The Civil Rights Movement (1950s-1960s)

# Roots of the Civil Rights Movement

* **JIM CROW LAWS** created a system of legally enforced racial segregation throughout the South
  + Many black Southerners moved North
* **AFRICAN AMERICAN ORGANIZATIONS** (churches, NAACP, the National Urban League, black universities) worked to improve conditions
* **WW2** contributed to the mobilization of African Americans.
  + Black soldiers fought in the military (still segregated). On the home front, many worked in jobs previously barred to them.
  + The horrors of Nazism revealed the dangers of racism to all
* After the war, **ANTI-COLONIAL MOVEMENTS IN AFRICA AND ASIA** inspired civil rights leaders.
* The **COLD WAR** made American leaders realize the need to curb racism if they were going to act like the world’s leaders in democracy

# Early Civil Rights Movement

* Began in post-war era (1945) and continued through the 1960s
  + Individuals, civil rights organizations and the US government worked together to produce great changes

**1947** – **JACKIE ROBINSON** was the first black major league baseball player

**1948** – President Truman **DESEGREGATED THE MILITARY**

**1954** – **BROWN** *v.* **BOARD OF EDUCATION OF TOPEKA, KANSAS**

* Overturned **PLESSY v. FERGUSON** (1898) which had made “separate, but equal” facilities legal
* Argued that “**SEPARATE, BUT EQUAL**” didn’t exist and that racially separated schools were psychologically damaging to students
* Reactions throughout the South were violent and some schools closed rather than desegregate

**1955** – Murder of **EMMETT TILL** (14 years old) in Mississippi for whistling at a white woman

**1955 – MONTGOMERY BUS BOYCOTT**

* Attempt to **DESEGREGATE PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION** in Montgomery, AL after **ROSA PARKS** was arrested for refusing to move to the “colored” section in the back of the bus
* **MLK, JR**. was the leader of the boycott (this is how he first became famous)
* Boycott lasted for almost a year – **SUCCESSFUL** and buses were desegregated
* **SCLC- SOUTHERN CHRISTIAN LEADERSHIP CONFERENCE** formed by numerous civil rights leaders (many of the ministers).

**1957** – **LITTLE ROCK NINE** (Central High School in Little Rock, Arkansas)

* Federal troops were sent in to desegregate and nine black students were enrolled at Central High School
* The **GOVERNOR OF ARKANSAS** **REFUSED** to allow the students to attend
* President Eisenhower sent in the National Guard to ensure the safety of the students and to escort them to school

# Struggle for Civil Rights

* Southern African Americans had been stripped of voting rights by the use of poll taxes, literacy tests, violence and intimidation

**1957, 1960 – CIVIL RIGHTS ACTS** tried to end voter discrimination, but didn’t work

**1964 – 24TH AMENDMENT** prevented poll taxes

**FREEDOM SUMMER** was a campaign to register black voters in Mississippi

* Volunteers were often attacked and 3 were killed by the KKK
* **MLK, JR.** organized the **SELMA TO MONTGOMERY MARCH** to raise awareness of lack of black voting rights
* March led President Johnson to pass **VOTING RIGHTS ACT OF 1965**

# Struggle Against Racial Segregation

African Americans fought for equality through

* **SOCIAL ACTIVISM**
  + **GREENSBORO SIT-IN**
  + **FREEDOM RIDES**
* Marches like “**MARCH ON BIRMINGHAM**” demanded equality
  + - MLK, Jr. was arrested; wrote his famous “**LETTER FROM A BIRMINGHAM JAIL**”
* “**MARCH ON WASHINGTON**” (1963) – MLK, Jr. gave the “**I HAVE A DREAM**” speech
* Federal legislation like the **CIVIL RIGHTS ACT OF 1964**
  + Banned discrimination in all public facilities and protected the rights of women and other minorities
* **AFFIRMATIVE ACTION** (1965) – requiring employers with federal contracts to hire more women and minorities
  + **ROBERT WEAVER** (first African American cabinet member)
  + **THURGOOD MARSHALL** (first African American Supreme Court justice)

# Black Power Movement

A series of events in the late 1960s fractured the civil rights movement.

**1965, 1967 – WATTS RIOTS**

**1968 – MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR. ASSASSINATED**

Many African Americans (particularly young urban men) felt that the civil rights movement was moving too slowly.

* Disagreed with the non-violent approach and were frustrated by interracial cooperation
* This started the Black Power movement
* The **BLACK POWER MOVEMENT** wanted
* Blacks to take control of their own communities
* Fight racism directly (even if this meant violence)
* Avoid contact with whites

“**BLACK NATIONALISM**” – black self-government (led by Malcolm X)

“**BLACK POWER**” – favored black separation and the use of violence to fight racism

* Led by **STOKELY CARMICHAEL** (Howard University student)
* **BLACK PANTHER PARTY** (led by **BOBBY SEALE**, **HUEY NEWTON**)
  + Started to protect black neighborhoods in Oakland, CA
  + Believed in violence, but also wanted blacks to take a greater pride in their African American identity
  + Led to creation of new fashions (Afro) and creation of African American Studies in colleges/universities