The Civil Rights Movement

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SEGMENT 1 - RECONSTRUCTION TO REDEMPTION

In all of America's history no war has been as divisive, as bitterly fought or as costly as the American Civil War.

The question of slavery—above all others—defined the conflict between the Union North and Confederate South.

Through four long years, men fought and died to determine the future of slavery—and the fate of the union itself.

President Lincoln declared that, on New Years Day, 1863, all persons held as slaves—within any rebellious State—"..shall be then, thenceforward, and forever free."

Lincoln's "Emancipation Proclamation" did not end slavery everywhere, but it marked a turning point in the war. Thereafter, every advance, was a step toward Union victory….and freedom for all who were enslaved.

That victory came on April 9, 1865 when Union commander Ulysses S. Grant accepted the surrender of Confederate General Robert E. Lee.

Five days later, John Wilkes Booth assassinated President Lincoln. The man who had fought so passionately to preserve the Union would not live to help bind-up its wounds. That task would prove to be nearly insurmountable.

The Civil War had ravaged the South. Southern cities like Richmond and Atlanta were literally reduced to rubble. And while buildings and bridges would rise again, the ideas and institutions of the "old South" would not.

The last will and testament of a confederate officer named John Seargent Wise exposed the anxiety that plagued many Southerners.

Sgt. Wise (Character Voice): And now, having experienced a death to Confederate ideas and a new birth unto allegiance to the Union, I depart…I see what has been pulled down very clearly. What is to be built up in its place I know not. It is a mystery.

What had been pulled down was a "way of life" built on the bondage and exploitation of others. But following Union victory, during what is known as the "Reconstruction Era," three new amendments to the U.S. Constitution extended to former slaves the blessings of liberty:

- freedom
- citizenship
- the right to due process and equal protection under the law
- and the right to vote.

Pennsylvania Congressman Thaddeus Stevens feared that laws alone would be inadequate.

Stevens (Character Voice): "The infernal laws of slavery have prevented [Negroes] from acquiring an education, understanding the common laws of contract, or of managing the ordinary business of life…if we leave them to the legislation of their late masters, we had better have left them in bondage.

The concern was prescient.

For die-hard confederates reconstruction and racial integration were bitter pills. Through intimidation and terror they sought to redeem what had been lost on the battlefield. Seething resentment towards Northern "invaders" fueled the growth of vigilante groups, like the Ku Klux Klan or KKK. Clad in white robes and bearing torches, Klan posses terrorized the South.

One former-slave recalled a Klan lynching:

Slave Narrative (Character Voice): "I never will forget when they hung Cy Guy…they comed after him a hundred strong. They tries him there in the woods, an' with Cy's blood they writes that he shall hang 'tween the heavens and the earth till he is dead, dead, dead. Well sir, the next morning there he hung, swinging in the wind…"

By 1877, Reconstruction had succumbed to bitter opposition and backroom politics. Federal Troops then occupying the South, were withdrawn, and white supremacists were left to reestablish the racial hierarchy that had existed before the war.

Across the former confederacy, informal practices of racial discrimination were written into law.

States instituted poll taxes, literacy tests and other requirements that disenfranchised negroes.

They passed "Jim Crow" laws—which imposed segregation and other restrictions on blacks. A few blacks challenged the system of legal discrimination. In New Orleans, a man named Homer Plessy deliberately defied the Louisiana State law requiring separate rail cars accommodations for blacks and whites. He was arrested and jailed. But the incident led eventually to the Supreme Court case Plessy vs. Ferguson.

Plessy argued that the law infringed on his 14th amendment right to equal protection. But, the majority of justices disagreed. The court's opinion read, in part:

SCOTUS (Character Voice): "Legislation is powerless to eradicate racial instincts, or to abolish distinctions based upon physical differences…If one race be inferior to the other socially, the constitution of the United States cannot put them upon the same plane."

The Court affirmed that segregation was constitutional as long as accommodations were “separate but equal.” It also left it up to the individual states—not the Federal governament—to guarantee equal standards.

As the lone dissenting opinion, Justice John Marshall Harlan, wrote:

Justice Harlan (Character Voice): “The thin disguise of “equal” accommodations…will not mislead anyone, nor atone for the wrong this day done.”

Plessy versus Ferguson became a landmark decision. It sanctioned a system of institutionalized racism that would persist for decades. One that would require a second period of reconstruction to overcome.

SEGMENT 2 - THE ROAD TO BROWN

In 1917, U.S. President Woodrow Wilson committed the nation to World War I in order that the world ”…might be made safe for democracy.” 400,000 black Americans would serve during the war—fighting abroad for freedoms they were denied at home; dying for an country where discrimination was widespread; where Southern Jim Crow laws relegated them to attend inferior schools, to drink from separate fountains, ride in separate streetcars; and where poll taxes, literacy tests and intimidation prevented the vast majority of blacks from exercising their right to vote.

Many negroes fled the South during the period to find work in the factories and shipyards of the North. They found better jobs, higher wages, a brighter future…

…and, in many areas, venomous racism.

Competition for jobs between blacks and whites led to violence in many cities. Newspapers christened the summer of 1919 “Red Summer of Hate” for the national frenzy of race riots and lynchings that gripped the country.

Discrimination was endemic in the U.S. military as well. One young army officer named Charles Hamilton Houston later recalled his experience during World War I:

HOUSTON (CHARACTER VOICE): "The hate and scorn showered on us Negro officers by our fellow Americans convinced me there was no sense in my dying for a world ruled by them… I made up my mind…that if I got through this war, I would study law and use my time fighting for men who could not strike back."

Houston lived and, true to his word, took up the fight for social justice. He accepted a position as legal counsel for the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People in 1934 and joined the battle to overthrow the Southern system of segregation.

Founded in 1909, the NAACP was a tireless crusader against racial violence. It focused on a legal approach to ending discrimination—fighting in the nation’s courtrooms, rather than in the streets. In 1919, the organization waged a high-profile campaign against the racist motion piture—”The Birth of a Nation.” The film’s director, D.W. Griffith, portrayed Southern Whites as the victims of lascivious blacks and carpetbagging Northerners. Klansmen were cast as valiant heroes.

The NAACP criticized the melodrama as “three miles of filth,” but to no avail. It was fabulously popular and shaped a romanticized, yet widely accepted view of the Reconstruction South that persisted for decades.

Taking a cue from “Birth of a Nation” Charles Houston and his team harnessed the power of the motion picture to document the disparity between black and white education in South Carolina.

