

## Guide to Reading

**Main Idea**

After World War II, African Americans and other supporters of civil rights challenged segregation in the United States.

**Key Terms and Names**

separate-but-equal, de facto segregation, NAACP, sit-in, Thurgood Marshall, Linda Brown, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., Southern Christian Leadership Conference

**Reading Strategy**

**Organizing** As you read about the birth of the civil rights movement, complete a graphic organizer similar to the one below by filling in the causes of the civil rights movement.

**Reading Objectives**

- **Explain** the origin of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference.
- **Discuss** the changing role of the federal government in civil rights enforcement.

**Section Theme**

**Government and Democracy** In the 1950s, African Americans began a movement to win greater social equality.

## Preview of Events



Rosa Parks

★ *An American Story* ★

On December 1, 1955, Rosa Parks left her job as a seamstress in Montgomery, Alabama, and boarded a bus to go home. In 1955 buses in Montgomery reserved seats in the front for whites and seats in the rear for African Americans. Seats in the middle were open to African Americans, but only if there were few whites on the bus.

Rosa Parks took a seat just behind the white section. Soon all of the seats on the bus were filled. When the bus driver noticed a white man standing at the front of the bus, he told Parks and three other African Americans in her row to get up and let the white man sit down. Nobody moved. The driver cautioned, “You better make it light on yourselves and let me have those seats.” The other three African Americans rose, but Rosa Parks did not. The driver then called the Montgomery police, who took Parks into custody.

News of the arrest soon reached E.D. Nixon, a former president of the local chapter of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). Nixon wanted to challenge bus segregation in court, and he told Parks, “With your permission we can break down segregation on the bus with your case.” Parks told Nixon, “If you think it will mean something to Montgomery and do some good, I’ll be happy to go along with it.”

—adapted from *Parting the Waters: America in the King Years*

**The Origins of the Movement**

When Rosa Parks agreed to challenge segregation in court, she did not know that her decision would launch the modern civil rights movement. Within days of her arrest, African Americans in Montgomery had organized a boycott of the bus system. Mass



CLICK HERE




HISTORY  
Online 

**Student Web Activity** Visit the *American Vision* Web site at [tav.glencoe.com](http://tav.glencoe.com) and click on **Student Web Activities—Chapter 29** for an activity on the civil rights movement.

protests began across the nation. After decades of segregation and inequality, many African Americans had decided the time had come to demand equal rights.

The struggle would not be easy. The Supreme Court had declared segregation to be constitutional in *Plessy v. Ferguson* in 1896. The ruling had established the “**separate-but-equal**” doctrine. Laws segregating African Americans were permitted as long as equal facilities were provided for them.

After the *Plessy* decision, laws segregating African Americans and whites spread quickly. These laws, nicknamed “Jim Crow” laws, segregated buses and trains, schools, restaurants, swimming pools, parks, and other public facilities. Jim Crow laws were common throughout the South, but segregation existed in other states as well. Often it was left up to each local community to decide whether to pass segregation laws. Areas without laws requiring segregation often had **de facto segregation**—segregation by custom and tradition.  (See page 1082 for more information on *Plessy v. Ferguson*.)

### Court Challenges Begin

The civil rights movement had been building for a long time. Since 1909, the **National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP)** had supported court cases intended to overturn segregation. Over the years, the NAACP achieved some victories. In 1935, for example, the Supreme Court ruled in *Norris v. Alabama* that Alabama’s exclusion of African Americans from juries violated their right to equal protection under the law. In 1946 the Court ruled in *Morgan v. Virginia* that segregation on interstate buses was unconstitutional. In 1950 it ruled in *Sweatt v. Painter* that state law schools had to admit qualified African American applicants, even if parallel black law schools existed.  (See pages 1082–1083 for more information on these cases.)

 NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC

## MOMENT in HISTORY

### AMERICAN SEGREGATION

In an Oklahoma City streetcar station in 1939, a man takes a drink from a water cooler labeled “**COLORED.**” Racially segregated facilities—waiting rooms, railroad cars, lavatories, and drinking fountains—were prevalent all across the South. Under the so-called Jim Crow system, African Americans were legally entitled to “separate-but-equal” education, housing, and social services. In practice, however, only a small percentage of public funds earmarked for schools, streets, police, and other expenses found its way to African American neighborhoods.





**New Political Power** In addition to a string of court victories, African Americans enjoyed increased political power. Before World War I, most African Americans lived in the South, where they were largely excluded from voting. During the Great Migration, many moved to Northern cities, where they were allowed to vote. Increasingly, Northern politicians sought their votes and listened to their concerns.

