

The Civil Rights Revolution: “Like a Mighty Stream”

How did civil rights activists advance the ideals of liberty, equality, and opportunity for African Americans?

Introduction



In the civil rights protests of May 1963, hundreds of child marchers were arrested in a Birmingham park. Today, that park features monuments honoring those children and their fight against segregation. Over 1,000 children participated in the march.

Four decades later, Cardell Gay remembered the day—May 3, 1963—when hundreds of young people marched through the streets of Birmingham, Alabama, to protest segregation. He recalled, “The police were there with their dogs and their hoses. And . . . although they had instructed us to stop, we would not stop. We continued to move closer to them. What they did, they let it fly.”

What the police “let fly,” in fact, was water from a high-pressure fire hose. “It knocked us on the ground,” Gay said. “The hoses were so strong . . . [the water] . . . would knock us all over the place, send you tumbling.” Indeed, the force of the blast threw children down the street.

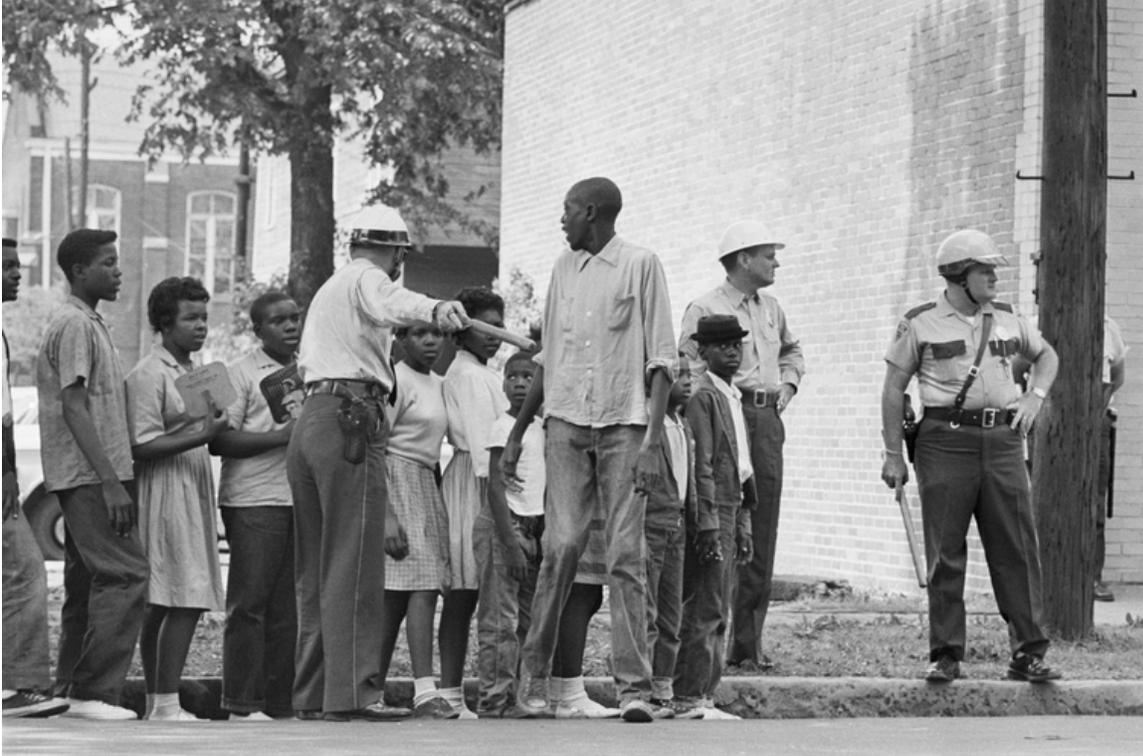
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Gay was 16 at the time of the Birmingham marches, when young people took to the streets to protest segregation. He later claimed that his high school teachers influenced his decision to march, explaining, "In class, they'd say, 'Don't leave campus or you'll be expelled. But in private, they'd say, 'Go on. I can't do it, I'd lose my job. But do it up. Keep it up.'"

More than 1,000 people, some only 5 years old, marched on May 2, the first day of the protest. Hundreds were arrested for marching without a permit. An even larger group of young blacks marched the following day, when Police Chief Bull Connor ordered his forces to disperse the children with fire hoses. As the marchers fled, policemen chased them down with clubs and dogs.

These protests proved that African Americans would not relent in their struggle for civil rights; they would persist until they achieved their goal. As one 12-year-old protestor declared, "I'll keep marching till I get freedom."

In this lesson, you will learn about key events of the early civil rights movement. From 1955 to 1965, the United States witnessed efforts to desegregate buses, schools, lunch counters, and other public places. In these years, civil rights activists also worked to expand voting rights for African Americans.



These children are being arrested at the Birmingham civil rights marches, in which hundreds of young protestors were arrested, doused with fire hoses, and chased by police dogs.



Public buses were rigidly segregated in the South—if a bus was full, black passengers had to relinquish seats to whites. Activists in Montgomery, Alabama, organized a successful bus boycott in 1955, achieving integration on city buses. On this segregated bus, African Americans are required to sit in the back rows, separated from whites.

1. A Boycott in Montgomery Inspires a Movement

Although the 1954 Supreme Court ruling in *Brown v. Board of Education* outlawed segregation in public schools, the practice continued in much of the South. Laws and customs still required blacks and whites to use separate facilities, like drinking fountains and waiting rooms, and to sit

apart in restaurants and on buses. Then, a 1955 boycott in Montgomery, Alabama, catalyzed transformation in the Jim Crow South.

Protesting Unfair Bus Laws In the 1950s, Montgomery's public buses were segregated, as they were throughout the South. African Americans were required to sit at the back of the bus, and if the bus was full, they were forced to give up their seats to white patrons. Blacks were also prohibited from sharing bus rows with whites.

This would change on December 1, 1955, when Rosa Parks, a 43-year-old African American woman, refused to give up her bus seat to a white passenger. Parks, a seamstress, was an active member of the Alabama chapter of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People. Parks later explained her motives for remaining in her seat, saying, "This is what I wanted to know: when and how would we ever determine our rights as human beings?"



Rosa Parks was arrested after she refused to give up her seat on a bus to a white man. When the driver told Parks that he was going to call the police, she calmly replied, "You may go on and do so." Her protest served as a catalyst for the Montgomery Bus Boycott.

Before Parks' act of defiance, leaders of the NAACP's Montgomery chapter were organizing a test case to challenge segregation laws. Parks, an articulate woman with a shining reputation in the community, was an optimal candidate. A local activist named E. D. Nixon asked

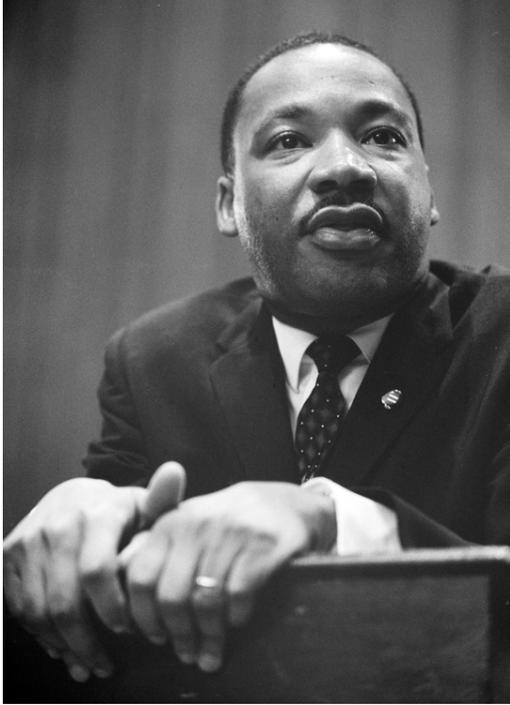
Parks if the NAACP could build a case around her arrest, and Parks agreed.

