

Northern Lights: The Black Freedom Struggle Outside the South

The racial issue we confront in America is not a sectional but a national problem. Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere." So proclaimed the Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr. in 1960. More than a half-century later, our histories—and our collective memories—of the civil rights era do not reflect the national scope of racial inequality and the breadth of challenges to it. The dramatic history of the southern freedom struggle occupies a central place in our narratives of modern America. The canonical history begins in 1954, with the landmark *Brown v. Board of Education* decision that overturned the concept of "separate but equal," and follows a textbook storyline from the Montgomery Bus Boycott (1955) through the lunch counter sit-ins in Nashville, Greensboro, and Atlanta, the Freedom Rides to desegregate interstate bus transportation, the clash between nonviolent protestors and police in Birmingham, Alabama, the March on Washington in 1963, and the passage of landmark civil rights legislation in 1964 and 1965 (1).

This is a powerful history—told and retold in countless textbooks, films, memoirs, and novels.

It is a dramatic narrative that pits heroic, nonviolent protestors—led by King, the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC), and the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC)—against racist villains like Arkansas Governor Orval Faubus (who tried to prevent the desegregation of Little Rock Central High School in 1957), George Wallace (the Alabama governor who famously proclaimed "segregation now, segregation tomorrow, segregation forever" during his 1963



Figure 1. In this 1941 photograph, striking black workers picket landlord and employer Mid-City Realty Company, located on Chicago's South Side. Bemoaning low wages and high rents, and demanding union recognition, the picketers exhibit the "civil rights unionism" that took root in the North during World War II under the banner of the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO). Historians increasingly recognize such activity as the beginning of the "long civil rights movement" that includes both the North and South. (Courtesy of Library of Congress)

inaugural address), Eugene "Bull" Connor (the Birmingham, Alabama commissioner who authorized his forces to use police dogs and fire hoses against civil rights protestors), and the murderous segregationists of places like Anniston, Alabama and Philadelphia, Mississippi. Ultimately, the southern history of civil rights is a story of triumph—a grassroots movement that led to profound political, social, and legal change—culminating in the passage of landmark civil rights legislation and the abolition of "colored" and "white" lunch counters and water fountains, Jim Crow public transit, and separate and unequal public schools (2).

The North shows up in our conventional textbook accounts and in most histories of the era near the end of the story, as the tragic denouncement to the uplifting account of the southern struggle. The North was the place where the dream of nonviolence allegedly crashed apart on the shoals of racial separatism and Black Power; the region where riots tore apart the dream of racial integration; the place where a poisonous identity politics destroyed a supposedly liberal consensus that brought blacks and whites together in the shared vision of a colorblind America (3).

In the last decade, however, there has been a revolution in the historiography of race and civil rights, both North and South. Historians have emphasized the "long civil rights movement," exploring the myriad struggles for racial equality well before the "classic phase" of the movement in the 1950s and 1960s. Still others have emphasized the radicalism of many civil rights activists, focusing on anticapitalist, anticolonialist, and internationalist currents in the freedom struggle.

Through local case studies of places as big as New York, Philadelphia, Chicago, and Los Angeles, and as small as Grand Rapids, Michigan; Levittown, Pennsylvania; and Wichita, Kansas, historians have begun documenting the mostly forgotten struggles for civil rights outside the land of Dixie. And revisionist historians—among them Matthew Lassiter and Joseph Crespino—have issued a serious challenge to old histories that relied on “Southern exceptionalism,” the idea that America’s racial problems were distinctly southern, the result of the region’s peculiar history of slavery, secession, and Jim Crow (4).

Transregional Histories of Race

There were, of course, differences between the manifestations of segregation, racial inequality, and violence between North and South. Most importantly, northern blacks had access to the ballot box—unlike most of their southern counterparts between the late nineteenth century and the passage of the Voting Rights Act of 1965. Northern blacks used their votes both to elect black candidates for public office and, even more importantly, to put pressure on city governments and state legislatures to enact civil rights law, especially in northern states with closely divided electorates, where they were perceived as holding the balance of power between the parties (5).

