Against the Day: The Generation Before the Civil Rights Movement in the South* (New York, 1994); Richard Lentz, *Symbols, the News Magazines, and Martin Luther King* (Baton Rouge and London, 1990); Nicolaus Mills, *Like a Holy Crusade: Mississippi 1964: The Turning of the Civil Rights Movement in America* (Chicago, 1992); Herbert H. Haines, *Black Radicals and the Civil Rights Mainstream, 1954–1970* (Knoxville, 1988); Brenda Gayle Plummer, *Rising Wind: Black Americans and U.S. Foreign Affairs, 1935–1960* (Chapel Hill and London, 1996); Penny M. Von Eschen, *Race Against Empire: Black Americans and Anticolonialism, 1937–1957* (Ithaca and London, 1997); Michael L. Krenn, *Black Diplomacy: African Americans and the State Department, 1945–1969* (Armonk, N.Y., and London, 1999). See also the essays collected in Michael L. Krenn, ed., *The African-American Voice in U. S. Foreign Policy since World War II* (New York, 1998), and the helpful and oft-cited article by Mary L. Dudziak, "Desegregation as a Cold War Imperative," *Stanford Law Review*, XL (November 1988), 61–120.

²⁹ Taylor Branch, *Parting the Waters: America in the King Years, 1954–1963* (New York and other cities, 1988) and *Pillar of Fire: America in the King Years, 1963–1965* (New York, 1998); Manning Marable, *Race, Reform, and Rebellion: The Second Reconstruction in Black America, 1945–1982* (Jackson, Miss., 1984); Jack M. Bloom, *Class, Race, and the Civil Rights Movement* (Bloomington and Indianapolis, 1987); David R. Goldfield, *Black, White, and Southern: Race Relations and Southern Culture, 1940 to the Present* (Baton Rouge and London, 1990). See also Rhoda Lois Blumberg, *Civil Rights: The 1960s Freedom Struggle* (Boston, 1984); Juan Williams,

For all the vast and increasingly diverse scholarship during the last three decades on the civil rights struggle, traditional subjects have not been exhausted and innumerable topics still beg for research. A dozen examples may indicate the range of the work remaining. Many individuals and a number of organizations have not been studied. Among the individuals, for instance, the NAACP's executive director Roy Wilkins and its head in Mississippi, Medgar Evers, still have not found their biographers, and the same holds for many others including Stokely Carmichael, James Lawson, and Ralph David Abernathy. Among organizations, the larger stories of the NAACP as well as its Legal Defense and Educational Fund, especially after the school desegregation cases, have not been told. Many other smaller organizations—the Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights Under Law, the Southern Student Organizing Committee, the Council for United Civil Rights Leadership, the Fellowship of Concern, the Southern Regional Council, the Episcopal Society for Cultural and Racial Unity, and many local organizations—may not warrant book-length study but do deserve attention.³⁰

Civil rights organizations survived because of the support, financial and otherwise, they received, and scholars need to study the larger contours of support for the movement. In his pioneering *Political Process and the Development of Black Insurgency, 1930–1970* (1982), sociologist Doug McAdam employed a political-process model to examine the growth and development of civil rights organizations, but no other student of the movement has followed McAdam's lead to explain the nature and sources of movement support and development.³¹ Too little is known, for instance, about the non-activist patrons of the major protest organizations and how and why their support may have flowed and ebbed. In civil rights as in politics, historians might be wise to follow the money.

Eyes on the Prize: America's Civil Rights Years, 1954–1965 (New York, 1987); Robert Weisbrot, *Freedom Bound: A History of America's Civil Rights Movement* (New York and London, 1990); John A. Salmond, "My Mind Set on Freedom": *A History of the Civil Rights Movement, 1954–1968* (Chicago, 1997); William T. Martin Riches, *The Civil Rights Movement: Struggle and Resistance* (New York, 1997).

³⁰ Roy Wilkins, Ralph David Abernathy, and Myrlie Evers have written memoirs; see Roy Wilkins with Tom Mathews, *Standing Fast: The Autobiography of Roy Wilkins* (New York, 1982); Mrs. Medgar Evers with William Peters, *For Us, the Living* (Garden City, N.Y., 1967); and Ralph David Abernathy, *And the Walls Came Tumbling Down: An Autobiography* (New York and other cities, 1989). On the Council for United Civil Rights Leadership see Nancy J. Weiss, "Creative Tensions in the Leadership of the Civil Rights Movement," in Eagles, ed., *The Civil Rights Movement*, 39–55.

³¹ Doug McAdam, *Political Process and the Development of Black Insurgency, 1930–1970* (Chicago and London, 1982).

