

Chronology

- 1953** A successful ten-day boycott of buses takes place in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, in June. Led by Rev. T. J. Jemison, a former NAACP president, black citizens gain modifications in the segregation rules.
- 1954** On 17 May the U.S. Supreme Court (in *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka Kansas*) declares segregation in the public schools to be inherently unequal, and mandates desegregation. The first Citizens' Council is formed in Indianola, Mississippi, in July by whites determined to resist and nullify the school desegregation decision.
- 1955** The "*Brown II*" decision of the Supreme Court implements the 1954 ruling by requiring desegregation "with all deliberate speed."
- The Interstate Commerce Commission outlaws segregated buses and waiting rooms for interstate passengers, but the order is generally ignored.
- Emmett Till, a visiting teenage boy from Chicago, is viciously lynched in Mississippi on 28 August.
- On 1 December Rosa Parks is arrested for violating the bus segregation ordinance in Montgomery, Alabama.
- The Montgomery Bus Boycott begins on 5 December; the Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr., is elected president of the Montgomery Improvement Association.
- The Supreme Court orders the University of Alabama to admit Autherine Lucy for graduate study.

1956 On 3 February, Autherine Lucy attempts to enter the University of Alabama, and white students riot for three days. First suspended “for her own safety,” she is expelled permanently by the trustees. The university remains segregated for seven more years.

Southern senators, led by Harry Byrd of Virginia, sign a “Southern Manifesto” denouncing the Supreme Court’s desegregation decision.

The Supreme Court upholds a favorable district court decision declaring Montgomery’s bus segregation to be illegal. On 21 December, Montgomery’s buses are integrated, and the bus boycott is called off after 381 days.

1957 In July Tuskegee, Alabama is redistricted in order to exclude most black voters from the city. This leads to a selective buying campaign against white merchants, lasting for four years. The vote is restored to black citizens in 1961.

The Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) is founded in January (at first under another name), and Martin Luther King, Jr., is chosen president. In February it acquires its permanent name.

Governor Orval Faubus of Arkansas calls out the National Guard to prevent nine black students from entering all-white Central High School in Little Rock. A court order requires Faubus to withdraw them. After threats of mob violence, President Eisenhower orders paratroopers to Little Rock to enforce integration and places 10,000 National Guardsmen on federal service. The troops remain the rest of the year to protect the students, who are guided by Daisy Bates, president of the state NAACP.

The first Civil Rights Act in 82 years is passed by Congress. Though weak, it has investigative and advisory functions and the power of subpoena. The Civil Rights Commission is established.

1958 A successful voter registration drive in Fayette and Haywood counties, Tennessee, leads to severe economic reprisals. Many black sharecroppers are evicted. In 1960 “Tent City” is set up and a national appeal for aid made.

1960 On 1 February, four black students—Ezell Blair, Jr., Joseph McNeil, David Richmond, and Franklin McClain—sit in at the

Woolworth’s lunch counter in Greensboro, North Carolina. The action is repeated by college students throughout the South. Sympathetic picketing and boycotts occur in the North. Within a year and a half, demonstrations have been held in more than 100 cities and towns in every southern and border state.

The student demonstrators meet from 15 to 17 April at Shaw University in Raleigh, North Carolina. The Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) is founded.

Dr. King is jailed in Atlanta on 19 October. Democratic presidential nominee John F. Kennedy telephones Coretta Scott King to express concern. This act is credited with gaining him the election in November.

1961 On 4 May Freedom Riders, led by James Farmer of the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE), leave Washington, D.C., by bus in order to expose illegal segregation practices in terminal accommodations. On 14 May a white mob burns a Freedom Riders’ bus near Anniston, Alabama. Klansmen in Birmingham beat Riders aboard a second bus. The Freedom Rides continue. In September segregation in all interstate transportation facilities is declared illegal by the Interstate Commerce Commission.

Efforts to desegregate facilities in Albany, Georgia, are launched by local leaders (the Albany Movement). Students test terminal facilities and are jailed. The SCLC is called in. This campaign is viewed as relatively unsuccessful.

Voter registration campaigns are intensified. On 25 September Herbert Lee, a local activist, is killed in Amite County, Mississippi.

1962 The Council of Federated Organizations (COFO) is formed to coordinate voting registration activities.

On 1 October James Meredith becomes the first African American to attend class at the University of Mississippi after a weekend of riots, during which the National Guard is called in.

1963 On 3 April major demonstrations are launched in Birmingham by the SCLC to protest segregation. These continue throughout May. School children are recruited for marches and demonstrations. Police Commissioner Eugene (“Bull”) Connor responds with police dogs, fire hoses, and mass arrests.

