How did the black freedom movement evolve?

More than anything else, African American mass protest distinguished the liberalism of the 1960s from that of the New Deal. The civil rights movement shook the nation’s conscience, forced federal action, and provided a protest model for other groups. Building on decades of organized resistance to racial injustice, African Americans mobilized to strike down legal segregation and discrimination in the South and to secure voting rights. This “second Reconstruction,” a century after the first, depended heavily on the courage and determination of black people to stand up to racist violence.

Civil rights activism that focused on the South and on legal rights eventually won widespread acceptance in most of the country. As African Americans stepped up protests against racial injustice outside the South and challenged entrenched economic inequality, however, white support for the black freedom struggle eroded. By the 1970s, the national mass movement had been replaced by an array of local efforts, as civil rights and black power activists pursued new strategies for liberation.

The Flowering of Civil Rights

The Montgomery bus boycott of 1955–1956 turned a national — and international — spotlight on America's racial divisions and produced a leader in Martin Luther King Jr. In the 1960s, black protest expanded dramatically, as African Americans directly confronted the institutions of an unequal and racially segregated society: retail establishments, public parks and libraries, buses and depots, voting registrars, and police forces.

Massive direct action in the South began in February 1960, when four African American college students in Greensboro, North Carolina, requested service at the whites-only Woolworth's lunch counter. Within days, hundreds of young people joined them, and others launched sit-ins in thirty-one southern cities. From the Southern Christian Leadership Conference headquarters, organizer Ella Baker telephoned her young contacts at black colleges, asking: "What are you going to do? It's time to move."

Baker helped protesters form a new organization, the **Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC)**. Committed to decision making at the grassroots level, SNCC rejected the top-down leadership of established civil rights organizations, although it embraced King's principles of civil disobedience and nonviolence. Activists were trained to confront their oppressors and stand up for their rights but not to respond if assaulted. Nashville lunch counter

protesters preparing for a sit-in were instructed: “Do show yourself friendly on the counter at all times. Do sit straight and always face the counter. Don’t strike back or curse back if attacked.”

The Granger Collection, New York.

Lunch Counter Sit-In Tougaloo College professor John Salter Jr. and students Joan Trumpauer and Anne Moody take part in a 1963 sit-in at the Woolworth’s lunch counter in Jackson, Mississippi. Shortly before this photograph was taken, whites had thrown two demonstrators to the floor, and police had arrested one student. In 1968, Moody published *Coming of Age in Mississippi*, a book about her experiences in the black freedom struggle.

The activists' optimism and commitment to nonviolence were tested. Although some cities quietly met protesters' demands, activists more typically encountered violence. Hostile whites poured food over demonstrators, burned them with cigarettes, and pelted them with rocks. Local police were often complicit, attacking protesters with dogs, clubs, fire hoses, and tear gas and arresting thousands of demonstrators.

Another wave of protest occurred in May 1961, when the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE) organized Freedom Rides to pressure the government to enforce court rulings ordering the integration of public transportation. When a group of six whites and seven blacks reached Alabama, whites bombed their bus and beat them with baseball bats so fiercely that an observer "couldn't see their faces through the blood." To President Kennedy's pleas for a cooling-off period, CORE leader James Farmer retorted that blacks had been "cooling off for 150 years. If we cool off anymore, we'll be in a deep freeze." After a mob attacked the riders in Montgomery, Alabama, Attorney General Robert Kennedy finally dispatched federal marshals to restore order. Nonetheless, Freedom Riders arriving in Jackson, Mississippi, were arrested, and several hundred spent weeks in jail.

In the summer of 1962, SNCC and other groups organized the Voter Education Project to register black voters in southern states. Fannie Lou Hamer, who went on to become a prominent figure in the civil rights movement, recalled that before these activists arrived in her home state of Mississippi, “I didn’t know that a Negro could register and vote.” Blacks constituted a majority in her county but only 1.2 percent of registered voters. Hamer herself passed through a hostile, gun-carrying crowd of whites as she attempted to register.

The voting drives, like the Freedom Rides, sparked violent resistance. Whites bombed black churches, threw tenant farmers out of their homes, and beat and jailed activists. In June 1963, a white man gunned down Mississippi NAACP leader Medgar Evers in front of his house. Similar violence met King’s 1963 campaign in Birmingham, Alabama, to integrate public facilities and open jobs to blacks. The police attacked demonstrators, including children, with dogs, cattle prods, and fire hoses — brutalities that television cameras broadcast around the world.

In August 1963, 250,000 blacks and whites flocked to the nation’s capital for the March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom, inspired by the strategy of A. Philip Randolph in 1941 (see chapter 25). Speaking from the Lincoln Memorial, King put his indelible stamp on the day. “I have a dream,”

he repeated, as he imagined the day “when all of God’s children … will be able to join hands and sing … ‘Free at last, free at last; thank God Almighty, we are free at last.’”

Activists returned from the march to continued hostility in the South. In 1964, the Mississippi Freedom Summer Project prepared northern black and white college students to conduct voter registration drives. Opposition was fierce, and by the end of the summer, only twelve hundred new voters had been registered. Southern whites had killed several activists, beaten eighty, arrested more than one thousand, and burned thirty-five black churches.

Even then, activists could not rely on the support of liberal politicians. When the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party challenged the all-white delegation sent by the state party to the 1964 Democratic National Convention, its members were rebuffed. Resistance came from the federal government itself, as the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) spied on King and expanded its activities to “expose, disrupt, misdirect, discredit, or otherwise neutralize” black protest.

In March 1965, Alabama state troopers used such violent force to turn back a voting rights march from Selma to the state capital, Montgomery, that the incident earned the name “Bloody Sunday” and compelled President Johnson to

call up the Alabama National Guard to protect the marchers. Battered and hospitalized that day, John Lewis, chairman of SNCC — and later a congressman from Georgia — called the Voting Rights Act, which passed that October, “every bit as momentous as the Emancipation Proclamation.” Referring to the Selma march, he said, “we all felt we’d had a part in it.”

