

The Modern Civil Rights Movement

In the greatest mass movement in modern American history, black demonstrations swept the country seeking constitutional equality at the national level, as well as an end to Massive Resistance (state and local government-supported opposition to school desegregation) in the South. Presidential executive orders, the passage of two Civil Rights Acts, and the federal government's first military enforcement of civil rights brought an end to de jure segregation. The success of this movement inspired other minorities to employ similar tactics.

Three years after the Supreme Court ruled school segregation unconstitutional in *Brown v. Board of Education* and two years after the Montgomery, Alabama, bus boycott, President Dwight D. Eisenhower signed the first civil rights bill since Reconstruction. The 1957 Civil Rights Act created the independent U.S. Commission on Civil Rights. Although the Commission was limited to fact-finding, its reports helped shape the breakthrough Civil Rights Act of 1964, which also provided the Commission with greater authority.

Gains in civil rights varied for minorities during this era. Hispanics lost ground as they experienced mass deportations of legal and illegal immigrants in Operation Wetback, educational segregation in Southwest schools, and police brutality cases that rocked Los Angeles. In contrast, the re-emergence of a women's rights movement in the 1960s resulted in significant civil rights gains: adoption of the 1963 Equal Pay Act, the prohibition of inequality based on gender in the Civil Rights Act of 1964, and the breaching of barriers to employment for women.

Asian Americans likewise experienced gains and losses in civil rights. The McCarran-Walter Act of 1952 permitted Japanese immigrants to become citizens but contained restrictive quotas based on race and country of origin. Chinese Americans, especially during the McCarthy era, found themselves targets of suspicion and possible deportation following the Communist takeover of China. During this period, however, Asian Americans began their own social, cultural, and political initiatives to challenge the status quo and advance their civil rights.

During this time, the homophile movement grew and changed direction. Gays and lesbians in the "bar culture" engaged in various forms of resistance to police repression by insisting on their right to gather in public. In cities across the country, for example, working-class lesbian bars nurtured a world where women made public their same-sex desire. This cultural resistance, along with the formal political efforts of homophile organizations, laid the basis for the contemporary gay and lesbian movement.

African American mass demonstrations, televised racial violence, and the federally enforced desegregation of higher education institutions, as well as the black passive resistance movement of the early 1960s led to adoption of the landmark Civil Rights Act of 1964. Considered the most comprehensive civil rights legislation in U.S. history, the act granted the federal government strong enforcement powers in the area of civil rights. It prohibited tactics to limit voting; guaranteed racial and religious minorities equal access to public accommodations; outlawed job discrimination on the basis of race, color, religion, sex, or national origin; continued the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights; and established the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission.

Civil Rights to Equal Rights Era in the U.S.

CIVIL RIGHTS MOVEMENT

We Shall Overcome





United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service
Ocmulgee Mounds National Historical Park
1207 Emery Highway
Macon, Georgia 31217-4399



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Ref.: Civil Rights Movement

Dear Sir/Madame:

The 2020 Black History Month programs presented at Ocmulgee Mounds National Historical Park will be different from those done in the past. My plan is to do an interpretive program on a series of selected eras in American history associated to people of color, to enlighten and educate the public. A different program will be presented each weekend in the month of February. The first subject to be covered is Slavery in the United States culminating in its abolishment after the Civil War. The second era to be covered is Reconstruction and the post Civil War activities of the newly freed slaves. The Third era to be covered is the period from 1896 to 1955 which has been called the Jim Crow era. The next era will be the Civil Rights Era and culminating with the Equal Rights era.

These series of programs relating to the historical eras of American history also included my attempt to come up with a small pamphlet or document on each of the subjects to help the reader to better understand these periods. I realize that all of these subjects are touchy when it come to American History. It is now time that we quit avoiding the discussion of these topics and start having meaningful dialogues as a Nation.

The Civil Rights Movement Era in the United States spanned from the 1950s to the 1970s. This movement was a long struggle with the goal of enforcing constitutional and legal rights for African Americans that other Americans already enjoyed. With roots that dated back to the Reconstruction era during the late 19th century, the movement achieved its largest legislative gains in the mid-1960s, after years of direct actions and grassroots protests that were organized from the mid-1950s until 1968. Encompassing strategies, various groups, and organized social movements to accomplish the goals of ending legalized racial segregation, disenfranchisement, and discrimination in the United States, the movement, using major nonviolent campaigns, eventually secured new recognition in federal law and federal protection for all Americans.

Sincerely,

Lonnie J. Davis

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Ocmulgee Mounds National Historical Park

Cultural Resources Specialist/Historian

Meanwhile, the strain and changing dynamics of the civil rights movement had taken a toll on King, especially in the final months of his life. "I'm frankly tired of marching. I'm tired of going to jail," he admitted in 1968. "Living every day under the threat of death, I feel discouraged every now and then and feel my work is in vain, but then the Holy Spirit revives my soul again."

King's plans for a Poor People's March to Washington were interrupted in the spring of 1968 by a trip to Memphis, Tennessee, in support of a strike by that city's sanitation workers. In the opinion of many of his followers and biographers, King seemed to sense his end was near. As King prophetically told a crowd at the Mason Temple Church in Memphis on April 3, the night before he died, "**I've seen the promised land. I may not get there with you. But I want you to know tonight that we, as a people, will get to the promised land.**"

The next day, while standing on the second-story balcony of the Lorraine Motel, where he and his associates were staying, King was killed by a sniper's bullet. The killing sparked riots and disturbances in over 100 cities across the country. On March 10, 1969, the accused assassin, a white man, James Earl Ray, pleaded guilty to the murder and was sentenced to 99 years in prison.

Ray later recanted his confession, claiming lawyers had coerced him into confessing and that he was the victim of a conspiracy. In a surprising turn of events, members of the King family eventually came to Ray's defense. King's son Dexter met with the reputed assassin in March 1997 and then publicly joined Ray's plea for a reopening of his case. When Ray died on April 23, 1998, Coretta Scott King declared, "America will never have the benefit of Mr. Ray's trial, which would have produced new revelations about the assassination...as well as establish the facts concerning Mr. Ray's innocence." Although the U.S. government conducted several investigations into the murder of King and each time concluded that Ray was the sole assassin, the killing remains a matter of controversy.

David L. Lewis

The Civil Rights Movement in America did not die with the "Dreamer". There will always be a movement until the wording of the Declaration of Independence is 100 percent true:

All Men (and Women) are Created Equal...

persuade him to cancel it. Heading a procession of 1,500 marchers, black and white, he set out across Edmond Pettus Bridge outside Selma until the group came to a barricade of state troopers. But, instead of going on and forcing a confrontation, he led his followers to kneel in prayer and then unexpectedly turned back. This decision cost King the support of many young radicals who were already faulting him for being too cautious. The suspicion of an “arrangement” with federal and local authorities—vigorously but not entirely convincingly denied—clung to the Selma affair. The country was nevertheless aroused, resulting in the passage of the Voting Rights Act of 1965.

