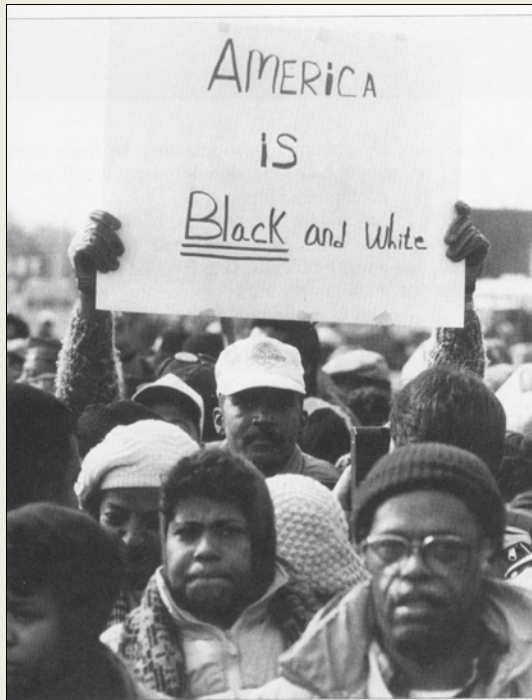




THE CIVIL RIGHTS MOVEMENT



The Civil Rights Movement

The ending of the Civil War started a brief time of freedom. New amendments to the Constitution gave hope to black people.

Thirteenth Amendment – Outlaw of Slavery

Fourteenth Amendment – Protects the rights of the newly freed slaves

Fifteenth Amendment – Black citizens now had the right to vote

In many Southern states blacks were elected to high offices and black legislatures helped write new state constitutions, In the House of Representatives, between 1870 and 1876, fourteen blacks were elected.

Most Southern whites wanted to keep blacks poor, uneducated and powerless. The federal government did little to protect the newly freed peoples and the reforms of Reconstruction slowly faded away.

The **Ku Klux Klan** was formed by a group of Army veterans to re-establish white supremacy through the use of violence. Between 1882 and 1901 nearly 2,000 blacks were lynched. One lynching of note was that of **Sam Hose** in April, 1899. He was accused of murder in Georgia. He was publicly mutilated then burned alive before a cheering crowd of 2,000 people. Other occasions saw trains carrying whites across the South so they could attend a public lynching.

By 1910 the **Jim Crow Laws** (named after a black minstrel in a popular song) ruled the South. Blacks were ordered to use separate bathrooms, water fountains, restaurants, waiting rooms and other public facilities. The United States Supreme Court gave its approval of Jim Crow segregation when it passed **Plessy v. Ferguson** in 1896. The court said separate facilities were legal as long as they were equal. Southern states never provided equal facilities, only separate ones.

“So far as the colored people of the country are concerned, the Constitution is but a stupendous sham....fair without and foul within, keeping the promise to the eye and breaking it to the heart.”

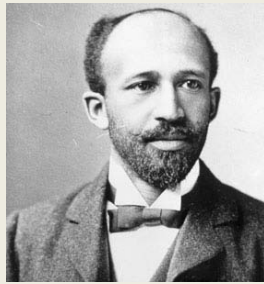
Frederick Douglass.



The newly freed blacks revolted peacefully against white rule. **Ida B. Wells** began a crusade against lynching. In 1893, at the age of 19 she inspired a national gathering of black leaders to call for an anti-lynch law. **George Henry White**, a former slave and the only black congressman left at the turn of the century, led the campaign.

W.E. Du Bois, who was educated at Harvard, wrote a critique of racism in *The Souls of Black Folk*. He said that American society had to be transformed if blacks were to achieve full equality. Along with other leaders, it was Du Bois who founded the **NAACP** in 1910. (**National Association for the Advancement of Colored People**)

The campaign published a magazine called *Crisis*, and by 1940 the NAACP membership reached 50,000.



W.E.B. Du Bois

By the time the NAACP was ten years old the Ku Klux Klan had over two million members. By the 1920's Klansmen held high government positions throughout the country. In the South violence re-emerged and the North saw a rapid increase in migration from those who fled the Klan's violence. The Northern blacks still faced poverty, unequal education and discrimination but it was less harsh than in the South.

President Franklin Delano Roosevelt and his *New Deal* made welfare and jobs available to both blacks and whites. His presidency saw a more liberal Supreme Court who ruled against bus segregation and all-white political primaries. Racial discrimination was banned in all defense industries.

