

10-1-2014

# Four Questions Paradigm of Brown, Racial Change, and the Civil Rights Movement

Anna M. Hodgson

Loyola Marymount University, [ahodgson@lion.lmu.edu](mailto:ahodgson@lion.lmu.edu)

---

## Repository Citation

Hodgson, Anna M., "Four Questions Paradigm of Brown, Racial Change, and the Civil Rights Movement" (2014). *American Cultures Studies Student Works*. 3.

[http://digitalcommons.lmu.edu/acs\\_students/3](http://digitalcommons.lmu.edu/acs_students/3)

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the American Cultures Studies at Digital Commons @ Loyola Marymount University and Loyola Law School. It has been accepted for inclusion in American Cultures Studies Student Works by an authorized administrator of Digital Commons@Loyola Marymount University and Loyola Law School. For more information, please contact [digitalcommons@lmu.edu](mailto:digitalcommons@lmu.edu).

Four Questions Paradigm of *Brown, Racial Change, and the Civil Rights Movement*

By

Anna Hodgson

A paper submitted to the  
American Cultures Studies 105: History of Ethnic America class

Fall 2014

Anna Hodgson

Dr. Ulia Gosart

AMCS 105-04

10 November 2014

Four Questions Paradigm of *Brown, Racial Change, and the Civil Rights Movement*

## **I. What does the author want to know?**

**1.1 Originating question:** What influences change in the way people think?

To what degree are laws instruments of change and justice?

**1.2 Central question:** Was racial change inevitable?

**1.3 Specifying questions:** What impact did World War II have on influencing racial change? How did the Cold War impact racial change? How did the changing political power of African Americans impact racial change? How did the economic and social integration of the nation influence racial change? How did changing southern racial norms influence racial change?

## **II. What is the author's answer?**

**2.1 Answer to central question:** Beginning at the end of the Civil War in the late 1860s, many events occurred that made racial change inevitable in the United States. In this time period racial change did not necessarily occur as a result of pushes to cause racial change. In actuality the causes of racial change stemmed from, and were side effects of, unrelated events such as World War II or southern industrialization. The pushes that caused racial change in America were unexpected

consequences of other events, and together these influences combined to transform the southern states, federal policy, and the opinions of a nation.

**2.2 Answer to specifying questions:** The first major influence on racial change stemmed from World War II. First, the war had a major influence on black attitudes as soldiers returned from fighting abroad. African Americans rallied for World War II under the premise that the war would be fought on two fronts, abroad and at home against the Jim Crow South. This was known as the Double V Campaign. Additionally, African Americans felt that if they were good enough to fight and die for their country, they should also be good enough to be integrated into white society, and if they were fighting for democracy abroad, there should be true democracy at home. This, combined with a taste of what freedom was like from their time abroad, created a new surge of pro-racial change attitudes among blacks, and a ten-fold increase in NAACP members (Klarman 18).

With this change in black attitude came an increase in political opportunities as well. As African Americans saw the forces for change that were coming forth from the War, they began to demand more and more from the government. One example of this was the Fair Employment Practices Commission (FEPC) that resulted from the March on Washington (19). This monitored race discrimination in war industries, but it eventually promoted fair employment practices as well. Finally, the War led to increased economic opportunities, as the lack of white males in the job market created a labor need that African Americans filled. During World War II, the number of African American employed by the federal government tripled, the number of blacks employed in skilled jobs doubled, and the average

income of black workers doubled (20). All of this inevitably led to racial change because these economic changes created a larger black middle class, which was primarily the group that took part in civil rights activities.

The Cold War contributed greatly to inevitable racial change as well. In the isolationist period, the United States could keep its race relations struggles its own affair, but during the Cold War everything was brought to the public eye for scrutiny. The Cold War was essentially a fight against the Soviet Union for control over the mainly non-white Third World, and with World War II basically obliterating white supremacy in these countries, the existence of white supremacy in America became very conspicuous. It soon became imperative to end segregation simply as a way of winning the Cold War and keeping up political appearances.

The ways of the Jim Crow south had harmful international implications on America as other countries quickly pointed out. For example, when Americans argued against Nazi anti-semitism, the Nazis pointed out the hypocrisy in America's segregated Jim Crow south. The Soviet Union used American racial incidences, such as the Montgomery bus boycotts and Little Rock, as subjects for propaganda to convince people that the United States did not stand for true democracy like they argued. These incidences caused great international embarrassment for America, and so the government had no choice but to intervene on the side of desegregation. President Eisenhower justified the federal intervention in Little Rock by citing international ramifications of the desegregation debacle, and invited the minister of Ghana to the White House after he publicly was refused service at a southern

restaurant (29). Eventually, the government appealed to state leaders to change the segregation laws, not because they actually believed in the morality of desegregation, but because it was a necessary factor in maintaining political relations. The government was trying its best to clean up the messes that desegregation was causing on the international front, but they realized that eventually these problems had to be fixed if the United States wanted to stay a prominent political power.