The evening after Parks' arrest, a group of African American ministers convened to strategize a one-day bus boycott on December 5. Black ministers announced the boycott during Sunday services, and activists distributed leaflets asking African Americans to participate.

On December 5, a sign was placed at a Montgomery bus stop: "People, don't ride the bus today. Don't ride it, for freedom." That day, 90 percent of African Americans who usually rode the bus honored the boycott.

A Young Minister Becomes a Leader The one-day boycott was so successful that its organizers, who called themselves the Montgomery Improvement Association (MIA), decided to extend it. To lead the **Montgomery Bus Boycott**, the MIA chose a 26-year-old minister, Martin Luther King Jr.

King was the pastor of the Dexter Avenue Baptist Church. Originally from Atlanta, King moved to Montgomery after completing a Ph.D. in theology at Boston University, and had been a resident for two years when the boycott began. On the evening of December 5, King delivered a speech to an assembly at Holt Street Baptist Church, explaining the boycott's purpose:



Reverend Martin Luther King Jr. quickly established himself as a leader in the struggle for civil rights. King's strategy of nonviolent protest—which he learned from studying the Indian leader Mahatma Gandhi—helped shape the civil rights movement. Here, King answers questions during a press conference.

My friends, I want it to be known that we're going to work with grim and bold determination to gain justice on the buses in this city. And we are not wrong, 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, the Constitution of the United States is wrong. If we are wrong, God Almighty is wrong . . . If we are wrong, justice is a lie. And we are determined here in Montgomery to work and fight until justice runs down like water and righteousness like a mighty stream.

In order to support the boycott, African Americans in Montgomery

organized an elaborate carpool system to get around town. Several thousand people used the carpools daily, while others walked, rode bicycles, took taxis, or hitchhiked.

Many of Montgomery's white leaders worked to end the boycott and preserve segregation. Some business owners fired black protesters, while other whites acted violently. Some radical segregationists, including members of the Ku Klux Klan, attacked protesters, bombed boycott leaders' houses, and firebombed several black community churches.

In November 1956, the Supreme Court upheld an Alabama court ruling that bus segregation was unconstitutional. On December 20 of that year, Montgomery protesters voted to end the bus boycott, which had lasted 381 days. From the Montgomery Bus Boycott, Martin Luther King Jr. earned a national reputation as a civil rights leader.

African American Churches Support the Movement Following the boycott, King worked with other ministers and civil rights leaders to form the **Southern Christian Leadership Conference** (SCLC) in 1957. With King as its president, the SCLC would play a major role in the civil rights movement.

The SCLC pledged to use **nonviolent resistance**, peaceful protest or noncooperation with authorities designed to achieve social or political goals, in order to redeem "the soul of America." In a public statement on January 11, 1957, the SCLC explained its strategy:

Nonviolence is not a symbol of weakness or cowardice, but as Jesus demonstrated, nonviolent resistance transforms weakness into strength and breeds courage in the face of danger. We urge . . . [African Americans], no matter how great the provocation, to dedicate themselves to this motto: "Not one hair of one head of one white person shall be harmed."

—SCLC, "A Statement to the South and Nation," January 11, 1957

SCLC supporters vowed not to resort to violence to achieve their ends, but rather remain peaceful and steadfast in their pursuit of justice. This would be a powerful tactic in the struggle for civil rights.

2. School Desegregation

Some districts and states in the South desegregated their schools shortly after the *Brown* ruling, but others resisted the Supreme Court decision. Several southern state governors staunchly maintained their opposition to integration, including the governors of Arkansas and Mississippi, who aggressively intervened to prevent blacks from attending all-white schools. Thus, the battle to integrate public schools was long and difficult.

Nine Teenagers Integrate Central High School In 1957, a federal judge ordered Little Rock, Arkansas, public schools to desegregate. To postpone district desegregation as long as possible, Little Rock school superintendent Virgil Blossom devised a plan to integrate just one school, Central High School, which 2,000 white students attended. In September 1957, nine black students were scheduled to join them, forming a group that would later be known as the Little Rock Nine.

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Elizabeth Eckford (shown here) and eight other black students challenged segregation by enrolling at Central High School in Little Rock, Arkansas, in 1957. The federal government intervened when the Arkansas state governor and angry white mobs tried to prevent the students from attending classes. Eventually, all southern states integrated their public schools.

Arkansas Governor Orval Faubus declared that he would not support desegregation in Little Rock, citing public opposition to integration, and then summoned the Arkansas National Guard. The day the nine students were to begin classes, September 4, 1957, Guard troops appeared at Central High to display force and prevent the students from entering the building. One of the nine, Elizabeth Eckford, recalled being surrounded by an angry white mob outside the school:

They moved closer and closer . . . I tried to see a friendly face somewhere in the crowd—someone who maybe would help. I looked into the face of an old woman and it seemed a kind face, but when I looked again, she spat on me.

—Elizabeth Eckford, in an interview with NAACP official

Daisy Bates

Another white woman emerged from the crowd to help shield Eckford from harm. However, Eckford and the other eight students were prevented from entering the school for days.

On September 23, the Little Rock Nine returned to Central High to face another angry white mob surrounding the school. This time, the mayor of Little Rock sought help from President Eisenhower. Although Eisenhower did not support integration through force, he could not permit defiance of federal authority. The president promptly issued Executive Order 10730, sending federal troops to maintain order and enforce the school's integration, and placing the Arkansas National Guard under federal control. The nine rode to school in a convoy led by army jeeps with mounted guns, and had military bodyguards for part of the school year.

Despite this protection, the nine black students were subjected to insults and violence from Central High's white students. One of the nine, Minnijean Brown, said at the time, "They throw rocks, they spill ink on your clothes . . . they bother you every minute." Acid was thrown in the eyes of Melba Pattillo, another of the nine, and only the quick action of her bodyguard saved her eyesight. The black students and their families also received death threats.

Eight of the nine African American students finished the school year at Central High, but the following year, Governor Faubus closed all Little Rock schools rather than allow another year of integration. Integration did not continue in Little Rock until the schools were reopened in September 1959.

James Meredith Enrolls at the University of Mississippi Public universities were also required to integrate. In 1961, James Meredith, an African American veteran of the Korean War, applied for transfer student admission to the University of Mississippi, commonly known as Ole Miss. Meredith knew he would be challenged trying to integrate the traditionally all-white university.



James Meredith was the first African American to attend Ole Miss. He required protection from U.S. Marshals in order to attend classes. Meredith later wrote that the country's future "rests on . . . whether or not the Negro citizen is to be allowed to receive an education in his own state."

When his application was rejected, Meredith asked the NAACP to help challenge his case in court. After a district court ruled against him, they appealed to a higher court that determined the university must admit Meredith. Refusing him admission, the court said, meant the state of Mississippi was maintaining segregation.

Mississippi governor Ross Barnett vowed that no black student would attend Ole Miss while he was in office. Acting as university registrar on September 20, Barnett personally refused to enroll Meredith.

