

A photograph of Barack and Michelle Obama walking on a red carpet. Barack is on the left, wearing a dark suit and a blue tie, smiling. Michelle is on the right, wearing a dark patterned dress and red gloves, also smiling and clapping. The background is a blurred crowd of people.

FOURTH EDITION

Running for Freedom

Civil Rights and Black Politics
in America since 1941

Steven F. Lawson

WILEY Blackwell

RUNNING FOR FREEDOM

About the Author

Steven F. Lawson was professor of history at Rutgers University from 1998 to 2009 and is now professor emeritus. From 1992 to 1998 he was professor and head of the History Department at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro. Before then, he taught for 20 years at the University of South Florida in Tampa. He has received fellowships from the National Endowment for the Humanities, the American Council of Learned Societies, and the National Humanities Center. He has served as an adviser to the television documentary series *Eyes on the Prize* and has participated as a historical consultant on voting rights cases. His publications include *Black Ballots: Voting Rights in the South, 1944–1969* (1976), which was awarded the Phi Alpha Theta best first-book prize; *In Pursuit of Power: Southern Blacks and Electoral Politics, 1965–1982* (1985); *Civil Rights Crossroads: Nation, Community and the Black Freedom Struggle* (2003); *To Secure These Rights: The Report of President Harry S. Truman's Committee on Civil Rights* (2004), and numerous articles and essays on the civil rights movement and politics. Along with Nancy Hewitt he has published the documentary textbook *Exploring American Histories: A Brief Survey with Sources* (2013).

RUNNING FOR FREEDOM

**Civil Rights and Black Politics
in America since 1941**

**Fourth Edition
Steven F. Lawson**

WILEY Blackwell

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For Nancy and Scooter, best friends both

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Preface to the Fourth Edition

Winning is new people running.

Winning is also new voters.

Winning is more young voters.

Winning is providing hope. ...

We're not just running for an office.

We're running for freedom.

(Jesse Jackson, "On Winning," 1984)

In the more than five decades since the civil rights movement achieved some of the most momentous reforms of the twentieth century, scholars have produced a rich body of literature detailing the battle for racial and political equality. Initially, most of the works focused on the activities of major civil rights organizations and leaders and their efforts to enact national legislation, gain presidential support, and win litigation before the federal courts. In general, they concentrated on the responses of government institutions and officials to demands for social change. Subsequently, a second generation of scholarly studies shifted the emphasis away from powerful leaders, interest groups, and agencies to indigenous mass movements, seeking to discover their unique structures, ideologies, strategies, and tactics. From this perspective, black protest and politics are not viewed primarily as a struggle for obtaining civil rights laws in the national arena but for liberating black communities at the grassroots level.

As scholarly inquiry refocused the vision of this struggle "from the bottom up," it is appropriate to consider how efforts at the local level intersected with those on the national stage. Both national civil rights campaigns aimed at legislation and litigation and community organizing directed toward consciousness-raising were part of a larger process of empowerment. In an interconnected way, the civil rights movement altered local black institutions

and shaped national goals; in turn, the actions of the federal government and established civil rights groups transformed local communities in the process of expanding freedom.

An interpretive synthesis, this book examines the freedom struggle and black political development since the beginning of World War II. Moving along two tracks, the national and the local, this study attempts to gauge the connections between the two. Pressure from below ultimately pushed the federal government to challenge disfranchisement. Northern blacks, whose votes swung the balance of power in close national elections, demanded that lawmakers remedy the plight of blacks deprived of their rights in the South. The urgency of a response became greater as southern blacks, prevented from registering their discontent at the polls, used nonviolent civil disobedience to spark crises, forcing the national government to come to their aid. In organizing against racism, the civil rights movement mobilized blacks for political action and prepared the way for extensive black participation in the electoral process following the passage of the 1965 Voting Rights Act.

The franchise figured prominently in the thinking of both white officials and black protesters, though in different ways. White leaders saw the ballot as a means of promoting orderly social change during a period when black protests and hostile white reactions to them threatened civic peace and the legitimacy of democratic institutions. Blacks considered the franchise less as an implement of social cohesion and more as a weapon for destroying racist institutions and encouraging liberation. In pursuit of group power, African Americans marshaled their forces to elect candidates of their own race, a preference that has highlighted the conflict between proportional representation and color-blind politics, between affirmative action and traditional notions of political equality.