A large political shift occurred for African Americans as a result of the population changes of the Great Migration. Between 1910 and 1960, 5 million blacks moved from the south to the north where they received complete access to voting rights. 85% of these people moved to New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Ohio, Michigan, Illinois and California which gave these seven states alone 80% of the electoral votes (31). This made the Democratic Party suddenly very competitive in the North, and as a result they turned from depending on the Southern states to working for the Northern black Americans' votes. Black Americans in the North now had no allegiance to a political party, and so each party began competing for their vote using civil rights legislation. African Americans used this political leverage for national intervention against southern atrocities. For example, via lobbying by the NAACP, the senate rejected the nomination for notoriously pro-southern Judge John Parker to the Supreme Court.

Another result of this huge political shift for African Americans was the presidential election of 1948. President Truman saw that he now needed the black vote for reelection, so he completely shifted his policies in the direction of civil

rights. In his “conversion” to a civil rights activist, he created a civil rights committee, and desegregated the military with an executive order. Truman’s actions were not because he truly wanted the country to become desegregated, but because he simply wanted the black vote. However, despite the intent behind his actions, it was an additional inevitable step towards racial change in America. The changes resulting from the political shift, however beneficial they were to the desegregation cause, were in fact just a means to another goal.

The economic and social integration also led to inevitable racial change. Beginning in the 1930s, the south was brought into the national economy and soon became dependent on northern and federal investment. To begin, in 1938 Congress passed the Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA) that worked to phase out low skilled, minimum wage jobs in the south (40). This act caused the government to have great influence over southern economy, and marked the beginning of southern dependence on outside aid. Eventually, national commitment to racial change threatened to revoke investment in the South if they did not change their ways, and with the South so dependent on this aid, this threat was very influential. Southern businessmen and politicians realized that the preservation of Jim Crow society would not coincide with economic growth, and suddenly their goal became to preserve the economy even if it meant dismantling the Jim Crow system. Following the televised Little Rock desegregation crisis, Arkansas’s foreign investment dropped from \$131 million to \$25.4 million, and so a Little Rock Chamber of Commerce member toured other cities urging them not to repeat Little Rock’s mistakes and to peacefully accept desegregation (46). Southern businessmen and

politicians did not suddenly become forces of racial change based on moral beliefs, but instead it was a consequence that must be paid in order to maintain their economy. Additionally, the addition of national television to people's everyday lives made it much harder to keep Southern desegregation crises strictly in the south. Everyone knew of the racial violence occurring in the south, and opposition to it spread quickly. This, combined with the need to preserve the economy at all costs, greatly eroded southern opposition to desegregation. However, once again it is seen that this change in racial norms was not caused by a change in moral beliefs by southerners, but instead by economic preservation of which racial change was a consequence of.

As previously stated, the economic and social integration of the South made the South more susceptible to new racial norms regarding racial equality. However, there were changes brewing independently in the south as well. The first of these was increasing urbanization and industrialization, which marked the shift from agricultural to industrial jobs. For example, in 1900 65.8% of southerners were in agricultural industries, and in 1960 only 10.2% were (52). This decline was in part due to the falling cotton prices, which fell from 35 cents a pound in 1919 to 6 cents in 1931 (53). Also, during the Great Depression, the Agricultural Adjustment Act (AAA) turned cotton farming into a mechanized process. This decline in agriculture, which was the industry that mainly employed African Americans, caused a great black migration to cities, where African Americans were able to get more diverse and specialized jobs. In turn, African Americans were able to get higher wages, more leisure time, and eventually contributed to a larger black middle class. This

process dismantled Jim Crow in multiple ways. Fundamentally Jim Crow was based off of a submissive black agricultural work force, so the shift to industrialization greatly reduced the permeability of Jim Crow and made room for greater resistance to the Jim Crow society. Additionally, an increased black middle class led to more participants in civil rights and the NAACP, whose membership went from 85,000 in 1934 to 420,000 in 1946 (57). This helped eventually lead to civil rights movements like the Montgomery Bus Boycotts.

Another social norm that contributed to racial change was increased education levels. As the jobs of African Americans changed, they spent less time working and more time learning, and as a result black illiteracy fell from 76.2% in 1880 to 26% in 1920 (66). For white people, segregation, which was based in a time when blacks were unskilled and uneducated, became harder to justify as blacks became more educated. In general as well, racial tolerance tends to increase as people become more educated. For African Americans, increased education led to more frustration with southern society, and paved the way for an educated resistance.

