Chapter Five

As the turn of the century drew near, a postslave generation of African-Americans confronted a rising tide of racism and economic hardships little mitigated by emancipation and Reconstruction. The Black community was divided as to the best course of action: What tactics would ensure fulfillment of the hopes dashed in the postwar years? Frederick Douglass died in 1895, after half a century of leadership, and the men who moved into the forefront of the struggle for Black liberation, Booker T. Washington and W.E.B. Du Bois, were divided in their views. Simply put, Washington saw separation as the way to Black empowerment, while Du Bois focused on integration.

Booker T. Washington (1856-1915)

Booker Taliaferro Washington was born a slave in 1856 in Franklin County, Virginia. His mother was a cook and his father, a local White man. His childhood was typical for African-Americans of the period in that he never knew the exact date of his birth or his father’s identity. He chose the surname “Washington” himself and became determined to get an education. Though his goal wasn’t unusual, the fact that he succeeded was.

As he described it in his autobiography Up From Slavery (1901), Washington set out in 1872 for Hampton Institute in Hampton, Virginia, a school for African-Americans founded by former Union officer Samuel C. Armstrong. Since he lived nearly 200 miles from Hampton and had little money, he made the trip on foot and by hitchhiking, sleeping outdoors along the way. When he applied for admission to the school, the registrar gave him a rag and a bucket of water and told him to clean out one of the classrooms. He passed this unusual entrance exam.

Like most African-American college students of his day, Washington worked his way through school, mainly by performing manual labor for the Institute. During his senior year at Hampton, in order to help the incoming freshmen, he and a group of upperclassmen volunteered to spend the winter months in tents, so the new students could share the school’s only dormitory.

At Hampton, Washington was greatly influenced by General Samuel C. Armstrong. With many Whites of the period,
Old Problems, New Solutions, 1877-1954

Armstrong believed that Black students should get a vocational-technical education stressing manual labor and technical training rather than the liberal arts. Many of the school's construction, maintenance, and custodial duties were performed by the students, since money was scarce. At Hampton these tasks extended to growing crops and other food items. Implicit in the system was an emphasis on cleanliness, thrift, and the dignity of manual labor. This philosophy dominated the approach to Black education for decades, and Washington became its staunch advocate over the objections of many Black intellectuals. To this day, many historically Black colleges and universities carry the designations A&M (for Agricultural and Mechanical), A&T (Agriculture and Technology), and A&I (Agriculture and Industry.)

After graduation, in 1875, Washington taught school in West Virginia and spent a year at Wayland Seminary in Washington, D.C. He returned to Hampton as an instructor in 1879 and directed a night school for Black students who worked in local industries by day to pay for their education. In 1881 General Armstrong recommended him as director of a new school for African-Americans in Tuskegee, Alabama.

At first, the local White community was opposed to the idea of a Black college in its midst. But Washington assured the local opposition that the college would be an asset. He stressed the mutuality of interests between Blacks and Whites and pointed out that the school could train Black share-
croppers to be more productive. Eventually, Washington won support, not only from his comprehensive local opposition but from powerful Northern philanthropists like Andrew Carnegie.

Washington opened the school with some 30 students whose first classes were held in an abandoned chicken coop donated by a local farmer. The curriculum was patterned after that of Hampton Institute and was designed to improve the economic condition of African-Americans without making them dissatisfied with the existing sociopolitical order. After 14 years of tireless effort as both educator and fundraiser, Washington had established Tuskegee Normal and Industrial Institute as a powerful influence on national thinking and the capital of Black America.

In 1895 Washington was chosen to deliver an address at the Cotton States Exposition in Atlanta. At this landmark meeting in the effective capital of the New South, he proposed a formula for race relations that allayed White fears of equal rights and turned many Blacks against him. His theme was that Blacks would best protect their constitutional rights through their own economic and moral progress and that the best approach to civil rights in the South was to let the issue alone: it would take care of itself.

