

GRADE 12

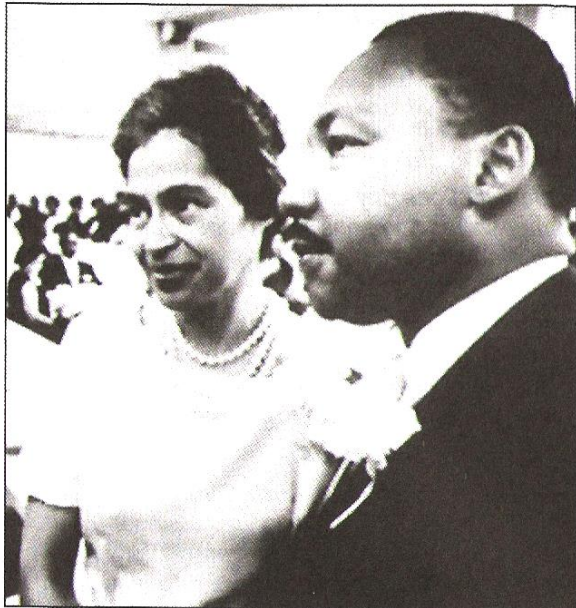
HISTORY

IF. CIVIL RIGHTS MOVEMENT



a) ROSA PARKS AND THE BUS BOYCOTTS

In 1955, Rosa Parks, a black American seamstress in Montgomery, Alabama, refused to give up her seat on a bus to a white man. **This event sparked the civil rights movement in America.** No one understood the dehumanisation of segregation better than Rosa Parks; she had quietly endured countless indignities. But this time for no apparent reason, she chose to make a stand.



Rosa Parks and Martin Luther King

Picture from Academy of Achievement Museum of Living History Washington.
www.achievement.org/.../achievers/par0-003

Parks was arrested and her family met with Ed Nixon who was a lawyer with the National Association for the Advancement of Coloured People (NAACP). Nixon was excited about taking on her case as he believed that the time was right to challenge the law. Park's husband, however, was quite afraid and only very reluctantly allowed him to represent her. **Nixon suggested a boycott of public buses, which along with his appeal against Rosa's arrest, would put pressure on the City Council to make a stand against segregation.** To lead the boycott, they turned to a young 26 year old minister who had been in Montgomery for just under a year – Martin Luther King.



Rosa Parks is fingerprinted on her arrest

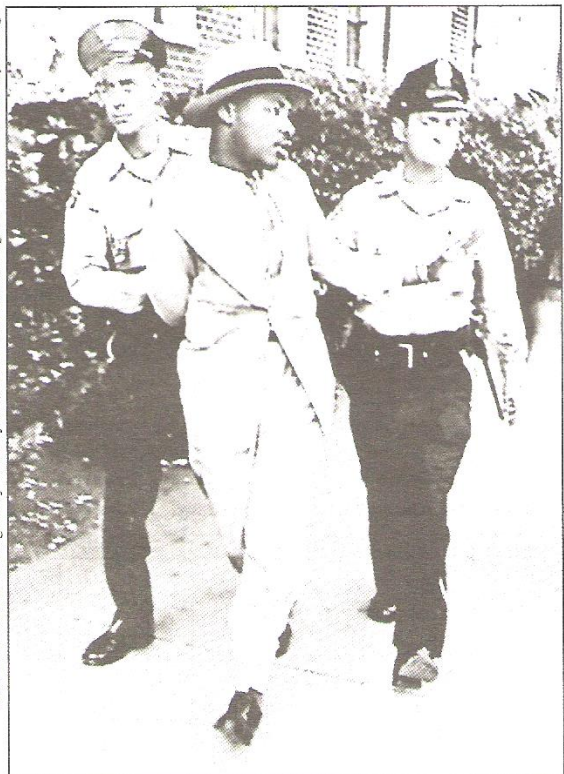
When Martin Luther King spoke to a packed crowd at the first mass meeting, he recalled the history of abuse suffered by blacks on the buses of Montgomery. Black Americans were tired of being segregated and humiliated and King fed this fertile ground, stating that they had no alternative but to protest.

