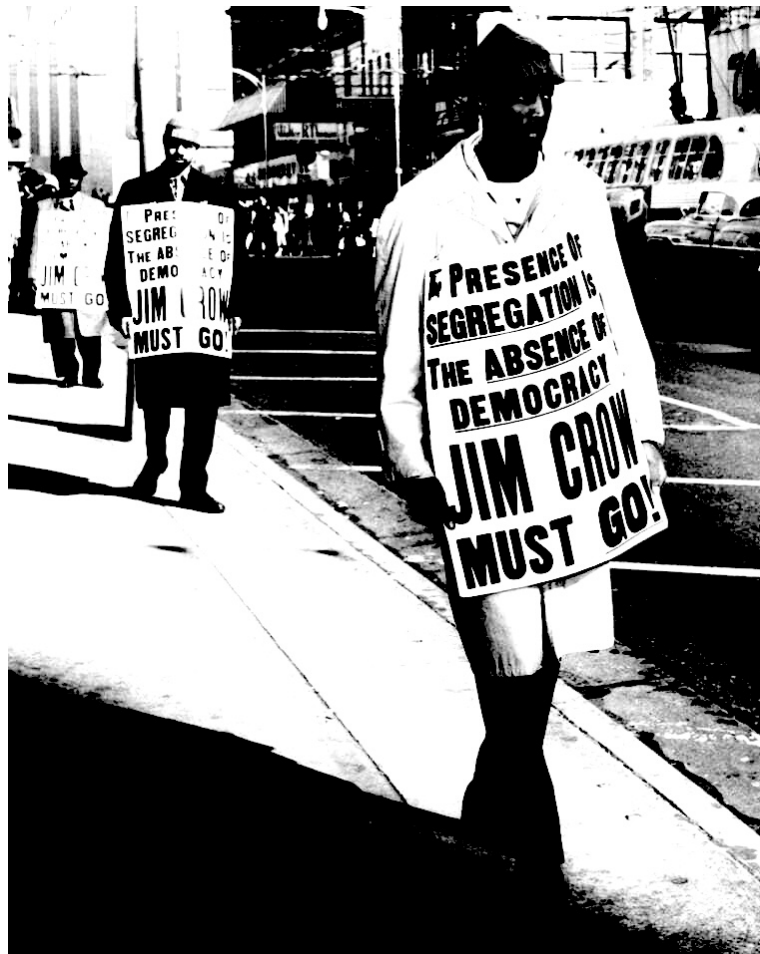


FROM EMANCIPATION TO JIM CROW

A SHORT OVERVIEW OF THE CONTINUATION
OF STRUCTURAL RACISM IN THE U.S.A



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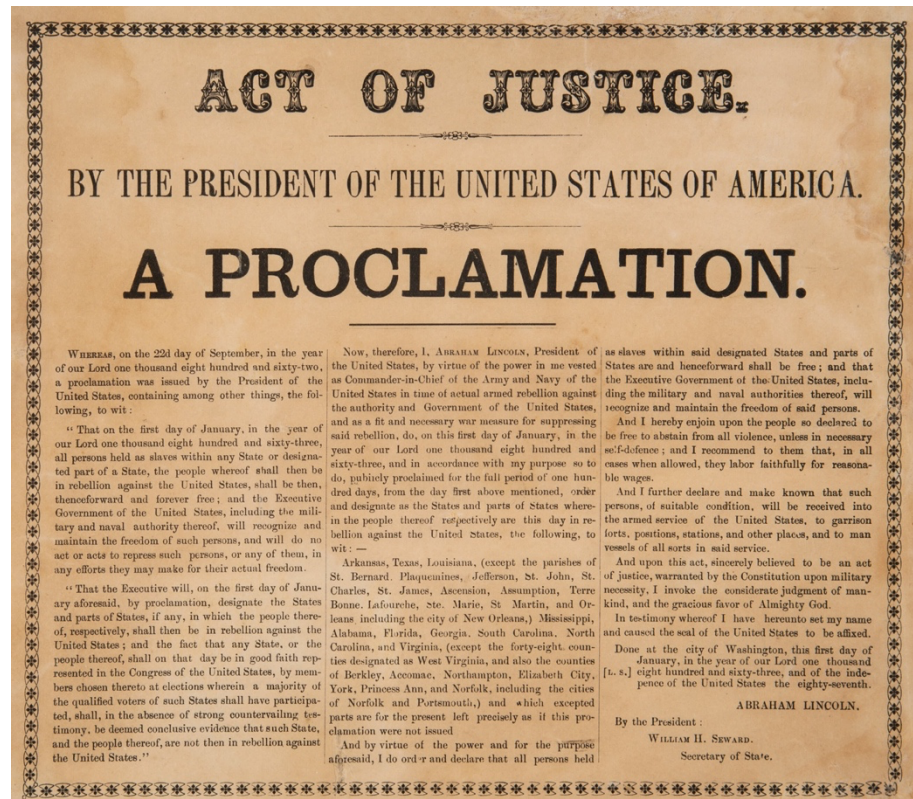


