INTRODUCTION

This study seeks to explain what the civil rights movement was about, why it happened and why it was successful. It is an analysis, not a history, of that movement, but it explores the history of the movement and that of the preceding era. It examines the interrelationship of class and race in America and analyzes the ways in which the politics of class and the politics of race shaped and affected each other. I contend that the racial practices and beliefs that the civil rights movement confronted—the denial of political rights to blacks, forced segregation, and the degradation of blacks to second-class citizenship—were embedded within the class, economic, and political systems of the South. Southern racial customs emerged from that class structure and were retained because they were necessary to its functioning. The interest group that, above all others, depended upon black subordination and suppression was the agrarian upper class of the Southern black belt.* This class had both the need to subordinate blacks and the power to do so, albeit in conjunction with other classes. The racist practices that the civil rights movement challenged were basically constructed by and for this agrarian elite. When this class system was undermined, the emergence of the civil rights movement became possible. Overturning the South’s racial policies necessitated pushing aside what had been the dominant class in the region.

This study of the structural roots of Southern racism provides the basis for answering some of the central questions with which an analytical account of the civil rights movement must come to grips:

1. Since blacks had been unable to alter the terms of their subjection previously, what changed to make their successful intervention in history possible?
2. Why did the civil rights movement arise in, and remain centered in, the South? Further, as the movement changed its focus from civil rights to black power, why did its geographical location shift from the South to the North?
3. What interests underlay the vehement opposition to the black movement?
4. How did the movement affect the structure of power within the South?

*The term black belt refers to the plantation area of the South. That region was the black belt in two senses: it contained the fertile black soil that was the most productive farmland in the South—the heritage of the power of the slaveowning class. And it was where most black people resided; they often constituted the majority of the population of a district.
The answers to these questions make up the first part of this book, which deals with the changing structure of Southern racism.

The industrialization and urbanization of the South provided the context for the changes in racial patterns. A new elite and a middle class based on the new urban, commercial, and industrial economy developed as an economic, and ultimately as a political, competitor to the agrarian upper class. This situation provided new opportunities for blacks, but there was no simple relationship of cause and effect. Barrington Moore, Jr. and others have pointed to the possibility of the "Prussian route," whereby a society industrializes while maintaining its repressive political and social system under the continued domination of the agrarian upper class. Moore examined the United States in this light, and he argued that the Civil War was a revolutionary war in which industrial capitalism defeated and destroyed the slaveowners, eliminating them as a force in national politics and paving the way for the further development of democratic rule in the country.¹

Moore was concerned with national developments, and his analysis of the transition from agrarianism to industrialism stops there. But in the postbellum South itself, the agrarian class, while subordinate to Northern capitalism, retained its dominance and set the political tone for the region. In its benign days that meant black subordination and white paternalism. In times of stress, agrarian dominance meant aggressive acts against blacks, including outright guerilla warfare. When the agrarian elite was finally faced with the political and social ramifications of the trend toward industrialism in the region, it dug in its collective heels to fight, and it was defeated.

The Supreme Court ruling of 1954 outlawing segregation in public schools was followed by tumult. The turmoil came about because in challenging Southern racial practices, blacks were effectively threatening the social system on which those practices were based, and the Southern elite whose position depended upon that system. In the end, the black movement was responsible for the transfer of political power from the rural and small-town cliques to the business and middle classes within the cities. That was the historic accomplishment necessary to gain equal legal rights for blacks. Had this process taken place in a nation rather than a region, it would be called a social revolution.

This political upheaval helped to complete the modernization of the South and to assimilate it into the rest of the country. Increasingly, the social and political structure of the South became like that of the rest of the nation. The civil rights movement was thus the producer of these sociological changes as well as their product. The social and economic changes created new centers of power, which did not have the same vested interest in the maintenance of the old racial patterns as the traditional Southern elite. In addition, the new international situation after World War II, in which the United States was competing with the Soviet Union in a world where the hue of more and more political actors was dark, weakened the ties of the federal government with Southern racism. The black vote in the North began to shift the orientation of the national Democratic party. These structural shifts provided new opportunities for blacks in the South to act.
The Class Basis of Racial Politics

The racial patterns that developed in the South were shaped in an economic system that depended upon cheap, plentiful, and easily controlled black labor. When the class system that relied upon racial supremacy was superseded by one that utilized other means to provide adequate supplies of labor, the patterns of racial domination could be abandoned. Racial patterns and racial consciousness have as their foundation particular class structures, and they develop and change as these structures themselves change. White supremacy, then, was the ideological foundation on which the Southern elite created a ruling coalition that it dominated; thus, class and racial struggles often took the form of political battles over white supremacy.

The concepts of class and class structure that I use here in explaining the dynamic of race are not narrowly construed. The concerns of classes, while shaped by their material existence, are political as well as economic, because the political system is so important in setting the framework within which economic struggles are carried out. Therefore, political conflicts frequently express class conflicts as well, even though they may not be phrased in those terms. Political interests, while necessarily conscious and organized, often present their goals in terms of the broader society rather than of a particular social sector. It is political suicide in the United States for a political party to announce itself as upholding the program of a special sector of the society. Parties seek to speak for the society as a whole and to become the legitimate representatives of classes and sectors other than their own. They attempt to obscure the differences between their own and broader social interests, and in the words of John W. Cell, they “make their special class concerns appear identical with the desires of the politically represented sections of society. Making such an identification is the very nature of the politician’s profession.”

My emphasis on the economic sphere is not to deny that racial issues have had a life of their own. Class structure may set the parameters of racial action, but it cannot reduce race to class. All classes of whites participated in various ways in the oppression of blacks; this oppression may have been shaped by the class system, but it had its own independent character.

What, then, provided the dynamic of racism? Recently Edna Bonacich has contended that it was primarily the working class (broadly construed) that was responsible for that dynamic. Bonacich’s analysis is based on her work on split labor market theory. A split labor market is one in which there are at least two groups of workers who are technically distinct, with one being more highly paid and generally better off than the other. According to this theory, racial antagonism emerges from the three-cornered conflict between the employers and the two labor groups. Capital seeks the cheapest labor and may attempt to use the lower-priced labor either in lieu of the more expensive labor or to force the cost of that labor down. At the same time, the better-off labor group emphasizes ethnic or racial antagonism in order to constrict the ability of the lower-priced workers to compete, either by driving them out of the labor market altogether or by
restricting them to jobs that are lower-paid, are more arduous in their working conditions, and offer lower status. Through these efforts they thereby create a caste system.³ Split labor market theory tends to ascribe the primary dynamic of racial discrimination to white labor’s policies. Bonacich says: “The theory predicts that the class most overtly antagonistic to blacks is white labor, not white capital.”⁴ Thus white labor is presumably not only more antagonistic to blacks, but also able to impose its policies against the wishes of capital. An increase in black degradation should be the result.

