

16: THE CIVIL RIGHTS MOVEMENTS

ESSENTIAL TERMS



PEOPLE AND GROUPS

Jackie Robinson: First African American baseball player to play for a major league team.

Emmitt Till: African American teenager from Chicago who was murdered by Whites in 1955 while visiting his family in Mississippi. His murder and open casket funeral brought national attention to the issue of Jim Crow segregation and racism in the South.

National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP): Organization dedicated to promoting African American rights through the justice system. It was established in 1909 as part of the Niagara Movement.

Thurgood Marshall: NAACP lawyer who argued the Brown v. Board of Education case and was later appointed to be the first African American justice on the Supreme Court.

Earl Warren: Chief Justice of the Supreme Court in the 1950s and 1960s who pushed the Court to rule favorably on numerous cases related to civil rights.

Little Rock Nine: Group of African American students who integrated the main high school in Arkansas under the protection of the National Guard.

James Meredith: First African American student at the University of Mississippi.

George Wallace: Governor of Alabama during the 1960s who was a champion of segregation. His most famous line was “segregation now, segregation tomorrow, segregation forever.”

Rosa Parks: African American activist in Montgomery, Alabama who was arrested for refusing to give up her seat on a city bus. The event initiated the Montgomery Bus Boycott.

Martin Luther King, Jr.: Leader of the African American Civil Rights Movement in the 1960s. He was a minister from Montgomery, Alabama and was assassinated in 1968. He is most famously remembered for his “I Have a Dream” Speech.

Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC): Organization formed by Martin Luther King, Jr. and Ralph Abernathy to organize civil rights demonstrations.

Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC): Civil rights organization formed by African American students in 1960s. They organized sit-ins and joined in other protests.

“Bull” Connor: White police chief in Birmingham, Alabama who used fire hoses and police dogs to attack civil rights protesters.

Kerner Commission: Government commission appointed by President Johnson to study the urban riots of the late-1960s. They found racism, lack of job opportunities, and poor education and social services as the root cause, but little was done to resolve the issues.

Malcolm X: Civil rights leader and spokesman for the Nation of Islam. He advocated African American self-reliance and was assassinated in 1965.

Black Panther Party: African American political organization founded by Huey Newton and Bobby Seale in the late 1960s. They carried guns in an effort to protect African Americans from police and government violence.

Richard Nixon: Republican president elected in 1968. He gained the support of White Southerners by promising to reduce the involvement of the federal government in implementing civil rights laws in the South.

Cesar Chavez: Leader of the United Farm Workers and champion of the rights of Hispanic farm

Dolores Huerta: Co-founder of the National Farm Workers Association and champion of the rights of Hispanic farm workers.

United Farm Workers: Union of Filipino and Hispanic farm workers in California led by Cesar Chavez.

American Indian Movement (AIM): Native American political organization founded in 1968. They organized various protests including the occupation of Alcatraz Island, Trail of Broken Treaties and occupation of Wounded Knee.



EVENTS

Civil Rights Movement: Overall term for the many protests throughout the 1950s and 1960s in which African Americans sought to advance their civil rights through protests, boycotts, sit-ins, marches, etc. Martin Luther King, Jr. was its generally accepted, although unofficial, leader.

Montgomery Bus Boycott: 1955 civil rights protest let initiated by the arrest of Rosa Parks in which African Americans refused to ride city busses until they were desegregated. It was successful and helped propel Dr. King to prominence as the leader of the Civil Rights Movement.

Freedom Rides: 1961 civil rights demonstration against segregated waiting rooms at bus terminals. The protesters were attacked when they arrived in the Deep South.

Birmingham Campaign: Effort by SCLC to desegregate the city of Birmingham, Alabama in 1963. They were met with fierce and violent resistance from the city's White leadership. Images of police dogs and fire hoses attacking protesters captured national attention and helped the effort succeed.

March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom: Major civil rights rally in Washington, DC in 1963 to promote the passage of the Civil Rights Act. Dr. King gave his “I Have a Dream” speech at the event.

Freedom Summer: Effort to register African Americans in Mississippi to vote during 1964. It was marked by violent resistance from the KKK.

Bloody Sunday: Attack in 1965 on civil rights marchers by White police officers as they tried to march across the Edmund Pettus Bridge between Selma and Montgomery, Alabama. They protesters were marching to demand voting rights and the attack pushed congress to pass the Voting Rights Act.

The Long, Hot Summer: Nickname for a series of urban riots that took place in African American neighborhoods of major northern and western cities between 1964 and 1968. The cause of the riots was studied by the Kerner Commission.

Assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr.: Killing of Martin Luther King, Jr. on April 4, 1968 in Memphis, Tennessee. His death was followed by rioting in most major cities.

1968 Presidential Election: Watershed election in American history in which the coalitions that supported each party shifted. Due to Nixon's Southern Strategy, White Southerners switched to the Republican Party and African Americans switched to the Democratic Party.