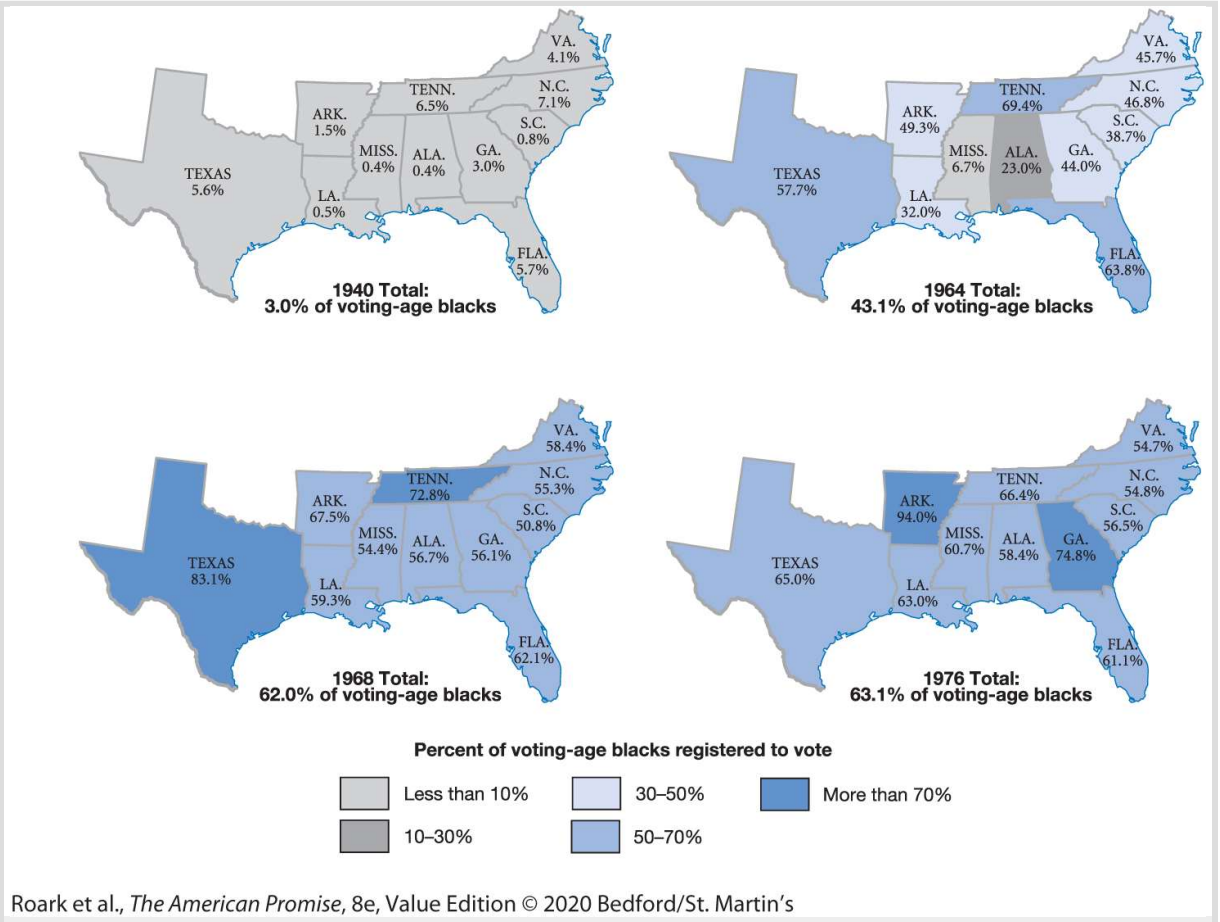
The Response in Washington

The Democratic administrations of the 1960s did not lead the way on racial justice. The Voting Rights Act, like the landmark civil rights legislation that preceded it, was the product of disciplined, persistent, and often bloody protest. Reluctant to alienate southern voters and their congressional representatives, Kennedy and Johnson tended to move on civil rights only when events gave them little choice.

Yet move they did. The sit-ins and Freedom Rides had not been enough to prompt decisive federal action, but Birmingham was. In June 1963, after scenes of violence against peaceful demonstrators appalled television viewers across the world, Kennedy finally made good on his promise to seek strong antidiscrimination legislation. The Civil Rights Act of 1964, signed by Johnson, was the most important civil rights law since Reconstruction. The act guaranteed equal access for all Americans to public accommodations, public

education, employment, and voting, and it extended constitutional protections to Indians on reservations. Title VII of the measure, banning discrimination in employment, not only attacked racial discrimination but also outlawed discrimination against women. Because Title VII applied to every aspect of employment, including wages, hiring, and promotion, it represented a giant step toward equal employment opportunity for white women as well as for racial minorities.

Likewise, the furious resistance to voter registration drives in the South prompted Johnson to demand legislation to remove “every remaining obstacle to the right and the opportunity to vote.” In August 1965, he signed the Voting Rights Act. By empowering the federal government to intervene directly to enable African Americans to register and vote, the law transformed southern politics. Black voting rates shot up dramatically (**Map 28.2**). In turn, the number of African Americans holding political office in the South increased from a handful in 1964 to more than one thousand by 1972, translating into tangible benefits for black communities.



Roark et al., *The American Promise*, 8e, Value Edition © 2020 Bedford/St. Martin's

MAP 28.2 The Rise of the African American Vote, 1940–1976

Voting rates of southern blacks increased gradually in the 1940s and 1950s but shot up dramatically in the deep South after the Voting Rights Act of 1965 provided for federal agents to enforce African Americans' right to vote.

Description

"The map on the top-left shows the following data based on the percentage of voting age blacks registered to vote:

Less than 10 percent: Texas: 5.6 percent; Arkansas: 1.5 percent; Tennessee: 6.5 percent; Virginia: 4.1 percent; North Carolina: 7.1 percent; South Carolina: 0.8 percent; Georgia: 3 percent; Alabama: 0.4 percent; Mississippi: 0.4 percent; Los Angeles: 0.5 percent; and Florida: 5.7 percent.

Text below the map reads, 1940 Total: 3 percent of voting age blacks.

The map on the top-right shows the following data based on the percentage of voting age blacks registered to vote:

50 to 70 percent: Texas: 57.7 percent; Tennessee: 69.4 percent; and Florida: 63.8 percent.