William Wilson rejected Bonacich’s contention that white labor imposed its policies during the antebellum period in the South, when the slaveowners were manifestly in control. But he accepted her analysis for the period after the Civil War, and historian C. Vann Woodward has presented a picture that in many ways supports Bonacich’s. Woodward contended that lower-class whites provided the main impetus for the imposition of restrictions on blacks, stating that “the escalation of lynching, disfranchisement and proscription reflected concessions to the white lower class [on the part of the upper class].” He saw the lower-class whites as the active agents in this process. It was they who wished to suppress the blacks, but they were held off from doing so by the upper class, which, soon after the Civil War, ceased to view blacks as a threat: “By and large, the blacks still ‘knew their place’; with a few exceptions, mainly political, roles were still defined by race and so was status; social distance prevailed over physical propinquity.”⁵ The ancient racial etiquette persisted with few breaches, and so did personal relationships, and so did the dominance-submissive pattern.” These circumstances helped to create what Wilson termed an “unholy alliance” between blacks and upper-class whites. The latter protected the blacks against the lower-class white demands for their subjugation. In return, said Woodward, the protectors received support they badly needed against the lower-class whites:

Black votes could be used to overcome white working class majorities, and upper class white protection was needed by blacks under threat of lower class aggression. Many reciprocal accommodations between upper class whites and blacks were possible under the paternalistic order.⁶

It was the threat of joint action against the upper class, especially as manifested in the Populist movement of the 1890s, that broke up this arrangement: “The top people of the South were in this instance frightened to some degree, all right, but they were frightened by the white lower class, not by the blacks”⁷ (emphasis in original). Faced with this menace, the upper class deserted the blacks and capitulated to the racist demagogues who emerged from, and who represented, the lower-class whites. It was these whites, held Woodward, who were responsible for the rise of the post-Civil War system of racism.

The barriers of racial discrimination mounted in direct ratio with the tide of political democracy among whites. In fact, an increase of Jim Crow laws upon the statute books of a state is almost an accurate index of the decline of the reactionary regimes of the Redeemers and the triumph of white democratic movements.⁸
Introduction

While the tendencies identified by split labor market theory are real, I contend that the theory ignores the central dynamic of racial oppression. It does not explain how this split labor market was created, nor does it adequately explain the vested interests of the upper class involved in maintaining the racial lines. For most of the second half of the nineteenth century, black and white labor were not primarily in competition with each other. They existed mainly in different geographical locations. The bulk of their labor was farm labor—rural labor, while segregation was basically an urban phenomenon. Black degradation was not primarily the product of upper-class capitulation to lower-class demagoguery. Rather, the upper class created the atmosphere that promoted attacks on blacks and often actually carried out lynching and other forms of terrorism. It did so as a political response to the challenge to its authority and power that emerged from the Populist revolt. The upper class bore the main responsibility for black disfranchisement and accomplished it, for the most part, when it wished to do so. While segregation is not unambiguously a product of upper-class effort, it came into being only after the framework of white and upper-class supremacy had already been established, mainly after the defeat of the Populist uprising in the early 1890s. Woodward himself points out some of this trend: “In their frantic efforts to stop the [Populist] revolt and save themselves the conservatives lost their heads . . . [and] themselves raised the cry of ‘Negro domination’ and white supremacy.” It was this class, still in power and still defending its interests, that blacks had to confront and defeat by creating the political coalition that could effectuate the new balance of power. 8

Creating a New Movement:
The Emergence and Development of the New Negro

The new class structure only provided new possibilities for blacks. Structural change alone does not fully account for the ability of the Southern black population to use its newly acquired social weight with such effect. Blacks could not have accomplished their ends alone; they were not sufficiently powerful to do so. But they were able to bring together a coalition of disparate social forces, which ultimately included Southern business and middle classes, the Northern middle class, the national Democratic party, and the federal government, in support of their efforts to change the racial practices of the South. This new coalition, made possible by the sociological and economic changes mentioned above, was the key to the victory of the civil rights movement. Through the coalition blacks were able to restructure racial politics in the South. The coalition cohered in response to the fight led by the agrarian upper class against desegregation, first of the schools, which that class saw as the beginning of the end of the existing Southern racial order, and hence of its continued political dominance.

That blacks could create such a coalition was remarkable in and of itself. The
Civil War and Reconstruction were the last occasions during which a powerful grouping of forces had toiled on their behalf. At that time, the Northern armies and politicians set their own agenda, and when in their view it was completed, the blacks’ allies retired from the field. It was almost a century before these allies could again be enlisted. This time it was blacks who led the movement and shaped it for their own ends. In doing so, they challenged the power of the racists within the national Democratic party, and they transformed Southern politics.

Of themselves, neither the Southern urban businessmen and middle classes nor the federal government and Northern Democratic party would have pressed for the substantial and rapid changes in Southern racial practices that actually took place. Southern businessmen did not have the same need to suppress blacks as did the agrarian upper class, nor were they necessarily disposed to upset the status quo. The same reluctance to act was exhibited by the federal government and the national Democratic party, both of which drew back from racial confrontation whenever possible.

If the new structural conditions were to eventuate in a changed racial and political order, blacks had to actualize the potential coalition. Doing so meant creating sufficient chaos and disorder that blacks could not be ignored; it meant making it more costly to maintain the status quo than to accede to their demands. Using the growing political power of blacks in the North, the same strategy was successfully invoked to enlist the federal government, the national Democratic party, and Northern middle-class public opinion. The civil rights movement succeeded in pitting one section of the Southern elite against the other, effectively splitting the heretofore solid white Southern leadership. The movement also set the federal government against state and local policies and thus brought victory within its grasp.

How blacks were able to accomplish this task makes up the second set of questions that must be answered to understand the success of the civil rights movement. These are primarily questions of social psychology, dealing with the development of black consciousness. Blacks were the most important element of the coalition. The task that lay before them, of confronting Southern racism and white power, was not an easy one. The consolidation of Southern racist practices that took place at the turn of the century had meant for blacks the suppression of dignity, autonomy, and independence. The emergence of the black movement required a reversal of this pattern, and of the personalities and social relationships it had engendered. A psychological reconstruction of black individuals and of the black community in its relationship to white society as a whole was necessary.

1. How, then, were blacks able to carry through this change? Some people stepped forward before others; some opposed the move. There was a struggle within the black community, and the winners, those who led toward a new direction, redefined the black community in its relationship to white society. What was the inner turmoil occasioned by this change, both for individuals among the black population and for the black community as a whole?
2. Sociologically, who were the participants, who the leaders of this movement, and who among the black population opposed it?

3. How do we account for the outcome of the struggle—the emergence of the “New Negro” in the South, and of a leadership stratum that represented this new trend?

4. How did the class dynamic, invoked to shed light on the structural changes that underlay black motion, affect the composition and development of the movement, including its ultimate transformation from a movement for civil rights to one for black power?