Black access to the ballot box distinguished the regions, but from the colonial period to the twentieth century, the histories of race on either side of the Mason-Dixon Line were intertwined. The northern economy was fundamentally linked to that of the South—some of the richest antebellum northerners made their fortunes buying and selling slaves and, more importantly, creating an industrial base with raw materials like cotton that were the fruits of unfree labor. In the twentieth century, as the North’s black population grew exponentially as a result of mass migration from the South, northerners enacted their own forms of Jim Crow. Whites entrapped blacks in second-class economic status, segregated schools and neighborhoods every bit as effectively as their southern counterparts, and created a two-tier job market deeply divided by race.

Lynchings were far more prevalent in the South, but northern whites sometimes resorted to lynch law as well. Between the first decade of the twentieth century and the 1940s, whites instigated mass riots that targeted blacks in places as diverse as Springfield, Illinois (1908), Chicago and East St. Louis (1919), and Detroit (1943). And in nearly every northern city between the 1920s and 1960s, the first blacks to move into formerly white neighborhoods were usually subject to vandalism and violent attacks by enraged white neighbors protecting their turf. In Detroit, for example, between the mid-1940s and mid-1960s, more than 200 black families moving into white neighborhoods were the targets of white protestors and vandals (6).

If the North had its own history of racial antagonism and inequality, the region also has a long history of civil rights activism. Northern blacks (and their white and, in a few places Latino and Asian allies) fought back against segregation and discrimination, creating social movements and grassroots organizations dedicated to racial equality. The northern civil rights struggle was deeply rooted—but it intensified beginning in World War I, with massive black migration. It then took a radical turn in the Great Depression, as activists linked economic and racial inequality and coupled their calls for antidiscrimination with demands for economic justice (Figure 1). It expanded during World War II, as the reality of racism collided with the high-minded rhetoric of anti-facism and democracy. The northern struggle evolved in the postwar years, as activists worked to change the hearts and minds of white Americans with educational campaigns, often through mainstream Protestant, Catholic, and Jewish congregations. And it finally exploded in the 1960s, as many blacks grew impatient at the glacial pace of change and at the persistence of racial inequality.

Throughout the twentieth century, the civil rights struggle in the North was mostly organized and led by African Americans themselves. To be sure, black activists depended on the support of white allies (and sometimes Latino and Asian allies, although those populations were very small outside the Southwest until the last third of the twentieth century)—whether in trade unions, churches, or public office. Those northern whites who joined the civil rights struggle were outliers—disproportionately political and religious leftists (7).

The vast majority of whites in the North were indifferent at best and hostile at worst to black demands for racial equality. Even though white attitudes about race changed quite dramatically in the middle of the twentieth century (overt expressions of racial prejudice became less common in public settings in the North), shifts in discourse did not easily translate into changes in practice. In public opinion surveys in the 1940s, 1950s, and 1960s, ostensibly liberal white northerners ranked racial issues low on the list of domestic priorities. Most saw the discrimination as distinctly southern and paid little heed to the inequalities in their own communities. When black anger burst into the white press in the 1960s, most northern whites were surprised and embittered. Bemused headlines like “The North Has Problems Too” were commonplace in mainstream newspapers and magazines. The civil rights legislation of the mid-1960s led many whites to believe that inequality had been eradicated while urban riots and Black Power led many more to see blacks as ungrateful. By the 1970s, sizeable pluralities of northern whites expressed their belief that blacks were better off than they were.

The northern movement and the southern movement were intimately intertwined. Those committed to racial equality—both North and South—often fought together, inspired by the actions of their counterparts on either side of the Mason-Dixon Line, learning lessons from battles fought and won (and sometimes lost), connected together by the black press and by national civil rights organizations like the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) and the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE), by national trade unions, by religious denominations, and by various radical organizations. Most of those organizations were based in the North—but had members throughout the country who collaborated, shared information through speaking bureaus and publications, and provided material support for organizing efforts across regions. Martin Luther King, Jr.’s aide, C.T. Vivian, for example, had cut his teeth protesting restaurant segregation in his hometown of Peoria, Illinois (Figure 2). SNCC organizer Ella Baker had spent decades organizing in Harlem. The peripatetic Bayard Rustin had joined protests in his home state of Pennsylvania and had worked for CORE and SCLC in a variety of northern and southern locales. And James Farmer of CORE started his career challenging segregated restaurants in the North, moved on to work as a labor organizer in the South, was centrally involved in efforts to open housing markets, and led the Freedom Rides (8).