Since 1941, the political system has been opened up, gradually though sometimes dramatically, to active minority participation, and black Americans are working through it to acquire the advantages long denied them. Consequently, they have come to rely much less on the tactics of agitation and confrontation employed so effectively during the civil rights struggle and to depend more on the process of bargaining and compromise associated with professional politics. As a result, increased electoral power at the local level and influence at the national level generally have come at the expense of mass-based activism. Many black leaders made the transition from the civil rights battlefield to the electoral arena, but they had to heed the realities of practical politics. Furthermore, despite considerable progress, the political system has only partially settled black grievances,

especially those related to economic deprivation. Race has not disappeared as a divisive element, and polarization of the electorate often stands in the way of further resolution of critical problems.

Whatever these limitations, the quest for freedom over the past half-century released blacks from serving as passive objects of white domination and forged them into active agents striving to shape their own political destinies. Much of this story necessarily focuses on the South, where the civil rights movement originated and tested its most innovative political strategies. Yet the problems of racial inequality and political powerlessness were not confined to any one region, but were national in scope. Though they did not have to reacquire the ballot, as was the case in the South, northern blacks nonetheless had to struggle to mobilize their communities to compete successfully for electoral office and obtain political legitimacy. In doing so, they joined black southerners in trying to redefine the meaning of success and to infuse American politics with a greater dose of democratic participation.

For this fourth edition, I have provided some new material on the George W. Bush administration in Chapter 9, but more substantially I have added a new chapter (10) on the presidential election of Barack Obama, his first term in office, his reelection in 2012, and the first year of his second term. In addition to his two presidential elections, this chapter includes a discussion of the 2010 midterm elections, which produced a Republican majority in the House of Representatives and in statehouses across the nation; the impact of the killing of Trayvon Martin and the subsequent trial of George Zimmerman; the commemorations of the fiftieth anniversary of the March on Washington; and state voter suppression efforts and the Supreme Court's weakening of the Voting Rights Act. Indeed, I have tried to make this new concluding chapter up-to-date, though it necessarily remains a work in progress, as events continue to unfold even as these words are written.

Acknowledgments

I would like to acknowledge my debt to the many scholars of civil rights history and black politics whose fine works I have drawn on. The bibliographical essay at the end of the book is not only a guide for readers but also an expression of appreciation to the many authors from whom I have benefited.

Writing this edition constitutes something of an archaeological expedition into my career as a historian. The first edition coincided with my tenure at the University of South Florida; the second my years at the University of North Carolina-Greensboro; and the third my ten years at Rutgers. Although this fourth edition comes in my retirement from academic teaching and service, it evidences my continuing presence as a historian. For persuading me to undertake this latest edition, I thank Peter Coveney at Wiley-Blackwell, who has been a delight to work with over many years.

The silk thread weaving all four editions together is Nancy Hewitt. Without her generosity, sharp intellect and editorial skills, and her unflagging patience this book would have been impossible to write.

Steven F. Lawson
Metuchen, New Jersey

Abbreviations Used in the Text

ACA	Affordable Care Act
ACORN	Association for Community Organizations for Reform Now
ARRA	American Recovery and Reinvestment Act
BPP	Black Panther Party
CAP	Community Action Program
CBC	Congressional Black Caucus
CETA	Comprehensive Employment and Training Act
CIO	Congress of Industrial Organizations
COFO	Council of Federated Organizations
CORE	Congress of Racial Equality
DCVL	Dallas County Voters League
EEOC	Equal Employment Opportunity Commission
FEMA	Federal Emergency Management Agency
FEPC	Fair Employment Practice Committee
LCFO	Lowndes County Freedom Organization
MFDP	Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party
MIA	Montgomery Improvement Association
MOWM	March on Washington Movement
NAACP	National Association for the Advancement of Colored People
NACGN	National Association of Colored Graduate Nurses
NAG	Nonviolent Action Group
NCBCP	National Coalition on Black Civic Participation
NCLB	No Child Left Behind
NUL	National Urban League
PDP	Progressive Democratic Party
PLO	Palestine Liberation Organization
POWER	People Organized for Welfare and Employment Rights
PUSH	People United to Save Humanity