Throughout the nation, impatience with the lack of greater substantive progress encouraged the growth of black militancy. Especially in the slums of the large Northern cities, King’s religious philosophy of nonviolence was increasingly questioned. The rioting in the Watts district of Los Angeles in August 1965 demonstrated the depth of unrest among urban African Americans. In an effort to meet the challenge of the ghetto, King and his forces initiated a drive against racial discrimination in Chicago at the beginning of the following year.

The chief target was to be segregation in housing. After a spring and summer of rallies, marches, and demonstrations, an agreement was signed between the city and a coalition of African Americans, liberals, and labor organizations, calling for various measures to enforce the existing laws and regulations with respect to housing. But this agreement was to have little effect; the impression remained that King’s Chicago campaign was nullified partly because of the opposition of that city’s powerful mayor, Richard J. Daley, and partly because of the unexpected complexities of Northern racism.

In Illinois and Mississippi alike, King was now being challenged and even publicly derided by young black-power enthusiasts. Whereas King stood for patience, middle-class respectability, and a measured approach to social change, the sharp-tongued, blue jean-clad young urban radicals stood for confrontation and immediate change. In the latter’s eyes, the suit-wearing, calm-spoken civil rights leader was irresponsibly passive and old beyond his years (King was in his 30s)—more a member of the other side of the generation gap than their revolutionary leader. Malcolm X went so far as to call King’s tactics “criminal”; “Concerning nonviolence, it is criminal to teach a man not to defend himself when he is the constant victim of brutal attacks.” In the face of mounting criticism, King broadened his approach to include concerns other than racism.

On April 4, 1967, at Riverside Church in New York City and again on the 15th at a mammoth peace rally in that city, he committed himself irrevocably to opposing U.S. involvement in the Vietnam War. Once before, in early January 1966, he had condemned the war, but official outrage from Washington and strenuous opposition within the black community itself had caused him to relent.

He next sought to widen his base by forming a coalition of the poor of all races that would address itself to economic problems such as poverty and unemployment. It was a version of populism—seeking to enroll janitors, hospital workers, seasonal laborers, and the destitute of Appalachia, along with the student militants and pacifist intellectuals. His endeavors along these lines, however, did not produce much support in any segment of the population.

CIVIL RIGHTS MOVEMENT

We Shall Overcome

Overview

The Civil Rights Movement in the United States was an era which spanned from 1950s to 1970s. This movement was a long struggle with the goal of enforcing constitutional and legal rights for African Americans that other Americans already enjoyed. With roots that dated back to the Reconstruction era during the late 19th century, the movement achieved its largest legislative gains in the mid-1960s, after years of direct actions and grassroots protests that were organized from the mid-1950s until 1968.

Encompassing strategies, various groups, and organized social movements to accomplish the goals of ending legalized racial segregation, disenfranchisement, and discrimination in the United States, the movement,



(Photo: History.com)

using major nonviolent campaigns, eventually secured new recognition in federal law and federal protection for all Americans.

Background

After the American Civil War and the abolition of slavery in the 1860s, the Reconstruction Amendments to the United States Constitution granted emancipation and constitutional rights of citizenship to all African Americans, most of whom had recently been enslaved. For a period, African Americans voted and held political office, but they were increasingly deprived of civil rights, often under Jim Crow laws, and subjected to discrimination and sustained violence by whites in the South. Over the following century, various efforts were made by African Americans to secure their legal rights.

Between 1955 and 1968, acts of nonviolent protest and civil disobedience produced crisis situations and productive dialogues between activists and government authorities. Federal, state, and local governments, businesses, and communities often had to respond immediately to these situations, which highlighted the injustices faced by African Americans across the country. The lynching of Chicago teenager Emmett Till in Mississippi, and the outrage generated by seeing how he had been abused, when his mother decided to have an open-casket funeral, mobilized the African-American community nationwide.

Forms of protest and/or civil disobedience included boycotts, such as the successful Montgomery Bus Boycott (1955–56) in Alabama; "sit-ins" successful as the influential Greensboro sit-ins (1960) in North Carolina and successful Nashville sit-ins in Tennessee; marches, such as the 1963 Birmingham Children's Crusade and 1965 Selma to Montgomery marches (1965) in Alabama; and a wide range of other nonviolent activities.

Moderates in the movement worked with Congress to achieve the passage of several significant pieces of federal legislation that overturned discriminatory practices and authorized oversight and enforcement by the federal government. The Civil Rights Act of 1964 expressly banned discrimination based on race, color, religion, sex, or national origin in employment practices; ended unequal application of voter registration requirements; and prohibited racial segregation in schools, at the workplace, and in public accommodations. The Voting Rights Act of 1965 restored and protected voting rights for minorities by authorizing federal oversight of registration and elections in areas with historic under-representation of minorities as voters. The Fair Housing Act of 1968 banned discrimination in the sale or rental of housing. African Americans reentered politics in the South, and across the country young people were inspired to become part of the movement.

From 1964 through 1970, a wave of inner-city riots in black communities undercut support from the white middle class, but increased support from private foundations. The emergence of the Black Power movement, which lasted from about 1965 to 1975, challenged the established black leadership for its cooperative attitude and its practice of nonviolence. Instead, its leaders demanded that, in addition to the new laws gained through the nonviolent movement, political and economic self-sufficiency had to be developed in the black community.

Montgomery in support of voting rights, but were stopped at the Edmund Pettus Bridge by a police blockade in Selma, Alabama State troopers and the Dallas County Sheriff's Department, some mounted on horseback, awaited them. In the presence of the news media, the lawmen attacked the peaceful demonstrators with billy clubs, tear gas and bull whips, driving them back into Selma.

The incident was dubbed "Bloody Sunday" by the national media, with each of the three networks interrupting telecasts to broadcast footage from the horrific incident. The march was considered the catalyst for pushing through the Voting Rights Act five months later.

Ceremonial Action within 48 hours, demonstrations in support of the marchers, were held in 80 cities and thousands of religious and lay leaders, including Dr. Martin Luther King, flew to Selma. He called for people across the country to join him. Hundreds responded to his call, shocked by what they had seen on television. Outraged at the images of "Bloody Sunday", sympathizers staged sit-ins, traffic blockades and demonstrations in solidarity with the voting rights marchers. Some even traveled to Selma to participate.

However, to prevent another outbreak of violence, marchers attempted to gain a court order that would prohibit the police from interfering. Instead of issuing the court order, Federal District Court Judge Frank Minis Johnson issued a restraining order, preventing the march from taking place until he could hold additional hearings later in the week. On March 9, Dr. King led a group again to the Edmund Pettus Bridge where they knelt, prayed and to the consternation of some, returned to Brown Chapel. That night, a Northern minister who was in Selma to march, was killed by white vigilantes.

