

The Civil Rights Movement

Civil rights had long been an issue, but not until the sixties did it reach such urgency. Tired of the slow pace of legislative changes, African American leaders emerged and pushed the civil rights movement to the forefront. Listed below are some important 1960s developments in the civil rights cause.

Sit-Ins This nonviolent action was started on February 1, 1960, by a group of four black students who had gone to the Woolworth's store in Greensboro, North Carolina, to buy supplies. When they sat at the lunch counter for coffee, they were told they could not be served. In protest, the group remained seated until the store closed.

Freedom Rides This project protested the segregation of long-distance interstate bus travel. In 1961 a group called CORE announced plans for seven blacks and six whites to begin a Freedom Ride from Washington, D.C., to New Orleans, Louisiana. The bus did not get far before there was trouble. Angry whites beat several riders and set fire to the bus. Nevertheless, several more freedom rides were planned and carried out before the U.S. government initiated very clear rules about integrating bus stations.

March on Washington On August 28, 1963, more than 2,000 buses and thirty special trains had brought a quarter of a million people to Washington, D.C., to protest against discrimination. People of all races and from all over the country traveled to our nation's capital so their voices could be heard. This is where Martin Luther King, Jr., delivered his famous "I Have a Dream . . ." speech.

Mississippi Freedom Summer During the summer of 1964, close to 1,000 students from the North traveled to Mississippi to participate in the Mississippi Summer Project. Bob Moses had planned the event to create a new political party and provide volunteers to register black voters. This angered many whites, and on June 21, three young civil rights workers were killed.

Selma to Montgomery March On March 21, 1965, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., began with a group of 4,000 people across the Edmund Pettus Bridge. By the time they reached Montgomery on March 25, they numbered 25,000.

Poor People's Campaign This was Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.'s, last campaign. In 1968 he had decided to take his cause North to work to eliminate poverty among blacks and whites.

Riots In Los Angeles from August 11–16, 1965, race riots spread throughout the city's Watts area. Sparked by charges of police brutality, National Guardsmen were called in to restore order. During one week in July of 1967, seventy-five race riots erupted in Detroit. Forty-three people died in the conflicts.

Suggested Activities

Changes With the class, discuss what important changes were brought about by the civil rights movement and how the U.S. government helped the cause.

Resource For more information about these issues read . . . *If You Lived at the Time of Martin Luther King, Jr.*, by Ellen Levine (Scholastic, Inc., 1990).

Leading the Cause

Not everyone agreed with Martin Luther King, Jr.'s ideas. Although the civil rights groups and black leaders believed that blacks and whites must be treated equally, their methods were not all the same. Read about some of these groups and leaders of the civil rights cause.

NAACP The oldest civil rights group, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, was founded in 1909. Its members believed that the best way to change bad laws was through the court system. Lawyers for the NAACP argued that segregation was wrong and they won several important cases.

CORE The Congress of Racial Equality was founded in Chicago in 1942. Composed of black and white members, they believed in nonviolent direct action and organized the Freedom Rides of 1961.

SNCC Founded in 1960 by students from the sit-ins, the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee helped African Americans to register to vote.

SCLC The Southern Christian Leadership Conference was founded by Ralph Abernathy and Martin Luther King, Jr., following the bus boycott in Montgomery, Alabama.

Malcolm X Malcolm X was originally a leader of the Nation of Islam, or Black Muslims. He spoke out against integration and believed that blacks and whites should not live together. After a trip to Mecca in Saudi Arabia, he changed his ideas about hate and violence. Malcolm broke with the Black Muslims to form his own group. In 1964 he was killed by some men in the Muslim group.



Malcolm X



Stokely Carmichael

Medgar Evers As Mississippi field secretary of the NAACP, he coordinated the effort to desegregate public facilities in Jackson, Mississippi. His assassination on June 13, 1963, led President Kennedy to advocate a new, comprehensive civil rights program.

Huey Newton In 1966 Huey Newton and other black activists founded the Black Panther Party, the original purpose of which was to protect African American neighborhoods from police brutality.

Stokely Carmichael When Stokely Carmichael was elected president of the SNCC, he decided to take the organization in a more aggressive direction. He talked about change by any means necessary and black power. In 1966 SNCC expelled all whites from its organization.

Suggested Activities

Nation of Islam Louis Farrakhan became an outspoken leader of the Nation of Islam later in the century. Tell the students to find out his views on civil rights, whites, and integration.

Assassins Medgar Evers' assassins were not brought to trial until some thirty years after the event. Direct the students to find out why it took so long to prosecute his killers.

Update Instruct the students to find out about current changes in the NAACP. Find out who is the current leader and how the organization is affecting social change.