SCHW	Southern Conference for Human Welfare
SCLC	Southern Christian Leadership Conference
SNCC	Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee
UFT	United Federation of Teachers
VA	Veterans Administration
VEP	Voter Education Project
VISTA	Volunteers in Service to America

World War II and the Origins of the Freedom Struggle

For African Americans, the ultimate aim of politics, either protest or electoral, has been liberation. Seeking emancipation from the bondage of white supremacy, disfranchised southern blacks challenged the political system for admission, even as they hoped to transform it by their participation. Civil rights proponents have long believed that blacks could not be free without obtaining the right to vote. At the turn of the century, W. E. B. Du Bois set the standard for rejecting racial solutions that excluded the exercise of the franchise. Attacking Booker T. Washington for his strategy of postponing black participation at the ballot box, Du Bois insisted that the right to vote was intimately connected to first-class citizenship. Without it blacks would never command respect, protect themselves, and feel pride in their own race. To Du Bois, a scholar of the freedom struggle after the Civil War, Reconstruction provided vivid evidence that black elected officials could transform the lives of their constituents. From this experience they derived the historical lesson, summarized by Eric Foner, that “it was in politics that blacks articulated a new vision of the American state, calling upon government, both national and local, to take upon itself new and unprecedented responsibilities for protecting the civil rights of individual citizens.”

The long history to obtain the right to vote suggests that reenfranchisement was considered the decisive first step toward political equality. Civil rights proponents expected participation at the polls to yield the kinds of basic benefits that groups exercising the franchise customarily enjoyed. Yet, for black Americans, much more was at stake. With their systematic exclusion from the electoral process, the simple acquisition of the vote constituted an

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essential element of liberation from enforced racial subordination. The political scientist Charles V. Hamilton, who studied the voting rights struggle both as a participant and as a scholar, found this passion for the ballot very understandable. “White America had spent so much effort denying the vote to blacks,” he observed, “that there was good reason to believe that they must be protecting some tool of vast importance. Perhaps it was reasonable to put so much emphasis on the one fundamental process that clearly distinguished first-class from second-class citizens.”

Victory at Home and Abroad

Going off to war in the months after Pearl Harbor, black GIs might very well have pondered the connection between politics and freedom. They had many reasons to wonder about the principles of the democratic creed and their promise of first-class citizenship for all. Like their white counterparts they remembered December 7, 1941, when Dorie Miller, a black sailor, performed heroic deeds that would win him the Navy Cross; but they also carried with them the memory of Sikeston, Missouri, where on January 25, 1942, a black prisoner named Cleo Wright was taken out of the local jail and cruelly burned and lynched by a white mob. Unlike Japan and its Axis partners, which were eventually defeated on the battlefield and forced to accept unconditional surrender, the killers of Cleo Wright were never brought to justice. Helping to combat fascism abroad, black fighting men and the families they left behind also demanded unconditional surrender from the forces of racism at home. Blacks failed to persuade the American government to wage total war in their behalf, but they did lay the groundwork for continuing the battle in the decades to come.

This determination to stand up for their rights, strengthened by World War II, grew out of both disillusionment and optimism. In response to Woodrow Wilson’s pledge during World War I to make the world safe for democracy, blacks had followed the advice of Du Bois to “close ranks [and] while this war lasts, forget our special grievances.” Rather than freedom, the end of the war produced bloody race riots and a continuation of Jim Crow practices. At the same time, African Americans refused to plunge into despair and experienced instead a heightening of racial consciousness. The Harlem Renaissance and the black nationalist movement spearheaded by Marcus Garvey explored the roots of black identity and helped forge renewed racial solidarity. A. Philip Randolph organized workers into the



Figure 1 Dorie Miller receiving the Navy Cross from Admiral Chester Nimitz. Miller was later killed in action. (Photo courtesy US National Archives)

Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters and not only fought for economic benefits from employers but also challenged racial discrimination within the trade union movement. In addition, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), an interracial organization founded in 1909, kept alive the battle for equal rights by lobbying Congress to enact an antilynching bill and petitioning the Supreme Court to outlaw disfranchisement measures such as the white primary.