The visual record they compiled anchored a new, three-step legal strategy to overturn Plessy versus Ferguson: Demonstrate that separate educational facilities were seldom equal. Make “equality” too expensive for States’ to maintain. And finally, attack the very principal of “separate but equal.”

Under the guidance of Houston, the NAACP legal team, filed case after case—slowly chipping away at the legal foundation of segregation.

At the same time, the current of social progress was eroding the racial caste system.

In 1947, Jackie Robinson broke the color barrier in Major League Baseball. The next year, President Harry S. Truman issued executive orders to end segregation in both the federal workforce and the military.

PRESIDENT HARRY S. TRUMAN (JUNE 29, 1947):

"...but we cannot any longer await the growth of a will to action in the slowest state or the most backward community. Our national government must show the way."

Truman’s public support for civil rights prompted a fierce backlash from Southern democrats.

STROM THURMOND:

“...these uncalled for and these damnable proposals he has recommended under the guise of so-called civil rights.”

As the NAACP prepared for its final assault on school segregation, Southern segregationists dug-in and prepared for battle.

GEORGIA DELEGATE CHARLES J. BLOCH:

“In the words of the Great Commoner of a generation ago: ‘You shall not crucify the South on this cross of civil rights.’”

SEGMENT 3 - INTEGRATION

"We may not win today or tomorrow," Charles Houston wrote in 1947, "But the storm gathers, and all the pride and power [of prejudice] will be swept away."

Houston did not live to see legal segregation abolished. But the fight continued following his death, in 1950. In fact, it was time to test the final phase of his strategy. It was time to put the concept of "separate" on trial.

The NAACP filed suit on behalf of the Reverend Oliver Brown and a dozen other families living in Topeka, Kansas. Brown's daughter, Linda, was forced to walk twenty-one blocks to the nearest "black" school, while there was a comparable "white" school only seven blocks away. Their case was consolidated with four other cases of school segregation and came before the United States Supreme Court bearing bearing one name: Oliver Brown versus Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas.

On behalf of the plaintiffs, Thurgood Marshall argued that it was not enough to have "equal" public schools. He produced evidence that suggested segregation itself branded black children with a stamp of inferiority that affected their ability to learn.

For the defendants, Attorney John W. Davis based his argument on the 1896 precedent of Plessy versus Ferguson. He asserted that negroes should not throw-away the "equality that existed between black and white schools simply to achieve prestige."

For seventeen months, the nation waited.

Finally, on May 17, 1954 the Court handed down its opinion.

Before a hushed courtroom, Chief Justice Earl Warren read the unanimous decision:

CHIEF JUSTICE EARL WARREN (CHARACTER VOICE):

"In the field of public education, the doctrine of separate but equal has no place. Separate educational facilities are inherently unequal."

The news resounded in every quarter of American society.

The (negro-run) Chicago Defender newspaper wrote:

CHARACTER VOICE:

"Neither the atom bomb nor the hydrogen bomb will ever be as meaningful to our democracy as the unanimous decision of the Supreme Court - Chicago Defender, May 18, 1954

Few Southerners welcomed the Brown decision. The most venomous critics predicted a new racial war:

CHARACTER VOICE:

"Human blood may stain Southern soil…but the dark red stains of that blood will be on the marble steps of the United States Supreme Court building."

The progressive newspaperman Hodding Carter, Jr. saw it differently:

HODDING CARTER, JR. (CHARACTER VOICE):

"For 75 years we sent Negro kids to school in hovels and pig pens. [We must] replace trickery and subterfuge… with an honest realization that every American child has the right to an equal education."

The initial Brown decision did not mandate immediate desegregation. But a year later, in a group of cases known collectively as "Brown II," the Supreme Court urged that school districts make a "…prompt and reasonable start toward full compliance…" and that negros be admitted to previously all-white public schools with "…with all deliberate speed."

The Court had spoken—and many school districts willingly complied with its decision. But other Southerners—including some at the highest level of government—remained defiant.

South Carolina Senator Strom Thurmond drafted an official battle cry for states' rights known as the "Southern Manifesto." Over one-hundred members of Congress pledged their support for the document, which called on all Southerners to "resist integration by any lawful means."

Americans looked to President Eisenhower for moral leadership and to unite the country on the issue of civil rights. But the President did not favor the sweeping changes mandated by Brown.

PRESIDENT DWIGHT D. EISENHOWER (SOT):

"I personally believe that if you try to go too far too fast in laws, in this delicate field that has involved the emotions of so many millions of Americans, you're making a mistake. I believe we've got to have laws that go

along with education and understanding and I believe if you go beyond that at any one time you cause trouble rather than benefit."

Off the record, the President went further. He called his appointment of Chief Justice Warren "…the biggest damn fool thing I ever did."

Eisenhower's feeble public support for civil rights encouraged some Southerners to openly challenge court-ordered desegregation.

Following the Brown decision, the Little Rock, Arkansas school board developed a plan to integrate its public schools. Nine negro students—who would become known as the "Little Rock Nine"—were scheduled to begin the 1957 school year at the previously all-white Little Rock Central High.

Arkansas Governor Orval Faubus had publicly supported integration. But, at the last minute, he changed his position.

GOV. ORVAL FAUBUS (SOT):

I have therefore in accordance oath of my office taken the follow action: Units of the national guard have been and are now being mobilized with the mission to maintain or restore the peace and good order of this community. Advance units are already on duty on the grounds of Central High School.

The campus was swarming with segregationist protesters on the first day of school. National guardsmen were drawn-up in formation to prevent any negro students from entering the building.

Elizabeth Eckford later recalled her terrifying experience:

ELIZABETH ECKFORD (CHARACTER VOICE):

"Somebody started yelling, 'Lynch her! Lynch her!' I tried to see a friendly face…I looked into the face of an old woman and it seemed a kind face, but when I looked at her again, she spat on me."

Every day for the next three weeks, hundreds of sign-toting protesters stood vigil at the high school.

But if these elements represented the entrenched prejudice of the past, some of Central High's white students symbolized hope for the future.

REPORTER (SOT):

"Do you think that the trouble is with the students here in the high school where is the trouble."

Girl #1:

"I think its the parents."

Girl#2:

"I think it was just downright un-American. I think it was the most terrible thing ever seen in America. I mean, yeah I guess I'm sounding all patriotic or something like that, but I always thought that all men were created equal."

