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THE CIVIL RIGHTS MOVEMENT

STRUGGLE AND RESISTANCE

WILLIAM T. MARTIN RICHES

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To Judy

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SERIES EDITORS' PREFACE

There are those, politicians among them, who feel that historians should not teach or write about contemporary events and people – many of whom are still living – because of the difficulty of treating such matters with historical perspective, that it is right to draw some distinction between the study of history and the study of current affairs. Proponents of this view seem to be unaware of the concept of contemporary history to which this series is devoted, that the history of the recent past can and should be written with a degree of objectivity. As memories of the Second World War recede, it is surely time to place in perspective the postwar history that has shaped all our lives, whether we were born in the 1940s or the 1970s.

Many countries – Britain, the United States and Germany among them – allow access to their public records under a thirty-year rule, opening up much of the postwar period to archival research. For more recent events, diaries, memoirs, and the investigations of newspapers and television, confirm the view of the famous historian Sir Lewis Namier that all secrets are in print provided you know where to look for them. Contemporary historians also have the opportunity, denied to historians of earlier periods, of interviewing participants in the events they are analysing. The problem facing the contemporary historian is, if anything, the embarrassment of riches.

In any case, the nature and extent of world changes since the late 1980s have clearly signalled the need for concise discussion of major themes in post-1945 history. For many of us the difficult thing to grasp is how dramatically the world has changed over recent years: the collapse of the Soviet Union and Russian communism; the end of Soviet hegemony over eastern Europe; the unification of Germany; the end of the Cold War; America's sense of a 'new world

order'; the pace of integration in the European Union; the disintegration of Yugoslavia; the Middle East peace settlement; the continuing economic strength of Japan. Writing in a structured and cogent way about these seismic changes is what makes contemporary history so challenging, and we hope that the end result will convey some of this excitement and interest to our readers.

The general objective of this series, written entirely by members of the School of History, Philosophy and Politics of the University of Ulster, is to offer concise and up-to-date treatments of postwar themes considered of historical and political significance, and to stimulate critical thought about the theoretical assumptions and conceptual apparatus underlying interpretation of the topics under discussion. The series should bring some of the central themes and problems confronting students and teachers of recent history, politics and international affairs into sharper focus than the textbook writer alone could provide. The blend required to write contemporary history that is both readable and easily understood but also accurate and scholarly is not easy to achieve, but we hope that this series will prove worthwhile for both students and teachers interested in world affairs since 1945.

University of Ulster

T. G. Fraser
J. O. Springhall

PREFACE

A friend at Harvard University in 1964 enquired about the places that my wife and I would visit during our travels in the United States from our home in Canada. When we informed him that we were going to visit the southern states, including Alabama and Mississippi, he was very concerned about our safety and pressed us to buy a flag and put it in the front of the car. He warned us that we would be mistaken for civil rights ‘outside agitators’ and the locals would not know that our Ontario licence plate proved we were from Canada but would assume it was just another northern state. We assured him that we would take the necessary precautions.

As foreigners we were naive about the dangers we faced and, more important, equally unaware of the ‘etiquette of segregation’. This became apparent as we approached the town of Biloxi, Mississippi. We were thirsty and just after crossing the city limits we stopped at a restaurant for a drink. It was crowded and we sat at the counter and I ordered two coffees. The woman did not respond. I asked for a second time and still no acknowledgement. I assumed it must be my accent and, with a slightly raised voice, I spoke slowly and distinctly and repeated my order. The woman turned and fled. Before we could leave a man appeared and asked politely what we wanted and I repeated my order. Looking at the woman he told her to give us the cups of coffee. Throughout this almost surrealistic exchange we were aware that the conversations of the other customers had stopped and there was just an oppressive silence. Looking around the restaurant we realised why. We were the only white couple in the place. With my long hair and beard it must have seemed that I was one of those civil rights ‘trouble makers’ and by

integrating that cafe we had endangered the man, his wife and even his customers. Inadvertently we had defied segregation etiquette. In later years as graduate students at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville, our defiance of the South and its custom was never accidental.

