



Activists and Strategies

Activity

Inquiry Question

What were some key events, organizations, and campaigns of the civil rights movement, and what strategies did organizers use to make their voices heard?

Identify prominent events, organizations, and campaigns that shaped the civil rights movement. Look at the provided sources and **classify** the information you find into three categories: a description of the events, the individuals and organizations involved, and the tactics they employed to get the country's attention.

Clarifying Questions

- What were some major events and campaigns of the civil rights movement?
- Who were some of the major individuals and organizations who contributed to the movement?
- What strategies did advocates use to draw attention to their goals and efforts?

Vocabulary

- **Southern Christian Leadership Conference:** founded in 1957, this organization sought through nonviolent protest to appeal to the moral conscience of white Americans and end discrimination against Black Americans.
- **Freedom Summer:** a project in which hundreds of Black and white students volunteered to go to the Deep South to work on African American voter registration.
- **segregation/desegregation:** segregation is a setting apart or a separation of people from others, usually referring to races. To desegregate is the process of ending the separation of the groups.
- **Jim Crow:** this term refers to the social, political, and economic restrictions placed on African Americans between 1877 to the 1950s; Jim Crow encompasses both laws and ordinances as well

as the social interactions between African Americans and others during the period.

- **Little Rock desegregation crisis:** a crisis that began in 1957 when nine African American students attempted to desegregate Central High School in Little Rock, Arkansas but were prevented by Gov. Orval Faubus' directive to call in the local troops to block their entrance. President Dwight D. Eisenhower dispatched the National Guard to ensure that the African American students were admitted to the school.
- **Montgomery bus boycott:** a protest and economic boycott from December 1955 to December 1956 against racial segregation of the public transportation system in Montgomery, Alabama.

Background Information

By the beginning of the 20th century, African Americans found themselves constrained by the system of segregation and racial etiquette for racial behavior known as Jim Crow. Jim Crow laws sought to separate African Americans from white Americans and exclude them from the privileges granted to white society. To maintain white "racial purity," which was central to the Jim Crow racial caste system, these regulations sought to keep Black and white people from mixing by prohibiting interracial relationships and marriage through antimiscegenation laws. In addition, many of these laws banned African Americans from using the same facilities as white people, such as schools, restaurants, bathrooms, and even water fountains. Within this backdrop, by the early 1950s, African Americans were completely disenchanted with this rigid racial system keeping them subordinate. One of the first arenas in which civil rights battles were fought involved using the court system to overturn racial segregation. In addition, other segregated areas of life such as education, public accommodations including transportation, and the right to vote became important arenas where civil rights activists and organizations worked to achieve equality for African Americans during the decades of the 1950s and 1960s.

Creator: ABC-CLIO with history teacher Krister Swanson

Description: This video introduces the four major organizations that led mobilization efforts in the civil rights movement.

Context and Things to Consider

- Pay attention to the growth of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference and the way in which it used the network of churches and religious leaders to advance civil rights causes.
- Consider the way in which the Southern Nonviolent Coordinating Committee differed in composition and philosophy from other civil rights organizations.
- Note the origins of the Congress for Racial Equality and how it differed from other organizations.
- Consider the varied actions taken by the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People and the long history of this organization dating back to the early 20th century. What might be the strengths and limitations of such a historic and nationally recognized organization?
- Think about how the specific projects organized by civil rights groups were geared to gain attention from the public.

Civil Rights Organizations [5:08]

https://players.brightcove.net/2566261579001/S11ADARH_default/index.html?videoId=5521004509001

<https://schoollibraryconnection.com/Content/StudentActivity/2276463>

Entry ID: 2252001

Photographer: Gene Herrick for the Associated Press

Description: This photograph shows Rosa Parks being fingerprinted after her arrest for her involvement in the Montgomery Bus Boycott.

Date: February 22, 1956

Context and Things to Consider

- Note that this photograph was not taken on December 1, 1955, when Rosa Parks famously refused to give up her seat on a Montgomery bus to make way for a white passenger. The second arrest shown in the photograph in 1956 was for her role in the Montgomery Bus Boycott.
- Think about the impact a citywide bus boycott might have on businesses and industries. What strategy did the bus boycott organizers aim to accomplish?
- Consider the significance of being arrested for organizing an economic boycott. What does this suggest about the effectiveness of the boycott on the city government of Montgomery, Alabama?