During the 1930s, many African Americans benefited from FDR’s New Deal programs. Thus they began supporting the Democratic Party, giving it new strength in the North. This wing of the party was now able to counter Southern Democrats, who often supported segregation.

**The Push for Desegregation** During World War II, African American leaders began to use their new political power to demand more rights. Their efforts helped end discrimination in factories that held government contracts and increased opportunities for African Americans in the military.

In Chicago in 1942, James Farmer and George Houser founded the **Congress of Racial Equality**

(CORE). CORE began using **sit-ins**, a form of protest first used by union workers in the 1930s. In 1943 CORE attempted to desegregate restaurants that refused to serve African Americans. Using the sit-in strategy, members of CORE went to segregated restaurants. If they were denied service, they sat down and refused to leave. The sit-ins were intended to shame restaurant managers into integrating their restaurants. Using these protests, CORE successfully integrated many restaurants, theaters, and other public facilities in Chicago, Detroit, Denver, and Syracuse.



**Reading Check**

**Examining** How had the ruling in *Plessy v. Ferguson* contributed to segregation?

**Separate but Unequal** Linda Brown’s court case ended decades of official segregation in the South.

## The Civil Rights Movement Begins

When World War II ended, many African American soldiers returned home optimistic that their country would appreciate their loyalty and sacrifice. In the 1950s, when change did not come as quickly as hoped, their determination to change prejudices in the United States led to protests and marches—and to the emergence of the civil rights movement.

**Brown v. Board of Education** After World War II, the NAACP continued to challenge segregation in the courts. From 1939 to 1961, the NAACP’s chief counsel and director of its Legal Defense and Education Fund was the brilliant African American attorney **Thurgood Marshall**. After World War II, Marshall focused his efforts on ending segregation in public schools.

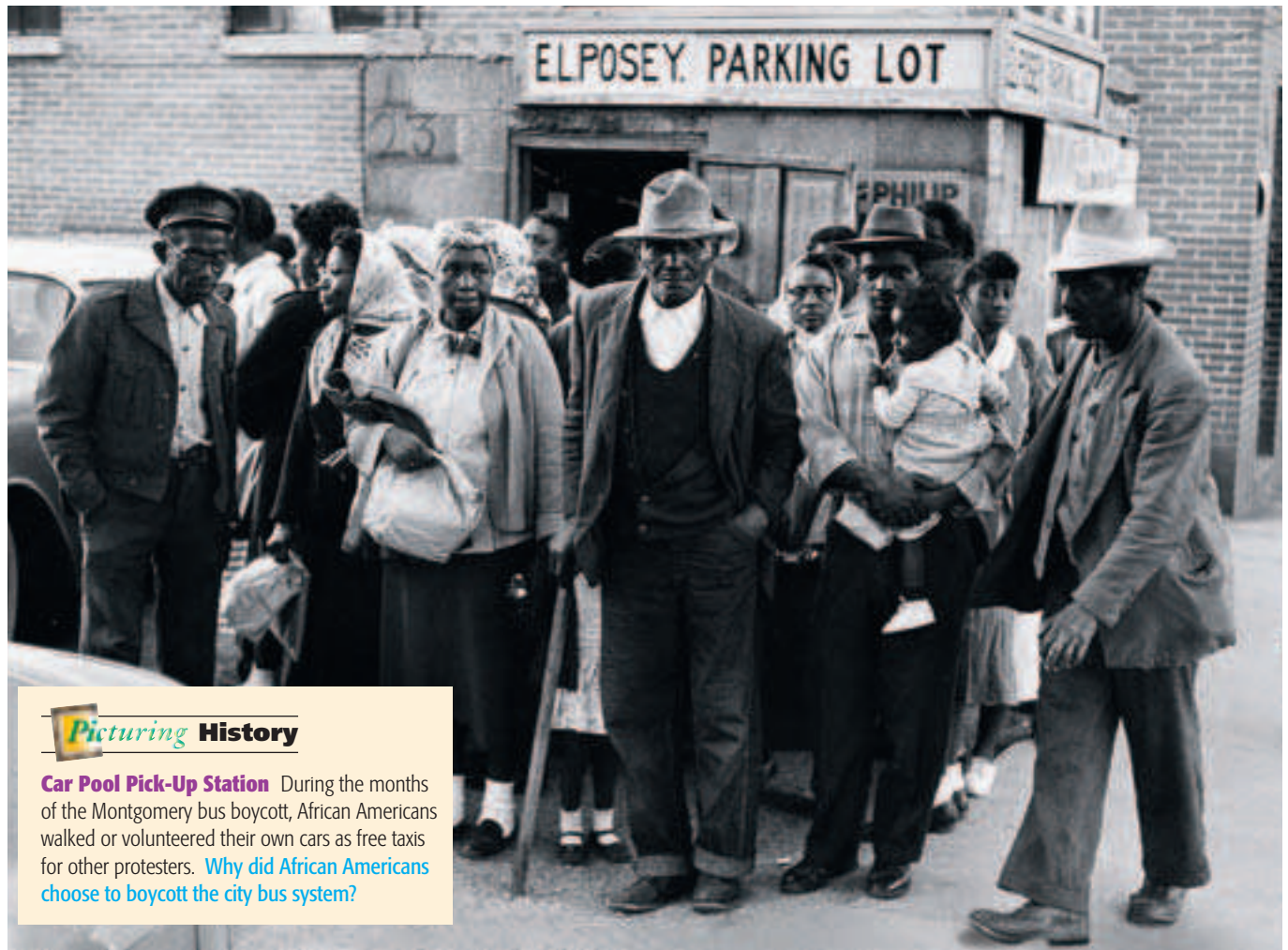
In 1954 the Supreme Court decided to combine several different cases and issue a general ruling on segregation in schools. One of the cases involved a young African American girl named **Linda Brown**, who was denied admission to her neighborhood school in Topeka, Kansas, because of her race. She was told to attend an all-black school across town. With the help of the NAACP, her parents then sued the Topeka school board.