President John F. Kennedy, or JFK, and Attorney General Robert Kennedy were determined to uphold the law as *Brown* had defined it. Although JFK was concerned about losing Democratic support in the South, he was sympathetic to the civil rights movement, declaring in a nationally broadcasted speech: "Americans are free to disagree with the law but not to disobey it."

Meredith secretly arrived on campus on Sunday, September 30, 1962, sparking a riot as the news spread. Angry white students burned cars and destroyed property, and before the night was over, two men were shot and killed.

President Kennedy sent armed federal marshals to escort Meredith to his classes. Meredith suffered verbal taunts and threats against his and his parents' lives, but he remained steadfast, knowing what was at stake. Days before entering Ole Miss, he wrote, "The price of progress is indeed high, but the price of holding back is much higher." Meredith graduated from Ole Miss in the summer of 1963.



Protestors held sit-ins to integrate lunch counters across the South. The demonstrators remained nonviolent, even when local residents taunted them. Sit-ins were led by college students, who became influential members of the civil rights movement.

3. Sit-ins and Freedom Rides

The campaign to integrate public facilities in the South continued through the 1960s, when a growing student movement influenced the direction of the civil rights struggle. Student protesters challenged segregation in various ways, including sitting in “whites-only” public spaces and refusing to move, thereby causing businesses to lose customers, a tactic known as a **sit-in**. They also boycotted businesses that maintained segregation, and rode interstate buses that many southern whites tried to keep segregated.

Sitting Firm to Challenge Segregated Facilities On February 1, 1960, four African American students from North Carolina’s Agricultural and Technical College sat down at a Woolworth’s drugstore lunch counter in Greensboro. The waitress refused to serve them, claiming only white customers could eat at Woolworth’s.

The four students stayed at the lunch counter until the store closed. As one of the four, Franklin McCain, explained, the group did not like being denied “dignity and respect.” The next day, they returned with about 20 other people to sit at the counter all day, without service.

During the 1960s, these sit-ins drew nationwide attention to the civil rights movement. As news of the Greensboro sit-in spread, protesters organized sit-ins in towns and cities across the South.

The Greensboro protests continued for months. In April, the city’s blacks organized a boycott of Woolworth’s and another local store with a segregated lunch counter. Eventually the local businesses relented, and on July 25, 1960, the first African American ate at the Woolworth’s lunch counter in Greensboro.

Black students mounted a large sit-in campaign in Nashville, Tennessee. Like Greensboro, Nashville’s African American community boycotted segregated downtown businesses, to which local business owners and public officials also yielded. On May 10, 1960, Nashville became the first major city in the South to begin integrating its public facilities.

Students Organize to Make a Difference Sit-ins and boycotts began to transform the segregated South as well as the civil rights movement. College students led sit-ins, and many became activists in the movement.

In April 1960, Ella Baker, a leader with the SCLC, organized a meeting of student civil rights activists in Raleigh, North Carolina. Although Baker was 55 years old and no longer a student, she believed it was important for students to organize and operate their own organization.

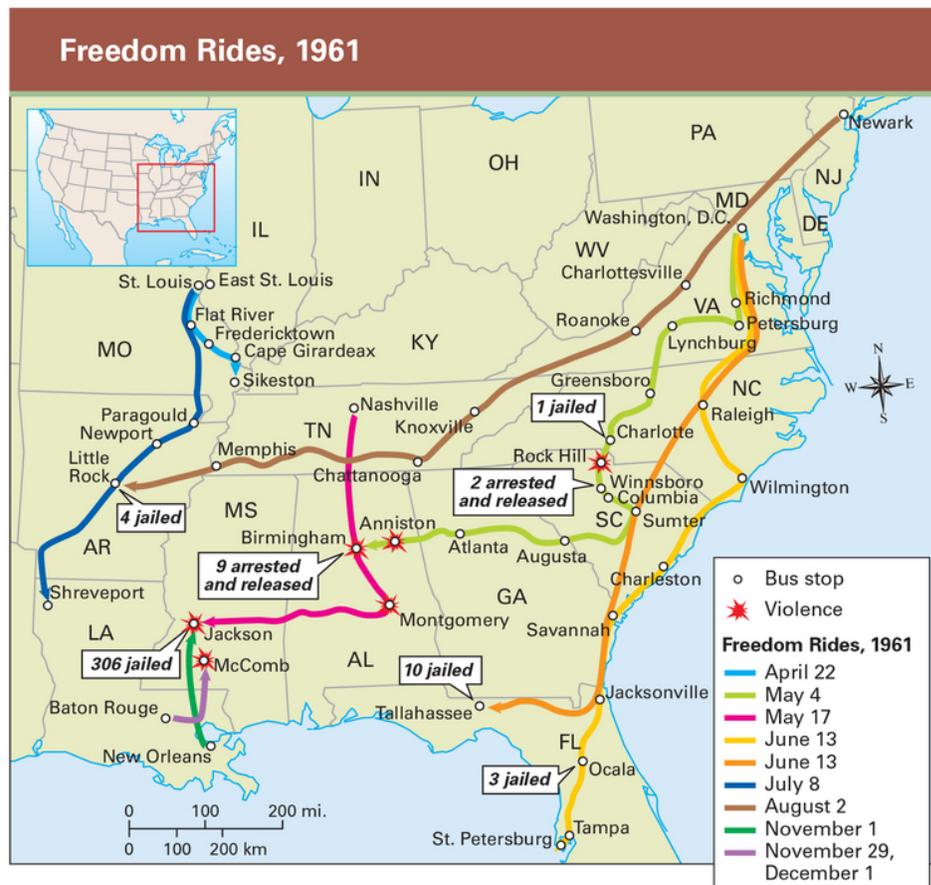
Under Baker's guidance, the students formed the **Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee** (SNCC), pronounced "snick." SNCC's Statement of Purpose, written in May 1960, affirmed the organization's commitment to justice, peace, and nonviolence:

We affirm the philosophical or religious ideal of nonviolence as the foundation of our purpose . . . Through nonviolence, courage displaces fear; love transforms hate. Acceptance dissipates prejudice; hope ends despair. Peace dominates war; faith reconciles doubt. Mutual regard cancels enmity. Justice for all overthrows injustice.

SNCC trained students in **civil disobedience**, counseling them to deliberately break laws they considered unjust. SNCC leaders emphasized not to use violence even if the students were physically attacked. One SNCC training document explained, "You may choose to face physical assault without protecting yourself, hands at the sides, unclenched; or you may choose to protect yourself, making plain you do not intend to hit back."

Throughout the South, SNCC members planned and participated in **direct action**, or political acts, including protests of all types, designed to have immediate impact. SNCC members were critical to various nonviolent direct action campaigns over the next several years.

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Freedom Riders Face Violence One direct action targeted the interstate bus system in the South. In 1960, the Supreme Court declared that segregation in interstate transport was illegal, so in the spring of 1961, civil rights group Congress of Racial Equality (CORE) organized **Freedom Rides** to test whether southern states were complying with the Court's ruling.

On May 4, 1961, seven blacks and six whites boarded two buses traveling south from Washington, D.C. When the first bus reached Anniston, Alabama, on May 14, a white mob attacked the Freedom Riders. The mob followed the bus as it left town, then hurled a firebomb through a window and beat passengers as they fled the bus. Passengers on the second bus were also beaten when they arrived in Alabama.