Finally, after a federal court order permitted the protest, the voting rights marchers left Selma on March 21, and stood 25,000 strong on March 25 before the state capitol in Montgomery. As a direct consequence of these events, the U.S. Congress passed the Voting Rights Act of 1965, guaranteeing every American 21 years old and over the right to register to vote.

Challenges of the Final Years

The first signs of opposition to Martin Luther King's tactics from within the civil rights movement surfaced during the March 1965 demonstrations in Selma, Alabama, which were aimed at dramatizing the need for a federal voting-rights law that would provide legal support for the enfranchisement of African Americans in the South. King organized an initial march from Selma to the state capitol building in Montgomery but did not lead it himself. The marchers were turned back by state troopers with nightsticks and tear gas. He was determined to lead a second march, despite an injunction by a federal court and efforts from Washington to



Bloody Sunday
(Photo: History.com)

Luther King, Jr. and newly inaugurated President Lyndon B. Johnson continued to press for passage of the bill – as King noted in a January 1964 newspaper column, legislation "will feel the intense focus of Negro interest...It became the order of the day at the great March on Washington last summer. The Negro and his white compatriots for self-respect and human dignity will not be denied."

The House of Representatives debated H.R. 7152 for nine days, rejecting nearly 100 amendments designed to weaken the bill. It passed the House on February 10, 1964 after 70 days of public hearings, appearances by 275 witnesses, and 5,792 pages of published testimony.

Selma to Montgomery Marches

Even the passage of the landmark Civil Rights Act of 1964 months earlier had done little in some parts of the United States to ensure African Americans of the basic right to vote. Perhaps no place was Jim Crow's grip tighter than in Dallas County, Alabama where African Americans made up more than half of the population, yet accounted for just 2 percent of registered voters.

For months, the efforts of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) to register black voters in the county seat of Selma had been thwarted. In January 1965, Martin Luther King Jr., came to the city and gave the backing of the Southern Christian Leadership Council (SCLC) to the cause. Peaceful demonstrations in Selma and surrounding communities resulted in the arrests of thousands, including King, who wrote to the New York Times, "This is Selma, Alabama. There are more negroes in jail with me than there are on the voting rolls."

The rising racial tensions finally bubbled over into bloodshed in the nearby town of Marion on February 18, 1965, when state troopers clubbed protestors and fatally shot 26-year-old Jimmie Lee Jackson, an African American demonstrator trying to protect his mother, who was being struck by police.

In response, civil rights leaders planned to take their cause directly to Alabama Governor George Wallace on a 54-mile march from Selma to the state capital of Montgomery. Although Wallace ordered state troopers "to use whatever measures are necessary to prevent a march," approximately 600 voting rights advocates set out from the Brown Chapel AME Church on Sunday, March 7. King, who had met with President Lyndon Johnson two days earlier to discuss voting rights legislation, remained back in Atlanta with his own congregation and planned to join the marchers en route the following day. By a coin flip, it was determined that Hosea Williams would represent the SCLC at the head of the march along with 25-year-old John Lewis, a SNCC chairman and future U.S. congressman from Georgia.

The demonstrators marched undisturbed through downtown Selma, where the ghosts of the past constantly permeated the present. As they began to cross the steel-arched bridge spanning the Alabama River, the marchers who gazed up could see the name of a Confederate general and reputed grand dragon of the Alabama Ku Klux Klan, Edmund Pettus, staring right back at them in big block letters emblazoned across the bridge's crossbeam.

The Selma to Montgomery marches, which included Bloody Sunday, were actually three marches that marked the political and emotional peak of the American civil rights movement. Blacks began a march to

Many popular representations of the movement are centered on the charismatic leadership and philosophy of the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr., who won the 1964 Nobel Peace Prize for his role in non-violent, moral leadership. However, some scholars note that the movement was too diverse to be credited to any one person, organization, or strategy.

Movements, Politics, and White Reactions

Before the American Civil War, almost four million blacks were enslaved in the South, only white men of property could vote, and the Naturalization Act of 1790 limited U.S. citizenship to whites only. Some free states of the North extended the franchise and other rights of citizenship to African Americans. Following the Civil War, three constitutional amendments were passed, including the 13th Amendment (1865) that ended slavery; the 14th Amendment (1868) that gave African-Americans citizenship, adding their total population of four million to the official population of southern states for Congressional apportionment; and the 15th Amendment (1870) that gave African-American men the right to vote (only males could vote in the U.S. at the time).

From 1865 to 1877, the United States underwent a turbulent Reconstruction Era trying to establish free labor and civil rights of freedmen in the South after the end of slavery. Many whites resisted the social changes, leading to insurgent movements such as the Ku Klux Klan, whose members attacked black and white Republicans to maintain white supremacy. In 1871, President Ulysses S. Grant, the U.S. Army, and U.S. Attorney General Amos T. Akerman, initiated a campaign to repress the KKK under the Enforcement Acts. Some states were reluctant to enforce the federal measures of the act. In addition, by the early 1870s, other white supremacist and insurgent paramilitary groups arose that violently opposed African-American legal equality and suffrage, intimidating and suppressing black voters, and assassinating Republican officeholders. However, if the states failed to implement the acts, the laws allowed the Federal Government to get involved. Many Republican governors were afraid of sending black militia troops to fight the Klan for fear of war.

After the disputed election of 1876 resulted in the end of Reconstruction and federal troops were withdrawn, whites in the South regained political control of the region's state legislatures. They continued to intimidate and violently attack blacks before and during elections to suppress their voting, but the last African Americans were elected to Congress from the South before disenfranchisement of blacks by states throughout the region.

From 1890 to 1908, southern states passed new constitutions and laws to disenfranchise African Americans and many poor whites by creating barriers to voter registration; voting rolls were dramatically reduced as blacks and poor whites were forced out of electoral politics. After the landmark Supreme Court case of *Smith v. Allwright* (1944), which prohibited white primaries, progress was made in increasing black political participation in the Rim South and Acadiana – although almost entirely in urban areas and a few rural localities where most blacks worked outside plantations. The *status quo ante* of excluding African Americans from the political system lasted in the remainder of the South, especially North Louisiana, Mississippi and Alabama, until national civil rights legislation was passed in the mid-1960s to provide federal

enforcement of constitutional voting rights. For more than sixty years, blacks in the South were essentially excluded from politics, unable to elect anyone to represent their interests in Congress or local government. Since they could not vote, they could not serve on local juries.

During this period, the white-dominated Democratic Party maintained political control of the South. With whites controlling all the seats representing the total population of the South, they had a powerful voting bloc in Congress. The Republican Party—the "party of Lincoln" and the party to which most blacks had belonged—shrank to insignificance except in remote Unionist areas of Appalachia and the Ozarks as black voter registration was suppressed. Until 1965, the "Solid South" was a one-party system under the white Democrats. Excepting the previously noted historic Unionist strongholds the Democratic Party nomination was identical to election for state and local office.

