

WITNESS HISTORY AUDIO

Blocking the Schoolhouse Door

Alabama governor George Wallace made it clear where he stood on civil rights: “I say segregation now! Segregation tomorrow! Segregation forever!” Wallace vowed to stand “in the schoolhouse door” and personally block any attempt to integrate Alabama schools. On June 11, 1963, he got his chance. As federal marshals escorted two African American students to register at the University of Alabama, Wallace stood on the steps of the school. He proclaimed the right of states to regulate their own schools. One of the students later recalled:

“I didn’t feel I should sneak in. I didn’t feel I should go around the back door. If [Wallace] were standing in the door, I had every right in the world to face him and to go to school.”

—Vivian Malone Jones, 2003

▲ George Wallace (right) takes a stand against integration.

The Movement Gains Ground

Objectives

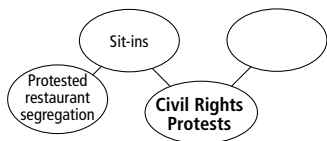
- Describe the sit-ins, freedom rides, and the actions of James Meredith in the early 1960s.
- Explain how the protests at Birmingham and the March on Washington were linked to the Civil Rights Act of 1964.
- Summarize the provisions of the Civil Rights Act of 1964.

Terms and People

sit-in	Medgar Evers
SNCC	March on Washington
freedom ride	filibuster
James Meredith	Civil Rights Act of 1964

NoteTaking

Reading Skill: Summarize Use a concept web like the one below to record information about the civil rights protests of the 1960s.



Why It Matters Despite the *Brown* decision and other civil rights victories, little changed in the everyday lives of most African Americans. Nonetheless, activists continued to struggle for civil rights. In the early 1960s, the movement experienced a groundswell of support. This surge produced a dramatic shift in race relations, led to the passage of landmark civil rights legislation in 1964, and set the stage for future reforms. **Section Focus Question:** How did the civil rights movement gain ground in the 1960s?

Student Activists Make a Difference

After the *Brown* decision, many black youths expected that their schools would integrate quickly and that other racial reforms would follow. Change was not quick to come, however. Disappointed by the lack of progress, young African Americans began to challenge segregation with new vigor and determination.

Sit-ins Challenge Segregation On February 1, 1960, four African American college students ordered doughnuts and coffee at a Woolworth’s lunch counter in Greensboro, North Carolina. As they expected, the white waitress refused to serve them. In the South, nearly all restaurants that served whites refused to serve blacks. To protest this discrimination, the four students sat down on the stools at the lunch counter, where they stayed until closing time.

Word of the Greensboro **sit-in** spread rapidly, sparking a wave of similar protests across the nation. In Nashville, Tennessee, for instance, students led by the Reverend James Lawson staged sit-ins



Protesting Segregation

Protesters challenged segregation at lunch counters by picketing (above, left). Later activists held sit-ins, like the one (above, right) in Jackson, Mississippi. Sit-in participants were trained not to react, even when hostile onlookers dumped food on them. *How would you describe the atmosphere at this lunch counter?*

and, later, marches to protest racial inequality. Elsewhere, protesters held “wade-ins” at public beaches and “read-ins” at public libraries, refusing to leave beaches or libraries reserved for whites only. Other activists carried picket signs in demonstrations and wrote letters to newspapers and government officials to express their support of the protests in the South.

SNCC Promotes Nonviolent Protest The sit-ins marked the birth of a new militancy, especially among young African Americans. To build on the momentum they had gained, about 175 students from 30 states met at Shaw University, in Raleigh, North Carolina. There, on Easter weekend in 1960, they listened to James Lawson deliver an inspiring address:

Primary Source

“We who are demonstrators are trying to raise what we call the ‘moral issue.’ That is, we are pointing to the viciousness of racial segregation and prejudice and calling it evil or sin. . . . [We are also] asserting, ‘get moving.’ The pace of change is too slow. At this rate it will be another generation before the major forms of segregation disappear. . . . Most of us will be grandparents before we can live normal human lives.”

