

Contesting the Nation, 1900–1965

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In 1903, when the African American scholar and activist W. E. B. Du Bois wrote that “the problem of the Twentieth Century is the problem of the color-line,” he was in the middle of a very long life.¹ Du Bois was born in 1868, the same year that the Fourteenth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution was passed² (Figure 1). He spent his childhood in a society reeling from the Civil War. After the war he lived through deeply oppressive years when the nation became segregated by law and by custom. Violence against people of color rose to new heights of brutality. He also witnessed some of the bittersweet triumphs of the modern civil rights movement.³ Du Bois died in Ghana, West Africa on 28 August 1963, the same day as the historic March on Washington, and his passing was announced from the podium. His prediction about the color line turned out to be completely correct.

In 1900, most native-born white Americans believed that an Anglo-Protestant white supremacist racial hierarchy was crucial for national stability and identity, and that all immigrants should assimilate as soon as possible. These views restricted all people of color to limited social, economic, and educational spheres. The related political movement meant to protect the interests of native-born or long-established inhabitants against those of immigrants was called “nativism,” and nativist elected officials developed new laws to restrict the number of immigrants from certain parts of the world. Yet by the end of Du Bois’s lifetime, enough

Figure 1.

Early portrait of Dr. W. E. B. Du Bois, photographed in Washington, D.C. in 1911. A prolific author and activist, W. E. B. Du Bois helped shape twentieth-century debates about race both in the United States and globally. Among his many contributions, Du Bois co-founded the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People in 1909. Scurlock Studio Records, ca. 1905–1994, Archives Center, National Museum of American History.



white Americans had changed their views such that the nation passed new civil rights laws and courts at all levels decided cases meant to guarantee equal rights to all Americans. These were rights that had been promised earlier, but discriminatory laws such as those levying poll taxes, which required everyone who voted to pay a special tax, were passed to prevent Americans of color from exercising them.⁴ In 1965, after decades during which federal laws severely limited immigration, a new law opened the possibility of immigration to the wider world, increasing the diversity of the American populace—sometimes in unexpected ways. By the 1970s, a leading national metaphor suggested that the United States was “a nation of nations,” in which the importance of immigrant contributions and diversities could be celebrated.⁵ While “cultural pluralism” had developed into a mainstream ideology shared by many liberals and centrists, other Americans clung to long-held racial views and practices. Massive resistance to the modern civil rights movement characterized not only the South but many parts of the urban and suburban North as well.

This essay highlights some of the principal factors that led to these cultural shifts. The unanticipated shocks of World War II and the Cold War were key causal elements. People of color and sympathetic whites formed advocacy organizations, pushed for new laws, published books and articles, and created new elementary and secondary school curricula that emphasized the social and economic advantages of diversity. By the mid-1960s, these coalitions led by African Americans

gained enough political and social power to challenge key elements of a centuries-old system of white racial hierarchy, in legislatures, courts, universities, in religious settings, and in the streets. This essay investigates the significant movements, organizations, and individuals as well as the tremendous obstacles they faced in striving for a nation that came closer to living up to its long-stated ideals.

COMPETING BELIEFS ABOUT RACE AND ETHNICITY

By 1920, the United States had emerged as a world power with widely scattered territories (e.g., Puerto Rico, Hawaii, the U.S. Virgin Islands, American Samoa, and Guam) and unacknowledged colonies (e.g., Cuba, the Philippines).⁶ Rapid industrialization and urbanization beckoned southern and eastern Europeans seeking social mobility, freedom from conscription, religious tolerance, and greater economic opportunity.

Early twentieth-century images reflected common ideas about the appropriate hierarchy of the different “races.” Ordinary trade cards, magazine illustrations, and illustrated sheet music were filled with images of Uncle Sam (Figure 2), and later the Statue of Liberty, welcoming all newcomers—even some who by law could not immigrate or become naturalized citizens, such as those from Asia. People emigrated from places such as Italy, Poland, the Balkans, and Russia because they were pushed out of their homelands by poverty, wars, revolutions, and religious intolerance. The United States was remarkably easy to get into,



Figure 2.

Trade card for the Keystone Manufacturing Company in Sterling, Illinois, 1892. In this illustration, Uncle Sam presents Keystone Manufacturing Company’s agricultural implements to different peoples of the world. Each figure is associated with a specific racial or ethnic group, specified by stereotypical facial features, clothing, and adornments. Archives Center, National Museum of American History, Smithsonian Institution.

compared to western Europe and Japan. Before the 1920s, there was no such thing as an illegal alien. If a person could get to American shores, he or she could stay or go back and forth many times, unless convicted of a crime.⁷

Not all who came here settled here. For example, many Italian and Polish men often went back and forth, spending some years in the United States, then returning home temporarily or even permanently. Yet enough of these new people did stay that some Americans began to worry whether the “national character” would change. Political, social, and religious leaders often invoked this term as a nod to the widespread understanding that “national character” depended upon the maintenance not only of white supremacy in relation to all people of color, but also the unchallenged notion that British and northern European laws, customs, language, and religious traditions had always been, and should always be, the fundamental organizing element of American society. Even other Europeans, such as those from the south, central, and eastern regions, were viewed as coming from lesser cultures. In the 1990s, scholars such as Theodore Allen and David Roediger began to use the term “whiteness” to describe this constellation of socio-political attitudes.⁸

Newer arrivals hailed from cultures quite different from the earlier British and other Northern European immigrants, who often called themselves “natives.”⁹ Jewish, Polish, Irish, and Italian communities also broadened and complicated what it meant to be “white” because although they were not people of color, they did not fit the normative Anglo-Saxon Protestant archetype of the time.¹⁰ Each new wave of international immigrants and internal migrants encountered some prejudice and discrimination. Social anxieties about immigration also served to harden explicitly racial hierarchies that segregated all people of color as outside the national mythology of equality and freedom for all. By the time Du Bois died, the nation was only just beginning to enforce the anti-discrimination laws that challenged white supremacy and create more inclusive definitions of what it meant to be American. However powerful, these laws and judicial rulings could not quickly eliminate the customs and values contained in white supremacy. Debates over the relevance of past prejudices and symbols continue into the twenty-first century, for example in the discussion over states and public institutions flying Confederate flags.

