



# The Civil Rights Movement

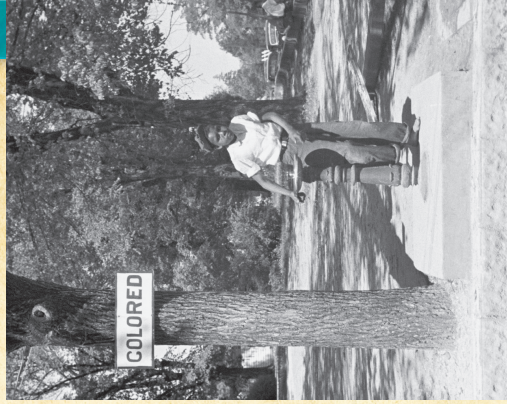
Imagine laws that prohibit you from drinking at certain water fountains. Restaurants that will not serve you, and bus drivers who will not allow you to sit wherever you want on their buses. All of this is happening because of your skin color. This is called segregation (seg-rih-GAY-shuhn), and this was how things used to be for African Americans in parts of the United States, especially those living in the South. Then, some brave individuals decided it was time for a change. They began the Civil Rights Movement, and things started to improve.

Oliver Brown wanted his daughter to go to the school closest to their Kansas home. However, she was an African American, and the nearby school was only for white children. The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) saw an opportunity to challenge segregation in the courts and sued to get the child enrolled in the white school. The lawsuit was *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas*, and it went all the way to the U.S. Supreme Court in 1954. The Court ruled that segregation in public schools was illegal (il-LEE-guhl). It was a major victory, but the battle was far from over.

## Now the Hard Part Begins

Schools were slow to obey the Supreme Court's ruling. In 1957, a federal court ordered Little Rock, Arkansas, to desegregate (DEE-seg-rih-gate) its schools. The nine African American students registered at Little Rock Central High School were supposed to start on September 4, but the Arkansas governor sent armed guards to keep them out. This was a direct violation (vye-oh-LAY-shuhn) of the court's order. So, on September 23, U.S. President Dwight Eisenhower had the "Little Rock Nine" escorted into the school. However, angry parents and students caused problems, and the nine students were removed for their own safety. The next day, armed U.S. soldiers arrived and led them into the building. Once inside, the students endured name-calling, assaults, and threats.

In 1960, six-year-old Ruby Bridges started first grade at an all-white school in New Orleans, and furious parents removed their children from Ruby's classroom. For an entire year, Ruby was in a class all by herself. For most of the year, protesters stood outside the school.



## Peaceful Protests Change Things

In the South, African Americans had to ride in the rear of public buses. If the bus filled up, African Americans had to give up their seats to white riders. One day, Rosa Parks, an African American, refused to give up her bus seat to a white man. The police arrested Parks and put her in jail. Jo Ann Robinson, a local civil rights leader, heard about this and sent out flyers urging African Americans not to ride the city buses. Robinson meant for this boycott to last one day, but instead it lasted a year! During that time, not a single African American set foot on a bus. They realized that they had to act together to overturn the law. In the end, African Americans could sit wherever they liked on buses, and they no longer had to give up their seats. People saw that they could use nonviolent resistance to make positive changes.

"White-only" lunch counters were a way of life in the South. But one day, four young African American men defied (DEE-fyd) those laws at a Woolworth's department store. They sat and ordered food at a "white-only" lunch counter. The owner refused to serve them, but the men did not leave. They were not violent, and they acted with respect. This was the first sit-in. Other students joined them the next day and every day for the next six months. When one group was arrested, another group would take its place. Finally, on July 25, 1960, the lunch counter was desegregated. People staged peaceful sit-ins at segregated lunch counters throughout the South.

## Civil Rights Today

Many minorities (muh-NAVVR-uh-teez) still live in poverty. A minority is a person who is a member of a small group in a society. In the United States, African Americans are minorities, as are American Indians, Latinos, and Hispanics. Activists (ak-TUH-veetz) work to be sure that minority children receive good health care and educational opportunities. They strive for affordable housing and job opportunities. Much progress has been made, but there is still a long way to go.



Rosa Parks's fingerprints

## Comprehension Question

How do you think Ruby Bridges felt while sitting alone with her teacher in her classroom?