

Waking from the Dream—by David L. Chappell, University of Oklahoma

The civil rights movement [or post-WWII phase of the Af-Am freedom struggle] is one of the most fertile fields of scholarship. Every year, more books and articles get published on the subject than even the most diligent and unemployed specialist can keep up with.¹ The relationship of the movement to the present keeps changing in more disruptive and demanding ways than with most fields of history, even recent history.² Court cases create a market for interpretations of the past, as do the gestures of professional activists, candidates, and advertisers. Hardly a year goes by without a major film treatment.³

Yet at the heart of all this abundance is an absence. There is a lot of historical writing, but precious little historiography in the sense of distinct interpretive choices, staked out by experts. There are no camps to define where scholars stand and help readers make sense of the friction between contending authorities.⁴ The main tendencies of interpretation are handed down from prof to student, it would appear, more out of habit than conscious choice among carefully cultivated alternatives. There have been intelligent efforts at revisionism.⁵ But these have not caught on. There is no debate. Or none about the basic premises and outlines of the story that trickles down from the ivory tower to the textbook-publishers and PBS. We've had Kuhnian normal science w/o a significant wrinkle for 3 decades.

The field is ripe for debate. I'll gnaw only the most obvious bone of potential contention, the questionable but unquestioned assumption of continuity. With scarcely an exception, scholars in the field have long asserted a strong continuity between the struggle of the 60s and the "backlash" of later years.⁶ To question this might yield fruitful innovations of analysis and interpretation. I offer 4 modest starting points (5 if time).

I. Perhaps most fundamental: the two major goals of the post-WWII movement, electoral power and desegregation, came into surprising conflict. Until 1970 or so, both goals were part of the same strategy. But as re-enfranchisement paid off with large numbers of Black Elected Officials, especially in big cities, the logic of the two quests diverged: BEOs, seeking to hold and increase their power, opposed suburban annexation, which they saw—often rightly—as a conservative and/or racist strategy to dilute black voting power. But desegregators—of schools and neighborhoods—saw “white flight” directly undo their accomplishments and doom future integration experiments to failure (since tax dollars went with the flight, and college-educated black parents fled too). They favored annexation to halt the flight or to put escapees within busing range.

II. The liberal-conservative divide that defined movement politics, and the related Dem-GOP divide, crisscrossed and blurred so much as to become unrecognizable. By the late 1960s, outright racist opposition to civil rights virtually disappeared from political rhetoric: black voting power became formidable in precisely those places once dominated by racist politicians. Opposition to the now trans-regional civil rights movement quickly became bipartisan (it had been led and dominated by Dems till the mid-1960s). As it did, it became transideological. In scattered instances, right-wingers peddled J.E. Hoover’s line of King’s communist associations. But that smelled too much of esoteric paranoia for the smart money in the opposition. Pragmatic opponents of the movement pitched a big tent on the ground of revulsion with civil disobedience, which they said bred disrespect for the law and encouraged violence, either wittingly or irresponsibly.⁷ (This had a significant kernel of honesty in it: King and others openly avowed that they sought to bring the inherent tensions and violence of a racist order “to the surface.”)

Many fair-weather supporters of the movement—liberals—turned against it for law and order. George Wallace campaigned on that slogan—which he had denounced years earlier as “a communist term” (L&A was a term that civil rights supporters rallied around, remember, in the days of Massive Resistance.) Perhaps some racists took the slogan as a coded promise for some vestigial face-saving concession to “white” folk.⁸ But many northern Democrats—New Dealers, trade unionists, etc.--as well as Nixon and Agnew, campaigned for law and order.⁹ Wallace picked up a lot of Bobby Kennedy supporters (as did Nixon). A majority of Wallace voters in key states named Humphrey (the candidate of unions and welfare-statists), not Nixon, as their second choice.

The last season of riots ('68) shows how ideologically open law & order was. In major cities—all but three by my count—mayors and police chiefs,¹⁰ notably the Republican Lindsay (he did not switch to Dem till 1971) essentially heeded the Kerner Commission's warning against shows of excessive police force¹¹ (and other recommendations). The rioting in April 1968 was surprisingly minor—everywhere but Chicago, Baltimore, and Kansas City (where mostly Democratic and one Republican official rejected Kerner with varying degrees of bombast, and in doing so appeared to prove it right), and Washington DC (where black liberal mayor Walter Washington, aided by singer James Brown and others, was unable to contain the outbursts largely initiated by the former Chairman of SNCC, Stokely Carmichael).¹² Even Richard J. Daley's own police chief objected to—and contravened--the Mayor's order to shoot to kill.¹³

Liberal-conservative lines became even more unsustainable when Nixon—who had a more liberal record on civil rights than Adlai Stevenson or Jack Kennedy in the 1950s, and much black support--began surfing the waves of partisan realignment. He

chose Spiro Agnew (who took credit for the crackdown in Baltimore)¹⁴ to anchor his campaign in fear of urban unrest, and later Clarence Kelley (who was responsible for police provocations in KC) as his FBI Chief.¹⁵ Scholars see in this a continuation of southern massive resistance to black rights, a bid for the old resisters' votes.

More plausible evidence of Nixon's racial manipulation—more decisive for those who accuse Nixon of carrying old segregationist water--is his turn against busing, which had first been ordered by his own appointee, Warren Burger (writing for a unanimous court in 1971). Whatever Nixon's motives, a racial campaign must also be judged by its results. To turn against busing did not do the political trick that Nixon—let alone subsequent Republicans--needed it to do.

Busing died out—but not from white backlash alone.¹⁶ One reason it died is that black parents often came out in huge, vocal numbers against it. Nationwide polls showed a majority of black voters for busing, but as w/ white voters, support appears to drop sharply when their own children are involved. Part of black opposition was fear of other people's racism—a complex thing that needs to be explored if we are ever to get a grip on how racial institutions and divisions persist: in my research on segregationism, I found white southerners insisting, as early as the 1940s, “I have nothing against black people, but you know, there are a lot of backward rednecks whose prejudices will explode in violence, which will only hurt the Negro.” There's much in subsequent events to vindicate such fears. But it is also clear that racism got a long extension on its lease from people who, if we take them at their word, feared not black people but white racists.¹⁷ (We have no way of knowing their sincerity. Scholarly discipline would dictate neutrality. If that won't do the trick, the parallel to black opposition to busing should.)

Part of black opposition was cultural nationalism, which had a long history. Most white people thought it was in remission or decline after Brown, but it came back with a vengeance by 1968. Part of it was simply pragmatic skepticism about investing in long-term gambles like desegregation; their limited capital could purchase more certain gains for their children by improving their present schools immediately.¹⁸

Scholars talk about wedge issues, but don't follow through. Effective wedges split ideological clumps and allow new, different clumps to form. Nixon's political masterpiece was affirmative action. Initiated by LBJ and strongly supported by M.L. King, the policy was soon abandoned by LBJ because it clearly violated the 1964 civil rights act.¹⁹ Nixon had great reasons to revive it. He could force Democrats to support his initiatives—indeed adroitly induce them to start taking credit for them--or face reduced black turnout in close districts. Thus he drove a wedge between the Democrats and the increasingly hard-pressed white “ethnic” voters. Those voters felt betrayed by Democrats and by “limousine liberals” who, they believed, supported social polices and evaded their burdens—as they had done by sending their own kids to suburban and private schools.

The GOP had other reasons to create affirmative action: party leaders were desperate to reduce riots and other urban crime. This was a cheap way to do that—and to blame the injustice on Democrats (or more often, unelected judges). People are surprised to learn that Wm F Buckley, for his own reasons, initially endorsed “reverse discrimination.” Soon the military brass and corporate boardrooms supported affirmative action (see briefs in MI cases), which pays off in recruitment and marketing.²⁰ (While we're on the military, it may not exactly be evidence of discontinuity, but it certainly is a surprise, that the biggest, if not the only significant, engine of successful post-1960s integration

was this institution that King and other civil rights veterans denounced in 1968.) All that aside, it is hard to imagine so much emphasis on affirmative action at the time Nixon launched it without its having the added benefit of splitting the Great Society coalition.

