

## We Shall Overcome

Introducing Nonviolent Direct Action

Anatomy of the Montgomery Movement

Movement Milestones

Movement Women

The Northern Side of the Movement

The Landmarks and Limitations of Government



Woman carried to police patrol wagon during demonstration in Brooklyn, New York, 1963.

**W**ell  
Jr.?

ists were engaged in Washington that were composed of racial equity segments asserting leadership a crescent

The became a direct-action initiated their fight tremendous public university students to register men and

Far from concrete, ism in the fication of enforcement movement protracted ity of the communeral gove

**Introduct**

“Unopinion,” referring of Virginia segregation interstate tion of reordinanc of the Constitution al

**W**ell before the familiar protest demonstrations of the 1960s and Martin Luther King, Jr.'s, stirring, eloquent appeals to the conscience of white America, civil rights activists were championing nonviolent direct action to attain racial equality. In the 1940s, they engaged in strikes, sit-ins, boycotts, and freedom rides, and they planned a mass march on Washington. Their efforts signaled the beginning of a dramatic, unfolding quest for rights that were denied to blacks while assured to white Americans. Much like a great symphony, composed of unique but linked musical segments known as movements, the struggle for racial equality that spanned the 1940s through the mid-1970s included four identifiable segments—labor activism, challenges to the courts, nonviolent mass direct action, and assertions of black self-determination. Each segment, itself a social movement with its own leadership and constituency, represented a distinct emphasis and strategy, and each rose to a crescendo at different moments. Yet there were also significant overlaps.

The challenge to the courts, although often perceived as a gradualist approach that became less relevant after the 1954 *Brown* decision, did not cease with the rise of nonviolent direct-action protest in the sixties. Civil rights lawyers continued to bring to the courts cases initiated by individuals and communities braving job losses, arrests, and even violence in their fight for the fundamental rights of American citizens. Pursuing such cases demanded tremendous personal courage—by black parents and their children who dared to desegregate public schools, by black women who refused segregated seating on city buses, by university students who insisted on sitting at store lunch counters, by sharecroppers who tried to register to vote, by black families who sought to move into white neighborhoods, and by men and women in love who attempted to marry across the color line.

Far from being abstract legalism, activism by lawyers continued into the 1960s as a concrete, supportive arm of the movement and often as a direct consequence of the activism in the streets. Legal activism in the defeat of Jim Crow was essential both to the codification of African Americans' cumulative gains and to the onward press for governmental enforcement of newly acquired civil rights and voting rights. Thus to speak of the civil rights movement as a "movement of movements," as historians often do today, is to recognize its protracted character, stretching from the 1940s through the 1960s, as well as the complexity of those instrumental to it—blacks and whites, women and men, southern and northern communities, old and new civil rights organizations, leftists and anti-Communists, the federal government, and the press.

### Introducing Nonviolent Direct Action

"Unjust social laws and patterns do not change because supreme courts deliver just opinion." Bayard Rustin's words appeared brusquely in the *Louisiana Weekly* in January 1947, referring to the U.S. Supreme Court's ruling six months earlier in *Morgan v. Commonwealth of Virginia*. In a stunning victory for the NAACP, the Court had overturned the legality of segregation on interstate bus travel on the basis of its being an impermissible burden on interstate commerce. However, bus companies operating in the South showed no indication of respecting the landmark decision (which would have meant defying local segregation ordinances). For civil rights activists such as Rustin and the other black and white members of the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE), the clock had run out for courtroom argumentation alone.

CORE leaders sought to correct the insulting discrepancy between the legal outcome of the case brought by Irene Morgan and the daily realities of Jim Crow bus travel by sending an integrated group on a two-week “journey of reconciliation” through Virginia, North Carolina, Tennessee, and Kentucky. CORE’s style of activism—its assertive confidence in nonviolent direct action—testified to the changing times. Among the organizers of the journey were Rustin and white social activist George M. Houser, both members of the Fellowship of Reconciliation (FOR), an interracial pacifist group established during World War I and headed by A. J. Muste. The two organizations worked closely together in the 1940s, picketing and staging sit-ins at restaurants, amusement parks, and other public places in northern cities.

CORE leaders were influenced by Muste, who explicitly championed the model of civil disobedience organized and led by Mohandas Gandhi as part of India’s resistance to British colonial rule, and they advocated Gandhi’s philosophy of *satyagraha*—the belief that love and truth will triumph over violence and oppression. Houser’s book *Erasing the Color Line* (1945), with a foreword by A. Philip Randolph, commented on the possibility for similar and complementary roles between Gandhian *satyagraha* and Christian principles of “love thy enemy” and “turn the other cheek” in the fight against racial discrimination.

According to historian Ray Arsenault, Thurgood Marshall of the NAACP initially questioned CORE’s tactics, believing that a civil-disobedience bus ride in the South would foment violence, not reconciliation. CORE leaders disagreed and held firmly to the belief that only disciplined nonviolence could minimize retaliatory violence in the postwar climate, in which tensions ran high on both sides. Two months before the official departure date on April 9, 1947, Rustin and Houser rehearsed the journey. Their goal was not to defy the Jim Crow seating policy of the time, but rather to educate black communities along the bus route of the Supreme Court’s decision in *Morgan*. Rustin and Houser met with local activists and solicited support from NAACP branches, NAACP Youth Councils, and churches.

As the date for the “journey of reconciliation” approached, CORE and FOR held a two-day training session on nonviolence at the latter’s office in Washington, D.C. Eight black men and eight white men volunteered for the bus trip. All were relatively young; Rustin, at 37, was the oldest. They represented a range of political perspectives and a variety of organizations, in addition to CORE and FOR including the American Friends Service Committee, the Workers Defense League, individual Congregational and Methodist churches, and the New York Council for a Permanent FEPC. At the orientation, the volunteers practiced nonviolence through role playing, attempting to learn effective techniques in the event of verbal and physical harassment or arrest. Written instructions stipulated that blacks were to take the front seats of the bus, and whites were to go to the rear. The instructions reminded them to act calmly and courteously when refusing to move as the bus driver commanded, and they were instructed to inform the driver of their rights according to the recent Supreme Court decision.

On April 9, the group divided, half boarding a Greyhound bus and half taking a Trailways. Most would not complete the entire journey as planned, since twelve were arrested, including Rustin, who was pulled off the bus in Chapel Hill, North Carolina, amid what newspapers described as a “mob spirit” against the civil rights workers. The journey of reconciliation, as covered in the black newspaper the *Atlanta Daily World* in May 1947, attested to the lack of knowledge by bus drivers, passengers, and police of the historic Supreme Court decision in *Morgan*. The paper observed: “Those who have heard of it [the Court decision] vaguely did not know whether or how it applies.”

Althou  
papers pai  
Chicago ir  
Michigan,  
recounted  
buses and  
by black se  
saged the

## Anatom

The M  
tion but a  
The boyc  
when initi  
that “sepa  
Court’s se  
erate spec  
decision.  
outlawed  
ties and o  
lunch cou  
segregate

The i  
cannot be  
tience wit  
greater m  
freedom s  
ruptive ef  
“slowing  
ians of a c  
its annual

On s  
the milit  
methods  
around t  
regard to  
defied ex  
the feder

The  
rationale  
economy  
by four  
the emer  
tained a  
the 1960

Although extensive coverage of the bus trip appeared in black newspapers, white newspapers paid relatively scant attention to it. At the fifth annual CORE Convention, held in Chicago in June 1947, delegates from affiliated state branches, including Kansas, Nebraska, Michigan, Ohio, and New York, listened with rapt attention as the “freedom riders” recounted their challenging journey and urged travelers to “break the pattern by riding buses and trains in an unsegregated manner.” Conference participants also heard a lecture by black sociologist Ira D.A. Reid on “Direct Action Challenges Segregation.” The title presaged the dominant model of civil rights activism over the next two decades.

## Anatomy of the Montgomery Movement

The Montgomery, Alabama, bus boycott was not only a direct challenge to segregation but also the first successful example of mass nonviolent resistance in the United States. The boycott began in December 1955—a sobering time for many African Americans, when initial rejoicing over the victory in the *Brown* decision—the Supreme Court’s ruling that “separate was inherently unequal”—had turned considerably more subdued after the Court’s second ruling in May 1955, calling for public school desegregation “with all deliberate speed.” Desegregation moved slowly, if at all, in the school year after the Court’s decision. Meanwhile attacks on southern state branches of the NAACP had begun. States outlawed the NAACP and harassed members with false accusations of un-American activities and orders to disband. Schools and public libraries, movie theaters, department stores, lunch counters, and city buses were among the numerous public facilities that remained segregated by law in the South and by practice in many places in the North.

The importance of the Montgomery boycott in rejuvenating the black freedom struggle cannot be overstated. The boycott symbolized African Americans’ rising frustration and impatience with the denial of their rights as American citizens. It called for greater militancy in a concerted and sustained effort to advance the freedom struggle. In the winter of 1955, Montgomery’s black community, in choosing the disruptive effects of a boycott, refused to accept gradualism or “moderation.” There would be no “slowing up in the move for freedom and capitulating to the whims and caprices of the guardians of a deadening status quo,” Martin Luther King, Jr., asserted in a speech to the NAACP at its annual convention in June 1956. At that time the boycott was in its seventh month.

### The Role of the Boycott

On some levels, the new spirit that galvanized an entire Alabama community evoked the militant impatience of Bayard Rustin and the leaders of CORE in the 1940s, whose methods of nonviolent direct action implied no longer waiting for white Americans to come around to accepting Supreme Court decisions that upheld blacks’ rights (for example, in regard to interstate travel). Going beyond CORE, however, the Montgomery movement defied existing state and city ordinances—statutes that had not as yet been overturned by the federal judiciary.

The boycott served to affirm Rosa Parks’ act of breaking the law. The necessity and rationale for her civil disobedience toward unjust laws as well as the tactic of mass grassroots economic withdrawal would also be accompanied by a class-action lawsuit against the city by four similarly defiant black women. The boycott’s success meant, in the final analysis, the emergence of a new legal status quo. Black Montgomery’s forward-looking stance contained all the elements that embodied and characterized nonviolent civil rights activism in the 1960s.

Highly planned and carefully strategized, the Montgomery bus boycott was a mass, indigenous movement of black people of all classes and ages. Women played crucial roles in the boycott, from its inception to the very end. Monetary and other material resources from the local black community, and later from nationwide black church networks, supported the boycott, sustaining it through crucial formative months and allowing it to continue during months of harsh opposition and before national and international attention and donations began to arrive. Not quite twenty-six years old when he assumed the boycott's helm, Martin Luther King, Jr., represented charismatic youthful leadership—one that conveyed to the people of Montgomery a visionary energy and a willingness to be arrested and jailed for the sake of justice for all.

Under King's leadership, the Montgomery movement emphasized nonviolence as a guiding credo of moral courage (for example, King's call for calm after segregationists dynamited his own home) and as a strategy for winning the sympathy of the nation. Montgomery activists formed a new civil rights organization, an umbrella of many local groups, instead of relying on the guidance and support of one of the older national civil rights groups. The movement advocated an end to segregation, while at the same time seeking racial harmony and reconciliation. Finally, in order to endure for a long and troubled period, the movement drew on the culture and beliefs of blacks' religious faith and institutions. The church became a site of personal and community empowerment for its people—for strengthening them physically and emotionally to withstand the mighty forces arrayed against them and, moreover, to prevail.



Rosa Parks being fingerprinted after her arrest for refusing to give up her seat on a segregated bus, December 1955.

The Mo  
Thursday, D  
who demand  
black passen  
their seats, b  
sign demarc  
However, Al  
sengers on c  
black person  
woman, who  
black men ar  
not moving c

In the 19  
frequently ex  
disobedience  
more numer  
In the month  
arrested for r

Aurelia S  
so in April 1  
to give up he  
black women  
sor Joanne G  
Although the  
created the b  
refusing to rel  
Smith, who w  
Parks. Althou  
boycott, they

Parks' an  
quickly transl  
branch), Joan  
pastor of Park  
Robinson's w  
black commu  
ride the bus t  
woman has be  
ride the bus t  
or share a ride

Rosa Parl  
respected in t  
she was no rec  
openly suppor  
local branch of  
cal activist wh  
the Brotherho

The Montgomery movement was set in motion as a result of the arrest of Rosa Parks on Thursday, December 1, 1955, for the crime of refusing to yield her bus seat to a white man who demanded it. The bus driver had warned her and three other black passengers “to make it easy” on themselves by giving up their seats, but Parks was the only one to stand her ground by remaining seated. A Jim Crow sign demarcated the colored section located in the rear of the bus, where Parks was sitting. However, Alabama law was sufficiently flexible, when it came to the comfort of white passengers on crowded buses, to permit them to take seats in the “colored section” even if a black person was occupying one of those seats. Nor did male chivalry extend to a black woman, whose seat (like that of Rosa Parks) could be demanded by a white man. Worse yet, black men and women were often violently assaulted by bus drivers and white passengers for not moving quickly enough in relinquishing their seats.