When Parks was convicted of breaking the law and fined \$10 along with \$4 in court costs, the support and turn-out for the boycott was

phenomenal; the city responded en masse. So began a protest that initially was meant to last for just one day. One day turned into 1 week which turned into a month which turned into a year. No matter how far they had to walk, or whether it was raining, or if the soles in their shoes had worn through, black people (supported by a small minority of whites) walked everywhere that they had to go. If they couldn't walk, a taxi was organized for them. People volunteered the use of their cars and often had lift schemes that transported over a 100 commuters a day. But nobody rode on the busses. As a result, the bus companies suffered severe economic losses which bankrupted them. After only a few months, the bus companies had been prepared to give into the demands of the MIA (Montgomery Improvement Association) and to allow black people to sit on seats on a first come, first served basis. But the town council refused.

Police resorted to harassing the cars used to ferry black people (as an alternative to bus travel). They threatened to arrest drivers and revoke their licenses and cancel their insurance policies. On January 26th 1956, Martin Luther King was arrested for speeding! He was driving at 30kmph in a 25 kmph zone. A few days later his house was bombed and he received hate letters and threatening phone calls.

Rosa Parks and the Montgomery Bus Boycott, David C. Hanson, Virginia Western Community College



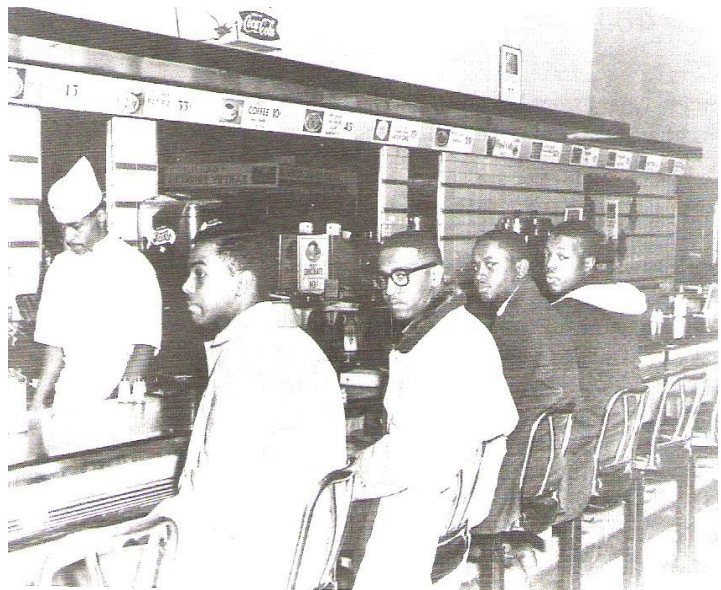
Martin Luther King being arrested

The bus boycott lasted 381 days and the pressure it placed on the legal system was immense, especially when Martin Luther King's arrest and trial made the bus boycott national news. After lengthy court hearings, a press release announced that the Supreme Court of the United States affirmed a decision of a special 3-judge US District Court in declaring segregation on buses unconstitutional. The protestors had won.

After losing her job and enduring endless threats on her life, Rosa Parks and her husband Raymond left Montgomery in 1957 and moved to Detroit. For the next twenty years she worked as an administrative assistant, retiring in 1988. She also founded a non-profit institute for helping young people. In 1996, Parks was awarded the Presidential Medal of Freedom. An ordinary woman of extraordinary courage and determination, Parks is often referred to as the Mother of the Civil Rights Movement. She died at the age of 92 on October 24, 2005, and became the first woman to lie in state in the Capitol Rotunda. In her honour, US flags were flown at half-mast in all public buildings on the day of her funeral.

SIT - INS

This victory obviously encouraged further protest, especially against segregation of public facilities. In 1960, in Greensboro, North Carolina, 4 young black men sat at the whites only lunch counter in the local Woolworths. This was the start of **'sit-ins'**. More and more black people sat in previously whites-only restaurants, department stores and public places, forcing change. This was an important non-violent means of protest that proved to be quite effective.



John R Slater recalls his experience at a Woolworths sit-in.

This was the most violently attacked sit-in during the 1960s and is the most publicised. A huge mob gathered, with open police support while the three of us sat there for three hours. I was attacked with fists, brass knuckles and the broken portions of glass sugar containers, and was burned with cigarettes. I'm covered with blood and we were all covered by salt, sugar, mustard, and various other things.

