



A MORE PERFECT UNION

VOICES FOR CIVIL RIGHTS IN AMERICA



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A MORE PERFECT UNION

VOICES FOR CIVIL RIGHTS IN AMERICA

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Teacher Guide for *A More Perfect Union*
(for Core Knowledge Language Arts®)

The Blessings of Liberty:
Voices for Social Justice and Equal Rights in America
(primary source readings from the mid-19th to early 20th centuries)

Editor

John Holdren

Cover Images: TOP, left to right: Cesar Chavez, Rosa Parks, Martin Luther King Jr. BOTTOM, left to right: Jackie Robinson, Shirley Chisholm, Dolores Huerta.

Title Page Image: Crowd holding American flags,
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Introduction

This is a book of voices—the voices of brave and determined people speaking out for civil rights in America.

The voices take different forms—speeches, memoirs, interviews, letters, proclamations, and more. They are the voices of journalists, judges, presidents, preachers, activists, and students. Some are pointing out wrongs and injustices. Some are proposing solutions and plans for action. Some are remembering the challenges and dangers they faced when fighting for civil rights, such as the right to vote, or peacefully protest, or attend the school in your own neighborhood.

While the people behind these voices have different reasons for speaking out, most are motivated by a shared goal—to create “a more perfect union.” Do you recognize those words? They come from the Preamble to the United States Constitution, which begins: “We the people of the United States, in order to form a more perfect union. . . .”

The idea of creating something “more perfect” suggests an effort that is ongoing, ever striving. The struggle for civil rights in America is such an effort—an effort that is ongoing because, while we have come a long way, we have yet to become a nation that guarantees and protects the civil rights not just of some but of *all*.

When we talk of civil rights, we’re talking about our rights as citizens to be treated equally under the law, and to be free from discrimination—which means not being treated differently for any of a number of reasons, such as the color of your skin, or your religion, or your national origin, or your sex.

Our focus here is on the struggle for civil rights in the United States from the mid-twentieth century on. A companion volume titled *The Blessings of Liberty* examines earlier efforts from the mid-nineteenth to early twentieth centuries, including the campaign for women's right to vote, and the struggle to achieve equal rights and freedom for Black Americans after the Civil War (led by pioneering activists such as Ida B. Wells, who fought against lynching, and W. E. B. Du Bois, who co-founded the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People).

In this book, before we explore the modern-day civil rights movement, we take a brief look back to earlier times—first, to the years after the Civil War, known as Reconstruction, when three important amendments were added to the Constitution. These three amendments have given power and focus to the struggle for civil rights even to the present day. Then we proceed to 1896, because in that year the U.S. Supreme Court issued a decision that placed a massive obstacle in the path toward civil rights—an obstacle that, despite many efforts to remove it, remained stubbornly in place throughout the first half of the twentieth century.

The modern-day struggle for civil rights in America took shape in court cases and nonviolent protests of many kinds, from sit-ins to freedom rides to boycotts. Sometimes the struggle involved a single person, like Rosa Parks quietly refusing to give up her seat on a bus. Sometimes it involved hundreds of thousands of people joining together to make their demands known, as in the 1963 March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom, at which Martin Luther King, Jr., inspired his listeners (then and ever since) with his dream of freedom and racial harmony.

When historians speak of “the civil rights movement,” they are sometimes referring specifically to a time during the 1950s and 1960s when Black Americans engaged in a heroic struggle for social justice, freedom, and equality. In this book, while you will hear many voices from those critical decades, you will also encounter the voices of more people—of Native Americans, Asian Americans, Hispanic and Latino Americans, farmworkers, and women—who spoke out for the rights and freedoms they deserved.

The story of the struggle for civil rights in America can sometimes be painful to read, especially when it shows not what America has done well but where we have gone wrong or fallen short. Many of the speakers and writers in this book see these wrongs and shortcomings, and speak out strongly against them—but in almost every case, when they speak out against injustice or inequality in America, they are not against America. Rather, they understand that only by acknowledging our imperfections can we begin to create “a more perfect union.” While the voices may sometimes convey impatience, frustration, and anger about what America is, most are driven by hope for what America can be.

The Language of Race

In referring to racial identity, the speakers and writers in this book used terms that were accepted in their times, but in many cases are no longer accepted today. In the primary sources collected in this book, for the sake of historical accuracy, we have not changed the terms each speaker or writer used when referring to race. In the introductory texts that provide background information, we have aimed to use terms for race and ethnicity that are generally accepted now. What is accepted, however, is a matter of ongoing discussion.

When referring to race and ethnicity in writing, major publishing organizations follow different standards. In cases where there is no universal agreement, we have had to choose which standards to follow. Here are the choices we have made:

- Currently, major publications do not agree on the use of hyphens in terms that describe a person's dual heritage—some say, for instance, "Mexican-American" while others say "Mexican American." In this book, we have chosen not to use the hyphen. So, you will see "Mexican American," "Asian American," "African American," and the like, unless a hyphenated term appears in the historical primary source material.
- Another ongoing discussion involves the use of "Latinos" to refer to people of Spanish heritage as a whole. Since "Latino" is a masculine form, and "Latina" the feminine, some have urged the use of a new gender-neutral term, "Latinx" (pronounced *la-TEEN-ex*). In this book, we continue to follow the practice of the U.S. Census Bureau, which refers to people of "Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish" origin.

- At the time of this writing, in reference to African Americans, there is an ongoing discussion about whether to use the lowercase “black” or uppercase “Black” to refer to persons of African ancestry. In keeping with the practice of an increasing number of major publications, in the introductions written for this book, we use the uppercase “Black,” which acknowledges, as an editor for the *New York Times* explains, “the difference between a color and a culture.”
- While we have chosen to capitalize “Black” (except when lowercase “black” is used in historical texts), we have chosen not to capitalize “white.” The historical texts gathered in this book do not capitalize “white.” There are arguments for capitalizing “white” on the grounds that lowercase “white” might be taken to imply “whiteness” as a commonly accepted norm apart from race, while uppercase “White” acknowledges “Whiteness” as a racial identity in the context of American history. On the other hand, the *New York Times*, the *Columbia Journalism Review*, and others make the point that “white” should remain lowercase because hate groups and white supremacists have long insisted on capitalizing “white.” We maintain our practice of not capitalizing “white” while affirming that “whiteness” is not to be understood as a norm but as a racial identity.

To sum up: In this book, in writing of race and ethnicity, it has been our goal to remain historically accurate in the primary source materials, and culturally sensitive to generally accepted current usage in the introductions that provide historical background. If you think that in specific instances we have not met this goal, please let us know by contacting the Core Knowledge Foundation.

Three Important Amendments to the U.S. Constitution

Background Knowledge

Before exploring the modern-day civil rights movement, we need to take a brief look back to earlier times—to the years after the Civil War, known as Reconstruction. During this time, three important amendments were added to the Constitution. Many of the speakers and writers featured in this book refer to these amendments.

First, let's recall some basic facts about the Constitution and its amendments. The Constitution of the United States is “the supreme law of the land”—those very words are in the Constitution itself. If a state law says one thing, and the U.S. Constitution says another, then the U.S. Constitution takes priority. Even as the highest law of our land, the Constitution is not carved in stone—in other words, it can be changed. Changes to the Constitution are called amendments. These changes cannot be made lightly—a great majority must first agree. It requires two-thirds of each house of Congress and three-fourths of all the states to ratify an amendment before it becomes part of the Constitution.

The fact that our Constitution can be amended proved especially critical during the years after the Civil War (which ended in 1865), known as Reconstruction. During Reconstruction, one especially challenging question was how to bring millions of formerly enslaved people into the political life of the nation. In part this question was answered by three amendments to the Constitution—the Thirteenth, Fourteenth, and Fifteenth.

The Reconstruction Amendments, as they are called, had far-reaching effects long after Reconstruction ended around 1877, not only for Black people but for all people facing unfair and unequal treatment. The struggle for civil rights, even to this day, has often built on the words and ideas in these amendments, especially the Fourteenth.

The Reconstruction Amendments

Primary Source

Each of the three Reconstruction Amendments has a number of sections. Here we introduce only the sections most relevant to issues of civil rights. Because the legal language in the Constitution is sometimes technical and complicated, we present both the original language and a paraphrased version.

The Thirteenth Amendment

The Thirteenth Amendment (ratified in December 1865) outlawed slavery.

Thirteenth Amendment, Section 1	Paraphrase
Neither slavery nor <u>involuntary servitude</u> , except as a punishment for crime whereof the party shall have been <u>duly</u> convicted, shall exist within the United States, or any place subject to their <u>jurisdiction</u> .	Neither slavery nor forced labor shall be allowed in the United States, or any place controlled by the United States, except to punish a person who has been justly convicted of a crime.

involuntary servitude: forced labor; work that you are forced to do against your will

duly: properly; justly (that is, in agreement with proper legal procedures)

jurisdiction: government power and authority

The Fourteenth Amendment

The Fourteenth Amendment (ratified in July 1868) made formerly enslaved people into citizens. It also provided guarantees of equal treatment that continue to influence decisions about civil rights to this day. The first section of the amendment makes three main points:

- *Citizenship: All persons born in this country are automatically citizens of the United States and citizens of the states where they live.*
- *Due Process: No state can take away your life, freedom, or belongings without giving you fair treatment according to accepted legal procedures and principles.*
- *Equal Protection: States cannot give rights and protections to some people but deny them to other people; all persons must be treated equally by the law.*

Fourteenth Amendment, Section 1	Paraphrase
All persons born or <u>naturalized</u> in the United States, and <u>subject to the jurisdiction thereof</u> , are citizens of the United States and of the State <u>wherein</u> they reside. No State shall make or enforce any law which shall <u>abridge</u> the privileges or <u>immunities</u> of citizens of the United States; nor shall any State deprive any person of life, liberty, or property, without <u>due process of law</u> ; nor deny to any person within its jurisdiction the equal protection of the laws.	All persons born in the United States, or who go through the process required for citizenship, and who are under the authority of the laws of the United States, are citizens of the United States and of the state in which they live. No state may make any laws that limit the rights and protections of citizens; and, no state can take any person's life, liberty, or property without going through the necessary steps required by law, nor can a state refuse to give any person within the state the equal protection of the laws.

naturalized: having gained citizenship in a new country

subject to the jurisdiction thereof: under the authority of the laws of the United States—
in other words, not under the authority of some foreign government or owing allegiance to some other country.

wherein: in which

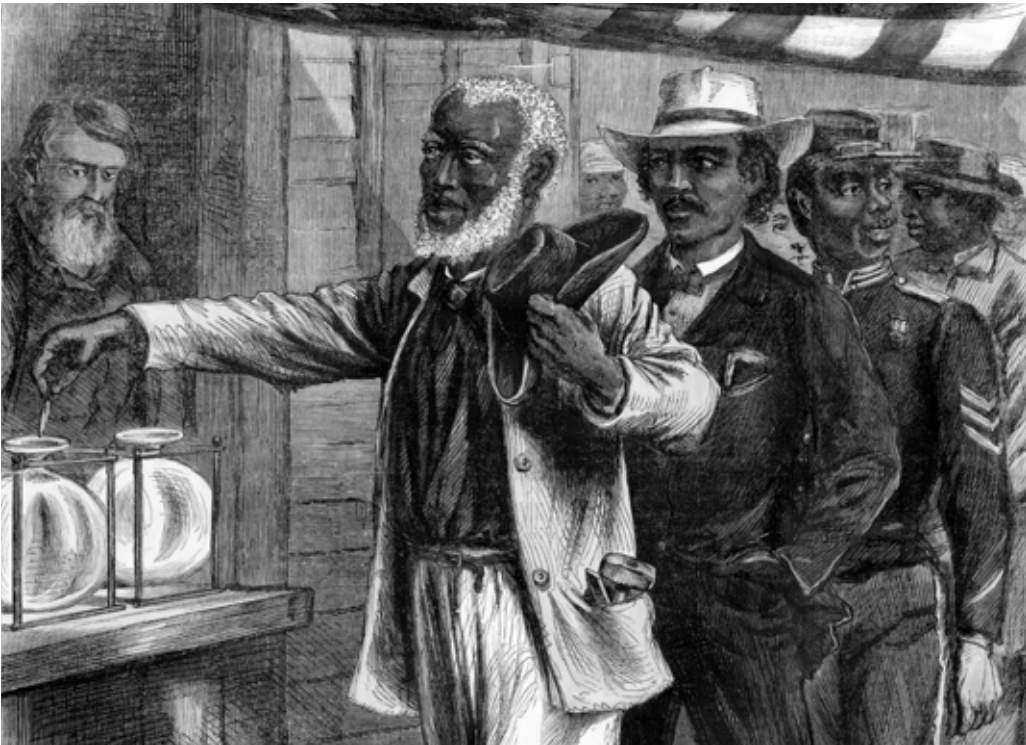
abridge: limit

immunities: protections

due process of law: fair treatment according to accepted legal procedures and principles

The Fifteenth Amendment

The Fifteenth Amendment (ratified in February 1870) made it unlawful to deny or limit the right to vote based on a person's race, color, or the fact that the person was once enslaved.



African American men line up to vote. The Fifteenth Amendment made it unlawful to deny the right to vote based on a person's race or color.

Fifteenth Amendment, Section 1	Paraphrase
The right of citizens of the United States to vote shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any State on account of race, color, or previous condition of <u>servitude</u> .	No citizen's right to vote can be taken away or limited because of the person's race or color, or because the person might have been enslaved in the past.

servitude: the condition of being completely under the power of others; the condition of being enslaved

Plessy v. Ferguson: **Separate But Equal**

After the Civil War, the Thirteenth, Fourteenth, and Fifteenth amendments to the Constitution changed the rules in a society in which one race had long dominated another. The amendments made formerly enslaved people citizens, guaranteed equal treatment under the law, and made it unlawful to deny the right to vote based on a person's race or color. But some states, mostly in the South, passed "Jim Crow" laws, designed to undo the recent Constitutional amendments and keep the races separate.

The term "Jim Crow" came from the name of a character from minstrel shows, a form of entertainment that began in the early nineteenth century. These shows featured songs and silly skits with white actors in "blackface," using make-up to make them look like insulting stereotypes of Black people. By the 1890s, "Jim Crow" referred to the many customs and laws intended to enforce racial segregation—keeping the races apart and separate—while taking away the rights and opportunities of African Americans.

Jim Crow laws kept African Americans and white people segregated in many ways. Because of Jim Crow, Black children could not attend the same schools as white children. Black people could not ride in the train cars reserved for white people. Public bathrooms were marked with signs saying "Whites Only" or "Colored." Jim Crow denied Black people their rights, limited their economic opportunities, and kept them socially inferior to white people.

Many African Americans worked to challenge Jim Crow laws and end segregation. But in 1896, their efforts received a severe setback from a ruling by the U.S. Supreme Court in the case of *Plessy v. Ferguson*.

The *Plessy* case had its beginnings in Louisiana with a state law called the Separate Car Act. This law, passed in 1890, required that all railroads in Louisiana have “equal but separate accommodations for the white and colored races.” For violating the law, a passenger could be fined twenty-five dollars or put in jail for up to twenty days.

A group of Black citizens organized to challenge the Separate Car Act. Their plan was to have an African American sit in the car for whites only and, after his arrest, to take the case to court and argue that the Separate Car Act violated the U.S. Constitution. They picked Homer Plessy, a thirty-year old shoemaker whose great-great-grandmother was African; his other ancestors came from European backgrounds. His skin was light, but back then he was considered Black—even though nobody in the whites-only railroad car would have given him a second glance.

In June of 1892, Plessy bought a first-class ticket for a train departing from New Orleans. He proceeded to sit in the car reserved for white people. When the train’s conductor was told that Plessy was Black, the conductor ordered him to move to the “colored car.” Plessy refused. He was arrested and taken to jail.

In the district court, Plessy’s lawyers argued that the Separate Car Act went against the U.S. Constitution. They said the act violated the Thirteenth Amendment, which banned slavery, and the Fourteenth Amendment, which forbids states from making any laws that “abridge the privileges or immunities of citizens,” and guarantees all citizens “the equal protection of the laws.”

In the New Orleans district court, Judge John Howard Ferguson said Plessy was guilty and the Separate Car Act was constitutional. The Louisiana State Supreme Court agreed with Judge Ferguson’s

accommodations: something supplied to satisfy a need, here, seating on a form of public transportation

decision. And in 1896, the Supreme Court of the United States—the highest court in the country—ruled that the Louisiana law did not violate the U.S. Constitution.

In their ruling on *Plessy v. Ferguson*, the U.S. Supreme Court justices said that there was nothing wrong with Jim Crow laws so long as equal facilities were available to both Black and white people. In reality, the separate facilities for Black people were rarely equal.

For a half-century after the Plessy ruling, the principle of “separate but equal,” as it came to be known, was used to justify racial segregation in transportation, restaurants, public restrooms, schools, and more.

Majority Opinion of the U. S. Supreme Court in Plessy v. Ferguson (1896)

Primary Source

A majority of the justices on the United States Supreme Court—seven out of nine—agreed that Louisiana’s law requiring segregation on trains was constitutional. (One justice did not take part in the case because he was away for a family matter.) The seven justices bluntly rejected the argument that the Louisiana law violated the Thirteenth Amendment. While the justices allowed that the Fourteenth Amendment made white and Black Americans equal in the eyes of the law, they said the amendment did not guarantee “social equality” and did not forbid “distinctions based upon color.” Plessy’s lawyers had argued that such distinctions made Blacks inferior in the eyes of the law, but the Supreme Court justices disagreed.

justices: the title given to judges in higher courts, in particular the U.S. Supreme Court

distinctions: acts of separating people or things into different groups based on specific characteristics

Here are excerpts from the majority opinion. Because the legal language is sometimes technical and complicated, we present both the original language and a paraphrased version.

[Original Language]

This case turns upon the constitutionality of an act of the general assembly of the state of Louisiana, passed in 1890, providing for separate railway carriages for the white and colored races. . . .

The constitutionality of this act is attacked upon the ground that it conflicts both with the Thirteenth amendment of the Constitution, abolishing slavery, and the Fourteenth amendment, which prohibits certain restrictive legislation on the part of the states.

That it does not conflict with the Thirteenth amendment, which abolished slavery and involuntary servitude, except as a punishment for crime, is too clear for argument. . . .

. . . The object of the [Fourteenth] amendment was undoubtedly to enforce the absolute equality of the two races before the law, but . . . it could not have been intended to abolish distinctions based upon color, or to enforce social, as distinguished from political, equality, or a commingling of the two races upon terms unsatisfactory to either. Laws permitting, and even requiring, their separation in places where they are liable to be brought into contact do not necessarily imply the inferiority of either race to the other, and have been generally, if not universally, recognized as within the competency of the state legislatures. . . .

majority opinion: In law, an *opinion* is the formal written statement from a judge or group of judges that states the decision in the case and explains the reasoning and principles of law used in reaching the decision. A majority opinion is one that has been agreed to by more than half the members of a court.

general assembly: the state legislature; the lawmaking body of the state

involuntary servitude: forced labor; work that you are forced to do against your will

commingling: mixing together

liable: likely

So far, then, as a conflict with the Fourteenth amendment is concerned, the case reduces itself to the question whether the statute of Louisiana is a reasonable regulation. . . . In determining the question of reasonableness, [the state legislature] is at liberty to act with reference to the established usages, customs, and traditions of the people, and with a view to the promotion of their comfort, and the preservation of the public peace and good order. Gauged by this standard, we cannot say that a law which authorizes or even requires the separation of the two races in public conveyances is unreasonable. . . .

We consider the underlying fallacy of the plaintiff's argument to consist in the assumption that the enforced separation of the two races stamps the colored race with a badge of inferiority. If this be so, it is not by reason of anything found in the act, but solely because the colored race chooses to put that construction upon it. . . .

The argument also assumes that social prejudices may be overcome by legislation, and that equal rights cannot be secured to the negro except by an enforced commingling of the two races. We cannot accept this proposition. If the two races are to meet upon terms of social equality, it must be the result of natural affinities, a mutual appreciation of each other's merits and a voluntary consent of individuals. . . .

statute: law

conveyances: vehicles for transporting (such as a train)

fallacy: false or mistaken idea

plaintiff: In law, the *plaintiff* is the person who sues or accuses another person (called the *defendant*) in a court. (To *sue* is to undertake a legal process against a person or organization you think has wronged you in some way.)

solely: only; for this reason alone

construction: interpretation; a particular understanding of what was said

proposition: statement that claims something as true

affinities: feelings of closeness and shared understanding

mutual: shared



For more than a half-century, the Plessy ruling was used to justify racial segregation in transportation (as at the bus station pictured here), restaurants, public restrooms, schools, and more.

Legislation is powerless to eradicate racial instincts or to abolish distinctions based upon physical differences, and the attempt to do so can only result in accentuating the difficulties of the present situation. If the civil and political rights of both races be equal, one cannot be inferior to the other civilly or politically. If one race be inferior to the other socially, the Constitution of the United States cannot put them upon the same plane.

[Paraphrased Version]

This case focuses on whether a law passed by the state legislature of Louisiana is constitutional. The law, passed in 1890, calls for separate railway cars for white and Black people.

eradicate: remove completely; erase

accentuating: emphasizing

It has been charged that the Louisiana law is unconstitutional because it is in conflict with two amendments to the U.S. Constitution: the Thirteenth, which abolished slavery, and the Fourteenth, which forbids the states from making laws that limit people's rights.

It is so obvious that the Louisiana law does not violate the Thirteenth Amendment that we are not even going to explain why.

The Fourteenth Amendment was clearly intended to make Blacks and whites equal in the eyes of the law. But it was never intended to wipe out differences based on color. Nor was it intended to require social equality (as opposed to political equality). Nor does it require that Black people and white people mix together in ways that are not agreeable to either race. Laws that allow or require their separation in places where they are likely to come together do not necessarily mean that one race is inferior to the other. And it is generally agreed that state legislatures have the authority to pass such laws.

So, in considering whether the Louisiana law is in conflict with the Fourteenth Amendment, it comes down to this—is the law reasonable? In asking whether the law is reasonable, we note that the Louisiana state legislature is free to act in ways that go along with existing local customs and traditions, in order to make people comfortable and keep things peaceful and orderly. So, looking at it that way, a law requiring separation of Blacks and whites on railroad cars does not seem unreasonable to us.

We think Mr. Plessy is basically wrong in assuming that the required separation of Black people marks them as an inferior race. If they feel singled out as inferior, it's not because of anything in the Louisiana law, but simply because that is the way they choose to see the law.

Mr. Plessy also assumes that laws can undo social prejudices, and that only a required social mixing of Black and white people will result in equal rights for Black people. We don't agree. If Black and white people are going to mix socially, it must be because they have some natural liking for each other, because they both appreciate each other's good qualities, and because individuals willingly agree to it.

Laws have no power to root out deep-seated feelings about race. Nor can laws erase physical differences—trying to do so will only make things even more difficult than they already are. If both races have equal civil rights and equal political rights, then one race can't be civilly or politically inferior to the other. But if one race is socially inferior to the other, the U.S. Constitution can't make them socially equal.

Dissenting Opinion of Justice John Marshall Harlan in Plessy v. Ferguson (1896)

Primary Source

One Supreme Court justice, John Marshall Harlan, did not agree with the majority. In his dissenting opinion, he asserts, "Our constitution is color-blind, and neither knows nor tolerates classes among citizens." He reminds us of the purpose and power of the Thirteenth, Fourteenth, and Fifteenth Amendments to the Constitution, and argues that those amendments are undercut by the ruling of the majority in this case. Because the legal language is sometimes technical and complicated, we present both the original language and a paraphrased version.

dissenting opinion: a statement written by a judge or judges expressing reasons for disagreement with the majority opinion of the court

[Original Language]

We have before us a state enactment that compels, under penalties, the separation of the two races in railroad passenger coaches, and makes it a crime for a citizen of either race to enter a coach that has been assigned to citizens of the other race.

Thus, the state regulates the use of a public highway by citizens of the United States solely upon the basis of race.

I deny that any legislative body or judicial tribunal may have regard to the race of citizens when the civil rights of those citizens are involved. . . .

The Thirteenth amendment . . . not only struck down the institution of slavery as previously existing in the United States, but it prevents the imposition of any burdens or disabilities that constitute badges of slavery or servitude. It decreed universal civil freedom in this country. . . . But that amendment having been found inadequate to the protection of the rights of those who had been in slavery, it was followed by the Fourteenth amendment, which added greatly to the dignity and glory of American citizenship and to the security of personal liberty by declaring that

enactment: a law

compels: forces; requires

public highway: In part of his opinion not included here, Justice Harlan refers to a previous court case, which established that, for legal purposes, "a railroad is a public highway."

solely: only; for this reason alone

tribunal: court

imposition: the act of putting some unreasonable demand on someone

burdens: conditions that are hard to accept; things that are hard to do

disabilities: conditions that limit a person's rights or freedom

constitute: to form; to be equivalent

badges: symbols; outward signs of something

servitude: the condition of being completely under the power of others; the condition of being enslaved

decreed: ordered

inadequate: not enough

“all persons born or naturalized in the United States, and subject to the jurisdiction thereof, are citizens of the United States and of the State wherein they reside,” and that “no State shall make or enforce any law which shall abridge the privileges or immunities of citizens of the United States; nor shall any State deprive any person of life, liberty or property without due process of law, nor deny to any person within its jurisdiction the equal protection of the laws.”

These two amendments, if enforced according to their true intent and meaning, will protect all the civil rights that pertain to freedom and citizenship. Finally, and to the end that no citizen should be denied, on account of his race, the privilege of participating in the political control of his country, it was declared by the Fifteenth Amendment that “the right of citizens of the United States to vote shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any State on account of race, color or previous condition of servitude.”

These notable additions to the fundamental law were welcomed by the friends of liberty throughout the world. They removed the race line from our governmental systems. . . .

. . . It was said that the statute of Louisiana does not discriminate against either race, but prescribes a rule applicable alike to white and colored citizens. But . . . everyone knows that the statute in question had its origin in the purpose not so much to exclude

naturalized: having gained citizenship in a new country

jurisdiction: government power and authority

abridge: limit

immunities: protections

due process of law: fair treatment according to accepted legal procedures and principles

pertain: relate

abridged: limited

discriminate: to treat unfairly

prescribes: establishes (a rule or law)

statute in question: the law under consideration in this case (specifically, the Louisiana Separate Car Act)

white persons from railroad cars occupied by blacks as to exclude colored people from coaches occupied by or assigned to white persons. . . .

If a State can prescribe . . . that whites and blacks shall not travel as passengers in the same railroad coach, why may it not so regulate the use of the streets of its cities and towns as to compel white citizens to keep on one side of a street and black citizens to keep on the other? Why may it not, upon like grounds, . . . require the separation in railroad coaches of native and naturalized citizens of the United States, or of Protestants and Roman Catholics? . . .

. . . In view of the Constitution, in the eye of the law, there is in this country no superior, dominant, ruling class of citizens. There is no caste here. Our constitution is color-blind, and neither knows nor tolerates classes among citizens. In respect of civil rights, all citizens are equal before the law. . . .