CORE abandoned the Freedom Rides as a result, but SNCC chose to continue them. Attorney General Robert Kennedy sent federal marshals to ensure the riders' safe passage to Jackson, Mississippi, but when the Freedom Riders arrived in Jackson, city officials arrested them. They suffered physical abuse while in jail, strengthening most riders' commitment to ending segregation.

In late 1962, the Interstate Commerce Commission issued clear rules mandating that interstate buses and bus terminals be integrated. CORE's leader, James Farmer, proclaimed victory for the Freedom Rides.

4. A Campaign in Birmingham

In the early 1960s, Birmingham, Alabama, was a steel-mill town with a long history of bigotry—Martin Luther King Jr. called it the most segregated city in the country. In 1963, the SCLC focused its efforts on Birmingham.

Taking Aim at the Nation's Most Segregated City Black Birmingham residents experienced segregation in nearly every aspect of public life. Virtually no public facility in Birmingham allowed blacks and whites to mix.

Birmingham also had a history of racist violence—between 1956 and 1963, there were 18 unsolved bombings in black neighborhoods. This violence not only targeted African Americans. In 1960, the *New York Times* reported attempts to explode dynamite at two Jewish synagogues.

The SCLC became mired in this violent climate in the spring of 1963. King and the SCLC united with local Birmingham activists, led by Reverend Fred L. Shuttlesworth, to strategize a series of nonviolent actions against segregation.



Hundreds of people were arrested and jailed during mass demonstrations in Birmingham in 1963. This photograph of protesters at the Birmingham jail was taken through the bars of a paddy wagon. One of those arrested was Martin Luther King Jr., who wrote his famous “Letter from a Birmingham Jail” at this time. In the letter, King wrote, “Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere . . . Whatever affects one directly, affects all indirectly.”

King Advocates Nonviolence in “Letter from a Birmingham Jail” Lunch counter sit-ins and street demonstrations launched the protests on April 3, 1963, and 30 marchers were soon arrested at Birmingham City Hall for not having a permit. As the Birmingham campaign’s leader, King decided the nonviolent protests and arrests must continue. With little money to post bail, King realized that he would likely be arrested and jailed for some time.

On April 12, King and 50 others were arrested for demonstrating. While King was in jail, members of Birmingham’s white clergy took out an ad in the local newspaper to criticize King’s tactics: “We recognize the

natural impatience of people who feel that their hopes are slow in being realized," the ad said. "But we are convinced that these demonstrations are unwise and untimely." The clergy urged African Americans to abide by the law and negotiate with whites to achieve integration.

King disagreed, writing a response to the ad from jail. In this "Letter from a Birmingham Jail," King explained why African Americans were employing civil disobedience and other methods of direct action to protest segregation, writing, "The answer lies in the fact that there are two types of laws: just and unjust. One has not only a legal but a moral responsibility to obey just laws. Conversely, one has a moral responsibility to disobey unjust laws." Concerning the charge that segregation protesters were being "impatient," King wrote,

We know through painful experience that freedom is never voluntarily given by the oppressor; it must be demanded by the oppressed. Frankly, I have yet to engage in a direct-action campaign that was "well-timed" in the view of those who have not suffered unduly from the disease of segregation. For years now I have heard the word "Wait!" It rings in the ear of every Negro with piercing familiarity. This "Wait!" has almost always meant "Never." We must come to see . . . that "justice too long delayed is justice denied."

—Martin Luther King Jr., "Letter from a Birmingham Jail,"
April 16, 1963



On May 3, 1963, Birmingham police turned high-pressure fire hoses on children during a civil rights march. The force of such blasts can tear the bark from a tree and knock a grown man to the ground. The incident horrified many Americans and helped gain support for the civil rights movement.

The Nation Watches in Horror By late April, Birmingham's black leaders realized their protests were dwindling. Few members of the black community were willing to execute direct action protests and risk going to jail. To recruit numbers, the SCLC turned to children. Although this decision was controversial, King argued that children who participated in demonstrations would develop "a sense of their own stake in freedom and justice."

On May 2, 1963, more than 1,000 African American youths marched from Birmingham's Sixteenth Street Baptist Church into the city center. Public safety commissioner Bull Connor arrested most of them.

On May 3, more students gathered at the church to march, and Connor ordered the police to barricade them in. When some students attempted to leave, police assaulted them with dogs and high-pressure fire hoses.

News photographers captured scenes of peaceful protesters being knocked over by blasts of water or attacked by snarling dogs. These images in newspapers and on television shocked many Americans, many of whom never imagined that southerners would resort to such

brutal methods to maintain segregation.

These protests and the attention they drew changed the course of the segregation struggle. Birmingham city officials relented after urging from local business leaders, and on May 10, civil rights leaders announced a historic accord. Their agreement with the city called for numerous changes, including desegregating public facilities within 90 days. King claimed the deal was “the most magnificent victory for justice we’ve seen in the Deep South.”

This agreement was followed by a racist backlash. The Ku Klux Klan organized a rally, after which bombs exploded at a motel where black leaders were staying. In response, President Kennedy sent federal troops to a nearby military base, promising to deploy them if necessary to maintain peace.

Birmingham remained calm for several months, until another violent attack occurred. During Sunday services on September 15, a bomb exploded at the Sixteenth Street Baptist Church, killing four African American girls. Reverend King spoke at the girls’ funeral, calling them “the martyred heroines of a holy crusade for freedom and human dignity.”

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CORE organized a march in Washington, D.C., in honor of the four African American girls killed in the Sixteenth Street Baptist Church bombing. The march drew increased attention to Birmingham's hostile atmosphere. The four girls were named "martyred heroines" at their funeral.



On August 28, 1963, approximately 250,000 people marched in Washington, D.C. They protested for civil rights, employment, decent housing, and voting rights. At the time, the March on Washington was the largest political gathering in U.S. history.

5. Achieving Landmark Civil Rights Legislation

Despite the Birmingham campaign's success, racial tensions did not abate overnight, nor did the protests effect immediate equality for African Americans. The campaign did have an impact, however, by increasing nationwide support for the civil rights movement. More Americans began to identify with the movement's emphasis on rights, freedom, equality, and opportunity.

Following the spring protests in Birmingham, civil rights activists shifted their focus to Washington, D.C. There, they demonstrated for "jobs and freedom" and urged the passage of civil rights legislation.

Thousands March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom The 1963 **March on Washington** was planned 20 years previous. A. Philip Randolph, head of the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters, had proposed the march in 1941 to protest unequal treatment of African

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Americans in war industries. He then called off the rally in deference to President Roosevelt's plea for unity in the war effort.

The summer of 1963 was an opportune time for the overdue march, which was organized by leaders of the country's major civil rights organizations. On August 28, more than 250,000 people marched in Washington, becoming the largest political gathering ever held in the United States. The 250,000 protesters included about 60,000 whites, as well as union members, clergy, students, entertainers, and celebrities like Rosa Parks and Jackie Robinson.

Marchers listened to African American performers, including opera great Marian Anderson, who sang "He's Got the Whole World in His Hands." They held hands and sang along to folksinger Joan Baez's "We Shall Overcome."



Martin Luther King Jr. declared in his “I have a dream” speech: “When the architects of our republic wrote the magnificent words of the Constitution and the Declaration of Independence, they were signing a promissory note . . . that all men . . . would be guaranteed the unalienable rights of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.”

