

The Civil Rights Movement

EYE'S ON THE PRIZE
AMERICA'S CIVIL RIGHTS MOVEMENT
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Emmett Till's Murder (Aug 1955)

"When people saw what had happened to my son, men stood up who had never stood up before." Mamie Till Bradley, Emmett's mother

Emmett Till was an African American teenager visiting his uncle in Mississippi. He was accused of whistling at a white women in a grocery store. Three days later he was brutally murdered and his killers were found not guilty in the court of law. The same men accused later admitted their guilt but were safe from being tried twice for the same crime.

Emmett Till's mother chose to have an open casket funeral to allow the world to see what these men had done to her son.



The Montgomery Bus Boycott (Dec 1955 - Dec 1956)

"...people wanted to continue that boycott. They had been touched by the persecution, the humiliation...they voted for it unanimously..." Jo Ann Robinson, boycott organizer

Rosa Parks refuses to give up her seat on a segregated bus in Montgomery, Alabama, and is arrested. Parks' arrest inspires black leaders to mount a bus boycott. The boycott was organized by several civil rights leaders including Martin Luther King Jr. It lasted until December 1956 when the Supreme Court finally made the decision to integrate the bus system.

Violence erupted targeting civil rights leaders and boycott organizers.



Southern School Desegregation (1957-1962)

"Supreme Court or no Supreme Court, we are going to maintain segregated schools down in Dixie." U. S. Senator James Eastland, Democrat from Mississippi

Southern whites including political leaders try to resist the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision of 1954, which states that separate school facilities are inherently unequal and orders school integration. As a result riots and violence erupted in several southern states including Mississippi, Virginia, and Arkansas.

In response to the violence President John Kennedy chooses to support the Civil Rights Movement and begins to use military support to improve the order in the southern states.



Non-Violent Protests (1960)

"The workshops in nonviolence made the difference... the philosophy... the tactics, the techniques, how to... take the blows and still respond with... dignity." Rev. C. T. Vivian, Nashville activist

The sit-in movement largely run by the student population spread to 69 cities across the South, black communities organize economic boycotts. Students found the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee and work with members of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference.

The strength and determination of these students was remarkable even when punched or assaulted by segregationists, the protesters do not retaliate with violence, but instead tried to protect themselves and each other.



The Freedom Rides (1961)

"Segregation must be stopped... we'll take hitting, we'll take beating. We're willing to accept death. But we're going to keep coming..." Jim Zwerg, Freedom Rider

The Supreme Court banned segregation on interstate travel twice, but Southern states ignore these rulings. In May 1961, the Congress of Racial Equality sends mixed-race groups of non-violent volunteers, known as Freedom Riders, on bus trips into Dixie. They are met with resistance, violence, and even arrested despite the effort of Attorney General Robert Kennedy to protect the riders.

The Freedom Riders eventually win their battle when President Kennedy convinces the Interstate Commerce Commission to ban segregation on interstate travel.



Project "C" in Birmingham (1963)

"The events in Birmingham... have so increased the cries for equality that no city or state or legislative body can prudently choose to ignore them." President John F. Kennedy, June 1963

Birmingham Alabama is known for its segregation, racial hatred, and violence towards the African American community. Activists plan to confront the community and are met with outrage and arrested. Five days after the start of the non-violent confrontation 2500 people are in jail most of them children. When Martin Luther King is arrested, he writes his famous "Letter from Birmingham Jail," which justifies the movement's work.

Birmingham business leaders make a deal with protesters after 38 days of confrontation. The city promises to desegregate public facilities and begin an employment program for black people downtown. The Klan makes an attempt on King's life by bombing his hotel but he had already left. The city erupts in violence.

The March on Washington (Aug 1963)

"Those... who exhort patience in the name of a false peace, are in fact supporting segregation and exploitation. They would have social peace at the expense of social and racial justice." A. Philip Randolph, March organizer

On August 28, more than 200,000 people gather in peace and unity on the National Mall. Martin Luther King stands before the Lincoln Memorial to deliver his speech. "I have a dream," he declares, "that my four little children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character.."

Though the March on Washington is a triumph, it does not distinguish the violence targeted at the movement.