In my opinion, the judgment this day rendered will, in time, prove to be quite as pernicious as the decision made by this tribunal in the Dred Scott Case. It was adjudged in that case that the descendants of Africans who were imported into this country and sold as slaves were not included nor intended to be included under the word “citizens” in the Constitution, and could not claim any of the rights and privileges which that instrument provided for and secured to citizens of the United States. . . .

prescribe: make a rule that requires certain actions

regulate: control through rules or laws

caste: rigid system of social classes

rendered: delivered (a legal decision)

pernicious: having harmful effects

Dred Scott Case: In 1857, the Supreme Court ruled that Dred Scott, an enslaved man whose owner took him to live in a free territory where slavery was prohibited, was not entitled to his freedom. Not only did the court rule that Scott was his owner’s property; it also declared that African Americans were not citizens of the United States and could never become citizens.

adjudged: decided (in a case of law)

instrument: legal document

The recent amendments of the Constitution, it was supposed, had eradicated these principles from our institutions. . . . The present decision . . . will encourage the belief that it is possible, by means of state enactments, to defeat the beneficent purposes which the people of the United States had in view when they adopted the recent amendments of the Constitution. . . . Sixty millions of whites are in no danger from the presence here of eight millions of blacks. The destinies of the two races, in this country, are indissolubly linked together, and the interests of both require that the common government of all shall not permit the seeds of race hate to be planted under the sanction of law. What can more certainly arouse race hate, what more certainly create and perpetuate a feeling of distrust between these races, than state enactments which, in fact, proceed on the ground that colored citizens are so inferior and degraded that they cannot be allowed to sit in public coaches occupied by white citizens? That, as all will admit, is the real meaning of such legislation as was enacted in Louisiana.

. . . The arbitrary separation of citizens on the basis of race while they are on a public highway is a badge of servitude wholly inconsistent with the civil freedom and the equality before the law established by the Constitution. It cannot be justified upon any legal grounds.

If evils will result from the commingling of the two races upon public highways established for the benefit of all, they will

recent amendments: the Thirteenth, Fourteenth, and Fifteenth Amendments

eradicated: completely removed

beneficent: doing good or causing good to be done

indissolubly: in a way that cannot be broken up or destroyed

sanction: official approval

perpetuate: cause something to continue

degraded: regarded with disrespect; judged as worthless

arbitrary: random; based on no plan or reason

badge of servitude: an outward sign of a condition equivalent to slavery

be infinitely less than those that will surely come from state legislation regulating the enjoyment of civil rights upon the basis of race. We boast of the freedom enjoyed by our people above all other peoples. But it is difficult to reconcile that boast with a state of the law which, practically, puts the brand of servitude and degradation upon a large class of our fellow citizens, our equals before the law. The thin disguise of “equal” accommodations for passengers in railroad coaches will not mislead anyone, nor atone for the wrong this day done. . . .

[Paraphrased Version]

We are looking at a state law that requires Black people and white people to sit in separate railroad coaches, and makes it a crime for a citizen of one race to sit in a coach assigned to the other race, with penalties for doing so.

So, simply based on race and nothing more, the state is controlling and limiting how citizens can use public transportation.

I say that no lawmaking body or court can consider the race of citizens when dealing with matters that affect the civil rights of those citizens.

Not only did the Thirteenth Amendment ban slavery as it had existed in the United States; it also ruled out any actions that put unacceptable conditions or limits on people in ways that in effect mark them as being like slaves. The amendment ordered that all citizens in this country have freedom. But because the amendment was not enough to protect the rights of people who were once enslaved, the Fourteenth Amendment was added. It made being

brand: a mark burned into the skin

degradation: the condition of being kept down by disrespectful and humiliating treatment

atone: to make up for errors

an American citizen even more wonderful, and strengthened the protection of our personal freedom, by declaring that all persons born in the United States, or who go through the process required for citizenship, and who are under the authority of the laws of the United States, are citizens of the United States and of the state in which they live; and, that states may not make any laws that limit the rights and protections of citizens; and, that no state can take any person's life, liberty, or property without going through the necessary steps required by law, nor can a state refuse to give any person within the state the equal protection of the laws.

If the Thirteenth and Fourteenth Amendments are enforced in ways that support their true intention and meaning, they will protect all civil rights that apply to freedom and citizenship. For the same purpose—and because no citizen should be excluded, for reasons of race, from taking part in the government of the country—the Fifteenth Amendment declared that no citizen's right to vote can be denied or limited because of the person's race or color, or because the person might have been enslaved in the past.

Around the world, people who value liberty welcomed these amendments to the U. S. Constitution. These amendments removed racial barriers from our government.

It was said that the Louisiana law does not unfairly treat one race or the other, but makes a rule that applies to both white and Black citizens. But everyone knows that from the start the Louisiana law was not meant to keep white people out of railroad cars where Black people are sitting. It was meant to keep Black people out of the coaches reserved for white people.

If a state can require by law that Black and white people must not travel in the same railroad car, then what is to stop the state from controlling the use of city streets in a way that forces Black people to stay on one side of the street and white people on the other? By the same reasoning, what would stop the state from requiring that persons born in the United States ride in separate railroad cars from naturalized citizens, or from requiring the separation of Protestants from Catholics?

According to the Constitution, in the eye of the law, in this country there is no superior, controlling, ruling class of citizens. We have no rigid system of social classes. Our constitution is color-blind, and does not recognize or put up with classes among citizens. With regard to civil rights, all citizens are equal before the law.

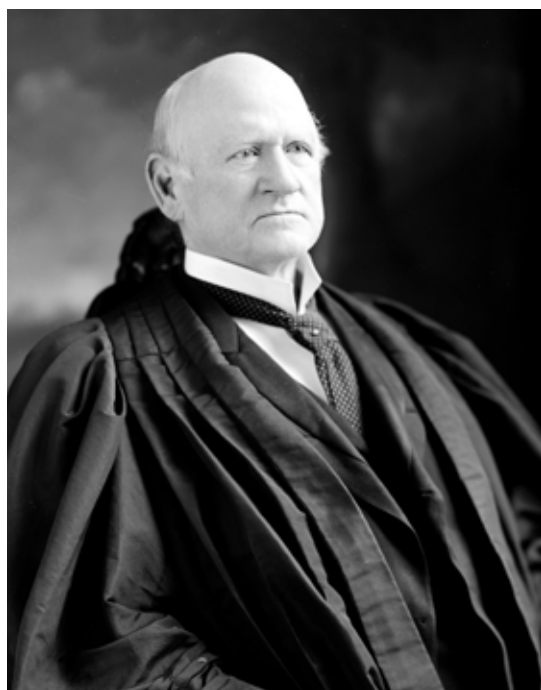
I think the court's decision today will eventually prove to be as harmful as the Dred Scott decision, which said that the descendants of Africans who were brought to this country and sold as slaves were not, nor never intended to be, included by the Constitution as citizens, and could not claim the rights and privileges that the Constitution guarantees to citizens of the United States.

You might have thought that the recent amendments to the Constitution had completely removed such ideas from our institutions. The court's decision in this case will make people believe that states can pass laws that undercut the helpful effects the American people intended when they adopted the recent amendments to the Constitution. In this country, sixty million white people are not in any danger from eight million Black people. The fates of the two races are linked together in ways that cannot be broken apart. For the good of both, our nation's government cannot allow the seeds of hatred between the races

to be planted in ways that seem to be approved by law. What can more certainly create hatred and lasting distrust between the races than when states pass laws that are based on seeing Black citizens as so low and unworthy of respect that they must not sit in the same railroad cars as white citizens? That, as everyone must confess, is the real meaning of the law that was passed in Louisiana.

The unreasonable act of separating citizens using public transportation based on their color marks those citizens as being like slaves, and goes entirely against the freedom and equality that the Constitution says these people have. There is no legal justification for such separation.

If evils come from the mixing of the races in public transportation created for the good of all, they will be infinitely less than the evils caused by laws that limit civil rights because of a person's race. We



brag about how Americans enjoy greater freedom than any other people. But that claim is in conflict with laws that basically mark a large group of our fellow citizens—who are our equals in the eyes of the law—as unworthy and practically like slaves. The pretense that the separate railroad coaches are “equal” will not fool anyone, nor make up for the wrongs done on this day.

Supreme Court Justice John Marshall Harlan was the lone dissenter to the decision in *Plessy v. Ferguson*.

A. Philip Randolph and the Desegregation of the Armed Forces

Background Knowledge

With few exceptions, until the middle of the twentieth century the armed forces of the United States were segregated. African American soldiers served mainly in all-Black units. They were housed in separate barracks and ate in separate spaces. Such practices seemed wrong to the labor leader and civil rights activist A. Philip Randolph (1889-1979), who became a driving force behind the effort to desegregate the U.S. military.

In 1925 Randolph was elected to head the largest Black labor union, the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters. The union grew quickly under Randolph's direction, while Randolph became a well-known advocate for civil rights and economic opportunity for African Americans.

With the coming of World War II, Randolph was angered because Black workers were shut out of good jobs in the defense industries. American factories were hiring many workers to meet the wartime demand for vehicles, machinery, and weapons, but these factories were only hiring Black workers for the worst-paying jobs, while all the better jobs went to white workers.

Along with officials of the NAACP and other civil rights organizations, Randolph tried to convince President Franklin D.

union: an organization of workers to protect their rights and achieve goals such as higher wages and better working conditions

porters: persons employed to carry luggage and provide other helpful services on the railroads

NAACP: National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, a leading civil rights organization

Roosevelt to end discrimination in the defense industries. When their letters, meetings, and conferences led nowhere, Randolph decided on another strategy. He began organizing a massive march on Washington, D.C., scheduled for July 1, 1941.

Randolph estimated that up to 100,000 African Americans would march to the Lincoln Memorial and peacefully make their concerns known to President Roosevelt. The president tried to persuade Randolph to call off the march. Randolph remained firm—the march would go on.

On June 25, 1941, six days before the planned march, Roosevelt signed Executive Order 8802, which stated that “there shall be no discrimination in the employment of workers in defense industries or government because of race, creed, color, or national origin.” Randolph cancelled the march.

Although good jobs in the defense industries were now open to Black workers, throughout World War II the armed forces of the United States were almost entirely segregated. In an article published in 1942, A. Philip Randolph observed that “in many parts of the South, Negroes in Uncle Sam’s uniform are being put upon, mobbed, sometimes even shot down by civilian and military people, and on occasion lynched.” Randolph asked, “Why has a man got to be Jim Crowed to die for democracy? If you haven’t got democracy yourself, how can you carry it to somebody else?” Randolph formed the Committee Against Jim Crow in Military Service. “If Negroes must fight,” he said, “let them fight as free

Executive Order: an order from the President of the United States, usually directed to, and requiring action on the part of, government agencies or officials

creed: religious belief

the march: While Randolph called off the 1941 march, years later, in 1963, he would play a major role in organizing the March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom. See page 143.

lynched: killed by a lawless mob

men and not as Jim Crow slaves.”

Randolph organized rallies, met with government officials, and coordinated with other civil rights organizations. In March 1948, Randolph and other civil rights leaders met with President Harry S. Truman. Randolph urged the president to issue an executive order to end segregation in the armed forces. The meeting produced no results. But Randolph had no intention of letting up in his pressure on the president to desegregate the military.

Shortly after meeting with President Truman, A. Philip Randolph appeared before the Senate Armed Services Committee. This committee within the U.S. Senate deals with proposed laws relating to the armed services, defense spending, and other military matters, including the Selective Service System—the government organization that signs up young men for the draft. (To be drafted is to be required to do military service in times of need.)

When Randolph appeared before the Armed Services Committee, it was reviewing President Truman’s proposal for “universal military training”—a plan to strengthen the country’s military readiness by requiring all men from age eighteen to twenty-two to spend a year in military training. Randolph told the Senate committee that as long as the American military remained segregated, he would urge young men to refuse to sign up for the draft or for the president’s proposed “universal military training.”

This was a bold move on Randolph’s part. What he was urging was against the law. Some civil rights leaders thought Randolph was going too far. But Randolph saw danger in the president’s proposed program—if it were passed, said Randolph, it would establish “a federally enforced pattern of segregation.” That would be a big setback

for civil rights advocates. If the federal government were to allow segregation on such a vast scale, then, Randolph asked, what would stop states or private businesses from discriminating when they could simply point to “the federal government itself . . . discriminating against Negro youth in military installations all over the world?”

A. Philip Randolph's Testimony before the Senate Armed Services Committee (1948)

Primary Source

In his testimony before the Senate Armed Services Committee, A. Philip Randolph justified his call for men to refuse to serve in a segregated military by pointing to recent events in India. There, in 1947, a deeply religious man named Mohandas Gandhi had led his country to gain independence from the long rule of Great Britain. He did this not through armed revolution but through civil disobedience—nonviolent resistance to unjust laws and oppressive actions. A. Philip Randolph argued that for American men to refuse to be drafted into a segregated military was also a form of civil disobedience—these men, Randolph told the Senate committee, would be like Gandhi in refusing to obey an unjust law in order to uphold a higher moral law. (As you will see in later selections in this book, Gandhi influenced many American civil rights activists.)

In the end, President Truman's universal military training program never happened. And Randolph did not have to go forward with a campaign of massive civil disobedience because in July of 1948, Truman issued an order that desegregated the Armed Forces. Historians offer various reasons why Truman issued the order, including the pressure put on him by A. Philip Randolph. You can get a feel for the lengths to which Randolph was willing to go in the following selections from his testimony to the Senate committee.

testimony: a formal written or spoken statement in an official setting

Mr. Chairman:

. . . I reported last week to President Truman that Negroes are in no mood to shoulder a gun for democracy abroad so long as they are denied democracy here at home. In particular, they resent the idea of fighting or being drafted into another Jim Crow army. I passed this information on to Mr. Truman not as a threat, but rather as a frank, factual survey of Negro opinion. Today I should like to make clear to the Senate Armed Services Committee and, through you, to Congress and the American people, that passage now of a Jim Crow draft may only result in a mass civil disobedience movement along the lines of the magnificent struggles of the people of India against British imperialism. . . .

In resorting to the principles . . . of Gandhi, whose death was publicly mourned by many members of Congress and President Truman, Negroes will be serving a higher law than any passed by a national legislature in an era when racism spells our doom. . . . In refusing to accept compulsory military segregation, Negro youth will be serving their fellow men throughout the world.

. . . So long as the Armed Services propose to enforce such universally harmful segregation not only here at home but also overseas, Negro youth have a moral obligation not to lend themselves as world-wide carriers of an evil and hellish doctrine. . . . I can only repeat that this time Negroes will not take a Jim Crow draft lying down. The conscience of the world will be shaken as by nothing else when thousands and thousands of us second-class Americans choose imprisonment in preference to permanent military slavery.

imperialism: the practice of extending a country's power by taking over other countries

death: Gandhi died in January 1948, shot dead by an assassin.

compulsory: required

as by nothing else: as it never has been before by anything else

. . . I personally will advise Negroes to refuse to fight as slaves for a democracy they cannot possess and cannot enjoy. . . . I personally pledge myself to openly counsel, aid, and abet youth, both white and Negro, to quarantine any Jim Crow conscription system, whether it bear the label of UMT or Selective Service.

. . . From coast to coast in my travels I shall call upon all Negro veterans to join this civil disobedience movement and to recruit their younger brothers in an organized refusal to register and be drafted. Many veterans, bitter over Army Jim Crow, have indicated that they will act spontaneously in this fashion, regardless of any organized movement. “Never again,” they say with finality.

I shall appeal to the thousands of white youth in schools and colleges who are today vigorously shedding the prejudices of their parents and professors. I shall urge them to demonstrate their solidarity with Negro youth by ignoring the entire registration and induction machinery. And finally I shall appeal to Negro parents to lend their moral support to their sons—to stand behind them as they march with heads high to federal prisons as a telling demonstration to the world that Negroes have reached the limit of human endurance—that is, in the words of the spiritual, we’ll be buried in our graves before we will be slaves.

. . . We have no other recourse but to tell our story to the peoples of the world by organized direct action. . . . If we cannot ring a

counsel: advise

abet: to help or encourage someone in doing something wrong

quarantine: to exclude and keep away from; to put apart in isolation

conscription: having to do with the draft, that is, with required military service

UMT: Universal Military Training (the program proposed by President Truman)

vigorously: energetically

solidarity: unity

induction: the act of bringing someone into the military

telling: producing a strong impression; having a significant effect

recourse: source of help to deal with a difficult situation

direct action: nonviolent action used to bring about change when it is no longer useful to negotiate

bell in you by appealing to human decency, we shall command your respect and the respect of the world by our united refusal to cooperate with tyrannical injustice.

. . . I feel morally obligated to disturb and keep disturbed the conscience of Jim Crow America. In resisting the insult of Jim Crowism to the soul of black America, we are helping to save the soul of America. . . . We shall wage a relentless warfare against Jim Crow without hate or revenge for the moral and spiritual progress and safety of our country, world peace, and freedom.



With civil rights activist and lawyer Grant Reynolds (left), A. Philip Randolph (right) organized the Committee Against Jim Crow in Military Service. Here they are seen testifying before the Senate Armed Services Committee in 1948.

relentless: not stopping or giving in in any way

President Harry Truman's Executive Order 9981 (1948)

Primary Source

In July 1948 President Truman issued an executive order ending discrimination in the U.S. military. Desegregation in the armed services didn't happen overnight; some top military leaders resisted Truman's order. But within a few years, when the U.S. got involved in the Korean War, Black and white soldiers were fighting together.

Establishing the President's Committee on Equality of Treatment and Opportunity in the Armed Forces.

WHEREAS it is essential that there be maintained in the armed services of the United States the highest standards of democracy, with equality of treatment and opportunity for all those who serve in our country's defense:

NOW THEREFORE, by virtue of the authority vested in me as President of the United States, by the Constitution and the statutes of the United States, and as Commander in Chief of the armed services, it is hereby ordered as follows:

1. It is hereby declared to be the policy of the President that there shall be equality of treatment and opportunity for all persons in the armed services without regard to race, color, religion or national origin. This policy shall be put into effect as rapidly as possible, having due regard to the time required to effectuate any necessary changes without impairing efficiency or morale.

whereas: In legal documents, when *Whereas* opens a statement, it means "Since it is true that. . ." or "Considering the fact that. . ."

vested: fully guaranteed by law

statutes: laws

effectuate: bring about

impairing: damaging; making worse

2. There shall be created in the National Military Establishment an advisory committee to be known as the President's Committee on Equality of Treatment and Opportunity in the Armed Services. . . .
3. The Committee is authorized on behalf of the President to examine into the rules, procedures and practices of the Armed Services in order to determine in what respect such rules, procedures and practices may be altered or improved with a view to carrying out the policy of this order. . . .
4. All executive departments and agencies of the Federal Government are authorized and directed to cooperate with the Committee in its work, and to furnish the Committee such information or the services of such persons as the Committee may require in the performance of its duties. . . .



President Truman's 1948 order ended segregation in the U.S. military. Shortly after, Black and white soldiers fought side by side in the Korean War.

The Internment of Japanese Americans: “You Feel You Were Betrayed”

Background Knowledge

When World War II began in 1939, the United States stayed out of it, even as Nazi Germany under Hitler proceeded to conquer much of Europe and launched a devastating bombing campaign against Britain. It took a military attack on American soldiers to draw America into the war. That attack came not from the Germans but from the Japanese.

On the morning of December 7, 1941, Japan launched a surprise attack on Pearl Harbor, a U.S. Navy base in Hawaii, and headquarters of the Navy’s Pacific Ocean fleet. Japanese planes swarmed over the naval base, dropping bombs that fell on American warships in the harbor, on the airfield next to the naval base, and on barracks and houses, killing men in their sleep. The attack went on for two hours. By the time the Japanese pilots flew away, they had sunk or badly damaged nineteen ships and killed more than two thousand Americans.

The surprise attack on Pearl Harbor shocked and angered the American people. On the next day, President Franklin D. Roosevelt spoke to Congress. He described December 7, 1941, as “a date which will live in infamy.” Congress quickly declared war, and millions of young Americans rushed to join the military, rallied by the cry, “Remember Pearl Harbor!”

Japanese: In World War II, Japan was part of the Axis Powers, with Germany and Italy. They fought against the Allies, whose chief members included Britain and France, and later the Soviet Union and the United States.

After the attack on Pearl Harbor, Americans were enraged at the Japanese and unfairly turned their anger on Japanese Americans as well. Large numbers of people of Japanese descent lived on America's West Coast, and many were American citizens.

For many years, they and other Asian Americans had faced prejudice and discrimination—there were laws that forbid them to own land, and that strictly limited the number of immigrants from Asian countries. After Pearl Harbor, people said that Japanese Americans could not be trusted, and accused them of being more loyal to Japan than to the United States. Some government officials claimed that Japanese Americans were spying for Japan.

All of this was untrue. Japanese Americans were as loyal as any other Americans. Nevertheless, in early 1942, President Roosevelt issued Executive Order 9066, which authorized the military to exclude from large areas in the western United States anyone considered to be a risk to national security. As a result of this order, almost 120,000 people of Japanese descent who were living on the West Coast were forced to go to internment camps located in remote areas. They were uprooted from their homes and had to give up their jobs and businesses. Because they were allowed to bring to the camps only what they could carry, many lost much of their property. Even beloved family pets had to be given away or left behind.

The “relocation centers,” as the government called the prison camps, were surrounded by barbed wire and guarded by soldiers with rifles and machine guns. The Japanese Americans held in

Executive Order: an order from the President of the United States, usually directed to, and requiring action on the part of, government agencies or officials

exclude: force out; forbid from entering

internment: the condition of being confined as a prisoner, especially for political reasons or during a war

these camps felt humiliated and angry. But they remained loyal to the United States. Many volunteered to serve in special Japanese American army units, which became famous for their courage in fighting the Germans in Europe.

In January 1945, the government finally began to allow the Japanese to leave the camps; the last camp closed in March 1946. Today most Americans realize that the internment of Japanese Americans was a terrible injustice fueled by racism. German Americans and Italian Americans did not suffer the same extreme treatment. Only people of Asian descent, who did not look like the majority of white Americans, were locked away merely on suspicion of disloyalty. While the United States was fighting for human rights abroad, it had taken away the rights of thousands of innocent people at home.

In 1980, the U.S. Congress created the Commission on Wartime Relocation and Internment of Civilians, which set out to review Executive Order 9066 and study how Japanese Americans were affected by internment in World War II. The commission produced a detailed report, including these findings:

[The] . . . removal and detention inflicted tremendous human cost. There was the obvious cost of homes and businesses sold or abandoned under circumstances of great distress, as well as injury to careers and professional advancement.

But, most important, there was the loss of liberty and the personal stigma of suspected disloyalty for thousands of people who knew

inflicted: caused someone to experience something painful or harmful

stigma: marks of shame; negative beliefs about a person or group

themselves to be devoted to their country's cause and to its ideals but whose repeated protestations of loyalty were discounted. . .

. . . Executive Order 9066 was not justified by military necessity, and the decisions which followed from it . . . were not driven by analysis of military conditions.

The broad historical causes which shaped these decisions were race prejudice, war hysteria and a failure of political leadership. Widespread ignorance of Japanese-Americans contributed to a policy conceived in haste and executed in an atmosphere of fear and anger at Japan.

A grave injustice was done to American citizens and resident aliens of Japanese ancestry who, without individual review or any probative evidence against them, were excluded, removed and detained by the United States during World War II.

In 1988, Congress passed the Civil Liberties Act, which authorized a reparations payment of \$20,000 to each person who had been interned in the camps. Beyond that, the act apologized for the internment of Japanese Americans and stated a determination to "discourage the occurrence of similar injustices and violations of civil liberties in the future."

protestations: strong statements that something is true when others tend to doubt or disbelieve it

discounted: considered as having little value or importance

hysteria: a state of emotions wildly out of control, especially among a group of people

conceived: thought up; planned

executed: carried out; put into effect

grave: very serious

resident aliens: citizens of one country (in this case, Japan) legally living in another country (in this case, the United States)

probative evidence: In law, probative evidence is evidence that tends to prove something.

detained: prevented from leaving (a place); held in prison or a similar place

reparations: actions that make up for a wrong done to someone, sometimes by making a monetary payment

*Manzanar:
As Recalled by Yuri Tateishi (1984)*

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to copyright restrictions*

Tateishi: pronounced *tah tay-ee shee*

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Japanese Americans behind a barbed wire fence wave to friends leaving the Santa Anita Camp on a train. From 1942 to 1944, the Santa Anita Race Track was used as an internment camp for thousands of Japanese American people, with many living in converted former horse stables.

Jackie Robinson Breaks Baseball's Color Barrier

Background Knowledge

In the mid-1940s, Jim Crow laws required African Americans to attend separate schools, ride in separate train cars, use separate restrooms, and more. Segregation was the rule as well in major league baseball—all the players on the major league teams were white. African Americans played in what were called the Negro leagues. There was no law keeping Black players out of the major leagues—it was just a long practice based in racism.

In 1947, Jackie Robinson (1919-1972) broke the color line in major league baseball as he took the field for the Brooklyn Dodgers. It was an event that captured national attention, for at this time, in the mid-twentieth century, major league baseball was a hugely popular sport.

Jackie Robinson was an extraordinary athlete. Back in high school, he had played not only baseball but also football and tennis, and ran track as well. He continued playing multiple sports in college.

When the United States entered World War II, he joined the Army and was sent to a segregated unit in Kansas. There he completed the training to become an officer. In 1944, when he boarded a military bus, the driver ordered him to sit at the back. Robinson refused. Later, he was confronted about the incident by an officer who charged Robinson with insubordination. Robinson was tried in a military court and found not guilty.

In 1945, Robinson joined the Kansas City Monarchs, a baseball team in the Negro leagues. He was approached by the general manager of the Brooklyn Dodgers, Branch Rickey, who was looking for a player to break the color line in major league baseball.

Rickey wanted more than a great athlete; he also wanted someone with the strength of character to take the insults and abuse that would be hurled at him by racist fans and players. Robinson asked, "Are you looking for a Negro who is afraid to fight back?" Rickey replied, "I'm looking for a ballplayer with guts enough *not* to fight back."

Rickey signed Robinson up. At first Robinson played for the Dodgers' farm team in Canada, the Montreal Royals, part of the International League. His presence on the team drew large crowds. In 1946, Robinson led the Royals to the International League championship, and also had the league's highest batting average and most stolen bases.

Throughout the 1946 season, sportswriters for newspapers and magazines kept their eye on Robinson. Their articles raised the level of anticipation—when would Jackie Robinson be called up to the major leagues?

It happened in the next season. On April 15, 1947, Jackie Robinson became the first African American in the twentieth century to play major league baseball. He had to put up with insults and threats. Playing for the Brooklyn Dodgers, wearing the number 42 on his uniform, Robinson went on to win the Rookie of the Year award in 1947. In 1949 he was named the Most Valuable Player in the National League.

farm team: in baseball, a minor league team that prepares players who are moved up as needed to a connected major league team

In breaking baseball's color barrier, and in playing so brilliantly, Jackie Robinson changed American attitudes forever. Soon after Robinson joined the Dodgers, more Black players were playing in baseball's major leagues. By 1959, all major league baseball teams were integrated.

Robinson retired from baseball in early 1957. Later, he was the first Black player named to baseball's Hall of Fame. In 1997, the professional organization in charge of major league baseball honored Robinson by retiring his number, 42, from every team. Since then, no baseball player's uniform has had the number 42 on it—except each year on April 15, when players across the league wear 42 to remember and celebrate the day in 1947 when Robinson broke the sport's color barrier.



Jackie Robinson was the first African American in the twentieth century to play major league baseball.