As immigration increased, many native-born whites wondered whether it was possible to have social order with so many culturally dissimilar people. Anxieties about the growing population of southern and eastern Europeans sparked the passage of the Immigration Act of 1924. This law limited new immigrants from

those regions to a very small percentage, based on their presence in the population in 1890. According to the U.S. Department of State Office of the Historian, the purpose of the act was “to preserve the ideal of American homogeneity.”¹¹

“Old stock” Americans of northern European, Protestant descent wondered how to preserve their traditions, values, and the nation’s “Anglo-dominant” character. By 1920, an “Americanization movement” had emerged involving public school officials, the YMCA and YWCA, groups such as the Sons and Daughters of the American Revolution, veterans’ groups, especially the Grand Army of the Republic and the American Legion, and many local governments. They developed public school curricula, sponsored historical pageants about the Founding Fathers and the Revolutionary era, worked towards English-only instruction, and actively developed patriotic celebrations for Independence Day (4 July) and George Washington’s birthday (22 February).

Many scholars, educators, elected officials, and opinion leaders posited that assimilation was the only way to inculcate normative Anglo-Protestant values and produce good citizens. In 1909, a play entitled *The Melting Pot*, written by Jewish immigrant Israel Zangwill, first popularized the notion that it was just a matter of time before all newcomers would give up any distinctive cultural traits in order to blend together into “Americanness.” For example, businessman Henry Ford organized English schools and pageants for his workers where



Figure 3.

“Melting Pot” graduation ceremony from the Ford English School, 1916. Aligned with the popular melting pot philosophy of the time, the Ford Motor Company offered English and Americanization classes to its workers. Upon graduation, the melting pot ideal was literally acted out in a ceremony where graduates passed through a large “melting pot” and emerged in uniform Americanized clothing. Courtesy of the collections of The Henry Ford, Dearborn, Michigan. Object ID P.O.5167.

they literally acted out the “melting pot” ideal. Participants started with their original ethnic clothing and flags, then passed through a symbolic cauldron, and emerged wearing similar sober suits and waving American flags. In particular, Jewish, Slavic, Greek, and other eastern European immigrant groups experienced some discrimination in economic opportunities and education, but not nearly to the same extent as did people of color. As in the case of Henry Ford’s program, tremendous economic and social pressures were exerted to force the acceptance of this Protestant, Anglo dominant superiority (Figure 3).

Not all resistance to immigration was so genteel. In the 1920s the Ku Klux Klan (KKK) was reorganized in Indiana, home to many southerners who had migrated from Kentucky and Tennessee. Klan parades in broad daylight, nighttime meetings where fiery crosses were burned, and violent intimidation worked to terrorize Catholic immigrants and communities of color (Figure 4). As a result of redlining, racial prejudice, and the threat of racial violence, most cities were made up of neighborhoods defined by ethnic/racial boundaries of language, national origin, religion, and other customs, making them easily identifiable targets.

Thousands of African American men and women were lynched in the South and elsewhere. Photographs of gleeful white mobs crowding around the broken body of a colored person appeared in newspapers and were sometimes sent as postcards. Such mob actions rarely received any judicial sanctions or even public criticism.¹² Typically, newspapers reported that such acts were committed by “persons unknown.”¹³ This violence against black and brown people (including Native Americans and those of Mexican descent), against immigrants (even those who would eventually identify as white, such as Italians and Jews), and against labor organizers (who were often foreign-born) reinforced Anglo-Protestant conformity and white racial supremacy.

While the Klan was a grassroots national organization, academic eugenicists Madison Grant and Harry Laughlin offered “scientific” rationales for segregation, and reinforced fears of “mongrelization” or “race mixing.” This trade card in an ordinary printer’s sample book was offered routinely as one option for illustrating a business enterprise (Figure 5). While this image is more explicit than others, such ideas were commonplace.¹⁴

Espousing a competing vision for American society, Progressivist reformers believed that national harmony could be created through viewing all cultures as offering some distinct gift or contribution to American life.¹⁵ Founding settlement houses to work with the urban poor, Jane Addams and other reformers wanted to build



Figure 4.

White pointed hood worn by a member of the Ku Klux Klan, 1920s. Employing tactics of mass violence and fear, the Ku Klux Klan terrorized minority communities throughout the twentieth century. Members wore hoods like this one to conceal their identities. National Museum of American History, Smithsonian Institution, gift of Mr. Hoffman.



Figure 5.

"Professor Darwin" design offered for use on cigar labels by printing firm F. Heppenheimer's Sons in New York, around 1879. Everyday objects such as this trade card reinforced the application of Charles Darwin's scientific theory to racial hierarchies of people. Archives Center, National Museum of American History, Smithsonian Institution.

cultural bridges that would support immigrant families and cushion their entrance into American life. Philosopher and educator John Dewey joined W. E. B. Du Bois as a founding member of the interracial, interfaith advocacy organization the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP).¹⁶ Dewey and like-minded others were concerned with fighting ethnic prejudices, especially through education, creating children’s toys, books, and curricula to teach tolerance. They believed that if children were taught to be prejudiced, then they also could be taught to be open-minded and accepting of cultural diversity.¹⁷ For example, this “teaching tolerance” chart was amended by African American writer Langston Hughes and used during the many lectures he gave around the country (Figure 6).

