

Reading Essentials and Study Guide

networks

The Civil Rights Movement, 1954-1968

Lesson 2 *Challenging Segregation*

ESSENTIAL QUESTION

Why do you think the civil rights movement made gains in postwar America?

What motivates a society to make changes?

Reading HELPDESK

Content Vocabulary

filibuster an attempt to kill a bill by having a group of senators take turns speaking continuously so that a vote cannot take place

cloture a motion that ends debate and calls for an immediate vote

Academic Vocabulary

register to file personal information to become eligible for an official event

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The Civil Rights Movement, 1954-1968

TAKING NOTES: Organizing

ACTIVITY Use the following graphic organizer to identify the challenges to segregation in the South.

Challenge	Result
Sit-In Movement	
Freedom Riders	

IT MATTERS BECAUSE...

In the early 1960s, the struggle for civil rights grew. African American citizens and white supporters created new organizations. They organized protests that got the attention of the mass media and the government.

The Sit-in Movement

GUIDING QUESTION What were the goals of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee?

In the fall of 1959, four young African Americans started attending North Carolina Agricultural and Technical College, an African American college in Greensboro. The four students—Joseph McNeil, Ezell Blair, Jr., David Richmond, and Franklin McCain—often talked about the civil rights movement. In January 1960 McNeil suggested they hold a sit-in at a nearby store.

On February 1, 1960, the four friends entered Woolworth's department store. They bought school supplies. Then they sat at the whites-only lunch counter and ordered coffee. No one would wait on them. Blair asked why they were served at the checkout counter, but not the lunch counter. The students stayed at the lunch counter until it closed. They said that they would sit there every day until they got the same service as white customers. They left the store feeling empowered.

News of the daring sit-in spread quickly. The following day, 29 African American students went to Woolworth's. They wanted to sit at the counter until they were served. By the end of the week, more than 300 students were taking part. A new mass movement for civil rights had begun. Within two months, sit-ins had spread to 54 cities in nine states. Sit-ins took place at segregated stores, restaurants, hotels, and movie theaters. By 1961 sit-ins had been held in more than 100 cities.

The sit-in movement brought large numbers of idealistic and energized college students into the civil rights struggle. Many felt let down by the slow pace of desegregation. Sit-ins gave them a way to take matters into their own hands.

At first, the leaders of the NAACP and the SCLC were nervous about the sit-ins. They worried that some students might react with violence. Students conducting sit-ins were shouted at, punched, kicked, and beaten with clubs. Some were burned with cigarettes, hot coffee, or acid. Most of them did not fight back.

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Former NAACP official and the SCLC executive director Ella Baker urged the students on. In 1960 the students started the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC). Most of the SNCC's members were African American college students from across the South, but many whites also joined. The SNCC became an important civil rights group.

Volunteer Robert Moses urged the SNCC to start helping rural African Americans in the South who often faced violence if they tried to **register** to vote. Many SNCC volunteers, including Moses, bravely headed south as part of the voter education project. The period of registration efforts that took place in 1964 was known as the Freedom Summer. During that time, members of the Ku Klux Klan murdered three SNCC workers. Local officials knew about it but did not stop it from happening.

One SNCC organizer, a sharecropper named Fannie Lou Hamer, was forced to leave her farm after she registered to vote. Police arrested her in Mississippi as she was returning from a voter registration event in 1963. They beat her while she was in jail. She later helped organize the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party. She challenged whether the state's segregated Democratic Party was legal at the 1964 Democratic National Convention.

PROGRESS CHECK

Making Inferences Why were SNCC organizers willing to put themselves at such personal risk?

The Freedom Riders

GUIDING QUESTION How did the Kennedy administration's Justice Department help the civil rights movement?

Segregation in interstate bus service was against the law. However, bus travel was still segregated in much of the South. In Alabama, many bus stations were still segregated. Alabama's governor, John Patterson, was in favor of segregation. As attorney general of the state, he had banned the NAACP from being active in Alabama. He had also fought the bus boycotts.

In early May 1961, teams of African American and white volunteers got on southbound interstate buses. The teams became known as Freedom Riders. Angry white mobs met the buses in Alabama in Anniston, Birmingham, and Montgomery. The mobs slit bus tires and threw rocks at the windows. In Anniston, someone threw a firebomb into one bus. Fortunately, no one was killed.