*“It Was a Great Day in Jersey”
by Wendell Smith (1946)*

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to copyright restrictions*

columns: regularly appearing articles by a newspaper writer

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to copyright restrictions*

picturesque: attractive; pleasing in appearance

Hyde Park: in New York, the birthplace of Franklin D. Roosevelt in 1882

Johnny Wright: a pitcher called up from the Negro Leagues to play with Montreal in the International League, but who did not go on to play in the major leagues

Wendell Wilkie's "One World": Wendell Wilkie had been the Republican nominee for president in 1940 (and lost to Roosevelt). In 1943, he published a bestselling book, *One World*, describing his travels around the world and meetings with world leaders. He put forth his vision for global peace and called for equal rights for non-white Americans.

gaudy: bright and showy

henchmen: faithful followers of a person in power

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to copyright restrictions*

lustily: with great energy and enthusiasm

dignitaries: important people because of their titles or high-ranking jobs

West Point cadets on dress parade: Cadets are students at the U.S. Military Academy at West Point (in New York). To be on “dress parade” is to be in full military uniform for a special occasion.

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idolizing: hero-worshipping

bedlam: noisy confusion

kibitzers: Yiddish term for people who stand around and offer unwanted commentary or advice

petite: small and thin

Letter from Jackie Robinson to President Dwight D. Eisenhower (1958)

Primary Source

After his retirement from baseball, Jackie Robinson went on to a career in business, and also became actively involved in working for civil rights. He led a major fundraising drive for the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People and later joined the organization's board of directors. He advocated for the integration of public schools. And he pushed major league baseball to hire African Americans not just as players but also as managers and executives.

Here is a letter that Jackie Robinson wrote to President Dwight D. Eisenhower in 1958. In the letter, Robinson refers to Governor Faubus—that was Orval Faubus, governor of Arkansas, who in 1957 refused to obey a federal court order to integrate Little Rock Central High School. (See page 99.) In September 1957, President Eisenhower sent U.S. soldiers to Little Rock to enforce the order—an incident that Jackie Robinson refers to in the closing paragraph of his letter.

May 13, 1958

The President

The White House

Washington, D.C.

My dear Mr. President:

I was sitting in the audience at the Summit Meeting of Negro Leaders yesterday when you said we must have patience. On hearing you say this, I felt like standing up and saying, “Oh no! Not again.”

I respectfully remind you sir, that we have been the most patient of all people. When you said we must have self-respect, I wondered how we could have self-respect and remain patient considering the treatment accorded us through the years.

17 million Negroes cannot do as you suggest and wait for the hearts of men to change. We want to enjoy now the rights that we feel we are entitled to as Americans. This we cannot do unless we pursue aggressively goals which all other Americans achieved over 150 years ago.

As the chief executive of our nation, I respectfully suggest that you unwittingly crush the spirit of freedom in Negroes by constantly urging forbearance and give hope to those pro-segregation leaders like Governor Faubus who would take from us even those freedoms we now enjoy. Your own experience with Governor Faubus is proof enough that forbearance and not eventual integration is the goal the pro-segregation leaders seek.

In my view, an unequivocal statement backed up by action such as you demonstrated you could take last fall in dealing with Governor Faubus if it became necessary, would let it be known that America is determined to provide -- in the near future -- for Negroes -- the freedoms we are entitled to under the Constitution.

Respectfully yours,
Jackie Robinson

accorded: given to someone

unwittingly: unintentionally; without being aware

forbearance: patient self-control

unequivocal: clear and firm, leaving no doubt

Mendez v. Westminster: A Ruling for Social Equality in Schooling

Background Knowledge

In 1954, the Supreme Court of the United States issued a historic decision. In the case of *Brown v. Board of Education*, the court ruled that segregation in public schools is unconstitutional. Most people know about the *Brown* decision (which you can read about in the next chapter of this book). But eight years before *Brown*, there was *Mendez v. Westminster*, the first case in which a federal court declared segregation in public schools to be unconstitutional. The ruling in the *Mendez* case affected only Mexican American students in California, but the reasoning used to win the case helped prepare the way for the *Brown* decision.

At the heart of the California case was the *Méndez* family—the husband and wife, Gonzalo and Felicitas, and their three children, Sylvia, Gonzalo Jr., and Gerónimo.

Gonzalo was a child when his family came to America from Mexico; Felicitas was a young girl when her family left Puerto Rico for the mainland, coming first to Arizona and moving soon to California. Their families, like many others, came seeking agricultural work. After they married in 1935, Gonzalo and Felicitas Méndez worked hard and in a few years managed to open a neighborhood restaurant in the town of Santa Ana in Southern California.

Brown v. Board of Education: See page 64.

Méndez: There is an accent mark in the Méndez family name. But court officials left out the accent mark when preparing the documents for the case. So, in references to the case, you will see “Mendez” without the accent mark, as it appears in the historical records.

During World War II, Gonzalo Méndez rented a farm from a Japanese American family that had been forced to relocate to an internment camp. In 1944 the Méndez family moved from Santa Ana to Orange County, where the farm was located in the town of Westminster.

The three Méndez children went with their aunt to enroll in the Westminster school—the same school their father had attended when his family had first come to America. But this school, they were now told, was for white children, and they must attend a separate “Mexican school.”

There was no state law requiring segregation of Mexican Americans (in contrast to the American South, where Jim Crow laws required the segregation of African Americans). In California, the segregated “Mexican schools” were the result of prejudice and pressure.

The prejudice came from white people who did not want to mix with the quickly growing population of people coming from Mexico to work on the farms and in the citrus groves of Southern California. The pressure came from wealthy farmers and landowners who relied on having the Mexican American schoolchildren available to work on the farms, especially at harvest time. Compared to the schools for white children, the “Mexican schools” started weeks later and, in harvest time, let out after a half-day so that children could work in the fields. And many of the “Mexican schools” were run down and lacked books and supplies.

internment camp: On the internment of Japanese Americans in World War II, see page 36. When the family that rented their farm to Gonzalo Méndez was released from internment in 1946, they returned to their farm, and the Méndez family returned to Santa Ana.

Gonzalo and Felícitas Méndez refused to accept this. Gonzalo Méndez spoke with the school principal, and then to the school board, but got no results. So he decided to go to court. He hired David Marcus, a civil rights attorney from Los Angeles, who advised that they could make a stronger case by showing that other school districts in Orange County were also segregating Mexican American children. They organized families in four nearby school districts to take the case to court as a group, representing not only their own children but the thousands of children of “Mexican and Latin descent” in the five school districts.

In the case of *Mendez v. Westminster School District of Orange County*, the lawyer for the school districts argued that separate schools were needed for students who mainly spoke Spanish—though many of the children spoke English as well. One school official testified that the Mexican American children were “inferior in personal hygiene” and that they might bring diseases that would endanger white children.

In response, David Marcus, the lawyer for Méndez and the other families, decided not to build his case on issues of racial prejudice or the unfairness of putting the Mexican American children in run-down facilities. Instead, he argued that the segregated schools violated the families’ constitutional right to “the equal protection of the laws” guaranteed by the Fourteenth Amendment. He also tried something new in the legal battle against segregation—he brought in experts to testify that segregation was mentally and emotionally harmful to the children. In court, one educational expert said that “segregation,

Latin: Latin American

Fourteenth Amendment: See page 9.

by its very nature, is a reminder constantly of inferiority, or not being wanted, of not being a part of the community.”

In the end, the judge agreed with the Méndez family and the other families in the case. He ruled that the separate schools for Mexican American students violated their Fourteenth Amendment right to equal protection of the law. The school districts decided to appeal the ruling to a higher court.

Before the case reached the higher court, lawyers for various civil rights organizations provided written arguments to support the *Mendez* decision. One of these lawyers was Thurgood Marshall of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP).

The appeals court upheld the judge’s decision in *Mendez v. Westminster* but it limited the reach of his decision. The appeals court did not agree that segregation was a violation of the families’ constitutional rights. Instead, the appeals court said that attendance in separate “Mexican schools” could not be required because there was no state law requiring segregation of Mexican Americans. The state *did* have laws that allowed for segregated schools for Asian Americans and American Indians, but not for Mexican Americans.

Even though the appeals court severely limited the reach of the *Mendez* ruling, the case was important and influential. Eight years later, when Thurgood Marshall argued the case of *Brown v. Board of Education* before the U. S. Supreme Court, he built on the strategy used in *Mendez* and brought in experts to testify about the social and emotional damage caused by segregation. And less than two months after the appeals court upheld the

appeal: In the American legal system, if you lose your case in court, then you can appeal your case—which means, asking a higher court to review and reverse the lower court’s decision.

upheld: In law, when a higher court upholds a lower court’s decision, it is saying that the lower court’s decision is correct.

decision in *Mendez v. Westminster*, the governor of California signed legislation repealing the old state laws that had allowed segregated schools for Asian Americans and Native Americans. The name of that governor? Earl Warren, who would soon become the Chief Justice of the U.S. Supreme Court and lead the court to its unanimous decision in *Brown v. Board of Education*.

In 2009, a new public high school—the Felicitas and Gonzalo Méndez High School—opened in Los Angeles. Sylvia Méndez, the daughter of Felicitas and Gonzalo, grew up to become a nurse; after retiring from nursing, she devoted herself to helping students learn about the importance of the *Mendez v. Westminster* case in the history of civil rights in America. In 2011, in honor of her work to promote “excellence and equality in classrooms across America,” she was awarded the Presidential Medal of Freedom.



Sylvia Méndez at eight years old—in her later life, she devoted herself to helping students learn about the importance of the *Mendez v. Westminster* case.

repealing: officially canceling (a law or laws)

Decision in Mendez v. Westminster School District (1947)

Primary Source

In February 1946, Judge Paul J. McCormick of the U.S. District Court for the Southern District of California issued his ruling in the case of Mendez v. Westminster. In 1947, an appeals court upheld his decision. Here are excerpts from the judge's ruling, including his bold statement of the need for "social equality" in public education. Because the legal language is sometimes technical and complicated, we present both the original language and a paraphrased version.

[Original Language]

. . . It is conceded by all parties that there is no question of race discrimination in this action. It is, however, admitted that segregation per se is practiced in the . . . school districts as the Spanish-speaking children enter school life and as they advance through the grades in the respective school districts. It is also admitted by the defendants that the petitioning children are qualified to attend the public schools in the respective districts of their residences.

conceded: admitted; accepted as true

all parties: both sides of the case

no question of race discrimination: While the school districts were in fact racially discriminating against the children of the Méndez family and other families in the case, the lawyer representing the families, David Marcus, decided not to bring up racial prejudice but instead to argue that the schools violated the families' rights guaranteed by the Fourteenth Amendment.

per se: in itself

respective: as relates separately to each thing or person mentioned; particular

defendants: In a legal case, the defendant is the person accused of wrongdoing. The defendants in this case are the school districts that required the Méndez children and others to go to segregated "Mexican schools."

petitioning children: the children who, through their legal representatives, have brought their case to court

. . . We therefore turn to consider whether under the record before us the school boards and administrative authorities in the respective defendant districts have by their segregation policies and practices transgressed applicable law and Constitutional safeguards and limitations and thus have invaded the personal right which every public school pupil has to the equal protection provision of the Fourteenth Amendment to obtain the means of education.

. . . “The equal protection of the laws” pertaining to the public school system in California is not provided by furnishing in separate schools the same technical facilities, text books and courses of instruction to children of Mexican ancestry that are available to the other public school children regardless of their ancestry. A paramount requisite in the American system of public education is social equality. It must be open to all children by unified school association regardless of lineage.

. . . The evidence clearly shows that Spanish-speaking children are retarded in learning English by lack of exposure to its use because of segregation, and that commingling of the entire student body instills and develops a common cultural attitude among the school children which is imperative for the perpetuation of American institutions and ideals. It is also established by the record that the methods of segregation prevalent in the defendant

transgressed: disobeyed a law or a command

paramount: of the highest importance

requisite: something required or necessary

lineage: ancestry; family background

retarded: slowed down or held back in progress

commingling: mixing together

instills: gradually develops an idea or feeling within a person

imperative: of the highest importance; absolutely necessary

perpetuation: continuation

prevalent: widespread; most commonly occurring (in a given time or place)

school districts foster antagonisms in the children and suggest inferiority among them where none exists. . . .

. . . We conclude by . . . restraining further discriminatory practices against the pupils of Mexican descent in the public schools of defendant school districts.

[Paraphrased Version]

Everyone on both sides accepts that this case is not about racial discrimination. But it has been admitted that the school districts practice segregation, starting when Spanish-speaking children enter school and continuing as they move up through the grades in their school districts. The school districts have also admitted that the children involved in this case have the capabilities needed to attend the public schools in the specific districts in which they live.

So, given all that we have heard in this case, it is now time to ask: Have the school boards and administrators in each of the accused districts, through their practice of segregation, violated relevant law and Constitutional protections? And have they interfered with the personal right of every public school child, in obtaining an education, to the equal protection of the law, as provided by the Fourteenth Amendment?

In the California public school system, we are not giving children of Mexican ancestry “the equal protection of the laws” if we put them in separate schools, even if those schools have the same equipment, textbooks, and curriculum available to other students regardless of their background. One of the most important things needed in American public education is

foster: to help something grow or develop

antagonisms: strong feelings of dislike or hatred, usually between competing groups

restraining: preventing someone from doing something; holding back

social equality. The public schools in any district must be open to all children living in that district regardless of their family background.

The evidence clearly shows the following: that Spanish-speaking children are held back in learning English because segregation limits their exposure to English; that bringing all students together develops in them shared values that are necessary for American institutions and ideals to continue; and, that the methods of segregation used in the accused school districts develop in the children strong feelings of dislike for others, and also make them feel inferior when they are not.

We conclude by prohibiting any further acts of discrimination against students from Mexican backgrounds in the school districts involved in this case.



In 2007, the United States Postal Service issued a stamp to commemorate the *Mendez v. Westminster* ruling on its 60th anniversary.

Brown v. Board of Education: No Place for “Separate But Equal”

Background Knowledge

In law, a *precedent* is a court decision that establishes rules or principles that later courts follow in cases dealing with similar facts and issues. The Supreme Court’s 1896 decision in *Plessy v. Ferguson* (see page 11) set the precedent that it was constitutional to segregate people of different races as long as “separate but equal” facilities were provided. For decades afterward, many people who went to court to challenge segregation lost their cases because the courts pointed to the *Plessy* decision as a precedent. What was ruled constitutional in 1896, the courts said, remains constitutional now. And so African Americans had to put up with segregation in transportation, restaurants, public restrooms, schools, and more.

It wasn’t until 1954 that the *Plessy* ruling was finally overturned. It happened in a United States Supreme Court case known as *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka*.

Oliver Brown lived in Topeka, Kansas. His seven-year-old daughter, Linda, had to walk across railroad tracks and then ride a bus to her elementary school, even though there was a school a few blocks from her house—but that school was for white children only. Oliver Brown went to court to argue against this segregation in schooling. He lost the case. The Kansas court pointed to the precedent of *Plessy v. Ferguson* and said that the separate schools for Black children in Topeka were equal enough.

overturned: In law, when a higher court disagrees with a decision made before by a lower court, it overturns the lower court’s ruling. (As the highest court in the land, the U.S. Supreme Court can overturn earlier Supreme Court decisions.)

At this time (in the early 1950s), seventeen states and the District of Columbia had laws requiring that children be racially segregated in public schools. Other states allowed communities to make local rules requiring segregation. These states and communities provided much more money to the white schools than to the schools serving Black children. Especially in the South, where some Black schools lacked electricity or libraries, the separate schools fell far short of equal.

In various states, people were going to court to challenge the segregated schools, but they lost because of *Plessy v. Ferguson*. In the American legal system, if you lose your case in a local court, then you can *appeal* your case—which means, asking a higher court to review and reverse the lower court’s decision. If the state or federal court leaves the lower court’s ruling unchanged, you can try to take your appeal to the highest court in the land, the U. S. Supreme Court. That’s what happened with Oliver Brown’s case. A team of lawyers from the NAACP—the



This photograph shows a segregated class in a Washington, D.C. high school in 1949, five years before the *Brown* decision.

National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, a leading civil rights organization—took on Oliver Brown’s case and grouped it with similar cases from Delaware, South Carolina, Virginia, and the District of Columbia. These five cases were all part of the case known as *Brown v. Board of Education*.

In Supreme Court cases, lawyers for each side present their arguments to the Supreme Court justices. The NAACP legal team, led by Thurgood Marshall, made their first presentations to the justices in December 1952.

They argued that the “separate but equal” principle established by *Plessy v. Ferguson* was unconstitutional. They said that segregation in public schools violated the Fourteenth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution—in particular, the part of the amendment which says that states cannot deny “the equal protection of the laws.”

Beyond this constitutional argument, Thurgood Marshall and his team made arguments against segregation based on psychological studies. These studies showed that the act of separating children made them feel socially inferior. How could “separate but equal” be justified if being separate meant feeling unequal?

It took a long time for the Supreme Court justices to reach a decision in *Brown v. Board of Education*. In the end, they agreed with Thurgood Marshall and the NAACP. In May 1954, the Supreme Court said the separation of schoolchildren because of their race was unconstitutional because it violated the Fourteenth Amendment’s promise of “equal protection.” The justices rejected the *Plessy v. Ferguson* principle of “separate

but equal.” In its *unanimous* decision—meaning that all nine justices agreed—the court said, “We conclude that in the field of public education the doctrine of ‘separate but equal’ has no place. Separate educational facilities are inherently unequal.”

The court’s decision did not fix things overnight. Indeed, as Marshall said soon after the decision, “The fight has just begun.” Some Southern states closed schools rather than integrate them. As for how to integrate the schools, the court left that to local officials and judges—and many were supporters of segregation who fiercely opposed the *Brown* decision. (You can read more about resistance to school integration starting on page 97.)

Thurgood Marshall’s Arguments before the U. S. Supreme Court (1953)

Primary Source

In the early 1950s, Thurgood Marshall (1908-1993) led the NAACP legal team in the case of Brown v. Board of Education. In 1967, Marshall was appointed the first African American justice of the Supreme Court.

As a young college graduate, Marshall had applied for admission to the University of Maryland Law School. The school, which was segregated at the time, turned him down. He received his law degree from Howard University in Washington, D.C. In 1936, as a lawyer for the NAACP, Marshall argued and won a case that challenged the segregation policy at the University of Maryland Law School.

inherently: by their nature

Continuing to work for the NAACP, Marshall took on cases that challenged Plessy v. Ferguson, aiming to chip away at the “separate but equal” doctrine. His efforts prepared him well to lead the argument in the case of Brown v. Board of Education.

Here are excerpts from the arguments Marshall presented to the Supreme Court in December, 1953. Marshall begins with the words that lawyers traditionally say first as a sign of respect for the justices, and then he responds to the arguments that had just been presented by the lawyers for the other side.



Thurgood Marshall, pictured here in front of the Supreme Court, led the NAACP legal team in the case of *Brown v. Board of Education*. In 1967, he was appointed the first African American justice of the Supreme Court.

May it please the Court:

There are several points I would like to clear up preliminarily, and then I would like to make sure that our position is correctly stated. . . .

. . . One of the points that runs throughout the argument . . . on the other side . . . is that they deny that there is any race prejudice involved in these cases. They deny that there is any intention to discriminate. But . . . throughout the argument they not only recognize that there is a race problem involved, but they emphasize that that is the whole problem. And for the life of me, you can't read the debates, even the sections they rely on, without an understanding that the Fourteenth Amendment took away from the states the power to use race. . . .

. . . They say no education was intended to be covered by the Fourteenth Amendment. Obviously, that is not correct, because even their pet case, *Plessy v. Ferguson*, recognized that education was under the Fourteenth Amendment. . . .

. . . The duty of following the Fourteenth Amendment is placed upon the states. The duty of enforcing the Fourteenth Amendment is placed upon this Court. . . .

. . . I got the feeling [from the arguments made in court] yesterday that when you put a white child in a school with a whole lot of colored children, the child would fall apart or something. Everybody knows that is not true. Those same kids in Virginia and South Carolina—and I have seen them do it—they play in the streets together, they play on their farms together, they go down the road together, they separate to go to school, they come out of school and play ball together. . . .

preliminarily: before getting to the main business

discriminate: to treat unfairly

pet: favored

. . . You can have them going to the same state university and the same college, but if they go to elementary and high school, the world will fall apart. And it is the exact same argument that has been made to this Court over and over again. . . .

They can't take race out of this case. From the day this case was filed until this moment, nobody has in any form or fashion . . . done anything to distinguish this statute from the Black Codes. . . . Say anything anybody wants to say one way or the other, the Fourteenth Amendment was intended to deprive the states of power to enforce Black Codes or anything else like it. . . .

. . . The only way that this Court can decide this case in opposition to our position . . . is to find that for some reason Negroes are inferior to all other human beings. Nobody will stand in the Court and urge that, and in order to arrive at the decision . . . , there would have to be some recognition of a reason why, of all of the multitudinous groups of people in this country, you have to single out Negroes and give them this separate treatment.

It can't be because of slavery in the past, because there are very few groups in this country that haven't had slavery some place back in the history of their groups. It can't be color because there are Negroes as white as the drifted snow, with blue eyes, and they are just as segregated as the colored man. The only thing it can be is an inherent determination that the people who were formerly in slavery, regardless of anything else, shall be kept as near that stage as is possible, and now is the time, we submit, that this Court should make it clear that that is not what our Constitution stands for.

distinguish: recognize as different

statute: law

Black Codes: laws passed by Southern states after the Civil War, designed to limit the rights and freedoms of African Americans and keep them economically in a condition near slavery

deprive: to take something away from someone

in opposition to: in a way that goes against

multitudinous: very many

inherent: deeply existing in something as a basic characteristic

Opinion Delivered by Chief Justice Earl Warren in Brown v. Board of Education (1954)

Primary Source

When arguments in the Brown case began in December 1952, Earl Warren was not yet a Supreme Court justice. He had recently served as governor of California. When the chief justice of the Supreme Court died unexpectedly, President Dwight D. Eisenhower appointed Earl Warren as the new chief justice in October 1953.

The chief justice leads and guides the public sessions when the Supreme Court meets to hear arguments presented by lawyers on both sides of a case. After these public sessions, the justices meet in private conference to discuss what they have heard and reach a decision. The chief justice guides these discussions as well. When Earl Warren was appointed chief justice, he found that the other justices disagreed about the Brown case. Through Warren's efforts, the justices all came to agree on the need to overturn Plessy v. Ferguson, and the Court issued a unanimous decision stating that segregation in public schools is unconstitutional.

Earl Warren took the lead in writing the opinion in Brown v. Board of Education. You can read excerpts below. Because the legal language is sometimes technical and complicated, we present both the original language and a paraphrased version.

opinion: In law, an *opinion* is the formal written statement from a judge or group of judges that states the decision in the case and explains the reasoning and principles of law used in reaching the decision.

[Original Language]

These cases come to us from the States of Kansas, South Carolina, Virginia, and Delaware. They are premised on different facts and different local conditions, but a common legal question justifies their consideration together in this consolidated opinion.

In each of the cases, minors of the Negro race, through their legal representatives, seek the aid of the courts in obtaining admission to the public schools of their community on a nonsegregated basis. In each instance, they had been denied admission to schools attended by white children under laws requiring or permitting segregation according to race. This segregation was alleged to deprive the plaintiffs of the equal protection of the laws under the Fourteenth Amendment. . . . [Federal district courts have] denied relief to the plaintiffs on the so-called “separate but equal” doctrine announced by this Court in *Plessy v. Ferguson* Under that doctrine, equality of treatment is accorded when the races are provided substantially equal facilities, even though these facilities be separate. . . .

The plaintiffs contend that segregated public schools are not “equal” and cannot be made “equal,” and that hence they are deprived of the equal protection of the laws. . . .

premised on: based on; grounded in

consolidated: grouped or combined together

minors: persons under an age (18 in most states) at which they are considered legally responsible

alleged: claimed but not yet proven

deprive: to take something away from someone

plaintiffs: In law, the *plaintiff* is the person or persons who sue or accuse another person or group (called the *defendant*) in a court. (To *sue* is to undertake a legal process against a person or organization you think has wronged you in some way.)

doctrine: a stated policy or principle

accorded: given to someone

substantially: mostly; to

contend: argue; state a position

hence: for this reason

[In the cases before us,] there are findings . . . that the Negro and white schools involved have been equalized, or are being equalized, with respect to buildings, curricula, qualifications and salaries of teachers, and other “tangible” factors. Our decision, therefore, cannot turn on merely a comparison of these tangible factors in the Negro and white schools involved in each of the cases. We must look instead to the effect of segregation itself on public education.

In approaching this problem, we cannot turn the clock back to 1868, when the [Fourteenth] Amendment was adopted, or even to 1896, when *Plessy v. Ferguson* was written. We must consider public education in the light of its full development and its present place in American life throughout the Nation. Only in this way can it be determined if segregation in public schools deprives these plaintiffs of the equal protection of the laws.

Today, education is perhaps the most important function of state and local governments. Compulsory school attendance laws and the great expenditures for education both demonstrate our recognition of the importance of education to our democratic society. It is required in the performance of our most basic public responsibilities, even service in the armed forces. It is the very foundation of good citizenship. Today it is a principal instrument in awakening the child to cultural values, in preparing him for later professional training, and in helping him to adjust normally to his environment. In these days, it is doubtful that any child may reasonably be expected to succeed in life if he is denied the opportunity of an education. Such an opportunity . . . is a right which must be made available to all on equal terms.

findings: conclusions or decisions reached in a legal matter

tangible: capable of being touched; real and definite

compulsory: required by a rule or law

expenditures: spending of money

We come then to the question presented: Does segregation of children in public schools solely on the basis of race, even though the physical facilities and other “tangible” factors may be equal, deprive the children of the minority group of equal educational opportunities? We believe that it does.

. . . To separate [schoolchildren] from others of similar age and qualifications solely because of their race generates a feeling of inferiority as to their status in the community that may affect their hearts and minds in a way unlikely ever to be undone. The effect of this separation on their educational opportunities was well stated by a finding in the Kansas case by a court which nevertheless felt compelled to rule against the Negro plaintiffs: Segregation of white and colored children in public schools has a detrimental effect upon the colored children. The impact is greater when it has the sanction of the law, for the policy of separating the races is usually interpreted as denoting the inferiority of the negro group. A sense of inferiority affects the motivation of a child to learn. Segregation with the sanction of law, therefore, has a tendency to [retard] the educational and mental development of negro children and to deprive them of some of the benefits they would receive in a racial[ly] integrated school system. Whatever may have been the extent of psychological knowledge at the time of *Plessy v. Ferguson*, this finding is amply supported by modern authority. Any language in *Plessy v. Ferguson* contrary to this finding is rejected.

We conclude that, in the field of public education, the doctrine of “separate but equal” has no place. Separate educational

compelled: forced; required

detrimental: harmful

sanction: official approval

psychological: relating to psychology, the science that studies the mind and behavior

amply: more than enough

facilities are inherently unequal. Therefore, we hold that the plaintiffs and others similarly situated . . . are, by reason of the segregation complained of, deprived of the equal protection of the laws guaranteed by the Fourteenth Amendment. . . .

[Paraphrased Version]

The cases before us—from Kansas, South Carolina, Virginia, and Delaware—are based on different facts and local conditions. But all share a focus on a specific legal question, which makes it right for us to deal with them as a group in this decision.

In each case, African American schoolchildren, through lawyers representing them, have asked the courts to help them attend the public schools in their community without being put in a separate school based on race. In each case, because of laws that require or permit racial segregation, they were not allowed to attend schools attended by white children. The plaintiffs have claimed that this segregation takes away from them the equal protection of the laws guaranteed by the Fourteenth Amendment. Lower courts have issued decisions against the plaintiffs, basing their decisions on the “separate but equal” principle of *Plessy v. Ferguson*, which says that when the races are provided with facilities that are equal in most ways, then they are being treated equally, even if the facilities are separate.

The plaintiffs argue that they do not have the equal protection of the laws because public schools separated by race are not “equal” and cannot be made “equal.”