Despite public cries for his intervention, President Eisenhower maintained that Little Rock's problems should be settled in the courts. Privately, he feared he would be forced to act. "If I do," he told an aid, "you can bet one thing. It will be quick, hard and decisive."

The issue was no longer segregation versus integration, it was a question of the supremacy of the United States government.

Governor Faubus finally agreed to remove the National Guard troops—but that only fueled the violence.

White mobs attacked members of the negro press corps. One reporter—Alex Wilson of the Tri-State Defender—was brutally beaten and never recovered from his injuries.

After weeks of patience, President Eisenhower was left with only one choice.

PRESIDENT DWIGHT D. EISENHOWER (SOT):

"Certain misguided persons have insisted on defying the law and bringing it into disrepute. The orders of the courts have thus been frustrated. "

The President federalized the Arkansas National Guard and ordered twelve-hundred Army paratroopers into Little Rock. He made it clear that he was legally compelled to uphold the Supreme Court's directive:

PRESIDENT DWIGHT D. EISENHOWER (SOT):

"The very basis of our laws and freedoms rest upon the certainty that the President and the executive branch of government will support and ensure the carrying out of the decisions of the federal courts, even when necessary,

with all the means at the President's command. Thus will be restored the image of America and of all its parts as one nation, indivisible with liberty and justice for all."

Federal troops brought an abrupt end to the dissent which had festered for nearly a month. With order restored, they escorted the negro students to school.

The crisis in Little Rock graphically underscored the hardening resolve of Jim Crow segregationists.

REV. CT VIVIAN (SOT):

"If we're wrong, why don't you arrest us?"

But as the Civil Rights Movement swept across the South place names like Birmingham, Neshoba County and Selma would make Little Rock look like a beginner's course in racial violence.

SEGMENT 4 - BENDING TOWARD JUSTICE

THEODORE PARKER (CHARACTER VOICE):

"I do not pretend to understand the moral universe; the arc is a long one, my eye reaches but little ways; I cannot calculate the curve and complete the figure by the experience of sight; I can divine it by conscience. And from what I see I am sure it bends towards justice."

When abolitionist Theodore Parker wrote these words in 1853, he did so with a vision for the nation that few then held. One century later, the Brown decision seemed to vindicate his dream. It marked the beginning of the end for "de jure" segregation—segregation by law. But the practice of segregation—"de facto" segregation—continued, and challenging this Southern dogma could be lethal.

In 1955, a 14-year-old Chicago boy named Emmett Till traveled to visit relatives in Money, Mississippi. A month later, his body returned home in a pine box. For the high-crime of whistling at a white woman, Emmett Till had been beaten and shot and his body dumped in the Tallahatchie River.

The legal system had been too slow—the arc too long—to save Emmett Till and countless other victims of racial violence. But in the mid-1950s a new generation of activists mounted a campaign of direct political action and non-violent protest to exorcize Jim Crow and its violent legacy once and for all. Their fight for freedom and equality became known as the modern Civil Rights Movement.

MONTGOMERY BUS BOYCOTT

On December 1, 1955, a department store seamstress boarded a city bus in Montgomery, Alabama. Her name was Rosa Parks. She was a negro. When the bus driver ordered Ms. Parks to surrender her seat to a white man, she refused and was arrested.

The popular legend of the tired seamstress reveals only part of the story. Rosa Parks was a seamstress—and she was tired—"…just tired of giving in" she would write years later. She was also an active member of the NAACP. By the time Rosa Parks was arrested, community leaders had a plan in place to boycott Montgomery's segregated bus system. They were just waiting for the right person to be arrested: someone who would anger the negro community into action, someone of unimpeachable character, someone like Rosa Parks.

Within a days, the Montgomery Improvement Association was formed to guide the Montgomery Bus Boycott. It was the first large-scale and enduring protest for Negro rights. For leadership, the protesters chose a young Baptist minister—The Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

Signs were posted around town, "Don't ride the bus today, don't ride it for freedom."

The boycotters organized carpools; they rode in taxicabs; they walked…through heat and cold, rain and snow, they refused to ride the bus. The city of Montgomery lost as many as 35,000 fares each day during the boycott. But even as weeks turned to months, they refused to meet with demands for more courteous service, equal seating privileges and the hiring of negro bus drivers.

Instead, they held fast to their segregationist convictions and filed suit against Movement leaders. Even under attack, King and the others would not be provoked to violence.

MARTIN LUTHER KING (SOT):

"We still feel that we are right and that we stand without our constitutional rights in the protest. We still advocate non-violence and passive resistance and we're still determined to use the weapon of love."

The idea of "passive resistence" was inspired by India's Monhandas Ghandi. Ghandi's campaign of non-violent civil disobedience during the 1940s had confounded British imperialists and helped lift India from nearly a century of colonial rule.

On the streets of Montgomery, passive resistance bore similar fruit. In November 1956, the U.S. Supreme Court upheld a ruling that declared segregated busing to be unconstitutional. The protest ended a month later 381 days after it began.

The Montgomery Bus Boycott was a major victory against racial segregation and propelled the Civil Rights Movement to national attention. Martin Luther King became its public face and voice, its most influential leader, and its most lucrative target. During the bus boycott, King's Montgomery home was bombed and shot at; he was harassed and arrested. For King and the cause, it was symbolic of the determined opposition and deadly violence that lay ahead.

SEGMENT 5 - SHOCK TROOPS OF THE REVOLUTION

In the wake of the Montgomery victory, Martin Luther King brought together other black ministers and community leaders to form the Southern Christian Leadership Conference. With King as its President, the SCLC championed voter registration drives and supported bus boycotts in other parts of the South.

At about the same time, President Eisenhower's Attorney General, Herbert Brownell Jr., drafted a proposal for new civil rights legislation. It was universally opposed by Southern legislators.

Nevertheless, Senate Majority Leader Lyndon Johnson guided a diluted bill to final passage by a 60-15 vote, establishing the Civil Rights Act of 1957. The NAACP's Roy Wilkins dismissed it as a "crumb from Congress." Even so, It was the first civil rights legislation since Reconstruction. The law provided new authority to the Justice Department to oversee elections and investigate officials who interfered with voter registration. It also created a new division within the Justice Department to prosecute Civil Rights violations.

The legislation was a symbolic victory for King and other Civil Rights leaders, but not enough to silence their rising demand for full legal, economic and social equality.

In some cases, the most deafening statements were made without uttering a word.