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Coming in the next issue: Patrice Lumumba

When Abraham Lincoln issued the Emancipation Declaration in January of 1863, while entering the third year of the civil war, stating that "all persons held as slaves ... shall be then, thenceforward, and forever free", 4 million enslaved people were by union law proclaimed freed men, women and children. This changed the course of history and challenged a deeply solidified racial structure within the system of chattel slavery.

All regions that were already under the Union army's control, the formerly enslaved were legally free. The proclamation did not include territories



that were still under Confederate rule. An aspect that served the union army, formerly enslaved could escape and join the Union army to fight in the resistance against the Confederate army.

In January 1965, two years after the implementation of the Emancipation declaration and only few months before the end of the civil war and the assassination of President Lincoln, the Thirteenth Amendment was passed by Congress. This formalized, constitutionally and under federal law, the freedoms established by the Emancipation Proclamation. It abolished enslavement and involuntary servitude, except as punishment for a crime, in the entire United States and in all areas under its jurisdiction.

The South's slave plantation economy was dependent on free labor. What seemed to be freedom to millions, was a malnourished and halfhearted proclamation, that lead black people from enslavement into a continuous unstable and threatened existence. Racial discrimination, mob violence, black codes, lynching, the rise of the Ku Klux Klan and the Jim Crow segregation laws, kept black Americans in a limited space, unable to take their rightful equal place. Still dominated by a white supreme system, that was at no moment interested in giving up its power and sharing the benefits of a capitalist system with black people. We will see in the analysis, that the continuation of oppressive force to stop black progress and participation in society was persistent from the end of slavery till the 21st century. This paper will focus on the period of Reconstruction (1863 - 1877) and the period after Reconstruction, which is marked by the development of segregation under the Jim Crow laws. Only in 1964 Lyndon B. Johnson signed the Civil Rights Act, outlawing discrimination in the public domain.

In January 1865, when the Thirteenth Amendment was passed, General William T. Sherman issued Special Field Order No. 15. 'The order promised thousands of freedmen 40-acre parcels of land located in a 30-mile-wide swath from Charleston south along the Atlantic coast to the St. Johns River in Florida.' (Beard 46) The promise of "40 acres and a mule" did never manifest and worse, the formerly enslaved would not receive any form of reparation for the injustices and oppression their people had to face for hundreds of years since the first boat with enslaved Africans hit the shore of North America in 1619, Virginia. The order initially provided that each family should have a plot of land, and the management will be left to the freed people themselves. (Beard 47)

"Saxton [inspector of settlement and plantations, responsible for assigning land] efficiently processed thousands of requests for land, and by June 1865, approximately 40,000 blacks had settled on 400,000 acres." (Beard 48) The land in question was seized land from plantation owners who abandoned or were forced out of their land during the civil war between the confederation and the Union. The

war was won by the Union in 1865. When Lincoln was assassinated in June the same year and Andrew Johnson became president, the climate changed.

“This is a country for white men, and by God, as long as I am President, it shall be a government for white men,” Johnson wrote in 1866. (NCC) Johnson, though supporting the end of slavery in the south, was by heart a white supremacist and saw no place for black people in an equal position to whites and was in clear favor of the white, financially strong slaveholder class in the South. This made progress over land distribution to the formerly enslaved even more complicated, as it was white owned land that had been confiscated by the Union army.