Jim Crow, Northern Style

Over the last decade, a slew of historians have excavated a history of systematic segregation in hotels, restaurants, movie theaters, swimming pools, and amusement parks in the North. Through the 1940s—and in many places the 1950s and 1960s—blacks were denied admission to movie theaters or confined to the “crow’s nest” (the colloquial term for the balcony). Public swimming pools regularly excluded black bathers or relegated them to special “colored” days, often draining and refilling pools that blacks had used. Amusement parks turned away black customers or only admitted them on special occasions or on segregated days, usually early in the week, when amusement park attendance was otherwise low. Public beaches regularly cordoned off blacks into segregated sections. White mobs enforced Jim Crow, as was the case at

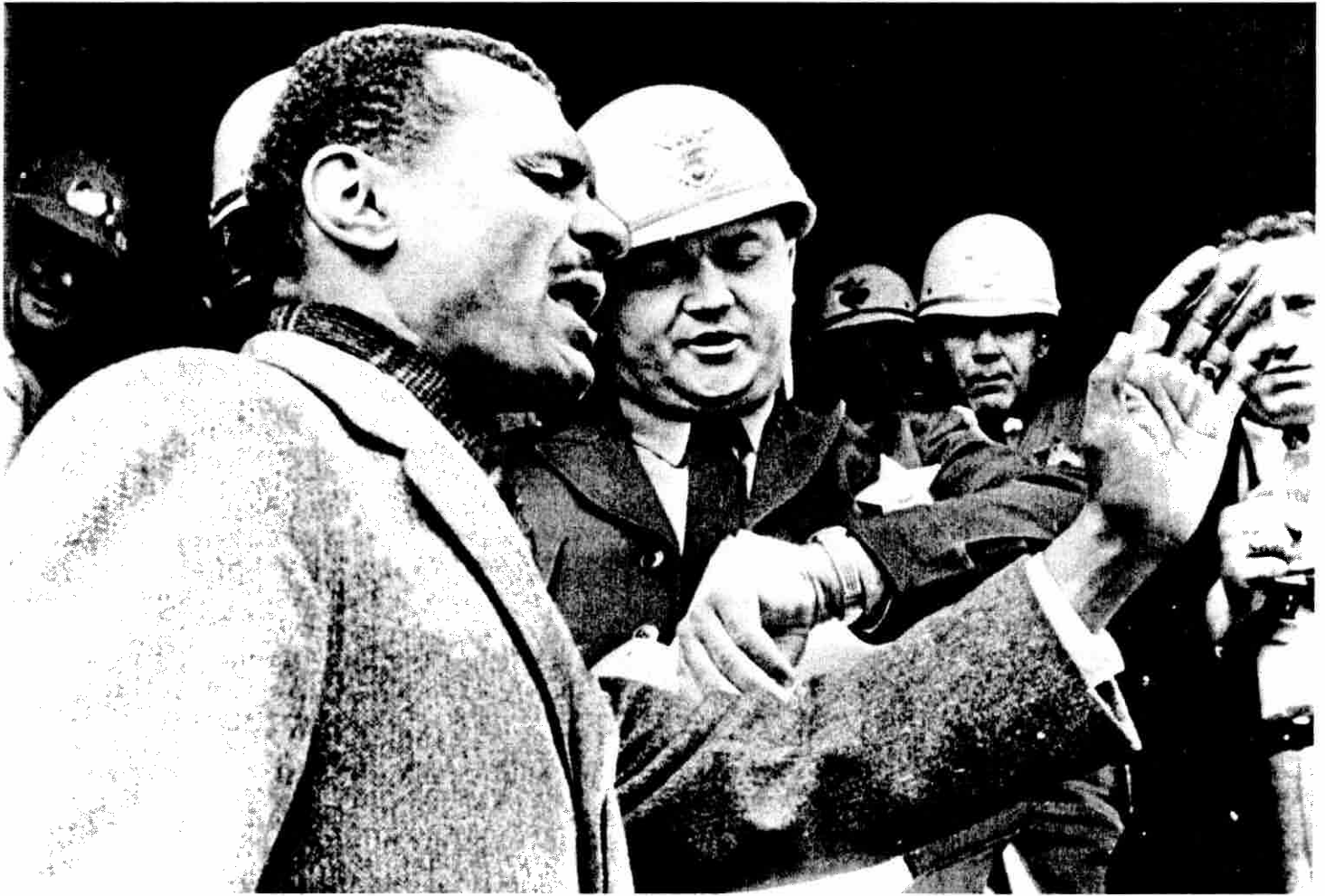


Figure 2. Reverend C. T. Vivian, at left, leads a prayer during the 1965 voting rights campaign in Selma, Alabama. Born in Missouri, Vivian moved to Peoria, Illinois as a child where he first protested racial segregation. Vivian later helped lead both the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference. He exemplifies the numerous civil rights activists who took part in the northern movement before bringing their experience to Dixie. (Courtesy of Library of Congress)

Chicago's Rainbow Beach in the late 1950s, when blacks who ventured onto white turf were beaten. Restaurants closed their doors to black customers or required them to sit in separate—often curtained off—sections or only let them take out food directly from the kitchen or service entrance. Even black celebrities were turned away from most hotels and motels in the North. In 1948, for example, entertainer Josephine Baker and her husband were turned away by thirty six New York City hotels before they were able to find a room. Celebrities or not, black tourists had to stay in black-run boarding houses, hotels, or YWCAs and YMCAs, and relied on black newspaper advertisements and special guidebooks, like the *Negro Motorist Green Book* to help them find hotels, resorts, and restaurants when they were on the road.

It took decades of grassroots protest—of demonstrations outside segregated cinemas, sit-ins at segregated restaurants, and civil disobedience at pools and amusement parks to open them up on a nondiscriminatory basis. Nearly every community in the North has its history of segregated public accommodations and many have still untold histories of struggle against them. In the 1930s and 1940s, grassroots activists in places as diverse as Philadelphia and Cincinnati challenged Jim Crow movie theaters. During World War II, for example, the newly formed CORE, which played a key role in introducing Gandhian nonviolence in the United States, targeted segregated restaurants in Chicago.