In Birmingham, riders getting off a bus faced a gang of young men. They were armed with baseball bats, chains, and lead pipes. The gang beat the riders viciously. The Birmingham public safety commissioner, Theophilus Eugene "Bull" Connor, said that no police were at the bus station because it was Mother's Day. He had given many officers the day off. FBI evidence later showed that Connor had told the local Ku Klux Klan to beat the riders. The violence made the national news. It shocked many Americans. It also drew the attention of the federal government to the difficult situation faced by African Americans in the South.

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The Civil Rights Movement, 1954-1968

Kennedy and Civil Rights

While running for president in 1960, John F. Kennedy had promised to support civil rights. Civil rights leaders such as NAACP executive director Roy Wilkins urged him to support civil rights laws. However, Kennedy knew that new civil rights laws would anger Southern senators. He needed their support to get other programs through Congress, so he did not want to upset them.

However, Kennedy brought about 40 African Americans into high-level government jobs. He appointed Thurgood Marshall as a federal judge on the Second Circuit Appeals Court in New York. Kennedy also created the Committee on Equal Employment Opportunity (CEEEO). He allowed the Justice Department, run by his brother Robert, to actively support the civil rights movement. The department tried to help African Americans register to vote by filing lawsuits across the South.

After the attacks on the Freedom Riders in Montgomery, both Kennedys publicly urged them to have a "cooling off" period. CORE leader James Farmer rejected that idea. He announced that the riders would go into Mississippi. To stop the violence, President Kennedy made a deal with Mississippi senator James Eastland. No violence took place when buses arrived in Jackson, but Kennedy did not protest the riders' arrests.

The cost of bail to gain release of the Freedom Riders from jail used most of CORE's money. Thurgood Marshall heard about the situation. He offered the use of the NAACP Legal Defense Fund's huge bail-bond account to keep the rides going. President Kennedy found out that the Freedom Riders were still active. He ordered the Interstate Commerce Commission (ICC) to tighten its regulations against segregated bus terminals. Robert Kennedy ordered the Justice Department to take legal action against Southern cities that had segregated bus terminals. By late 1962, segregation in interstate bus travel had ended.

Violence in Birmingham

In the spring of 1963, Martin Luther King, Jr., decided to hold demonstrations in Birmingham, Alabama. He knew they would trigger a violent response. Yet he believed it was the only way to get the president to actively support civil rights. Eight days after the protests began, King was arrested. While in jail, he began writing a letter. It was a well-written explanation of the reasons for nonviolent protest. In his "Letter from Birmingham Jail," King said that any law that treats human beings badly is unjust. He said that people had a moral responsibility not to obey unjust laws.

After King was let out of jail, the protests continued to grow. Public Safety Commissioner Connor responded with force. He ordered police to use clubs, police dogs, and fire hoses on demonstrators.

One powerful demonstration was called the Children's March. On May 2, young people marched in groups from churches to downtown businesses. The police attacked and arrested many of the demonstrators. On September 15, 1963, the Ku Klux Klan bombed Birmingham's Sixteenth Street Baptist Church, killing four young girls. News reports of these attacks on children led to greater support for the civil rights movement.

PROGRESS CHECK

Constructing Arguments Why do you think there was such a violent reaction to the civil rights movement?

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The Civil Rights Movement, 1954-1968

The Civil Rights Act of 1964

GUIDING QUESTION How did the Civil Rights Act of 1964 allow the federal government to fight racial discrimination?

When he was sworn in as Alabama's governor, George Wallace said he wanted segregation forever. On June 11, 1963, Wallace stood in front of a building at the University of Alabama. He was trying to block two African Americans from enrolling for school there. Federal marshals had to order Wallace to step aside. The next day a white segregationist murdered civil rights activist Medgar Evers in Mississippi. Evers had been the NAACP's first field secretary. He had focused his efforts on voter registration and boycotts. His death made him a martyr of the civil rights movement. Amid these events, President Kennedy announced a civil rights bill.

The March on Washington

Civil rights leaders were happy about President Kennedy's support, but they knew that racial hatred was still a problem. They joined together to plan a large-scale protest march on Washington. On August 28, 1963, more than 250,000 demonstrators, African American and white, gathered near the Lincoln Memorial. They heard speeches and sang songs. Dr. King then gave a powerful speech that called for freedom and equality for all Americans.