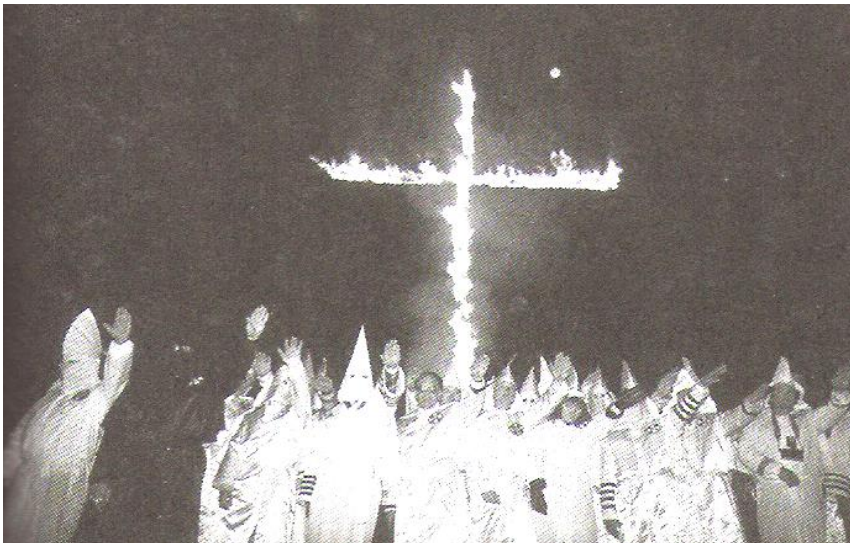
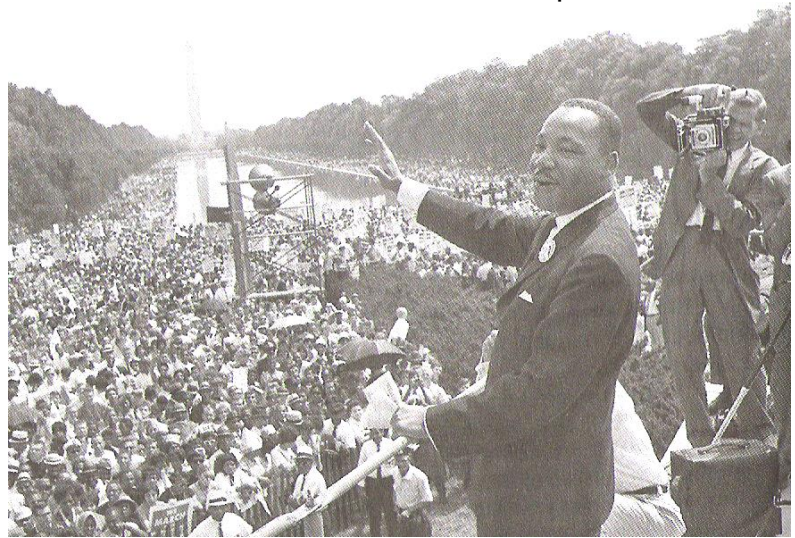
Source: John R Slater Jr, *Jackson, Mississippi: An American Chronicle Of Struggle And Schism*, Krieger, 1987

MARTIN LUTHER KING JNR

Martin Luther King studied to be a pastor, like his father, and began his vocation in 1954 in Montgomery, Alabama. During the 1950s and 1960s he became better known as a civil rights activist and he organized many mass rallies and mass marches. He adopted a policy of non-violent protest, following in the footsteps of Ghandi.

In April 1963, King led a march in Birmingham, Alabama, a city which he regarded “by far” as America’s worst racist city. He aimed to expose the racism on a national level and was successful when the police retaliated with dogs and water hoses that left many protesters with their clothes torn and bodies beaten. This drew national attention and pressurized the Governor of Alabama, George Wallace, to desegregate Birmingham.

In August 1963, King organized a march on Washington in order to persuade President Kennedy to introduce a Civil Rights Bill. Over 200 000 blacks and 50 000 whites marched on the capital. It was here that King made his inspirational “I have a dream” speech.