After this address, often called the Atlanta Compromise speech, Washington's critics became more vocal. Many African-Americans questioned the degree of his influence and accused him of supporting segregation and discrimination. "In all things social" he said, "we separate as the fingers, yet [balling his hand into a fist] one as the hand in all things essential to mutual progress."

When the Supreme Court ruled the following year, in Plessy v. Ferguson, that "separate but equal" facilities for Blacks were constitutional, Washington's critics blamed him for upholding institutional segregation.

To implement his ideas, Washington started the National Negro Business League, still in existence, to give African-Americans a foothold in the world of commerce, and he set up many rural extension programs. He initiated a trade program to develop economic ties between West Africa and the United States before World War I, but it was interrupted by the hostilities. To the end of his life, in 1915, he preferred to work outside the political arena, even withdrawing himself from consideration for a Cabinet post in the McKinley administration in 1896.

In his work Rebellion or Revolution? (1968) Harold Cruse argued that the Nation of Islam (Black Muslims) and its
leader Malcolm X (born Malcolm Little) were contemporary manifestations of Washington's ideas on Black nationalism. Cruse declared that Washington was not against civil rights but wanted to tone down the rhetoric in favor of the movement because of the danger to Blacks. He was outspoken in his denunciation of lynching and other forms of mob violence against African-Americans.

William Edward Burghardt Du Bois, 1868-1963

W. E. B. Du Bois, one of the most influential men of the twentieth century, was born in 1868 in Great Barrington, Massachusetts. His mother was Black and his father, mulatto, of mixed African, Dutch, and French ancestry. The couple was affluent by the standards of the day and encouraged the educational aspirations of their gifted son. Du Bois was graduated from Springfield (MA) High School at the top of his class. He was rejected in his first application to Harvard University and entered Fisk University, historically a Black liberal arts college, in Nashville, Tennessee, in the early 1880s. His formal education and full scholarship enabled him to enter as a sophomore rather than a freshman.

At Fisk, the young Du Bois experienced an all-Black environment for the first time. He became aware of the struggle that most African-Americans faced from day to day. He was influenced to devote his talents to ending racial oppression using education as his primary tool. Unlike Booker T. Washington, he believed that it was vital for Blacks to enhance their own aesthetic and cultural values even as they worked toward their eventual social emancipation.

In 1888 Du Bois entered Harvard on a full scholarship. There he earned a second bachelor's degree and became the first Black scholar to receive a Ph.D. from Harvard. His dissertation, *The Suppression of the African Slave Trade*, published in 1896, is a classic historical study. He pursued graduate studies at the University of Berlin, and taught at Wilberforce, the University of Pennsylvania, and Atlanta University. At the same time, he began the enormous literary endeavor that would make him famous as a critic, scholar, editor, and civil rights leader.

Du Bois' educational philosophy revolved around what he called the "Talented Tenth Theory." He advocated a good primary and secondary-school education for Black children of both sexes, of whom the top 10 percent should be encouraged to seek a college education, with generous help from scholarship funds. These young people
were to be encouraged to go as far as they chose academically, with a strong curriculum grounded in the liberal arts. Ideally, they would become a professional and academic elite equipped to furnish leadership to the entire Black community.

Du Bois’ numerous books include *The Philadelphia Negro* (1899), widely considered the first sociological study published by an American; *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903); *John Brown* (1909); *The Negro* (1915); *The Gift of Black Folk* (1924); *Color and Democracy* (1945) and *The World and Africa* (1947). He predicted that the great problem of the twentieth century would be that of the color line between the white nations of the world and the nations compromising the majority “countries of color,” and that racial oppression would eventually explode into violence. In 1909 Du Bois helped found the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (N.A.A.C.P.), in which he was active for most of his life. He edited the organization’s magazine, *Crisis*, for 25 years (to 1934). He was an early champion of “Pan-Africanism” and emigrated to Africa in 1961 to work on a major publishing venture proposed by the then president of Ghana, Kwame Nkrumah: the *Encyclopedia Africana*. That same year, disillusioned by the slow pace of change in America, he joined the Communist Party. Du Bois died in Ghana at the age of 95 — on the same day that Martin Luther King, Jr., delivered his famous “I Have a Dream” speech in Washington: August 28, 1963.