30 to 50 percent: Arkansas: 49.3 percent; Los Angeles: 32 percent; Georgia: 44 percent; Virginia: 45.7 percent; North Carolina: 46.8 percent; and South Carolina: 38.7 percent.

10 to 30 percent: Alabama: 23 percent.

Less than 10 percent: Mississippi: 6.7 percent.

Text below the map reads 1964 Total: 43.1 percent of voting age blacks.

The map on the bottom-left shows the following data based on the percentage of voting age blacks registered to vote:

More than 70 percent: Texas: 83.1 percent and Tennessee: 72.8 percent.

50 to 70 percent: Arkansas: 67.5 percent; Virginia: 58.4 percent; North Carolina: 55.3 percent; South Carolina: 50.8 percent; Georgia: 56.1 percent; Alabama: 56.7 percent; Mississippi: 54.4 percent; Los Angeles: 59.3 percent; and Florida: 62.1 percent.

Text below the map reads 1968 Total: 62.0 percent of voting age blacks.

The map on the bottom-right shows the following data based on the percentage of voting age blacks registered to vote:

More than 70 percent: Arkansas: 94 percent and Georgia: 74.8 percent.

Less than 10 percent: Texas: 65 percent; Tennessee: 66.4 percent; Virginia: 54.7 percent; North Carolina: 54.8 percent; South Carolina: 56.5 percent; Alabama: 58.4 percent; Mississippi: 60.7 percent; Los Angeles: 63 percent; and Florida: 61.1 percent.

Text below the map reads 1976 Total: 63.1 percent of voting age blacks.”

Johnson would also declare the need to realize “not just equality as a right and theory, but equality as fact and result.” He issued an executive order in 1965 requiring employers holding government contracts to take “**affirmative action**” to ensure equal opportunity. Extended to cover women in 1967, the affirmative action program aimed to counter the effects of centuries of discrimination by requiring employers to act vigorously to align their hiring with the available pool of qualified candidates. While many corporations came to see affirmative action as a good employment practice, the policy became a flashpoint of partisan battles in the 1970s and beyond.

Ending racial discrimination in housing was another item on civil rights activists’ agenda. But white resistance to neighborhood integration, including in northern, Democratic-leaning cities, was formidable. When Martin Luther King Jr. launched a campaign against de facto segregation in Chicago in 1966, thousands of whites jeered and threw stones at demonstrators. Johnson’s efforts to secure a federal open-housing law succeeded only in the wake of King’s assassination. The Civil Rights Act of 1968 banned racial discrimination in housing as well as jury

selection, and it authorized federal intervention when states failed to protect civil rights workers from violence.

Black Power and Urban Rebellions

By 1966, black protest engulfed the entire nation. On the heels of civil rights victories, activists turned to the problem of black poverty, demanding not just legal equality but also economic justice. Some abandoned nonviolent resistance as a basic principle. These developments were not completely new. African Americans had waged campaigns for decent jobs, housing, and education outside the South since the 1930s. Some African Americans had always armed themselves in self-defense, skeptical that a passive response to violent attacks would change the hearts of racists. Still, these developments made the black freedom struggle appear more threatening to the white majority.

African Americans' rage at oppressive conditions erupted in waves of urban uprisings from 1965 to 1968 (**Map 28.3**). In a situation where virtually all-white police forces patrolled black neighborhoods, confrontations between police and African Americans typically sparked the riots and resulted in looting, destruction of property, injuries, and deaths. The August 1965 urban rebellion in Watts (Los Angeles) was set off by an incident of police brutality, but it was fueled by

long-standing grievances over inadequate housing, poor sanitation, and underfunded, segregated schools. Major uprisings followed in Newark and Detroit in July 1967 and in the nation’s capital in April 1968. Violence convulsed hundreds of cities, with African Americans suffering most of the casualties.

Roark et al., *The American Promise*, 8e, Value Edition © 2020 Bedford/St. Martin’s

MAP 28.3 Urban Uprisings, 1965–1968

When a white police officer in the Watts district of Los Angeles struck a twenty-one-year-old African American, whom he had just pulled over for driving drunk, one onlooker shouted, “We’ve got no rights at all — it’s just like Selma.” The altercation sparked a five-day uprising, during which young blacks set fires, looted, and attacked police and firefighters. By its end, 34 people were dead, more than 3,000 were arrested, and scores of businesses

had been wiped out. Similar but smaller-scale violence erupted in dozens of cities across the nation during the next three summers.

Description
“The data marked on the map are as follows:

1965 to1966: Oakland and Los Angeles (Watts) in the southwest; Grenada, Birmingham, Atlanta, and Americus in the southeast; Chicago, Detroit, Cleveland, New York, New Jersey, Philadelphia, Newark, and Rochester in the northeast.

1967 to 1968: Portland in the northwest; San Francisco, Oakland, Palo Alto, Denver in the West; Phoenix and Tucson in the southwest; Houston, Pine Bluff, Jackson, Itta Bena, Memphis, Birmingham, Atlanta, and Nashville in the southeast; Minneapolis, Waterloo, Omaha, Wichita, Milwaukee, Grand Rapids, Chicago, Flint, Detroit, Pontiac, Kansas City, South Bend, Saginaw, Cincinnati, Dayton, and Toledo in the north; Boston, Providence, Poughkeepsie, Newark, New York, Philadelphia, New Jersey, Plainfield, Wilmington, Washington D.C., Cambridge, Baltimore, Pittsburgh, Youngstown, Newark in the northeast; and Tampa, Riviera beach, Miami, Houston, and Jacksonville in the southeast.”

New voices called for “black power,” a term coined by SNCC chairman Stokely Carmichael at a June 1966 rally in Greenwood, Mississippi. In the North, Malcolm X — an activist who while in prison had converted to the Nation of Islam, a religious sect — challenged the ethos of nonviolence. Civil rights leaders, he charged, had failed to protect their communities, and African Americans would need to act in their own defense against white violence. Proclaiming that blacks needed to separate themselves from

“corrupt [white] society,” Malcolm X attracted a large following, especially in urban ghettos.

Arguing that black self-determination could not be achieved through integration — and that even sympathetic whites could not excise their own racism — SNCC expelled its white members. Linking their cause to the colonial struggles and independence movements of dark-skinned people around the world, black radicals believed that African Americans’ freedom would come only from control over their own schools, communities, businesses, and political organizations.

