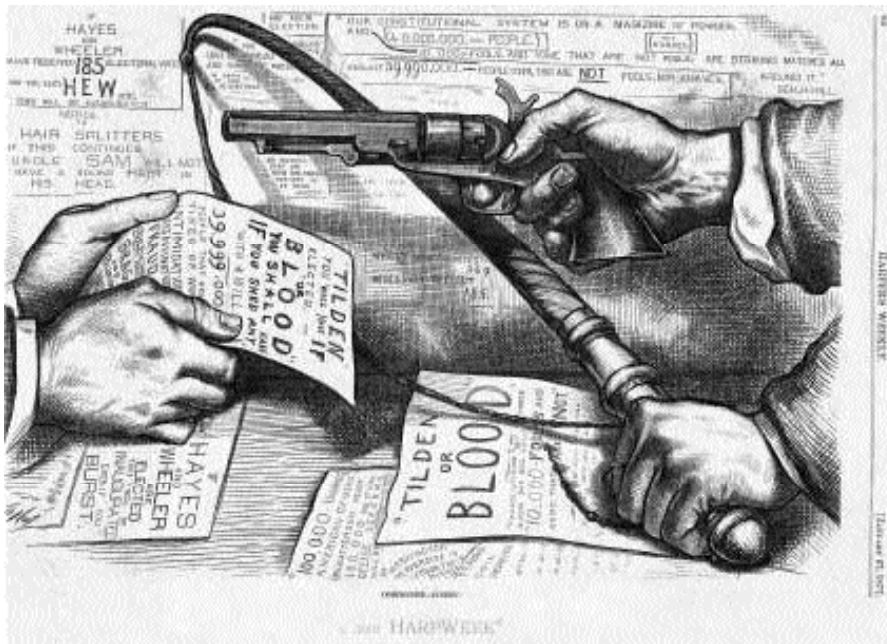


The Rise and Fall of the Civil Rights Movement¹

by

Roland Sheppard²

The first civil and human rights movement by and for Black people started during the Civil War and the period of Black Reconstruction that followed. It was a time of radical hopes for many freed slaves. But it was also a time of betrayal. Then President Andrew Johnson and the non-radical Republicans, in collusion with the Democratic Party, the party of slavery, sold out the early post-war promises for full equality and "40 acres and a mule". Instead, the promise of equality was soon replaced by the restoration of the property rights of the former slave owners in the South. This was accomplished by the Compromise of 1877.



"Compromise—Indeed!"

Thomas Nast's view of the Compromise of 1877.

<http://www.harpreweek.com/09Cartoon/BrowseByDateCartoon.asp?Month=January&Date=27>

¹ This article was originally published on September 5, 2006, by Counterpunch.com under the title: 'Where Will Blacks Find Justice? The Civil Rights Movement is Dead and So is the Democratic Party' <http://www.counterpunch.com/sheppard09052006.html>.

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How did they accomplish this betrayal? The answer is simple -- terrorism. They used police and terroristic Ku Klux Klan violence. These extra-legal activities laid the basis for the overthrow of Black Reconstruction and the institutionalization of legal segregation (*Jim Crow*) in the former slave states. To enforce *Jim Crow*, Black people were, for decades, indiscriminately lynched and framed.

This was the status quo in the United States until the United States Supreme Court came out with its "Brown v. Board of Education" decision in 1954, mandating the right to equal education. The successful yearlong Montgomery Bus Boycott in 1955-56 reflected the new, more militant mood among Negroes (the name given to Black people by the ruling class). This new mood was a product of the rise of the Black Liberation movements in Africa, the confidence gained by the Black working class during the rise of the CIO, and the respect, knowledge, and expectations of democracy gained by Black soldiers during the Korean War.³

Thus the struggle against *Jim Crow* had begun, and with each victory to integrate and enforce the 1954 Supreme Court decision, the mass of Black people gained confidence in themselves and that the fight for racial equality could be won. In the early sixties, the movement grew stronger as young people from the universities spearheaded the 'freedom rides' and sit-ins throughout the South to oppose *Jim Crow* and enforce the law of the land, which the local, state, and federal governments had refused to enforce.