During the 1950s, activists in places as diverse as New York City, Detroit, and San Francisco challenged segregation in hotels. And in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania; Fort Lee, New Jersey; and Buffalo, New York, protestors held “wade ins” at public pools and challenged segregation at amusement parks.

Over time, activists’ demand for the right to consume met with success—fewer restaurants turned away black customers, hotels opened their rooms on a nondiscriminatory basis, and movie theaters eliminated their “crow’s nests.” The battles were hard fought and hard won. It was not until the 1950s and 1960s, after months or years of protest, that discriminatory businesses relented or, as was increasingly common, closed their doors or relocated to segregated communities. Still the myriad victories against Jim Crow in the North inspired similar activism in the South. Many northern activists, especially members of CORE, provided support for the more famous civil rights lunch counter and bus terminal protests in the South in the early 1960s (9).

The Struggle for Fair Employment

The battle to open up public accommodations led to significant gains for African Americans, but it was not the most important. No issue concerned northern blacks more than employment. From the “Don’t

Wading-in at Rainbow Beach

On August 20, 2011, seventy-one-year old Velma Hill traveled to Chicago's Rainbow Beach, located in the majority-white South Chicago neighborhood of the city where she had lived as a child. She was there to help dedicate a historic marker to a nearly forgotten campaign: the battle against the racial segregation of Chicago's lakefront. When Hill, who is African American, was growing up, segregation had long been officially outlawed in the city, but the beach still was off-limits to area blacks. In 1960, inspired by the groundswell of civil rights activism, and outraged by a recent mob attack on a black family visiting the beach, members of the Chicago NAACP Youth Council (YC) decided to organize a "wade-in" campaign. On August 28 of that year, YC president Hill—then Velma Murphy—led thirty Youth Council members into the water in defiance of local racist custom. In response, white beach-goers accosted the protestors, hurling stones at them, one of which struck Murphy in the head.

