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4

# The Black Struggle Continues

By Edward W. Brooke

## Part I: The Unfinished Revolution

In this year of national celebration, as others look back to 1776 and to the lofty documents which set forth the founding principles of this nation, Black folk look even further back to 1619, and to the violence and anguish which marked their entry into this country.

At other critical points in this nation's life the rights of Black men and women were compromised. Many times, Black and white Americans joined together, to fight in defense of the great American "truths": That freedom and equal justice for all are absolute and inalienable rights belonging to each human being, regardless of social status or economic class. Indeed, for Black Americans, these principles have had special meaning and significance.

In 1776, Blacks hungered for liberty and for the realization of those revolutionary ideas so clearly articulated by the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution. In spite of white America's denial of the very humanity of Blacks, slaves and freedmen joined forces with whites in the fight for liberty. The need for manpower overcame the fear of arming slaves. And it is estimated that nearly 5,000 Blacks bore arms in defense of the American Revolution and the American dream.

It is not an overstatement to suggest that the very cause of the American freedom would have been lost, but for the support of Blacks. Yet, when it was time for the nation to repay the debt of honor so clearly owed, the hypocritical response was to exclude the 59,557 Blacks and even larger unrecorded number of slaves from application of the Constitution and the Bill of Rights in 1783.

In 1876, the hundred-year cycle repeated itself. After the divisiveness and pain of the Civil War, after the sacrifice and suffering of almost 168,000 Black troops, this nation seemed willing, at last, to extend those inalienable rights promised more than 100 years before.

In the 12-year period following the Civil War, tentative political advances were

made by Black Americans; which included the enactment of the 13th, 14th and 15th Amendments to the Constitution. In the Compromise of 1877, Black rights and the nation's principles were bargained away when Rutherford B. Hayes became President of the United States. Northern militia withdrew from the South, leaving in their wake Jim Crow, the Black Codes, the Ku Klux Klan, and the lynching tree.

The intervening years have transformed the contours of the Black experience. Black Americans have worked in the factories and fields of this land during peacetime, enlisted and fought and died with white Americans in global conflagrations—to insure that this nation, and indeed all nations, might escape the shadow of totalitarian repression. Yet, in spite of the success in defense of freedom abroad, Black soldiers returned to repression, segregation and inequality at home. The nation has seen the resilience of the Black spirit—after 200 years of tensions caused by expectations not realized, dreams deferred, hopes diminished.

But, in the face of myriad obstacles, Black Americans have in this century witnessed real political and social gains, including the historic civil rights decisions in the courts, all the major legislative victories of the 60s. Blacks have witnessed a remarkable moral awakening in America, which in part was accomplished by leaders like Medgar Evers, Malcolm X, Martin Luther King, Constance Baker Motley, Adam Clayton Powell, Charles Hamilton Houston and Thurgood Marshall, and those who sat-in, stood-in, swam-in; those who were spat upon and jailed; those who still live and those who have died. But much is left to be done. There remain, on one hand, serious questions about the depth of this country's commitment to those ringing ideals which have stirred all Americans since this country's inception. For many, the promises of the "Great Society" remain unfulfilled, and the society itself remains—in many ways—straitened, unequal, closed, certainly less than great.



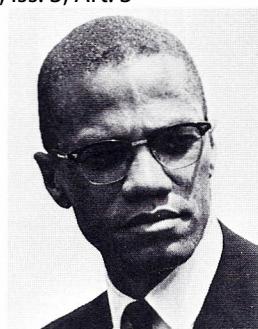
Charles Hamilton Houston



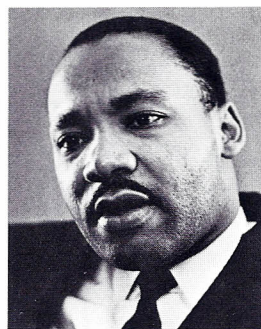
Constance Baker Motley



Adam Clayton Powell



Malcolm X



Martin Luther King

On the other hand, as America begins the third hundred years, Black America has, perhaps for the first time, the ability to affect change. Blacks are no longer begging for rights, but are in a position to demand them, to work for them, to secure them. Black America cannot wait the third hundred years for inertia's force to help the nation drift aimlessly and pointlessly toward final resolution of the conflict between stated principles and actual practice. This resolution must be secured through a collective effort.