Black power quickly became the rallying cry in organizations such as the Black Panther Party for Self-Defense, established in Oakland, California, in 1966 by Huey P. Newton and Bobby Seale to combat police brutality. Armed with rifles and adopting military attire, the Panthers struck fear into many whites. But they also established day care centers, free breakfast and clothing programs, and classes in black history. The Panthers and other radicals were harassed by the FBI and jailed, with some encounters leaving both black militants and police dead. Yet black power’s emphasis on self-determination and its critique of American institutions resonated loudly. And a new emphasis on pride in African and African American culture, captured by the slogan “Black is Beautiful,” endured.

The press paid inordinate attention to the **black power movement**, which met with a severe backlash from whites. Although the urban rebellions of the mid-1960s erupted spontaneously, many Americans blamed black militants. By 1966, polls indicated that 85 percent of the white population — up from 34 percent two years earlier — thought that African Americans were pressing for too much too quickly.

Martin Luther King Jr. agreed with black power advocates about the need for economic justice and “a radical reconstruction of society,” even as he continued to believe that nonviolence and integration were the means to this end. In 1968, the thirty-nine-year-old leader went to Memphis to support striking municipal sanitation workers. On April 4, he was shot and killed by an escaped white convict. King’s assassination triggered riots and protests in one hundred American cities. One speaker at a Boston rally commemorated the civil rights leader who had been “prepared to give his life for justice in America,” whereas a pastor from Iowa asked, “Why must we always kill our prophets before we will listen to them?” Into the 1970s, civil rights and black power activists would continue the difficult work that King and countless other African American men and women had begun.

REVIEW

How and why did the civil rights movement change in the mid-1960s?

What other social movements emerged in the 1960s?

The civil rights movement's moral claims, protest strategies, and legal victories inspired a multitude of other social movements in the 1960s and 1970s. Native Americans, Latinos, college students, women, gay men and lesbians, and environmentalists all drew on the black freedom struggle's model and lessons. Many of these groups engaged in direct-action protests, demanded new rights and recognition, and formed cultural pride movements. The challenge they posed to dominant institutions and values would permanently transform American society and culture.

Native American Protest

Young Native Americans rallied for "red power" in the late 1960s, reflecting their new militancy as well as the influence of black radicalism. The termination and relocation programs of the 1950s (see chapter 27), contrary to their intent, had forged a sense of Indian identity across tribal lines and a determination to preserve traditional cultures. Activists pursued cultural recognition as well as economic claims, including rights to natural resources and territory that American Indian groups had owned collectively before European settlement.

In 1969, Native American demonstrators captured world attention when several dozen seized Alcatraz Island, an abandoned federal prison in San Francisco Bay, claiming their right of “first discovery” of this land. For nineteen months, they used the occupation to publicize injustices against Native Americans while promoting pan-Indian cooperation. One of the organizers, Dr. LaNada Boyer, the first Native American to attend the University of California, Berkeley, said of the Alcatraz protest, “We were able to reestablish our identity as Indian people, as a culture, as political entities.”

In Minneapolis in 1968, two Chippewa Indians, Dennis Banks and George Mitchell, founded the **American Indian Movement (AIM)** to attack the problems faced by the 300,000 Indians who lived in urban areas. AIM sought to protect Native Americans from police harassment, to secure antipoverty funds, and to establish “survival schools” to teach Indian history and values. The movement spread quickly. Lakota activist and author Mary Crow Dog wrote that AIM’s visit to her South Dakota reservation “loosened a sort of earthquake inside me.”

AIM leaders helped organize the “Trail of Broken Treaties” caravan to the nation’s capital in 1972, where activists occupied the Bureau of Indian Affairs to protest the bureau’s policies and its interference in Indians’ lives. In 1973, a

much longer siege occurred on the Lakota Sioux reservation in South Dakota. For seventy-two days, AIM took over the village of Wounded Knee, where U.S. troops had massacred more than two hundred Sioux Indians in 1890 (see chapter 17).

Although these dramatic occupations did not achieve all their specific goals, activists would by the 1970s win the end of relocation and termination policies, greater tribal sovereignty and control over community services, protection of Indian religious practices, and visibility for their cause. A number of laws and court decisions also restored rights to ancestral lands and compensated tribes for land seized in violation of treaties.

Latino Struggles for Justice

Latinos — the term for an extraordinarily varied population encompassing people of Mexican, Puerto Rican, Caribbean, and other Latin American origins — were the fastest-growing U.S. minority group in the 1960s. People of Puerto Rican and Caribbean descent populated East Coast cities, but more than half of the nation's Latino population — including some six million Mexican Americans — lived in the Southwest. In addition, thousands illegally crossed the border between Mexico and the United States yearly in search of economic opportunity and security from violence.

Political organization of Mexican Americans dated back to the League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC), founded in 1929, which fought segregation and discrimination through litigation (see chapter 27). In the 1960s, however, young Mexican Americans increasingly rejected traditional politics in favor of direct action. One symbol of this generational change was young activists' adoption of the term *Chicano* (from *mejicano*, the Spanish word for "Mexican").

The **Chicano movement** drew national attention to California, where Cesar Chavez and Dolores Huerta organized a movement to overcome the exploitation of migrant agricultural workers. As the child of migrant farmworkers, Chavez lived in soggy tents, saw his parents cheated by labor contractors, and encountered indifference and discrimination. One teacher, he recalled, "hung a sign on me that said, 'I am a clown, I speak Spanish.'" After serving in World War II, Chavez began to organize voter registration drives among Mexican Americans.

Gary Whitton/Alamy Stock Photo.

Cesar Chavez and Dolores Huerta Chavez and Huerta became heroes to many during the United Farm Workers' struggle with grape growers for better wages and working conditions in 1968, and for their tireless advocacy in the decades after. This mural on the wall of a taqueria in West Jordan, Utah, painted as a community project in 2015, suggests the lasting impact of their work on behalf of migrant laborers. The flag of the United Farm Workers is at the center of the mural.