#### The Arrest of Rosa Parks

In the 1950s, and especially after the *Brown* decision in 1954, African Americans more frequently expressed open resentment of their second-class citizenship through acts of civil disobedience to Jim Crow. Arrests such as that of Rosa Parks in December 1955 had become more numerous in other southern cities, and hers was not the first in Montgomery that year. In the months preceding Parks’ arrest, four other black women residents of the city had been arrested for refusing to comply with the racial policy of the city’s bus system.

Aurelia S. Browder, a graduate of Alabama State University and a seamstress, had done so in April 1955. Even earlier, in March 1955, fifteen-year old Claudette Colvin refused to give up her seat. Her arrest caught the attention of the Women’s Political Council, a black women’s civic organization under the leadership of Alabama State University professor Joanne Gibson Robinson, and the women began to plan a boycott of the city buses. Although the WPC did not launch a boycott after Colvin’s arrest, the organization had created the blueprint for future action. Two other Montgomery women were arrested for refusing to relinquish their seats to a white person in 1955—eighteen-year-old Mary Louise Smith, who was arrested in October 1955, as well as Susie McDonald, who also preceded Parks. Although their names remain far less familiar in the history of the Montgomery bus boycott, they would play a crucial and defining role in its outcome.

Parks’ arrest jolted Montgomery’s black community, and the idea of a boycott was quickly translated into action. Edgar Daniel Nixon (the president of the local NAACP branch), Joanne Gibson Robinson (the president of the WPC), and Ralph Abernathy (the pastor of Park’s church) began reaching out to local ministers and other community leaders. Robinson’s well-honed organization printed and distributed 30,000 leaflets throughout the black community, announcing a mass rally and a day-long boycott. The leaflet read: “Don’t ride the bus to work, to town, to school or any place, Monday Dec. 5. Another Negro woman has been arrested and put in jail because she refused to give up her bus seat. Don’t ride the bus to work, to town, to school, or anywhere on Monday. If you work, take a cab, or share a ride, or walk.”

Rosa Parks, who worked as a seamstress at a Montgomery department store, was respected in the city’s black community. Considered a woman of impeccable character, she was no recent initiate to civil rights activism. She and her husband Raymond Parks had openly supported the release of the Scottsboro Boys in the 1930s. As the secretary of the local branch of the NAACP since the 1940s, she worked with E. D. Nixon, a longtime political activist who headed the Montgomery chapter of the NAACP and was an organizer of the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters, the black union founded by A. Philip Randolph.

Parks worked as well with the members of the local NAACP Youth Council, advising them in their protest against the segregated public library. In June 1955, she, along with NAACP national field secretary Ella Baker and veteran civil rights activist Septima Clark, participated in the summer training workshop, "Racial Desegregation: Implementing the Supreme Court Decision," at the Highlander Folk School, which had been founded by white labor organizer Myles Horton in Monteagle, Tennessee. Parks thus bore two decades of civil rights credentials. Her arrest served as the linchpin for uniting Montgomery's black community.

**The Leadership of Martin Luther King, Jr.**

Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., at the time of Parks' arrest only twenty-five years old and a newcomer to the city (he came from Atlanta, where his father was a well-known church leader), was selected by community leaders to lead the boycott effort coordinated by the Montgomery Improvement Association (MIA). An erudite yet electrifying preacher at the Dexter Memorial Baptist Church, King had made no enemies and had no ties to the city's white power structure. He yielded to the urgency of the events, recalling later that "I did not have time to think it through," and became head of the MIA, an umbrella group, including the local NAACP, the Women's Political Council, civic, business, religious, and fraternal organizations, as well as individuals. Since African Americans had no political power in Montgomery (the great majority were denied the vote), they increasingly embraced the power of nonviolent protest.



Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., speaks at the Holt Street Baptist Church during the Montgomery bus boycott.

alte  
mal  
tic c  
sent  
that  
rath  
blac  
]   
fully  
the b  
they  
white  
]   
Meet  
violer  
destir  
transp  
black  
]   
T  
uals in  
but ne  
headq  
ing of  
unders  
during  
Gandh  
]   
Th  
transp  
what s  
to rema  
describ  
ignorar  
represe  
the ever  
]   
In M  
perceive  
asked he  
ting bus  
thing to  
trouble i  
Initially  
from bla  
and inter  
]   
Just :  
four blac

In his speech to the MIA on the first night of the boycott, King asserted: “We have no alternative but to protest . . . we have come here tonight to be saved from the patience that makes us patient with anything less than freedom and justice.” The MIA adopted the tactic of nonviolent resistance. The newly formed association drafted three demands and presented them to city officials: that bus drivers treat black passengers with dignity and respect; that the city of Montgomery agree to hire black bus drivers in black neighborhoods; and the rather conservative demand that the city adopt a first-come, first-served seating system, with blacks filling the rear and whites the front.

Mayor W. A. Gayle and the attorneys for the bus line rejected those demands. They fully expected the boycott to fail, believing, as did most white residents of Montgomery, that the black population could not sustain a prolonged withdrawal from the buses. Compromise, they surmised, would lead only to further demands. The city remained intransigent. The white citizens of Montgomery could not have imagined the transformative events ahead.

The boycott continued because of the MIA’s highly planned and strategized efforts. Meeting in churches—their endurance strengthened by a religious culture that stressed nonviolence and the moral justice of their cause—men, women, and children walked to their destinations. The MIA organized carpools and dispatch-call stations; black taxicab drivers transported black passengers at reduced rates. White Montgomery retaliated by indicting black residents for conspiracy to obstruct the operation of a business.

The city threatened and subsequently filed a legal suit against more than eighty individuals involved in the boycott, including King and Abernathy. King’s home was firebombed, but no one was hurt. Indeed, constant threats of violence forced the relocation of the MIA headquarters several times. From the boycott’s inception, King linked the Christian teaching of love for one’s enemies to the civil rights tactic of nonviolent resistance, but he came to understand the role of nonviolence more deeply after Bayard Rustin’s visit to Montgomery during the boycott. Rustin became an advisor to King, introducing him to the teachings of Gandhi and also those of A. J. Muste and the Fellowship of Reconciliation.

The men and women who waged nonviolent war on Montgomery’s segregated public transportation system also risked financial retribution. Some lost their jobs. Others walked what seemed like a tightrope—remaining loyal to the boycott while desperately needing to remain employed. King, writing about the boycott in his 1964 book *Why We Can’t Wait*, described the tactic of black domestic servants, who participated in the boycott but feigned ignorance in order to keep their jobs. Such duplicity, which existed since the days of slavery, represented a covert style of resistance, a “hidden transcript,” as scholar James Scott terms the everyday, prosaic forms of protest wielded by the oppressed toward those in power.

In Montgomery, black maids often adopted this kind of strategy with employers who perceived the boycott as an unlawful act of defiance. King noted that when a white employer asked her black maid if she supported the “terrible things the Negroes were doing, boycotting buses and demanding jobs,” the latter would reply “Oh no, ma’am. I won’t have any thing to do with that boycott . . . I am just going to stay away from the buses as long as that trouble is going on.” Some white women employers even began to drive their maids to work. Initially sustained by the Montgomery black community’s resources and by monetary gifts from black churches and individuals in northern cities, the boycott eventually drew national and international attention and funds.

Just as the actions of one black woman had precipitated the bus boycott, the actions of four black women, who had also defied segregated seating, helped to bring the boycott to a



victorious end. Aurelia Browder, Claudette Colvin, Mary Louise Smith, and Susie Macdonald (Parks was not among the plaintiffs) brought a class-action lawsuit against Mayor

### Victory

Gayle and other city officials a few months after the boycott began. Browder served as the lead plaintiff in the case, which challenged the constitutionality of both city and state segregation ordinances. While the boycott sorely tested the will of white officials to continue segregation on city buses, the women's suit tested the very legality of Jim Crow buses.

Leaders of the Montgomery Bus Boycott were in agreement as to the importance of such a federal lawsuit. The case, which was argued in the federal courts by black Montgomery attorney Fred Gray and Robert Carter, a black NAACP lawyer from New York, referenced *Brown*. The special three-judge panel in the U.S. District Court declared Alabama's state and local laws requiring segregation on buses unconstitutional, and the Supreme Court affirmed that judgment. The Supreme Court's declarative ruling ended the 381-day boycott by requiring an immediate end to the city's segregated bus system.

## Movement Milestones

The Montgomery Bus Boycott inspired new civil rights activism and leaders. James M. Lawson, Jr., learned of the boycott while on a missionary trip to India after spending fourteen months in a federal prison for refusing to be drafted in the Korean War. Influenced by A. J. Muste's pacifist ideas, Lawson became a devoted member of FOR and understood how Gandhian nonviolence and Christian pacifism could be interwoven. When Lawson read about the boycott in the Indian newspaper *Nagpur Times*, he returned to America to take part in the budding movement against southern segregation.

In the fall of 1958, Lawson settled in Nashville, Tennessee, and began teaching his philosophy of nonviolence. Some of his students would become influential leaders of the 1960s

### New Leaders: James M. Lawson

student sit-in movement. Among those who attended Lawson's weekly workshop were James Bevel, Diane Nash, John Lewis, Marion Barry, Jr., and Bernard Lafayette, all of whom attended universities and divinity schools in Nashville. John Lewis, a black divinity student from American Baptist College who would later become a U.S. congressman, remembers the urgency with which he felt that the "movement for civil rights needed—no, *demand*—[their] involvement." The young men and women who attended Lawson's weekly workshops sought actual change in their lifetime.

In addition to student support, the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, founded in Atlanta in February 1957 in the wake of the Montgomery victory and headed by Martin Luther King, Jr., had an active branch in Nashville—the Nashville Christian Leadership Council (NCLC) under the leadership of local minister, Rev. Kelly Miller Smith. In the fall of 1958, Smith invited Lawson to Nashville to lead a workshop on nonviolent resistance. Throughout 1959, Lawson taught nonviolence and nonviolent direct action protest strategies to eager young men and women in a church basement in the city. Workshop participants discussed the philosophy of nonviolence from the perspectives of Jesus, Gandhi, and American thinkers Henry David Thoreau, Reinhold Niebuhr, and A. J. Muste.

Lawson's teachings on nonviolence as a way of life were not always readily accepted, according to John Lewis. Lewis's roommate James Bevel confessed to his personal struggle in responding with love to hate and violence. In the workshop, the student activists learned to employ nonviolent tactics and strategies during demonstrations and in the event of violence. Through mock sit-ins and other forms of role playing, they learned how to maintain

eye cor  
attack,  
of peac  
events t  
Fisl  
first tar  
cago, sh  
viewed  
unities ar  
Before  
Greenst  
On  
Richmo  
moveme  
service.  
to stand  
restaurai  
let them  
known—



#### Sit-in participants endure harassment.

In Jackson, Mississippi, whites poured sugar, mustard, and ketchup on the heads of sit-in participants seeking to desegregate a lunch counter.

eye contact with aggressors, how to minimize blows by covering up one another when under attack, and how to deal with arrest. In their practice sessions, students alternated the roles of peaceful protesters and angry whites, attempting to create as much as feasible the actual events that might occur. Lawson's group made plans for a lunch-counter sit-in in Nashville.

Fisk University student Diane Nash is credited for suggesting the lunch counter as the first target in the students' nonviolent assault on segregated Nashville. Coming from Chicago, she found it difficult to adjust to Jim Crow etiquette, and she viewed lunch-counter segregation as a stark reminder of the inequities and insults blacks faced daily, particularly by black women, who were often shoppers. Before the Nashville students could set their plan in motion, however, four students in Greensboro, North Carolina, made their move.

#### The Lunch Counter Sit-In

On February 1, 1960, Ezell Blair, Jr., Franklin McCain, Joseph McNeill, and David Richmond, four Greensboro students, staged the first successful sit-in of the 1960s civil rights movement by taking seats at a "whites only" lunch counter in a Woolworth's and asking for service. Their protest inspired other students in Greensboro and cities throughout the South to stand up for their rights. Blacks throughout the South had a deep sense of resentment for restaurants and department stores that took money from black consumers but refused to let them dine on their premises. News of the Greensboro Four—as they would come to be known—sparked similar protests by black student activists throughout the South.

# WE INSIST!

MAX ROACH'S - FREEDOM NOW SUITE

8002



FEATURING ABBEY LINCOLN  
COLEMAN HAWKINS, OLATUNJI

CANDID

## Album cover for Max Roach's *Freedom Now Suite*

The cover shows a sit-in and reflects the wide support for the civil rights movement.

Two weeks after the Greensboro sit-in, Lawson's Nashville students initiated a sophisticated plan of rotating protesters at a lunch counter in a downtown Nashville store. As the police arrested the seated protesters at the counter, another wave of protesters took their places. Student groups in Tallahassee, Florida, in Richmond, Virginia, in Chattanooga, Tennessee, in Charleston, South Carolina, in Chapel Hill, North Carolina, and in Atlanta, Georgia, began staging lunch-counter sit-ins. In the spring and summer of 1960, white and black young people participated in similar peaceful protests against segregated public accommodations with sit-ins at white libraries, wade-ins at white beaches, and sleep-ins in the lobbies of white hotels.