—James Lawson, “From a Lunch Counter Stool,” 1960

Ella Baker, a veteran of the struggle for civil rights, had organized the meeting. The granddaughter of enslaved African Americans, Baker had been active in the NAACP and SCLC. She helped the young activists to establish a new civil rights organization, the **Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee**, or **SNCC**. Its goal was to create a grass-roots movement that involved all classes of African Americans in the struggle to defeat white racism and to obtain equality.



Checkpoint How did young people energize the civil rights movement in the 1960s?

Riding for Freedom

The next battleground was interstate transportation. Activists targeted this industry because they knew that travel between states was subject to federal rather than state regulation. In fact, the Supreme Court had recently ruled in *Boynton v. Virginia* (1960) that segregation on interstate buses and in waiting rooms was illegal. Civil rights activists were now going to test the federal government’s willingness to enforce the law.

Freedom Riders Face Angry Mobs In the spring of 1961, CORE staged a “freedom ride” through the Deep South. Riders set off in two separate buses from Washington, D.C., bound for New Orleans. En route, they defied segregationist codes. African Americans sat in the front of the bus and used “white” restrooms in bus stations.

In Alabama, the trip took a dangerous turn. After departing from Anniston, prosegregationists firebombed one of the buses. When the second bus arrived in Birmingham, a white mob attacked the riders.

INFOGRAPHIC

Troops stand guard on the bus to Jackson. ▶

RIDING FOR FREEDOM

In 1961, a group of freedom riders set out to challenge segregation in buses and bus terminals in the South.

- A** May 4: Freedom riders depart. Six white and seven African American freedom riders leave Washington, D.C.
- B** May 14: Attacks in Alabama Riders travel in two groups through Alabama. Outside of Anniston, one bus is firebombed. A mob attacks the second bus in Birmingham.
- C** May 20: Federal marshals arrive. Riders meet more violence when they reach Montgomery. U.S. marshals are sent in.
- D** May 24: Mass arrests Troops escort riders to Jackson, where they are arrested and sent to jail.

New volunteers kept the freedom rides going. By the end of the summer, more than 300 had been arrested.

Freedom rider James Zwerg reels ▶ after being beaten in Montgomery.

Passengers watch as their bus burns near Anniston. ▼

➔ Route of Freedom Riders


Thinking Critically

- 1. Analyze Information** Why do you think the freedom riders chose the route that they did?
- 2. Draw Inferences** Do you think they anticipated the opposition they encountered?

President Kennedy Takes Action Photographs of the bombed-out bus and the injured riders appeared in newspapers and on television screens around the world, prodding President John F. Kennedy to intervene. Kennedy had intervened before. The previous year, when he was running for the presidency, Kennedy had helped to win Martin Luther King's release from a Georgia prison after state officials had sentenced King to 6 months in jail for a traffic violation. King was freed and Kennedy, with the help of African American voters, went on to win the presidential election of 1960.

Kennedy now took action to stem the violence against the freedom riders. His administration worked out a deal with Mississippi's leaders. Police and state troopers agreed to protect the riders. The Federal Transportation Commission also issued an order mandating the desegregation of interstate transportation. In exchange, the Kennedy administration agreed not to intervene when Mississippi authorities arrested the activists and sentenced them to jail for disturbing the peace.

The freedom riders achieved their immediate goal. They compelled a reluctant federal government to act. By refusing to allow violent mobs to deter them, the riders also displayed that intimidation would not defeat the movement.

 **Checkpoint** What did the freedom rides accomplish?

Protests and Confrontations Intensify

In the fall of 1962 and spring of 1963, protests against racial discrimination intensified. The protesters put pressure on the federal government to help break down legal, or de jure, segregation.

Integrating Ole Miss

Accompanied by federal marshals, James Meredith arrived at the University of Mississippi in 1962. He went on to graduate from the university in 1963.