In 1960, in Greensboro, North Carolina, four freshmen college students walked into a Woolworth's Drug Store and sat down at a lunch counter reserved for whites. The "Greensboro Four"—as they became known—were refused service, but they remained seated in silent protest until the store closed.

Their "sit-in" continued for weeks and ignited a wave of similar demonstrations. Within months, the movement reached every southern state and attracted more than 50,000 students.

WHITE THUG (SOT):

They come in and they sit down and we're not used to them sittin' down beside us cause I wasn't raised with 'em, I never have lived with them and I'm not going to start now…

Demonstrators encountered humiliation, abuse, and police harrassment.

OFFICIAL:

You're not welcome in the store, all right?

But they held-fast to their principles of passive resistance.

During a sit-in staged in Nashville, Tennesee, silent protesters were chided with insults and attacked.

They refused to fight-back, but eighty-one demonstrators were arrested anyway—on charges of "disorderly conduct." John Lewis, who would rise to prominence with the movement, later recalled this life-changing moment:

JOHN LEWIS (CHARACTER VOICE):

"It was really happening, what I'd imagined for so long, the drama of good and evil playing itself out on the stage of the living, breathing world. It felt holy, and noble, and good. That paddy wagon…seemed like a chariot to me, a freedom vehicle carrying me across a threshhold."

The arrests galvanized the Nashville Student Movement. Student leader Diane Nash led three thousand protesters in the first major march of the Civil Rights Movement. The aim: to challenge Mayor Ben West to take a stand on segregation.

DIANE NASH (SOT):

"…and we needed him to say…should have done a long time ago…like 95 years ago after the civil war. So I asked the Mayor, first of all, Mayor West do you think its wrong to discriminate…based on race and color?"

Ultimately, the answer was "no". Within a month, Nashville became the first major city in the South to begin desegregating its public facilities.

Building on the success of the sit-in movement, Nash and others formed a new organization to harness the energy of young people for the cause of civil rights: the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee or SNCC (pronounced "SNICK"). Younger and more aggressive than the senior civil rights organizations, SNCC members became the "shock troops of the revolution," willing to take the fight to racist enemy in the most intolerant parts of the South.

As a Mississippi farmer named Hartman Turnbow would observe:

HARTMAN TURNBOW (SOT):

"Power seek tha weak places, water seek tha low places, but SNCC done seek the hard places, seem like t' me."

SEGMENT 6 - FREEDOM RIDES

The sit-in protests attracted the first widespread media coverage of the Civil Rights Movement. Photographs and film footage from places like Nashville provided many Americans with their first glimpse of the racism and discrimination that had infected the South for generations.

News reports in October 1960 that Martin Luther King had been jailed for participating in a sit-in were brought to the attention of a young Senator campaigning for the U.S. Presidency. John F. Kennedy of Massachusetts was not a supporter of civil rights, but he recognized that political capital could be gained by reaching out to negroes. At the urging of his advisors, Kennedy intervened on behalf of the incarcerated Civil Rights leader and helped win his release.

MARTIN LUTHER KING:

Well I owe a great debt of gratitude and his family…and all that he did to make this possible. I might say that there are no political considerations here, I'm sure the Senator did it because of his great humanitarian concern… deeply indebted to him for it.

The maneuver paid-off. With King's endorsement candidate Kennedy carried 70% of the nation's black vote and won the Presidency by the narrowest of margins.

As the new President assumed office in Janauary 1961, many Blacks rightfully expected bold new civil rights initiatives.

But Kennedy had other priorities. His "New Frontier" proposals required the support of Southern Democrats. And Cold War concerns in Cuba, Berlin, Vietnam and elsewhere—left little room on the Presidential agenda for civil rights.

But the demand for change could not be quieted. The Congress of Racial Equality or CORE spearheaded the Movement's boldest initiative to date—the "Freedom Rides"—a descent into the deep South, by bus, to test compliance with Supreme Court rulings barring segregated interstate travel. CORE founder, James Farmer acknowledged the perilousness of the journey.

JAMES FARMER (CHARACTER VOICE):

"I think all of us were prepared for as much violence as could be thrown at us. We were prepared for the possibility of death."

On May 4, 1961, two buses departed Washington D.C. carrying black and white volunteers into forbidden territory. These were the first Freedom Riders. In Atlanta, they parted for the journey through Alabama. When the first bus reached Anniston, it was attacked and firebombed—the Freedom Riders barely escaped alive. The second bus met a similar fate in Birmingham. The city's notorious Public Safety Commissioner, Eugene "Bull" Connor made good on his promise to allow Klansmen "…fifteen minutes to do their dirty work."

REPORTER (SOT):

"With me are part of a group calling themselves the Freedom Riders, an interracial group traveling through the deep south to challenge segregated transportation facilities in this part of the country. Yesterday they ran into trouble—they ran into violence. Today they say, they intend to keep up their pilgrimage.

Mr. Peck, you obviously have been injured, you're wearing bandages. What happened to you?

PECK (SOT)"

I got beaten twice yesterday, by hoodlums, once aboard the bus and once in the terminal in Birmingham.

The attacks left the Freedom Riders wounded, terrified and trapped among those who had tried to kill them.

In Washington, the reaction of President Kennedy and his brother, Attorney General Robert Kennedy was mixed.

They feared for the Freedom Riders' safety, but worried that offering federal protection to the group would inflame the white South.

"Tell them to call it off! The President demanded of an aid. "Stop them…Get your friends off those buses."

But it was too late to turn back. SNCC (SNICK) leader Diane Nash recognized this as a watershed moment.

DIANE NASH (CHARACTER VOICE):

"If they stop us with violence, the movement is dead. We're coming."

Nash sent SNCC volunteers to replace the battle-weary CORE group in Birmingham.

Learning of this, the President lost his composure: "All hell is going to break loose. She's going to get those people killed."

The situation fell to Bobby Kennedy. As head of the Justice Department, he was empowered to intervene if he suspected Federal laws were being violated. He dispatched his assistant, John Seigenthaler, to Birmingham to rescue the Freedom Riders.

On May 20th—Seigenthaler boarded a Birmingham-to-Montgomery Greyhound along with the SNCC reinforcemets. Their arrival in Montgomery was met by a mob of more than one thousand screaming racists. Some Freedom Riders were able to flee, but others were overwhelmed by fists, iron pipes, axe handles and baseball bats. John Lewis was beaten and bloodied. Seigenthaler himself was struck in the head with a pipe and kicked unconscious.