Shifts in southern demographics were also known to have racial change effects. A large black migration caused white racial resistance to decrease, and the failure of state's to invest in human resources caused a large number of migrants to take southern white jobs. These migrants brought with them new morals and ideas that helped shift southern norms. Finally, southern whites began to reject the basis of segregation, that blacks were inferior to whites. The scientific studies that had served as evidence of this were brought under attack, and racial attitudes turned

more positive. All in all, changes in social norms helped bring about racial change just as the rest of the causes did, but they did not do so directly. All of the causes mentioned here created a domino effect. They caused something to happen that in turn helped contribute to racial change and desegregation in the civil rights movement.

### **III. What is the intellectual rational?**

#### **3.1 How the answer to the central question matters intellectually:**

This research study has a very large impact on scholarly conversation regarding history, politics, and how political change occurs. The work is primarily geared towards lawyers, legal scholars, historians and politicians, and develops ideas and theories in their fields. It provides information for these fields on how elections function, the true purpose of politicians, and how change can come from other things.

The study on Truman's political switch to civil rights highlights most of this. As the article discusses, President Truman switched his political focus to civil rights when he realized that he would need to win the black vote in order to be reelected. He did not morally strive for black equality, but he switched his focus to civil rights only because it was a means to another goal. This study can be used to explain how elections and politicians truly function. It brings up the idea that what happens on the surface of elections and political actions might not be as transparent as they seem. It discusses that political actions have underlying causes, which could change how historians view history in general.

This concept contributes to the overall idea of the article that racial change evolved inevitably from other factors. This idea brings up new topics to scholarly discussion by questioning what facilitates change in general. Change is responsible for all of history and today's society, so if scholars and historians can understand what causes change, it could bring about great potential for the future.

**3.2 How else it matters:** The topics discussed in this article have the potential for great impact because they have to do with social justice and political struggles. The Civil Rights movement was one of the most famous times in the history of the United States, where the country put behind decades of legal segregation in hopes for a better future. Understanding how this was brought about, and how change occurs in general, can be applied to future change by solving current problems. The article highlights this when it discusses how African Americans wielded their new political power to achieve civil rights legislation. The power that simply came from the number of African American voters was able to achieve civil rights legislation, anti-lynching laws, and convinced the Senate to defeat Judge John Parker's Supreme Court nomination (33). The political focus of one group of people was able to influence the government and the future of laws in America. If this political power could be harnessed again, where the focus of a minority bands together, change for the future could be virtually limitless. The influence of the people could achieve laws to help minority groups or influence the direction that the government takes, and it could take the country in any direction.

**IV. How does the author go about finding the answer to the central and specifying questions?**

**4.1 Author's focus:** The author focuses on making his point by first stating his argument, and then providing multiple examples to back it up. These examples are periods of history or changes in economic, political or social factors. He cites these changes with statistics to back them up, and then pulls it together by showing how each event ended up affecting the treatment of African Americans.

**4.2 Types of evidence:** The author uses multiple types of evidence, mostly citing historical events backed up with statistics as proof. For example, when arguing that the south was dependent on outside investment, the author cites that the South's percent of national military contracts increased from 7% to 15% in the 1950s. These historical events are used as proof to as either a result or a cause, eventually leading to racial change.

**4.3 Ways the answer is determined:** The argument is very logical as each section ends up directly proving that racial change was inevitable. The thesis of the article is stated right away, and then backed up using a wide range events and actions that led to racial change. It is easy to believe because the argument is logical and there are no stretches that are hard to believe. The evidences given are extremely relevant. When the author states something relating to a sub argument, it is backed up with statistics to prove that it is true. They directly relate to the argument, and work together to prove the thesis in the work as a whole.

Despite the relativity of the evidence and the directness of the argument, there are things missing from the article. The entire work is focused on two groups of people, whites and blacks, but other minorities are distinctly not mentioned. During the time, minorities probably tended to side with the African Americans in

terms of civil rights issues because it could further their own cause. A win for one minority would pave the way for beneficial legislation for other minority groups. Despite this, minority groups are strangely not mentioned even though they could have been a driving supporting force for the African American movement and for the argument in this paper.

Another thing that is not mentioned is the presence of leadership in the civil rights campaign. The author claims that change was the product of bigger things that did not include people's efforts to cause change, but leadership played a big role in the civil rights movement. People rallied around civil rights leaders like Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., and without leaders like him it would have been much harder to organize an entire movement. This is an aspect that is missing from the article, yet it could have contributed to it. These two things could be missing because it deters from the author's central argument, or because the topic of leadership is an aspect that proves his argument wrong. He argues that racial change did not come from people's actions, but the idea of civil rights leaders does not support this.

Works Cited

Klarman, Michael J. "Brown, Racial Change, and the Civil Rights Movement." *Virginia Law Review* 80.1 (1994): 7-75. Web.