Meredith Integrates the University of Mississippi

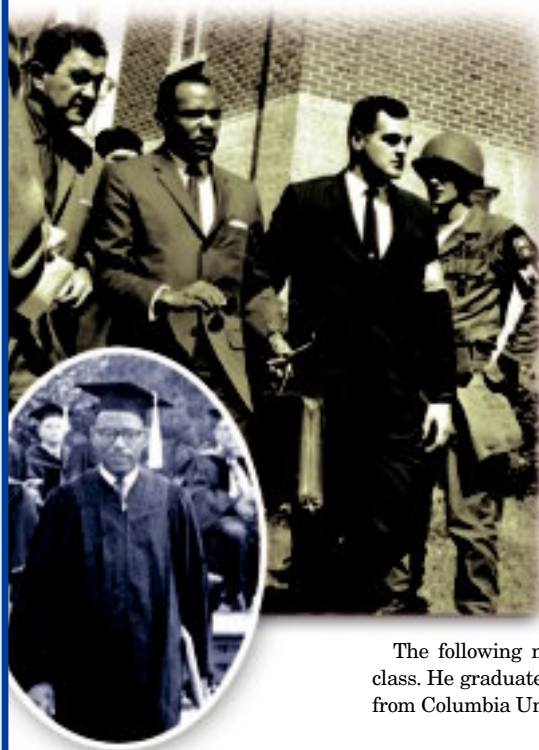
One struggle that gained international attention involved **James Meredith**. Meredith was an Air Force veteran who sought to enroll at the all-white University of Mississippi, known as "Ole Miss." In September 1962, with the support of the NAACP, Meredith won a federal court case that ordered the university to desegregate. Civil rights activist **Medgar Evers** was instrumental in this effort.

Mississippi governor Ross Barnett was determined to prevent the integration of the university. The issue became a standoff between the governor and the federal government.

On September 30, rumors of Meredith's arrival on the university's campus began to spread. Federal marshals had been assigned to protect him. Over the course of the night, a full-scale riot erupted, with federal marshals battling white protestors intent on scaring Meredith away.

As the rioting took place, President Kennedy addressed the nation on television. "Americans are free . . . to disagree with the law but not to disobey it," he declared. "For any government of laws . . . , no man, however prominent and powerful . . . is entitled to defy a court of law." The rioting went on throughout the night. By the time it ended, 160 people had been injured and 2 men had been killed.

The following morning, Meredith registered as a student and took his first class. He graduated from Ole Miss in 1963 and went on to obtain his law degree from Columbia University in New York City. Tragically, Medgar Evers was assassinated



sinated, on his front doorstep, in June 1963. Three years later, Meredith himself was shot and nearly killed. Both shootings stand as historical reminders of the high costs of fighting racial discrimination.

King Campaigns in Birmingham In the spring of 1963, Martin Luther King, Jr., and the SCLC targeted Birmingham, Alabama, for a major civil rights campaign. They chose Birmingham because of its reputation as the most segregated city in the South.

The campaign began nonviolently at first with protest marches and sit-ins. City officials got a court order prohibiting the demonstrations. On Good Friday, April 12, 1963, King decided to violate the order and join the demonstration personally, even though he knew it would lead to his arrest. From his jail cell, King wrote a letter explaining why he and other civil rights activists were tired of waiting for reform: “For years now I have heard the word ‘wait!’ It rings in the ear of every Negro with piercing familiarity. This ‘Wait!’ has almost always meant ‘Never.’”

One of the most poignant passages of the letter describes King’s concern about the impact of discrimination on his children:

Primary Source

“Perhaps it is easy for those who have never felt the stinging darts of segregation to say, ‘Wait.’ But . . . when you suddenly find your tongue twisted and your speech stammering as you seek to explain to your six-year-old daughter why she can’t go to the public amusement park that has just been advertised on television, and see tears welling up in her eyes when she is told that Funtown is closed to colored children. . . . Then you will understand why we find it difficult to wait.”

