

Civil Rights Era

OBJECTIVES

- Explain how the demand for Civil Rights was increased by African Americans.
- Explain the important strategies of the leaders of the Civil Rights Movement.
- Describe how the struggle for Civil Rights was intensified.
- Describe how the government responded to the Civil Rights Movement.
- Explain why the Civil Rights Movement took a new turn in the 1960's and 70's.

Lecture #2 “Important Strategies of the Movement”

NAACP

- Many groups fought for civil rights
- The **NAACP** was founded in 1909
- It was interracial organization,
- **W.E.B. Du Bois**, a founding member, helped define the **NAACP's** goals.
- During the 1920s and 1930s, the **NAACP** won many legal victories
- The **NAACP** received criticism from poorer African Americans, who claimed that it was out of touch with the issues of basic economic survival.



W. E. B. Du Bois Founder of the NAACP

National Urban League...an organization that sought to assist people moving out of the South looking for work in major urban American cities

- It helped African Americans find homes and jobs and made sure they received fair treatment at work

Congress of Racial Equality (CORE)...was an interracial organization founded by pacifists dedicated to bringing about change through peaceful confrontation

Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC)...was organized by civil rights leaders and clergymen, including **Martin Luther King, Jr.**

- It introduced the concept of nonviolent protest, a peaceful way of protesting against policies
- Nonviolent protesters did not resist even when attacked by opponents

Martin Luther King, Jr.

When the **Montgomery Bus Boycott** began, **Martin Luther King, Jr.** was a young, small-town Baptist preacher

- Within a few years he would become one of the most loved and admired – and hated – people in the United States
- MLK became a symbol for the civil rights movement and nonviolent protest

He was born in Atlanta, Georgia in 1929 and grew up amid all the symbols of racism in the United States: separate schools, stores, churches and public places, lynchings, etc...

MLK's father and grandfather were both Baptist preachers

- He was raised with a sense of pride and dignity

In high school, young Martin was an inspiring and eloquent public speaker

- He graduated early from HS and went to Morehouse College in Atlanta, eventually earning a Theological degree from a seminary school in Pennsylvania, and a doctorate from Boston Univ. in 1955

He met and married Coretta Scott while at Boston Univ.

Martin Luther King was heavily influenced by the beliefs of Mohandas Gandhi, the leader of India's struggle against Great Britain

- Gandhi preached a philosophy of nonviolence as the only way to achieve victory against much stronger foes
- He also taught that those who fought for justice must peacefully refuse to obey unjust laws



- No matter the violence committed against them, they must remain nonviolent
- Dr. King preached the same message

King's first job as pastor was in Montgomery, Alabama

- He was 27 years old when he was chosen to lead the year-long boycott of the city's buses

Once the boycott ended, King began training volunteers for what they might expect in the months ahead

- He taught them the same passive resistance as Ghandi
- Bus boycotters in other cities were taught the same thing
- They were advised to follow rules for maintaining a nonviolent approach
- Here is an excerpt of a training pamphlet:

"Pray for guidance and commit yourself to complete nonviolence in word and action as you enter the bus..."

Be loving enough to absorb evil and understanding enough to turn an enemy into a friend...

If cursed, do not curse back. If pushed, do not push back. If struck, do not strike back, but evidence love and goodwill at all times...

If another person is being molested, do not arise to go to his defense, but pray for the oppressor and use moral and spiritual force to carry on the struggle for justice... Do not be afraid to experiment with new and creative techniques for achieving reconciliation and social change... If you feel you cannot take it, walk for another week or two [rather than ride the bus]."

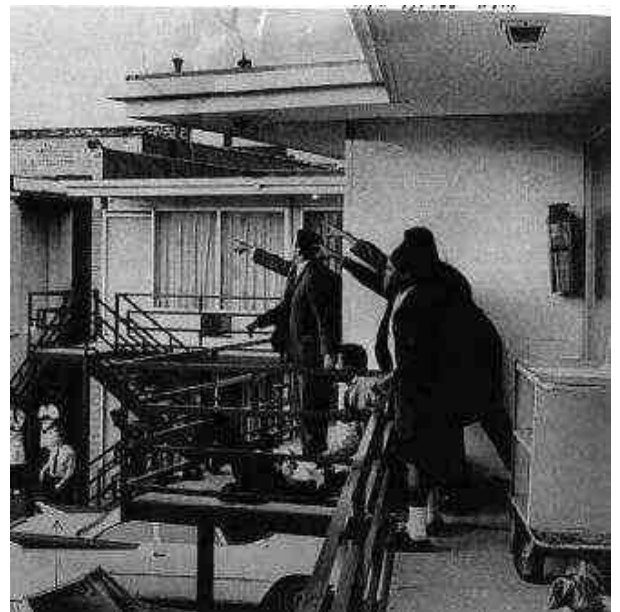


For his role in the Montgomery boycott, King gained national prominence

- For the next 11 years he would play a key role in almost every major civil rights event
- His work even earned him the Nobel Peace Prize in 1964
- Dr. King's opponents attacked him physically and verbally, and he would often go to jail for his beliefs
- Death threats were frequent as well

