

Summary: Civil Rights

The Movement Begins

The end of slavery was not the end of inequality. African Americans could not use many of the civil rights guaranteed by the Constitution. In the early 1950s, many public places were segregated. People were separated by race. Many Americans thought segregation was wrong. They wanted desegregation. In 1954, the Supreme Court said segregation of public schools was illegal because African American children did not get an equal education. In Montgomery, Alabama, buses were segregated. In 1955, Rosa Parks, an African American woman, sat in the white section of a bus. The Montgomery Bus Boycott began. Protesters stopped riding buses. Martin Luther King Jr. led nonviolent protests. In 1956, bus segregation became illegal.

Civil Rights Victories

In 1960, African Americans in 54 cities did protests called “sit-ins.” They sat in segregated restaurants until they were served. Freedom Riders tested desegregation in the South. They used public places that were once for “whites only.” People who were against desegregation attacked them. Martin Luther King Jr. organized a children’s protest. The police attacked the protesters. In Washington, D.C., King organized a march and gave a famous speech.

Gains and Losses

In the 1960s, religious and ethnic groups, including women and Native Americans, fought for civil rights. Cesar Chavez and Dolores Huerta organized farm workers to improve work conditions. The Civil Rights Act of 1964 made segregation illegal in schools, workplaces, and public places. Change was slow. Laws made it difficult for African Americans to vote. In 1965, the Voting Rights Act made it illegal to stop people from voting because of their race. In 1968, Martin Luther King Jr. was assassinated. The civil rights movement lost an important leader. King became a symbol for peaceful change.



Before You Read

Find and underline each vocabulary word.

civil rights *noun*, rights that countries guarantee their citizens

desegregation *noun*, ending the separation of people by racial or ethnic group

nonviolent protest *noun*, a way to bring change without using violence



After You Read

REVIEW What was the goal of the Montgomery Bus Boycott? Circle the words that tell what happened because African Americans stopped riding buses in Montgomery, Alabama.

REVIEW What was the purpose of the restaurant sit-ins? Circle the sentence that tells what happened because of the sit-ins.

REVIEW What did the Civil Rights Act do? Circle the sentence that tells what the Civil Rights Act did.