In 1901, President Theodore Roosevelt invited Booker T. Washington, president of the Tuskegee Institute, to dine at the White House, making him the first African American to attend an official dinner there. "The invitation was roundly criticized by southern politicians and newspapers. Washington persuaded the president to appoint more blacks to federal posts in the South and to try to boost African-American leadership in state Republican organizations. However, these actions were resisted by both white Democrats and white Republicans as an unwanted federal intrusion into state politics.

The system of state-sanctioned racial discrimination and oppression that emerged from the post-Reconstruction South became known as the "Jim Crow" system. During the Jim Crow era, African Americans were being disenfranchised. From 1890 to 1908, Southern states of the former Confederacy created constitutions with provisions that disfranchised tens of thousands of African Americans, and states such as Alabama disfranchised poor whites as well. When white Democrats regained power, they passed laws that made voter registration more restrictive, essentially forcing black voters off the voting rolls. The number of African-American voters dropped dramatically, and they were no longer able to elect representatives.

The United States Supreme Court, made up almost entirely of Northerners, upheld the constitutionality of those state laws that required racial segregation in public facilities in its 1896 decision *Plessy v. Ferguson*,

legitimizing them through the "separate but equal" doctrine. During the Jim Crow era, white southerners imposed racial segregation by law. By law, public facilities and government services such as education were divided into separate "white" and "colored" domains.

Characteristically, those for colored were underfunded and of inferior quality. Segregation, which began with slavery, continued with Jim Crow laws, with signs used to show blacks where they could legally walk, talk, drink, rest, or eat. For those places that were



"Colored Waiting Room" signs were common throughout the South (Photo: Library of Congress)

In the end, after all of the musical performances, speeches, and politics, it was the people that truly made the March on Washington a success. They brought box lunches, having spent all they could spare to get to Washington; some dressed as if attending a church service while others wore overalls and boots; veterans of the Civil Rights Movement and individuals new to the issues locked arms, clapped and sang and walked. Many began without their leaders, who were making their way to them from meetings on Capitol Hill. They could no longer be patient and they could no longer be held back, and so they started to march - Black, White, Latino, American Indian, Jewish, Christian, men, women, famous, anonymous, but ultimately all Americans, all marching for their civil rights.

Civil Rights Act of 1964

The Civil Rights Act of 1964 was the nation's premier civil rights legislation. The Act outlawed discrimination on the basis of race, color, religion, sex, or national origin, required equal access to public places and employment, and enforced desegregation of schools and the right to vote. It did not end discrimination, but it did open the door to further progress.

Each year, from 1945 until 1957, Congress considered and failed to pass a civil rights bill. Congress finally passed limited Civil Rights Acts in 1957 and 1960, but they offered only moderate gains. As a result of the 1957 Act, the United States Commission on Civil Rights was formed to investigate, report on, and make recommendations to the President concerning civil rights issues. Sit-ins, boycotts, Freedom Rides, the founding of organizations such as the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC), local demands for inclusion in the political process, all were in response to the increase in legislative activity through the 1950s and early 1960s.

1963 was a crucial year for the Civil Rights Movement. Social pressures continued to build with events such as the Birmingham Campaign, televised clashes between peaceful protesters and authorities, the murders of civil rights workers Medgar Evers and William L. Moore, the March on Washington, and the deaths of four young girls in the bombing of Birmingham's 16th Street Baptist Church. There was no turning back. Civil rights were firmly on the national agenda and the federal government was forced to respond.

In response to the report of the United States Commission on Civil Rights, President John F. Kennedy proposed, in a nationally televised address, a Civil Rights Act of 1963. A week after his speech, Kennedy submitted a bill to Congress addressing civil rights (H.R. 7152). He urged African American leaders to use caution when demonstrating since new violence might alarm potential supporters. Kennedy met with businessmen, religious leaders, labor officials, and other groups such as CORE and NAACP, while also maneuvering behind the scenes to build bipartisan support and negotiate compromises over controversial topics.

Following Kennedy's assassination in November 1963, both Martin



Signing the Civil Rights Act of 1964 (Photo: White House Press Office)

(CORE), and John Lewis of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC). These "Big Six," as they were called, expanded to include Walter Reuther of the United Auto Workers (UAW), Joachim Prinz of the American Jewish Congress (AJC), Eugene Carson Blake of the Commission on Religion and Race of the National Council of Churches (CRRNC), and Matthew Ahmann of the National Catholic Conference for Interracial Justice. In addition, Dorothy Height of the National Council of Negro Women (NCNW) participated in the planning, but she operated in the background of this male dominated, leadership group.

The March was organized in less than 3 months. Randolph handed the day-to-day planning to his partner in the March on Washington Movement, Bayard Rustin, a pioneer of the 1947 Journey of Reconciliation and a brilliant strategist of nonviolent direct action protests. Rustin planned everything, from training "marshals" for crowd control using nonviolent techniques to the sound system and setup of porta-potties. There was also an Organizing Manual that laid out a statement of purpose, specific talking points, and logistics. Rustin saw that to maintain order over such a large crowd, there needed to be a highly organized support structure.

Rustin coordinated a staff of over 200 civil rights activists and organizers to assist in publicizing the march and recruiting marchers, organizing churches to raise money, coordinating buses and trains, and administering all of the other logistical details. In many ways, the March defied expectations. The number of people that attended exceeded the initial estimates made by the organizers.

Rustin had indicated that they expected over 100,000 people to attend - the final estimate was 250,000, 190,000 blacks and 60,000 whites.

With that many people converging on the city, there were concerns about violence. The Washington, D.C. police force mobilized 5,900 officers for the march and the government mustered 6,000 soldiers and National Guardsmen as additional protection. President Kennedy thought that if there were any problems, the negative perceptions could undo the civil rights bill making its way through Congress. In the end, the crowds were calm and there were no incidents reported by police.

While the March was a peaceful occasion, the words spoken that day at the Lincoln Memorial were not just uplifting and inspirational such as Martin Luther King Jr.'s "I Have a Dream" speech, they were also penetrating and pointed. There was a list of "Ten Demands" from the sponsors, insisting on a fair living wage, fair employment policies, and desegregation of school districts. John Lewis in his speech said that "we do not want our freedom gradually but we want to be free now" and that Congress needed to pass "meaningful legislation" or people would march through the South. Although the SNCC chairman had toned down his remarks at the request of white liberals and moderate black allies, he still managed to criticize both political parties for moving too slowly on civil rights. Others such as Whitney Young and Joachim Prinz spoke of the need for justice, for equal opportunity, for full access to the American Dream promised with the Declaration of Independence and reaffirmed with the passage of the 13th, 14th, and 15th Amendments. They spoke of jobs, and of a life free from the indifference of lawmakers to people's plights.



