

**Civil Rights Timeline
Milestones in the modern
civil rights movement**

by Elissa Haney

1954 1960 1964 1968 1971
1988 1991

1954 May 17

The Supreme Court rules on the landmark case *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka, Kans.*, unanimously agreeing that segregation in public schools is unconstitutional. The ruling paves the way for large-scale desegregation. It is a victory for NAACP attorney Thurgood Marshall, who will later return to the Supreme Court as the nation's first black justice.

1955 Dec. 1

(Montgomery, Ala.) NAACP member Rosa Parks refuses to give up her seat at the front of the bus to a white passenger, defying a southern custom of the time. In response to her arrest the Montgomery black community launches a bus boycott, which will last for more than a year, until the buses are desegregated Dec. 21, 1956. As newly elected president of the Montgomery Improvement Association (MIA), Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr., is instrumental in leading the boycott.

1957 Jan. Feb.

Rev. King, Charles K. Steele, and Fred L. Shuttlesworth establish the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, of which King is made the first president. The SCLC becomes a major force in organizing the civil rights

movement.

Sept

(Little Rock, Ark.) Formerly all-white Central High School learns that integration is easier said than done. Nine black students are blocked from entering the school by crowds organized by Governor Orval Faubus. President Eisenhower sends federal troops and the National Guard to intervene on behalf of the students.

1960 Feb. 1

(Greensboro, N.C.) Four black students from North Carolina Agricultural and Technical College begin a sit-in at a segregated Woolworth's lunch counter. Although they are refused service, they are allowed to stay at the counter. The event triggers many similar nonviolent protests throughout the south.

April

(Raleigh, N.C.) The Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) is founded at Shaw University, providing young blacks a more organized place in the civil rights movement. The SNCC later grows into a more radical organization, especially under the leadership of Stokely Carmichael (1966/1967).

1961 May 4

The Congress of Racial Equality (CORE) begins sending student volunteers on bus trips to test the implementation of new laws prohibiting segregation in interstate travel facilities. One of the first two groups of "freedom riders," as they are called, encounters its first problem two weeks later, when a mob in Alabama sets the riders' bus on fire. The program continues, and by the end of the summer 1,000 volunteers, black and white, have participated.

1963 June 12

(Jackson, Miss.) Mississippi's NAACP field secretary, 37-year-old Medgar Evers, is murdered outside his home. Byron De La Beckwith is tried twice in 1964, both trials resulting in hung juries. Thirty years later he is convicted for murdering Evers.

Aug. 28

(Washington, D.C.) About 250,000 people join the March on Washington. Congregating at the Lincoln Memorial, participants listen as Reverend King delivers his famous "I Have a Dream" speech.

Sept. 15

(Birmingham, Ala.) Four young girls attending Sunday school are killed when a bomb explodes at the Sixteenth Street Baptist Church, a popular location for civil rights meetings. Riots erupt in Birmingham, leading to the deaths of two more black youths.

1964 Summer

The Council of Federated Organizations (COFO), a network of civil rights groups that includes CORE and SNCC, launches a massive effort to register black voters during what becomes known as the Freedom Summer. It also sends delegates to the Democratic National Convention to protest and attempt to unseat the official all-white Mississippi contingent.

July 2

President Johnson signs the Civil Rights Act of 1964, making segregation in public facilities and discrimination in employment illegal.

Aug. 5

Three Mississippi civil-rights workers are officially declared missing, having disappeared on June 21. The last day they were seen, James E. Cheney, 21; Andrew Goodman, 21; and Michael Schwerner, 24, had been arrested, incarcerated, and then released on speeding charges. Their murdered bodies are found after President Johnson sends military personnel to join the search party. It is later revealed that the police released

the three men to the Ku Klux Klan. The trio had been working to register black voters.

1965 Feb. 21

Malcolm X, black nationalist and founder of the Organization of Afro-American Unity, is shot to death in Harlem. It is believed the assailants are members of the Black Muslim faith, which Malcolm had recently abandoned.

March 7

(Selma, Ala.) Blacks begin a march to Montgomery in support of voting rights but are stopped at the Pettus Bridge by a police blockade. Fifty marchers are hospitalized after police use tear gas, whips, and clubs against them. The incident is dubbed "Bloody Sunday" by the media.

Aug. 10

Congress passes the Voting Rights Act of 1965, making it easier for southern blacks to register to vote. Literacy tests and other such requirements that tended to restrict black voting become illegal.

1968 April 4

(Memphis, Tenn.) Reverend King, at age 39, is shot as he stands on the balcony outside his hotel room. Although escaped convict James Earl Ray later pleads guilty to the crime, questions about the actual circumstances of King's assassination remain to this day.

April 11

President Johnson signs the

Civil Rights Act of 1968, prohibiting discrimination in the sale, rental, and financing of housing.

1971 April 20

The Supreme Court, in *Swann v. Charlotte-Mecklenburg Board of Education*, upholds busing as a legitimate means for achieving integration of public schools. Although largely unwelcome (and sometimes violently opposed) in local school districts, court-ordered busing plans in cities such as Charlotte, Boston, and Denver continue until the late 1990s.

1988 March 22

Overriding President Reagan's veto, Congress passes the Civil Rights Restoration Act, which expands the reach of non-discrimination laws within private institutions receiving federal funds.

1991 Nov. 22

After two years of debates, vetoes, and threatened vetoes, President Bush reverses himself and signs the Civil Rights Act of 1991, strengthening existing civil rights laws and providing for damages in cases of intentional employment discrimination.

**Ex-Black Panther
says murder trial is
FBI conspiracy**

Duncan Campbell
The Guardian

A murder trial under way in Atlanta, Georgia, has rekindled memories of one of the most turbulent periods of American racial politics, with the accused - a former leading figure of the Black Panthers - claiming to be the victim of an FBI witch-hunt. Jamil Abdullah al-Amin, 58, a Muslim cleric, was better known as "H Rap Brown" in the 1960s when he was one of the firebrands in the Black Panthers. The short-lived movement challenged the police and played a leading part in the black power movement.

Mr al-Amin was a leading member of the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee and was active in the registration of black voters in the 1960s. Now he faces a possible death penalty after the fatal shooting of a sheriff's deputy in Atlanta in March 2000.

Two deputies, Ricky Kinchen and Aldranon English, went to Mr al-Amin's house to serve him with a summons for some minor motoring charges and an accusation of impersonating a police officer. The visit came after he had failed to attend a court hearing.

Both deputies were shot in an exchange of gunfire. Kinchen, who was black, later died. Mr English identified Mr al-Amin as the gunman.

The suspect was found four days later in woods near a small town in Alabama where he had helped to register voters in the 1960s. Police say the weapon used in the fatal shooting was found nearby.

The prosecution says that this is a straightforward case. Mr al-Amin was identified by one of his victims and the weapon used in the shooting was found near him.

But the defendant told the *New York Times* from prison that the charges resulted from the FBI's determination to jail him. "They still fear a personality, a character coming up among African-Americans who could galvanise support among all the different elements of the African-American community. They are trying to crush Islam before it realises its own worth and strength," he said.

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