

CIVIL RIGHTS

ROAD TRIP

This timeline highlights the road to equality that African Americans took in the 1950s and 1960s. It was not straight or smooth. Great advances against racial prejudice were often followed by setbacks. For instance, the Brown v. Board of Education ruling, which ended school segregation, was ignored by many communities. African Americans often had to force states to comply, as they did in Little Rock, Arkansas. The road to civil rights was also marked by violence, even against children and peaceful protesters. Each step involved great sacrifices. Those sacrifices were made to guarantee that all Americans had equal rights.

Topeka, Kansas

1954 Brown v. Board of Education Supreme Court Case

Until the 1950s, many states had separate schools for white and African-American children. Usually, the schools for white children were better than schools for black children. This unequal system was called segregation. Seeking change, African-American families sued. One case, from Topeka, went all the way to the U.S. Supreme Court. The justices ruled unanimously that school segregation wasn't equal and violated the 14th Amendment of the U.S. Constitution. They ordered states to end school segregation and open schools to all students, no matter their race.



Montgomery, Alabama

1955-56 Montgomery Bus Boycott

African Americans in the South had to sit in the back of buses. If the bus was full, they had to give up their seats to white people. On Dec. 1, 1955, an African-American woman named Rosa Parks refused to give up her seat on a bus in Montgomery. She was arrested and fined. Fed up, the city's African-American citizens stopped riding buses. Their boycott lasted for 13 months. People walked and found other ways to get to work while bus companies lost money. A year later, the U.S. Supreme Court said bus segregation was unequal and ordered Montgomery to integrate its buses.



Little Rock, Arkansas

1957 Desegregation of Central High

After *Brown v. Board of Education*, many communities, especially in southern states, refused to integrate their schools. Three years after the ruling, nine African-American students tried to attend all-white Central High School in Little Rock. Many of the city's white residents protested. Some threatened and harassed the students. The governor even ordered the state's National Guard to block the black teens from entering the school. In the end, President Dwight D. Eisenhower sent soldiers to keep the students safe as they integrated the school.



New Orleans, Louisiana

1960 Desegregation of Schools

Six years after *Brown*, 6-year-old Ruby Bridges became a symbol of the civil rights movement. The small African-American girl walked into her new elementary school holding her mom's hand. Four U.S. marshals guarded them. Three other little girls were doing the same thing at all-



white grade schools around the city. For days, white citizens protested. Many Americans became supporters of school integration when they saw pictures of Ruby walking bravely into the school.

Greensboro, North Carolina

1960 Lunch Counter Sit-Ins

"Jim Crow" was the nickname for laws that required segregation. Under Jim Crow, African Americans couldn't eat alongside white people or use the same water fountains or public bathrooms that white people used. In February 1960, four African-American college students sat at a "whites only" lunch counter for an hour. The workers refused to serve them. Students repeated the "sit-in" for months. In July, the store finally gave in and began serving African Americans. The sit-ins spread to other cities and, one by one, many restaurants changed their policies.



Anniston, Alabama

1961 Freedom Rides

Buses in southern cities may have been integrated after Montgomery. But bus stations and buses that went from state to state were still segregated five years later. Black and white activists boarded a bus in Washington, D.C., and planned to visit stations all the way to New Orleans. They called their protest "Freedom Rides." In some places, the Freedom Riders were attacked or arrested. In Anniston, they were almost killed. Angry white people threw rocks and set one bus on fire. But the Riders, joined by others, didn't quit. Later that year, the federal government stepped in to integrate the buses, trains and stations.



Oxford, Mississippi

1962 Integration of the University of Mississippi

Many colleges and universities across the South denied enrollment to African Americans thanks to Jim Crow laws. The University of Mississippi was one of them. A young black man named James Meredith applied to the university anyway. He was turned down because of his race. He sued, and the court said he had an equal right to study there. When he tried to enroll, a white mob rioted and attacked the U.S. marshals there to protect him. The mob



killed two people and hurt more than 200. President John F. Kennedy ordered federal troops to restore order. Meredith was able to attend classes and graduated the next year.

Birmingham, Alabama

1963 Children's Crusade · 16th Street Baptist Church Bombing

In early May, hundreds of kids left school and staged their own civil rights march in Birmingham, one of the most segregated cities in the United States. The march lasted several days. This protest became known as the Children's Crusade. White police attacked the students with dogs, and firefighters blasted them with fire hoses.



Later that year, in September, four white men planted a bomb at the 16th Street Baptist Church. Four African-American girls died in the blast. The violent events in Birmingham shocked many Americans, who saw reports on television. More people began to support civil rights.

Washington, D.C.

1963 March on Washington**1964 Passage of the Civil Rights Act****1965 Passage of the Voting Rights Act**

A quarter of a million people gathered on the National Mall as part of the March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom in August 1963. "I have a dream that my four 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," said Martin Luther King Jr., speaking from the steps of the Lincoln Memorial. The nation listened. In 1964, Congress passed the Civil Rights Act to ban discrimination in schools, public spaces and the workplace. In 1965, it passed the Voting Rights Act to protect the right of African Americans to vote.

New York City

1964 Malcolm X's Split with the Nation of Islam

Malcolm X was a leader in the Nation of Islam. This was an organization of militant black Muslims who did not trust whites. He argued that African Americans should fight for equal rights on their own "by any means necessary," including violence. But in March 1964, he quit the group. Having met peaceful Muslims of many races, he changed his views. He began to speak in favor of racial harmony. He was murdered by Nation of Islam members in 1965.



Philadelphia, Mississippi

1964 Freedom Summer and the Murder of Three Civil Rights Workers

Young civil rights workers from all over the country went to Mississippi to help educate and register African-American voters. Their efforts became known as "Freedom

Summer." But some white Mississippians targeted the volunteers. They threatened them and set homes and churches on fire. Three volunteers—James Chaney, Michael Schwerner and Andrew Goodman—disappeared near the town of Philadelphia, Mississippi. Officials found their bodies weeks later. An investigation revealed they had been beaten and murdered by members of the Ku Klux Klan.

Alabama

1965 Bloody Sunday and the Selma-to-Montgomery March

More than 10 years after the *Brown* decision, 600 civil rights marchers began walking 54 miles from Selma to Montgomery, Alabama. They wanted their rights, especially the right to vote. Local police attacked the nonviolent march, injuring many of the marchers. Americans watched the attack on the evening news. The day became known as "Bloody Sunday." The marchers vowed not to quit. Two weeks later, they set out again with more than 3,200 people, including Martin Luther King Jr. U.S. soldiers protected them. In four days, they completed the march to Montgomery. Soon after, Congress passed the Voting Rights Act.



Caroline County, Virginia

1967 Loving v. Virginia Supreme Court Case

In 1958, two Virginia residents, Mildred Jeter and Richard Perry Loving, got married. Jeter was African American and Loving was white, and their interracial marriage was illegal in Virginia. Police arrested the couple and a judge forced them to leave the state. The Lovings challenged the law in court. "We loved each other and got married," said Mrs. Loving. "The law should allow a person to marry anyone he wants." The Supreme Court agreed. It ruled that Jim Crow laws against interracial marriage violated the Constitution.



Memphis, Tennessee

1968 Assassination of Martin Luther King Jr.

Martin Luther King Jr. traveled to Memphis to help African-American sanitation workers who were on strike. In the late afternoon a week after he arrived, King was standing on a balcony at the Lorraine Motel. He was struck by a bullet and died shortly afterwards. News of his assassination set off riots in cities across the country. The civil rights movement lost its most important leader.