Police fingerprint Rosa Parks in Montgomery

Rosa Parks is fingerprinted in Montgomery, Alabama, after being arrested for the second time on February 22, 1956. Parks's arrest for refusing to give up her seat on a bus to a white man on December 1, 1955, inspired the Montgomery Bus Boycott, a prolonged action against the segregated Montgomery, Alabama, bus system by African American riders and their white supporters. In 1956, Parks and dozens of other African American residents of Montgomery were indicted for conspiring to interfere with lawful business by boycotting the city buses.



[Library of Congress]

<https://schoollibraryconnection.com/Content/StudentActivity/2276463>

Entry ID: 1508267

Author: Clayborne Carson, historian and director of the Martin Luther King, Jr. Papers Project, Stanford University

Description: This reference entry explores the organizing and challenges of the Birmingham campaign in the spring of 1963.

Context and Things to Consider

- Think about how the timing of the Birmingham campaign—during the busy Easter shopping season—related to its goals.
- Pay attention to the locations of the campaign's protests, and consider the role that the public setting of these protests played in their effectiveness.
- Think about Southern Christian Leadership Conference organizer James Bevel's decision to use young children in the demonstrations of the Birmingham campaign. What do you think was the strategy behind this decision?

Birmingham Campaign

The Birmingham Campaign was a movement in 1963 aimed at raising awareness of attempts to integrate Black and white society in Birmingham, Alabama. In April 1963, Martin Luther King Jr. and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) joined with Birmingham, Alabama's existing local movement, the Alabama Christian Movement for Human Rights (ACMHR), in a massive direct action campaign. Their goal was to attack the city's segregation system by putting pressure on Birmingham's merchants during the Easter season, the second biggest shopping season of the year. As ACMHR founder Fred Shuttlesworth stated in the group's "Birmingham Manifesto," the campaign was "a moral witness to give our community a chance to survive."

Campaign Launch and Challenges

The campaign was originally scheduled to begin in early March 1963. It was postponed until April 2, when

the relatively moderate Albert Boutwell defeated Birmingham's segregationist commissioner of public safety, Eugene "Bull" Connor, in a run-off mayoral election. On April 3, the desegregation campaign was launched with a series of mass meetings, direct actions, lunch counter sit-ins, marches on City Hall, and a boycott of downtown merchants. King spoke to Black citizens about the philosophy of nonviolence and its methods. At the end of the mass meetings, he extended appeals for volunteers. With the number of volunteers increasing daily, actions soon expanded to kneel-ins at churches, sit-ins at the library, and a march on the county building to register voters. Hundreds were arrested.

On April 10, the city government obtained a state circuit court injunction against the protests. After heavy debate, campaign leaders decided to disobey the court order. King declared: "We cannot in all good conscience obey such an injunction which is an unjust, undemocratic and unconstitutional misuse of the legal process." Plans to continue to submit to arrest were threatened, however, because the money available for cash bonds was depleted. Leaders could no longer guarantee that arrested protesters would be released. King contemplated whether he and Ralph Abernathy should be arrested. Given the lack of bail funds, King's services as a fundraiser were desperately needed. But King also worried that his failure to submit to arrests might undermine his credibility. King concluded that he must risk going to jail in Birmingham. He told his colleagues: "I don't know what will happen; I don't know where the money will come from. But I have to make a faith act."

On Good Friday, April 12, King was arrested in Birmingham after violating the anti-protest injunction. Kept in solitary confinement, King penned the "Letter from Birmingham Jail" on the margins of the *Birmingham News*. He wrote in reaction to a statement published in that newspaper by eight Birmingham clergymen who condemned the protests. In addition, King's request to call his wife, Coretta Scott King, who was at home in Atlanta recovering from the birth of their fourth child, was denied. After she communicated her concern to the Kennedy administration, Birmingham officials permitted King to call home. Bail money was made available, and he was released on April 20, 1963.

Children's Crusade

In order to sustain the campaign, SCLC organizer James Bevel proposed using young children in demonstrations. Bevel's rationale for the Children's Crusade was that young people represented an untapped source of freedom fighters without the prohibitive responsibilities of older activists. On May 2, more than

1,000 African American students attempted to march into downtown Birmingham, and hundreds were arrested. When hundreds more gathered the following day, Commissioner Connor directed local police and fire departments to use force to halt the demonstrations.