In the spring of 1963, the struggles in Birmingham, Alabama, led by the Black working class, garnered international attention when police commissioner Eugene ("Bull") Connor unleashed powerful water hoses and German shepherd police dogs against the demonstrators. Terror and violence gripped this city, while the world watched. Indeed, it was the national and international embarrassment that forced President Kennedy and the government to begin to take governmental action.

³ For more information about the boycott read my article: *50 Years Later: Lessons from the Montgomery Bus Boycott*.
<http://www.counterpunch.org/sheppard11112005.html>

The Rise and Fall of the Civil Rights Movement



Dogs Attacking Birmingham Black Citizens in 1963

http://www.rethinkingschools.org/img/archive/20_02/RS_20_02_51.jpg

After Birmingham, the March on Washington was called. In the space of a few weeks a huge demonstration built. This demonstration was the largest social action in the United States since the mass strikes that led to the rise of the CIO in the 1930s and late 1940s. This mass action led to the passage of the *Civil Rights Act* in 1965.

At that rally, the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) Chairman John Lewis was prevented from delivering his prepared speech by the march organizers. It was a notable omission. In this speech, he was going to say:

". . . . We are now involved in a serious revolution. This nation is still a place of cheap political leaders who build their career on immoral compromises and ally themselves with open forms of political, economic and social exploitation. What political leader here can stand up and say 'My party is the party of "principles"'? The party of Kennedy is also the party of Eastland. The party of Javits is also the party of Goldwater. Where is our party? "⁴

But if Lewis could be prevented by the March organizers from offending the liberal Democratic establishment from the stage of the Washington march, they could not prevent the civil rights movement from embracing a growing militancy and desire to expand the struggle to embrace a larger vision of social change.

⁴ *The Militant*, September 9, 1963

Unfortunately, the momentum that was gained from the March was lost during the 1964 Presidential election campaign, when the major civil rights groups called for a moratorium on demonstrations in order not to embarrass then President Lyndon Baines Johnson during the election campaign against the "greater evil" Barry Goldwater. (Both were defenders of *Jim Crow* prior to the 1963 March on Washington.) The movement never fully recovered to this subordination of the struggle to "lesser evil" political action.



<http://www.historycentral.com/sixty/60's/March.jpg>

"The March on Washington for Jobs and Justice was the largest *social action* in the United States since the union strikes that led to the rise of the CIO in the 1930s and late 1940s. This mass action led to the passage of the *Civil Rights Act* in 1965."

While the struggle in the South was specifically against *Jim Crow*, the struggle in the North was against de-facto segregation. The images of the dogs etc. on TV being used against Blacks in the South subsequently gave rise to the Black Nationalist movement in the North. The rise of the Black Muslims and Malcolm X was a reflection of the mood in the majority of the Black ghettos in every major northern city, where the economic and political power of Black people

The Rise and Fall of the Civil Rights Movement

was more concentrated and greater than in the rural south. The rise of the nationalist movement consequently generated heated debates within the movement between the strategies of peaceful disobedience and righteous self-defense.

In his latter years, Malcolm X saw the Black struggle as a struggle for human rights, and, notably, as an anti-capitalist economic struggle. As he explained at the Militant Labor Forum in the fall of 1964:

"It's impossible for a chicken to produce a duck egg... The system in this country cannot produce freedom for an Afro-American. It is impossible for this system, this economic system, this political system, period... And if ever a chicken did produce a duck egg, I'm certain you would say it was certainly a revolutionary chicken."⁵

Unfortunately, Malcolm X was assassinated in 1965 before he could build an organization to follow in his footsteps.

Following the assassination of Malcolm X, Stokely Carmichael, later known as Kwame Ture, became the new leader of SNCC and is credited with starting the movement for Black Power. In Lowndes County Alabama in 1965, he helped the Lowndes County Freedom Organization (LCFO) to form *their* own party. The symbol of the party was the Black Panther and they were called the Black Panthers because of that symbol. The Alabama Democrats retaliated against this movement by evicting sharecroppers and tenant farmers, and attempting illegal foreclosures against Black Panther supporters. They even threatened to kill any African-American who registered. Thus the LCFO was forced to arm themselves for self-defense, but not to initiate any violence. The political activities of the LCFO inspired the formation of the Black Panther Party in Oakland, Calif. In the course of time, Black Panther Parties arose throughout the country.