Grassroots campaigns across the nation, which historian Diana Selig has termed “the cultural gifts movement,” organized interfaith groups such as

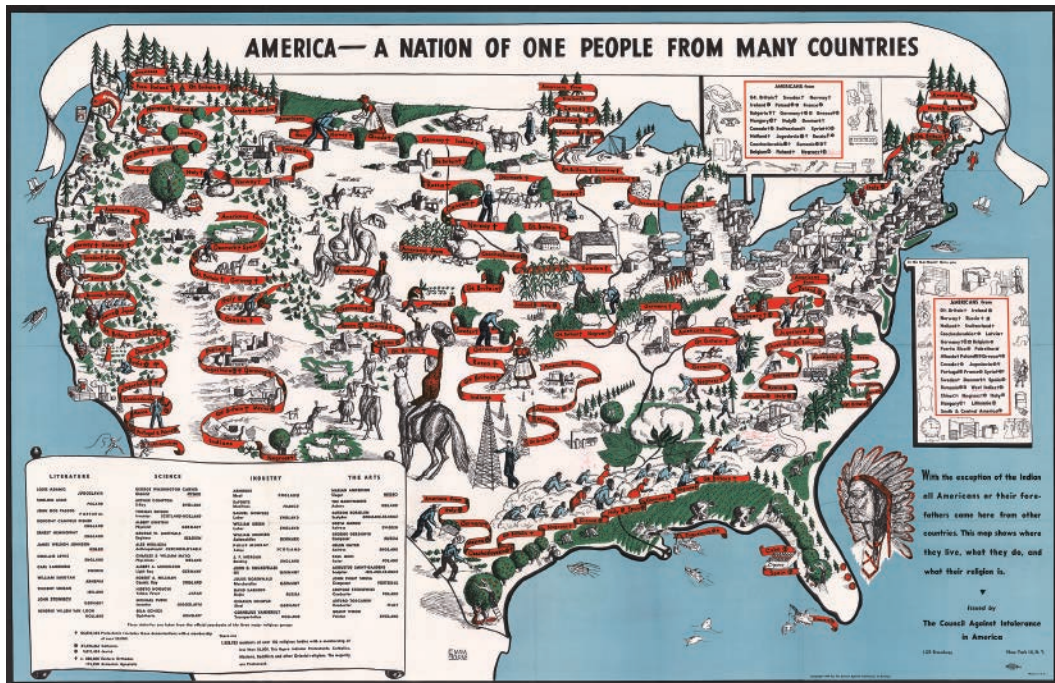


Figure 6. “America—A nation of one people from many countries,” created by Emma Bourne for The Council Against Intolerance in America in 1940. This illustration mapped the United States by ethnic group, profession, and religion. Meant to promote tolerance and unity, materials like these were printed for educational use. The poet Langston Hughes used a red pen to add his own commentary to this map, including an illustration of a burning cross in the American South. Courtesy of Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University and by permission of Harold Ober Associates Incorporated.

the National Conference of Christians and Jews (NCCJ) with a specific goal of “teaching tolerance.”¹⁸ By holding interfaith (and sometimes in the North, interracial) meetings, conferences, symposia, teaching seminars and other events, groups such as the NCCJ sought to counteract white supremacy ideologies of the interwar years.

In 1915, German Jewish immigrant philosopher Horace Kallen coined the term “cultural pluralism” as a new way of thinking about American diversity.¹⁹ He wrote that the diversity of the United States was the strength of the nation and its economy, which was in direct contrast to the notions of “Nordic” superiority. Kallen rejected the idea of the “melting pot” where every difference would dissolve. Rather, he proposed the metaphor of a “symphony” where different groups played distinct instruments and each had a special role to play in the creation of the American nation. Kallen influenced generations of liberal scholars and leaders. His views about so-called “hyphenated Americans” grew more influential after World War II. By 1951, the notion that American cultural diversity was a positive strength began to take hold. Historian Oscar Handlin, the child of Russian Jewish immigrants, opened his Pulitzer Prize-winning book *The Uprooted* with the statement: “Once I thought to write a history of the immigrants in America. Then I discovered that the immigrants *were* American history.”²⁰

Nonetheless, all groups could not be accommodated by Handlin’s benign view of immigration. The nation included millions of formerly enslaved African Americans, who had been unwillingly imported. The United States had also forcibly incorporated highly diverse Indian peoples, and the mixed-race populations of lands that were formerly part of the Spanish empire in the Caribbean and Mexico, and the island populations in the Pacific.

As a result of this complicated history of peopling, the United States developed laws and customs to privilege white people and to control and contain distinct populations of nonwhite peoples. Between the 1880s and 1950s, many state laws mandated racial segregation: the separation of people by color from cradle to beyond the grave.²¹ In 1896, the Supreme Court issued the *Plessy v. Ferguson* decision which declared that “separate could be equal” under the Fourteenth Amendment to the Constitution. After this decision, most states in the South and elsewhere passed highly detailed segregation laws. Definitions of “whiteness” were especially important; the notion that “one drop of colored blood” made a person “nonwhite” was enshrined in law.²²

Figure 7.

Hinged sign reading “For Colored Passengers,” on one side and “For White Passengers,” on the other, date and location unknown. By 1900, racial segregation was written into local and state laws. In many places, people of color did not have equal access to education, jobs, housing, and other realms of social participation. National Museum of American History, Smithsonian Institution.



By the 1950s, national customs and state laws enforced racial divisions in public and private life. Throughout much of the nation, virtually all colored children were legally or customarily prevented from attending public school with white children. Churches, private clubs, hotels, and restaurants were segregated by custom in most places and in some states by law. Public facilities were segregated by law as well (Figure 7). Even cemeteries had black, white, and “Spanish” sections.²³ In some places, mailmen delivered “colored mail” and “white mail” in separate pouches.

Nevertheless, ironies abounded. While colored people were legally separate and unequal, colored women raised white children, cooked and cleaned in white homes, and nursed white people through illness and old age. Present in many private spaces as servants, colored people could not enter those same spaces as equals. Du Bois’s color line was indeed the fundamental problem of the nation.

The key ideological problem with both mainstream and alternative theories of immigration is that they justified continuing discrimination against African Americans and other people of color and did not acknowledge that historically slavery and segregation were just as “American” as ideals of freedom and equality.²⁴ Many whites viewed African Americans and other ethnic groups such as Puerto Ricans as “unmeltable,” singularly unable to be included in the growing ideology of a “nation of immigrants.” In many ways, the massive immigrations that occurred from 1880 to 1920 served to harden racial lines, because even those Europeans previously considered to be “lesser” were legally and socially considered to be designated white and favorably compared to nonwhite people. The contradictions between these newer pluralistic ideals and older prejudicial realities accompanied Americans as they entered the maelstrom of World War II.