During the next few days, images of children being blasted by high-pressure fire hoses, clubbed by police officers, and attacked by police dogs appeared on television and in newspapers, triggering international outrage. While leading a group of child marchers, Shuttlesworth himself was hit with the full force of a fire hose and had to be hospitalized. King offered encouragement to parents of the young protesters: "Don't worry about your children, they're going to be alright. Don't hold them back if they want to go to jail. For they are doing a job for not only themselves, but for all of America and for all mankind."

White Businesses Yield

In the meantime, the white business structure was weakening under adverse publicity and the unexpected decline in business due to the boycott. However, many business owners and city officials were reluctant to negotiate with the protesters. National pressure on the White House was also mounting. Attorney General Robert Kennedy sent Burke Marshall, his chief civil rights assistant, to facilitate negotiations between prominent Black citizens and representatives of Birmingham's Senior Citizen's Council, the city's business leadership.

The Senior Citizen's Council sought a moratorium on street protests as an act of good faith before any final settlement was declared, and Marshall encouraged campaign leaders to halt demonstrations, accept an interim compromise that would provide partial success, and negotiate the rest of their demands afterward. Some Black negotiators were open to the idea. Although the hospitalized Shuttlesworth was not present at the negotiations, on May 8, King told the negotiators he would accept the compromise and call the demonstrations to a halt.

When Shuttlesworth learned that King intended to announce a moratorium he was furious—about both the decision to ease pressure off white business owners and the fact that he, as the acknowledged leader of the local movement, had not been consulted. Feeling betrayed, Shuttlesworth reminded King that he could not legitimately speak for the Black population of Birmingham on his own: "Go ahead and call it off . . . When I see it on TV, that you have called it off, I will get up out of this, my sickbed, with what little ounce of

strength I have, and lead them back into the street. And your name'll be Mud." King made the announcement anyway. But he indicated that demonstrations might be resumed if negotiations did not resolve the situation shortly.

Agreement and Backlash

By May 10, negotiators had reached an agreement. Despite his falling out with King, Shuttlesworth joined him and Abernathy to read the prepared statement that detailed the compromise: the removal of "Whites Only" and "Blacks Only" signs in restrooms and on drinking fountains, a plan to desegregate lunch counters an ongoing "program of upgrading Negro employment," the formation of a biracial committee to monitor the progress of the agreement, and the release of jailed protesters on bond.

Birmingham segregationists responded to the agreement with a series of violent attacks. That night, an explosive went off near the Gaston Motel room where King and SCLC leaders had previously stayed. The next day, the home of King's brother, Alfred Daniel King, was bombed. President John F. Kennedy responded by ordering 3,000 federal troops into position near Birmingham and making preparations to federalize the Alabama National Guard. Four months later, on September 15, Ku Klux Klan members bombed Birmingham's Sixteenth Street Baptist Church, killing four young girls. King delivered the eulogy at the September 18 joint funeral of three of the victims. He preached that the girls were "the martyred heroines of a holy crusade for freedom and human dignity."

Clayborne Carson

Dr. Clayborne Carson is professor of history at Stanford University and director of the Martin Luther King, Jr. Research and Education Institute.

<https://schoollibraryconnection.com/Content/StudentActivity/2276463>

Entry ID: 1409091

Author: Michael Kronenwetter

Description: This reference article explains the Little Rock desegregation crisis, during which President Dwight D. Eisenhower called in federal troops to enforce integration and protect African American students after Arkansas governor Orval Faubus resisted desegregation.

Context and Things to Consider

- Note the involvement of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People in the Little Rock desegregation crisis. What role did the organization and the president of its Arkansas branch play, and how did they work to make the crisis into a civil rights movement success?
- Think about the role the Little Rock desegregation crisis played in the larger civil rights movement. How significant was it that the federal government acted to support and enforce integration with federal troops for an extended period of time?
- Note that President Eisenhower deployed federal troops and federalized members of the Arkansas National Guard in order to enforce a federal court ruling, not to impose a new law. Consider that civil rights activists often demonstrated not for a change in the laws, but for enforcement of the laws that already existed.

Little Rock Desegregation Crisis

The Little Rock desegregation crisis occurred when nine Black students attempted to integrate Central High School in Little Rock, Arkansas, in 1957 and Gov. Orval Faubus deployed the state national guard to prevent them from entering the school. The crisis drew attention to the enforcement of the *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954) ruling that school segregation was unconstitutional and fueled the growing civil rights movement.



