

◀ Medgar Evers

**WITNESS HISTORY**  AUDIO**A Different Kind of Enemy**

After serving in the army in Europe in World War II, Medgar Evers returned home to the South, where he faced a different kind of enemy: discrimination. When he and some other African American veterans tried to register to vote, a mob of armed whites blocked their way. "All we wanted to be was ordinary citizens," Evers later said, frustrated to find his life at risk in his own country. "We fought during the war for America, Mississippi included." Evers retreated that day, but he did not give up on his goal. He became an active member of the NAACP and a leader in the fight for civil rights.

◀ Sign at a segregated bus station

# Early Demands for Equality

**Objectives**

- Describe efforts to end segregation in the 1940s and 1950s.
- Explain the importance of *Brown v. Board of Education*.
- Describe the controversy over school desegregation in Little Rock, Arkansas.
- Discuss the Montgomery bus boycott and its impact.

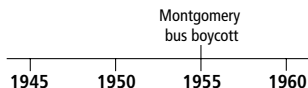
**Terms and People**

de jure segregation  
de facto segregation  
Thurgood Marshall  
Earl Warren

Civil Rights Act of 1957  
Rosa Parks  
Montgomery bus boycott  
Martin Luther King, Jr.

**NoteTaking**

**Reading Skill: Summarize** Copy the timeline below and fill it in with events of the early civil rights movement. When you finish, write two sentences that summarize the information in your timeline.



**Why It Matters** The postwar period brought prosperity to many, but most African Americans were still treated as second-class citizens. The civil rights movement, a broad and diverse effort to attain racial equality, compelled the nation to live up to its ideal that all are created equal. The movement also demonstrated that ordinary men and women could perform extraordinary acts of courage and sacrifice to achieve social justice, a lesson that continues to inspire people around the world today. **Section Focus Question:** How did African Americans challenge segregation after World War II?

## Segregation Divides America

African Americans had a long history of fighting for their rights. After World War II, the struggle intensified, as African Americans grew increasingly dissatisfied with their second-class status.

**Jim Crow Laws Limit African Americans** In the South, Jim Crow laws enforced strict separation of the races. Segregation that is imposed by law is known as **de jure segregation**. In 1896, in *Plessy v. Ferguson*, the Supreme Court had ruled that such segregation was constitutional as long as the facilities for blacks and whites were "separate but equal." But this was seldom the case. The facilities for African Americans were rarely, if ever, equal.

In the South and elsewhere, segregation extended to most areas of public life. Officials enforced segregation of schools, hospitals, transportation, restaurants, cemeteries, and beaches. One city even forbade blacks and whites from playing checkers together.

**Segregation Prevails Around the Nation** In the North, too, African Americans faced segregation and discrimination. Even where there were no explicit laws, **de facto segregation**, or segregation by

unwritten custom or tradition, was a fact of life. African Americans in the North were denied housing in many neighborhoods. They faced discrimination in employment and often could get only low-paying jobs.

Jim Crow laws and more subtle forms of discrimination had a widespread and severe impact on African Americans. Black Americans occupied the bottom rungs of the economic ladder. Compared to white Americans, they had significantly higher rates of poverty and illiteracy, as well as lower rates of homeownership and life expectancy. Although African Americans living in the North could vote, most who lived in the South could not. Very few African Americans held public office.

In the West and Southwest, Asian Americans and Mexican Americans, too, faced de facto segregation and, in some cases, legal restrictions. (Their struggle for equality will be discussed in a later chapter.)

**The Civil Rights Movement Grows** In many ways, World War II set the stage for the rise of the modern civil rights movement. President Roosevelt banned discrimination in defense industries in 1941. Gunnar Myrdal's publication in 1944 of *An American Dilemma* brought the issue of American prejudice to the forefront of public consciousness. Lastly, after risking their lives defending freedom abroad, African Americans were unwilling to accept discrimination at home.

In the 1940s, new efforts arose to try to bring an end to racial injustice. James Farmer and several others founded the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE). Its members were deeply influenced by Henry David Thoreau and Mohandas Gandhi. They became convinced that African Americans could apply direct non-violent methods to gain civil rights. CORE organized protests against segregation in Chicago, Detroit, Denver, and other northern cities.