Dolores Huerta grew up in an integrated neighborhood and avoided the farmworkers' grinding poverty but witnessed discrimination based on language and color — one high school teacher challenging Huerta's authorship of an essay because it was so well-written. Believing that collective action was the key to progress, she and Chavez founded the United Farm Workers (UFW) union in 1962. To gain leverage

for striking workers, the UFW mounted a nationwide boycott of California grapes, winning support from millions of Americans and gaining a wage increase for the workers in 1970. The UFW lost membership during the 1970s but was critical in politicizing Mexican Americans and improving farmworkers' lives.

Others pressed the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) to combat job discrimination against Mexican Americans. After LULAC and the American GI Forum picketed government offices, President Johnson appointed Vicente T. Ximenes as the first Mexican American EEOC commissioner in 1967 and created a special committee on Mexican American issues.

Claiming "brown power," Chicanos organized in order to end discrimination in education, gain political access, and combat police brutality. In Denver, Rodolfo "Corky" Gonzales set up "freedom schools" where Chicano children learned Spanish and Mexican American history. The nationalist strains of Chicano protest were evident in La Raza Unida (the United Race), a political party founded in 1970 based on cultural pride and solidarity. Along with African Americans and Native Americans, Chicanos continued to be disproportionately impoverished, but they gradually won more political offices, more effective enforcement of

antidiscrimination legislation, and greater respect for their cultural institutions.

Youth Rebellions, the New Left, and the Counterculture

White youths, although comparatively privileged, were also inspired by the black freedom struggle, and some were radicalized by its critique of American society. They participated in civil rights actions, the antiwar movement, and the new wave of feminism. Young activists were part of a broader phenomenon of student movements around the globe that challenged establishment institutions.

The central organization of white student protest in the United States was Students for a Democratic Society (SDS). The organization's 1962 Port Huron Statement outlined its purpose, asserting: "We are people of this generation, bred in at least modest comfort, housed now in universities, looking uncomfortably at the world we inherit." Students criticized the complacency of their elders, the remoteness of decision makers, and the powerlessness and alienation generated by a bureaucratic society. SDS aimed to mobilize a "New Left" around the goals of civil rights, peace, and universal economic security. Other forms of student activism flourished, including the mobilization of young conservatives around a different set of concerns: the threats of

international communism, big government, and incursions on economic freedom.

The first large-scale white student protest arose at the University of California, Berkeley, in 1964, when university officials banned students from setting up tables to recruit support for various causes. Led by activists returning from civil rights work in the South, the Free Speech Movement occupied the administration building, and more than seven hundred students were arrested before the California Board of Regents overturned the new restrictions.

Hundreds of student rallies and building occupations followed on campuses across the country, especially after 1965, when opposition to the Vietnam War mounted and students protested universities' ties with the military (as discussed in chapter 29). Students also sought to expose the injustices of their own campuses. Women at the University of Chicago charged in 1969 that universities "discriminate against women, impede their full intellectual development, deny them places on the faculty, exploit talented women and mistreat women students." At Howard University, African American students called for a "Black Awareness Research Institute," demanding that academic departments "place more emphasis on how these disciplines may be used to effect the liberation of black people." Across the country, students borrowed sit-ins and

other tactics to win curricular reforms such as black studies and women's studies programs, more financial aid for minority and low-income students, independence from paternalistic rules, and a larger voice in campus decision making.

Student protest sometimes blended into a cultural rebellion against conventional standards of behavior. Drawing on the ideas of the Beats of the 1950s (see chapter 27), the so-called hippies rejected mainstream values such as consumerism, order, and sexual restraint in search of more authentic experiences. The 1967 "Human Be-In" that gathered in San Francisco's Golden Gate Park brought an eclectic group of nonconformists to national attention. Questioning established authority — along with long hair, wildly colorful clothing, and drug use — became a hallmark of the counterculture. Across the country, thousands of radicals renounced private property and established communes in cities or on farms.

Rock and folk music, often carrying insurgent social and political messages, were the backdrop of radical youth culture. "Eve of Destruction," a top hit of 1965, reminded young men of draft age at a time when the voting age was twenty-one, "You're old enough to kill but not for votin'." The 1969 Woodstock Music Festival, attended by 400,000 young people, epitomized the centrality of music to the

youth rebellion. Never a movement in a traditional sense, many elements of the counterculture — rock music, jeans, and long hair, as well as new social attitudes — filtered into the mainstream. This was especially evident in the liberalization of sexual mores, which, along with the birth control pill (introduced in 1960), fostered the era's "sexual revolution."

Gay Men and Lesbians Organize

More permissive sexual norms did not stretch easily to include tolerance of homosexuality. Gay men and lesbians typically had escaped discrimination and ostracism only by concealing their identities. Those who couldn't, or wouldn't, found themselves fired from jobs, arrested for their sexual activities, or accused of "perversion."

In the 1950s, the homophile movement had acted quietly to advance the equal rights of homosexuals, in part through careful conformity to heterosexual norms. But gays and lesbians organized in new ways in the mid-1960s. In 1965, picketers outside the White House challenged the government's policy of banning homosexuals from civil service with signs branding such discrimination "as immoral as discrimination against Negroes and Jews." It took another

ten years for the Civil Service Commission to end the policy, but a full-fledged social movement would not wait that long.

A turning point came in 1969 when police conducted a routine raid of a gay bar, the Stonewall Inn, in New York City's Greenwich Village — and gay men and lesbians fought back. "Suddenly, they were not submissive anymore," a police officer remarked. Bolstered by the defiance shown at the Stonewall riots, gay men and lesbians launched a host of new advocacy groups, such as the Gay Liberation Front and the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force. As with black power, gay liberationists pursued equal rights as well as cultural self-determination. Shouts of "gay power" broke out at Stonewall, and activists called for gay men and lesbians to "come out" publicly and proudly.

In 1972, Ann Arbor, Michigan, passed the first antidiscrimination ordinance pertaining to homosexuals, and two years later, Elaine Noble's election to the Massachusetts legislature marked the first time that an openly gay candidate won state office. In 1973, activists succeeded in getting the American Psychiatric Association to withdraw its designation of homosexuality as a disorder. It would take decades for these initial gains to improve conditions for most, but by the mid-1970s, gay men and lesbians had created a movement through which they would advance

equal rights and promote a society more welcoming of diverse sexualities.

