

ORGANIZATIONS INVOLVED IN THE CIVIL RIGHTS MOVEMENT

National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP):

In 1908 a race riot in Springfield, Illinois, was sparked by the county sheriff's transfer of two African American suspects in crimes against whites out of the city jail. A white mob formed, rioting in black neighborhoods, where they destroyed and burned many black-owned businesses and homes, and killed black citizens. This riot was the catalyst for formation, in 1909, of the NAACP, with leadership provided by W.E.B. Dubois, Ida B. Wells, an African American journalist and anti-lynching crusader, other black activists, and including three white members. Its mission was "to promote equality of rights...to secure for colored citizens impartial suffrage...and to increase opportunities for...justice in the courts, education for the children, employment according to their ability, and complete equality before the law", and in its early years concentrated on using the courts to overturn statutes legalizing racial segregation.

Accomplishments:

1914 - Won the right of African Americans to serve as officers in World War I.

1917 - Buchanan vs. Warley: state and local governments cannot officially segregate blacks into separate residential districts

1923 - Expanded Federal courts' oversight of states' criminal justice systems

1944 - Supreme Court ruled against the white primary (although states devised new methods to disenfranchise blacks)

1954 - Brown vs. Board of Education, outlawing school segregation (perhaps its most important case, argued by Thurgood Marshall)

1955 - Helped organize the successful bus boycott in Montgomery, Alabama. (As a result, it was barred from operating in Alabama because, fearing retaliation against its members, it refused to provide its membership list to the state. In 1958, the Supreme Court overturned Alabama's action.)

1963 - Participated in the March on Washington, and continued to press for civil rights legislation.

1964 - Legislation was passed aimed at ending discrimination in employment, education, and public accommodations.

1965 - Voting Rights Act was passed, with a role for federal oversight in places where black voter turnout was historically low.

Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC):

In 1957, following the successful bus boycott in Montgomery, Alabama, Dr. Martin Luther King (after consulting with Bayard Rustin, Ella Baker, and others) invited 60 black ministers and other leaders to Atlanta to form an organization to coordinate nonviolent direct action as a method of desegregating bus systems across the South. SCLC's belief that churches should be involved in political activism against social ills was initially very controversial.

Accomplishments:

1961 - SCLC rescued the Highlander Citizenship School program and, under cover of adult-literacy classes, taught democracy and civil rights, community leadership and organizing, practical politics and tactics of resistance and struggle.

1961-62 - With SNCC, organized large demonstrations against segregation in Albany, Georgia. Many protesters were arrested, but they attracted little national attention and resulted in few changes. What they learned from the experience, however, helped in future campaigns.

1962 - In the Birmingham campaign to desegregate Birmingham's downtown merchants. King was jailed (resulting in his "Letter from a Birmingham Jail"). Hundreds of school children in the demonstration were arrested, and, when 2500 more joined in, they were met by police dogs and high pressure fire hoses. Public outrage led to a settlement desegregating downtown businesses and ending discriminatory hiring practices.

1963 - SCLC called for massive protests in Washington to push for new civil rights. A. Philip Randolph and Bayard Rustin issued similar calls for a March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom. The two organizations met with the leaders of the NAACP, SNCC, CORE, and the Urban League and planned The March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom.

1964 - In St. Augustine, Florida, so many protestors were arrested that they were held in outdoor stockades; participants in nightly marches were attacked by white mobs; and the owner of a hotel swimming pool poured acid into the water when an integrated group of protestors tried to use the pool.

1965 - In cooperation with SNCC and CORE, SCLC undertook the Voting Rights Campaign. When 600 protesters attempted to march from Selma to Montgomery, the marchers were brutally attacked on what became known as "Bloody Sunday". Thousands responded to the call from King to support the black citizens of Selma, among them James Reeb, a white Unitarian Universalist minister, who was beaten to death and Viola Liuzzo, a white woman from Michigan who was shot and killed by Klansmen. The march finally began on March 21, arrived in Montgomery on the 24th, and led to the enactment of the Voting Rights Act of 1965.

1966 - In Grenada, Mississippi, which maintained rigid segregation despite the 1964 Civil Rights Act, 450 black students registered at formerly white schools, but threats of economic and physical retaliation reduced the number to 250. On the first day of school, parents and black children were attacked by a white mob with clubs, chains, whips, and pipes. 150 black children remained in the school by the end of the first week, and that number dropped to 70 by October. In November, a Federal court ordered that the school system treat everyone as equal.

