A Companion to African American History
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Chapter Twenty-nine

Searching for a New Freedom

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In the immediate aftermath of emancipation, the lives of former bondsmen and bondswomen failed to meet their basic expectations. Quite simply, their lives too closely resembled the status quo antebellum. Indeed, African Americans remained landless, lacked ownership of the fruits of their labor, lost the vote (through electoral fraud and discriminatory changes to state constitutions) shortly after they had received it, and were subject to vicious, vulgar, and random acts of racial terrorism as a result of the federal government being more interested in protecting the southern economy than in protecting black folk.

In response, African Americans organized to implement their vision of freedom, which differed substantially from that of white southerners and white northerners. By agitating for their civil and human rights, especially for good-quality education, political participation, personal safety, and control of their own labor, the former slaves launched the fight for racial justice that continues to this day (Harding 1981). The most important link in this intergenerational struggle is the modern Civil Rights Movement. It represents the most highly organized manifestation of African Americans' post-emancipation search for a new freedom and, if measured narrowly in legislative terms, the most successful.

Popular interest in the Civil Rights Movement has swelled during the last two decades. Evidence of this trend is the surge in the number of feature-length films that explore aspects and events of the civil rights era, such as *Freedom Song* and *Boycott*. The extensive media coverage given to the trials and convictions of whites involved in the 1963 murders of Medgar Evers and the four little girls killed in the Birmingham church bombing also reflects this trend. Academics have also paid increasing attention to the Black Freedom Struggle. In fact, their interest in the movement has fueled popular interest in it. In the years since 1990, the literature on the movement has grown substantially (Fairclough 1990; Lawson 1991). In the process, scholars have altered their general analytic framework, relying less on top-down, "great man" perspectives, and more on bottom-up, grassroots approaches. They have also broadened their subjects of inquiry, ranging beyond dramatic mobilizing events to examine community organizing (Eagles 1986; Robinson and Sullivan

1991; Lawson and Payne 1998; Davis 2000). Consequently, movement scholarship has become much richer and more complex.

This chapter focuses on the evolution of civil rights inquiry over the last quarter-century. It discusses and analyzes the major shifts in the subjects that historians study. It also looks at the ways the latest analytic approaches to studying social movements have caused scholars to look anew at civil rights events, activists, and organizations. This chapter also identifies and considers areas of the Black Freedom Struggle that remain understudied.

The origin of the Civil Rights Movement has been the focus of intense scholarly debate. Initially, historians tended to locate the starting point of the Black Freedom Struggle in the mid-1950s, arguing that the movement began when the US Supreme Court ruled in *Brown v. Board of Education, Topeka, Kansas* in 1954 that *de jure* segregated education was inherently unequal and unconstitutional (Kluger 1975). For these scholars, the primary catalysts behind the movement were the usual arbiters of power. They argue that the judicial branch of the federal government, followed later by the executive and legislative branches, led the charge for social change (Sitkoff 1978; Weisbrot 1991).

The push to acknowledge African American agency started a gradual shift in the discourse on movement origins. Rather than *Brown*, scholars began to point to the Montgomery bus boycott and the emergence of Dr Martin Luther King, Jr in 1955 as having jumpstarted civil rights struggles (Garrow 1986; Branch 1988). As a result, many scholars centered their studies of the movement around the life and protest activities of the Atlanta-born preacher. Taylor Branch, for example, situates his award-winning works on the Civil Rights Movement wholly around King's public life (Branch 1988, 1998). David Garrow and Adam Fairclough examine King's personal life during his public years even more closely; Garrow accomplishes this by making effective use of Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) surveillance records (Garrow 1983, 1986; Fairclough 1995a). More recently, historian Clayborne Carson has edited several volumes of King's personal papers. Although Carson is less committed to a King-centered understanding of the movement's beginning and evolution, he argues forthrightly for King's centrality to the Black Freedom Struggle (Carson 1992–2000, 1998).