Due to the mass mobilizations by the civil rights movement and the Black rebellions in the inner cities, by 1968 legal segregation, *Jim Crow*, was destroyed. Blacks acquired the right to vote and access to jobs through affirmative action programs, to make up for the past discriminations. There was hope for a better life in the Black Community. However, after Martin Luther King, struggled against de facto segregation in Chicago, he realized that the struggle for economic equality was a more difficult fight than the struggle against *Jim Crow*. At this point he began to take similar anti-capitalist positions as Malcolm X.

Both Malcolm X and Martin Luther King opposed the Vietnam War prior to their assassinations. At the time of their assassinations, both Martin Luther King and Malcolm X were

⁵ Malcolm X, *Not Just An American Problem*, <http://panafricannews.blogspot.com/2007/11/malcolm-x-40-years-then-and-now.html>

embarking on a course in opposition to the capitalist system. It is clear from reading and listening to their final speeches that they had both evolved to similar conclusions of capitalism's role in the maintenance of racism. That is why they were assassinated.⁶

It's now known that during the rise of the modern civil rights movement, the government, led by Attorney General Robert F. Kennedy, was spying on the movement and its leadership. In the 1970's, the "Cointelpro" disruption operations by the government against the civil rights movement, the antiwar movement, and radicals and socialists, during that period, also became public knowledge. Under "Cointelpro" the different United States spy agencies used informers, agents, and agent provocateurs to disrupt organizations. One purpose of this program was to "neutralize" Malcolm X, Martin Luther King, and Elijah Muhammad," in order to prevent the development of a "Black Messiah," who would have the potential of uniting and leading a mass organization of Black Americans in their quest for freedom and economic equality.

At the end of his life, King also stated what he was planning in the struggle for economic equality:

"There is nothing but a lack of social vision to prevent us from paying an adequate wage to every American citizen whether he be a hospital worker, laundry worker, maid, or day laborer.

"There is nothing except shortsightedness to prevent us from guaranteeing an annual minimum-and livable-income for every American family.

. . . . "There is nothing, except a tragic death wish, to prevent us from reordering our priorities... The coalition of an energized section of labor, Negroes, unemployed, and welfare recipients may be the source of power that reshapes economic relationships and ushers in a breakthrough to a new level of social reform.

"The total elimination of poverty, now a practical responsibility, the reality of equality in race relations and other profound structural changes in society may well begin here."⁷

At that time, the stock market was below 1,000 points. Today, it is above 10,000 points, and yet there still is no social vision for paying an adequate wage and the minimum wage has dropped 42% since 1968.

Unlike Malcolm X, whose assassination cut short his organizing plans, King was organizing a movement to obtain his stated goals when he was assassinated. In fact, he was in Memphis to build that "coalition of an energized section of labor, Negroes, unemployed, and welfare recipients" in support of striking municipal sanitation workers.

⁶ For more information read *The Assassinations of Martin Luther King, Jr. and Malcolm X*, <http://www.holtlaborlibrary.org/malcolmX.htm>

⁷ *A Testament of Hope: The Essential Writings of Martin Luther King Jr.*, Paperback, Harper San Francisco, 1990, pp. 630-634.

The Rise and Fall of the Civil Rights Movement

If such a force had been launched, the whole power of the antiwar and civil rights movement in the 1960s could have transformed the labor movement and become "the source of power that reshapes economic relationships and ushers in a breakthrough to a new level of social reform."

To combat the rise of the Civil Right Movement, the "war on poverty" was first launched in 1965 along with the concept of "Black Politicians". Malcolm X described this process in his Jan. 7, 1965 speech "The Prospects for Freedom", at the Militant Labor Forum, in New York City:

"They have a new gimmick every year. They're going to take one of their boys, black boys, and put him in the cabinet so he can walk around Washington with a cigar. Fire on one end and fool on the other end. And because his immediate personal problem will have been solved he will be the one to tell our people: 'Look how much progress we're making. I'm in Washington, D.C., I can have tea in the White House. I'm your spokesman, I'm your leader.' While our people are still living in Harlem in the slums. Still receiving the worst form of education.