Booker T. Washington and W. E. B. Du Bois set the tone and defined the parameters of the debate on civil, political, and economic rights for half a century. A popular poem by Dudley Randall summarizes the differences between them:

**Booker T. and W.E.B.**

It seems to me, said Booker T,
It shows a mighty lot of cheek
To study chemistry and Greek,
When Mr. Charlie needs a hand
To hoe the cotton on his land
And when Miss Ann looks for a cook,
Why stick your nose inside a book?
I don’t agree, said W.E.B.
If I should have the drive to seek
Knowledge of chemistry or Greek,
I’ll do it. Charles and Miss can look
Another place for hand or cook.
Some men rejoice in skill of hand
And some in cultivating land
But there are others who maintain
The right to cultivate the brain.
It seems to me, said Booker T,
That all you folks have missed the boat,
Who shout about the right to vote,
And spend vain days and sleepless nights
In uproar over civil rights.
Just keep your mouth shut, and do not grouse,
But work, and save, and buy a house.
I don’t agree, said W.E.B.
For what can property avail if dignity and justice fail?
Unless you help to make the laws,
They’ll steal your house with trumped-up clause.
A rope’s as tight, a fire as hot,
No matter how much cash you’ve got.
Speak soft and try your little plan,
But as for me I’ll be a man.
It seems to me, said Booker T. . . .
I don’t agree, said W.E.B.
The First Great Migration: 1910-1930

The twentieth century dawned with the philosophical debate between the Du Bois and Washington factions still raging. It was remarkable how much—and how little—change had occurred since the end of the Civil War. Equally puzzling was the number of African-Americans unaffected by turn-of-the-century shifts in culture and society. Despite marginally better educational opportunities for African-Americans, the general movement to the cities with urban industrialization, and the settling of the West, in which Black soldiers, farmers, and cowboys had participated, fully 80 percent of the Black population remained in 11 of the former Confederate states. Most were in rural areas working as sharecroppers and tenant farmers. Few owned the land that they farmed. A disproportionately large number of African-Americans were still poor, with little prospect for change in the foreseeable future, when the Northern migration got underway. It held out the promise of a different kind of life, with opportunities undreamt of in the South. Yet with it came the pain of separation from one’s own environment—community, church, and, often, family. Several organizations sprang up after 1900 to address the needs of Black migrants to Northern cities and the overall question of Black civil rights across the nation.

The Niagara Movement of 1905, founded by Du Bois and William Monroe Trotter, was an all-Black civil rights coalition of intellectuals determined to press for full citizenship rights and public awareness of Black contributions to national stability and progress. By 1909 it was fusing into the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, which included such White liberals as Oswald Garrison Villard, grandson of abolitionist William...
Lloyd Garrison. Its impetus was the economic race riot of 1908 in Springfield, Illinois, which broke out in August near Abraham Lincoln's boyhood home. Many African-Americans had recently moved to the city and were competing with Whites for jobs. A false accusation of a rape by a Black handyman precipitated a riot that left eight Blacks dead and required intervention by the state militia.

In 1911 the National Urban League was founded in New York City by Edmund Haynes and Eugene K. Jones, with support from a number of White benefactors. The League was designed to help Black newcomers to the nation's cities find housing and jobs. Collectively, the new organizations were helping Blacks in urban areas on a short-term basis, but their long-range goals were centered on integration of African-Americans into the mainstream of national life. Meanwhile, the "promised land" proved illusory to many Southern Blacks who had come North in search of greater freedom and prosperity.