They were usually arrested for trespassing, disorderly conduct, and disobeying police officers. Many were harassed and even beaten by white mobs and tear-gassed and jailed by police. Northern youth also showed their support. Some traveled to Maryland and demonstrated in Annapolis and Baltimore, and others remained in northern cities and picketed chain stores with branches in the southern states. Not only the press but also jazz musicians captured the fervor of the student sit-ins. The album cover of *We Insist! Max Roach's Freedom Now Suite*

(1960) pictured a lunch-counter sit-in. Vocals by Abbey Lincoln and other arrangements in the album referenced the civil rights movement in the United States and the struggle against apartheid in South Africa.

In Atlanta, Morehouse student Julian Bond led a student sit-in in March 1960 that mushroomed into a larger protest movement of students from five historically black colleges and seminaries. The group published its "Appeal for Human Rights" in the *Atlanta Constitution* and *The New York Times*, capturing the insurgent mood of young black men and women in local communities throughout the South: "We do not intend to wait placidly for those rights which are already legally and morally ours. . . . We want to state clearly and unequivocally that we cannot tolerate, in a nation professing democracy and among people professing Christianity, the discriminatory conditions under which the Negro is living today in Atlanta, Georgia."

The collective demands of students found voice in the new national, student-led civil rights group, the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC). On the weekend of April 14 and 15, 1960, student activists from across the South converged at Shaw University in Raleigh, North Carolina. SNCC emerged from this conference and quickly became a powerful force in the Movement. Along with providing nonviolent soldiers for sit-ins, marches, and other demonstrations, SNCC members branched out into smaller cities and towns and worked to organize local blacks, teach nonviolence, and encourage voter registration. In Nashville, SNCC members including Diane Nash, James Bevel, John Lewis, and other members of James Lawson's workshop were successful in getting the city's mayor to consent to the desegregation of the downtown area.

Under the leadership of SNCC, the SCLC, and the NAACP, in 1961 the black community of Albany, Georgia, staged months of demonstrations in an attempt to secure fair employment for black workers, to end police brutality, and to desegregate parks, playgrounds, city buses, bus and train stations, and the public library. It was in Albany as well that the movement first used freedom songs as an integral part of demonstrations. As the movement progressed, such SNCC workers as Bernice Johnson Reagon enlisted the power of community singing in order to unite large groups of people. In vocal displays of unity, Albany's blacks sang passionately during meetings, protests, and in the jailhouse to uplift one another, adapting songs of the black church and the slave spirituals—"Ain't Gonna Let Nobody Turn Me Round," "This Little Light of Mine," and "We Shall Overcome."

#### The Albany Movement

Unfortunately, the Albany movement failed. The cunning police chief Laurie G. Pritchett knew that protesters expected public violence and that members of the press would capture police brutality in Albany, as they did in other southern cities, in such a way that would elicit sympathy for the protesters. Determined to undermine the movement, Pritchett did what SNCC and SCLC organizers had not predicted: he advised his officers not to be violent—at least not on camera. (Numerous beatings took place behind the scenes, away from the reporters and cameramen.)

Pritchett also labored to keep Albany's blacks from filling the jails as they had done during campaigns in other cities. He had read King's 1958 book *Stride toward Freedom* on the Montgomery bus boycott and was aware of the effect of the large number of protesters who filled the jails, as had happened with Gandhi and his followers in Britain's colonial Indian jails. To prevent his jail from reaching capacity, the Albany police chief made arrangements with police departments in neighboring counties to hold prisoners in jails as far as a hundred miles away. His police force arrested more than seven hundred civil rights activists, including King, during December 1961, but not for breaking Jim Crow laws. They were arrested for such infractions as parading without a permit, creating a disturbance, loitering, trespassing, and even contributing to the delinquency of minors by organizing young people to take part in demonstrations. When the "Freedom Rides" made a stop in Albany, Pritchett's henchmen arrested the riders for "obstructing traffic."

His tactics worked. The U.S. government never intervened. Other than Pritchett's manipulations, there was another reason the Kennedy administration stayed out of Albany's affairs. James A. Gray, a well-connected segregationist, was the chairman of the Georgia Democratic Party and a personal friend of John F. Kennedy. Gray controlled the area's only television station, a radio station, and was married to the daughter of the owner of the local newspaper, *The Albany Herald*. His influence in Albany and in the White House helped keep the federal government out of "local" affairs.

Finally, the Albany Movement failed because unity among the civil rights groups began to fracture. Disputes over leadership and tactics contributed to the faltering campaign, particularly rising tensions between SNCC and the SCLC. SNCC criticized the SCLC for trying to control the movement and resented the press attention on King, especially for what seemed to them like cameo appearances, to the exclusion of SNCC's efforts. The students had even begun to refer to King derisively as "De Lawd." The NAACP, in turn, shunned SNCC. In the end, organizational in-fighting precluded success.

Civil rights activists learned several lessons from Albany. The campaign taught the importance of "freedom songs" and spiritual fortitude for the struggle. It taught future

organizers that a campaign on all fronts was not as effective as targeting specific discriminatory practices one at a time. Most important, it confirmed the influential role of the press. King's arrests and jailing brought international press coverage. In the Birmingham campaign in 1963, those lessons would not be lost.

Birmingham in the 1960s was a racial powder keg with a long history of white violence toward blacks. The NAACP, outlawed in the state of Alabama as "communistic" and a "foreign corporation," had very little power in the city. So many unsolved bombings had taken place over the years that residents dubbed the city "Bombingham."

In 1956 local minister Rev. Fred L. Shuttlesworth organized the Alabama Christian Movement for Human Rights (ACHR) in hopes of challenging the racist rule of Birmingham's white business and political leaders, including its police commissioner, the well-known segregationist Eugene "Bull" Connor. Shuttlesworth and the men and women of the ACHR risked their lives and livelihoods by working to oppose the racial status quo.

Initially, Shuttlesworth and the ACHR followed the NAACP model of fighting against segregation in the courtroom. The group filed a suit against the city aimed at opening up the city's public accommodations to all residents regardless of race, and it won. However, the city responded by closing its parks to all residents. When legal injunctions failed to produce change, the ACHR turned to nonviolent direct action. Early in 1962, the ACHR aligned itself with student activists from Miles College who began a series of boycotts of downtown businesses owned by whites who refused to serve blacks as equals. The ACHR organized the student protesters, who began a massive campaign of economic withdrawal from all businesses that displayed signs designating "white" and "colored" areas, that denied blacks other than menial jobs, and that refused to serve black customers at lunch counters. Unable to get a binding agreement from local business owners, the ACHR, by now a SCLC affiliate, turned to the larger organization for help.

Key SCLC leaders, including King, believed that success in Birmingham had the potential to cripple segregation in the South and throughout the entire nation. "A victory there," King recalled in his book *Why We Can't Wait*, "might well set forces in motion to change the entire course of the drive for freedom and change." The civil rights leaders were determined not to make the same organizational mistakes that cost them a victory in Albany. "We began to prepare a top-secret file which we called 'Project C,'" wrote King—"the 'C' for Birmingham's *Confrontation* with the fight for justice and morality in race relations."

"Project C" was a focused, calculated, and meticulously planned nonviolent assault on Birmingham's white economic power structure. In May 1962, the SCLC began talks with Shuttlesworth on how to take the momentum he had already generated in Birmingham to the next level. They settled on a boycott and a mass demonstration to commence on April 3, 1963. It was a brilliant plan. By choosing the Easter season, with its heavy shopping, the movement leaders ensured that blacks' economic withdrawal would have a distinctly adverse affect on white businesses, which were accustomed to making a profit from sales to black customers. April 3 was also the day after the runoff election for mayor of Birmingham, in which the opposing candidates were Albert Bourtwell and Commissioner Bull Connor. Although both men were staunch segregationists, King and his associates feared that citywide demonstrations against the status quo before the election would cause Connor, the worse of the two, to win the race. Thus they waited until the day after Bourtwell claimed victory to strike.

The Birmingham campaign began as scheduled on April 3, 1962, without a violent response from Bull Connor and his police force. When the first wave of demonstrations began in department stores, drugstores, and other businesses with lunch counters, Connor's

men arrested them for “trespass after warning.” Taking his cue from the example of the Albany police, Connor instructed his men not to harm the protesters. However, this policy did not last long. After similar protests continued day after day, despite the certainty of arrest and incarceration, Connor lost patience with the determined activists and on April 7—Palm Sunday—Birmingham police attacked protesters with clubs and police dogs.

Connor still hoped to win the battle for Birmingham without violent confrontations, by using legal means that would not attract the press. Connor also sought to reduce the amount of outside sympathy and support for the protesters by keeping the circumstances as uneventful as possible. The city government, for example, sought to secure victory for segregation inside the quieter arena of the courtroom and jailhouse. Between four and five hundred men and women were incarcerated for participating in protest activities. On April 10, Birmingham tried to extinguish the movement through a court injunction ordering an end to all activities until the “right to demonstrate” was argued in court. Two days later, Birmingham’s black citizens shocked Connor and the rest of white Birmingham by disobeying the court order.

On April 12, Good Friday, King and Abernathy were both arrested for leading a demonstration in defiance of a court order. During his incarceration, King wrote his famous *Letter from Birmingham Jail*, a defense of his involvement in the movement and a response to white clergymen whose open letter *Letter from Birmingham Jail* in a Birmingham newspaper asked blacks to end their demonstrations for the good of the city. King, in turn, asked the white clergy to take a moral stand, since “injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere.” King’s letter explained that he was no “outside agitator,” as local segregationist reporters and city officials often labeled him and other nonresident blacks, white allies, Jewish supporters, and other activists. They protested, King insisted, because “privileged groups seldom give up their privileges voluntarily.”

An interesting feature of the Birmingham campaign is the active role of children. The SCLC decided that children could take part in the growing protest movement, and although some local parents disapproved of their children taking part in the protests, young people by the hundreds and later, the thousands, began to attend nonviolence workshops similar to those led by James Lawson in Nashville several years earlier.

Exasperated, Bull Connor unleashed his full fury on the demonstrators—men, women, and children. Television news reporters who came to Birmingham to cover the protests broadcast scenes of police violence, resulting in greater sympathy for the city’s black community. The monetary donations that poured in *Victory* from across the nation were used to bail out jailed protesters. Without the national press, segregation in Birmingham may have taken months or even years to end. With the news coverage, it took only five weeks. On May 10, 1963, city business leaders reached a formal agreement with the SCLC, pledging to desegregate lunch counters, rest rooms, fitting rooms, and drinking fountains in planned stages within ninety days after signing; hiring and upgrading the employment of blacks; and cooperating with the movement’s lawyers to work for jailed protesters.

The Birmingham Movement brought a much-needed victory for King, the SCLC, and the countless protesters whose courage and determination made it possible. However, a signed pact with the city’s white power players did little to change the violent opposition to black advancement that gave the city the nickname “Bombingham.”

Bombs exploded at the home of Martin Luther King’s brother, Rev. E. D. King, and near the hotel room in which Dr. King was staying while in Birmingham, forcing the Kennedy administration to act on behalf of the city’s blacks. Abandoning the hands-off stance he had taken in

## Window in Time

### Why Families Should Demonstrate

A hundred times I have been asked why we have allowed little children to march in demonstrations, to freeze and suffer in jails, to be exposed to bullets and dynamite. The questions imply that we have revealed a want of family feeling or a recklessness toward family security. The answer is simple. Our children and our families are maimed a little every day of our lives. If we can end an incessant torture by a single climactic confrontation, the risks are acceptable. Moreover, our family life will be born anew if we fight together. Other families may be fortunate enough to be able to protect their young from danger. Our families, as we have seen, are different. Oppression has again and again divided and splintered them. We are a people torn apart from era to era. It is logical, moral and psychologically constructive for us to resist oppression united as families. Out of this unity, out of the bond of fighting together, forges will come. The inner strength and integrity will make us whole again.

Martin Luther King, Jr., *Where Do We Go from Here: Chaos or Community* (New York, 1967), p. 128.



Albany, President Kennedy ordered 3,000 federal troops to take positions near Birmingham and considered federalizing the Alabama National Guard. Press coverage of the events in Birmingham played a key role in his decision. Birmingham played no small role in Kennedy's proposal for broader civil rights legislation. In September 1963, the bombing of a black church would take the lives of four little girls, ages 11 and 14—the movement's youngest martyrs.

Among the most memorable civil rights campaigns was Freedom Summer 1964, which was sponsored by the Council of Federated Organizations (COFO), an umbrella of civil rights groups including SNCC, the SCLC, CORE, and the NAACP. Civil rights and liberal reform groups throughout the nation were involved, although SNCC played the most prominent role and was the organization with which Freedom Summer has become identified. It was SNCC worker Bob Moses's idea to bring hundreds of northern white students into the South in order to advance a massive interracial campaign to register Mississippi's black voters. Moses, a leader in both SNCC and COFO, argued that the presence of the young northern white volunteers, overwhelmingly from affluent families, would attract the national media's and the federal government's attention to conditions in the Delta and specifically to the lack of political rights for the great mass of the Delta's rural residents. SNCC also intended for the summer project to promote a strong grassroots movement on the part of black Mississippians. In this regard, SNCC played a key role in working with community residents in challenging the state's racially exclusive Democratic Party by means of an alternative party open to all races—the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party.

lege  
they  
alre  
blac  
ism  
civil  
play  
worr  
to ta  
work  
conse  
feare  
V  
to eat  
realiz  
woma  
at his  
sit dov  
everyt  
canva  
D:  
gone r  
man n  
studen  
August  
By  
dom I  
delega  
sented  
the rac  
rejecte  
disillus  
months  
Yet  
Virginia  
veteran  
nationa  
fight for  
number  
in 1964  
black vo  
racism, l  
by white

Over the course of the summer, more than seven hundred white volunteers from colleges and universities in the North and West descended on Mississippi. Divided into groups, they underwent a weeklong orientation in Oxford, Ohio. In black communities that had already begun to organize, the white volunteers were welcomed and placed in the homes of black families. The students were assigned to forty-three project sites. With a sense of idealism and a commitment to change the racial status quo, many had already been involved in civil rights activism in the North.

