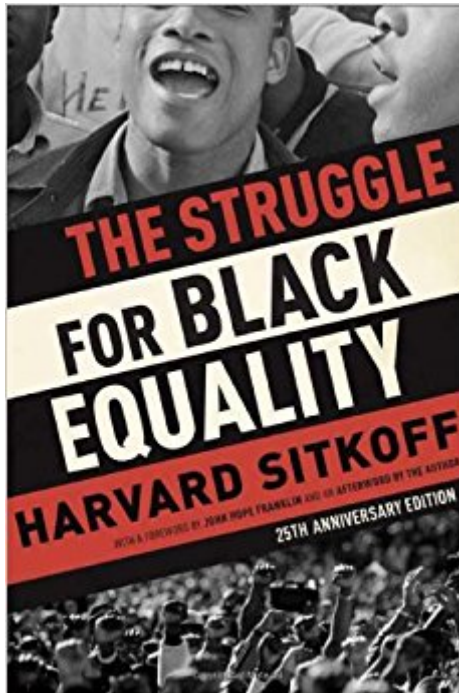




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The Struggle For Black Equality



Synopsis

The Struggle for Black Equality is a dramatic, memorable history of the civil rights movement. Harvard Sitkoff offers both a brilliant interpretation of the personalities and dynamics of civil rights organizations and a compelling analysis of the continuing problems plaguing many African Americans. With a new foreword and afterword, and an up-to-date bibliography, this anniversary edition highlights the continuing significance of the movement for black equality and justice.

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Customer Reviews

Harvard Sitkoff, of the University of New Hampshire, is the author of numerous books, including *King: Pilgrimage to the Mountaintop* (H&W, 2008).

THE STRUGGLE FOR BLACK EQUALITY (Chapter One)Up From SlaveryThere is a difference in knowing you are black and in understanding what it means to be black in America. Before I was ten I knew what it was to step off the sidewalk to let a white man pass.MARGARET WALKERNourished by anger, revolutions are born of hope. They are the offspring of belief and bitterness, of faith in the attainment of one's goals and indignation at the limited rate and extent of change. Rarely in history are the two stirrings confluent in a sufficient force to generate an effective, radical social movement. They would be so in African America in the 1960s.During the last decade of the nineteenth century, however, few African-Americans struggled hopefully. Many African-Americans resisted, often in subtle and solitary ways, at times in an organized and collective manner,

transmitting from one generation to the next a tradition of black protest. But their initial efforts to continue the campaign against Jim Crow initiated by the black abolitionists failed to stem the rising crest of white racism after Reconstruction. Largely bereft of white allies, blacks fought on the defensive, trying to hold their limited gains. They lost each battle. Congress permitted the white South to reduce blacks to a state of peonage, to disregard their civil rights, and to disenfranchise them by force, intimidation, and statute. So did the Supreme Court. Writing into the Constitution its own beliefs in the inferiority of blacks, the late-nineteenth-century high court tightened every possible shackle confining the ex-slaves. Most American scholars cheered this legal counterrevolution which effectively nullified the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments. It exemplified their teachings of inherent and irremediable racial differences, of blacks as the most primitive, degraded, and least civilized of the races, and of the folly of governmental tampering with local folkways. Whether appealing to scriptural or scientific evidence, to Darwinism, the gospel of Anglo-Saxonism, or the new interest in eugenics, a generation of clergymen, editors, and educators propounded the intellectual rationalizations for white supremacy. Not surprisingly, most white Americans at the beginning of the twentieth century believed that, for the good of all, the naturally superior whites should rule over the baser races. They heard or read little to the contrary. The Southern Way had become the American Way. Even the most humanitarian reformers concerned with racial injustice counseled gradualism. Northern liberals preached the necessity of deferring citizenship for blacks until the freedmen were ready for it; they emphasized the long-term gains to be derived from education, religion, and economic uplift and denigrated strategies predicated on agitation, force, or political activity. This total acquiescence by government officials and Northern public opinion gave the white South all the permission it needed to institutionalize its white-supremacist beliefs. First came disenfranchisement, accomplished in the 1880s mainly through fraud and force. All the Southern states felt emboldened in the next two decades to follow the lead of the 1890 Mississippi state constitutional convention in officially adopting such disenfranchising techniques as poll taxes, “grandfather clauses,” literacy and “good character” tests, and white primaries. Black voter registration plummeted 96 percent in Louisiana between 1896 and 1900. The number of African-Americans permitted to vote in the new century hovered around 3,500 in Alabama, which had an adult black population of nearly 300,000; and in Mississippi, with an even larger black population, fewer than a thousand blacks voted. Political impotency bore on every aspect of African-American life. Unable to participate in the enactment or enforcement of the law, Southern blacks became increasingly vulnerable to physical assault and murder. Over a thousand were lynched between 1900 and 1915. No records exist to

