

20th Century African American History

By John A. Braithwaite

Directions:

Using the accompanying documents, your knowledge of the time period and topic, and any other resources you have or care to consult, respond to the following question fully, accurately, and from a variety of viewpoints. The question is multi-dimensional, broad and sweeping. Focus on the bolded part of the question.

Question:

*The evolution in Black History during the 20th Century, has revealed that there have been various strategies and tactics used to acquire education, civil rights, and cultural equity for Blacks in America. **Have the tactics, the personalities involved, and the government decisions, provided for improved social, political, cultural, and developing economic justice for Black Americans?** Are African Americans beginning to have some chance of progress and parity on the national landscape as a result of the 20th changes in American social, cultural, economic, and political life?*

Prompts: These are not the question, but ideas to think about as you answer the question above.

1. Discuss and analyze at least three basic issues demonstrating develops in civil rights
2. Discuss the impact of events, ideas, and conflicts as agents of the civil rights movement?
3. What evidence of change can be noticed since before and after the 1954 Brown vs Board of Education case?
4. Show, identify, and explain the beneficial changes for Black Americans 1920-2000
5. It would be wise for students to verbally discuss the range of tactics used over the eighty year time period.

Document A:

Source: Gunner Myrdahl, *An American Dilemma*. (1944)

"The observer finds that in the North there is actually much unawareness on the part of white people to the extent of social discrimination against Negroes... White northerners are surprised and shocked when they hear about such things... One of the main difficulties for the Negroes in the North is simply lack of publicity. It is convenient for the Northerners' good consciences to forget about the Negro."

Document B:

Lyrics for Hymn: "We Shall Over Come."

We shall overcome,
We shall overcome,
We shall overcome some day.
Oh, deep in my heart
I do believe
We shall overcome some day.

We shall walk in peace
We shall walk in peace
We shall walk in peace some day.
Oh, deep in my heart
I do believe
We shall walk in peace some day.

We shall build a new world,
We shall build a new world,
We shall build a new world some day
Oh, deep in my heart
I do believe
We shall build a new world some day

Document C:

Source: John Hope Franklin, *Up From Slavery. A History of Negro Americans.* [1966]

"The steady migration of Negroes to the North and West and their concentration in the industrial communities gave them a powerful voice in political affairs. In cities like Chicago, Detroit, Cleveland they frequently held the balance of power in close elections, and in certain pivotal states the votes of Negroes came to be regarded as crucial in national elections. Meanwhile, an increasing number of Negroes in the South were registering and voting. In 1947 Federal District Judge J. Walter Waring declared that Negroes could not be excluded from the Democratic primary in South Carolina. In the following year 35,000 Negroes voted in the Democratic primary in that State. By 1948 the number of registered Negro voters in Georgia had already exceeded 150,000 and this number of Negro votes was even higher by the time of the next presidential election. In 1952 it was estimated that 63 percent of the eligible Negro electorate in Durham, North Carolina voted regularly

Document C:

Source: Majority Opinion in Brown vs Board of Education.

"Today, education is perhaps the most important function of state and local governments. Compulsory school attendance laws and the great expenditures for education both demonstrate our recognition of the importance of education to our democratic society. It is required in the performance of our most basic public responsibilities, even service in the armed forces. It is the very foundation of good citizenship. Today it is a principal instrument in awakening him to adjust normally to his environment. In these days, it is doubtful that any child may reasonably be expected to succeed in life if he is denied the opportunity of an education. Such an opportunity, where the state had undertaken to provide it, is a right, which must be made available to all on equal terms.

"We come then to the question presented: does segregation of children in public schools solely on the basis of race, even though the physical facilities and other "tangible" factors may be equal, deprive the children of the minority group of equal educational opportunities? We believe that it does...

"We conclude that in field of public education the doctrine of 'separate but equal' has no place. Separate educational facilities are inherently unequal."