Success was limited, but one highly visible break in the wall of segregation did take place in 1947. Jackie Robinson joined the Brooklyn Dodgers, becoming the first African American to play major league baseball. Robinson braved death threats and rough treatment, but throughout his career he won the hearts of millions and paved the way for integration of other sports.

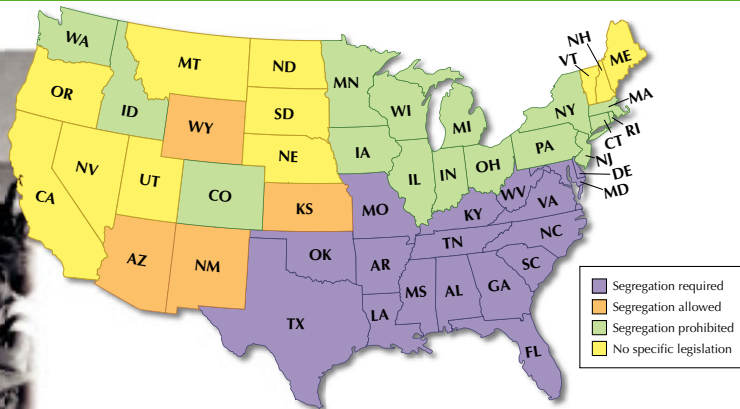
Nevertheless, African Americans continued to face discrimination and felt that racial equality was long overdue.

## African Americans Are Segregated

In some parts of the country, even drinking fountains were segregated (below, left). On public buses, African Americans had to sit in the back. *Were the separate facilities for African Americans shown here "equal"?*



## Public School Segregation, 1954



**Map Skills** Before the *Brown* decision, many states had laws mandating segregation in public schools. Even in states that had no laws regarding segregation, there was de facto segregation in schools. The photograph shows

Linda Brown, the student at the center of the *Brown* case, in her classroom in Topeka, Kansas.

**1. Region** Which states had laws requiring school segregation? What was the status of segregation in the state where Linda Brown lived?

**2. Draw Conclusions** Why did school segregation exist even where it was not mandated by law?

However, the vast majority of white Americans took the opposite view. Racial violence erupted in the South, sometimes against veterans who were just trying to register to vote.

In the wake of this violence, President Truman appointed a Committee on Civil Rights to investigate race relations. In its report, the committee recommended a number of measures to ensure equal opportunity for all Americans, including an antilynching law and federal protection of voting rights. Unfortunately, Truman was unable to win congressional support for these initiatives. However, in 1948, he did use his executive power to order the desegregation of the military. Over time, the U.S. armed forces would become one of the most integrated institutions in the United States.

**Checkpoint** How did segregation affect the lives of African Americans?

## *Brown v. Board of Education*

Although the civil rights movement had made some gains in the 1940s, it stalled in the early 1950s. Feeling that the executive and legislative branches of government were unwilling to promote additional reforms, the NAACP decided to turn to the federal courts to attain its goals.

**The NAACP Challenges Segregation** By the end of World War II, the NAACP had become the largest and most powerful civil rights organization in the nation. It attracted a wide array of individuals, both black and white, including a

number of lawyers. In the 1940s, a team of NAACP attorneys pursued a strategy to challenge in the courts the legality of segregation. **Thurgood Marshall**, an African American lawyer from Baltimore, Maryland, headed the legal team that mounted this challenge.

In 1950, the NAACP won a number of key cases. In *Sweatt v. Painter*, the Supreme Court ruled that the state of Texas had violated the Fourteenth Amendment by establishing a separate, but unequal, all-black law school. Similarly, in the *McLaurin v. Oklahoma State Regents*, the Court ruled that the state of Oklahoma had violated George McLaurin's constitutional rights. Even though McLaurin had been admitted to the graduate school of the University of Oklahoma, he was denied equal access to the library, dining hall, and classrooms. According to the Supreme Court, a truly equal education involved more than simply admitting African Americans to previously all-white universities.