The Great Depression provided unexpected opportunities for black advancement. Franklin D. Roosevelt's New Deal extended economic relief to the one-third of the nation that was ill housed, ill clothed, and ill fed, which included blacks as well as poor whites. Blacks profited from these programs because of their poverty, not because of their race; in fact, many New Deal agencies, especially in the South, were administered to preserve prevailing racial practices that maintained blacks in a subordinate position. For example, programs for federal housing construction contained provisions guaranteeing segregation in the North as well as the South. Despite

the perpetuation of racial discrimination and the unwillingness of President Roosevelt to fight for special civil rights measures, African Americans welcomed federal assistance. "Any time people are out of work, in poverty, have lost their savings," Du Bois remarked, "any kind of a 'deal' that helps them is going to be favored."

Blacks showed their appreciation by abandoning their traditional allegiance to the Republican Party of Abraham Lincoln and hopping aboard the Roosevelt bandwagon. This realignment was facilitated by the appointment of blacks to federal posts, a sufficient number to convene an informal "black kitchen cabinet" in Washington. Whites sensitive to racial concerns headed several New Deal agencies and worked to see that relief was distributed more fairly. Furthermore, Roosevelt's selections to the Supreme Court after 1937 paved the way for a constitutional revolution that augured well for NAACP attorneys preparing a legal assault upon racial discrimination. Most of all, the President's wife, Eleanor, nurtured the growing attachment African Americans felt toward the Roosevelt administration. Mrs. Roosevelt's commitment to civil rights was far greater than her husband's, and she served as an ally in the White House to see that complaints of black leaders received a hearing in the Oval Office. This combination of racial gestures and economic rewards led the majority of the black electorate to vote for Roosevelt beginning in 1936.

On the eve of World War II, blacks stood poised to consolidate their gains and press ahead for full equality. Their political agenda included an end to job discrimination, which helped keep black unemployment at a high 11 percent in 1940; legislation to empower the federal government to prosecute lynchers and to abolish the poll tax on voting imposed by eight southern states; the destruction of the lily-white Democratic primary; and the abandonment of the principle of "separate but equal" that actually produced segregated and unequal treatment in the armed forces, public education, and public accommodations. As the prospect of war increased, black aspirations collided with the reality of pervasive discrimination in a country where mobilization for war came first.

National defense took priority over racial equality in the armed services. As the nation inched closer to the side of the Allies and prepared to join them in war, the army maintained its customary policy of segregation, the navy recruited blacks only as messmates, and the marines and Army Air Corps generally excluded them. When pressed by black leaders for integration of the military in the fall of 1940, President Roosevelt refused to alter practices that had "been proved satisfactory over a long period of

years.” Instead, he directed the utilization of “the services of negroes ... on a fair and equitable basis.” To do otherwise, he and his advisers believed, would risk upsetting white soldiers and would lower their morale, thereby jeopardizing the war effort.

The attempt to make the system of racial separation operate more equally failed to solve the problem. Black GIs assigned to military bases in the South encountered segregation both on and off the bases. Conforming to the law and customs of the surrounding communities, the military enforced segregation in recreation clubs, theaters, and post exchanges. In one camp, a sign on a chapel announced religious services for “Catholics Jews, Protestants, Negroes.” When they received passes to travel into town, black soldiers rode on segregated buses and used Jim Crow facilities. With the population of many towns swollen with servicemen, an intolerable strain was placed on public transportation and accommodations. Crowded transit systems often led to pushing and shoving between black and white passengers, frequently ending in violence. In July 1942, a black army private in Beaumont, Texas, refused to vacate his seat in a section of a bus reserved for whites. After his arrest, he was shot by white patrolmen while in their custody. Racial incidents such as this were becoming increasingly commonplace throughout the South that year, culminating in a riot in Alexandria, Louisiana, in which 28 blacks were wounded and nearly 3,000 arrested.