Sociologist Aldon Morris complicates the Montgomery–King starting point slightly by beginning his exploration and analysis of the movement's origin with the 1953 Baton Rouge bus boycott. Like the aforementioned scholars, however, he centers the bulk of his study on the protest activities of King and the resource networks of black ministers (Morris 1984). In the years since 1990, increased awareness of the power of ordinary people – the proverbial grassroots – to make the decisions that most affect their lives has prompted scholars to challenge the idea that the Civil Rights Movement began with the bus boycotts of the 1950s and the emergence of King. Robin D. G. Kelley and Eric Arnesen look at organized black protest among southern sharecroppers and railroad workers as antecedents to the civil rights struggles of the 1950s (Kelley 1990; Arnesen 2001). Kelley also points to individual grassroots protest during the Second World War era as evidence of the need to push back the movement's starting point (Kelley 1994). Robert Korstad and Nelson Lichtenstein (1988), Michael Honey (1993), and Bruce Nelson (1993), for their part, test the normative narrative of the movement's origin by examining the

intersection of black struggles for equality and southern labor organizing in the 1940s.

Interestingly enough, scholars who position white powerbrokers as the leading catalysts behind the Black Freedom Struggle have also divined earlier roots for the movement. Patricia Sullivan (1996), for example, locates the origins of the Civil Rights Movement in the liberal politics of New Deal southerners. Others have suggested that a liberal ethos permeated the late 1940s and sparked the movement by creating a popular consensus for progressive social change. As evidence, they point to the publication of Gunnar Myrdal's *An American Dilemma* and the Truman Administration's statement on civil rights *To Secure These Rights* (Lawson and Payne 1998). Scholars questioning this analytic trend note that the machinations of Washington insiders had only a limited impact on everyday black life, particularly in the rural South, even during the height of the New Deal. They also point out that Red-baiting McCarthyites and massive white resistance in the wake of *Brown* together limited the space available for public criticism and social activism, extinguishing post-war liberal sentiment and retarding rather than sparking black protest (Klarman 1994; Payne 1995; Lawson and Payne 1998; Dudziak 2000).

Understandings of the origins of the Civil Rights Movement have significantly shaped the study of civil rights organizations. Interest in *Brown* has sparked a handful of monographs on the NAACP's strategy to dismantle Jim Crow and on the Howard University lawyers who engineered and executed it (McNeil 1983; Tushnet 1987; Williams 1998). A number of works investigating the nation's oldest civil rights organization examine aspects of its fight "to reach the conscience of America" such as the crusade against lynching (Zangrando 1980; Goings 1990; Meier and Bracey 1993; Bates 1997). Unfortunately, far fewer studies exist of NAACP operations beyond New York boardrooms and Washington courtrooms. Only in the last decade have historians focused significant attention on the activities of the NAACP's local branches and local leaders. Notable works in this category are Ray Gavins' essay on the NAACP in North Carolina during the Jim Crow era, Tim Tyson's biography of Robert F. Williams, NAACP branch leader in Monroe, North Carolina, and most recently John Kirk's work on black activism in Little Rock, Arkansas, which considers the leadership and struggles of Daisy Bates (Robinson and Sullivan 1991; Tyson 1999; Kirk 2003).

As scholars began to look more closely at the bus boycotts of the 1950s and the emergence of Martin Luther King, Jr, they devoted increasing attention to the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) and King-led SCLC campaigns. King biographers David Garrow and Adam Fairclough have both written impressive organizational histories of SCLC that scrutinize King's leadership and look closely at the group's civil rights battles (Garrow 1986; Fairclough 1987). Garrow has also penned a detailed account of SCLC's involvement in the 1965 voting rights drive in Selma, Alabama (Garrow 1978). Not surprisingly, most treatments of SCLC center on King. A refreshing break from this practice is Andrew Manis' 1999 biography of Fred Shuttlesworth. The fiery Rev. Shuttlesworth was the driving force behind the Alabama Christian Movement for Human Rights (ACMHR) and SCLC's man-on-the-ground in Birmingham, Alabama.

Popular perceptions of King *as* the movement, coupled with the NAACP's legal victories, caused scholars to pay only nominal attention to the Congress of Racial

Equality (CORE) or the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC). They pushed these bodies to the movement periphery, dismissing them as secondary, even irrelevant (Morris 1984). Notable early exceptions are the 1973 history of CORE by August Meier and Elliot Rudwick, and histories of SNCC by Howard Zinn (1964) and Clayborne Carson (1981). To their credit, the works by Carson, and Meier and Rudwick are still the definitive studies of their subjects.