On May 17, 1954, the Supreme Court ruled unanimously in the case of *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas*, that segregation in public schools was unconstitutional and violated the equal protection clause of the Fourteenth Amendment. Chief Justice Earl Warren summed up the Court’s decision when he wrote: “In the field of public education, the doctrine of separate but equal has no place. Separate educational facilities are inherently unequal.” (See pages 1077 and 1080 for information on *Brown v. Board of Education*.)

**The Southern Manifesto** The Brown decision marked a dramatic reversal of the ideas expressed in the *Plessy v. Ferguson* case. *Brown v. Board of Education* applied only to public schools, but the ruling threatened the entire system of segregation. Although it convinced many African Americans that the time had come to challenge other forms of segregation, it also angered many white Southerners, who became even more determined to defend segregation, regardless of what the Supreme Court ruled.

Although some school districts in border states integrated their schools in compliance with the Court’s ruling, anger and opposition was a far more common reaction. In Washington, D.C., Senator Harry F. Byrd of Virginia called on Southerners to





### Picturing History

**Car Pool Pick-Up Station** During the months of the Montgomery bus boycott, African Americans walked or volunteered their own cars as free taxis for other protesters. **Why did African Americans choose to boycott the city bus system?**

adopt “massive resistance” against the ruling. Across the South, hundreds of thousands of white Americans joined citizens’ councils to pressure their local governments and school boards into defying the Supreme Court. Many states adopted pupil assignment laws. These laws created an elaborate set of requirements other than race that schools could use to prevent African Americans from attending white schools.

The Supreme Court inadvertently encouraged white resistance when it followed up its decision in *Brown v. Board* a year later. The Court ordered school districts to proceed “with all deliberate speed” to end school segregation. The wording was vague enough that many districts were able to keep their schools segregated for many more years.

Massive resistance also appeared in the halls of Congress. In 1956 a group of 101 Southern members of Congress signed the **Southern Manifesto**, which denounced the Supreme Court’s ruling as “a clear abuse of judicial power” and pledged to use “all lawful means” to reverse the decision. Although the Southern

Manifesto had no legal standing, the statement encouraged white Southerners to defy the Supreme Court.

**The Montgomery Bus Boycott** In the midst of the uproar over the *Brown v. Board of Education* case, Rosa Parks made her decision to challenge segregation of public transportation. Outraged by Parks’s arrest, Jo Ann Robinson, head of a local organization called the Women’s Political Council, called on African Americans to boycott Montgomery’s buses on the day Rosa Parks appeared in court.

The boycott was a dramatic success. That afternoon, several African American leaders formed the Montgomery Improvement Association to run the boycott and to negotiate with city leaders for an end to segregation. They elected a 26-year-old pastor named **Martin Luther King, Jr.**, to lead them.