Martin Luther King Addressing the Crowd.
(Photo: Encyclopedia Britannica)

racially mixed, non-whites had to wait until all white customers were served first. Elected in 1912, President Woodrow Wilson gave in to demands by Southern members of his cabinet and ordered segregation of workplaces throughout the federal government.

Violence against blacks continued to increase during the Jim Crow Era, with numerous lynchings through the turn of the century. The early 20th century is a period often referred to as the "Lowest point of American race relations", when the number of lynchings was at its highest. While tensions and civil rights violations were most intense in the South, social discrimination affected African Americans in other regions of the United States as well. At the national level, the Southern bloc controlled important committees in Congress, defeated passage of federal laws against lynching, and exercised considerable power beyond the number of whites in the South. Individual, police, paramilitary, organizational, and mob racial violence against blacks (and Latinos in the Southwest and Asians in the West Coast) was common throughout the post-Reconstruction period.

Resistance

African Americans and other ethnic minorities rejected this regime. They resisted it in numerous ways and sought better opportunities through lawsuits, new organizations, political redress, and labor organizing. The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) was founded in 1909. It fought to end race discrimination through litigation, education, and lobbying efforts. Its crowning achievement was its legal victory in the Supreme Court decision *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954) when the Court rejected separate white and colored school systems and, by implication, overturned the "separate but equal" doctrine established in *Plessy v. Ferguson* of 1896. Segregation had continued intact into the mid-1950s. Following the unanimous Supreme Court decision in *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954) that ruled that segregation of public schools was unconstitutional, many states began to gradually integrate their schools, but some areas of the South resisted by closing public schools altogether.

The integration of Southern public libraries followed demonstrations and protests that used techniques seen in other elements of the larger civil rights movement. This included sit-ins, beatings, and white resistance. For example, in 1963 in the city of Anniston, Alabama, two black ministers were brutally beaten for attempting to integrate the public library. Though there was resistance and violence, the integration of libraries was generally quicker than the integration of other public institutions.

The situation for blacks outside the South was somewhat better (in most states they could vote and have their children educated, though they still faced discrimination in housing and jobs). From 1910 to 1970, African Americans sought better lives by migrating north and west out of the South. A total of nearly seven million blacks left the South in what was known as the Great Migration, most during and after World War II. So many people migrated that the demographics of some previously black-majority states changed to white majority (in combination with other developments). The rapid influx of blacks altered the demographics of Northern and Western cities; happening at a period of expanded European, Hispanic, and Asian immigration, it added to social competition and tensions, with the new migrants and immigrants battling for place in jobs and housing.

Reflecting social tensions after World War I, as veterans struggled to return to the workforce and labor unions were organizing, the Red Summer of 1919 was marked by hundreds of deaths and higher casualties across the United States as a result of white race riots against blacks that took place in more than three dozen cities, such as the Chicago race riot of 1919 and the Omaha race riot of 1919. Urban problems such as crime and disease were blamed on the large influx of Southern blacks to cities in the north and west, based on stereotypes of rural southern African Americans. Overall, African Americans in Northern and Western cities experienced systemic discrimination in an overabundance of aspects of life. Within employment, economic opportunities for blacks were routed to the lowest-status and restrictive in potential mobility. Within the housing market, stronger discriminatory measures were used in correlation to the influx, resulting in a mix of "targeted violence, restrictive covenants, redlining and racial steering".

The Great Migration resulted in many African Americans becoming urbanized, and they began to realign from the Republican to the Democratic Party, especially because of opportunities under the New Deal of the Franklin D. Roosevelt administration during the Great Depression in the 1930s. Substantially under pressure from African-American supporters who began the March on Washington Movement, President Franklin D. Roosevelt issued the first federal order banning discrimination and created the Fair Employment Practice Committee. Black veterans of the military after both World Wars pressed for full civil rights and often led activist movements. In 1948, they gained integration in the military under President Harry Truman, who issued Executive Order 9981 to accomplish it.

Housing segregation was a nationwide problem, widespread outside the South. Although the federal government had become increasingly involved in mortgage lending and development in the 1930s and 1940s, it did not reject the use of race-restrictive covenants until 1950, in part because of provisions by the Solid South Democrats in Congress. Suburbanization became connected with white flight by this time, because whites were better established economically to move to newer housing. The situation was perpetuated by real estate agents' continuing racial discrimination. In particular, from the 1930s to the 1960s, the National Association of Real Estate Boards (NAREB) issued



(Photo: History.com)

guidelines that specified that a realtor "should never be instrumental in introducing to a neighborhood a character or property or occupancy, members of any race or nationality, or any individual whose presence will be clearly detrimental to property values in a neighborhood." The result was the development of all-black ghettos in the North and West, where much of the housing was older, as well as in the South.

Invigorated by the victory of *Brown v The Board of Education* and frustrated by the lack of immediate

schoolchildren. His supporters did not, however, include all the black clergy of Birmingham, and he was strongly opposed by some of the white clergy who had issued a statement urging African Americans not to support the demonstrations. From the Birmingham jail, King wrote a letter of great eloquence in which he spelled out his philosophy of nonviolence: ***You may well ask: "Why direct action? Why sit-ins, marches and so forth? Isn't negotiation a better path?" You are quite right in calling for negotiation. Indeed, this is the very purpose of direct action. Nonviolent direct action seeks to create such a crisis and foster such a tension that a community which has constantly refused to negotiate is forced to confront the issue.***



Attacks on Demonstrators
(Photo: Encyclopedia Britannica)

Near the end of the Birmingham campaign, in an effort to draw together the multiple forces for peaceful change and to dramatize to the country and to the world the importance of solving the U.S. racial problem, King joined other civil rights leaders in organizing the historic March on Washington.

March on Washington

It was the largest gathering for civil rights of its time. An estimated 250,000 people attended the March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom on August 28, 1963, arriving in Washington, D.C. by planes, trains, cars, and buses from all over the country.

The event focused on employment discrimination, civil rights abuses against African Americans, Latinos, and other disenfranchised groups, and support for the Civil Rights Act that the Kennedy Administration was attempting to pass through Congress. This momentous display of civic activism took place on the National Mall, "America's Front Yard" and was the culmination of an idea born more than 20 years before.

While the March was a collaborative effort, sponsored by leaders of various student, civil rights, and labor organizations, the original idea came from A. Philip Randolph, a labor organizer and founder of the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters and the Negro American Labor Council (NALC). His vision for a march on the Nation's Capital dated to the 1940s when he twice proposed large-scale marches to protest segregation and discrimination in the U.S. military and the U.S. defense industry and to pressure the White House to take action. The pressure worked. President Roosevelt signed Executive Order 8802 (Prohibition of Discrimination in the Defense Industry, 1941) and President Truman signed Executive Order 9981 (Desegregation of the Armed Forces, 1948), and Randolph cancelled the marches.

