

## Segregation

As you read, look for:

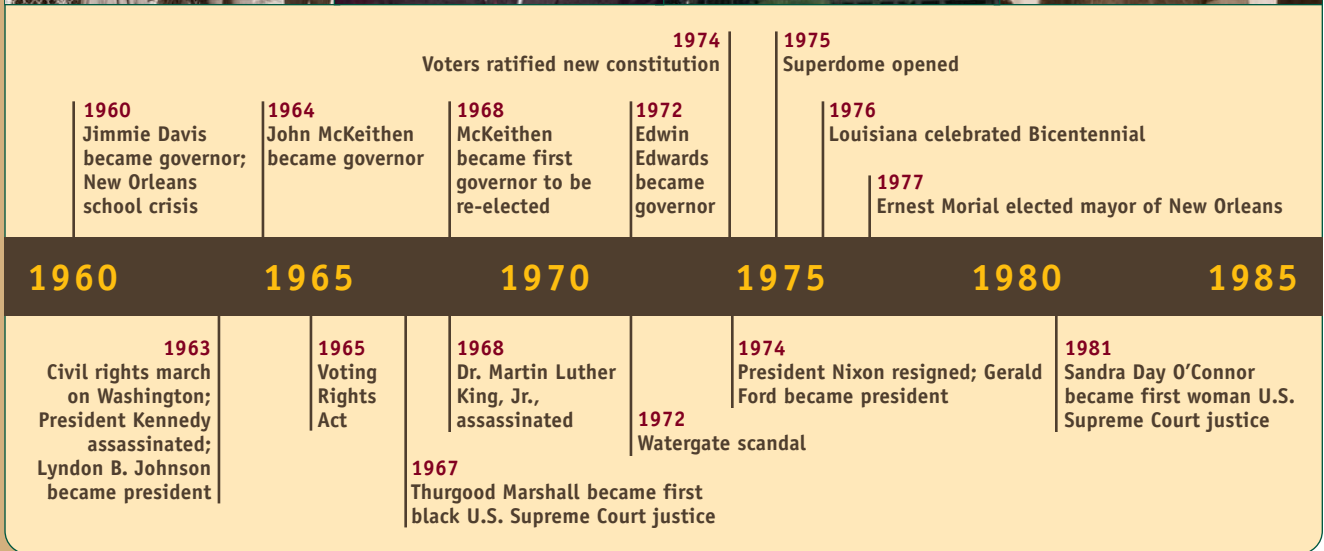
- early civil rights protests in Louisiana,
- the civil rights movement in Louisiana, and
- vocabulary terms **boycott**, **Citizens' Council**, **Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka**, **propaganda**, **National Association for the Advancement of Colored People**, **sit-in**, **Civil Rights Act of 1964**, and **Voting Rights Act**.

Whites in Louisiana had long operated in a system that benefited them and deprived blacks. Most white southerners did not even consider this unjust. Segregation was just the unquestioned way of life. The white community and the black community lived parallel lives that crossed only under rigid, usually unspoken, rules.



Above: Civil rights leader A. P. Tureaud of New Orleans.

### Figure 30 Timeline: 1960–1985



## Figure 31 Major Civil Rights Decisions

U.S. Supreme Court Decision	When Decided	Explanation
<i>Plessy v. Ferguson</i>	1896	Declared that “separate” facilities for blacks and whites were constitutional as long as they were “equal.”
<i>Smith v. Allright</i>	1944	Declared unconstitutional the all-white primaries held in the South.
<i>Brown v. Board of Education</i>	1954	Declared unconstitutional the separate-but-equal concept for public education put forth in <i>Plessy v. Ferguson</i> .
<i>Baker v. Carr</i>	1962	Declared that voting districts should have populations that are nearly equal.

The signs of segregation were seen everywhere. Some were literal and enforced by laws. Water fountains were marked “White only.” African Americans had to use the rear entrance to movie theaters and sit in the segregated balcony marked “Colored.” Restaurants for whites did not serve African Americans. In stores, all of the white customers were waited on before a black person could buy anything. Other signs of segregation were more subtle. Job opportunities were limited for African Americans. The educational system directed black children toward manual labor instead of professional jobs.

Throughout the segregated South, voices from the black community began to rise in protest. Many of those voices belonged to black veterans. They had fought for the United States in World War II, and now they wanted their full rights as citizens. The country had followed the *Plessy v. Ferguson* separate-but-equal ruling in name only. Life was separate but certainly not equal. Blacks were tired of poor schools and all the restrictions of segregation.

### Lagniappe

Before Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr., began the much-better-known bus boycott in Montgomery, Alabama, he called Reverend Jemison for advice.

### Baton Rouge Bus Boycott

Returning veterans joined with others to protest being told to ride in the back of the bus. The Baton Rouge bus boycott, one of the earliest organized protests against segregation in Louisiana, took place in 1953.

Most riders of the Baton Rouge buses were African Americans. They were expected to sit or stand in the back of the bus even when front seats were empty. When the bus fare was increased, the idea of paying more money to stand on a bus with empty seats seemed even more unfair.

Reverend T. J. Jemison, representing the African American community, requested that the city council correct this injustice. A new law changed the seating rules to allow African Americans to sit in the front of the bus if they did not sit in front of any whites or sit in the same seat with a white rider. The bus drivers resisted this change. They insisted on following the old policy where the front ten rows were reserved for whites, even if they were empty. The Louisiana attorney general said the city law violated the segregation laws of the state.

