

the country, in 1917, Baker settled in New York, specifically a mostly white community, Sayville in Suffolk County, Long Island, and took the name the Reverend Major Jealous Divine. In addition to Divine's teachings and writings, which were considered sacred, members followed the *International Modest Code* that prohibited tobacco, alcohol, and profanity and established dress codes for men and women. Divine had a diverse following that included both African Americans and whites, and members of the upper and lower class. At the height of the movement, the community had about 50,000 members.

On November 15, 1931, responding to a disturbing the peace complaint, officers arrested 80 members attending Divine's service. Fifty-five members pleaded guilty and paid a \$5 fine. Father Divine and others pleaded not guilty and stood trial. Most were found guilty and were forced to pay the fine. Justice Lewis J. Smith sentenced Divine to a year in jail and a \$500 fine. Two days later, an apparently healthy Smith died of cardiac arrest. For many of Divine's followers, the event confirmed his divinity. A new trial was ordered, but never took place. After 33 days, Divine was released from jail.

Divine's Peace Mission Movement opened hotels, restaurants, stores, and many other businesses, while providing jobs, housing, and free meals during the dire Depression years. Divine became famous for his elaborate "Love Feasts," communion banquets, and services. In the mid-1930s, Divine moved his community to Harlem. In January 1936, Divine issued his "Righteous Government Platform," which called for the elimination of racial segregation, lynching, and capital punishment and advocated for additional government funds to end unemployment and poverty. In 1940, the movement petitioned for more stringent federal prosecution of lynching. Throughout his ministry, Divine had a number of accusations leveled against him including racketeering charges; however, the movement grew steadily in the 1930s, with more than 150 communities across the country.

After the death of his first wife, Divine married Edna Rose Ritchings, also known as Sweet Angel, on April 29, 1946. After the wedding, she assumed the title of Mother Divine. In 1947, the community moved to Woodmount, a suburb in Philadelphia. While the community held a variety of beliefs and practices, they emphasized racial and gender equality, patriotism to the United States, economic independence, and celibacy. As his health declined, Father Divine put institutional structures in place for the continuation of the movement such as developing new orders with

their own codes of conduct such as the "Rosebuds" for young girls, "Lily-buds" for women, and "Crusaders" for men. Despite his death on September 10, 1965, the community was able to continue under the direction of Mother Divine. Mother Divine currently handles the affairs of the community from Woodmont, which still operates several businesses. Their newspaper the *New Day*, which appeared weekly during the 1930s, suspended publication in 1992; however, Father Divine's teachings and writings remain sacred to his followers. There are currently several hundred members of the Peace Mission Movement, with the largest communities in Philadelphia and Newark, but there are followers across the United States and around the world.

*See also:* Destination, Harlem, New York; Evangelism

*Julius H. Bailey*

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## Fifteenth Amendment

Most Americans take voting for granted, but the right to vote was not given to African Americans, women, and American Indians until sustained legislative and legal battles had been fought. The first such victory was the enactment of the Fifteenth Amendment. Passed by Congress on February 26, 1869 and ratified on March 30, 1870, the Fifteenth Amendment prohibited states from denying the right to vote (to African American males) on the basis of race, color, or previous condition of servitude.

The Fifteenth Amendment was a catalyst of suffrage extensions. Tracing the evolution of American voting rights, it took a half-century to extend this same right to women under the Nineteenth Amendment in 1920, with American Indians receiving the right to vote in 1924. Not surprisingly, the Fifteenth Amendment's color-blind language ("race, color, or previous condition of servitude") was acutely color-conscious. Thus, one lingering "badge of slavery" was what one might call "political slavery," in the sense that blacks, prior to the Fifteenth Amendment (and after),

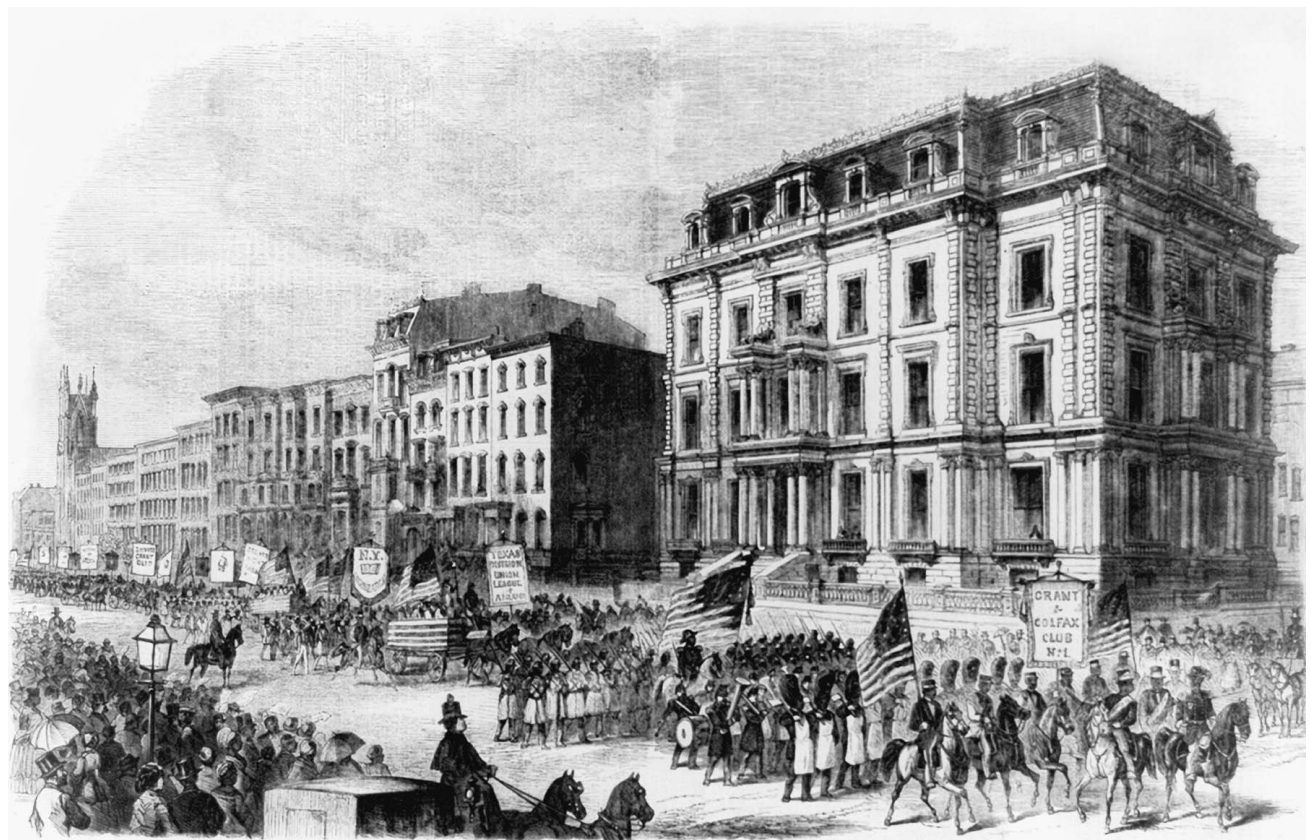
were barred from balloting, had no political representation, and perforce followed the laws of the white political establishment. In 1870, African Americans comprised around 10 percent of the nation's population (an estimated 4,000,000 out of 40,000,000). African Americans make up 14 per cent of Americans today, along with an equal number of Hispanic Americans.

Civil rights must first be recognized in principle. Then they must be realized in practice. After slavery was abolished by the Thirteenth Amendment in 1865, the question of the right of blacks to vote had ignited a national controversy. In spite of the adoption of the Fifteenth Amendment five years later, it took nearly a century to effectively enforce it under the Voting Rights Act (1965), which is the most successful civil rights legislation ever passed by Congress. This follows a pattern whereby the Civil War Amendments were not fully implemented until civil rights acts had been passed and enforced by direct federal intervention.

Partisan politics played a major role in establishing universal suffrage among African American men. Three years

before ratification of the Fifteenth Amendment, Congress passed the Reconstruction Act of 1867, requiring Southern states to grant blacks suffrage rights. Yet in 1868, 11 of the 21 Northern states denied blacks the right to vote. This was not simply a regional problem. It was national in scope and called for a nationwide solution. Amending the Constitution was the surest way to enact this legislative reform. As the law of the land, the Fifteenth Amendment was binding on all states. Yet they were not bound by it for historical reasons. The Southern states were forced to accept what they had long opposed, for the simple reason that they were obliged to ratify both the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments as a condition to their readmission into the Union after the Civil War.

The Southern states ratified these constitutional reforms grudgingly. While the Confederacy lost the Civil War, Southern states gained national power. The way that they exercised that power was to effectively deconstruct Reconstruction. After Reconstruction, Southern states did not honor the Fifteenth Amendment. Instead, they did all within their power to systematically disenfranchise blacks



*African Americans march in New York City on April 8, 1870, in celebration of the passage of the Fifteenth Amendment. The Fifteenth Amendment, which gave African American men the right to vote, was adopted by Congress on February 26, 1869, and officially ratified on March 30, 1870. (Library of Congress)*

through imposing literacy and character tests (“voter qualifying tests”), registration and poll tax requirements, along with white primaries, grandfather clauses, outright racial gerrymandering, and other restrictive devices, thereby rendering the Fifteenth Amendment a dead letter in a living document. Later, in *Smith v. Allwright*, 321 U.S. 649 (1944), the Supreme Court found that voting rights discrimination in primaries was unconstitutional on the basis of the Fifteenth Amendment. In *South Carolina v. Katzenbach*, 383 U.S. 301 (1966), the Supreme Court held that Congress, in enforcing the Fifteenth Amendment through the Voting Rights Act of 1865, may prohibit literacy tests in an effort to eliminate racial discrimination in voting. Notwithstanding such judicial enforcement, a paradox of national-historical proportions is this: Not until the passage of the Voting Rights Act of 1965 could the majority of African Americans in the South register to vote.

See also: Disfranchisement; Radical Republicans; Voting Rights Act 1965

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## Five Percenters

The Nation of Gods and Earths (NGE) is the official name of an organization popularly known as the Five Percenters. Headquartered in Harlem, with members in major cities

across the United States, the organization originated as a splinter group that broke away from the Nation of Islam (NOI) circa 1964, under the leadership of Clarence Jowers Smith, who is better known by his NOI alias, Clarence 13 X and his nickname “Puddin.” The latter moniker so-called attested to his legendary powers of persuasion. He was a gifted conversationalist with a hypnotic speaking style. Thus in street parlance his “rap,” or “game” was so sweet and smooth that people would swallow his words like pudding. The organization’s official name stems from the designation of male members as “Gods” and female members as “Earths” (analogous to the familiar gendered constructions “God the Father” and “Mother Earth”). The popular name is derived from the members’ belief that 85 percent of humanity are mentally dead, uncivilized slaves who are unaware of their true identity or the true God; 10 percent are the wealthy enslavers of the poor who use lies to teach that the true and living God is an invisible, ghostlike “spook,” and that they, in contrast, are the 5 percent of humanity who are the poor righteous teachers who do not believe in the teachings of the 10 percent and who know and teach that the Living God is the Asiatic black man.

These beliefs come directly from the *Lessons* of the NOI, the catechism-like sets of questions and answers (Q & A) that all NOI members must master (e.g., “Who is the Original Man? The Original Man is the Asiatic Black Man, the Maker, the Owner, the Cream of the Planet Earth, the father of Civilization, and God of the Universe.”) The NGE, as an offshoot of the NOI, retains many of the NOI’s teachings and heterodox Islamic beliefs, chief among them the idea that God (Allah) exists in a human form, an anathema to orthodox (Sunni and Shi’a) Muslims for whom *shirk* (associating partners with God) is the most grievous and unpardonable sin. There are several contrasts between the NOI and NGE, however. Diverging from the NOI’s creed that Allah appeared in the person of Master W. D. Fard (also known as W. D. Farrad and Farrad Muhammad), the mysterious Middle Eastern peddler who was mentor of the Honorable Elijah Muhammad, the NGE holds that it is not Fard Muhammad who is Allah but the black man collectively. While the NOI proclaims that it is a religious organization, and has made attempts to mainstream some of its deviant beliefs and practices so that they are in more in alignment with the orthodox Muslim world, the NGE adamantly states that it is not a religious organization, and the members do not consider themselves Muslims but gods. While