With no other option, Attorney General Kennedy asserted federal authority by ordering 400 U.S. marshals to Montgomery to restore order and escort the Freedom Riders to safety.

Freedom Riders continued to probe the deep South through the summer of 1961—inspiring arrests and violence, and forcing the Kennedys to confront the issue head-on.

Bobby Kennedy began to see the civil rights debate in a new light: not as one issue among the thousands confronting the administration, but as the defining moral issue of the era.

As a first step, He petitioned the Interstate Commerce Commission to adopt new regulations that would stiffen already existing Federal laws requiring all interstate transportation facilities to be integrated.

But, more importantly, the younger Kennedy's attitude influenced the President's evolving position on civil rights.

SEGMENT 7 - BIRMINGHAM 1963

George Wallace (SOT):

“I draw the line in the dust and toss the gauntlet before the feet of tyranny . . . and I say . . . segregation today . . . segregation tomorrow . . . segregation forever.”

In 1963, Southern segregationists got a new rallying cry—and the Civil Rights Movement gained a new arch-villain. But even as Alabama’s incoming governor, George Wallace, invoked the spirit of the confederacy, movement leaders were preparing to challenge segregation and racial hatred in the state’s largest city—Birmingham.

Like many Southern cities—Birmingham was struggling to throw-off its racist legacy.

Eugene “Bull” Connor (SOT):

“You’ve got to keep the whites and the blacks separate, just like you’ve got to keep them in schools…. June 7, 1963

The town’s top police official, Eugene “Bull” Connor, embodied the entrenched prejudice of the “old South.” He had given Klansmen free-reign to beat the Freedom Riders in 1961—just as he allowed them to persecute Birmingham’s black population and firebomb their homes with impunity.

By 1963, the public outrage sparked by the Freedom Rides and other high-profile civil rights demonstrations had disappeared. The Movement needed to provoke the kind of news-worthy confrontation that would capture headlines and TV screens. If you’re looking fight, Martin Luther King was told, you’re sure to find a good one in Birmingham.

King and the SCLC launched “Project C” on April 3rd, 1963. The “C” stood for the confrontations designed to bait “Bull” Connor into outrageous action.

But nine days in and the campaign was in trouble. Martin Luther King had been arrested for violating a court order and was languishing in jail. It was here that he penned his famous “Letter from a Birmingham Jail”—concluding that “one day the South will recognize its true heroes.”

King bonded out of jail on April 20th to find the Birmingham movement in peril. With few adults willing to risk jailtime, the city’s Black youth rose-up…and marched into history.

At 1:00 on May 2nd—”D-Dday”—a group of students emerged from the 16th Street Baptist Church singing “We Shall Overcome.” Hundreds were arrested and loaded onto school buses—destined for the city jail.

The next day “Bull” Connor called-in the Fire Department and K-9 units.

Teenagers and children became targets for high-pressure water hoses and snarling police dogs. News reports and images from Birmingham spread like wild fire.

The New York Times called the events “…a national disgrace” that made “…a mockery of the legal process”

A letter to the Washington Post read: “If the United States doesn’t stand for some decent average level of human dignity, what does it stand for?”

Day after day for a week the scene was replayed. “Bull” Connor filled the jail—and then the county fairground—with thousands of youthful prisoners. But still more came.

Birmingham business leaders finally agreed to negotiate with movement leaders. Within days, the parties reached an accord to desegregate the city.

Events in Birmingham shone a hard light on America’s race problem and influenced many citizens to reexamine their own views on the issue. Among them, President John F. Kennedy. One month after the Birmingham settlement, the President made an unprecedented statement on national television.

PRESIDENT JOHN F. KENNEDY (SOT):

“Next week I shall ask the Congress of the United States to act, to make a commitment it has not fully made in this century to the proposition that race has no place in American life or law. The old code of equity law under which we live commands for every wrong a remedy, but in too many communities, in too many parts of the country, wrongs are inflicted on Negro citizens and there are no remedies at law. Unless the Congress acts, their only remedy is in the street.”

The President’s call for Federal Civil Rights legislation—held staggering implications. But the opposition remained intractable and dangerous.

The President was forced to use Federal troops to ensure the admission of James Meredith, the first black student to attend the University of Mississippi in 1962.

In Alabama—Governor George Wallace—who had promised “segregation forever” staged his historic “stand in the schoolhouse door” to oppose the integration of the University of Alabama. Only after Federal Troops arrived on orders of the President—did Wallace relent—allowing Vivian Malone and James Hood to enter.

And just hours after President Kennedy called on the nation to embrace civil rights, NAACP field secretary Medgar Evers was gunned down at his home in Jackson, Mississippi.

Jim Crow was on the run—but he remained armed, dangerous and determined to die in a blaze of glory.

SEGMENT 8 - MARCH ON WASHINGTON

In the wake of Birmingham and the President's proposed Civil Rights legislation, Negro leaders announced a mass march to galvanize nationwide support for Civil Rights.

For decades, this had been the dream of labor leader, A. Philip Randolph.

A. PHILLIP RANDOLPH (SOT):

Negroes want the same things that white citizens posses. They want complete equality—social, economic and political—and no force under the sun can stand and stop and block this civil rights revolution which is now underway.

Randolph first raised the idea of a mass march in 1941—when he used it as a threat to encourage President Franklin Roosevelt to end segregation in Federal Government agencies and among defense contractors.

Twenty years later, Randolph's dream became reality. The March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom would be the greatest mass protest in the nation's history.

SOT:

Freedom Now Movement, hear me. We are requesting all citizens to move into Washington. to go by plane, by car, by bus—any way that you can get there—walk if necessary. We are pushing for jobs, housing, desegregated schools. This is an urgent request. Please join. Go to Washington.

Thousands set-off for the nation's capital to show their support for Civil Rights. They came by car, by bus, by rail—from LA and SanFrancisco, from Cleveland and Chicago, from Jackson and Birmingham.

Many who opposed Civil Rights predicted violence, but the March organizers went to great lengths to ensure none came. Security volunteers—equipped with 2-way radios—would provide a first line of defense. Their code names: freedom, equality, justice, jobs.

SOT:

"This is Freedom 2 to Equality 1…"

A quarter of a million participants—some say even more—converged on the mall in Washington D.C.

Speakers and performers inspired the crowd.

But the one who enunciated their universal call for justice most passionately was Martin Luther King, Jr.

MARTIN LUTHER KING (SOT):

I have a dream that my four little children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character. I have a dream today!"