The challenge in writing contemporary history is that the writer has lived through the events and some would argue that this makes considered judgement impossible. In my case it is even more difficult in that I was also a participant in a very small way in some of these events. However, this is not a participant's history, but rather seeks objectively to analyse the struggle of African Americans and other minorities, such as Native Americans, women and gays, to achieve equality in the years after World War II and those who sought to resist that change. I believe the intervening years and my views as an outsider living in Ireland have ensured some objectivity. I can only agree with Alan Dawley that 'the destiny of modern America was in the hands of the meek as well as the mighty'. As he points out, the struggles for racial justice and sexual equality were not simply a matter of the good versus the bad guys but 'there is no doubt that good and evil hung in the balance. In comprehending what happened, I have aspired to objectivity. But objectivity does not mean indifference. It matters very much how things turned out' (Dawley, 1991).

I am aware of the vital role played by Martin Luther King Jr in the civil rights movement and very conscious of the tragic consequences of his assassination in Memphis. However, in this study I have stressed the role of the civil rights movement as a mass movement and its interaction with those who held political power at the state, federal and local levels. It was the extraordinary courage and sacrifice of hundreds of thousands of the 'meek' that achieved the successes of the movement. I am very conscious that the movement had a profound influence on the ideology and tactics of those who participated in the anti-Vietnam War campaign. I have alluded frequently to the connections between the two but it has not been possible within the current text to elaborate on the anti-war movement. In addition, in chapter six, 'A New South?', it may be argued that I have neglected the resurgence of racism and the role of the modern Ku Klux Klan. In my defence, I have pointed out in every chapter the resistance to the movement, but what has not been sufficiently acknowledged is the change in the attitudes of a

significant number of southerners. Having lived in the South for many years, having studied at a southern university with students from all over the South, I believe that it is time that their voices were heard because they played a vital part in the struggle and many continue to do so today. I consider myself fortunate to include many of these people as my friends.

With the election of Richard Nixon in 1968 and with the Democratic party deeply divided, it seemed that the gains of the civil rights movement would be wiped out. A white friend who was a doctor in Tennessee, whose father was an illiterate sharecropper in Alabama, invited me and my wife to a dinner with friends, black and white, who were active in the civil rights movement and the anti-Vietnam War movement. We reminisced about the years that had passed and were fearful about the years ahead. Before we left he insisted that we all sit, listen and in the years ahead, when we were separated, to remember these words and try to live by them. He left the room and returned shortly. On that very late hot summer night in East Tennessee the small group of southerners – academics, ministers, atheists and the couple from the United Kingdom – sat and listened to the speech given by Martin Luther King Jr at the Washington rally of 1963.

So I say to you, my friends, that even though we must face the difficulties of today and tomorrow, I still have a dream. It is a dream deeply rooted in the American dream that one day this nation will rise up and live out the true meaning of its creed – we hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank the editors of the series, Tom Fraser and John Springhall, for their advice, criticism and support. I owe Professor Fraser a special debt of gratitude for his support of the American Studies programme at the University of Ulster at Jordanstown, at both the undergraduate and postgraduate level. I would also like to thank the University for its support for my teaching and research for the last 20 years. In addition, I appreciate the criticism and advice given by my daughter, Julia Riches, who is currently studying at Georgetown University, and my son, Theo, who, despite his interest in medieval studies, has also read and commented on the manuscript. All lecturers owe great debts to their students who have helped in so many ways. It is invidious to single out individuals but I must thank Jacqueline Tine Nichols for persuading me to take a closer interest in the role of Native Americans, Leonora Campbell for introducing me to the struggle of Oglala women on the Pine Ridge Reservation (especially the poetry of Beth Brant), Simon Topping for a copy of his interview with James Meredith and David McAree for use of his taped interviews with African American women who worked with the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee. This book also owes much to friends from the South such as David Bowen, John Thomas, Tom Wilson, O. C. Richardson and Dan Pomeroy, to name just a few of my fellow graduate students from the University of Tennessee, Knoxville. Apart from my colleagues in England and Ireland who have provided constructive criticism, I would like especially to mention friends and members of the Milan Group for the Study of American History. This book is dedicated to my wife Judith, who made my academic career possible and who is my sternest critic and supporter.