THE IRONIES OF WORLD WAR II AND THE COLD WAR

The generation who struggled through the Depression and the war years certainly made many sacrifices, but most also perpetuated racial segregation. Consequently, the nostalgic consensus that has grown up about this generation bears little relationship to the historical experiences of many minority Americans of that same generation.²⁵ The U.S. Armed Forces had been segregated since the mid-nineteenth century. African Americans and darker-skinned Mexicans, Puerto Ricans, and other Latinos served in colored units, while European Americans and sometimes lighter-skinned Latinos served in white units. Most Asian Americans served in separate units as well.

The ironies of fighting against the racist, anti-Semitic Third Reich with segregated troops were clearly visible to many.²⁶ For the first time, the United States government released patriotic posters, documentary films, and other images of heroic African Americans, such as this poster of Doris “Dorie” Miller²⁷ (Figure 8). The African American newspaper the *Pittsburgh Courier* supported this notion that African Americans had to fight on two fronts. They supplied their own propaganda through the popular “Double V” campaign—to win victory in the war abroad, then to achieve victory in the war against racism and discrimination at home²⁸ (Figure 9). Civil rights activists such as A. Philip Randolph and Mary



Figure 8.

Color photolithographic poster of Dorie Miller, designed by Office of War Information art director, David Stone Martin, 1943. Navy messman Dorie Miller was serving on the *U.S.S. West Virginia* when Japan attacked Pearl Harbor in 1941. He rescued a wounded officer and manned an antiaircraft gun to defend the ship. This poster honoring Miller was meant to inspire the black community to participate in the war effort. Courtesy of National Portrait Gallery, Smithsonian Institution.

Figure 9.

"A Yankee Doodle Tan (The 'Double V' Song)," words by Andy Razaf and music by J. C. Johnson, published by the Broadway Music Corporation in 1942. As part of the civil rights campaign to gain equal rights for African Americans, this song referred to a war being waged on two fronts: against the Axis powers in World War II, and against an established racial hierarchy at home. Archives Center, National Museum of American History, Smithsonian Institution.



Figure 10.

Christmas Card from World War II soldier Ken Nihei to a resident of the Topaz Relocation Center in Utah. Nihei was a soldier in the 442nd Combat Team, a segregated all-Japanese American division of the U.S. Army that served in World War II. While fighting abroad, he sent this card to family members or friends held at the Japanese internment camp in Topaz, Utah. National Museum of American History, Smithsonian Institution, gift of Takako Tsuchiya Endo, Tama Tsuchiya Koda, Keyko Tsuchiya Hall, and Takenori Tsuchiya.



McLeod Bethune campaigned to have jobs in the war industries open to everyone, not just whites.²⁹

Many other racial ironies abounded during World War II. While a very small number of German or Italian immigrants (and sometimes their families) were detained, about 120,000 Japanese-born and Japanese American families were forced into internment camps. Meanwhile, the 442nd Regimental Combat Unit, composed entirely of Japanese Americans, served in Europe and became one of the most highly decorated units (Figure 10). Native American “Code Talkers,” often from remote, impoverished reservations, sent secret messages for the military in their native language.³⁰ Minority groups who suffered prejudice and discrimination were critical to the Allied victory abroad as well as the war industries at home.

The war also underscored a newly shared “Americanness,” dependent upon a shared “whiteness” of Italians, Jews, Poles, and others whose relatives had immigrated before 1924. In Army platoons and Navy ships, white ethnic groups served alongside “old-stock” Americans from across the country, cementing battle-tested friendships across ethnic lines. Both during and after the war, numerous movies and comic books celebrated ethnically diverse platoons.³¹ Immigrant men also volunteered for the Armed Forces in large numbers, including Chaim (later Harold) Kempner. In the 1920s, Kempner immigrated with his Jewish family from



Figure 11.

Uniform Jacket of United States Army Lieutenant Chaim Kempner, an immigrant from Russia, World War II. Military service and related industries brought diverse people from cities, towns, and rural areas across the nation to live, work, and fight together. In the 1940s every segment of the population mobilized to fight in World War II. National Museum of American History, Smithsonian Institution.

the Pale of Settlement within Russia as a young child and grew up in the United States. When the war came and the Jews of Europe were threatened with extinction, Chaim Kempner volunteered (Figure 11). Because he could speak several languages, he served as a writer and journalist for a number of Army publications.³² After growing up in an ethnically Jewish community, working for the Army papers enabled him to meet and interview powerful figures such as General Dwight Eisenhower as well as to roam around the region and converse with refugees and others displaced by the war.³³ And like many others, Kempner's military service in a multiethnic unit during the war helped him develop relationships with other Americans that continued after military service.

After the deprivations of the Depression and the dislocations of the war, many Americans retreated to home and family as a sanctuary against an uncertain future during the increasing tensions and rivalries between the United States and the Soviet Union that came to be known as the Cold War. These young veterans and their wives left behind crowded multigenerational households in urban ethnic neighborhoods, defined by language, religion, foodways, and other customs from their homelands, and moved to new homes in the suburbs. In the years between 1944 and 1960, 60 million new Americans were born, creating a vast new group of consumers, especially of baby and child products, toys, games, family sedans, and all manner of goods³⁴ (Figure 12). Transistor radios, portable record players, and powerful new alternative radio stations provided this generation of “baby boomers” with access to previously segregated music such as



Figure 12.

Thirteen-fluid-ounce can of Gerber baby formula, 1964–1973. Baby formula and other infant- and child-rearing goods flooded the growing consumer market during the post-World War II baby boom. National Museum of American History, Smithsonian Institution, the Fournet Drugstore Collection.

rhythm and blues, early rock and roll, and other cultural forms that may also have helped shift cultural dynamics in the post-war years.

