**African American Civil Rights Chronology**

1619:

A year before the Mayflower, [the first 20 African slaves](http://www.pbs.org/wnet/aaworld/timeline/early_01.html) are sold to settlers in Virginia as "indentured servants."

1789:

[Constitution](http://www.law.cornell.edu/constitution/constitution.overview.html) adopted; slaves counted as three-fifths of a person for means of representation.

1831:

[Nat Turner](http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/aia/part3/3p1518.html) leads slave revolt in Virginia.

1857:

In the [Dred Scott](http://library.wustl.edu/vlib/dredscott/) decision, Scott, a slave who had lived in a free territory, sues for his freedom on the grounds his residence on free soil liberates him. The Supreme Court, citing historical and conventional view of African Americans, rules against him, saying African American people are regarded as "so far inferior...that they had no rights which the white man was bound to respect." The court also declares that slaves were not citizens and had no rights to sue, and that slave owners could take their slaves anywhere on the territory and retain title to them.

1861:

The [Civil War](http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/cwphtml/tl1861.html) begins.

1863:

January 1, Lincoln signs the [Emancipation Proclamation](http://www.nps.gov/ncro/anti/emancipation.html).—This document freed the slaves.

1865:

The [Civil War](http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/cwphtml/tl1861.html) ends. [Lincoln assassinated](http://members.aol.com/RVSNorton/Lincoln.html) (April 15). [Freedman's Bureau](http://www.freedmensbureau.com/), to help former slaves, established. Ku Klux Klan organized in Pulaski, Tenn. The Thirteenth Amendment to the Constitution is ratified stating that "neither slavery nor involuntary servitude....shall exist" in the United States.

1868:

[Fourteenth Amendment](http://www.law.cornell.edu/constitution/constitution.amendmentxiv.html), making African Americans full citizens of the United States and prohibiting states from denying them equal protection or due process of law, is ratified. Congress reports that 373 freed slaves have been killed by whites.

1870:

[The Fifteenth Amendment](http://www.law.cornell.edu/constitution/constitution.amendmentxv.html) enacted, guaranteeing the right to vote will not be denied or abridged on account of race. *At the same time, however, the first*[*"Jim Crow"*](http://www.jimcrowhistory.org/)*or segregation law is passed in Tennessee mandating the separation of African Americans from whites on trains, in depots and wharves*. In short order, the rest of the South falls into step. By the end of the century, African Americans are banned from white hotels, barber shops, restaurants, theaters and other public accommodations. By 1885, most southern states also have laws requiring separate schools.

In Wyoming Mrs. Louisa Swain becomes [first woman to cast a legal ballot](http://womenshistory.about.com/od/suffrage/a/1st_woman_vote.htm) in the nation. The Rev. Hiram R. Revels (R-MISS) and Joseph H. Rainey (R-S.C.) become [first African Americans to sit in Congress](http://rs6.loc.gov/ammem/aaohtml/exhibit/aopart5b.html).

1875:

Congress passes the first [Civil Rights Act](http://chnm.gmu.edu/courses/122/recon/civilrightsact.html), guaranteeing African Americans equal rights in transportation, restaurant/inns, theaters and on juries. The law is struck down in 1883 with the Court majority arguing the Constitution allows Congress to act only on discrimination by government and not that by private citizens.

1877:

With the election of [Rutherford B. Hayes](http://www.whitehouse.gov/history/presidents/rh19.html) as President, Reconstruction is brought to an end and most federal troops are withdrawn from the South while those remaining do nothing to protect the rights of African Americans. The return of "home rule" to the former secessionist states also means the restoration of white supremacy and the beginning of the disenfranchisement and segregation of African Americans.

1890:

In Mississippi, a state constitutional convention meets to write a suffrage (voting) amendment, including a poll tax and a literacy test designed -successfully- to exclude African Americans from voting. South Carolina follows suit in 1895, Louisiana in 1898. By 1910, African Americans are effectively barred from voting by constitutional provisions in North Carolina, Alabama, Virginia, Georgia, and Oklahoma as well.

Treaty with China allows unrestricted immigration of Chinese into the country, primarily as laborers on railroads in the West

1896:

The Supreme Court, in [Plessy v. Ferguson,](http://www2.law.cornell.edu/cgi-bin/foliocgi.exe/historic/query%3D%5BGroup%20163%20U.S.%20537%3A%3C/div%3E%5D%28%5BLevel%20Case%20Citation%3A%3C/div%3E%5D%7C%5BGroup%20citemenu%3A%3C/div%3E%5D%29/doc/%7B%401%7D/hit_headings/words%3D4/hits_only)rules that state laws requiring separation of the races are within the bounds of the Constitution as long as equal accommodations are made for African Americans, thus establishing the "separate but equal" doctrine that justifies legal segregation in the South. Justice John Harlan, in lone dissent, says Constitution is "colorblind and neither knows nor tolerates classes among citizens."