These questions provide the framework for the second part of this study, which examines the black movement of the 1950s and 1960s and the development of black consciousness in that period.

The transformation of blacks was not a simple matter of grievances’ being felt, since these are known to have been there for a long, long time. Neither was it merely a question of the development of an ideology to give shape to these grievances—though this perspective did emerge and did provide black and white supporters alike with an understanding of the legitimacy of their endeavors. Nor was it simply a matter of the development of what Marxists refer to as consciousness, either of class or of race, although racial solidarity did grow significantly in this period and was a part of the necessary changes. The development described by James Coleman in his summary of the “revolutionary transformation theorists” was not a complete description of what took place, but it is relevant: “The revolutionary action itself and the rewards of success it brings to hard work create men who are no longer bound by traditional customs, inhibited by ascribed authority patterns, and made apathetic by the lack of hope.”

All of these elements played their part, as victories fed the black sense of power.

The most important development went deeper than any of these partial explanations. It involved the self-transformation of the black participants and of the black community as an entity. One of Karl Marx’s great insights was that people could not change the world without changing themselves in the process. Marx saw that it was through men’s and women’s actual struggles that they would grow, develop talents and potentials of which they became aware only in retrospect, and eventually alter even their consciousness and self-concepts. He phrased it in the following way in *The German Ideology*:

> The alteration of men on a mass scale is necessary, an alteration which can only take place in a practical movement, a revolution; this revolution is necessary, therefore, because the class overthrowing it can only in a revolution succeed in ridding itself of all the muck of ages and become fitted to found society anew.  

Blacks had to overcome the patterns of action and the self-conceptions that decades, and even centuries, had imposed upon them. In the course of the civil rights movement they made this profound change, and they thus transformed themselves.

In the 1950s, the black movement for change and the white movement of
reaction shaped each other. When the decade began, whites had the power in the South. The Brown ruling of 1954, outlawing segregation in public education, upset the balance of power by placing the federal government on the side of the blacks. But the immediate reaction of the whites showed them to be both intransigent and on the offense. Their response to the Brown ruling, in turn, shaped the choices for the blacks. Each participant’s move was affected by the lessons learned in its previous efforts and by the other’s response. Each sought to impose its version of reality on the society, and thereby each hoped to shape the reality within which the other had to function.

By the end of the decade of the fifties, the white resistance movement had lost in this struggle, and blacks had the momentum. The black movement began with tentative probes, with fits and starts. As it was tested against the white power structure and at crucial junctures emerged victorious, blacks’ resulting self-confidence and courage allowed them to pursue their quest for equality irrespective of the repression and vilification they encountered. In this process, the black population came to define itself in a new way, as makers rather than victims of history. Crucial to this trend was the development of a new leadership that could reflect and articulate the new black attitudes, as well as lead and define them.

As the black movement further developed in the sixties, and as many of its participants continued the struggle for black equality, they perceived that the specifically Southern brand of racism was not the only source of black suffering. American society was a class society, and blacks were on the bottom there, also. As that became evident, and as lower-class blacks were increasingly able to make their social weight have an impact, the demands of the movement for change broadened. The black movement began to call for social and economic alternatives not just in the South but throughout American society—changes that would involve a redistribution of wealth and power. But for such a program there were no white allies of significance to be found. The civil rights coalition foundered on this political rock. Hence, blacks were left in isolation. The cry for black power was a response to these conditions.

Structure and Consciousness

My approach to the civil rights movement draws on, but differs from, two traditional ways of treating social movements in American society. One has tended to treat movements as part of the field of collective behavior and has emphasized what social movements have in common with panics, crazes, fads, and hysteria. From this perspective, movements are treated largely outside of the realm of social structure. A crowd is the prototype of such analysis, and in this crowd the structural origins of the participants are not important. Whether the individuals in a lynch mob are mill workers, farmers, storekeepers, or preach-
ers does not matter; rather, their momentary and intense involvement creates the crowd's own emergent concerns, definitions of reality, and social relationships. They get "swept away." Harkening back to its origins in the reaction to the French Revolution, the collective-behavior tradition tends to perceive the actions of the crowd and its participants as irrational. Such a perception is surely reasonable on the assumptions of this tradition: if there is no structure, if on entering into the field of collective behavior the participants' background, social base, concerns, and needs become irrelevant, then there are no socially rooted interests, and choices of action therefore become capricious. It is difficult, under such circumstances, to imagine what rational action would be.

Another conventional approach is to focus on the structure itself. This approach sees the social structure as defining, shaping, and limiting the emergent social movement. It tends to see the structural components as moved by their interests: class, race, nationality, or status group. But such an approach tends to ignore the active construction of group cohesion and the conscious definition of group interests. These issues of definition are often hotly fought over and are an essential part of the development of group action in social movements. It is not, after all, fated that a black sharecroppers' organization will present itself as a farmers', workers', or blacks' movement; or that blacks will define themselves as having more in common with other blacks of different classes than with whites. Thus, another element that tends to be missing from the structural approach is the interaction of collective actors in motion. If the lines of action of any group must be constructed, then the explanation of the construction of those lines of action must include an examination of the interaction of and within the collectivities. The words and actions of one group can affect significantly those of the other.

It is this interactionist element that provides the necessary corrective to structuralism. One can find the theoretical basis for this approach in the teachings of Herbert Blumer and in the influential work by Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann *The Social Construction of Reality*. The action of groups is constructed within the framework of structures that define and limit the possibilities for social actors; yet, those structures themselves have been humanly constructed. This understanding provides the strategy that governs this analysis of the civil rights movement: it examines the interaction within and between classes and races, first to observe the process by which the class and racial structure of the South was attained after the disruption of slavery by the Civil War. That structure shaped the actors who were part of it. When it was weakened, the various collective actors had to create a new social reality, which would in turn shape those who lived in that society. In the case of blacks, I examined closely how this collective process was mediated through and sometimes within individuals. For that reason, there are frequent references in part two of this study to the experiences and thought processes of individual actors. A good deal of that section examines the interaction within the black community in order to grasp the process by which a new collective identity was created.
Previous Analyses of the Civil Rights Movement

Four analyses of the civil rights movement have made particularly important contributions. The first was Anthony Oberschall's *Social Conflict and Social Movements*. Oberschall held that the Southern rural black population lacked the capacity to change its situation by itself. "Unless massive resources are poured into them," he contended, "and protection from physical violence is extended to the first blacks who break the pattern of subordination, protest against the segregation structure is not likely to come about simply from within." Therefore, to explain the rise of the black movement, he called attention primarily to new allies who came to support the black struggle, and to the movement of blacks to the cities, where they were able to build their own organizations, including the black church and, in the North, the NAACP and the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE).