As planned neighborhoods, nicknamed “Levittowns” after real-estate developments in the Northeast, were built all across the nation, many white people established their “nuclear families” in the segregated suburbs. As housing covenants that discriminated against Jews were declared illegal, Jewish people also joined all-white suburbs.³⁵ African Americans and other people of color, in contrast, were usually excluded by restrictive covenants, government policies, and “redlining” by insurance companies, banks, and the federal government, thereby losing crucial opportunities to own homes and build wealth as many white Americans were doing.³⁶

At the same time, many African American, Puerto Rican, Mexican American, and Asian American veterans came home and organized against segregation and racist prejudices.³⁷ The NAACP brought a slew of new legal cases to local and federal courts. New organizations, such as the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC), the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), and others sponsored boycotts, marches, and protests to argue that “separate” was inherently unequal, unconstitutional, and immoral.³⁸

During the Cold War, the United States sent propaganda materials and news media worldwide to proclaim American democracy. The Soviet Union and other communist governments pointed out episodes of American hypocrisy, such as black churches being bombed, and interracial, interfaith marchers being attacked by police and mobs. These events were covered on television and in newspapers around the world, giving other countries reason to balk at American claims of moral superiority.³⁹

In response to a new direct action movement and the history of service during the war by all minority groups, a series of court decisions ultimately reinforced the civil rights of all Americans. The most famous of these is the Supreme Court rulings in *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954, 1955), which declared segregated public schools unconstitutional.⁴⁰ These court cases were followed by the passage of the Civil Rights Act (1964) and the Voting Rights Act (1965), which marked the beginning of a legally desegregated society and what many hoped would be a new “equal opportunity society.”⁴¹ While these efforts began the process of desegregation, both in the South and the North there was profound violence against civil rights workers, the bombing of churches, and massive resistance which resulted in the closing of whole school systems, the paving over of

public pools, and the constant surveillance by police and government officials of people deemed to be suspect.

All these postwar changes created cracks in the strict legal walls barring most immigration from all of Asia, Africa, and southern and eastern Europe. Exemptions and special laws were passed in the 1940s and 1950s to allow in various new kinds of refugees, exiles, special excepted categories, and asylum seekers. Congress found an increasing number of ways to let in people fleeing Communist oppression in eastern Europe, the Soviet Union, and Cuba.⁴² These new forms of access even extended to previously banned immigrants from Asia, including military allies China, Taiwan, and Korea. As Section Four of this volume details, in 1965 Democratic Representative Emanuel Celler from New York and Democratic Senator Philip Hart from Michigan sponsored a successful new Immigration and Nationality Act that opened the nation to the entire world for the first time in 80 years.⁴³

Nonetheless, white supremacist values remained powerful. Many Southern states mounted massive resistance to these changes. When the Rev. Martin Luther King led an attempted march in the suburbs of Chicago, he encountered unmitigated racism and resistance that matched, if not exceeded, the response of Southern communities. In 1968, Richard Nixon was elected to the presidency through a coalition of what he called the “silent majority” of Northern working-class whites who had previously voted for the Democratic party but were now disillusioned and the “Southern strategy” that attracted white Democrats to join the Republican party by appealing to their beliefs that segregation should continue as a matter of states’ rights. Meanwhile, the difficulties and violence of the Vietnam War reinforced many older prejudices about Asians and Asian Americans. For example, the lingo of the men fighting the war and characterizing their enemy as “gooks” entered the language of popular culture through news broadcasts and films.⁴⁴

Today, years later, we live in a time when civil rights advances are being reinterpreted and arguably weakened by recent Supreme Court decisions. Nonetheless, this earlier socio-political activism widened the definition of what it meant to be American, including and embracing the contributions of African Americans and others whose historical and cultural experiences had also been ignored. Many schools, businesses, and governments now celebrate Black History Month each February. This holiday was established by Carter G. Woodson as Negro History Week in Chicago in 1926 (Figure 13). In 1976, during the Bicentennial of the Declaration of Independence, the month-long celebration was officially recognized by President Gerald R. Ford.⁴⁵



Figure 13.

Portrait of Dr. Carter Woodson, Washington, D.C., in 1915. Woodson was a scholar and activist who advocated for wider acceptance and appreciation of African American history. He established Negro History Week in 1926, which later was officially recognized and expanded to Black History Month, celebrated each February. Scurlock Studio Records, ca. 1905-1994, Archives Center, National Museum of American History, Smithsonian Institution.

Black History Month paved the way for the celebration of the histories and cultures of other people of color, such as Hispanic Heritage Month (mid-September to mid-October), Native American History Month (November), Asian and Pacific American History Month (May), and others.⁴⁶ Though the full history of these cultural shifts has not yet been written, the musical preferences, fashion sensibilities, language, and aesthetic concerns of many young white Americans swung away from middle-class Anglo-conformity and normativity. This teenage generation began to seek out encounters with those cultural expressions, such as music and dance, which had been created in the colored enclaves of American society. All of these nonmaterial, intangible aspects of the American experience may also have contributed to the greater acceptance of a wider notion of cultural diversity.

CRACKS IN THE COLOR LINE

In 1900, the Americanization project was in full swing. But, after the challenges and sacrifices of World War II, the stories of more recently arrived Americans were recognized and celebrated as the authentic American experience.⁴⁷ In 1960,

John F. Kennedy, a war hero, was elected as the first Irish Catholic president and considered to be the first of “immigrant stock.” In the years since Du Bois’s death, numerous alternative metaphors have been offered to replace “melting pot,” including “salad bowl,” “mosaic,” “tapestry,” and “quilt.” During the 1990s, the term “multiculturalism” became widely used. Each of these efforts embodied a crucial but not total change in cultural attitudes. Each seismic alteration produced a furious response from those who still clung to nativist ideas and who had remained powerful in American society.

In the twenty-first century, many Americans, though far from all, would agree that the nation is now made up of ethnically and racially diverse people who are nonetheless fully American.⁴⁸ While racial and religious prejudices remain present, and violence is still possible, Kallen’s ideas about cultural pluralism have become widely accepted among both liberal sectors and younger generations. While Americans who can remember a segregated nation are now passing into history, their stories and struggles remain relevant. All Americans living today exist in a nation shaped by these earlier prejudices, conflicts, ironies, and changing ideas about how to live in a diverse nation.

