



5 CHALLENGES TO SEGREGATION 1951–65

THIS CHAPTER ASKS

What barriers faced Black people fighting for civil rights 1951–1965?

What kind of challenges were made and how successful were they?

In Chapter 4 we learned how, in the 1950s, an organised Civil Rights movement was born. It aimed to end segregation. It also wanted to win voting rights for all Black people. There would be no single 'battlefield' in the struggle, however; the conflict would be fought in several different areas of everyday life in the South.

THE RIGHTS BEING 'FOUGHT' FOR

In education Black people wanted the right to attend good, all-White schools and universities. They wanted to be able to use the same public facilities as White people – such as lunch counters in the large department stores. Inter-state buses were still not desegregated. They wanted to change this. As we saw earlier, Southern Blacks did not have voting rights for very long. The Civil Rights Movement wanted them **restored**. While 'fighting' to bring about these changes, however, there would also be a battle for people's hearts and minds. Martin Luther King hoped the method of non-violent protest would win support for their cause by showing that Black people could behave with dignity – even when facing White brutality.

THE DIFFICULTIES ENCOUNTERED

Many White Southerners did not want to see the changes that King's movement and other Civil Rights protesters were aiming for. At every step, therefore, they faced fierce resistance. As well as groups such as the Klan, White Citizens' Councils were set up. Their members included business people, lawyers, teachers, doctors, clergymen and others. These groups did not wear white hoods. They operated in a different way. In 1955, when a group of Black people in Orangeburg, South Carolina, wanted their children to attend a White school, the local Citizens' Council got to work. Nearly every Black person who had a White employer was sacked. Blacks who rented homes from Whites were **evicted** and some White businesses would not sell goods to Black people. The Councils **influenced** politicians and often used newspaper adverts to spread their ideas. If it was felt to be necessary, however, the White Citizens' Councils would also use violence.

NEW WORDS

DIXIE: the Southern states of the USA.

EVICTED: thrown out of a place.

FBI: the police with responsibility for Federal Laws which apply in every state of the USA.

INFLUENCED: had an effect on a person or idea.

RESTORED: given back.

SOURCE **A**

All the people of the South are in favour of segregation and Supreme Court, or no Supreme Court, we are going to maintain segregated schools down in Dixie.

▲ *Senator James Eastland of Mississippi.*

SOURCE **B**

The people of the South have always fed folk who asked for something to eat. They have also reserved the right to eat only with invited guests.

▲ *A White Southerner.*

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THE POLICE

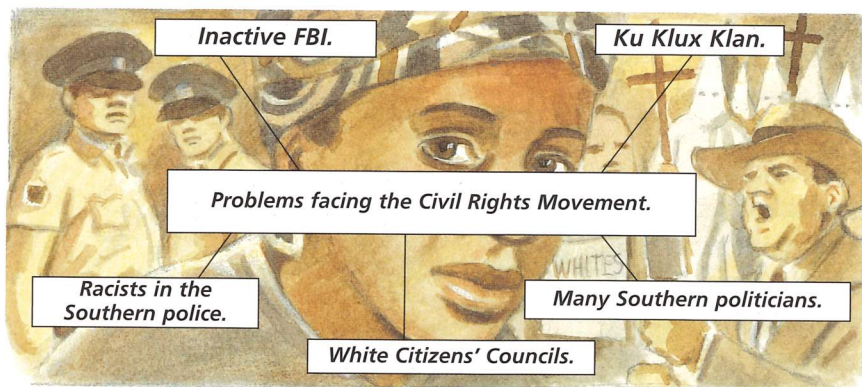
The police also presented a problem for the Civil Rights Movement. In the South local officers might be members of the Klan or White Citizens' Councils.

THE FBI

For a long time even the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) did little to help Black people. Their chief, J. Edgar Hoover, did not like the Klan, but he also saw Martin Luther King as a dangerous threat – someone who was using the Civil Rights Movement to cause trouble on the streets of America. Another reason the FBI did little to help Blacks was that sometimes their agents needed the help of the local state police forces and they did not want to take action which would lose them this co-operation. The Bureau also felt all-White juries were never going to convict a White man of the murder of a Black person.

STATE GOVERNORS

Southern governors also were against the Civil Rights Movement. They saw it as their responsibility to protect the Southern way of life. They wanted things to remain the same. This meant protecting segregation.