But the white students' arrival was not without some tension and discomfort. Bob Moses played the crucial role in trying to assuage differences. Some of the black staff members worried that a large white contingent would undermine the ability of the local population to take the reins of leadership, necessary for a grassroots social movement. Black SNCC workers, most of them from the South, were acutely aware of the dangerous, potentially fatal consequences of interracial fraternization. In the highly oppressive and violent Delta, blacks feared for their lives, employment, and general security.

White civil rights volunteer Sally Belfrage described the difficulty of merely sitting down to eat with a black sharecropper family that summer. In the home of that family, Belfrage realized that the head of the household, Mr. Amos, had never sat as an equal with a white woman present and was not psychologically ready to do so. Her pleading for him to join her at his own dinner table went unheeded, and so she resorted to an order: "I begged him to sit down; he wouldn't; I *told* him to sit down. He did in great confusion. Somehow or other, everything was all right after that." In other instances, blacks would simply avoid whites who canvassed their neighborhoods for voter registration.

Danger was not confined to punishment against blacks. Three civil rights workers had gone missing in Philadelphia, Mississippi on June 21, two CORE staff members—a black man named James Cheney and a white man named Michael Schwerner—and one white student volunteer, Andrew Goodman, who had come in the first wave of volunteers. In early August, the bodies of the three men were discovered.

By summer's end, more than 80,000 persons had registered in the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party. In August 1964 the MFDP held its state convention and sent delegates to the National Democratic Convention in Atlantic City. Although it presented its case to the Credentials Committee on August 22, the MFDP failed to unseat the racist state party by claiming to be the legitimate Democratic Party. The MFDP rejected a proposed compromise for only two seats at large with no voting power. The disillusioned SNCC members would move ideologically toward black power in the months ahead.

Yet Freedom Summer had not failed. As a result, local leaders Fannie Lou Hamer, Virginia Gray, Amzie Moore, and Aaron Henry were but a few of the Mississippi civil rights veterans who gained increasing stature as statewide leaders and, in Hamer's case, even national stature. After the passage of the Voting Rights Act in 1965 they continued the fight for political empowerment in the sustained effort to advance their communities. The number of registered black voters rose to 250,000 in 1968, more than tripling its highpoint in 1964 and accounting for 60 percent of all blacks eligible to vote. The growing number of black voters had not averted tensions within the black community, nor had it ended white racism, but politics in the state were changing and in the next decade race-baiting rhetoric by white politicians was steadily silenced.



Freedom Summer had done even more than this, however. SNCC's freedom schools, which were separate from COFO's voting-rights drive, gave thousands of Mississippi youth an educational experience that most would otherwise never have received. According to SNCC leader Charlie Cobb, the founder of the freedom school concept, the schools were intended to serve as "parallel institutions."

Mississippi allocated four times the money to white schools than to black schools. Freedom school students were taught to question and explore, as well as receiving basic reading, writing, arithmetic, and history lessons that emphasized black struggle and pride—a curriculum uncommon in southern public schools. About fifty freedom schools throughout the state taught more than 2,500 primary-to-secondary school children that summer. The curriculum was derived from a similar curriculum used in Boston by black parents who challenged their city's de facto school segregation through boycotts that same year and autonomous community-led schools. According to SNCC historian Clayborne Carson, the Mississippi freedom schools had an impact on voter registration. Parents acknowledged gaining political awareness and the willingness to struggle for their rights because of the courageous example of their children.

Freedom Summer 1964 had also brought out-of-state groups of doctors and lawyers to Mississippi. The Medical Committee for Human Rights (MCHR), organized in June 1964, aided both volunteers and the black poor through immunization and pediatric services. Northern lawyers, ranging from the more moderate politics of the NAACP Legal Defense Fund to the leftist politics of the National Lawyers Guild, provided legal services. George W. Crockett, who would be elected a judge in Michigan's Wayne County (Detroit) in 1965 and would later go to the United States Congress, established the National Lawyers Guild's office in Jackson, Mississippi, and managed the Mississippi Project (a coalition of the NLG and other leading civil rights legal organizations), which provided legal services during that summer. Medical and legal professionals set up programs to continue the work begun in the state. For example, from 1965 to 1967, California-based black psychiatrist Alvin Poussaint provided medical care to civil rights workers as Field Director of the MCHR.

Perhaps because of the sacrifice involved, the movement's greatest moments invariably contained tragedy along with triumph. The Selma-to-Montgomery march in March 1965 was no exception. The idea for the march took shape in February 1965, after the murder of black SNCC worker Jimmie Lee Jackson, who had been active in voter registration. He was killed while trying to protect his mother. SNCC and the SCLC decided to march from Selma to Montgomery to protest Jackson's death, as well as the denial of black voting rights. Although Martin Luther King, Jr., inopportunely backed out of the march, members of the SCLC and SNCC continued the plan to march. On March 7, 1965, nearly five hundred protesters, many just out of church and still in their Sunday clothes, walked two abreast in a line the length of several blocks. There was no singing, SNCC marcher John Lewis recalled, "just the sound of scuffling feet" somberly moving toward the Edmund Pettus Bridge. Lewis and the other marchers were met on the other side by the full frontal attack of 150 white police troopers—some on foot and others on horseback. White onlookers, called "possemen," joined in, mercilessly beating the nonviolent protesters.

The violence against the demonstrators was so vicious that the date is remembered as "Bloody Sunday." The press coverage shocked the nation and the world. The twenty-four-year old white Unitarian minister, Rev. James Reeb of Boston, who had gone south to support the voting rights drive, was beaten to death. On March 21, in a third attempt to march the fifty-four miles from Selma to Montgomery, the demonstrators were finally



The  
De  
Ra  
  
succe  
remir  
teach  
white  
where  
T  
protec  
federa  
Luthe  
rights  
Pr  
tor in  
have b  
to be  
televi  
but all  
the sig  
gushin  
cattle-p



### The Selma March

Demonstrators conclude the Selma March as they enter Montgomery in March 1965. In the front line are Ralph Abernathy, Ralph Bunche, Martin Luther King, Jr., and Coretta King.

successful. An estimated 3,200 people of all races marched in a mile-long column. As Lewis reminisced in his autobiography, “Ministers, nuns, labor leaders, factory workers, school teachers, firemen—people from all walks of life, from all parts of the country, black and white and Asian and Native American, walked with us as we approached the same bridge where we’d been beaten two weeks before.”

The marchers walked past the Alabama troopers on this occasion with no incident. To protect the demonstrators, President Johnson had called the Alabama National Guard into federal service. On the final day of the march, demonstrators stood 50,000 strong. Martin Luther King, Jr., who a few months earlier had received the Nobel Peace Prize for his civil rights leadership, told the crowd in Montgomery that “no tide of racism can stop us.”

Press coverage of white violence against nonviolent black demonstrators was a key factor in gaining sympathy for the movement from persons who may have been skeptical of protesters’ motivations or presumed them to be troublemakers. Newspaper photographs and particularly television coverage brought to the public eye, in fact for the world to see, the unflattering but all-too-vivid underside of American society. And it was difficult to remain unfeeling at the sight of black men and women thrown into the air by the powerful force of firemen’s gushing water hoses, or bitten by police dogs, or struck by southern policemen with electric cattle-prods and billy clubs and then carted off to jail.

### The Importance of Press Coverage

Most people were startled to see television scenes of peaceful black students in neat attire being attacked by angry, hate-filled white mobs—pushing, spitting, striking, taunting, and screaming racist epithets at them. Many reporters confessed their surprise to see the disciplined and orderly composure of such students in the face of insults and violence, and all this in order to eat at a lunch counter or to attend a state university or a public school. It was shocking to see in a magazine the photograph of the mangled, unrecognizable face of the teenage boy Emmett Till from Chicago, who in 1955 while visiting relatives in the Mississippi Delta was lynched for allegedly whistling at (or, as another version had it, saying “Bye, baby” to) a white woman. The boy’s mother, Mamie Till, insisted on publicizing the horrific image so that the world could see evidence of southern atrocities.

The press made it too painful to accept the lives cut short—the assassinated Mississippi NAACP field officer Medgar Evers, the murdered young civil rights workers James Cheney, Andrew Goodman, and Michael Schwerner, the four little girls martyred in a Birmingham church, and finally Martin Luther King, Jr., slain in 1968 by a sniper’s bullet. It was all too horrifying to count the list of the dead—a white housewife from Detroit, a black educator from Washington, D.C., the many others young and old, southern and northern—too many to name.

Conversely, reporters on civil rights—the “race beat,” as they called it—provided at times some measure of protection for civil rights protesters. When the nightly news began to broadcast civil rights events to the nation, local mayors and commissioners pressured police forces to avoid making their cities look bad. According to writers Gene Roberts and Hank Klibanoff, a reporter’s camera lens and notebook were often the only weapons that kept protesters safe from beatings by the police. The press also captured for posterity memorable moments of the civil rights movement that invoke a glorious moment in the history of this nation. No better example is the documentary footage of the March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom in August 1963 and the climactic speech of the day, Martin Luther King’s “I Have a Dream.” Replayed on television and in the media for various purposes, the images and rhetoric of the march are today emblazoned on the national consciousness as a source of pride.

### Movement Women

African American women in the civil rights movement came from varying backgrounds and occupations, from the North and the South, and from rural and urban areas. They represented a vast age range, some highly educated and others with little formal schooling. Some women were new recruits to the movement and some decades-long veterans.

Women such as Joanne Gibson Robinson, Johnnie Carr, and Rosa Parks had worked in various civil rights and reform groups in Montgomery, Alabama, since the 1940s, and Robinson and Carr played critical roles in the day-to-day operation of the boycott. NAACP branch president in the 1950s, Daisy Bates began her fight against racial injustice as a journalist in the 1940s, writing articles in the newspaper, the *Arkansas State Press*, run by her and her husband. She assisted the Little Rock Nine in preparation for their integration of Central High School in 1957, conducting strategy sessions in her home. New to the movement were young, energetic women students such as Ruby Doris Smith Robinson, Diane Nash, Prathia Hall, Bernice Johnson Reagon, Ann Moody, and Unita Blackwell, all of whom contributed to the ideological and cultural work of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee.

Movement women left no singular type of legacy but played various roles throughout the 1950s and 1960s. Recent studies show that in school desegregation cases at the primary

## Window in Time

### Charlayne Hunter Integrates the University of Georgia

Skillfully, she [Constance Baker Motley] set traps that would cause the University's officials to ensnare themselves in their own words. In the world of deception they lived in, they could not publicly acknowledge that they or their admissions policies were racist. So Mrs. Motley asked if they would favor the admission of a qualified Negro to the University, if all other things, like dormitory space, were available. Registrar Walter Danner answered yes. The news story in the *Atlanta Journal and Constitution* the following day revealed her strategy. It read "The university . . . registrar has testified in Federal Court here that he favors admission of qualified Negroes to the University."

Source: Charlayne Hunter Gault, "'Heirs to a Legacy of Struggle': Charlayne Hunter Integrates the University of Georgia," in *Sisters in the Struggle: African American Women in the Civil Rights-Black Power Movement*, edited by Bettye Collier Thomas and V. P. Franklin. New York: New York University Press, 2001, p. 79.



and secondary school levels, girls outnumbered boys in legal suits. Women were the initiators, as well, in the desegregation of state universities at the undergraduate level. The first such effort was made by Arthurine Lucy **School Desegregation and Constance Baker Motley** at the University of Alabama in 1956. The university was ordered to admit her, but the students and townspeople of Tuscaloosa resorted to violence to prevent her from attending. Even with heavy police escort and in the company of the dean of women, her car was pelted with stones, and some people even jumped on top of the car. When she was suspended because of the rioting, she accused university officials of conspiring to keep her out of the university.

The first successful integration of a public university was accomplished by a woman, Charlayne Hunter (later PBS correspondent Charlayne Hunter Gault), and a man, Hamilton Holmes. High school classmates in Covington, Georgia, the two waged a legal battle for admission to the University of Georgia. The university's two-year-long effort to deny their admission proved no match for the students' attorneys—Vernon Jordan, recently out of Howard Law School, and Constance Baker Motley, from the New York office of the NAACP Legal Defense Fund. In her recollection of this time, Hunter Gault praised Motley's masterful legal strategy.

Charlayne Hunter and Hamilton Holmes entered the University of Georgia in the fall of 1961 under court order and amid a crowd of white students shouting racial epithets. Over the next two days, whites burned crosses and formed a mob outside Hunter's dormitory. It took state patrolmen and tear gas to quell the disorder. Yet their arrival on campus was far less tumultuous than that of Arthurine Lucy, and they would remain and graduate.