NOTES

1. W. E. B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk* (Chicago: A. C. McClurg and Co., 1903), vii–viii.
2. The Fourteenth Amendment redefined citizenship by asserting that the term “citizen” includes all people who were born or naturalized in the United States. The Amendment also states that all citizens are deserving of “equal protection before the law.” To read the amendment visit “Primary Documents in American History,” Library of Congress, last modified 20 April 2015, <http://www.loc.gov/rr/program/bib/ourdocs/14thamendment.html>.
3. For more information about this time period see Eric Foner, *Reconstruction: America’s Unfinished Revolution, 1863–1877* (New York: Harper & Row, 1988).
4. Laws were passed in many southern states that required people to pay a tax, known as a “poll tax” to vote. In other words, if you wanted to vote, you had to make a payment of \$1.00 or \$1.50 in order to vote. These taxes were cumulative, so that if you had tried to vote ten years ago and now wanted to vote again, your tax was not \$1.00, but \$10.00. Everyone had to pay the tax to vote, but in practice only poor people had difficulty paying the tax. Poll taxes were declared unconstitutional in 1964 by the 24th amendment to the U.S. Constitution.
5. Werner Sollors, *Beyond Ethnicity: Consent and Descent in American Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986); Werner Sollors, ed., *The Invention of Ethnicity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989).
6. The people in these unacknowledged colonies were never declared citizens of the United States. Even when people in the territories did receive citizenship, as Puerto Ricans did in 1917, often the full rights of citizens as outlined in the U.S. Constitution were ruled by various courts not to apply to them. For more on this, see

- Bartholomew H. Sparrow, *The Insular Cases and the Emergence of American Empire* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2006).
7. Under the Naturalization Act of 1790 the law limited full citizenship to free white men. Although this law had been on the books since 1790, there was no federal government agency to police the borders until 1924. Newly constituted, the Border Patrol focused their attention on the United States–Mexico border nearly exclusively. It was originally set up to prevent Chinese immigrants from crossing illegally into the United States, since their immigration had been largely banned since 1882. On the term “illegal alien,” see Mae M. Ngai, *Impossible Subjects: Illegal Aliens and the Making of Modern America* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004).
 8. For more on this topic, see Theodore Allen, *The Invention of the White Race* (London, Verso Press, 1994). See also Peter Kolchin, “Whiteness Studies: The New History of Race in America,” *The Journal of American History* 89(1)(June 2002):154–73, doi:10.2307/2700788; David Roediger, *The Invention of Whiteness: Race and the Making of the American Working Class* (London, Verso Press, 1991).
 9. Only native people can be considered indigenous to the Americas. These earlier immigrants were predominantly from Great Britain, including the English, Scottish, Welsh, and the Protestant Irish, though they often called themselves “natives.” Northern European groups were predominantly German and Dutch, with a small number of Scandinavians. Saying “My ancestors came on the Mayflower” was a way of expressing the notion that these were the original, native, Americans. Irish Catholic immigration is somewhat different because that group had a distinct history of subjugation by the British on the island of Ireland. Significant numbers of Irish Catholics began to arrive in the 1840s and the early 1850s as a result of famine and extreme poverty. For more on earlier racial designations, see Thomas A. Guglielmo, *White on Arrival: Italians, Race, Color, and Power in Chicago, 1890–1945* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003).
 10. For more on this topic of Anglo-dominance, see Desmond S. King, *Making Americans: Immigration, Race, and the Origins of the Diverse Democracy* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2000).
 11. Helene Hayes, *U.S. Immigration Policy and the Undocumented* (Westport, Conn.: Praeger Publishers, 2001). For more on this topic: Steven G. Koven and Frank Götzke, *American Immigration Policy: Confronting the Nation’s Challenges* (New York: Springer, 2010); Stuart J. Wright, *An Emotional Gauntlet: From Life in Peacetime America to the War in European Skies* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2004); Aristide R. Zolberg, *A Nation by Design: Immigration Policy in the Fashioning of America* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2006). See also the essay in this volume by Alan Kraut.
 12. For more on the history of violent white supremacist organizations and their connections with police in many states, see Kenneth T. Jackson, *The Ku Klux Klan in the City 1915–1930* (Chicago: I. R. Dee, 1992). Other sources include: Diane McWhorter, *Carry Me Home: Birmingham, Alabama: The Climactic Battle of the Civil Rights Revolution* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2001); Leonard J. Moore, *Citizen Klansmen: The Ku Klux Klan in Indiana, 1921–1928* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1991); Allan W. Trelease, *White Terror: The Ku Klux Klan Conspiracy and Southern Reconstruction* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1995); Wyn Craig Wade, *The Fiery Cross: The Ku Klux Klan in America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998). For groups other than the KKK, see: Colin Flint, *Spaces of Hate: Geographies of Discrimination and Intolerance in the USA* (New York: Routledge, 2004); George Fredrickson, *White Supremacy* (London: Oxford University Press, 1981).
 13. For more on the history of lynching, see: Bruce Baker, *This Mob Will Surely Take My Life:*