—Martin Luther King, Jr., “Letter From Birmingham Jail,” 1963

After King was released from jail, the SCLC increased the frequency of the demonstrations. For the first time, schoolchildren joined the “freedom marches.” Finally, Birmingham’s Public Safety Commissioner, T. Eugene “Bull” Connor, would not tolerate the demonstrations any longer. He used police dogs and fire hoses on the protesters. Many Americans were shocked by photographs and news coverage of nonviolent protesters set upon by dogs and overwhelmed by the powerful jets of water from fire hoses. They sent telegrams and letters by the thousands to the White House, calling on the President to act.

Kennedy Backs Civil Rights In addition to the conflict in Birmingham, civil rights protests were taking place in cities from Jackson, Mississippi, to Cambridge, Maryland. President Kennedy became convinced that he had to take a more active role in promoting civil rights.

On June 11, 1963, Kennedy delivered a moving televised address. Calling civil rights a “moral issue,” he declared that the nation had an obligation to “fulfill its promise” of giving all Americans “equal rights and equal opportunities.” President Kennedy sent to Congress a proposal for sweeping civil rights legislation. His brother, Attorney General Robert F. Kennedy, led the charge for passage of the bill.



Clash in Birmingham

Police in Birmingham, Alabama, used police dogs to break up civil rights marches in 1963. *How do you think Americans reacted when they saw images like these on television and in newspapers?*

Vocabulary Builder

tolerate—(TAHL er ayt) *v.* to allow or put up with



Checkpoint How did James Meredith and Martin Luther King, Jr., prompt President Kennedy to promote civil rights?

The Movement Marches on Washington

To put pressure on Congress to pass the new civil rights bill, supporters made plans for a massive demonstration in Washington, D.C. The event brought together the major civil rights groups—including the NAACP, SCLC, and SNCC—as well as labor unions and religious groups.

The **March on Washington** took place on August 28, 1963. Organizers had hoped for 100,000 demonstrators. More than double that number showed up, having made the journey to the capital from around the country. Before the march, there had been some concern about maintaining order at such a huge demonstration. Yet despite the massive numbers, the day was peaceful and even festive. Popular celebrities and entertainers were on hand to perform for the crowd.

The main rally took place in front of the Lincoln Memorial, where a distinguished roster of speakers addressed the crowd. The highlight of the day came