In one sense, the African-American migration to Northern cities continued into the 1980s, but historians generally divide the movement into two parts because of the hiatus created by the Great Depression during the 1930s. The pace picked up again during World War II, when labor shortages and wartime industries created many new jobs. No one could have envisioned these changes at the turn of the century, when the concept of a world war did not exist. But war was only one of several "push" and "pull" forces acting to effect enormous population shifts. The "push" forces were literally pushing Blacks (and poor Whites) off the land in the South. These forces included the destruction of cotton crops by the boll weevil, low pay and land foreclosures, ruinous flooding in 1916, and continuing racial injustice and violence. Between 1900 and 1931, 345 of the South's 551 cotton-growing counties had at least one lynching, and 170 (31 percent) had 10 or more.

The "pull" forces included good wages in war-related Northern industry during World War I. Before the war, Northern factories had exploited the labor of successive waves of European immigrants. This pipeline was all but shut at the very time when cheap labor was badly needed for the war effort. The only place to look was South. Black newspapers like the Chicago Defender
Painted an almost idyllic picture of life in the North, where Blacks could be free of the lynch mob and “live anywhere they wanted.” Parents could send their children to good integrated public schools. And you could vote in the North.

Some 227,000 Blacks moved north during the decade 1910-20, as opposed to only 79,000 migrants between 1880 and 1910. Between 1920 and 1930, the number reached 440,000. Industrialist George Pullman was paying almost $2 a day at his railroad sleeping-car factory outside Chicago. Steel mills in Gary, Indiana, were paying nearly $1.50 a day. And Henry Ford was reportedly paying the unheard of sum of $5 per day, as compared to 15 to 50 cents per day for Southern farm laborers.

The example of the city of Detroit indicates the level of Black migration into major Northern industrial centers at this time. In 1910 Detroit counted 5,741 African-Americans in its population of 465,766. The city covered 40 square miles of territory. By 1920, the city’s population stood at 993,675, of whom 40,838 were Black, and its area had increased to 79.6 square miles. By 1930, when Detroit comprised 140 square miles, there were 120,066 people of
African descent in a population of 1,568,662. Between 1910 and 1920, the city's population and territory increased nearly 300 percent, while its Black population increased by an astonishing 2,400 percent. Cities including Chicago, Cleveland, and Philadelphia saw similar gains in both total and Black populations, as industrial jobs attracted sharecroppers and farm laborers from the South.

**Black Soldiers, Sailors, and Veterans**

Despite their good record in previous conflicts, including the Spanish-American War, African-Americans practically had to fight their way into the armed forces in 1917-18. It took a wave of protest to overcome initial rejection of Black volunteers for the U.S. Army and Navy (they were not allowed into the U.S. Marines until World War II). Once in the service, most Blacks were assigned to non-combat duty, restricted to training camps, and barred from most clubs for servicemen.

Some African-Americans did see action overseas—fighting in segregated units with White officers. But most Black soldiers didn't fight with their White compatriots; they were assigned to the French Army! The record shows that African-American soldiers fought with distinction, both individually and as a group. Among those singled out for bravery were Privates Needham Roberts and Henry Johnson of the 369th Infantry, who helped hold off a surprise German attack in May 1918, in which both were wounded. The French awarded them the Croix de Guerre. Members of the Black 370th United States Infantry also won commendations for bravery, including the American Distinguished Service Cross and the Croix de Guerre. Meanwhile, at home, race riots were erupting in East St. Louis, Illinois; Houston; Chester, Pennsylvania; and Philadelphia.

Unfortunately, the war brought no end to racism in the U.S.; in fact, it became more virulent. A number of presidents, beginning with Woodrow Wilson, were urged to obtain passage of federal anti-lynching bills, but all were reluctant to bring sufficient pressure to bear on Congress. In the South, the all-White primary continued to disfranchise Southern Blacks. And in the North, race riots were a constant threat. But African-Americans, especially Black veterans, had changed during the war years. They were demanding greater rights and privileges. Overseas, they had been treated with respect by the French, and a consensus was emerging that they should not settle for less in their own country.
TOP LEFT: Melville Miller, a member of the most famous Black regiment of World War I, the fighting 639th.