In the cases we are considering, we have been shown that in some visible ways—such as in the quality of buildings, or the

inherently: in a way that is basic to and inseparable from what something is

hold: judge; state [our] belief

courses of study, or the training of teachers and the pay they receive—some schools for African American children are equal, or being made equal, to schools for white children. So, in making our decision, we cannot limit ourselves to comparing these visible matters in the schools for each of the races. Instead, we have to look at how segregation itself affects public education.

In thinking about this problem, we can't go back to the past—to 1868 when the Fourteenth Amendment was adopted, or 1896 when *Plessy v. Ferguson* was written. We have to look at how public education has developed and what it means now for Americans throughout the nation. This is the only way we can decide if segregation in public schools takes away from the plaintiffs the equal protection of the laws.

Today, education is perhaps the most important function of state and local governments. Laws that require school attendance, and the great amount of money spent on education, show our understanding of how important education is to our democratic society. To do our most basic public duties, education is needed, and in military service as well. It is the foundation of good citizenship. Today is it a main means of awakening shared values in children, preparing them for skilled jobs, and helping them adjust well to the conditions around them. These days, it is unlikely that any child can be expected to succeed in life if denied the opportunity for an education. Such an opportunity is a right that must be made available equally to all.

Here is the question before us: Does separating children, simply because they are of different races, into different public schools for each race—even if those schools are “equal” in outward ways—take away equal educational opportunities from the children of the minority group? We believe that it does.

To separate children from others like them in age and other ways, simply because of their race, makes them feel like they have a lower place in their community, in ways that may affect their hearts and minds forever. Even though the court in Kansas felt that it had to decide against the plaintiffs, the court clearly stated how this separation can affect children's educational opportunities: Segregation of white and Black children in public schools has a harmful effect on the Black children. The effect is even worse when segregation is approved by law, because when people are separated by race, it is usually taken to mean that the Black children are inferior. Children who feel inferior are less motivated to learn. For this reason, segregation approved by law tends to hold back the mental progress of Black children and to take away from them some of the benefits they would receive in integrated schools. This is a finding confirmed by experts today, regardless of what people might have known about the minds of children back in the time of *Plessy v. Ferguson*. Any language in *Plessy v. Ferguson* that goes against this finding is rejected.

We conclude that, in the field of public education, the doctrine of "separate but equal" has no place. Separate schools for different races are by their nature unequal. And so we rule that segregation in public education, which the plaintiffs in this case have challenged, takes away from them, and from others in similar situations, the equal protection of the laws guaranteed by the Fourteenth Amendment.

Emmett Till: Memories of a Murder in Mississippi

Background Knowledge

In August 1955, a little more than a year after the Supreme Court's ruling in *Brown v. Board of Education*, a murder took place that shocked the nation. Emmett Till's body was found in the Tallahatchie River in Mississippi. He had been brutally beaten and shot in the head. A heavy weight was tied to his neck with barbed wire.

He was only fourteen years old.

Born and raised in Chicago, Emmett Till had come down to visit relatives in Mississippi. With his cousins and their friends, he visited a country store to buy candy. A white woman, the wife of the store owner, sat behind the counter. We don't know for sure what happened—some accounts say that Emmett Till whistled at the woman, some say that he said "Bye, baby" as he walked out. The woman claimed that he grabbed her around the waist, but afterward she admitted that she had lied.

A few days later, the woman's husband and his half-brother dragged Emmet Till from the house where he was staying. They tortured him and killed him and threw his body in the river.

Emmett Till's battered body was sent back to Chicago. His mother, Mamie Till Mobley, wanted the world to see what had been done to her child. She held an open casket funeral, and tens of thousands of visitors came to the church. When photos of Emmett Till's battered corpse were published, outraged people around the country called for justice.

Emmett Till's killers were charged with murder and went to trial, where an all-white jury quickly pronounced them not guilty. Like the horrible lynchings described by the reformer and journalist Ida B. Wells, here was yet another instance of racist white violence against Black people with no consequences for the murderers.

The anger and outrage sparked by the murder of Emmett Till helped fuel the growing civil rights movement.



Emmett Till with his mother, in a photograph taken around 1950

Ida B. Wells: From the 1890s on, Wells wrote many articles and gave many speeches to make people aware of the horrors of lynching, the lawless killing of a person by a mob. (For an account of her career, see the companion volume to this book, *The Blessings of Liberty*.)

From Coming of Age in Mississippi by Anne Moody (1968)

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tenant farmers: persons who do not own the land they farm but rent it by paying the landowner with money or a portion of their crops

memoir: an account of one's own life and experiences

riddled: pierced with many holes

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Essie: In her memoir, Anne Moody explains that she was named Essie Mae by her parents, but found out in high school that her birth certificate mistakenly listed her name as Annie Mae—a name she preferred and chose to use.

notions: foolish ideas

instill: to put into

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The murder of young Emmet Till sparked international outrage. This photograph from October 1955 shows union workers attending a protest rally sponsored by the NAACP.

subdue: to overpower; to bring under one's control

Rosa Parks Sits Down and a Community Rises Up

Background Knowledge

The story of Rosa Parks (1913-2005) has now become familiar—how, after a long day’s work, she boarded a bus in Montgomery, Alabama, sitting in the back section as Black people were required to do; how the driver told her to give up her seat for a white passenger; how she calmly refused, was arrested, and taken to jail. That is only the barest outline—for the more complete story of what happened on that December evening in 1955, you can read the account below, in Rosa Parks’s own words.

Rosa Parks’s story is the story of a courageous individual. It is also the story of a determined community—a community that saw a wrong and then took action to make it right.

The wrong was segregation—in particular, the laws that required Black people to sit in a separate section in the back of the bus, and to give up their seats to white passengers when the front section of the bus, the so-called white section, filled up. Such laws were unfair, humiliating, and wrong.

How could this wrong be righted? One way was through a form of peaceful protest called a *boycott*. To boycott is to refuse to buy products or use services as a way to push for change. Most people who rode the buses in Montgomery were Black—so, if they refused to ride, the bus company would lose most of its money, which is a strong way to motivate a business to change.

A boycott is hard. It doesn’t work if only a few people participate—almost everyone in the community has to

commit to it. For many Black people in Montgomery, the buses were their main means of transportation. If they refused to ride the buses, how would they get to work or school, or run errands?

Even before Rosa Parks kept her seat, other Black women in Montgomery had been arrested for refusing to give their seats to



Rosa Parks in 1955 (with Martin Luther King, Jr. in the background of the photo)

white passengers. The city's Black leaders were already planning how to fight the bus company in court, with the help of the Montgomery chapter of the NAACP, where Rosa Parks had served as secretary. And for some time, Jo Ann Robinson, who led the Women's Political Council, a group of politically active women in Montgomery, had been planning a boycott to put pressure on the bus company.

With the arrest of Rosa Parks on Thursday, December 1, 1955, those plans turned into

actions. Word spread fast. Jo Ann Robinson wrote a notice asking all Black people in Montgomery not to ride the buses on the coming Monday, the day that Rosa Parks would appear in court. On the Sunday before that day, ministers in the city's African American churches encouraged their congregations to support the bus *boycott*. And when Monday came, almost all Black people in the city boycotted the buses.

NAACP: National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, a leading civil rights organization

The city's Black leaders quickly met to form a new organization called the Montgomery Improvement Association (MIA). They decided to continue the bus boycott. And they chose as their leader a young minister who had only recently moved to Montgomery. His name? Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

Thousands of people showed up at the Holt Street Baptist Church for a mass meeting hastily organized by the MIA. King gave a speech—as the people listened, their polite attention turned to energized enthusiasm. King praised Rosa Parks. Then he said, “And you know, my friends, there comes a time when people get tired of being trampled over by the iron feet of oppression.” The crowd burst into applause, loud and long. King reminded them that “we are not here advocating violence.” As he spoke, he repeatedly emphasized the power of nonviolent protest: “The only weapon that we have in our hands this evening,” he said, “is the weapon of protest.”

At the Montgomery mass meeting, King also reminded his many listeners that “in all of our actions we must stick together.” And stick together they did. For more than a year, the African American community in Montgomery boycotted the city buses. Instead, they walked, sometimes miles. They shared rides in a carefully organized carpool system. And they endured violence from angry white people who shouted insults, sometimes shot at them, and even bombed Black churches.

While Montgomery's Black citizens engaged in peaceful protest by boycotting, lawyers were preparing their challenge to the laws requiring segregation on the city buses. They asked Rosa

mass meeting: a meeting attended by a large crowd to discuss some topic of public interest

oppression: cruel and unfair treatment

nonviolent protest: Like the founders of CORE (see page 116), King was inspired by Mahatma Gandhi's ideas about the power of nonviolent resistance. See page 128 for more information on King's belief in nonviolence.

Parks if they could use her case to fight the unfair laws, and she agreed. Later, however, they decided that an appeal of her case might get bogged down in the state courts. So, on behalf of four other Black women who had been mistreated on city buses, the lawyers went to court to argue that the laws requiring segregation on buses were unconstitutional. And they won—in June 1956, a U.S. District Court issued its decision: “We hold that the statutes . . . requiring segregation of the white and colored races on the motor buses . . . in the City of Montgomery . . . violate the due process and equal protection of the law clauses of the Fourteenth Amendment to the Constitution of the United States.”

The city and state appealed the decision, but the U.S. Supreme Court upheld it and ordered an end to segregation on buses in Montgomery and throughout Alabama. Martin Luther King, Jr., described the Supreme Court’s decision as “a reaffirmation of the principle that separate facilities are inherently unequal, and that the old Plessy doctrine of separate but equal is no longer valid.” Shortly afterward, King announced an end to the boycott of the city buses. And from this episode, King emerged as an inspiring and eloquent leader of a growing national movement for civil rights.

appeal: In the American legal system, if you lose your case in court, then you can appeal your case—which means, asking a higher court to review and reverse the lower court’s decision.

statutes: laws

clauses: In law, a clause is a specific part of a legal document. The “due process” clause of the Fourteenth Amendment says that no one shall be “deprived of life, liberty or property without due process of law”—that is, without fair treatment according to accepted legal procedures and principles. The “equal protection” clause says that states cannot deny to any person “the equal protection of the laws.”

upheld: In law, when a higher court upholds a lower court’s decision, it is saying that the lower court’s decision is correct.

inherently: by their nature

valid: legally acceptable

eloquent: having the ability to speak effectively, powerfully, and expressively

From Rosa Parks: My Story (1992)

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Rosa Parks was arrested in December 1955 for refusing to give up her seat to a white passenger. In February 1956, as shown in this photo, she was arrested again, along with more than a hundred other African Americans, for taking part in the bus boycott in Montgomery, Alabama.

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plaintiff: In law, the *plaintiff* is the person who sues or accuses another person (called the *defendant*) in a court. (To *sue* is to undertake a legal process against a person or organization you think has wronged you in some way.)

reproach: disapproval; blame [To be “above reproach” is to be perfect, beyond any possible blame or criticism.]

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complied: did as asked or ordered

manhandled: treated roughly

“Don’t Ride the Bus”—Leaflet by Jo Ann Robinson, Women’s Political Council (1955)

Primary Source

Jo Ann Robinson led the Women’s Political Council (WPC), a group of politically active women in Montgomery, who played an important role in publicizing, planning, and organizing the bus boycott. On the night when Rosa Parks was arrested, Jo Ann Robinson called fellow members of the WPC. They agreed—this was the time to push ahead with a boycott. Mrs. Robinson wrote a notice urging Black residents of Montgomery to not ride the buses on the coming Monday, when Rosa Parks was scheduled to appear in court. Mrs. Robinson also called some students from Alabama State College, where she taught, and with their help, 35,000 copies of the following leaflet were printed and distributed.

This is for Monday Dec. 5, 1955

Another Negro woman has been arrested and thrown into jail because she refused to get up out of her seat on the bus and give it to a white person.

It is the second time since the Claudette Colvin case that a Negro woman has been arrested for the same thing. This has to be stopped.

Negroes have rights too, for if Negroes did not ride the buses, they could not operate. Three-fourths of the riders are Negroes, yet we are arrested, or have to stand over empty seats. If we do not do something to stop these arrests, they will continue.

Claudette Colvin: In March 1955, Claudette Colvin, a high school student, was told by a bus driver to give her seat to a white passenger and move to the back of the bus. She refused, and was then removed from the bus and arrested.

The next time it may be you, your daughter, or mother.

The woman's case will come up on Monday. We are therefore asking every Negro to stay off the buses Monday in protest of the arrest and trial. Don't ride the buses to work, to town, to school, or anywhere on Monday.

You can afford to stay out of school for one day if you have no other way to go except by bus.

You can also afford to stay out of town for one day. If you work, take a cab, or walk. But please, children and grown-ups, don't ride the bus at all on Monday. Please stay off all buses Monday.

Resolution of the Citizens' Mass Meeting, December 5, 1955

Primary Source

At the mass meeting on December 5, 1955 at the Holt Street Baptist Church—the meeting at which the young Martin Luther King, Jr., spoke so powerfully—members of the Montgomery Improvement Association (MIA) approved a set of resolutions. (A resolution is the official statement of the decisions or opinions of a group.) In this case, the MIA resolved to continue the bus boycott and set out their reasons for doing so. The resolutions, which follow King's call for nonviolent protest, are written as a kind of legal declaration. They were published in the December 13, 1955 edition of the Birmingham World, a popular weekly newspaper in the Black community.

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whereas: In legal documents, when *Whereas* opens a statement, it means "Since it is true that. . ." or "Considering the fact that. . ."

said: In law, *said* is used to mean "those mentioned before."

relinquish: to give up something

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be it resolved: it is decided or agreed upon

creed: religious belief

refrain: to stop yourself from doing something

afford: provide

delegation: a group of people who have been chosen to represent a larger group

grievances: statements that explain why you feel you have been wronged or treated unfairly

intimidation: action that makes someone afraid or threatens someone

Daisy Bates and the Little Rock Nine

Background Knowledge

The Supreme Court's 1954 decision in *Brown v. Board of Education* was supposed to end segregation in public schools. But in most Southern states, the schools remained segregated.

Southern leaders openly defied the *Brown* decision. In 1956, about a hundred Southern members of Congress signed the Southern Manifesto. In this document, they proclaimed, "We regard the [*Brown v. Board of Education*] decision of the Supreme Court as a clear abuse of judicial power." They accused the Supreme Court of violating states' rights. They warned that "outside agitators are threatening immediate and revolutionary changes . . . certain to destroy the system of public education in some of the States."

Senator Harry F. Byrd of Virginia called for "massive resistance"—for widespread opposition to the Supreme Court's ruling in *Brown v. Board of Education*. Senator Byrd said, "If we can organize the Southern States for massive resistance to this order I think that in time the rest of the country will realize that racial integration is not going to be accepted in the South." As part of the campaign of massive resistance, some Southern states closed schools rather than integrate them. White parents got together to set up "segregation academies," private schools for white children only.

Brown v. Board of Education: See page 64.

manifesto: a public statement of a group's objectives and opinions

agitators: troublemakers; persons who stir up unrest

After the Brown decision, the schools in Little Rock, the capital of Arkansas, announced a plan to integrate the city schools slowly, over a period of years, starting in the fall of 1957 with a few students in high school and gradually reaching the lower grades years later. As the superintendent of schools privately told other whites, the plan was designed to provide “the least amount of integration over the longest period.”

That was not nearly fast enough for Daisy Lee Gaston Bates (1913–1999), president of the Arkansas chapter of the NAACP. She and her husband published a newspaper, the *Arkansas State Press*, which covered issues in the African American community and advocated for civil rights. After the *Brown v. Board of Education* ruling, Daisy Bates urged Little Rock officials to move quickly in integrating the schools. She organized thirty-three Black students who wanted to attend the all-white Little Rock schools. Accompanied by a photographer from her *State Press* newspaper, she led a group of nine of these students to the office of the school superintendent and asked that they be enrolled. As expected, the request was denied.

The *Free Press* and other Arkansas newspapers ran the story and photographs. The NAACP filed a lawsuit, charging that the Little Rock schools were denying the Black children their constitutional rights. In 1956, at a pre-trial hearing (a meeting in court to prepare for the upcoming trial), a lawyer for the Little Rock school board questioned Daisy Bates. He kept calling her by her first name, as was often done by Southern white people who refused to show Black adults even the minimal respect of addressing them as “Mr.”

1913: The year of Daisy Bates’s birth is uncertain because no original birth certificate is available and later records have conflicting dates.

NAACP: National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, a leading civil rights organization

or “Miss” or “Mrs.” As the afternoon session got underway, Daisy Bates spoke firmly to the lawyer, saying: “You addressed me several times this morning by my first name. That is something that is reserved for my intimate friends and my husband. You will refrain from calling me Daisy.”

The NAACP did not win the case—the court ruled that the school board’s plan to begin integrating in the fall of 1957 was reasonable. At least that gave Daisy Bates a definite date to prepare for—and preparation was needed, because white racists in Little Rock were organizing to oppose integration.

The weeks leading up to the first day of school in early September 1957 were filled with tension. Daisy Bates and her husband received many threats. Late on an August night, a rock crashed through the large window at the front of their house—tied to it was a note: “THE NEXT WILL BE DYNAMITE” and below that the letters “KKK.”

Through the summer months leading up to the opening of school, Little Rock’s superintendent of schools had interviewed dozens of Black students to be the first to integrate Central High School. He was looking, he said, for students who could act like Jackie Robinson—as the first Black player in modern major league baseball, Robinson had shown great self-control in putting up with the racist insults hurled at him by fans and other players. Once the students were chosen, Daisy Bates helped prepare them for the hostility they were sure to face.

intimate: very closely acquainted

refrain: stop (from doing something)

KKK: Ku Klux Klan, a secret society dedicated to achieving white supremacy, often by violent means, especially against Black people

Jackie Robinson: See page 45.



Daisy Bates and the Little Rock Nine. Bottom row, left to right: Thelma Mothershed, Minnijean Brown, Elizabeth Eckford, Gloria Ray. Top row, left to right: Jefferson Thomas, Melba Pattillo, Terrence Roberts, Carlotta Walls, Daisy Bates, Ernest Green.

On September 3, Daisy Bates had a long, anxious night, making many phone calls to get everything ready for the next day. She called the families of the Black students to arrange for them to meet and arrive together for their first day at the high school. She called the local police to make sure they would be there to protect the students.

On the morning of September 4, 1957, the Black students met as planned and approached the school. They saw troops of the Arkansas National Guard lined up and blocking the entrance. The troops had been sent by the state's governor, Orval Faubus.

He said they were there to protect the Black students, but their real purpose was to keep them out.

There was one Black student, however, who had arrived at school that morning alone—her family had no phone, so she had not received the message about meeting as a group. As fifteen-year-old Elizabeth Eckford got off the bus and started to walk the last block to school, she was met by an angry mob. A photographer captured an image of her walking toward the school through the hateful white crowd.

National Guard troops remained in place at Little Rock Central High School until a federal judge ordered Governor Faubus to remove them. On September 23, 1955, police escorted nine Black students—the Little Rock Nine, as they were now known—into a side door of the school. Outside, a crowd of about a thousand white protesters started to turn violent. After the nine Black students had spent only a few hours in class, the police removed them from the school.

Alarmed by the violence, the mayor of Little Rock asked President Dwight D. Eisenhower to send federal troops to maintain order. The president was very reluctant to do so. But he knew that it was his duty to uphold the Constitution. And he was concerned about the image of America in the eyes of the world, as television reports were showing the violence and race hatred in Little Rock. He sent more than a thousand U.S. Army soldiers to Little Rock and placed them in charge of the Arkansas National Guard troops. In a speech to the nation, broadcast on television, Eisenhower said, “Mob rule cannot be allowed to override the decisions of our courts.”

On September 25, 1957, the Little Rock Nine, surrounded by soldiers, entered Central High for their first full day of class. It was not a happy day. Many white students walked out of school, with some chanting, "Two, four, six, eight, we don't want to integrate."

At the start of the next school year, in September 1958, Governor Faubus closed the four public high schools in Little Rock rather than integrate them. The schools remained closed for the entire 1958-59 school year. In other Southern states, schools did take steps toward integration, but white resistance remained strong.

Elizabeth Eckford Remembers: Little Rock, 1957

Primary Source

Shortly after being confronted by the angry mob at Little Rock Central High School, Elizabeth Eckford sat down and talked with Daisy Bates. In that conversation, Elizabeth Eckford recalled what happened the night before and then on her first day at Central High.

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Sit-Ins and the Power of Youth Protest

Background Knowledge

It's 1960—six years after the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision, the beginning of a new decade. But across much of the South, and in other parts of the country as well, there was the same old segregation, the same old “separate but equal” (yet really not equal) that the Supreme Court had ruled unconstitutional. There were still lynchings, as well as bombings of Black churches and the homes of civil rights leaders. There was massive resistance, with its stubborn bigotry captured in the image of the angry, hate-filled white faces surrounding Elizabeth Eckford as she tried to go to school.

Despite the resistance and violence, the struggle for civil rights continued in courtrooms and in protests like the Montgomery bus boycott. These were peaceful protests. As Martin Luther King, Jr., said on the eve of the Montgomery boycott, “The only weapon that we have in our hands this evening is the weapon of protest.”

In 1960, four Black college students in North Carolina engaged in a form of peaceful protest that spread quickly, especially among young activists. They decided to hold a sit-in at a lunch counter that refused to serve Black people. A sit-in is what it sounds like—sitting down in a segregated place and staying put, as a peaceful way to pressure the place to change.

Brown v. Board of Education: See page 64.

massive resistance: See page 99.

Elizabeth Eckford: See page 104.

Montgomery bus boycott: See pages 85-88 and 95-98.

The four students attended North Carolina Agricultural and Technical College in Greensboro. On the afternoon of February 1, 1960, they walked into the Woolworth's store downtown.

First, they purchased a few small items—this was part of their plan. Then they sat down at the lunch counter. They tried to place an order. But they were refused service because the lunch counter was “for whites only.”

What did they do then? They sat there—and kept on sitting there until the store closed. A policeman had stepped in but did nothing because the young men were just sitting there peacefully.



Young African Americans sit in at a lunch counter for “whites only” in Nashville, Tennessee, in 1960.

The next day, they returned and sat in with more students. Newspapers and television stations reported what was happening in Greensboro. Within weeks, the sit-in grew to a sit-in movement across the South, and in parts of the North as well. Black students were joined by white students as the sit-ins spread from lunch counters to segregated libraries, swimming pools, and hotels. As for that lunch counter in the Greensboro Woolworth's—by summer, it was integrated.

As the sit-in movement spread, so did opposition to it. The student protesters were insulted and yelled at. Some were beaten by segregationists. Some were arrested by the police. Through it all, the student protesters remained nonviolent.

Civil rights leaders like Ella Baker saw the power of the growing sit-in movement. She was a leader of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC), a major civil rights organization founded in 1957, and headed by Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Ella Baker organized a conference held in April, 1960, in Raleigh, North Carolina. More than 120 students attended the meeting. King and others hoped they would organize a youth branch of the SCLC, but the students decided to form an independent organization, the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC—pronounced “snick”). Ella Baker inspired the students to think big—the struggle, she told them, was “much bigger than a hamburger or even a giant-sized coke.”

SNCC went on to play a major role in the civil rights movement, especially at the grassroots level. Members of SNCC organized to register Black voters across the South. Some risked their lives in the Freedom Rides to desegregate buses. (You can read about the Freedom Rides on page 116.)

grassroots: a term used to describe working with ordinary people in neighborhoods and communities (in contrast to working with political leaders)

“Sit Down Chillun, Sit Down!” by Wilma Dykeman and James Stokely (1960)

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scope: extent; how far the effects of something can be felt

intimidation: being threatened or confronted by actions meant to make one feel fear

faltering: beginning to weaken or give way in doing something

initial: first

episode: event

refutation: the act of proving that something is not true

Thoreau and Gandhi: Through their acts of nonviolent resistance, they influenced the civil rights movement. See pages 128-130 for more information on how they influenced Martin Luther King, Jr.

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implicit: present within though not externally obvious

paradoxes: statements or situations that seem to be opposite and self-contradictory but are nevertheless true or possible

Chillun: children

stoutly: boldly; bravely

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intimidate: to fill someone with fear

ordeals: painful experiences



This sculpture on campus of North Carolina A&T State University honors the four young men who inspired nonviolent sit-ins across the South.

CORE and the Freedom Riders

Background Knowledge

In 1942—in the midst of World War II—a group of students (both white and African American) at the University of Chicago founded the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE). One of the founders, James Farmer, said that CORE “was born into a time of violence, but out of a hope for peace. Its founders were young men and women deeply concerned with social justice, most of whom were also pacifists”—people who believe that war and violence are wrong.

CORE’s founders were inspired by Mahatma Gandhi, the leader of India’s long struggle for independence from British rule. Gandhi did not lead an armed revolution. Instead, he urged the Indian people to practice nonviolent resistance. He inspired millions of people to march in peaceful protest, or to boycott British-manufactured cloth and make their own by hand. He remained committed to nonviolent resistance even as he was repeatedly arrested and imprisoned.

Nonviolence does not mean doing nothing. It begins with taking action against injustice—by sitting in at a segregated lunch counter, for example, or, like Rosa Parks, by staying seated when ordered to give up her seat to a white passenger on the bus. Those who practice nonviolent resistance risk being insulted, beaten, arrested, and jailed. It takes great self-control to remain nonviolent in the face of violence.

Inspired by the example of Gandhi, members of CORE organized a nonviolent effort called the Journey of Reconciliation. In

Mahatma Gandhi: Born Mohandas Gandhi, he came to be called Mahatma, which means “Great Soul.”

nonviolent resistance: See page 129 for further discussion of Gandhi’s ideas about nonviolent resistance, specifically in relation to their influence on Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

boycott: to refuse to buy products or use services as a way to push for change

reconciliation: the restoring of friendly relations after some disagreement

1946, the Supreme Court had ruled that segregation on interstate buses and trains was unconstitutional, but many Southern states ignored the ruling. In April 1947, to challenge the continuing practice of segregation on buses, members of CORE, both Black and white, boarded a bus in Washington, D.C. and headed south. Their journey soon ended in North Carolina, where many of the participants were arrested.

Although the Journey of Reconciliation did not succeed, it inspired the Freedom Rides organized by CORE in 1961. The Freedom Rides were designed to push the federal government to enforce a 1960 Supreme Court decision, which extended the court's earlier ruling against segregation on interstate buses and trains to include the facilities that served travelers, such as waiting rooms, restrooms, and lunch counters. Despite the court's ruling, many Southern states continued to force Black travelers to use separate and inferior facilities.



Some states, especially in the South, made Black people use separate and inferior facilities, as at this bus station in North Carolina.

interstate: relating to travel across two or more states

On May 4, 1961, the first Freedom Riders boarded a Greyhound bus in Washington, D.C., headed south. The group was made up of men and women, seven African Americans and six whites. They met only mild resistance in Virginia and North Carolina. In South Carolina, the violence began, when some of the Freedom Riders were attacked and beaten as they attempted to enter a waiting area restricted to “whites only.” The group continued their southbound journey through Georgia. In Atlanta, some of the group boarded a separate bus run by the Trailways company.

On May 14, the Freedom Riders on the Greyhound bus ran into violent mobs in Alabama. Someone threw a bomb into the bus. The Freedom Riders managed to get out before the bus burst into flames, only to be beaten by the waiting mob.

The Trailways bus went to Birmingham, Alabama. A white mob was waiting, with many members of the Ku Klux Klan. They brutally beat the Freedom Riders with baseball bats and metal pipes.