A. PHILLIP RANDLOPH (SOT):

I think history was written today which will have its effect on coming generations with respect to our democracy, our ideals, struggle man dignity.

Everyone agreed: it was an historic milestone in the Civil Rights movement. It awakened millions of Americans to the quest for Freedom and equality and stressed to Congress the widespread support for the issue.

SOT:

I believe the real significance…laid the groundwork for the building of a broad coaltion…

..another thing is we did produce a non-segregated march.

MARTIN LUTHER KING (SOT):

I think this march will go down as one of the greatest—if not THE greatest demonstrations for freedom and human dignity ever held in the United States.

President Kennedy welcomed the leaders at the White House. His ambivalence towards civil rights had evaporated. With a 60% approval rating, the President looked forward to a second term, in which he would consolidate public support for his Civil Rights proposals and press Congress to enact legislation. But it was not to be.

The President was assassinated in Dallas, TX on November 22, 1963.

PRESIDENT LYNDON JOHNSON (SOT):

"The Greatest leader of our time has been struck down by the foulest deed of our time….

As deep grief …swirled around Washington, the new President, Lyndon Baines Johnson, sought to reassure the nation.

PRESIDENT LYNDON JOHNSON (SOT):

Today the immortal John F. Kennedy lives on….nor in the life of this administration, but he said, "Let us begin." Today, in this moment of new resolve I say, "Let us continue."

Johnson vowed to revolutionize America with federal aid to education, tax cuts to stimulate business, conservation programs and to pass the Civil Rights legislation proposed by the late President. He called it the Great Society.

But Lyndon Johnson also inherited Vietnam.

In 1963, it was, "…no bigger than a fist on the horizon," but it cast a long shadow over the new President…and all he hoped to accomplish at home.

SEGMENT 9 - MISSISSIPPI BURNING

LBJ Telephone Audio: "lbj_wh6406_14_3836_eastland"

Senator Eastland on 9-1

LBJ: Jim?

Hello Mr. President, how you feel?

I'm doing all right. I hope you are. You got a lot of sunshine down there?

Eastland: We need some rain…We need rain mighty bad.

LBJ: Well, we're so dry in my country that we're ging to have sell off all of our cattle if we don't get a rain.

Eastland: Well, I'm in the same shape, got a cotton crop just burning up.

LBJ: I'll be darned.

In June 1964, the secret White House taping system recorded this conversation between President Lyndon Johnson and Mississippi's influential Senator, James Eastland. The two men were old friends, but their call was deadly serious.

Just days earlier, three young Civil Rights Workers had disappeared while working to register black voters in Mississippi.

LBJ: Jim, we've got three kids missing down there, what can I do about it?

Eastland: Well, I don't know. I don't believe there's…I don't believe there's three missing.

LBJ: We've got their parents down here.

Eastland: I believe it's a publicity stunt….

Eastland: And I'm going to tell you why I don't think there's a damn thing to it…they were put in jail in Philadelphia and they were going to Meridien…

There's not a KKK in that area, there's not a Citizens' Council in that area—there's no organized white man in that area…so that's why I think its a publicity stunt….

It was no publicity stunt and both men knew it. President Johnson ordered FBI director J. Edgar Hoover probe the disappearance. The FBI investigation that ensued—code-named "Mississippi Burning"—would unveil the cauldron of racial intolerance, hatred and violence that infected 1960s Mississippi.

In 1964, fewer than 7% of Mississippi's 900,000 black citizens were registered to vote. Movement Efforts to sign-up new voters had been met by Klan intimidation, beatings, and death threats.

SNCC's Bob Moses outlined a new initiative to confront the challenge directly.

ROBERT MOSES (SOT):

We hope to send in to Mississippi this summer upwards of one thousand teachers, ministers, lawyers, and students, from all around the country who will engage in what we're calling Freedom Schools and, in general, a program designed to open up Mississippi to the country.

The project was called Freedom Summer. Middle class kids from Northern universities were recruited to help register black voters in rural Mississippi.

As SNCC's John Lewis put it: "Mississippi was deadly…Our people were essentially being slaughtered down there. If White America would not respond to the deaths of our people…maybe it would react to the deaths of its own children."

James Foreman (SOT):

"We're going down there we're trying to face a real situation that will occur…"

James Forman led SNCC training sessions that prepared volunteers for police brutality, mob violence and worse…

James Foreman (SOT):

"People should expect to be get beaten, they should expect to spend in jail…and it may go beyond the summer when they're in jail and they should expect possibly somebody to get killed…"

Twenty-one year old Andrew Goodman was among the first contingent to depart for Mississippi.

On the first day of Freedom Summer—June 21, 1963—Goodman, James Chaney, and Michael Schwerner left project headquarters in Meridien to investigate the burning of a Black church in neighboring Neshoba County. They were never heard from again.

Within days the FBI turned-up the remains of their burnt-out station wagon—but there was no sign of the boys. As the intense search continued, locals refused to cooperate with investigators. The word on the street was: "If they were killed, they got what was comin' to 'em."

Assistant Attorney General John Doar condemned the lack of cooperation from local officials, saying: "…a thousand eyes explored every corner of Neshoba County, but 'Neshoba County' remained silent."

Forty-four days into the investigation—the FBI received and anonymous tip. Even the buzzards sensed what lay beneath the Mississippi clay.

LBJ: Lyndon Johnson.

"Deke" DeLoach: Mr. President, Mr. Hoover wanted me to call you immediately and tell you that the FBI has found three bodies six miles southwest of Philadelphia, Mississippi.

We have not identified them as yet as the three missing men, but we have every reason to believe they are the three missing men….

The gruesome discovery solved half the mystery. Finding and prosecuting those responsible remained.

WHITE HOUSE OPERATOR (SOT):

"J. Edgar Hoover on nine-one."

PRESIDENT LYNDON JOHNSON (SOT):

Edgar, I wanted to call you last night…I wanted to congratulate you on a job well done…

J. EDGAR HOOVER (SOT):

Well that's awful nice of you indeed. You might be interested the physical examination showed that each of these men had been shot. The two white men had been shot once each and the colored fella was shot three times. And we have the names of the people who did it. To prove it is going to be a little tougher job. The sheriff was in on it;

the deputy sheriff was in on it; the justice of the peace was in on it; and there were seven other men. So we have all those names and as I say, we're concentrating now on developing the evidence…

Only twelve-hundred blacks were added to Mississippi's voter rolls during Freedom Summer—at a brutal cost of thirty-five shootings, thirty bombings, eighty physical attacks and six murders. Fifteen thousand other negro applicants petitioned the registrar but were rejected. But the Summer Project was far from a failure.

