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ABSTRACT
              Two main ideas are put forth in this paper: a
description of the struggle of African-Americans to become full
participants in the democratic process both before and after World
War II; and an argument posited that through these struggles African
Americans exposed the imperfections and weaknesses of the democratic
society and provided for themselves a blueprint of how to resist
oppression successfully. The roots of the Civil Rights movement of
the 20th century can be found in the historical experience of
African-Americans in which they were systematically excluded from the
democratic process. Highlights of the Civil Rights movement included
specific incidents, marches and protests, the formation of
organizations, legal efforts, and other tools utilized to promote
social and political change. African-Americans had little choice but
to resort to mass concerted pressure and to take their efforts
outside the existing democratic structure, because the American
ideals of equality and liberty did not, in reality, yet apply to
them. The paper concludes by arguing that the struggle of
African-Americans for civil rights provided a blueprint for
successful resistance used by other disadvantaged groups in the 1960s
and 1970s. A 28-item bibliography is included. (DB)

POST WORLD WAR II CIVIL RIGHTS MOVEMENT: THE STRUGGLE FOR DEMOCRACY AND BEYOND

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POST WORLD WAR II CIVIL RIGHTS MOVEMENT:
THE STRUGGLE FOR DEMOCRACY AND BEYOND

The purpose of this presentation is twofold: to describe the African-American struggle to become full participants in the democratic process before and after World War II; and to demonstrate that by these struggles, African-Americans exposed the imperfections and weaknesses of the democratic society and provided a blueprint of how to resist oppression and how to resist oppression successfully. In other words, the struggle was a movement beyond Democracy--a struggle not simply to enter the status quo as it existed but to fundamentally change the practice of Democracy in the United States. Since the history of Africans in South Africa is not just a history of Apartheid, the history of Africans in America is not just a history of oppression. Therefore, the goal here is not to bring to you a history of oppression in America. The challenge is to describe the African struggle against oppression in America.

Democracy has been defined as government by the people, i.e. with supreme power vested in the people and exercised directly by them or indirectly through elected officials. This definition, expanded over time, today encompasses the ideas of social equality, the concept of the "common people," the notion of people as the source of political authority, and the belief in the respect for the individual

within the community. The principles of Democracy have

remained the same whether the prevailing terminology was

Jeffersonian Democracy, Jacksonian Democracy, Republicanism

or Progressivism. However, a nation founded on these

principles consistently found itself unwilling or unable to

extend benefits to a people who surfaced on the North

American continent in 1526, who became willing immigrants in

1619 and forced immigrants by the 1640s, and who suffered

hereditary enslavement after 1662. But as slaves and later

as freedmen (before and after the Civil War) these people

tested the principles on which the nation stood.

African-Americans fought in the Colonial and Revolutionary

battles, instituted conspiracies and revolts, produced

newspapers and books, explored the West as cowboys and

farmers, founded organizations to help themselves, and

fought back against riots and lynching. The rationale was

enunciated thusly: "We refuse to allow the impression to

remain that the Negro American assents to inferiority, is

submissive under oppression and apologetic before insults."

(Niagara Platform, 1905) However, the system of segregation

(Jim Crow) in place by the 1890s expanded swiftly and

tightly. Educationally, Jim Crow was segregated schools and

inferior education. Judicially, Jim Crow saw to it that all

fundamental civil liberties guaranteed by the Constitution

were denied--such liberties as the right to due process of

law and the right to trial by a jury of one's peers.

Furthermore, those African-Americans convicted of crimes were often placed as a part of the convict system of leasing prisoners to work only for Anglo-American contractors. Economically, Jim Crow stood for the denial of jobs, equal pay where jobs were available, job protection by employers and labor unions as well as adequate housing, food and health care. Politically, African-Americans were denied voting rights and the right to hold public office. Socially, Jim Crow required signs specifying color over water fountains, separate hospitals and cemetaries, different Bibles in courtrooms and more, including the separation of blood by color of the donor in blood banks. Underlying this system of oppression was the federal government's abject failure to enforce the rights guaranteed by the Constitution, the Bill of Rights and the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments. The situation in America from the African-American perspective was simply "Apartheid USA."