When Nixon's conservative southern appointee Lewis Powell rescued affirmative action in its first major challenge in 1978, he circumvented the legal ban on it with an entirely novel justification—a state interest in “diversity.” This was in many ways inconsistent with the original justification of LBJ and MLK. Diversity's selling point was, it made education a richer, more realistic experience for white people. Practical aid to people who were actually crippled by generations of race-specific deprivation was off the table.

After some delay and confusion, black papers and black opinion generally rallied to the Bakke doctrine—a southern conservative judge's repackaging of Richard Nixon's policy. The NAACP was in some sense rescued by it: that organization, battered by competition from more fashionable groups in the 1960s, legal troubles, debt, declining membership, and a long-deferred succession struggle, revived.

III: Organizational Style, Constituencies, and Programs. That may be the most surprising discontinuity: the lumbering old dinosaur of bureaucratic incrementalism is the civil rights group left standing in the '80s. The NAACP's postwar competitors, CORE, SCLC, SNCC, Panthers, NWRO all swiftly died or shrunk to mere formalities by the early 70s.²¹ [NUL survives too, even less influenced by the '50s-60s mass movement than the NAA.] There is a major theme in news coverage of the NAACP in the 1970s and early 1980s that historians have left unexamined, but also speaks to the question of continuity: its increased financial dependence on corporate donors rather than its members. Everyone in 1st Reconstruction history notes the corporate hijack of the most

powerful tool of black liberation, the 14th Amendment. No one in 2nd Recon history as far as I know even asks the question. The NAA also makes a much more definitive break w/ the labor movement in the 1970s, I believe, than it ever did before.

The NAA pulled a new coalition from the jaws of “diversity”—quite distinct from the one ML King & Geo Wiley envisioned. Unlike King’s poor minorities, always hard to mobilize, the new coalition was eager, upwardly mobile, and even affluent people who could claim some legal connection to such a minority, plus the majority group, women. (Black beneficiaries in education were already within inches of admission to target schools—precisely those who least needed aid, increasingly the offspring of college-trained parents. The picture in the labor market is more complicated.²²)

Meanwhile, a number of deeply committed liberals, including black people with unimpeachable left credentials like Bayard Rustin and William Julius Wilson, complained that affirmative action was at best a diversion & waste of scarce political capital.²³ Affirmative action supporters dishonestly wrote off these and other deviations from the party line as “neo-conservative.” Scholars have since generally followed that invidious usage, defining affirmative action as liberal and opposition as conservative, full stop.

The broader economic program of the civil rights movement—guaranteed income, full employment, increased school funding—was lost. The focus of organized struggle for racial reform in the 1980s was defense and expansion of affirmative action policies that left the worst victims of racism (the poor)—who were practically the sole focus of SCLC in 1968—largely unaffected. [The Black Caucus unsuccessfully pushed some of the old agenda. We might discuss that in the Q&A, along w/ racial redistricting.]

The NAA promoted the soon widespread perception that attacks on affirmative action were attacks on black people. The kernel of honesty here was that affirmative action was the only gesture that the Democratic party was consistently willing--or able--to make in return for black votes.²⁴ The NAA's tactic was shrewd: one of the lessons of the 1970s was that the only way to unify empowered black people was to attack them.

The NAACP—aided by periodic Democratic efforts to boost black turnout—isolated and exaggerated the GOP's racist imagery, especially Reagan's Neshoba County line about state rights—a complex, unexamined problem I can say more about in the Q & A. The biggest example scholars posit after Neshoba County was the Willie Horton ad in 1988. Whether that ad had the racial effect of scaring white voters away from Dukakis is unclear. What is clear is something that historians almost never acknowledge: the partisan provenance of the ad. People who ought to know better are often surprised to learn that the first person to use the Willie Horton ad was not Roger Ailes or Lee Atwater but Al Gore.²⁵ How can race-baiting be an exclusively GOP game?

IV: Positive Mass mobilization: The key feature of the 1950s-early 1960s, a mass movement in the streets, was not sustained. The important distinction between the movement and the rioting (which scholars see as its continuation—an assumption that's hard to make w/o racism) is not that the latter is violent but that it is disorganized and fleeting. To the extent that masses mobilized in the 70s, they did so around leaders, especially Jesse Jackson. Historians have devoted more ink to divorcing charismatic leadership (and nationally prominent organizations) from the mass upsurge of the 50s-60s than to any other interpretive point. A major faction in SNCC had tried to eradicate the historic association of social movements with charismatic leaders; historians have drunk that

faction's cool aid. Aldon Morris (following Weber) showed that charismatic leaders can flourish in symbiosis with, rather than at the expense of, mass movements.²⁶ But the question soon became—when so many black leaders were responsible to constituents in elections—whether anybody could square the circle of institutionalizing such leadership. Black leaders—elected and non--were far more devoted to institutionalizing black power than mobilizing masses in the 1970s. That's among the starkest contrasts to the 50s-60s.

The CBC and National BI Political Conventions (1972 and 1974) were only two of the crusades for the new grail of institutionalizing the momentum of the mass movement of the 1960s. Actor Ossie Davis used his own charisma to try to wean supporters from dependence on leaders when he told the crowd assembled for the founding of the CBC, "It's not the rap, it's the map; it's not the man, it's the plan." But Jesse Jackson, acclaimed as King's heir by the media but also (after a while) by polling data and the crowds he alone could draw at rally after rally, stole the show of the two NBPCs, and soon stole other shows. (His message was, in effect, it is not the plan, and I am the man.)

More than any figure, Jackson galvanized masses in the 1970s and 1980s. And more than Nixon or Reagan, he made a hash of ideological continuity: Within weeks of the 1973 Roe decision, Jackson announced that abortion was murder—and soon added that liberals' effort to insure Medicaid funding of abortions a strategy to destroy black political power. Jackson repeatedly called himself "conservative" later in the decade and hinted to Republicans that he would bring millions of black Democrats over to them if they played ball. He endorsed Bob Dole in his 1980 Senate race. Not to be outdone, Eldridge Cleaver returned to the US as a conservative born-again Christian in 1976, who went on tour w/his new friend Chuck Colson, Nixon's former lawyer and hatchet-man.

CORE's Roy Innis made headlines supporting the causes of Idi Amin, Jonas Savimbi, Trent Lott, and subway vigilante Bernhard Goetz. Ralph Abernathy, Hosea Williams, and Charles Evers—heir to the other civil rights martyr of the 1960s—all endorsed Reagan in 1980. (Abernathy, interestingly, was one of the few civil rights leaders who had broken with the NAACP to oppose Powell's nomination.)

While old veterans of the anti-civil rights movement (Faubus, Wallace, John Satterfield, Rev. Criswell, John Stennis, etc.²⁷) in various ways made their peace with civil rights—often campaigning for and winning black votes—black veterans of the movement had changed, too. We need to acknowledge their irreducible, indomitable variety too.

V: Ideological continuity is also a matter of manufactured memory—a pre-occupation that has lately begun to soak into civil rights history, but again without diluting the assumption of continuity. You find more historians bitterly citing right-wing appropriation of a deradicalized King than you find actual conservatives appropriating him. Wm Bradford Reynolds did—with transparent dishonesty--invoke King's ghost to support his “color blind” attack on affirmative action. (It's not a simple lie, since by then the constitutional justification, the coalition of beneficiaries, and the cultural appeal of affirmative action are radically different from the affirmative action that King supported. Reynolds lied. But his critics have not retaliated with complete honesty, as they pretend that affirmative action is the same as it was in King's day.) At any rate, conservatives never relied on their “color-blind” King as much as scholars like to pretend: they had far more crowd-pleasing arguments against affirmative action than that. (The anti-abortion movement was the real “conservative” appropriation of King, joined by some of King's family as well as Jackson, for a time. Again more on this if anyone's interested in Q&A.)