War on Drugs: Nickname for a collection of programs and laws passed in the 1980s to fight the spread of crime related to the use and sale of drugs. It especially was known for the passage of strict sentencing laws that resulted in overcrowding of jails.

1992 Los Angeles Riots: Urban riots that followed the not guilty verdict in the beating of Rodney King by officers of the LAPD.

Trial of the Century: The highly publicized trial of OJ Simpson in 1995 for the murder of his ex-wife and her boyfriend. He was found not guilty. The trial revealed how racially divided the nation remained.

Delano Grape Strike and Boycott: Major strike and boycott during the 1960s in California by the United Farm Workers to win guarantees of humane treatment of workers and better pay.

Chicano Movement: Movement of Hispanic Americans beginning in the 1960s that focused on civil rights. It involved the development of political institutions and was marked by an increased sense of community pride as well as a flowering of artistic expression and literature.

Occupation of Wounded Knee: Violent 71-day standoff between AIM activists and the federal government in 1973.

Stonewall Inn Riots: Violent confrontation between New York City police and gay men at a bar in 1969. The event sparked the modern gay rights movement.



COURT CASES

Plessy v. Ferguson: 1896 Supreme Court case in which the court declared that racially segregated schools and other public facilities were constitutional establishing the “separate but equal” doctrine. It was overturned in the Brown v. Board of Education case in 1954.

Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka: 1954 Supreme Court decision that ended segregated schools by overturning the Plessy v. Ferguson ruling.

Mendez v. Westminster: 1947 court case that ended segregated schools for Hispanic students.

Obergefell v. Hodges: 2015 Supreme Court case that declared gay marriage constitutional in all 50 states.



LAWS

Jim Crow: The nickname for a system of laws that enforced segregation. For example, African Americans had separate schools, rode in the backs of busses, could not drink from White drinking fountains, and could not eat in restaurants or stay in hotels, etc.

Separate but Equal: Legal doctrine established by the Supreme Court in the Plessy v. Ferguson case that segregated schools and other public institutions were legal so long as they were equal.

Civil Rights Act of 1964: Law passed in 1964 that outlawed discrimination based on race, color, religion, sex, or national origin. It ended unequal application of voter registration requirements and racial segregation in schools, at the workplace, and by facilities that serve the public.

Voting Rights Act of 1965: Law passed in 1965 that eliminated restrictions on voting such as literacy tests and poll taxes.

Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA): 1990 law that guaranteed protections to people with disabilities, including signage in Braille, wheelchair ramps, access lifts, handicapped parking spaces, etc.

Defense of Marriage Act (DOMA): Law passed in 1996 that defined marriage as between one man and one woman. It prohibited the federal government from recognizing gay marriages and allowed states to ignore gay marriages issued in other states. It was overturned in 2015.



KEY CONCEPTS

Nonviolence: The use of peaceful means, not force, to bring about political or social change.

Civil Disobedience: The breaking of laws to demonstrate that they are unjust.

Sit-In: A form of protest used to desegregate lunch counters in the South in the late-1950s. African American students would enter a restaurant and sit peacefully until they were served.

Black Power: Movement in the late 1960s and early 1970s which emphasized African American self-reliance. It deemphasized the nonviolent protests led by Martin Luther King, Jr. and was embraced by more militant, younger activists such as members of the Black Panther Party.

Southern Strategy: President Nixon’s strategy to gain the support of White southern voters by promising to limit the use of federal power to implement civil rights changes. Because of this, White Southerners have mostly supported Republicans, while African Americans have mostly supported Democrats.



GOVERNMENT POLICIES

Bussing: Government policy of transporting students from one area of a town to another to attend school in order to create integrated school populations when neighborhoods were mostly segregated.

Affirmative Action: Government program in which certain numbers of minorities are hired in order to match the racial makeup of the surrounding population.

Three Strikes Laws: Nickname for state laws passed during the 1980s and 1990s that called for lifetime sentences for drug offenders convicted for their third time. It resulted in jails filling up with non-violent criminals and the social destruction of some neighborhoods.

Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell: Policy adopted by the Clinton Administration in the 1990s that allowed homosexual Americans to serve in the military so long as they didn’t reveal their sexual orientation. In turn, the military would not actively try to find out their orientation. It ended the days of an open ban on service.



TEXTS

Letter from a Birmingham Jail: Famous letter written by Martin Luther King, Jr. during the Birmingham protests in which Dr. King responds to critics who accused him of being an outside agitator and believed he was trying to make too much change, too quickly.



SPEECHES

I Have a Dream Speech: Martin Luther King, Jr.’s most famous speech given at the March on Washington in 1963 in which he laid out the moral aspirations of the Civil Rights Movement.



SCIENCE & TECHNOLOGY

AIDS: Illness caused by HIV that was first detected in the 1980s and mistakenly believed to infect only gay men. It devastated the gay community and because the federal government was slow to respond to the growing crisis, sparked organization and activism in the gay community.