SOURCE C

Desegregation is against the Bible.

▲ A claim made by Reverend William Carter.

SOURCE D

... no school in our state will be integrated while I am your governor. I now call on every ... citizen ... to join with me in refusing ... to submit.

▲ Ross Barnett, Governor of Mississippi.

SOURCE E

Segregation now, segregation tomorrow and segregation forever.

▲ George Wallace, Governor of Alabama.

On 28 August 1963, the largest demonstration that Washington had ever seen brought over 200,000 Black and White people onto the streets calling for 'Jobs and Freedom'.

Q

1. Segregation was not just enforced by terrorists, it was seen as part of Southern life and the law. Can you find evidence for this?
2. Explain the problems facing the Civil Rights Movement from:

■ White Citizens' Councils

- the police
- the FBI
- State governors.

Say how each one made their job more difficult.



How far did the 'challengers' succeed?

The Black people challenging White power in the 1950s and 60s did so in a number of areas. But how successful were they?

EDUCATION

In 1954 the US Supreme Court declared segregated schools were wrong. It is, however, one thing to pass a law – but another to get people to accept it. This can be difficult. A key test came at Little Rock, Arkansas, in 1957. Nine very able Black students were allowed to attend what had always been an all-White high school. On the first day, one Black student, Elizabeth Eckford, arrived at the school alone. A mob of angry Whites surrounded her and some even threatened to kill her. However, local police and soldiers of the state National Guard did nothing to help her – she was 'rescued' by a local White woman, who put her on a bus.

Three days later President Dwight Eisenhower sent paratroops to Little Rock and the nine young people were taken to school by an armed escort every day. Soldiers even took the students to each class. After a year the state governor closed the school. Some other state governors did the same to stop desegregation.

HIGHER EDUCATION

James Meredith, a Black student, wished to attend the University of Mississippi. There was only one problem – the university was for Whites only. When he finally did win the right to a place in 1962, the Governor of Mississippi himself, Ross Barnett, stopped him from entering the building. America's president had to send 500 US marshals to the university. Meredith took his place – but it led to a riot – and two people died before order was restored.

PUBLIC FACILITIES: THE LUNCH COUNTER SIT-INS, 1960

Although Black Americans in the South could buy goods in the department stores they were not allowed to use the lunch counters. In 1960, in Nashville, Tennessee, Black students who were part of SNCC decided to challenge this. They selected a number of stores and sat at the lunch counters. The staff refused to serve them, but they continued to occupy seats at the counters every day. At first, they were sworn at and had ketchup, salt and other things poured on them.

NEW WORDS

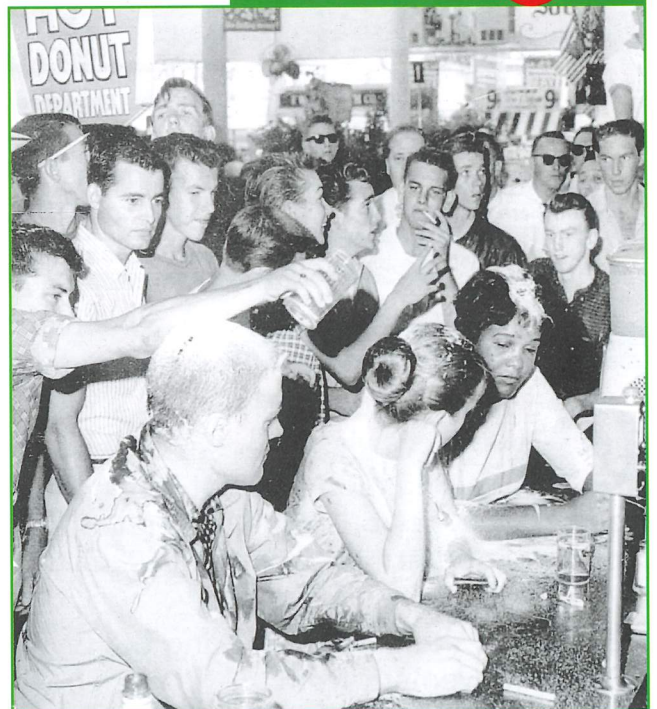
ATTORNEY GENERAL: person in the government in charge of the law.

CORE: Congress of Racial Equality.

