

Using research from your local or school library or school and from the Internet, write a short report comparing and contrasting the fight for civil rights in the United States in the 1950s and 1960s with the fight for freedom and justice in South

Africa today. Discuss the similarities and differences between these two struggles. What methods were most effectively used by various activists?

Multiple Perspectives

Civil rights activist Rosa Parks is often portrayed in books and in the media as an ordinary African American working woman who was too tired to move to the back of the bus. Compare this vision of the petite Rosa Parks with the author's statement that Parks's actions were planned by the NAACP.

In small groups, discuss your prior knowledge of Parks. Ask the people in your group who among them knew only

the popular media version of this event and who was aware that the event was planned. Use the following statements and questions to guide your discussion: Are media accounts of historical events always accurate? How does it feel to know that something that you've heard and believed for a long time is not correct? Using the information that you've learned, write a short biography on Parks. Title your work, *Update on History*.

CENTER YOUR WRITING

It is the 1950s and you are a reporter for a small Northern newspaper whose readers know little about the sit-ins and protests for civil rights that are starting to occur in the South. You have just witnessed a Freedom Ride in Atlanta, Georgia, and you have been asked to write a lead story for

the people back home explaining what you have seen, who is taking part in these protests, and what these individuals expect to accomplish. Comment on the reaction of the residents in Atlanta.

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AS YOU READ

- How did established civil rights organizations aid the student movement?
- Why did Dr. King go to Birmingham, Alabama, in 1963?
- How did white supremacists react to Freedom Summer?

Chapter Outline

- Students Adopt Nonviolence
- Dr. King Is Called to Birmingham
- Letter from a Birmingham Jail
- A Leader Falls

Vocabulary

- Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee • consensus
- nonviolence • concessions • Freedom Summer

Students Adopt Nonviolence

As more and more students became involved in the struggle against segregation, the older civil rights organizations attempted to provide guidance to this dynamic new part of the movement. While the students honored and respected the older leaders, they wanted to remain independent of these established groups. The majority of the students were simply concerned with overthrowing the racist regime of segregation. Fortunately, some of the experienced leaders came to their aid as they were trying to organize. Chief among these was Ella Jo Baker.

ELLA JO BAKER EMERGES AS NATIONAL LEADER

Baker, a longtime activist with a career in the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), was the office manager for the Southern Christian Leadership Conference's (SCLC) Atlanta headquarters. It was she who had helped the students in Greensboro organize the first sit-ins. Baker was well connected. She knew all the

1963

President Kennedy writes a new Civil Rights Bill allowing the attorney general of the United States to file lawsuits to enforce school integration and to cut off federal funds when a program was discriminatory.

1963

Medgar Evers, field secretary for the NAACP in Jackson, Mississippi, is assassinated by a white supremacist.

1964

Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., is awarded the Nobel Peace Prize.

1965

Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., leads demonstrations in Birmingham, Alabama.

important people in the Civil Rights Movement, and she understood the workings of the political situation. She knew what the students would confront as they traveled around the South. A woman in a male-dominated movement, Baker demonstrated a great ability to handle male leaders and difficult situations. Under Baker's guidance, the young college students, who had been just teenagers when the Supreme Court handed down the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision, brought a new burst of enthusiasm to civil rights activities.

On Easter weekend in 1960, Baker invited the leading student activists to a meeting at Shaw University in Raleigh, North Carolina. At this meeting she encouraged them to form their own organization and to practice a group-centered leadership. James Lawson, who had been dismissed from Vanderbilt Divinity School because of his activism, wrote a statement of purpose for a new organization, the **Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC)**, which said in part:

"Nonviolence as it grows from Judaic-Christian traditions seeks a social order of justice permeated by love."

Lawson had been trained in India and had declared nonviolence to be his life's mission. Some students did not agree with all of the principles in Lawson's statement of purpose. It was the topic of several debates.

Baker did not want any one person to feel left out of the organization's leadership.