After World War II, when black soldiers returned home from the war blacks were more determined to fight for their rights. The peaceful demonstrations of **Mahatma Gandhi** in India led to the formation of **CORE (the Congress of Racial Equality)** and a new era of *Civil Disobedience* was born.

In 1946, after the Supreme Court outlawed segregation on interstate buses CORE members began a *"Journey of Reconciliation"* (nicknamed *"Freedom-Rides"*) to test whether these laws were being obeyed. Blacks and Whites rode together on buses through the south and still the blacks endured harassment only this time they did not retaliate.

Even though CORE organized sit-ins and freedom-rides they did not achieve the proper national recognition for their cause. **President Harry S. Truman** was pressured by legislatures and in courtrooms to **integrate the armed forces** and establish a **civil rights commission**. By 1947 the NAACP had over a half a million members who brought lawsuits into courts to improve black schools and in 1950 they began building a case that would mark the beginning of the modern civil rights movement.

- Harry Briggs (Clarendon, South Carolina) was outraged that his five children had to attend schools whose budget was one-fourth of the white school
- Ethel Belton (Claymont, Delaware) complained to the Board of Education that her children had a two-hour bus ride instead of walking to their neighborhood school
- Linda Brown's parents (Topeka, Kansas) protested that the "chosen" school was so far away and runs down and that their daughter should be enrolled in a white school in their own neighborhood....

A team of NAACP lawyers used these cases to argue segregation. They lost in the lower courts but then they appealed and their case ended up in the Supreme Court, the chief justices ruled that they were right.

On **May 17, 1954** the Supreme Court unanimously ruled that segregated schools "**are inherently unequal.**" The ***Brown v. Board of Education*** ruling enraged many Southern whites and they denounced the Supreme Court and stated that they would not abide by the decision.



Linda Brown

- **White Citizens Councils** were organized to oppose school integration
- Mississippi legislation passed a law abolishing mandatory school attendance
- A declaration called the **Southern Manifesto** was issued by 96 Southern congressmen demanding that the Court reverse the Brown decision.

Four days after the ruling, on May 21st **Jo Ann Robinson**, president of the **Women's Political Council**, wrote a letter to the mayor of Montgomery, Alabama. She stated that she represented 75% of the cities bus riders and that she was tired of the law that her people were forced to enter the buses in the front, pay the driver, then re-enter the bus from the rear where they could only sit in designated "colored" seats. If all of the "white" seats were full, blacks had to give up their seats.

Black women and children had been arrested for refusing to give up their seats. Other who protested to the driver were slapped or beaten. Hilliard Brooks, 22, was shot dead by police in 1952 after arguing with a bus driver. The mayor said segregation was the law and he could not change it!

On December 1, 1955 **Rosa Parks** was riding the bus home from her seamstress job. The bus was full when a white man boarded. Mrs. Parks and three other blacks were told to move from their seats so the white man could sit down. The three blacks moved but Mrs. Parks resisted and for this she was arrested.



Rosa Parks on a Montgomery, Alabama bus

Jo Ann Robinson and her Women's Political Council met with the local NAACP leader, **Mr. E.D. Nixon** and began a bus boycott. They formed the **Montgomery Improvement Association** and selected as their leader a newcomer to the town, a minister by the name of **Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.**

On December 5th a crowd of 15,000 gathered at the Holt Street Baptist church to listen to Dr. King.

"There comes a time that people get tired....We are here this evening to say to those who have mistreated us so long that we are tired – tired of being segregated and humiliated; tired of being kicked about by the brutal feet of oppression...We have no alternative to protest...And we are not wrong in what we are doing. If we are wrong, the Supreme Court of this nation is wrong. If we are wrong, God Almighty is wrong!"

For 381 days the black people of Montgomery, Alabama did not ride the buses.

Montgomery City officials tried to outlaw the boycott, but the buses traveled empty. On December 21, 1956 the black people went back to riding the buses. The Supreme Court had outlawed bus segregation in Montgomery. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. then established an organization of black clergy, the **Southern Christian Leadership Conference** and became the spiritual force behind the non-violence movement. Using what was learnt in Montgomery, similar moves to boycott bus systems took place in Tallahassee and Atlanta. Changing the education system and the use of public facilities was hard. The movement soon found out just how far whites would go to maintain their supremacy.