As part of his research, McAdam also traced the coverage of the movement by the *New York Times*, and Richard Lentz later examined the coverage given to King by the major news magazines. David Garrow's study of King's Selma campaign also emphasized the role of the national news media. A number of additional books have discussed southern journalists and race, but no scholar has attempted a general study of the relationship between the civil rights movement and the media; Todd Gitlin's analysis of the effects of the media on the rise and fall of the New Left might provide a suggestive model. More specific studies could deal with individual publications or journalists, such as the *New York Times* and its major southern correspondents, John Popham and Claude Sitton. Analysis of coverage by countless other smaller publications—white and black, North and South—could also reveal much about the struggle in individual locales and particularly about popular opinion. The portrayal of the movement in the broader popular culture might also help to explain later perceptions of the movement. In this vein, Melissa Walker has discussed novels by black women that dealt with the freedom struggle, and Brian Ward has recently delved into the connections among “rhythm and blues, black consciousness, and race relations” during the civil rights era, but much remains to be examined in literature, television, the movies, and popular culture generally, including the role of celebrities in supporting the civil rights struggle.³²

Although several scholars have examined various facets of Martin Luther King's thought, the intellectual history of the black freedom struggle has received scant attention. The formal ideas and ideologies of the people involved at all levels in the movement as well as their unarticulated assumptions and beliefs warrant serious analysis. Richard H. King attempted to study “the idea of freedom,” but instead he got mired in theoretical and philosophical considerations only peripherally

³² Lentz, *Symbols, the News Magazines, and Martin Luther King*; Garrow, *Protest at Selma*; Todd Gitlin, *The Whole World Is Watching: Mass Media in the Making and Unmaking of the New Left* (Berkeley, 1980); Melissa Walker, *Down from the Mountaintop: Black Women's Novels in the Wake of the Civil Rights Movement, 1966–1989* (New Haven and London, 1991); Brian Ward, *Just My Soul Responding: Rhythm and Blues, Black Consciousness, and Race Relations* (Berkeley, 1998). Examples of works on southern journalists include Charles W. Eagles, *Jonathan Daniels and Race Relations: The Evolution of a Southern Liberal* (Knoxville, 1982); John T. Kneebone, *Southern Liberal Journalists and the Issue of Race, 1920–1944* (Chapel Hill and London, 1985); Gary Huey, *Rebel with a Cause: P. D. East, Southern Liberalism, and the Civil Rights Movement, 1953–1971* (Wilmington, Del., 1985); and Alexander Leidholdt, *Standing Before the Shouting Mob: Lenoir Chambers and Virginia's Massive Resistance to Public-School Integration* (Tuscaloosa and London, 1997).

related to the rhetoric of the movement.³³ Students of the movement need to be aware of how the rhetoric and its meanings varied among contemporaries and how the definitions may have changed over time. An effort to understand the meanings of language used in the movement could start with the very term *civil rights*. In addition to *freedom*, possibilities include *equality*, *integration*, *Christian*, *nonviolence*, *equality of opportunity*, *black power*, and *the beloved community*. At the same time, scholars need to learn more about the beliefs of those common southern whites who did not support the movement—not just members of the Citizens' Council, southern liberals, and politicians. The attitudes of ordinary people need to be examined as well. Whites' ideas about *Negroes*, *amalgamation*, *segregation*, *the southern way of life*, *states' rights*, and *communism*, for example, warrant exploration because they might reveal much about what George Fredrickson has called "the black image in the white mind" and thereby expose more fully southern white attitudes toward changing race relations and the civil rights movement.³⁴

The language of the movement often had Biblical origins or other religious connotations, yet only recently have the roles of religion and churches begun to receive considerable attention by scholars. Much remains to be done. National, regional, and state studies of many denominations, especially the Methodists and Baptists, have not been written, and the Roman Catholic Church's involvement in the movement still needs to be told, along with that of smaller churches and sects. In each case, scholars need to clarify the differences and similarities among the churches' hierarchies, the clergy, and the laity, white and black. Discussion of the controversy in the South over the National Council of Churches and descriptions of the desegregation of individual congregations would enrich an understanding of the white southern church. In many ways the work of Charles Marsh stands as a model because he treats seriously and sympathetically the religious beliefs of segregationists as well as integrationists, the theologically informed as well as the unsophisticated.³⁵

³³ Richard H. King, *Civil Rights and the Idea of Freedom* (New York and Oxford, 1992). On the thought of Martin Luther King Jr., see Hanes Walton Jr., *The Political Philosophy of Martin Luther King, Jr.* (Westport, Conn., 1971); John J. Ansbro, *Martin Luther King, Jr.: The Making of a Mind* (Maryknoll, N.Y., 1982); Ira G. Zepp Jr., *The Social Vision of Martin Luther King, Jr.* (Brooklyn, 1989).

³⁴ George M. Fredrickson, *The Black Image in the White Mind: The Debate on Afro-American Character and Destiny, 1817–1914* (New York and other cities, 1971).

³⁵ Marsh, *God's Long Summer*.

Many topics, such as religious denominations, may be effectively approached through a study limited to an individual state, and the movement itself could be usefully analyzed through a series of state studies. Adam Fairclough has provided a prototype in his comprehensive work on Louisiana. With significant scope and impressive depth, Fairclough probed all aspects of the movement in the Pelican State. He dealt effectively at the grassroots with the Catholic Church, politics, segregationists, a multitude of activist organizations, and all parts of the state, including New Orleans, over several decades.³⁶ Similar studies are needed on other southern and border states.