Examinations of CORE remain few in number. The literature on SNCC, however, has exploded. Since the mid-1990s, SNCC has moved from the margins of civil rights inquiry to the center. Studies of SNCC organizing in Mississippi by historian John Dittmer (1994) and sociologist Charles Payne (1995) have been principally responsible for redefining how the academic community looks at SNCC. Their application of a bottom-up approach to the Black Freedom Struggle demonstrated unequivocally that SNCC, and more specifically its African American organizers and the local people working with them, belongs at the center of movement histories, rather than at the margins. These works also reshaped the broader field of civil rights inquiry by drawing attention to the desire of the grassroots to have a say in the decisions that affect their lives and by making clear the essential distinction between movement organizing and movement mobilizing.

A disproportionate amount of the literature on SNCC focuses on Freedom Summer. In 1964, SNCC brought hundreds of white students from the nation's premier universities to Mississippi to draw attention to the desire of Mississippi's black residents to vote, to shine light on the obstacles impeding their ability to exercise the franchise, and to conduct freedom schools (McAdam 1988). Scholarly interest in this particular SNCC project has everything to do with white participation, particularly the participation of white women, and the murder of two white volunteers (Evans 1979). Whites, rather than SNCC's veteran black organizers and the local people who risked life and livelihood to shelter and feed them, are the primary subjects of inquiry. Memoirs by SNCC field secretaries have helped set the record straight, redirecting scholarly attention toward the activism, and heroism, of SNCC's black organizers and their local comrades (Forman 1972; Sellers 1973; King 1987; Lewis 1998; Curry et al. 2000; Moses and Cobb 2001). Former SNCC chairman Stokeley Carmichael's posthumously released autobiography is the most recent addition to this invaluable body of literature, and arguably the most significant (Carmichael 2003).

There remains a need for detailed studies of SNCC organizing that occurred outside Mississippi. Journalist David Halberstam's 1998 look at the Nashville movement and the soon-to-be SNCC activists who led the sit-in campaign in that city in 1960, namely Diane Nash, James Bevel, Bernard Lafayette, and John Lewis, is a step in the right direction. There is a similar need for critical studies of prominent SNCC members. Recent biographies of SNCC activists Fannie Lou Hamer and Ruby Doris Smith Robinson, and influential SNCC adviser Ella Baker, are excellent starting points (Lee 1999; Fleming 1998; Ransby 2003).

Scholars began to look anew at SNCC in the 1990s largely because of lessons they had learned in the 1980s from studying local civil rights movements. Collectively, William Chafe's 1980 examination of the freedom struggle in Greensboro, North Carolina, David Colburn's 1985 look at the movement in St Augustine, Florida, and Robert Norrell's 1985 study of black protest in Tuskegee, Alabama, made clear that

the Civil Rights Movement was less a centrally coordinated national campaign and more a diffuse collection of local struggles in which local people played a leading role (Norrell 1985). Realizing that no organization worked in the trenches and on the front lines with the grassroots more than SNCC, scholars began to reevaluate the organization.

Interest in local movements continues. Caroline Emmons and Paul Ortiz have penned excellent articles on voting rights in Florida (Emmons 1997; Ortiz 2003). In 2003, much-needed monographs on the civil rights movements in Cambridge, Maryland, and Little Rock, Arkansas, appeared (Levy 2003; Kirk 2003). These studies reaffirm the idea that local people were the driving force behind the Black Freedom Struggle. At the same time, deconstructing the Civil Rights Movement geographically has prompted scholars to conduct state studies of black protest. John Dittmer's *Local People* (1994) is the foremost state study of the freedom struggle in Mississippi. Adam Fairclough's *Race and Democracy* (1995b) is an exhaustive study of black protest in Louisiana. Its pattern was followed by Stephen Tuck's *Beyond Atlanta* (2001), a broad history of civil rights activism in Georgia. To date, however, no comprehensive study of civil rights activism in Alabama exists – a glaring omission given the history of struggle in the self-styled Heart of Dixie. Glen Eskew's *But for Birmingham* (1997) and J. Mills Thornton's *Dividing Lines* (2002) come closest to filling this void, but these works focus wholly on municipalities and pay scant attention to civil rights activism in Alabama's rural counties.

