

Newman, Mark. *The Civil Rights Movement*. Westport CT.: Praeger, 2004. 193pp.

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Mark Newman's book is a compact but informative history of the U.S. civil rights movement. In less than 200 pages, chronologically structured and densely filled with facts, Newman covers a broad period that goes from the late 19th/early 20th Century, when the preconditions for the birth of the movement began to develop, to the 1970s, when the politically and culturally conservative climate and the fragmentation of the civil rights movement marked the end of the great mobilisation of the previous twenty years.

Obviously, Newman dedicates a significant portion of the book to the crucial decade, the 1960s, when Jim Crow was finally put to an end. However, he is careful to connect this part with what came before and what would happen afterwards. He rightly identifies World War II as a relevant turning point, which catalysed the emergence of the movement, creating political and social conditions that finally allowed a challenge to discrimination, segregation and white supremacy in the South. In the overall economy of the text, the decision to have a single chapter on the 40s and 50s is an unusually valuable one.

The part on the 60s, nevertheless, occupies the lion's share. In chapters 3 and 4, Newman discusses several issues: how the movement and its various organisations decided to resort to various forms of direct action; the dramatic confrontation that followed; the ambiguity and hypocrisy of the Kennedy Administration (always reluctant to intervene directly in civil rights crises since far more interested in international issues); the sacrifices and courage of many militants; the successes that led to the approval of the Civil Rights Act and the Voting Act; the tensions and difficulties during the second half of the decade and the centrifugal tendencies they concurred to stimulate them. Newman's attention to the many recent works on the connection between Civil Rights and the international scene will be very welcome by scholars (for instance this reviewer), concerned primarily with United States foreign policy. It proves that even general historical introductions can be methodologically innovative. Newman aptly discusses the role played by international considerations in stimulating (and sometimes obliging) federal action, as well as the influence Vietnam had in radicalising the movement, fracturing it, and weakening the always shaky partnership with the Johnson administration. The successive conservative backlash of the 1970s and 1980s facilitated, among many things, a reaction against what were considered the excesses of the previous years, which found its most paradigmatic manifestation in the *de facto* resegregation of many schools. More dramatically, in the same period the rise of an African-American middle class, politically and economically influent, was matched by the perseverance of very high levels of poverty among urban blacks. While the successes of the civil rights movement can and must not be underestimated ("to some extent, the national civil rights coalition was a casualty of its own success," Newman claims at p.130), something clearly stopped in late 1960s/1970s.

Finally, the book is sporadically integrated by references to historiography and to different interpretations of the facts under discussion. This is probably the only weakness of Newman's fine volume: the relevance and meaning of these historiographical digressions are sometimes difficult to grasp and they don't add much to what is said. A short historiographical essay at the end of the book would probably have been a better solution.