But the militant mood which flashed in slavery with insurrections, petitions, daily resistance and David Walker's Appeal (1829), flashed under early Jim Crow with boycotts, "sit-ins," institution building and migration. The militancy against the denial of liberty flashed in the 1920s with Marcus Garvey's United Negro Improvement Association with its call to return to Africa and its emphasis on the beauty of blackness and with Claude McKay's stirring rhetoric that "If we must die, . . . let us nobly

die . . . fighting black!" The poem written after the "Red Summer" of 1919 (twenty-six race riots) was placed in the Congressional Record as an example of the "dangerous currents" among African-Americans. The 1930s witnessed overt reactions against the Bronx (N.Y.) "slave marts" where African-American women, standing on street corners, were forced to sell their "wares" (domestic skills) for starvation wages on a daily basis to wealthy suburbanites. Outrage for these and other incidents acted as an impetus to the founding of the National Negro Congress (NNC-1935) which urged the unionization of African-American women workers, desegregation of public accommodations and schools and anti-lynching legislation in its attempt to accomplish unity of action among all existing protest organizations. The NNC went further. In its list of resolutions, the organization condemned war, colonialism, fascism and the attempt to subjugate Ethiopia.

By this time, the United States, gearing up its industrial production for possible war, envisioned its great destiny: "It must be a sharing with all peoples of our Bill of Rights, our Declaration of Independence, our Constitution, our magnificant industrial products, our technical skills" and set an example as "the dynamic center of ever-widening spheres of enterprise . . . the training center of the skilled servants of mankind." (Henry Luce, 1941) This vision resulted in an aggressive mandate in

foreign and domestic affairs. But the assault on racial and
ethnic domestic problems was too meager. African-Americans
decided to begin their own assault against injustice.

The national verbal opposition to fascism and nazism
indicated to African-Americans that World War II was, in
part, a fight against racism. The rhetoric of equality,
Democracy, "saving the world" became a part of American
patriotism which African-Americans accepted. However, while
accepting the rejection of the master race ideology, they
were not content to simply wait out the war. The community
demanded that all gains made not be lost and that the
struggle for equality should proceed unabated and, if
necessary, proceed on an intensified scale. Consequently,
it was during the period immediately before the war that the
African-Americaqn community stepped up protest against
injustice. Ironically, even while the democratic slogans of
war were being enunciated and while the war was being fought
African-Americans were subjected to harrassment, lynchings
and riots. As a matter of fact there were some 243 racial
conflicts during the war years, the worst in Detroit, the
"arsenal of Democracy" where the riot led to a loss of
thirty-four African-American lives and millions in war
production. Additionally, war efforts themselves emphasized
the disparity between the creed and practice of Democracy as
African-Americans faced rigid discrimination in industry and
the armed forces. With the disparity, many realized that

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perhaps the war was not being waged to end racism but to retain the fundamental elements of the American system including segregation and discrimination.

The African-American responses to discrimination coalesced in 1941 into the March on Washington Movement—regarded as one of the most brilliant power plays ever executed by an ethnic minority. Bringing together all the bitterness, protest, unrest, frustration, trauma and believing that the power of organized masses affects policy, African-Americans threatened to bring to Washington one hundred thousand people to participate in a protest march on 01 July 1941 against discrimination in defense industries, the government itself, and the armed forces. The president (Franklin D. Roosevelt) capitulated after serious attempts at negotiation had failed and issued on 25 June 1941 the famous Executive Order 8802. The order which forbade discrimination based on race, color or national origin in defense industries and in the government was hailed as a victory even though the armed services would remain segregated until Executive Order 9981 (issued in 1948 by Harry S. Truman). But the victory, although partial, gave credence to the idea of mass concerted African-American protest.

Additionally, the 161 community newspapers, led by the "Big Four" [Pittsburgh (PA) Courier, Chicago (IL) Defender, Baltimore (MD) Afro-American, Norfolk (VA) Journal and

Guide] began a campaign for the "Double-V"--victory at home
and abroad--by aggressively pointing out the similarities
between the American and the German treatment of ethnic
minorities. The papers publicized protests, rallies,
boycotts and headlined atrocities committed against
African-American civilians and soldiers. The struggles
continued as the nation became aware that these descendants
of slaves were as resolved to undermine caste as their
forbears had been resolved to undermine slavery--in ways as
many and varied as the ways of oppression.

In 1942, southern African-American leadership issued
its "Durham Manifesto" which called for equality of
education and of economic and political opportunity. The
same year, midwestern leaders met in Chicago and formed the
Congress of Racial Equality (CORE) which staged, before the
year was over, its first "sit-in." CORE, although committed
to non-violence, did advocate forcing direct confrontation
with all degradinig racial policies legally sanctioned in
the United States. Within five years, CORE sponsored a
series of "wade-ins" and "freedom rides." "Freedom rides"
were reinstituted by CORE in 1961 to test the strength of
Morgan v. Commonwealth of Virginia (1946) against the custom
of segregation on interstate bus transportation, while the
earlier challenges against segregated local bus service had
borne fruit. In 1956, the Alabama church leadership had
used successfully an old tactic to end local bus

segregation. The Montgomery Bus Boycott was not the first but the last of these activities to force a change in local customs. There were some thirty economic boycotts of local buses between 1900 and 1906 which were successful in at least three-fourths of the cities involved. Out of the 1956 effort came the formation of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC).