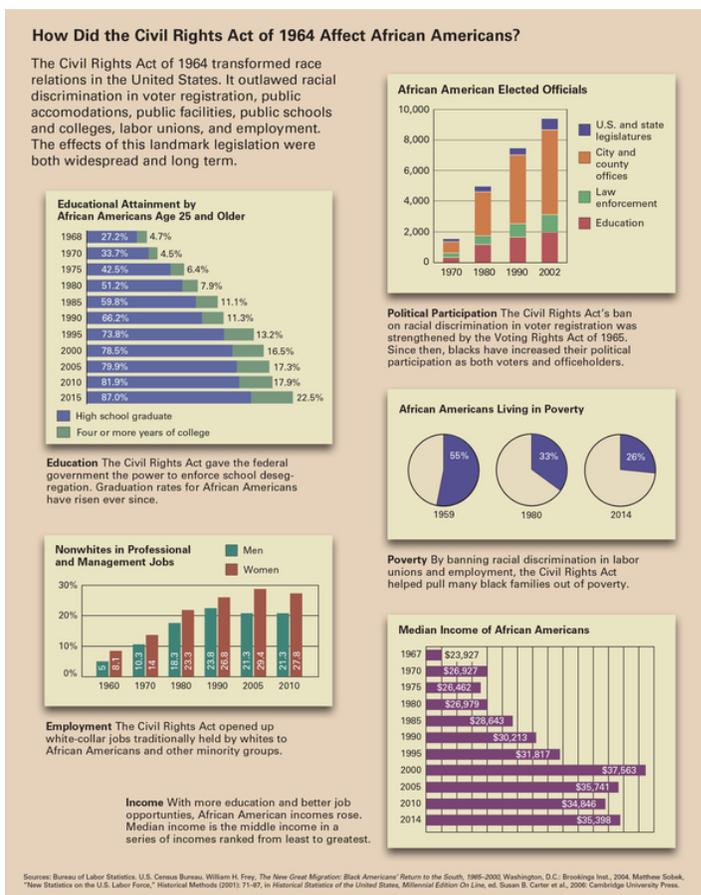
King Inspires the Nation with His Dream The most notable event from the March on Washington was Martin Luther King Jr.’s “I have a dream” speech, delivered from the Lincoln Memorial. In resounding tones, King spoke of his dream for a better America:

I have a dream that one day this nation will rise up and live out the true meaning of its creed: “We hold these truths to be self-evident; that all men are created equal . . .” When we allow freedom to ring, when we let it ring from every village and every hamlet, from every state and every city, we will be able to speed up that day when *all* God’s children, black men and white men, Jews and Gentiles, Protestants and Catholics, 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!”

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—Martin Luther King Jr., “I have a dream” speech, August 28, 1963

When the march occurred, Congress was debating a civil rights bill that was cautiously supported by President Kennedy. After Kennedy’s assassination in November, President Lyndon B. Johnson advocated for the bill. Opposing senators conducted a **filibuster**, in which they spoke at great length to prevent legislative action, to stall the bill in the Senate. Their efforts ultimately failed, and the bill was signed into law on July 2, 1964 as the **Civil Rights Act of 1964**. This landmark law banned discrimination on the basis of race, sex, religion, or national origin—the most important civil rights law passed since Reconstruction.



6. Regaining Voting Rights

In January 1964, the Twenty-fourth Amendment to the Constitution was ratified, declaring that no U.S. citizen could be denied the right to vote “by reason of failure to pay any poll tax or other tax.” Because some southern states used poll taxes to prevent blacks from voting, the

Twenty-fourth Amendment was a key victory in the struggle for expanded African American voting rights. However, additional efforts were necessary to ensure that black citizens were actually able to vote.

Voter Registration Rates in Selected Southern States, 1965

State	Percentage of Voting-Age Blacks Registered to Vote	Percentage of Voting-Age Whites Registered to Vote
Alabama	19.3%	69.2%
Georgia	27.4%	62.6%
Louisiana	31.6%	80.5%
Mississippi	6.7%	69.9%
North Carolina	46.8%	96.8%
South Carolina	37.3%	75.7%
Virginia	38.3%	61.1%

Source: Grofman, Handley, and Niemi, *Minority Representation and the Quest for Voting Equality*, New York: Cambridge Press, 1992, as reported at U.S. Dept of Justice, Civil Rights Division, Voting Section, "The Effect of the Voting Rights Act," www.usdoj.gov.

In the early 1960s, large numbers of African Americans were denied voting rights in the South. One employed method was limiting black voter registration. As shown in the table above, only 19.3 percent of voting-age blacks were registered to vote in Alabama, compared to 69.2 percent of voting-age whites, in 1965.

Registering African American Voters in a Freedom Summer In the spring of 1964, CORE and SNCC organized **Freedom Summer**, a campaign to register black voters in Mississippi. Mississippi was one of the most segregated states in the country at the time, and voting rights for blacks were severely restricted. Although African Americans comprised nearly 50 percent of the state's population, only a few blacks were registered to vote. This was largely due to restrictions imposed by state and local officials.

Most of the approximately 900 Freedom Summer volunteers were white

college students from the North. They were trained in voter registration and were warned that they should expect violent opposition to their efforts to register black voters.

On June 21, three student activists disappeared in Neshoba County, Mississippi, after visiting a black church that had been burned. One of the activists, James Chaney, was black, while the other two, Andrew Goodman and Michael Schwerner, were white. Six weeks later, the FBI discovered their bodies—they had been murdered.

Other violent acts marred Freedom Summer, including numerous beatings, shootings, and bombings, and at least three other activists suffered brutal deaths. Most of these crimes went unpunished.

Marching for the Right to Vote Undeterred by the violence of Freedom Summer, activists continued their campaign to register black voters. Early the following year, the SCLC began to register black voters in Selma, Alabama. Only 320 of more than 15,000 eligible black voters were registered to vote in Dallas County, where Selma is located. Every day for weeks, civil rights protesters marched at the Dallas County Courthouse. By February, over 3,000 protesters had been arrested and charged with crimes such as “unlawful assembly.” Following this, the SCLC organized a march from Selma to the Montgomery state capital, where the marchers planned to present the governor with a list of grievances.



After the Voting Rights Act was passed in 1965, African Americans lined up to vote for the first time throughout the South. The law outlawed literacy tests and other methods used to prevent black voter registration. The number of registered black voters grew dramatically in the late 1960s.

The protesters began their walk on March 7, 1965. Decades later, civil rights activist John Lewis recalled,

As we crossed the Pettus Bridge, we saw a line of lawmen. “We should kneel and pray,” I said . . . but we didn’t have time. “Troopers,” barked an officer, “advance!” They came at us like a human wave, a blur of blue uniforms, billy clubs, bullwhips and tear gas; one had a piece of rubber hose wrapped in barbed wire.

Televised images of the day’s violence further outraged many

Americans. As a result, the civil rights movement continued to gain support around the country.

In August, Congress passed the **Voting Rights Act of 1965**, which outlawed literacy tests and other methods used to deny African Americans the right to vote, and required the federal government to supervise voter registration in areas where less than half of voting-age citizens were registered. Federal intervention would ensure that eligible voters were not deterred from having their voices heard.