Opinion rendered by Chief Justice Earl Warren, Vote was 9-0

Document D:

Brown vs Board of Education-Topeka, KS

347 U.S. 483 [1954]

May 31, 1955

FACTS:

Brown v. Board of Education was not the first challenge to school segregation. As early as 1849, African Americans filed suit against an educational system that mandated racial segregation, in the case of *Roberts v. City of Boston*.

Oliver Brown, the case namesake, was just one of the nearly 200 plaintiffs from five states who were part of the NAACP cases brought before the Supreme Court in 1951. The Kansas case was named for Oliver *Brown* as a legal strategy to have a man head the plaintiff roster

ISSUE:

For Kansas this would become the 12th case filed in the state focused on ending segregation in public schools. The local NAACP assembled a group of 13 parents who agreed to be plaintiffs on behalf of their 20 children. Topeka operated eighteen neighborhood schools for white children, while African American children had access to only four schools. In February of 1951 the Topeka NAACP filed a case on their behalf. Although this was a class action it was named for one of the plaintiffs Oliver Brown. These schools were separate and unequal.

HOLDING:

"Today, education is perhaps the most important function of state and local governments. Compulsory school attendance laws and the great expenditures for education both demonstrate our recognition of the importance of education to our democratic society. It is required in the performance of our most basic public responsibilities, even service in the armed forces. It is the very foundation of good citizenship. Chief Justice Earl Warren for 9-0 Court Opinion

RATIONALE:

A society that is separate is inherently unequal. There must be integrated schools accessible to all.

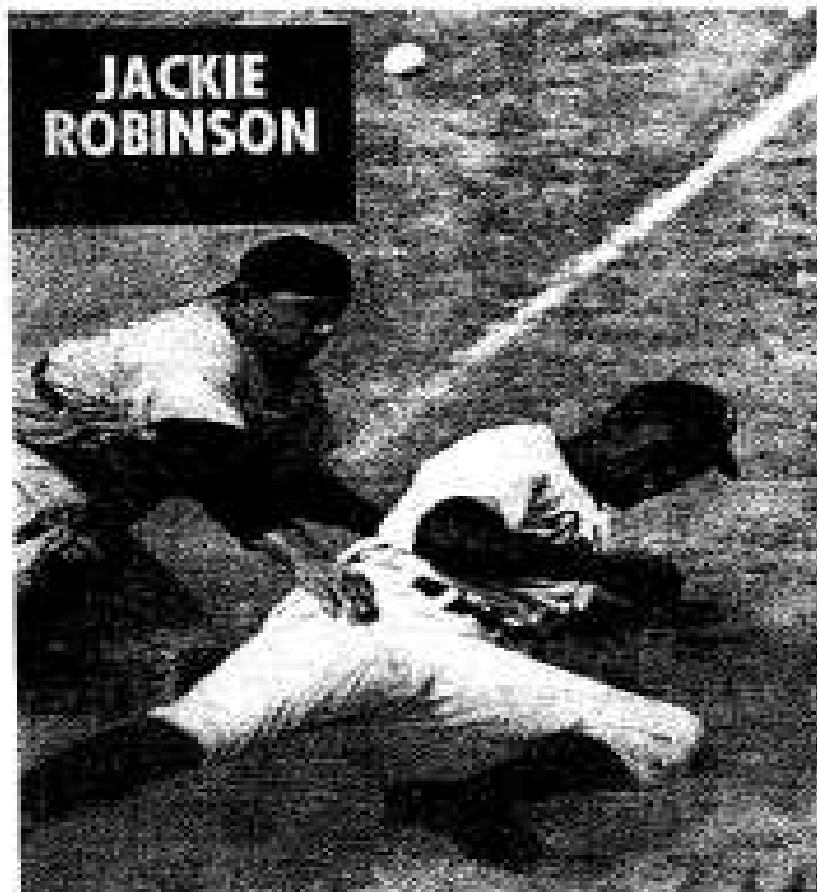
SIGNIFICANCE:

"Today it is a principal instrument in awakening the child to cultural values, in preparing him for later professional training, and in helping him to adjust normally to his environment. Such an opportunity, where the state has undertaken to provide it, is a right which must be made available to all on equal terms."