The legal attacks against segregation and discrimination began not long after the National Association for the Advancement of colored People (NAACP) was founded in 1901. Cases taken up included the infamous "Scottsboro Boys" action in 1931, and the initial assaults on segregated education in 1933 which culminated in the 1954 Supreme Court decision of Brown v. Topeka Board of Education which overturned the principle of "separate but equal" established by the Plessy v. Ferguson decision of 1896. The fight for equal education continues today--step by step, case by case.

While the struggles for integrated transportation and equal educational opportunities were in progress, African-Americans continued using other tactics to end the withholding of Democracy from them. The tumultuous decade of the 1960s began with a series of "sit-ins" initiated by Southern college students as a way to confront the local customs of segregation. The first three years witnessed hundreds of "sit-ins," "wade-ins," "jail-ins," "pray-ins," marches, pickets, and boycotts. These youth and their

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leaders, recognizing the need for unity of effort, came
together in 1960 to form the Student Non-violent
Coordinating Committee (SNCC). The organization was
dedicated to the ideology of non-violence and to the tactic
of unified, collective action. They became the
"guerrillas," the "trouble-makers," the "fleas" that
harrassed local officials who stood behind the rhetoric of
white supremacy. They exhibited deliberate harshness and
believed that their actions were the essence of Democracy.
By 1966, however, realizing that the system had not changed,
SNCC shifted to an increasingly militant, ethnocentric
position. It was also in 1966 that a new slogan was
heard--"Black Power"--a call for freedom from fear, for the
closing of ranks, self-defense, self-help,
self-determination and economic, political, racial and
cultural solidarity. Even the older organizations shifted
as CORE proposed that the right to self-defense was a
constitutional right in the face of continued Anglo-American
violence. The year 1966 also marked the formation date of
the Black Panther Party for Self-Defense--an organization
whose members openly carried weapons which members said were
needed to protect African-American citizens against the
horror of racism. Another realm of activities which
developed out of the promises and betrayals were the series
of riots during the 1960s. They began in Harlem (New York
City) in 1964, and spread to Watts (Los Angeles) in 1965, to

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forty-three open conflicts in 1966, to one hundred riots in 1968. This was urban African-America at its bitterest. Additional militancy was evidenced by the formation by 1967 of such organizations as the League of Revolutionary Black Workers, a group which espoused violent confrontation when necessary.

Mass marches increased in volume and frequency in the early 1960s, culminating in the two hundred thousand participants in the March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom in 1963. After 1963 marchers were, in many places, attacked verbally and physically as in the Selma to Montgomery (AL) March in 1965. It was on the 1966 march against fear, discrimination, harrassment from Memphis (TN) to Jackson (MS) where the slogan "Black Power" was first uttered.

The constitutional right to vote was difficult to acquire even after the legal challenges which started in 1870 culminated in the 1944 decision of Smith v. Allwright which allowed African-American participation in the all-important election primaries. To aid in and speed up the process, students by the hundreds went southward to take part in the Mississippi Summer Freedom Project in 1964. This valiant attempt to register voters came to be considered the high point of the nonviolent struggle although violence was certainly visited on the registration workers. During that summer, three were killed, eighty were

wounded, over one thousand were arrested, thirty-five
churches and thirty homes were bombed but Mississippi
entered the Fall with over twelve hundred newly registered
African-Americans voters. Out of this effort came the
Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party which by the 1968
Democratic convention was able to seat two of its delegates.
African-Americans went a step further and attempted in 1972
to establish a third political party. Eight thousand people
went to Gary, Indiana, where they adopted resolutions
ranging from busing to American foreign policy. There were,
however, other problems and issues to be faced.

In 1968, African-American leaders staged the Poor
Peoples' Campaign for Economic Justice--a campaign which
recognized that the right to eat in a non-segregated
restaurant presumed a wage-earning level above starvation
level. It was not enough to vote in elections, swim in
pools, eat in restaurants. This concern for economic
justice for over 25% of the American population would grow
into a massive civil disobedience strategy where thousands
would descend on Washington, DC, and remain there until some
demands were met for jobs and income. By May of 1968,
demonstrators had erected tents near Lincoln Memorial and
called their living space Resurrection City. Economic
concerns, always present, flashed again in 1971 with the
formation of Operation PUSH (People United to Serve

Humanity) and later in the 1980 March on Washington for
Jobs, Peace and Justice.

The Civil Rights Movement, then, was more than
radicalism as an ideology. It was a rejection of
long-abused authority. It was fearlessness in the face of
overwhelming power. It was a struggle which went beyond
Democracy. It was a revolution beyond race aggrandizement.
It challenged a nation's values in its opposition to all
forms of injustices.