The tendency to overlook rural protest is not limited to Alabama. Much of the literature on civil rights struggles outside Alabama also ignores rural protest. This oversight is partly a function of academic interest in dramatic mobilizing events, which typically occurred in urban areas. Norrell's 1985 work on Tuskegee is a notable exception, but the presence there of Booker T. Washington's Tuskegee Institute and a Veteran's Administration hospital made Tuskegee less than representative of typical, rural, black towns. Greta de Jong's *A Different Day* (2002), a study of black protest in rural Louisiana from 1900 to 1970, and Nan Woodruff's *American Congo* (2003), which examines the Black Freedom Struggle in Arkansas and the Mississippi Delta during the first half of the twentieth century, are first-rate examples of the types of rural case studies needed.

Black protest in rural areas is just one of several aspects of the Civil Rights Movement pregnant with investigative possibility. Another is black protest outside the South. To date, most studies that examine black activism in the North focus on the Nation of Islam (NOI) (Lincoln 1961; Essien-Udom 1962; McCartney 1992; Sales 1997). Ironically, the NOI, under the leadership of the Honorable Elijah Muhammad, did not identify with the Civil Rights Movement. Muhammad, through his principal spokesperson Malcolm X, preached racial separatism and criticized civil rights activists, particularly Christian ministers, for "trying to integrate into a burning house." Claude Clegg's biography of Elijah Muhammad offers an excellent analysis of the NOI's criticisms of the Civil Rights Movement. It also places the Nation's civil rights critique in the context of its political conservatism (Clegg 1997).

Interest in the Nation of Islam, coupled with the tendency of the southern struggle against Jim Crow and disfranchisement to dominate conceptualizations of the Civil Rights Movement, has caused historians to give much less attention than it

deserves to organized northern protest against job discrimination and police brutality, and for fair housing and improved social services. Hopefully *To Stand and Fight*, a study of black activism in post-Second World War New York City, and *Freedom North*, a collection of essays on freedom struggles outside the South, will start a new trend, one in which northern struggles are fully integrated into analyses of the Civil Rights Movement (Biondi 2003; Theoharis and Woodard 2003).

African American armed self-defense is another greatly understudied aspect of the Civil Rights Movement. Popular perceptions of the freedom struggle as a nonviolent crusade obscure the fact that most civil rights activists who subscribed to nonviolence did so as a tactic only, and that the grassroots indulged rather than embraced nonviolent protest. Under constant assault from white reactionaries affiliated with terror organizations and law enforcement, local people did not hesitate to pick up guns in defense of self, family, organizers, and community. Although a full-length study of armed self-defense during the Black Freedom Struggle has yet to be written, there are useful articles on self-defense in Mississippi and on the Louisiana-based Deacons for Defense and Justice that demonstrate the willingness of local people to defend themselves and the ways they did it (Strain 1997; Umoja 1999, 2002; Crosby 2003).

Violence against African Americans has become a regular part of the discourse on southern white resistance, and thus has received more attention than armed self-defense. Lynching dominates the literature on white violence that occurred in the decades up to the 1960s. The lynchings of Mack Charles Parker and Emmett Till in Mississippi have captured the interest of historians above all (Smead 1986; Whitfield 1988; Hudson-Weems 1996, 1998). Much of the literature on violent white behavior during the 1960s examines violence perpetrated by terror groups, particularly the Ku Klux Klan and the White Citizens' Council (McMillen 1971; McWhorter 2001). Urban uprisings, beginning with the Harlem rebellion of 1965, and state-sponsored terrorism, most notably the counter intelligence programs of city police and the FBI, take over the literature on white violence of the late 1960s and early 1970s (Horne 1995; O'Reilly 1989). Although studies of white violence during all three eras are generally balanced – meaning that they incorporate black perspectives – future explorations have to include greater scrutiny of the interplay between violent white behavior and African American armed self-defense. White expectations of African American responses, whether nonviolent or violent, dictated white behavior to a measurable degree. In the rural South, it was common for whites to refrain from violence when they suspected an armed black response. At the same time, urban police often resorted to violence when they believed African Americans would meet force with force.