Among the black soldiers encountering wartime discrimination was Jackie Robinson. Having attended the University of California at Los Angeles before entering the service, Robinson excelled in basketball, track, baseball, and football, a sport in which he was named as a college All-American. However, these accomplishments did not guarantee him an easy time in the army. When military officials attempted to keep him out of Officers’ Candidate School at Fort Riley, Kansas, he successfully complained and gained admission to the program. Despite his athletic prowess, Robinson was barred because of his race from playing on the baseball team at the army training camp. In protest, he refused to join the football team, which was open to blacks. In 1944, Lieutenant Robinson again challenged unfair racial treatment. While stationed at Ford Hood, Texas, he steadfastly refused to follow a bus driver’s order that he sit in the back of the vehicle with the other black passengers. Subjected to a military court martial for his defiance of local segregationist customs, the former All-American athlete was found innocent.

As a soldier, Robinson did not act alone in challenging racial discrimination in the armed forces. On the eve of America’s entry into the war, civil rights groups such as the NAACP and National Urban League,

along with the Negro press and black college officials, campaigned to break down the barriers that kept the Army Air Corps from accepting black pilots. The War Department believed blacks incapable of flying aircraft. One report claimed that the “colored race does not have the technical nor the flying background for the creation of a bombardment-type unit.” Nevertheless, persistent pressure and the negative publicity tarnishing the nation’s democratic war aims led the War Department in 1941 to agree to train African-American pilots. The black fighter squadron remained segregated from white pilots, prompting criticism from the NAACP and the black press, which favored the cessation of racial criteria in the military. The *Pittsburgh Courier* blasted the Jim Crow policy as “a citadel to the theory that there can be segregation without discrimination.” Yet, by the end of the war, the exploits of the Tuskegee Airmen had made African Americans swell with pride. Stationed at Tuskegee army airfield in Alabama, on the grounds of an abandoned graveyard, black pilots eventually took to the skies over Europe and proved their skills in fighting the Nazis.

However, both overseas and at home, the Tuskegee Airmen battled racial discrimination. They fought against the military command’s thinking that they could not make talented fighter pilots in combat, and they challenged segregated facilities on military posts in the United States. At the Tuskegee training center, the airmen conducted a successful sit-in protest to desegregate accommodations on the base. In response, Colonel Noel F. Parish discarded segregated signs, invited popular entertainers to lift the troop’s morale, and desegregated the mess hall. At other military posts black pilots were segregated in the mess halls and movie theaters, while German prisoners of war who were quartered at the camps took seats in the “whites only” areas of these accommodations, an outrage black soldiers protested. Indeed, enemy prisoners of war could attend shows, movies, and dances, sponsored by the United Service Organizations (USO) and local chambers of commerce, which were barred to black soldiers. The situation was much the same once the soldiers left the military posts. In one highly charged incident, black airmen taking leave from Walterboro army airfield in South Carolina stopped to eat in a racially restricted café in nearby Fairfax, and were denied service. Brimming with anger, they told the white owner to “go to hell,” brandished their service revolvers, and left the restaurant shouting the mock-salute, “Heil Hitler!” Slightly more successful, in November 1944, Walterboro airmen, spending a leave in Washington, DC, integrated the District of Columbia’s airport cafeteria after having been first turned away. They may have received service out of

deference to their military uniforms, because the airport resumed segregation in its accommodations once the war ended.

