The civil rights movement in the United States was a political and social movement to promote justice and equality for African Americans. The Civil War ended slavery in the United States but discrimination against African Americans continued. Black people across the country experienced prejudice, racism, and violence socially, but also legally. While the majority of the Civil Rights Movement took place in the 1950s and 1960s, the struggle for equality continues to this day.
May 17, 1954
Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas
The U.S. Supreme Court overturned the Plessy v. Ferguson (1896) decision and declared that racial segregation in schools was unconstitutional. They argued that separate schools for blacks and whites were inherently unequal because separate facilities deprived educational opportunities to black children.

May 31, 1955
Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas II
The U.S. Supreme Court furthered its ruling in Brown v. Board of Education and provided directives that helped implement its previous decision. They stated that all protocols should be complied "with all deliberate speed".

August 28, 1955
The Murder of Emmett Till
Emmet Till, a 14-year-old black boy, is kidnapped and murdered in Money, Mississippi.

Even though his murderers were acquitted, his case brought international attention when a photo of his open-casket funeral was published.

1955-1956
Montgomery Bus Boycott
Activists in Montgomery, Alabama, boycott racial segregation on the city's buses.

In November 1956, the Supreme Court affirmed Browder v. Gayle, which struck down a law requiring segregated seating on buses because it violated the 14th Amendment.

April 23, 1951
Robert Russa Moton School Walkout
Barbara Johns, a 16-year-old girl, leads a student walkout at Robert Russa Moton High School in Virginia, to protest the school's poor conditions.

December 1, 1955
Rosa Parks Refuses to Give Up Her Seat
Rosa Parks refuses to give up her bus seat to a white man in Alabama. Her act of resistance leads to the Montgomery Bus Boycott.

January 1957
Southern Christian Leadership Conference is Founded
Martin Luther King Jr. and Ralph Abernathy formed the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) to fight for civil rights.

May 17, 1957
Prayer Pilgrimage to Washington for Freedom
More than 50,000 nonviolent demonstrators gathered at the Lincoln Memorial to commemorate the third anniversary of Brown v. Board of Education.
September 4, 1957
Little Rock Nine
Arkansas Governor Orval E. Faubus uses the National Guard to block the entry of black students from integrating into Little Rock Central High School.
President Eisenhower sends federal troops to escort the students for them to attend the school.

September 9, 1957
Civil Rights Act of 1957 is Passed
The Civil Rights Act of 1957 created the Civil Rights Commission to protect civil and voting rights amongst minority groups.
It allowed the Justice Department to federally prosecute those suppressing one's voting rights, but it lacked enforcement in practice.

February 1, 1960
Greensboro Sit-Ins
Four African American college students - Ezell Blair Jr., Franklin McCain, Joseph McNeil, and David Richmond, hold the first sit-in at a Woolworth in Greensboro, North Carolina, sparking a series of sit-ins across the country.
They refused to leave a "whites only" lunch counter without being served.

May 6, 1960
Civil Rights of 1960 is Passed
The Civil Rights Act of 1960 allowed all voters the right to register to vote in any of the states and allowed those denied this right to sue a state official responsible.

1961
Freedom Rides
Activists, called Freedom Riders, took bus trips across the South and attempted to use "white only" restrooms and lunch counters to test Boynton v. Virginia.
They were often attacked and beaten by white supremacists and the KKK but their efforts led to President Kennedy enacting the Interstate Commerce Commission to create stricter fines and regulations for bus companies that refused to integrate.

September 10, 1962
James Meredith Becomes First Black Student Admitted to the University of Mississippi
The Supreme Court ruled that the University of Mississippi must admit James Meredith, a black man.

The governor of Mississippi, Ross Barnett, ordered state troopers to prevent Meredith from entering and riots erupted over this decision. Despite all this, Meredith attends the university with the aid of President Kennedy and the U.S. Marshalls.

April 12, 1963
MLK is Arrested
Martin Luther King Jr. is arrested in Birmingham, Alabama for demonstrating without a city permit.
While in jail, King writes the famous, "Letter from a Birmingham Jail", speaking on his impatience with the time delay of justice.
November 22, 1963
President Kennedy is Assassinated
John F. Kennedy is assassinated in Dallas, Texas. President Johnson promises to keep pushing civil rights legislation in his honor.

July 2, 1964
The Civil Rights Act of 1964
The Civil Rights Act of 1964 banned discrimination due to race, color, sex, religion, and national origin in employment and public accommodations. It also allowed the federal government to withdraw its funds from schools and government entities that discriminated against from receiving federal funding.

February 21, 1965
Malcolm X is Assassinated
Civil rights and religious leader, Malcolm X, is assassinated during a rally by members of the Nation of Islam.

August 28, 1963
The March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom
Around 250,000 people join the March on Washington to promote freedom and the right to have a good job. Martin Luther King Jr. gives the “I Have a Dream” speech.

June – August 1964
Mississippi Freedom Summer
The SNCC organizes a voter registration drive in Mississippi. Three activists, James Chaney, Andrew Goodman, and Michael Schwerner, go missing and later are found to be beaten and murdered by the KKK.

March 7, 1965
Bloody Sunday
About 600 civil rights leaders march from Selma, Alabama to Montgomery to protest Black voter suppression and the killing of Jimmy Lee Jackson, an unarmed demonstrator. They are stopped and attacked by police at the Edmund Pettus Bridge before they can reach Montgomery. This trek is taken by several other marchers for the next month. By March 25th, 25,000 people join the Selma marchers in Montgomery.

August 6, 1965
Voting Rights Act of 1965
The Voting Rights Act of 1965 banned discriminatory voting requirements, including literacy test requirements, to vote. It provided federal supervision to eliminate racial discrimination in elections.

March 24, 1966
Harper v. Virginia Board of Elections
The Supreme Court ruled that Virginia’s poll tax was unconstitutional based on the equal protection clause of the 14th Amendment. This made poll taxes for any state illegal. The poll tax was already banned in federal elections after the passage of the 24th Amendment in 1964.
**October 15, 1966**
**Black Panther Party Founded**
Huey P. Newton and Bobby Seale create a new political organization to advance conditions for Black people, the Black Panther Party.

They sought to improve educational and employment opportunities as well as improve housing.

**April 4, 1968**
**Martin Luther King Jr. is Assassinated**
Martin Luther King Jr. is assassinated on the balcony of his motel room in Memphis, Tennessee.

James Earl Ray is convicted of his murder in 1969.

**June 12, 1967**
**Loving v. Virginia**
The Supreme Court overturns several laws banning interracial marriage.

**April 11, 1968**
**Civil Rights Act of 1968**
The Civil Rights Act of 1968, also known as the Fair Housing Act, prohibited housing discrimination based on race, religion, or national origin.

**Learn More**

**Sources**

- Timeline - Civil Rights Trail
- Civil Rights Movement Timeline - History
- Civil Rights Era - Ferris State University
- Civil Rights Digital Library - University System of Georgia
- Civil Rights Act - Library of Congress
- National Civil Rights Museum

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