At this point, the African Americans decided to boycott the city bus system. (A **boycott** occurs when a group refuses to do business with some organization to protest its policies.) If African Americans did not ride the buses, the city would lose money. People with cars provided free rides so that everyone could get to work. Leaders at mass meetings encouraged support for the boycott and collected money to pay for gas for the cars.

After five days, the city council and the boycott leaders settled the situation. A new law said that blacks could sit anywhere but the front two seats as long as they did not sit in front of whites or on the same seat as white riders. Bus drivers were instructed to follow the law. As a compromise, blacks would enter the bus from the back and whites from the front. The long back seat was reserved for blacks. The majority of the protesters agreed to this settlement.

The year after this boycott, the U.S. Supreme Court declared segregation unconstitutional. Louisiana's black citizens hoped they would no longer be treated as second-class citizens. Equal treatment had been declared the only American way. The changes ahead would end generations of discrimination. But those changes would come only after years of struggle. White resistance blocked efforts to provide equal rights and equal opportunities.

## The Fight for Civil Rights

To the white community, segregation was the way of life. The U.S. Supreme Court's *Brown* decision brought a fear of change and uncertainty about the future. Some whites formed **Citizens' Councils** to support segregation. This group used propaganda rather than the violence used by the Ku Klux Klan.

In 1959, Jimmie Davis was elected governor after campaigning as a strong segregationist. Davis faced a

**Below:** Firefighters used firehoses in an attempt to break up a protest against desegregation in front of the New Orleans City Hall in late 1960.



state filled with racial unrest. The states' rights argument, first heard before the Civil War, was discussed again in the South. Louisiana's legislature argued that the state had the right to enforce segregation. They passed many laws trying to keep the segregated school system.

## Organizing

The black community faced this strong opposition. One of the most important organizations seeking equal rights for African Americans was the **National Association for the Advancement of Colored People** (NAACP), which had been organized nationally in 1909. The first Louisiana chapter of the NAACP was formed in New Orleans in 1915. The organization had supported the *Brown v. Board of Education* case. Now its members struggled to change Louisiana's segregated schools.

A longtime leader of the Louisiana NAACP was A. P. Turead of New Orleans. His Creole family had lived in Louisiana for generations. Turead graduated from the Howard University Law School and then returned to Louisiana to begin his court battles. One of the first African American lawyers in the state, he fought for equal rights long before the civil rights movement of the 1960s.

In 1952, Turead had filed a lawsuit to allow a black student to enter a formerly all-white school in New Orleans. This occurred two years before the U.S. Supreme Court ruled in the *Brown v. Board of Education* case. The New Orleans case, however, had to wait until the Court decided the *Brown* case.

## The New Orleans School Crisis

The schools for black children in New Orleans were overcrowded and run-down. At first, the parents pushed for improvements to the schools, willing to keep the separate schools if they could be made equal to white schools. These requests were ignored by the whites in power.

New Orleans then became the battleground in the struggle over desegregation in Louisiana. In the *Brown* decision, the U.S. Supreme Court had ruled that segregated schools were unconstitutional. In 1956, a federal judge ordered the Orleans Parish School Board to submit a desegregation plan. The long, ugly battle to desegregate the schools of New Orleans began.

The school board refused and appealed the decision. The state legislature reacted by passing a law to take control of the New Orleans school system and other local school boards. The legislature also established a Joint Committee on Segregation that tried to block changes in the schools.



**Above:** Desegregation of the New Orleans school system did not go smoothly. In this November 1960 photo, white parents and students at the William Frantz Elementary School protested the assignment of Ruby Bridges to the school.



The Washington Parish town of Bogalusa filled with unrest during this period. The town had been established as a lumber town, and the mill continued to be the largest employer. The town was still a segregated community; the civil rights of African Americans were largely ignored.

Civil rights groups demanded better mill jobs for black workers and pushed to end inequality throughout the community. The Congress of Racial Equality (CORE), a national civil rights group, organized the protests in Bogalusa. The group's members were younger and more militant (aggressive) than the NAACP. Some white segregationists in Bogalusa used violence to oppose the civil rights groups.

Governor John McKeithen realized he had to act to prevent riots. He met with leaders of both sides and managed to bring about a compromise. He then appointed a statewide biracial committee to continue the efforts started in Bogalusa. In 1965, when A. Z. Young, a leader of the Bogalusa protests, led a march from Bogalusa to Baton Rouge, the governor protected the marchers with the State Police and the National Guard.

Protests such as these in Louisiana and across the South brought results. The U.S. Congress passed the **Civil Rights Act of 1964**, which ended segregation by prohibiting discrimination in public facilities and in employment. The 1965 **Voting Rights Act** outlawed all literacy tests and poll taxes and sent registrars into the southern states to register black voters. The number of blacks registered to vote increased greatly.



**Above:** A. Z. Young (center) leads a march in August 1967 from Bogalusa to Baton Rouge. Marchers were protected by the Louisiana National Guard.

## Check for Understanding ✓

1. How did black veterans of World War II react to segregation?
2. How was the Baton Rouge bus boycott ended?
3. What is the oldest civil rights organization?
4. How did the state legislature react to the judge's order to desegregate schools?
5. How did Governor McKeithen respond to the protest march from Bogalusa to Baton Rouge?