Document E:

Source: Jules Tygiel, *Baseball's Great Experiment: Jackie Robinson and His Legacy*. [1984] Michael Barson Collection.

Picture



Document F:

Source: "The Southern Manifesto" US Congress, 84th 2nd Session, Mar. 12, 1956

"We regard the decision of the Supreme Court in school cases as a clear abuse of judicial power. It climaxes a trend in the federal judiciary undertaking to legislate, in derogation of the authority of Congress, and encroach upon the reserved powers of the states and the people..."

"This unwarranted exercise of power by the Court, contrary to the Constitution, is creating chaos and confusion in the states principally affected. It is destroying the amicable relations between the White and Negro races. It has planted hatred and suspicion where there has been heretofore friendship and understanding."

"Without regard to the consent of the governed, outside agitators are threatening immediate and revolutionary changes in our public school systems. If done, this is certain to destroy the system of public education in some states."

Document G:

Source: Photo of Rosa Parks seated on the bus.



Document H:

Source: President John F. Kennedy, addressing the nation, June 1963

"The Negro baby born in America today, regardless of the section or state in which he is born, has about one-half as much chance of completing a high school as a white baby born in the same place on the same day; one-third as much chance of completing college; one-third as much chance of becoming a professional man; twice as much chance of becoming unemployed; about one-seventh as much chance of earning \$10,000 a year; a life expectancy which is seven years shorter and the prospects of earning only half as much...

"We are confronted primarily with a moral issue. It is as old as the scriptures and is as clear as the American Constitution. The heart of the question is whether all Americans are to be afforded equal rights and equal opportunities; whether to treat our fellow Americans as we want to be treated.

"Now the time has come for this nation to fulfill its promise. The events of Birmingham and elsewhere have so increased the cries for equality that no city or state or legislative body can prudently ignore them. The fires of frustration and discord are burning in every city, North and South.

"Therefore, I'm asking for your help in making it easier for us to move ahead and provide the kind of equality of treatment which we could want ourselves—to give a chance for every child to be educated to the limit of his talent."

Document I:

Source: Martin Luther King's, Address in Washington, August 28, 1963

"Five score years ago, a great American, in whose symbolic shadow we stand, signed the Emancipation Proclamation. This momentous decree came as a great beacon light of hope to millions of Negro slaves who had been seared in the flames of withering injustice. It came as joyous daybreak to end the long night of captivity.

"I say to you today, my friends that inspire of the difficulties and frustrations of the moment I still have a dream. It is dream deeply rooted in the American dream.

"I have a dream that one day this nation will rise up and live out the true meaning of its creed: 'We hold these truths to be self evident; that all men are created equal.'

"I have a dream that one day even the State of Mississippi, a desert state sweltering with heat of injustice and oppression, will be transformed into an oasis of freedom and justice.

"I have a dream that my four little children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin but the content of their character...

"And if America is to be a great nation this must become true. So let freedom ring from the prodigious hilltops of New Hampshire. Let freedom ring from the mountains of New York. Let freedom ring from the heightening Alleghenies of Pennsylvania!

"Let freedom ring from the snow capped Rockies of Colorado!

"Let freedom ring from the curvaceous peaks of California!

"But not only that, let freedom ring from Stone Mountain of Georgia!

"Let freedom ring from Lookout Mountain of Tennessee!

"Let freedom ring from every hill and mole hill of Mississippi. From every mountainside, let freedom ring...

"When we let freedom ring, when we let it ring from every village and every hamlet, from every state and every city, we will be able to speed up that day when all God's children, black men and white men, Jew and Gentile, Protestant and Catholics, will be able to join hands and sing in the words of the old Negro spiritual, 'Free at Last! Thank God almighty, we are free at last!'"