The next day, newspapers showed pictures of the burning bus and the bloodied riders. Hundreds of people came forward to take part in new Freedom Rides. Many were beaten, arrested, and jailed. Support for their cause grew as national media—newspapers, magazines, radio, and television—continued to report and show the brutality against the Freedom Riders. In the face of violence and injustice, they remained nonviolent in their struggle for justice. Their brave efforts helped fuel a growing demand for change that led the federal government to pass major civil rights legislation in 1964 and 1965.

Ku Klux Klan: a secret society dedicated to achieving white supremacy, often by violent means, especially against Black people

“I’m Not Free Unless My Brothers Are Free”—Freedom Rider Robert (1961)

Primary Source

In 1961, the Freedom Riders were featured in a sixty-page pamphlet that was published to help people understand the movement’s purposes. Headlined “Freedom Riders Speak For Themselves,” the pamphlet collected the stories of people who had journeyed on the southbound buses. In their own words, they told about their experiences and hardships, and why they were willing to take the risks and suffer the punishments. Some were veterans of the civil rights movement, and some were young people, including the high school student whose words are reprinted below. Because he was only seventeen years old, and at the time a minor, Robert’s last name was not published.

I’m 17 years old, a high school student, and, most important, I’m a Freedom Rider. At Jackson they made me wait in a separate room from where the other Freedom Riders were.

They took me into a little office. They asked me my name; to show identification; where I was from; and that sort of thing. They told me to check my luggage with the guard outside the door, which I did. Then I had to stand on the other side of the room and wait until they called me.

They asked me questions such as: Was I a Communist? Did I know that I belonged to a Communist organization? Did I know that the organization that sent the Freedom Riders down would just put them there and forget about them?

Jackson: Jackson, Mississippi, where the bus Robert was on was stopped and many of the riders arrested

When they saw that they were not scaring me, they said that because I am 17 I wouldn't be classified as a Freedom Rider, but as a runaway: that I wouldn't be sent to Parchman, but to Oakley Reformatory.

I told them I had a slip signed by my mother saying that I was a legal Freedom Rider, and that she had consented to this.

They said that didn't make any difference—if they wanted to classify me as a runaway, they'd do it. They asked me if I had ever been in the South before.

I told them, “No, I hadn't.”

They said, “Well then, it's none of your business what goes on down here, is it?”

I said, “Yes, it is my business, because I feel that I'm not free unless my brothers are free.”

Then they offered to release me in the custody of my lawyer providing I would return to Los Angeles.

. . . I was taken to the CORE office where I met the CORE representative who drove me to the airport. His car had KKK scratched on the window. I asked him how that happened. He said that when the people found out he was helping with integration that happened to his car. He had to get right back, so I stayed in the plane terminal by myself.

I thought that if we keep sending more Freedom Riders down there we can break Jackson. They're tired of us now. They told us this. They wish we would stop coming. The more we send the better. If we keep sending them, time after time, they'll have to do something.

Parchman: Parchman Penitentiary, a prison farm in Mississippi known for its harsh treatment of inmates

Oakley Reformatory: a correctional facility for young people in Mississippi

The problem concerns everyone, all over the United States, and all over the world. There's no one who can say that he's completely free as long as people are getting arrested just for sitting in waiting rooms or being in "white places."

The reason I went on a Freedom Ride is because I feel I belong to a generation which won't live with segregation—and we're not the ones who are illegal. It's the government in Jackson that should be arrested. They're not supposed to give anyone six months just for sitting in a waiting room. It's illegal. They should be put behind the bars, not the Freedom Riders.

“Which Side Are You On?” by James Farmer (1985)

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john: toilet

permeated: spread throughout

our white counterparts: Farmer here refers to the white Freedom Riders who had also been arrested and imprisoned, but placed in part of the jail apart from the Black Freedom Riders.

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tentatively: hesitantly

entertain: give attention to

hymnals: books of hymns

sermonette: a brief sermon

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One of the Freedom Riders' buses was fire-bombed in Alabama. The passengers escaped, only to be beaten by a white mob.

contempt: scorn; an attitude of looking down on something as unworthy
was hard-pressed: was having great difficulty

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furrowing: making wrinkles in

coterie: a small and closed-off group of people united by common interests or beliefs

salutation: greeting

summoned: asked (someone) to come

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to copyright restrictions*

imminent: about to happen
ventured: risked; took a chance on
averted: turned away

Martin Luther King, Jr.: Birmingham and the Power of Nonviolence

Background Knowledge

You have seen how the civil rights movement in America took action through nonviolent protest, such as boycotts, sit-ins, and Freedom Rides. The civil rights leader most known for embodying and expressing the philosophy of nonviolence was Martin Luther King, Jr. (1929–1968). Born in Atlanta, Georgia, his mother was a schoolteacher, and his father the pastor of the well-known Ebenezer Baptist Church in Atlanta. He attended Morehouse College in Atlanta, and then studied theology at Crozer Seminary in Pennsylvania. He went on to earn his Ph.D. in philosophy from Boston University.

As a student, King was drawn to writers who spoke of social change. Their ideas shaped his later leadership of the civil rights movement. Two writers in particular led King to his belief in the power of nonviolent protest: Henry David Thoreau and Mahatma Gandhi.

In mid-nineteenth century Massachusetts, Henry David Thoreau, a writer and philosopher, went to jail rather than pay his taxes. He explained why in an essay titled “Civil Disobedience” (1846). The law required Thoreau to pay taxes. But these taxes, said Thoreau, supported a government that allowed slavery and was waging war against Mexico to take Mexico’s land for the United States. As Thoreau saw it, the law that required him to pay taxes also required him to support injustice—thus, the law itself was unjust.

pastor: a minister in charge of a church

seminary: a college that prepares religious leaders

Ph.D.: Doctor of Philosophy, one of the highest educational degrees you can earn, requiring years of study and research after you graduate from college

Thoreau wrote: “Unjust laws exist: shall we be content to obey them, . . . or shall we transgress them at once?” He answered bluntly: If a law “requires you to be the agent of injustice to another, then, I say, break the law.”

This idea of civil disobedience—of nonviolently disobeying an unjust law for the sake of bringing about justice—excited young Martin Luther King, Jr. In reading Thoreau, said King, “I made my first contact with the theory of nonviolent resistance. . . . I became convinced that noncooperation with evil is as much a moral obligation as is cooperation with good.”

The idea of “nonviolent resistance” that King discovered in Thoreau was reinforced when, as a seminary student, he studied the writings of Mahatma Gandhi. Gandhi (who himself admired Thoreau) led India in its long struggle for independence from British rule. Gandhi developed a concept he called *satyagraha*, which may be translated as “holding onto truth.” By holding onto truth and nonviolently resisting injustice, said Gandhi, you could change the world.

Gandhi urged the Indian people to practice nonviolent resistance, for example, by marching in peaceful protests, or by refusing to buy British-made goods. But Gandhi emphasized that *satyagraha* requires great self-discipline—you must remain true to your beliefs and sense of justice, even if it brings suffering upon you, for you must never harm others even if they hurt you.

Martin Luther King, Jr., said that through his study of Gandhi’s philosophy, he “came to see for the first time that the Christian doctrine of love operating through the Gandhian method of nonviolence was one of the most potent weapons available to

transgress: to disobey a law or a command

Mahatma: Born Mohandas Gandhi, he came to be called Mahatma, which means “Great Soul.”

oppressed people in their struggle for freedom." This insight guided King when he returned to the segregated South and became a pastor in Montgomery, Alabama. In 1955, after Rosa Parks was arrested for refusing to give up her seat on a city bus to a white person, King helped lead the Black community in their boycott of Montgomery's bus service. King later recalled, "The experience in Montgomery did more to clarify my thinking on the question of nonviolence than all of the books that I had read. As the days unfolded I became more and more convinced of the power of nonviolence."

King's commitment to nonviolence was deepened even more when, in 1959, he and his wife, Coretta Scott King, traveled to India. Because the Indian newspapers had closely covered King's leadership of the Montgomery bus boycott, he was welcomed enthusiastically. King met Gandhi's relatives and his close associates in the Indian independence movement. (Gandhi himself had died in 1948, shot by an assassin only months after India gained independence from Britain.)

During his weeks in India, King gave many lectures and spoke with many student groups. When he met with a group of African students studying in India, he found them doubtful about the power of nonviolent resistance. But, said King, they mistakenly thought of nonviolent resistance as passive. True nonviolent resistance, said King "is not unrealistic submission to evil power. It is rather a courageous confrontation of evil by the power of love, in the faith that it is better to be the recipient of violence than the inflictor of it. . . ."

oppressed: treated cruelly and unfairly by those in power

boycott: to refuse to buy products or use services as a way to push for change (See pages 86-88 and 95-98 for more on the Montgomery boycott.)

“Letter from Birmingham Jail” by Martin Luther King, Jr. (1963)

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clergymen: religious leaders (usually applied to those in Christian churches)

direct action: King uses “direct action” to refer to nonviolent acts—such as sits-ins and marches—that people use to bring about change when it is no longer useful to negotiate. In this sense, direct action is closely related to nonviolent resistance and civil disobedience.



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mutuality: connectedness

provincial: narrow-minded

agitators: troublemakers; persons who stir up unrest

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to copyright restrictions*

deplore: strongly disapprove of
retaliating: fighting back
inevitably: unavoidably
lamentably: unfortunately; regrettably

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whim: an impulsive desire

affluent: wealthy

ominous: fill with a sense that something bad is going to happen

concoct: make up

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to copyright restrictions*

harried: troubled; worried; bothered

plagued: constantly worried or troubled

resentments: angry and bitter feelings about having been treated unfairly

degenerating: causing one to feel worse, weaker, less worthwhile

abyss: a seemingly bottomless hole

legitimate: reasonable

conversely: on the other hand

St. Augustine: a 5th century leader of the Christian church whose writings had a great influence on the development of early Christianity

arouse: wake up; stir to action

A Powerful Speech for Civil Rights, and a Tragic Loss for the Movement

Background Knowledge

The violent response to the nonviolent protests in Birmingham, Alabama, affected the nation. Televised scenes of police brutality against peaceful protesters motivated people in cities across the country to stage their own protests in support of the Birmingham demonstrators.

Meanwhile, Alabama's racist governor, George Wallace, doubled down on a pledge he had made to maintain "segregation today . . . segregation tomorrow . . . segregation forever." On June 11, 1963, when two Black students tried to enroll at the University of Alabama, the governor stood at the entrance to block them from entering. Wallace's "stand in the schoolhouse door," as the event is now remembered, ended when President John F. Kennedy sent in troops to protect the students. Wallace stepped aside and the students entered the university.

That same evening, President Kennedy went on television and spoke to the nation. He announced he would be sending a new civil rights bill to Congress. But he also spoke directly to Americans about what he called the nation's "moral crisis." He expressed support for the civil rights protests. "The time has come," he asserted, "for this nation to fulfill its promise."

The president's dramatic speech gave new hope and energy to those who had been struggling for years in the civil rights

Birmingham, Alabama: See page 131.

"... segregation forever": Wallace spoke these words in a speech he made at his inauguration in January, 1963.



Medgar Evers, the first field secretary of the NAACP in Mississippi, lost his life for the cause of civil rights.

movement. One of those people was Medgar Evers, who worked for the NAACP in Mississippi.

Evers was a combat veteran who had fought with the U. S. Army in France in World War II. After he returned from the war to Mississippi, he went on to earn a college degree and became active in the struggle for civil rights. In 1954, he was named the first field secretary of the NAACP in Mississippi. Evers traveled around the state to set up local chapters of the NAACP. He led voter registration drives, and worked to integrate the University of Mississippi. He investigated a number of incidents of racially motivated violence against Black people in Mississippi, including the murder of fourteen-year-old Emmett Till.

When Medgar Evers learned about the murder of Emmett Till, he knew that the local law enforcement officials would put little

NAACP: National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, a leading civil rights organization

field secretary: the highest ranking position in a state chapter of the NAACP

Emmett Till: See page 78.

effort into the case. With NAACP co-workers, Evers set out to find witnesses who would be willing to come forward at the trial of the accused murderers. In this part of Mississippi, a Black person would be taking a great risk to testify against a white person. Medgar Evers and others helped keep the witnesses safe; after the trial, Evers helped the witnesses leave town quickly and secretly before any harm was done to them.

Evers and his family were often threatened with violence. In May of 1963, a Molotov cocktail was thrown through a window into his house.

On the night of June 11, 1963—the night of President Kennedy’s televised speech on civil rights—Medgar Evers was in Jackson, at a meeting with other NAACP workers. They watched the president’s speech with excitement, and their meeting lasted late into the night. Shortly after midnight, Evers returned home. As his wife, Myrlie, later recalled, she heard the slam of the car door and then almost at once a loud gunshot—the bullet hit Evers in the back, and he died soon after.

Medgar Evers was buried in Arlington National Cemetery with full military honors. His murderer, a white supremacist, was tried by an all-white jury, which could not reach a decision, so there was no conviction. Myrlie Evers continued to gather evidence and push for another trial, which finally took place in 1994, with a jury of eight Black people and four white. They reached a verdict of guilty and sentenced the murderer to life in prison.

When Medgar Evers was shot, as he fell to the ground he held in his hands a pile of NAACP shirts with these words printed on them: *Jim Crow Must Go*.

President John F. Kennedy's Speech on Civil Rights (1963)

Primary Source

From the start of his presidency in 1960, John F. Kennedy had been cautious about proposing major new civil rights laws, as he was worried he might lose the support of Southern Democrats in Congress. But the violence in Birmingham changed his mind. On June 11, 1963, President Kennedy went on television and spoke to the nation, making an urgent appeal to all Americans to embrace the cause of civil rights. He began his speech by referring to the National Guard troops he had sent to the University of Alabama earlier in the day. He explained that the troops were needed to carry out the federal district court order that two Black students be admitted to the University of Alabama. Here are selections from what the president went on to say:



In a televised speech on June 11, 1963, President John F. Kennedy urged all Americans to embrace the cause of civil rights.

I hope that every American, regardless of where he lives, will stop and examine his conscience about this and other related incidents. This nation was founded by men of many nations and backgrounds. It was founded on the principle that all men are created equal, and that the rights of every man are diminished when the rights of one man are threatened.

Today we are committed to a worldwide struggle to promote and protect the rights of all who wish to be free. And when Americans are sent to Vietnam or West Berlin, we do not ask for whites only. It ought to be possible, therefore, for American students of any color to attend any public institution they select without having to be backed up by troops.

It ought to be possible for American consumers of any color to receive equal service in places of public accommodation, such as hotels and restaurants and theaters and retail stores, without being forced to resort to demonstrations in the street, and it ought to be possible for American citizens of any color to register and to vote in a free election without interference or fear of reprisal.

It ought to be possible, in short, for every American to enjoy the privileges of being American without regard to his race or his color. In short, every American ought to have the right to be treated as he would wish to be treated, as one would wish his children to be treated. But this is not the case. . . .

The heart of the question is whether all Americans are to be

diminished: reduced; weakened

Vietnam: The United States was involved in the Vietnam War from the 1960s to the 1970s. In the 1960s, President Kennedy sent thousands of American soldiers, called “advisers,” to train and support South Vietnamese troops in their fight against Communist North Vietnam.

West Berlin: At the time of this speech, in 1963, the German city of Berlin was tensely divided, with a heavily guarded barrier, the Berlin Wall, separating (Communist) East Berlin from (noncommunist) West Berlin.

reprisal: actions done to hurt or punish someone

afforded equal rights and equal opportunities; whether we are going to treat our fellow Americans as we want to be treated. If an American, because his skin is dark, cannot eat lunch in a restaurant open to the public, if he cannot send his children to the best public school available, if he cannot vote for the public officials who represent him, if, in short, he cannot enjoy the full and free life which all of us want, then who among us would be content to have the color of his skin changed and stand in his place? Who among us would then be content with the counsels of patience and delay?

One hundred years of delay have passed since President Lincoln freed the slaves, yet their heirs, their grandsons, are not fully free. They are not yet freed from the bonds of injustice; they are not yet freed from social and economic oppression. And this nation, for all its hopes and all its boasts, will not be fully free until all its citizens are free.

. . . Now the time has come for this nation to fulfill its promise. The events in Birmingham and elsewhere have so increased the cries for equality that no city or state or legislative body can prudently choose to ignore them.

. . . We face, therefore, a moral crisis as a country and a people. It cannot be met by repressive police action. It cannot be left to increased demonstrations in the streets. It cannot be quieted by token moves or talk. It is a time to act in the Congress, in your state and local legislative body, and, above all, in all of our daily lives.

afforded: provided with

counsels: words of advice

oppression: cruel and unfair treatment

legislative: lawmaking

prudently: carefully and thoughtfully

repressive: using force to control people and limit their freedom

token: minimal; merely giving an appearance of effort

It is not enough to pin the blame on others, to say this is a problem of one section of the country or another, or deplore the fact that we face. A great change is at hand, and our task, our obligation, is to make that revolution, that change, peaceful and constructive for all.

. . . I am, therefore, asking the Congress to enact legislation giving all Americans the right to be served in facilities which are open to the public—hotels, restaurants, theaters, retail stores, and similar establishments.

. . . I am also asking the Congress to authorize the federal government to participate more fully in lawsuits designed to end segregation in public education. . . .

Other features will also be requested, including greater protection for the right to vote. But legislation, I repeat, cannot solve this problem alone. It must be solved in the homes of every American in every community across our country.

In this respect I want to pay tribute to those citizens North and South who have been working in their communities to make life better for all. They are acting not out of a sense of legal duty but out of a sense of human decency.

Like our soldiers and sailors in all parts of the world they are meeting freedom's challenge on the firing line, and I salute them for their honor and their courage. . . .

The March on Washington: “I Have a Dream”

Background Knowledge

In the wake of the police violence against demonstrators in Birmingham, Alabama, as protests spread around the nation, Martin Luther King, Jr., and other civil rights leaders launched plans for a massive demonstration in Washington, D.C.—a March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom.

One of the leading organizers of the march was A. Philip Randolph. Back in 1941 he had planned a march on Washington to pressure President Franklin Roosevelt to desegregate defense industries. When Roosevelt agreed, the march in 1941 was called off. But now, in 1963, this march was definitely going forward.

The main organizer of the march was Bayard Rustin. A veteran of the civil rights movement, and co-founder of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, Rustin had been a leader of the Journey of Reconciliation that inspired the Freedom Rides of the 1960s. By tirelessly reaching out to activists across the nation, within two months Rustin organized what was the largest demonstration in the U.S. up to that time.

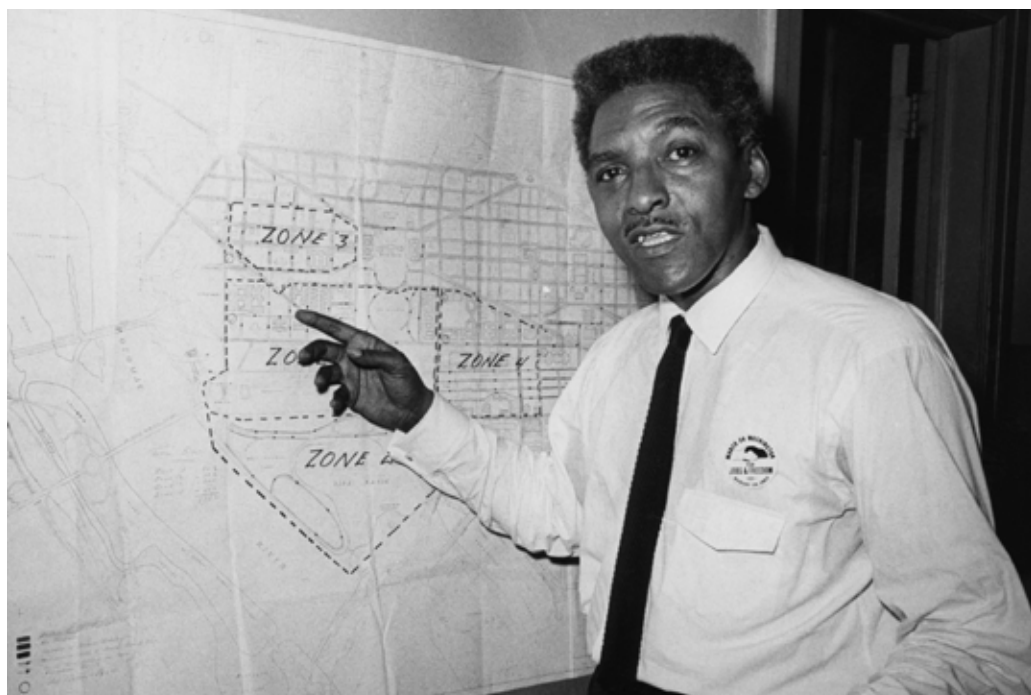
On August 28, 1963, an estimated 250,000 people participated in the March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom. The march was intended to support greater civil rights and economic opportunities for African Americans, and to put pressure on Congress to pass the civil rights legislation proposed by President Kennedy.

Birmingham, Alabama: See page 131.

A. Philip Randolph: See page 27.

Journey of Reconciliation: See page 116.

President Kennedy: See page 139 for President Kennedy's speech on civil rights.



Bayard Rustin was the leading organizer of the 1963 March on Washington.

As they marched, many people carried signs calling for justice, an end to segregation, and better jobs. Their planned route led them to the Lincoln Memorial. From the steps of the memorial, singers performed protest songs; the crowd joined in to sing a gospel hymn that had become an anthem of the civil rights movement:

*We shall overcome,
We shall overcome,
We shall overcome,
Someday.*

A number of civil rights leaders gave speeches, including A. Philip Randolph, still an active advocate at age 74, and John Lewis, a veteran of the Freedom Rides and many other protests, and now chair of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee. The final speaker of the day was Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

In the late afternoon August heat, King stood on the steps of the Lincoln Memorial in Washington, D.C., and looked out over the vast crowd. Then he began to speak. He started by observing the symbolic significance of the march happening 100 years after the signing of the Emancipation Proclamation—though even after a hundred years, said King, the promise of emancipation remained unfulfilled for African Americans.

Then, in keeping with an event focused on “Jobs and Freedom,” King spoke in economic terms—the protesters had come to Washington, he said, “to cash a check,” only to find that “America has given the Negro people a bad check.” In one sense, this bad check represented economic opportunity—the unfulfilled promise of good-paying jobs and a share in America’s prosperity. But, as King emphasized, the check also represented something larger—a share in “the riches of freedom and the security of justice.”

King then spoke of the urgent need to bring about “racial justice.” But, he said, protesters must not turn to violence. He also advised against following the path of “the marvelous new militancy,” an emerging movement whose leaders were calling for Black people to separate from whites. Looking out at the many thousands of faces in the crowd, about one-fourth of them white, King said that “many of our white brothers . . . have come to realize that their destiny is tied up with our destiny. . . . We cannot walk alone.”

new militancy: *Militancy* is the willingness to use forceful and aggressive means to achieve a goal. King was referring to the growing movement that would come to be known as Black Power. See page 177, on Malcolm X and Black Power.

“I Have a Dream”—Speech by Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. (1963)



On, August 28, 1963, at the March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom, Martin Luther King, Jr., standing in front of the Lincoln Memorial, delivered his “I have a dream” speech.

Primary Source

On August 28, 1963, as Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., addressed the vast crowd in Washington, D.C., at some point he departed from his written speech and began to speak from inspiration. Here is the part of his speech that is most remembered, celebrated, and quoted—and will be as long as there are people who care about freedom and justice.

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to copyright restrictions*

creed: system of beliefs

“... created equal”: from the Declaration of Independence

oppression: cruel and unfair treatment

governor: George Wallace

interposition and nullification: two strategies used by elected officials in the South (such as Alabama’s Governor Wallace) to justify their refusal to enact or follow laws requiring desegregation (especially as required by the Supreme Court’s ruling in *Brown v. Board of Education*). “Interposition” refers to the idea that a state could interpose (place itself between) its citizens and any unconstitutional actions of the federal government—at least, unconstitutional in the state’s eyes. To *nullify* is to cause something to have no value or effect; “nullification” is the idea that a state has the right to nullify federal laws that it believes to be unconstitutional.

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every valley . . . : from the Bible, Isaiah 40:4-5

hew: to carve; to shape by cutting or chopping

jangling discords: irritating, disturbing arguments and disagreements

prodigious: impressive in size

heightening: rising

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due to copyright restrictions*

curvaceous: having an attractive curved shape

hamlet: a small village

Gentiles: persons who are not of the Jewish faith (especially Christians, as distinguished from Jews)

Fannie Lou Hamer and Freedom Summer

Background Knowledge

In 1962 in Mississippi, for every hundred Black people eligible to vote, fewer than seven were registered. Why so few? Because voting is power—the power to choose the people who represent you, the people who make and enforce laws that affect your life. In Mississippi and in other Southern states, white people wanted to keep that power out of the hands of Black people.

White Southerners came up with many ways to keep African Americans from voting. When Black people tried to register to vote, they risked getting fired from their jobs. Sometimes they had to take so-called “literacy tests” with confusing questions designed to trip them up. Sometimes they were required to pay a “poll tax” before they could vote, which many could not afford. Sometimes they were threatened with violence from white people armed with clubs or guns.

In the summer of 1962, various civil rights organizations decided to work together to focus on registering Black people to vote in Mississippi. There were members of SNCC (the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee), CORE (the Congress of Racial Equality), the SCLC (Southern Christian Leadership Conference), and the NAACP (the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People). In the struggle for civil rights, these organizations sometimes argued about what needed to be done and the best way to do it, but they decided to work together in Mississippi.

Often threatened and sometimes arrested, the civil rights workers went door to door, telling Black people about their rights, and

SNCC: pronounced “snick”

urging them to come to meetings to learn more about registering to vote. One Monday evening in August 1962, at a church in the small town of Ruleville, two visiting civil rights workers spoke about the power of the vote. Then they asked for volunteers who would be willing to try to register to vote at the county courthouse on Friday. In all, eighteen people were willing. One of them was Fannie Lou Hamer.

In the summer of 1962, Fannie Lou Hamer was working as a sharecropper on a cotton plantation. It was a hard life—sharecroppers were always in debt to the landowner, to whom they owed half their harvest and other fees, which left them poor no matter how hard they worked. It had been Fannie Lou's life since childhood—her parents were sharecroppers before her; she was the youngest and last of their twenty children.

At the age of twelve, she left school to work in the fields. When she was twenty-seven, she married another sharecropper, Perry Hamer, known as "Pap," who worked on a nearby plantation. She joined him there and, because she could read and write, was also employed as a "timekeeper," keeping track of how much each worker harvested. For the next eighteen years, Fannie Lou Hamer and her husband worked on the plantation.

In August 1962, when Fannie Lou Hamer attended the meeting at the church in the town of Ruleville, her life got swept up in the civil rights movement. She and the other people from the meeting who had volunteered to register to vote boarded a rented bus that took them to the courthouse in the town of Indianola. A civil rights worker on the bus later recalled what happened when they arrived at the courthouse—as people started getting off the bus, they just stood there, feeling "some hesitancy" to approach the building that "represented the seat of power, the jail, and all of the things that

blacks wanted to stay away from. . . . Then this one little stocky lady just stepped off the bus and went right on up to the courthouse and into the circuit clerk's office." That lady was Fannie Lou Hamer. She and the seventeen others who hoped to register were told to enter only two at a time. They had to fill out long forms. They were required to take a literacy test, which consisted of the registrar asking each person to explain obscure sections of the Mississippi state constitution. In this way, the registrar could decide who passed—almost always, white people—and who didn't—generally, Black people.