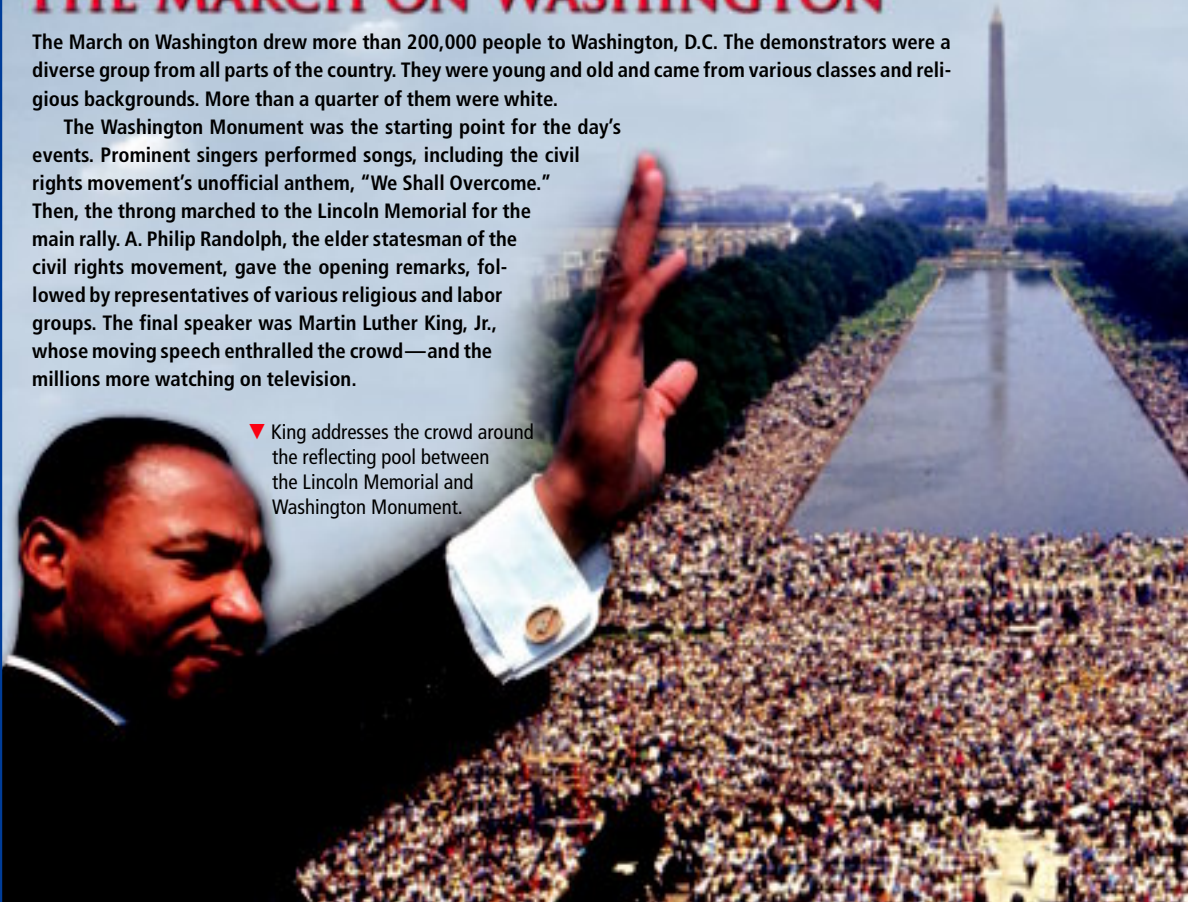
Events That Changed America

THE MARCH ON WASHINGTON

The March on Washington drew more than 200,000 people to Washington, D.C. The demonstrators were a diverse group from all parts of the country. They were young and old and came from various classes and religious backgrounds. More than a quarter of them were white.


The Washington Monument was the starting point for the day's events. Prominent singers performed songs, including the civil rights movement's unofficial anthem, "We Shall Overcome." Then, the throng marched to the Lincoln Memorial for the main rally. A. Philip Randolph, the elder statesman of the civil rights movement, gave the opening remarks, followed by representatives of various religious and labor groups. The final speaker was Martin Luther King, Jr., whose moving speech enthralled the crowd—and the millions more watching on television.

▼ King addresses the crowd around the reflecting pool between the Lincoln Memorial and Washington Monument.



when Martin Luther King, Jr., took the podium. King held the audience spellbound as he described his dream of a colorblind society “when all God’s children” would be free and equal. Millions more watched King’s address live on television. This powerful and eloquent speech has come to be known as the “I Have a Dream” speech. (You will read an excerpt from the “I Have a Dream” speech later in this chapter.)

Behind the scenes, there was some tension between the organizations that had planned the March. SNCC, in particular, had wanted to stage a more militant protest, to show its dissatisfaction with the pace of change. Yet for the public at large and for most who took part, the March on Washington represented a magical moment in American history.

 **Checkpoint** What is considered the highlight of the March on Washington?



▲ Button from the march urging interracial cooperation

Why It Matters

The March on Washington was one of the largest political demonstrations in U.S. history. Widely covered in the media, the march increased awareness of the movement and built momentum for the passage of civil rights legislation. Despite the huge numbers and the emotional intensity of the day, the march remained orderly and is considered a model for peaceful protest. The March on Washington has come to symbolize the civil rights movement itself.