Document J:

Source: Malcolm X. Memorandum to the Organization of African Unity. July 17, 1964

“Your Excellences:

The American government is either unable or unwilling to protect the lives and property of your 22 million African brothers and sisters. We stand defenseless at the mercy of American racists who murder us at will for no other reason than we are Black and African descent.

“Our problem is your problem.

“Your problem will never be solved until and unless ours are solved. You will never be fully respected until and unless we are also respected.

“Our problem is your problem. It is not an African or an American problem. It is a world problem, a problem of humanity.

“In the interests of world peace and security, we beseech the heads of independent African states to recommend the immediate investigation into our problem by the United States Commission on Human Rights.”

Document K:

Source: The Kerner Commission. *Report of the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders*, March 1968

“Just as Lincoln, a century ago, put preservation of the Union above all else, so should we put creation of a true union—a single society and single American identity—as our major goal. Toward that goal, we propose the following objectives for national action:

--Opening up opportunities to those who are restricted by racial segregation and discrimination, and eliminating all barriers to their choice of jobs, education and housing.

--Removing the frustration and powerlessness among disadvantaged by providing the means for them to deal with the problems that affect their own lives, and by increasing the capacity of our public and private institutions to respond to these problems.

--Increasing communication across racial lines to destroy stereotypes, to halt polarization, to end distrust and hostility, and to create common ground for efforts toward common goals of public order and social justice.

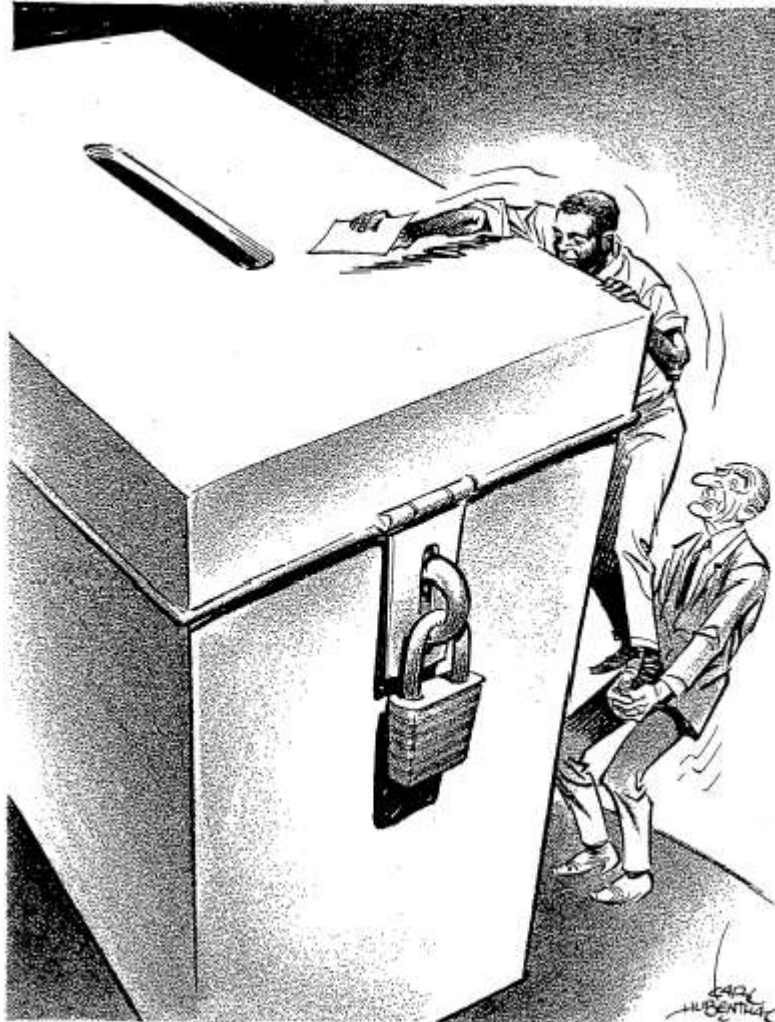
“These are those who oppose these aims as ‘rewarding the rioters’ They are wrong. We propose these aims to fulfill our pledge of equality and to meet the fundamental needs of a democratic civilized society—domestic peace, social justice, and urban centers that are citadels of the human spirit.