1900:

Lynching has become virtually a fact of life as a means for intimidating African Americans. Between 1886 and 1900, there are more than 2,500 lynchings in the nation, the vast majority in the Deep South. In the first year of the new century, more than 100 African Americans are lynched, and by World War I, more than 1100.

1910:

The [National Association for the Advancement of Colored People](http://www.naacp.org/) (NAACP) is founded by W.E.B Du Bois, Jane Addams, John Dewey and others.

The [Mexican Revolution](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mexican_Revolution) brings an influx of immigrants to the United States looking for work.

Congress by a delegate with only limited powers and are unrepresented in the Senate.

1928:

The [League of United Latin American Citizens](http://www.lulac.org/) (LULAC) is founded to fight discrimination, help educate Chicanos and protest segregation, killings and other abuses.

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1939:

African American contralto, [Marian Anderson](http://txtx.essortment.com/biographyofmar_rgtl.htm), barred by the Daughters of the American Revolution from singing in Washington D.C.'s Constitution Hall, sings instead to a crowd of 75,000 people at Lincoln Memorial.

The Legal Defense Fund established as the legislative arm of the NAACP. A year later the two become separate organizations.

1941:

[President Roosevelt](http://www.whitehouse.gov/history/presidents/fr32.html) issues [executive order](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Executive_order_%28United_States%29) banning discrimination against minorities in defense contracts.

1947:

[Jackie Robinson](http://www.jackierobinson.com/) becomes first African American to play major league baseball.

1948:

Supreme Court, in *Shelly v. Kramer,*declares illegal the government support enforcement of restrictive covenants under which private parties could exclude minorities from buying homes in white neighborhoods.

Democratic party endorses civil rights platform, prompting Southern walkout and formation of States Rights Democratic Party (better known as the Dixiecrats) and nomination of Strom Thurmond as presidential candidate.

1952:

Tuskegee Institute reports that, for the first time in the 71 years it has been keeping records, there were no lynchings of African Americans during the year.

1954:

In [Brown v. Board of Education](http://www2.law.cornell.edu/cgi-bin/foliocgi.exe/historic/query%3D%5BGroup%20347%20U.S.%20483%3A%3C/div%3E%5D%28%5BLevel%20Case%20Citation%3A%3C/div%3E%5D%7C%5BGroup%20citemenu%3A%3C/div%3E%5D%29/doc/%7B%401%7D/hit_headings/words%3D4/hits_only), the decision widely regarded as having sparked the modern civil rights era, the Supreme Court rules deliberate public school segregation illegal, effectively overturning "separate but equal" doctrine of [Plessy v. Ferguson](http://www2.law.cornell.edu/cgi-bin/foliocgi.exe/historic/query%3D%5BGroup%20163%20U.S.%20537%3A%3C/div%3E%5D%28%5BLevel%20Case%20Citation%3A%3C/div%3E%5D%7C%5BGroup%20citemenu%3A%3C/div%3E%5D%29/doc/%7B%401%7D/hit_headings/words%3D4/hits_only). Chief Justice Earl Warren, writing for a unanimous Court, notes that to segregate children by race "generates a feeling of inferiority as to their status in the community that may affect their hearts and minds in a way unlikely ever to be undone." [Thurgood Marshall](http://www.thurgoodmarshall.com/home.htm) heads the NAACP/Legal Defense Fund team winning the ruling. *Hernandez v. Texas* becomes the first Mexican American discrimination case to reach the Supreme Court. The case involves a murder conviction by a jury that includes no Latinos. Chief Justice Earl Warren holds persons of Mexican descent are "persons of a distinct class" entitled to the protection of the Fourteenth Amendment.

1955:

On August 28, 14 year old [Emmett Till](http://www.watson.org/~lisa/blackhistory/early-civilrights/emmett.html) is beaten, shot and lynched by whites after allegedly saying "bye, baby" to a white woman in a store in Mississippi.

In Alabama, on December 1 [Rosa Parks](http://www.rosaparks.org/) refuses to up her bus seat to a white man, precipitating the [Montgomery bus boycott](http://www.watson.org/~lisa/blackhistory/civilrights-55-65/montbus.html), led by [Martin Luther King, Jr.](http://nobelprize.org/nobel_prizes/peace/laureates/1964/king-bio.html)

1956:

[Montgomery bus boycott](http://www.watson.org/~lisa/blackhistory/civilrights-55-65/montbus.html) ends in victory, December 21, after the city announces it will comply with a November Supreme Court ruling declaring segregation on buses illegal. Earlier in the year, [King's home was bombed](http://www.cr.nps.gov/nr/travel/civilrights/al8.htm). Autherine Lucy is first African American admitted to the University of Alabama.