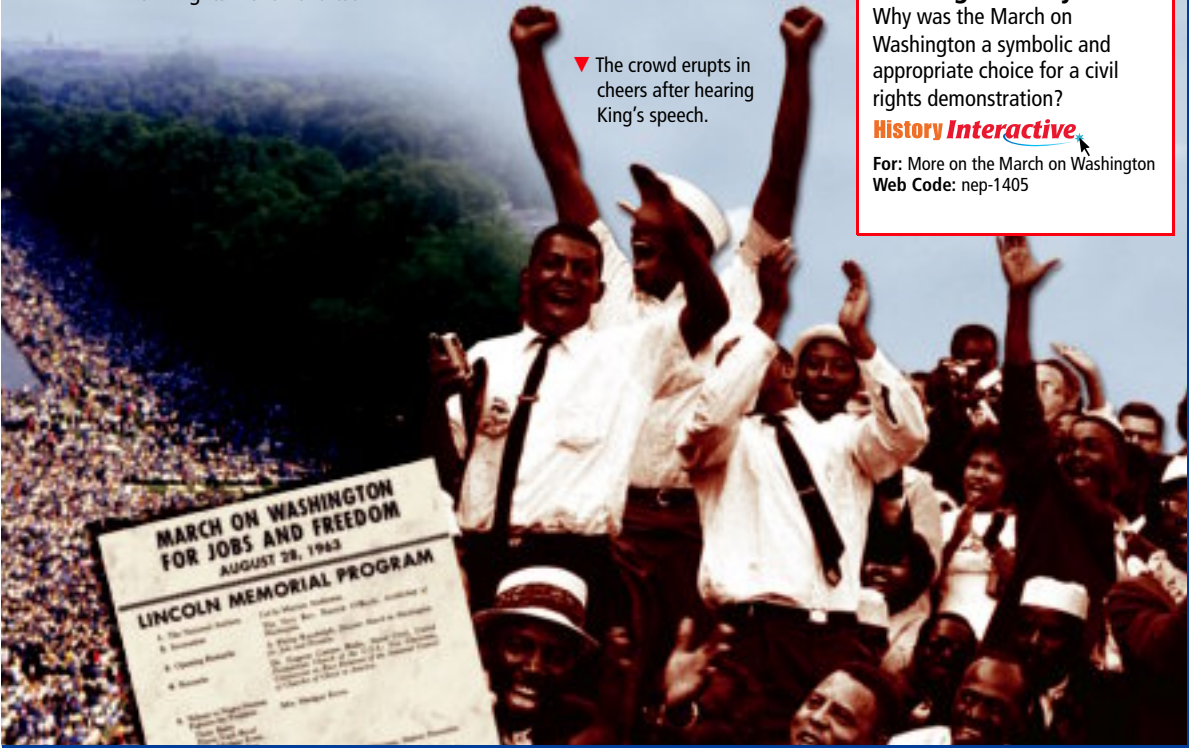
Thinking Critically

Why was the March on Washington a symbolic and appropriate choice for a civil rights demonstration?

History Interactive

For: More on the March on Washington
Web Code: net-1405

▼ The crowd erupts in cheers after hearing King’s speech.



Congress Passes the Civil Rights Act of 1964

On September 15, 1963, less than three weeks after the march, a bomb exploded in the Sixteenth Street Baptist Church in Birmingham. The church had been the SCLC's headquarters earlier that spring. Four young African American girls, all dressed in their Sunday best, were killed in the bombing.

Two months later, on November 22, 1963, President John F. Kennedy was assassinated in Dallas, Texas. Vice President Lyndon B. Johnson assumed the presidency.

Johnson was a southerner with an undistinguished record on racial matters. However, he surprised many Americans by immediately throwing his support behind the cause of civil rights. "No eulogy could more eloquently honor President Kennedy's memory," Johnson told Congress and the nation, "[than the] earliest passage of the civil rights bill for which he fought so long."

The civil rights bill faced strong opposition in Congress, but Johnson put his considerable political skills to work for its passage. The bill passed in the House of Representatives, but it faced a more difficult fight in the Senate, where a group of southern senators attempted to block it by means of a **filibuster**. This is a tactic by which senators give long speeches to hold up legislative business. The filibuster went on for more than 80 days until supporters finally put together enough votes to overcome it. In the end, the measure passed in the Senate, and President Johnson signed the **Civil Rights Act of 1964** into law in July.

The act banned segregation in public accommodations and gave the federal government the ability to compel state and local school boards to desegregate their schools. The act also allowed the Justice Department to prosecute individuals who violated people's civil rights and outlawed discrimination in employment on account of race, color, sex, or national origin. It also established the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC), which is responsible for enforcing these provisions and investigating charges of job discrimination.



