*Essay on The Players*

The significant gains of the civil rights movement were won by people, not processes. Against incredible odds--and often at great risk--the thousands of activists in the modern freedom struggle won victories that touched their own lives as well as those of their neighbors and future generations. Here are highlights about some of the groups and individuals involved in the unfolding human drama:

**Southern resistance** Resistance to racial equality in the Deep South came not only from extremist groups like the Ku Klux Klan and white "citizens' councils." It occurred at all levels of government and society--from federal judges to state governors to county sheriffs to local citizens serving on juries.

Governor Orvil Faubus of Arkansas used the Arkansas National Guard to prevent school integration, and Governors Ross Barnett of Mississippi and George Wallace of Alabama physically blocked school doorways. E.H. Hurst, a Mississippi state representative, stalked and killed a black farmer for attending voter registration classes. Laurie Pritchett, Albany, Georgia's police chief, thwarted student efforts to integrate public places in the city. Birmingham's public safety commissioner Eugene T. "Bull" Connor advocated violence against freedom riders and ordered fire hoses and police dogs turned on demonstrators. Sheriff Jim Clark of Dallas County, Alabama loosed his deputies on ["Bloody Sunday"](https://www.nps.gov/nr/travel/civilrights/text.htm#al4)marchers and personally menaced other protestors. Police all across the South arrested civil rights activists on trumped-up charges. All-white juries in several states acquitted known killers of local African Americans.

**Black churches** The leadership role of black churches in the movement was a natural extension of their structure and function. They offered members an opportunity to exercise roles denied them in society. Throughout history, the black church served not only as a place of worship but also as a community "bulletin board," a credit union, a "people's court" to solve disputes, a support group, and a center of political activism. These and other functions enhanced the importance of the minister. The most prominent clergyman in the civil rights movement was Martin Luther King, Jr. *Time* magazine's 1964 "Man of the Year" was a man of the people. He joined as well as led protest demonstrations, and as comedian Dick Gregory put it, "he gave as many fingerprints as autographs." King's powerful oratory and persistent call for racial justice inspired sharecroppers and intellectuals alike. His tireless personal commitment to and strong leadership role in the black freedom struggle won him worldwide acclaim and the Nobel Peace Prize.

Other notable minister-activists included Ralph Abernathy, King's closest associate; Bernard Lee, veteran demonstrator and frequent travel companion of King; Fred Shuttlesworth, who defied Bull Connor and who created a safe path for a colleague through a white mob in Montgomery by commanding "Out of the way!"; and C.T. Vivian, who debated Sheriff Clark on his conduct and the Constitution.

**Students** Students and seminarians in both the South and the North played key roles in every phase of the civil rights movement--from bus boycotts to sit-ins to freedom rides to social movements. The student movement involved such celebrated figures as John Lewis, the single-minded activist who "kept on" despite many beatings and harassments; Jim Lawson, the revered "guru" of nonviolent theory and tactics; Diane Nash, an articulate and intrepid public champion of justice; Bob Moses, pioneer of voting registration in the most rural--and most dangerous--part of the South; and James Bevel, a fiery preacher and charismatic organizer and facilitator. Other prominent student activists included [Charles McDew](https://www.nps.gov/nr/travel/civilrights/text.htm#sc2), Bernard Lafayette, Charles Jones, Lonnie King, Julian Bond (associated with [Atlanta University](https://www.nps.gov/nr/travel/civilrights/text.htm#g2)), Hosea Williams (associated with [Brown Chapel](https://www.nps.gov/nr/travel/civilrights/text.htm#al2)), and Stokely Carmichael, who later changed his name to Kwame Toure.