By the 1960s, a public expression of dissatisfaction with the status quo was considered necessary and a march was planned for 1963, with Randolph as the nominal head. Joining Randolph in sponsoring the March were the leaders of the five major civil rights groups: Roy Wilkins of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), Whitney Young of the National Urban League (NUL), Martin Luther King, Jr. of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC), James Farmer of Congress On Racial Equality

Williams had rebuilt the chapter after its membership was terrorized out of public life by the Klan. He did so by encouraging a new, more working-class membership to arm itself thoroughly and defend against attack. When Klan nightriders attacked the home of NAACP member Dr. Albert Perry in October 1957, Williams' militia exchanged gunfire with the stunned Klansmen, who quickly retreated. The following day, the city council held an emergency session and passed an ordinance banning KKK motorcades. One year later, Lumbee Indians in North Carolina would have a similarly successful armed stand-off with the Klan (known as the Battle of Hayes Pond) which resulted in KKK leader James W. "Catfish" Cole being convicted of incitement to riot.

After the acquittal of several white men charged with sexually assaulting black women in Monroe, Williams announced to United Press International reporters that he would "meet violence with violence" as a policy. Williams' declaration was quoted on the front page of *The New York Times*, and *The Carolina Times* considered it "the biggest civil rights story of 1959." NAACP National chairman Roy Wilkins immediately suspended Williams from his position, but the Monroe organizer won support from numerous NAACP chapters across the country. Ultimately, Wilkins resorted to bribing influential organizer Daisy Bates to campaign against Williams at the NAACP national convention and the suspension was upheld. The convention nonetheless passed a resolution which stated: "We do not deny, but reaffirm the right of individual and collective self-defense against unlawful assaults. Martin Luther King Jr. argued for Williams' removal, but Ella Baker and WEB Dubois both publicly praised the Monroe leader's position.

Williams—along with his wife, Mabel Williams—continued to play a leadership role in the Monroe movement, and to some degree, in the national movement. The Williamses published *The Crusader*, a nationally circulated newsletter, beginning in 1960, and the influential book *Negroes With Guns* in 1962. Williams did not call for full militarization in this period, but "flexibility in the freedom struggle. Williams was well-versed in legal tactics and publicity, which he had used successfully in the internationally known "Kissing Case" of 1958, as well as nonviolent methods, which he used at lunch counter sit-ins in Monroe—all with armed self-defense as a complementary tactic.

Williams led the Monroe movement in another armed stand-off with white supremacists during an August 1961 Freedom Ride; he had been invited to participate in the campaign by Ella Baker and James Forman of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC). The incident (along with his campaigns for peace with Cuba) resulted in him being targeted by the FBI and prosecuted for kidnapping; he was cleared of all charges in 1976. Meanwhile, armed self-defense continued discreetly in the Southern movement with such figures as SNCC's Amzie Moore, Hartman Turnbow, and Fannie Lou Hamer all willing to use arms to defend their lives from nightrides. Taking refuge from the FBI in Cuba, the Williamses broadcast the radio show "Radio Free Dixie" throughout the eastern United States via Radio Progresso beginning in 1962.

Birmingham Campaign

In Birmingham, Alabama, in the spring of 1963, Martin Luther King's campaign to end segregation at lunch counters and in hiring practices drew nationwide attention when police turned dogs and fire hoses on the demonstrators. King was jailed along with large numbers of his supporters, including hundreds of

practical effect, private citizens increasingly rejected gradualist, legalistic approaches as the primary tool to bring about desegregation. They were faced with "massive resistance" in the South by proponents of racial segregation and voter suppression. In defiance, African-American activists adopted a combined strategy of direct action, nonviolence, nonviolent resistance, and many events described as civil disobedience, giving rise to the civil rights movement of 1954 to 1968.

The Murder of Emmett Till

Emmett Louis Till, a 14-year old African American teenager whose murder on August 28, 1955 in Money, Mississippi became a critical event for the emerging civil rights movement. Emmett Till was born to working-class parents on the South Side of Chicago and in 1955 he took a trip to rural Mississippi to spend the summer with relatives. He had been warned by his mother (who knew him to be a jokester accustomed to being the center of attention) that whites in the South could react violently to behavior that was tolerated in the North.

This animosity was worsened by the U.S. Supreme Court's 1954 decision (in *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka*), which had set into motion the overturning the "separate but equal" doctrine established in *Plessy v. Ferguson* (1896) that allowed racial segregation in public facilities.

Emmett Till arrived in Money, Mississippi, on August 21, 1955. He stayed with his great-uncle, Moses Wright, who was a sharecropper, and he spent his days helping with the cotton harvest. On August 24, Till and a group of other teens went to a local grocery store after a day of working in the fields. Accounts of what transpired thereafter vary. Some witnesses stated that one of the other boys dared Till to talk to the store's cashier, Carolyn Bryant, a white woman. It was reported that Till then whistled at, touched the hand or waist of, or flirted with the woman as he was leaving the store. Whatever the truth, Till did not mention the incident to his great-uncle.

In the early morning hours of August 28, Roy Bryant, the cashier's husband, and J.W. Milam, Bryant's half-brother, forced their way into Wright's home and abducted Till at gunpoint. Bryant and Milam severely beat the boy, gouging out one of his eyes. They then took him to the banks of the Tallahatchie River, where they killed him with a single gunshot to the head. The two men tied the teen's body to a large metal fan with a length of barbed wire before dumping the corpse into the river.

Wright reported the kidnapping to the police, and Bryant and Milam were arrested the following day. On August 31, 1955, Till's corpse was discovered in the river. His face was unrecognizable as a result of the assault, and positive identification was possible only because Till was wearing a monogrammed ring that had belonged to his father. On September 2, less than two weeks after Till had embarked on his journey south, the train bearing his remains arrived in Chicago. Till's mother kept her son's casket open, choosing to reveal to the tens of thousands who attended the funeral the brutality that had been visited on her son. The appalling images of Till's body in the casket appeared in the pages of *Jet* magazine and the *Chicago Defender*, and his murder became a rallying point for the civil rights movement.

The trial of Till's killers began on September 19, 1955, and from the witness stand Wright identified the men

who had kidnapped Till. After four days of testimony and a little more than an hour of deliberation, an all-white, all-male jury (at the time, blacks and women were not allowed to serve as jurors in Mississippi) acquitted Bryant and Milam of all charges. Protected from further prosecution by double jeopardy statutes, the pair was paid for the story and interviewed by their lawyer and a journalist in a 1956 article for *Look* magazine in which they related the circumstances of Till's kidnapping and murder.