Oberschall saw the civil rights movement as the product of a growing black middle class, in which students, who were particularly unencumbered by responsibilities and therefore uniquely free from threats of reprisal for their participation in protest activity, often took the lead. He contrasted this movement to the Northern ghetto riots of the late sixties, which, he argued, were a lower-class upheaval that tended to isolate the black movement.

Both of these insights are important. Allies were essential to the success of the black struggle, as was the movement of blacks to the cities, where they were less isolated than in rural areas. And examination of the class influences within the black movement helped to explain its direction and character.

Francis Piven and Richard Cloward also examined the civil rights movement in their 1977 study *Poor Peoples' Movements*. Their treatment was based on an examination of the political economy of racism. Piven and Cloward contended that the Southern patterns of racism were rooted in the class structure of the post-Reconstruction period. Blacks were reduced to a status of serfdom through economic controls supplemented by mob and police violence. Segregation and disfranchisement followed, with the acquiescence of the federal government. Piven and Cloward argued that it was changes in the Southern social and economic structure, resulting from both federal agricultural policies during the Depression and agricultural and industrial modernization beginning in World War II, that prepared the way for a new racial settlement. As they put it: "In the largest sense, political modernization in the South followed from economic modernization."

This analysis provided Piven and Cloward with the basis for grappling with the key question: What had changed to make the successes of the civil rights movement possible? They argued that the new capitalist class that arose with Southern industry did not need the mechanisms formerly used to control the labor market. They further proposed that the acceptance by big business of unions in the North had undermined the utility of racial cleavages to American capitalism and thus loosened the ties of Northern capital to the Southern racial patterns.
They noted that the cold war put pressure on the federal government to withdraw its support of Southern racial practices.

Piven and Cloward viewed blacks as playing a much more active role than Oberschall did. They saw "mounting unrest among masses of blacks, eventually culminating in a black struggle against the Southern caste system" to which "national political leaders finally responded . . . and imposed modernizing political reforms on the South." Like Oberschall, they recognized that black urbanization both freed blacks from the constraints of the tight social control prevalent in rural areas and provided the base for the development of a much more independent leadership and population at large. They provided a valuable account of the development of black consciousness and black action: in response to frustration with the pace of change, students initiated the sit-in movement, which escalated the pace of struggle and inspired other audacious tactics such as freedom rides. This campaign culminated in the massive demonstrations in Birmingham and Selma, which forced the federal government to enact the civil rights legislation that, they said, "finally dismantled the feudal apparatus of the post-Reconstruction era."\(^{14}\)

Doug McAdam’s *Political Process and the Development of Black Insurgency, 1930-1970* explained that to comprehend the emergence of the civil rights movement, it was necessary to examine the broad historical processes "that rendered the political establishment more vulnerable to black protest activity while also affording black the institutional strength to launch such a challenge."\(^{15}\) McAdam began with the joint interests of Southern planters and Northern industrialists to restore cheap black labor and the cotton economy, and he asked what changed to permit the black movement of the mid-twentieth century to emerge. He stressed two changes: the decline of King Cotton in the South, which lessened the planters’ need for cheap labor; and the growing need for black labor in the North. These developments permitted blacks to depart from the farms to Northern and Southern cities, where they became an increasingly important political factor and less subject to terrorism. In the North, McAdam showed, blacks were able, through the use of the electoral system and mass action, to pressure the president and the Supreme Court to act more favorably on their behalf. McAdam argued that the structural roots of racism had been substantially weakened. Thus, he observed, the conditions in which blacks operated had changed, and an effort to alter their terms of existence became feasible.

McAdam next examined the change within blacks that enabled them to take advantage of their new situation through what he called "cognitive liberation," which he defined as "the transformation from hopeless submission to oppressive conditions to an aroused readiness to challenge those conditions." What social conditions will bring about such a change in attitudes? McAdam emphasized a combination of the changing circumstances themselves and the configuration of organizational strength within the black community. He noted that blacks were quite able to perceive the changes around them and that these perceptions rendered "the process of cognitive liberation more likely." Before, under the old con-
ditions, blacks had "widespread feelings of pessimism and impotence." Later, they became more optimistic and developed a greater sense of political efficacy in dealing with these phenomena.16

McAdam built upon Oberschall's work in his analysis of the organizational strength of Southern blacks. He argued that Southern black institutions in the earlier period—churches, colleges, and the NAACP—had all been weak. But the same developments that altered the conditions in which blacks existed also augmented the strength of these institutions: churches expanded and developed a better-educated membership and pastoral leadership; so did black colleges and the NAACP. That was important because these institutions provided much of the base on which the civil rights movement drew for participants, leadership, and support.

McAdam saw much of the decline of the movement in the late 1960s as having occurred because the process that had formerly advanced blacks' efforts now ran in reverse. Whereas in the early sixties the main civil rights organizations had dominated black activities, now the movement became organizationally dispersed and became concerned with a much broader range of issues, each emphasized by one or another group. Factionalism, which became particularly intense with the emergence of the black power ideology, weakened the black movement as the disagreement over goals and other tactics became more heated. Coincidental with these trends was a move by whites away from support for black needs, largely in reaction to the growing militancy of blacks and to the tendency of the movement to make demands regarding racial issues that were no longer limited to the caste system in the South. McAdam held that this white reaction weakened the power of the black vote and increased pessimism among blacks concerning their prospects for political gains. Like Oberschall, McAdam perceived that the issues being raised by the black movement became increasingly infused with a class content. He argued that this change was, in part, what lay behind the diminution of white support and, with the outbreak of the ghetto riots, the turn of the federal government away from supporting black demands and toward suppressing their more militant organizations.

Alden Morris's *The Origins of the Civil Rights Movement*, published after this manuscript was written, has a different slant on the movement from that of the other works considered.17 Morris does not concern himself with the structural basis of the civil rights movement. His focus is on the movement itself. Morris's book argues that blacks led and created the civil rights movement themselves. The book is a careful demonstration of this proposition, showing the sources and sustaining elements of the movement in and around the institutions and organizations of the black community. With that focus, Morris also provided an effective critique of Piven and Cloward's contention that organization impeded black gains.

Morris was concerned with the emergence of the black movement of the fifties and sixties. He showed in detail how that movement grew out of the already existing organizations of the black community, especially the church, but also
the NAACP and black colleges. The church was the centerpiece of the movement as Morris saw it. It provided independent leadership for the black community; it sustained the developing movement; it provided organization and financial resources; and it provided a communications network that helped to spread knowledge of the movement and its strategy of nonviolent direct action. It educated and often organized the activists in the movement. The church became the instrument through which other organizations were mobilized. When the NAACP came under sustained attack in the South during the late fifties, the church provided the base for an alternative movement and an alternative organization, the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, which became the source of a more militant approach than that of the NAACP. The church often educated the students who initiated the sit-ins, and it played a substantial role in organizing those confrontations. Morris showed that at almost every stage, the black church was central to the movement. He also explored other sources of the movement, including the Congress of Racial Equality and what he called “movement halfway houses” — where people were trained and connected to a network of other activists.