Checkpoint How did the Civil Rights Act of 1964 try to end discrimination?

SECTION

2 Assessment

Progress Monitoring Online

For: Self-test with vocabulary practice
Web Code: nea-1406

Comprehension

1. Terms and People For each item below, write a sentence explaining its significance:

- sit-in
- SNCC
- freedom ride
- James Meredith
- Medgar Evers
- March on Washington
- filibuster
- Civil Rights Act of 1964

2. NoteTaking Reading Skill:

Summarize Use your concept web to answer the Section Focus Question: How did the civil rights movement gain ground in the 1960s?

Writing About History

3. Quick Write: Construct a

Hypothesis After identifying an unanswered question, a historian might form a hypothesis, an unproven answer to that question. Write a one-sentence hypothesis to answer the following question: Why was Johnson more successful than Truman in getting civil rights legislation passed? Remember,

your statement is not a fact but a theory that might or might not be supported by further research. The sentence you write could later become the thesis statement for a research paper.

Critical Thinking

4. Draw Conclusions Why were sit-ins often a successful tactic?

5. Analyze Information Why did the freedom rides lead to violence?

6. Recognize Cause and Effect What events led to passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964?

Martin Luther King, Jr.: *I Have a Dream*

Martin Luther King, Jr., delivered the closing address at the March on Washington. For approximately 20 minutes, he mesmerized the crowd with one of the most powerful speeches ever delivered. In this excerpt, King speaks of his dream for America:

I say to you today, my friends, that in spite of the difficulties and frustrations of the moment I still have a dream. It is a dream deeply rooted in the American dream.

I have a dream that one day this nation will rise up and live out the true meaning of its creed¹: “We hold these truths to be self-evident; that all men are created equal.”

I have a dream that one day on the red hills of Georgia the sons of former slaves and the sons of former slaveowners will be able to sit down together at the table of brotherhood.

I have a dream that one day even the state of Mississippi . . . will be transformed into an oasis of freedom and justice.

I have a dream that my four little 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.

I have a dream today.

I have a dream that one day the state of Alabama . . . will be transformed into a situation where little black boys and black girls will be able to join hands with little white boys and girls and walk together as sisters and brothers. . . .

This is our hope. This is the faith with which I return to the South. With this faith we will be able to hew² out of the mountain of despair a stone of hope. With this faith we will be able to transform the jangling discords of our nation into a beautiful symphony of brotherhood. . . .

This will be the day when all of God’s children will be able to sing with new meaning, “My country ’tis of thee, sweet land of liberty, of thee I sing. Land where my father died, land of the Pilgrims’ pride, from every mountainside, let freedom ring.” . . .

When we let freedom ring, when we let it ring from every village and every hamlet, from every state and every city, we will be able to speed up that day when all of God’s children, black men and white men, Jews and Gentiles³, Protestants and Catholics, will be able to join hands and sing in the words of the old Negro spiritual, “Free at last! Free at last! Thank God Almighty, we are free at last!”



▲ Martin Luther King, Jr., at the March on Washington

Thinking Critically

1. Identify Central Issues

What is the “American dream” to which King refers?

2. Draw Inferences

How well does King think the nation has lived up to its promises?

1. **creed** (kreed) *n.* beliefs or principles

2. **hew** (hyoo) *v.* carve

3. **Gentiles** (JEHN tilz) *n.* non-Jews

EXPERIENCE

NONVIOLENT PROTEST



College students held sit-ins at lunch counters. African Americans boycotted buses. Groups of demonstrators knelt in prayer. Protesters in the civil rights movement used many different nonviolent methods to make it clear that they would no longer tolerate segregation and voter discrimination. These protests eventually led to the passage of the Civil Rights Act and the Voting Rights Act.

Since the 1960s, America has made great strides in truly embodying the Declaration of Independence statement that "All men are created equal." However, certain groups still struggle to have their rights recognized. For example, individuals with disabilities worked to gain passage of the landmark Americans With Disabilities Act. This law requires that people with disabilities have equal access to public facilities and equal employment opportunities.