ABOVE: In a victory parade in Harlem in 1919 a wounded 369th veteran is greeted by his family.

LEFT: Some officers of the all-Black 92nd ("Buffalo") Division in France in 1918.
ABOVE: The Ku Klux Klan parades in the nation's capital in 1925. Klan membership had grown during the First World War.

RIGHT: A lynching mob in Marion, Indiana, in 1930 proudly displays its bloody handiwork.
But postwar America gave mixed signals at best.

The Ku Klux Klan had experienced a revival during the war years. And most new Klan members lived outside the Southern states. The Klan’s resurgence showed increased American intolerance for anyone who differed from the “norm,” including Blacks, Catholics, and Jews. Klan terrorism tapped into fear about the spread of Bolshevism (Communism) after the Russian Revolution of 1917. There were 78 lynchings in 1919 – 20 more than the year before, and some of the victims were Black veterans still in uniform. Aliens, dissenter, suspected radicals – all were widely distrusted and became targets of mob violence.

The “Red Summer” of 1919

If the heightened expectations of postwar African-Americans could not be reversed, neither could the increasing conservatism of the larger society. Something had to give. When expectations collided with reality, the result was a summer of violence and bloodshed – what the NAACP’s James Weldon Johnson called “the Red Summer.” Twenty-five towns and cities were involved. It was the worst year for racial violence in American history and would be until the 1960s.

The riots broke out in both North and South, but they had a number of commonalities. Most were triggered by an incident (or rumor) involving a Black person and a White person, often a Black male and a White female. But in most cases, the underlying cause was White resentment at working with or competing with Blacks for housing and jobs. Some half a million Blacks had migrated North during the war years. Many Southern Whites had also migrated, for the same reasons. They were by no means ready to work side-by-side with a person of color. Clashes were inevitable. In Longview, Texas, White residents were infuriated when they discovered that a local lynching had been reported in the Black newspaper, the Chicago Defender. A mob formed to loot Black-owned businesses and attack Black residents, four of whom were killed. Other riots erupted in Knoxville, Tennessee; Washington, D.C.; and Millen, Georgia, with comparable loss of life.

In Chicago, tension was building on the borders of the Black enclave on the city’s South Side, as Black families moved into previously all-White neighborhoods. An estimated 50,000 African-Americans had moved to the city between 1910 and 1920, and White residents were threatening to “bomb them out.” This threat was carried out against the homes of 58 African-Americans who attempted to leave their overcrowded neighborhoods. The Chicago riot began on a hot July day at the segregated 29th Street Beach on the South Side. The dividing line down the middle of the beach extended into Lake Michigan. During the course of the day, July 27, a 15-year-old Black swimmer accidentally crossed the line and was stoned by Whites. The youth drowned. When Blacks demanded that the offenders be arrested, the police tried to arrest the Black protesters. Unfounded rumors spread through the city as White youths gathered at so-called athletic clubs from which they headed out to attack unwary Blacks in the downtown area, many returning home from work outside the Black neighborhoods. The city was in the grip
A Chicago policeman kneels beside a Black man beaten in the July 1919 race riots.

3. The commission recommended closing the “athletic clubs” - hangouts used by White rioters as headquarters to coordinate their attacks on innocent citizens.

4. The city government was called upon to upgrade living conditions in African-American neighborhoods. Areas of concern included construction of more schools to end half-day classes at some overcrowded sites. The commission also called for an end to discrimination, desegregation of public facilities, the upgrading of city services in Black neighborhoods, and stricter enforcement of housing and building codes to make dwellings safer.

5. Interestingly, the report blamed the riots in part on a growing sense of “race consciousness” (read “Black Pride”) on the part of African-Americans. The commissioners noted that Black people seemed to be more sensitive to racial insults than they had been in the past; this “racial chip” on their shoulders had contributed to the climate of violence. Instrumental in this change of attitude was Marcus Garvey, founder of the United Negro Improve-
ment Association (UNIA) and a charismatic champion of negritude and Pan-Africanism.