The story of Charlayne Hunter—the first successful university desegregation—was overshadowed by the gunshots, riots, and intervention by President Kennedy that greeted Air Force

veteran James Meredith when he presented himself for registration at the University of Mississippi one year later, in 1962. Meredith also benefited from having Constance Baker Motley as his lawyer. She would bring her legal skill again and again to the fight for the admission of African Americans to state universities, in 1963 winning entrance for Vivian Malone and James Hood into the University of Alabama and for Harvey Gantt into Clemson University. As a civil rights lawyer, Motley won nine of the ten cases that she argued before the United States Supreme Court. In 1964, she was the first black woman elected to a seat on the New York state senate, and in 1966 she was appointed a federal district judge by President Lyndon Johnson.

In the voting-rights campaigns in Mississippi during the 1960s, local women proved dynamic and fearless organizers. Many came to prominence working with SNCC and CORE. The student-led movement's decentralized leadership structure and its advocacy of grassroots participation were especially encouraging of local women. The COFO voting-rights campaign in Mississippi in 1964 brought women into the movement in large numbers. They attended meetings in greater number than men and performed much of the voter registration work. Fannie Lou Hamer, Victoria Gray, and Annie Devine—all Mississippi women—led marches to the courthouses, led in the formation of the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party, and ran for public office. Mothers came to the movement often as a result of their children's involvement. Women's church work and religious beliefs facilitated their participation in the movement, even when male church leaders, including ministers, refused to join in.

#### Voting Rights Campaigns

Several women have become icons of the movement, revered for their contributions. Next to Rosa Parks, Ella Baker and Fannie Lou Hamer are probably the most well-known female contributors to civil rights history. Their backgrounds were entirely different, and yet they both represented a style of leadership that sought to empower ordinary people. A field secretary for the NAACP in the 1940s, as well as national director of NAACP branches, the tireless Baker traveled throughout the United States, building up local memberships and urging the branches to confront forms of racial inequality in their specific locations. As Baker stated on one occasion, she did the best she could “to try to jolt or scare them [the branches] into action.”

#### Ella Baker and Fannie Lou Hamer

Executive secretary of the black ministerial-led Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) upon its founding in 1957, Baker helped to convene the meeting that brought into existence the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee in 1960. Dubbed the “political and spiritual midwife” of SNCC, she found a captive audience among the young men and women in the organization. As their mentor and guide, Baker is credited with imparting to SNCC her predilection for democratic exchange and loosely structured leadership, as opposed to the top-down, more authoritarian style she witnessed at the NAACP and the SCLC. She valued the intellect and talents of ordinary people who lacked high educational attainment and financial affluence, and she conveyed a commitment to empowering local people in grassroots movements for racial equality. Mississippi leaders such as Fannie Lou Hamer, Victoria Gray, and Annie Devine represented such local leaders, with whom SNCC would work.

Fannie Lou Hamer, a native of Sunflower County, Mississippi, went to the fields to work at age six. By twelve years of age, her formal schooling had ended. Hamer found herself at the vanguard of the civil rights movement when she went to her local courthouse to register to vote along with others who had been recruited through the efforts of SNCC and the SCLC. Threatened and arrested in Winona, Mississippi, for entering the white side of the bus terminal, Hamer was beaten viciously after the local jailers learned of her voting



Fannie Lou Hamer testifies before the Credentials Committee at the 1964 Democratic National Convention.

activities. All the women with Hamer were beaten, but she was singled out with special severity because of her reputation as a local leader. Despite threats and acts of violence against her, Hamer struggled with even greater intensity in the local movement as a field worker for SNCC, mobilizing eligible voters to register. She achieved national renown by describing the violence against her at the 1964 Democratic National Convention, when she testified before the members of the Credentials Committee as a delegate of the ultimately unseated Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party. Hamer never lost her local focus, running (although unsuccessfully) for Congress on the MFDP ticket in her district in 1965.

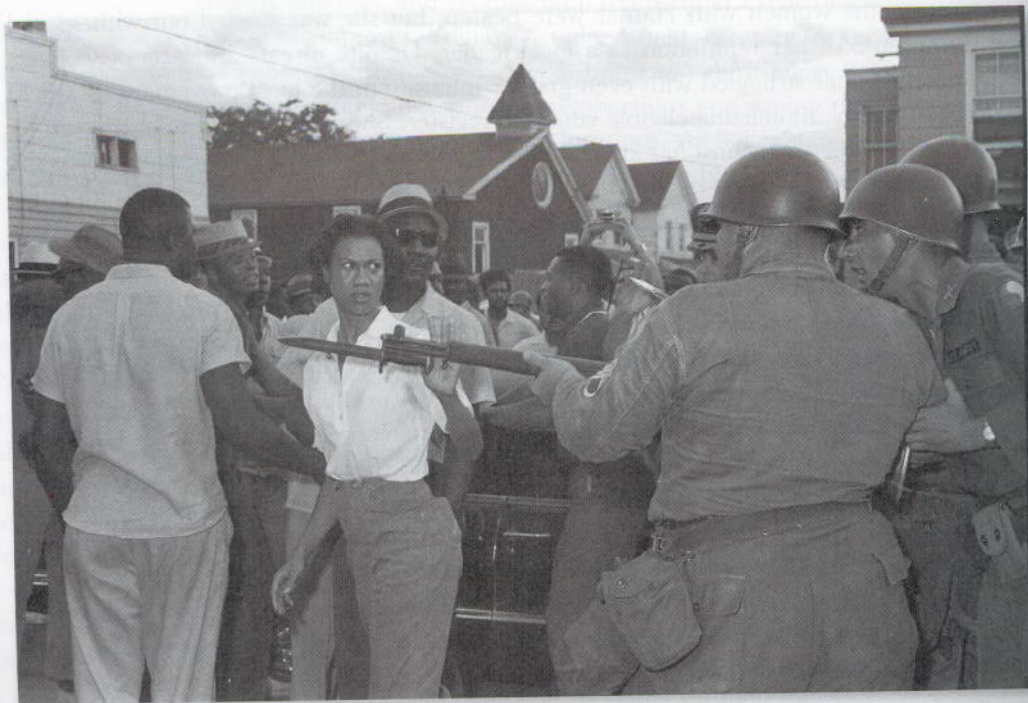
Local women, while joining new civil rights organizations and campaigns in the South, were not new to resisting racial inequality. Nor did they suddenly find courage to act or gain understanding of their oppression from their acquaintance with SNCC workers. Female grassroots activists were long aware of poverty, hard work, and racism, but they never accepted their subordinate and oppressed position. Sharecroppers Fannie Lou Hamer of Mississippi and Georgia Mae Turner of Tennessee, and the many others in similarly dire economic conditions, found themselves and their families evicted from the land because of their involvement in the civil rights struggles of the 1960s. They remained committed to fighting for racial equality based on a longstanding hatred of injustice.

Septima Clark exemplified a different version of longstanding commitment to the struggle. A 1916 graduate of Avery College in Charleston, she moved to Johns Island off the South Carolina coast to teach reading skills to illiterate adults and children who worked as sharecroppers and farmers there. The **Septima Clark** experience led her to question the disparities between schools for blacks and whites and also between the salaries of black and white teachers. Returning to Charleston, she actively

supported the NAACP's effort in 1918–1919 to hire black teachers in the public schools of Charleston. She went door-to-door obtaining signatures for a petition, which ended successfully in the hiring of more black teachers. In the mid-1940s, she formed part of the successful class-action suit for the equalization of teachers' pay in South Carolina. In 1956, Clark lost her teaching job because of her membership in the NAACP. She also taught in her citizenship school, sponsored by the Highlander Folk School, and throughout the 1960s she developed citizenship schools in other cities in the South under the auspices of the SCLC after state officials in Tennessee forced Highlander to close in 1959. Clark's belief in the principles for which she fought sustained her through dark days of intimidation. This would be the case for other women in the movement.

#### Strength through Religious Faith

According to scholar Charles Payne, many movement women derived strength from their religious faith, and they encouraged other women by repeating biblical messages in speeches, by singing such freedom songs as "Ain't Gonna Let Nobody Turn Me 'Round," "We Shall Overcome," "Keep Your Eyes on the Prize," and "This Little Light of Mine," as well as employing familiar symbols and strategies used in women's missionary societies. They tended to focus their appeals on other women, fully cognizant of the inspirational power of the black religious tradition. For example, Ruby Hurley, a NAACP field worker in the South in the 1950s, recalled drawing from the Bible to embolden persons who knew all too well the threat of violence. "I found using the Bible to be effective in saying to our people, 'You go to church on Sunday or you go every time the church doors are open,'" she said. "You say 'amen' before the minister even has the word out of his mouth . . . Yet you tell me you're afraid. Now



Civil rights leader Gloria Richardson practiced self-defense rather than nonviolence in militant protests in Cambridge, Maryland, 1963.

how can y  
sing that C  
Christian  
tered the  
voter regi  
hindering  
Socio  
functione  
such as C  
because c  
Although  
women w  
Maryland  
black Me  
in the fac  
praised b  
under he  
Cambrid

#### The No

The J  
advocate  
helped to  
In sig  
of Africa  
their con  
affairs. T  
ity to loc  
impossib

In C  
tight elec  
the outcc  
undoubte  
New Yor  
(1959). I  
bers. In 1  
of the U  
was retur  
of Detroi  
twentieth

By 1  
African  
holding  
edented  
service b

how can you be afraid and be honest when you say ‘My faith look up to Thee’ or when you sing that God’s going to take care of you? If you don’t believe it, then you are not really the Christian you say you are.” Working in Greenwood, Mississippi, SNCC members headquartered there spoke of hearing Fannie Lou Hamer sing and preach in local churches about voter registration. At times the outspoken Hamer criticized the pastors of those churches for hindering the movement.

Sociologist Belinda Robnett calls such civil rights women “bridge leaders,” since they functioned as the link between local community members and external organizations, such as COFO, SNCC, or the NAACP. They influenced people to work with and for them because of the relationships that they fostered in churches and in daily community service. Although women were crucial to the direct-action phase of the civil rights movement, not all women were nonviolent. Outspoken civil rights leader Gloria Richardson from Cambridge, Maryland, led a militant campaign of sit-ins in June 1963 that resulted in mass arrests, when black Marylanders including Richardson herself brandished rifles in armed self-defense in the face of white mobs. Certainly exceptional, the gun-toting Gloria Richardson was praised by black nationalist leader Malcolm X. An article on the Cambridge Movement under her leadership noted: “No one really talks seriously about practicing non-violence in Cambridge.”

### The Northern Side of the Movement

The March on Washington in 1963, which brought together a quarter-million civil rights advocates, provided visible proof of the many grassroots movements outside the South that helped to forge the national civil rights movement.

In significant ways, the North appeared different from the South. The steady migration of African Americans to the North (the northeastern, midwestern, and western states) and their concentration in large industrial cities gave them a new, powerful voice in political affairs. The growing political efficacy among northern black voters permitted them the ability to look to local, state, and national government for redress of racial injustice, in a way impossible for southern blacks.

In Chicago, Detroit, and other cities, blacks frequently held the balance of power in tight elections, and in some states African Americans were periodically regarded as crucial to the outcome of national elections. The northern black urban vote undoubtedly influenced the enactment of fair employment laws in **Electoral Power** New York (1945), Michigan, Minnesota, and Pennsylvania (1955), and California and Ohio (1959). In the 1950s, black elected officials began to be elected to Congress in multiple numbers. In 1954 Illinois sent black Democrat William Dawson to the House of Representatives of the United States Congress for his seventh consecutive term, and Adam Clayton Powell was returned from New York for his sixth term. When that same year Charles C. Diggs, Jr., of Detroit was elected to the House on the Democratic side, it marked the first time in the twentieth century that three African Americans sat in Congress.

By 1956 forty blacks served in state legislatures—all outside the South. The number of African Americans elected to city councils, judgeships, and boards of education, as well as holding high-level federal appointments, increased in number, leaving a record of unprecedented achievement. In 1949 William H. Hastie, with many years of distinguished public service behind him, became a judge on the Third United States Circuit Court of Appeals.



Thurgood Marshall went to the circuit court in 1961, resigning in 1965 to become Solicitor General of the United States. In 1953 J. Ernest Wilkins became assistant secretary of labor, E. Frederick Morrow became an administrative assistant in the executive offices of the president, and Scovel Richardson was appointed chairman of the United States Parole Board.

African Americans worked as secretaries and assistants in the offices of several senators and members of the House of Representatives, while others served as registrar of the Treasury, as governor of the Virgin Islands, as assistant to the director of Selective Service, and as assistant to the secretary of health, education, and welfare. African Americans had begun to make their presence felt in the nation's capital.

Yet the signs carried by the thousands who marched along the mall on that hot August day in 1963 told a very different story. From northeastern, midwestern, and western states,

#### Battling Discrimination

civil rights proponents of all races rode in airplanes, buses, trains, and cars to Washington. A black man from Chicago even traveled the entire way on roller skates. Northern civil rights activists traveled to D.C. to do more than lend support to the southern freedom struggle. Throughout the 1950s and 1960s, they had waged targeted campaigns, mobilizing their own local constituencies to launch boycotts, direct-action sit-ins, marches, and other forms of protest. In the 1950s, the northern civil rights movement did not confront neighborhood signs reading "For Whites Only" or laws mandating schools by race (that is, de jure segregation), or practices denying them the right to vote. They did, however, face neighborhoods and jobs that were closed to them and de facto school segregation.