Langston Hughes' poetry eloquently attests to the former despair, and the present hope of Black America:

"I, too, sing America"

I am the darker brother.  
They send me to eat in the Kitchen  
When company comes,  
But I laugh,  
And eat well,  
And grow strong.

Tomorrow,  
I'll sit at the table  
When company comes.  
Nobody'll dare  
Say to me,  
"Eat in the kitchen,"  
Then.

Besides,  
They'll see how beautiful I am  
And be ashamed—

I, too, am America.

The challenges posed by the present economic conditions are stark. The nation is in the throes of a serious economic recession which, as usual, affects Black citizens disproportionately. The ravages of unemployment affect Blacks at unacceptably high rates; many Black businesses, most of which were already marginal, are failing. And the educational institutions, which so often depend on government support and private philanthropy, are suffering as their stretched re-

of declining contribution and declining concern.

These are deeply disturbing developments. For example, the economist, Lester Thurow, in his evaluation of the actual economic progress of Black Americans, has come up with findings that should shock America, though they should not surprise most Blacks. Despite economic gains in the Sixties, progress toward economic parity has been temporary. In fact, the gap between Black and white income is again widening, and probably cannot be closed for another 75 years. Black unemployment is still "at all points in time, good or bad," running at about twice the rate of white unemployment. Absorbing Black youth into the work force through Job Corps and similar hasty responses to the urban riots of the mid-Sixties caused illusory economic progress in the Black community. Black family income reached 64% of white family income during the Vietnam conflict. Yet, in 1973, Black family income had dropped to 60%. And this trend has not been reversed. What this means, according to Mr. Thurow, is that "nothing has changed in the past 30 years." It also means continuing crisis in the Black community—crisis which cannot be solved by short-term measures.

America is also deep in the throes of a moral depression. Blacks have seen many former allies retreating from positions of support as the battles for freedom and equality leave the furrows and backroads of the South for the rowhouses and suburbs of the North.

The Black revolution is unfinished and the struggle continues. One need only look at the city of Boston, where mothers hurl invectives at children, and students hurl chairs at one another, simply because Black Americans are availing themselves of an opportunity supposedly guaranteed to them more than 20 years ago—the right and opportunity to obtain an equal and desegregated education.

Vernon Jordan, executive director of the National Urban League, stated it well as

"Freedom, liberty and equality appear to have lost their meaning for many white Americans today. But for Black people, those concepts still live and breathe; they still move us. They cannot be taken for granted by a people who just got the right to fair housing seven years ago, to vote ten years ago, the right to work eleven years ago, and the right to quality integrated schools barely twenty years ago. And the very fact that these are rights still honored more in the breach than in observance make it all the more imperative for Black citizens to use the occasion of the Bicentennial to press our uncompleted revolution."

Even so, Blacks in America have made progress that should be acknowledged. As Martin Luther King once said, "We aren't where we want to be, and we aren't where we should be, but thank God we aren't where we used to be."

The task of the Seventies is to seek power in, and control over, the institutions and occupations which directly affect the lives of Black folk, and to shift from overt protest to a more pragmatic approach in problem solving.

Many Black Americans feel that there is no cause for celebrating the Bicentennial. Considering the difficulties Blacks have faced, one can sympathize with this point of view. But, let us celebrate Black achievements, and let us bring again to all Americans a reawakened dedication to the impulses on which this nation was founded. With a firmer awareness of the Black experience in America, Blacks can focus during the 1976 Bicentennial on a new agenda for future accomplishments. The difficulties which continue to plague Black America can only be transcended through positive planning and forthright articulation of needs and goals.

6 **Part II:  
The Impact of Howard University**

This year, Howard University's 109th birthday is coupled with the nation's Bicentennial, and the confluence of these two important events offers a great opportunity for reflection: This year must not only be a year of commemoration, it must also be a year of rededication and revitalization. Black people should celebrate this particular birthday by reviewing past accomplishments and shortcomings.