tally the number beaten or tortured. Nor can one describe adequately the terror of living with a constant fear of barbarity and violence, of having your security subject to the whim of those who despise you, of having no recourse to police or courts. The Southern states, in addition, adopted a host of statutes methodically outlawing everything "interracial." These new segregation laws expressed the white South's all-encompassing belief in the inequality of blacks. Most Southern states now formally required Negroes and whites to be born separately in segregated hospitals; to live their lives as separately as possible in segregated schools, public accommodations, and places of work and recreation; and, presumably, to dwell in the next life separately in segregated funeral homes and cemeteries. The rapid proliferation of Jim Crow laws inspired an irrational competition among Southern legislators to erect ever more and higher barriers between the races. "White" and "Colored" signs sprouted everywhere and on everything. Atlanta mandated Jim Crow Bibles in its courtrooms and prohibited African-Americans and whites from using the same park facilities, even from visiting the municipal zoo at the same time. Alabama forbade African-Americans to play checkers with whites, and Mississippi insisted on Jim Crow taxicabs. New Orleans segregated its prostitutes, and Oklahoma, its telephone booths. The lawmakers of Florida and North Carolina saw to it that white students would never touch textbooks used by African-Americans. Such edicts bolstered white power and privilege while demeaning the spirit of African-Americans. Jim Crow, furthermore, easily led to gross inequities in the distribution of public monies for education and civic services. The eleven Southern states in 1916 spent an average of \$10.32 per white public-school student, and only \$2.89 per black pupil. There was one hospital bed available for every 139 American whites in the 1920s, but only one for every 1,941 blacks. And that was not all. Southern governments victimized blacks by bestial convict-leasing and chain-gang practices, and confined them to serfdom on the lowest rung of the economic ladder, doing all they could to implement the view of James K. Vardaman, who became Governor of Mississippi in 1904, that "God Almighty had created the Negro for a menial." Alexis de Tocqueville's observation early in the nineteenth century that white Americans "scarcely acknowledge the common features of humanity in this stranger whom slavery has brought among them" remained as accurate a century later. And blacks could do little to alter the situation. More than 90 percent of the nearly ten million African-Americans in 1910 lived in the South, three-quarters of them in rural areas, the vast majority working a white man's land, with a white man's mule and a white man's credit. Theirs was an oppressive, closed society, designed to thwart black advancement and encourage black subservience. All political and economic power remained vested in whites determined to maintain

the status quo, however many black lives it cost. Daily facing grinding poverty, physical helplessness, and all the banal crudities of existence under an open, professed, and boasting racism, many blacks grew fatalistic. Segregation and discrimination came to seem permanent, immutable, an inevitable condition of life, and the majority of African-Americans succumbed to the new racial order. But not all. Some protested by migrating. Between 1890 and 1910, nearly two hundred thousand Southern blacks fled to the North. Others returned to Africa or established autonomous black communities in the West. A few, mostly members of the tiny, Northern black elite, continued the struggle they had inherited from the black abolitionists and from the inspiring vision of equal rights nourished by the Civil War and Reconstruction. They spoke out for racial justice in such organizations as the Afro-American Council, Monroe Trotter's National Equal Rights League, Ida B. Wells's Antilynching League, and the Niagara Movement. Yet few blacks heard their pleas, and fewer whites heeded their demands. These small communities of resistance and struggle in the early twentieth century, lacking adequate finances, political leverage, influential white allies, access to the major institutions shaping public opinion and policy, and the support of large numbers of blacks, could do virtually nothing to alter the course of American life and thought. As Willie Brown lamented in his blues: Can't tell my future, I can't tell my past. Lord, it seems like every minute sure gon' be my last. Oh, a minute seems like hours, and hours seem like days. And a minute seems like hours, hour seems like days. The ascendancy of Booker T. Washington at the turn of the century epitomized both the widespread despair of blacks and the powerlessness of the handful of blacks actively fighting against racial injustice. Although he worked covertly to diminish disenfranchisement and Jim Crow, Washington publicly emphasized the necessity of accommodation, conciliation, and gradualism. "The best course to pursue in regard to civil rights," he lectured to blacks, "is to let it alone; let it alone and it will settle itself." When the British author H. G. Wells criticized Jim Crow while on a visit to the United States, Washington answered back: "The only answer to it is for colored men to be patient, to make themselves competent, to do good work, to give no occasion against us." A spokesman for the emerging black middle class, he counseled all blacks to lift themselves up by their own bootstraps. Too few, however, even had boots, and in the years before his death in 1915, Washington's nostrums failed abysmally to alleviate the plight of blacks. The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, organized in 1910, fared no better. Declaring its pur...

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Used in a history of the civil rights movement course, this book provides a solid introduction for

students to the names, places and dates of many of the movements key moments. The book is easy to read organized into chapters chronologically surrounding key events including the bus boycott, student sit ins, and freedom riders. Sitkoff writing includes enough context to allow the reader understand the movement from it earliest beginnings.

I am an Australian, who is in the USA for 3 years due to work committments. I wanted to know about the history of race relations in the USA. What I learnt fromt the book amazed me. A must read for all the countries which have racial problems. Sitkoff has presented a lot of hard data in an very readeable book, which is a great achievement.

I read the first 18 pages and was really impressed. It contains a lot more information than the average civil rights textbook!

It's okay...

The book shipped quickly and without damage. The text is well written and actually one of the more interesting non fiction books I have read

I really enjoyed this book. Well organized, very readable, and concise. Also available on Kindle, which is a big plus!

This book is very well written, however it can be a very difficult book to continue reading because it's so vivid and detail oriented. Though I would highly recommend if you are interested in this era of American History.

I bought this book for a class, but I actually like and it is very easy to read. There is not much I can say about it because there is just too much to say

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