

Civil Rights Movement

The civil rights movement was an organized effort by Black Americans to end racial discrimination and gain equal rights under the law. It began in the late 1940s and ended in the late 1960s. Although tumultuous at times, the movement was mostly nonviolent and resulted in laws to protect every American's constitutional rights, regardless of color, race, sex or national origin.

TIMELINE

July 26, 1948

President Harry Truman signed Executive Order 9811, creating the President's Committee on Equality of Treatment and Opportunity in the Armed Services. The order mandated the desegregation of the U.S. military. The first point in the executive order states "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."

May 17, 1954

Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka was a landmark 1954 Supreme Court case in which the justices ruled unanimously that racial segregation of children in public schools was unconstitutional. *Brown v. Board of Education* was one of the cornerstones of the civil rights movement, and helped establish the precedent that "separate-but-equal" education and other services were not, in fact, equal at all.

August 28, 1955

While visiting family in Money, Mississippi, 14-year-old Emmett Till, an African American from Chicago, is brutally murdered for allegedly flirting with a white woman four days earlier.

In March of 2022, President Joe Biden signed the Emmett Till Antilynching Act into law, making lynching a federal hate crime.

December 1, 1955

Rosa Parks, an African American woman, was arrested and fined for refusing to yield her bus seat to a white man.

The Montgomery Bus Boycott was a civil rights protest during which African Americans refused to ride city buses in Montgomery, Alabama, to protest segregated seating.

January 10-11, 1957

Sixty Black pastors and civil rights leaders from several southern states—including Martin Luther King, Jr.—meet in Atlanta, Georgia to coordinate nonviolent protests against racial discrimination and segregation.

September 4, 1957

Nine Black students known as the “Little Rock Nine” are blocked from integrating into Little Rock Central High School in Little Rock, Arkansas. President Dwight D. Eisenhower eventually sends federal troops to escort the students, however, they continue to be harassed.

September 9, 1957

Eisenhower signs the Civil Rights Act of 1957 into law to help protect voter rights. The law allows federal prosecution of those who suppress another’s right to vote.

February 1, 1960

Four African American college students in Greensboro, North Carolina refuse to leave a Woolworth’s “whites only” lunch counter without being served. The Greensboro Four—Ezell Blair Jr., David Richmond, Franklin McCain and Joseph McNeil—were inspired by the nonviolent protest of Gandhi. The Greensboro Sit-In, as it came to be called, sparks similar “sit-ins” throughout the city and in other states.

November 14, 1960

Six-year-old Ruby Bridges is escorted by four armed federal marshals as she becomes the first student to integrate William Frantz Elementary School in New Orleans. Her actions inspired Norman Rockwell’s painting *The Problem We All Live With* (1964).

1961

Throughout 1961, Black and white activists, known as freedom riders, took bus trips through the American South to protest segregated bus terminals and attempted to use “whites-only” restrooms and lunch counters. The Freedom Rides were marked by horrific violence from white protestors, they drew international attention to their cause.

June 11, 1963

Governor George C. Wallace stands in a doorway at the University of Alabama to block two Black students from registering. The standoff continues until President John F. Kennedy sends the National Guard to the campus.

August 28, 1963

Approximately 250,000 people take part in The March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom. Martin Luther King gives his “I Have A Dream” speech as the closing address in front of the Lincoln Memorial, stating, “I have a dream that one day this nation will rise up and live out the true meaning of its creed: ‘We hold these truths to be self-evident: that all men are created equal.’”

September 15, 1963

A bomb at 16th Street Baptist Church in Birmingham, Alabama kills four young girls and injures several other people prior to Sunday services. The bombing fuels angry protests.

July 2, 1964

President Lyndon B. Johnson signs the Civil Rights Act of 1964 into law, preventing employment discrimination due to race, color, sex, religion or national origin. Title VII of the Act establishes the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) to help prevent workplace discrimination.