**Marcus Mosiah Garvey, 1887-1940**

Jamaica-born Marcus Garvey is considered the founder of modern-day revolutionary Black Nationalism. A man who spoke no African languages and never set foot on the African continent did more to champion the cause of Pan-Africanism than anyone before or since. He built the largest all-Black civil rights organization in the world on the twin concepts of Black unity and racial pride. Garvey glorified everything Black, from history and culture to physical features. His newspaper, *The Negro World*, accepted no advertisements for what he called "race-degrading" products, including skin lighteners and hair straighteners.

Marcus Garvey arrived in the United States early in 1916, bringing with him the United Negro Improvement Association, which he had founded in Jamaica in 1914. He had read Booker T. Washington’s autobiography *Up From Slavery* (and was eager to meet the author, unaware that Washington had died in late 1915). Garvey settled in New York City’s Harlem and traveled the country to convince Black people that they would never enjoy equality until they founded their own nations, industries, and businesses. By 1920 the UNIA claimed nearly two million Black members rallied by the cry “Back to Africa,” including people of African descent in Europe, the Caribbean, and other parts of the world. It was the largest international civil rights organization of its kind, and in 1920, it held a 31-day international conclave at Madison Square Garden that proclaimed a formal declaration of Rights for Blacks all over the world.

Garvey’s success won him many enemies, and his stay in America was relatively short. Many Black leaders distrusted his rhetoric and his motives. His grandiose business ventures, including the Black Star steamship line, floundered in financial difficulties. His plan for the repatriation of Blacks to
the African state of Liberia came to grief when the state withdrew its support, fearing a Garvey takeover. His criticism of the federal and New York State governments led to charges of mail fraud in 1923. Convicted in 1925, he was sentenced to the federal penitentiary in Atlanta but was released two years later and deported to his native Jamaica. Bickering with the Harlem branch of the UNIA and the onset of the Great Depression brought his program to an end, and he died in England in 1940, still trying to resurrect his organization and his dreams.

The Harlem Renaissance, 1919-1930

The period from the end of World War I to the financial collapse of 1929 saw the nation's first celebration of African-American culture: "the Harlem Renaissance." In fact, it was a birth rather than a rebirth, but since the word Renaissance also implies vigorous artistic and intellectual activity, the term is fitting. Never before had Black culture been taken so seriously, as African-Americans began to benefit from greater mobility, leisure, and educational opportunities. Literature, music, the theater arts - all were enriched by new or newly-recognized contributions from the Black community.

The Harlem Renaissance was an urban movement centered in New York City, the nation's cultural capital.
Spurred on by the debates of Du Bois and Washington, Black intellectuals had become recognizable as a group and were turning to Black culture as a source of solidarity and pride. Musicians like Edward Kennedy "Duke" Ellington and Louis "Satchmo" Armstrong were creating and refining jazz, and William Christopher (W. C.) Handy was composing such classics as "Beale Street Blues" and "Saint Louis Blues." Bessie Smith and other singers brought up on Gospel music took the new sound to a wider audience. Eubie Blake and Noble Sissle made their marks in the world of musical entertainment.

Black writers of the Harlem School were taking indigenous themes and voices that ensured their places in American literature. In 1926 poet Langston Hughes urged fellow Black writers to stop imitating Whites and express themselves honestly. Author Alain Locke called for a literature of art instead of propaganda. Locke's essay The New Negro set the tone for the era.

Suddenly, it was fashionable for White New Yorkers to spend an evening
uptown in Harlem. Clubs like the Savoy, Small's Paradise, and the Cotton Club catered to White patrons. Composer George Gershwin captured the new awareness of Black America in his acclaimed folk opera *Porgy and Bess*.