In 2004 the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) reopened the case. Although Bryant and Milam were now long dead, the FBI agents sought to obtain a conclusive account of what actually happened to Emmitt Till in the final hours of his life. The three-year investigation, during which Till's body was exhumed for a complete autopsy, did not lead to the filing of criminal charges, but it did uncover a deathbed confession by Milam's brother Leslie, who admitted his own involvement in the kidnapping and murder. After the exhumation, Till's body was reburied in a new casket, and the original one was placed in storage at Burr Oak Cemetery in Alsip, Illinois, pending the creation of a planned memorial on the site. In 2009 a scandal involving the reselling of grave plots led police to investigate the cemetery, and they discovered Till's original casket rusting and abandoned in a work shed on the outskirts of the property. Later that year the casket was donated to the Smithsonian's National Museum of African American History and Culture.

Michael Ray

The Beginning of Direct Action

The strategy of public education, legislative lobbying, and litigation that had typified the civil rights movement during the first half of the 20th century broadened after *Brown v Board of Education* to a strategy that emphasized "direct action" such as: boycotts, Freedom Rides, marches or walks, and similar tactics that relied on mass mobilization, nonviolent resistance, standing in line, and, at times, civil disobedience.

Churches, local grassroots organizations, fraternal societies, and black-owned businesses mobilized volunteers to participate in broad-based actions. This was a more direct and potentially more rapid means of creating change than the traditional approach of mounting court challenges used by the NAACP and others.

In 1952, the Regional Council of Negro Leadership (RCNL), led by T. R. M. Howard, a black surgeon, entrepreneur, and planter, organized a successful boycott of gas stations in Mississippi that refused to provide restrooms for blacks. Through the RCNL, Howard led campaigns to expose brutality by the Mississippi state highway patrol and to encourage blacks to make deposits in the black-owned Tri-State

Bank of Nashville which, in turn, gave loans to civil rights activists who were victims of a "credit squeeze" by the White Citizens' Councils.

After Claudette Colvin was arrested for not giving up her seat on a Montgomery, Alabama bus in March 1955, a bus boycott was considered and rejected. But when Rosa Parks was arrested in December, Jo Ann Gibson-Robinson of the Montgomery Women's Political Council put the bus boycott protest in motion. Late

the National Guard troops. Authority over the explosive situation was put in the hands of the Little Rock Police Department.

On September 23, as a mob of 1,000 whites milled around outside Central High School, the nine black students managed to gain access to a side door. However, the mob became unruly when it learned the black students were inside, and the police evacuated them out of fear for their safety. That evening, President Eisenhower issued a special proclamation calling for opponents of the federal court order to "cease and desist." On September 24, Little Rock's mayor sent a telegram to the president asking him to send troops to maintain order and complete the integration process.

Eisenhower immediately federalized the Arkansas National Guard ordered them to return to their barracks and approved the deployment of U.S. troops to Little Rock. That evening, from the White House, the president delivered a nationally televised address in which he explained that he had taken the action to defend the rule of law and prevent "mob rule" and "anarchy." On September 25, the Little Rock Nine entered the school under heavily armed guards.

Troops remained at Central High School throughout the school year, but still the black students were subjected to verbal and physical assaults from a faction of white students. Melba Patillo, one of the nine, had acid thrown in her eyes, and Elizabeth Eckford was pushed down a flight of stairs. The three male students in the group were subjected to more conventional beatings. Minnie Jean Brown was suspended after dumping a bowl of chili over the head of a taunting white student. She was later suspended for the rest of the year after continuing to fight back. The other eight students consistently turned the other cheek. On May 27, 1958, Ernest Green, the only senior in the group, became the first black to graduate from Central High School.

Governor Faubus continued to fight the school board's integration plan, and in September 1958 he ordered Little Rock's three high schools closed rather than permit integration. Many Little Rock students lost a year of education as the legal fight over desegregation continued. In 1959, a federal court struck down Faubus' school-closing law, and in August 1959 Little Rock's white high schools opened a month early with black students in attendance. All grades in Little Rock public schools were finally integrated in 1972.

Robert F. Williams and the Debate on Nonviolence

The Jim Crow system employed "terror as a means of social control, with the most organized manifestations being the Ku Klux Klan and their collaborators in local police departments. This violence played a key role in blocking the progress of the civil rights movement in the late 1950s. Some black organizations in the South began practicing armed self-defense. The first to do so openly was the Monroe, North Carolina, chapter of the NAACP led by Robert F. Williams.



Little Rock Nine Escorted by Federal Troops
(Photo: History.com)

Arkansas was at the time among the more progressive Southern states in regard to racial issues. The University of Arkansas School of Law was integrated in 1949, and the Little Rock Public Library in 1951. Even before the Supreme Court ordered integration to proceed “with all deliberate speed,” the Little Rock School Board in 1955 unanimously adopted a plan of integration to begin in 1957 at the high school level. The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) filed suit, arguing the plan was too gradual, but a federal judge dismissed the suit, saying that the school board was acting in “utmost good faith.” Meanwhile, Little Rock’s public buses were desegregated. By 1957, seven out of Arkansas’ eight state universities were integrated.

In the spring of 1957, there were 517 black students who lived in the Central High School district. Eighty expressed an interest in attending Central in the fall, and they were interviewed by the Little Rock School Board, which narrowed down the number of candidates to 17. Eight of those students later decided to remain at all-black Horace Mann High School, leaving the “Little Rock Nine” to forge their way into Little Rock’s premier high school.

In August 1957, the newly formed Mother’s League of Central High School won a temporary injunction from the county chancellor to block integration of the school, charging that it “could lead to violence.” Federal District Judge Ronald Davies nullified the injunction on August 30. On September 2, Governor Orval Faubus—a staunch segregationist—called out the Arkansas National Guard to surround Central High School and prevent integration, ostensibly to prevent the bloodshed he claimed desegregation would cause. The next day, Judge Davies ordered integrated classes to begin on September 4.



White parents protesting Little Rock integrating
(Photo: History.com)

That morning, 100 armed National Guard troops encircled Central High School. A mob of 400 white civilians gathered and turned ugly when the black students began to arrive, shouting racial epithets and threatening the teenagers with violence. The National Guard troops refused to let the black students pass and used their clubs to control the crowd. One of the nine, 15-year-old Elizabeth Eckford, was surrounded by the mob, which threatened to lynch her. She was finally led to safety by a sympathetic white woman.

Little Rock Mayor Woodrow Mann condemned Faubus’ decision to call out the National Guard, but the governor defended his action, reiterating that he did so to prevent violence. The governor also stated that integration would occur in Little Rock when and if a majority of people chose to support it. Faubus’ defiance of Judge Davies’ court order was the first major test of *Brown v. Board of Education* and the biggest challenge of the federal government’s authority over the states since the Reconstruction Era.

The standoff continued, and on September 20 Judge Davies ruled that Faubus had used the troops to prevent integration, not to preserve law and order as he claimed. Faubus had no choice but to withdraw

that night, she, John Cannon (chairman of the Business Department at Alabama State University) and others mimeographed and distributed thousands of leaflets calling for a boycott.