It helped to launch the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party which challenged the legitimacy of the all-white Democratic Party in the state.

And, it successfully focused national attention on the need for voting rights legislation—a cause that was destined to galvanize the movement and the entire nation in Selma, Alabama six months later.

SEGMENT 10 - CIVIL RIGHTS TO SELMA

When Lyndon Johnson assumed the Presidency in 1963, Movement leaders feared they would lose the meager gains achieved under President Kennedy. But the new President—a native Southerner—embraced the cause of Civil Rights as a great domestic challenge and a historic opportunity.

PRESIDENT LYNDON JOHNSON (SOT):

"This bill is going to pass if it takes us all summer…and this bill is going to be signed and enacted into law because justice and morality demand it."

President Johnson applied his passion and political accumen to the cause. He encouraged Congressmen, cajoled the press and enjoined the public to support new Civil Rights legislation.

PRESIDENT LYNDON JOHNSON (SOT):

"The Civil Rights bill now before congress is a far-reaching step in the direction of equality."

Legislators who resisted were subjected to the full force of President's overbearing personality—the "Johnson Treatment."

Johnson once said the only power he had was the power to persuade. To which an aide replied, that was like saying the only wind we have is a hurricane.

Within a year, Johnson achieved his goal.

UNITED NEWSREEL (SOT):

"Congress passes the most sweeping Civil Rights Bill ever to be written into the law and thus reaffirms the conception of equality for all men that began with Lincoln and the Civil War 100 years ago."

PRESIDENT LYNDON JOHNSON (SOT): "I am about to sign into law the Civil Rights Act of 1964. We believe that all men are entitled to the blessings of liberty. Yet millions are being deprived of those blessings, not because of their own failures, but because of the color of their skin. But it cannot continue. Our Constitution, the foundation of our Republic, forbids it. The principles of our freedom forbid it. Morality forbids it. And the law I will sign tonight forbids it."

The Civil Rights Act of 1964 was the most sweeping Civil Rights legislation since reconstruction. It outlawed discrimination on the basis of race, religion, national origin, or gender; and banned the practice of segregation in schools, public places and employment.

It was a major advancement toward racial equality. But it did not provide "total" equality. In many areas, literacy tests and other forms of discrimination still prevented African Americans from voting.

SOT:

"In other words, you tell what it means, your understanding of it."

To the President's chagrin, demonstrations continued.

In 1965 protests targeted Selma, Alabama—the seat of Dallas County—where fewer than 1% of eligible blacks were registered to vote.

And where "bully-boy segregationist," Sheriff Jim Clark and his deputized citizens' posse rounded up civil rights activists using getapo tactics and cattle prods.

SNCC's John Lewis was among more than 2,000 demonstrators jailed in the first months of 1965.

C.T. VIVIAN (SOT):

"If we're wrong, then why don't you arrest us?"

The Reverend C.T. Vivian—an organizer for the Southern Christian Leadership Conference—led the Selma campaign.

C.T. VIVIAN (SOT):

"We're willing to be beaten for democracy and you misuse democracy in the streets. You beat people bloody in order that they will not have the privelge to vote. You beat me in the side and then hide your blows."

Officer: "Well go on…"

C.T. VIVIAN (SOT):

"No, I don't need to leave. We've come to register to vote. And you must realize this is a national issue—not a Selma issue. It's not an Alabama issue, this is a national issue. Whenever anyone does not have the right to vote then every man is hurt."

On the night of February 18th, State troopers savagely attacked Vivian and other demonstrators. In the chaos, a young man named Jimmy Lee Jackson was shot at point blank range in what the local newspaper called "a nightmare of state police stupidity."

MARTIN LUTHER KING (SOT):

"He was murdered by the irresponsibility of every politician from governors on down who have fed his constituents a stale bread of hatred and the spoiled meat of racism."

The tragedy galvanized the Selma voting rights campaign.

The SCLC's James Bevel proposed a symbolic march from Selma to the Alabama state capital in Montgomery—more than fifty miles away.

On March 7, 1965, SNCC's John Lewis and the SCLC's Hosea Williams led a procession of more than 500 marchers over the Edmund Pettus bridge.

Alabama State troopers—clad in gas masks and bearing riot gear—waited on the other side.

SELMA POLICE OFFICER (SOT):

"It will be detrimental to your safety to continue this march and I'm saying this is an unlawful assembly. You have orders to disperse…you are ordered to disperse, go home, or go to your church. This march will not continue…"

News cameras immortalized a hellish scene of police brutality and chaos. Images of "Bloody Sunday" shocked the nation. Time Magazine reported that, "Rarely in human history has public opinion reacted so spontaneously and with such fury."

MARTIN LUTHER KING (SOT):

"We have no alternative but to keep moving with determination. We've gone too far now to turn back."

Two weeks later, Martin Luther King led more than three thousand demonstrators in a repeat of the "Bloody Sunday" march. This time, there would be no tear gas, no bull whipsm no billy clubs….

PRESIDENT LYNDON JOHNSON (SOT):

"At times history and fate meet at a single time in a single place to shape a turning point in man's unending search for freedom. So it was at Lexington and Concord. So it was a century ago at Appomattox. So it was last week in Selma, Alabama."

On March 15, 1965, President Johnson called upon Congress to enact new Voting Rights legislation.

PRESIDENT LYNDON JOHNSON (SOT):

"Our mission is at once the oldest and the most basic of this country: to right wrong, to do justice, to serve man.// The issue of equal rights for American Negroes is such an issue. And should we defeat every enemy, should we double our wealth and conquer the stars, and still be unequal to this issue, then we will have failed as a people and as a nation.//For with a country as with a person, "What is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?"

When the Selma to Montgomery march reached its destination five days later, its numbers surpassed 25,000. Ten years after the Montgomery bus boycott christened the Civil Rights movement, the crusade was at its zenith: unified, triumphant and non-violent.

MARTIN LUTHER KING (SOT):

"I know you're asking today, how long will it take. How long? Not long, because the arc of the moral universe bends toward justice. How long? Not long, because mine eyes have seen the glory…"

But even as Martin Luther King reassured the faithful that their goal was within reach, divisions between the "old guard" and young militants within SNCC threatened to splinter the movement itself.