Already in 1960, the city's beaches had a long history of racial conflict. In 1919, a young black swimmer inadvertently drifted on a raft across the invisible line in the water dividing the black and white sides of a beach divided at 26th Street. He was violently attacked and the police refused to intervene. The incident helped to trigger the Chicago Race Riot, which left thirty-eight dead, including the swimmer, and over five hundred injured. And in 1935, angered by the installation of a fence dividing the black and white sections of Jackson Park Beach, a group of young whites, led by several University of Chicago students, tested the boundary by climbing over the fence. Police arrested eighteen of the youths, branding them "Communists."

Conflict at the beaches reached a climax with the organized "freedom wade-ins" that Hill pioneered at Rainbow Beach. After the initial 1960 protest, the beaches drew more public attention: the next "wade-in" was supervised by police and had the full support of the NAACP and other civil rights organizations. Protestors finally saw their goal materialize with the passage of the 1964 Civil Rights Act which outlawed segregation in public accommodations. Segregation at Rainbow Beach may be part of our history that many would like to forget, but, as Hill said, "It's important to see the history of Chicago. We should not be afraid of our history. We should celebrate it and learn from it." □

—By Haley Leuthart

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"Buy Where You Cannot Work" boycotts of discriminatory shopkeepers in the 1930s to battles over affirmative action in the 1970s, northern activists pushed for greater job opportunities for African Americans. Overall, northern cities offered blacks economic opportunities unavailable in much of the South—indeed many migrated to northern cities during and after World War I and World War II when employers faced a shortage of workers. Overall, however, blacks were confined to what one observer called "the meanest and dirtiest jobs." During the first Great Migration (1919–1929), black women tended to be concentrated in servile jobs, working as domestics and dishwashers, laundry workers, and maids, while men found themselves mostly trapped in unskilled manual labor, regardless of their skills (Figure 3). During the Depression, civil rights activists stepped up their demands for both full employment (calling for the expansion of stable, secure employment) and fair employment (demanding the end to workplace discrimination). Leading civil rights organizations, among them the NAACP, the National Negro Congress, and the Urban League put job creation and antidiscrimination at the top of their agendas by the end of the 1930s and used the occasion of World War II to push for the inclusion of blacks in the booming defense industry (10).

If World War II accelerated protests for fair and full employment, those struggles took on new dimensions in the postwar years, when civil rights groups allied with trade unionists to push for the passage of state and local fair employment practices laws that forbade discrimination in the workplace. New York led the way, with the passage of a 1944 law that forbade employers to use race, ethnicity, and religion in hiring, but it took the next two decades for other states to follow suit. Many northern antidiscrimination laws were rather ineffectual—they lacked strong enforcement mechanisms. Still, for all of their weaknesses, they signaled a new governmental commitment to civil rights. Employment opportunities for black workers—especially in the public sector—expanded significantly in the North in the 1940s and 1950s, but whole sectors of the economy remained mostly closed to blacks, including the skilled trades, white collar positions, clerical jobs, and sales positions. Local civil rights activists in northern cities pushed employers to hire token secretaries, flight attendants, bank clerks, and salespeople—and in the process opened up jobs, especially for African American women. But as the northern urban economies that had attracted black migrants began to collapse with deindustrialization and suburbanization in the postwar decades, many blacks (especially men) found their job opportunities dwindling. Still, many activists pushed for more aggressive efforts to open up job market opportunity (11).

Those battles came to a peak in the early and mid-1960s, when the magnitude of the economic devastation of northern cities (abandoned factories, vacant downtown shopping districts) became clear. A wide coalition of civil rights organizations—both from the urban North and the South—pushed anew for fair and full employment. The 1963 March on Washington, which attracted huge numbers of black workers from northern cities, was billed as a demonstration for "jobs and freedom," a reminder of the centrality of the economic agenda to the northern movement. By the mid-1960s, protestors in nearly every major northern city led "selective patronage" campaigns—boycotting employers that hired few if any blacks—and picketed workplaces with histories of discrimination, most notably construction sites, where whites held a near-monopoly on well-paying, unionized building trades jobs.