More significant is the public memory of King's most prominent black enemies, who go almost completely unexamined in the literature. The Nation of Islam underwent a radical change in 1975—and began to rehabilitate King. Till then, the NOI called King a race traitor & Uncle Tom. Louis Farrakhan soon broke with the NOI, which obligingly changed its name (to World Community of al-Islam in the West) in time for Farrakhan to start a new “Nation of Islam”—which resuscitated Elijah Muhammad's racism and loopy romantic faith in gunplay.²⁸ By all accounts, Farrakhan took only a small fraction of the original NOI with him. (W.D. Muhammad's increasingly orthodox Islam has been far more popular among black Americans who identify as Muslims: they understood W.D. as a disciple of a true hero, Malcolm X—the only rival that Elijah had denounced more bitterly than King.) Though the most prominent black Muslim celebrities—Kareem Abdul-Jabar and Muhammad Ali—publicly denounced Farrakhan, he still appeared in the media as “the black Muslim leader,” as though he were the only one. Even when Farrakhan was supposedly under scrutiny for his association with Jesse Jackson, the press conveyed the impression that he represented most black Muslims. As far as I know, no scholar of civil rights in the 1970s has challenged that picture. Farrakhan made things more complicated when he, too, twenty years after the main group of Muslims, began to rehabilitate King: he claimed King as a brother and fellow “martyr to truth” in his Million Man March in 1995, self-consciously modeled on King's MOW.

The Black Panthers had likewise denounced King as a sissy and a coward when he was alive. But their members began to claim King's mantle—in life as in death, King was far more popular among the black masses than any “militant” had been. Panthers needed his cachet. In 1990, Panthers attempted a revival in Milwaukee by marching to

lengthen Martin Luther King drive all the way across town. They built a shrine to King in their office--on King Drive--flanked by shrines to Huey Newton and Malcolm X, both of whom spent much of their lives denouncing King. (Malcolm calmed down a bit and made steps towards King near the end of his own life. That's another historical development that most scholars misrepresent, which we can address in Q&A.)

In light of all this, a striking discontinuity of scholarly method raises a final question about the pervasive assumption of continuity. The literature on civil rights in the 1950s and early 1960s has been driven above all by a focus on "grassroots" activism: on the black people who organized and took to the streets. But the literature on what became of that struggle in the politics of the 1970s-1980s focuses almost entirely on white people.²⁹ I wonder whether the whole assumption of continuity might evaporate as soon as we start seeing that black Americans—in electoral politics, street activism, or both—who were never united behind the famous strategies of the 1950s-60s to begin with, did not simply remain as they were. They adapted, reconsidered, regrouped: like any other people, they had and have a history, and their history involves as much change as continuity. If the post-1960s GOP gains its dynamism and spectacular growth from racial reactionaries, we need to look at what they were reacting against before we can say we understand them.

If time remains: Why is there no debate?³⁰ I am very tentative about this, based on off-hand comments made by scholars I have asked. Usually the fear seems to be that if a scholar goes down this road, he is apologizing for racism, underestimating its persistence, failing to be part of the solution, denying that black people struggle on today, &c &c. Let me be clear: my view is that racism is to this day a lot more pervasive than most people of any ideology or party admit. I believe we live in a racist society, and that in many ways, for poor black people, the effects of racism have gotten worse since the 1960s, not better. Racism played a key role in the politics of the 1970s and 1980s, in my view.

Where I differ with most of my colleagues, it seems to me, is that I think that most historians (who, like me, place themselves on the left) underestimate racism by restricting it first to southerners and lower-class Archie-bunker types; second, to “conservatives”; third to post-1960s Republicans, especially those who fled the southern Democratic party and/or the cities at the time; and finally to white people. It seems to me, you are as likely to find a racist on the opposite side of those four divisions: again to assume any correlations is to assume we can gauge people’s motives a lot better than I think we can. A supporter of racial redistricting and affirmative action, for example, is as likely to be a racist as an opponent—there are racist reasons for doing both. We cannot read minds and motives most of the time, especially not with statistical lumps like these. There’s no reason—other than our own prejudices, our own allegiances—to believe that the racism has aligned the way we wish, with all the racism on the side of our enemies. That’s what seems to me to be at stake in all the assertions of continuity: we have to keep up the fight against the enemy, scholars believe, and it simplifies matters if the enemy is the same enemy as it was in the good old days, when racism was so simple and clear you didn’t have to be a scholar to discern its presence.

In that light, the linchpin on which all the assumptions of continuity swing may be the one big underlying assumption of discontinuity, which seems even more pervasive: that racism was simple back then. Historians can distill few general truths from their years of training and research, but I bet we’d agree on this one: things were never simple. My work on white supremacist strategy and propaganda and black religious mobilization against them has certainly taught me that although racism has changed, it has not become more sophisticated or subtle--any more than people have become smarter and more capable of complex thought. Racism was always bristling with subtleties and contradictions, with seemingly infinite variations and overtones. Racists made alliances of convenience and principle that made them as interesting—if not as likable—as any other conglomeration of human beings who left a historical record behind.

To return to seemingly disengaged and even formulaic discussion of things like continuity and discontinuity—the sort of thing historians in less glamorous fields still have time for—would shake up the (occasionally self-righteous) complacency that has settled over the field. I think historians can do that sort of thing better, qua historians, than we do the sort of sublimated activism that often appears to drive us. I hasten to add I am something of a sublimated activist myself, and have no ideological quarrel with the goals passionately sought by my distinctly egalitarian and anti-racist colleagues. The problem is, I became a historian largely because I think activists and armchair activists alike are susceptible to comforting illusions. The illusion that the movement is still in progress—that it has not suffered a severe decline from internal as well as external causes; that all of the flaws and all of the evil are on the other side; that anything that’s bad must also be racist, etc.—makes for ineffectual activism. I don’t claim to have all the truth—but I do claim that disagreeing more openly and vigorously about these things would make better—more interesting as well as more accurate—history. And that will be our only chance to give activists something they may need and do not already have enough of.

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WAKING FROM THE DREAM

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NOTES

(Will supply additional documentation: a fuller version of the above points will appear in chapters 1-3 of my book, *Waking from the Dream: The Battle over Martin Luther King's Legacy*.)

¹ It's hard to name a major American university that lacks an authority on the subject. Many universities in the British Isles and Oceania, plus some notable ones on the European Continent and Japan, have full-time specialists in American civil rights. The topic crosses disciplinary borders even more promiscuously than national ones: the best works are often published by professional journalists and freelance writers, law school professors, div school and "religious studies" profs, political scientists, sociologists, musicologists, and English profs. Dozens of accessible archives keep these scholars busy, and new sources get discovered or declassified every year.

² Key movement veterans are not only alive but regularly attend history conferences.

³ Not to mention TV specials commemorating the irrepressible anniversaries of movement milestones.

There have been Martin Luther King plays and musicals, and a Malcolm X Opera. Living jazz classics from Mingus, Sonny Rollins, Abbey Lincoln and Max Roach keep serious listeners and players engaged with the movement's deep currents, if they aren't part of the standard repertoire. Pop musicians from Public Enemy to Stevie Wonder, from Beyonce to U2, Nina Simone to Bob Dylan, and even Dion (bereft of the Belmonts) DiMucci have performed and recorded songs about the movement.