On the American stage, actor, singer, and activist Paul Robeson won renown for his work. A graduate of Rutgers University and Columbia University School of Law, he played the male lead in Eugene O'Neill's *All God's Chillun Got Wings* (1924). It was the first time a Black actor had played such a part opposite a White actress. A year later Robeson scored a triumph in O'Neill's *Emperor Jones*. He also made African-American music widely known through his concerts. Ethel Waters was beginning her legendary career on the stage and other noted entertainers of the decade included Bill "Bojangles" Robinson, who costarred in numerous Shirley Temple films, and classical singer Roland Hayes.
Black education and scholarship were also on the ascendant. Carter G. Woodson's Association for the Study of Negro Life and History, founded in 1916, was publishing the Journal of Negro History, which still exists today. Anthropologist Zora Neale Hurston wrote about people of African descent in Jamaica and Haiti.

Many accomplishments of the Renaissance period have survived to the present. Unfortunately, much of the movement's fervor abated during the Depression years, only to revive in 1940 with the powerful writings of Richard Wright and Claude McKay, and with such compelling singers as Ella Fitzgerald.

The Great Depression, 1930-1940

The worst economic calamity in the nation's history began with the stockmarket collapse of October 1929 and eclipsed all previous depressions in its duration and severity. By this time, millions more were part of the urban-based industrial society, totally dependent on weekly wages for the necessities of life. Hunting, fishing and farming could help feed a hungry family in rural areas, but the urban factory worker was at the mercy of the economy.

For African-Americans the situation was even more critical. "Last hired and first fired" was the attitude of many employers toward Black workers. This was due in part to the fact that Whites took many jobs - the dirtiest, most dangerous, and lowest-paid - formerly held by Blacks. Faced with losing their livelihoods, many White workers gladly accepted such jobs, with the result that Black unemployment in some cities was over 70 percent. The Chicago Defender warned its readers to "head for the country before the snow flies." The great Northern migration stalled to a halt during the 1930s. There simply were no jobs.

To make matters even worse, there were no federal programs in place to cushion the initial shock of the Great Depression. There was, for example, no federal insurance on bank deposits; the prosperous 1920s had given the nation a false sense of security. Specu-
presidency. His promise of a “New Deal” had a strong appeal for African-Americans, and the appointment of several highly visible Black advisors, known as the “Black Cabinet,” was decisive in the Big Switch of Depression politics.

Roosevelt’s unofficial Black Cabinet was under the leadership of Mary McLeod Bethune, the youngest of 15 children born to ex-slave parents in South Carolina in 1875. She had received an education through a Quaker benefactor and became a teacher in Sumter, South Carolina, after attending the Moody Bible Institute in Chicago. She married Albertus Bethune and made a name for herself as a woman committed to the well-being of young people in both teaching and government service. President Roosevelt appointed her Director of the Negro Affairs Division of the National Youth Administration in 1935. She also directed the new Office of Minority Affairs. Later she helped found Bethune-Cookman College in Daytona Beach, Florida.

Few members of the Black Cabinet were politicians. Robert L. Vann edited the African-American newspaper, the Pittsburgh Courier. Other members included William Hastie of Howard University; Robert Weaver; Eugene Kinckle Jones of the Urban League; and Frank S. Horne, a poet, all of them committed to increasing Black participation in government. Other African-Americans were employed in a variety of fields and departments. In fact, the number of Blacks employed by the federal government rose from 50,000 at Roosevelt’s first election in 1932 to nearly 200,000 by the end of World War II. In short, Roosevelt helped African-Americans fight the Depression in a very concrete way—with jobs. As a result, the number of African-Americans voting Democratic rose with each presidential election after 1932. When Roosevelt was elected for an unprecedented fourth term in 1944, the switch was complete. Blacks have given most of their votes to Democratic candidates ever since. In trying to win back the Black vote, the Republicans have had to liberalize many of their policies.
The World War II Years and Their Aftermath

By the late 1930s, both Germany and Japan had embarked on courses of conquest and the international scene was ominous. When war broke out in Europe in 1939, U.S. industry experienced a revival that became a massive war effort after Japan attacked the U.S. naval base at Pearl Harbor, Hawaii, on December 7, 1941. With remarkable speed and determination, the nation mobilized.