"But how many sitting here right now feel that they could [laughs] truly identify with a struggle that was designed to eliminate the basic causes that create the conditions that exist? Not very many. They can jive, but when it comes to identifying yourself with a struggle that is not endorsed by the power structure, that is not acceptable, that the ground rules are not laid down by the society in which you live, in which you are struggling against, you can't identify with that, you step back.

"It's easy to become a satellite today without even realizing it. This country can seduce God. Yes, it has that seductive power of economic dollarism. You can cut out colonialism, imperialism and all other kind of ism, but it's hard for you to cut that dollarism. When they drop those dollars on you, you'll fold though."^{8, 9}

After the assassination of Martin Luther King and the subsequent rebellions in the inner cities protesting his assassination, the Democratic Party's "war on poverty" started laying dollars on any potential Black leaders and grooming Black Candidates.

John Lewis, formally of SNCC, became enlightened, he forego the Black Panthers and saw the Democratic Party, symbolized by a jackass, as his party. Most of what W.E. B. Dubois described as the "talented tenth" were bought off by this process. The more radical concepts that Martin Luther King and Malcolm X had developed at the time of their deaths disappeared from the scene. No one took up where they left off. The governmental policy, directed towards the 'leaders' of the civil rights movement, of the carrot (dollarism) and the stick (assassinations) had proven to be successful.

⁸A complete audio of the speech can be found at <http://www.brothermalcolm.net/mxwords/whathesaid23.html>

⁹<http://www.accuracy.org/newsrelease.php?articleId=987>

A last chance at rebuilding the movement was the first National Black Political Assembly on March 10, 1972. "Eight thousand African Americans (three thousand of whom were official delegates) arrived in Gary, Indiana, to attend their first convention, which was more commonly known as the 'Gary Convention.' A sea of Black faces chanted, 'It's Nation Time! It's Nation Time!' No one in the room had ever seen anything like this before. The radical Black nationalists clearly won the day; moderates who supported integration and backed the Democratic Party were in the minority.¹⁰ It gave birth to the "Gary Declaration" which stated:

". . . A Black political convention, indeed all truly Black politics, must begin from this truth: The American system does not work for the masses of our people, and it cannot be made to work without radical, fundamental changes. The challenge is thrown to us here in Gary. It is the challenge to consolidate and organize our own Black role as the vanguard in the struggle for a new society.

"To accept the challenge is to move to independent Black politics. There can be no equivocation on that issue. History leaves us no other choice. White politics has not and cannot bring the changes we need."¹⁰

Unfortunately, Black Democratic Party supporters such as Richard Hatcher the mayor of Gary Indiana, Jesse Jackson, Ron Daniels, and even Amiri Baraka betrayed the hope from the Gary Convention. Instead of the course that was decided at the convention, they led the way to support Black politicians and through them, the Democratic Party. "Vote for Me and I'll set you Free" became the slogan for the day and the civil rights movement became completely demobilized and with its "leaders co-opted" into the system. From this demobilization, came the betrayal and atomization of the movement.

As Malcolm X said in his New York City speech, Dec. 1, 1963: "The Negro revolution is controlled by foxy white liberals, by the Government itself."¹¹

At first, there was an illusion of progress; there was a rise in the number on Black politicians. There was an increase in jobs for black professionals in government, in industry, and on television. There was an impression that things were getting better through the strategy of relying upon the Democratic Party to politically secure, protect, and advance the struggle for racial equality.

An example of what was wrong with this strategy was clearly demonstrated when Maynard Jackson was elected mayor of Atlanta Ga., in 1974.

At the time of Martin Luther King's was assassination, he was willing to risk jail and to

¹⁰ http://www.aaregistry.com/african_american_history/1559/First_National_Black_Political_Convention_held____

¹¹ www.boston.com/news/globe/editorial_opinion/oped/articles/2007/09/28/at_the_elite_colleges____dim_white_kids/

The Rise and Fall of the Civil Rights Movement

organize a mass demonstration, in defiance of a court injunction and National Guardsmen, in armored personnel carriers equipped with 50-caliber machine guns, to help the striking Memphis municipal garbage workers. These workers ultimately won their union contract, and thousands of ordinary working families in that city got living wages that allowed them to educate their children, buy houses, live decent and dignified lives, and even retire.