Pickets ▲

A woman carries a picket sign outside a segregated lunch counter. Picketers tried to discourage people from patronizing businesses that did not treat black and white customers equally.





Prayerful Protests ▲

A group of demonstrators kneel in prayer during a hearing for arrested freedom riders in Albany, Georgia, in 1961. Nonviolent protests often took the form of prayer vigils like this.

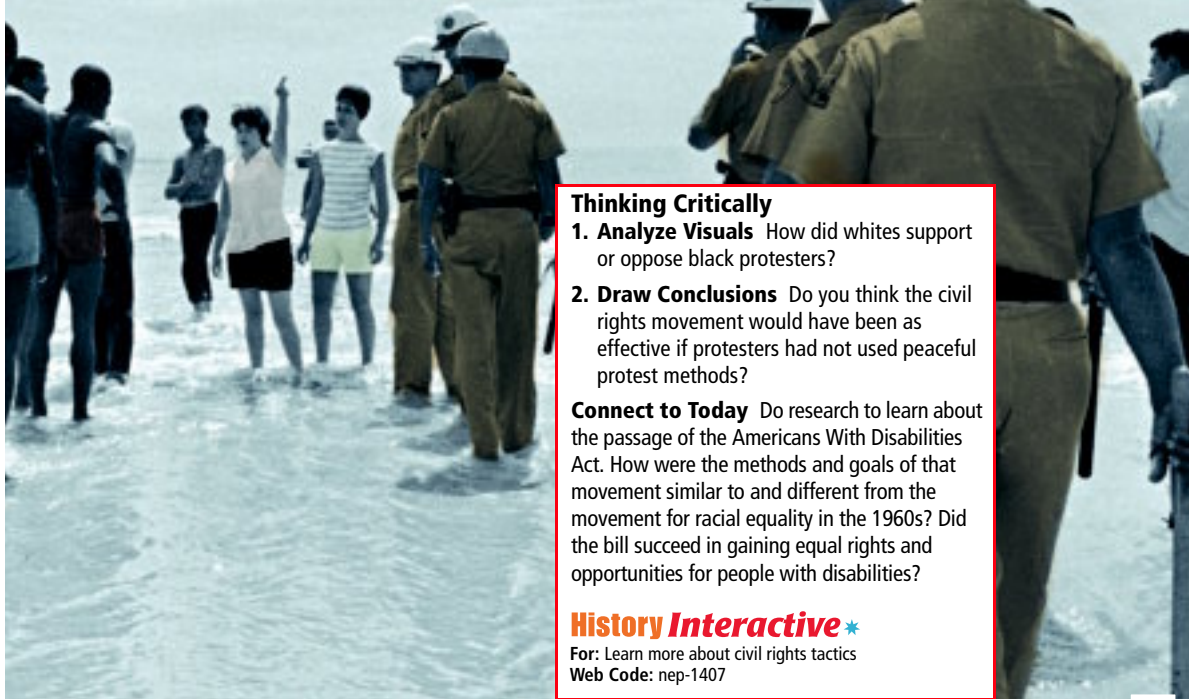


Boycotts ▲

African American students at Florida A&M College jeer at a nearly empty city bus as it passes through the campus. Protesters in Tallahassee were boycotting the buses to protest segregation on the bus lines.

Wade-ins ▼

Black protesters march onto a “whites only” public beach, ready to swim. Whites who did not want the beach desegregated face off against them as police stand guard.



Thinking Critically

1. Analyze Visuals How did whites support or oppose black protesters?

2. Draw Conclusions Do you think the civil rights movement would have been as effective if protesters had not used peaceful protest methods?

Connect to Today Do research to learn about the passage of the Americans With Disabilities Act. How were the methods and goals of that movement similar to and different from the movement for racial equality in the 1960s? Did the bill succeed in gaining equal rights and opportunities for people with disabilities?

History Interactive*

For: Learn more about civil rights tactics
Web Code: nep-1407