In response to protest and urban unrest in the North, the Johnson administration experimented with a set of programs that would come to be called "affirmative action." And finally in 1969, amidst a new wave of construction site protests in northern states, the Nixon administration announced a formal policy to require that government



Figure 3. Hoping to benefit from an expanding labor market, blacks migrated in large numbers to northern cities during the World War I years. There, they faced widespread job discrimination and hostility from white employers and the local working class. Those who did find employment, like this woman subway worker posing with her cleaning gear in this 1917 photograph from New York City, occupied the lowest-rung jobs available. The struggle against job discrimination was part of the “long civil rights movement” in the North decades before the 1960s. (Courtesy of Library of Congress)

contractors set targets for the hiring of minority workers and meet timetables for diversifying their workforces. Affirmative action—which was adopted nationwide in government contracts, and voluntarily in higher education and in many private firms—was perhaps the most controversial legacy of a thirty-plus year effort by northern activists to open the workplace (12).

The sum of campaigns ranging from the boycotts of the 1930s to the antidiscrimination efforts of the 1940s and ‘50s to the civil rights and preferential programs of the 1960s and ‘70s was nothing short of staggering. Although blacks remained disproportionately concentrated in insecure, bottom of the ladder jobs, and were consistently more vulnerable to unemployment (from the 1950s to the present, black unemployment rates have consistently been between one-and-a-half and two times that of whites nationwide), the civil rights struggles in the workplace had demonstrable successes. By the 1970s, it was not unusual to be greeted by a black salesperson or bank teller, to speak to a black government employee, or to find blacks in some of the nation’s most high profile and remunerative careers (13).

Housing Discrimination

If the efforts to open public accommodations met with significant breakthroughs and the battle to open the workplace led to gains, other battles in the northern freedom struggle met with fewer successes. In particular, the northern housing market remained deeply segregated by race, despite decades of efforts to open up housing on a non-discriminatory basis.

Few civil rights struggles were more consequential than that to end housing discrimination. New patterns of segregation in real estate grew deeply entrenched in the first decades of the twentieth century. A majority of new housing developments in the North built between the 1920s and 1948 were covered by racially restrictive covenants that forbade the use or occupancy of properties by non-whites. Federal mortgage programs overseen by the Home Owners’ Loan Corporation, the Federal Housing Administration, and the Veteran’s Administration mandated residential segregation. Homeowners in racially mixed or predominantly African American communities were generally unable to get federally-backed loans. And public housing projects were routinely segregated by race in northern cities.

Beginning in the 1940s, and continuing for most of the remainder of the century, civil rights organizations targeted housing segregation. They achieved some victories. During World War II black homeowners and local NAACP chapters in Chicago, Detroit, St. Louis, Los Angeles, and many other cities filed lawsuits challenging racially restrictive covenants, which the Supreme Court ruled unenforceable in its landmark *Shelley v. Kraemer* decision in 1948. But the barriers of discrimination in housing proved very difficult to overcome. Federal housing officials refused to roll back discriminatory loan programs. Civil rights groups worked through churches and collaborated with the press and filmmakers to delegitimize racism in the housing market. Local activists also pushed for local and state fair housing laws that forbade housing discrimination (14).

By the early 1960s, a majority of white northerners professed that they would accept a black neighbor—a significant change in opinion. But the degree of racial segregation barely changed: whites rapidly fled when African Americans moved to their neighborhoods and, just as importantly, new white homebuyers were seldom attracted to neighborhoods with any blacks living there. The result was that rates of residential segregation by race barely changed in northern metropolitan areas between the 1920s and 1980s; and when they did, integration was on a very small scale. The failure to open housing markets was arguably the greatest loss in the northern civil rights struggle. Blacks remained mostly confined to older, declining neighborhoods; unable to get full access to home loans because of discrimination. They were more likely to rent or live in houses concentrated in communities that suffered disinvestment and job loss and with less value than those in white communities (15).

Race and the Northern Classroom

The limitations of the open housing movement were echoed by the halting gains made in the desegregation of public education. Northern educational segregation took many forms. Many northern states had laws, dating to the nineteenth century, which forbade racially separate schools, although some states allowed segregated schools (New York until 1937 and Indiana until 1949). But whether permitted by law or technically illegal, separate schools were commonplace in nearly every school district that had more than a small number of black students. Some school districts gerrymandered school attendance zones to maintain segregation. Others created special “Negro” or “colored” schools, often named after Abraham Lincoln or other Civil War era figures. Still others—especially in small towns—corralled black students in separate classrooms. One school district in southern New Jersey had separate playgrounds for black and white students. Another in suburban Long Island