“There are others who say that violence is necessary—that fear alone can prod the nation to act decisively on behalf of racial minorities. They too are wrong. Violence and disorder compound injustice; they must be ended and they will be ended.

“Our strategy is neither blind repression nor capitulation to lawlessness. Rather it is the affirmation of common possibilities, for all, within a single society.

Document L:

Source: "Big Lift." President Johnson Supports the Voting Rights Act of 1965. Karl Hubenthal cartoon from Los Angeles Examiner, Mar. 18, 1965. Dennis Ryan Cartoon Collection.



Document M:

Source: James Baldwin, "The Fire Next Time" an essay.

"How can the American Negro past be used? It is entirely possible that this dishonored past will rise up soon to smite all of us. There are some wars, for example...that the Negro will not support, however many of his people may be coerced—and there is limited to the number of people any government can put in prison. . . . A bill is coming in that I fear America is not prepared to pay. "The problem of the twentieth century" wrote W.E.B. DuBois around sixty years ago, "is the problem of the color line.

". . . .If we—and now I mean the relatively conscious whites and the relatively conscious blacks,—do not falter in our duty now, we may be able, handful that we are, to end the racial nightmare, and achieve our, and change the history of the world. If we do not now dare everything, the fulfillment of that prophecy, re-created from the Bible in song by a slave, it upon us: *GOD GAVE NOAH THE RAINBOW SIGN, NO MORE WATER, THE FIRE NEXT TIME!*"

Document N:

EXECUTIVE ORDER 9981

Establishing the President's Committee on Equality of Treatment and Opportunity In the Armed Forces.

WHEREAS it is essential that there be maintained in the armed services of the United States the highest standards of democracy, with equality of treatment and opportunity for all those who serve in our country's defense:

NOW THEREFORE, by virtue of the authority vested in me as President of the United States, by the Constitution and the statutes of the United States, and as Commander in Chief of the armed services, it is hereby ordered as follows:

1. It is hereby declared to be the policy of the President that there shall be equality of treatment and opportunity for all persons in the armed services without regard to race, color, religion or national origin. This policy shall be put into effect as rapidly as possible, having due regard to the time required to effectuate any necessary changes without impairing efficiency or morale.
2. There shall be created in the National Military Establishment an advisory committee to be known as the President's Committee on Equality of Treatment and Opportunity in the Armed Services, which shall be composed of seven members to be designated by the President.
3. The Committee is authorized on behalf of the President to examine into the rules, procedures and practices of the Armed Services in order to determine in what respect such rules, procedures and practices may be altered or improved with a view to carrying out the policy of this order. The

Committee shall confer and advise the Secretary of Defense, the Secretary of the Army, the Secretary of the Navy, and the Secretary of the Air Force, and shall make such recommendations to the President and to said Secretaries as in the judgment of the Committee will effectuate the policy hereof.

4. All executive departments and agencies of the Federal Government are authorized and directed to cooperate with the Committee in its work, and to furnish the Committee such information or the services of such persons as the Committee may require in the performance of its duties.

5. When requested by the Committee to do so, persons in the armed services or in any of the executive departments and agencies of the Federal Government shall testify before the Committee and shall make available for use of the Committee such documents and other information as the Committee may require.

6. The Committee shall continue to exist until such time as the President shall terminate its existence by Executive order.

Harry Truman

The White House
July 26, 1948

Document S:

We Wear the Mask

We wear the mask that grins and lies.
It hides our cheeks and shades our eyes, --
This debt we pay to human guiles:
With torn and bleeding hearts we smile,
And mouth with myriad subtleties.

Why should the world be over wise.
In counting all our tears and sighs?
Nay, let them only see us, while
 We wear the mask.

We smile, but, O great Christ, our cries
To Thee from tortured souls arise.
We sing, but oh, the clay is vile
Beneath our feet, and long the mile:
But let the world dream otherwise.
 We wear the mask.