These studies provide a good basis for understanding the civil rights movement, and this study builds upon them. It roots the Southern practice of racial domination in the economic system that evolved during the Reconstruction period, and it sees the black-belt elite, not Northern capital, lower-class whites, or all whites, as the primary agent in creating and maintaining black oppression. The concentration here is on changes in the class structure as the central element that made a black movement possible. I contend that new classes came into being whose relations to blacks were based on different considerations than in the old system, and that it was this development that made possible the black victories of the mid-twentieth century. Oberschall drew attention primarily to the new allies who came to aid blacks in the fifties, without examining the social changes that underlay the new political attitude of these allies and without recognizing that black leadership had cohered the movement. Piven and Cloward, who were aware of the broader process of social change, felt that all classes of Southern whites had lessened their opposition to the transformation of the “place” for blacks, and specifically to granting to blacks the right to vote. McAdam also emphasized the universal white participation in black subjection; where he employed a class analysis, it was Northern capital that was presented as the main shaper of economic and racial structures, with little mention of the Southern agrarian elite. But it was this elite that was the primary force that created the economic and racial structure of the South, even though it had to operate within the constraints of Northern capital and the federal government. (It also felt pressures from lower-class whites, and from blacks.) It was that same elite, decades later, that led the resistance to the civil rights movement. The old interests did not fade away — they had to be shoved away.

This study emphasizes the black community’s leading role in overcoming Southern racial domination, beginning with an examination of the ways in which
white power had been able to insinuate itself into and to shape the black community. These aspects of the black subjective experience are important because they indicate what blacks had to overcome if they were to confront white power in the South. The struggle that ensued was key to the emergence of the “New Negro” who challenged white power in this period. The white movement to resist desegregation was defeated in the fifties, and its defeat was crucial to the élan and self-confidence of the black movement. It was on the basis of their own victories that blacks were able to begin the decade of the sixties with such momentum and audacity. A sense of élan was part of the subjective experience of blacks that was necessary to sustain them in their movement.

This interactive development of the black movement meant also that black power grew out of the experience of the civil rights movement, though not in any simple way: the movement was both continuous and discontinuous. It was continuous in that the experiences of the civil rights movement radicalized the black activists and opened them to the new ideology of black power. This effect was more broadly felt as it infused the blacks in the Northern ghettos with a new sense of self, of potential power and militancy, as well as anger with the brutal treatment they saw delivered to the civil rights demonstrators. It was discontinuous in the social base from which it emerged and to whom it appealed. Stokely Carmichael, the leader of SNCC, proclaimed black power in a rally in rural Mississippi. But he was responding to the self-assertions of lower-class blacks in the mostly Northern cities. These blacks had already exploded in several areas, and it was plain that they would do so still more. The rise of black power and the decline of the black movement, if they are to be properly understood, must be approached in the same way as the civil rights movement itself, using a combination of analysis of the political economy and the developing consciousness and élan of the black movement. Blacks moved beyond asking only for their rights as citizens in the South, and their new demands were unacceptable to the white allies who had stood with them against Southern opposition to desegregation; the black movement became isolated. This isolation was the soil out of which grew both the call for black power and the factionalism on which McAdams focused. Factionalism was less a cause than a symptom of the decline of the black movement.

The organization of this book reflects the approach presented here. Part one deals with the changing social, economic, and political structures within which blacks operated. Chapters one and two deal with the structure within which Southern racial discrimination was embedded. Chapter one provides an analysis of the emergence of a new class system after the destruction of slavery, and of how racial practices fit into this system. My contention is that these customs and the power structure of which they were a part were the substance that the civil rights movement had to confront in the mid-twentieth century. Chapter two details the undermining of this class structure and the laying of the foundation of a new structure. In chapter three I turn to another critical component that prepared the way for the emergence of the civil rights movement: the process of bringing the
federal government into the civil rights coalition. The concern here is on the demographic and political changes that enabled blacks to affect the racial policy of the government. In chapter four I examine the rise and fall of the white reaction and how Southern businessmen and the Southern middle class came to support the new coalition.

Part two examines the growth and development of the black movement. Chapter five is concerned with the rise of the leadership of the coalition—the black movement—and with the transformation of Southern blacks. Chapters six and seven examine the experience of the 1960s and the transformation of black consciousness that took place in that turbulent period. Chapter six focuses on the Southern movement in the first half of the decade, with an emphasis on the broadening of the social base of the movement, its growing militance, and the radicalization of black youth. Chapter seven is concerned with the ghetto rebellions of the middle and late sixties, the emergence of black power, and the disintegration of the civil rights coalition.
This study of the growth and development of the civil rights movement has had a dual focus: first, the impact of class politics upon the system of racial domination and of racial politics upon the class structure; second, the transformation of the black self, both individual and collective. At this point it is appropriate to ask, What is gained from such an approach? What insights does it yield?

Class and Race

First, the examination of class and race highlights what the black movement was about, what it was facing as it sought civil rights. It was not merely prejudice, hatred, or entrenched customs that stood in the way of blacks' being treated as humans, but also the vested interest of the agrarian elite. This class had mobilized for massive resistance to segregation to defend its own power and position in the name of the whole white population of the South. Black victory meant the defeat of this class. That is why the term Second Reconstruction applied to the civil rights movement is apt: the first Reconstruction attempted but failed to do away with the power of the Southern landed elite. The Second Reconstruction succeeded where the first failed; it accomplished this change by carrying out what was, in effect, a social revolution.

What had to be changed were not merely laws and customs. The vested interests maintaining those laws and customs had to be confronted. That was the aspect of the civil rights movement that made it seem like a revolutionary movement: the regime of the black-belt, upper class had to be removed forcibly from power. In carrying out this task, blacks fulfilled many of the broken promises from the original Reconstruction era—a period that, in its own way, was tinged with revolution. Because the federal government acted on the side of blacks, the transition of the mid-twentieth century was a mere upheaval rather than an actual overthrow of the government. But this difference should not obscure the social meaning of the outcome: a historic regime was ushered out against its will.
The impact of the 1962 Supreme Court ruling in *Baker v. Carr* was to reinforce the loss of power of the agrarian elite. Known as the one-man, one-vote decision, *Baker v. Carr* ruled illegal all districting that gave disproportionate power to the voters of any one district. The agrarian elite had retained its dominance partly by its disproportionate representation in the legislature and the United States Congress. Georgia even maintained an electoral college type of arrangement for electing the governor, which greatly augmented the electoral strength of the black-belt whites. *Baker v. Carr* hastened the transfer of power to the cities.