Demonstrators from the NAACP form a picket line outside an F.W. Woolworth store to protest the store's segregated lunch policy. African Americans could eat at Woolworth's lunch counters in the North but not in the South.

Although personal issues would emerge between different groups, she urged that they be settled by **consensus**—continuing a discussion until all members came to a solution on which they could agree. She hoped to institute a traditional African leadership style into the organization. She said what the organization needed were

"people who were not so interested in being leaders as developing leaders among other people."

When the students left Shaw University, they were committed to **nonviolence**. They would not be afraid to stand up for what they believed. They would speak out and act against Jim Crow. Marion Barry, H. Rap Brown (Jamil Abdullah Al-Amin), John Lewis, Julian Bond, and Stokely Carmichael (Kwame Ture) were the most famous SNCC leaders, but there were many other strong leaders at the national and local levels.



Roy Wilkins (far left), the future Executive Secretary of the NAACP, was one of the key organizers of this anti-lynching campaign.

others acted alone, but all held to the same goal; exhibiting unusual courage in the face of mob violence. None showed more firmness than James Meredith. He had applied to the all-white University of Mississippi in 1962. When the university blocked his admission, he sued in federal court and won. When the school was ordered to desegregate, 3,000 white people rioted in protest. President John F. Kennedy had to order troops to the campus in Oxford, Mississippi. It took more than 23,000 federal troops to bring peace to the town. By

October 1962, Meredith was escorted to class by federal marshals.

In showdown after showdown, African American students were willing to face fierce consequences in their quest to destroy racial discrimination. Their efforts reshaped the Civil Rights Movement as the resistance to segregation increased.

NEW ENERGY

The student movement brought an energy into the fight for justice that was contagious. Diane Nash, a student at Fisk University, organized a group of students to continue the Congress for Racial Equality (CORE) Freedom Ride into Jackson, Mississippi, after the original interracial CORE group had to cancel its ride because of white mobs. Immediately after the group was arrested, Nash became a symbol of the new African American woman. She was proud of her heritage and committed to liberating all her people from segregation.

Not all student activists were members of the SNCC. Some created different organizations,

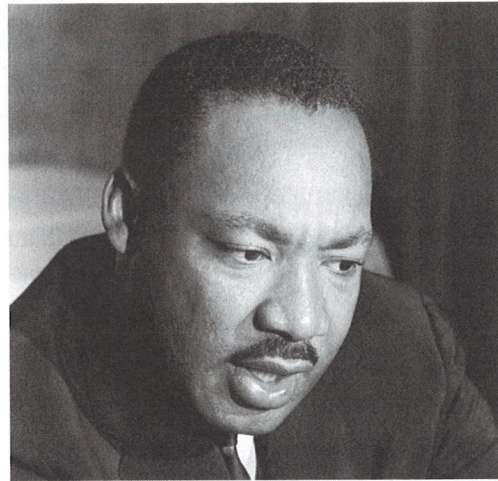
DID YOU KNOW ?

Over 70,000 students took part in the sit-ins. Over 3,600 served time in jail.

Dr. King Is Called to Birmingham

The students who participated in the Freedom Rides and sit-ins were beaten, jeered, and doused with food and liquids. Many had been arrested. Through it all, the young protesters held to nonviolence and refused to strike back. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., Ralph Abernathy, and other leaders of the SCLC gave the courageous students their full support. Dr. King had become the most influential leader in the Civil Rights Movement. He called being arrested “a badge of honor.”

Dr. King's leadership in the SCLC was so powerful that others called on him for help. In early 1963, Reverend Fred Shuttlesworth of Birmingham, Alabama, asked King for help. Shuttlesworth's church had been bombed and he had been arrested for assisting the Freedom Riders. On April 3, 1963, Dr. King went to Birmingham with his top lieutenants to begin a new campaign. During the next few weeks, Shuttlesworth and Dr. King prepared their volunteers for a full-scale, nonviolent assault on Birmingham's barricades of segregation.



Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., tells reporters at a news conference in Miami, Florida, on August 16, 1965, that he would help to create a "community of love" with community leaders in Los Angeles.

CHALLENGING BULL CONNOR

Bull Connor, the Birmingham sheriff, was determined to defend and uphold segregation. He gave his deputies vicious police dogs which were used to attack the demonstrators. He outfitted his forces with powerful water hoses taken from fire trucks, whips, tear gas, and electric prods that could send a person into a state of shock.

Shuttlesworth and King were not afraid of Bull Connor or the other segregationists; they

had been in many battles and had won most of them. King told reporters that he planned to be in Birmingham until

"Pharaoh lets God's people go."

Finally, on April 12, 1965, the demonstrations began. Bull Connor's deputies were out in full battle gear, and their vicious attacks on the



A crowd of supporters conduct a peaceful march in Washington, D.C., in August 1963.

JAMES WELDON JOHNSON



James Weldon Johnson (1871-1938) was the first African American executive secretary of the NAACP and, because of his many skills, was called “truly the ‘Renaissance man’ of the Harlem Renaissance” by his

biographer. He also served as a diplomat, lawyer, journalist, and teacher. A figure both literary and political, he was instrumental in the growth of the NAACP and the formation of a distinctly African American artistic community.

After a relatively privileged upbringing, he became a diplomat to Venezuela and Nicaragua. In 1915, he became the field secretary of the NAACP, responsible for forming new branch offices throughout the country. Johnson’s many talents made him valuable to the organization. He remained with the NAACP until 1930, rising to the level of executive secretary in 1920.

In 1912, Johnson became an editorial writer for the *New York Age*. Throughout his career, he wrote poetry, songs, fiction, history, and editorials.

Also in 1912, Johnson published (anonymously) *The Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man*. In 1930, he finished writing *Black Manhattan*, which traced the contributions of African Americans in the arts in New York from the 17th to the 20th centuries. He also edited anthologies of African Americans in the 1920s. In 1930, he became a professor of creative writing at Fisk University in Nashville, Tennessee. Johnson died in an auto accident at age 67.

peaceful demonstrators were seen nightly on national television news.

Letter from a Birmingham Jail

The attention of the nation was focused on the cruel events unfolding in Birmingham. King was arrested and thrown into jail. Many of the demonstrators were arrested; others were injured. The white ministers of Birmingham denounced the marchers and asked Dr. King why he had come to Birmingham. King was moved, while in prison, to write his “Letter from a Birmingham Jail” to the white ministers. In the letter he defended the right of oppressed people to protest their condition.

King wrote to them in a language that they could understand:

“I am in Birmingham because injustice is here. Just as the prophets of the eighth century B.C. left their villages and carried their ‘thus saith the Lord’ far beyond the boundaries of their home towns, and just as the Apostle Paul left his village of Tarsus and carried the gospel of

Jesus Christ to the far corners of the Greco-Roman world, so am I compelled to carry the gospel of freedom beyond my own home town. Like Paul, I must constantly respond to the Macedonian call for aid.”

By May, more than 3,000 people had been arrested in the city. The town had acquired the nickname “Bombingham” because there had been so many unsolved shootings and bombings. Bull Connor, as well as Alabama Governor George Wallace, conspired to put an end to the civil rights protest. The governor sent state patrolmen to reinforce Connor’s prohibition of the marches. The attacks on the demonstrators in

Birmingham sparked activism across the nation. More than 930 public protests were held in more than 100 cities. Birmingham was a symbol of the defiance of racism. Finally, the white leaders in Birmingham made **concessions**. On Monday, May 10, 1963, businessmen announced the desegregation of lunch counters and downtown stores, and the demonstrations ended. Connor was furious. He condemned the deal as:

" . . . capitulation by certain weak-kneed white people under threat of violence by rabble-rousing Negro, King."

The sheriff had another trick up his sleeve. He offered his help when Governor Wallace promised to block the registration of African American students at the University of Alabama. The governor made Connor a kind of roving ambassador, sending him to speak to various segregationist groups, asking them to hold down their outrage.