Northern blacks had also begun to fight back against discrimination, and these struggles were in full swing at the time of the 1963 March on Washington. For example, in Philadelphia between 1959 and 1963 four hundred black ministers and other civil rights activists, led by Rev. Leon Sullivan, waged a series of consumer boycotts, which they called a "selective patronage" campaign, against employers with a record of racial discrimination in hiring. More than two hundred companies responded to the pressure by promising to open thousands of skilled and unskilled jobs to blacks. The many Philadelphians who came to Washington for the march in August 1963 perceived their multi-year campaign as complementary to the Birmingham campaign that same year.

Since the 1940s, moreover, Californians had been struggling against discrimination in housing, schools, and jobs. In July 1963 members of the NAACP and CORE marched together against the Torrance housing project in Los Angeles. At the time of the March on Washington, the local California NAACP was embroiled in negotiations with the Los Angeles Board of Education to develop a "pupil swap" program between predominantly black and white schools, while also pursuing legal action in the form of a lawsuit against the Pasadena school system for racial discrimination.

Days before the August 28, 1963, March on Washington, demonstrators had become so disorderly in St. Louis in their picketing of a local bank that a court injunction demanded that their protest cease. Blacks in Chicago and Boston were in the midst of school demonstrations. Boston blacks had led a successful "Stay Out For Freedom Day" in June of that year against the city's de facto segregation, in what would turn out to be a decade-long fight. In February 1964, nearly 20,000 students walked out of the Boston public schools, many of the boycotters attending freedom schools that had been set up as alternative learning sites. Like their counterparts in Boston, black Chicagoans faced ill-equipped and overcrowded schools. A month before the March on Washington, the Chicago CORE held a sit-in at the city's board of education.

Detroit's "Walk to Freedom" on June 23, 1963, offered a fascinating preview of the Washington, D.C., march. Civil rights activism began to increase in the city during the summer of 1962. Detroit's black residents suffered an unemployment rate nearly twice that of whites between 1957 and 1961, and in 1962 civil rights groups began to call upon unions to open apprenticeship programs to all, regardless of race. Having tallied up the civil rights record since the city's infamous 1943 race riot, activists found the record wanting and thus mobilized a march for June 23, 1963. The press estimated that 125,000 persons were in attendance. The main speaker, Martin Luther King, Jr., emphasized themes that he would repeat at the March on Washington two months later—the metaphor of the "dream" of racial equality and reconciliation, of the broken promise of freedom a century after Emancipation, and the ubiquitous threat to justice when injustice goes unchecked in any location. King told his applauding audience: "Work with determination to get rid of any segregation and discrimination in Detroit, realizing that injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere."

In the North, no issue appeared more intractable than housing. The black ghetto, a fixture in urban America since the early twentieth century, seemingly was made permanent by the black migration of World War II and the postwar years. If African Americans attempted to move into neighborhoods where they were not wanted, they often met stern resistance, even extreme hostility and violence. In the postwar years, Detroit's working-class neighborhoods vowed to keep blacks out. White housewives carried their babies in one arm and in the other signs reading: "My home is my castle, I will die defending it. The Lord separated the races."

#### The Problem of Housing

Discrimination in housing was both a private practice and a public policy. Between 1935 and 1950, 11 million homes were built. Wherever there was federal assistance, the racial policy was laid down in the manual of the Federal Housing Administration, which declared: "If a neighborhood is to retain stability it is necessary that properties shall be continued to be occupied by the same social and racial classes." That policy entrenched racial bias in housing, making it one of the most difficult tasks for government to undo.

Levittown, the postwar development of 10,000 homes for veterans on New York's Long Island, was subsidized by federal money even though it denied residence to blacks with a clause stipulating that property could not be sold nor rented nor "used or occupied by a person other than members of the Caucasian race." In New York City, the policy of excluding blacks from the Stuyvesant Town housing project aroused a controversy that stimulated the drive for legislation against discrimination in housing. In Chicago's Trumbull Park in 1954, a black family caused a near riot after moving into a federally subsidized housing project.

As whites fled from central cities to more attractive outlying urban neighborhoods or to the suburbs, African Americans found housing not on their own terms but on those arranged by owners, mortgage companies, and other groups. All too often they paid premium prices for housing that was becoming dilapidated. Racial bias persisted, although by 1962 seventeen states and fifty-six cities had passed laws or resolutions against housing discrimination. Banks, insurance companies, real estate boards, and brokers benefited from segregated housing, for which they extracted maximum profit for a minimum of expenditure. If redlining (banks' refusal to lend to blacks) and restrictive covenants failed to discourage black residents from settling in white neighborhoods, then vandalism and violence were often used. The lack of progress appeared daunting.

In 1951 black veteran Harvey Clark and his family were driven from their apartment in the Chicago suburb of Cicero when an angry mob broke windows and defaced and burned

the building. Fifteen years later, black Chicagoans were still marching for open housing in Cicero. Martin Luther King, Jr., who would be brought to his knees by a rock hurled at him from an angry white mob in Chicago during a demonstration in August 1966, observed that he had never seen greater racial antipathy, not even in the South.

In northern cities African Americans were greatly embittered to discover that they were being exploited by landlords and real estate brokers who took their rent money but refused to comply with the minimum housing and health standards established by the city and the state. Just as they paid high rents for vermin-infested, deteriorating slum housing, they also received inferior education in neighborhood schools, few job opportunities, and little equality in public services.

**In Cities: Substandard Housing and Poor Education**

Even worse, cities refused to enforce their own antibias housing codes. This discovery led blacks in New York City in 1963 to launch rent strikes against slumlords and in Chicago in 1966 to call for Martin Luther King's assistance in their struggle against housing discrimination. In California, the supporters of equal opportunity in housing suffered a setback in 1964 when voters overwhelmingly adopted a cleverly framed state constitutional amendment ostensibly guaranteeing a property owner the right to dispose of his property to any person he chose. Backed by the California Real Estate Association and the National Association of Real Estate Boards, the amendment was in fact meant to be a bulwark against open occupancy in housing. In 1966 the California supreme court declared the amendment unconstitutional. But the state's African Americans continued to experience difficulty in finding decent housing.

## The Landmarks and Limitations of Government

The "rights revolution" that began in the postwar period and extended through the 1960s could not have occurred without the role of all three branches of the federal government. In the United States, where the guarantee of citizenship rights resides in the rule of law, the victory over segregation, disenfranchisement, and other forms of "legal" institutional racism had to be won ultimately through landmark actions in the form of presidential executive orders, congressional legislation, and judicial decisions. Not since Reconstruction had the federal government played such a direct role in mitigating racial inequality. However, the various federal civil rights landmarks achieved in the 1950s and 1960s also betrayed limitations—the failure to transcend gradual or watered-down change, to overcome circumvented and even blatant non-enforcement of new civil rights laws, and to offer only token gestures of racial progress. Governmental legitimation of blacks' rights occurred slowly—as an incremental process pushed forward at every point by grassroots activism, the members and leaders of civil rights organizations, and world opinion. For African Americans, denied the vote or equal access to housing, jobs, and education, the illusion of equality would not be sufficient.

By the 1950s, black Americans stood poised to launch persistent, uncompromising demands on the national government. Not a casualty of the Cold War in that decade, the civil rights movement embraced the tenets of liberal democracy in the struggle for equal rights, justice, and national citizenship—thus fully rejecting what its members called "second-class citizenship."

The fiercely anticommunist milieu of the late 1940s and early 1950s had certainly changed the configuration of civil rights groups and their ability to collaborate. The Red

**Civil Rights in the 1950s**

Scare  
Cong  
"fello  
such p  
invok  
south  
a new  
racy, t  
hypoc  
of rac  
Baptis  
had v  
Washi  
highes  
Go  
under  
at the  
civil ri  
Memo  
show t  
messag  
and pr  
Ou  
betwee  
whose  
our pra  
ment's  
Th  
govern  
and the  
tile whi  
the way  
chiseme  
all-whit  
Sin  
to take  
The N/  
and late  
involvin  
number  
Warren  
passage  
played a  
cases th  
criminat  
tions, an

Scare hysteria had caused the demise of such left-leaning organizations as the National Negro Congress and the Council on African Affairs, and it led to purges of alleged communists and “fellow-travelers” from longstanding civil rights organizations, including the NAACP and such progressive labor unions as the CIO. In the 1950s, desegregation was slowed down by invoking anticommunism against virtually all protest organizations, and especially against the southern branches of the NAACP—yet the civil rights movement was not quelled. Indeed, a new generation of activists, adopting the Cold War’s rhetoric of freedom and democracy, turned their critique on the American government itself. They condemned the nation’s hypocrisy in failing to live up to its democratic creed and emphasized the deleterious effects of racism on America’s moral authority as leader of the Free World. In 1957 the young Baptist minister Martin Luther King, Jr., of Alabama, who little more than a year earlier had vaulted into national prominence, declared in a speech before thousands of listeners in Washington, D.C., that the abridgement of blacks’ voting rights was “a tragic betrayal of the highest mandates of our democratic traditions and it is democracy turned upside down.”

Government leaders were not unaware of the nation’s flaws. President Harry S. Truman, under whose administration the Cold War began, conveyed a similar message in his address at the annual convention of the NAACP a decade earlier. The first president to address the civil rights organization, on June 29, 1947, Truman declared from the steps of the Lincoln Memorial to a crowd of about 10,000 NAACP members that the federal government “must show the way” in eradicating racial discrimination. In early February 1948, in a historic message to the United States Congress, Truman called for legislation that would expand and protect blacks’ civil rights.

Outraging southern Democrats in Congress, Truman left no doubt as to the relationship between his civil rights and Cold War agendas. “If we wish to inspire the people of the world whose freedom is in jeopardy,” he asserted, “we must correct the remaining imperfections in our practice of democracy.” Both speeches were broadcast in Europe over the State Department’s international radio program “Voice of America.”

The growing number of black voters and civil rights proponents demanded the federal government’s involvement. They sought the enactment and enforcement of civil rights laws and the laws’ invocation in court cases, and they expected government protection from hostile white mobs. The national government, they believed, had for far too long failed to “show the way” by acquiescing in states-rights arguments in defense of segregation and disenfranchisement and by looking away when the perpetrators of racial violence went unpunished as all-white juries rendered “not guilty” verdicts.

Since the early 1940s, civil rights advocates had pressured and prodded the government to take the lead in advancing civil rights. Victories in the courts were discernible early on. The NAACP legal team, led first by Charles Hamilton Houston and later by Thurgood Marshall, saw success in the 1940s in cases involving voting, housing, employment, and education. In the 1950s and 1960s, the sheer number of landmark civil rights decisions by the Supreme Court under its chief justice, Earl Warren, opened a new chapter in the judiciary’s role in American race relations. With the passage of new civil rights laws in the 1950s and 1960s, the Warren Court (1953–1969) played a critical role in upholding their constitutionality, deciding a plethora of civil rights cases that undergird liberal equality—including cases involving school desegregation, discriminatory legislative apportionment and voting, the integration of public accommodations, and interracial marriage.

#### Court Victories



Protesters after the *Brown* decision.

The Court's landmark *Brown* decision in 1954, holding that "separate is inherently unequal," carried far-reaching implications and served as a compelling precedent in non-school-related desegregation cases. Even so, the Court's ruling in *Brown II* in May 1955, which called for "all deliberate speed" in ending school segregation, was a setback to those who demanded immediate desegregation.

**The Executive Branch** The executive branch provided the first obvious and lasting achievement of the 1950s with the Truman administration's integration of the armed forces. Truman had issued the desegregating executive order in 1948, but the Korean War (1950–1953) provided the battlefield test of integration in the making. Between May and August 1951, the integration of military units in Korea jumped from 9 percent to 30 percent. A special military report declared that the integration of blacks had resulted in an overall gain for the Army. For the first time in the nation's history, black Americans had officially become an integral part of the nation's military.

Pr  
presen  
Attorn  
first civ  
Eis  
desegre  
hower  
he asse  
paratro  
Guard  
School.  
Cor  
most res  
by Sena  
sion, an  
ration o  
documen  
and enc  
North C  
in the De  
The  
ing year,  
Congress  
in Septe  
federal g  
courts wh  
the civil r  
assistant  
with auth  
informati  
laws, and  
protection  
century, it  
It was  
ment and  
Protesters  
civil rights  
ground. A  
which Eise  
worked tog  
The NAAC  
its success  
rights orgar  
attempt to r  
Citizens  
then expans

President Dwight D. Eisenhower, although not as progressive on civil rights as Truman, presented a four-point proposal for civil rights, which was written and submitted by his Attorney General, Herbert Brownell. The end product was the Civil Rights Act of 1957, the first civil rights law since 1875.