Environmental Activists Mobilize

Advocates for protecting the natural environment and reversing the hazards of rapid economic growth were yet another node of social activism in the 1960s and 1970s. Like the conservation movement of the Progressive Era (see chapter 21), the new environmentalists sought to preserve natural areas for recreational and aesthetic purposes and to conserve natural resources. In the West, population growth and the resulting demands for electricity and water stirred activists. Already in the 1950s, environmental groups had mobilized to halt construction of dams that would disrupt national parks and wilderness.

The new environmentalists, however, went beyond conservationism to attack the ravaging effects of industrial and technological advances on human life and health. Biologist Rachel Carson drew national attention in 1962 with her best seller *Silent Spring*, which vividly described the perils of toxic chemicals, such as the pesticide DDT, to wildlife, plants, and the ecological balance that sustains human life.

The Sierra Club and other older conservation organizations expanded their membership rolls and their agendas, and a host of new environmental groups appeared. Twenty million Americans took part in the first observation of Earth Day in April 1970, where teach-ins and rallies sought to raise consciousness about air and water pollution, oil spills, industrial waste, and automobile emissions.

LBJ had signaled federal support for environmental regulations, but it was his successor, Richard Nixon, who enacted them. Nixon pronounced “clean air, clean water, open spaces … the birthright of every American” and urged Congress to “end the plunder of America’s natural heritage.” In 1970, he created the **Environmental Protection Agency (EPA)** to enforce environmental laws, conduct research, and reduce human health and environmental risks from pollutants. He also signed the landmark Occupational Safety and Health Act (OSHA), protecting workers against job-related accidents and disease; the Clean Air Act of 1970, restricting factory and automobile emissions of carbon dioxide and other pollutants; and the Endangered Species Act of 1973. Congress pressed further, overriding Nixon’s veto of the Clean Water Act of 1972, an indication of how decisively the issues raised by environmental activists had moved onto the national agenda.

REVIEW

How did the black freedom struggle influence other reform movements of the 1960s and 1970s?

What were the goals of the new wave of feminism?

On August 26, 1970, the fiftieth anniversary of woman suffrage, tens of thousands of women across the country — from radical women in jeans to conservatively dressed suburbanites, and from peace activists to politicians — took to the streets. They carried signs reading “Sisterhood Is Powerful” and “Don’t Cook Dinner — Starve a Rat Today.” Some opposed the war in Vietnam, others demanded racial justice, but women’s own liberation stood at the forefront.

Gathering steam in the late 1960s, “second-wave” feminism — a label meant to distinguish it from earlier efforts on behalf of women’s rights, including the suffrage movement — reached its high tide in the 1970s and extended into the twenty-first century. By that time, despite a powerful countermovement, women had witnessed remarkable transformations in their legal status, public opportunities, and personal and sexual relationships, while popular expectations about appropriate gender roles had shifted dramatically.

A Multifaceted Movement Emerges

Demographic changes laid the foundations for a resurgence of feminism. During World War II, the importance of women's paid work to the economy and their families challenged traditional views and awakened many female workers, especially those in labor unions, to discrimination in employment. The postwar democratization of higher education also brought more women to college campuses, where their aspirations collided with the confines of domesticity and low-wage, subordinate jobs.

These developments, along with the efforts of women's rights activists, led to new policy initiatives in the early 1960s. In 1961, Assistant Secretary of Labor Esther Peterson persuaded John F. Kennedy to create the President's Commission on the Status of Women, chaired by Eleanor Roosevelt. Its 1963 report documented widespread discrimination against women and recommended remedies ranging from affordable child care to paid maternity leave. Although these policies were not enacted, one of the commission's concerns was addressed even before its report came out, when Congress passed the Equal Pay Act of 1963, making it illegal to pay women less than men for the same work.

Like other movements, second-wave feminism owed much to the black freedom struggle. By piggybacking onto civil rights measures, women gained protection from

employment discrimination (through Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964) and were covered by affirmative action. They soon grew impatient when the government failed to take these new policies seriously. Calling for “an NAACP for women,” Betty Friedan, civil rights activist Pauli Murray, several union women, and others founded the **National Organization for Women (NOW)** in 1966.

At a time when newspapers advertised jobs as either “male” or “female,” and women could not apply for their own credit cards, NOW set its sights on equal opportunity for women in the male-dominated public arena, including employment, education, medicine, law, and politics. Among other causes, NOW pledged support for the ratification of the Equal Rights Amendment (ERA) to the Constitution, a measure first introduced in 1923 and intended to outlaw differential treatment of men and women under all state and federal laws.

Simultaneously, a more radical feminism emerged among young women active in the black freedom struggle and the New Left. These women — often relegated to mundane tasks and sexually exploited by fellow radicals — found it particularly jarring to discover their second-class status even within movements for social justice. Frustrated when male leaders dismissed and ridiculed their claims of

discrimination, many walked out of New Left organizations and created independent women's liberation groups.

Radical feminists first captured national media attention when they picketed the Miss America beauty pageant in 1968. Activists decried being forced "to compete for male approval," describing women as "enslaved by ludicrous 'beauty' standards." Calling their movement "women's liberation," they encouraged public discussion of experiences shrouded in secrecy, such as rape and abortion. Women joined "consciousness-raising" groups, where they realized that what they had considered to be personal problems reflected an entrenched system of male privilege, or sexism. The slogan of women's liberation, "the personal is political," insisted that sexual relationships, the division of labor in the family, and norms about bodies and beauty were always also relations of power.

Radical feminists differed from the members of NOW in several ways. NOW focused on equal treatment for women in the public sphere; women's liberation emphasized ending women's subordination in the family and in their most intimate relationships. Whereas NOW sought to integrate women into existing institutions, radical groups insisted that women's liberation required a total transformation of those institutions and perhaps even a separation from men. Differences between these two strands of feminism blurred

in the 1970s, however, as NOW and other mainstream groups embraced many of the issues raised by radicals.