On the bus on the way home, a police car pulled them over. The officer arrested the driver because the yellow color of the bus was too close to the color of a school bus. It wasn't a real crime, but a way to intimidate the people on the bus. To ease the tension among the passengers—who knew that an arrest might suddenly turn violent—Fannie Lou Hamer began to sing; other passengers joined in or hummed along to the familiar words of the spiritual. Eventually, the passengers managed to chip in enough money among themselves to pay the fine and be on their way again.

When Fannie Lou Hamer returned home, she was fired from the job she had held for eighteen years. She had to leave the plantation. Friends took her in and gave her a place to live. A little more than a week later, bullets ripped through the walls of the house where she was staying. Shots were also fired at the houses where SNCC volunteers were staying. No one was killed, but two young volunteers were injured.

SNCC's leaders in Mississippi recognized something special in Fannie Lou Hamer. They saw her courage and her ability to inspire people when she spoke. Working with SNCC, Fannie Lou Hamer went on to lead workshops and speak at meetings across the South, telling her

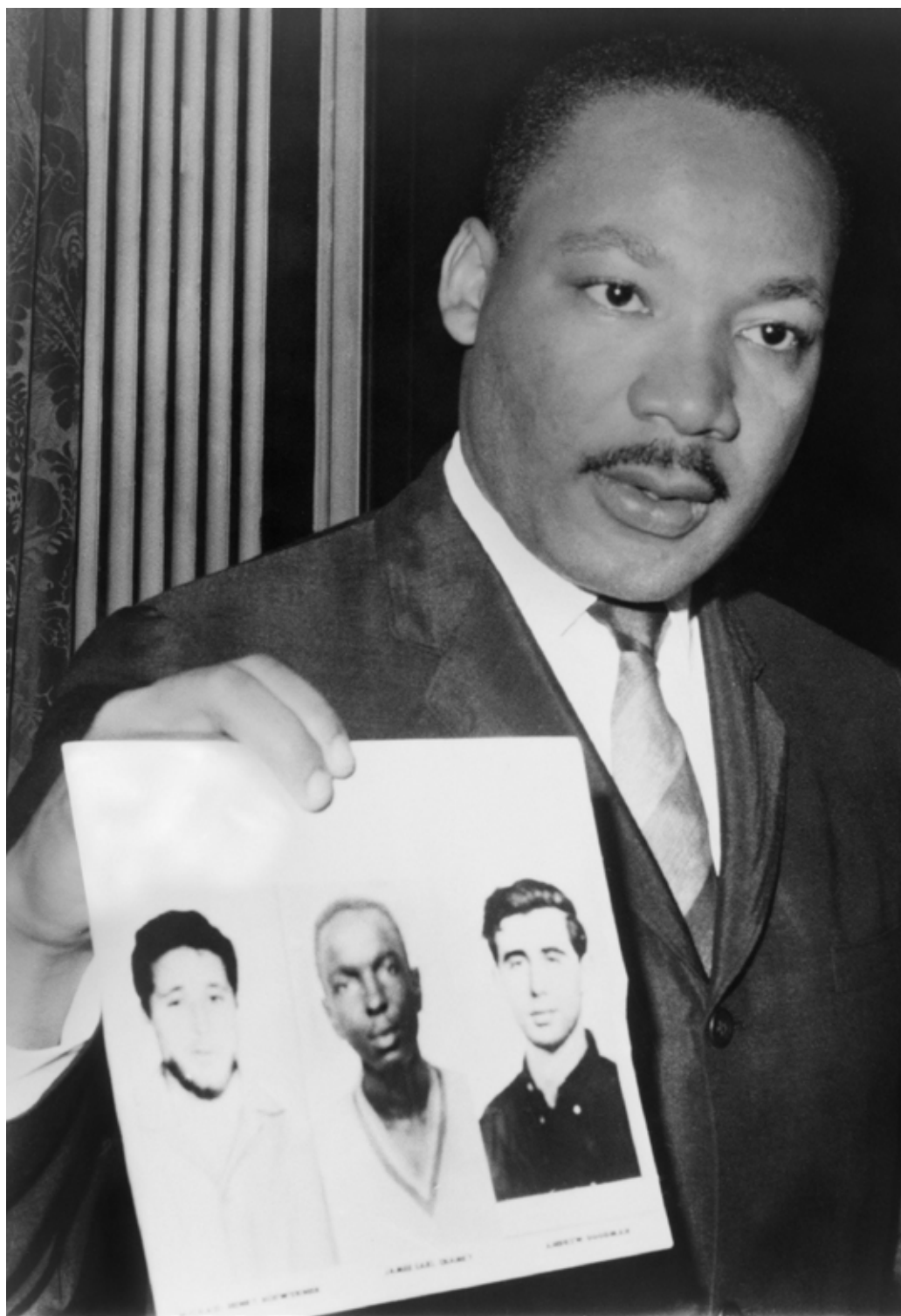
story and encouraging Black people to register to vote.

In June 1963, when returning from a voter registration event in South Carolina, Fannie Lou Hamer and other volunteers were arrested in Mississippi and severely beaten. This brutal treatment was intended to silence her, but once she recovered, she kept on speaking out. In her speeches, she would sometimes say, “I’m sick and tired of being sick and tired.” No matter how sick and tired she felt, for the rest of her days she continued to work for the civil rights of her people.

Freedom Summer: In the summer of 1964, in an effort that came to be known as Freedom Summer, SNCC and CORE renewed their push to register Black voters in Mississippi. Hundreds of northern college students volunteered to come to Mississippi and spend their summer registering Black voters and setting up Freedom Schools—summer programs to help students young and old learn about African American history and their rights as citizens, as well as reading, writing, and arithmetic. Black families opened their homes to the mostly white student volunteers. The students were joined by SNCC and CORE workers, as well as many volunteer lawyers, medical workers, and people representing various churches.

The Freedom Summer volunteers faced violent resistance. They were beaten, shot at, and arrested for no reason. In late June, three men went missing: two white men from New York, Michael Schwerner, a CORE staff member, and Andrew Goodman, a new volunteer; and, a local Black man, James Chaney, who also worked for CORE. A massive FBI manhunt, with national media coverage, led to the eventual discovery of their bodies—they had been shot and killed by the Ku Klux Klan, with the help of a local policeman.

Ku Klux Klan: a secret society dedicated to achieving white supremacy, often by violent means, especially against Black people



Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., holds photographs of three Freedom Summer volunteers who were murdered by the Ku Klux Klan: Andrew Goodman, James Earl Chaney, and Michael Schwerner.

As the weeks wore on, the Freedom Summer volunteers focused on another goal—they worked to involve Black people in a new political party, the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party (MFDP). The regular Democratic Party in Mississippi had a long history of excluding Black people. “We formed our own party,” Fannie Lou Hamer explained, “because the whites wouldn’t even let us register.”

The Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party decided to challenge the state’s regular Democratic Party. It was 1964, a presidential election year, and the national Democratic Party was holding its convention in Atlantic City, New Jersey. At the national convention of a political party—whether it be for Democrats, Republicans, or some independent party—each state is represented by people selected to represent the voters in the state who favor that political party. These representatives are called delegates, and the group of delegates sent by each state is called a delegation. In a presidential election year, the delegates pick their party’s candidate for the presidency. They also participate in shaping the party’s platform, a statement of the party’s goals and priorities. This is important work that can shape the direction of the nation if the party’s candidate goes on to win the election.

In 1964, two different delegations from Mississippi arrived at the Democratic National Convention. There was the all-white delegation of the state’s regular Democratic Party. And there was the delegation of the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party, which a SNCC leader described as “black, white, maids, ministers, carpenters, farmers, painters, mechanics, schoolteachers, the young, the old.” The MFDP asked—though without success—that they be recognized as the official Democratic Party delegates from Mississippi, instead of the state’s all-white delegation.

Among the MFDP delegates who spoke at the national convention was Fannie Lou Hamer.

Testimony Before the Credentials Committee at the Democratic National Convention, by Fannie Lou Hamer (1964)

Primary Source

On August 22, 1964, at the Democratic National Convention, Fannie Lou Hamer spoke on behalf of the delegation of the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party. She told her story—it was broadcast on national television, and replayed often on news programs in the days after the convention. Her words opened the eyes of many Americans to the brutal injustices inflicted on African Americans in the South.



When television news programs replayed Fannie Lou Hamer's testimony at the 1964 Democratic National Convention, many viewers were deeply moved by her account of the brutal injustices she suffered in her struggle for voting rights.

Mr. Chairman, and to the Credentials Committee, my name is Mrs. Fannie Lou Hamer, and I live at 626 East Lafayette Street, Ruleville, Mississippi, Sunflower County, the home of Senator James O. Eastland, and Senator Stennis.

It was the 31st of August in 1962 that eighteen of us traveled twenty-six miles to the county courthouse in Indianola to try to register to become first-class citizens.

We was met in Indianola by policemen, highway patrolmen, and they only allowed two of us in to take the literacy test at the time. After we had taken this test and started back to Ruleville, we was held up by the City Police and the State Highway Patrolmen and carried back to Indianola where the bus driver was charged that day with driving a bus the wrong color.

After we paid the fine among us, we continued on to Ruleville, and Reverend Jeff Sunny carried me four miles in the rural area where I had worked as a timekeeper and sharecropper for eighteen years. I was met there by my children, who told me the plantation owner was angry because I had gone down to try to register.

After they told me, my husband came, and said the plantation owner was raising Cain because I had tried to register, and before he quit talking the plantation owner came and said, “Fannie Lou, do you know—did Pap tell you what I said?”

And I said, “Yes, sir.”

He said, “Well I mean that.” He said, “If you don’t go down and

Senator James O. Eastland, and Senator [John] Stennis: at the time, Mississippi’s two senators, both strong supporters of racial segregation and opponents of civil rights legislation

first-class citizens: an expression to describe citizens who enjoy all their constitutional rights, especially the right to vote

withdraw your registration, you will have to leave.” Said, “Then if you go down and withdraw,” said, “you still might have to go because we are not ready for that in Mississippi.”

And I addressed him and told him and said, “I didn’t try to register for you. I tried to register for myself.”

I had to leave that same night.

On the 10th of September 1962, sixteen bullets was fired into the home of Mr. and Mrs. Robert Tucker for me. That same night two girls were shot in Ruleville, Mississippi. Also Mr. Joe McDonald’s house was shot in.

And June the 9th, 1963, I had attended a voter registration workshop; was returning back to Mississippi. Ten of us was traveling by the Continental Trailway bus. When we got to Winona, Mississippi, which is Montgomery County, four of the people got off to use the washroom, and two of the people—to use the restaurant—two of the people wanted to use the washroom.

The four people that had gone in to use the restaurant was ordered out. During this time I was on the bus. But when I looked through the window and saw they had rushed out I got off of the bus to see what had happened. And one of the ladies said, “It was a State Highway Patrolman and a Chief of Police ordered us out.”

I got back on the bus and one of the persons had used the washroom got back on the bus, too.

As soon as I was seated on the bus, I saw when they began to get the five people in a highway patrolman’s car. I stepped off of the bus to see what was happening and somebody screamed

from the car that the five workers was in and said, "Get that one there." And when I went to get in the car, when the man told me I was under arrest, he kicked me.

I was carried to the county jail and put in the booking room. They left some of the people in the booking room and began to place us in cells. I was placed in a cell with a young woman called Miss Ivesta Simpson. After I was placed in the cell I began to hear sounds of licks and screams. I could hear the sounds of licks and horrible screams. And I could hear somebody say, "Can you say, 'yes, sir,' n-----? Can you say 'yes, sir'?"

And they would say other horrible names.

She would say, "Yes, I can say 'yes, sir.'"

"So, well, say it."

She said, "I don't know you well enough."

They beat her, I don't know how long. And after a while she began to pray, and asked God to have mercy on those people.

And it wasn't too long before three white men came to my cell. One of these men was a State Highway Patrolman and he asked me where I was from. I told him Ruleville and he said, "We are going to check this."

And they left my cell and it wasn't too long before they came back. He said, "You are from Ruleville all right," and he used a curse word. And he said, "We are going to make you wish you was dead."

I was carried out of that cell into another cell where they had two Negro prisoners. The State Highway Patrolmen ordered the first Negro to take the blackjack.

The first Negro prisoner ordered me, by orders from the State Highway Patrolman, for me to lay down on a bunk bed on my face.

And I laid on my face. The first Negro began to beat, and I was beat by the first Negro until he was exhausted. I was holding my hands behind me at that time on my left side, because I suffered from polio when I was six years old.

After the first Negro had beat until he was exhausted, the State Highway Patrolman ordered the second Negro to take the blackjack.

The second Negro began to beat and I began to work my feet, and the State Highway Patrolman ordered the first Negro who had beat to sit on my feet, to keep me from working my feet. I began to scream and one white man got up and began to beat me in my head and tell me to hush.

One white man—my dress had worked up high—he walked over and pulled my dress, I pulled my dress down and he pulled my dress back up.

I was in jail when Medgar Evers was murdered.

All of this is on account of we want to register, to become first-class citizens. And if the Freedom Democratic Party is not seated now, I question America. Is this America, the land of the free and the home of the brave, where we have to sleep with our telephones off the hooks because our lives be threatened daily, because we want to live as decent human beings, in America?

Thank you.

polio: an infectious viral disease that affects the nervous system and can cause the loss of the ability to move parts of the body, often the legs. Once widespread, the disease has now been eliminated in many countries through vaccination programs

seated: put in the position of authority (in this case, recognized as the official state delegation)

From the Civil Rights Act to Bloody Sunday in Selma

Background Knowledge

Before the March on Washington, at which Martin Luther King, Jr., delivered his stirring “I have a dream” speech, President John F. Kennedy sent his proposed civil rights bill to Congress. Kennedy did not live to see it passed—he was assassinated on November 22, 1963.

Vice-President Lyndon Baines Johnson was promptly sworn in as president. Some civil rights advocates worried that Johnson, a Southerner raised in rural Texas, would devote little effort to their cause. But Johnson pushed hard for the passage of the civil rights bill, over the objections of some segregationist Southern senators who delayed the bill from moving forward.

On July 2, 1964, President Johnson signed the Civil Rights Act of 1964 into law. The act ended the Jim Crow laws that had been upheld by the Supreme Court’s 1896 Plessy v. Ferguson decision—a decision overturned by the Court’s 1954 ruling in Brown v. Board of Education, which found “separate but equal” unconstitutional, but which many Southern states fiercely resisted.

Here are some of the main things that the Civil Rights Act of 1964 did:

March on Washington: See page 143.

Kennedy: See page 139 for the speech in which President Kennedy announced his proposed civil rights legislation.

Plessy v. Ferguson: See page 11.

Brown v. Board of Education: See page 64.

- It prohibited segregation in public accommodations—no longer could African Americans and other people of color be denied service or kept out of places like restaurants, hotels, theaters, or sports stadiums simply because of their race, religion, or national origin.
- It said that in hiring, promoting, and firing, employers could not discriminate on the basis of race, religion, national origin, or sex.
- It made discrimination unlawful in any program receiving federal government funding.
- It called for the desegregation of public schools and provided some guarantees for equal voting rights.

In the Freedom Summer of 1964, many young volunteers, both white and Black, were working to register African Americans in Mississippi to vote. As had often happened before, the volunteers met with violent resistance. The violence kept up after the Civil Rights Act was passed. Martin Luther King, Jr., and other civil rights leaders pushed for new laws to provide even stronger guarantees against discrimination in voting.

In January 1965, King visited Selma, Alabama, where only a little more than 300 of the 15,000 eligible Black voters were registered, despite many months of effort by SNCC volunteers. In a series of marches for voting rights in Selma, hundreds of people were arrested and jailed, including Dr. King himself, who observed: “When the Civil Rights Act of 1964 was passed, many decent

national origin: According to the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission—established by the Civil Rights Act of 1964 to ensure nondiscrimination in the workplace—“National origin discrimination involves treating people (applicants or employees) unfavorably because they are from a particular country or part of the world, because of ethnicity or accent, or because they appear to be of a certain ethnic background (even if they are not).”

Freedom Summer: See page 153.

SNCC: Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee

Americans were lulled into complacency because they thought the day of difficult struggle was over. . . . This is Selma, Alabama. There are more Negroes in jail with me than there are on the voting rolls.”

In mid-February of 1965, in a town not far from Selma, a peaceful protest turned deadly when state troopers and local police attacked the protesters and even the reporters covering the event. To escape the violence, Jimmie Lee Jackson—age 26, an Army veteran—entered a café, along with his mother and other protesters. State troopers entered the café, knocked out the lights with their clubs, and began beating people. When a trooper hit Jackson’s mother, he leaped to help her. A trooper shot him twice, and he died eight days later.

Jackson’s death spurred civil rights leaders to plan an event that would draw attention to the growing violence and injustice in Alabama. They planned a march from Selma to Montgomery, the state capital.

On Sunday, March 7, 1965, about 600 people set out on the planned 54-mile journey. They marched through downtown Selma and came to the Edmund Pettus Bridge, which would put them on the road out of town to Montgomery. As they came over the rise in the bridge, they were met by a line of police and state troopers, with white onlookers behind them waving Confederate flags. Within minutes, the police and troopers attacked with clubs, whips, and tear gas. Television cameras captured the awful violence of what became known as “Bloody Sunday,” prompting outrage across the nation and an urgent cry for change.

lulled: relaxed into a false sense of safety

complacency: a feeling of satisfaction with things as they are, while being unaware of risks, dangers, or problems

*From Selma, Lord, Selma: Girlhood Memories
of the Civil Rights Days by Sheyann Webb (1980)*

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to copyright restrictions*

Sheyann: pronounced, she says, shy-anne, “like the capital city of Wyoming”

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to copyright restrictions*

posse: in the old West, a group of men gathered by the sheriff to enforce the laws

Hosea Williams and John Lewis: These two civil rights leaders walked at the head of the march. Hosea Williams was with the SCLC (the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, led by Martin Luther King, Jr.). John Lewis was chairman of SNCC (Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee), and would later become a congressman from Georgia. (Martin Luther King, Jr. was scheduled to join the march the next day; he had traveled earlier to Washington, D.C., to discuss new voting rights laws with President Johnson.)

disperse: scatter; break up and spread apart

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A state trooper hit SNCC chairman John Lewis (on the ground in a light coat) on the head, cracking his skull.

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trample: to step heavily; to crush

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From Selma to the Voting Rights Act

Background Knowledge

On March 15, 1965—a week after Bloody Sunday in Selma, Alabama—President Lyndon Baines Johnson gave a speech in a special session of Congress. He was also speaking to the American people in general, as the speech was nationally televised.

President Johnson spoke of the events in Selma as a “turning point.” He emphasized that the issue of equal rights for African Americans was not a problem limited to any single race or region but “an American problem.” He called on all Americans to “overcome the crippling legacy of bigotry and injustice.” And, echoing the hymn that had become the anthem of the civil rights movement, he expressed confidence that “we shall overcome.”

Congress voted to pass the Voting Rights Act of 1965, which President Johnson signed into law on August 6. The act opens with these words: “An act to enforce the fifteenth amendment to the Constitution of the United States, and for other purposes.” That amendment, passed shortly after the Civil War ended, stated that the right to vote “shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or any state on account of race, color, or previous condition of servitude.” As you know, many states, mainly in the South, came up with various ways to deny and abridge the voting rights of Black Americans. The Voting Rights Act of 1965 tried to make sure that the Fifteenth Amendment could actually be enforced by law.

Bloody Sunday: See page 161.

bigotry: prejudice; strong and unreasonable dislike or hatred

abridged: limited

servitude: the condition of being completely under the power of others; the condition of being enslaved

The Voting Rights Act outlawed literacy tests, poll taxes, and other dirty tricks used to keep Black people from voting. In states where local officials refused to follow the new law, it gave the federal government the power to go in and register people of all races to vote. It required states and localities with a history of voter discrimination to get approval from the federal government before changing any of their voting laws. Within a year after the Voting Rights Act was passed, there were more than half a million new Black voters registered in the South.

The Voting Rights Act has faced many challenges in court. In 2013, the U. S. Supreme Court issued a controversial ruling that weakened the Voting Rights Act. Because of stubborn racism, some states are still making up ways to keep African Americans and other people of color from voting. To repeat President Johnson's words, the struggle to "overcome the crippling legacy of bigotry and injustice" goes on.

President Lyndon Johnson's Special Message to the Congress (1965)

Primary Source

Here are excerpts from President Lyndon Johnson's speech to Congress, which, through television, became an appeal to the American public. The president's main goal was to urge Congress to quickly pass the Voting Rights Act. His speech raised that goal to the level of a mission bound to the larger history and destiny of the nation.

I speak tonight for the dignity of man and the destiny of democracy.

I urge every member of both parties, Americans of all religions and of all colors, from every section of this country, to join me in that cause.

At times history and fate meet at a single time in a single place to shape a turning point in man's unending search for freedom. So it was at Lexington and Concord. So it was a century ago at Appomattox. So it was last week in Selma, Alabama.

There, long-suffering men and women peacefully protested the denial of their rights as Americans. Many were brutally assaulted. One good man, a man of God, was killed.

. . . In our time we have come to live with moments of great crisis. Our lives have been marked with debate about great issues; issues of war and peace, issues of prosperity and depression. But rarely in any time does an issue lay bare the secret heart of America itself. Rarely are we met with a challenge, not to our growth or abundance, our welfare or our security, but rather to the values and the purposes and the meaning of our beloved Nation.

The issue of equal rights for American Negroes is such an issue. And should we defeat every enemy, should we double our wealth and conquer the stars, and still be unequal to this issue, then we will have failed as a people and as a nation.

Lexington and Concord: towns in Massachusetts where the first battle of the American Revolution occurred in April 1775

Appomattox: location of Appomattox Court House in Virginia, where Confederate General Robert E. Lee surrendered to Union General Ulysses S. Grant in April 1865, ending the Civil War

killed: The man killed was Jimmie Lee Jackson; see page 163.

prosperity: the state of being financially well off

depression: a period in which the economy does very badly

abundance: wealth; the condition of having plenty

welfare: well-being

security: being safe and protected

For with a country as with a person, “What is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?”

There is no Negro problem. There is no Southern problem. There is no Northern problem. There is only an American problem. And we are met here tonight as Americans—not as Democrats or Republicans—we are met here as Americans to solve that problem.

This was the first nation in the history of the world to be founded with a purpose. The great phrases of that purpose still sound in every American heart, North and South: “All men are created equal”—“government by consent of the governed”—“give me liberty or give me death.”

. . . Those words are a promise to every citizen that he shall share in the dignity of man. This dignity cannot be found in a man’s possessions; it cannot be found in his power, or in his position. It really rests on his right to be treated as a man equal in opportunity to all others. It says that he shall share in freedom, he shall choose his leaders, educate his children, and provide for his family according to his ability and his merits as a human being.

. . . Our fathers believed that if this noble view of the rights of man was to flourish, it must be rooted in democracy. The most basic right of all was the right to choose your own leaders. The history of this country, in large measure, is the history of the expansion of that right to all of our people.

Many of the issues of civil rights are very complex and most difficult. But about this there can and should be no argument. Every American citizen must have an equal right to vote. There is

. . . **own soul?**”: From the Bible (Matthew 16:26), meaning: What good is it to gain the whole world if you lose your soul?

flourish: grow in a healthy way; develop successfully

no reason which can excuse the denial of that right. There is no duty which weighs more heavily on us than the duty we have to ensure that right.

Yet the harsh fact is that in many places in this country men and women are kept from voting simply because they are Negroes.

Every device of which human ingenuity is capable has been used to deny this right. The Negro citizen may go to register only to be told that the day is wrong, or the hour is late, or the official in charge is absent. And if he persists, and if he manages to present himself to the registrar, he may be disqualified because he did not spell out his middle name or because he abbreviated a word on the application.

And if he manages to fill out an application he is given a test. The registrar is the sole judge of whether he passes this test. He may be asked to recite the entire Constitution, or explain the most complex provisions of State law. And even a college degree cannot be used to prove that he can read and write.

For the fact is that the only way to pass these barriers is to show a white skin.

Experience has clearly shown that the existing process of law cannot overcome systematic and ingenious discrimination. No law that we now have . . . can ensure the right to vote when local officials are determined to deny it.

In such a case our duty must be clear to all of us. The Constitution says that no person shall be kept from voting because of his race or his color. We have all sworn an oath before God to support and to defend that Constitution. We must now act in obedience to that oath.

registrar: the official in charge of registering voters

Wednesday I will send to Congress a law designed to eliminate illegal barriers to the right to vote.

. . . This bill will strike down restrictions to voting in all elections—Federal, State, and local—which have been used to deny Negroes the right to vote.

This bill will establish a simple, uniform standard which cannot be used, however ingenious the effort, to flout our Constitution.

It will provide for citizens to be registered by officials of the United States Government if the State officials refuse to register them.

It will eliminate tedious, unnecessary lawsuits which delay the right to vote.

Finally, this legislation will ensure that properly registered individuals are not prohibited from voting.

. . . To those who seek to avoid action by their National Government in their own communities; who want to and who seek to maintain purely local control over elections, the answer is simple:

Open your polling places to all your people.

Allow men and women to register and vote whatever the color of their skin.

Extend the rights of citizenship to every citizen of this land.

There is no constitutional issue here. The command of the Constitution is plain.

flout: to shamelessly and openly disregard or disobey a rule or law
tedious: slow, dull, and tiresome

There is no moral issue. It is wrong—deadly wrong—to deny any of your fellow Americans the right to vote in this country.

There is no issue of States rights or national rights. There is only the struggle for human rights.

. . . What happened in Selma is part of a far larger movement which reaches into every section and State of America. It is the effort of American Negroes to secure for themselves the full blessings of American life.

Their cause must be our cause too. Because it is not just Negroes, but really it is all of us, who must overcome the crippling legacy of bigotry and injustice.

And we shall overcome.



After signing the Voting Rights Act, President Lyndon Johnson (at right) met with civil rights activists, including John Lewis of SNCC (third from left) and James Farmer of CORE (at back).

From Malcolm X to Black Power: “By Any Means Necessary”

Background Knowledge

In his “I have a dream” speech at the March on Washington in August 1963, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., called attention to “the marvelous new militancy which has engulfed the Negro community.” This “new militancy” included Black leaders who distrusted white people and spoke of using violence to defend themselves against white violence—a stark contrast to King’s commitment to integration and nonviolence.

These militant Black leaders had run out of patience. They looked around and saw that, despite the passage of the Civil Rights Act and Voting Rights Act, many African Americans still faced inequality and prejudice—not only in the South, but in the North as well, where many Black people had moved with hopes of finding a better life.

Impatient for change and bitter about the long history of racial injustice in the United States, many African Americans were drawn to a group called the Nation of Islam, also known as the Black Muslims. The Black Muslims, led by Elijah Muhammad, saw white people as the enemy. They rejected integration, which was the goal of King and other civil rights leaders. They said that Black people should rely only on themselves, take pride in their race, and defend themselves against white violence “by any means necessary.”

Those words—“by any means necessary”—were spoken by the man who became the most recognized and influential

speech: See page 146.

militancy: the willingness to use forceful and aggressive means to achieve a goal

spokesman for the Nation of Islam, Malcolm X (1925–1965). He was born Malcolm Little but, like other members of the Nation of Islam, changed his last name to “X” as a rejection of the “slave name” imposed upon his ancestors who had been brought to America in chains.

Malcolm’s father was a minister who preached racial pride. When Malcolm was only six, his father was found dead, his battered body lying across streetcar tracks. There was little doubt that he had been murdered by white supremacists who didn’t like what Reverend Little preached.

When Malcolm was 13, his mother was placed in a mental institution, and he was then raised in foster homes. At the age of 16 he moved to Boston. In travels to New York City, he fell into criminal activity: gambling, bootlegging, and selling and using drugs. He started to commit robberies. He was caught and sent to jail.