1957:

Efforts to integrate Little Rock, Ark., [Central High School](http://www.watson.org/~lisa/blackhistory/school-integration/lilrock/index.html) meet with legal resistance and violence; [Gov. Orval Faubus](http://www.watson.org/~lisa/blackhistory/school-integration/lilrock/faubus.html) predicts "blood will run in the streets" if African Americans push effort to integrate. On Sept. 24, federal troops mobilize to protect the nine African American students at the high school from white mobs trying to block the school's integration.

1960:

February 1, [Lunch counter sit-in](http://www.watson.org/~lisa/blackhistory/civilrights-55-65/sit-ins.html) by four college students in Greensboro, N.C. begins and spreads through the South. On April 17, the [Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee](http://www.ibiblio.org/sncc/) (SNCC) is founded.

John F. Kennedy elected president.

Following Sudan (1956) and Ghana (1957), 11 African nations achieve independence.

1961:

[Congress of Racial Equality](http://www.core-online.org/) (CORE) organizes [Freedom Rides](http://www.watson.org/~lisa/blackhistory/civilrights-55-65/freeride.html) into the South to test new [Interstate Commerce Commission](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Interstate_Commerce_Commission) regulations and court orders barring segregation in interstate transportation. Riders are [beaten by mobs](http://www.watson.org/~lisa/blackhistory/civilrights-55-65/freeride.html) in several places, including Birmingham and Montgomery, Ala.

1963:

June 20, President John F. Kennedy meets with civil rights leaders at the White House in an attempt to call off the [March on Washington](http://www.watson.org/~lisa/blackhistory/civilrights-55-65/marchwas.html) scheduled for August.

Over a quarter of a million people participate in the March on Washington on August 28, 1963, and hear Martin Luther King Jr. deliver his "I Have a Dream" speech.

Medger Evers, NAACP field secretary in Jackson, Miss., murdered on June 12, 1963. A Birmingham church is bombed on Sept. 15, killing four African American girls attending Sunday school: Denise McNair, age 11, and Cynthia Wesley, Carole Robertson and Adie Mae Collins, all 14 years old.

1963:

In an event that traumatizes the nation, President Kennedy is assassinated in Dallas, Texas. Two days later, his alleged assailant, Lee Harvey Oswald, is also shot and killed. Vice President Lyndon Johnson becomes president.

Martin Luther King Jr., receives the Nobel Peace Prize. The Twenty-fourth Amendment, ending the poll tax, is ratified and becomes part of the Constitution.

[Mississippi Freedom Summer](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Freedom_Summer), a voter education and registration project, begins. White northern college students volunteer to run practice elections in preparation for the Presidential election of 1964. Two white students, Andrew Goodman and Michael Scherner, and an African American civil rights worker, James Chaney, are murdered.

The Bracero Program is terminated.

1965:

Selma, Ala. voting rights campaign. Jimmie Lee Jackson, 26, participating in a march led by the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, is killed by Alabama state troopers as he attempts to prevent the troopers from beating his mother and grandfather.

Selma to Montgomery march. The Voting Rights Act passes and is signed into law on August 6, effectively ending literacy tests and a host of other obstacles used to disenfranchise African American and other minority citizens.

The Watt's section of Los Angeles erupts in five days of rioting after an African American woman is killed by a fire truck driven by white men.

1967:

Sparked by a police raid on a black power hangout, Detroit erupts into the worst race riots ever in the nation, with 43 people dead, including 33 African Americans and 10 whites. During the nine months of the year, 164 other racial disturbances are reported across the country, including major riots in Tampa, Cincinnati, Atlanta, Newark, Plainfield and Brunswick, New Jersey, which kill at least 83 people.

[Thurgood Marshall](http://chnm.gmu.edu/courses/122/hill/marshall.htm) becomes the first African American justice of the Supreme Court.

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1968:

* March 1,The National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders, popularly known as the Kerner Commission after chairman Otto Kerner, Governor of Illinois, issues its report warning that the nation is moving toward two separate societies-one black and poor, the other affluent and white. The commission, appointed by President Johnson following the 1967 disorders in Detroit and other communities, calls for major anti-poverty efforts and strengthened civil rights enforcement to eliminate the causes of the disorders.
* April 4, Martin Luther King, Jr. is murdered. The assassination sparks unrest and civil disorders in 124 cities across the country, including the nation's capital, Washington, D.C. On April 11, as disorders continue, President Johnson signs the Civil Rights Act of 1968, aimed at curbing discrimination in housing.