Sharecroppers, USA

After Johnson’s inauguration he instituted a policy of special pardons that restored most rights of former Confederates who swore an oath of allegiance to the United States. Beard writes of the process and speed the land was given back to the former owners, and those freed people living on confiscated land, were given a choice to either enter a sharecropping agreement or to leave. Many decided to leave. Others stayed and became sharecroppers often on the land they were enslaved on to their former slave holders.

“Within a year of the war’s end, the Freedmen’s Bureau had returned more than 400,000 acres to their antebellum owners. By the middle of 1867, all but 75,000 acres were in the hands of their original owners. Few decisions have had a more long-lasting and deleterious impact on American society than the Johnson administration’s decision to force the freedmen off confiscated lands.” (Beard 51) The massive conflict that arose here, is that there were millions of freed black men and women, who had nowhere to go, no housing, no food, no labor. White supremacy was threatened by an unforeseen change of social structure.

In 'The untold story of Reconstruction' Gene Dattel writes that in 1865 the North did not want free blacks and the South needed free blacks as cotton laborers. White Southerners were not interested in voluntarily consent to equal rights for four million formerly enslaved. They were fast in establishing 'Black Codes' to restrict black rights. (Dattel 15) Slavery was no longer the institutionalized law that separated white and black. Now they shared personal freedom - and parts of society shared increasingly similar material conditions across the color line, as white landlessness and poverty grew in numbers after the civil war's disastrous effects on the everyday lives of white peasants and working class. Tensions regarding maintaining a secure social position for whites within society grew. The social identity and construct of whiteness, that had protected white Southerners until 1862 was now threatened. (Smångs 1852)

'The reassertion of status and dominance over blacks in everyday life accordingly played an important part in whites' efforts to reconstitute hierarchical interracial relations in the South in the post-Reconstruction period.' (Smångs 1853) Smångs describes this period of uncertain racial division and the battle arising with it as the "collision of social identities". Following the ratification of the 15th Amendment in 1870, which barred states from depriving citizens the right to vote based on race, southern states began implementing measures such as poll taxes, literacy tests, all-white primaries, felony disenfranchisement laws, grandfather clauses, fraud and intimidation to keep African Americans from the polls. After more than a half million black men joined the voting rolls during Reconstruction in the 1870s, helping to elect nearly 2,000 Black men to public office, Mississippi led the way in using measures to circumvent the 15th Amendment. Mississippi's Jim Crow laws then set a precedent for other southern states to use the same tactics to assault Black enfranchisement for nearly a century until the passage of the Voting Rights Act in 1965. Focused on retaining white supremacy in the electoral process, legislators used loopholes in the 15th Amendment to implement a range of measures to disenfranchise Black voters without explicitly characterizing them based on race.

The installation of Black Codes on national level supported the conservation of racially divided class lines. Black Codes were restrictive laws designed to limit the freedom of newly freed formerly enslaved population and ensured their availability as a cheap labor force after slavery was abolished with the Thirteenth



Amendment to the constitution. Enacted between 1865 and 1866 these Black Codes were meant to replace the social controls that were abolished by Emancipation and the Thirteenth Amendment. There were vagrancy laws that declared a black person to be vagrant if unemployed and without permanent residence. A person so defined could be arrested, fined, and bound out for a term of labor, if unable to pay the fine. These measurements lead to what will be defined as the convict leasing system. Black people were arrested and convicted at a high number and then rented out to

plantations and other work intense labors. Incarceration was a loophole to bypass the new constitutional pressure. The constitution demanded that blacks own their own labor and life, as free men and women. (Graff 122) 'In response Southern whites turned to the criminal justice system in order to maintain both profit and control.' (Thompson 33) The convict leasing opened the door for another form of enslavement, where the one leasing the laborers was not worried about their health, nor if they are clothed, or fed. Enslaved used to be seen as part of property and their free labor as an economic asset, part of accumulation and profit. Slaveholders gave more emphasis on maintaining those assets and not losing them to illness or death. This changed, now that former slave owners were leasing labor in the system of convict leasing. If a worker died of malnourishment, overwork or disease, they were given a new worker.