**Institutional frameworks** Church and student-led movements developed their own organizational and sustaining structures. The Southern Christian Leadership Conference (the SCLC), founded in 1957, coordinated and raised funds, mostly from northern sources, for local protests and for the training of black leaders. The Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, or SNCC, founded in 1957, developed the "jail-no-bail" strategy. SNCC's role was to develop and link sit-in campaigns and to help organize freedom rides, voter registration drives, and other protest activities. Bob Moses of SNCC created the Council of Federated Organizations (COFO) to coordinate the work of the SCLC, SNCC, and various other national and independent civil rights groups. These three new groups often joined forces with existing organizations such as the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), founded in 1909, the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE), founded in 1942, and the National Urban League. The NAACP and its Director, Roy Wilkins, provided legal counsel for jailed demonstrators, helped raise bail, and continued to test segregation and discrimination in the courts as it had been doing for half a century. CORE initiated the 1961 Freedom Rides which involved many SNCC members, and CORE's leader James Forman later became executive secretary of SNCC. The National Urban League, founded in 1911 and headed by [Whitney M. Young, Jr.,](https://www.nps.gov/nr/travel/civilrights/text.htm#ky2) helped open up job opportunities for African Americans. Labor was represented by [A. Philip Randolph](https://www.nps.gov/nr/travel/civilrights/text.htm#ny2), vice-president of the American Federation of Labor, and his chief assistant and organizer, Bayard Rustin.

**Federal involvement** All branches of the federal government impacted the civil rights movement. President John Kennedy supported enforcement of desegregation in schools and public facilities. Attorney General Robert Kennedy brought more than 50 lawsuits in four states to secure black Americans' right to vote. President Lyndon Johnson was personally committed to achieving civil rights goals. Congress passed and President Johnson signed the century's two most far-reaching pieces of civil rights legislation--[the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965](https://www.nps.gov/nr/travel/civilrights/text.htm#prize). Johnson advocated civil rights even though he knew it would cost the Democratic Party the South in the next presidential election, and for the foreseeable future. FBI director J. Edgar Hoover, concerned about possible Communist influence in the civil rights movement and personally antagonistic to Martin Luther King, Jr., used the FBI to investigate King and other civil rights leaders. U.S. District Court [Judge Frank M. Johnson, Jr.,](https://www.nps.gov/nr/travel/civilrights/text.htm#al6) ruled against segregation and voting rights discrimination in Alabama and made the Selma-to-Montgomery March possible.

**Diary Entries Regarding Jim Crow Laws:**

**Municipal Swimming Pool**

During my early childhood days in Alamogordo, New Mexico, in the early-to-mid l950s, my grandparents owned and operated the local municipal swimming pool. This was before filtering systems were required and the pool therefore had to be treated with chlorine and other chemicals to maintain the cleanliness of the water. It was also drained once a week and refilled with fresh water.

The sign on the outside of the pool read: Hours 10am to 6pm Tuesday— Sat. Colored: Sunday from 1pm-5pm. After 5pm on Sunday, my grandfather would drain the pool (125,000 gal.) and on Monday everyone would grab buckets of liquid chlorine and scrub the entire pool.

I asked my grandfather why we did this, and he said that the colored people were unclean and this would kill any bacteria that they would bring in. I also would ask my grandmother if I could go swimming on Sunday, and she would always tell me no, because that was the time when the "colored folks" could swim and I wasn't allowed to swim with them. This went on till 1957 and at that time the state required the new filtering system and my grandparents closed the pool because of the cost of the new equipment. This was an accepted practice during my early childhood.

Ted Gaskins
Las Cruces, NM

**Public Library Segregation**

I am a middle class white. I was in grade school in Alexandria, Virginia, during the 50s. When I was growing up, I knew about segregation, but I didn't know the extent of it. It wasn't until the 90s that I learned that, before desegregation, the public library in Alexandria did not admit black people (even though their taxes help support it), and —what is worse —that there was no separate public library for the black population. As a child, I spent many happy and ignorant hours in that library, and I "learned", because they did not use the library, that African-Americans had no interest in intellectual pursuits. Such lessons that are intuited through ignorance, lessons that are not taught but that come through osmosis, can be the most damaging and insidious.

Charlotte Becker
Roanoke, VA



**Norfolk, VA. Busses in WWII**

I am not old enough (and I grew up in Canada) to remember this era myself, but my Dad told me the following:

My Dad was from New York City. During the Second World War, he enlisted in the Navy and was sent to Norfolk, Virginia. Upon boarding a public transit bus there for the first time, he went and sat in the back, as was the rule and custom in New York (Please Move to the Rear). The driver stopped the bus, came to the back, and addressed him in an apparently unpleasant tone: "Hey, sailor, y'all get up here in the front where y'all belong." The system could be restrictive in both directions.

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