Until recently, scholars paid little attention to the critical role played by African American women in the freedom struggle. The historiographic tendency to focus on ministerial leadership and movement spokespersons, positions typically occupied by men, rendered the activism of African American women invisible. There are now, however, several excellent studies of African American women's participation and leadership in the movement. *Women in the Civil Rights Movement* was the first major collection of academic essays that looked closely at the struggles of African American women in the movement (Crawford et al. 1990). *Sisters in Struggle* follows a similar format, but delves deeper into the personal lives of the women under

study and pushes the temporal boundaries of their activism forward into the Black Power era (Collier-Thomas and Franklin 2001). A spate of biographies on women activists, particularly women affiliated with SNCC, and memoirs by women who were active in the struggle, has vastly improved understandings of the personal and political lives of black women activists (Brown 1986; Robinson 1987; Murray 1989; Lee 1999; Fleming 1998; Ransby 2003). Of greatest need now are monographs synthesizing black women's activism along the lines of Belinda Robnett's *How Long? How Long?* (1997), which offers a usable analytic framework for understanding black women's participation and leadership in the movement.

Exploring the complexity of women's roles in the freedom struggle is part of a broader trend of complicating the movement's evolution. What began with historians reconsidering the starting point of the Black Freedom Struggle has now shifted toward scholarly reassessments of its terminus. Theses positing that the Civil Rights Movement ended with the passage of the 1964 Civil Rights Act and 1965 Voting Rights Act have fallen out of favor. The goal of the Black Freedom Struggle was never, simply, federal legislation. Rather than fighting solely for unfettered access to public accommodations and the ballot box, African Americans in the middle decades of the twentieth century agitated for full civil and human rights, much as their forebears had immediately after emancipation. Theses arguing that the movement ended with the assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr in 1968 have also lost currency. King was big in the movement, but it was bigger than him.

Replacing earlier arguments positing that the Civil Rights Movement ended in 1965 or 1968 is the idea that civil rights struggles continued into the Black Power era. Rather than viewing civil rights and Black Power agitation as unconnected, scholars have begun to see the latter as an extension of the former (Collier-Thomas and Franklin 2001; Joseph 2002). Merging civil rights and Black Power struggles has required scholars to go beyond simplistic understandings of the era. The Civil Rights Movement, for example, was more than what King said and SCLC did. Similarly, the Black Power Movement was more than what Stokely Carmichael said and the Black Panther Party did (Carmichael and Hamilton 1967, 1992; McCartney 1992; Van Deburg 1992). Students of Black Power have taken the lead in reconceptualizing this moment. Recent works by Komozi Woodard on the Black Arts Movement (1999), Rod Bush on Black Nationalism (1999), Scot Brown on the US organization (2003), and Yohuru Williams on the Black Panther Party (2000) have established a template for looking anew at this tumultuous time.

The literature on the Civil Rights Movement has matured substantially over the last quarter-century. Scholars have transcended narrow understandings of the movement's chronology, extending its temporal boundaries both forward and backward in time. They have complicated civil rights leadership, broadening definitions of leaders to incorporate women and the grassroots. No longer is the prototypical civil rights leader the black Baptist minister. They have also placed ordinary black folk, local people, at the center of study, recognizing not only their agency as historical actors, but also their desire and capacity to make the decisions that shape their lives. In addition, they have reevaluated civil rights organizations, finally recognizing the invaluable contributions of SNCC's young radicals.

There remains, however, work to be done. The leadership and participation of women has to be synthesized further, as does African American armed self-defense.

Some significant local movements, in both the South and the North, have yet to be examined, and important state studies have yet to be written. Fortunately, if the period from 1980 to 2004 is any indication of the direction in which movement literature is headed, these gaps will be filled in the very near future. This will enhance our understanding of this critical moment in African Americans' intergenerational search for a new freedom.