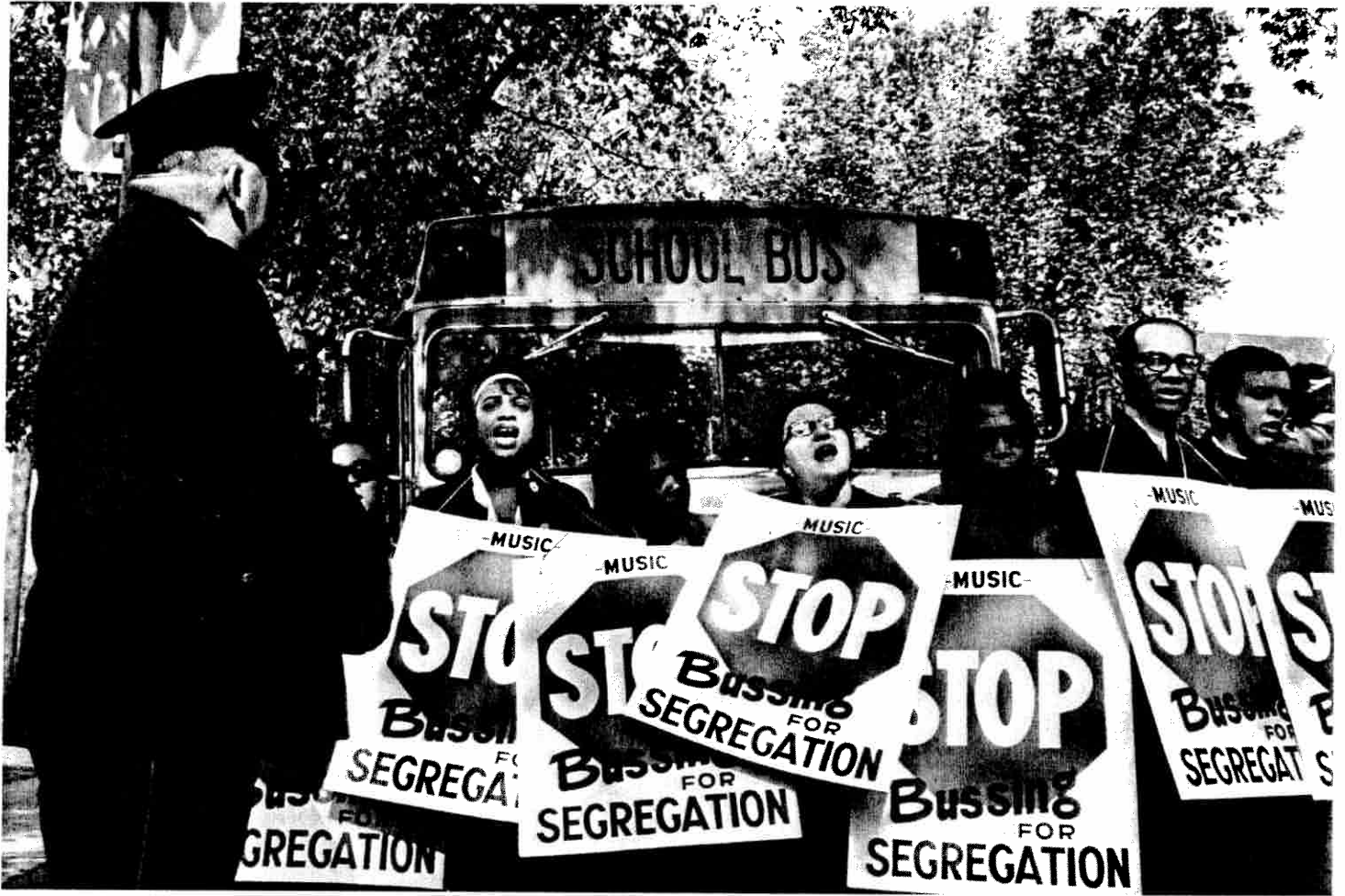


Figure 4. Members of the Milwaukee United School Integration Committee (MUSIC), led by Memphis-born civil rights activist Lloyd Barbee (second from right), protest against school segregation in Milwaukee by forming a “human chain” to block a bus. MUSIC’s campaign resulted in sixty-one arrests in the spring of 1965 and garnered national attention, including a special feature on the Huntley-Brinkley television news program. Attempts to dismantle school segregation often met with a hostile reception throughout the North during the 1960s and 70s. (Courtesy of Milwaukee Journal Archives)

sent all black students, regardless of their place of residence, to a single all-black school. In Chicago, school district officials—well into the 1960s—refused to admit black students from overcrowded schools into nearby, underutilized white schools, resulting in double shift school days in many schools in the city’s segregated South and West Sides (16).