**The Court Strikes Down Segregated Schools** Not long after it won these cases, the NAACP mounted a much broader challenge to segregated public education at all grade levels. This challenge became known as *Brown v. Board of Education, Topeka, Kansas*. In the *Sweatt* and *McLaurin* cases, the NAACP had asserted that Texas and Oklahoma had failed to provide equal educational experiences. In the *Brown* case, however, the NAACP challenged the “separate but equal” principle itself, which had been established in the 1896 *Plessy v. Ferguson* case.

The Supreme Court agreed with the NAACP's argument that segregated public education violated the U.S. Constitution. All nine of the Court's Justices supported the *Brown* decision, which was written by newly appointed Chief Justice **Earl Warren**. “Does segregation of children in public schools solely on the basis of race . . . deprive the children of the minority group equal education opportunities?” Warren asked in his decision. “We believe that it does.” The Chief Justice and the Court declared, “in the field of public education the doctrine of ‘separate but equal’ has no place.”

In the same month as the *Brown* decision, the Supreme Court decided another civil rights case, this time involving Mexican Americans. In *Hernandez v. Texas*, the Court ended the exclusion of Mexican Americans from trial juries. The *Hernandez* decision was the first Supreme Court ruling against discrimination targeting a group other than African Americans.

**Reaction to Brown** The *Brown* decision was one of the most significant and controversial in American history. Because public education touched so many Americans, it had a much greater impact than cases involving only professional and graduate schools. Moreover, by overturning the principle of “separate but equal,” the Court lent its support to the views of many civil rights advocates that all forms of segregation were wrong.

In a separate ruling, known as *Brown II*, the Court called for the implementation of its decision “with all deliberate speed” across the nation. However, most southerners had no intention of desegregating their schools without a fight. In 1956, about 100 southern members of Congress endorsed “The Southern Manifesto.” They pledged to oppose the *Brown* ruling through all “lawful means,” on the grounds that the Court had misinterpreted the Constitution.

More ominously, the Ku Klux Klan staged a revival. Many prominent white southerners and businessmen

## HISTORY MAKERS

### Thurgood Marshall (1908–1993)

An excellent student, Thurgood Marshall applied to the University of Maryland Law School but was turned down because he was an African American. He went to the law school at Howard University, an historically all-black school. The law school dean, Charles Hamilton Houston, trained the students to use the law to fight segregation, and in 1936, Marshall joined the NAACP legal team.

*Brown v. Board of Education* was just one victory among many that he won. From 1965 until 1991, Marshall himself was a Justice on the Supreme Court.



organized “White Citizens Councils” that declared that the South would not be integrated. The Citizens Councils imposed economic and political pressure against those who favored compliance with the Supreme Court’s decision.

✓ **Checkpoint** Why was the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision important?

## Federal and State Governments Clash

Historically, education had been a state matter. States and local school boards ran the schools, and the federal government had little involvement. Local and state officials resisted the *Brown* decision’s order to desegregate, and clashes with the federal government resulted. The most famous battle took place in 1957 in Little Rock, Arkansas.

**A Conflict Erupts in Little Rock** The Little Rock school board had established a plan to gradually desegregate its schools, beginning with Central High School. Nine young African American students volunteered to enroll. But Arkansas governor Orval Faubus announced his opposition to integration and called out the Arkansas state National Guard. When the nine students arrived at Central High, the soldiers blocked their way.

One of the nine, Elizabeth Eckford, has described the scene. An angry white mob began to approach her, with some screaming, “Lynch her! Lynch her!” Eckford sought out a friendly face, someone who might help. “I looked into the face of an old woman and it seemed a kind face,” she recalled, “but when I looked at her again she spat on me.” Fortunately, another white woman whisked Eckford away on a public bus before the mob could have its way. None of the nine African American students gained entrance to the school that day.

Up until the Little Rock crisis, President Eisenhower had provided little leadership on the civil rights front. Following the *Brown* decision, he did not urge the nation to rapidly desegregate its schools. Privately, he expressed his misgivings

### Integrating Little Rock Schools

Angry white students surrounded Elizabeth Eckford (below, right) as she tried to enter Central High in Little Rock. *How is Eckford responding to the white students?*



about the ruling. But when Governor Faubus resisted the will of the federal courts, Eisenhower realized he had to act. He sent federal troops to Little Rock to protect the students and to enforce the Court's decision. Eisenhower explained this action in a nationally televised address:

### Primary Source

“It is important that the reasons for my action be understood by all our citizens. . . . A foundation of our American way of life is our national respect for law. . . . If resistance to the federal court orders ceases at once, the further presence of federal troops will be unnecessary and the City of Little Rock will return to its normal habits of peace and order and a blot upon the fair name and high honor of our nation in the world will be removed.”