Resistance to Integration

Little Rock had made some progress toward desegregation. Libraries, parks, and buses were already

integrated. The student body of the University of Arkansas Graduate Center was about 50% Black. However, resistance to desegregation was still widespread in the state. In early 1956, Faubus said 85% of Arkansans opposed integrating.

After the U.S. Supreme Court's decision in *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954), the Little Rock school board announced its intention to integrate the school system. School administrators did not expect that there would be problems when nine Black students entered Little Rock's Central High on September 3, 1957. The night before the students' first day, however, Faubus announced on statewide television that it "would not be possible to restore or to maintain order" if integration were carried out the next day, and he ordered the Arkansas National Guard to surround Central High. The state senate also stated that it opposed desegregation.

National Guard Blockade and Protests

The nine students postponed their first day until the school board obtained a court order for desegregation. When they arrived on September 4, the Arkansas National Guard blocked their entrance, thus directly challenging the federal government. Also present were white segregationists threatening violence against the students.

On September 20, the district court ordered Faubus to stop interfering with desegregation and remove the troops; he refused. On the morning of September 21, 1,000 segregationists from across the South surrounded Central High. White students chanted, "Two, four, six, eight, we ain't gonna integrate." Meanwhile, at a side entrance to the school that was out of sight, Daisy Bates, the president of the Arkansas branch of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), accompanied the "Little Rock Nine" into the school.

Little Rock's mayor feared that there would be violence and ordered the nine students to be withdrawn. Bates told the press that the Black students would not attempt to enter Central High again unless President Dwight. D. Eisenhower provided them with protection. That evening, Eisenhower denounced the actions at Central High as disgraceful and ordered those who were obstructing federal law to cease and desist and for the mob to disperse. However, he resisted federal intervention because he favored gradual integration and did not think the South could be forced into racial reform.

Federal Help

The determined segregationists ignored the president. An even larger mob assembled outside the high school on the morning of September 22. Little Rock's mayor, whose police force was vastly outnumbered, called the U.S. Justice Department and asked for federal help. On September 24, 1957, Eisenhower ordered 1,000 troops of the U.S. Army's 101st Airborne Division to go to Little Rock and mobilized 10,000 members of the Arkansas National Guard under federal command. In a nationally televised address, he said it was his duty to preserve the "peace and order of the community." By 5:00 A.M., armed paratroopers from the 101st had surrounded the school. Federal troops picked up the Little Rock Nine from Bates's home and escorted them to school.

The soldiers remained in Little Rock for two months. After the 101st was withdrawn, the federalized Arkansas guardsmen continued to patrol Central High for the rest of the school year, and they escorted the Little Rock Nine to and from school. Despite the presence of the military at the high school, the Little Rock Nine were subjected to constant harassment. The press coverage of the events at Central High drew national attention to enforcement of the *Brown* decision and also helped energize the growing civil rights movement.

Michael Kronenwetter

Michael Kronenwetter is a freelance writer and newspaper columnist. Among his more than 30 books for adults and young adults are *Prejudice in America* (Franklin Watts, 1993), *The Encyclopedia of Modern American Social Issues* (ABC-CLIO, 1997), and *First Kill* (Minotaur Books, 2005). Several of his books have appeared on the New York Public Library's prestigious annual list of Notable Books for the Teen Age. He has written in a variety of other forms and media, including fiction, poetry, and CDs. His script for the filmstrip *America's Power and Prestige since Vietnam* was honored by the National Educational Film Festival in 1983.

<https://schoollibraryconnection.com/Content/StudentActivity/2276463>

Entry ID: 1510503

Author: History professor Neil A. Hamilton

Description: This reference entry explains the Freedom Summer, which was organized by several civil rights groups in Mississippi in 1964.

Context and Things to Consider

- Note the major civil rights groups involved in organizing the Freedom Summer.
- Pay attention to the Freedom Summer's focus on a voter registration drive. Why would civil rights advocates have to organize in order to register African Americans to vote?
- Think about Robert Moses's reasoning for including white students as volunteers in the campaign.
- Consider the effects of the Freedom Summer campaign, from its small successes in registering African American voters to the violent responses to it.