February 21, 1965

Black religious leader Malcolm X is assassinated during a rally by members of the Nation of Islam.

March 7, 1965

Bloody Sunday. In the Selma to Montgomery March, around 600 civil rights marchers walk to Selma, Alabama to Montgomery—the state’s capital—in protest of Black voter suppression. Local police block and brutally attack them. After successfully fighting in court for their right to march, Martin Luther King and other civil rights leaders lead two more marches and finally reach Montgomery on March 25.

August 6, 1965

President Johnson signs the Voting Rights Act of 1965 to prevent the use of literacy tests as a voting requirement. It also allowed federal examiners to review voter qualifications and federal observers to monitor polling places.

April 4, 1968

Martin Luther King, Jr. is assassinated on the balcony of his hotel room in Memphis, Tennessee. James Earl Ray is convicted of the murder in 1969.

April 11, 1968

President Johnson signs the Civil Rights Act of 1968, also known as the Fair Housing Act, providing equal housing opportunity regardless of race, religion or national origin.

KEY EVENTS

- Montgomery Bus Boycott 1955 - The Montgomery Bus Boycott was a civil rights protest during which African Americans refused to ride city buses in Montgomery, Alabama, to protest segregated seating. The boycott took place from December 5, 1955, to December 20, 1956, and is regarded as the first large-scale U.S. demonstration against segregation.
- Albany Movement 1961 - It was the first mass movement in the modern civil rights era to have as its goal the desegregation of an entire community, and it resulted in the jailing of more than 1,000 African Americans in Albany and surrounding rural counties.
- Birmingham campaign 1963- Goal was to end discriminatory economic policies against African American residents.
- March on Washington 1963 – largest political rally for human rights. The goal was to look for jobs and freedom against Black American.
- Chicago Freedom Movement 1965- Led by Martin Luther king Jr, to expand the civil rights movement from the south to the north.
- Poor People's Campaign 1968 – Goal was to gain economic justice for poor people in the united states.

LEADERS

(Asa) Philip Randolph

- Director of the March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom.
- His big concern were jobs, unemployment & workers right. He believed all workers should receive fair pay and be treated with dignity. He thought that true equality would when people earned enough money to live a descent life.

Eugene Carson Blake

- He became the secretary general to the World Council of Churches, an organization which brings together churches around the world to improve people's lives through better education, health care, improving human rights.
- Justice and Fairness were the most important to him.

John Lewis

- Younger Speaker at time of March.
- He studied how to fight injustice with "nonviolence". He helped to create SNCC or the Students Non-Violent Coordinating Committee, and then became its national chairman.
- Through his courage and dedication, he fought the rights of the black men.

James Farmer

- He wanted to devote his life to making things more fair.
- Created the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE) in 1942 and became its National Director.
- He risked his life in organizing demonstrations.

Rosa Parks

- Recognized as the "Mother of the Modern-Day Civil Rights Movement",
- She refused to obey the bus driver when he ordered her to give her seat to a white passenger and was arrested.
- Parks continued to play a vital role in the movement, working with other civil rights leaders to end racial segregation.

Whitney Young

- Young was very skilled at working with wealthy white people in business, government, and organizations. He knew how to explain the challenges blacks faced and was able to raise large amounts of money so that people could learn job skills, find jobs, and better their health and education.

Rabbi Joachim Prinz

- He wrote and spoke about the dangers of Nazism long before Adolph Hitler came into power in 1933.
- Participated in demonstrations and had close relationships with the black community.

Reverend Martin Luther King Jr.

- One of the faces of civil rights movement.
- Organize the March on Washington for jobs and Freedom.
- He Organized a number of marches and protest and was a key figure in American civil rights movement.
- He believed in loving one's enemy and creating a community based on love.

Benefits: The Civil Rights Act of 1964 hastened the end of legal Jim Crow. It secured African Americans equal access to restaurants, transportation, and other public facilities. It enabled blacks, women, and other minorities to break down barriers in the workplace.