Protests also surfaced at Selfridge Field just outside of Detroit. On January 1, 1944, black officers teamed in groups of three at intervals throughout the day attempted to integrate the racially restricted officer's club. Although one group gained admission, the soldiers were soon ordered to leave by the base commander. The protest resumed the next day, but the club remained barred to blacks. One of the leaders of the challenge was Lieutenant Milton Henry from Philadelphia, who had had previous confrontations with segregation. In the spring of 1942, Henry had a run-in with a Montgomery, Alabama bus driver when he refused his order to sit in the rear of the vehicle. Henry demanded his nickel fare back and punched the driver in the mouth. The driver pulled out a gun, and the two began a struggle that spilled out onto the street. Henry managed to escape, but was sent to the military stockade for a brief period. A year later, he was stationed at Selfridge and helped plan the organized protests. The persistent Henry lodged a complaint with the War Department, which resulted in an investigation of racial discrimination at the airfield, under the direction of General Benjamin O. Davis, the military's highest ranking African-American officer. The report confirmed the protesters' charges, and the War Department ordered a reprimand for Selfridge's commander. However, Henry faced reprisals. In 1944, air force officials prosecuted him for insubordination in an incident unrelated to the officer's club demonstration. He was found guilty and discharged from the army on August 10.

An even more serious brouhaha occurred in April 1945, when Colonel Robert Selway ordered that the officers' club at Freeman Field in Seymour, Indiana, remain segregated. The policy sparked a challenge from members of the 477th Bombardment Group who were stationed there. Previously, black soldiers had staged a protest when Selway insisted on separating the races in the base's movie theater. Black airmen and their white sympathizers initiated "Operation Checkboard," and when the lights went down the soldiers switched seats so that they were sitting next to each other under cover of darkness. On April 5, 1945, several groups of black officers defied Selway's Jim Crow regulations and proceeded to enter the "whites-only" Club Number Two. In turn, the colonel had them arrested and proceeded to court-martial over one hundred African-American officers. The beleaguered airmen wired Secretary of War Henry Stimson that the continuation of segregation "can hardly be reconciled with the world wide struggle for freedom for which we are asked and are willing to lay down our lives." By

this point in the war, the army high brass, under pressure from the NAACP and the black press, had grown less tolerant of overt racial discrimination, especially within its officers' corps, and set nearly all the accused airmen free. Nevertheless, General Frank O. Hunter, the commander of the First Air Force and a Georgia native who supported Jim Crow, convinced the War Department to approve the court martials of three of the protesters, Lieutenant Robert Terry, Lieutenant Shirley Clinton, and Lieutenant Marsden Thompson. The military panels acquitted Clinton and Marsden, but found Terry guilty; however, he received a light fine. At the same time, the army punished Colonel Selway and relieved him of the command of Freeman Field.

Meanwhile, African-American women endeavored to open up the military to women. Mabel Keaton Staupers, the director of the National Association of Colored Graduate Nurses (NACGN), tried to break down the rigid quota set by the military for employing African-American nurses. Despite a severe shortage of army nurses, the War Department refused to draft a large number of black nurses. By 1943, however, Staupers had managed to get the army to increase the number of military nurses from 56 to 160, chosen mainly to attend to black soldiers. Within the next two years, having recruited First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt to her side, Staupers succeeded in persuading the War Department to draft all qualified nurses, regardless of race, to serve in the army Nurse Corps. Mabel K. Staupers, Darlene Clark Hine wrote in summing up her accomplishments, "played the ... active, highly visible role of 'interpreting the Negro nurse' to the general public and marshaling the mass support so essential to their short-run struggle for equal education, fair employment opportunities, and professional integration."

Black civilians also encountered blatant racial prejudice as they sought employment in wartime industries. Blacks had been especially hard hit by the Depression, and as the economy geared up for war production after 1940 they looked forward to taking their places in the booming factories. They had to wait in line, however, behind millions of unemployed white workers who were the first choice of employers. When African Americans showed up looking for work at aircraft plants, they were informed that "the Negro will be considered only as janitors and in other similar capacities." Of 100,000 aircraft workers in 1940, only 240 were black. In related electrical and rubber industries, black employees constituted a meager 1 percent and 3 percent of the workforce. The federal government, which let out war contracts and could have challenged discriminatory hiring practices, collaborated with employers in reinforcing them. According to the policy of the United States

Employment Service, “white-only” requests for defense labor would be filled in conformity with “the social pattern of the local community.”