- A black student was admitted to the University of Alabama – the order was expelled
- The State of Virginia closed all public schools to avoid integration
- Some communities filled-in their swimming pools, closed tennis courts, removed library seats rather than share.

President Eisenhower wanted to avoid the segregation issue but in 1957 a crisis in Little Rock, Arkansas forced Eisenhower to act.

On September 4, 1957 **Governor Orval Faubus** ordered Arkansas National Guard troops to surround Central High School in Little Rock. He was going to keep nine black teenagers from entering the building as he believed that blacks had no right to attend integrated schools. That afternoon a federal judge mandated that the teens attend the school.

The next day, **Elizabeth Eckford** went to the school. She met a mob, was cursed at, spit at and verbally abused. The National Guard troops turned her away. An outraged judge ordered the governor to allow the teens to enter. Faubus removed his troops, offering the black teens no protection. They made it to first period but classes were cancelled due to a violent mob outside the building.



Linda Eckford walking to the first day of school

President Eisenhower had two choices:-

1. Allow the governor to defy the constitution
- OR**
2. Send in federal troops to protect the children

For the rest of the school year federal troops escorted the nine black teens

(The **Little Rock Nine**) to school. The next year, Governor Faubus shut down all of the public schools rather than integrate. The Supreme Court ruled these as “*evasive schemes*” and the schools were finally opened to both black and white students.

The Little Rock Nine did not end school integration but it did show that the federal government was not going to allow state laws to rule.

One Monday afternoon in 1960 four black college students walked into a Woolworth’s store in Greensboro, North Carolina. After buying some small items they sat at the lunch counter and asked to be served. They were told by the waitress that “*We don’t serve colored here.*” They stayed in their seats until the store closed. The following day 19 other students joined them and by the end of the week 400 students, including several white teenagers, joined them. **Sit-Ins** now took place in seven North Carolina cities.



The response was amazing. Sit-Ins took place in over 100 Southern cities, protesting segregation in restaurants, parks, swimming pools, libraries and theaters. By 1961 over 70,000 people had joined these protests, 3,600 having been arrested for their non-violent protests. Many were beaten, kicked, burned with cigarettes and had food thrown at them. These actions did bring black youth into the front lines of the civil rights movement. Seeking their own freedom from their elders, students in the Deep south formed the **Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC)** They were strongly influenced by **James Lawson**, a theology student from Nashville who was a devout believe in civil disobedience. He stated that it was honorable to go to jail for the cause of equality.

Violence in the South did not stop. In May, 1961, a bus containing “Freedom Riders” pulled in to **Anniston, Alabama**. Waiting was a white mob who smashed the windows and firebombed the bus. The riders rushed from the fire and were subsequently beaten with bats, pipes and clubs. When a second bus pulled into Anniston eight white men boarded the bus and began to beat the occupants. A second mob met the “Freedom Riders” and again began to beat them. There was not a policeman in sight! Those who were not hospitalized rode another bus back to Montgomery and again they were met and beaten by a mob of white students. Again there was no police protection.



In response, **Attorney General Robert Kennedy** made two moves. First he told Mississippi officials that they could keep their segregation laws if the “Freedom Riders” were left alone. From then on, they traveled unharmed. Secondly he asked the Interstate Commerce Commission to issue regulations against segregated terminals. In September, 1961 they agreed and complied.

Birmingham, Alabama was the South’s most segregated city. Since the end of World War II terrorists had bombed over 60 black homes and churches. The best jobs in business and local government were always given to whites. The city police were notorious for their brutality and racism. In 1963 Martin Luther King Jr. began anti-segregation protests in the city. He was met head-on by **Police Commissioner Eugene “Bull” Connor**. His police force was ordered to respond by using force against anyone who protested. Demonstrators were struck with billy-clubs, attacked by German Shepherd dogs and knocked down by torrents of water from fire hoses.

King and many other demonstrators were arrested. While in jail he wrote his **“Letter from a Birmingham Jail.”** Part of it read

“I guess it is easy for those who have never felt the stinging darts of segregation to say, ‘Wait.’ But freedom is never voluntary given by the oppressor; it must be demanded by the oppressed.”