- Lynchings in the Carolinas, 1871–1947* (London: Continuum, 2008); W. Fitzhugh Brundage, ed., *Under the Sentence of Death: Lynching in the South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997); Paul Ortiz, *Emancipation Betrayed: the Hidden History of Black Organizing and White Violence in Florida from Reconstruction to the Bloody Election of 1920* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005). Some of the most infamous race riots include Springfield, Illinois (1908); St. Louis, Missouri (1917); Chicago, Illinois (1919); Tulsa, Oklahoma (1921); Rosewood, Florida (1923).
14. Madison Grant was a leading conservationist who supported the establishment of national parks and was a vocal advocate of the Boy Scouts and other examples of “muscular Christianity” which would keep the Aryan population strong. Though today his work would be called “pseudoscience,” in his lifetime he was seen as a prominent scientist who justified inequality based on race. His several books include *The Passing of the Great Race or the Racial Basis of European History* (New York: C. Scribner’s Sons, 1921), *The Founders of the Republic on Immigration, Naturalization, and Aliens* (New York: C. Scribner’s Sons, 1928), and *Conquest of a Continent or the Expansion of Race* (New York: C. Scribner’s Sons, 1934). Other noted “race scientists” include Harry H. Laughlin, *Eugenical Sterilization in the United States* (Chicago: Psychopathic Laboratory of the Municipal Court of Chicago, 1922). Laughlin thought that sterilization based on scientific principles would prevent the inferior from propagating and thereby debasing the national character with their progeny.
 15. For more on this, see Eric. P. Kaufmann, *The Rise and Fall of Anglo-America*. (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2004). For more information on Jane Addams, who won the Nobel Peace Prize in 1931, see James Weber Linn, *Jane Addams: A Biography* (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 2000) and Louise W. Knight, *Citizen: Jane Addams and the Struggle for Democracy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005). For a sample of Dewey’s writing, see John Dewey, *Democracy and Education: An Introduction to the Philosophy of Education* [1916] (New York: WLC Books, 2009). For more information on Dewey, see Nathan Crick, *Democracy & Rhetoric: John Dewey on the Arts of Becoming* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2010); Stephen M. Fishman and Lucille McCarthy, *John Dewey and the Philosophy and Practice of Hope* (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 2007).
 16. The NAACP was founded in 1909 in response to a violent white race riot in Springfield, Illinois in 1908 (seen as very symbolic, as this was the hometown and burial place of Abraham Lincoln). W. E. B. Du Bois was another founding member. He became the founding editor of the NAACP magazine, *The Crisis*. For more on the history of the NAACP, see Patricia Sullivan, *Lift Every Voice: The NAACP and the Making of the Civil Rights Movement* (New York: The New Press, 2009).
 17. For more on theories of education as a pathway to develop tolerance, see Diana Selig, *Americans All: The Cultural Gifts Movement* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University, 2008). In her book, Selig includes analyses of key figures of this “cultural gift” movement of many different organizations, including Everett R. Clinchy of the National Conference of Christians and Jews, Rachel Davis DuBois, a Quaker educator and activist, and philosopher and educator John Dewey, as well as Horace Kallen, the best-known philosopher of cultural pluralism.
 18. For more information on this movement, see Selig, *Americans All*. For more on the history of Highlander, see the history section of the group’s web page: www.highlandercenter.org.
 19. See Horace Kallen, “Democracy Versus the Melting Pot,” *The Nation* (25 February 1915), available online at <http://www.expo98.msu.edu/people/kallen.htm>. See also Kallen, *Culture and*

- Democracy in the United States* [1924] (New York: Arno Press, 1970). For more on Kallen, see Sidney Ratner, "Horace Kallen and Cultural Pluralism," *Modern Judaism* 4(2)(May 1984):185–200, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1396461>.
20. Oscar Handlin, *The Uprooted: The Epic Story of the Great Migrations that Made the American People* (New York: Grosset and Dunlap, 1951).
 21. For more on the laws of segregation, see Paul Finkelman, ed., *Lynching, Racial Violence, and the Law* (New York: Garland Press, 1992).
 22. A foundational text on American segregation and its justifications is C. Vann Woodward, *The Strange Career of Jim Crow* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1974). See also Woodward, *The Burden of Southern History* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1993). Additional sources include Paul Finkelman, *Encyclopedia of African American History, 1896 to the Present: From the Age of Segregation to the Twenty-First Century* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1964) and Douglas Massey and Nancy Denton, *American Apartheid: Segregation and the Making of the Underclass* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1993).
 23. The contemporary term "Latinos" was not widely used before the 1980s. In areas such as South Texas, the Southwest, and Southern California, people of Mexican descent named themselves *Tejanos*, *Hispanos*, or *Californios* as well as *Mexicanos*. When signs were put up to keep the "colored Mexicans" out of white establishments during these years, the term "Spanish" was frequently used, along with ethnic slurs.
 24. These key historical connections are raised by Michelle Alexander in *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Color Blindness* (New York: New Press, 2010) and Douglass A. Blackmon in *Slavery by Another Name: The Re-Enslavement of Black Americans from the Civil War to World War II* (New York: Anchor Books, 2009).
 25. The World War II generation has become widely referred to in popular culture as "the greatest generation" of Americans, following the lead of television journalist Tom Brokaw, *The Greatest Generation* (New York: Random House, 1981).
 26. In 1944, the United States Army released a documentary film, *The Negro Soldier*, about the service of African American men in the nation's wars (tactfully leaving out the Civil War). Directed by Frank Capra, this was a follow up to his film series, *Why We Fight*. Initially, the Army officials feared that the film would be controversial, but it was widely popular among black and white servicemen. It was so popular that after the war it was released stateside and is credited with changing some people's opinions of African Americans' service to the nation. See Thomas Cripps and David Culbert, "The Negro Soldier (1944): Film Propaganda in Black and White," *American Quarterly* 31(5) (Winter 1979):616–40. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2712429>.
 27. For more information, see Richard E. Miller, *The Messman Chronicles: African Americans in the U.S. Navy, 1932–1943* (Annapolis, Md.: Naval Institute Press, 2004).
 28. For more information on the Double V campaign and the agitation for the desegregation of the U.S. Armed Forces, see: James Rawn Jr., *The Double V: How Wars, Protest, and Harry Truman Desegregated America's Military* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2013); Ronald Takaki, *Double Victory: A Multicultural History of America in World War II* (New York: Little, Brown, 2000); Jon E. Taylor, *Freedom to Serve: Truman, Civil Rights, and Executive Order 9981* (New York: Routledge, 2013).
 29. For more on this, see: Andrew E. Kersten and Clarence Lang, eds., *Reframing Randolph: Labor, Black Freedom, and the Legacies of A. Philip Randolph* (New York: New York University Press, 2015); David Welky, *Marching Across the Color Line: A. Philip Randolph and Civil Rights in the World War II Era* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013). For additional information on Mary McLeod Bethune, see: Rackham Holt,