All this keeps up a constant commerce between academic and mass cultures, with key civil rights scholars achieving a quasi-celebrity status in the media.

⁴ There are certainly patterns of interpretation and widely shared assumptions. But these are shared because they are unquestioned, it seems, rather than because they have been argued with any persuasive ingenuity or tested by debate and further research. At any rate, they never have been argued against anybody but straw men outside the profession (who are perforce assumed to be immune to 30 yrs of historical writing).

⁵ Fashions do shift: we had a fever for foreign policy (how it influenced and was influenced by civil rights), for example, and now are having a great revival of the old fascination with black violence, or rather black threats of violence (in what civilians still think was a distinctly non-violent movement). But these and other waves of emphasis do no more than embroider the prevailing view that is passed on in textbooks and the perennial commemorations on the History Channel and CNN. Even the most innovative and lushly documented new subfield—suburbanization—hasn't provoked any significant disagreement, or none that has been acknowledged.

There seems at present more ferment at the beginning of the end of Jim Crow—the transition from the focus on labor rights, lynching, and the Poll Tax in the 1930s, through the focus on desegregation of military industry and the armed services in the war, through the focus on a permanent FEPC and military again, and finally the full-scale attack on disfranchisement and segregation in public accommodations and government-controlled institutions, which brought a mass movement into the streets and changed the constitution and laws forever.

But underneath it all the assumption seems barely questioned that *There Is a River* (Vincent Harding's unforgettable metaphor) of black struggling against white, with allies coming over by definition from left or liberal quarters.*

⁶ Not only do the leading scholars believe in continuity, they act as though morality and freedom depend on converting the population to their belief. As fervently as scholars in other fields once railed

against consensus, historians of post-WWII race n' rights now seem to fear any deviation from their consensus.

I would not put Dan Carter and Kevin Kruse in any camp of fanatics or ideologues. They have argued for continuity most aggressively. But when one reads their books closely, they both offer—to their credit—much ammunition for alternative interpretations. No reasonable scholar I know has denied that race played a significant role in the post-1964 regional-partisan realignment. But Carter and Kruse—when pressed for summaries and conclusions—seem to me to give race far more weight than race alone can bear. If historians have learned anything about race, I believe we have learned that Barbara Fields was right in saying racism has no significant “life of its own.” It does not exist in a vacuum, and people—even political candidates—cannot live by racism alone. If you listen carefully to Carter and Kruse, they do not deny the importance of non-racial forces in post-1960s politics. But their pull quotes tend to enable and reinforce a lot of denial.

I'm not sure that's their fault. I think we might all share the fault.

⁷Historians forget—if they ever noticed—that this objection to civil disobedience was the dominant theme in public opposition to the civil rights movement in the months before and after King's death. Rejection of civil disobedience unified liberals and conservatives, North and South, including a significant number of black people who wanted to rein in the direct action movement. By the mid-1970s, conservatives seem to have forgotten this reason to oppose King—perhaps because their own constituencies embraced civil disobedience in their fights against busing and abortion. To anti-abortionists, King and civil rights became positive models.

By the end of the 1970s, very few conservatives criticized King at all: In Congress, only John Ashbrook of Ohio and Larry McDonald of Georgia carried on the Hoover line, stressing fellow-travellers, dupes, and com-sympy close to King. They were also the only ones who carried on the civil-disobedience-breeds-violence-and-anarchy line. The only time King's memory came up for extensive discussion in Congress (other than the 1978 assassination hearings) was during the Holiday debates of 1975, 1979, and 1982-83. Ashbrook and McDonald opposed the holiday on their narrow, esoteric ground, but other conservatives, including Strom Thurmond, conspicuously declined to join them and even appeared to be embarrassed by them.

Opponents of the King holiday stuck almost entirely to two other arguments—implicitly and often explicitly granting that King was a worthy and admirable figure: 1. the holiday would be expensive (during economic crisis, this was perhaps more serious than people now are inclined to believe, especially since many assumed that a whole raft of additional holidays would logically follow as other outcast groups were given their fare share to match the new black holiday); and 2., for all King's gifts and admirable qualities—this was before either his adultery or his plagiarism were widely acknowledged and discussed—his ranking at the level of Columbus, Washington, and Lincoln* had not yet been established by a long-standing popular consensus, and perhaps could not be, for a generation or two more.

(*Interestingly, both sides tacitly agreed not to bring the Jesus/Xmas comparison up.)

Jesse Helms, late to the anti-King game in Congress, picked up the Hooverite anti-King line in the Senate after Ashbrook left office and McDonald was shot down in a Korean airliner in 1983. But by then most Republicans—led by Ben Hooks's friend Howard Baker and Jesse Jackson's old ally Bob Dole—supported the holiday. Prominent sponsors included conservatives like Clarence Thomas's patron John Danforth, Jack Kemp, and others. Ultimately, Strom Thurmond voted for the King holiday. So did former Klansman Robert Byrd. So did Jeremiah Denton, Dan Quayle, Paul Laxalt, Mack Mattingly, John Warner, Thad Cochran, Dick Cheney, Newt Gingrich, Henry Hyde, Ham Fish, Dan Lungren. The Deep South, plus Ark & Va, were nearly unanimous in the Senate for the holiday. Opposition to the Holiday came not from the South but from the West (and NH). (The South's most “progressive” state was arguably NC: it's the one that went unanimously against King. It's also known as one of the worst places for unions in the South, an important connection.) And we see similar patterns in opposition to other civil rights bills in the 1980s—most dramatically in the votes for the civil rights restoration act of 1988 (which passed over Reagan's veto 3/22) and the Fair Housing Act amendments of 1988 (which passed overwhelmingly, w/ the Reagan admin's support: according to the NYT, it finally put “teeth” into the FH Act of 1968). That ought further to confound notions of continuity: it is prima facie plausible to say that many southern segregationists moved to the GOP in the 1970s. But it is prima facie ridiculous to assume they moved to Idaho and Utah.

Even in the West, when Republican renegade Evan Meacham, governor-by-fluke of Arizona, took a last stand against the King holiday, his party—prodded by big business—dumped him quickly. (Business interests had already prevailed in the only places it really mattered, Phoenix and Tempe, which enacted and maintained municipal King holidays in defiance of Meacham’s state policy.) Even before Meacham’s inauguration, a recall campaign was underway against him. Meacham denounced the campaign as the work of disgruntled “homosexuals and democrats,” but in fact prominent Republicans were part of it. Barry Goldwater Sr.—something a demigod in the state—soon joined the anti-Meacham campaign, signaling it was safe for others to join him. His successor in the Senate, John McCain, was among those who did, and within [a year tk] the State had a holiday, a new governor, and the forgiveness of the NFL and millions of dollars worth of other tourism and convention concerns (lifeblood of the state’s main cities).

Republican survivors had other reasons for dumping Meacham, of course. But the move remains an emblem of King’s legacy in the GOP: only renegades on the fringes of the party remained true to the anti-King views of the 1950s-1960s. This was by now a pattern of speedy GOP repudiation of people who let their racism (or racial insensitivity) show in public: Earl Butz, David Duke, Trent Lott, etc.

⁸ Again I am deeply indebted to Dan Carter. He pointed out that George Wallace equated “law and order” with communism. Carter’s biography of Wallace is far less devoted than its sequel to the idea that post-1960s Republicans are Johnny-one-notes, singing *Herrenvolk uber alles*.