In contrast, Maynard Jackson quickly demonstrated that he was not beholden to or a leader of the Black population that elected him, but beholden to those who financed his election campaign and who helped his personal political and financial advancement. In Atlanta, Jackson, instead of helping city sanitation workers, fired more than a thousand city employees to crush their strike. In this, he had the support of white business leaders and the Atlanta Journal-Constitution.



March 29, 1968: Scene in Memphis

<http://web.commercialappeal.com/newgo/mlk/strike.html>

Similar fruits, from the political policy of supporting the "lesser evil" Democratic Party, has led to a set back for the struggle for civil rights and equality.

"Lesser evil" always means "More Evil"-the Republican Richard Nixon, the "greater evil" in 1968, would be the "lesser evil" to the Democrat Clinton (Bill and Hillary) in today's world!

No longer fearing a mass civil rights movement in the streets, the Democrats have, for the past 30 years, shared responsibility for the gradual reduction of affirmative action and the victories of the movement.

From my own experience, the only way to enforce affirmative action, is if there are quotas for employment in the workplace. The new Black politicians, along with Jessie Jackson, came out against quotas in the 80s, helping to make affirmative action more difficult. Various court decisions helped to reduce the effects of affirmative action and to resegregate the nation's

school system. In 1995, President Clinton, as the leader of the Democratic Party, drafted a memorandum for the elimination of any program that creates (1) a quota; (2) preferences for unqualified individuals; (3) creates reverse discrimination (The slogan of the racists); or continues affirmative action even after its equal opportunity purposes have been achieved." (A myth)

Actually, according to a recent article from the *Boston Globe*, at the elite colleges, there is affirmative action for rich dim white kids.¹²

The Democratic Party was responsible for the 1986 Anti-Drug Abuse Act which established a 100-to-1 sentencing ratio between possession of crack (mainly used in the inter-cities) and of cocaine powder (mainly used in the suburbs). Under this law, possession of five grams of crack is a felony and carries a mandated minimum five-year federal prison sentence. For cocaine powder it is only a misdemeanor for the possession of less than 500 grams of cocaine powder. The five-year felony sentence applies if one has 500 grams in their possession. This sentencing disproportion was based on phony testimony that crack was 50 times more addictive than powdered coke. The Democratic Party-controlled Congress then doubled this ratio as a so-called "violence penalty". This has led to "affirmative action" in the prison system, where Black inmates are a far greater in percentage of all prisoners than their percentage in the nation. At the same time, many states are now preventing those convicted of a felony from voting.

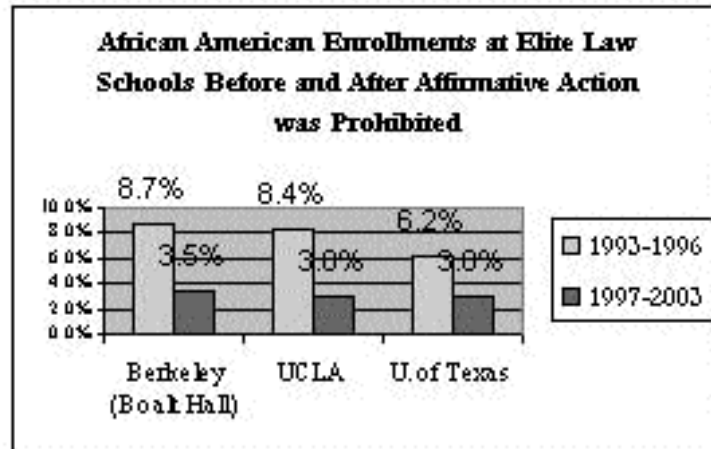


Graph <http://faculty.ncwc.edu/toconnor/images/racedrugs.gif>

¹² http://www.civilrightsproject.harvard.edu/research/deseg/separate_schools01.php