Many in the Birmingham movement were children and for weeks they begged to be allowed to march. Martin Luther King Jr. had told them no but finally, on May 3, 1963 thousands of children, as young as six years old walked bravely through the police barricades, dogs and fire hoses and were arrested. It became known as **“The Children’s March.”** The jails were full of young children and the Kennedy administration was horrified. Federal mediators were sent to Birmingham. An agreement between King’s party and local businessmen was finalized with an agreement to integrate downtown facilities and to hire more blacks.



Hosing down the protestors



“Bull” Connor’s dogs at work

June 11, 1963 saw President Kennedy deliver his strongest civil rights message of his term. He stated ***“We face....a moral crisis...A great change is at hand, and out task, our obligation, is to make that revolution....peaceful and constructive for all.”*** Days later Kennedy sent a detailed civil rights bill to congress.

In August of 1963 a crowd of 250,000, both blacks and whites, took part in **The March on Washington** to show support for the President’s bill. Martin Luther King Jr. addressed the crowd and said that these past successes were ***“not an end, but a beginning.”***

King’s speech became known as the **“I Have A Dream”** speech.

“When we allow freedom to ring, when we let it ring from every village and every hamlet, from every state and city, we will be able to speed up that day when all of God’s children – black men and white men, Jews and Gentiles, Catholics and Protestants – will be able to join hands and sing in the words of the old Negro spiritual, ‘Free at last, free at last; thank God Almighty, we are free at last!’”

Two weeks later a dynamite explosion killed four Sunday School students at Birmingham’s Sixteenth Street Baptist Church. Two months later Kennedy was assassinated. The following summer Congress passed the **1964 Civil Rights Act**.

Martin Luther King Jr. was himself assassinated. The civil rights movement had won many a battle but trouble still continued. The 1964 Civil Rights Act did outlaw segregation in public accommodations but it did not address the problem of voting rights. That struggle was still to come.



Martin Luther King Jr.

The Right to Vote

- Less than a week after the children marched in Birmingham, two firebombs were thrown into the house of Hartman Turnbow in Holmes County, Mississippi. Before he could lead his family to safety he was attacked by a white mob waiting outside. His punishment – he was the first black person since the turn of the century to fill out a voter registration form.
- Izell Henry voted in the Democratic Primary in Greensburg, Louisiana. The next morning he was beaten by white men and left for dead. He lived but suffered terminal brain damage.

Attacks on black voters were common in the South but they were not the only weapon used to deny them their right. State Legislatures used more sophisticated methods. Until the mid-1960's, most Southern states still had laws for voters to pay **poll taxes**, pass **literacy tests**, or **read and interpret any section of the state constitution**. Voter registrars gave the tests unfairly. Blacks were denied voting rights if they pronounced a word but whites, who could not read at all were approved!

Other tactics used to deny blacks the right to vote

- Voting lists were purged, removing names of registered black people
- Blacks who registered to vote were fired or dismissed without reason from their jobs
- Many were denied loans by local banks
- Rents were doubled or tripled for black registered voters
- Government food supplies were denied to registered black voters in Mississippi
- Local newspapers printed the names of all registered black voters
- Police arrested voter registration workers

In 1964 several civil rights organizations combined forces to create **COFO – the Council of Federated Organizations**, a voter registration project. Workers helped blacks fill out the necessary forms and helped the poor get government assistance. They even taught black children to read and write. As a result the number of black voters steadily rose in the South but despite these efforts many faced brutality and intimidation.

Later that year COFO launched a campaign called “**Freedom Summer.**” The goal was to use college students, most of them white, to bring national attention to the voting abuses.

On the first day of Freedom Summer, three workers – Michael Schwerner, Andrew Goodman and James Chaney were kidnapped and killed, their bodies buried in an earthen dam. By the end of the summer, 37 churches had been burned, 30 homes bombed, 80 civil rights workers beaten, and more than 1,000 arrested.

[Goodman and Schwerner were both from New York and the disappearance and murder of these three boys was told in the movie Mississippi Burning starring Gene Hackman].

National attention was now brought to the voting rights issue in the South. By August of that year 80,000 blacks in Mississippi alone had joined the **Mississippi Freedom Democratic party**. Their leaders were Fannie Lou Hamer, Victoria Gray, Annie Divine and Aaron Henry. At the Democratic National Convention that year 64 delegates from the Freedom Democratic Party attended.

Alabama was another state that saw demonstrations for voting rights. Since 1963 blacks had marched on the city courthouses of **Marion and Selma** to register to vote, only to be turned away by local police. In 1965 Martin Luther King Jr. came to Selma, along with the national media. He arranged mass meeting, only to have hundreds arrested, right in front of the cameras.

