

# Civil Rights Study Guide – US History

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## Here is a short overview of the material we covered.

Make sure you are familiar with important figures, organizations, and events during the Movement.

In particular make sure you understand the importance of the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision, the Civil Rights Act of 1964, and the Voting Rights Act of 1965. We also spent a significant amount of time looking at the events in Montgomery, Birmingham, and Selma.

Expect questions on the extra readings – Martin Luther King Jr.’s Letter from a Birmingham Jail and the From Ferguson to Baltimore reading. Honors students expect extra questions on the Ta Nehisi Coates piece.

## The Emerging Civil Rights Struggle: 1941–1957

1. In what ways did World War II and the Cold War help advance the cause of civil rights?
  - In the interest of attaining greater civil rights, African Americans skillfully took advantage of the federal government’s need to present an image of racial inclusion and its need for manpower for the war effort and to prevent the Soviets from using American racism as propaganda during the Cold War.
  - A. Phillip Randolph pressured FDR to enforce equity in federal employment.
  - An important influence of World War II was that Black soldiers experienced equality in Europe while fighting to end Nazi tyranny.
  - The desegregation of the armed services during the Cold War by President Truman and the rise of the black middle class were made possible by World War II and early Cold War economic prosperity.
  - The growth of the black middle class in the 1950s provided the monetary opportunity to organize against Jim Crow segregation. Its ranks produced the leadership of the movement.
  - Black college students, part of the baby boom surge, provided the large numbers needed to continue the movement.
  - Trade unions assisted the movement at the national level.
  - Television delivered the ugliness of Jim Crow segregation across the world, popularizing the Civil Rights Movement
2. How did the NAACP go about developing a legal strategy to attack racial segregation?
  - In the late 1930s, several important NAACP lawyers, including future Supreme Court justice Thurgood Marshall, began laying out the legal groundwork for convincing the Supreme Court to use the Fourteenth Amendment’s “equal protection of the laws” clause to overturn its 1898 *Plessy v. Ferguson* decision upholding racial segregation under the “separate but equal” doctrine.
  - He and other lawyers filed suit after suit to chip away at the legal edifice of segregation in higher education and the all-white primary. The final *Brown* case turned on violations of the Fourteenth Amendment.

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3. To what extent did the Supreme Court's decision in *Brown* bring about the change advocates had hoped for?

- Although the *Brown* decision ended segregation in public education, the Court did not force the issue rapidly upon the states to comply. Instead, the Court held that integration should proceed “with all deliberate speed.”
- This vagueness gave white southerners time to resist the decision.
- In 1956, over 100 U.S. Congressmen signed the “Southern Manifesto” pledging to resist *Brown*.
- President Dwight Eisenhower did not champion civil rights, making implementation of *Brown* even more difficult over time in the 1950s and early 1960s.
- These factors helped to support a white southern backlash against federal integration that created the events we understand now as comprising the official civil rights movement.
- Essentially, southern whites refused to abide by the desegregation order. African Americans then resisted white attempts to stop them from complying with federal desegregation orders for schools and colleges by engaging in non-violent civil disobedience.

### Forging a Protest Movement: 1955–1966

1. What factors explain the rise of the civil rights protest movement? Why was nonviolent civil disobedience the chosen tactic?

- The broadening of African American aspirations created by World War II, the resistance of white Southerners and state governments to black advancement in all forms, the rise of the black middle class, the invention of television, the expansion of black Protestant churches, the sympathy of labor unions, the need to combat Soviet propaganda, the murder of Emmett Till, the nonviolent civil disobedience of Gandhi in India against British colonialism, and the passage of the *Brown* decision by the Supreme Court combined to start the U.S. Civil Rights Movement.
- Non-violent tactics helped the movement in a variety of ways. By being non-violent, the protesters invoked the civil and spiritual righteousness of Jesus Christ and Gandhi. Avoiding violence also showcased southern white violence against youth protesters, which was aired on television across the world to the detriment of white southerners. The government also could not discredit the protesters, nor ignore them, if they remained nonviolent.

2. In what ways did white resistance hinder the movement? In what ways did it help?

- White resistance clearly hindered the movement by challenges at virtually every level of integration in public education, transportation, and employment.
- Key black leaders were murdered.
- Integration by court order should have reached fruition by 1960 instead of the early 1970s because of white resistance.
- Yet southern white determination failed in the face of television cameras that caught the beatings on camera for the world to see.
- The Soviet Union used anti-black treatment in the South as propaganda against the United States during the Cold War.
- Southern white violence, ironically, pressured Presidents Eisenhower, Kennedy, and Johnson to acquiesce to African American demands for equality so that the United States did not look so bad to the world.

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3. What was the role of various leaders in the Civil Rights movement? In what ways did different organizations in the movement disagree? What did these disagreements mean for the movement as a whole?

- Consider the roles of Rosa Parks, Martin Luther King Jr., Thurgood Marshall, Stokely Carmichael, Malcolm X, John Lewis, John F. Kennedy, Lyndon Johnson.

### **Beyond Civil Rights: 1966–1973**

1. How would you characterize the different forms that the Black Power took? How were these forms related to traditions in African American history?

- Black Power took many forms: the Nation of Islam, the Black Panther Party, SNCC's and CORE's reinvention as Black Power advocates
- Ending police harassment through self-defense, creating inner city breakfast programs for children, opening up city jobs to black people, ending black poverty, poor housing, and health conditions, and helping heroin addicts get clean reflected earlier traditions in the African American community.
- For generations, African Americans used self-help strategies through voluntary associations, legal challenges to private and public racism, and the use of the church to fight discrimination.

### **Urban violence and Poverty**

1. What were the causes of urban African-American poverty?
  - Consider the policies of redlining and deliberately underfunding public services in African-American parts of American cities.
2. What are the connections between poverty and urban violence?