The event that triggered the Montgomery bus boycott took place on December 1, 1955, after seamstress Rosa Parks refused to give her seat to a white passenger on a city bus. Local laws dictated that African American passengers sat at the back of the bus while whites sat in front. If the white section became full, African Americans had to give up their seats in the back. When Parks refused to move to give her seat to a white rider, she was taken to jail; she was later bailed out by a local civil rights leader.



Rosa Parks being fingerprinted by Deputy Sheriff D.H. Lackey.
(Photo: Encyclopedia Britannica)

Many of Montgomery’s African American residents were politically organized long before Parks was arrested. For example, the Women’s Political Council (WPC) was founded in 1946, and it had been lobbying the city for improved conditions on the buses for a decade before the bus boycott began. In addition, Montgomery had an active branch of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), where Parks also worked as a secretary.

Although Parks was not the first resident of Montgomery to refuse to give up her seat to a white passenger, local civil rights leaders decided to capitalize on her arrest as a chance to challenge local segregation laws. Shortly after Parks’ arrest, Jo Ann Robinson, a leader of the WPC, and E.D. Nixon, president of the local NAACP, printed and distributed leaflets describing Parks’ arrest and called for a one-day boycott of the city buses on December 5. They believed that the boycott could be effective because the Montgomery bus system was heavily dependent on African American riders, who made up about 75 percent of the ridership. Some 90 percent of the African American residents stayed off the buses that day. Rosa Parks told Mamie Till that “the photograph of Emmett’s disfigured face in the casket was set in her mind when she refused to give up her seat on that Montgomery bus.

The boycott was so successful that local civil rights leaders decided to extend it indefinitely. A group of local ministers formed the Montgomery Improvement Association (MIA) to support and sustain the boycott and the legal challenge to the segregation laws. Martin Luther King, the charismatic young pastor of the Dexter Avenue Baptist Church, was elected president of the MIA. A powerful orator, he was new to the area and had few enemies, and, thus, local leaders believed he could rally the various factions of the African American community to the cause.

The MIA initially asked for first-come, first-served seating, with African Americans starting in the rear and

white passengers beginning in the front of the bus. They also asked that African American bus drivers be hired for routes primarily made up of African American riders. The bus companies and Montgomery officials refused to meet those demands. Many white citizens retaliated against the African American community: King's home was bombed, and many boycotters were threatened or fired from their jobs. Several times the police arrested protesters and took them to jail, once charging 80 leaders of the boycott with violating a 1921 law that barred conspiracies to interfere with lawful business without just cause.



Martin Luther King Jr. and other civil rights leaders on a bus afterwards.
(Photo: Bettmann/Corbis)

Despite such intimidation, the boycott continued for more than a year. The MIA filed a federal suit against bus segregation, and on June 5, 1956, a federal district court declared segregated seating on buses to be unconstitutional. The Supreme Court upheld that ruling in mid-November. The federal decision went into effect on December 20, 1956.

The boycott garnered a great deal of publicity in the national press, and Martin Luther King became well known throughout the country. The success in Montgomery inspired other African American communities in the South to protest racial discrimination and galvanized the direct nonviolent resistance phase of the civil rights movement. It also inspired other bus boycotts, such as the successful Tallahassee, Florida boycott of 1956–57.

The Southern Christian Leadership Conference

Recognizing the need for a mass movement to capitalize on the successful Montgomery action, Martin Luther King Jr. set about organizing the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC), which gave him a base of operation throughout the South, as well as a national platform from which to speak. King lectured in all parts of the country and discussed race-related issues with religious and civil rights leaders at home and abroad. In February 1959 he and his party were warmly received by followers of Gandhi about the Gandhian concepts of peaceful noncompliance (satyagraha), King became increasingly convinced that nonviolent resistance was the most potent weapon available to oppressed people in their struggle for freedom. King also looked to Africa for inspiration. "The liberation struggle in Africa has been the greatest single international influence on American Negro students," he wrote. "Frequently I hear them say that if their African brothers can break the bonds of colonialism, surely the American Negro can break Jim Crow."

In 1960 King and his family moved to his native city of Atlanta, where he became co-pastor with his father of

the Ebenezer Baptist Church. At this post he devoted most of his time to the SCLC and the civil rights movement, declaring that the "psychological moment has come when a concentrated drive against injustice can bring great, tangible gains." His thesis was soon tested as he agreed to support the sit-in demonstrations undertaken by local black college students. In late October he was arrested with 33 young people protesting segregation at the lunch counter in an Atlanta department store.

Charges were dropped, but King was sentenced to Reidsville State Prison Farm on the pretext that he had violated his probation on a minor traffic offense committed several months earlier. The case assumed national proportions, with widespread concern over his safety, outrage at Georgia's infringement of legal forms, and the failure of President Dwight D. Eisenhower to intervene. King was released only upon the intercession of Democratic presidential candidate John F. Kennedy—an action so widely publicized that it was felt to have contributed substantially to Kennedy's slender election victory eight days later.

In the years from 1960 to 1965, King's influence reached its zenith. Handsome, eloquent, and doggedly determined, King quickly caught the attention of the news media, particularly of the producers of that budding medium of social change—television. He understood the power of television to nationalize and internationalize the struggle for civil rights, and his well-publicized tactics of active nonviolence (sit-ins, protest marches) aroused the devoted allegiance of many African Americans and liberal whites in all parts of the country, as well as support from the administrations of Presidents Kennedy and Lyndon B. Johnson. But there were also notable failures, as in Albany, Georgia (1961–62), when King and his colleagues failed to achieve their desegregation goals for public parks and other facilities.

Editors of Encyclopedia Britannica

Desegregating Little Rock Central High School

A crisis erupted in Little Rock, Arkansas, when the Governor of Arkansas, Orval Faubus, called out the National Guard on September 4, 1957 to prevent entry to the nine African-American students who had sued for the right to attend an integrated school, Little Rock Central High School. Under the guidance of Daisy Bates, the nine students had been chosen to attend Central High because of their excellent grades.

Under escort from the U.S. Army's 101st Airborne Division, nine black students enter all-white Central High School in Little Rock, Arkansas. Three weeks earlier, Arkansas Governor Orval Faubus had surrounded the school with National Guard troops to prevent its federal court-ordered racial integration. After a tense standoff, President Dwight D. Eisenhower federalized the Arkansas National Guard ordered them back to their barracks and sent 1,000 army paratroopers from the 101st Division to Little Rock to enforce the court order.

On May 17, 1954, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled unanimously in *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka* that racial segregation in educational facilities was unconstitutional. Five days later, the Little Rock School Board issued a statement saying it would comply with the decision when the Supreme Court outlined the method and time frame in which desegregation should be implemented.