- Mary McLeod Bethune: A Biography* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday and Co., 1964); Audrey Thomas McCluskey and Elaine M. Smith, eds., *Building a Better World: Essays and Selected Documents* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999).
30. The technique of using Native American language speakers to send secret tactical messages was pioneered in World War I by Cherokee and Choctaw men. For more information on this, see: Salley McClain, *Navajo Weapon: The Navajo Code Talkers* (Tucson: Rio Nuevo Publishers, 2001); William C. Meadows, *The Comanche Code Talkers of World War II* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2002).
 31. Examples of such films include: John Wayne, *Sands of Iwo Jima*, directed by Allan Dwan (Los Angeles: Republic Pictures, 1949), John Wayne and Robert Ryan, *Flying Leathernecks*, directed by Nicholas Ray (Burbank, Cal.: RKO Radio Pictures, 1951), John Wayne and Henry Fonda, *The Longest Day*, produced by Darryl F. Zanuck (Burbank, Cal.: Twentieth Century Fox, 1962), and Burt Lancaster, Montgomery Clift, and Frank Sinatra, *From Here to Eternity*, directed by Fred Zinnemann (Burbank, Cal.: Columbia Pictures, 1963), based on the James Jones novel of the same name: Jones, *From Here to Eternity* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1951).
 32. Chaim Kempner could speak Hebrew, German, Yiddish, Lithuanian, and Russian, according to his daughter, Aviva Kempner. Conversation with Aviva Kempner, daughter and donor, 24 July 2016, and excerpts from Chaim Kempner's writings sent by e-mail to author from Ms. Kempner.
 33. Conversation with Aviva Kempner, daughter and donor, 24 July 2016, and excerpts from Chaim Kempner's writings sent by e-mail to author from Ms. Kempner. In Berlin, while writing for *The Grooper*, Kempner met and married Hanka Ciesla. Ciesla was a Polish Jewish woman who had survived the war passing as a Catholic in a work camp. Both of them lost most of their European family members in the death camps, although Ciesla's younger brother Dudek survived Auschwitz. Their daughter, Aviva Kempner, donated her father's military jacket to the National Museum of American History in 2015.
 34. For more information on the formation of the American suburbs, see: James A. Jacobs, *Detached America: Building Houses in Postwar Suburbia* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2015); Kenneth T. Jackson, *Crabgrass Frontier: The Suburbanization of the United States* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985). For more on these families and the baby boom, see Elaine Tyler May, *Homeward Bound: American Families in the Cold War Era* (New York: Basic Books, 1988); Jessica Weiss, *To Have and to Hold: Marriage, the Baby Boom, and Social Change* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2000).
 35. For more on this process of change, see Hasia R. Diner, *The Jews of the United States 1654–2000* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2006).
 36. For additional information specifically on African American suburbs, see Andrew Wiese, *Places of their Own: African American Suburbanization in the Twentieth Century* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2004). See also the essay by Davarian Baldwin in this volume.
 37. A brief list of the many veterans involved in the postwar civil rights movement include Medgar Evers (NAACP), Amzie Moore and Aaron Henry of the Regional Council of Negro Leadership (RCNL), Dr. Hector P. Garcia, founder of the American G.I. Forum, and Daniel K. Inouye, who was first elected to the House of Representatives from Hawaii after it became a state in 1959. In 1962, he was elected to the U.S. Senate where he served for nearly 50 years.
 38. Other important interracial, interfaith civil rights organizations of this era included the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE), the Urban League, and the National Council of Negro Women (NCNW). There were numerous other

- local and regional organizations across the country, such as the Mississippi Democratic Freedom Party.
39. For additional information on the bombings in Birmingham and the civil rights movement, see McWhorter, *Carry Me Home* and Charles E. Connerly, “*The Most Segregated City in America*”: *City Planning and Civil Rights in Birmingham, 1920–1980* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2005).
 40. There was an important case prior to *Brown v. Board of Education*. In 1947, a federal appeals court in California rendered a decision in the *Mendez et al. v. Westminster School District of Orange County*. In its ruling, the United States Court of Appeals for the Ninth Circuit held that the segregation of Mexican and Mexican American students into separate “Mexican schools” was unconstitutional. However, because this was a California-specific case, it did not affect schools across the nation as did the *Brown v. Board* cases in 1954 and 1955.
 41. Robert Dallek, *Flawed Giant: Lyndon Johnson and His Times, 1961–1973* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998). For additional information on Nixon’s “Southern Strategy,” see Earl Black and Merle Black, *The Rise of Southern Republicans* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2003). For more on the Voting Rights Act, see Gary May, *Bending toward Justice: The Voting Rights Act and the Transformation of American Democracy* (New York: Basic Books, 2013).
 42. For more information on immigration to the United States from Communist countries after World War II, see: Maria Cristina Garcia, *Havana USA: Cuban Exiles and Cuban Americans in South Florida, 1959–1994* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996) and Ngai, *Impossible Subjects*. See also the essay in this volume by Sojin Kim.
 43. Bill Ong Hing, *Defining America: Through Immigration Policy* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2012), 95; Lyndon B. Johnson’s remarks at the signing of the Immigration Bill, Liberty Island, New York, 3 October 1965, <http://www.lbjlib.utexas.edu/Johnson/archives.hom/speeches.hom/651003.asp>.
 44. For more on how the Vietnam War reinforced old stereotypes of Asian Americans, see Erika Lee, *The Making of Asian America: A History* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2015).
 45. For more on Woodson, see: Claire Corbould, *Becoming African Americans: The Public Life of Harlem 1919–1939* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2009); Jacqueline Anne Goggin, *Carter G. Woodson: A Life in Black History* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1993).
 46. During the late 1960s and early 1970s, many historically black universities were attempting to expand Black History Week into a full month. According to some sources, the first celebration of Black History Month took place at Kent State University in 1970. In 1976, during the United States Bicentennial, Black History Month was formally recognized by the federal government. For more on how certain aspects of African American culture came to be incorporated into a liberal mainstream, see Gary Gerstle, *American Crucible: Race and Nation in the Twentieth Century* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), 51.
 47. Robert L. Flegler, *Ellis Island Nation: Immigration Policy and American Identity in the Twentieth Century* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013).
 48. Since 11 September 2001, some of the most urgent contemporary religious prejudices in the United States seem to be focused on Muslim followers and the Islamic faith. Numerous violent incidents have occurred around the country and mosques have been defaced. At the same time, violence against African Americans remains high throughout the nation.

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