Second, the focus on class and race illuminated the social and historical changes necessary for a black victory in the mid-twentieth century. New economic circumstances diminished the significance of the agrarian elite in the Southern economy; new classes—the business and middle classes—emerged, with different needs and interests. Although these classes had no intention of challenging the power of the old ruling class, they acted when their interests were threatened. In case after case, business and middle classes intervened to counter the resistance to civil rights demands and to accommodate blacks. These steps were often taken grudgingly—businessmen were often no less hostile toward blacks than anyone else—but they were taken. The businessmen acted in this way because they were economically and socially vulnerable to black pressures in ways that the agrarian elite had never been and could never be. A glance at some cases other than those already discussed illustrates how decisive this trend was:

*In New Orleans there was resistance to desegregation. Fears of school closing brought business leaders to support publicly a moderate for the school board, “for the future of our children and for the continued growth of New Orleans as a major industrial center in the South.” When mobs and violence persisted, hotels, restaurants, and department stores suffered steep declines in sales. Victor Schiro, appointed as mayor by the city council in the midst of the turmoil, told the public that he was “putting all on notice that law and order will be maintained at any cost.” Schiro was supported by business leaders, and these joint efforts brought an end to the crisis. Desegregation was implemented.*

*In Atlanta, which was the financial center of the Southeast, businessmen did not wait for disorder; they moved to forestall it. The Chamber of Commerce and other influential business leaders put their full weight behind open schools, because “disruption of our public school system would have a calamitous effect on the economic climate outside of Georgia.”*

*In Columbia, South Carolina, the experience of other cities convinced the business leaders, who sought *Look* magazine’s All-American City Award all through the fifties and sixties (they won it twice), that they had to desegregate peacefully.*

*Newspaper accounts of events in Little Rock warned business executives in Dallas of the cost of failure to desegregate peacefully. Fifteen industries were lost in the Arkansas capital, they were told. The Dallas business community supported compliance to desegregation.*
In Augusta, Georgia, threats to disrupt the Masters Golf Tournament and the experience in New Orleans brought some concessions. But it is interesting to note that in Augusta, when blacks pressed for their demands in the courts rather than the streets, steps toward integration proceeded much more slowly, indicating once again that social disruption was necessary to produce results.\footnote{6}

Even in Jackson, Mississippi, said one observer: “Mississippi business opinion generally came to believe that the state’s economic development would be hurt by racial disorder. When they reached this conclusion, the weight of their influence moved toward easing the conflict through compliance with the federal law.”\footnote{6}

Third, a class and race analysis explained the form that the civil rights movement took. The process of social change is uneven. New economic and social conditions were not accompanied by a different way of treating blacks, or by an altered distribution of political power in the region. The “fit” between these spheres was no longer tight. Numan Bartley first characterized the South as a classic example of what William Ogburn termed “cultural lag.” The differing situation of the new urban classes meant that they could be split from the black-belt upper class. That split did not take place of itself. The unevenness of social change helped to set the stage for a social movement to establish a new stable equilibrium; but to attain it required social upheaval.

The Southern upper class had two distinct social and economic bases, each with a different relationship to the segregation system and to blacks themselves. While for the small-town agrarian group the maintenance of the old color line was of vital importance, it simply was not for the urban business interests. This difference provided space for the black movement to develop, space that was greatly augmented by the shift of the federal government in favor of civil rights. Indeed, the division within the Southern elite invited a black movement, for while the new business class could be induced through pressure to throw its weight on the side of the blacks, it would not do so of itself. The black-belt elite did everything in its power to block change, and the federal government moved ponderously. Therefore, blacks had to act. At the same time, the divisions made it easier for blacks to act and more difficult for the segregationists to repress them.

Normally, a monolithic elite is much more difficult to confront than one that is divided. A unified elite is able to mobilize the population in its support, to point to all the prestigious and powerful centers of the society in support of its position and to contend that its point of view represents a consensus. A monolithic elite is thereby able to isolate those who seek to challenge its power. When there is an open split, an elite cannot so readily isolate its opposition, and so that opposition gains access to a broader hearing in the society. Moreover, because the elite is split, the opposition can, as blacks did, render the split wider, increasing its social power.

The civil rights movement created a new racial etiquette and recast political alignments. It helped to close the fissures that had opened between the agrarian
and urban centers of power within the Southern states, and between these states and the federal government, but on a new basis. The system became stable once again.

Finally, the focus on class and race explained the shift of the movement to the North, and with that move the decline of civil rights as a unifying slogan and the emergence of black power. The swelling of black activity in the North, and its relative decline in the South, indicated that the civil rights movement had accomplished its goals. The move to the North also heralded a new set of goals defined by problems unique to the black urban experience and especially felt in the North. These problems arose from the position of most blacks on the bottom of the class structure of modern America—their class position was exacerbated by their racial status. Black efforts to alter this position demanded changes in the class system; these were structural changes that the civil rights coalition would not and could not carry out. So, as the focus of the movement changed, blacks were left alone in their efforts, an isolation that ultimately led to the move toward black power.

The civil rights coalition, which had been vital to the success of the movement, was an unstable phenomenon. As a coalition, it was never negotiated, nor did it have any explicitly agreed-upon program. The blacks’ allies often had to be dragged into support. As the movement proceeded into the sixties, and the tasks the blacks set for themselves were more far-reaching, the demands that they made on their coalition “partners” were more significant, as well. Much more was asked of businessmen in Birmingham than in Montgomery or Little Rock, and of the federal government, as well. At the same time, the struggle moved from the Upper South to the Deep South, where the agrarian elite was stronger and the racial patterns more entrenched. As a result, resistance to desegregation and to black political rights was greater. The stronger position of the agrarian elite in the Deep South meant a more aggressive struggle for civil rights—massive confrontations ensued. Such confrontations served two tactical functions: to demonstrate the strength of the movement to those in power and to elicit support from allies. The tactics were successful: concessions were made on the local level, and the federal government was prodded to intervene much more deeply in Southern social and political life.

The success of confrontation, however, contributed to the disintegration of the civil rights coalition. In one sense that should have been expected, because the coalition succeeded in attaining its goals. In another sense it was not expected; there was no clearly defined statement of goals that the coalition as such was seeking. The federal government did attempt to accommodate itself to the newly expressed aims of the black movement for equality with its multifaceted Poverty Program, begun in 1964. This program also raised expectations, especially with the Community Action Programs, through which it mandated “maximum feasible participation” by the poor. But these were expectations that could not be fulfilled without altering the structure, not of an outmoded social system such as had been dominant in the South but of modern America. It was these raised expec-
tations that called into relief the limits of the civil rights coalition and foretold its disintegration.

The rallying cries of the movement may have signaled its fragile character. Coalitions are created with slogans and concepts that are of sufficient generality to appeal to broad sectors of the society. The broad slogan of white supremacy, for example, became the banner under which the Southern agrarian elite was able to grasp and consolidate its power. The goals of the civil rights movement were similarly framed in the simple and appealing calls for "freedom" and "equality." The development of the doctrine of nonviolence and the search for "brotherhood" were also part of the ideological appeal of the black movement—waged under virtually the same slogans as the French Revolution: liberty, equality, and brotherhood.