On the evening of December 5, 1955, a meeting was held at Dexter Avenue Baptist Church, where Dr. King was pastor. In the deep, resonant tones and powerful phrases that characterized his speaking style, King encouraged the people to continue their



protest. “There comes a time, my friends,” he said, “when people get tired of being thrown into the abyss of humiliation, where they experience the bleakness of nagging despair.” He explained, however, that the protest had to be peaceful:

“Now let us say that we are not advocating violence. . . . The only weapon we have in our hands this evening is the weapon of protest. If we were incarcerated behind the iron curtains of a communistic nation—we couldn’t do this. If we were trapped in the dungeon of a totalitarian regime—we couldn’t do this. But the great glory of American democracy is the right to protest for right!”

—quoted in *Parting the Waters: America in the King Years*

King had earned a Ph.D. in theology from Boston University. He believed that the only moral way to end segregation and racism was through nonviolent passive resistance. He told his followers, “We must use the weapon of love. We must realize that so many people are taught to hate us that they are not totally responsible for their hate.” African Americans, he urged, must say to racists and segregationists: “We will soon wear you down by our capacity to suffer, and in winning our freedom we will so appeal to your heart and conscience that we will win you in the process.”

King drew upon the philosophy and techniques of Indian leader Mohandas Gandhi, who had used nonviolent resistance effectively against British rule in India. Like Gandhi, King encouraged his followers to disobey unjust laws. Believing in people’s ability to transform themselves, King was certain that public opinion would eventually force the government to end segregation.

Stirred by King’s powerful words, African Americans in Montgomery continued their boycott for over a year. Instead of riding the bus, they organized car pools or walked to work. They refused to be intimidated, yet they avoided violence. Meanwhile Rosa Parks’s legal challenge to bus segregation worked its way through the courts. Finally, in December 1956, the Supreme Court

## Profiles IN HISTORY

### Thurgood Marshall 1908–1993

Over his long lifetime, Thurgood Marshall made many contributions to the civil rights movement. Perhaps his most famous accomplishment was representing the NAACP in the *Brown v. Board of Education* case.

Marshall’s speaking style was both simple and direct. During the *Brown* case, Justice Frankfurter asked Marshall for a definition of equal. “Equal means getting the same thing, at the same time and in the same place,” Marshall answered.

Born into a middle-class Baltimore family in 1908, Marshall earned a law degree from Howard University Law School. The school’s dean, Charles Hamilton Houston, enlisted Marshall to work for the NAACP. Together the two laid out the legal strategy for challenging discrimination in many arenas of American life.



Marshall became the first African American on the Supreme Court when President Lyndon Johnson appointed him in 1967. On the Court, he remained a voice for civil rights. In his view, the Constitution was not perfect because it had accepted slavery. Its ideas of liberty, justice, and equality had to be refined. “The true miracle of the Constitution,” he once wrote, “was not the birth of the Constitution, but its life.”

affirmed the decision of a special three-judge panel declaring Alabama’s laws requiring segregation on buses to be unconstitutional.

**Reading Check** **Describing** What was the ruling in *Brown v. Board of Education*?

## African American Churches

Martin Luther King, Jr., was not the only prominent minister in the bus boycott. Many of the other leaders were African American ministers. The boycott could not have succeeded without the support of the African American churches in the city. As the civil rights movement gained momentum, African American churches continued to play a critical role. They served as forums for many of the protests and planning meetings, and they also mobilized many of the volunteers for specific civil rights campaigns.

After the Montgomery bus boycott demonstrated that nonviolent protest could be successful, African American ministers led by King established the **Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC)** in 1957. The SCLC set out to eliminate segregation from American society and to encourage





African Americans to register to vote. Dr. King served as the SCLC's first president. Under his leadership, the organization challenged segregation at the voting booths and in public transportation, housing, and public accommodations.

**✓ Reading Check** **Summarizing** What role did African American churches play in the civil rights movement?

## Eisenhower and Civil Rights

President Eisenhower sympathized with the goals of the civil rights movement, and he personally disagreed with segregation. Following the precedent set by President Truman, he ordered navy shipyards and veterans' hospitals to be desegregated.

At the same time, however, Eisenhower disagreed with those who wanted to roll back segregation through protests and court rulings. He believed that people had to allow segregation and racism to end gradually as values changed. With the nation in the midst of the Cold War, he worried that challenging white Southerners on segregation might divide the nation and lead to violence at a time when the country

had to pull together. Publicly, he refused to endorse the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision. Privately, he remarked, "I don't believe you can change the hearts of men with laws or decisions."