The Bill Becomes Law

Kennedy tried but failed to win passage of his civil rights legislation. In November 1963, Kennedy was assassinated. Vice President Lyndon Johnson became president. Johnson was the former leader of the Senate Democrats. He had helped pass the Civil Rights Acts of 1957 and 1960. However, he had done so by weakening them and by compromising with other Southern senators.

Johnson worked to get Kennedy's civil rights legislation through Congress. The bill passed the House of Representatives in February 1964. Then it stalled in the Senate for several weeks. Those against it used a **filibuster**, a strategy in which senators speak continuously to stop a vote from taking place. In June the Senate voted for **cloture**—to end debate and take a vote—with 71 votes for and 29 against. The Senate then easily passed the bill. On July 2, 1964, Johnson signed the Civil Rights Act of 1964 into law.

This act was the most complete civil rights law Congress had ever enacted. The law made segregation illegal in most public places. It gave citizens of all races and nationalities equal access to public facilities. The law gave the U.S. attorney general more power to sue schools, forcing them to desegregate. It required companies to end workplace discrimination. It also made the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) a permanent agency.

PROGRESS CHECK

Assessing Did government support for civil rights come from the federal or state level?

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The Civil Rights Movement, 1954-1968

The Struggle for Voting Rights

GUIDING QUESTION Why was the passage of the Voting Rights Act of 1965 a turning point of the civil rights movement?

Despite the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, voting rights were still an issue. The Twenty-fourth Amendment to the Constitution, signed in 1964, helped. The amendment stopped poll taxes in federal (but not state) elections. Dr. King was still convinced that a new law was needed to protect African American voting rights. He decided to hold another big protest.

The Selma March

In December 1964, Dr. King received the Nobel Peace Prize in Oslo, Norway. He received it for his work in the civil rights movement. A few weeks later, King announced that African Americans demanded the right to vote.

In January 1965, the SCLC and Dr. King chose Selma, Alabama, for their campaign for voting rights. African Americans made up most of Selma's population. Yet they made up only 3 percent of registered voters. To stop African Americans from registering to vote, Sheriff Jim Clark had deputized and given weapons to dozens of white citizens. His armed group terrorized African Americans. On one occasion they even used clubs and cattle prods on people. King's demonstrations in Selma led to the arrest of more than 3,000 African Americans, including schoolchildren, by Sheriff Clark.

Dr. King wanted to keep pressure on the president and Congress to act. He joined with SNCC activists and organized a "march for freedom." It went from Selma to the state capitol in Montgomery, a distance of about 50 miles (80 km). On Sunday, March 7, 1965, the march began. The SCLC's Hosea Williams and SNCC's John Lewis led about 600 protestors toward Montgomery.

The protestors moved toward the Edmund Pettus Bridge, which led out of Selma. Sheriff Clark then ordered them to break up the march. Many protestors were beaten in full view of television cameras. This brutal attack became known later as "Bloody Sunday." It put 70 marchers in the hospital and injured another 70.

The nation viewed the shocking footage of law enforcement officers beating peaceful demonstrators. People were stunned. Watching the events from the White House, President Johnson became furious. Eight days later, he went before a nationally televised session of Congress. He proposed a new voting rights law.

The Voting Rights Act of 1965

On August 3, 1965, the House of Representatives passed the voting rights bill by a wide margin. The following day, the Senate also passed the bill. The Voting Rights Act of 1965 gave the U.S. attorney general the power to send in federal examiners to register voters. This would avoid using local officials who often refused to register African Americans. The law also stopped discriminatory devices, such as reading and writing tests, in counties where less than half of all adults had been registered to vote.

The results were huge. By the end of the year, almost 250,000 African Americans had registered as new voters. The number of African American elected

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officials in the South also went up. In 1960 for example, no African American from the South held a seat in the U.S. Congress. By 2011 there were 44 African American members of Congress.

The passage of the Voting Rights Act of 1965 marked a big change in the civil rights movement. The movement had now met two major legislative goals. Segregation was now illegal, and new federal laws stopped discrimination and protected voting rights. After 1965 the movement began to shift its focus to the problems of African American poverty in cities.

PROGRESS CHECK

Summarizing What was the positive outcome of the brutal response of police to civil rights protests?