SNCC: Student Non-Violent Co-ordinating Committee, a group which believed in the ideas of Martin Luther King.

Special training helped the young students in the sit-ins to remain calm and not to react in anger when they were yelled at, humiliated and even dragged from their stools.

SOURCE **A**



▲ A lunch counter sit-in.

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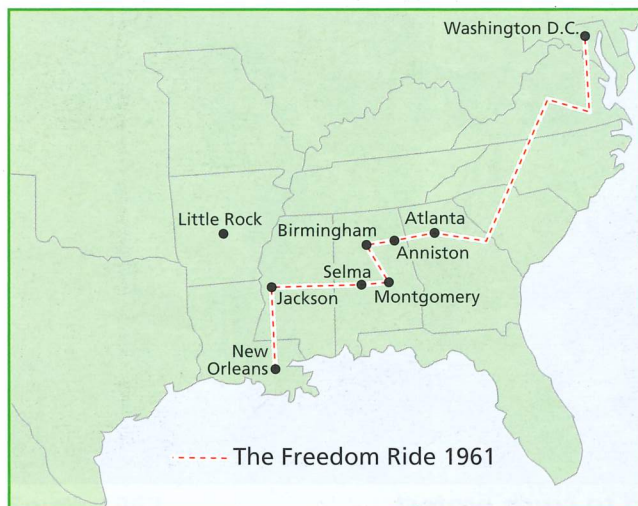
WHITE VIOLENCE. BLACKS ARRESTED!

One day a White mob attacked and savagely beat a number of lunch counter protesters. Police ignored this. They waited until the mob had done its work – then arrested their Black victims! This pattern was repeated as more students came to sit at the counters. Ordinary Black citizens now decided to boycott the stores and even White customers stayed away because they feared violence. The store owners, of course, were losing a lot of money. Eventually, however, the lunch counters were opened to Blacks as well as Whites. Sit-ins in other cities were also successful.

TRANSPORT

In 1960 the Supreme Court said there should be no segregation on buses travelling between states, (eg Greyhound buses).

CORE, a Civil Rights group founded in the 1940s, wanted to put this decision to the test. They wanted to know whether it would be enforced if Black and White passengers sitting on a bus together met opposition when they travelled from the North to the South. The new president, John F. Kennedy, seemed to favour Black Civil Rights – but he acted in a cautious way. It appeared he might need Southern votes to be re-elected. To CORE he seemed to be dragging his feet, so they took action! In 1961 two buses of Black and White passengers, called ‘freedom riders’, left Washington DC to travel through the South to New Orleans.



SOURCE B



▲ *Freedom riders of Montgomery, Alabama, needed armed guards for protection.*

VIOLENCE

One bus was fire-bombed at Anniston, Alabama, and Whites tried to block the exits. The second bus was met by a mob in Birmingham. SNCC students joined the bus to keep the ride alive but they encountered another mob at Montgomery. White ‘freedom riders’ were particularly savagely beaten.

Alabama’s governor, John Patterson, would give no protection, nor did the FBI. America’s **Attorney General**, Robert Kennedy (brother of the President), did try to help, however. US marshals were sent to the area – but were too late! So what was the outcome? The riders did not reach their destination, New Orleans, but Robert Kennedy did enforce the ban on segregation on inter-state transport.



1. Look at these areas of life: Education, Public facilities, Transport. For each, explain problems facing Black people. Describe how they challenged the problems. Decide how successful you think that they were.
2. What questions would you ask about **Sources A and B**, to judge how useful they were for deciding how Black People were treated across the Southern states?

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POLITICS

To Martin Luther King, Birmingham was the South's most segregated city. Frequent attacks on Black homes and churches earned it the nickname 'Bombingham'. Blacks had few job opportunities and could not vote. Police Commissioner, 'Bull' Connor, saw that segregation was enforced. King organised boycotts, sit-ins and tried to help Black people register for the right to vote. Police used tear gas, electric cattle prods and batons – even against school children who had answered King's call to help. Dogs were used to tear into the protesters while the Fire Department used hoses against them. A Black church was bombed, killing four young schoolgirls. There were, however, many White people in Birmingham, including local leaders, who were sickened by the violence. They said it must not be allowed to go on. This, action by local leaders is what brought about the end of segregation in their city in 1963.