Eisenhower on civil rights is perhaps best remembered for his role in facilitating the desegregation of Central High School in Little Rock, Arkansas, in 1957. Although Eisenhower fretted over the initial *Brown* decision and his choice of Earl Warren as chief justice, he asserted his federal authority over the defiant Arkansas governor Orville Faubus and sent paratroopers from the 101st Airborne to Little Rock. He also federalized the state's National Guard to assure the enrollment and attendance of the nine black students at Central High School.

Congress, and specifically the Senate with its powerful southern bloc, proved to be the most resistant branch of government. More than ninety southern members of Congress, led by Senator Walter George, vigorously denounced the *Brown* decision, and in March 1956 they presented in Congress their "Declaration of Constitutional Principles," commonly known as the "Southern Manifesto." The document condemned the desegregation decision as a usurpation of the powers of the states and encouraged the use of "every lawful means" to resist its implementation. Of the three North Carolina members of Congress who refused to sign the manifesto, two were defeated in the Democratic primary the following May.

#### Congress Drags Its Feet

The protective armor over the racial status quo began to crack, however. In the following year, after acrimonious debate in the Senate and pressure from civil rights advocates, Congress passed the Civil Rights Act in August 1957, and the president signed it into law in September. The new law primarily safeguarded blacks' voting rights. It authorized the federal government to bring civil suits in its own name to obtain injunctive relief in federal courts whenever anyone was denied or threatened in his or her right to vote. It elevated the civil rights section of the Department of Justice to the status of a division, headed by an assistant attorney general. It also created the United States Commission on Civil Rights, with authority to investigate allegations of denial of the right to vote, to study and collect information concerning legal developments constituting a denial of equal protection of the laws, and to appraise the laws and policies of the federal government with respect to equal protection. Despite the landmark achievement of the first civil rights act in the twentieth century, its enforcement proved far less adequate in enfranchising black southerners.

It was never government action alone but rather the interaction between the government and civil rights advocates that brought about changes in the nation's legal system. Protesters demanded that the government rectify the paucity of civil rights laws and assure the actual expansion of rights on the ground. A variety of civil rights strategies created the climate in which Eisenhower, the Congress, and then-Senate majority leader Lyndon Johnson of Texas worked together to support the passage of the first civil rights statute in eighty-two years. The NAACP's 1944 victory in *Smith v. Allwright*, which outlawed the white primary in Texas, its success in *Brown* a decade later, and the subsequent voter-registration activism of civil rights organizations in the southern states had all inspired thousands of southern blacks to attempt to register to vote—some at extreme peril.

#### The Role of Civil Rights Advocates

Citizenship schools, first begun by Septima Clark and Esau Jenkins at Highlander and then expanded by them to other locations, taught adult literacy for the purpose of passing



#### The Freedom Pilgrimage Rally

Roy Wilkins, the Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr., and A. Philip Randolph at the Lincoln Memorial, May 17, 1957.

the literacy tests required for voter registration and made possible the registering of many new voters in the South. Protest demonstrations, most notably the Prayer Pilgrimage for Freedom on May 17, 1957, in Washington, D.C., played a role. More than 20,000 people gathered at the Lincoln Memorial on that day to commemorate the third anniversary of the *Brown* decision and to pressure the federal enforcement of school desegregation. The prayer pilgrimage was co-chaired by A. Phillip Randolph, Roy Wilkins of the NAACP, and Martin Luther King, Jr., head of the newly founded Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC). The strategists and organizers were Bayard Rustin and Ella Baker. With a gospel song by Mahalia Jackson and the final speech by King, the event gave a vivid preview of the much larger march on Washington that would occur in 1963. The press brought the event to the world's attention.

No one who heard about the meeting could deny the importance of the civil rights legislation to black Americans. King's speech focused on black voting rights. "Give us the ballot," his words rang out, "and we will no longer have to worry the federal government

about c  
the sac  
devotio  
bitterne

In a  
March  
United  
rights bi  
Ghana l  
ington.  
the mov  
by eithe

Crit  
ence Mi  
lobbyist  
Baltimor  
subsequ  
pressing  
nicknam

The  
ator, "a  
voters, es  
proportio  
Rights, b  
The Dep.  
that regist  
Although  
suits, the  
strengthen  
passed to  
federal inv

The e  
the rising  
1940s and  
political iss  
In at least  
power in cl  
took strong  
observed ir  
dency: "To  
of absolute

While l  
over Eisenh  
hurry to ful  
chided the  
He criticize

about our basic rights . . . we will fill our legislative halls with men of good will, and send to the sacred halls of Congress men who will not sign a Southern Manifesto, because of their devotion to the manifesto of justice . . . we will quietly and nonviolently, without rancor or bitterness, implement the Supreme Court's decision of May 17, 1954."

In addition, international pressure created pressure on the federal government. On March 8, 1957, the new nation of Ghana became the first former African colony to join the United Nations. As Congress began to debate the proposed civil rights bill in the summer of 1957, diplomatic representatives from Ghana had taken up residence at the United Nations and in Washington. The emergence of independent African nations afforded a considerable stimulus to the movement for racial equality in the United States. This important fact was not ignored by either President Eisenhower or responsible members of Congress.

#### The Civil Rights Acts of 1957 and 1960

Critical as well to the fight for the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1957 was Clarence Mitchell, Jr., director of the NAACP's Washington bureau and the organization's chief lobbyist on Capitol Hill. Mitchell worked tirelessly to garner support for the bill. Born in Baltimore in 1911, Mitchell helped to secure not only the 1957 civil rights law but also all subsequent civil rights and voting rights laws passed in the 1960s. Mitchell was so effective in pressing for legislation favorable to blacks and to disadvantaged people generally that he was nicknamed the "101st senator."

The Civil Rights Act of 1957 was undeniably a first step, but in the words of one senator, "a limited and modest step." Although making possible a greater number of black voters, especially in southern cities, the civil rights legislation left disenfranchised the great proportion of southern blacks eligible to vote. In hearings held by the Commission on Civil Rights, blacks revealed that local white registrars regularly denied them the right to vote. The Department of Justice instituted suits in Alabama, Georgia, and Louisiana, charging that registrars had failed to register qualified African American voters solely because of race. Although the Supreme Court upheld the right of the Department of Justice to bring such suits, the slow case-by-case approach revealed the inadequacies of the law and the need to strengthen it. After much debate and Senate filibusters, the Civil Rights Act of 1960 was passed to do just that. Neither law was sufficiently enforced, but each prefigured greater federal involvement on issues of African Americans' civil rights.

The emergence of the nonviolent protest movement in both the North and South and the rising number of black voters, especially in the northern states due to migration in the 1940s and 1950s, made African Americans' civil rights a burning political issue—one that neither major party failed to recognize.

#### The Kennedy Administration

In at least six of the eight most populous states in the country, blacks held the balance of power in closely contested elections. In their campaign platforms in 1960 both major parties took strong stands for racial justice and equality. Journalist and historian Theodore H. White observed in his book *The Making of the President 1960*, on Kennedy's campaign for the presidency: "To ignore the Negro vote and Negro insistence on civil rights must be either an act of absolute folly—or one of absolute miscalculation."

While beholden, to some degree, to the black vote for his narrow, hairbreadth victory over Eisenhower's vice president Richard M. Nixon, President John F. Kennedy was in no hurry to fulfill his campaign promises on civil rights. During the campaign Kennedy had chided the Republicans for not doing more to advance the cause of African Americans. He criticized President Eisenhower for not ending discrimination in federally supported



housing, which, he declared, could be done "with the stroke of a pen." Forced to be cautious by the entrenched power of southern Democratic congressional chairmen, who threatened to block his entire agenda, Kennedy felt that he had to move very slowly. Two years after his election, in November 1962, he addressed the housing issue, but housing continued to be one of the most difficult and unpopular problems to solve in both the North and South and would continue to be so, even after the Fair Housing Act became law in 1968 in the last year of Lyndon Johnson's presidential administration.

Over the course of Kennedy's presidency, he became increasingly influenced by the civil rights leadership and their agenda. By 1963 his civil rights record had improved considerably. In the last year of his presidency, which was cut short by an assassin's bullet on November 22, 1963, Kennedy made good on his promise to submit new, more comprehensive civil rights legislation. He also began to focus on the economic plight of urban blacks. In May 1963, Kennedy's council of economic advisers, led by Walter Heller, had been developing a job training plan to eradicate poverty. These efforts guided the policies of President Lyndon Johnson, who took office upon Kennedy's death, and became the basis of the Economic Opportunity Act of 1964.

Kennedy's record was impressive for his immediate appointment of blacks to high-profile federal positions. As federal judges, Kennedy appointed Thurgood Marshall to the circuit court in New York, Wade McCree to the district court for Eastern Michigan, James Parsons to the district court of Northern Illinois, and Marjorie Lawson, Joseph Waddy, and Spottswood Robinson to the federal bench in the District of Columbia. He appointed A. Leon Higginbotham, Jr., to the Federal Trade Commission and later nominated him to the district court of Pennsylvania (he would be confirmed after Kennedy's death). Robert Weaver became head of the Housing and Home Finance Agency under Kennedy; and when the agency was elevated to cabinet rank in 1965, President Johnson appointed Weaver secretary of the new Department of Housing and Urban Development, the first African American to hold a cabinet office.

President Kennedy also appointed George L. P. Weaver to be assistant secretary of labor, Carl Rowan to be deputy assistant secretary of state (and later ambassador to Finland), and Clifton R. Wharton and Mercer Cook to be ambassadors to Norway and Niger, respectively. He appointed two blacks, Merle McCurdy and Cecil F. Poole, as United States attorneys, and several others to presidential committees working in the civil rights field and to other boards and commissions, including John B. Duncan to the Board of Commissioners of the District of Columbia.

These high-level appointments represented unprecedented steps toward changing the face of the judiciary and executive administration. Yet federal employment for African Americans remained, on the whole, limited to lower-level jobs. Only in the subprofessional categories did African Americans constitute a substantial proportion (23 percent) of the federal service.

The shifting character of the Kennedy administration was evident in response to the freedom rides sponsored by CORE in May 1961. To challenge segregation laws and practices in bus terminals, the interracial direct-action group sent "freedom riders" on a route intended to stretch from Washington, D.C., to New Orleans. More than a decade had passed since the Supreme Court affirmed the constitutionality of racial equality on interstate bus travel and since CORE's journey of reconciliation in 1947 had first tested the Court's decision on southern highways. In the civil rights

**The Freedom Rides, May 1961**

fervor  
white b  
freedor  
attacked  
one of t  
badly th  
Atte  
annoyal  
Howeve  
Departm  
interven  
marshal  
SNCC,  
more th  
where lo  
then that  
riders an  
sengers c  
could no  
As th  
and mon  
nomic b  
school-de  
racist pol  
appeared  
the center  
ing proble  
on Civil R  
the Free,"  
tices still r  
received n  
to each of  
Speaki  
"Until just  
with the co  
Kennedy t  
years after  
strate in the  
same terms  
The tu  
limitations  
ruary, even  
dent Kenne  
legislation to  
elsewhere, h  
can people v

fervor of 1961, CORE head James Farmer had counted on a racist response, believing that white backlash in various locations would compel the federal government to protect the freedom riders as well as enforce the interstate transportation law. Indeed, segregationists attacked CORE's interracial teams in Anniston and Birmingham, Alabama, firebombing one of the two buses and bloodying freedom riders on both buses; one of them was beaten so badly that he suffered irreparable brain damage.

Attorney General Robert F. Kennedy, the president's brother, initially responded with annoyance at the aggressiveness of the civil rights activists and urged a cooling-off period. However, when the freedom riders were set upon by a mob in Montgomery, and a Justice Department monitor was severely beaten, he took more aggressive action. Alabama police intervened only belatedly and after the attorney general dispatched six hundred deputy marshals and other federal officers to the scene. Other groups, including the newly formed SNCC, the SCLC, and the Nashville Student Movement, rushed to join the effort, sending more than a thousand volunteers. Federal marshals escorted them to Jackson, Mississippi, where local officials arrested at least three hundred, including fifteen Catholic priests. It was then that the Interstate Commerce Commission, in response to the pressures of the freedom riders and the intervention of the attorney general, ruled on September 22, 1961, that passengers on interstate carriers would be seated without regard to race and that such carriers could not use segregated terminals.

As the direct-action phase of the movement in the South and North stepped up its scope and momentum between 1961 and 1963, with sit-ins, demonstrations, freedom rides, economic boycotts, mass marches, voter registration drives, and school-desegregation efforts, and as white violence on the part of racist police, mobs, and individuals also escalated, coverage of the civil rights movement appeared daily on television and in the press. The events played out dramatically in 1963, the centennial of the Emancipation Proclamation, and many leaders pointed out the lingering problem of racial inequality in American life. That year, the United States Commission on Civil Rights presented to the president a report on the history of civil rights, "Freedom to the Free," in which it declared that "a gap between our recorded aspirations and actual practices still remains." On Lincoln's birthday in February 1963, President and Mrs. Kennedy received more than a thousand black and white citizens at the White House and presented to each of them a copy of the report.

Speaking at Gettysburg that same year, Vice President Lyndon Baines Johnson said, "Until justice is blind, until education is unaware of race, until opportunity is unconcerned with the color of men's skins, emancipation will be a proclamation but not a fact." President Kennedy took note of the absence of equality when he said, "Surely, in 1963, one hundred years after emancipation, it should not be necessary for any American citizen to demonstrate in the streets for an opportunity to stop at a hotel, or eat at a lunch counter . . . on the same terms as any other American."