—President Dwight D. Eisenhower, “Address on Little Rock,” 1957

For the entire school year, federal troops stayed in Little Rock, escorting the nine students to and from Central High and guarding them on the school grounds. On the last day of class, Ernest Green, the one senior of the nine, became the first African American to graduate from Central High School. The showdown demonstrated that the President would not tolerate open defiance of the law. Still, most southern states found ways to resist full compliance with the Court's decision. Many years would pass before black and white children went to school together.

### Vocabulary Builder

compliance—(kuhm PLĭ uhns) *n.*  
the act of obeying a rule or law

**Congress Passes a Civil Rights Law** Civil rights forces enjoyed a small victory when Congress passed the **Civil Rights Act of 1957** and President Eisenhower signed it into law. This law established the United States Civil Rights Commission, which had the power to investigate violations of civil rights. The law also gave the U.S. Attorney General greater power to protect the voting rights of African Americans. But overall, the law lacked teeth. Its main significance was that it was the first civil rights bill passed by Congress since Reconstruction.



**Checkpoint** Why did President Eisenhower send federal troops to Little Rock?

## The Montgomery Bus Boycott

In addition to legal efforts during this era, some civil rights activists took direct action to end segregation. On December 1, 1955, **Rosa Parks**, an African American seamstress, boarded a bus in Montgomery, Alabama, and sat down in an empty seat. Several stops later, the bus driver requested that she give up her seat to a white passenger. Montgomery law required African American passengers to give up their seats to whites. After Rosa Parks refused to obey the law, she was arrested. “The [policemen] asked if the driver had asked me to stand up, and I said yes, and they wanted to know why I didn’t,” Parks later recalled. “I told them I didn’t think I should have to stand up. After I had paid my fare and occupied a seat, I didn’t think I should have to give it up.”

**Rosa Parks Launches a Movement** Parks’s action set in motion a chain of events that transformed the civil rights movement. Over the next few days, a core of civil rights activists in Montgomery organized a one-day bus boycott. They called upon the black community

### HISTORY MAKERS

#### Rosa Parks (1913–2005)

On December 1, 1955, in Montgomery, Alabama, Rosa Parks was arrested for refusing to give up her bus seat to a white passenger. African Americans responded with a boycott of city buses that lasted more than a year. Parks later moved to Detroit and worked for many years for Representative John Conyers, an African American member of Congress. She founded a nonprofit institute whose goal was to help young people improve their school, work, and interpersonal skills. When she died in 2005, her body was laid in honor at the Capitol in Washington, D.C., making her the first woman ever to be recognized in this way.



to refuse to ride the buses as a way to express their opposition to Parks's arrest, in particular, and segregation, in general. Meanwhile, during the **Montgomery bus boycott**, the NAACP began preparing a legal challenge.

For a long while, many people thought that Parks had refused to give up her seat simply because she was tired after a long day of work. But, in reality, Parks had a record of fighting for civil rights. She had been active in the Montgomery chapter of the NAACP for years. This does not mean that she set out to get arrested and spark a movement. But Parks and other activists welcomed the chance to use the incident to protest bus segregation.

## INFOGRAPHIC

### King's Philosophy of **NONVIOLENT PROTEST**

For Martin Luther King, Jr., the strategy of nonviolent protest had diverse roots. As the son and grandson of Baptist preachers, King absorbed the teachings of Jesus at an early age. Later, a deep interest in philosophy led him to explore the writings of the American author Henry David Thoreau, who advocated civil disobedience, or refusing to obey unjust government or laws. Mohandas Gandhi was another critical influence on King. During India's struggle for independence from British rule, Gandhi expanded on Thoreau's approach, preaching nonviolence as the only way to achieve victory against much stronger foes.