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CHAPTER THIRTY

"Race Rebels": From Indigenous Insurgency to Hip-Hop Mania

MARCELLUS C. BARKSDALE AND SAMUEL T. LIVINGSTON

By 1935, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) had launched its legal assault on segregation, discrimination, and disfranchisement. Two major successes came in the area of higher education when Donald Murray (*Murray v. Pearson*) and Lloyd Baines (*Missouri ex. rel. Gaines v. Canada*) integrated the law schools of the University of Maryland in 1935 and Missouri in 1938, respectively. In the area of voting rights, a major victory was achieved in the case of *Smith v. Allwright*, 1944. These victories inspired many African Americans and contributed to the beginning of the modern Civil Rights Movement. The Movement spurted ahead through the 1940s and reached a new zenith in *Brown v. Board of Education* in 1954 (Woodward 1974; Jackson 1990).

These achievements in the federal courts seemed to justify the NAACP's legalistic approach to dismantling Jim Crow. Some, however, continued to believe that this strategy was too slow and too piecemeal. The only major organization at the time to deviate from the NAACP's legalism was CORE, a biracial group founded in Chicago in 1942. It launched restaurant sit-ins in Chicago that year and conducted "freedom rides" as early as 1947. Even NAACP officials, like Florida's Howard Moore and North Carolina's Robert Williams, rebelled against the strategy of the parent organization, leading to their suspension. The activities of Moore and Williams and the long struggle that had brought blacks to *Brown* were partly the result of a psychological revolution that had occurred among African Americans by 1950. This had been intensified by their military experiences and upward social mobility during the 1940s, which helped to poise them to take their fight for inclusion – and that is what the early civil rights movements were about – to another level.

The years immediately after the Second World War saw the emergence of a different, if not new, black America. Some writers – James Baldwin, Gunnar Myrdal, E. Franklin Frazier, and Charles Silberman – attribute this change in the behavior of blacks to the social upheavals brought about by the war. Some scholars – Harold R. Isaacs, Talcott Parsons, and Kenneth B. Clark – describe the increased militancy of blacks in the United States as part of the international struggle for liberation by

Africans and other peoples of the Third World who saw a glaring conflict in the myth and reality – the ideal and practice – of universal democracy; while others – like Lodis Rhodes, S. Rudolph Martin, Jr, and James Robert Bruce – say that increased civil rights activity among blacks was the product of time and the process of conscious awakening. Whatever the causes, one result was clear: blacks did more actively demand their human and civil rights after the Second World War (Myrdal et al. 1944; Silberman 1964; Isaacs 1964; Parsons 1968; Rhodes 1972, 1998; Barksdale 1984; Jackson 1990).

The thesis of conscious awakening as the principal motivation for the escalation of the black struggle for freedom in America is, in itself, an intriguing discussion. Human culture is learned behavior that is internalized on both the conscious and subliminal levels of our minds. The socialization process through which human culture is perpetuated begins very early in life and continues, for all intents and purposes, for the remainder of our lives. In the absence of health issues, humans never get too old to learn new things. According to Lodis Rhodes, black conscious development evolves through identifiable stages characterized by symbolic behavior. At no time are all blacks at the same level of consciousness, but groups of blacks may conform to the same symbolic behavior and share philosophical positions. The more provincial a person's or a group's experiences are, the more conservative and prescriptive their thinking and behavior may be. The more cosmopolitan a person's or a group's experiences are, the more liberal and open their thinking and behavior may be. And so it was for black Americans, who for generations had lived very provincial lives on slave plantations and sharecroppers' farms. As they migrated out of the South and served military duty in foreign places, they had new and stimulating experiences, which changed their way of thinking and behaving. They were now more willing than ever before to take up the fight for their freedom (Berelsen and Steiner 1967; Levine 1977; Rhodes 1972, 1998).