One of the first problems exposed by the
African-American struggle was the inadequacy of the
democratic structure in the United States to bring about
social change peacefully and without the use of mass
concerted pressure. This community turned in desperation to
planned confrontation in order to redress its grievances.
Additionally, the quest brought to the forefront the problem
of free expression in a Democracy--a right which should be
guarded jealously. All too often, in the period after World
War II (and before) participants confronted obstacles to the
rights of petition and peaceful assembly. Those who tested
the Bill of Rights found themselves captured and imprisoned
by the so-called guardians of domestic tranquility, the
police. The true turning point for many was the realization
that officers would fire on and kill not only

African-Americans (Jackson State University, 1970) but also on Anglo-Americans (Kent State, 1970) and that the federal government offered no protection against the most basic infringement of Constitutional rights.

Because the struggle was something more than "sit-ins" and "freedom rides," participants and observers discovered that in this Democracy there were different kinds of justice with reference to poor or rich. Wealth determined whether one went to jail or went free. This issue which went beyond race continues today as a serious fallacy in American Democracy. On another economic level, the concept of the sanctity of private property was rethought because private enterprise often affected and affects the public interest and need was and is more important than profit. The question of inequitable distibution would remain unresolved unless the economic system was restructured and to date this has not been accomplished. The struggles of the African-American set in motion attempts to create and recreate out of the powerless, a new force which would see to it that true Democracy prevailed.

In the final analysis, the struggle for Democracy and beyond presented a format for successful resistance for use by other groups in America who had not been given access to the "American Dream." With its emphasis on not categorizing or labeling individuals, the blueprint manifested itself in the rise of the counter-culture among youth who insisted

that individuals should be recognized for their human
dignity rather than for what society said they were. The
Women's Liberation Movement also expressed renewed interest
in individualism by demanding acceptance based on qualities
and skills and not on stereotypes about a woman's place in
society. The process of protest promoted increasing
rejection of deference to authority. In consequence, the
strategies of the African-American struggles were used to
mount a full domestic revolt against the Vietnam War.
Leaders in the communities and on college campuses initiated
"teach-ins" while protest marches grew larger. By 1967, the
efficacy of mass marches was verified as appropriate when
two hundred thousand demonstrators went to Washington. The
largest march against the Vietnam War occurred in 1970 when
over five hundred thousand protestors filed into the
nation's capital.

The era after World War II saw the emergence of other
powerful liberation movements following the format
established by African-Americans. One example was the
Indian American movement which, repeatedly thwarted in its
attempts at negotiation and peaceful redress of
centuries-old grievances, presented in 1961 the Declaration
of Indian Purpose which stressed cultural liberation. In
later years, following the models of African-American
militancy, the younger, more strident voices in the Indian
communities formed such organizations as the American Indian

Movement (AIM). Founded in 1968, AIM succeeded in winning a
little of the government's attention but it was too little
too late, and other insurgent groups turned instead to
direct action which included occupation of land in the San
Francisco Bay (federal abandoned land of Alcatraz Island),
occupation of the building which housed the Bureau of Indian
Affairs in Washington and the celebrated two-month long
siege and protest at Wounded Knee. Indian Americans also
used legal strategies to force victories from the federal
courts--legal strategies which sought the return of the
lands taken illegally before 1900.

The effectiveness of the economic boycott was
duplicated in the activities of the United Farm Workers
union (UFW) which launched a prolonged strike in 1965
against grape and lettuce growers. Aided by college
students, churches, CORE and the NAACP and by active
involvement in political campaigns, the UFW forced many
growers to sign contracts with the union for better wages
and benefits for farm workers. These boycotts, these
prolonged "sit-ins," these marches continue today. The
ideology of direct confrontation even found its way into the
world of the handicapped as students at Gallaudet University
(DC) staged a series of protests against the insensitivity
displayed by an administration which would hire a

non-signing hearing individual to become the president of a
university for the hearing-impaired.

As scholars, we know the history of oppression. We
know that struggles against oppression do not evolve in a
vacuum. We may suspect that where discrimination exists,
revolt is only an inch below the surface. What many may not
realize is that the African-American fought against bigotry,
racism, vigilante injustice, brutal violence, lynching,
terror, death. The struggle against these forces, the
strength for struggle, the odds against success in the
struggle are little known, especially in international
circles. It was valiant warfare to be included into the
economic, social, political, judicial, educational
mainstreams as a matter of right, not a matter of privilege.
But it was much, much more. The struggle was a challenge to
the American definition of Democracy and a challenge to move
beyond that definition.

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