King was a Baptist preacher with a deep faith in God and in the teachings of Jesus. ▼

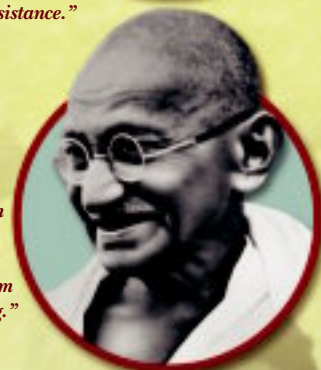
*"In the midst of ... dangers I have felt an inner calm and known resources of strength that only God could give.... I have felt the power of God transforming me the fatigue of despair into the buoyancy of hope."*

King read Thoreau's *Essay on Civil Disobedience*. ►

*"Fascinated by the idea of refusing to cooperate with an evil system, I was so deeply moved that I reread the work several times. This was my first intellectual contact with the theory of nonviolent resistance."*

Gandhi's tactics inspired King. ►

*"It was in this Gandhian emphasis on love and nonviolence that I discovered the method for social reform that I had been seeking."*



#### Thinking Critically

- 1. Apply Information** How did King put his belief in nonviolence into practice in the Montgomery bus boycott?
- 2. Draw Conclusions** What are the advantages and disadvantages of nonviolent protest?

**Martin Luther King Urges Nonviolence** On the evening following the boycott, the Montgomery Improvement Association (MIA), the organization that sponsored the bus boycott, held a meeting. Dr. **Martin Luther King, Jr.**, a Baptist minister, addressed the group. Though he had had little time to prepare, King delivered an inspirational speech that brought the audience to its feet. Noting that African Americans were tired of segregation and oppression, King declared that there was no alternative but to protest. However, he called for the protest to be nonviolent. He urged them not to become resentful, which would lead to hatred toward whites, but rather to follow Christian doctrine and love them.

After King spoke, the MIA vowed to continue the boycott and chose King as its leader. For more than a year, African Americans in Montgomery maintained their boycott of the buses. They did so despite economic pressures from their employers and threats of violence by the Ku Klux Klan. King himself survived a bombing of his house. Fortunately, his wife and baby daughter were not home at the time. Finally, in 1956, the Supreme Court ruled that the Montgomery city law that segregated buses was unconstitutional. After more than a year, the MIA ended its boycott, and African Americans began to ride the buses again.

**Ministers Form the SCLC** The bus boycott represented a tremendous victory for African Americans in Montgomery and across the nation. The boycott revealed the power that African Americans could have if they joined together. The protest also elevated King and his philosophy of nonviolence into a prominent position within the civil rights movement.

After the boycott, King and another Montgomery minister, Ralph Abernathy, established the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) to continue the struggle for civil rights. Made up largely of southern African American ministers, the SCLC advocated nonviolent resistance to fight injustice. The SCLC went on to organize a series of protests, including a Prayer Pilgrimage in Washington, D.C., in 1957, which helped convince Congress to pass civil rights legislation. Still, discrimination and segregation remained widespread.



**Checkpoint** What role did Rosa Parks and Martin Luther King, Jr., play in the Montgomery bus boycott?

## SECTION

# 1

## Assessment

### Progress Monitoring *Online*

For: Self-test with vocabulary practice

Web Code: nea-1403

### Comprehension

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

- de jure segregation
- de facto segregation
- Thurgood Marshall
- *Brown v. Board of Education*
- Earl Warren
- Civil Rights Act of 1957
- Rosa Parks
- Montgomery bus boycott
- Martin Luther King, Jr.

### 2. **NoteTaking** Reading Skill:

**Summarize** Use your timeline to answer the Section Focus Question: How did African Americans challenge segregation after World War II?

### Writing About History

#### 3. **Quick Write: Identify Questions**

Historical research begins with identifying unanswered questions. Such questions often relate to the causes of an event or development. Reread this section and identify two events or developments that raise unanswered questions in your mind. Try to write questions that begin with *Why* or *How*.

### Critical Thinking

**4. Recognize Cause and Effect** Why did the struggle for equal rights intensify after World War II?

**5. Analyze Information** How did the *Brown* decision lead to conflict between federal and state governments?

**6. Synthesize Information** Why is the Montgomery bus boycott considered a turning point in the civil rights movement?