GLOSSARY

- Baby boom** This is an expression commonly used to describe the generation born in the late 1940s and 1950s, a period which saw a dramatic increase in childbirth in the United States.
- Bossism** The corruption of democratic government primarily in the urban centres of the United States enabled parties to control local government with the corrupt use of patronage. The most notorious city Boss in the nineteenth century was Boss Tweed of New York City and in the twentieth Mayor Richard Daley of Chicago.
- Bussing** After World War II southern states used bussing to consolidated schools, thereby eliminating many inferior rural institutions, in an effort to raise academic quality of the school system. However, the bus was also used to guarantee the segregation of white and black school children. In *Swann v Charlotte-Mecklenburg* (1971) the Supreme Court ordered the use of bussing to achieve racial integration.
- Carpetbagger** An allegedly corrupt, white or black, Republican politician from the North who had moved to the South after the Civil War and who was active in southern politics. Carpetbaggers were seen by southerners as coming to rob the South because the only belongings they had with them were capable of being carried in a carpetbag.

- Filibustering** A method of delaying or preventing legislation in Congress or in the state legislatures by prolonging the debate or using parliamentary procedures to prevent the passage of legislation.
- Governor** The title of the leading executive officer of a state.
- Great Society** The 1964–68 liberal social and economic reform programme of President Lyndon Baines Johnson who hoped to resolve the problem of poverty in the United States and thereby to complete the New Deal begun by Johnson's hero, Franklin Delano Roosevelt.
- Interposition** The argument of southerners before the Civil War and during the civil rights movement that a state was sovereign and should interpose its authority between the people of the state and the federal government and protect the citizens of the state from the enforcement of a federal law which the people of the state deemed unconstitutional.
- Jim Crow Laws** The system of segregation of the races imposed after the Civil War in southern and some border states. The origin of the term Jim Crow is not known but may have its origins in a minstrel song.
- Ku Klux Klan (KKK)** A paramilitary terrorist organisation founded in Pulaski, Tennessee, after the Civil War. Despite the protestations of some southerners, the Invisible Empire of the Ku Klux Klan was the paramilitary wing of the Democratic party and was instrumental in the overthrow of the Reconstruction governments in the South. The modern KKK was launched in Georgia and claimed five million members by 1925. It not only emphasised issues of race but also gained popularity throughout the United States with its anti-Semitism and anti-Catholicism. It still exists and it is not confined to the South.

New Deal	The title given by President Franklin Delano Roosevelt to the wide-ranging social and economic legislation which he introduced after his election in 1932, which was designed to regulate the capitalist economy and introduce a welfare state.
Nullification	The southern argument that every state was sovereign and had the right to declare null and void federal legislation that the people of the state deemed unconstitutional.
Ole Miss	The popular title of the University of Mississippi.
Peculiar institution	This was a euphemism that was used by southerners before the Civil War to describe the institution of slavery. In the North it was used to indicate that slavery was an institution peculiar (i.e. belonged exclusively) to the South.
Sharecropper	A tenant farmer in the South who paid for rent and supplies by giving a share of the crop to the landowner.
Solid South	Following its defeat in the Civil War, the South was governed by Republican state governments which were defeated with the end of Reconstruction. Following 1876, the South voted for one-party rule – by the Democratic party.
Territories	Land acquired by the United States was held by the federal government and organised into territories governed by four judges until the population reached 5000 eligible voters. After that they could elect a territorial legislature and send a nonvoting delegate to Congress. When the population reached 60 000, the land was subdivided into congressional districts and a republican constitution was adopted; when Congress had approved these measures, the state was allowed to enter the Union with its own members of the House of Representatives, the number of whom was based on its population, and with two senators.

ACRONYMS

ACHR	Alabama Council on Human Relations
ACLU	American Civil Liberties Union
ACMHR	Alabama Christian Movement for Human Rights
ADA	Americans for Democratic Action
AFL–CIO	American Federation of Labor–Congress of Industrial Organizations
AIM	American Indian Movement
AME	African Methodist Episcopal
BIA	Bureau of Indian Affairs
CEEO	Commission on Equal Employment Opportunity
CIA	Central Intelligence Agency
COFO	Council of Federated Organizations
CORE	Congress of Racial Equality
ERA	Equal Rights Amendment
FBI	Federal Bureau of Investigation
FDR	Franklin Delano Roosevelt
FEPC	Fair Employment Practices Commission
FOR	Fellowship of Reconciliation
FSC	Friends Service Committee
HEW	(Department of) Health, Education and Welfare
HUAC	House Un-American Activities Committee
IRS	Internal Revenue Service
KKK	Ku Klux Klan
MFDP	Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party
MIA	Montgomery Improvement Association
NAACP	National Association for the Advancement of Colored People