Wallace did not want to upset President John Kennedy and his brother, Robert, the Attorney General, with rallies led by white supremacists. He riled them himself, however, when, on June 11, 1963, he stood in the university's doorway, refusing to allow James Hood and Vivian Malone to register. Later that day, the state's national guard commander, backed by federal marshals, forced Wallace to step aside. After the governor left the campus, the students walked through the university doors, shattering the school's color barrier.

By the summer of 1963, President Kennedy had written a new Civil Rights Bill and sent it to Congress. This was a stronger bill than a previous one that had failed to make it through Congress earlier in the year. The new bill allowed the attorney general of the United States to bring lawsuits to enforce school integration and to cut off federal funds when a program was guilty of discrimination. To ensure the bill's passage, Dr. King and other Civil rights leaders felt some additional pressure was needed from the streets and began a plan for the March on Washington.

A Leader Falls

As they were preparing for the August March on Washington, a tragic event gave a clear warning that white supremacist resistance to the Civil Rights Movement would grow worse. In June 1963, a white supremacist murdered Medgar Evers, the field secretary for the NAACP in Jackson, Mississippi.



Medgar Evers (1925–63), field secretary for the NAACP and the first of several civil rights leaders assassinated during the 1960s. He was shot and killed outside his home in Jackson, Mississippi.

Evers had been a magnetic personality and one of the key organizers of the "**Freedom Summer**"—a massive voter registration project throughout the state of Mississippi—slated for the summer of 1964.

Saddened, but even more strengthened in their resolve, civil rights leaders fanned out to other cities and other battles. Soon the massive March on Washington would be a reality and the "shock troopers" of the movement would present their case to the nation at the Lincoln Memorial.

DID YOU KNOW ?

Septima Poinsette Clark was a civil rights activist, a member of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC). She is best known for her literacy and voter registration schools in the South. She wrote *Echo In My Soul* (1962), *Ready From Within: Septima Clark*, and *The Civil Rights Movement* (1986). She is one of the stalwarts of the Civil Rights Movement of the 1950s and 1960s.



Chapter 44 After You Read

Read each section carefully, then write your answers on a separate sheet of paper.

Comprehension Review

1. How did Ella Jo Baker aid student protestors in the 1960s?
2. What was the purpose of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee?
3. What method did Baker suggest the members of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee use to resolve their differences?
4. In what way did Diane Nash symbolize the new African American woman?
5. What is James Meredith noted for?
6. Why did Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., go to Birmingham, Alabama in 1963?
7. What caused Birmingham to be called "Bombingham" throughout the country?
8. How was the Civil Rights Bill proposed by President Kennedy stronger than the previous bill that Congress failed to pass?
9. What was the purpose of the march on Washington planned by Dr. King and other civil rights leaders?

Center Your Thinking

10. Think about a time when you acted like Dr. King and responded to a call for aid. Write a letter to a friend explaining how you responded to the call for help and why you acted that way.

Vocabulary and Concept Development

1. Why did Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., call being arrested "a badge of honor"?
2. What analogy did Dr. King use when he said that he would stay in Birmingham until "Pharaoh let God's people go"?
3. What does the author mean by this statement: "The new bill allowed the attorney general to cut off federal funds when a program was guilty of discrimination"?

Reading a Timeline

Use Unit 13 and Chapter 44 timelines to complete the following:

1. Look at the 1963 event connected with President Kennedy. Do you think that this kind of action would have been taken by many United States presidents in the 1800s?
2. Look at the 1963 event connected with Medgar Evers. What kind of time was it for American society considering President Kennedy's civil rights action and this assassination? Does this suggest that progress was made for African Americans in the United States compared with the late 1800s or early 1900s?
3. Note the event listed for 1964. Would an African American activist living in the 1800s receive this award from a European organization? Why or why not?
4. Would you like to have lived in this time? If so, would you have participated in civil rights activism? Explain.