Matthew Lassiter makes a compelling case that Nixon never used a “southern strategy” except in the mid-term elections of 1970, when it failed spectacularly: that year the South rejected Nixon’s party and elected Jimmy Carter, Don West, and Dale Bumpers, perhaps the most important turning point in southern politics since 1896. Nixon came back to win a nationwide landslide without racist appeals in 1972. Nobody, to my knowledge, has responded or bothered to acknowledge Lassiter’s careful and interesting case. See Lassiter, *Silent Majority* (2006)

I have a different point: I don’t want to go down the counterfactual road too far, but a wee Gedankenexperiment should undermine the orthodox view of a uniform racist backlash: everybody seems to agree that Humphrey, had he been the 1972 Democratic nominee, would have done much better against Nixon than McGovern in fact did—because Humphrey could still get votes in those lower-middle and working class strongholds that were recently exposed to rioting, and simultaneous increases in taxes, inflation, crime, etc. But HHH had a far higher identification with civil rights than McGovern ever did; indeed, McGovern did not do very well among black voters. (DC Turnout in Nov was lowest in City’s history: WP 11/9/72. McG did best in bl vote in Charlotte & Columbia; but Nixon got 30% bl vote in Louisville: NYT/JCPS: 11/12/72. Real test was of course in primaries: McGov did not do well w/ bl voters when HHH was still in race: see appleNYT 5/18, HarrisChiTrb 5/25 &c.) If the backlash were primarily racial, however, everybody would have to believe that HHH would have done as badly in 1972 or worse than McGovern. And that seems impossible, no?

⁹ It bears noting that Agnew urged the Maryland Congressional delegation to vote for the Fed Open Housing law, a state version of which had been killed by “a small number of” Marylanders (his words) and litigation. He said, had the state bill passed, he would have pushed for its expansion. Now the state’s “major hope” was a federal imposition. *Baltimore Afro*, 4/6/68.

¹⁰ One might even add the Democrat Yorty (he switched to GOP in 1972). Yorty’s case is complex: he had a reputation as a tough, “hard-line” Mayor. What I mean here is that after Watts in Aug 1965, the govts of LA and CA, on the recommendation of the state commission headed by conservative Republican John McCone, anticipated many of the Kerner commission’s findings, except the blame on police. Thus LA implemented various programs, including the Watts Festival, and gave an institutional ear to angry ghetto residents. That Yorty resisted particularly efforts to hold police responsible, and that his positive programs were inadequate and in some cases symbolic, does not obscure the basic point. We should not overestimate either the radical intentions of the Commission—it aimed to do enough to stop violence, not to bring on a millennium of perfect equality and social harmony—or the capacities of urban governments in the late 1960s. In his defense, Yorty said the “weak mayor” structure of his government kept the city from doing even more to placate restive ghetto dwellers (he had no jurisdiction over schools, welfare, or transportation). The LA city council held a series of meetings before King’s assassination to

implement the Kerner recommendations. Liberal and black critics, including Tom Bradley, accused Yorty of “followership”—of not doing anything until Watts, and then of not doing enough. They conceded he had some effective programs to his credit. See Payne & Ratzan, Tom Bradley, 52, 63, 74-5; Mike Davis, City of Quartz: LAT 4/5/68 5/8/68, 5/17/68; Golden in Chi Defender, 4/22/68; the LA Herald-Dispatch, the smaller & more nationalistically inclined of the city’s two major black weeklies, blamed the riots on undisciplined black kids who did not realize they were doing the work of “the man” by indulging in violence—this from columnist Jewell Crosby and columnist/editor Cora Crosby (members of the controlling family, who penned most of the paper’s analysis of unrest and lack thereof in April-May 1968): See Jewell Crosby 4/18/68, 4/20/68, 4/25/68, and 5/2/68 and in later years; Cora Crosby LA H-D, 4/11/68. On McCone, see Borstelmann, Cold War & Color Line (01), 194.

¹¹ Lindsay had been a member of the commission. A surprising number of mayors and police chiefs took the Kerner Commission's report--remembered today by conservatives as a high-water mark of Dr. Spock-induced permissiveness and breakdown of discipline--to heart. The Kerner report, published only a month before King's murder, warned: "the use of excessive force--even the inappropriate display of weapons--may be inflammatory and lead to worse disorder." After the riots, Time observed, "Police and soldiers kept their fingers off the trigger." 4/19/68. The NY Times, however, found fault with this peacekeeping strategy: "there was flagrant looting while policemen merely looked on.... There must not be any police overreaction to violence but there must not be such palpable underreaction to it either. To condone lawbreaking is to encourage it." NYT editorial 4/6/68.

Though Strom Thurmond objected, such relatively conservative organs from the Moody Bible Monthly and Christianity Today embraced the Kerner report as a good beginning.

After the smoke cleared in April 1968, James Farmer, the still-nonviolent former leader of CORE, observed overall that "Police have shown remarkable restraint." Kenneth Clark, the influential black psychologist who had played a key role, and infuriated conservatives, with his testimony in the Brown case, observed: "It seems to me a high-policy decision was made to trade goods and appliances for human lives." He was alluding to the possibility that police restraint, while dampening violence, might have encouraged looters. Farmer & Clark quoted in Time, 4/19/68.

¹² According to the Baltimore Afro's editorial, there was no riot in Baltimore: only property was attacked. The paper defined a riot as collective violence aimed at people. (Apparently it took the human casualties in Baltimore to be bystanders, or perhaps did not consider the white vigilantes, a huge and possibly decisive feature of the Baltimore events, to be rioters.) Afro Lead editorial, 4/20/68.

Carmichael's apologists have denied his role in Washington. There are conflicts in the news accounts. Some papers appear to have exaggerated and distorted Carmichael's actions on the first night, April 5. (On subsequent subsequent dates, accounts are remarkably consistent, however.) Only the Washington Post appears to have had a reporter on the scene with Carmichael on the first night, though perhaps not with him the entire time he was leading a crowd on and around 14th street. I have relied where possible on the Post's coverage. The Post editors made a tremendous effort to detect and correct "bias" against young black men in its coverage. Post editors tried in initial coverage and later analysis to rely on black reporters and editors.

The Post later published a massive investigative report, the best effort at the time to verify and correct the inevitable rumors and misstatements that get reported during riots, and to eliminate the racial bias that the Post (and other major outlets) believed compromised their work in these matters: Ben W. Gilbert et al, Ten Blocks from the White House: Anatomy of the Washington Riots of 1968 (New York: Praeger, 1968). The DC Police conducted many investigations, and the statements they collected are quite revealing—many if not all were passed on (as often happened in urban investigations) to the FBI.

My account is based on all the news coverage I could track down and on three significant packages of investigative materials released to me under the Freedom of Information Act: FBI Main Investigative Files on Stokely Carmichael, HQ 100-446080, vols 39-41 (includes some material released to previous researchers on 2/1/00) (released to me by the FBI Oct. 17, 2005, and March 30, 2006), and FBI case file 146-1-51-19654 sections 40-47 (released to me by NARA Feb. 2006), and further items from the

same file (released to me on appeal by NARA January 2008). Unhelpful materials were also released to me by the CIA on Nov. 17, 2005. The NSA stonewalled and denied appeals for relevant documents it might possess regarding Carmichael's alleged Cuban connections, and the widely alleged leaking of classified information about those connections to key news outlets. (If any reader is interested in sponsoring a lawsuit to get further material, please contact me.)

¹³ Daley complained to a press conference that his orders to his police chief, James Conlisk Jr., "were not carried out." He had told Conlisk "very emphatically and very definitely that an order be issued by him immediately to shoot to kill any arsonist or anyone with a Molotov cocktail in his hand, because they're potential murderers, and to shoot to maim or cripple anyone looting." Daley had intended to spare young looters, ordering only use of mace on them. Among other things, he was angry that only 19 of the 2,600 Negroes arrested could be charged with arson. Daley berated Conlisk for failure to use "deadly force" to stop the burning and looting. He appointed a "blue ribbon" commission to determine whether a conspiracy was behind the destruction, then added, "If anyone doesn't think this is a conspiracy, I can't understand." Though Jesse Jackson referred to this as a "fascist's response," Daley claimed that the 4,500 letters he got ran 15 to 1 in favor of his stance.