Paul Laurence Dunbar, "We Wear the Mask,"

Document T:

Source: Lyndon Johnson's War On Poverty Program. *Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States: Lyndon B. Johnson, 1963-1964*. (Washington, D.C. 1965), Book 1, 375-377.

Comment: *Forgotten amongst the materialism and prosperity and productivity of the 1950s was the existence of what Michael Harrington called "Other America"—the poor!*

LBJ Speech:

There are millions of Americans—one fifth of our people—who have not shared in the abundance which has been granted to most of us, and on whom the gates of opportunity have been closed.

What does this poverty mean to those who endure it?

It means daily struggle to secure the necessities for even a meager existence. It means that the abundance, the comforts, the opportunities they see all around them are beyond their grasp.

Worst of all, it means hopelessness for the young.

The young man or woman who grows up without a decent education, in a broken home, in a hostile and squalid environment, in ill health or in the face of racial injustice—that young man or woman is often trapped in a life of poverty

The war on poverty is not a struggle simply to support people, to make them dependent on the generosity of others.

It is a struggle to give people a chance.

We do this, first of all, because it is right that we should.

The war on poverty is a further step in that pursuit.

It can be a milestone in our one-hundred eighty year search for a better life for our people.

Document V:

Source: Letter From a Birmingham Jail. Martin Luther King. (April 16, 1963)

But more basically, I am in Birmingham because injustice is here. Just as the prophets of the eighth century B.C. left their villages and carried their "thus saith the Lord" far beyond the boundaries of their home towns, and just as the Apostle Paul left his village of Tarsus and carried the gospel of Jesus Christ to the far corners of the Greco-Roman world, so am I compelled to carry the gospel of freedom beyond my own home town. Like Paul, I must constantly respond to the Macedonian call for aid.

Moreover, I am cognizant of the interrelatedness of all communities and states. I cannot sit idly by in Atlanta and not be concerned about what happens in Birmingham. Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere. We are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny. Whatever affects one directly, affects all indirectly. Never again can we afford to live with the narrow, provincial "outside agitator" idea. Anyone who lives inside the United States can never be considered an outsider anywhere within its bounds

You may well ask: "Why direct action? Why sit-ins, marches and so forth? Isn't negotiation a better path?" You are quite right in calling for negotiation. Indeed, this is the very purpose of direct action. Nonviolent direct action seeks to create such a crisis and foster such a tension that a community which has constantly refused to negotiate is forced to confront the issue. It seeks so to dramatize the issue that it can no longer be ignored. My citing the creation of tension as part of the work of the nonviolent-resister may sound rather shocking. But I must confess that I am not afraid of the word "tension." I have earnestly opposed violent tension, but there is a type of constructive, nonviolent tension which is necessary for growth. Just as Socrates felt that it was necessary to create a tension in the mind so that individuals could rise from the bondage of myths and half-truths to the unfettered realm of creative analysis and objective appraisal, we must see the need for nonviolent gadflies to create the kind of tension in society that will help men rise from the dark depths of prejudice and racism to the majestic heights of understanding and brotherhood.

The purpose of our direct-action program is to create a situation so crisis-packed that it will inevitably open the door to negotiation. I therefore concur with you in your call for negotiation. Too long has our beloved South land been bogged down in a tragic effort to live in monologue rather than dialogue?

I must make two honest confessions to you, my Christian and Jewish brothers. First, I must confess that over the past few years I have been gravely disappointed with the white moderate. I have almost reached the regrettable conclusion that the Negro's great stumbling block in his stride toward freedom is not the White Citizen's Council or the Ku Klux Klanner, but the white moderate, who is more devoted to "order" than to justice; who prefers a negative peace which is the absence of tension to a positive peace which is the presence of justice; who constantly says: "I agree with you in the goal you seek, but I cannot agree with your methods of direct action"; who paternalistically believes he can set the timetable for another man's freedom; who lives by a mythical concept of time and who constantly advises the Negro to wait for a "more convenient season." Shallow understanding from people of

good will is more frustrating than absolute misunderstanding from people of ill will. Lukewarm acceptance is much more bewildering than outright rejection

Things are different now. So often the contemporary church is a weak, ineffectual voice with an uncertain sound. So often it is an arch-defender of the status quo. Far from being disturbed by the presence of the church, the power structure of the average community is consoled by the church's silent and often even vocal sanction of things as they are.