Of even greater interest would be a wider range of community studies to supplement the existing ones on Tuskegee, Greensboro, Houston, St. Augustine, Birmingham, and Tallahassee. Not only do communities such as Nashville, Selma, and Atlanta obviously deserve scholarly attention, but the stories of many otherwise unknown centers of activity should also be recounted.³⁷ The pivotal events and key individuals in unheralded places could further enhance an appreciation of the struggle in the lives of ordinary communities and of the movement in general. Especially needed are explanations of how the movement involved and affected people in the rural South. Although Payne's book on the Mississippi Delta and Couto's on several rural communities are first steps by social scientists, future work ought to be more historically analytical. In reaching out to include the otherwise ignored and forgotten, Payne and Couto rely on oral histories but too often accept the voices as telling true stories without verifying the material either with corroborating testimony from others or with more traditional sources. Just repeating such stories, however compelling they may be, makes for incomplete history.³⁸

The local level also provides a particularly important perspective on the desegregation of education, a central subject throughout the civil rights era. Higher education was involved in the movement in myriad ways. In addition to the well-known incidents at the state universities of Georgia, Alabama, and Mississippi, many other colleges, private as well as public, desegregated. Black institutions may not have battled integration, but they and their students played major roles throughout the era and merit study. Beginning with *Brown*, however, the

³⁶ Fairclough, *Race and Democracy*.

³⁷ David Halberstam's *The Children* (New York, 1998) draws on his reporting in Nashville in the late 1950s and early 1960s, but it does not qualify as a well-researched community study of the movement.

³⁸ Payne, *I've Got the Light of Freedom*; Couto, *Ain't Gonna Let Nobody Turn Me Round*.

movement emphasized elementary and secondary education. Although many fine works have examined various aspects of the desegregation of public schools, the topic remains far from exhausted. The works of Davison Douglas and David Cecelski, for example, need to be supplemented by accounts of a variety of other communities as they experienced desegregation. Because public schools operated under state authority, state studies of desegregation may be appropriate. Spawned in reaction to school integration, the private school movement in the South also merits investigation.³⁹

Beyond the traditional topics already mentioned, three general characteristics shared by much of the literature on the civil rights movement point to avenues for further important development and improvement. First, while considerable variety exists among the publications on the civil rights struggle, most conform to a similar chronological outline. At least since Sitkoff's survey of the movement, most historians have apparently accepted a periodization that proceeds essentially from *Brown* to Memphis, or, in the words of a 1970 documentary on King's life, from "Montgomery to Memphis." The chronological agreement received powerful reinforcement from the acclaimed *Eyes on the Prize* television documentary series on "America's Civil Rights Years, 1954–1965." In six episodes, executive producer Henry Hampton and his associates moved from *Brown* and the lynching of Emmett Till to the climactic Selma-to-Montgomery march and the enactment of federal voting rights legislation. (A subsequent eight-part companion series continued the story through 1985 but focused primarily on developments outside of the South.) Within the accepted time span, films and survey texts tend to emphasize the same major figures and episodes, in spite of all the additional information and insights brought by the new social history. The examination of events in individual communities and among ordinary people has failed to inaugurate a different chronological conception of the freedom struggle.⁴⁰

³⁹ Douglas, *Reading, Writing, and Race*; Cecelski, *Along Freedom Road*; Clark, *Schoolhouse Door*. On the University of Mississippi see Russell Barrett, *Integration at Ole Miss* (Chicago, 1965) and Lord, *Past That Would Not Die*.

⁴⁰ *King, A Filmed Record: Montgomery to Memphis*, Ely Landau, prod. (Skokie, Ill., 1970), videocassette; *Eyes on the Prize: America's Civil Rights Years, 1954–1965*, Henry Hampton, exec. prod. (Alexandria, Va., 1986), six videocassettes; *Eyes on the Prize II: America at the Racial Crossroads, 1965–1985*, Henry Hampton, exec. prod. (Alexandria, Va., 1990), eight videocassettes. Henry Hampton and Steve Fayer, eds., *Voices of Freedom: An Oral History of the Civil Rights Movement From the 1950s Through the 1980s* (New York and other cities, 1990). serves, like Juan Williams's previously cited book (n. 29), as a companion to the television series;

As a number of works have already indicated, students should at the very least be increasingly dissatisfied with the standard 1954–1968 scenario. Most breaks with the *Brown*-to-Memphis timeline have deepened appreciation for the decades prior to the school desegregation decision. The New Deal, the FEPC, Truman's civil rights committee, and earlier court cases have been explored at the national level, as well as forerunners at the local level, especially in the works of Norrell on Tuskegee and Fairclough on Louisiana. Too often, however, earlier people and events are viewed as precursors rather than parts of the actual civil rights movement; the relationship between the 1930s and 1940s and the more conventional 1954–1968 period needs to be clarified.

To balance the growing interest in the pre-1954 history, however, more attention needs to be paid to the period after 1968 and the legacies or ramifications of the movement. Three decades after King's assassination, historians and others have examined the effects of the movement primarily in politics and school desegregation, but they largely have overlooked the results in jobs, health care, law enforcement, housing, and many other areas of community life. One worthy recent exception is Timothy J. Minchin's *Hiring the Black Worker: The Racial Integration of the Southern Textile Industry, 1960–1980* (1999).⁴¹ Local and thematic analyses about the South since the 1960s might reveal as much about what happened in the movement as examinations of the pre-*Brown* years. Reassessing the origins of the movement on one end and its results at the other may eventually lead to better critical assessments of the movement itself.

Even within the 1954–1968 model, the research agenda needs to be expanded. Currently scholars typically stress the importance of the NAACP only up through the *Brown* verdict and then shift the focus to Martin Luther King and the development of nonviolent passive

see also the older but still excellent collection of oral histories compiled by Howell Raines, *My Soul Is Rested: Movement Days in the Deep South Remembered* (New York, 1977). Two previously cited exceptions to the chronological limits are Thomas R. Peake's work on the SCLC since Martin Luther King Jr. (see n. 17) and James W. Button's study of several Florida communities into the 1980s (see n. 22). Though beyond the scope of this essay, several photographic collections warrant mention: Michael S. Durham and Charles Moore, *Powerful Days: The Civil Rights Photography of Charles Moore* (New York, 1991); Danny Lyon, *Memories of the Southern Civil Rights Movement* (Chapel Hill and London, 1992); Flip Schulke, *He Had a Dream: Martin Luther King, Jr., and the Civil Rights Movement* (New York, 1995); and Steven Kasher, *The Civil Rights Movement: A Photographic History, 1954–68* (New York, 1996).

⁴¹ Timothy J. Minchin, *Hiring the Black Worker: The Racial Integration of the Southern Textile Industry, 1960–1980* (Chapel Hill and London, 1999). See also the essays in John Higham, ed., *Civil Rights and Social Wrongs: Black-White Relations Since World War II* (University Park, Pa., 1997).

resistance; beginning with Freedom Summer in the mid-1960s, SNCC and more radical activists gain nearly equal billing with King. Throughout the civil rights era, the less exciting contributions of the more conservative NAACP and National Urban League have received inadequate attention. Until Timothy B. Tyson's work on Robert F. Williams, studies of black power and other radical efforts in the South have not been examined.⁴² Even CORE's Freedom Rides of 1961 and the multi-organizational efforts of the Voter Education Project have yet to gain their historians.

Broadened research interests may open new ways of understanding the southern movement. Douglas S. Massey and Nancy A. Denton's *American Apartheid: Segregation and the Making of the Underclass* (1993) and Stephen Grant Meyer's broader *As Long as They Don't Move Next Door: Segregation and Racial Conflict in American Neighborhoods* (2000) studied urban residential segregation, but they have no analogue in the historiography of the South. Similarly, Thomas J. Sugrue's award-winning *The Origins of the Urban Crisis: Race and Inequality in Postwar Detroit* (1996) has no parallel in the literature on southern work, housing, and race relations.⁴³ A deeper understanding of residential and employment patterns might lead to the realization that the significance of some long-term trends or specific events have been either over- or underappreciated; results of a new understanding could include a shift in emphasis on research on the movement or a reperiodization of its history.

Second, the literature on the civil rights movement commonly shares the sense of engagement found in cold war scholarship by John Lewis Gaddis. In the case of civil rights history, the lack of detachment derives both from the participant-observer status of many of the scholars and from the overwhelming morality of the movement itself. Harvard Sitkoff, for example, acknowledged his involvement with the movement in the sixties and his continuing belief that "morality,

⁴² Timothy B. Tyson, *Radio Free Dixie: Robert F. Williams and the Roots of Black Power* (Chapel Hill and London, 1999).

⁴³ Douglas S. Massey and Nancy A. Denton, *American Apartheid: Segregation and the Making of the Underclass* (Cambridge, Mass., and London, 1993); Stephen Grant Meyer, *As Long as They Don't Move Next Door: Segregation and Racial Conflict in American Neighborhoods* (Lanham, Md., and other cities, 2000); Thomas J. Sugrue, *The Origins of the Urban Crisis: Race and Inequality in Postwar Detroit* (Princeton, 1996). Southern urban historians have considered some of the issues; see, for example, Christopher Silver, *Twentieth-Century Richmond: Planning, Politics, and Race* (Knoxville, 1984); Ronald H. Bayor, *Race and the Shaping of Twentieth-Century Atlanta* (Chapel Hill and London, 1996); and Thomas W. Hanchett, *Sorting Out the New South City: Race, Class, and Urban Development in Charlotte, 1875–1975* (Chapel Hill and London, 1998).

justice, and a due concern for the future well-being of our society necessitated an end to racial inequality"; he "felt compelled to write of the strivings and sufferings of these battles to make real the promise of democracy." Whether they personally participated in the freedom struggle or not, chroniclers of the campaign for equal rights have often demonstrated a deep admiration for the activists. A nostalgic William Chafe commented that the college students in the sit-in movement were "the products of an innocence and idealism that we may never see again." A conference on women in the civil rights struggle sought to "identify, acknowledge, and celebrate them" for their "relentless courage and commitment." Patricia Sullivan even dedicated her work on pre-1948 interracial political reform to Palmer Weber, who was both her "mentor" as well as one of the activists studied in her book. In an emotional conclusion to his study of Freedom Summer, Nicolaus Mills urged his readers not to abandon the legacy of the summer project: a belief that a "common ground could be found among blacks and whites." On few other historical topics have historians so passionately expressed their personal attitudes.⁴⁴

The lack of detachment can be readily seen in the striking tone displayed in much of the literature. For example, Taylor Branch's title phrases—"parting the waters" and "pillar of fire"—convey the movement's awesome biblical qualities and the sense that it was in fact a God-inspired moral crusade. Other titles that imply a similar commitment on the part of the author include "bearing the cross," "reaping the whirlwind," "and gently he shall lead them," "righteous lives," and "trailblazers and torchbearers."⁴⁵ The rhetoric reflects the belief pervasive among historians that the movement was just. No scholar would propose writing about the movement from a position hostile to its goals and aspirations, but a more objective view of its participants should be possible. Increased objectivity does not require repudiation of the movement's commitment to justice, freedom, and equality, and it should not be interpreted as showing a lack of appreciation for the bravery, courage, resilience, and heroism displayed by the "trailblazers and torchbearers" of the crusade. Most works, however, have presented only positive interpretations of the movement that shy away from

⁴⁴ Sitkoff, *Struggle for Black Equality*, viii; Chafe, *Civilities and Civil Rights*, viii; Crawford, Rouse, and Woods, eds., *Women in the Civil Rights Movement*, xix, xx; Sullivan, *Days of Hope*, v, xi; Mills, *Like a Holy Crusade*, 193.

⁴⁵ Branch, *Parting the Waters and Pillar of Fire*; Garrow, *Bearing the Cross*; Norrell, *Reaping the Whirlwind*; Burner, *And Gently He Shall Lead Them*; Rogers, *Righteous Lives*; Crawford, Rouse, and Woods, eds., *Women in the Civil Rights Movement*.

searching criticism of its leaders, tactics, and strategies, as well as its larger failure to achieve the goals of racial justice. Again, the writing on the movement has yet to produce a range of strikingly different interpretive schools or consistently clashing interpretations.

A lack of detachment can also prevent scholars from exploring subjects and asking questions that challenge their faith or that appear to threaten their goals for contemporary society. Several examples may suffice to show the range of neglected opportunities. For all the attention to Martin Luther King Jr., scholars have been rather cautious in their treatment of the Nobel laureate. Although David J. Garrow candidly discussed King's "various sexual involvements with a number of different women," his "incidental couplings that were a commonplace of King's travels," and "his compulsive sexual athleticism" in his massive 1986 biography, he offered little serious analysis or deeper explanation of King's behavior. Similarly, King's plagiarism became well known in 1990 when major newspapers and news magazines covered revelations coming from the King Papers Project. In 1991 the *Journal of American History* devoted more than one hundred pages to a roundtable discussion of King and "plagiarism and originality." Since then, the plagiarism issue has received some scholarly attention, particularly in Keith Miller's meticulous work, but no scholar has yet combined the sexual and plagiarism revelations, along with other facts about King's life, to fashion a critical, possibly psychologically informed, biography of King comparable to, for example, the recent studies of John F. Kennedy.⁴⁶

Adventurous students of the movement might go beyond King's sexuality and investigate the importance of sex generally in the movement. White supremacists tried to discredit Freedom Summer and the Selma-to-Montgomery march by charging that interracial sex occurred on each occasion. Even though activists protected themselves and their cause by denying such allegations at the time, nobody since has investigated the extent of interracial sex and its effects on the movement. With so many energetic, passionate young people working in the movement, the absence of sex seems quite unlikely. The importance of

⁴⁶ Garrow, *Bearing the Cross*, 374–75; "Becoming Martin Luther King, Jr.—Plagiarism and Originality: A Round Table," *Journal of American History*, LXXVIII (June 1991), 11–123 (the issue contains an introduction by editor David Thelen, comments by the editors of the King Papers Project, some of King's writings, two interviews conducted by Thelen with King's fellow seminararians, and comments by David Levering Lewis, David J. Garrow, Clayborne Carson, John Higham, Bernice Johnson Reagon, and Keith D. Miller); Miller, *Voice of Deliverance*; Thomas C. Reeves, *A Question of Character: A Life of John F. Kennedy* (New York and other cities, 1991); Nigel Hamilton, *JFK, Reckless Youth* (New York, 1992).