Although NOW elected a black president, Aileen Hernandez, in 1970, the new feminism's leadership and constituency were predominantly white and middle-class. Women of color criticized white feminists for assuming that white women could speak for *all* women. To African American women, who were much more frequently compelled to labor in difficult and dirty jobs for their families' survival, for example, entrance into the paid workforce did not necessarily represent liberation. Feminists struggled with how to build a movement spanning the many constituencies among women: ethnic and racial minorities, labor union members, religious women, rural women, mothers on welfare, lesbians, and more.

They also contended with the media's refusal to take women's grievances seriously. Finding their movement mocked and trivialized, some protesters refused to grant interviews except to female reporters. One solution was to create woman-run organizations. In 1972, Gloria Steinem founded *Ms.: The New Magazine for Women*, a mass-circulation periodical controlled by women and featuring articles on a broad range of feminist issues. A host of other organizations emerged that were devoted to issues such as women's health, abortion rights, and domestic violence.

After the United Nations declared 1975 International Women's Year, U.S. women also began to take part in global conversations about women's status. As they did, they learned that theirs was often not the most advanced nation when it came to women's welfare or political leadership.

Feminist Gains Spark a Countermovement

Feminism lifted female aspirations and helped lower barriers to occupations monopolized by men. By 2010, women's share of law and medical degrees had shot up from 5 percent and 10 percent, respectively, to approximately 50 percent, although women earned much less than men in those fields. Women gained political offices very slowly; by 2018, they constituted 20 percent of Congress and nearly 25 percent of all state legislators.

Despite outnumbering men in college enrollments and making some inroads into male-dominated occupations, women still concentrated in low-paying, traditionally female jobs, and an earnings gap between men and women persisted. Working women continued to bear primary responsibility for taking care of their homes and families, thereby working a "double shift." Unlike in other industrialized countries, women in the United States were

not entitled to paid maternity leave and could not count on government provisions for child care.

By the mid-1970s, feminism faced a powerful countermovement, organized around opposition to the Equal Rights Amendment (see chapter 30). Powerful opposition likewise arose to feminists' quest for abortion rights. "Without the full capacity to limit her own reproduction," activist Lucinda Cisler insisted, "a woman's other 'freedoms' are tantalizing mockeries that cannot be exercised." In 1973, the Supreme Court ruled in the landmark ***Roe v. Wade*** decision that the Constitution protected the right to abortion, and that states could not prohibit it in the early stages of pregnancy.

This decision galvanized many conservatives, some of whom believed that abortion constituted murder. Like ERA opponents, with whom they often overlapped, those drawn to the emerging "right-to-life" movement charged feminism with threatening traditional motherhood and gender roles. Beginning in 1977, abortion foes pressured Congress to restrict the right to abortion by prohibiting coverage under all government-financed health programs, and the Supreme Court allowed states to impose additional obstacles.

Despite such resistance, feminists won lasting gains. Title IX of the Education Amendments Act of 1972 banned sex

discrimination in all aspects of education, such as admissions, athletics, and hiring. Congress also outlawed sex discrimination in credit in 1974, opened U.S. military academies to women in 1976, and prohibited discrimination against pregnant workers in 1978. The Supreme Court struck down laws that treated men and women differently in Social Security, welfare and military benefits, and workers' compensation — rulings based on legal arguments made by future Supreme Court justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg and crafted in part by Pauli Murray.

At the state and local levels, women saw many reforms in areas first introduced by radical feminists. They won laws requiring police departments and the legal system to treat rape victims more justly and humanely. Activists also pushed domestic violence onto the public agenda. They obtained government financing for shelters for battered women along with laws ensuring greater protection for victims of domestic violence and more effective prosecution of abusers. In perhaps the largest victory of all, many of the feminist causes deemed radical in the 1960s — from a right to equal pay to the criminalization of marital rape — had won the support of a majority of Americans by the end of the 1970s.

REVIEW

What were the key goals of feminist reformers, and why did a countermovement arise to resist them?

Why and where did the conservative movement gain ground?

Resistance to black power, student protest, and second-wave feminism came from a reinvigorated right. Hidden beneath Lyndon B. Johnson’s landslide victory over the far-right Arizona senator Barry Goldwater in the presidential election of 1964 lay a rising conservative movement. Goldwater defined his goal as “enlarging freedom at home and safeguarding it from the forces of tyranny abroad,” and his nomination was a victory for conservative activists in the Republican Party who believed that government intervention into the economy hindered prosperity, stifled personal responsibility, and interfered with the right of citizens to determine their own values. Increasingly, they would merge their free enterprise, states’ rights, and anti-Communist views with a moral critique of sixties liberalism. While Republican Richard Nixon’s election to the presidency in 1968 did not immediately overturn liberal policies, the coordinated action of conservatives in the 1960s and 1970s paved the way for future victories.

A Grassroots Right

The grassroots movement on the right included middle-class suburban women and men as well as members of the

rabidly anti-Communist John Birch Society. These groups assailed big government in domestic affairs but demanded a strong military to eradicate “Godless Communism.” Joining them was a key force behind Goldwater’s nomination — college students. Gathering at the home of conservative intellectual William F. Buckley in 1960, they formed the **Young Americans for Freedom (YAF)**, a counterpart to radical student groups on the left. In 1966, these same grassroots organizations helped former movie star Ronald Reagan defeat the liberal incumbent governor of California, whom Reagan linked to the Watts riot, student disruptions at the University of California, and rising taxes.

Conservatism flourished in the Sun Belt. Places such as Orange County, California; Dallas, Texas; and Scottsdale, Arizona were predominantly white with relatively homogeneous, skilled, and economically comfortable populations. They were also home to military bases and defense plants. The West harbored a long-standing tradition of individualism and opposition to interference by a remote federal government — a tradition that ignored the Sun Belt’s economic dependence on defense spending and federal projects providing water and power for the burgeoning region. The South, which also benefited from military bases and the space program, shared this antipathy toward the federal government. Hostility to racial change was, however, much more central to its conservatism. After

signing the Civil Rights Act of 1964, President Johnson remarked privately, “I think we just delivered the South to the Republican Party.”

Grassroots movements on the right were often triggered by fears about American moral decline. In 1962, for example, Mel and Norma Gabler pressed the Texas Board of Education to drop books in the public schools that they believed undermined “the Christian-Judeo morals, values, and standards as given to us by God through … the Bible.” New sex-education programs were a particular point of contention. The U.S. Supreme Court’s liberal decisions on school prayer and abortion as well as obscenity helped galvanize conservatives in defense of “traditional values.”