The black press generally pounded Daley. But the Pittsburgh Courier led its letters column a month after King's death with a reader stating, "I agree wholeheartedly with Chicago's Mayor Daley's order to the City's policemen to 'shoot to kill any arsonist or anyone with a Molotov cocktail.'" He was sure the order reduced fires and deaths. Time took Lindsay's side and gently ridiculed Daley. Newsweek was more ambivalent, granting that although fewer lives were lost in most cities than in the days when Daley's pugnacity was common, property damage may have increased from the impression "that arsonists and pillagers had been allowed to roam the streets almost at will." A chorus of "ghetto tenants, landlords and shopkeepers...blamed their loss of goods and livelihoods on insufficient police protection and deterrence." Unaware of the irony that would only be revealed months later, Newsweek noted that Daley had taken his hard line partly in response to rumors that the Democratic Convention might change its plan to come to Chicago the following summer if he did not crack down.

This might be a good place to recall that Coleman Young, first black mayor of black-majority Detroit and often seen as a strong radical, named Daley (along with Adam Powell) as his great political role model. See Young w/ Lonnie Wheeler, Hard Stuff (1994).

Even so, Daley backtracked within days of his press conference: Everyone was blowing his comments "out of proportion," he complained. It had long been established policy that "only minimum force be used by policemen."

IN BALTIMORE, too, General ___ Gelston of the Fifth US Army (National Guard) Regiment, anticipated criticism for ordering his soldiers to hold their fire. "hundreds of thousands of rounds of ammunition were fired in Detroit [the previous year] without returning the city to normal any faster. Shooting is not the answer." The Afro of 4/13/68 said he made this point "emphatically."

¹⁴ The new mayor, Democrat Thomas d'Alessandro III, had only been in office briefly before the rioting broke out. His predecessor Theodore McKeldin seemed to believe in the Kerner recommendations. But police action effectively became moot when the new mayor declared the city out of control at 11:00 on the first night, and Gov Agnew ordered in National Guard troops. Agnew ordered the troops not to shoot rioters—in stark contrast to Daley—though Agnew's "get-tough" supporters quickly forgot this. Vigilante action by anti-riot residents near the ghettos was a key factor in Baltimore's violence. Agnew stole attention from the chaos with a well publicized meeting with local black leaders, in which he angrily dressed them down for not being as tough as he was on leaders like Rap Brown, who incited and glorified violence. The black leaders—some of whom had in fact been denouncing violence and putting their money where their mouths were—felt demeaned, insulted, and above all used. . The local Afro condemned the rioters and defended local police, national guard troops, and Mayor D'Alessandro, but reacted with great anger at what it saw as Agnew's inflammatory and opportunistic gesture. The Mayor, too, called Agnew's remarks "inflammatory." See Baltimore Afro, 4/20/68 editorial & 4/13/68 p.1 story on Agnew, and "What it's All About" letter. Baltimore taxpayers had endured one of the first Community Action Programs; it ranked number five nationally in narcotics use. That fed the anger of many residents at what they saw as

tax-financed appeasement of the unemployed and destructive parts of the population. Racism of course played a role. See Kenneth Durr, Behind the Backlash (2003).

¹⁵ This is the view of Kelley taken by the major black weekly, the KC Call. See its coverage of the riots and editorials, 4/19/68, 5/10/68, and letters to ed., 5/3/68.

In most of the urban districts that rioted heavily in 1968, Democrats were returned to office in the next few elections, but Clarence Long's 2nd and Paul Sarbanes's 3rd Dem districts went for Nixon in Baltimore as did all 3 districts containing KC—all rep'd by Dems (4th 47% suburban by Wm Randall; the 5th nrly pure urban by Richd Bolling, and the 50% rural 22% suburban, 30% urban WR Hull /(&from '72 Jerry Litton) KC. (The other Baltimore district, P.Mitchell's black-majority 7th, of course went for HHH and McGovern.)

A cynic might call these token appointments—sops to frantic urban property-owners. Their racial character is strictly ambiguous: they were white, but most residents of inner cities—black as well as white—condemned rioters (only a small percentage, overwhelmingly young, participated) and called for more vigorous—as well as fair--policing. Scholars are quick to see Nixon's black and liberal appointees—including CORE founder James Farmer—as tokens: but to an opportunist, isn't every concession to true believers a token? Even the conservative true believers?

¹⁶ From the beginning, as Lillian Rubin noted, busing was about class as well as race—upper-class white people leaving all the burdens of urban violence and shabby schools in the laps of lower class white as well as black people. Lillian Rubin, Busing and Backlash (1972). Jennifer Hochschild explores the theme with greater breadth and in greater depth in The New American Dilemma (1984). The best recent works on suburbanization and racially charged conflict over residential space also grasp and clarify this point very well. See especially Matthew Lassiter, who follows the point through to its logical conclusion, and Kevin Kruse, who mysteriously stops short. See my review of both in RAH, 35 (2007).

¹⁷ Theodore Lowi pointed out what was perhaps obvious though is still barely explored in the literature: to blame white racism was essentially a way to blame the white lower classes.

¹⁸ Adam Fairclough's recent A Class of their Own (2007) finally fleshes out the rich array of strategies that black parents and teachers had before the NAACP LDF short-circuited them all and put all black America's eggs into the desegregation basket. There were many practical and realistic leaders who believed that desegregation was not the safest or most efficient strategy for use of their limited political capital. Risa Goluboff sounds a different note of regret for the way Brown closed off other strategies in The Lost Promise of Civil Rights (HUP 2007); no one has told that story more incisively, or with less romanticism, than Goluboff; Michael Klarman's From Jim Crow to Civil Rights (OUP 2004) covers much the same ground without explicitly wagering so much on any particular roads not taken. Derrick Bell states outright that black people would have been better off without all the wasted expenditure on Brown and subsequent efforts to make Brown work in Silent Covenants (OUP 2004). The turn that history in fact took—focus on school desegregation--has never been so unpopular in the elite law schools. Many of these scholars simultaneously (and it would seem somewhat inconsistently) cling to an almost evangelical faith in affirmative action. Some, like Bell, appear to invest their hopes in the even more implausible scheme of slave reparations.

¹⁹ Affirmative action violated the 1964 Act: so ruled Comptroller General Elmer Staats, in Lyndon Johnson's day. The policy directly and clearly contradicted much of the legislative history as well, including eloquent speeches in the Act's favor by such stalwart civil rights supporters as Hubert Humphrey (who said the Act would never be used for reverse discrimination, etc.)

²⁰ Scholars are troubled by the military's success in desegregation. The most hierarchical, undemocratic, and often southern dominated institution, apparently, did better than any other in American life (save possibly collegiate and professional sports) in realizing Dr. King's dream of black and white together. Historians have ignored the book that explains how that happened: Chas Moskos and John Butler, All That We Can Be (1996). (The military also has, I believe, the biggest socialized housing program and one of the biggest socialized medicine programs in the world. It often resists violent imperial

ventures more vigilantly than civilian leaders of either party, while coming closer than any other institution in the real world to fulfilling the old red slogan, Arm the Proletariat.)

The corporate story is less well understood—and even more unaccountably ignored by historians. The most promising start appears to be David Rieff, “Multiculturalism’s Silent Partner,” *Harper’s* (Aug 1993).

²¹ We have some pale new institutions at the tail end of the sixties that go on to do their best work in the 1970s—Bayard Rustin’s AP Randolph Institute and Coretta King’s ML King Center, for example. In style these are essentially one-person shows—no mass involvement to speak of. Neither accomplishes much, except, in the King Center’s case, to enshrine ML King’s memory in the national holiday legislation and the National Historic Site. These government projects may entirely subsume the King Center’s mission; the Center itself appears to be withering—perhaps, God save us, terminally.