homosexuality in the movement also needs to be assessed beyond a few well-known individuals such as Allard Lowenstein, Bayard Rustin, and Aaron Henry. While Sara Evans linked the movement to women's liberation, no one has examined the possible connections between the black struggle and the gay rights movement.⁴⁷

Historians committed to the movement's goals also have had little interest in exploring one of King's major setbacks, his 1961–1962 involvement in the efforts to end segregation in Albany, Georgia. Although the Albany debacle was covered by Taylor Branch, Clayborne Carson, and David Garrow as part of their larger works, the Albany movement has attracted no attention on its own. Part of the explanation for the neglect of the southwest Georgia community may be that Albany's wily police chief Laurie Pritchett foiled the best efforts of protesters, and scholars have not been drawn to white segregationists, especially when they seemed victorious.

Third, scholarship on the movement also suffers from an asymmetry similar to that Gaddis found in the cold war historiography. Where cold war historians have studied the United States and its allies' role in the conflict rather than the actions and attitudes of their communist opponents (in part due to a lack of available sources during the tense conflict), civil rights scholars have created a similar imbalance by neglecting the movement's opponents. Books on southern politics and politicians such as George Wallace and Orval Faubus necessarily included discussions of the segregationists, and thorough state studies such as Adam Fairclough's on Louisiana and balanced works like Charles Marsh's on religion also paid due attention to them. In the three decades since the studies of Numan Bartley and Neil McMillen, however, historians have generally ignored whites, and particularly the powerful white resistance. With a few exceptions, which include Jeff Roche's study of the politics of massive resistance in Georgia, scholars seem to have assumed that little remains to be learned about the segregationists or that they are simply too unattractive or unimportant to warrant examination.

The failure to explore the segregationists would certainly disappoint Gunnar Myrdal, who argued more than fifty years ago that the real racial problem was in the white mind. As a result of the absence of attention to the segregationists, the stories of the civil rights movement

⁴⁷ William H. Chafe, *Never Stop Running: Allard Lowenstein and the Struggle to Save American Liberalism* (New York, 1993); Anderson, *Bayard Rustin: Troubles I've Seen*; Levine, *Bayard Rustin and the Civil Rights Movement*.

have been told from the inside with little consideration paid to the larger context and opponents of the movement, and the scholarship has therefore failed to develop more comprehensive and complex accounts of the entire era in the South. Including the resistance by white segregationists will heighten appreciation for the achievements of the black freedom struggle and enrich its history. David L. Chappell's odd and sketchy look at southern white supporters of the movement at least broached the topic of southern whites, and a collection of original essays on Virginia examined the "moderates' dilemma" over school desegregation, but no recent scholar has devoted a monograph to the most vocal white position of the period.⁴⁸ An additional deficiency involves blacks who did not participate in the movement or perhaps did not even support it; they too deserve examination and explanation.

More studies of the civil rights era that included the opponents of the movement plus the silent majorities of both races would help promote the symmetry now lacking in the literature and perhaps provide a different view of the movement itself. Studying the entire South, not just black activists and their supporters, would make for a much more complicated story, full of additional conflicts and ambiguities. Understanding the movement's white opponents would necessitate, for example, probing the complex political, economic, and cultural dimensions of southern white society to explain how and why whites held the racial attitudes they did. Told without condescension, the often tragic stories of white southerners' hates, fears, and pride belong in the wider accounts of the civil rights era. Just as scholars need to be critical of the civil rights movement that they endorse as morally correct, they need also to employ sympathetic understanding toward the historical figures whom they cannot morally justify. As Bartley and McMillen have long since demonstrated, historians do not have to approve of the segregationists in order to fully appreciate their significance in southern history.

⁴⁸ Bartley, *Rise of Massive Resistance*; McMillen, *Citizens' Council*; Stephan Leshner, *George Wallace: American Populist* (Reading, Mass., and other cities, 1994); Dan T. Carter, *The Politics of Rage: George Wallace, the Origins of the New Conservatism, and the Transformation of American Politics* (New York and other cities, 1995); Roy Reed, *Faubus: The Life and Times of an American Prodigal* (Fayetteville, Ark., 1997); Fairclough, *Race and Democracy*; Marsh, *God's Long Summer*; Jeff Roche, *Restructured Resistance: The Silbey Commission and the Politics of Desegregation in Georgia* (Athens, Ga., and London, 1998); David L. Chappell, *Inside Agitators: White Southerners in the Civil Rights Movement* (Baltimore and London, 1994); Matthew D. Lassiter and Andrew B. Lewis, eds., *The Moderates' Dilemma: Massive Resistance to School Desegregation in Virginia* (Charlottesville and London, 1998); Gunnar Myrdal, *An American Dilemma: The Negro Problem and Modern Democracy* (New York and London, 1944).