Efforts to secure voting rights were ultimately successful. Less than 7 percent of Mississippi's eligible black voters were registered to vote in 1964, but by 1968, that number had risen to 59 percent. In Alabama, voter registration numbers increased from about 20 percent to 57 percent during the same four-year period. Overall, the number of African American voters in the South swelled from 1 million to 3.1 million between 1964 and 1968. Thus, in the years following the Montgomery Bus Boycott, the civil rights movement made significant strides.

Summary

Between 1955 and 1965, many key events took place in the civil rights movement. African Americans made great progress in their struggle for rights and equality.

Montgomery Bus Boycott In 1955, blacks in Montgomery, Alabama, began a lengthy boycott of the city's segregated bus system. As a result, Montgomery's buses were integrated.

SCLC and SNCC These two groups helped organize nonviolent civil rights protests. The Southern Christian Leadership Conference, led by Martin Luther King Jr., played a major role in the Birmingham campaign and other events. The Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee organized sit-ins and engaged in other forms of civil disobedience.

Freedom Rides In 1961, black and white Freedom Riders rode buses throughout the South, challenging southern laws outlawing segregation in interstate transport. The riders were subjected to violence and eventually received federal protection.

March on Washington Some 250,000 people marched in Washington, D.C., in August 1963 to demand jobs and freedom. The highlight was Martin Luther King Jr.'s "I have a dream" speech.

Freedom Summer In the summer of 1964, activists led voter registration drives in the South for African Americans.

Landmark legislation The Civil Rights Act of 1964 banned discrimination on the basis of race, sex, religion, or national origin. The Voting Rights Act of 1965 outlawed literacy tests, enabling many African Americans to vote.

The Civil Rights Act of 1964

The Civil Rights Act was initially proposed by President John F. Kennedy in 1963, but had not passed Congress before Kennedy was assassinated. Days after Kennedy's assassination, President Lyndon B. Johnson told Congress, "No memorial oration or eulogy could more eloquently honor President Kennedy's memory than the earliest possible passage of the civil rights bill." In February of 1964, Congress passed the Civil Rights Act.

The Civil Rights Act of 1964 was highly controversial. It was challenged in the Supreme Court only months after it became a law. In *Heart of Atlanta Motel v. United States*, the Supreme Court upheld the Civil Rights Act, concluding that "the [Heart of Atlanta Motel] has no 'right' to select its guests as it sees fit, free from governmental regulation."

The Civil Rights Act of 1964 was part of President Johnson's domestic agenda, the Great Society program, which called for "an end to poverty and injustice." In addition to the Civil Rights Act, President Johnson also proposed legislation to create jobs, fight poverty, and enhance early childhood education. The Elementary and Secondary Education Act promotes equal access to quality education, and has been reauthorized every five years since its passage in 1965. President Johnson also fought for additional civil rights legislation such as the Voting Rights Act of 1965, which banned literacy tests and other forms of voter suppression. The Civil Rights Act of 1964 addressed many of the challenges that racial, religious, and ethnic minority communities faced, including voter suppression, segregation, unequal access to education, and discrimination at work.

Excerpts from Civil Rights Act; June 2, 1964

An Act

To enforce the constitutional right to vote, to confer jurisdiction upon the district courts of the United States to

provide injunctive relief against discrimination in public accommodations, to authorize the Attorney General to institute suits to protect constitutional rights in public facilities and public education, to extend the Commission on Civil Rights, to prevent discrimination in federally assisted programs, to establish a Commission on Equal Employment Opportunity, and for other purposes.

Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled, That this Act may be cited as the "Civil Rights Act of 1964".

TITLE I—VOTING RIGHTS . . .

"(2) No person acting under color of law shall—

"(A) in determining whether any individual is qualified under State law or laws to vote in any Federal election, apply any standard, practice, or procedure different from the standards, practices, or procedures applied under such law or laws to other individuals within the same county, parish, or similar political subdivision who have been found by State officials to be qualified to vote;

"(B) deny the right of any individual to vote in any Federal election because of an error or omission on any record or paper relating to any application, registration, or other act requisite to voting, if such error or omission is not material in determining whether such individual is qualified under State law to vote in such election; or

"(C) employ any literacy test as a qualification for voting in any Federal election unless (i) such test is administered to each individual and is conducted wholly in writing, and (ii) a certified copy of the test and of the answers given by the individual is furnished to him within twenty-five days of the submission of his request made within the period of time during which records and papers are required to be retained and preserved pursuant to title III of the Civil Rights Act of 1960 (42 U.S.C. 1974--74e; 74 Stat. 88): Provided, however, That the Attorney General may enter into agreements with appropriate State or local authorities that preparation, conduct, and maintenance of such tests in accordance with the provisions of applicable State or local law, including such special provisions as are necessary

in the preparation, conduct, and maintenance of such tests for persons who are blind or otherwise physically handicapped, meet the purposes of this subparagraph and constitute compliance therewith . . .

"If in any such proceeding literacy is a relevant fact there shall be a rebuttable presumption that any person who has not been adjudged an incompetent and who has completed the sixth grade in a public school in, or a private school accredited by, any State or territory, the District of Columbia, or the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico where instruction is carried on predominantly in the English language, possesses sufficient literacy, comprehension, and intelligence to vote in any Federal election . . .

TITLE II—INJUNCTIVE RELIEF AGAINST DISCRIMINATION IN PLACES OF PUBLIC ACCOMMODATION

SEC. 201. (a) All persons shall be entitled to the full and equal enjoyment of the goods, services, facilities, and privileges, advantages, and accommodations of any place of public accommodation, as defined in this section, without discrimination or segregation on the ground of race, color, religion, or national origin.

(b) Each of the following establishments which serves the public is a place of public accommodation within the meaning of this title if its operations affect commerce, or if discrimination or segregation by it is supported by State action:

(1) any inn, hotel, motel, or other establishment which provides lodging to transient guests, other than an establishment located within a building which contains not more than five rooms for rent or hire and which is actually occupied by the proprietor of such establishment as his residence;

(2) any restaurant, cafeteria, lunchroom, lunch counter, soda fountain, or other facility principally engaged in selling food for consumption on the premises, including, but not limited to, any such facility located on the premises of any retail establishment; or any gasoline station;

(3) any motion picture house, theater, concert hall, sports arena, stadium or other place of exhibition or entertainment; and

(4) any establishment (A)(i) which is physically located within the premises of any establishment otherwise covered by this subsection, or (ii) within the premises of which is physically located any such covered establishment, and (B) which holds itself out as serving patrons of such covered establishment . . .

The provisions of this title shall not apply to a private club or other establishment not in fact open to the public, except to the extent that the facilities of such establishment are made available to the customers or patrons of an establishment within the scope of subsection (b).

SEC. 202. All persons shall be entitled to be free, at any establishment or place, from discrimination or segregation of any kind on the ground of race, color, religion, or national origin, if such discrimination or segregation is or purports to be required by any law, statute, ordinance, regulation, rule, or order of a State or any agency or political subdivision thereof.

SEC. 203. No person shall (a) withhold, deny, or attempt to withhold or deny, or deprive or attempt to deprive, any person of any right or privilege secured by section 201 or 202, or (b) intimidate, threaten, or coerce, or attempt to intimidate, threaten, or coerce any person with the purpose of interfering with any right or privilege secured by section 201 or 202, or (c) punish or attempt to punish any person for exercising or attempting to exercise any right or privilege secured by section 201 or 202 . . .

TITLE IV—DESEGREGATION OF PUBLIC EDUCATION . . .