Congress of Racial Equality (CORE):

Inspired by a book outlining Gandhi's procedures for organizing people and mounting a nonviolent campaign and believing that nonviolent civil disobedience could be used by African Americans to challenge racial segregation in the United States, six men and women (only two of whom were black) founded CORE in Chicago in 1942. Under the leadership of James Farmer, campaigns opposed segregation and job discrimination, and fought for voting rights in the South. In the North, CORE focused on discrimination in employment and housing and *de facto* school segregation.

By 1963, most of the major urban centers in the Northeast, Midwest and West Coast had one or more CORE chapters, and there were active chapters in a number of Southern states.

Accomplishments:

1947 - A group of 16 men (8 white and 8 black) undertook a 2-week journey through Virginia, North Carolina, Tennessee and Kentucky in an effort to end segregation in interstate travel. They were arrested and jailed several times on what was the first of the Freedom Rides.

1961 - Participants (this time including women) went to the Deep South, in new Freedom Rides testing segregated transportation as well as bus terminals, and were met with severe violence. When one of the buses was firebombed and white mobs attacked the riders, it attracted national attention, and SNCC joined CORE for additional rides made that summer.

1963 - CORE helped organize the March on Washington, which attracted between 200,000 and 300,000 participants.

1964 - CORE, with SNCC and the NAACP, operating under the name Council of Federated Organizations (COFO), organized Freedom Summer in Mississippi, aiming to end the disenfranchisement of black Americans in the Deep South. They formed the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party (MFDP) and established 30 Freedom Schools. That summer 30 black homes and 37 black churches were firebombed; 80 volunteers were beaten by mobs or police officers, and 3 CORE activists (Michael Schwerner, James Chaney, and Andrew Goodman) were murdered by the Ku Klux Klan.

In the mid-1960's, CORE renounced its non-violent, integrationist philosophy and began to support Black Nationalism. Since that time, it has moved ever more strongly to the right and has been accused by others in the Civil Rights Movement of renting out its historic name to any corporation in need of a black front person (e.g., payday-lending industry, DDT manufacturer Monsanto). It has worked with conservative groups to undermine environmental regulation, and to oppose same sex marriage. According to James Farmer, in 1993, "CORE has no functioning chapters, holds no...elections or meetings, sets no policies, has no social programs...In my opinion, CORE is fraudulent."

Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC):

Founded in 1960, SNCC grew out of a conference sponsored by the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) and organized by Ella Baker, a member of SCLC. 126 student delegates came from 12 states and 19 Northern colleges, as well as delegates from SCLC, CORE, Fellowship of Reconciliation (FOR), National Student Association (NSA), and Students for a Democratic Society (SDS). SNCC members were referred to as "shock troops of the revolution".

Accomplishments:

1961 - They joined the Freedom Rides with CORE when it seemed that violence might stop the Rides. After the Freedom Rides, SNCC worked primarily on voter registration and with local protests over segregated public facilities. This was dangerous work at a time when black people who attempted to register could lose their jobs, their homes and even their lives and when the homes in which SNCC workers lived with local families were sometimes firebombed.

1963 - SNCC conducted the Freedom Ballot, a parallel election in which black Mississippians came out to show their willingness to vote—a right the state denied them.

1963 - SNCC helped organize the 1963 March on Washington. Congressman John Lewis, then chair of SNCC, delivered a speech at the March.

1963 - SNCC joined with CORE and NAACP in the Mississippi Summer Project (also known as Freedom Summer), which brought hundreds of white Northern students to the South as volunteer teachers and organizers. Three of those involved in Freedom Summer—James Chaney (a local young black man), Andrew Goodman (a white Northern student), and Michael Schwerner (a white CORE field staffer from New York City) were murdered after being released from police custody late at night.

By 1965, SNCC fielded the largest staff of any civil rights organization in the South, but it had begun to split into two factions—one favoring nonviolent redress of grievances with the existing political system and the other moving towards Black Power and revolutionary ideologies. That year, SNCC expelled its white members, and the rest of the civil rights movement distanced itself from the organization. During the mid-to-late sixties, its membership went into sharp decline and, approaching bankruptcy, SNCC finally disappeared during the 70's.

National Urban League:

In 1910, several groups were brought together to form the National League on Urban Conditions among Negroes, to develop a campaign to crack the barriers to black employment. It became the National Urban League in 1920 and defined its mission as “enabling African Americans to secure economic self-reliance, parity, power and civil rights.” Under its leadership, Lester Granger (in the 50's) and Whitney Young (in the 60's) played an important role in the Civil Rights movement.

Accomplishments:

1941 - It supported a March on Washington to protest racial discrimination in defense work and the Armed Forces, proposed by A. Phillip Randolph and Bayard Rustin. The government's agreement to ban discrimination by defense contractors and establish the Fair Employment Practices Committee to enforce that decree ended plans for the march.