Despite his belief that the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision was wrong, Eisenhower felt he had to uphold the authority of the federal government, including its court system. As a result, he became the first president since Reconstruction to send federal troops into the South to protect the constitutional rights of African Americans.

**Crisis in Little Rock** In September 1957, the school board in Little Rock, Arkansas, won a court order to admit nine African American students to Central High, a school with 2,000 white students. Little Rock was a racially moderate Southern city, as was most of the state of Arkansas. A number of Arkansas communities, as well as the state university, had already begun to desegregate their schools.

The governor of Arkansas, Orval Faubus, was believed to be a moderate on racial issues, unlike many other Southern politicians. Faubus was determined to win re-election, however, and so he began to campaign

### **Picturing History**

**Crisis in Little Rock** Fifteen-year-old Elizabeth Eckford (in sunglasses at right) braves an angry crowd of Central High School students in Arkansas. [How did Governor Orval Faubus react to attempts to integrate the high school?](#)





as a defender of white supremacy. He ordered troops from the Arkansas National Guard to prevent the nine African American students from entering the school. The next day, as the National Guard troops surrounded the school, an angry white mob joined the troops to protest the integration plan and to intimidate the African American students trying to register.

Television coverage of this episode placed Little Rock at the center of national attention. Faubus had used the armed forces of a state to oppose the authority of the federal government—the first such challenge to the Constitution since the Civil War. Eisenhower knew that he could not allow Faubus to defy the federal government. After a conference between Eisenhower and Faubus proved fruitless, the district court ordered the governor to remove the troops. Instead of ending the crisis, however, Faubus simply left the school to the mob. After the African American students entered the school, angry whites beat at least two African American reporters and broke many of the school’s windows. The mob came so close to capturing the terrified African American students that the police had to take them away to safety.

The mob violence finally pushed President Eisenhower’s patience to the breaking point. Federal authority had to be upheld. He immediately ordered the U.S. Army to send troops to Little Rock. By nightfall 1,000 soldiers of the elite 101st Airborne Division had arrived. By 5:00 A.M. the troops had encircled the school, bayonets ready. A few hours later, the nine African American students arrived in an army station wagon, and they walked into the

high school. The law had been upheld, but the troops were forced to remain in Little Rock for the rest of the school year.

**New Civil Rights Legislation** The same year that the Little Rock crisis began, Congress passed the first civil rights law since Reconstruction. The **Civil Rights Act of 1957** was intended to protect the right of African Americans to vote. Eisenhower believed firmly in the right to vote, and he viewed it as his responsibility to protect voting rights. He also knew that if he sent a civil rights bill to Congress, conservative Southern Democrats would try to block the legislation. In 1956 he did send the bill to Congress, hoping not only to split the Democratic Party but also to convince more African Americans to vote Republican.

Several Southern senators did try to stop the Civil Rights Act of 1957, but the Senate majority leader, Democrat Lyndon Johnson, put together a compromise that enabled the act to pass. Although its final form was much weaker than originally intended, the act still brought the power of the federal government into the civil rights debate. The act created a civil rights division within the Department of Justice and gave it the authority to seek court injunctions against anyone interfering with the right to vote. It also created the United States Commission on Civil Rights to investigate allegations of denial of voting rights. After the bill passed, the SCLC announced a campaign to register 2 million new African American voters.

 **Reading Check** **Explaining** Why did President Eisenhower intervene in the civil rights controversy?

## SECTION 1 ASSESSMENT

### Checking for Understanding

- Define:** *separate-but-equal, de facto segregation, sit-in.*
- Identify:** NAACP, Thurgood Marshall, Linda Brown, Martin Luther King, Jr., Southern Christian Leadership Conference.
- State** the outcome of the *Brown v. Board of Education* case.

### Reviewing Themes

- Government and Democracy** Why did the role of the federal government in civil rights enforcement change?

### Critical Thinking

- Interpreting** Do you think the civil rights movement would have been successful in gaining civil rights for African Americans without the help of the NAACP and the SCLC? Explain.
- Organizing** Use a graphic organizer similar to the one below to list the efforts made to end segregation.



### Analyzing Visuals

- Examining Photographs** Study the photograph of Central High School students on page 871. How would you describe Elizabeth Eckford’s demeanor compared to those around her? What might this tell you about her character?

### Writing About History

- Expository Writing** Take on the role of an African American soldier returning to the United States after fighting in World War II. Write a letter to the editor of your local newspaper describing your expectations of civil rights as an American citizen.