SURVEY AND REPORT OF EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES

SEC. 402. The Commissioner shall conduct a survey and make a report to the President and the Congress, within two years of the enactment of this title, concerning the lack of availability of equal educational opportunities for individuals by reason of race, color, religion, or national

origin in public educational institutions at all levels in the United States, its territories and possessions, and the District of Columbia.

TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE

SEC. 403. The Commissioner is authorized, upon the application of any school board, State, municipality, school district, or other governmental unit legally responsible for operating a public school or schools, to render technical assistance to such applicant in the preparation, adoption, and implementation of plans for the desegregation of public schools. Such technical assistance may, among other activities, include making available to such agencies information regarding effective methods of coping with special educational problems occasioned by desegregation, and making available to such agencies personnel of the Office of Education or other persons specially equipped to advise and assist them in coping with such problems.

TRAINING INSTITUTES

SEC. 404. The Commissioner is authorized to arrange, through grants or contracts, with institutions of higher education for the operation of short-term or regular session institutes for special training designed to improve the ability of teachers, supervisors, counselors, and other elementary or secondary school personnel to deal effectively with special educational problems occasioned by desegregation. Individuals who attend such an institute on a full-time basis may be paid stipends for the period of their attendance at such institute in amounts specified by the Commissioner in regulations, including allowances for travel to attend such institute.

GRANTS

SEC. 405. (a) The Commissioner is authorized, upon application of a school board, to make grants to such board to pay, in whole or in part, the cost of—

(1) giving to teachers and other school personnel inservice training in dealing with problems incident to desegregation, and

(2) employing specialists to advise in problems incident to

desegregation . . .

TITLE V—COMMISSION ON CIVIL RIGHTS . . .

"DUTIES OF THE COMMISSION

"SEC. 104. (a) The Commission shall—

"(1) investigate allegations in writing under oath or affirmation that certain citizens of the United States are being deprived of their right to vote and have that vote counted by reason of their color, race, religion, or national origin; which writing, under oath or affirmation, shall set forth the facts upon which such belief or beliefs are based;

"(2) study and collect information concerning legal developments constituting a denial of equal protection of the laws under the Constitution because of race, color, religion or national origin or in the administration of justice;

"(3) appraise the laws and policies of the Federal Government with respect to denials of equal protection of the laws under the Constitution because of race, color, religion or national origin or in the administration of justice;

"(4) serve as a national clearinghouse for information in respect to denials of equal protection of the laws because of race, color, religion or national origin, including but not limited to the fields of voting, education, housing, employment, the use of public facilities, and transportation, or in the administration of justice;

"(5) investigate allegations, made in writing and under oath or affirmation, that citizens of the United States are unlawfully being accorded or denied the right to vote, or to have their votes properly counted, in any election of presidential electors, Members of the United States Senate, or of the House of Representatives, as a result of any patterns or practice of fraud or discrimination in the conduct of such election; and

"(6) Nothing in this or any other Act shall be construed as authorizing the Commission, its Advisory Committees, or any person under its supervision or control to inquire into or investigate any membership practices or internal operations of any fraternal organization, any college or

university fraternity or sorority, any private club or any religious organization . . .”

TITLE VI—NONDISCRIMINATION IN FEDERALLY ASSISTED PROGRAMS

SEC. 601. No person in the United States shall, on the ground of race, color, or national origin, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any program or activity receiving Federal financial assistance . . .

TITLE VII—EQUAL EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITY . . .

DISCRIMINATION BECAUSE OF RACE, COLOR, RELIGION, SEX, OR NATIONAL ORIGIN

SEC. 703. (a) It shall be an unlawful employment practice for an employer—

(1) to fail or refuse to hire or to discharge any individual, or otherwise to discriminate against any individual with respect to his compensation, terms, conditions, or privileges of employment, because of such individual's race, color, religion, sex, or national origin; or

(2) to limit, segregate, or classify his employees in any way which would deprive or tend to deprive any individual of employment opportunities or otherwise adversely affect his status as an employee, because of such individual's race, color, religion, sex, or national origin.

(b) It shall be an unlawful employment practice for an employment agency to fail or refuse to refer for employment, or otherwise to discriminate against, any individual because of his race, color, religion, sex, or national origin, or to classify or refer for employment any individual on the basis of his race, color, religion, sex, or national origin.

(c) It shall be an unlawful employment practice for a labor organization—

(1) to exclude or to expel from its membership, or otherwise to discriminate against, any individual because of his race, color, religion, sex, or national origin;

(2) to limit, segregate, or classify its membership, or to classify or fail or refuse to refer for employment any individual, in any way which would deprive or tend to deprive any individual of employment opportunities, or would limit such employment opportunities or otherwise adversely affect his status as an employee or as an applicant for employment, because of such individual's race, color, religion, sex, or national origin; or

(3) to cause or attempt to cause an employer to discriminate against an individual in violation of this section.

(d) It shall be an unlawful employment practice for any employer, labor organization, or joint labor-management committee controlling apprenticeship or other training or retraining, including on-the-job training programs to discriminate against any individual because of his race, color, religion, sex, or national origin in admission to, or employment in, any program established to provide apprenticeship or other training.

(e) Notwithstanding any other provision of this title, (1) it shall not be an unlawful employment practice for an employer to hire and employ employees, for an employment agency to classify, or refer for employment any individual, for a labor organization to classify its membership or to classify or refer for employment any individual, or for an employer, labor organization, or joint labor-management committee controlling apprenticeship or other training or retraining programs to admit or employ any individual in any such program, on the basis of his religion, sex, or national origin in those certain instances where religion, sex, or national origin is a bona fide occupational qualification reasonably necessary to the normal operation of that particular business or enterprise, and (2) it shall not be an unlawful employment practice for a school, college, university, or other educational institution or institution of learning to hire and employ employees of a particular religion if such school, college, university, or other educational institution or institution of learning is, in whole or in substantial part, owned, supported, controlled, or managed by a particular religion or by a particular religious corporation, association, or society, or if the curriculum of such school, college,

university, or other educational institution or institution of learning is directed toward the propagation of a particular religion . . .

OTHER UNLAWFUL EMPLOYMENT PRACTICES

SEC. 704. (a) It shall be an unlawful employment practice for an employer to discriminate against any of his employees or applicants for employment, for an employment agency to discriminate against any individual, or for a labor organization to discriminate against any member thereof or applicant for membership, because he has opposed, any practice made an unlawful employment practice by this title, or because he has made a charge, testified, assisted, or participated in any manner in an investigation, proceeding, or hearing under this title.

(b) It shall be an unlawful employment practice for an employer, labor organization, or employment agency to print or publish or cause to be printed or published any notice or advertisement relating to employment by such an employer or membership in or any classification or referral for employment by such a labor organization, or relating to any classification or referral for employment by such an employment agency, indicating any preference, limitation, specification, or discrimination, based on race, color, religion, sex, or national origin, except that such a notice or advertisement may indicate a preference, limitation, specification, or discrimination based on religion, sex, or national origin when religion, sex, or national origin is a bona fide occupational qualification for employment.

EQUAL EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITY COMMISSION

SEC. 705. (a) There is hereby created a Commission to be known as the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, which shall be composed of five members, not more than three of whom shall be members of the same political party, who shall be appointed by the President by and with the advice and consent of the Senate . . .