It was in the context of awakened consciousness that Howard Moore and the NAACP clashed over tactics, beginning in the 1930s. Moore, head of the Florida State NAACP, won national attention after leading a black registration drive that added 10,000 voters in the state. He also broke with tradition by advising blacks to break with the Republicans and vote Democratic. His militancy led him further into a pivotal role in the Groveland Rape Case ("Florida's Little Scottsboro"), when he intervened to prevent the swift conviction and certain execution of two black defendants. Scholars agree that his involvement in this case led to his murder, along with his wife, in 1951. Moore's story is told best in *Before His Time: The Untold Story of Harry T. Moore, America's First Civil Rights Martyr*; however, this is more of a journalistic account than a historical analysis. A general overview of pre-war challenges to the NAACP hegemony can be found in Beth Tompkins Bates, "A new crowd challenges the agenda of the old guard in the NAACP, 1933–1941" (Bates 1997; Sanders 2000).

The case of Robert F. Williams and the Civil Rights Movement in Monroe, North Carolina, is another example of this conscious change. Williams was born in Monroe in 1925 and in his youth had acted, to some extent, according to the dictates of the local brand of the culture of white supremacy. Although his father provided a comfortable standard of living for his family, Williams' social life was limited by the Jim Crow laws of the time. He lived in a segregated community, attended segregated

schools and churches, socialized in segregated settings, and was relegated by the rules of segregation as he encountered whites in the public arena. Williams's mind-set changed after he left Monroe to work for the Ford Motor Company in Detroit, to attend West Virginia State College, and to serve in the US Army and Marines. The Robert Williams who returned to Monroe in the mid-1950s and took command of the black struggle for freedom in that western North Carolina town was not the same Robert Williams that left in the 1940s. There had been a conscious awakening in him and, by 1950, in thousands of other blacks too (Williams 1962; Barksdale 1984; Tyson 1999).

The actions of Moore, Williams, and others were, in fact, a continuation of protests dating back to the era of African American bondage. Runaway slaves and day-to-day resistance were hallmarks of the indigenous phase of abolitionism, to which David Walker, Henry Highland Garnet, and others gave theoretical and textual support. In the Civil Rights Era, such action became national news in December 1955 when Mrs Rosa Parks took a seat designated for Negro passengers on a bus in Montgomery, Alabama, and refused to get up for a white man. Parks' conscious awakening was repeated in thousands of other black citizens of Montgomery, including E. D. Nixon, JoAnne Robinson, Ralph D. Abernathy, and Martin Luther King, Jr. This was the beginning of a new era in the black struggle for freedom in America: blacks moved to became more widely organized and mounted protests through mass meetings, boycotts, marches, and acts of civil disobedience such as sit-in and sit-down demonstrations (Branch 1988, 1998; Garrow 1986).

Perhaps the most telling example of the conscious awakening took place in Sumner, Mississippi. In August 1955, Emmett Till had been lynched by white racists in Money, Mississippi, for violating the culture of white supremacy by making an unwelcome advance to a white woman. The Till murder became a *cause célèbre* when his mother, Mamie Till, directed that his casket be left open during his funeral and *JET* magazine carried color pictures of his mutilated body in its next issue. The world was horrified at what it saw. At the trial for Till's murderers, Mose Wright, his uncle, testified for the prosecution. When asked if he saw the white men who came to his house and took Till away, Wright stood and in a very resolute voice said: "Thar he." Clearly some change had taken place in the mind-set of Wright that allowed him to make this bold statement. He probably would not have taken this stand ten or twenty years earlier; and the stand he took in 1956 would not have been taken by other blacks at that time (Whitefield 1988; Hudson-Weems 2000).

Benjamin E. Mays, one of the most prominent African American educators of this period epitomizes the awakening that took place. He emerged from a life under white terrorism in South Carolina to become a leading spokesperson for civil rights. By 1950 many other prominent blacks had emerged from behind the veil and were making their mark on the world stage. In addition to Mays, there were Dr Mary McLeod Bethune in education, Gwendolyn Brooks and Langston Hughes in literature, Malcolm X and Nannie Helen Burroughs in religion, Marian Anderson and Roland Hayes in black classical music, and Paul Robeson and Dorothy Dandridge in other performing arts. The events of the 1950s brought about a sea-change in the life experiences of black Americans and they began to consciously identify with their blacknesss in the 1960s (Franklin and Moss 1988; Hine, Hine, and Harrold 2000; Levine 1977).