1963 - The League developed programs like “Street Academy”, an alternative education system to prepare high school dropouts for college, and “New Thrust”, a program to help local black leaders identify and solve community problems.

1963 - It hosted planning meetings for the March on Washington that took place in 1963.

Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party:

For generations, African Americans had been denied voting rights in Mississippi, and participation in the state Democratic Party was limited to whites only. When in June, 1963, blacks were prevented from casting votes in the Mississippi primary election, COFO (Council of Federated Organizations, consisting of SNCC, CORE, and the NAACP) organized an alternative “Freedom Ballot” to take place at the same time as the November voting. Freed from fears of retaliation for trying to register at the courthouse and from having to take a complex and unfair literacy test, 80,000 people cast freedom ballots for an integrated slate of candidates.

The MFDP sent its elected delegates to the Democratic National Convention in New Jersey, where the challenge was referred to the Convention Credentials Committee. To prevent Southerners from bolting the Democratic Party and throwing their support to Goldwater in the November election, the Convention offered the MFDP two “at large” seats, without interfering with the State's official delegation. The MFDP rejected this offer but its members remained at the convention. When all but three of the “regular”

Mississippi delegates left because they refused to support Johnson over Goldwater, the MFDP delegates took the vacated seats. When those seats were removed the next day by the convention organizers, the MFDP stayed to sing freedom songs.

After passage of the Voting rights Act in 1965, the number of registered black voters grew dramatically, and the regular party agreed to conform to the Democratic Party rules guaranteeing fair participation. Eventually, the MFDP merged into the regular party.

Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters:

In 1935, after thirty years of failed efforts, the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters (BSCP) became the first labor organization led by blacks to receive a charter in the American Federation of Labor (AFL). Under the leadership of A. Philip Randolph, the union played a significant role in the U.S. civil rights movement in the 1940's and 1950's, forcing the administration to ban discrimination by defense contractors and establish the Fair Employment Practices Committee to enforce that decree (in order to avert a threatened March on Washington in 1941). Randolph and Bayard Rustin were among the moving forces behind the 1963 March on Washington. Randolph retired as head of the union in 1968, and eventually the union merged with the Brotherhood of Railway and Airline Clerks, and the union's focus was no longer on civil rights for blacks.

What follows is a description of the Nation of Islam (NOI), not part of the Civil Rights Movement—either in the judgment of the Civil Rights Organizations listed above nor in that of NOI's own leaders. But, with the extraordinary visibility of Malcolm X, who rose to prominence during the 60's and under whose leadership the membership in the NOI was estimated to have reached 500,000, the organization achieved an unprecedented visibility. Media frequently sought out and published NOI's views on the non-violent actions of members of the Civil Rights Movement and the violent responses to those actions by Southern mobs and police. (As the 60's wore on, with undiminished violence against non-violent protestors, factions of some civil rights organizations also repudiated non-violent resistance and began to support philosophy and methods that resembled those of NOI.)

Nation of Islam (NOI):

The Nation of Islam was a religious movement founded in 1930 by Fard Muhammad "to improve the spiritual, mental, social and economic condition of African Americans in the U.S. and all of humanity." Succeeded by Elijah Muhammad in 1934, NOI's program advocated a separate nation for black Americans and a religion based on the worship of Allah and the belief that blacks are his chosen people. The Nation of Islam sought economic and political power for blacks but was not part of the larger Civil Rights Movement, because it opposed the Movement's non-violent, integrationist philosophy. NOI believed that blacks could achieve equality only in a separate nation and that rejecting the use of self-defense when attacked was embracing inferiority.

Malcolm Little (Malcolm X and, later, El-Hajj Malik El-Shabazz) joined the religion while in prison for burglary, rose to be second in rank, and increased the organization's membership to around 500,000. When Malcolm X left the Nation of Islam, Louis Farrakhan became second in command. In 1975, when Elijah Muhammad's son became leader after the death of his father, he accepted whites as worshipers and forged closer

ties with mainstream Muslim communities, bringing the Nation of Islam closer to Sunni Islam.

In 1977 Louis Farrakhan resigned from the transformed group and rebuilt a new NOI based on Fard and Elijah Muhammad's original separatist views. In 1995, the NOI sponsored the Million Man March in Washington, D.C., to promote African-American unity and family values. It established a clinic for AIDS patients in Washington, and helped force drug dealers out of some public housing projects and private apartment buildings in the city. It has worked with gang members in Los Angeles and promotes social reform in African American communities based on its traditional values of self-reliance and economic independence.