The system of the post-slavery-South simply turned the slave into a criminal and thereby white capital again owned their labor and their bodies as economic assets. It is estimated that within the convict system the death rate was at about 45%, there were no penalties for mistreating or killing convict laborers. (Thompson 34)



Black Codes, in combination with the Convict Leasing system provided a constant stream of black labor into the places that needed laborers and where whites had lost control over the black labor force. “The Convict Lease System and Lynch Law are twin infamies which flourish hand in hand in many of the United States. They are the two great outgrowths and results of the class legislation under which our people suffer to-day.” Ida B. Wells, 1893.

Those black people who made social progress, who climbed the social ladder, who opposed the continuation of the white supremacist rule were terrorized by the threat of lynching. After the period of Reconstruction, lynching became a tool to terrorize the black population and keep black progress down. The Ku Klux Klan was founded in 1865 in Tennessee and grew in popularity and size throughout the decades into the twentieth century.

Another element that undermined and targeted the 13th amendment in the former confederate states, were the Jim Crow laws. Implemented in various states in the South in the 1870s, the former slave-holding societies kept hoping to avoid a true equality between the races. Calls for a tightening and nationalization of laws to solidify racial segregation grew louder. In the census of the 1870s most of the South's black population was about equal to the white population with South Carolina leading with a population that was 58.9% black, followed by Mississippi at 53.7%, Louisiana at 50.1%, Florida at 48.8%, Alabama at 47.7% and Georgia at 46%. Economically and politically superior, the white minority still had the power to enact laws that helped to keep the black population subjugated and separated from the white world, instilling and insisting on the notion of black inferiority. In the article "Manhood Rights in the Age of Jim Crow: Evaluating "End- Of-Men" Claims in the Context of African American History" Martin Summers evaluates "To be sure, the white supremacist reaction to emancipation and black citizenship was ultimately aimed at restoring the antebellum political, social, and economic order. (...) the nighttime attacks on free people's homes by white vigilante organizations such as the Ku Klux Klan reminded African American men that they did not have the patriarchal authority or power to protect their families and, therefore, were not worthy of citizenship." (Summers 752) Lynching was used to further terror on black empowerment.

It had economic, social and political reasons. "The peak periods of Lynch mob activity roughly coincided with the disenfranchisement campaign that swept the states of the old Confederacy, starting with Mississippi, which altered its constitution to revoke black franchise in 1890." (Hagen et al. 761)

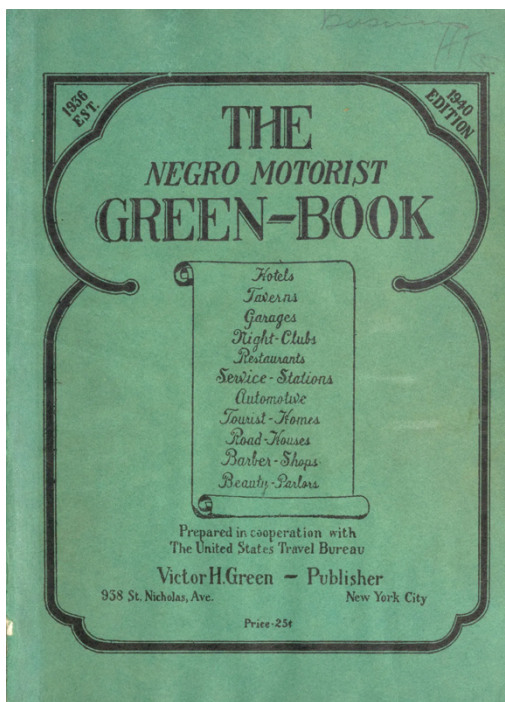


The growing black middle class, consisting of a new generation of black Southerners, sons and daughters of formerly enslaved parents, who did not experience slavery and were therefore more rooted in their rights to justice and