Marian Wright Edelman soldiered on instructively. A southern Baptist preacher’s kid (her father was a follower of AP Randolph as well), she was part of the SNCC leadership in the early 1960s, and stayed on in the Child Development Group in Mississippi. She helped bring Head Start, Bobby Kennedy (in 1965), and national attention to poverty in the Delta. Edelman founded the Washington Research Group in 1968, which became the Children’s Defense Fund in 1973. Her work for CDF remains alive and well and unfinished—and not just as a notch on Hillary Clinton’s resume. (Clinton long ago identified Edelman, whom she met the same year she met Bill, as her mentor; she worked at the CDF early in her career.) CDF nearly always appears in public as a creature of Edelman’s personal devotion and integrity. It’s telling that more people seem to recognize her name than the Children’s Defense Fund’s. CDF has never been a mass organization. It educates and influences the press and Congress, raises money and consciousness for all manner of unimpeachably good and necessary programs. But it does not transcend the hyperspecialized culture of niche lobbies, whereby professionalized activists keep the pot of protest boiling. If CDF keeps doing good work that will not otherwise get done, it is also an emblem, through no fault of its own, of the fragmented world of “interest-group pluralism” that so many in the old movement wanted to transcend.

The idea of a mass, deliberative organization that has strategic priorities and can focus international attention upon them, may be outmoded by 1968. The patchwork of unmemorable organizations that move into the vacuum left by the Panthers, SNCC, SCLC, CORE, et al., is a medium in which organizations and activist careers thrive, but popular causes—and the discipline of mass involvement—do not. (See Lowi, Lustig, Glendon.) It is perhaps a good thing that a brilliant college graduate can now aspire to a lifelong career in activism—make a living at it. But are we right to imagine that such fragmented and highly developed organizational agendas can ever be reconciled and assimilated into a broader movement for social change? Or have they become barriers and safety valves, which thwart and dissipate the mass passion for social justice? It seems a question worth pondering.

The exception to the professional-specialized rule of post-1960s activism may prove the rule: Operation Breadbasket, a spinoff of SCLC, was also a one-person show. Though it certainly demonstrated a tremendous ability to mobilize masses—or at any rate to call them out for rallies—it seems to do this much more from the top-down than its pre-1968 rivals. It did not sustain the momentum of protest that civil rights groups achieved in the 1950s and 1960s at their best. Obviously, people made similar criticisms of King and SCLC—with some justice. Breadbasket morphed into People United to Save Humanity (toned down soon to People United to Serve Humanity, and later PUSH/Excel, with a Bookerite self-help emphasis that some “conservatives” claimed as their own): all carried on King’s notorious organizational disabilities. Nobody who takes PUSH seriously thinks of it as other than Jackson’s personal vehicle: if that was arguably true about SCLC and King (and was proven by SCLC’s rapid decline after King’s death), it is not so true of, say, CORE and SNCC—which died of other causes. PUSH, renamed again Rainbow/PUSH Coalition, years after Jackson’s peak in the 1980s, is decidedly quiet. It tends to react when the media call on it, rather than to make news independently.

The only major new national black political organization that survives is the Congressional Black Caucus, though it has had few successes (the King Holiday and, arguably, the sanctions imposed on South Africa over Reagan’s veto). The CBC has been regularly frustrated in efforts to develop the independent agenda that its idealistic founders sought—to represent black people generally rather than the specific constituencies of its members (or its most senior and talented members). The CBC is also in practice hard to distinguish, except on the rarest occasions, from the Democratic party to which it has become tied. (Republicans like liberal Sen. Edward Brooke of Mass. have always resisted its invitations to join.)

One should also count the Southern Poverty Law Center (founded in 1971) as a new, post-1960s civil rights organization, and it is one that has flourished. It has some of the top-down, one-man-show aspects of the others, centered around its daring and impressive leader Morris Dees. It functions mainly as a kind of free-lance, non-governmental police force. It monitors, investigates, and apparently infiltrates white supremacist organizations that engage in or plot criminal activity. It also attempts to counter the influence of such groups with a “teach tolerance” campaign aimed at schools. It leaves most of the positive agenda—economic equality and political power—to other groups. The SPLC’s persistence is also a standing testimony as to the state of things: the enemy is flourishing. The existence of the “hate groups” it tracks will always be evidence that the civil rights movement is unfinished. One sometimes gets the impression from its literature that the SPLC is so busy keeping the violent backlash from getting out of hand that it has no time, or no hope for the foreseeable future, for a more positive program.

This specialization of functions is a striking general development of the post-1960s years—not just in what remains of the civil rights agenda, but in nearly all lobbying and litigating operations across the ideological spectrum. That the movement would have a private FBI/CIA of its own, focused on its own criminally inclined enemies, must have been hard to imagine in 1955 or 1963. But SPLC certainly did and does a more impressive job than the anti-civil right’s movement’s effort in the early 1960s, the Mississippi State Sovereignty Commission.

²² To summarize a complicated tangle, my view is that affirmative action has worked beautifully in elite institutions. It is a complex comment upon affirmative action to say that that means, it has worked beautifully and mainly for elite institutions. Aptly, one of the best cases in its defense comes from Ivy League presidents Derek Bok and Wm. Bowen, *The Shape of the River* (1998). Its results have been uneven—arguably better for the host institution’s image than for the named beneficiaries—at middling institutions. James Traub made an excellent start in exploring the ironies there in his NYT Magazine article (). See also the sketch of Roland Farley’s work in *Economist* 5/8/08. Affirmative action in the labor market is the focus of one of the most adventurous and invigorating books on the subject—also one of the most challenging cases for continuity--by a believer who does not take continuity for granted: Nancy Maclean, *Freedom is Not Enough* (2006).

²³ See William Julius Wilson, *Declining Significance of Race* (1978), and Nathan Glazer, *Affirmative Discrimination* (1973), for example. Both were ritualistically denounced by their former allies as “neoconservative,” etc. Wilson’s more radical-than-thou enemies attempted to have him expelled from the black sociologists’ association. Many years later, Glazer famously changed his mind and endorsed affirmative action. The complexities of the issue can be further understood through sensitive work by Stephen Carter and Orlando Patterson. Carter, who identifies himself as social democratic, not conservative, in *Reflections of an Affirmative Action Baby* (1991), supports affirmative action through college admission, but thinks it needs to prove its effectiveness by the end of college: it lacks moral legitimacy, and can be politically as well as psychologically counterproductive, at the post-graduate and employment levels. (History students will recognize the twist on the NAACP LDF’s old strategy of desegregating the grad and professional schools first.) Carter interestingly seems to hew to the pre-Powell justification of affirmative action: its legitimacy derives from its necessity as a remedy--or a second chance--for actual victims of actual discrimination. Patterson, who defies efforts to pin him down ideologically, supports affirmative action more broadly, but only for another twenty years. If it works, it will no longer be necessary by then. If it doesn’t, then it will have proven its ineffectiveness, and the time will have arrived to try something that works. Examples of white authors on the left who have emphasized the limitations and sometimes counterproductive effects of affirmative action include Jim Sleeper, *The Closest of Strangers* (1990), and James Kahlenberg, *The Remedy* (1996).

²⁴ Even the Clintons, who rejected welfare and the unions, while easily reclaiming the southern “Bubba vote,” stuck with affirmative action. Their concessions to liberalism were to 1970s liberalism—abortion, aff action, environment, etc.: Nothing of 1960s-vintage civil rights was left to have sufficient hold on them, or rather on their most influential constituents and donors.