That whites did not intend the war to alter race relations was demonstrated in several other ways as well. Though the process of storing blood plasma was developed by a black scientist, Dr. Charles Drew, the Red Cross refused to mix donations of whites and blacks in their blood banks. In Tennessee, those blacks who wanted to fight for their country experienced difficulty in getting enlisted by all-white selective service centers. Refusing to appoint blacks to sit on draft boards, the governor of the state explained: “This is a white man’s country. The Negro had nothing to do with the settling of America.” In neighboring Mississippi, to avoid any suggestion that the war against totalitarianism overseas was meant to affect the status of blacks at home, the state legislature ordered the deletion of all references to voting, elections, and democracy in textbooks used in black schools.

Despite these racist setbacks, most blacks supported the war effort and responded to the global conflict, as did other patriotic Americans. One survey revealed that 66 percent of blacks considered that they had a great stake in the outcome of the war and 43 percent felt that they would be better off than before. Though daring victories of nonwhite Japanese over Caucasians early in the war inspired admiration in many blacks, the majority realized what would happen if the Axis powers emerged victorious. “If Hitler wins,” the NAACP pointed out, “every right we now possess and for which we have struggled here in America for three centuries will be instantaneously wiped out.” At least if the Allies triumphed black Americans would be free to continue fighting for their democratic rights. Desiring full participation as American citizens, they had no real difficulty choosing which side they were on.

Nevertheless, blacks remained sorely troubled by the discrimination they encountered at home. Their loyalty was not at issue, but as one knowledgeable observer declared, many blacks displayed a “lack of enthusiasm for a war which they did not believe is being fought for true democratic principles.” Lloyd Brown, a black soldier stationed in Salina, Kansas, who was refused service at a restaurant that admitted German prisoners of war, poignantly expressed his disappointment: “If we were *untermenschen* [subhuman species] in Nazi Germany they would break our bones. As ‘colored’ men in Salina, they only break our hearts.” That a fascist victory would exact a higher price than an Allied one was acknowledged by African Americans; yet this awareness did not bring contentment. No greater slogan of despair over the gap between the democratic creed and discriminatory practice

existed than in the sardonic statement popular at the time: "Here lies a black man killed fighting a yellow man for the protection of a white man."

Cynical yet hopeful, African Americans used the war to pursue their own political aims. While blacks sought to defend their country on foreign battlefields alongside other American citizens, they also intended to open up a second front for freedom at home. Wartime ideology extolling the virtues of the "four freedoms" and denouncing the doctrines of Aryan racism was not lost upon blacks. On January 16, 1943, a black newspaper, the *Baltimore Afro-American*, published a "Draftee's Prayer," a poem that tersely summed up the twin goals black soldiers fought for:

So while I fight
Wrong over there
See that my folks
Are treated fair.

Black leaders agreed, and seized the opportunity to turn America's lofty pronouncements to their advantage. Shortly after Pearl Harbor, Walter White, the executive secretary of the NAACP, asserted that "declarations of war do not lessen the obligation to preserve and extend civil liberties here while the fight is being made to restore freedom from dictatorship abroad." These sentiments were echoed in the pages of the *Pittsburgh Courier*, a black newspaper that mounted a campaign for the "double V," victory at home and overseas. In this way, the black press not only reflected the increasing militancy of its readers but also reinforced black support for the war against the fascists. Not willing to postpone their egalitarian demands as they had during World War I, blacks planned to attack "the principle and practice of compulsory segregation in our American society."

This new assertiveness on behalf of full equality had its most powerful expression in the March on Washington Movement (MOWM). Organized by A. Philip Randolph, the militant trade union leader, the MOWM represented both the exclusiveness of racial pride and the integration of blacks into the mainstream of American life. The group barred whites from participation not out of prejudice but because, as Randolph explained, an all-black movement would promote "faith by Negroes in Negroes." The main goals of the movement were the desegregation of the armed forces and the elimination of discrimination in employment by government contractors. To gain these ends, Randolph proposed a mass march on Washington by some 75,000 to 100,000 blacks to take place in

June 1941. Though this proposal had the endorsement of established black groups such as the NAACP, the MOWM derived its power from the black masses rather than middle-class reformers, who generally worked for change through the courts and legislatures. In this way, the MOWM foreshadowed the successful protest tactics of the later civil rights movement.