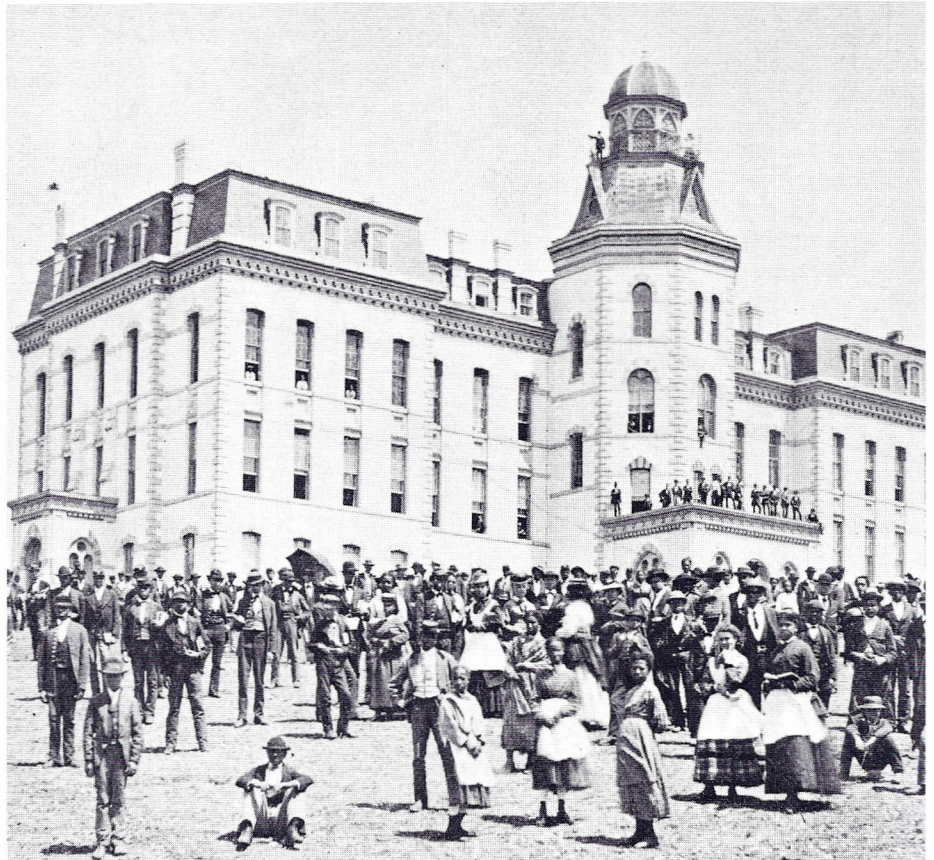
In the case of Howard, there can be no distinction between Black America and the university's constituency. Therefore, it is necessary to assess past contributions and, indeed, the sacrifices that will be required in the future if Howard is to remain vital and strong throughout her second century.

Howard's role is both symbolic and central to the kind of struggle the years ahead will bring. It will have to be a central resource for information and analysis about the world and the needs of the people. It will have to reach out for the best and most eager minds. And it will have to effect changes in those grim statistics which show that less than 2 percent of doctors and lawyers in this country are Black, that even fewer architects, engineers, chemists or bankers are Black.

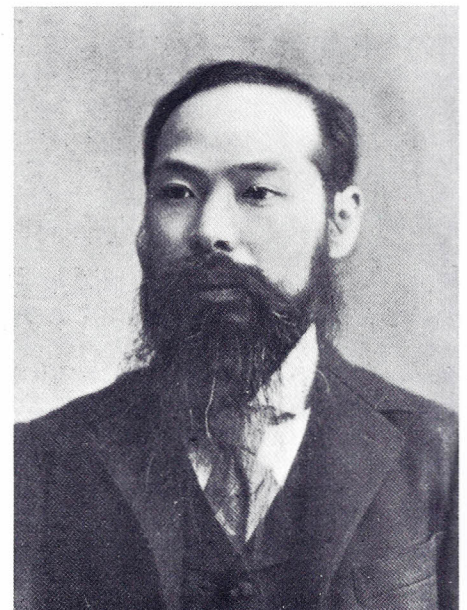
No doubt Howard University can meet this challenge. After all, Howard's growth and development has always mirrored the growth and development of Black America. Its founding in 1867 was, in many ways, an act of deep faith. From its inception, Howard provided an education for all who desired it, including many who had previously been excluded—Blacks, women, and poor whites. This radical concept that Blacks could not only be educated but "higher-educated," was at once Howard's greatest strength and greatest difficulty.