The Rise and Fall of the Civil Rights Movement

According to the Harvard Civil Rights Project the public schools have become more separate and unequal -the consequences of a decade from 1988 to 1998) of resegregation along economic, ethnic and racist lines.¹³



http://www.equaljusticesociety.org/connerly_myths.html

Throughout this land, both the Republican and Democratic Parties are gentrifying the inner cities, in the service of big business, and the poor are being scattered to the winds. It is how the rich are handling unemployment and poverty in this country. Recently, Black U.S. Senator Barack Obama (D-IL) went to Africa to publicize the catastrophe of Aids in Africa. He should have also gone to the Black Communities in the United States and publicized the crisis of Aids in Black America, where nearly half of the million Americans, who are living with HIV today, are Black. In fact it has become a Black disease.¹⁴

The bipartisan corporate "bankruptcy reforms" in the late 80s to the present have allowed corporations to lay off workers, rob pension plans, and tear up union contracts. Because Black workers are still the "last hired and first fired", they have received the brunt of these attacks.

Overall, the rich have become richer, and the poor have become poorer.

Ben H. Bagdikian put it well in his "Preface to the Sixth Edition" of *The Media Monopoly*, after he explained that just six of the world's largest corporations, control 95% of the mass media, he wrote:

"The American economy [has been] undergoing an astonishing phenomenon that the

¹³ <http://www.blackaids.org/ShowArticle.aspx?pagename=ShowArticle&articletype=NEWS&articleid=203&pagenumber=1>

¹⁴ *The Media Monopoly* (2000) Beacon Press, 25 Beacon St., Boston Mass 02108-2892

mainstream news left largely unreported or actually glamorized in its infrequent references, the largest transfer of the national wealth in American history from a majority of the population to a small percentage of the country's wealthiest families."¹⁵

This process was facilitated by the fact that almost every "tax reform" from Kennedy in 1961, to Bush in 2004, has resulted in the taking of wealth from the working class and giving it to the capitalist class.

And yet, the Congressional Black Caucus echoes the "hype" from the government, the press, and the Republican and Democratic Parties, that things are better today. The economic figures from the bipartisan wage-price freeze in 1972 to today demonstrate that this it is false illusion.

According to *infoplease*, Black households median income in 1972 was \$21,311 or \$97,201.78 in 2005 dollars, while white Households median income in 1972 was \$36,510 or \$166,526.06 in 2005 dollars.¹⁶ In 2004 Black households had a median income in 2004 was \$30,947 in 2005 dollars. White Households had the highest median income at \$47,957 in 2005 dollars. Significantly lower than the median incomes for 1972.¹⁷

These figures show that Black Households median income in 1972 was 58% of white households median income and approximate 64% of white households today. This does not represent progress, it represents that income for workers, Black People and other minorities has decreased since 1972. Black people now have an income of 64% of white households that has not kept up with inflation and has actually decreased by over 50% since 1972. 15 Since the working class and the poor have been suffering an ever-increasing rate of taxation and concurrent cuts in government services, the decline in real wages and their standard of living has been worse.

In order to regain what has been lost and win equality rights for all, we must stop supporting those who are oppressing us - the Democratic and Republican Parties - and go back to what made all movements powerful. Which was relying upon ourselves and building our own independent power.

As King said: "There is nothing, except a tragic death wish, to prevent us from reordering our priorities... The coalition of an energized section of labor, Negroes, unemployed, and welfare recipients may be the source of power that reshapes economic relationships and ushers in a breakthrough to a new level of social reform.

¹⁵ www.infoplease.com/ipa/A0104552.html

¹⁶ All inflation calculations done at <http://www.westegg.com/inflation/>

¹⁷ <http://www.infoplease.com/ipa/A0104688.html>

The Rise and Fall of the Civil Rights Movement

"The total elimination of poverty, now a practical responsibility, the reality of equality in race relations and other profound structural changes in society may well begin here."

Such a coalition, as King envisioned it thirty-three years ago, is needed today. In order to survive, we must begin the begin.



<http://www.muhammadspeaks.com/Police&KKK.gif>

The Congressional Black Caucus echoes the "hype" from the government, the press, and the Republican and Democratic Parties, that things are better today. And yet, racism continues to be an institutional part of the United States.

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Such a coalition, as King envisioned it thirty-three years ago, is needed today. In order to survive, we must begin the begin.¹⁸

¹⁸ For a graphic video on how race relations have not changed in this country go to:
<http://www.komotv.com/home/video/5001856.html?video=YHI&t=a>