March from Selma to Montgomery (March 1965)

"I was hit in the head by a state trooper with a nightstick... I thought I saw death." John Lewis, SNCC leader

On March 7, demonstrators start a 54-mile march in response to an activist's murder. They are protesting his death and the unfair state laws and local violence that keep African Americans from voting. Roughly 525 peaceful marchers are violently assaulted by state police near Selma.

Television networks broadcast the attacks of "Bloody Sunday" nationwide, creating outrage at the police, and sympathy for the marchers. The U.S. Congress passed the Voting Rights Act of 1965, forcing states to end discriminatory voting practices.

The Nation of Islam and Malcolm X (1964-1966)

"If you live in a society... and it doesn't enforce its own law because of the color of a man's skin... then... people are justified to resort to any means necessary to bring about justice..." Malcolm X, Nation of Islam spokesman

Malcolm X became the spokesman for the Nation of Islam spreading the message of black pride, self-sufficiency, and self-defense. He becomes nationally known and his words inspire many blacks but his relationship with the Nation of Islam deteriorates. In February 1965, members of the Nation of Islam assassinate him in Harlem.

Malcolm X's philosophy survives, especially among younger civil rights workers.



Poor People's Campaign & Vietnam (1968)

"A time comes when silence is betrayal, and that time has come for us in relation to Vietnam." Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr.

In 1967, one in seven Americans lives in poverty. The Southern Christian Leadership Conference tries to bring attention to the nation's most needy people.

King makes a connection between the nation's involvement in the war and the poverty in our own country. "The promises of the great society have been shot down on the battlefields of Vietnam," he says, "making the poor, white and Negro, bear the heaviest burden both at the front and at home."



Attica Prison Riot (1971)

"The whole criminal justice system... is very much intertwined with the economic oppression of black people." Angela Davis, professor and prisoners' rights activist

At Attica Correctional Facility in New York, inmates (most of whom are African Americans and Latinos from poor, urban neighborhoods) living under poor conditions start an uprising in which 1200 inmates take over the prison. Holding 39 hostages, the prisoners demand improved conditions including less mail censorship, better sanitary conditions, the hiring of more minority guards, and a promise of amnesty to end the impasse. In the end 29 inmates and 10 hostages are killed by police. Surviving prisoners are stripped, tortured, and humiliated.



The First Black Southern Mayor (1973)

"We were, for all practical purposes, engaged in a revolution." Emma Darnell, Atlanta affirmative action commissioner

In 1973 Maynard Jackson is elected the as the first black mayor of Atlanta. He makes affirmative action the city's priority hiring more minorities and women, awards city contracts more fairly to include minority-owned businesses, and ends discriminatory business practices. Confounding the critics, affirmative action has been proven successful in addressing social inequities.



Operation Push (1983)

"I felt like I was a part of something... I was a small person in the corner, wouldn't get the big headlines, but I made it happen." Rosie Mars, African American voter

Operation PUSH (People United to Serve Humanity) a Chicago based organization lead by Jesse Jackson sought to register an astronomical number of new voters as a way to empower the community. They exceeded their goal and PUSH remained working for social justice for over a decade.



Civil Rights Today (2006)

"We are a society that has been structured from top to bottom by race. You don't get beyond that by deciding not to talk about it anymore." Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw, law professor and trial analyst

In the 21st century, Americans are finding other reasons for improving race relations. It has become more then black and white and seeks to foster a social community that embraces all differences whether it be the color of ones skin or their sexual orientation.



How did people involved in these events react and feel about the situations they were in?

- Emmett Till's Murder
 - "When people saw what had happened to my son, men stood up who had never stood up before." Mamie Till Bradley, Emmett's mother
- Montgomery Bus Boycott
 - "... people wanted to continue that boycott. They had been touched by the persecution, the humiliation... they voted for it unanimously..." Jo Ann Robinson, boycott organizer
- The Freedom Rides
 - "Segregation must be stopped... we'll take hitting, we'll take beating, We're willing to accept death. But we're going to keep coming..." Jim Zwerg, Freedom Rider
- Project "C" in Birmingham
 - "The events in Birmingham... have so increased the cries for equality that no city or state or legislative body can prudently choose to ignore them." President John F. Kennedy, June 1963
- Operation PUSH
 - "I felt like I was a part of something... I was a small person in the corner, wouldn't get the big headlines, but I made it happen." Rosie Mars, African American voter



Video

"A Change is Gonna Come" By Sam Cooke

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IL-dI18lFFU>