NCAI	National Congress of American Indians
NOW	National Organization for Women
LBJ	Lyndon Baines Johnson
ROAR	Restore Our Alienated Rights
SCEF	Southern Conference Education Fund
SCLC	Southern Christian Leadership Conference
SDS	Students for a Democratic Society
SNCC	Student Nonviolent (in 1965 changed to National) Coordinating Committee
UCMI	United Christian Movement Incorporated
UT	The University of Tennessee, Knoxville
WPC	Women's Political Council

BASIC CHRONOLOGY

- 1945** Harry S. Truman becomes President on the death of FDR
- 1947** Truman is the first President to address the annual conference of the NAACP
- 1948** Both parties support civil rights, but the Democrats split over the issue and Strom Thurmond, governor of South Carolina, leads the resistance, forming the Dixiecrat party
Truman uses executive orders to set up Fair Employment Board and to begin the integration of the armed forces
- 1954** *Brown v Board of Education, Topeka Kansas*
First White Citizens' Council, Mississippi
- 1955** *Brown II*
Segregation on interstate transport banned
Montgomery bus boycott begins
- 1956** Martin Luther King Jr's home is bombed
Southern Manifesto published
Eisenhower re-elected President
Supreme Court orders bus desegregation
Bus boycott ends
- 1957** SCLC established
Little Rock Central High School integration stopped by riots
First Civil Rights Act since 1875
Ghana wins its independence
- 1959** Massive resistance to school integration starts in Virginia
- 1960** Sit-in movement starts in Greensboro, North Carolina
SNCC set up

- Civil Rights Act becomes law
- Eleven colonies in Africa gain independence
- John F. Kennedy elected President
- 1961** CORE organises 'Freedom Rides'
- Kennedy appoints his brother Robert Attorney General and voter registration drive is started
- Albany protest starts
- 1962** Kennedy signs executive order on integration of federal housing
- Riots as students resist integration of the University of Mississippi
- 1963** Albany protest ends
- Birmingham, Alabama, demonstrations
- George Wallace tries to stop integration of University of Alabama
- March on Washington
- John F. Kennedy and Medgar Evers killed
- 1964** LBJ elected President
- Martin Luther King Jr wins Nobel Peace Prize
- Civil Rights Bill passed
- Mississippi Freedom Democratic party established
- Rioting in New York, Chicago and Philadelphia
- 1965** Selma demonstrations
- Voting Rights Act becomes law
- Malcolm X is murdered
- Rioting in Watts, Los Angeles
- King's first anti-Vietnam War speech
- SNCC advocates black power
- 1966** Civil rights campaign meets fierce resistance in Chicago
- 1967** Civil rights demonstrations extended to Cleveland
- King attacks Vietnam War
- National Organization of Women set up
- 1968** Poor People's Campaign plans march on Washington
- Martin Luther King Jr assassinated in Memphis
- Civil Rights Bill enacted
- Robert Kennedy assassinated in California
- AIM established
- LBJ does not seek re-election
- Richard Nixon is elected President
- 1969** Nixon greatly extends the use of affirmative action

- Stonewall gay bar raided in New York City, Gay Liberation Front set up
- 1970** Nominations of Haynesworth and Carswell defeated
- 1971** Supreme Court orders desegregation by bussing
- 1972** Richard Nixon re-elected
Watergate scandal begins to emerge
Equal Rights Amendment campaign begins
- 1973** Supreme Court legalises abortions in *Roe v Wade*
Second Battle of Wounded Knee
- 1974** Richard Nixon is the first President to be forced to resign
- 1976** Jimmy Carter of Georgia elected President; he appoints two black women to his cabinet and extends affirmative action
- 1980** Ronald Reagan elected President
Reagan's opposition to Voting Rights Act defeated
- 1981** First cases of AIDS reported
- 1988** Reagan's veto of the Civil Rights Restoration Act fails
George Bush elected President
- 1990** George Bush first President to veto civil rights law successfully
Civil rights law extended to include the disabled
- 1991** Bush nominates black conservative, Clarence Thomas, to Supreme Court
- 1992** William Clinton elected President
- 1993** Clinton extends Voting Rights Act with Motor Voter Bill
Clinton fails to keep his promise to gays in the military