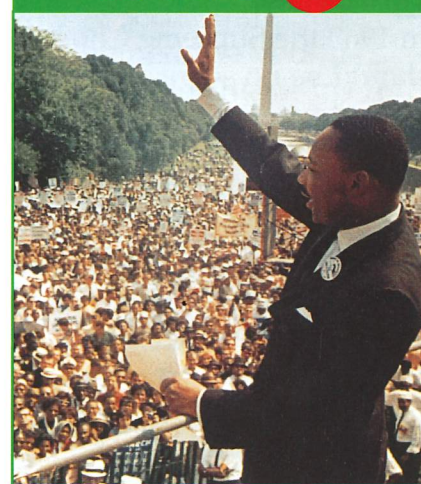
THE POLICE

Local police would remain a problem, but President Johnson, who replaced the murdered President Kennedy in 1963, wanted the FBI to become tougher in the fight against groups such as the Klan who targeted not only Black people, but also White people who supported them. These were referred to as 'nigger lovers'. In Mississippi, in 1964 three young Civil Rights workers from the North, Michael Schwerner, James Chaney and Andrew Goodman, vanished. The FBI launched a massive investigation and found their bodies. They had been murdered. Not until 1997 was a member of the Ku Klux Klan – Henry Hayes – executed for the murder of a Black person.

HEARTS AND MINDS

King's method of non-violent protest won admiration in America and abroad, and Black people by their dignity, even when facing terrible violence, had won great support. 250,000 people flocked to hear King speak in Washington in 1963. The FBI, however, continued to view King as an enemy of America. It was so suspicious of him, that it 'bugged' his phone and his home. Nevertheless, in 1964, he was given one of the world's highest awards – the Nobel Peace Prize.

SOURCE C



▲ Martin Luther King, addressing the crowd at the 1963 Washington Rally.

SOURCE D



▲ Methods used to crush protest.












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SOURCE E

If an American, because his skin is dark, cannot eat lunch in a restaurant open to the public; if he cannot send his children to the best school available, if he cannot vote – if he cannot enjoy the full and free life which all of us want, then who among us would have the colour of his skin changed and stand in his place?

▲ *President Kennedy, speaking on nationwide television.*

SOURCE F

Percentage of Black People in population	% of these Black People entitled to vote
 Alabama 30	13.7
 Arkansas 21.8	37.7
 Florida 17.8	39
 Georgia 28.5	28.4
 Louisiana 31.9	30.9
 Mississippi 42	6.1
 N. Carolina 24.5	38.2
 S. Carolina 34.8	4.7
 Tennessee 16.5	64
 Texas 12.4	33
 Virginia 20.6	23

▲ *Black people in the South, 1962.*

VOTING RIGHTS

In the early 1960s many Blacks in areas of the South could not vote. Before their names could go on the voters' register they had to pass a test. These tests were 'fixed' so that it was very difficult for a Black person to pass. Then there was the threat of violence.

After events in Birmingham, President Kennedy wanted a new Civil Rights act. In a world where Communist countries, such as Russia and China, did not allow their people basic freedoms, he knew that America saw itself as the champion of democracy and human rights. Yet it was denying basic rights to its Black citizens. This new act, then, was to protect the Black right to vote and ban discrimination and segregation for good. It became law in 1964 but Southern states still tried to stop Black people voting. Kennedy did not live to see the law passed. He was assassinated in 1963.

ANOTHER STEP FORWARD

A non-violent protest march was organised in 1965. Marchers would walk from Selma to Montgomery to protest about the lack of voting rights. The police attacked the marchers at a place called Pettus Bridge. Tear gas and clubs were used whilst mounted police ran some of the marchers down. Television captured these images. The American public was shocked. King had not been able to attend the first march but came for a second one which was given army protection. President Johnson had ordered this protection and, in 1965, he made sure Black voting rights were guaranteed by law.

SOURCE G

I have a dream that my four little children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the colour of their skin – but by their character.

Martin Luther King, speaking at the Washington Rally, in 1963.



1. Why was getting the vote such an important step forward for Black people?
2. Look at **Source E**. Why was this speech a 'turning point' in the struggle for Black Civil Rights?
3. Imagine you are a member of the Nobel Peace Prize selection panel. Write a report on the work of Martin Luther King explaining why he should get a prize for working for peace. Look at all the information on him in this book so far. Use the index to help you.