Many hoped that the experiment would fail, and that the old order would re-establish itself. Yet Howard stood for "truth and right" standing fast in the days when proof was needed. The University showed that

Howard University campus—circa 1870



Choy Ahwah, a Chinese student at Howard—circa 1870



Kiesaburo Watanabe, D.D.S. Howard University 1897, one of early students from Japan.

of this history, equality is not simply a "theory" still to be tested at some future time.

What began in 1867 at Georgia Avenue, below "W" or Pomeroy Streets—on the site of a former slave owner's plantation—endured, grew, and prospered. Howard achieved an international reputation for its excellence, for its faculty, students and alumni.

As early as 1872, Howard University acknowledged the educational needs of Third World peoples and reached out to African and Chinese students. In the 1880s and 1890s, other foreign students, most notably the Japanese, came to study in the medical school and other areas of the university. They carried back skills which their countries, like many Black American communities, so sorely needed.

At Howard, too, Charlotte E. Ray, the first woman law student of any race in this country, studied law and was duly admitted to the Bar in 1872. And, the law faculty—under Charles Hamilton Houston—persuaded the great legal institutions of this land to redefine their interpretations of the Constitution, and most notably, the 14th Amendment. Howard's contributions in the social sciences have been enormous and of special usefulness to Blacks. The University has helped change research directions from the biological determinism of the early 20th century, to the more fluid behavioral approach which still has ascendancy today. Her invaluable contributions in science, in sickle cell anemia research and in cardiovascular research, have eased pain and increased healing for untold thousands.

Howard, since its founding, continues to be on the cutting edge of the Black experience in America.

A major challenge for Howard University has always been, and will continue to be, the need to provide quality educational opportunities not only for the well-prepared student but also for the student who has been termed "disadvantaged." Howard, therefore, must remain true to the belief that all students with the will to

status, deserve an opportunity to join a supportive community of scholars interested in their well-being. Yet, the costs of providing an education, and vital financial aid to students who have great needs are increasing. In fact, the cost of obtaining a Howard education has risen so precipitously in five years that those who could have paid to attend five years ago could no longer do so today.

It is ironic and unfortunate that the university's contemplated growth comes at a time of decreasing government support for higher education generally, and at a time when many sources of private philanthropy are themselves feeling the pinch of declining contributions, and declining dividends from their investment portfolios. The deep pockets of the government and of other friends are not boundless. Furthermore, excessive dependence on outside resources may not always be in Howard's best interest. Increasingly, the university must look to the community to return some measure to Howard—which has given so much.

Howard University has many goals for the future. In the next five to seven years, the university's New Directions Fund hopes to raise \$100,000,000. These funds will be used not only to sustain the traditional quality at Howard, but also to expand libraries, provide more tenured faculties, build new laboratories, provide more student aid and scholarships, sponsor research and program development.

Those who honor Howard's history, must also participate fully in Howard's future; must give support, ideas, hopes, and dollars. Alumni, along with the current administration, faculty, and the student body, must take this responsibility seriously. This is to insure that the environment which nurtured them as students continues, and that a Howard education remains a means for inclusion of greater numbers of minority Americans in every profession and every endeavor.

When I was a student at Howard [Class of '41], the light in the Founder's Library was an important tradition. When the light

where the science students toiled those long hours, all was well with Howard. Now, the Founder's Library is being renovated and improved, and the light again shines. The alumni, friends, students and faculty of Howard University, must insure that the light burns perpetually. This can only happen when each of us takes our responsibility to Howard and to the dream that it embodies seriously.

A strong and successful Howard University must be a vital participant in bringing education to our youth, and through them, bringing America closer to its principles. The light symbolizes a dream of achievement, and enduring progress for all Black Americans, a belief that change and improvement is possible. This dream is—simply stated—the American dream, for the spirit of achievement is the achievement of America.

In every conceivable way, it is a must that this Bicentennial and the 109th year of Howard are used to bring this dream for Howard and the nation closer to fruition. □

*Edward W. Brooke is the Republican Senator from Massachusetts. This article was excerpted from Senator Brooke's March 2 Charter Day address commemorating the 109th birthday of Howard University.*