While in prison, he became a believer in the teachings of the Nation of Islam. With amazing self-discipline, he also educated himself. He copied an entire dictionary, page by page. He read every book he could get from the prison library. He read many books that told him about the history of Black people, which he had never been taught in school. He learned about the horrors of slavery. “I knew right there in prison,” Malcolm X later recalled, “that reading had changed forever the course of my life.”

When he left prison, Malcolm X followed the strict code of conduct of the Nation of Islam. He became a spokesman for the Black Muslims, using his powerful and persuasive speaking style to communicate a message of Black pride, separation from whites, and self-defense. Millions of Americans heard his often angry words over radio and television. He was accused of promoting

hatred of white people, but he responded, “The white man is in no moral position to accuse anyone else of hate!”

Disagreements with Elijah Muhammad, the leader of the Black Muslims, led Malcolm X to break away from Nation of Islam. In 1964, he traveled to Africa and the Middle East. In Saudi Arabia, he made a pilgrimage to Mecca, the holy city of Islam. There he met Muslims of many different races: “There were tens of thousands of pilgrims, from all over the world,” he recalled. “They were of all colors. . . . But we were all participating in the same rituals, displaying a spirit of unity and brotherhood.” Upon his return to America, he criticized the teachings of Elijah Muhammad and began to speak out for a broader vision of human rights.

Before he could develop his new message, Malcolm X was shot dead in February of 1965, while delivering a speech in New York City. The assassins were three members of the Nation of Islam.

“The Ballot or the Bullet”— Speech by Malcolm X (1964)

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to copyright restrictions*



Malcolm X said, "We want freedom now, but we're not going to get it saying 'We Shall Overcome.' We've got to fight until we overcome."

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Adam Clayton Powell: A Baptist minister who in 1945 became the first Black congressman from New York, Powell served in the House of Representatives until 1971, representing the part of New York City that includes Harlem. He was a fiery speaker and tireless advocate for civil rights.

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to copyright restrictions*

organization: Dr. King was head of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC).

oppression: cruel and unfair treatment

exploitation: the action of selfishly and unfairly using others for your own benefit

degradation: the act of treating someone disrespectfully, putting them down as worthless

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to copyright restrictions*

hypocrisy: pretending to hold virtuous beliefs that you don't really have

administration: the government under its current leader (the president)

liberals: in general, persons who support an active government role in promoting social change

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to copyright restrictions*

“turn the other cheek”: to respond nonviolently to violence; an idea from the Bible—in Matthew 5:39, Jesus rejects the idea of “an eye for an eye” and says, “But if anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also.”

Molotov cocktails: handmade bombs made from bottles filled with gasoline

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to copyright restrictions*

picket: engage in protest

cracker: an insulting slang term for a white person, especially a poor white person in the South

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Black Power

Background Knowledge

After Malcolm X, other Black leaders kept up the call for Black separation and self-reliance. In a speech in 1966, Stokely Carmichael, chairman of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, called for “black power.” Black Power became the name for a movement whose supporters emphasized racial pride and called for cultural and economic independence from what they saw as the systemic racism of American society.

The ideas of Black Power motivated a group called the Black Panther Party for Self-Defense, founded in 1966 in Oakland, California. In a statement headed “What We Want Now!” the Black Panthers called for “power to determine the destiny of our Black Community.” Their demands included “land, bread, housing, education, clothing, justice and peace,” as well as “an immediate end to POLICE BRUTALITY and MURDER of Black people.” In Oakland, Black Panthers, openly carrying handguns and rifles, formed a militia and called for armed resistance to white violence and police brutality. The organization also provided social services to benefit the community, such as a breakfast programs for poor children and free medical clinics.

The Black Power movement expressed many African Americans’ frustration with the slow progress of the civil rights movement, and their anger over continuing racism, injustice, and economic inequality in America. In some cities, the anger flared in violent riots. Fires, looting, and shootings tore apart the Los Angeles neighborhood of Watts in 1965, as well as Newark, New Jersey, and Detroit, Michigan, in 1967. President Lyndon Johnson

systemic: thoroughly and deeply part of an entire system

formed a government commission to examine these disturbances; the commission reported that the nation was “moving toward two societies, one black, one white—separate and unequal.”

By 1968, Martin Luther King, Jr., had turned his attention to the problem of economic injustice, which kept so many African Americans in poverty. In April 1968, King traveled to Memphis, Tennessee, to lead a march for equal pay for Black garbage workers. Before the planned march, he spoke at a church. He told the large crowd,

We've got some difficult days ahead. But it doesn't matter with me now. Because I've been to the mountaintop. And I don't mind. Like anybody, I would like to live a long life. . . . But I'm not concerned about that now. I just want to do God's will. And He's allowed me to go up to the mountain. And I've looked over. And 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. And I'm happy, tonight. I'm not worried about anything. I'm not fearing any man. Mine eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the Lord.

The next evening, when King stepped out onto the balcony of his hotel room, he was shot dead by an assassin. The death of this man of peace left a nation in grief and turmoil.

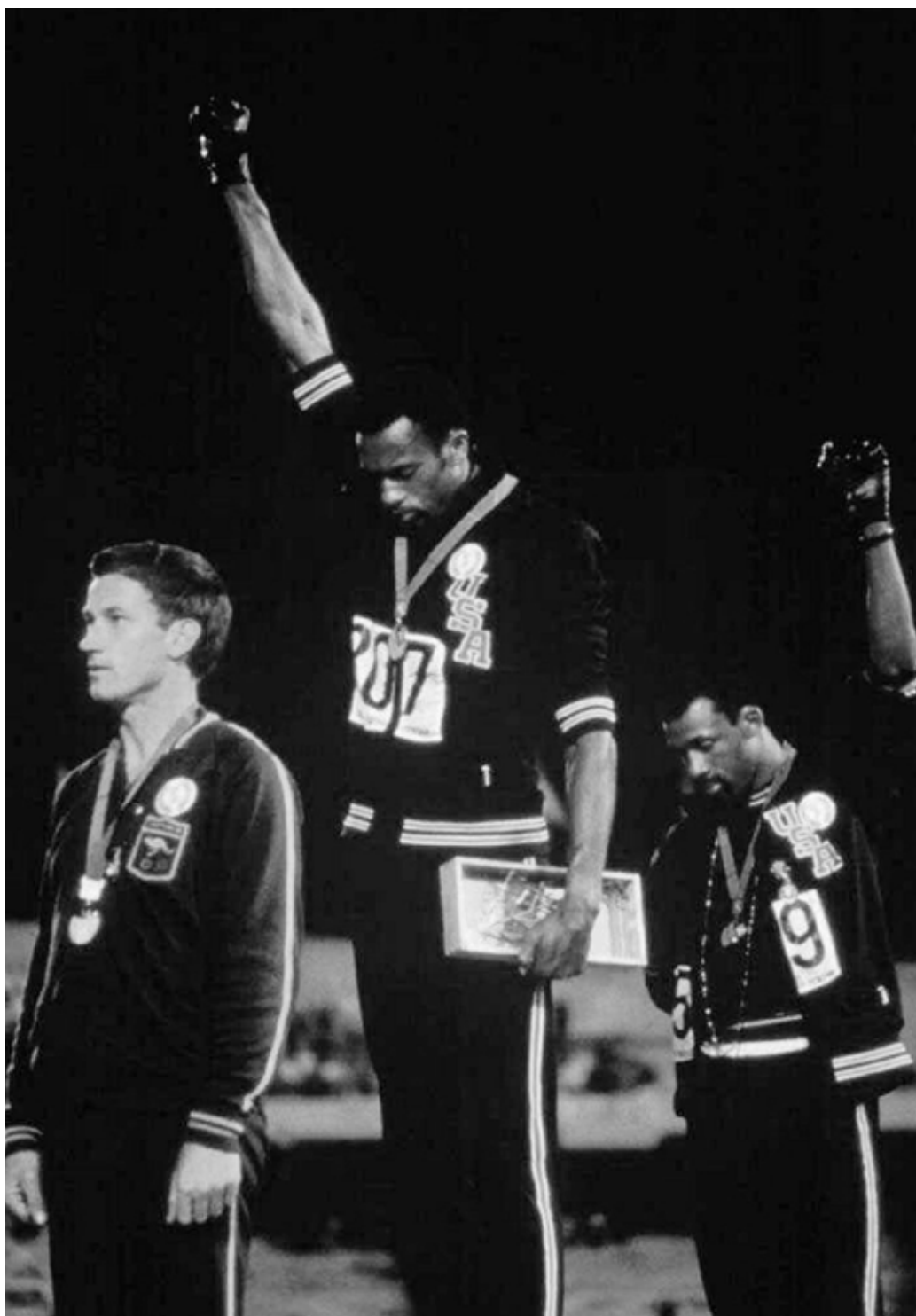
In the spring of 1968, after Dr. King's assassination, violent riots shattered many American cities, while college campuses were rocked by angry protests. In late summer, thousands of protesters, many of them furiously opposed to America's ongoing involvement in the Vietnam War, gathered outside the Democratic National Convention in Chicago. As police and National Guardsmen threw tear gas canisters at the protesters and beat them with nightsticks, the crowds chanted, “The whole world is watching!”

With the nation so deeply disturbed and divided, some African American athletes considered boycotting the 1968 Summer Olympic Games. At San Jose State University in California, Professor Harry Edwards formed the Olympic Project for Human Rights to urge a boycott of the Olympics to protest racial injustice, especially in sports. While the boycott didn't happen, two San Jose State athletes—Tommie Smith and John Carlos—found a way to raise awareness of issues of racial injustice.

At the 1968 Olympics in Mexico City, Tommie Smith won the gold medal in the men's 200-meter run, while John Carlos won the bronze. On the evening of October 16, 1968, at the awards ceremony, Smith and Carlos stood with the silver medal winner, Peter Norman of Australia. On their jackets, all three wore badges for the Olympic Project for Human Rights. Smith and Carlos each wore a black glove on one hand. When "The Star-Spangled Banner" played, Smith and Carlos lowered their heads and raised their gloved fists in a gesture widely known as the Black Power salute.

Primary Source

For their protest during the medal ceremony at the 1968 Olympics, Tommie Smith and John Carlos were kicked off the U.S. Olympic team and sent home, where they faced angry criticism for "politicizing" a sports event, and even received death threats. But their moment of protest, with heads lowered and fists raised, was captured in a photograph that has had lasting significance, not only as a symbol of Black Power, but as a bold and controversial gesture of defiance and solidarity.



At the 1968 Olympics in Mexico City, U.S. medal winners Tommie Smith (center) and John Carlos (right) bowed their heads and raised black-gloved fists when the American national anthem played.

Cesar Chavez and Dolores Huerta: Fighting for Farmworkers' Rights

Background Knowledge

Oranges, strawberries, grapes, tomatoes, lettuce, spinach—when these fruits and vegetables, as well as many others, are ripe, they must be picked without delay. It is hard, hot, backbreaking work.

In the mid-twentieth century in California and the Southwestern states, most of this work was done by Mexican Americans, who made up the largest minority in the region. Many were migrant workers, who moved from farm to farm and crop to crop, living in run-down, overcrowded camps. There were also many temporary workers who would cross the border from Mexico and legally enter the United States, where they would be allowed to stay for a time to do the hard labor of picking fruits and vegetables. Some stayed on beyond the harvest and lived in the United States as illegal immigrants. Many ended up living in poor, crowded city neighborhoods called *barrios*.

The growers—the owners of the big farms—relied on the migrant workers because they could get away with paying them so little. The workers had no power to make the growers pay them more or treat them better. Things began to change, however, in the early 1960s, when Cesar Chavez (1927-1993) and Dolores Huerta started their efforts to organize the farmworkers into a union.

Chavez knew all about the hardships farmworkers faced: when he was ten years old, his family had moved from Arizona to California to try to earn a living as migrant workers. His family

moved around so much that by the time he finished eighth grade, he had attended more than thirty different elementary schools. After a few years in the U. S. Navy and a series of other jobs, Chavez took a job with the Community Service Organization (CSO), which worked for Latino and Hispanic civil rights and economic improvements. Chavez traveled around California to set up local CSO chapters that registered voters, helped people become citizens, and provided other services.

During this time, Chavez met another CSO worker, Dolores Huerta. Born in 1930 in a mining town in New Mexico, Huerta grew up in central California. She became an elementary school teacher. Many of her students were the children of migrant farmworkers. Seeing the children come to class hungry and in ragged clothing, Huerta decided she could do more good by working to organize and empower their parents, the farmworkers.

In 1962, Dolores Huerta and Cesar Chavez founded the National Farm Workers Association (NFWA). Over the next few years, Chavez traveled from one farm to another, and the Farm Workers Association slowly built its membership. The goal was to build a strong union—though at first he did not call the Farm Workers Association a union. Farmworkers were sometimes afraid to join a union because they feared their employers would fire them and replace them with non-union workers. There were national labor laws that protected most workers from such anti-union actions on the part of employers, but farmworkers were excluded from those laws. The National Farm Workers Association tried to get the growers to provide better pay and working conditions, but the growers refused to listen.

Farm Workers: You can write “farm workers” as two words, or as the single word farmworkers, which is the form you will find in most dictionaries today.

In September 1965, an organization of Filipino American farmworkers decided to go on strike against the grape growers in Delano, California. They asked Cesar Chavez to bring in the National Farm Workers Association to join the strike. Chavez thought the NFWA needed time to grow bigger and stronger before undertaking a strike. But he also knew that growers would sometimes break strikes by getting workers of one race to undermine the efforts of workers of another race. Chavez put the issue to a vote, and the NFWA workers decided to join the Filipino Americans in their strike.

From the beginning of the strike, Chavez—inspired by both Mohandas Gandhi and Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.—emphasized the necessity for nonviolence. “We are engaged in another struggle for the freedom and dignity which poverty denies us,” Chavez said. “But it must not be a violent struggle, even if violence is used against us.” Violence was indeed used against the strikers, sometimes by the growers, and sometimes by police, who were on the side of the growers.

After the strike had gone on for many months, Chavez knew that something must be done to draw support to the farmworkers’ cause. In March 1966, he led a march of more than 300 miles from Delano northward to the state capital, Sacramento. Chavez called it a *peregrinacion*—a pilgrimage, “a trip,” he said, “made with sacrifice and hardship as an expression of penance and of commitment.” Along the way on the three-week journey, the workers were

Filipino: from the Philippines, an island country in Asia, southeast of China

strike: a protest that takes the form of an organized refusal to work by employees seeking to force an employer to meet their demands

nonviolence: See page 129 for a discussion of Gandhi’s philosophy of nonviolence and its influence on Dr. King.

pilgrimage: a journey with a sacred purpose

penance: a hardship undertaken to show sorrow and regret for the wrongs a person has done

joined by college students, religious activists, and workers from other unions. Television cameras brought national attention to the farmworkers and the grape strike.

Not long after the march, the Filipino American farmworkers' organization merged with the NFWA to form the United Farm Workers (UFW). As the strike dragged on, the union turned to a new strategy—they asked people to boycott grapes from non-union growers. With Dolores Huerta tirelessly organizing strikers and volunteers, the boycott gradually grew to become a national movement. Protesters marched in front of grocery stores around the nation, carrying signs saying "Don't buy California grapes!"

Many American consumers supported the boycott, and the growers felt the economic pressure. Still, most growers refused to meet the union's demands. Some union members grew impatient and began to speak of using violence. In February 1968, Cesar Chavez responded by going on a hunger strike—a nonviolent form of protest that Gandhi had used in India. Chavez fasted for 25 days—he ate no food and drank only water. Union members no longer called for violence. National coverage of the hunger strike brought more workers into the union and more sympathy for the farmworkers' cause.

In 1969, the leader of a large organization of grape growers publicly accused the strikers of using violence. Chavez knew the claims were false, and he responded in an emotional letter written from Delano, in which he said, "We are men and women who have suffered and endured much. . . . But God knows that we are not beasts of burden, agricultural implements, or rented slaves; we are men."

In 1970, the Delano grape strike and the boycotts finally succeeded. Dozens of growers signed contracts with the United Farm Workers. The growers agreed to limit use of dangerous pesticides, pay higher wages, and provide health care for the workers.

More strikes and boycotts would follow in the years ahead as the UFW continued to fight for the rights of farmworkers beyond the grape fields of California. Dolores Huerta played an important role in working with legislators to pass laws that would benefit the workers. Cesar Chavez continued to devote himself to improving the lives of farmworkers until he died in his sleep in April 1993.

Proclamation of the Delano Grape Workers on International Grape Boycott Day (1969)

Primary Source

As vice-president of the United Farm Workers, Dolores Huerta led the union's effort to expand the grape boycott until it eventually had national support, with millions of Americans refusing to buy grapes from non-union growers. On May, 10, 1969—declared as International Grape Boycott Day—there were protests at major grocery stores across the country, and the following proclamation was issued to explain the grape workers' cause and to rally continuing support.

We, the striking grape workers of California, join on this International Boycott Day with the consumers across the continent in planning the steps that lie ahead on the road to our liberation. As we plan, we recall the footsteps that brought us to this day and the events of this day. The historic road of our pilgrimage to Sacramento later branched out, spreading like the

*Some images cannot be shown
due to copyright restrictions*

unpruned vines in struck fields, until it led us to willing exile in cities across this land. There, far from the earth we tilled for generations, we have cultivated the strange soil of public understanding, sowing the seed of our truth and our cause in the minds and hearts of men.

We have been farm workers for hundreds of years and pioneers for seven. Mexicans, Filipinos, Africans and others, our ancestors were among those who founded this land and tamed its natural wilderness. But we are still pilgrims on this land, and we are pioneers who blaze a trail out of the wilderness of hunger and deprivation that we have suffered even as our ancestors did. We are conscious today of the significance of our present quest. If this road we chart leads to the rights and reforms we demand, if it leads to just wages, humane working conditions, protection from

unpruned: not cut back

seven: a reference to the seven years since the founding of the National Farm Workers Association

deprivation: the state of being without basic necessities

the misuse of pesticides, and to the fundamental right of collective bargaining, if it changes the social order that relegates us to the bottom reaches of society, then in our wake will follow thousands of American farm workers. Our example will make them free. But if our road does not bring us to victory and social change, it will not be because our direction is mistaken or our resolve too weak, but only because our bodies are mortal and our journey hard. For we are in the midst of a great social movement, and we will not stop struggling 'til we die, or win!

We have been farm workers for hundreds of years and strikers for four. It was four years ago that we threw down our plowshares and pruning hooks. These Biblical symbols of peace and tranquility to us represent too many lifetimes of unprotesting submission to a degrading social system that allows us no dignity, no comfort, no peace. We mean to have our peace, and to win it without violence, for it is violence we would overcome—the subtle spiritual and mental violence of oppression, the violence subhuman toil does to the human body. So we went and stood tall outside the vineyards where we had stooped for years. But the tailors of national labor legislation had left us naked. Thus exposed, our picket lines were crippled by injunctions and harassed by growers; our strike was

collective bargaining: the process by which the leaders of a union talk with employers to agree on wages, hours, working conditions, and other matters affecting employees

relegates: puts in a lower place or worse condition

resolve: determination

plowshares and pruning hooks: from the Bible, Isaiah 2:4: "And he shall judge among the nations, and shall rebuke many people; and they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks: nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more."

oppression: cruel and unfair treatment

left us naked: an image that conveys the vulnerability of the farmworkers because, while national labor laws protected most workers by forbidding employers from firing workers for joining a union, farmworkers were not included in these laws

picket lines: lines or groups of protesting workers on strike

injunctions: orders from a court requiring some action (in this case, that a strike be discontinued)

harassed: repeatedly treated in aggressive and threatening ways

broken by imported scabs; our overtures to our employers were ignored. Yet we knew the day must come when they would talk to us, as equals.

We have been farm workers for hundreds of years and boycotters for two. We did not choose the grape boycott, but we had chosen to leave our peonage, poverty and despair behind. Though our first bid for freedom, the strike, was weakened, we would not turn back. The boycott was the only way forward the growers left to us. We called upon our fellow men and were answered by consumers who said—as all men of conscience must—that they would no longer allow their tables to be subsidized by our sweat and our sorrow: They shunned the grapes, fruit of our affliction.

We marched alone at the beginning, but today we count men of all creeds, nationalities, and occupations in our number. Between us and the justice we seek now stand the large and powerful grocers who, in continuing to buy table grapes, betray the boycott their own customers have built. These stores treat their patrons' demands to remove the grapes the same way the growers treat our demands for union recognition—by ignoring them. The consumers who rally behind our cause are responding as we do to such treatment—with a boycott! They pledge to withhold their patronage from stores that handle grapes during the boycott, just as we withhold our labor from the growers until our dispute is resolved.

imported scabs: A *scab* is a worker who refuses to take part in a union strike, or who comes in to work for a striking worker. During the grape strike, the growers illegally brought in workers from Mexico to replace the striking union workers.

overtures: proposals to open discussions

peonage: condition of being held down in hard and low-paying work at the bottom of the social ladder

subsidized: partially paid for

shunned: rejected

affliction: suffering and misery

creeds: religious beliefs

patronage: financial support; regular business from a customer

Grapes must remain an unenjoyed luxury for all as long as the barest human needs and basic human rights are still luxuries for farm workers. The grapes grow sweet and heavy on the vines, but they will have to wait while we reach out first for our freedom. The time is ripe for our liberation.

Testimony before the Migratory Labor Subcommittee of the Senate Committee on Labor and Public Welfare, by Cesar Chavez (1969)

Primary Source

In 1968, Cesar Chavez went on a fast for the sake of nonviolence. He ate no food for 25 days. Twenty years later, in 1988, Cesar Chavez again went on a "Fast for Life," this time to protest against the use of pesticides that were dangerous not only to the health of grape workers but also, Chavez insisted, to consumers as well. The fast lasted 36 days and left Chavez severely weakened.

The grape growers accused Chavez of using the fast to get publicity. Chavez responded, "What good does it do to achieve the blessings of collective bargaining and make economic progress for people when their health is destroyed in the process?"

Long before his Fast for Life in 1988, Chavez had been deeply concerned by the use of "economic poisons," a legal term for pesticides used on agricultural crops. In speeches and in testimony before Congress, Chavez repeatedly focused attention on the dangers of pesticides, especially a widely used product called DDT. In testimony before a U. S. Senate subcommittee on September 29, 1969, Chavez made the dangers of pesticides real and human by describing the suffering of specific workers. Here are excerpts from his testimony.



Cesar Chavez led the fight for farmworkers' rights.

The real issue involved here is the issue of the health and safety not only of farm workers but of consumers and how the health and safety of consumers and farm workers are affected by the gross misuse of economic poisons.

The issue of the health and safety of farm workers in California and throughout the United States is the single most important issue facing the United Farm Workers Organizing Committee. In California the agricultural industry experiences the highest occupational disease rate. This rate is over 50% higher than the second place industry. It is also three times as high as the average rate of all industry in California. Growers consistently use the



A Mexican American farmworker bends over to pick melons on a California farm.

wrong kinds of economic poisons in the wrong amounts in the wrong places in reckless disregard of the health of their workers in order to maximize profits. Advancing technological changes in agriculture have left the industry far behind in dealing with the occupational hazards of workers which arise from the use of economic poisons. This problem is further compounded by the fact that commonplace needs such as clean drinking water and adequate toilet facilities are rarely available in the fields and are also deficient in many living quarters of farm workers, especially of those workers who live in labor camps provided by the employer.

In California an estimated 3,000 children receive medical attention annually after having ingested pesticides. There are over 300 cases of serious nonfatal poisonings annually, most of which occur in agriculture. There are some fatal poisonings which occur annually in agriculture. In addition to this, literally thousands of workers experience daily symptoms of chemical poisoning which include dermatitis, rashes, eye irritation, nausea, vomiting, fatigue, excess sweating, headaches, double vision, dizziness, skin irritations, difficulty in breathing, loss of fingernails, nervousness, insomnia, bleeding noses, and diarrhea.

The misuse of pesticides is creating grave dangers not only to farm workers but to their children as well. Dr. Lee Mizrahi at the Salud Clinic in Tulare County has recently conducted a study relating to nutrition, parasites and pesticide levels. . . . Dr. Mizrahi has informed me that as a practicing physician he would be greatly worried if he found 10% of reportedly normal children outside normal limits. In this case he is frightened. These farm worker children are suffering from high levels of DDT in their blood. . . .

. . . Dr. Irma West who works in the State Department of Public Health has written many articles concerning the occupational hazards of farm workers. Some of the examples of injuries are as follows:

On a large California ranch in the fall of 1965 a group of Mexican-American workers and their families were picking berries. None could understand or read English. A three-year-old girl and her four-year-old brother were playing around an unattended spray rig next to where their mother was working. The four-year-old apparently took the cap off a gallon can of

ingested: taken into the body; swallowed

dermatitis: swelling, redness, and soreness of the skin

insomnia: the inability to sleep

40% tetraethyl pyrophosphate [TEPP] . . . pesticide left on the rig. The three-year-old put her finger in it and sucked it. She vomited immediately, became unconscious, and was dead on arrival at the hospital where she was promptly taken. TEPP Is the most hazardous of all pesticides in common use in agriculture in California. The estimated fatal dose of pure TEPP for an adult is one drop orally and one drop dermally. This child weighed about 30 pounds.

Because of engine trouble, an agricultural aircraft pilot attempted a forced landing in an unplanted field. The plane rolled into a fence and turned over. The hopper of the airplane contained a dust formula of TEPP. . . . The pilot was not injured but was covered with dust. He walked a distance of 50 feet to a field worker, stated he felt fine, and asked for a drink of water. After drinking the water, he began to vomit and almost immediately became unconscious. By the time the ambulance arrived, the pilot was dead. . . .

During this past summer in the grapes alone and largely in the Delano area the following incidents have been brought to the attention of our legal department.

. . . Juanita Chavera was working in the Elmco Vineyards in the spring of 1969 when she developed, as a result of the spray residue on the vines, skin rash, eye irritation, and hands swollen so badly that her ring had to be cut off. Other women in the crew including Mrs. Chavera's sister, Linda Ortiz, suffered similar symptoms.

. . . Frances Barajas also worked in the Elmco vineyards this spring. While she was working there, a tractor spraying a liquid economic poison came through the vineyard in which she was working. She ran out of the field because she did not want to get

dermally: through the skin

hopper: a container for carrying a large amount of material, with the means of dropping the material out of an opening at the bottom

sprayed, but a foreman ordered her to go back in and get back to work. She later talked to the tractor driver, who said he had been ordered to spray there by one of the Elmco supervisors. While working there she developed skin rashes and eye irritations that led to a serious eye infection. She has been afraid to complain about the poisons for fear of being fired.

[Cesar Chavez ended his testimony by giving an account of the progress made by the union in negotiations with one grower.]

. . . The United Farm Workers Organizing Committee is attempting to solve this pervasive problem by the collective bargaining process. We have recently attained what is for farm workers an historic breakthrough in our negotiations with the Perelli-Minetti Company. We have completed negotiating a comprehensive health and safety clause which covers the subject of economic poisons. It includes the following protections:

HEALTH AND SAFETY

. . . The Health and Safety Committee shall be formed consisting of equal numbers of workers' representatives selected by the bargaining unit and P-M [Perelli-Minetti] representatives. The Health and Safety Committee shall be provided with notices on the use of pesticides, insecticides, or herbicides. . . .

The Health and Safety Committee shall advise in the formulation of rules and practices relating to the health and safety of the workers, including, but not limited to, the use of pesticides, insecticides, and herbicides; the use of garments, materials, tools and equipment as they may affect the health and safety of the workers and sanitation conditions.