Freedom Summer

In 1964, the Council of Federated Organizations pondered what action to take after a largely successful drive the previous year to register African American voters in Mississippi. It did not want the enthusiasm that had been stirred to fade and the fight for African American rights to lose momentum, and thus it launched Freedom Summer.

Planning Freedom Summer

The Council of Federated Organizations consisted of members of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, the Congress of Racial Equality, the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, and the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC). At a meeting in Greenville, Mississippi in 1964, David Dennis of the SNCC proposed to 45 delegates that a Freedom Summer campaign be aimed primarily at expanding the voter registration drive and taken into areas of the state where opposition and hostility ran high.

The delegates immediately debated whether they should recruit white college students from the North to help in the effort. Many in the SNCC believed that Freedom Summer should be all black; this, they insisted, would promote African American leadership. Further, these delegates did not like the superior attitude of whites who had previously come to the South to help. When civil rights leader Robert Moses arrived at the meeting, he helped persuade the delegates to recruit the white students. "Look, I'm not going to be part of anything all black," he insisted. "I always thought that the one thing we can do for the country that no one else can do is to be above the race issue." He realized, too, that the presence of white students would increase media coverage and assure federal protection for civil rights workers.

Violence Erupts

Such protection proved meager, however, and even before the campaign began in June, extensive violence had erupted as local whites assaulted African Americans. When the SNCC volunteers arrived—more than 800 who had met at the Western College for Women in Oxford, Ohio to plan their strategy—the violence continued unabated. Freedom Summer included a tragedy: three students (one African American and two whites) were brutally killed near Philadelphia, Mississippi by whites. One observer estimated that by summer's end, whites had killed three additional volunteers, beaten 80, shot at 35, burned more than 30 churches to the ground, and bombed about 30 buildings.

Aftermath

Freedom Summer greatly affected the SNCC and the civil rights movement: the violence radicalized African Americans, even to the point that some rejected nonviolence and armed themselves for protection. The white students returned home convinced that American society was not only undemocratic but also cruel and barbaric, and they felt betrayed by the federal government and its liberal supporters for having done little to protect the volunteers. These students constituted an activist minority that expressed disgust with the status quo and through the counterculture challenged the major political parties, the Vietnam War, poverty, and the entire economic structure.

Freedom Summer registered African American voters (although due to white resistance, only in small numbers) and led to an important confrontation at the Democratic National Convention when the recently organized Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party challenged the all-white delegation from that state.

Perhaps more importantly, Freedom Summer had exposed injustice and thus left an indelible imprint on the emerging counterculture.

Neil A. Hamilton

Dr. Neil A. Hamilton is a professor of history at Spring Hill College in Mobile, Alabama, and an adjunct professor of American history at the University of South Alabama. He received his PhD in American history at the University of Tennessee after graduating with a BA and MA from the University of Miami. A member of the Organization of American Historians, Hamilton has authored or coauthored a number of articles for historical journals and such books as *The ABC-CLIO Companion to the 1960s Counterculture in America* (ABC-CLIO, 1997), *Atlas of the Baby Boom Generation* (Macmillan, 2000), *American Social Leaders and Activists* (Facts on File, 2002), *The 1970s* (Facts on File, 2006), *Scientific Exploration and Expeditions: From the Age of Discovery to the Twenty-First Century* (Sharpe, 2011), *Outlaws Still At Large!: A Saga of Roots Country Music Since the 1970s* (Outlaw Press, 2013), and *Rebels and Renegades: a Chronology of Social and Political Dissent in the United States* (Taylor and Francis, 2016).

<https://schoollibraryconnection.com/Content/StudentActivity/2276463>

Entry ID: 2251998

COPYRIGHT 2026 ABC-CLIO, LLC

<https://schoollibraryconnection.com/Content/StudentActivity/2276463>

Activists and Strategies

Collect and Organize Information

Inquiry Question

Identify prominent events, organizations, and campaigns that shaped the civil rights movement. Look at the provided sources and classify the information you find into three categories: a description of the events, the individuals and organizations involved, and the tactics they employed to get the country's attention.

	What Happened	Leaders & Organizations Involved	Strategies Used
Montgomery Bus Boycott (1955-1956)			
Little Rock Segregation Crisis (1957)			
Birmingham Campaign (1963)			
Freedom Summer (1964)			

Name _____

Class _____

Inquiry Question

What were some key events, organizations, and campaigns of the civil rights movement, and what strategies did organizers use to make their voices heard?

Response