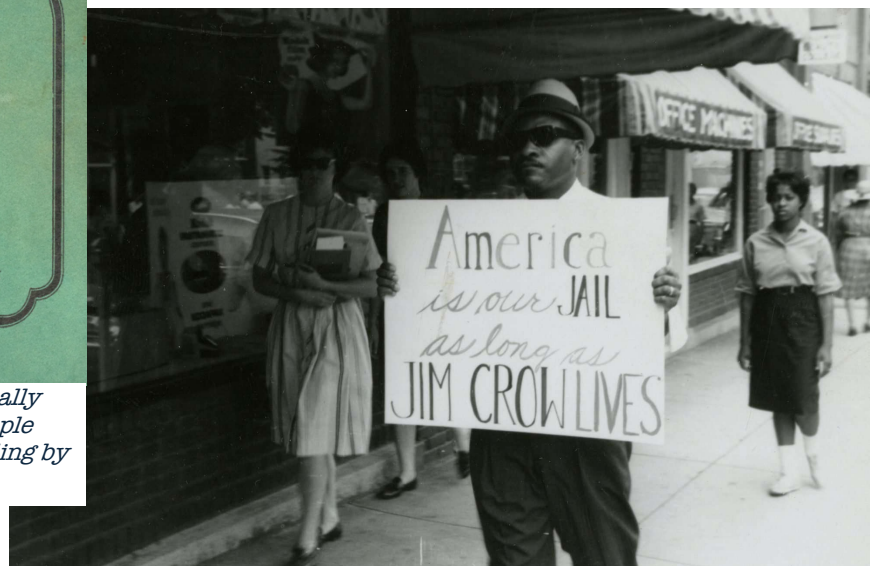
equality, was a further threat against white supremacist rule. Collective black success competed with the white supreme southern mentality and structure. Brandon Jett writes in his article “Paris is Burning: Lynching and Racial Violence in Lamar County, 1890-1920.” about the immense transformation the United States and especially the South went through within this period. “The changes to the social, political, and economic landscape of the South prompted an unprecedented era of racial violence throughout the region. From 1890 to 1920, lynching became the most visible and prevalent example of racial violence; at least 2,522 African- Americans died at the hands of Lynch mobs. Lynching remained a continued threat for southern blacks throughout the Jim Crow era (...)” (Jett 40)

Jim Crow laws implemented a total segregation of public space. Black people were legally declared second class citizens. They had to use other entries or use the exit

as entry, other restrooms, were not allowed in certain establishments, had to ride on the bus in front, on trains in a different wagon, were not allowed in white-only restaurants, hotels, bars, parks, beaches and whole towns after sunset.



The Green Book was published annually from 1936 to 1966 to help black people navigate Jim Crow laws while traveling by car.



Not surprisingly the segregated cities in the South accelerated black progress elsewhere, manifesting in the creation of black towns. Greenwood in Tulsa, Oklahoma was one example of a flourishing town created and run by and for African Americans, segregated, self- sustaining, autonomous. Atlanta, Georgia, was considered as the most progressive black city in the South in the early twentieth century and was at the same time one of the most segregated cities. In 1906 a riot broke out, later called the ‘Atlanta Riot’, showing a repeated story of “white-on-black violence born out of hatred and social anxiety, fanned by fears of black mobility, and shot through with themes of manhood under threat.” (Gotshalk 202) An armed white mob raged against black citizens in the black district of Atlanta, killing estimated a hundred. Tulsa, also called ‘Black Wallstreet’ had hospitals, theaters, schools, university, even a black owned flight airline was part of the town. In 1921, the ‘Tulsa Race Riot’ happened, within a few hours a white mob burned the black district of Greenwood to the grounds, leaving at least 300 residents dead and the town destroyed. (Greenwood 338)



These are just two examples of racial riots aiming at destroying flourishing black economies and life. There were hundreds more. Caused by the immanent fear of black progress and a fall of white dominance “racial categories continued to be

fundamentally anchored in hierarchical status distinctions long after slavery, and, for another, the contingency of social white identities on interpersonal racial dominance, without which whiteness as a social identity of racial superiority and privilege would have become meaningless and inconsequential.” (Smångs 1863)

Black Americans in the South did not always decide to confront or endure the oppressive legislature in the Jim Crow South, many left the South and migrated to the North, East and West in, what would be later called, the “Great Migration”. To flee from the terror of convict leasing, sharecropping, lynching and



segregated daily life, many chose the path into the unknown. “The rivulet would become rapids, which grew into a flood of six million people journeying out of the South over the course of six decades, they were seeking political asylum within the borders of their own country (...)” (Wilkerson 40)