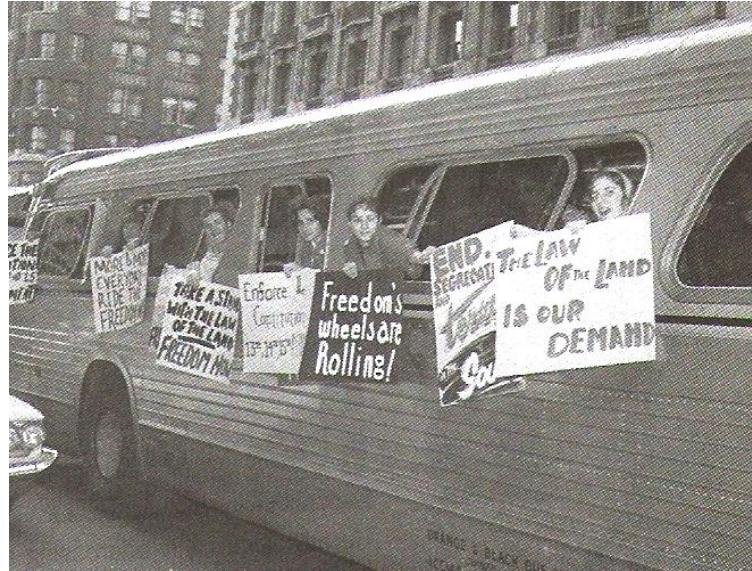
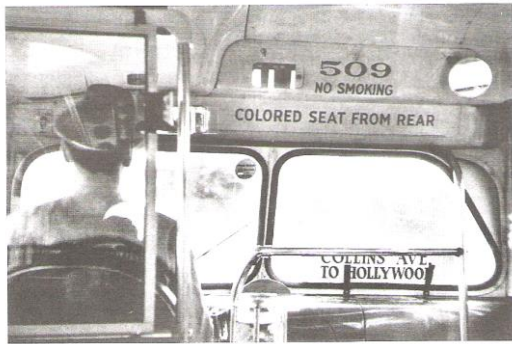
In 1965 King led another march in Alabama, from Selma to Montgomery. The march crossed Lowndes County, which was a known stronghold of the Ku Klux Klan. The population of Lowndes County was 73% black and 27% white. The voter registration statistics were: blacks - 0, whites - 2240.

Martin Luther King Jnr was assassinated by James Earl Ray in 1968. He was 39 years old.

FREEDOM RIDERS

In 1961, the American Supreme Court made segregation at bus terminals and on buses, illegal. Young black and white members of the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE) decided to test this new law and took two buses to Alabama. A white mob attacked the group and firebombed one bus. Police did not intervene when a white mob attacked the other bus. After this more protestors rode on buses and would use segregated restrooms, restaurants and waiting rooms even though they were continually beaten, arrested and imprisoned.

Pictured here are young Freedom Riders leaving by bus from New York to go to Washington DC. Note the slogans and demands on the posters.



Freedom Rides

Although segregated transport had been declared illegal, it still continued in many Southern states. In 1961 the Congress of Racial Equality, formed by James Farmer, organised the Freedom Rides to protest segregated buses. The Freedom Riders were black and white activists who deliberately rode on the buses in Birmingham and Alabama. They were confronted with violence. During the summer of the Freedom Rides, over 400 Freedom Riders were arrested. Three of them were murdered. Robert F Kennedy, the Attorney-General of the United States, ordered the end of segregated interstate transport in November 1961.

The deaths of Freedom Riders James Chaney, Andrew Goodman and Mickey Schwerner were the basis of the film *Mississippi Burning*. Justice was finally served in 2005, when Edgar Ray Killen, the man who orchestrated their murder, was brought to trial and sentenced to 60 years in prison.

~ Freedom summer ~

During the 1950s, most black people living in the South were not registered to vote in elections. As black people outnumbered white people in some areas, people believed that voting would be important for empowerment. However, the KKK often terrorised potential black voters to keep them from voting. Voting was thus dangerous. In the summer of 1964, civil rights activists began a campaign to register black voters in Mississippi. This period became known as Freedom Summer.

In this time, some 600 young SNCC members, including white students, went to the American South to help register black voters and mobilise black citizens. They started so-called freedom schools and community centres, and recruited teachers, artists, lawyers and clergy to staff these centres. Members of the white community constantly harassed them, and the KKK murdered one black and two white civil rights activists. In addition, 37 black churches and 30 homes were bombed or burnt and some 80 civil rights beaten up.