“Law and order” was another rallying cry of those on the right, reflecting concerns about rising rates of crime but also shifting patterns of decorum. Conservatives tended to link crime, civil disobedience, and antiwar protest alike to a declining respect for authority in American society. In this vein, a conservative newspaper condemned the sit-in movement as an “incitement to anarchy.” Those on the right blamed the social disorder of the era on Supreme Court decisions that “coddled” criminals, permissive attitudes toward protesters, and Great Society programs that seemed to undercut personal responsibility. For one Pennsylvania man, “crime, the streets being unsafe, strikes, the trouble

with the colored, all this dope-taking" added up to "a breakdown of the American way of life."

Nixon and the Election of 1968

Opposition to civil rights measures, government spending on the War on Poverty, and the pace of social change — along with frustration over the war in Vietnam (see chapter 29) — delivered the White House to Republican Richard M. Nixon in 1968. Although Nixon did not embrace the entire conservative agenda, he sought to rebuild the Republican Party by appealing to disaffected blue-collar and southern white Democrats. Nixon attacked the Great Society for "pouring billions of dollars into programs that have failed." At the same time, his administration promoted or accepted important elements of the liberal reform agenda, including greater federal assistance to the poor, new protections for women and minorities, and environmental regulation.

A number of factors shaped the policies of the Nixon administration. Democrats continued to control Congress, the Republican Party contained many liberals and moderates, and Nixon saw political advantages in endorsing some liberal programs. Although Nixon's real passion lay in foreign policy, he was eager to establish a domestic legacy. During his administration, federal assistance programs such

as Social Security, public housing, and food stamps grew, and Congress established Pell grants for low-income students to attend college. Noting the disparity between what Nixon said and what he did, his speechwriter, the archconservative Pat Buchanan, grumbled, “Vigorously did we inveigh against the Great Society, enthusiastically did we fund it.”

Nixon’s campaign exploited white hostility to black protest and civil rights policies, but his administration had to answer to the courts and to Congress. In 1968, fourteen years after the *Brown* decision, school desegregation had barely touched the South. Like Eisenhower, Nixon was reluctant to use federal power to compel integration. But the Supreme Court overruled the administration’s efforts to delay court-ordered desegregation, with dramatic effects. By 1974, fewer than one in ten southern black children attended totally segregated schools.

Nixon also implemented affirmative action among federal contractors and unions, and his administration increased government contracts and loans to minority businesses. Congress took the initiative in other areas. In 1970, it extended the Voting Rights Act of 1965, and in 1972 it strengthened the Civil Rights Act of 1964 by enlarging the powers of the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission. In 1971, Congress responded to the youth movement with

the Twenty-Sixth Amendment to the Constitution, reducing the voting age to eighteen. In 1973, Nixon signed legislation outlawing discrimination against people with disabilities in all programs receiving federal funds. The president also signed pathbreaking environmental legislation to regulate pollutants in the air and water and established the Environmental Protection Agency.

President Nixon was especially receptive to Native American rights. He told Congress that Indians were “the most deprived and most isolated minority group … the heritage of centuries of injustice.” While not bowing to radicals’ demands, his administration dealt cautiously with the occupations of Alcatraz and the Bureau of Indian Affairs. Nixon signed measures recognizing claims of Alaskan and New Mexican Indians, restoring tribal status and lands to groups that had lost them through earlier federal policies.

Nixon’s response to women’s activism was mixed. He vetoed a bill providing federal funds for day care centers, arguing that child care was a matter for the private market rather than the government and warning of the measure’s “family-weakening implications.” In response to the movement to liberalize abortion laws, Nixon sided with “defenders of the right to life of the unborn,” anticipating the Republican Party’s eventual embrace of the issue. Acknowledging a growing feminist movement, however,

Nixon signed the landmark Title IX, guaranteeing equality in all aspects of education, and permitted the Labor Department to pursue affirmative action for women.

Nixon took more consistently conservative positions in favor of law and order and in opposition to the rights-oriented Warren Court. The Republican president's distancing of himself from the programs of the New Deal and Great Society, although gradual, was significant. Whereas John F. Kennedy had summoned Americans to contribute to the common good, Nixon invited Americans to "ask — not just what will government do for me, but what can I do for myself?" An emphasis on individualism and private enterprise rather than reliance on the state would be a rallying cry of conservative politics in the 1970s and 1980s.

REVIEW

To what extent did the election of Republican president Richard Nixon in 1968 reverse the liberal tide?

Conclusion: What were the lasting effects of sixties-era reform?

The years between 1960 and 1974 witnessed the greatest efforts to reconcile America's promise with reality since the New Deal. Pressed by activists like Pauli Murray, Democratic administrations expanded the liberal agenda to encompass racial justice and individual rights. The lofty rhetoric of Kennedy's New Frontier, the burst of Great Society legislation under Johnson, and the rulings of the Warren Court spoke to the new federal commitment to the social welfare and quality of life of all Americans.

Johnson's War on Poverty and Great Society were emblematic of these aspirations as well as their limits. Antipoverty programs focused more on the poor than on structural reforms that would ensure adequately paying jobs for all, and they never commanded the resources necessary for victory over poverty. Yet some of Johnson's accomplishments were enduring. Federal aid for education and housing became permanent elements of national policy. Medicare and Medicaid continue to provide access to health care for the elderly and the poor.

New welfare policies, legal rights, and antidiscrimination measures were only secured through organized protest: from sit-ins and black power to the environmental and feminist movements. The African American freedom struggle inspired much of this change. Yet it was clear that black aspirations exceeded white Americans' commitment to genuine equality. While the overturning of crude forms of racism in the South gained wide support, activists' goal of equality in fact as well as in law met powerful resistance.

Feminists and other groups, including ethnic minorities, environmentalists, and gays and lesbians, carried the tide of reform into the 1970s. They pushed Nixon's Republican administration to sustain and even extend many liberal programs. At the same time, the rapid social changes and disorder of the era — along with a costly and difficult war in Vietnam — were undermining faith in government and energizing the conservative movement.