(g) The Commission shall have power—

(1) to cooperate with and, with their consent, utilize regional, State, local, and other agencies, both public and

private, and individuals;

(2) to pay to witnesses whose depositions are taken or who are summoned before the Commission or any of its agents the same witness and mileage fees as are paid to witnesses in the courts of the United States;

(3) to furnish to persons subject to this title such technical assistance as they may request to further their compliance with this title or an order issued thereunder;

(4) upon the request of (i) any employer, whose employees or some of them, or (ii) any labor organization, whose members or some of them, refuse or threaten to refuse to cooperate in effectuating the provisions of this title, to assist in such effectuation by conciliation or such other remedial action as is provided by this title;

(5) to make such technical studies as are appropriate to effectuate the purposes and policies of this title and to make the results of such studies available to the public;

(6) to refer matters to the Attorney General with recommendations for intervention in a civil action brought by an aggrieved party under section 706, or for the institution of a civil action by the Attorney General under section 707, and to advise, consult, and assist the Attorney General on such matters . . .

Excerpt from the Civil Rights Act, June 2, 1964.

Entire Selection:

http://avalon.law.yale.edu/20th_century/civil_rights_1964.asp

Accessed July, 2017

Martin Luther King Jr.'s Impact on Society



Pictured here is Martin Luther King Jr. in 1963 after he met with President Lyndon Johnson.

Many people know the name Martin Luther King Jr. because he is one of the most prominent figures in history. You may know him best for his “I have a dream” speech and his peaceful protests that helped the Civil Rights Act pass in 1964.

Early Life Martin Luther King Jr. was born on January 15, 1929 in Atlanta, Georgia to a very religious family. King read from the Bible every day and his grandmother often told him Bible stories. Both his father and grandfather were Baptist reverends. They were both respected members of their community. They were also part of the NAACP (National Association for the Advancement of Colored People). This organization wanted to try and improve conditions for African Americans.

King grew up in a time when segregation was still a major part of society. For example, white people and black people lived in different neighborhoods, they couldn’t sit in the same areas on the bus or in theaters, and there were signs like “whites only” at public pools, bathrooms, and drinking fountains.

King wanted to change the treatment of African American citizens. When he was 14, he entered a speech contest with the theme, “The Negro and the Constitution.” He spoke about how a democracy should give equal opportunity for all. He won the contest.

When he was 15, King enrolled at an all-male, all-black college called Morehouse College. Even at a young age, he was a powerful speaker. When he was 18, King told his father he wanted to be a reverend. His father wanted King to prove himself by giving a sermon at Ebenezer Baptist Church. He captivated the congregation and impressed his

THE CIVIL RIGHTS REV..

father. Four years later he became a minister, carrying on his family's tradition.

King did not stop there. He continued studying at a school for ministers where he was elected president of his mostly white class. King was given a scholarship to attend a graduate school where he studied theology. While working towards his Ph.D. (the highest academic degree), King met a woman named Coretta Scott who was studying voice at a school of music. She became Coretta Scott King on June 18, 1953 when they were married. Coretta Scott King would go on to become a civil rights activist as well.

Peaceful Protesting In 1954, King became a pastor at a Baptist church in Montgomery, Alabama. The city, like other cities in the south, was heavily segregated. Black people were living in areas neglected by the city government. The housing was terrible and the streets unpaved. Some houses did not even have electricity or running water.

King wanted to change the conditions and end segregation. A woman named Rosa Parks helped lead the way. On December 1, 1955, Parks refused to give up her seat on a city bus for a white passenger. She was arrested and charged for breaking the law.

To protest the segregation law and Parks' arrest, King and other black leaders decided to boycott the city buses. They knew it would be difficult because many black riders did not have cars and greatly depended on the bus system. King expected success if 60 percent of black riders participated in the boycott.

Amazingly, 90 percent of black riders did not board a single bus. Old men and women walked miles to work. College students hitchhiked to school. Someone even traveled on a horse drawn buggy.



Pictured here is Martin Luther King Jr. with his wife Coretta Scott King shaking hands with New York City's mayor in 1964.

King became the face of the bus boycott. He received hate mail and phone call threats. Someone even bombed his home. Instead of being afraid, this made King more determined. He also never promoted violence and urged people to remain peaceful. He said at a meeting, "If one day you find me sprawled out dead, I do not want you to retaliate with a single act of violence. I urge you to continue protesting with the same dignity and discipline you have shown so far."

The bus boycott lasted more than a year and was the first large-scale demonstration against segregation in the United States. In 1956, Rosa Parks' case was ruled unconstitutional by the U.S. Supreme Court. It was a major victory but many segregation laws and practices remained.

The protests continued. King organized and led many more while preaching non-violence. It was a practice he learned from the teachings of Mahatma Gandhi that aligned with his own religious beliefs. Gandhi successfully organized peaceful protests against British rule of India, and won independence for the country in 1947. King believed non-violence and Christian love for fellow people would change things in America.

During a protest against segregation in Birmingham, many children and teenagers marched alongside King. Police used forceful fire hoses on them and turned police dogs loose to attack them. This brutal treatment shocked the nation. King was arrested and taken to Birmingham's jail where he wrote a letter that became a famous

statement about the right to stand up to injustice through non-violent means.

The biggest protest King led was the March on Washington, or “march for freedom.” On August 28, 1963, more than 250,000 people marched in Washington, D.C. to draw attention to civil rights. They were demanding the integration of schools, a program for job training, and an end to job discrimination.

At the Lincoln Memorial, King delivered the most memorable speech of his life about freedom and equality for all, or his “I have a dream” speech. The next year, Congress passed the Civil Rights Act of 1964 which outlawed segregation in most public places, and forbade discrimination at work and in schools. The law was the most far-reaching civil rights law in almost 100 years and a huge step towards ending discrimination and segregation. However, King felt like there was more work to be done.

King's Legacy Inequality issues remained and King began planning a Poor People's Campaign. The movement's aim was to guarantee all Americans good educations, decent housing, and a job. Sadly, this was King's final campaign. He traveled to Memphis to support a strike by sanitation workers who wanted fair wages and better working conditions. In his last speech on April 3, 1968, King said he might not live to see the day when justice was truly achieved, “but I want you to know tonight that we, as a people, will get to the promised land.” The next night he was shot as he stood on his hotel balcony. He died shortly after. King was only 39 years old.

People around the world mourned his death. More than 100,000 people lined the streets to watch his funeral procession in Atlanta and President Lyndon Johnson declared a national day of mourning.

King spent eleven years of his life fighting for equality. He gave more than 2,500 speeches, wrote six books, and many articles. He was even awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1964 when he was just 35 years old. In 1986, Congress established a national holiday in honor of King's birthday. It's celebrated on the 3rd Monday in January.

Economic Rights

On August 19, 1958, members of the Oklahoma City NAACP Youth Council walked into the all-white drugstore, Katz Drug Store. The children sat at the lunch counter, but were refused service due to their

race. The children, however, continued to sit at the lunch counter in peaceful protest. Just two day later, Katz Drug Stores ended its segregation policy.

The mind behind these peaceful sit-ins was Clara Luper, the NAACP Youth Council's sponsor. Luper trained the students how to perform the sit-in, as well as how to respond to any actions in a way that prevented violence or escalation. She hoped to desegregate restaurants and diners in Oklahoma. The Oklahoma City sit-ins led by Luper was one of the first major sit-ins to occur in the United States, as well as occurred a year and a half before the famous sit-in in Greensboro, North Carolina in 1960.