Beginning in the early twentieth century and accelerating during World War II, the 1950s, and the early 1960s, black activists challenged separate, unequal education in the North, usually through parent-led school boycotts (Figure 4). Many of the first wave of school boycotts took place in small towns and suburbs with segregated schools—places where black parents could see up close and personal the costs of school segregation. During the middle of the century, for example, black mothers led school walkouts in places as diverse as Hillburn and Hempstead, New York; Gary, Indiana; and Montclair, Tom’s River, and Mount Holly, New Jersey. By the mid-1950s, these protests had succeeded in eliminating officially separate schools, but many districts used other techniques to maintain segregation. Increasingly common was the “neighborhood school,” whose boundaries were usually coterminous with the invisible lines of race that separated black and white neighborhoods. Many northerners came to describe such schools as “de facto” segregated—suggesting that the patterns of racial separation were the natural consequence of individual choices about where to live and where to send children to school (17).

Housing segregation was, however, anything but natural—it was the consequence of public policies that mandated segregation and put up major disincentives to integration. As one observer argued in the late 1950s, “the nearer Negroes get to [the neighborhood school] the more sacred it becomes.” Those sacred lines became the subject of intensifying protests and litigation in the late 1950s and especially the 1960s. By 1963, several hundred school districts outside the South were the targets of protest, boycott, administrative actions, and lawsuits, all challenging segregation. Massive protests broke out in big cities, including Boston, Chicago, Cleveland, New York, and Detroit, as black parents demanded quality education and held their children from classes in district-wide boycotts.

But the northern battle against educational segregation met with formidable obstacles. By the mid and late 1960s, federal courts imposed desegregation orders on school districts throughout the South—and in parts of the North and West—with a history of district or state-mandated segregation. But in those districts where the courts could find little direct proof (other than the homogeneity of schools and their surrounding neighborhoods) of overt, intentional racial discrimination on the part of school boards, superintendents, or principals, courts were less willing to require the closing of inferior all-black schools or the busing of black and white students to achieve integration. At the same time, even small-scale efforts to desegregate schools met with

intense opposition from white parents, and large-scale efforts to desegregate schools by busing met with massive white resistance.

The slow pace of school desegregation in the North frustrated many parents and educational advocates. By the mid-1960s, many began to look for alternative paths to quality education, downplaying or rejecting integration and instead calling for community control of schools, African-themed curriculums, and neighborhood magnet schools. Even though a majority of African Americans supported educational integration—even at the peak of the Black Power movement—the goal of racially balanced schools seemed unrealistic and, to many, unattainable. Over the course of the last three decades of the twentieth century, as courts grew less responsive to calls for school integration and as whites continued to withdraw their children from schools with growing black populations, educational advocates turned their attention to curricular administrative reforms like the decentralization of school districts, the creation of quasi-public charter schools, and vouchers that could be used for private and parochial schools. From the late 1970s onward, rates of racial segregation worsened, especially in big city school districts.

Conclusion

The history of racial inequality and the struggle against it in the North opens up new vistas for understanding modern American history. It is impossible to understand such gains as the dramatic increase in the number of black elected officials (there are more than nine thousand today, including the President) without putting the North in the center of the story. The gains of the black freedom struggle are visible in expansion of the black middle class, the fact that the sight of blacks in hotels, movie theaters, and restaurants is commonplace. But the limits of the struggle for equality are also abundantly clear in the still highly segregated metropolitan areas north of the Mason-Dixon Line; in the still-wide gaps in health, wealth, and joblessness between blacks and whites; and the persistence of separate and unequal education decades after the Supreme Court ruled it unconstitutional. The line between past and present is a blurry one. The struggle for racial equality both North and South remains unfinished. □

Endnotes

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