²⁵ Dan Carter acknowledged Gore’s role in *From Wallace to Gingrich* (Baton Rouge, 1996), 72. Perhaps the most scrupulous continuitarian, Carter refreshingly grants that some of his indictment of the

GOP fails to exculpate the Democrats. With the Clintons so flagrantly playing the race card in South Carolina, California, and elsewhere this year, the profession's official story of exclusive GOP race-baiting in the 1970s and 1980s may no longer be off limits to scrutiny. CA (super T) was 2/5.

Please note: I am restricting this observation to remarks by Bill Clinton after the SC primary (1/26) and by Geraldine Ferraro before and after her official departure from the Clinton Campaign on 3/11. (It was unfair to accuse Hillary Clinton of racism when she made her entirely reasonable remark about LBJ's role in the Civil Rights movement. Similarly, I think it was unfair to accuse Bill Clinton of racism when he called Obama's opposition to the Iraq war a "fairy tale.") Bill Clinton and Gerry Ferraro are seasoned and intelligent professionals. They do not make rookie mistakes. My belief that Ferraro and Bill Clinton knew exactly what they were doing is an inference from long observation and enthusiastic support for both spokespersons, admittedly beyond proof. But the story of many Clinton supporters that they just slipped up or wandered off reservation without the official approval of the campaign strikes me as implausible. I doubt the Clinton campaign could ever be so undisciplined, or that Ferraro and Bill Clinton could ever be so reckless and disloyal as to make racial comments on their own. I believe that Hillary Clinton has campaigned brilliantly this year, against a very formidable enemy, whom nobody could have been prepared for. She made some mistakes, but I don't believe that playing the race card was a strategic or tactical slip-up: it was a gambit. It was a moral compromise, made for a time-honored strategic purpose. Not as ugly, perhaps, as Bill Clinton's taking the time to participate personally in Ricky Ray Rector's execution back in the 1992 campaign. But the same species of deliberate choice.

²⁶ Aldon Morris, Origins of the Civil Rights Movement (1984).

²⁷ Joe Crespino adds congressman Jaime Whitten, as part of one of the most nuanced and moderate arguments for continuity. Like Maclean, Crespino does not frontally challenge the prevailing orthodoxy, but like her, he has the considerable virtue of not simply assuming that continuity is self-evident. Crespino, In Search of Another Country (2008).

²⁸ One practice of Elijah Muhammad's that Farrakhan soon rejected was the former's premillennial disdain for politics and other white men's games. From one perspective, Elijah Muhammad's Booker-esque rejection of political activism of any sort was more decisive (and divisive) than his condemnation of King's allegedly passive and cowardly belief in nonviolence. Though Farrakhan stuck to Elijah Muhammad's racism and his insistence on threatening foes with violence after he took up with Jesse Jackson in 1983-84, his entry into electoral politics and the accompanying media extravaganza was arguably the strongest break from Elijah Muhammad's legacy that any follower since Malcolm ever made. Considered in religious terms, Farrakhan's break was arguably as sharp as Wallace Muhammad's break. (I refer to the moment when Wallace broke away from his freshly dead father's racism back in 1975. Wallace had tried that before, but recanted and came back into the fold. Wallace claimed that his father had given tacit support, in front of witnesses, to the break that the old man knew the son would make. It was a complex and oblique atonement for so much denunciation of Malcolm X, who had done so much to expand and recruit members for the NOI.)

²⁹ An invigorating exception—which unfortunately seems to get far less attention than all the books on white suburbanites—is Andrew Wiese, Places of their Own: African-American Suburbanization in the 20th c. (2004). Another is Sheryll Cashin, The Failures of Integration (2004).

³⁰ A 1995 task force on affirmative action made a very useful observation along these lines. Convened and led by Carol Swain, one of the most talented and hard-working scholars of racial politics, the task force explored affirmative action in a broad historical and institutional context. The participants came from "different perspectives." The many distinguished speakers who met with the group ranged from Derrick Bell on the left to Randall Kennedy to Glenn Loury (then on the right). Swain (or some other writer on behalf of the task force—there is some ambiguity as to authorship) found the differences among participants less revealing than the point they all agreed on: that "a polarized racial climate had developed in the United States in recent years, particularly regarding affirmative action, and that this climate had prevented the development of a healthy, informed, and constructive national dialogue." Professional

scholars feel trapped in that polarized climate, [Swain] added: "both supporters and opponents of affirmative action had been driven to take extreme positions that thwarted the search for a more moderate, consensus-building middle ground." Preface to Swain, ed., Race versus Class: The New Affirmative Action Debate (Lanham, NY: UPA, 1996), vii-viii.

* More on n.5: I do not deny all continuity. What concerns me is the rigidity of the ideological and racial categories over huge, diverse, changing populations over centuries. There's a basic universal reality in all human history, that oppressed people do what they can to thwart or evade their oppression.. We've learned that much from the Thompsons, Genoveses, James Scotts, et al.

But why retain left & right, black and white--these peculiar racial and ideological lumps that were named in the late 18th century, for very parochial purposes? I'm guilty above, obviously, of perpetuating them. This is as much a confession as an argument. It's deucedly difficult to dump the old Manichean, forget, Hell! usage.

Why not say, some "allegedly black" or "Negro" or "colored" people on some days tended to think like the early DuBois, some like the middle-period Du Bois, and some thought like Zora Neale Hurston, who defended segregated schooling, as did thousands of black teachers and parents for practical or other reasons? Why do we have to forget that Progressives like Edgar Gardner Murphy and Woodrow Wilson helped create and intensify segregation? That the New Deal's integrationist fringe did not succeed in putting desegregation high enough on the agenda at liberalism's peak of power to accomplish any specifically racial reform (such as antilynching legislation or nationwide repeal of the poll tax)? Or that state governments made a great deal of progress on the former and some on the latter before 1965? Or that many New Dealers—including Henry Wallace—had other fish to fry during the time when they could have used their power to attack Jim Crow? And that black voters swung over to the Democratic party anyway.

There are of course continuities, but why the devotion to them?

It seems to me that the interesting things are the things that change from the 1930s to the 1950s and again to the 1970s to the 1980s. These teach us the poverty of theory, of generalizations, especially the crudest and most invidious generalizations (in this company), "white" "black" and "conservative" "left."

The ceaseless universal human yearning for freedom is interesting, but what gives each of us an opportunity to say something new about it is the particulars we discover.

Equally, the ceaseless universal tendency of some human beings to lord their superiority over other human beings, and make to preemptive strikes on minorities and majorities they fear, is also interesting.

But calling the one left and the other right just seems to distract us from adding anything to the picture, from finding the fresh relationships and tendencies, and laying them bare.

The retrospective finger-pointing keeps us from making the struggle for freedom interesting to people who don't already know all they need to know. All we teach them at present with these generalizations is that their elders and betters in the academy are always on the good side. And my point is: we should not be surprised that so few of them buy it, after 'the test.'

The categories of Liberal and White just do not hold up under any honest scrutiny, it seems to me. We know that "black" and "white" are scientifically meaningless. Why do we have such a stake in Left and Right? So much of our historiography seems to vindicate the left, somehow, make us feel good about the ideological forbears we like to call our own.

The retention of left and right (or progressive and right) is all premised on the notion that some day, masses of people will at last start voting "their economic interests." Isn't it? That that's somehow the underlying telos of history. Or at least a distant goal that we can aim at, as we craft our scholarly trajectories. But what if that whole notion is just the opiate of the intellectuals, as has so often been said of Marxism (a particularly pure strain of the illusion)? Aren't we missing the more peculiar, contingent, adjustments? Aren't we missing the unique reasons for rare great leaps forward, such as many Americans of all hues still think happened with black Americans (or at least black southern Christians) ca. 1955-65?