During World War I immigration from Europe slowed down and created a labor shortage in the North, “to fill the assembly lines, companies began recruiting black Southerners to work the steel mills, railroads and factories.” (Wilkerson 42) When migration began ninety percent of all African Americans were living in the South, by the time the migration was over, in the 1970s forty-seven percent of all African Americans were living in the North and West. This was a significant demographic change, pushed by the desire to find a life that is not dominated by white oppression, and in search of a freedom that Emancipation had promised but did not keep. “By the opening of the 20th century, the optimism of the Reconstruction era had long turned into the terror of Jim Crow.” (Wilkerson 42)

Gilda Graff sums it up in the following way “The end of slavery did not end the trauma and shame for African Americans. What followed slavery was the “old” Jim

Crow (a rigid pattern of racial segregation), lynching, disenfranchisement, an economic system -sharecropping and tenantry- that left little room for ambition or hope, and perpetuated unequal educational resources, terrorism, racial, caricatures, and every form of humiliation and brutalization imaginable.” (Graff 121) This quote summarizes the period discussed in this paper and makes clear that Lincoln’s Emancipation Declaration, the Thirteenth Amendment and the Period of Reconstruction that followed, failed to implement equality for the millions of black people in the United States. Instead, black progress was actively averted, by white Southerners, by militant white supremacist terrorist groups such as the KKK and protected by the Southern law of Jim Crow. Equality was not the emphasis after slavery was abolished, but protecting white capital was. And this was done with the support of continual force and systematic oppression of black people.

The turn of the twentieth century brought new leaders and organizations to the forefront. The National Association for the Advancement of Colored

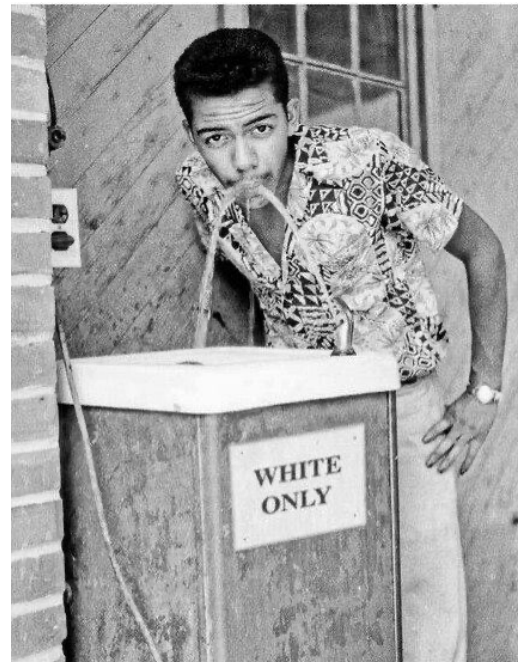


People (NAACP) and the Urban League spearheaded national campaigns for equality and against discrimination and violence. The United Negro Improvement Association (UNIA) promoted black pride, self-reliance and a back to Africa movement.



UNIA Rally, Harlem NY

Although not touched on, in this short analysis, it is important to note, that there was no point in time without black resistance to the inhumane system of slavery, racial subjugation and hatred on the continent. The German Coast uprising is only one of many revolts by enslaved against enslavement in Louisiana in 1811. (find more on this uprising in Vantage Point Zine #4)



Finishing with El-Hajj Malik El-Shabazz, better known as Malcolm X, born in Oklahoma to a father, who was lynched because of his political engagement as a Garveyite in the UNIA, fighting for black rights and equality. 'I'm not going to sit at your table and watch you eat, with nothing on my plate, and call myself a diner. Sitting at the table doesn't make you a diner, unless you eat some of what's on that plate. Being here in America doesn't make you an American.... No, I'm not an American, I'm one of the 22 million black people who are the victims of Americanism. One of the 22 million black people who are the victims of democracy, nothing but disguised hypocrisy.... I'm speaking as a victim of this American system. And I see America through the eyes of a victim. I don't see any American dream; I see an American nightmare.' (Malcolm X)

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National Memorial for Peace and Justice. Montgomery, Alabama, commemorating victims of lynching in the US

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