William Moore, a white CORE member who had planned a march from Chattanooga to Jackson to protest segregation is murdered in April. CORE takes up the march, joined by other organizations.

On 10 May Birmingham's white leaders agree to a desegregation plan. That night, Dr. King's motel headquarters and his brother's home are bombed and blacks riot until dawn.

Major demonstrations begin in Danville, Virginia, which are later joined by the SCLC.

On 11 June Alabama governor George Wallace tries to block integration at the University of Alabama by "standing in the door." The first student is admitted.

The next day, Medgar Evers, head of the Mississippi NAACP, is ambushed and shot to death at his home in Jackson, Mississippi.

The March on Washington, sponsored by a coalition of civil rights groups, churches, and some unions, attracts hundreds of thousands of peaceful demonstrators to the nation's capitol on 28 August.

September is marked by the death of four black girls and the injuring of many other people in the bombing of Birmingham's Sixteenth Street Baptist Church.

In November a slate of "freedom candidates" headed by Aaron Henry draws the votes of nearly 80,000 black Mississippians in a mock election paralleling the regular election for state governor from which they are excluded. To aid in the registration and organizing effort, SNCC imported about 100 northern white students.

An assassin kills President John F. Kennedy in Dallas, Texas, on 22 November.

- 1964** Hundreds of volunteers arrive to work in Freedom Summer, the Mississippi voter registration project organized by the combined civil rights organizations. Three civil rights workers, James Chaney, Mickey Schwerner, and Andrew Goodman, are abducted on 21 June while investigating an incidence of violence. Their bodies are found buried near Philadelphia, Mississippi, on 4 August.

The 1964 Civil Rights Act is passed by Congress on 2 July and signed by President Lyndon Johnson.

The Mississippi Freedom Democratic party challenges the seating of the "regular" (all-white) Democratic delegation at the party's September national convention. It rejects an unsatisfactory compromise, but black people overwhelmingly help reelect Johnson to the presidency in November.

Martin Luther King, Jr., receives the Nobel Peace prize.

- 1965** Lyndon Johnson outlines the Great Society program to attack poverty.

The desegregation campaign in Selma, Alabama, escalates between January and March. In nearby Marion, a local youth, Jimmie Lee Jackson, is shot by a trooper on 18 February and later dies.

Malcolm X is shot to death at the Audubon Ballroom in New York City on 21 February.

A planned march in Selma results in "Bloody Sunday," 7 March, when civil rights workers are charged by police on horses as they attempt to cross the Edmund Pettus Bridge. The next day, James Reeb, a Unitarian minister from Boston, dies of wounds inflicted by a club-wielding segregationist in Selma. King is criticized for agreeing to shorten a second march. On 17 March U.S. District Judge Frank M. Johnson, Jr., issues a court order, ruling that black protesters have the right to march from Selma to Montgomery. The massive march takes place from 21 to 25 March, drawing civil rights activists from all over the country. Viola Liuzzo, a white woman from Detroit, is killed on the last day of the march as she is transporting participants between Selma and Montgomery.

In August the Voting Rights Act is signed into law by Lyndon Johnson.

In the same month, the first major urban conflagration occurs in Watts, California, as black ghetto dwellers burn and loot following a police arrest of a black youth.

- 1966** James Meredith sets out on a one-man "March against Fear" in Mississippi in June and is gunned down by a sniper. Leaders of three major civil rights organizations continue the march, during

which time Stokely Carmichael popularizes the slogan "black power."

The formation of the Black Panther party by Huey Newton and Bobby Seale takes place in Oakland, California, in October.

Martin Luther King, Jr., SNCC, and CORE take positions opposing the war in Vietnam.

SCLC begins a massive campaign in Chicago, which goes through spring and summer.

Urban rebellions take place in Chicago and Cleveland. Riots in major cities continue through 1967.

SNCC votes to exclude white members. CORE endorses the black power concept.

1967 The president appoints a National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders to inquire into the causes of the urban rebellions. The report is published in 1968.

1968 Martin Luther King, Jr., is assassinated on 4 April while assisting striking sanitation workers in Memphis, Tennessee, in their quest for union recognition and improved wages. Massive riots take place throughout the nation.

Ralph Abernathy and the SCLC go ahead with the Poor People's campaign that had been planned by Dr. King. Thousands of the poor camp out in "Resurrection City" in Washington, D.C., in May and June.

Robert Kennedy, a candidate for the Democratic presidential nomination, is assassinated on 4 June as he leaves a rally.

Richard Nixon is elected president.