The MOWM timed its efforts well. The prospect of tens of thousands of blacks descending on the nation's capital as the United States prepared for war disturbed the President. Concerned about tarnishing the nation's image as well as about hampering attempts to rally support for the Allies, Roosevelt tried to get Randolph to halt the demonstration. Unsuccessful, the chief executive agreed partially to meet the movement's demands. Issuing Executive Order 8802, the President created the Fair Employment Practice Committee (FEPC) to investigate and publicize cases of employment discrimination. However, he left the policy of segregation in the military basically unchanged. Not getting all that he wanted, Randolph nevertheless called off the march, convinced that he had won an important political victory and confident that the movement would continue to apply pressure for social change. The MOWM did function throughout the war, but it never reached the same level of influence as it had during this first confrontation with the President.

Rising black militancy stimulated the growth of existing civil rights organizations. Foremost among them, the NAACP kept up the pressure to lower racial barriers along the color line. Although this oldest of civil rights groups had thrown its weight behind the MOWM, it preferred to operate in the traditional arenas of litigation, legislation, and lobbying. The national association's staff of dedicated attorneys prepared suits against white Democratic primaries in the South, segregation of passengers on interstate buses, and unequal educational facilities and teacher salaries. The NAACP functioned as a clearinghouse for complaints from black soldiers and civilians experiencing discriminatory treatment and directed them to the attention of officials in Washington. It prodded the Justice Department to investigate and prosecute perpetrators of lynching and other forms of violence and joined with white liberals and labor unions in petitioning Congress and state legislatures to lift poll-tax restrictions on the ballot. As a reflection of both its increased activism and the rising expectations of blacks, NAACP membership soared from 50,000 in 1940 to over 450,000 in 1946. Of these new recruits an estimated 15,000 black GIs signed up while they were still in uniform.

In addition, black activism spawned the formation of new protest groups. Most important for the future was the creation of the Congress of Racial

Equality (CORE) in 1942. Like Randolph's March on Washington Movement, CORE believed in the tactic of direct action to spotlight racist problems and bring them to an immediate resolution; in contrast to MOWM, however, the group welcomed white participation. Founded in Chicago by pacifists committed to the principle of nonviolence, its interracial membership initiated sit-in and picketing campaigns to desegregate public accommodations in northern cities. These innovative techniques led to the desegregation of restaurants and movie theaters in Detroit, Los Angeles, Denver, and Chicago.

CORE partisans were not the only ones to devise innovative tactics for protest. In Washington, DC, students at Howard University conducted their own sit-ins against racial discrimination in restaurants. In January 1943, shortly before the CORE protests in Chicago, three undergraduate women, Ruth Powell, Marianne Musgrave, and Juanita Morrow, were refused service at the counter of a United Cigar store. After the police instructed the waitress to serve the trio, she overcharged them for cups of hot chocolate. They insisted on paying only the regular amount, which then led the police to make a turnabout and arrest them for refusing to pay the specified bill. Sparked by this action, Howard students formed a Civil Rights Committee under the auspices of the college chapter of the NAACP. It zeroed in on restaurants in the area that surrounded the campus. Pauli Murray, a student from North Carolina attending Howard Law School, served as adviser to the group, and on April 17 student volunteers marched to the Little Palace Cafeteria on Fourteenth and U Streets, NW. Teams of three entered the facility and were rebuffed. While they sat at the tables and read their textbooks, others picketed outside hoisting posters with slogans such as "We Die Together – Why Can't We Eat Together?" The owner closed the cafeteria after the police refused to arrest the peaceful demonstrators. After two more days of protest, the restaurant capitulated, and African Americans could eat a meal alongside whites.

The following year, again led by Murray and Powell, Howard students resumed their desegregation drive against a major Washington, DC, cafeteria chain – John R. Thompson. They chose the restaurant at Eleventh Street and Pennsylvania Avenue, NW, because it was moderately priced, opened 24 hours a day, and was conveniently located for black government workers who were employed nearby. On Saturday, April 22, 1944, groups of black and white students entered the cafeteria and remained seated at tables after they were denied service. Outside, students walked a picket line. The demonstration received a big boost when six black soldiers came into the