But the judgment of God is upon the church as never before. If today's church does not recapture the sacrificial spirit of the early church, it will lose its authenticity, forfeit the loyalty of millions, and be dismissed as an irrelevant social club with no meaning for the twentieth century. Every day I meet young people whose disappointment with the church has turned into outright disgust.

Perhaps I have once again been too optimistic. Is organized religion too inextricably bound to the status quo to save our nation and the world?

I hope this letter finds you strong in the faith. I also hope that circumstances will soon make it possible for me to meet each of you, not as an integrationist or a civil rights leader but as a fellow clergyman and a Christian brother. Let us all hope that the dark clouds of racial prejudice will soon pass away and the deep fog of misunderstanding will be lifted from our fear-drenched communities, and in some not too distant tomorrow the radiant stars of love and brotherhood will shine over our great nation with all their scintillating beauty.

Document W:

Source: Marcus Garvey and "Back to Africa" Movement.

The main principle of this movement was "to unify people of color against imperialism all over the world" (McKissack 79). Garvey returned to Jamaica in 1914 and founded the United Negro Improvement Association. The UNIA reflected Garvey's beliefs and it was the tool he used to promote them. The objectives of the UNIA included:

To establish a universal confraternity among the race.

To promote the spirit of race pride and love.

To reclaim the fallen race.

To promote a conscientious Christian worship among the native tribes of Africa.

To establish universities, colleges and secondary schools for the further education and culture of the boys and girls of the race.

To conduct a worldwide commercial and industrial intercourse. (Stein 30)

Document X:

Source: Eric Foner & John A. Garraty. *The Readers Companion to American History*. pp. 440-441. Short biography of Garvey and his achievements by eminent current historians.

Born in Jamaica, Garvey aimed to organize blacks everywhere but achieved his greatest impact in the United States, where he tapped into and enhanced the growing black aspirations for justice, wealth, and a sense of community. During World I and the 1920's his Universal Negro Improvement Association was the largest black secular organization in African-American history.

...He combined the economic nationalist ideas of Booker T. Washington and Pan-Africanists with political possibilities and urban style of men women living outside of the plantation and colonial societies.

Garvey's goals were modern and urban. He sought to end imperialist rule and create modern societies in Africa, not, as his critics charged, to transport blacks "back to Africa." He knitted black communities on three continents with his newspaper, the *Negro World*.

Garvey's movement was the first black attempt to join modern urban goals and mass organization...Garvey had demonstrated ...that the urban masses were a potentially powerful force in the struggle for black freedom.

Document Y:

African American History Vignette:

Thurgood Marshall (1908-1993)



THURGOOD MARSHALL, arguably the most important and influential black lawyer of the twentieth century, was born in segregated Baltimore in 1908. His father was a steward at a country club, and his mother taught elementary school; both instilled

in him feelings of racial pride. Marshall attended Lincoln University and graduated at the top of his class from Howard's law school in 1933. He became a protege of Charles Hamilton Houston's, adopting Houston's philosophy that law could be used in the fight against racism. He became assistant special counsel to the NAACP in 1936 and special counsel in 1938. Marshall was the key litigator who pressed the plaintiff's case in *Brown v. Board of Education*. He assumed a position on the U.S. Supreme Court in 1967, the first black to do so. He retired from the Supreme Court in 1991, two years before his death in Bethesda, Maryland.

Source: *William Banks, Black Intellectuals: Race and Responsibility in American Life (New York: W.W. Norton, 1996)*

William Banks

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