SANITATION

- A. There shall be adequate toilet facilities, separate for men and women, in the field, readily accessible to workers, that will be maintained in a clean and sanitary manner. These may be portable facilities and shall be maintained at the ratio of one for every 35 workers.
- B. Each place where there is work being performed shall be provided with suitable, cool, potable drinking water convenient to workers. Individual paper drinking cups shall be provided.
- C. Workers will have two relief periods of fifteen minutes which, insofar as practical, shall be in the middle of each work period.

TOOLS AND PROTECTIVE EQUIPMENT

Tools and equipment and protective garments necessary to perform the work and/or to safeguard the health of or to prevent injury to a worker's person shall be provided, maintained and paid for by P-M.

potable: safe for drinking

Native American Activism: The Occupation of Alcatraz

Background Knowledge

In the 1960s, Native Americans added their voices to the growing chorus of people rising up to demand their civil rights. They were motivated by a long history of, broken promises and forced removal from their homelands by the United States government. They were also angry at the policy pursued by the federal government since about 1945, a policy called “termination.”

The policy of termination cancelled existing government support for American Indians, and ended the limited power that tribes had to govern themselves. It subjected tribes and their lands to state laws and taxes. It required that the shared property of the tribe be divided among individual members, thus breaking one of the bonds that held a tribe together. To make matters worse, while the government pursued the policy of termination, it also set up programs to relocate American Indians from tribal lands to cities like Minneapolis, Chicago, Seattle, and San Francisco. The government promised help in finding housing and employment. But in the cities, many thousands of American Indians found only poverty and discrimination.

The federal government said that termination would benefit American Indians by fully integrating them into American society. But for Indians, termination meant the end of government support and the loss of many of their rights. The result for many American Indians was increased poverty and a terrible sense of fear and injury at the forced dismantling of their ways of life.

In the 1960s, Native American activists from various tribes began to work together to draw attention to their suffering and demand their rights. In 1961, a group of young, college-educated Indians who were dissatisfied with the policies of older tribal leaders formed the National Indian Youth Council (NIYC). One of NIYC's founders, Clyde Warrior, a Ponca Indian from Oklahoma, said that young American Indians were fed up with having their lives controlled by outsiders—government officials, social workers, teachers, etc. “We are not free,” he said. “We do not make choices. Our choices are made for us. . . . They call us into meetings to tell us what is good for us. . . . For the sake of our children, for the sake of the spiritual and material well-being of our total community . . . we must make decisions about our own destinies.”

NIYC members had little patience for dealing with government bureaucracies and instead favored more direct action. For example, in 1964, after Indians in the state of Washington were arrested for fishing without licenses, NIYC organized “fish-ins” to claim the fishing rights that had been granted to Indians by federal treaties.

In July 1968, the American Indian Movement (AIM) was founded in Minneapolis. AIM's main goal at first was to end police brutality against American Indians living in the Minneapolis-St. Paul area. The organization expanded its goals to include health care and legal rights for urban Indians. The movement spread as AIM chapters opened in several cities. Its leaders began to demand that tribal land be given back and that the U. S. government honor promises it had made but broken in many treaties over the years.

bureaucracies: complicated and often frustrating systems of government or business

In July 1970, President Richard M. Nixon made a speech to Congress in which he said, "This policy of forced termination is wrong." The president asked that the U.S. government change its policy toward American Indians from termination to self-determination: "The time has come," Nixon declared, "to break decisively with the past and to create the conditions for a new era in which the Indian future is determined by Indian acts and Indian decisions." The new policy of self-determination restored federal government support and gave tribes back much control of their government on tribal lands.

While official federal policy had changed, there were still many challenges facing Native Americans, and activists continued to stage protests and demonstrations. The American Indian Movement played a major role in organizing some of the protests that drew the most national attention. In 1972, for example, in what was called The Trail of Broken Treaties, a caravan of vehicles crossed the country to Washington, D.C., where activists ended up occupying the headquarters of the Bureau of Indian Affairs. In 1973, on the Pine Ridge Reservation in South Dakota, many AIM members took part in what became an armed standoff against law enforcement officers and Army soldiers at Wounded Knee—the place where, in 1890, U. S. troops had opened fire and killed some 300 Sioux men, women, and children.

The Alcatraz Proclamation (1969)

Primary Source

In November 1969, more than seventy people—men, women, and children, mostly made up of American Indian students from various colleges in and near San Francisco—sailed across the San Francisco Bay in the dark of night and took over the abandoned federal prison on Alcatraz Island. Calling themselves the “Indians of All Tribes,” they claimed the island “in the name of all American Indians.” Government officials decided not to use force to remove them. The occupants quickly organized themselves and soon set up a clinic, a school for the children, and a group to deal with the constant stream of reporters. More students and activists joined them, often bringing fresh supplies.

As months went by, many of the students left to return to college. Some of the newcomers who arrived were less interested in Indian rights than in having a free place to live. The occupation ended in June 1971 when federal marshals removed the small group—little more than a dozen people—still on the island. While the occupation did not succeed in returning the island to Native control, it brought attention to the hardships faced by American Indians and put pressure on the federal government to change its policies. The occupation of Alcatraz also inspired a wave of pride among Native Americans, and sparked many demonstrations and occupations in the decade that followed.

The activists who occupied Alcatraz issued a proclamation—mostly serious, sometimes sarcastic—in which they explained their reasons and described their demands.

Proclamation:

To the Great White Father and All His People:

We, the native Americans, re-claim the land known as Alcatraz Island in the name of all American Indians by right of discovery.

We wish to be fair and honorable in our dealings with the Caucasian inhabitants of this land, and hereby offer the following treaty:

We will purchase said Alcatraz Island for twenty-four dollars (\$24) in glass beads and red cloth, a precedent set by the white man's purchase of a similar island about 300 years ago. We know that \$24 in trade goods for these 16 acres is more than was paid when Manhattan Island was sold, but we know that land values have risen over the years. Our offer of \$1.24 per acre is greater than the 47 cents per acre the white men are now paying the California Indians for their land.

We will give to the inhabitants of this island a portion of that land for their own, to be held in trust by the American Indian Affairs and by the bureau of Caucasian Affairs to hold in perpetuity—for as long as the sun shall rise and the rivers go down to the sea. We will further guide the inhabitants in the proper way of living. We will offer them our religion, our education, our life-ways, in order to help them achieve our level of civilization and thus raise them

right of discovery: The Alcatraz occupants are mocking Columbus and other European explorers who “claimed” the lands they “discovered” without regard to the people already living in these lands.

Caucasian: white

purchase of a similar island: a reference to the myth long repeated in American history books that Dutch settlers bought Manhattan Island from the Indians for \$24 worth of glass beads and other trinkets

their land: a reference to the lands where various Indian tribes of California had recently lived until the government began to sell of those lands under the policy of termination

“We will give. . .”: In this paragraph, the Alcatraz occupants use (and mock) the language used in various government treaties with Indian tribes.

bureau of Caucasian Affairs: This made-up organization is the Alcatraz occupants’ way of mocking the Bureau of Indian Affairs, the federal government agency that, since the 1800s, Indians had long accused of incompetence, corruption, and acting in ways that presumed to know what was best for Native Americans while ignoring and disrespecting them.

in perpetuity: forever

and all their white brothers up from their savage and unhappy state. We offer this treaty in good faith and wish to be fair and honorable in our dealings with all white men.

We feel that this so-called Alcatraz Island is more than suitable for an Indian reservation, as determined by the white man's own standards. By this we mean that this place resembles most Indian reservations in that:

1. It is isolated from modern facilities, and without adequate means of transportation.
2. It has no fresh running water.
3. It has inadequate sanitation facilities.
4. There are no oil or mineral rights.
5. There is no industry and so unemployment is very great.
6. There are no health care facilities.
7. The soil is rocky and non-productive; and the land does not support game.
8. There are no educational facilities.
9. The population has always exceeded the land base.
10. The population has always been held as prisoners and kept dependent upon others.

Further, it would be fitting and symbolic that ships from all over the world, entering the Golden Gate, would first see Indian land, and thus be reminded of the true history of this nation. This tiny island would be a symbol of the great lands once ruled by free and noble Indians.

"... unhappy state": Here the Alcatraz occupants reverse the terms long used by white people who thought that the best way to help American Indians was by assimilating them—by absorbing them into mainstream white society and erasing their tribal identities and ways of life.

oil or mineral rights: the rights to profit from the natural resources in an area, in this case, to drill for oil or mine minerals

game: wild animals that can be hunted or fished for food

prisoners: Alcatraz Island was the site of a maximum security federal prison that closed in 1963.

Golden Gate: a narrow waterway connecting the Pacific Ocean to the San Francisco Bay



Native American protesters—many of them students from various colleges in and near San Francisco—occupied Alcatraz Island in November 1969.

What use will we make of this land?

Since the San Francisco Indian Center burned down, there is no place for Indians to assemble and carry on tribal life here in the white man's city. Therefore, we plan to develop on this island several Indian institutions:

1. A CENTER FOR NATIVE AMERICAN STUDIES will be developed which will educate them to the skills and knowledge relevant to improve the lives and spirits of all Indian peoples. . . .
2. AN AMERICAN INDIAN SPIRITUAL CENTER which will practice our ancient tribal religious and sacred healing ceremonies. Our cultural arts will be featured and our young people trained in music, dance, and healing rituals.
3. AN INDIAN CENTER OF ECOLOGY which will train and support our young people in scientific research and practice to restore our lands and waters to their pure and natural state. . . .

burned down: In October 1969, a fire destroyed the American Indian Center in San Francisco, a popular gathering place and center for social, educational, and cultural activities.

4. A GREAT INDIAN TRAINING SCHOOL will be developed to teach our people how to make a living in the world, improve our standard of living, and to end hunger and unemployment among all our people. . . .

Some of the present buildings will be taken over to develop an AMERICAN INDIAN MUSEUM, which will depict our native food & other cultural contributions we have given to the world. Another part of the museum will present some of the things the white man has given to the Indians in return for the land and life he took: disease, alcohol, poverty and cultural decimation (as symbolized by old tin cans, barbed wire, rubber tires, plastic containers, etc.). Part of this museum will remain a dungeon to symbolize both those Indian captives who were incarcerated for challenging white authority, and those who were imprisoned on reservations. The museum will show the noble and the tragic events of Indian history, including the broken treaties, the documentary of the Trail of Tears, the Massacre of Wounded Knee, as well as the victory over Yellow Hair Custer and his army.

In the name of all Indians, therefore, we re-claim this island for our Indian nations, for all these reasons. We feel this claim is just and proper, and that this land should rightfully be granted to us for as long as the rivers shall run and the sun shall shine.

Signed,
Indians of All Tribes
November 1969
San Francisco, California

decimation: the destruction of a large part of something

incarcerated: put in prison

Trail of Tears: In the 1830s, the U.S. government forced Southeastern American Indian tribes to relocate to reservations on land west of the Mississippi River; many Indians died on the long journey, known as the Trail of Tears.

Massacre of Wounded Knee: In 1890, U. S. troops killed some 300 Sioux men, women, and children in Wounded Knee, South Dakota.

Custer: General George A. Custer. In Montana, at the Battle of Little Bighorn in 1876, Custer and all of his troops were killed in a battle with a large combined force of the Lakota (Sioux), Northern Cheyenne, and Arapaho tribes.

Feminism and the Equal Rights Amendment

Background Knowledge

In the 1960s and 1970s, the feminist movement was reborn in America. Feminism is the idea that women should have the same rights and opportunities as men. Through the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, American women had struggled to win such basic rights as the right to vote. When the Nineteenth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution was ratified in 1920, finally giving women the right to vote, some people thought that women had achieved equal standing with men. But there was more to be done.

Though they had gained the vote, women still had fewer opportunities than men. Men were raised to believe they could be whatever they dreamed of being—a surgeon, a pilot, an undersea explorer, an astronaut, a professional basketball player, or any one of a hundred other things. But most women were raised to believe that their fulfillment lay in a single dream—to get married and have a family.

In 1963, a feminist named Betty Friedan questioned “this mystique of feminine fulfillment.” (A “mystique” is a false way of thinking or feeling.) In her book called *The Feminine Mystique*, Friedan argued that many American women were suffering from “the problem that has no name.” They had grown up being taught that “truly feminine women do not want careers, higher education, political rights—the independence and the opportunities that the old-fashioned feminists fought for.”

right to vote: See “Women’s Suffrage: Fighting for the Right to Vote,” in the companion volume to this book, *The Blessings of Liberty: Voices for Social Justice and Equal Rights in America*.

Instead, said Friedan, “their only dream was to be perfect wives and mothers; their highest ambition to have five children and a beautiful house.”

Friedan observed that for many women, once this dream came true, they were not happy. These women, said Friedan, heard a “strange, dissatisfied voice stirring within.” Friedan urgently proclaimed, “We can no longer ignore that voice within women that says: ‘I want something more than my husband and my children and my home.’”

Friedan and other feminists called for more opportunities for women to find fulfillment outside the home—in higher education, in the working world, in business, in government. Feminists also pointed out that when women did work outside the home, they were often treated unfairly. For doing work comparable to what men did, many women were paid less than what men received. Women would be passed over for promotions in favor of less experienced or less qualified men. A woman might rise to become the secretary to the chief executive of a business, but rarely would she become the chief executive. Facing discrimination in and beyond the workplace, more and more women were drawn to feminism, or the women’s liberation movement, as people started calling it in the late 1960s.

In 1966, Friedan and other feminists founded a group called NOW. The name had a double meaning; it stood for the National Organization for Women, but it also meant that women were tired of waiting, that they wanted equality with men *now*.

NOW called for laws to make sure that men and women would receive the same pay for the same work. It called for the government to set up daycare centers where children could be

taken care of while their mothers worked. But NOW's largest goal was to amend the U.S. Constitution so that it would specifically guarantee equal rights for women.

The push for such an amendment had begun back in the 1920s, led by the suffragist and feminist Alice Paul. Paul had organized large protests in support of the Nineteenth Amendment, which gave women the right to vote. After that amendment was ratified in 1920, she called for another amendment, which came to be called the Equal Rights Amendment (ERA). She and other feminists felt that since the Constitution is the ultimate law of the land, it was vital that women's rights be specifically recognized in it. In 1923, Alice Paul proposed this amendment to the Constitution:

Men and women shall have equal rights throughout the United States and every place subject to its jurisdiction.

In 1943, the wording of the ERA was revised to its current form:

Equality of rights under the law shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any State on account of sex.

Progress on the ERA was slow. For many years, it was opposed by people who worried that the amendment would undo existing laws that protected women in the workplace. Also, any proposed amendment to the Constitution must first be passed by a vote of at least two-thirds of the members of Congress—and for much of the twentieth century, Congress was made up almost entirely of men.

jurisdiction: government power and authority

was revised: The wording of the Equal Rights Amendment was revised in order to bring it closer to the wording of two existing amendments to the Constitution, the Fifteenth and the Nineteenth. The Fifteenth Amendment says, "The right of citizens of the United States to vote shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any State on account of race, color, or previous condition of servitude." The Nineteenth Amendment says, "The right of citizens of the United States to vote shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any State on account of sex."

abridged: limited

In the late 1960s, the National Organization for Women renewed the push for the ERA. In Congress, a small but growing number of women pressed their fellow legislators to vote to send the ERA to the states for ratification.



Women in Chicago, Illinois, march to support ratification of the Equal Rights Amendment.

In 1972, the ERA passed both houses of Congress. Feminists and their supporters rejoiced. After a proposed amendment is passed by Congress, before it becomes part of the Constitution, it has to be ratified by three quarters of the states—currently, that’s 38 states—within a seven-year deadline. Thirty states ratified the ERA within a year. But in other states there was strong opposition.

Some of the strongest opposition to the ERA was led by the conservative activist Phyllis Schlafly. She strongly criticized not only the ERA but also feminism in general. Schlafly celebrated the traditional roles that Betty Friedan and other feminists found so limiting. For example, in 1972 Schlafly said, “The women’s libbers

ratification: official approval [Any proposed amendment to the U.S. Constitution requires ratification by three-fourths of the states.]

conservative: holding on to traditional and established ways

libbers: short for “liberationists”

don't understand that most women want to be wife, mother and homemaker—and are happy in that role. . . . American women do not want to be liberated from husbands and children. We do not want to trade our birthright of the special privileges of American women—for the mess of pottage called the Equal Rights Amendment.”

Faced by such opposition, ERA supporters could not get the required 38 states to ratify the amendment, even though the deadline was extended. In January 2020, however—years after the deadline for ratification had expired—Virginia became the 38th state to ratify the ERA. In February 2020 the U. S. House of Representatives passed a resolution to remove the deadline for ratifying the ERA. The House resolution then went to the Senate for consideration. As of the time of the publication of this book, the Senate has not taken any action, and so the Equal Rights Amendment has not yet been added to the Constitution.

Equal Rights for Women: A Speech to the U. S. House of Representatives by Shirley Chisholm (1969)

Primary Source

In 1968, Shirley Chisholm (1924-2005) became the first Black woman elected to the U.S. House of Representatives. She went on to represent her New York district for seven terms. During her time in Congress, she was a strong advocate for equal rights and for helping the poor and hungry.

On May 21, 1969, Shirley Chisholm made the following speech to the House of Representatives, in support of the Equal Rights Amendment.

mess of pottage: To trade your birthright for a mess of pottage is to foolishly exchange something of true worth for something that might seem appealing but has no lasting value. The expression comes from a story from the Bible (Genesis 25:29-34), in which Esau, who is hungry, gives his birthright—his privileges as the firstborn son—to his younger brother Jacob, who in exchange gives Esau a mess of pottage (a serving of soup or stew).



Shirley Chisholm, the first Black woman elected to the U.S. House of Representatives, strongly supported the Equal Rights Amendment.

Mr. Speaker, when a young woman graduates from college and starts looking for a job, she is likely to have a frustrating and even demeaning experience ahead of her. If she walks into an office for an interview, the first question she will be asked is, “Do you type?”

There is a calculated system of prejudice that lies unspoken behind that question. Why is it acceptable for women to be secretaries, librarians, and teachers, but totally unacceptable for them to be managers, administrators, doctors, lawyers, and Members of Congress?

The unspoken assumption is that women are different. They do not have executive ability, orderly minds, stability, leadership skills, and they are too emotional.

It has been observed before, that society for a long time, discriminated against another minority, the blacks, on the same basis—that they were different and inferior. The happy little homemaker and the contented “old darky” on the plantation were both produced by prejudice.

As a black person, I am no stranger to race prejudice. But the truth is that in the political world I have been far oftener discriminated against because I am a woman than because I am black.

Prejudice against blacks is becoming unacceptable although it will take years to eliminate it. But it is doomed because, slowly, white America is beginning to admit that it exists. Prejudice against women is still acceptable. There is very little

Mr. Speaker: By tradition, in making a speech to the House of Representatives, a representative begins by addressing the Speaker of the House, who leads sessions of the House of Representatives.
demeaning: causing someone to feel disrespected and humiliated

understanding yet of the immorality involved in double pay scales and the classification of most of the better jobs as “for men only.”

More than half of the population of the United States is female. But women occupy only 2 percent of the managerial positions. They have not even reached the level of tokenism yet. No women sit on the AFL-CIO council or Supreme Court. There have been only two women who have held Cabinet rank, and at present there are none. Only two women now hold ambassadorial rank in the diplomatic corps. In Congress, we are down to one Senator and 10 Representatives.

Considering that there are about 3 1/2 million more women in the United States than men, this situation is outrageous.

It is true that part of the problem has been that women have not been aggressive in demanding their rights. This was also true of the black population for many years. They submitted to oppression and even cooperated with it. Women have done the same thing. But now there is an awareness of this situation particularly among the younger segment of the population.

double pay scales: for the same or comparable work, one rate of pay for men, and a lower rate of pay for women

tokenism: A “token” effort is doing the least possible to give the appearance of making an effort. In the workplace, “tokenism” is making a minimal effort to include women and people of color in order to give the appearance of fairness and equality.

AFL-CIO: American Federation of Labor and Congress of Industrial Organizations, a large organization of labor unions

Supreme Court: When Shirley Chisholm made this speech in 1969, no woman had ever served on the Supreme Court. In 1981, Sandra Day O'Connor became the first woman to serve as a U.S. Supreme Court justice.

Cabinet: In the U. S. government, the Cabinet is made up of the vice-president and the top advisors to the president who serve as directors of agencies within the executive branch, for example, the Department of Defense, the Department of Justice, the Department of Education, and more.

diplomatic corps: the body of ambassadors and other officials who represent the United States in its dealings with other countries

As in the field of equal rights for blacks, Spanish-Americans, the Indians, and other groups, laws will not change such deep-seated problems overnight. But they can be used to provide protection for those who are most abused, and to begin the process of evolutionary change by compelling the insensitive majority to reexamine its unconscious attitudes.

It is for this reason that I wish to introduce today a proposal that has been before every Congress for the last 40 years and that sooner or later must become part of the basic law of the land—the equal rights amendment.

Let me note and try to refute two of the commonest arguments that are offered against this amendment. One is that women are already protected under the law and do not need legislation. Existing laws are not adequate to secure equal rights for women. Sufficient proof of this is the concentration of women in lower paying, menial, unrewarding jobs and their incredible scarcity in the upper level jobs. If women are already equal, why is it such an event whenever one happens to be elected to Congress?

It is obvious that discrimination exists. Women do not have the opportunities that men do. And women that do not conform to the system, who try to break with the accepted patterns, are stigmatized as “odd” and “unfeminine.” The fact is that a woman who aspires to be chairman of the board, or a Member of the House, does so for exactly the same reasons as any man. Basically, these are that she thinks she can do the job and she wants to try.

refute: prove to be wrong or untrue

menial: a term used to describe low-skilled and low-paying work

stigmatized: described in a strongly disapproving way; marked as deserving shame or disgrace

aspires: has hopes of achieving something

chairman of the board: the leader of a group (the board of directors) that oversees a business or corporation

A second argument often heard against the equal rights amendment is that it would eliminate legislation that many States and the Federal Government have enacted giving special protection to women and that it would throw the marriage and divorce laws into chaos.

As for the marriage laws, they are due for a sweeping reform, and an excellent beginning would be to wipe the existing ones off the books. Regarding special protection for working women, I cannot understand why it should be needed. Women need no protection that men do not need. What we need are laws to protect working people, to guarantee them fair pay, safe working conditions, protection against sickness and layoffs, and provision for dignified, comfortable retirement. Men and women need these things equally. That one sex needs protection more than the other is a male supremacist myth as ridiculous and unworthy of respect as the white supremacist myths that society is trying to cure itself of at this time.

John Lewis: The Power to Make a Difference

Background Knowledge

Congressman John Lewis was born in 1940, the son of sharecroppers in Alabama. When he died in 2020, he was honored by having his flag-draped casket placed for public viewing at the U.S. Capitol. Along the streets of Washington, D.C., the lines of mourners stretched for many city blocks, as people came to pay their last respects to a man who in many ways embodied the American civil rights movement.



John Lewis

As a young man, John Lewis was arrested for sitting in at a segregated lunch counter in Nashville, Tennessee. He was among the first group of Freedom Riders who were attacked and beaten as they tried to desegregate the buses traveling through Southern states. He helped organize the 1963 March on Washington—before Martin Luther King, Jr., delivered his “I have a dream” speech, Lewis urged the crowd to “get in and stay in the streets of every city, every village and hamlet of this nation until true freedom comes, until a revolution is complete.” As the

sharecroppers: farmers who do not own the land but give the landowner a portion of the crops as rent

sitting in: On the sit-ins, see pages 108-114.

Freedom Riders: See pages 116-127.

March on Washington: See pages 143-145.

hamlet: a small village

chairman of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, Lewis was a key leader in organizing the voter registration drives and community programs of Mississippi's Freedom Summer in 1964. In 1965, he was at the front of the line of protesters who planned to march from Selma to Montgomery, Alabama, but were stopped as they crossed the bridge leading out of Selma, where state troopers attacked with tear gas, whips, and clubs. One trooper hit Lewis on the head, cracking his skull.

In 1986, John Lewis was elected to the U.S. House of Representatives, representing a district in the Atlanta, Georgia area. He served in Congress for more than 30 years, where his dedication to justice earned him a reputation as "the conscience of the Congress."

"Together, You Can Redeem the Soul of Our Nation," by John Lewis (2020)

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Freedom Summer: See page 153.

march from Selma to Montgomery, Alabama: See pages 170-176.

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Black Lives Matter Plaza: In June 2020, Washington, D.C.'s mayor named a section of 16th Street leading to the White House "Black Lives Matter Plaza." The area was the site of large protests after the death of George Floyd.

silent witness: the act of observing without saying anything or getting involved

Emmett Till: A fourteen-year-old boy who was brutally murdered in Mississippi in 1955; see page 77.

Rayshard Brooks: a 27-year-old Black man killed by police in June 2020, in Atlanta, Georgia

Sandra Bland: a 28-year-old Black woman who was arrested by police in Texas in July 2015, and a few days later died in her jail cell, reportedly by suicide, though that has been questioned

Breonna Taylor: a 26-year-old Black woman who was shot by plainclothes police officers who forced entry into her apartment as part of an investigation involving Taylor's former boyfriend

constrained: limited; restricted; held back

oppression: cruel and unfair treatment

unchecked: not controlled; not stopped or slowed down in any way

unrestrained: not controlled; not held back

government-sanctioned: allowed or approved by the government

stroll to the store for some Skittles: In Florida in February 2012, a Black teenager, Trayvon Martin, was on his way home after a trip to a store where he bought a bag of candy called Skittles. He was shot by a man who was part of a neighborhood watch. The gunman went to trial but was found not guilty.

morning jog: In February 2020, while jogging through a neighborhood in Georgia, a 25-year-old Black man, Ahmaud Arbery, was chased and stopped by two armed white men, who were joined by a third white man who filmed the incident. One of the white men shot and killed Arbery. No legal action was taken against the white men until many weeks later when the video of the incident was posted on the website of a local radio station and quickly shared on social media. The three white men were later convicted of murder and federal hate crimes.

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In June 2020, a person on the way to a march in Columbia, South Carolina, carried this painting of the late George Floyd, who had recently been killed by a police officer. Pictured on Floyd's shoulders is his six-year-old daughter, Gianna—after her father's death sparked massive protests, she said in a video posted to social media, "Daddy changed the world."

Mother Emanuel Church in South Carolina: Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church in Charleston, South Carolina, the site of a mass shooting in June 2015, when a white supremacist killed nine Black people in a Bible study group

unwitting: unaware of what is happening

concertgoers in Las Vegas: The deadliest mass shooting in U.S. history occurred in October 2017 when a gunman opened fire on a crowd attending a country music concert in Las Vegas, Nevada, killing 58 people at the scene and wounding hundreds.

Elijah McClain: In August 2019, Elijah McClain, a 23-year-old Black man who had taught himself to play violin and guitar, and who had no criminal record, was arrested by Colorado police, who forced him to the ground. One officer held McClain by the neck in a way designed to restrict his breathing and render him unconscious. Paramedics arrived at the scene and injected McClain with a powerful sedative (a drug that calms a person or puts one to sleep). In the hospital, he died a few days later. The official cause of his death was "undetermined."

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complicit: taking part in doing something wrong

redeem: to make something better; in a religious sense, to save from evil

existential struggle: The word *existential* means relating to human existence. An existential struggle is a matter of life and death, in which one's existence is at risk.

exploitation: the action of selfishly and unfairly using others for your own benefit

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These young protesters embody the spirit of John Lewis's call for people "to answer the highest calling of your heart and stand up for what you truly believe."

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