These slogans made it possible to draw in a broad spectrum of groups to support the civil rights movement. The usual fate of coalitions that include such a broad spectrum is to fall apart once the broad aim that brought them together has been achieved. Because they involve disparate forces with differing needs, they group themselves under a single banner, using the most general of terms. But the various parties give such terms very different meanings. Freedom for the middle class may mean the removal of governmental control, and particularly the provision of free access to the market place, while for the working class it may mean access to jobs and social services, the absence of hunger and poverty. The two classes may unite against the power of the old regime, but when a new regime is brought into being, they then have to come to terms concerning its content. It is not surprising, therefore, that stresses emerged in the civil rights coalition, as a result of the differing concerns of its component parts. The "freedom" from segregation and overt racial discrimination was acceptable to the coalition; the "freedom" from economic misery was not. So, as the goal changed, the binding force of the coalition dissolved.

**Race and Class**

There were other ways in which the politics of class and race influenced one another. It was not merely that the class structure shaped the possibilities for racial action. There were classes within the black community, and these classes also affected black action. Consider:

1.---The dynamics of the old system had divided blacks along class lines. The divisions in the old system had a weak objective basis. Those considered of higher social rank often had a tenuous hold on their status. That was all the more reason for their subjective insistence upon an exaggerated social distance separating them from poorer and (in their view) less cultured blacks.

2.---The social distance separating blacks from each other was a significant obstacle to be overcome if blacks were successfully to confront white power. Overcoming it often came about when higher-status blacks realized that they
were still only “niggers” to whites and that they needed to stand with lower-class blacks to be successful in advancing their own ends.

3.—While the demands of the civil rights movement were of benefit to all in the sense that they were a step toward the recognition of blacks as worthy of human dignity, it was primarily middle-class blacks, who were financially independent of whites, who led the assault and who were able to make use of its victories.

4.—As the movement proceeded, it drew in broader layers of people, who began to influence its goals and methods, as well as the general thinking process that permeated the period. The fact that the black population was overwhelmingly lower- and working-class in the 1960s meant that the black movement would inevitably have to champion their cause and to raise issues that would trouble middle-class white America. Ultimately, it became these issues that divided blacks from their white allies.

These points demonstrate that the class structure of the black community, which was itself shaped by the class system of American society, played an important role in the development of black consciousness and in the course of action chosen.

At the same time, the interpenetration of race and class was such that race was very important in shaping the class structure. I have argued that race was the lynchpin of the class settlement that emerged out of the post-Civil War period: the positioning of blacks at the bottom of the class structure, circumscribed by law and by terror, was necessary for the political power and for the economic well-being of the agrarian elite. Moreover, in carrying through the reforms of the civil rights movement, blacks caused a reshuffling of the distribution of class political power. This change had economic as well as political consequences. As representatives of the business and middle classes came to power, they made decisions that were of benefit to business and to the urban economy in general. All of that is to indicate that the interrelationship between class and race, race and class is most complex and not subject to any simple formula.

The New Negro

While the impact of class on racial politics was profound, it was not determinate. The interaction of races, of classes, and of individuals provided the framework through which changes emerged. In the old system, accommodation became the dominant path for black advancement. The prolonged period of white supremacy took its toll on blacks, who developed a sense of inferiority, the custom of acceding to white power, and a leadership that made its way by winning favors from whites.

Challenging the entrenched system necessitated a self-transformation that involved a difficult struggle both within and between individuals. People had to confront themselves and to steel themselves to make it possible to confront white
power. It is not surprising that youth played such an important role in this process. They did so not only because they were relatively free of the encumbrances of life—of homes, jobs, families—but also because they were still in the process of defining themselves as individuals and had sufficient personal flexibility to attempt the difficult process of refashioning themselves. Standing up to white power necessitated restructuring the black community: new leaders were required, as well as a new style of leadership.

Southern blacks entered the decade of the fifties with the naive expectation that segregation and white supremacy would be ended voluntarily by the white leadership once it became clear that these policies were illegal and unfair. This expectation was based upon the concessions that had been made to blacks in the postwar period prior to the Brown ruling and upon the lingering attachment to the system of white paternalism. But the concessions were made primarily to maintain the system of white supremacy, and when it became clear, with the Brown decision, that white supremacy was in jeopardy, the response of the Southern elite changed. Irrespective of the law, they meant to have their own way, and they began to fight for it.

The actions of the agrarian elite forced the blacks, in their turn, to organize in response, and several confrontations ensued. The result was a new sense of self-worth and power; by the end of the decade, blacks had changed a great deal. They were angry, disillusioned with the federal government and with white liberals, and they recognized that their opponents, the advocates of white supremacy, were perfectly prepared to break the law. It became increasingly clear that it would take direct action on the part of blacks to defeat segregation. It was also evident that direct action might well entail breaking the local laws, which were structured to defeat the purpose of the federal law to which the blacks adhered. It was plainly a matter of whose laws would prevail. In this case, given the actions of leaders of the Southern resistance, one or the other—state or federal law—was bound to be broken. Thus, the lawbreaking that became almost a hallmark of the black movement in the sixties, and that spread by example to the student and antiwar movements of that time, was inspired and effectively taught by the Southern conservatives who chose to defy the Supreme Court.

It is possible that, had the Southern black population encountered in the fifties the viciousness and brutality that it met in the sixties, it would have been turned back. But in the fifties blacks won a series of victories, some larger, some smaller—with the high points in Montgomery and Little Rock—and thus they entered the sixties with a sense of growing self-confidence and militancy and with an organization that embodied these sentiments: the Southern Christian Leadership Conference. And when they faced the implacable resistance in the Deep South, they could not be turned back by it—they meant to have their victory. It was this sentiment, when carried into the later sixties, and when faced with the bitter resistance of the Deep South and the relative (to blacks) indifference of the white North, that brought about the alienation that was manifested in black riots and in the ideology of black power.
The New Negro, though made possible by changes in the class structure, was a product of black effort: blacks were creating themselves anew in may respects. Knowing that right and even the law were on their side was one thing, and seeing themselves act cohesively, courageously, and effectively was another. As blacks tried themselves and discovered their abilities under what were often adverse conditions, they grew and developed. Their perceptions and their consciousness changed through their efforts. Thus, the process of refashioning the world had as its byproduct a rather substantial reconstruction of black character. That is not a novel occurrence or finding; it frequently happens in a social movement, though each time in a unique way. It is no less significant a development for that, and to the participants it was certainly both very new and very important.