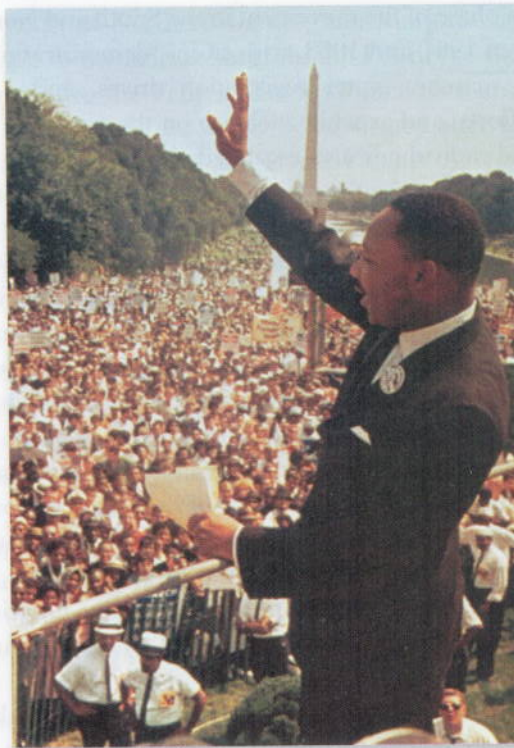
The tumultuous events of 1963 forced the government's hand by showing starkly the limitations of legislation and judicial decisions, once regarded as great achievements. In February, even before the demonstrations reached their peak, President Kennedy sent a special message to Congress recommending legislation to strengthen voting—but by June, largely because of events in Birmingham and elsewhere, he envisioned a new and broadened civil rights agenda. Speaking to the American people via radio and television, on the same day that National Guardsmen were used to

Freedom to the Free, 1963

The Civil Rights Act of 1964

secure the admission of two African Americans to the University of Alabama, the president stated, "We face . . . a moral crisis as a country and as 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." Kennedy submitted his comprehensive civil rights measure to Congress. Weeks and months of acrimonious debate, parliamentary maneuvers, and delays ensued.

During the summer of 1963 the civil rights bill was stalled by bitter opposition and filibusters. Attorney General Robert F. Kennedy testified before congressional committees ten times in support of the proposed legislation. As Congress debated the civil rights bill, more than 250,000 civil rights proponents from all parts of the nation marched on Washington in August in the largest demonstration in American history up to that time. With this great "March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom," veteran labor leader A. Philip Randolph's long-postponed 1941 dream had finally come to pass. Owing to the skillful organizing work of Randolph, ably assisted by Bayard Rustin and joined by all the major civil rights groups as well as many religious, labor, and civic groups (including the American Jewish Congress, the National Conference of Catholics for Interracial Justice, the National Council of Churches, and the AFL-CIO Industrial Union Department), the gigantic demonstration grabbed the world's attention.



**"I have a dream."**

The Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr. acknowledges the crowd at the Lincoln Memorial for his "I Have a Dream" speech during the March on Washington, D.C., on Aug. 28, 1963. The march was organized to support proposed civil rights legislation and end segregation. King founded the Southern Christian Leadership Conference in 1957, advocating nonviolent action against America's racial inequality. Awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1964, King was assassinated in Memphis, Tenn., in 1968.

K  
Johns  
days :  
the ci  
on the  
Const  
ninet  
from  
stanti  
civil ri  
TI  
ever e  
again  
The la  
muniti  
Comm  
most c  
progra  
to com  
financi  
In :  
cans op  
Act of  
erable v  
resente  
resentm  
nor of  
Indiana  
the Supr  
v. *United*  
upholdir  
Act. Bef  
Yet t  
not prev  
dreds of  
and fall  
posed of  
voter regi  
tions, see  
gate publ  
Mississipp  
Selma, Al  
president,  
In his  
eloquent w  
Selma is p

Kennedy did not live to see the fruition of his efforts, but his vice president, Lyndon Johnson, swiftly made known his strong support of his predecessor's civil rights program. Five days after taking office, he notified Congress that he desired "the earliest possible passage of the civil rights bill." However, the bill continued to linger into the new year. The bright spot on the horizon was the ratification in January 1964 of the Twenty-fourth Amendment to the Constitution, which outlawed the poll tax in federal elections, a method used since the late nineteenth century to disfranchise blacks. With continued pressure from the president and from civil rights groups, the House of Representatives passed the civil rights bill by a substantial majority, 290 to 130, in February. Then in June the Senate voted cloture to break a civil rights filibuster, thus ensuring final passage by a vote of 73 to 27.

The Civil Rights Act of 1964, the most far-reaching law in support of racial equality ever enacted by Congress, gave the attorney general additional power to protect citizens against discrimination and segregation in voting, education, and the use of public facilities. The law established the federal Community Relations Service to help individuals and communities solve civil rights problems, created the federal Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC), and extended the life of the Commission on Civil Rights. One of the most controversial provisions required the elimination of discrimination in federally assisted programs, authorizing termination of programs or withdrawal of federal funds upon failure to comply. Finally, the U.S. Office of Education was authorized to provide technical and financial aid to assist communities in the desegregation of schools.

In many places South and North, doors of opportunity once closed to African Americans opened for the first time. However, the period following the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 also witnessed strong resistance to its enforcement, and in some places considerable violence. In the North, some whites discovered their prejudices for the first time and resented direct-action protests to eliminate discrimination in their own communities. Such resentment accounts, at least in part, for the strong showing that the segregationist governor of Alabama, George Wallace, made in the 1964 presidential primaries in Wisconsin, Indiana, and Maryland. Some public places transformed themselves into private clubs, but the Supreme Court declared such actions illegal in two cases in 1964—*Heart of Atlanta Motel v. United States* and *Katzenbach [Attorney General Nicholas Katzenbach] v. McClung*—thus upholding the constitutionality of the public accommodations section in the Civil Rights Act. Before the end of the year, it was the segregationists' turn to be discouraged.

Yet the law also revealed a serious limitation. The weakness of its voting provision did not prevent states from circumventing it with practices that denied the right to vote to hundreds of thousands of eligible southern blacks. During the summer and fall of 1964, the Council of Federated Organizations, composed of all the major civil rights groups, faced strong opposition in their drive to increase voter registration among blacks. Southern whites, especially in areas of large black populations, seemed more opposed to voter registration drives than to demonstrations to desegregate public accommodations. The murder of three civil rights workers in Philadelphia, Mississippi, during Freedom Summer of 1964, as well as the murder in the spring of 1965 in Selma, Alabama, of a young white minister and the infamy of Bloody Sunday, outraged the president, who more clearly than ever recognized the need for additional legislation.

In his address to Congress and the nation on March 15, 1965, President Johnson stated in eloquent words that repeated the theme song of the civil rights movement: "What happened in Selma is part of a far larger movement which reaches into every section and state of America.

#### The Voting Rights Act of 1965



Long lines of African Americans wait to register in a makeshift office in Alabama after passage of the Voting Rights Act of 1965.

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." A few days later the president sent to Congress his proposal for a new voting rights law.

Congress passed the Voting Rights Act of 1965 with unusual swiftness. It authorized the attorney general to send federal examiners to register black voters when he concluded that local registrars were not doing their job. It suspended all literacy tests and other devices in states and counties that used them and where less than 50 percent of the adults had voted in 1964. The states affected were Alabama, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi, South Carolina, Virginia, and twenty-six counties in North Carolina, as well as Alaska and scattered counties in Arizona, Idaho, and Hawaii. In the latter states the voting rights of indigenous groups (native or Latino) had long been denied. There was opposition to the measure, and some blacks accused Attorney General Katzenbach of not sending federal examiners quickly enough. Nevertheless, by the end of the year nearly a quarter of a million new black voters had been registered, one-third by federal examiners and two-thirds by local officials. In that year blacks won seats in the Georgia legislature and in city councils of several southern cities.

The intense voter registration drives of thousands of black and white civil rights workers, the enactment and enforcement of the Voting Rights Act of 1965, and the growing awareness of African Americans of the power of the ballot created something of a black

politi  
and S  
such  
Hame  
a vali  
1964  
own M  
Mississipp  
So  
1964 a  
more t  
and na  
six mer  
legislatu  
setts, th  
of New  
Illinois.

Publ  
Civil Rig  
what the  
federally  
to have d  
and Seco  
incentive  
year, in th  
children w  
satisfy the  
old order.

unanticipa  
In its d  
bama and j  
constitutio  
were institu  
sure on sch  
black studer  
school syste  
with more th

Called th  
ernment's re  
"Jubilee," as  
struction. Fo  
would eventu  
Memorial in  
"able to trans  
hood . . . able  
stand up for fi

political revolution in the 1960s and 1970s in Mississippi, Alabama, Georgia, Louisiana, and South Carolina. The Voting Rights Act had the greatest impact on Mississippi, where such SNCC workers and local grassroots leaders as Fannie Lou Hamer, Amzie Moore, Annie Devine, and Aaron Henry had led a valiant voter-registration drive during Freedom Summer in 1964 and mobilized black voters, denied access to the state's Democratic Party, into their own Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party. The number of black registered voters in Mississippi grew astoundingly, from 6.7 percent of all blacks in 1964 to 68 percent in 1970.

#### Political Revolution in the South

Southern blacks once again became political contenders and officeholders. Between 1964 and 1970, black elected officials in the South had risen from less than twenty-five to more than seven hundred. The presence of black elected officials was a reality at the state and national levels. In 1966 there were ninety-seven black members of state legislatures and six members of Congress; by 1973, more than two hundred blacks sat in thirty-seven state legislatures and sixteen in Congress, including one senator (Edward Brooke of Massachusetts, the only black Republican member of Congress) and four women—Shirley Chisholm of New York, Barbara Jordan of Texas, Yvonne Burke of California, and Cardiss Collins of Illinois.

Public schools in the South began finally to show signs of desegregation, since under the Civil Rights Act of 1964 the executive branch of the government gained the means of doing what the federal courts had been unable to do. Because the act barred discrimination in federally aided projects and programs, school districts receiving federal funds were required to have desegregated or else to present acceptable plans for desegregating. The Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965, with an appropriation of \$1.3 billion, gave an added incentive to compliance. Progress could be seen within two years. In the 1965–1966 school year, in the eleven southern states of the former Confederacy, only 6 percent of the black children were attending desegregated schools. Southern states were rapidly learning how to satisfy the federal requirement and receive federal funds and at the same time preserve the old order. However, by the spring of 1967, the school desegregation process received an unanticipated boost from the United States Circuit Court, Fifth District.

In its decision in *United States v. Jefferson County*, a case arising from school systems in Alabama and Louisiana, the court declared that “the only school desegregation plan that meets constitutional standards is one that works.” Shortly thereafter about forty desegregation suits were instituted, and the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare intensified its pressure on school districts. By the beginning of the 1968 school year, about 20.3 percent of the black students in the former Confederate states were in “fully integrated schools.” By 1970 school systems in the South responded to the pressures applied by the courts and the public, with more than 90 percent of the school systems in the South classified as desegregated.

Called the Second Reconstruction, the years of civil rights activism and the federal government's response to it brought new hope to men and women who sought to keep faith in “Jubilee,” as the ex-slaves termed freedom on the eve of the Civil War and the first Reconstruction. For those who held firm to Martin Luther King's dream that the United States would eventually live up to its professed ideals, his famous speech on the steps of the Lincoln Memorial in 1963 offered hope that Americans of all races might try again this time and be “able to transform the jangling discords of our nation into a beautiful symphony of brotherhood . . . able to work together, to pray together, to struggle together, to go to jail together, to stand up for freedom together, knowing that we will be free one day.” The Civil Rights Act

of 1964, the Voting Rights Act of 1965, and later legislation and court rulings provided no panacea, however.

In 1964 through 1967 (thus before the assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr.), a nightmare of riots occurred in cities across the country—in Harlem and Rochester, NY, in 1964; in the Watts section of Los Angeles in 1965; in Cleveland in 1966; and in Newark, Cincinnati, Detroit, and other cities in 1967. The “long hot summers” of riots left civil rights advocates and government leaders with the painful realization that the new legislation had failed to solve deeper, structural problems of racial inequality. Indeed the riots were proof of the law’s inadequacy to rectify race-related issues of poverty and other economic problems left unaddressed by simply ending segregated public facilities. Nor did Johnson’s declaration of “war on poverty,” along with the creation of subsequent federally funded antipoverty programs, succeed.

A. Philip Randolph in November 1965, speaking to a conference on civil rights at the White House, posed the idea for “the creation of a vast ‘freedom budget,’ a nationwide plan for the abolition of the ghetto . . . even at the cost of a hundred billion dollars,” but as historian Thomas Sugrue notes, the idea, after some attention by government and civil rights supporters, never took hold. A rising tide of political conservatism, economic woes, the Vietnam War, and growing sentiments of racial separatism among blacks themselves precluded any possibility of Randolph’s idea. Later, Martin Luther King, Jr., would take the lead in a poor peoples’ campaign, but by then the integrationist, nonviolent movement was being severely challenged if not yet eclipsed by the rising tide of black power.