The literature on the movement now needs, therefore, to be invigorated by new works that will challenge the established chronology, add greater detachment, and correct the imbalance now pervading the scholarship. The innovations may come from imaginative monographic work, new syntheses, and, more likely, from new bold reconceptualizations of the movement's history. From whatever source, new approaches will cause controversy and stretch the tolerance of many established scholars. To extend the debate in civil rights scholarship will require that students of the movement become more tolerant of divergent, even iconoclastic, opinions. Two examples may indicate the resistance too often encountered by ideas that run contrary to common interpretations. In 1984, thirty years after the school desegregation case, Raymond Wolters wrote *The Burden of Brown* that assessed "how things worked out in the school districts where desegregation began." The author of earlier works on blacks during the Depression and on revolts among African American college students in the 1920s, Wolters argued that the *Brown* decision had failed because it had not led to desegregation but resegregation, because it had not improved black education, and because it had undermined public education generally. Contrary to the consensus that hailed *Brown* as a turning point for civil rights, Wolters contended that the implementation of the decision shifted from desirable desegregation to impossible integration as naive liberal judges promoted social change.⁴⁹

Initially Wolters's book received little public notice beyond the customary scholarly reviews, which were generally favorable, and a couple of reviews in liberal opinion magazines, one critical by the journalist J. Anthony Lukas. When the American Bar Association in the summer of 1985 announced that it would give its Silver Gavel Award to Wolters's book, however, a major civil rights scholar rushed to defend the standard interpretation by launching an attack on the book. David J. Garrow's criticisms received wide publicity when the *Washington Post* and the *New York Times* reported his charges that Wolters's book was "clearly racist in tone and sentiment." In response Wolters alleged that "in academic circles the word 'racist' nowadays is used to ruin people the same way 'pinko' was during the heyday of McCarthyism." Wolters admitted that "[i]t annoys me that whenever you depart in any respect from the standard prevailing liberal orthodoxy you come in for this sort of criticism." In a review of *The Burden of Brown* published a few months later, Garrow apparently backed off

⁴⁹ Wolters, *The Burden of Brown*, 3.

from the racism charge but did criticize Wolters's use of "heavily loaded" language, disagreed with many of his "outspoken" and "distinctive opinions," questioned his documentation on several points, and found offensive his "self-righteous vigor." Garrow concluded that "this book suffers fatally from a multiplicity of some of the most serious failings that a purported work of scholarship can offer" and that its "biases and political agendas . . . clothed in the garb of careful scholarship . . . completely vitiate any and all affirmative scholarly values that such a book might pretend to possess." In a subsequent letter to the journal, Wolters rebutted the attack on him and his work, but the attacks succeeded in marginalizing Wolters's book.⁵⁰

In 1994, ten years after the Wolters controversy, Michael J. Klarman, a law professor at the University of Virginia, sparked another argument over the 1954 Supreme Court decision. In two separate articles, Klarman questioned the importance of *Brown* in triggering the civil rights movement. Unlike other legal scholars who have challenged the legal reasoning and constitutional justification for the school desegregation decision, Klarman pointed to wider social, economic, and political changes and suggested that "scholars may have exaggerated the extent to which the Supreme Court's school desegregation ruling provided critical inspiration to the civil rights movement." In place of the conventional interpretation, Klarman offered a provocative "backlash thesis": the court's verdict "crystallized southern resistance to racial change," massive resistance then led to violent attempts to suppress civil rights demonstrators that were televised to national audience, and the scenes changed "previously indifferent northern whites into enthusiastic proponents of civil rights legislation." In an indirect way, therefore, the much heralded school decision played a major role in the enactment of the civil rights legislation of the 1960s because it prompted an angry, powerful white southern backlash. *Brown's* importance, according to Klarman, derived more from its impact on southern whites than from its effect in sparking the Montgomery bus boycott and later developments in the civil rights movement.⁵¹

⁵⁰ Washington *Post*, July 5, 1985, p. A10 (first and second quotations); New York *Times*, July 6, 1985, p. 8 (third quotation); David J. Garrow, "Segregation's Legacy," *Reviews in American History*, XIII (September 1985), 428–32 (first quotation on p. 429, second and third on p. 430, and others on p. 432); Wolters's letter of rebuttal is in *Reviews in American History*, XIV (March 1986), 160–61. For other reviews of *The Burden of Brown*, see *Journal of American History*, LXXII (June 1985), 197; *Journal of Southern History*, LI (August 1985), 467–69; Chester E. Finn Jr., "Choice and Coercion," *The New Republic*, March 11, 1985, 35–39; J. Anthony Lukas, "Black, White and *Brown*," *The Nation*, May 25, 1985, 623–24, 626.