The Impact of the Civil Rights Movement

I began this study with a perception of the significance of the civil rights movement. It had deeply affected American society. The student movement of the sixties, the anti-Vietnam War movement, the movements for women’s rights and gay rights emerged largely as a product of the civil rights movement. The struggles of American Indians, Hispanics, and Asians were profoundly influenced by this movement. The civil rights movement shattered the extraordinary social quiet that had settled upon the nation in the 1950’s. It put an end to the view that a consensus prevailed in American society, that ideological conflict was over, and that most of the fundamental problems associated with inequality had ceased to be in the United States. As my research proceeded, I came to realize that the legacy of this social movement was far greater even than these important developments.

The civil rights movement ended an era in American history and began a new one. It was a vital part of the modernization of the South. That was evident in the political realm, where blacks not only won the right to vote but, in doing so, brought a new class to political leadership within the region. Blacks played an important role in the industrial development of the South, as well. As the South developed its industry, failure to confront the racial patterns would have been likely to fetter industrial production; as industry expanded, business leaders would be saddled with segregation, limiting their use of labor. So the civil rights movement, which was made possible by industrial expansion in the South, in its turn cleared the way for further industrial expansion.

As a result of these changes, the particular structures, customs, economy, and political culture that had kept the South apart all deteriorated as the agrarian elite ceased to be the dominant class of the region. The South had become one with the nation. The election of Jimmy Carter of Georgia as president was indicative of this new situation. Carter was the first Southerner to attain that office by election since before the Civil War; until the civil rights movement it was unthinkable that anyone from the South could be the nation’s leader.
There has been much discussion and speculation about the end of the civil rights movement, and with it of the Second Reconstruction. Will blacks be returned to their position of second-class citizenship, as they were following the original Reconstruction period? If the analysis presented here is correct, there will be no turning back. The Second Reconstruction was more thoroughgoing than the first. It was premised on the structural changes that had already begun reshaping both the economy and the demographic make-up of the South, as well as the distribution within the nation. After the Civil War and Reconstruction, the South had continued to develop along lines radically different from those of the rest of the country. Its culture and politics reflected this different development. Later, as the South came to resemble the rest of the country economically and sociologically, the basis for its distinctive political structure and racial practices disappeared. The Second Reconstruction succeeded in removing from political power the representatives of a class that could no longer reassert its former control. The particular form that Southern racism had taken was the legacy of a system that was in the process of disappearing and that could not be restored. So, while racism is not ended in this country, its peculiar Southern form is, and so are some of its features that had become instituted nationally. That is not to say that blacks do not or will not suffer from what President Nixon called “benign neglect,” or that there has not been an effort to roll back some of the gains of the sixties and seventies. It is to say, however, that, short of some major catastrophe, state-sanctioned segregation and second-class citizenship for blacks are gone for good.

As a result, blacks have more opportunities for access to the benefits as well as the problems of the American class system. In that sense, the shift of the locus of black struggle from the South to the North had an important symbolic significance. Blacks in the North were not protesting primarily the segregated racial system of Southern oppression; they were protesting the American class system as it particularly affected blacks. As the South changed, it became more like the North. And the problems of blacks in the South became basically the same as those confronted by blacks in the North. Thus, the protests of Northern blacks were concerned with issues that did or would soon affect blacks everywhere.

The black civil rights victories, by opening some of the barriers of caste, left greater room for class differentiation within the black population. Many blacks have risen; the black middle class has substantially expanded. While E. Franklin Frazier could write critically in 1957 about a black bourgeoisie that was more pretense than substance, today the black community has a real stratification pyramid.* Affirmative action programs, instituted as a result of the civil rights movement, are one reason for the expansion of the black middle class.

A result of class differentiation within the black community has been the emergence of class conflict among blacks. This trend was evident in Atlanta in the 1970s. Garbage workers there, who were overwhelmingly black, went out

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*In truth, it is only a partial pyramid. There is no black stratum comparable in power and wealth to the upper stratum of whites.
on strike in 1970 against the white mayor. They were supported by the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, which joined their picket lines and turned the strike into something of a moral crusade, and by Maynard Jackson, the black vice-mayor of the city, who called the wages of the strikers “a disgrace before God.” As a result, the union backed Jackson in the next election, and he won, becoming the first black mayor of the city in 1973. Early in 1977 the workers again went out on strike. But by then Jackson had switched sides: as mayor, he fired one thousand strikers and effectively broke the union. In all probability no white mayor could have done that: in 1977 few members of the city’s black civil rights leadership spoke out in favor of the union. The SCLC was silent, while Martin Luther King, Sr., the Urban League, and other important black organizations sided with Jackson. The mayor had been bitterly opposed in his first election bid by the white business community in Atlanta, and bitter relations had persisted throughout his first term. But when he announced his candidacy for a second term shortly after the strike, he was embraced by these same business figures. One can expect other such occurrences, though perhaps not so dramatic as that in Atlanta.

That is not to say that blacks who move up into the middle class will or do find themselves in conflict with their poorer brethren. Black unity still has vitality, because race and racism persist as powerful forces in American society. An example is provided by the racially divided city of Chicago. There, Harold Washington was elected as the first black mayor of the city in 1983, on a reform platform. The city council retained a white, machine-dominated majority. When Washington nominated Dorothy Tillman, a longtime civil rights activist and foe of the machine, who represented poor blacks, to replace a black alderman who had been convicted of corruption, the city council sat on the nomination, refusing to confirm it. While her nomination was held in limbo, Ed Gardner, owner of Sof-Sheen, a prominent black hair products company, and John Johnson of Johnson Publications, which produces Jet and Ebony magazines, paid her aldermanic salary and picked up her office expenses. Here, class differences were minimized in the face of a racial conflict.

In recent times, the black movement has shown signs of advancing. The black power trend, as it was manifested in the late sixties, was something of a blind alley, and the riots soon ended. The protest organizations were either crushed (as was the Black Panther party by police attacks) or coopted, or they withered away. But many of the gains remained, and blacks progressed in some areas while losing out in others. The continued consolidation of the black presence within the cities and the flight of whites to the suburbs have extended the black political base. Political control, in its turn, provides an increasingly deep layer of people with leadership ability and experience and a base for extending black political influence. More black people are registering to vote, and more are voting. These voters are people who have been profoundly changed by the impact of the civil rights movement, and the American political system will have to come to terms with this developing black political savvy and strength.

Moreover, blacks have increasingly become a central part of the labor force,
and often the most union-conscious sector. That has been happening at a time when labor is under assault from business, from the shocks provided by international competition, and more recently from a conservative administration. What will be the outcome? Will there be a new labor upheaval? Will a coalition like the one Martin Luther King, Jr. envisioned of black and white poor, or of black and white labor, come into existence? Perhaps. If such a movement does cohere, there is no reason to assume that black members of the middle class will oppose it or be indifferent to it. Many will undoubtedly support it, and some will be among its leaders. Such a movement would not be able to forsake issues of racial discrimination and equality or allow them to be subsumed under the notion of class unity. More likely, such a movement would have forthrightly to come to terms with racial issues, because the social power of blacks simply cannot be ignored.