Despite the national need for manpower and womanspower in the defense effort, Blacks were still subject to discrimination. The armed services wanted to enlist them on the basis of their percentage in the population. Companies with defense contracts continued to discriminate against them in both hiring and promotion. In fact, the situation was little changed from that of World War I. Blacks had to threaten the government with protest demonstrations to end bias in war-related industries. A. Philip Randolph, founder and president of the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters and Maids, threatened to lead a march of 100,000 to the nation's capital unless something was done. President Roosevelt finally
issued an executive order banning discrimination in war-related industries. Once again, Black members of the armed forces acquitted themselves admirably. While most American planes never got off the ground during the attack on Pearl Harbor, Black Navy cook Dorie Miller, of the battleship U.S.S. Arizona, manned a machine gun and shot down four Japanese planes. He was awarded the Navy Cross. Blacks who wanted to fly fighter planes complained that they were barred from training programs with White pilots. In 1940 the War Department agreed to set up a flight school for African-American pilots at Tuskegee, Alabama. A total of 82 such pilots received the Distinguished Flying Cross. For the first time, Black men were accepted into the Marine Corps and Black women into the WAVES (Women Accepted for Volunteer Emergency Service), a branch of the U.S. Navy. Over 1,000,000 African-American men and women were inducted into the armed forces during the war. Of that number approximately 500,000 served overseas. For the first time in any war, African-Americans served in all branches of the armed services including the Coast Guard; they also entered the Merchant Marine. As in World War I, many were assigned to non-combat duties, while others saw combat and won medals for bravery from their country and its allies.

On the down side, the nation suffered its worst race riot of the century to that point. African-American migration had reached unprecedented numbers in the wake of labor shortages in war-related industries. Housing had become a critical issue, along with tension at the workplace, between Black and White workers. In June 1943, a race riot erupted in Detroit, at a park on the Detroit River. When the violence finally subsided, 34 persons were dead.

Postwar Changes
The end of World War II saw permanent change in many areas of American life. The migration of African-Americans from the rural South to urban areas, especially in the North, had resumed after the lull caused by the Great Depression. The 1950 census reported net 10-year Black emigration from the South at 1.6 million.
Black population went from some 220,000 in 1940 to more than 300,000 by 1950. Chicago had 233,000 residents of African descent in 1940 and almost 500,000 a decade later. The war years had continued the process of turning the Black population from a rural proletariat into an urban industrial working class. By the 1950s Blacks were more educated and better paid than at any time before, especially in the North. They were more sophisticated and knowledgeable about the world beyond the United States. Black veterans of two wars had helped create an international perspective for all the residents of the community.

While life in the cities offered more opportunities, it was creating a new Black culture. Urban Blacks still found themselves living in Black ghettos — not necessarily in run-down housing, but with few choices outside the Black
neighborhoods. On the other hand, such large concentrations of Blacks had unexpected benefits. The Black communities in many Northern cities had grown big enough to create predominately Black congressional districts. By the mid-1950s there were Black representatives in Congress from New York City, Chicago, and Detroit. Debate among the various civil rights organizations looked toward removing the legal barriers to the ending of segregation.

The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People had become the premier civil rights organization by the fifth decade of the century. It decided to make an all-out assault on de jure (by law) segregation. After years of attacking the doctrine of "separate but equal," NAACP lawyers were encouraged when the U.S. Supreme Court asked to re-hear five school segregation cases first heard in 1942. On May 17, 1954, by a unanimous 9 to 0 vote, the Supreme Court ruled that "separate but equal" educational facilities were "inherently unequal" and that segregation was unconstitutional. This decision in the case of Brown v. Board of Education (of Topeka, Kansas) overturned the doctrine that had legitimized segregation since the Plessy decision of 1896.
ABOVE: Blacks line up outside the Supreme Court Building on the day in 1952 when the Court is scheduled to begin hearing some suits that challenge school segregation. One of them is Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka.