

Chapter 21

The Long Freedom Movement

1950–1970



At the height of his moral authority, Martin Luther King, Jr. (1929–1968) delivers the memorable “I Have a Dream” speech at the 1963 March on Washington.



Learning Objectives

After reading this chapter, you should be able to:

- 21.1** Describe the backgrounds of key black men and women in the classic phase of the modern civil rights movement. Evaluate the effect that specific events had on the shape and contours of the 1950s phase of the modern civil rights movement and that laid the groundwork for the emergence of the Black Power movement.
- 21.2** Enumerate the events that inspired the NAACP to take up the case that resulted in the 1954 *Brown v. Board of Education* Supreme Court decision. Discuss why some may consider *Brown* to be one of the, if not *the*, most important cases in the twentieth century.
- 21.3** Identify the key components of white southerners' strategy of massive resistance and explain their impact on the modern civil rights movement.
- 21.4** Explain the evolution of the Montgomery Bus Boycott and how it affected race relations in Alabama.
- 21.5** Identify the major goals of the Civil Rights Act of 1957.
- 21.6** Explain the evolution of tactics used in the 1940s and those developed and practiced by the 1960s generation of student activists.
- 21.7** Discuss the individuals who were in the first wave of post–World War II leaders. Explain some of the differences in civil rights demands following the end of World War II and during the 1950s.
- 21.8** Analyze the impact of the federal government's intermittent support on the Long Freedom Movement.

Up to the mid-1950s, my people were afraid. They figured if they spoke out, they'd be pushed around on their job, or they would lose their job, so they kept silent. In my case, my paycheck came from Chicago, and they couldn't get me fired so easy. So when I saw the opportunity, I knew I could reach out and grab for it.

—E. D. Nixon, *Pullman Car Porter and NAACP activist*. Quoted from Nixon, in Donnie Williams with Wayne Greenhaw, *The Thunder of Angels: The Montgomery Bus Boycott and the People Who Broke the Back of Jim Crow* (Chicago: Lawrence Hill Books, 2006), 53

Between 1954 and 1965, the civil rights movement achieved a revolution, transforming the legal and social status of African Americans. Bold movements—beginning with the “Double V” Campaign during World War II and the NAACP’s long legal struggle to overthrow the “separate but equal” doctrine—triumphed in the *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka* decision in 1954. Black men and women protested against

Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka

Decision by the Supreme Court in 1954 that overturned the “separate but equal” doctrine.

segregation and discrimination through the Montgomery Bus Boycott of 1955–1956, and against white-only lunch counters and public transportation. Black protest culminated in massive grassroots campaigns throughout the South in 1963, 1964, and 1965—and changed the face of race relations in the United States. Despite fierce resistance, legally sanctioned segregation, racial discrimination, and disfranchisement fell before a mighty coalition of civil rights groups and their allies. Demonstrations and the pressures of the Cold War compelled high government officials to abandon their early caution. Although racism remained powerful in American life after 1965, and African Americans continued to suffer from severe economic disadvantages, the enlargement of freedom of opportunity and recognition of African Americans’ full citizenship rights transformed America and radiated across the globe.

The heart of the story of the modern civil rights movement is the courage and tenacity people showed in their own communities in their determination to attack segregation and exclusion from the political process. Behind the charismatic leaders and the spectacles of the NAACP’s Supreme Court victories and the marches and demonstrations captured so dramatically on television were the ordinary citizens who initiated protests, formulated strategies and tactics, and garnered other essential resources that made collective action work. The people’s actions were made effective through their families, churches, voluntary associations, political organizations, women’s clubs, labor unions, and colleges. The sacrifices and experience gained in the previous one hundred years of struggle had, by the mid-1950s, accumulated sufficiently to permit an all-out attack on white supremacy. The civil rights movement would be long and bloody, and it would not lead to the Promised Land, but it would change America.

21.1 The 1950s: Prejudice and Protest

Describe the backgrounds of key black men and women in the classic phase of the modern civil rights movement. Evaluate the effect that specific events had on the shape and contours of the 1950s phase of the modern civil rights movement and that laid the groundwork for the emergence of the Black Power movement.

For most white Americans, the 1950s were an era of unparalleled prosperity, consumer consumption, and a patriarchal business culture. Affluent white Americans fled to the suburbs; by 1960, 52 percent of Americans owned their own homes. The decade is remembered nostalgically as a time of large, stable nuclear families; wives and mothers who stayed at home; and communities untroubled by drugs, crime, and juvenile delinquency. It was a time of backyard barbecues and hula hoops, when nightly television shows like *Ozzie and Harriet* and *I Love Lucy* projected a vision of domestic tranquility.

For most black Americans, however, the 1950s were less blissful. American society remained rigidly segregated in housing and education. Despite the gains African Americans made during the World War II era, Jim Crow still reigned. Although the *Smith v. Allwright* Supreme Court decision in 1944, which declared the “white primary” unconstitutional, helped reenfranchise black voters in Florida, Tennessee, and Texas, Jim Crow restrictions and the threat of white violence kept millions of African Americans from voting in the Deep South. Likewise, although the 1948 *Shelley v. Kramer* Supreme Court decision—which outlawed the restricted residential covenants that had allowed homeowners to refuse to sell, rent, or lease their property to African Americans—was a significant victory, violence and extralegal practices still made housing integration a distant dream.

More important, most African Americans did not benefit from the economic boom of the 1950s that allowed so many white Americans to purchase homes in the suburbs. Moving into urban centers, where the number of factories and jobs were just beginning to decline, African Americans suffered a higher unemployment rate than any other segment of the population. White workers, fearing for their jobs, felt threatened by competition from unemployed black workers. As urban neighborhoods deteriorated, conditions ripened for a massive explosion.

21.2 The Road to *Brown*

Enumerate the events that inspired the NAACP to take up the case that resulted in the 1954 *Brown v. Board of Education* Supreme Court decision. Discuss why some may consider *Brown* to be one of the, if not *the*, most important cases in the twentieth century.

In 1954, with the Supreme Court's decision in *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas*, progress in the desegregation of American society moved into the civilian realm. The *Brown* decision undermined state-sanctioned segregation. The NAACP's legal program of the 1920s and 1930s was largely responsible for this victory. In 1940 the NAACP set up the Legal Defense and Educational Fund (NAACP-LDEF) to attack the legal foundations of race inequality in American education. Thereafter, the NAACP-LDEF fought segregation and discrimination in education, housing, employment, and politics. In the first years of its existence, attorneys for the fund won stunning victories, including a 1944 Supreme Court decision, *Smith v. Allwright*, declaring white primaries unconstitutional, and *Shelley v. Kramer* (1948), outlawing restrictive residential covenants. The life and career of one of the NAACP-LDEF lawyers, Constance Baker Motley, symbolizes the struggle that black professionals, both men and women, waged to overcome racial and gender exclusion as well as the union of disparate forces that planted and nurtured the seeds of the coming revolution. Motley is our guide on the road to *Brown*.

21.2.1 Constance Baker Motley and Black Lawyers in the South

Constance Baker Motley was born in 1921 to immigrant parents, Rachel Huggins and Willoughby Alva Baker, from Nevis, in the British West Indies. She grew up in a tightly knit West Indian community in New Haven, Connecticut. The members of New Haven's black community, including Baker's parents, worked as domestics or in service jobs for Yale University. Baker attended integrated schools and experienced episodic racism, including being refused admission to a local beach and a skating rink. In high school, Baker developed a strong racial consciousness: "My interest in civil rights [was] a very early interest which developed when I was in high school. The fact that I was a Black, a woman, and a member of a large, relatively poor family was also the base of this great ambition [to enter the legal profession]."

The most important event in her early life was the lecture that George Crawford, a 1903 Yale Law School graduate who worked in New Haven as an NAACP lawyer, gave at the local Dixwell Community Center. The talk concerned the Supreme Court decision in *State of Missouri ex rel. Gaines v. Canada*. Crawford explained that the University of Missouri's law school had denied Gaines admission but had offered to pay his tuition expenses to an out-of-state school. The NAACP Legal Committee under Charles H. Houston's leadership won a victory when the Supreme Court ruled that the state had violated the Fourteenth Amendment's mandate that state laws provide equal protection regardless of race. After *Gaines*, states had to furnish

within their borders facilities for legal education for black people equal to those offered for white citizens.

Baker desperately wanted to go to law school, but her family could not even afford to send her to college. For a year and a half after graduation from high school in 1939, Baker earned \$50 a month varnishing chairs for a building restoration project under the auspices of the National Youth Administration. In 1940, however, Baker came to the attention of Clarence Blakeslee, a local white philanthropist who offered to finance her education after hearing her speak at a meeting of black and white community residents. She attended Fisk University until 1942 and then transferred to New York University, where she graduated in 1943. She then became the second black woman ever to attend Columbia University Law School. In 1946 she married former New York University law student Joel Motley and went to work for the NAACP's LDEF.

Constance Baker Motley first met Thurgood Marshall in October 1945 when he hired her as a law clerk during her second year in law school. Marshall assigned her to work on the hundreds of army court-martial cases filed after World War II. Motley recalled, "From the first day I knew that this was where I wanted to be. I never bothered interviewing anywhere else. But for this fortuitous event, I do not think that I would have gotten very far as a lawyer. Women were simply not hired in those days."

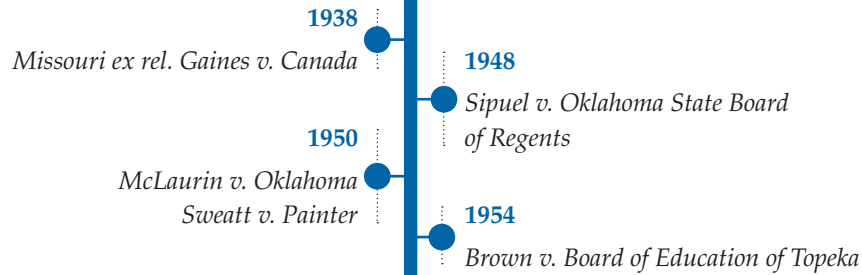
In the late 1940s, the NAACP-LDEF's attack on inequality in graduate education provided the basis for a full-scale assault on segregation. No longer would the organization be satisfied only to push for fulfillment of the promise of "separate but equal" facilities. In 1948 the University of Oklahoma Law School denied Ada Lois Sipuel admission because she was black. The Supreme Court, signaling it was willing to take a more activist stance, ordered Oklahoma, in *Sipuel v. Board of Regents of the University of Oklahoma*, to "provide [a legal education] for [Sipuel] in conformity with the equal protection clause of the Fourteenth Amendment and provide it as soon as it does for applicants of any other group."

Another case, *Sweatt v. Painter*, which the Supreme Court decided in 1950, began when the University of Texas at Austin attempted to circumvent court orders to admit Heman Sweatt to its law school by creating a separate facility consisting of three basement rooms, a small library, and a few instructors who would lecture to him alone.

Constance Baker Motley endured many hardships and even assaults as she tried school desegregation cases in the South. Here she leaves the federal court in Birmingham after an unsuccessful attempt to force the University of Alabama to accept a black student.



1938–1954 United States Supreme Court Decisions: The Road to *Brown*



The court ruled that the university had deprived Sweatt of intangibles such as “the essential ingredient of a legal education . . . the opportunity for students to discuss the law with their peers and others with whom they would be associated professionally in later life.”

On the same day the justices ruled in *Sweatt*, they also declared illegal the University of Oklahoma’s segregation of George W. McLaurin from white students attending the Graduate School of Education. The University of Oklahoma had admitted McLaurin but made him sit in the hallway at the classroom door, study in a private part of the balcony of the library, and eat in a sequestered part of the lunchroom. When he finally gained a seat in the classroom, it was marked “reserved for colored.” In these precedent-setting cases, the Supreme Court signaled a readiness to reconsider the “separate but equal” doctrine of *Plessy* (1896) and to redefine the meaning of the “equal protection of the laws” clause of the Fourteenth Amendment. These cases were important stepping-stones on the road to *Brown*.



This student at the University of Oklahoma was not allowed to sit in a classroom with white students. It took two Supreme Court decisions to end such segregation at the University of Oklahoma.

21.2.2 *Brown* and the Coming Revolution

A year after the *Sweatt* and *McLaurin* decisions, black parents and their lawyers filed suits in Kansas, South Carolina, Virginia, Delaware, and the District of Columbia asking the courts to apply the qualitative test of the *Sweatt* case to elementary and secondary schools and to declare the “separate but equal” doctrine invalid in public education. Black lawyers in the South handling civil rights cases were frequently assaulted. On February 27, 1942, for example, a former deputy sheriff attacked NAACP attorney Leon A. Ransom in the hall of the Davidson County Courthouse in Nashville, Tennessee. The *Crisis* reported,

The attack came when Ransom walked out into the hall from the courtroom where he was sitting with Z. Alexander Looby, local NAACP attorney, on a case involving the exclusion of Negroes from a jury. . . . When the scuffle began, Negroes who would have aided Ransom were held back by a former constable (white) named Hill, who drew his gun and shouted: “We are going to teach these northern Negroes not to come down here raising fancy court questions.”

At Ransom’s death in 1954, Thurgood Marshall eulogized,

Negro Americans, whether they know it or not, owe a great debt of gratitude to Andy Ransom and men like him who battled in the courts down a span of years to bring us to the place we now occupy in the enjoyment of our constitutional rights as citizens, in helping to build up the NAACP legal program step by step, in the skill which he gave to individual cases and to the planning of strategy, Dr. Ransom left a legacy to the whole population.

It was no less difficult for a black woman lawyer to venture into the South in search of justice. Black attorney Derrick Bell, who also worked for the LDEF, said of Motley’s work,

Nothing in the Southern lawyers’ background could have prepared them for Connie. To them Negro women were either mummies, maids, or mistresses. None of them had ever dealt with a Negro woman on a peer basis, much less on a level of intellectual equality, which in this case quickly became superiority.

Motley was keenly aware of her precarious situation. “Often a southern judge would refer to men attorneys as Mister, but would make a point of calling me ‘Connie,’ since traditionally Black women in the South were only called by their first name.” Housing was another problem. Motley recalled that when in a southern town for a long trial, “I knew that it was going to be impossible to stay in a decent hotel.” These lawyers had to depend on the good graces and courage of local people. Motley explained, “Usually in these situations a Black family would agree to put you up. But there was so much publicity involved with civil rights cases that no Black family dared have us—they were too afraid.” While in Mississippi arguing a teachers’ equalization of salaries case, Motley declared, “A Black doctor invited us to dinner, but that was about it. . . . I wonder how many lawyers have had the experience of preparing for trial in a flophouse. That was the only room I could get.”

In the late 1940s, the black parents of children attending Scott’s Branch School in Clarendon County, South Carolina, approached Roderick W. Elliott, the chairman of the school board, with a modest request. There were 6,531 black students and only 2,375 white students enrolled in the county’s schools. Although the county had 30 buses to convey the white students to their schools, no buses were available to black schoolchildren. Some black students had to walk 18 miles round-trip each day. Once they arrived, they entered buildings heated by wood stoves and lit by kerosene lamps. For a drink of water or to go to the toilet they had to go outdoors.

With the encouragement of African Methodist Episcopal pastor and schoolteacher Rev. Joseph Armstrong DeLaine, the parents mustered the courage to petition the school

board for buses. Elliott's reply was short: "We ain't got no money to buy a bus for your nigger children." In 1949 DeLaine went to the NAACP officials in Columbia, and Thurgood Marshall was there. On December 20, 1950, Harry Briggs, a navy veteran, and 24 other Clarendon County residents sued the school district. The case, *Briggs v. Elliott*, was the first legal challenge to elementary school segregation to originate in the South. Meanwhile, however, four other cases in different parts of the country were advancing through the federal courts. These would be combined into one case that would decide the fate of the *Plessy* doctrine of "separate but equal."

The years of preparation and hardship paid off. Motley worked with a dream team of black lawyers and academics, an inner circle of advisers that included Louis Redding from Wilmington, Delaware; James Nabrit from Washington, D.C.; Robert Ming from Chicago; psychologist Kenneth Clark from New York; and historian John Hope Franklin to prepare the case *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka* and to argue it before the Supreme Court. Motley, Robert Carter, Jack Greenberg, and Marshall also sought assistance from Spottswood Robinson and Oliver Hill of Richmond, Virginia, and read papers prepared by historians C. Vann Woodward and Alfred Kelly about the original equalitarian intentions of the post-Civil War amendments and other legislation. In his argument, Marshall appealed to the Court to meet the *Plessy* doctrine head on and declare it erroneous:

It [*Plessy*] stands mirrored today as a legal aberration, the faulty conception of an era dominated by provincialism, by intense emotionalism in race relations . . . and by the preaching of a doctrine of racial superiority that contradicted the basic concept upon which our society was founded. Twentieth century America, fighting racism at home and abroad, has rejected the race views of *Plessy v. Ferguson* because we have come to the realization that such views obviously tend to preserve not the strength but the weakness of our heritage.

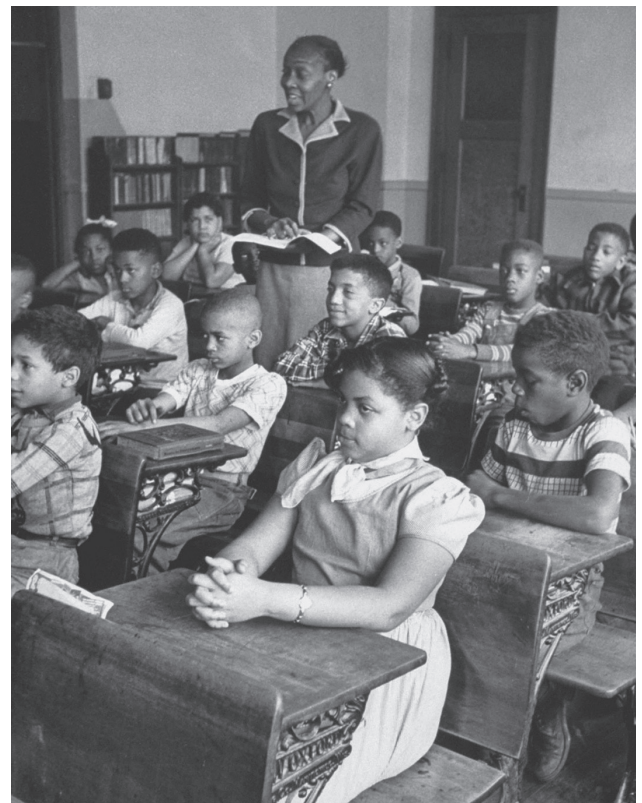
By the time Marshall made this argument, black intellectuals, scholars, and activists and their progressive white allies had closed ranks to support integration. To suggest other alternatives as the goal for African Americans was to swim against the current.

During late 1953 and early 1954, Chief Justice Earl Warren persuaded the Court to support Marshall's position. On May 17, 1954, the Court ruled unanimously in favor of the NAACP lawyers and their clients that a classification based solely on race violated the Fourteenth Amendment. In a stirring passage Warren declared,

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. . . . To separate them from others of similar age and qualifications solely because of their race generates a feeling of inferiority as to the status in the community that may affect their hearts and minds in a way unlikely ever to be undone. . . . We conclude that in the field of public education the doctrine of "separate but equal" has no place. Separate educational facilities are inherently unequal.

The *Brown* decision would eventually lead to the dismantling of the entire structure of Jim Crow laws that regulated important aspects of black life in America: movement, work, marriage, education, housing, and even death and burial. The *Brown* decision, more than any other case, signaled the emerging primacy of equality as a guide to constitutional decisions.

In 1950, when the all-white Sumner School in Topeka, Kansas, refused to admit Linda Brown (1943–), her father, Oliver Brown, filed a lawsuit and testified in court that his daughter had to travel an hour and 20 minutes to attend a black school. The Sumner School was only seven blocks away but practiced racial exclusion. Linda became the "named plaintiff" in the landmark U.S. Supreme Court case *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954), which declared unconstitutional laws mandating public school segregation.



This and subsequent decisions helped advance the rights of other minorities and women. As Motley reflected, “In the *Brown* case and in the decisions that followed, we blazed a trail for others by showing the competence of Black lawyers.”

A year after the *Brown* decision, in May 1955, the Supreme Court issued a second ruling, commonly known as *Brown II*, which addressed the practical process of desegregation. The Court underscored that the states in the suits should begin prompt compliance with the 1954 ruling and that this should be done with “all deliberate speed.” Many black Americans interpreted this to mean “immediately.” White southerners hoped it meant a long time or never. Ominously, President Eisenhower seemed displeased with the Court’s rulings and refused to put the moral authority of his office behind their enforcement.

Nevertheless, in 1955 and early 1956, desegregation proceeded without hindrance in Maryland, Kentucky, Delaware, Oklahoma, and Missouri. Alabama Governor Jim Folsom declared that his state would obey the courts. Other moderate white southern politicians counseled calm and worked to head off a full-scale conflict with the federal government.

21.3 Challenges to *Brown*

Identify the key components of white southerners’ strategy of massive resistance and explain their impact on the modern civil rights movement.

White moderates, however, found themselves a shrinking minority. Extremists, determined to maintain white supremacy at any cost, prepared to resist the Court’s decisions. The extremists’ rhetoric bordered on hysteria but found a receptive audience among many.

21.3.1 White Resistance

Jerry Falwell, a young minister from Virginia, explained that black people were the descendants of Noah’s son Ham and were destined to be servants because of a curse God had put on him. Falwell also claimed that Moscow had inspired the Supreme Court’s decisions. In 1955 leading businessmen, white-collar professionals, and clergy began organizing, in virtually every southern city, White Citizens’ Councils dedicated to preserving “the southern way of life” and the South’s “sacred heritage of freedom.” The councils used their economic and political power to intimidate African Americans who challenged segregation. They fired black people, evicted them, and refused them credit.

Many white politicians took up the banner of massive resistance. Mississippi Senator James O. Eastland had called the *Brown* decision a “monstrous crime.” The Virginia legislature had closed all public schools in Prince Edward County to thwart integration. On March 12, 1956, 96 southern congressmen led by North Carolina’s Senator Sam Ervin, Jr. and South Carolina’s Senator Strom Thurmond issued “The Southern Manifesto,” vowing to fight to preserve segregation and the southern way of life. The manifesto called the *Brown* decisions an “unwarranted exercise of power by the court, contrary to the Constitution.” The only southern senators who refused to sign the manifesto were Albert Gore, Sr. of Tennessee and Lyndon B. Johnson of Texas.

The NAACP came under siege after the *Brown* decision as southern states tried to destroy it. By 1957 nine southern states had filed suit to eradicate the organization. Some states, alleging the NAACP was linked to a worldwide communist conspiracy, made membership illegal. Membership plummeted from 128,716 to 79,677, and the association lost 246 branches in the South.

Under these pressures, educational desegregation ground to a halt. By 1958, only 13 school systems had been desegregated. By 1960, two years later, the total had risen to only 17. Massive resistance successfully challenged the possibility of achieving change through court action alone. In two 2007 decisions, Justices Clarence Thomas and John Roberts, both of whom were appointed by Presidents George H. W. and George W. Bush, respectively, sought to end the practice of racial classification as a means to achieve racial diversity in public schools. They ruled in two cases involving school assignment plans

developed by the boards of education in Seattle, Washington, and in Jefferson County, Kentucky, which included the city of Louisville. The Seattle school district classified children as white or nonwhite and used this system as the basis for allocating slots to attend the better, or oversubscribed, city high schools. On the other hand, the Jefferson County school district classified children as either black or as “other” and used that system to assign students to elementary schools and to inform decisions about transfer requests.

The Court ruled that both plans violated the Fourteenth Amendment, which guarantees equal protection of the laws. Chief Justice John Roberts, writing the majority opinion, declared, “The way to stop discrimination on the basis of race is to stop discriminating on the basis of race.” In a separate opinion, Justice Clarence Thomas insisted, “Racial imbalance is not segregation,” adding, “there is no danger of re-segregation.”

Joining Roberts and Thomas were Justices Antonin Scalia and Samuel Alito. In his concurring opinion, Justice Anthony Kennedy left open the door for school districts to devise nonracial measures to achieve diversity while limiting the use of racial classification: “Such measures may include strategic site selection of new schools; drawing attendance zones with general recognition of neighborhood demographics; allocating resources for special programs; recruiting students and faculty in a targeted fashion; and tracking enrollments, performance, and other statistics by race.”

In a spirited dissent, Justice Stephen Breyer called the majority decision a reversal of precedent and a fundamental weakening of *Brown*. Breyer argued that the majority opinion amounted to a retreat from the principle that allowed local school districts to exercise discretion about the best means to end racial segregation, curb resegregation due to segregated housing patterns, and overcome class division and racial exclusion. (Michigan Congressman John Conyers, chair of the House Judiciary Committee, called the ruling “shameful” and a “step backward” from *Brown*.)

The Court’s decisions had affected hundreds of school districts across the country. School systems had to struggle to devise their own strategies to avoid or reduce racial concentration, to reverse the wide gaps between white and black students on state tests in reading and math, and to resist the resegregation of schools that had arisen from the growing patterns of housing segregation.

21.3.2 The Lynching of Emmett Till

In the wake of the 1954 *Brown* decision, white southerners’ had violent reactions to black victories and assertiveness, as seen in the summer of 1955 in the lynching of 14-year-old Emmett Till of Chicago. This event helped galvanize the emerging civil rights movement. Till was visiting relatives in the small town of Money, Mississippi. Till was unaware how far white people would go to avenge any real or apparent breach of white supremacy’s racial etiquette. What was actually said by Till to the white woman owner of the store he entered may never be known. It is fair to say that the general racially hostile atmosphere emboldened Bryant’s husband and brother-in-law to kidnap and murder young Emmet Till. His body was subsequently found in the Tallahatchie River tied to a heavy cotton gin fan. Till had a bullet in his head and had been tortured before his murder. Despite overwhelming evidence and the testimony of Till’s uncle and others, an all-white jury acquitted the two men who had lynched Till. In early 1956 the murderers sold their confession to *Look* magazine and gloated over their escape from justice.

The Till lynching helped to shape the consciousness of a generation of young African-American activists. Partly this was due to Till’s mother, Mamie Bradley. Unwilling to let America turn away from this crime, she had her son’s mangled body

In August 1955, 14-year-old Emmett Till was visiting relatives in Money, Mississippi, when he transgressed the line of racial etiquette by speaking to a white woman in a country store. He paid the ultimate price. The lynching of Emmett Till and the subsequent acquittal of his murderers reflected the low regard in which black life was held in the Jim Crow South and the extent to which whites were determined to maintain the racial status quo.



displayed in an open casket in Chicago. Thousands of mourners paid their respects, and many committed themselves to fighting the system that made this crime possible. Bradley also traveled around the nation speaking to groups on whom her grief had a profound impact. Myrlie Evers, who would later have a role in the movement, remembered how she felt: “I bled for Emmett Till’s mother. I know when she came to Mississippi and appeared at the mass meetings how everyone poured out their hearts to her, went into their pockets when people had only two or three pennies, and gave.”

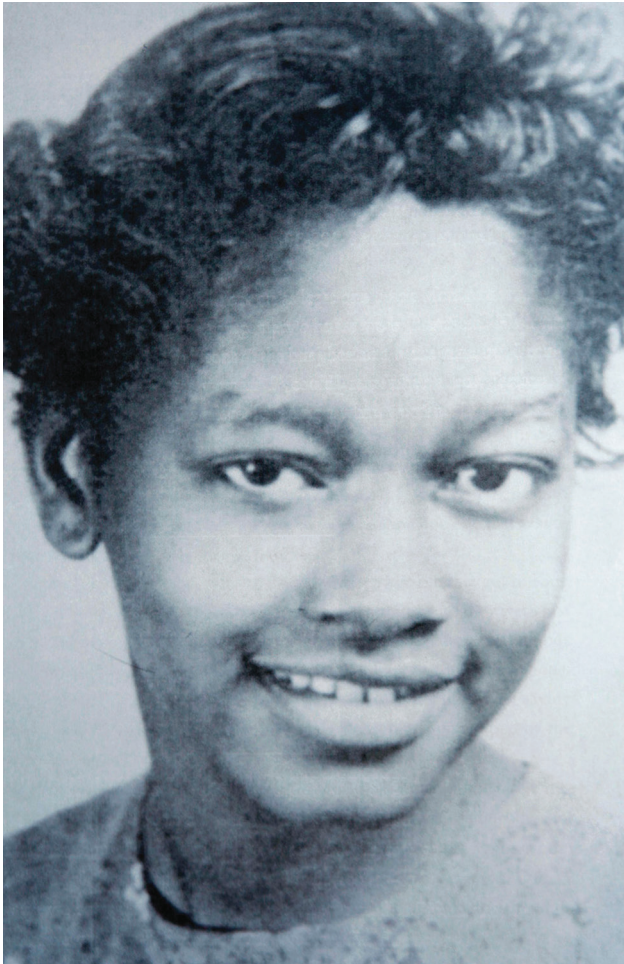
21.4 New Forms of Protest: The Montgomery Bus Boycott

Explain the evolution of the Montgomery Bus Boycott and how it affected race relations in Alabama.

Strong local communities formed the core of the civil rights movement in the South, and the deeds of brave individuals often sparked them to action. The first and one of the most important expressions of this process occurred in Alabama’s capital city. Blessed with well-organized educational, religious, and other institutions, Montgomery’s African-American community of 45,000 was poised to make history.

21.4.1 The Roots of Revolution

Claudette Colvin was a teenager when she refused to obey the transportation segregation laws in Montgomery.



The movement in Montgomery did not emerge out of the blue, although it must have seemed that way to many white southerners. It was the result of years of organization and planning by protest groups. In addition to its numerous churches, two black colleges, and other social organizations, Montgomery had a core of protest groups. One, the Women’s Political Council (WPC), had been founded in 1946 by Mary Frances Fair Burks, chair of the Department of English at Alabama State College, after the all-white League of Women Voters had refused to allow black women to participate in its activities. The WPC had only 40 members, all middle-class, courageous, and competent leaders who were willing to stand up to powerful white people. The WPC was joined by a chapter of the NAACP led by E. D. Nixon, a Pullman train car porter and head of the Alabama chapter of the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters. In 1943 Nixon had founded the Montgomery Voters League, which was dedicated to helping African Americans navigate Alabama’s tortuous voter registration process. In the decade after 1945, these groups searched for a way to mobilize the black community to challenge white power.

The 1954 *Brown* decision seemed to provide a means to destroy segregation and discrimination in the city. Four days after it was announced, Jo Ann Robinson, a professor at Alabama State College, wrote to Montgomery’s mayor on behalf of the WPC reiterating the complaints of the black community about conditions on the city’s buses: “Please consider this plea, for even now plans are being made to ride less, or not at all, on our buses.” The mayor ignored the warning, and the buses remained as segregated as before. All seemed quiet, but Montgomery’s black lawyers and NAACP chapter began laying the groundwork for a test case challenging segregation of the city’s bus lines.

On March 2, 1955, a 15-year-old Booker T. Washington High School student, Claudette Colvin, was arrested for refusing to give up her seat on a bus to a white woman. The WPC was

Voices

Letter of the Montgomery Women's Political Council to Mayor W. A. Gayle

In this letter threatening a boycott of Montgomery's buses, the Women's Political Council politely asks not for the desegregation of the buses but only for new regulations that would prevent black riders from being forced to move to accommodate white riders.

May 21, 1954

Honorable Mayor W. A. Gayle
City Hall
Montgomery, Alabama

Dear Sir:

The Women's Political Council is very grateful to you and the City Commissioners for the hearing you allowed our representative during the month of March, 1954, when the "city-bus-fare-increase case" was being reviewed. There were several things the Council asked for:

1. A city law that would make it possible for Negroes to sit from back toward front, and whites from front toward back until all the seats were taken.
2. That Negroes would not be asked or forced to pay fare at front and go to the rear of the bus to enter.
3. That buses stop at every corner in residential sections occupied by Negroes as they do in communities where whites reside.

We are happy to report that buses have begun stopping at more corners now in some sections where Negroes live than previously. However, the same practices in seating and boarding the bus continue.

Mayor Gayle, three-fourths of the riders of these public conveyances are Negroes. If Negroes did not patronize them, they could not possibly operate.

More and more of our people are already arranging with neighbors and friends to ride to keep from being insulted and humiliated by bus drivers.

There has been talk from twenty-five or more local organizations of planning a city-wide boycott of buses. We, sir, do not feel that forceful measures are necessary in bargaining for a convenience which is right for all bus passengers. We, the Council, believe that when this matter has been put before you and the Commissioners, that agreeable terms can be met in a quiet and in a sensible manner to the satisfaction of all concerned.

Many of our Southern cities in neighboring states have practiced the policies we seek without incident whatsoever. Atlanta, Macon and Savannah in Georgia have done this for years. Even Mobile, in our own state, does this and all the passengers are satisfied.

Please consider this plea, and if possible, act favorably upon it, for even now plans are being made to ride less, or not at all, on our buses. We do not want this.

Respectfully yours,
The Women's Political Council
Jo Ann Robinson, President

1. Explain the objectives or goals that inspired the activism of the members of the Women's Political Council as revealed in the letter by Jo Ann Robinson.
2. Analyze the significance of black women's political organizations in the early stages of the modern civil rights movement.

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ready to use this incident to initiate the threatened bus boycott. E. D. Nixon called 24-year-old Fred D. Gray, who agreed to represent Colvin in her challenge to Jim Crow segregation laws. Gray was one of only two black lawyers in Montgomery. The March 18, 1955, hearings resulted in a guilty verdict, and Claudette was placed on probation in the custody of her parents. Jo Ann Robinson recalled, "Claudette's agonized sobs penetrated the atmosphere of the courthouse. Many people brushed away their own tears." The Colvins were not members of the black social elite in Montgomery, and for various reasons community leaders decided against protesting Claudette's conviction for allegedly "assaulting" the police officers who had dragged her from the bus. They decided to wait for another opportunity to launch a protest movement. Fred Gray, however, decided to appeal Colvin's case.

21.4.2 Rosa Parks

On Thursday, December 1, 1955, Rosa Parks, a 43-year-old department store seamstress and civil rights activist, boarded a city bus and moved to the back where African Americans were required to sit. All seats were taken, so she sat in one toward the middle of the bus. When a white man boarded the bus, the driver ordered Parks to vacate her seat for him. There was nothing unusual in this, but on this fateful day, Parks refused to move. She had not planned to resist on that day, but, as she later said, she had “decided that I would have to know once and for all what rights I had as a human being and a citizen. . . . I was so involved with the attempt to bring about freedom from this kind of thing . . . I felt just resigned to give what I could to protest against the way I was being treated, and felt that all of our meetings, trying to negotiate, bring about petitions before the authorities . . . really hadn’t done any good at all.” At the time Parks was portrayed as simply tired, but she had been training for just this kind of challenge for years. When her moment came, she seized it; with this act of resistance, she launched the **Montgomery Bus Boycott** and inspired the modern civil rights struggle for freedom and equality.

Montgomery Bus Boycott

Refusal from 1955 to 1957 of African Americans in Montgomery, Alabama, to ride the city’s buses until the bus lines were desegregated.

The plans of the WPC and NAACP came into play after Parks’s arrest for violating Montgomery’s transportation laws. She was ordered to appear in court on the following Monday. Meanwhile, E. D. Nixon bailed her out of the city jail and began mobilizing the leadership of the black community behind her. Working in tandem with Nixon, Robinson wrote and circulated a flyer calling for a one-day boycott of the buses followed by a mass meeting of the community to discuss the matter. Robinson took the flyer to the Alabama State College campus, stayed up all night, and, with the help of a colleague, mimeographed 30,000 copies of it. The WPC had planned distribution routes months earlier, and the next day, Robinson and nearly 200 volunteers distributed bundles of flyers to beauty parlors and schools, to factories and grocery stores, and to taverns and barbershops throughout the black neighborhoods.

21.4.3 Montgomery Improvement Association

On December 5, 1955, the black community did not ride the buses, and the movement had begun. Nixon and other community leaders, including Jo Ann Gibson Robinson, who would become its chief strategist, formed a new organization, the Montgomery Improvement Association (MIA), to coordinate the boycott. They selected a 26-year-old minister, Martin Luther King, Jr., as its president. That evening there was an overflowing mass meeting of the black community at the Holt Street Baptist Church to decide whether to continue the boycott. King, with barely an hour to prepare, defined the goals of the boycott and the civil rights movement that followed. In his dramatic voice, he connected the core values of America and of the Judeo-Christian tradition to the goals of African Americans nationwide as well as in Montgomery. Fred Gray and his fiancée were in the church and recalled the impact of King’s speech:

The high point of the meeting was the speech by Dr. Martin Luther King. This was the first time he had spoken to so many people. It was the first speech of his career as a civil rights leader, later to become an internationally known figure. Each of us listened to his words and waited for his next phrase. My fiancée Bernice was in the audience. She later described how King’s inspiring speech ignited the crowd and was the motivating factor that was needed to make the protest successful. It was his message and his encouragement and his speech that gave those thousands of African Americans the courage, the enthusiasm and the desire to stay off the buses.

21.4.4 Martin Luther King, Jr.

King’s speech electrified the meeting, which unanimously decided to boycott the buses until the MIA’s demands were met. The speech also marked the beginning of King’s role as a leader of the civil rights movement. King had been raised in a prominent ministerial

Profile

Rosa Louise McCauley Parks



Rosa Parks, in this 1956 photograph by Paul Richards, is venerated as the mother of the civil rights movement and has remained an important symbol of hope and courage.

Rosa Louise McCauley Parks was born on February 4, 1913, to James and Leona (Edwards) McCauley, a carpenter and a schoolteacher, of Tuskegee, Alabama. Her father migrated north when his daughter was two years old. When she was 11, Rosa attended the Montgomery Industrial School for Girls while living with a widowed aunt. In 1932 Rosa married Raymond Parks, who worked in the Atlas Barber Shop in Montgomery. She worked as a department store seamstress. They were both active in the efforts to secure the release of the Scottsboro Boys. Rosa Parks enjoyed a full and busy life, serving as the secretary of the Montgomery branch of the NAACP (1943–1956) and as a member of the African Methodist Episcopal Church. In the late 1940s Rosa Parks worked to mobilize the black Montgomery community to protest white sexualized violence against black women. The assault on Gertrude Perkins, in the 1940s, and on many other black women by white men who were never punished made Parks even more determined in her activism. She participated in voter registration campaigns, and in 1954 she attended the Highlander Folk School, a training center for social change in Monteagle, Tennessee.

On December 1, 1955, when Rosa Parks refused to give up her seat on a Montgomery bus, little could she have anticipated that she would become a living symbol of the African-American quest for freedom, justice, and equality of opportunity. With great dignity and little fanfare, Parks chose to be arrested rather than to comply with the white

bus driver's order to move to the back-of-the-bus section reserved for black people. Parks's behavior was a thoughtful reflection of her larger pattern of personal and public resistance. As word of Parks's arrest reverberated through Montgomery's black community, Jo Ann Robinson and members of the Women's Political Council (WPC) swung into action. On December 2, 1955, Robinson wrote and circulated, with assistance from students and club women, 30,000 copies of a flyer that declared, "Another Negro woman has been arrested and thrown in jail because she refused to get up out of her seat on the bus for a white person to sit down. It is the second time since the Claudette Colvin case that a Negro woman has been arrested for the same thing. This has to be stopped. Negroes have rights too, for if Negroes did not ride the buses, they could not operate." Robinson and the WPC asked the community to stay off the buses for a day to show their opposition to bus segregation and their solidarity with Rosa Parks.

The success of the one-day boycott aroused the community and motivated thousands to attend the first mass meeting at the Holt Street Baptist Church and to found, under the leadership of Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr., the Montgomery Improvement Association. A year later, on December 20, 1956, the Supreme Court ruled Alabama's state and local segregation laws unconstitutional. In retaliation, the department store fired Parks. The response was, perhaps, irrelevant.

In 1957 Parks, her husband, and her mother moved to Detroit, where her brother resided. For a quarter of a century, Rosa Parks worked as a special assistant to Congressman John Conyers. In 1979 the NAACP awarded Parks its Spingarn Medal. Detroit named a street, Rosa Parks Boulevard, in her honor. In keeping with a lifetime commitment to social justice and the pursuit of freedom, at the celebration of her 77th birthday in 1990 at the Kennedy Center in Washington, D.C., Parks implored the 3,000 revelers to "pray and work for the freedom of Nelson Mandela and all of our sisters and brothers in South Africa."

Rosa Parks lived a quiet life in Detroit until her death on October 24, 2005, at the age of 92. Her casket lay in state in the rotunda of the U.S. Capitol for two days, an honor usually reserved for presidents, as the nation paid its last respects to this extraordinary woman.

family with a long history of standing up for African-American rights. His grandfather had led a protest to force Atlanta to build its first high school for African Americans. King's father spoke out for African-American rights as pastor of the Ebenezer Baptist Church. At age 15, King had entered Morehouse College but did not embrace the ministry as his profession until he came under the influence of its president, Dr. Benjamin E. Mays. By age 25, King had been awarded a Ph.D. in theology from Boston University. He moved to Alabama with his wife, Coretta Scott King, to become pastor of the Dexter Avenue Baptist Church in Montgomery.

In addition to his verbal artistry, King had the ability to inspire moral courage and teach people how to maintain themselves under excruciating pressure. King merged the nonviolence advocated by the Indian nationalist leader Mohandas Gandhi with black Christian faith and church culture to create a unique ideology well suited for the civil rights struggle. King declared that the boycott would continue with or without its leaders because the conflict was not "between the white and the Negro" but "between justice and injustice." He told the Montgomery boycotters, "If we are arrested every day, if we are exploited every day, if we are trampled over every day, don't ever let anyone pull you so low as to hate them. . . . We must realize so many people are taught to hate us that they are not totally responsible for their hate." King's faith was tested. As the boycott proceeded, his home was bombed. Segregationists also bombed Nixon's home and those of two other black clergymen and MIA leaders, Ralph Abernathy and Fred Shuttlesworth, and assaulted other boycott participants.

21.4.5 Walking for Freedom

Although men occupied the top leadership positions in the boycott, women were the key to its effectiveness. The boycott lasted more than a year—381 days—and over its course nearly all the black women previously dependent on the buses to get to work refused to ride them. Some walked 12 miles a day. Others had the support of their white women employers, who provided transportation. And many helped organize a carpool of 200 vehicles that proved critical to sustaining the boycott. The community held mass meetings nightly in local churches. Robinson edited the MIA newsletter. Other women supported the boycott in dozens of ways. Some organized bake sales and made door-to-door solicitations to raise the \$2,000 per week needed to keep the car pools going. The boycott took 65 percent of the bus company's business, forcing it to cut schedules, lay off drivers, and raise fares. White merchants also suffered. Impressive as it was, the boycott by itself could not end segregation on the buses. Black Montgomery needed a two-pronged strategy of mass local pressure and legal recourse through the courts. The legal backing of the federal government was necessary to end Jim Crow. Thus, NAACP lawyers and MIA's lawyer Fred Gray filed a suit in the names of Claudette Colvin, Mary Louise Smith, and three other women.

21.4.6 Friends in the North

The Montgomery movement was not without allies outside the South. Money poured into the MIA's coffers from concerned Americans. Many northern activists who had long been hoping black southerners would begin just this kind of resistance also swung into action to help. Indeed, black and white activists in many northern cities including New York and Chicago had launched challenges to overthrow housing segregation and promote open access to public beaches and amusement parks. Activist and civil rights groups joined with labor unionists to support issues of economic justice, fair employment, and an end to police corruption and brutality. Two people who were particularly important in the "Long Civil Rights" movement were Bayard Rustin and liberal Jewish lawyer Stanley Levison. Two and a half months into the boycott, Montgomery officials indicted King and 100 other leaders on charges of conspiracy to disrupt the bus system, and Bayard Rustin arrived in Montgomery.

He encouraged the leaders to follow Gandhian practice and submit freely to arrest. In a diary entry, Rustin wrote,

Many of them did not wait for the police to come but walked to the police station and surrendered. Nixon was the first. He walked into the station and said, "You are looking for me? Here I am." This procedure had a startling effect on both the Negro and the white communities. White community leaders, politicians, and police were dumbfounded. Negroes were thrilled to see their leaders surrender without being hunted down. Soon hundreds of Negroes gathered outside the police station and applauded the leaders as they entered, one by one.

Rustin continued working behind the scenes as one of King's most trusted advisers on nonviolent principles and tactics. Stanley Levison and Ella Baker created a group called In Friendship, which raised money for the boycott. (For more on Ella Baker, see Chapter 18.)

Levison was a wealthy attorney committed to social justice. He had worked with the Communist Party, and Rustin had a long history of association with radical groups. Their influence soon attracted the attention of the FBI, which had long been obsessed with black leaders and organizations. King was not a communist, but FBI director J. Edgar Hoover hated him and other black leaders. Hoover called King "the most dangerous man in America," and he pressed his subordinates to prove King was a communist and that the civil rights movement was a Moscow-inspired conspiracy. The FBI began tapping King's telephone and hotel room phones and even threatened to expose his extramarital affairs if he did not commit suicide. By the early 1960s, the FBI had stopped warning King when it uncovered threats to his life.

21.4.7 Victory

As the bus boycott reached the one-year mark, it was obvious that the all-white city government would not budge, no matter how long the boycott lasted. Any white politician who hoped to remain in office had to defend segregation. King and the others who suffered through the ordeal grew discouraged, and in November 1956 their hopes seemed to fade when it became clear the state courts would declare the car pools illegal.

Salvation for the movement came from the cases local women (Claudette Colvin, Aurelia Browder, Susie McDonald, and Mary Louise Smith), Fred Gray, and the NAACP had taken to the federal courts. In keeping with the *Brown* precedent, on November 13, 1956, the Supreme Court in *Browder v. Gayle* ordered an end to Montgomery's bus segregation and overturned the convictions of Colvin and the other women. This decision, unlike the *Brown* decision, also expressly overturned the 1896 *Plessy v. Ferguson* decision because, like *Plessy*, it applied to transportation. Ironically, the ruling was handed down on the same day an Alabama court issued an injunction to end the MIA carpool. The bus company agreed not only to end segregation but also to hire African-American drivers and to treat all passengers with equal respect. The city's black community rejoiced. On December 21, 1956, black citizens of Montgomery boarded the buses and sat wherever they pleased. The victory at Montgomery set an example for future protests. It was the result of a highly organized black community led by committed and capable black leaders. These local efforts were bolstered by advice and from involvement of activists from outside the South. The attention of a sympathetic national press and the intervention from the federal courts strengthened black resolve to continue the struggle. But local victories could only go so far, particularly as white resistance intensified. In the three years following the boycott, and the Supreme Court decision, black southerners and their allies across the nation prepared for a broader movement. At the same time, federal officials outside the judiciary realized that no longer was it possible to ignore the white South's incipient rebellion without grave consequences for both the nation and their own power.

Profile

Clara Luper: Victory in Oklahoma



Clara Luper is revered and celebrated in Oklahoma. She was born Clara Mae Shepard on May 3, 1923. Her father Ezell Shepard was a brick worker and her mother, Isabel Shepard, worked as a maid. When her brother became ill, the local hospital denied him treatment and that became one of the defining memories shaping her consciousness. Luper's biographer, Brenda L. Perry, affectionately refers to her as the "Iron Orchid." According to Perry, in 1950 Luper, a 1944 graduate of Langston University, the only historically black college in Oklahoma, joined a group of students determined to desegregate the University of Oklahoma. In 1951 she became the first black graduate from the University of Oklahoma's graduate history program. Her activism as a student continued into her adult professional life as a teacher at Dunjee High School and as an adviser to the Oklahoma City NAACP's youth council. When the young people asked her how they could participate in the movement for first-class citizenship, Luper swung into action.

On August 19, 1958, Clara Luper led her two children and a group of approximately a dozen or so young African Americans, ranging in ages from 6 to 17, to Katz Drug Store in downtown Oklahoma City to protest against the segregation policies of the lunch counter. According to Perry, Luper requested what would become a student mantra, "Thirteen Cokes, please." Of course they were refused service, but the routine persisted for weeks. Eventually Katz Drug Store gave in to the protesters. The owners agreed to provide

service without regard to race throughout its 38 stores across Oklahoma, Missouri, Kansas, and Iowa.

One of Luper's activist students recalled her clear-voiced instructions for the sit-in:

As we sit-in, we must remember the important dates in Black history. DATES! DATES! Important dates in Black History from the dark skies of the receding nights, a strong group of people survived. People who picked the brightest stars and with brave hands, courageous spirits and patriotic hearts wrote pages of history, adding a new unknown dimension to American History

Clara Luper later marched with Dr. Martin Luther King. In the Selma March in 1965 she was wounded when an officers' club smacked her in the knees. She revered Dr. King and wrote a play in his honor titled "Brother President: The Story of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr." She was arrested 26 times. Luper served as the adviser to the Youth Council of the Oklahoma City Chapter of the NAACP for fifty years. She retired from teaching at Oklahoma City high schools in 1991. Retirement did not stop her from teaching. She is reported to have said, "My biggest job now is making white people understand that black history is white history. We cannot separate the two" (Peter Rothberg, "Remembering Clara Luper," *The Nation*, June 10, 2011).

Today, the citizens in Oklahoma City treasure and honor her memory. According to Perry, Clara Luper "remains a symbolic force who constantly reminds us of the strength, courage, and often tough-love that is necessary for the advancement of humanity." She continued, Luper led "her fight against racial injustice at a crucial time in Oklahoma." One former student recalled, "I remember as a teen how influential she was in my life." Another student testified, "Miss Luper was my civics teacher in high school. She was a great teacher and a great person, and I learned a lot from her about justice and about bravery." The student concluded, "The world needs more people like her."¹

¹Clara Luper, *Behold the Walls* (Oklahoma City: Jim Wire, 1979).

21.5 No Easy Road to Freedom: The 1960s

Identify the major goals of the Civil Rights Act of 1957.

By the end of the campaign in Montgomery, Martin Luther King, Jr. emerged as a moral leader of national stature. On the advice of Stanley Levison, Bayard Rustin, and Ella Baker, he helped to create a new organization, the **Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC)**, and thus provide an institutional base for continuing the struggle.

Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC)

Organization spearheaded by Martin Luther King, Jr. to provide an institutional base for the civil rights movement.

21.5.1 Martin Luther King, Jr. and the SCLC

The SCLC was a federation of civil rights groups, community organizations, and churches that sought to coordinate the burgeoning local movements. King assumed leadership of the SCLC, crisscrossing the nation to build support and raise money. The organization also began training black activists, particularly on college campuses, in the tactics of nonviolent protest. Because the ballot was deemed the critical weapon needed to complete school desegregation and secure equal employment opportunity, adequate housing, and equal access to public accommodations, the SCLC focused on securing voting rights for black people. In the three years after the Montgomery Bus Boycott, the SCLC also aided black communities in challenging bus segregation in Tallahassee, Florida, and Atlanta.

The SCLC shared many of the NAACP's goals, but tensions arose between the two organizations. The NAACP's leadership doubted the effectiveness of the protest tactics the SCLC favored. They resented having to divert resources from work on important court cases to defend people arrested in protests and were troubled by the left-wing connections of King's advisers. The fortunes of the NAACP in the South, however, plummeted in the late 1950s as southern states persecuted its members. This left the field to the SCLC. The SCLC and the NAACP worked together, but the tensions over tactics were never far below the surface.

21.5.2 Civil Rights Act of 1957

Despite President Eisenhower's tepid response to *Brown*, Congress proved willing to take a modest step toward ending racial discrimination. Buttressing the Supreme Court's desegregation initiatives, it enacted the Civil Rights Act of 1957. To pass this legislation, liberals in the Senate had to end a filibuster by southern conservatives; clearly, the law, its symbolic importance notwithstanding, was weak. It created a commission to monitor violations of black civil rights and to propose remedies for infringements on black voting. It upgraded the Civil Rights Section into a division within the Justice Department and gave it the power to sue states and municipalities that discriminated on the basis of race. Although an important step on the long road toward black enfranchisement, this act disappointed black activists because it lacked enforcement power sufficient to counter white reaction. Moreover, most black leaders doubted that the Eisenhower administration would enforce the provisions.

21.5.3 The Little Rock Nine

President Dwight Eisenhower may have had little inclination to support the fight for black rights, but the defiance of Arkansas Governor Orville Faubus forced him to. At the beginning of the school year in 1957, Faubus posted 270 Arkansas national guardsmen outside Little Rock Central High School to prevent nine black youths from entering.



Elizabeth Eckerd, one of nine black students who sought to enroll at Little Rock Central High School in September 1957, endures the taunts of an angry white crowd as she tries to make her way to the school.

Faubus was determined to flout *Brown* and maintain school segregation. When a federal court order forced the governor to allow the children into the school, he simply withdrew the state guard and left the children to face a hate-filled mob.

To defend the sovereignty of the federal courts and the Constitution, Eisenhower had to act. He sent in 1,100 paratroopers from the 101st Airborne Division to Little Rock and put the Arkansas National Guard under federal authority. It was the first time since Reconstruction that troops had been sent to the South to protect the rights of African American citizens. The troops remained in Little Rock Central High School for the rest of the school year. Governor Faubus closed the Little Rock public schools in 1958–1959.

Eight of the nine black students withstood the abuse and curses of segregationists both inside and outside the facility and eventually desegregated the high school. Young African Americans throughout the South would show similar courage. President Eisenhower wrote to the parents and supporters of the students to express his willingness “to come down and address the student body if invited by the student leaders of the school.” Although he received no such invitation, the President assured Daisy Bates, leader of the NAACP branch in Arkansas, that, “In the course of our country’s progress toward equality of opportunity, you have shown dignity and courage in circumstances which would daunt citizens of little faith.” In 1958, the first African American graduate of Little Rock Central High School, Earnest Green, continued his college studies at Michigan State where he received his Bachelor of Arts and Master’s degrees in social science and sociology. Melba Pattillo Beals earned a Doctorate of Education degree from San Francisco State University, while Terrence J. Roberts earned a Ph.D. in Psychology from Southern Illinois University in 1977. For others the psychological wounds never healed. Thus, it was important that on November 9, 1999, President Bill Clinton conferred on the Little Rock Nine Congressional Gold Medals, in recognition of their courageous resistance to racial hatred and bigotry.

21.6 Black Youth Stand Up by Sitting Down

Explain the evolution of tactics used in the 1940s and those developed and practiced by the 1960s generation of student activists.

Beginning in 1960, motivated black college students adapted a strategy that the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE) had used in the 1940s—the “sit-in”—and emerged as the vanguard of the civil rights movement. Their distinctive and independent contributions to the black protest movement accelerated the pace of social change. Before long the movement would inspire more northern black and white students. Some high school students in southern cities, including the “Ribault Ten” who integrated Jean Ribault High School in Jacksonville, Florida, in 1966, had to stand up for freedom. As one of the students, Jean Downing, recalled: “Our high school experience was not a pleasant one . . . but someone had to integrate the high schools.”



Four students—from the left, Joseph McNeil, Franklin McCain, Billy Smith, and Clarence Henderson—sit patiently at a Woolworth lunch counter on February 2, 1960, the second day of the sit-in in Greensboro, North Carolina. Although not the first sit-in protest against segregated facilities, the Greensboro action triggered a wave of sit-ins by black high school and college students across the South.

21.6.1 Sit-Ins: Greensboro, Nashville, Atlanta

On February 1, 1960, Joseph McNeil, Franklin McCain, David Richmond, and Ezell Blair, Jr., all freshmen at North Carolina Agricultural and Technical College, decided to desegregate local restaurants by sitting at the lunch counter of a Greensboro Woolworth five-and-dime store. Although black people were welcome to spend their money in the store, they could not eat at the lunch counter, making it a painful symbol of white supremacy. At 4:30 in the afternoon the students sat at the counter. They received no service that day but sat quietly doing their schoolwork until the store closed. The action of these four young men electrified their fellow students, and the next day many others joined them. Soon, black women students from Bennett College and a few white students from the University of North Carolina Women's College joined the protest, and by the fifth day hundreds of young, studious, neatly dressed African Americans crowded the downtown store demanding their rights.

Like the black people of Montgomery, the students in Greensboro acted with forethought and with the support of their community. They had long debated how they could best participate in the desegregation movement. All four of the black students had been members of NAACP college or youth groups and were aware of the currents of change flowing through the South. Although they began the sit-in on their own, it quickly gained the support of the black community. Many people in the North and West—both black and white—also joined the campaign by picketing local stores of the national chains that approved of segregation in the South. After facing the collective power of the black community and their allies for months, white businessmen and politicians gave in to the black community's demands.

The students at Greensboro were not alone in their desire to strike out at discrimination. Indeed, at Fisk University in Nashville, Tennessee, Diane Nash, John Lewis, Marion Barry, James Bevel, Curtis Murphy, Gloria Johnson, Bernard Lafayette, and Rodney Powell had begun organizing nonviolent workshops before the Greensboro sit-in. With youthful exuberance and idealism, they determined to follow the Rev. James Lawson's leadership and teaching on nonviolence and Christian brotherhood. Even better organized than their comrades in North Carolina, they had been training

intensively for a sit-in campaign. Twelve days after the first sit-ins began, the Nashville group swung into action. Hundreds were arrested, and those who sat suffered insults, beatings, arrest, and torture while in jail. Nonetheless, by May 1960 they had compelled major restaurants to desegregate.

Atlanta, Martin Luther King, Jr.'s home base and the site of a large African-American community, spawned an even more dramatic movement. It began after Spelman College freshman Ruby Doris Smith persuaded her friends and classmates to launch sit-ins in the city. On March 15, 1960, two students at Atlanta University, Julian Bond and Lonnie King, executing a carefully orchestrated plan, deployed 200 sit-in students to 10 different eating places. They targeted government-owned property and public places, including bus and train stations and the state capitol, which should have been willing to serve all customers. At the Federal Building, Bond and his classmates attempted to eat in the municipal cafeteria and were arrested. After hours of incarceration they were released. In earlier years, a jail stint had been a mark of shame, but these students returned to the campus as heroes. The Atlanta sit-in students broadened their campaign demands to include desegregation of all public facilities, black voting rights, and equal access to educational and employment opportunities. On September 27, 1961, the Atlanta business and political elite gave in.

Just as in Greensboro, the students in Nashville, Atlanta, and other southern cities won the support of local people who had not been previously involved in organized resistance. By April 1960 more than 2,000 students from black high schools and colleges had been arrested in 78 southern towns and cities. Local people demonstrated their allegiance to them in numerous ways, but their most effective tactic was the economic boycott. When business began to suffer, white leaders proved willing to negotiate the racial status quo. By the summer, more than 30 southern cities had set up community organizations to respond to the complaints of black citizens.

21.6.2 The Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee

Recognizing the significance of the region-wide student action and fearing it would soon melt away, SCLC's Ella Baker organized a conference for 150 students at her alma mater, Shaw University, in Raleigh, North Carolina. Baker, who managed operations in SCLC's Atlanta headquarters, chafed under the rigid male leadership of the organization. In contrast, she advocated decentralized leadership and celebrated participatory democracy. Her skepticism about SCLC struck a chord with the students.

On April 15–17, 1960, delegates representing over 50 colleges and high schools from 37 communities in 13 states began discussing how to keep the movement going. Baker addressed the group in a speech titled “More Than a Hamburger” and became the midwife of a new organization named the **Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC)**. The newest addition to the roster of civil rights associations adhered to the ideology of nonviolence, but it also acknowledged the possible need for increased militancy and confrontation. More accommodating black leaders, even some of those in SCLC, objected to the students' use of direct confrontational tactics that disrupted race relations and community peace.

21.6.3 Freedom Rides

The sit-in movement paved the way for the “**Freedom Rides**” of 1961. CORE's James Farmer and Bayard Rustin resolved that it was time for a reprise of their 1947 mission to ride interstate buses and trains in the Upper South. That early effort—a planned bus trip from Washington, D.C., to Kentucky—reached only as far as Chapel Hill, North

Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC)

Civil rights organization founded by black college students in 1960 at the initiative of Ella Baker.

Freedom Rides

Effort in 1961 to desegregate interstate bus and rail travel.



On May 14, in Anniston, Alabama, a white mob firebombed this Freedom Riders' bus and attacked passengers as they escaped the flames.

Carolina. There the group of interracial riders met violent resistance, were arrested, and were sentenced to 30 days on a road gang. This new journey tested the Justice Department's willingness to protect the rights of African Americans to use bus terminal facilities on a nonsegregated basis.

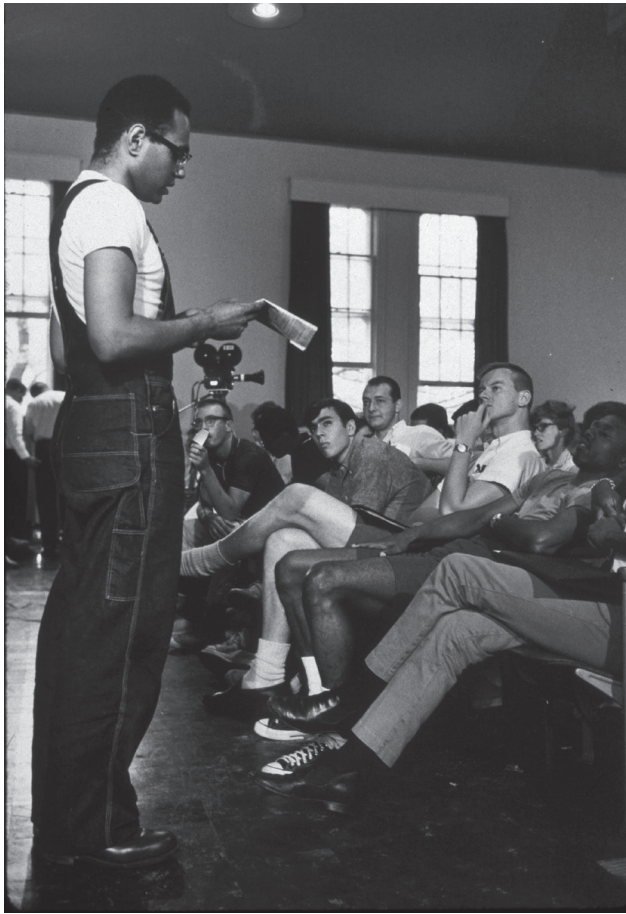
The Freedom Rides showed the world how far some white southerners would go to preserve segregation. The first ride ran into trouble on May 4, 1961, when John Lewis, one of the seven black riders, tried to enter the white waiting room of the Greyhound bus terminal in Rock Hill, South Carolina, and was beaten by local white people in full view of the police. The interracial group continued through Alabama toward Jackson, Mississippi, but white violence made escape from Alabama difficult. At Anniston, Alabama, a mob firebombed the bus and beat the escaping riders. Local African Americans, led by the Rev. Fred Shuttlesworth, took many of the shocked and injured riders to Birmingham.

With the police offering no protection, CORE abandoned the Freedom Rides, and most of the original riders left Alabama. But SNCC activists and students in Nashville refused to let the idea die. At least 20 civil rights workers went to Birmingham, where they vowed on May 20 to ride on to Montgomery. John Lewis remained with the group that arrived in Montgomery. Awaiting them was another angry mob of more than 1,000 white people and not a policeman in sight. This time Lewis was knocked unconscious, and all the riders had to be hospitalized. Even a presidential aide assigned to monitor the crisis was injured.

News services flashed around the world graphic images of the violence, and the federal government resolved to end the bloodletting. Attorney General Robert Kennedy sent 400 federal marshals to restore law and order. Martin Luther King, Jr. and Ralph Abernathy joined the conflict on May 21, as 1,200 men, women, and children met at Abernathy's church. The federal marshals averted further bloodshed by surrounding the building. Only then did Governor John Patterson order the National Guard and state troopers to protect the protesters. When the group arrived in Jackson, Mississippi, white authorities arrested them. By summer's end, more than 300 Freedom Riders had served time in Mississippi's notorious prisons.

Profile

Robert Parris Moses



Robert “Bob” Moses instructs volunteers for the Freedom Summer campaign of 1964.

Bob Moses, one of the most dedicated and revered young civil rights activists, was a soft-spoken man possessed of a powerful intellect, iron courage, and a rare purity of moral conviction. Born in Harlem in 1935, Moses was an excellent student. He attended Hamilton College in New York State, and from his readings there in philosophy, including works on Buddhism and existentialism, he developed a sophisticated understanding of nonviolent protest, a topic he explored during his graduate studies in philosophy at Harvard.

When Moses learned of the sit-ins in 1960, he went south to participate. It was a fateful trip during which he met Amzie Moore, one of the World War II veterans who had returned home to make Mississippi safe for democracy. Moore was

the vice president of the state conference of the NAACP branches. The two men developed a deep-seated appreciation for each other’s strengths, and Moore convinced Moses to work in Mississippi. By August 1961 Moses was an organizer for the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) in the small town of McComb, Mississippi. There his group registered black voters. In early 1962 he became the program director of the Council of Federated Organizations and remained in the center of the struggle in Mississippi for the next three years.

The violence of white people and the courage of local black people profoundly affected Moses. In McComb he was arrested, jailed, beaten, and threatened with death. One of the local black people who helped his group was murdered in cold blood by a state senator who was subsequently acquitted of the crime by an all-white jury. Moses respected anyone who had the courage to take a stand after suffering a lifetime of such abuse. He sought to give local people the tools to continue to control their lives long after movement organizers had left.

Although Moses refused to become a formal leader of the SNCC forces in Mississippi, the young civil rights worker set an example of nonviolent resistance and encouraged SNCC to avoid developing a hierarchical leadership. In late 1963 Moses became the driving force behind the Freedom Summer project and played a central role in persuading SNCC to accept white volunteers from the North. He also stood for principle rather than expediency when, at the 1964 Democratic Convention, he rejected the meager deal offered to the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party (discussed later in the chapter).

In 1965 Moses began to drift away from the civil rights movement and toward opposition to the war in Vietnam. Exhausted from his ordeal in the South and seeking to avoid the draft, he emigrated first to Canada and then to the African nation of Tanzania. Moses returned after President Jimmy Carter offered amnesty to draft resisters in 1977 and began teaching math and science to inner-city black children. After receiving a MacArthur Foundation “genius grant,” he developed the Algebra Project, which uses many of the empowerment strategies pioneered during the civil rights era to help children and their families gain the education they need in a computer-oriented economy.

21.7 A Sight to Be Seen: The Movement at High Tide

Discuss the individuals who were in the first wave of post–World War II leaders. Explain some of the differences in civil rights demands following the end of World War II and during the 1950s.

Between 1960 and 1963, the civil rights movement developed the techniques and organization that would finally bring America face-to-face with the conflict between its democratic ideals and the racism of its politics. Day after day the movement squared off against the die-hard resistance of the white South and created a situation that demanded that the president and Congress take action.

21.7.1 The Election of 1960

One of the persistent fears of white southerners was that black Americans, if armed with the ballot, would possess the balance of political power. The presidential election of 1960 proved this to be true. Initially, many African Americans favored the Republican nominee Richard Nixon, who had advocated strong civil rights legislation. Baseball star Jackie Robinson and many other well-known African Americans were Nixon supporters. It seemed as if the New Deal coalition had weakened and that black citizens would reverse their move into the Democratic Party. The Democratic nominee, Massachusetts Senator John F. Kennedy, in contrast, had done little to distinguish himself to black Americans in the struggles of the 1950s. As the campaign progressed, however, Kennedy made sympathetic statements in support of black protests. Meanwhile, Nixon attempted to strengthen his position with white southern voters and remained silent about civil rights issues, even though the Republican Party had a strong pro-civil rights record.

Shortly before the election, Martin Luther King, Jr. was sentenced to four months in prison for leading a nonviolent protest march in Atlanta. Kennedy telephoned Coretta Scott King to offer his support, while his brother Robert F. Kennedy used his influence to obtain King's release. These acts impressed African Americans and won their support. African-American voters in key northern cities provided the crucial margin that elected John F. Kennedy. In Illinois, for example, with black voters casting 250,000 ballots for Kennedy, the Democrats carried the state by only 9,000 votes.

21.7.2 The Kennedy Administration and the Civil Rights Movement

Early in his administration Kennedy grew concerned about the violence occasioned by the civil rights movement. As the Freedom Rides continued across the Deep South, the activists provoked confrontations and forced the federal government to intervene on their behalf. Kennedy's primary interest at this point was to prevent disorder from getting out of hand and to avoid compromising America's position with the developing nations. But he had little room to maneuver given the power of white southerners in his party and in Congress.

Despite these limitations, Kennedy did aid the cause of civil rights. He issued Executive Order 11063, which required government agencies to discontinue discriminatory policies and practices in federally supported housing, and he named Vice President Lyndon B. Johnson to chair the newly established Committee on Equal Employment Opportunity. Kennedy also nominated Thurgood Marshall to the Second Circuit Court of Appeals on September 23, 1961 (although opposition in the Senate blocked Marshall's confirmation until September 11, 1963). He named journalist Carl Rowan deputy assistant secretary of state. More than 40 African Americans took positions in the new

administration, including Robert Weaver, director of the Housing and Home Finance Agency; Mercer Cook, ambassador to Norway; and George L. P. Weaver, assistant secretary of labor. Moreover, Kennedy's brother Robert put muscle into the Civil Rights Division of the Justice Department by hiring an impressive team of lawyers headed by Washington attorney Burke Marshall.

Like Eisenhower, when President Kennedy felt that intractable southern governors were challenging his authority, he acted decisively. On June 25, 1962, one year after James Meredith had filed a complaint of racial discrimination against the University of Mississippi, the U.S. Court of Appeals ruled that the university had to admit him. Governor Ross Barnett vowed to resist, but Kennedy sent 300 federal marshals to uphold the order. Thousands of students rioted at the campus. Two people died, 200 were arrested, and nearly half the marshals were injured. Kennedy did not back down. He federalized the Mississippi National Guard to ensure Meredith's admission. Although isolated and harassed throughout his time at the University of Mississippi, Meredith eventually graduated. Likewise, in June 1963, the Kennedy administration compelled Governor George Wallace to allow the desegregation of the University of Alabama.

21.7.3 Voter Registration Projects

On June 16, 1961, Robert Kennedy urged student leaders to redirect their energies to voter registration projects and to lessen their concentration on direct-action activities. He and Justice Department aides persuaded the students that the free exercise of the ballot would result in profound and significant social change. James Foreman, SNCC's executive director, followed Kennedy's lead. By October 1962 SNCC had joined forces with the NAACP, SCLC, and CORE in the Voter Education Project funded by major philanthropic foundations and administered by the Southern Regional Council. SNCC was responsible for Alabama and Mississippi. Drawing on the expertise of Robert Moses and working with a cadre of local leaders like Amzie Moore, head of the NAACP in Mississippi's Cleveland County, and Fannie Lou Hamer of Ruleville, SNCC opened voter registration schools. When the "graduates" attempted to register to vote, it unleashed a wave of white violence and murder across Mississippi.

21.7.4 The Albany Movement

In Albany, Georgia, the civil rights movement met sophisticated resistance and experienced its most profound defeat up to that time. The movement in Albany began in the summer of 1961 when SNCC members moved into the city to register voters. Local groups decided to form a coalition called the Albany Movement and elected William G. Anderson as its president. The movement's goal expanded from securing the vote to the total desegregation of the town.

In Laurie Pritchett, Albany's police chief, the movement faced an uncommonly sophisticated opponent. Pritchett studied the past tactics of SNCC and King and resolved not to confront the federal government directly and to avoid the violence that brought negative media attention. When students from a black college decided to desegregate the bus terminal, Pritchett arrested them after they entered the white waiting room and attempted to eat in the bus terminal dining room. Shrewdly, he charged the students with violating a city ordinance for failing to obey a law enforcement officer. The Albany Movement decided to invite King and SCLC to aid them and to overwhelm the police department by filling the jails with protesters. King answered the call. On December 16, 1961, he and more than 250 demonstrators were arrested, joining the 507 people already in jail. The plan was to stay in jail to, as Charles Sherrod explained, "break the system down from within. Our ability to suffer was somehow going to overcome their ability to hurt us." King vowed to remain in jail until the city desegregated. Sheriff Pritchett, however, made arrangements to

Profile

Fannie Lou Hamer



Fannie Lou Hamer, in words and deeds, refused to compromise with racial injustice. Representing the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party, Hamer testified before the Credentials Committee of the Democratic National Convention in Atlantic City, August 22, 1964.

Fannie Lou Hamer (1917–1977) emerged from the ranks of “local people” in Mississippi to become one of the most powerful leaders and orators of the civil rights movement. Hamer, the youngest of 20 children, grew up in extreme poverty and had only a few years of education. She worked and lived as a timekeeper on a plantation in Ruleville,

Mississippi. When SNCC workers came to the community for a voting rights campaign, Hamer was one of the first to participate.

On August 1, 1962, Hamer attempted to register to vote in Indianola, Mississippi. In response, she was fired from her plantation job and evicted from her land. Still, she refused to capitulate and accepted full-time employment as a field secretary for the SNCC, where she worked on the Voter Education Project.

Despite her lack of education, Hamer was a spellbinding orator. Her televised testimony before the 1964 Democratic Convention won national support for the MFDP’s challenge to the party regulars from Mississippi. The next year Hamer, who had run for the House of Representatives, challenged the seating of the Mississippi congressional delegation. Although unsuccessful, her action paved the way for the Voting Rights Act of 1965.

Although basic civil and voting rights had been won by 1965, most black people in the Mississippi Delta still lived in deep poverty. In 1968 Hamer sought to address this problem by setting up the nonprofit Freedom Farms Corporation as an agricultural cooperative. The mixed results of this last campaign, however, cannot diminish the profound changes that Fannie Lou Hamer was so instrumental in bringing about.

house almost 2,000 people in surrounding jail facilities and trained his deputies in the use of nonviolent techniques. Thus, Pritchett avoided confrontation, violence, and federal intervention.

On December 18, 1961, two days after King’s arrest, the city and the Albany Movement announced a truce. King returned to Atlanta, and the city refused to implement the terms of the agreement. When King and Ralph Abernathy returned to Albany in July 1962 for sentencing on their December arrests, they chose 45 days in jail rather than admit guilt by paying a fine. The mass marches resumed, but again Pritchett thwarted King by releasing him from jail to avoid negative publicity. The city’s attorney then secured a federal injunction to prevent King and the other leaders from demonstrating. Given his dependence on the federal government, King felt he could not violate the injunction, and he abandoned the protest. For King, the Albany Movement was a failure, his most glaring defeat, and one that called into question the future of the movement.

21.7.5 The Birmingham Confrontation

By early 1963 the movement appeared to be stalled. Black communities in much of the South were strong and well organized, but their efforts had achieved only modest changes. It was impossible to overcome the power of southern state and local governments without the intervention of the federal government, but national politicians,

including President Kennedy, remained reluctant to act unless faced with open defiance by white people or with televised violence against peaceful protesters. King and other black leaders knew that if city governments throughout the South followed the model of Sheriff Pritchett in Albany, the civil rights movement might lose momentum. To rejuvenate the movement, SCLC decided to launch a massive new campaign during 1963, the year of the 100th anniversary of the Emancipation Proclamation.

Birmingham, Alabama, a large, tightly segregated industrial city, was chosen as the site for the action. The city was ripe for such a protest, in part because its black community suffered from police brutality and economic, educational, and social discrimination. The Ku Klux Klan terrorized people with impunity. The black community had, however, developed a strong phalanx of protest organizations called the Alabama Christian Movement for Human Rights (ACMHR) led by the Rev. Fred Shuttlesworth. The ACMHR and SCLC planned a campaign of boycotts, pickets, and demonstrations code-named "Project C for Confrontation." Their program would be far more extensive than any before, with demands to integrate public facilities, for guarantees of employment opportunities for black workers in downtown businesses, to desegregate the schools, to improve services in black neighborhoods, and to provide low-income housing. Organizers hoped to provoke the city's public safety commissioner Eugene T. "Bull" Connor, who, unlike Sheriff Pritchett, had a reputation for viciousness. Civil rights leaders believed Connor's conduct would horrify the nation and compel Kennedy to act.

Project C began on April 3 with student sit-ins. Days later, marches began, and Connor, following the lead of Pritchett, arrested all who participated but avoided overt violence. When the state courts prohibited further protests, King and Abernathy, among others, violated the ruling. They were arrested and jailed on Good Friday, April 12, 1963.

While in jail, King received a letter from eight local Christian and Jewish clergymen who objected to what they considered the "unwise and untimely" protest activities of black citizens. King had smuggled a pen into jail and on scraps of paper, including toilet paper and the margins of the *Birmingham News*, he wrote an eloquent treatise on the use of direct action. His "Letter From Birmingham City Jail" was widely published in newspapers and magazines. In it, King dismissed those who called for black people to wait. The letter resonated with black journalist Carl T. Rowan, who recalled, "My entire journalistic career had embraced a personal war against the gradualists, the whites of power who asked black Americans to wait." Wyatt Walker was empowered by the Birmingham campaign, declaring, "The most important thing that happened, was that people decided that they were not going to be afraid of white folks anymore." He concluded, "Dr. King's most lasting contribution is that he emancipated black people's psyche. We threw off the slave mentality. Going to jail had been the whip which kept black folks in line. Now going to jail was transformed into a badge of honor."

King's "Letter From A Birmingham City Jail" (1963) had a national impact. But the Birmingham movement lost momentum because many of the protesters either were in jail or could not risk new arrests. At this juncture James Bevel of SCLC proposed using schoolchildren to continue the protests. Many observers, and some of those in the movement, criticized this idea; King and other leaders, however, believed it was necessary to risk harm to children to ensure their freedom. Thus, on May 2 and 3, 1963, a "children's crusade" involving thousands of youths, some as young as six, marched. This tactic enraged "Bull" Connor and his officers. The police not only arrested the children but flailed away with nightsticks and set dogs on them. On Connor's order, firefighters aimed their hoses at the youngsters, ripping the clothes from their backs, cutting flesh, and tumbling children down the street. In the ensuing days, many of the children and their parents began to fight back, hurling bottles and rocks at their uniformed tormentors. As the violence escalated, white businessmen became concerned, and the city came to the bargaining table.

President Kennedy deployed Assistant Attorney General for Civil Rights Burke Marshall to negotiate a settlement. On May 10, 1963, white businessmen agreed to

integrate downtown facilities and hire black men and women. The following night the KKK bombed the A. G. Gaston Motel, where SCLC had its headquarters, and the house that belonged to King's brother, the Rev. A. D. King. Black citizens in turn burned cars and buildings and attacked the police. Only intervention by King and other leaders prevented a riot. White moderates delivered on the promises, and the agreement stuck.

Although SCLC did not win every demand, Birmingham was a major triumph and a turning point in the movement. The summer of 1963 saw protests across the South, with nearly 800 marches, demonstrations, and sit-ins. Ten civil rights protesters were killed and 20,000 arrested as the white South desperately sought to stem the tide. On June 12, 1963, in one of the most tragic losses for the movement, white extremist Byron de la Beckwith gunned down Medgar Evers in the driveway of his home in Jackson, Mississippi. Evers had been the executive secretary of the NAACP's Mississippi organization and the center of a movement in Jackson. His cold-blooded murder dramatized the hatred some white southerners felt and the lengths to which they would go to prevent change.

21.8 A Hard Victory

Analyze the impact of the federal government's intermittent support on the Long Freedom Movement.

The sacrifices in Birmingham and the intensification of the movement throughout the South set the stage for Congress to pass legislation for a Second Reconstruction that would at last fulfill the promise of the first.

21.8.1 The March on Washington

The lingering image of Birmingham and the growing number of demonstrations throughout the South compelled action from President Kennedy. On June 11, 1963, he made his strongest statement about civil rights to the nation: "We face . . . a moral crisis as a country and a people. It cannot be met by repressive police action. It cannot be left to increased demonstrations in the streets. It cannot be quieted by token moves or talk. It is a time to act in the Congress, in your state and local legislative body, and above all, in all our daily lives. A great change is at hand, and our task, our obligation, is to make that revolution . . . peaceful and constructive for all." Kennedy proposed the strongest civil rights bill the country had yet seen; however, despite the public's heightened awareness of discrimination, he could not muster sufficient support in Congress to counter the southern bloc within his own party.

To demonstrate their support for Kennedy's civil rights legislation, a coalition of civil rights organizations—SCLC, NAACP, CORE, SNCC, and the National Urban League—and their leaders resurrected the idea of organizing a march on Washington that A. Philip Randolph had first proposed in 1941. In 1962 Randolph and Bayard Rustin had proposed a march to protest black unemployment. Their initial call received a tepid response; however, after Birmingham the major civil rights organizations reconsidered. Reflecting renewed hope, Randolph christened it a march for "Jobs and Freedom."

On August 28, 1963, nearly 250,000 marchers gathered before the Lincoln Memorial to support the civil rights bill and the movement at large. Throughout the day they sang freedom songs and listened to speeches from civil rights leaders. Finally, late in the afternoon, Martin Luther King, Jr. arose and, casting aside his prepared remarks, delivered an impassioned speech. Most powerfully, King spoke of his vision of the future.

Historian Harvard Sitkoff provides an insightful assessment of the power of King's March on Washington speech by underscoring both its masterful delivery and its declaration of the rights of black people. He declared,

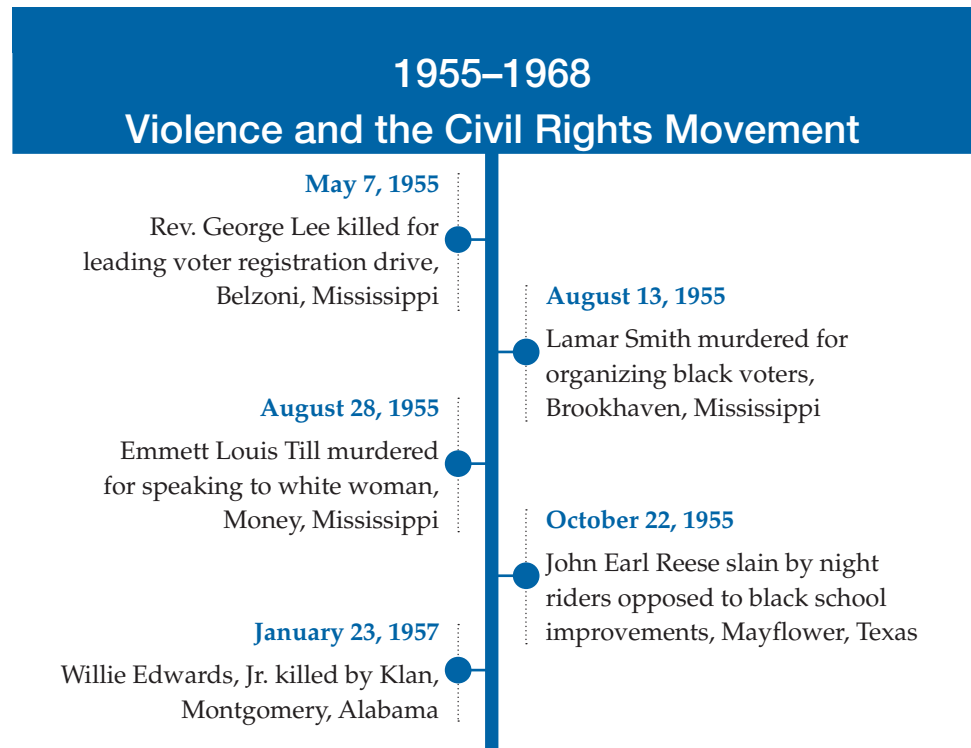
King's message and majestic delivery made the day historic. At a time when most Americans did not perceive the injustice or the immorality of the nation's racism, King depicted it at its most searing to the millions who watched on television and to the many more millions who had heard it on the radio or would see it excerpted on the evening news. At a time when the sight of black kids and white kids going to the same school inflamed racist mobs, he demanded an end to all barriers separating the races. . . . King confronted white America with the undeniable justice of African-American demands and succeeded in associating black rights with accepted values. . . . No harmless dreamer, the preacher interpreted the vast social upheaval, slaying expectations of gradualism or of moderation if America failed to make good on its promises.

King's words did not still the angry opposition of white southerners. On September 15, 1963, only days after the March on Washington, white racists bombed the 16th St. Baptist Church in Birmingham and killed four girls attending Sunday school: Addie Mae Collins, Denise McNair, Carole Robertson, and Cynthia Wesley. Chris McNair, the father of the youngest victim, pleaded for calm out of the depth of his own pain: "We must not let this change us into something different than who we are. We must be human."

The event shook the nation and, combined with the reaction to Kennedy's assassination on November 22, 1963, set the stage for real change.

21.8.2 The Civil Rights Act of 1964

Kennedy's successor, Lyndon B. Johnson, lobbied hard to pass the landmark Civil Rights Act. Many in the civil rights movement feared that Johnson, a southerner, would back his region's defiance. Nonetheless, only four days after taking the oath of office, Johnson told the nation he planned to support the civil rights bill as a memorial for the slain president. A master politician, Johnson pushed the bill through Congress despite a marathon filibuster by its opponents.



1955–1968

Violence and the Civil Rights Movement

	September 24, 1957	President Eisenhower orders federal troops to enforce school desegregation, Little Rock, Arkansas
April 27, 1959		Mack Charles Parker taken from jail and lynched, Poplarville, Mississippi
	May 14, 1961	Freedom Riders attacked in Alabama while testing compliance with bus desegregation laws
September 25, 1961		Voter registration worker Herbert Lee killed by a white legislator, Liberty, Mississippi
	April 1, 1962	Civil rights groups launch voter registration drive
April 9, 1962		Roman Ducksworth, Jr. taken from bus and killed by police, Taylorsville, Mississippi
	September 30, 1962	Riots erupt when James Meredith, a black student, enrolls at the University of Mississippi; Paul Guihard, European reporter, killed
April 23, 1963		William Lewis Moore slain during one-man march against segregation, Attalla, Alabama
	May 3, 1963	Birmingham police attack marching children with dogs and fire hoses
June 12, 1963		Medgar Evers assassinated, Jackson, Mississippi
	September 15, 1963	Schoolgirls Addie Mae Collins, Denise McNair, Carole Robertson, and Cynthia Wesley killed in the bombing of the 16th St. Baptist Church, Birmingham, Alabama
September 15, 1963		Virgil Lamar Ware killed during racist violence, Birmingham, Alabama
	January 31, 1964	Louis Allen, witness to the murder of a civil rights worker, assassinated, Liberty, Mississippi
April 7, 1964		Rev. Bruce Klunder killed protesting construction of a segregated school, Cleveland, Ohio

1955–1968

Violence and the Civil Rights Movement

	May 2, 1964	Henry Hezekiah Dee and Charles Eddie Moore killed by Klan, Meadville, Mississippi
June 21, 1964		
Civil rights workers James Chaney, Andrew Goodman, and Michael Schwerner abducted and slain by Klan, Philadelphia, Mississippi		July 11, 1964
		Lt. Col. Lemuel Penn killed by Klan, Colbert, Georgia
February 26, 1965		
Jimmie Lee Jackson, civil rights marcher, killed by state trooper, Marion, Alabama		March 11, 1965
		Selma to Montgomery march volunteer, Rev. James Reeb, beaten to death, Selma, Alabama
March 25, 1965		
Viola Gregg Liuzzo killed by Klan while transporting marchers, Selma Highway, Alabama		June 2, 1965
		Oneal Moore, black deputy, killed by night riders, Varnado, Louisiana
July 18, 1965		
Willie Wallace Brewster killed by night riders, Anniston, Alabama		August 20, 1965
		Jonathan Daniels, seminary student, killed by deputy, Hayneville, Alabama
January 3, 1966		
Samuel Younge, Jr., student civil rights activist, killed in dispute over whites-only restroom, Tuskegee, Alabama		January 10, 1966
		Vernon Dahmer, black community leader, killed in Klan bombing, Hattiesburg, Mississippi
June 10, 1966		
Ben Chester White killed by Klan, Natchez, Mississippi		July 30, 1966
		Clarence Triggs slain by night riders, Bogalusa, Louisiana
February 2, 1967		
Wharlest Jackson, civil rights leader, killed when police fire on protesters, Jackson, Mississippi		February 8, 1968
		Students Samuel Hammond, Jr., Delano Middleton, and Henry Smith killed when highway patrolmen fire on protesters, Orangeburg, South Carolina
April 4, 1968		
Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. assassinated, Memphis, Tennessee		

The **Civil Rights Act of 1964** was the culmination of the civil rights movement to that time. The act banned discrimination in places of public accommodation, including restaurants, hotels, gas stations, and entertainment facilities, as well as schools, parks, playgrounds, libraries, and swimming pools. The desegregation of public accommodations irrevocably changed the face of American society. The issue of legally mandated racial separation was now settled. The act also banned discrimination by employers and labor unions on the basis of race, color, religion, national origin, and sex in regard to hiring, promoting, dismissing, or making job referrals. The act had strong provisions for enforcement. Most important, it allowed government agencies to withhold federal money from any program permitting or practicing discrimination. This provision had particular importance for the desegregation of schools and colleges across the country. The act also gave the attorney general the power to initiate proceedings against segregated facilities and schools on behalf of people who could not do so on their own. Finally, it created the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission to monitor discrimination in employment.

Civil Rights Act of 1964

Federal law banning discrimination in places of public accommodation.

21.8.3 Mississippi Freedom Summer

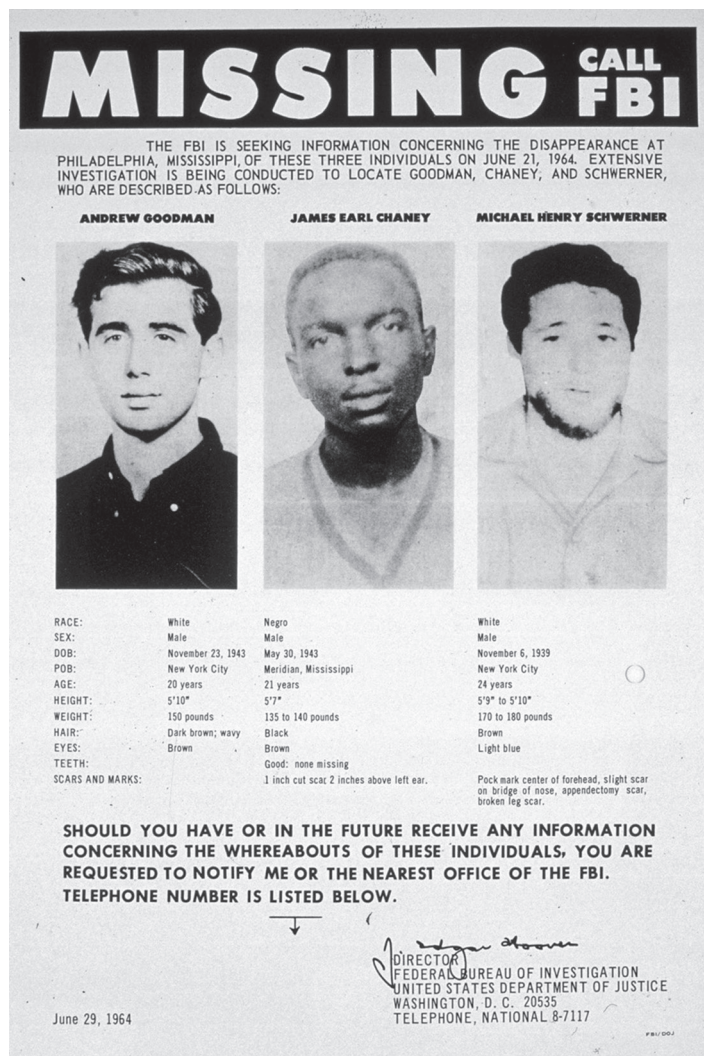
While Congress considered the Civil Rights Act, movement activists renewed their focus on voter registration in the Deep South. In the fall of 1963, many CORE and SNCC workers saw segregation crumbling; however, they knew that without the ballot, African Americans could never drive racist politicians from office, gain a fair hearing in court, reduce police and mob violence, or get equal services from state and local governments. CORE took responsibility for running registration campaigns in Louisiana, South Carolina, and Florida, while SNCC took on the two most repressive states, Alabama and Mississippi. Mississippi was widely known in the movement as the “toughest nut to crack”—the symbolic center of American racism and white violence. By the summer of 1964, national attention had shifted from Alabama to Mississippi, the site of a massive project known as “Freedom Summer.”

The voter registration campaign in Mississippi began in late 1963 when Robert “Bob” Moses mobilized the Council of Federated Organizations (COFO), which had been established in 1962 to aid imprisoned Freedom Riders. Moses convinced the members of COFO (CORE, SNCC, SCLC, and the NAACP) to sponsor a mock Freedom Election in Mississippi. On Election Day, 80,000 disfranchised black people voted for COFO candidates. Impressed with the turnout, Moses and other COFO members believed a massive effort to register voters during the summer of 1964 might break the white monopoly on the ballot box.

COFO decided to invite northern white students to participate in the Mississippi project. These students, about 1,000 in all, were to be drawn primarily from the nation’s most prestigious universities. This move contradicted the movement’s emphasis on black empowerment, but COFO leaders calculated that the presence of elite white students in the Magnolia State would attract increased media attention and pressure the federal government to provide protection.

Shortly after the project began, three volunteers—two white New Yorkers, 24-year-old Michael Schwerner and 21-year-old Andrew Goodman, and a black Mississippian, 21-year-old James Chaney—disappeared. Unknown at the time, Cecil Price, deputy sheriff of Philadelphia, Mississippi, had arrested the three on a trumped-up speeding charge. That evening the young men were delivered to a deserted road where three carloads of Klansmen waited. Schwerner and Goodman were shot to death. Chaney was beaten with chains and then shot.

These events were not publicly known until Klan informers, enticed by a \$30,000 reward, led investigators to the earthen dam in which Goodman, Schwerner, and Chaney had been buried. The disappearance of the three nonetheless focused



A missing persons poster displays the photographs of civil rights workers Andrew Goodman, James Earl Chaney, and Michael Henry Schwerner after they disappeared in 1964.

Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party (MFDP)

Interracial group set up to challenge Mississippi's all-white delegation to the Democratic National Convention in 1964.

national attention on white terrorism. During that summer, approximately 30 homes and 37 churches were bombed, 35 civil rights workers were shot at, 80 people were beaten, six were murdered, and more than 1,000 were arrested. In the face of this violence, uncertainty, and fear, many SNCC activists rejected Martin Luther King's commitment to nonviolence, the inclusion of white activists in the movement, and the wisdom of integration. Divisions over these issues increased tensions within the movement.

Despite the problems it encountered, the Freedom Summer organized dozens of Freedom Schools and community centers throughout Mississippi. Its efforts mobilized the state's black people to an extent not seen since the first Reconstruction. Many communities began to develop the rudiments of a political movement, one that would grow in coming years.

21.8.4 The Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party

Freedom Summer intersected with national politics at the Democratic Party National Convention in August 1964 in Atlantic City, New Jersey. White Mississippians routinely excluded African Americans from the political process, and Robert Moses encouraged COFO to set up the **Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party (MFDP)** to challenge the state's regular Democratic delegation at the convention. Under the leadership of veteran activists Fannie Lou Hamer, Victoria Gray, Annie Divine, and Aaron Henry, the MFDP held its first state convention

on August 6. Approximately 80,000 citizens put their names on the rolls. The convention elected 64 delegates who traveled to the national convention to present their credentials.

The MFDP challenge caused difficulty for the Democratic Party. Many liberals wanted to seat the civil rights delegation, but President Johnson, who was running for reelection, did not want to alienate white southerners, fearing they would vote for Barry Goldwater, his Republican opponent. Liberal Democratic Senator Hubert H. Humphrey, from Minnesota, worked out a compromise calling for Mississippi regulars to be seated if they swore loyalty to the national party and agreed to cast their 44 votes accordingly. The compromise also created two "at-large" seats for MFDP members Aaron Henry and Ed King. The rest of the Freedom Democrats could attend the convention as nonvoting guests.

Martin Luther King, Jr., Bayard Rustin, and other black leaders counseled acceptance of this compromise. Johnson and the Democrats, they argued, had achieved much of the legislative program the movement favored, and if the party were returned to power, they could do much more. But most of the MFDP delegation, fed up with the violence of Mississippi and unwilling to settle for token representation, rejected the compromise. Many members of SNCC turned their backs on liberalism and cooperation with white people of any political persuasion.

21.8.5 Selma and the Voting Rights Act of 1965

The Civil Rights Act of 1964 contained provisions for helping black voters to register, but white resistance in the Deep South had rendered them ineffective. In Alabama, for example, at least 77 percent of black citizens were unable to vote. Their cause was taken up by businesswoman Amelia P. Boynton, owner of an employment and insurance agency in Selma; her husband; and a high school teacher, the Rev. Frederick Reese, who also led the Dallas County Voters League. These three, with others, fought for black enfranchisement and an end to discrimination. Their struggle would help pass the **Voting Rights Act of 1965**, which finally ended the systematic exclusion of African Americans from southern politics.

Selma's sheriff, James G. Clark, worked to block the voter registration activity sponsored by the Boyntons, Reese, and SNCC suffrage workers. By 1964 fewer than 400 of the 15,000 eligible African Americans had registered to vote in Dallas County. President Johnson refused requests to deploy federal marshals to the county to protect voter registration workers. Seeking reinforcements, the workers sent a call to Martin Luther King, Jr. and SCLC. King came and was arrested. In mid-February 1965, during a night march in neighboring Perry County, 26-year-old Jimmie Lee Jackson was shot as he tried to shield his mother from a beating by a state trooper. His death and the thrashing of several reporters attracted the national media.

SCLC announced plans for a mass march from Selma to Montgomery to begin on Sunday, March 7, 1965. At the forefront of 600 protesters were King; one of his aides, Hosea Williams; and SCNC's chairman, John Lewis. As the marchers approached the Edmund Pettus Bridge, state troopers and the county police tear-gassed and beat the retreating marchers while their horses trampled the fallen. Captured in graphic detail by television cameras, this battle became known as "Bloody Sunday." Seizing the moment, King and the activists rescheduled a pilgrimage for March 9. The SCLC leader soon found himself in a dilemma. A federal judge who was normally supportive of civil rights had issued an injunction against the march. Moreover, President Johnson and other key figures in the government urged King not to go through with it. King was reluctant to violate a federal injunction, and he knew he needed Johnson's support to win strong voting rights legislation. But the people of Selma and the hundreds of young SNCC workers would probably march even if King did not.

When the day of the march came, 1,500 protesters marched to the bridge singing "Ain't Gonna Let Nobody Turn Me 'Round" and other freedom songs. To their surprise, King crossed the Pettus Bridge, prayed briefly, and turned around. He had made a face-saving compromise with the federal authorities. SNCC workers felt betrayed, and King's leadership suffered. That evening local white people clubbed to death James Reeb, a white Unitarian minister from Boston. His martyrdom created a national outcry and prompted Johnson to act. On March 15 the president, in a televised address to Congress, announced he would submit voter registration legislation. He electrified civil rights activists when he invoked the movement's slogan in his Texas drawl, "We shall overcome."

The protests at Selma and the massive white resistance spurred Congress to pass the Voting Rights Act of 1965, which President Johnson signed on August 6. The act outlawed educational requirements for voting in states or counties where less than half the voting-age population had been registered on November 1, 1964, or where less than half had voted in the

Voting Rights Act of 1965

Federal law banning the methods that had systematically excluded African Americans from registering or voting in southern state elections.

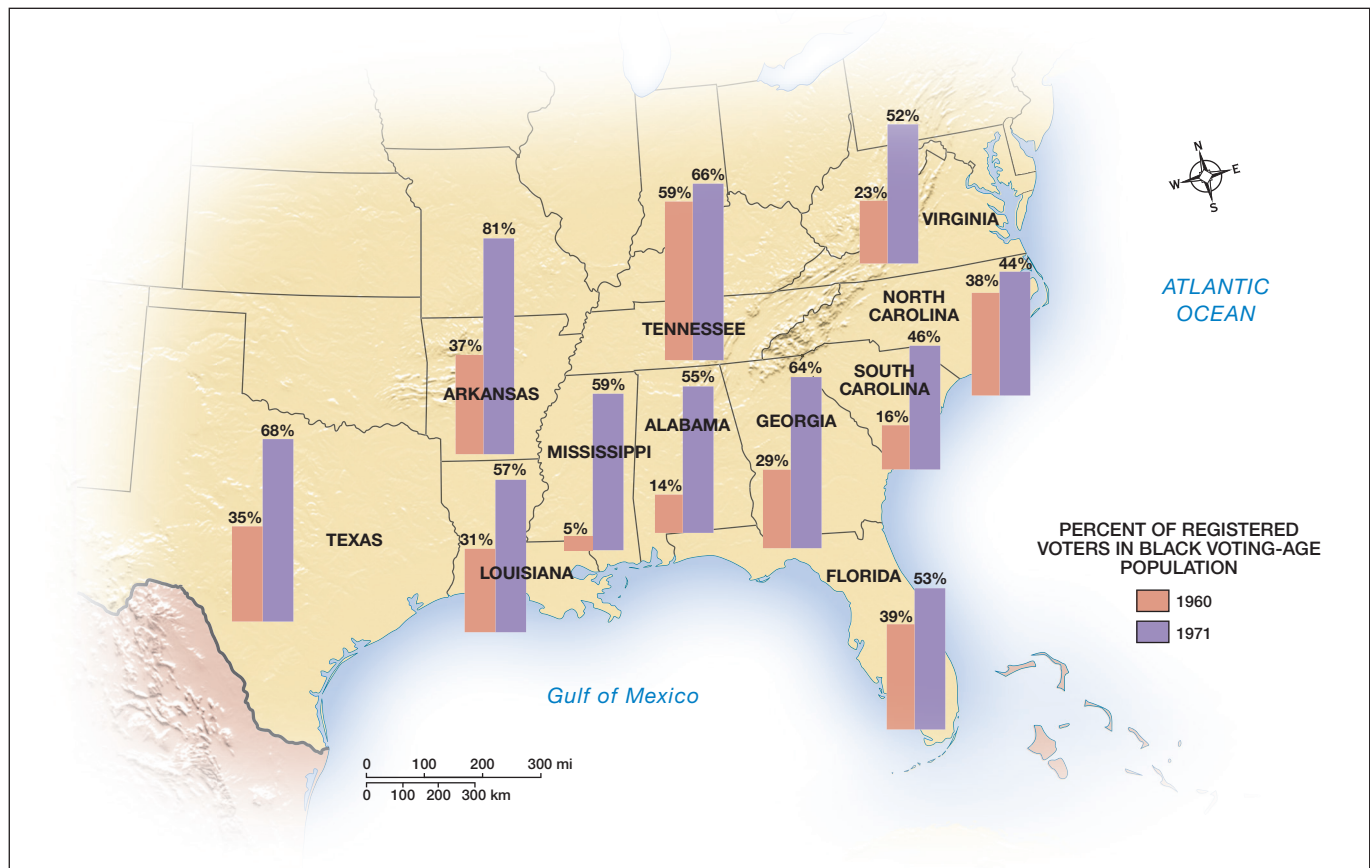
Young black man drinking from a segregated fountain.



Map 21-1 The Effect of the Voting Rights Act of 1965

The Voting Rights Act enabled millions of previously disfranchised African Americans in the South to vote.

Why was gaining the right to vote so important for southern African Americans?



1964 presidential election. It also empowered the attorney general to have the Civil Rights Commission assign federal registrars to enroll voters. Attorney General Nicholas Katzenbach immediately deployed federal registrars in nine southern counties. Within months, they had registered approximately 80,000 new voters. In Mississippi, black registrants soared from 28,500 in 1964 to 251,000 in 1968 (see Map 21-1).

Gaining voting rights made a tremendous difference. Before passage of the 1965 Act, Fannie Lou Hamer had unsuccessfully challenged the seating of the Mississippi representatives before the U.S. House of Representatives. In 1968 she was selected as a delegate to the Democratic Party convention. To be sure, southern state legislators resisted the act. They instituted a dazzling array of disfranchisement devices such as gerrymandering, at-large elections, more appointive offices, and higher qualifications for candidates. While it may be tempting to declare that white supremacy as the core of southern politics was over, it was only on temporary life support. In the twenty-first century southern policies and United States Supreme Court decisions reinvigorated after the election of President Barack Obama converged in an even more determined effort to eviscerate a core component of the achievements of the civil rights movement. The new redistricting and gerrymandering efforts and a couple of U.S. Supreme Court decisions encouraged state- and local-level politicians to intensify efforts to further reduce the power of the black ballot. They embraced strategies and questionable legislation to make it difficult and more challenging for Black people to secure identifications and thus meet new requirements to cast a ballot.

Profile

Dorothy Irene Height

Dorothy Irene Height (March 24, 1912–April 20, 2010) was born in Richmond, Virginia, to a father, James Height, who was a building and painting contractor, and a mother, Fannie Burroughs, who was a nurse. They migrated to a small town, Rankin, Pennsylvania, where Height graduated from Rankin High School in 1929. A scholarship from the Elks helped her attend college. From the outset she demonstrated a gift for oratory that would facilitate her rise to become one of the great African-American leaders in the struggle for human rights and civic equality in the twentieth century.

Height's father had been active in Republican Party politics, but she refused to be defined by a political affiliation. On March 4, 2004, President George W. Bush presented her with the Congressional Gold Medal. Other presidents, from Harry S. Truman to Barack Obama, would seek her council or acknowledge her contributions to the struggle for civil rights. How did an African-American woman earn a living while devoting her life to social justice? The first requirement was an education, which she wasted little time acquiring and spared no effort to attain. Within four years, Height earned both a bachelor's and a master's degree in educational psychology at New York University, and thereafter she continued to take courses at Columbia University and the New York School of Social Work.

She launched her career as a caseworker for the Department of Social Services of New York City at the height of the Great Depression. She became active in New Deal youth programs and found employment with the Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA). In 1937, Mary McLeod Bethune, founder and president of the National Council of Negro Women (NCNW), met Height in New York and invited her to join the NCNW. They shared a long and rewarding friendship. Over four decades, Height combined working for the YWCA with volunteering for the NCNW. Thus, she conjoined her commitment to improving the lives of children with securing greater rights for women and resolving tensions and misunderstandings between black and white women. Height worked closely and tirelessly with Bethune to lobby for jobs for women, greater educational opportunities for women and men, and food drives for the poor. She spearheaded voter registration drives for black southerners and voter education for black northerners.

Height became the director of the YWCA's Center for Racial Justice in 1965 and remained an employee of the



As leader of two major black women organizations, the NCNW and the Delta Sigma Theta sorority, Dorothy Irene Height was one of the most influential women in twentieth-century America.

organization until she retired in 1977. Her position with the YWCA enabled her to travel across the globe to train women and observe firsthand the issues that affected them in societies from Haiti to India. In 2000, the YWCA established the Dorothy I. Height Racial Justice Award. The first recipient was President Bill Clinton.

From 1947 to 1956, Height was president of the Delta Sigma Theta sorority. In 1957, she succeeded Bethune as president of the NCNW, a position she held until 1998. She worked to turn Bethune's dream of a politically empowered, economically secure, well-educated black womanhood committed to social justice and the protection of children into a reality. As leader of two of the largest and most powerful organizations of black women in America, she nurtured generations of black women. These women would prove indispensable to the civil rights movement, as the life and agency of Jo Ann Gibson Robinson, president of the Women's Political Council in Montgomery, Alabama, demonstrated at the time of the Montgomery Bus Boycott in the 1950s.

But gender conventions proved difficult to alter within the black community, and try as she might, Height could not persuade the leaders of the 1963 March on Washington to allow her to speak. The only woman's voice heard on that historic day was that of gospel great Mahalia Jackson. Nevertheless, Height wielded enormous power in both white and black leadership circles in the remaining 50 years of her life. In the 1990s, she received a bank vault of recognitions and awards, including the NAACP's Spingarn Medal (1993), induction into the National Women's Hall of Fame (1993), and the Presidential Medal of Freedom (1994) from Bill Clinton.

Dorothy Height was renowned for her quiet dignity and unrelenting determination to speak out on behalf of African-American women, black families, and their communities. Through her mastery of advocacy politics and ability to mobilize educated and resourceful black women, she helped overturn racial second-class citizenship and much of the gender discrimination that forced women into subordinate positions in the American economy. She entered the fray, whether it was to expand educational opportunities, open ballot boxes, or end legal segregation. Her voice never wavered, and she used it with skill and to great effect. At her memorial service, President Barack Obama said of Height, "She deserves a place in our history books. She deserves a place of honor in America's memory." Virtually the entire nation took note of her passing.

Conclusion

The two *Brown* decisions ended the legal underpinning of segregation and discrimination and set in motion events that would irrevocably transform the political and social status of African Americans. White southerners resisted the changes *Brown* unleashed, and as their resistance gained momentum, violence against African Americans and their allies exploded. For decades the Supreme Court would hear cases and render decisions that would challenge the *Brown* decision and the continuing efforts to combat the lingering effects of structural racial discrimination.

To be sure, the successes of the modern civil rights movement depended on many factors. The federal government intervened at crucial moments to enact historic civil rights legislation, and to issue judgments on behalf of the imprisoned protesters and organizers. Crucial federal court decisions protected the rule of law as did strategic deployment of marshals and soldiers. Some black leaders pursued and advocated strategies to provoke confrontations and thus ensure federal intervention as they gained invaluable media coverage. Over the course of a tumultuous decade, freedom fighters of the civil rights movement stormed the legal barricades of segregation. The uncompromising struggle of African Americans, their myriad organizations, and strong-willed white allies pressured federal officials in the legislative, executive, and judicial branches of government to enact major civil rights legislation, issue executive orders, and deliver judicial decisions to dismantle segregation in the South.

The victories of this era were far reaching, but as they were achieved, new issues arose that would fracture the movement. Until recently, scholarship concerning the rise and evolution of the civil rights movement focused largely on the South. Impressive new research focuses on the long history of struggles for civil rights and economic justice that occurred during the Great Depression and World War II eras. To be sure, by the advent of the civil rights movement in the South, black residents in northern and western cities, thanks to federal legislation, enjoyed access to public facilities, schools, and jobs in a more diverse economic sector. The civil rights movement has largely been focused on the South because black northerners already had many of the rights granted by the federal legislation of the era. Nonetheless, in all regions, long after the victories of the civil rights movement, many black individuals and communities still suffered the negative impact of discrimination and segregation. The future dictated the need for different techniques and new ways of thinking.

Chapter Timeline

AFRICAN-AMERICAN EVENTS

NATIONAL EVENTS

1954–1958

1954

Supreme Court's *Brown v. Board of Education* decision declares separate but equal education unconstitutional

1955

Supreme Court's *Brown II* decision calls for school districts to desegregate immediately or "with all deliberate speed"

The Interstate Commerce Commission outlaws segregated buses and waiting rooms for interstate passengers

1954

First White Citizens Council in Mississippi

1955

The American Federation of Labor and Congress of Industrial Organizations merge to form the AFL-CIO

1956

Segregationists in Congress issue the "Southern Manifesto"

Eisenhower wins second term as president

AFRICAN-AMERICAN EVENTS

Claudette Colvin arrested for
refusing to relinquish her seat to
a white woman on a bus
in Montgomery

Emmett Till lynched

Rosa Parks arrested for refusing
to give up her seat on a city bus,
beginning the Montgomery
Bus Boycott

1956

The Supreme Court, in *Gayle v.*
Browder, bars segregation in
intrastate travel

1957

Congress passes the Civil Rights Act
of 1957

President Eisenhower enforces
integration of Little Rock's Central
High School with federal troops

Martin Luther King, Jr. and other
religious leaders organize SCLC

1960–1965

1960

Black students sit in at a Woolworth
lunch counter in Greensboro,
North Carolina
SNCC founded

Black vote is critical to John F.
Kennedy's election

1961

Freedom Riders attacked in Alabama
and Mississippi

Kennedy names Thurgood Marshall to
the Second Circuit Court of Appeals

Herbert Lee killed in Amite County,
Mississippi

"Friendship Nine" students sit-in at
segregated McCrory's Five and Dime,
Rock Hill, SC, convicted of trespassing
and sentenced to hard labor—"Jail no
Bail" thereafter became the mantra
of protesters

1962

COFO is formed

James Meredith desegregates the
University of Mississippi with
federal support

NATIONAL EVENTS

1960

John F. Kennedy elected president

1963

Kennedy is assassinated; Lyndon
Johnson succeeds to the presidency

1964

Equal Employment Opportunity
Commission established

1965

Johnson outlines the Great Society
program to attack poverty

AFRICAN-AMERICAN EVENTS

The Albany Movement fails
Voter Education Project launched

1963

Project C highlights racial
injustices in Birmingham; King
writes his celebrated "Letter From
Birmingham Jail"

Federal government compels
Governor George C. Wallace to
desegregate the University
of Alabama

Medgar Evers murdered
W. E. B. Du Bois dies in Ghana, Africa,
at age 95

The March on Washington
Martin Luther King, Jr. delivers his
"I Have a Dream" speech

Ku Klux Klan bombs the 16th Street
Baptist Church in Birmingham,
Alabama, killing four girls

Malcolm X breaks with Elijah
Muhammad and the Nation of Islam
and founds his own movement,
Muslim Mosque

1964

SNCC launches the Mississippi
Freedom Summer Project to promote
voter registration

Twenty-Fourth Amendment to the
Constitution outlaws the poll tax

James E. Chaney, Michael Schwerner,
and Andrew Goodman murdered
in Mississippi

Civil Rights Act of 1964 enacted

The Mississippi Freedom Democratic
Party denied seating at the Democratic
National Convention

Martin Luther King, Jr. wins the Nobel
Peace Prize

1965

Civil rights marchers walk from
Selma to Montgomery after violent
confrontation in Selma

Voting Rights Act of 1965 enacted

NATIONAL EVENTS

Review Questions

1. What roles did “ordinary” or local people play in the civil rights movement? Explain how children were able to contribute to the civil rights movement’s successes. How did children contribute to the struggle for social change?
2. Why did the federal government intervene in the civil rights movement? What were the major pieces of legislation enacted, and how did they dismantle legalized segregation?
3. What were the ideologies, objectives, and tactics adopted by the major civil rights organizations and their leaders?
4. Who were some of the individuals who have not been forgotten but are still engaged in the freedom struggle?
5. What were the major successes and failures of the freedom movement? What intergenerational tensions plagued the movement? How did the movement transform American politics and society?

Retracing the Odyssey

Brown v. Board of Education National Historic Site, Topeka, Kansas. The Sumner and Monroe Elementary Schools compose the *Brown v. Board of Education* National Historic Landmark. The 1954 *Brown v. Topeka Board of Education* decision written by U.S. Supreme Court Chief Justice Earl Warren removed the legal foundation on which the entire system of racial segregation and discrimination in the South was based and reaffirmed the ideal of the equal protection under the law clause in the Fourteenth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution. The *Brown* decision struck down the 1896 *Plessy v. Ferguson* doctrine of “separate but equal.” *Brown* was the culmination of a long struggle waged by the NAACP’s team of lawyers headed by Thurgood Marshall and dozens of ordinary citizens in local communities.

Birmingham Civil Rights Institute. Exhibits depict the history of the black freedom struggle. The museum chronicles the dramatic and often violent activities that occurred in Birmingham, Alabama, during the 1960s as black protests confronted massive white resistance.

The Lincoln Memorial, Washington, D.C. The Lincoln Memorial was built to celebrate President Abraham Lincoln and memorialize the Civil War (1861–1865) that preserved the Union. It possesses a particular relevance and meaning to African Americans. The Lincoln Memorial was the site of the August 1963 March on Washington, during which Martin Luther King delivered his powerful “I Have a Dream” speech.

The Martin Luther King, Jr., Center for Nonviolent Social Change, Atlanta, Georgia. Founded by Coretta Scott King in 1968 as a living memorial dedicated to the preservation and advancement of the work of her husband, the Martin Luther King, Jr., Center for Nonviolent Social Change features exhibits that detail the life and legacy of Martin Luther King, Jr. It contains a unique exhibit of his personal memorabilia. The King Library and Archives contains the world’s largest existing collection of civil rights materials.

Recommended Reading

Taylor Branch. *Parting the Waters: America in the King Years, 1954–63.* New York: Simon and Schuster, 1988. Richly researched, lively study that places King at the center of American politics during a transformative decade.

Clayborne Carson. *In Struggle: SNCC and the Black Awakening of the 1960s.* Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1981. One of the best historical studies of SNCC and the contributions students made to the civil rights movement.

Vickie Crawford, Jacqueline Rouse, and Barbara Woods, eds. *Women in the Civil Rights Movement: Trailblazers and Torchbearers.* Brooklyn, NY: Carlson Publishing, 1990. An important anthology drawing attention to the women who contributed to the freedom struggle of the 1950s and 1960s.

Phillip Hoose. *Claudette Colvin: Twice Toward Justice.* New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2009. Essential reading. A splendidly documented book that corrects many

erroneous assumptions about the courageous 15-year-old high school student who refused to give up her bus seat on March 2, 1955, in Montgomery, Alabama.

Richard Kluger. *Simple Justice: The History of "Brown v. Board of Education" and Black America's Struggle for Equality*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1976. New ed., 2004. An excellent treatment of the historical events leading up to *Brown* and of the people whose lives were forever changed because of their resistance to Jim Crow segregation. The new edition includes an illuminating assessment of the 50 years since *Brown*.

Steven F. Lawson. *Running for Freedom: Civil Rights and Black Politics in America Since 1941*. 2nd ed. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2008. A succinct analysis of the politics, legislative measures, and individuals that

figured in the successes and failures of the civil rights movement and recent political developments.

Danielle L. McGuire. *At the Dark End of the Street: Black Women, Rape, and Resistance—A New History of the Civil Rights Movement from Rosa Parks to the Rise of Black Power*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2010. A revealing and important book that illuminates the organized resistance of black women to resist white male sexual aggression as part of the civil rights movement.

Aldon D. Morris. *The Origins of the Modern Civil Rights Movement: Black Communities Organizing for Change*. New York: Free Press, 1984. An insightful analysis of the mobilization and organizing strategies pursued by diverse communities for social change that paved the way for the modern civil rights movement.

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