- On February 26, 1965, just outside of Marion, **Jimmy Lee Jackson** was shot and killed by a state trooper.
- On March 7 demonstrators attempted to March from Selma to the state capitol in Montgomery. They were brutally beaten by state troopers. Days later,
- **Rev. James Reeb**, a white volunteer from Boston, was beaten to death on a Selma street.

King issued a nationwide appeal for support and the **Selma March** began. On March 25, after four days of walking, a huge crowd gathered at the state capitol. Later that day, **Viola Gregg Liuzzo**, a Michigan mother of five, was shot and killed by Klansmen while she was helping transport Selma marchers. In response to the march and the deaths of Reeb and Liuzzo, Congress passed the **Voting Rights Acts** on July 9, 1965. The bill ensured that blacks did not face any more registration obstacles and fair voting practices were now federally enforced. All over the South, thousands of blacks were registered to vote during the following year.

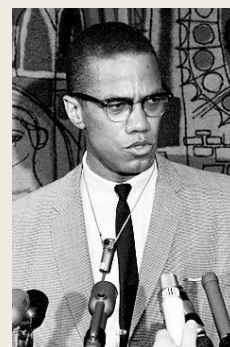
The Vietnam War caused more days of rage within the South. Activists claimed that the war was draining resources from the struggle against poverty and injustice at home. Many believed that civil rights and foreign policy should remain separate. More militant activists came to the forefront of the campaign for equal rights. Students in the **SNCC**

(Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee) asked white members to leave.

Their new leader was a black militant named **Stokely Carmichael**. He used the phrase **“Black Power”** to describe their change in focus. Another militant, **Malcolm X** gained popularity as a nationwide spokesman for black power. He was a Black Muslim yet he criticized the strategy of nonviolence.



Stokely Carmichael at a rally



Malcolm X

“It is criminal to teach a man not to defend himself when he is the constant victim of brutal attacks.”
(Malcolm X, 1965).

[Just before his assassination on February 21, 1965, Malcolm denounced violence and urged blacks not to hate whites]

The message of black militancy struck a nerve with many urban (city) youth, especially in the North, who were not affected by the success of the civil rights movement. They lived in poverty, slums, went to inadequate schools, had a high drop-out rate and had little chance of finding a decent job. Many young blacks resorted to street violence. In **1964** black areas of **New York City, Chicago and Philadelphia** were torn apart by rioting and looting. In **1965** the **Watts section of Los Angeles** saw 34 dead and 5,000 arrested, with millions of dollars in property damage caused by riots.



The Los Angeles “Watts” riots

These riots continued throughout the summer of 1967. By the time they were all over, nearly 17,000 arrests had been made, nearly 100 died and over 4,000 were injured.

President Johnson appointed a special commission to study the causes of urban race riots. On March 2, 1968, the **Kerner Commission** released its report and warned that America “is moving toward two societies, one black and one white – separate and unequal.”



Seeking a new direction, Martin Luther King Jr. planned a **Poor People's March** on Washington for 1968. In March, he took a break from planning and went to Memphis to help striking sanitation workers. While there he was shot and killed by James Earl Ray on the balcony of the Lorraine Motel on April 4, 1968.

Violence again broke out in the cities. Curfews were imposed to halt further outbreaks. King's death had turned public opinion against the militant factions. The federal government, by using the **FBI**, destroyed militant groups such as CORE and SNCC by using illegal wiretaps and having informers spread false information about these organizations. The traditional civil rights groups took up the cause for urban crisis management. They worked to ease tensions in the ghettos and maintaining calm during school desegregation battles. They began to address the complex racial problems that remained: inequalities in housing, education, job opportunities and health care.

Today, decades after the Montgomery Bus Boycott, statistics still reveal that:

- More black than white children die in infancy
- More blacks still live in poverty
- More black children drop-out of school than white children
- Blacks still earn less money than whites
- Blacks still work in lower skilled jobs
- Blacks still live in segregated neighborhoods
- Black children still attend poorer schools and are still racially segregated

The evidence is overwhelming. Blacks and Whites do not have equal chances in America today. We still have cross-burnings, neo-Nazi Skinheads and racist slurs and jokes. As long as these injustices continue there will always be people willing to continue the cause of the civil rights movement.