SEGMENT 11 - BLACK POWER

UNITED NEWSREEL (SOT):

“In the same room that President Lincoln signed the first Emancipation order in 1961…1965 Voter Regisration Act and pledged to millions of Americans, a new chance to find a political voice.”

On August 6, 1965—just five months after the violence of Selma and the President’s civil rights appeal to Congress—Lyndon Johnson signed into law the Voting Rights Act of 1965. (LINGER ON THIS A FEW BEATS LONGER)

Five days later, the Watts district of Los Angeles erupted in the worst race riots in the city’s history. National attention was riveted on the streets of L.A., but the riots there were simply manifestations (STAY ON THE WIDE SHOT OF THE CITY - AFTER THE TRAIN - RATHER THAN THE SEQUENCE) of the racial tension and rage that simmered in every major U.S. city during the period.

SOT:

“Is it too much to ask you to grant us human dignity? Should we be put down and shot to death for this request? If so, you can aim your guns. What the hell do you think we care about dying if you're going to deny us the right to live?”

Poverty, unemployment, police harassment, unfulfilled expectations…had created a tinderbox on the streets of inner-city ghettos. The Civil Rights Movement had dismantled the Southern system of segregation and white supremacy. But, it had largely ignored the insidious racism that festered elsewhere.

Northern Blacks were angry, disaffected and easily seduced by fringe groups.

MALCOLM X (SOT):

“They call Mr. Muhammad a hate teacher because he makes you hate dope and alcohol…….(establish and then under)”

Malcolm X had emerged in the early 1960s as a radical alternative to Martin Luther King and non-violence, which he called the “philosophy of the fool.” As the chief spokesman for a black nationalist group called the Nation of Islam, Malcolm X espoused self-reliance and separatism—rather than integration. To his admirers, he was a courageous advocate for black rights. But for many others, he symbolized reverse racism, black supremacy, and violence.

MALCOLM X (SOT):”

“We are trapped in a vicious cycle of poverty, of ignorance, of apathy, of disease, and of death. And they have these ol’ Uncle Toms, Negro leaders, coming to Harlem, telling you and me that the times are getting better. The times will never get better until you make ‘em better.”

During his lifetime, Malcolm X did not achieve the notoriety of figures like King. But he was assassinated in 1965 and, in death, became a near-mythic figure.

His revolutionary rhetoric infected many Civil Rights veterans—especially within the corps of SNCC.

STOKELY CARMICHAEL (SOT):

“You go sit in front of your television set and listen to LBJ say ‘violence never accomplishes anything my fellow Americans. But you see the real problem with non-violence is that we have never been violent; we have been too non-violent…too non-violent.”

Under the new leadership of Stokely Carmichael, SNCC assumed a militant posture, beginning in 1966. The group’s mantra of non-violence was replaced by the chorus of Black Power.

STOKELY CARMICHAEL (SOT):

“We want Black Power….We want Black Power….We want Black Power….”

For Americans who were just beginning to warm to the idea of Civil Rights, “Black Power” was something altogether different. Martin Luther King considered the slogan, at best, an unfortunate choice of words. Roy Wilkins, of the NAACP, called it, “The father of hatred and the mother of violence.” John Lewis feared that “Black Power” would divide the races and the movement—and it did.

The new movement challenged the established relationship between whites and blacks. In some communities, “Black Power” was exercised in the voting booth. In 1967, Cleveland voters elected Carl Stokes as mayor. He was the first negro to hold the position of Chief Executive of a major U.S. city.

But in other parts of the country—”Black Power” meant bullets, not ballots. In Oakland, California Huey Newton and Bobby Seale formed the Black Panther party.

What began as a community organization to provide free breakfasts and “liberation schools” to ghetto kids ultimately devolved into murder, rape, bank heists and drug trafficking.

The anarchy was not limited to California.

Chicago, Newark, Minneapolis, Memphis—in scores of American cities blacks rebelled against chronic racism and police brutality during the late 1960s.

In turn, White America took up arms. Civil rights had become civil war—President Johnson's Great Society, a lawless society.

By nearly any measure, the United States was an immensely divided society in the late sixties—divided on civil rights, by the war in Vietnam and by a generation gap without equal in American history.

"Black Power" brought an end to the Civil Rights Movement that began with the Montgomery Bus Boycott in 1956. But it never achieved mainstream recognition.

The NAACP and the Martin Luther King's SCLC—although marginalized—still spoke for the majority of Negroes—or "Blacks"—as many now preferred to be called.

In April 1968, Martin Luther King traveled to Memphis, Tennessee to speak in support of striking sanitation workers. The message of hope was familiar—but with an ominous sense of forboding.

MARTIN LUTHER KING (SOT):

"Like anybody, I would like to live a long life—longevity has its place. But I'm not concerned with that now. I just want to do God's will and he's allowed me to go up to the mountain and I've looked over and I've seen the promised land. I may not get there with you but I want you to know that we as a people will get to the promised land."

One day later, King stepped from his room at the Lorraine Motel—and was gunned down by an assassin.

From coast to coast, America erupted in violence.

Edward Kosner of Newsweek recalled,

EDWARD KOSNER (CHARACTER VOICE):

"It was Pandora's box flung open—an apocalyptic act that loosed the furies brooding in the shadows of America's sullen ghettos."

PRESIDENT LYNDON JOHNSON (SOT):

"Once again, the heart of America is heavy for a tragedy that denies the very meaning of our land. The life of a man who symbolized the freedom and faith of America has been taken. But the dream of Dr. Martin Luther King has not died with him. Men who are white, men who are black, must and will now join together, as never in the past to let all the forces of divisiveness know that America shall not be ruled not by the bullet but only by the ballot of free and of just men."

The Civil Rights Movement could rightfully claim victory in desegregating the South and opening its voting roles to millions of blacks who had been disenfranchised for a century.

But the rioting demonstrated that deep problems remained.

PRESIDENT LYNDON JOHNSON (SOT):

"We need to know the answer I think to three basic questions about these riots. What happened, why did it happen, what can be done to prevent it from happening again and again."

President Johnson appointed a special committee to study the violence and race riots of the late 1960s. The Kerner Commission concluded that America was "moving toward two separate societies, one Black, one white—separate and unequal." It warned that frustration and resentment resulting from brutalizing inequality and white racism were fostering violence by Blacks.

As the 1970s dawned, African-Americans were no longer at the back of the bus, but the challenge of achieving true freedom and equality remained.

It would be left for the next generation and those who followed to finish—once and for all—what President Lincoln had started.