Dr. King often predicted that he would not live to see the success of the Civil Rights movement

- He was assassinated on a hotel balcony in Memphis, Tenn. in April 1968, at the age of 39
- King's killer, James Earl Ray, was convicted in 1969 and sentenced to 99 years in prison



Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC)...was originally part of the ***SCLC***

- It began in 1960 in North Carolina for students active in the civil rights struggle
- It was an interracial organization at first, though it would change in later years
- It employed different tactics and shifted the focus of the movement away from church leaders alone
- Other organizations waited for gradual change...***SNCC*** wanted more immediate change



Robert Moses, Leader of SNCC

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Lecture #3 “Civil Disobedience”



Sit-ins

- Were originally created in 1943 by **CORE** to desegregate the Jack Spratt Coffee House in Chicago

In this technique, a group of **CORE** members simply sat down at a segregated lunch counter or other public place

- If they were refused service at first, they simply stayed where they were
- This was a popular form of protest in the 1960s
- It forced business owners to decide between serving the protestors or risking a disruption and loss of business

In some places sit-ins brought strong reactions:



"It was a Woolworth in the heart of the downtown area, and we occupied every seat at the lunch counter, every seat in the restaurant... A group of young white people came in and they started pulling and beating primarily the young women. They put lighted cigarettes down their backs, in their hair, and they were really beating people.

In a short time police officials came in and placed all of us under arrest, and not a single member of the white group, the people that opposed our sit-in, was arrested."

-John Lewis, SNCC member, recalling a sit-in in Tennessee



The Freedom Rides

In 1961, **CORE**, along with **SNCC**, organized and carried out the Freedom Rides

- This was a tactic designed to test whether southern states would obey the 1960 Supreme Court case **Boynton v. Virginia** desegregating interstate bus lines and facilities

The first Freedom Ride left Washington D.C. on May 4, 1961

In Anniston, Alabama, a heavily armed mob met the first bus at the terminal

- The bus attempted to flee, and made it almost out of the city.



“Before the bus pulled out, however, members of the mob took out their sharp instruments and slashed tires. The bus got to the outskirts of Anniston and the tires blew out and the bus ground to a halt. Members of the mob had boarded cars and followed the bus, and now with the disabled bus standing there, the members of the mob surrounded it, held the doors closed, and a member of the mob threw a firebomb into the bus, breaking a window to do so. Incidentally, there were some local policemen mingling with the mob, fraternizing with them while this was going on.”

-James Farmer, CORE Director



The riders escaped before the bus burst into flames, but many were beaten by the mob as they stumbled out of the vehicle

- They had anticipated trouble, but the level of violence had taken them by surprise
- Photographs of the smoldering bus shocked the country

The violence intensified in Birmingham and Montgomery and the riders were arrested immediately upon arriving in Jackson, Mississippi

- New volunteers arrived to replace them, but were also arrested
- Att. Gen. Robert Kennedy sent federal marshals to protect the riders for the remainder of the trip

The Albany Movement

- In October 1961, a group of black Americans in Albany, Georgia, known as the Albany Movement, began a year-long campaign of protest marches
- They called for desegregation of bus terminals and talks with white community leaders
- MLK Jr. went to Albany to help
- The movement largely fizzled out by 1962

Integration at “Ole Miss”

1961 – **James Meredith**, an Air force veteran, applied for admission to the all-white University of Mississippi (“Ole Miss”).

- When Meredith was rejected, he sought help from the NAACP.
- When the case reached the Supreme Court, Meredith’s claim was upheld.
- Mississippi Governor Ross Barnett personally blocked Meredith’s way to the admissions office, and violence erupted on campus.
- President Kennedy sent federal marshals to escort Meredith around campus.



Clash in Birmingham

Birmingham’s population was 40% black, but MLK Jr. called it “*the most segregated city in the country*”

Dr. King was invited to visit the city in April 1963

- *Boycotts* were planned for downtown stores and local churches were going to be integrated
- When asked how long he was going to stay in Birmingham, Dr. King said that he would remain until, “*Pharaoh let his people go.*”



Birmingham police commissioner Eugene “Bull” Conner, a devout **segregationist**, replied: “*I got plenty of room in jail.*”

The protest began with **sit-ins** and other **nonviolent** marches

Dr. King and other demonstrators were arrested for holding a parade without a permit...he was held for more than a week



The response from the Birmingham authorities became stronger

- **The Children's March** - They arrested more than 900 children who were protesting with the civil rights marchers
- They also used high-pressure fire hoses on the demonstrators, along with attack dogs
- When the demonstrators fell to the ground, authorities beat them with clubs and arrested them



Television cameras allowed the nation to watch the violence in Birmingham

- Even those unsympathetic to the Civil Rights cause were appalled

The marches were an eventual success, as the city officials agreed to desegregate city facilities and revamp hiring practices

- The Birmingham marches were a successful example of nonviolent protest