⁵¹ Michael J. Klarman, "*Brown*, Racial Change, and the Civil Rights Movement," *Virginia*

In the same issue as Klarman's original essay, the editors of the *Virginia Law Review* published several rejoinders by civil rights scholars, along with a reply by Klarman. David J. Garrow criticized Klarman for "rhetorical excesses" in his "rush toward interpretive novelty." Claiming that Klarman "ignores the profusion of firsthand evidence" about *Brown's* impact on Montgomery blacks, he warned that "rhetorically excessive overstatements and oversimplifications often-times do turn out to be hopelessly hollow once a fuller understanding of the historical record is brought to bear." Joining in rejecting Klarman's argument was historian and law professor Mark V. Tushnet. Eager to defend both the central importance of *Brown* and the crucial role of black activism, he too thought that Klarman "overargues his point" and particularly found distressing that "Klarman's account has the peculiar and no doubt unintended effect of substantially reducing the apparent role of African Americans . . . , coming close to eliminating African Americans as historical agents, as acting subjects in the historical process rather than its objects."⁵²

In a reply to his critics pointedly subtitled "Facts and Political Correctness," Klarman regretted that *Brown* had become "politically sacrosanct" among so many scholars. Specifically, he disputed the evidence of *Brown's* direct inspirational effect on Montgomery blacks, and he labeled the charge about black agency "not only inaccurate, but offensive." Judging *Brown* "not an unambiguously correct decision," Klarman despaired that "it is today unacceptable not only to question the constitutional basis of *Brown* but also to ponder the decision's significance for the civil rights revolution of the 1960s. Such constriction of academic debate is unfortunate." Klarman wanted to open the debate by considering *Brown* within its historical context and without feeling compelled to justify it as a "judicial icon" consistent with constitutional theory. "While, conceptually, it is possible to criticize *Brown* as a matter of constitutional theory without simultaneously endorsing the white supremacist beliefs that underlay the institution of school segregation," Klarman conceded, "in practice this separation has not been so easily accomplished." The attacks on Klarman, like the

Law Review, LXXX (February 1994), 7–150; Klarman, "How *Brown* Changed Race Relations: The Backlash Thesis," *Journal of American History*, LXXXI (June 1994), 81–118 (first quotation on p. 81; second and third on p. 82).

⁵² David J. Garrow, "Hopelessly Hollow History: Revisionist Devaluing of *Brown v. Board of Education*," *Virginia Law Review*, LXXX (February 1994), 151–60 (first quotation on p. 151; second quotation on p. 153; third on p. 154; fourth on p. 160); Mark V. Tushnet, "The Significance of *Brown v. Board of Education*," *ibid.*, 173–84 (both quotations on p. 174).

similar ones on Wolters a decade earlier, seemed to prove the accuracy of Klarman's conclusion.⁵³

Of course, special sensitivity in writing about the southern movement persists largely because the larger national racial dilemma remains unresolved even now, a generation after the passage of most of the major civil rights legislation and King's assassination. With no resolution of these problems, and with no expectation that a solution will soon be achieved, many believe that the civil rights movement has not only not ended but indeed must go on. Political divisions over the merits of affirmative action, over the benefits of school busing, over the meaning of racism, over the causes of black poverty and the interconnections between class and race, and over the nature of racial differences—such divisions, and many others, still characterize the public discussion of race.

Just as in the fifties and sixties, the continuing fight for equal rights and racial justice necessarily involves both proponents and opponents, and in some ways the sides are as clear as ever. In the enduring debate, many historians of the movement seem worried that what they write about the heyday of the movement may somehow affect current policy decisions. Historians, therefore, remain participant-observers or even become partisans, and their detachment suffers. One obvious example would be the possible effects of a truly critical biography of King on the decision to honor him with a national holiday; no scholar who thought King should be honored would have wanted a probing analysis of King's flaws and failures. More significant, supporters of the movement could have feared that Raymond Wolters's negative assessment of *Brown* would fuel the opponents of school desegregation efforts such as busing. Many other issues may strike many scholars as inappropriate for research because the results could have deleterious effects on the continuing public debate.

Historians of the civil rights era may be fated, therefore, to continue to write what Gaddis calls "abnormal history." The growing and expanding literature on the civil rights struggle will, however, inevitably produce an evolving historiography that can be neither predicted nor controlled. Just as scholars have begun to question the chronology of the movement by examining its origins and results, they will eventually

⁵³ Klarman, "*Brown v. Board of Education: Facts and Political Correctness*," *ibid.*, 185–200 (first, third, and fourth quotations on p. 185; second on p. 198; fifth on p. 186); Klarman, "*Brown, Originalism, and Constitutional Theory: A Response to Professor McConnell*," *Virginia Law Review*, LXXXI (October 1995), 1881–936 (quotation on p. 1929).

gain increased critical perspective and achieve more symmetry in their work on the movement itself. Fresh ways of conceiving the field may be attained when a younger generation of scholars who did not experience “America in the King years” begins to write about the movement, but even they will likely write within an ongoing struggle for racial justice. Until scholars acknowledge the end of the movement, like the end of the cold war, historians will need to muster even greater historical imagination to write new histories of the twentieth-century movement and its era in a more detached, well-rounded, balanced manner. Much remains to be learned about the civil rights era, and opportunities for both research and explanation should keep the field vigorous, challenging, and controversial for a long time.