

# US History/Eisenhower Civil Rights Fifties

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## Civil Rights Movement under Eisenhower and Desegregation

The first events that would spark off the entire Civil Rights movement happened during the Eisenhower administration. In the south, there were many statewide laws that segregated many public facilities ranging from buses to water fountains. Southern African Americans now felt that their time had come to enjoy American democracy and they fought hard to end southern segregation policies.

### *Brown v. Board of Education*

In 1952, seven year old Linda Brown, of Topeka, Kansas, wasn't permitted to attend a white-only elementary school that was only a few blocks from her house. In order to attend her coloreds-only school, Brown had to cross dangerous railroad tracks and take a bus for many miles. Her family sued the Topeka school board and lost, but appealed the case all the way to the Supreme Court. *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas* came to the Supreme Court in December of 1952. In his arguments, head lawyer for the NAACP, Thurgood Marshall, challenged the "Separate But Equal" doctrine established in *Plessy v. Ferguson* in 1896. He argued that schools could be separate, but never equal. On may 17, 1954, the Court gave its opinion. It ruled that it was unconstitutional to segregate schools, and ordered that schools integrate "with all deliberate speed."

### Central High Confrontation

Integration would not be easy. Many school districts accepted the order without argument, but some, like the district of Little Rock, Arkansas, did not. On September 2, 1957, the day before the start of the school term the Arkansas Governor, Orval Faubus, instructed the National Guard to stop any black students entering the school. He claimed this was to protect the property against violence planned by integration protestors.

The federal authorities intervened and an injunction was granted preventing the National Guard from blocking the school and they were withdrawn on September 20. School restarted on 23 September, with the building surrounded by local police officers and nearly one thousand protestors. The police escorted nine black students, later known as the Little Rock Nine, into the school via a side door. When the crowd discovered the students had entered the building, they tried to storm the school and the black students were hurried out around lunch time.

Congressman Brooks Hays and the Little Rock mayor, Woodrow Mann, asked the federal government for more help. On September 24, Mann sent a message to President Eisenhower requesting troops. Eisenhower responded immediately and the 101st Airborne Division was sent to Arkansas. In addition, the President brought the Arkansas National Guard under federal control to prevent its further use by the Governor.

On September 25, 1957, the nine black students finally began their education properly, protected by 1,000 paratroopers.

### Montgomery Bus Boycott

On December 1, 1955, Rosa Parks, a tired seamstress and secretary of the Montgomery, Alabama, chapter of the NAACP, boarded a city bus with the intention of going home. She sat in the first row of seats in the "colored" section of the segregated bus. At the next stop, whites were among the passengers waiting to board but all seats in the "white" front section of the bus were filled. Drivers had the authority, under local custom and the segregated-seating ordinance, to shift the line dividing the black and white sections to accommodate the racial makeup of the passengers at any given moment. So he ordered the the four blacks sitting in the first row of seats in the "colored" section to stand and move to the rear of the bus so the waiting whites could have those seats. Three of the passengers complied; Mrs. Parks did not. Warned again by the driver, she still refused to move, at which point the driver exited the bus and located a policeman, who came onto the bus, arrested Mrs. Parks, and took her to the

city jail. She was booked for violating the segregation ordinance, and was shortly released on bail posted by E. D. Nixon, the leading local civil rights activist. She was scheduled to appear in municipal court on December 5, 1955.

Mistreatment of African Americans on Montgomery's segregated buses was not uncommon, and several other women had been arrested in similar situations in the months preceding Parks's. However, Mrs. Parks was especially well-known and well-respected within the black community, and her arrest particularly angered the African Americans of Montgomery. In protest, community leaders quickly organized a one-day boycott of the buses to coincide with her December 5 court date. An organization, the Montgomery Improvement Association, was also created, and the new minister of the Dexter Avenue Baptist Church, the 26-year-old Martin Luther King, Jr., was selected as the MIA's president. Word of the boycott spread effectively through the city over the weekend of December 3-4, aided by mimeographed flyers prepared by the Women's Political Council, by announcements in black churches that Sunday morning, and by an article in the local newspaper about the pending boycott, which had been "leaked" to a reporter by E. D. Nixon.

On the morning of Mrs. Parks's trial, King, Nixon, and other leaders were pleasantly surprised to see that the boycott was almost 100 percent effective among blacks. And since African Americans made up 75% of Montgomery's bus riders, the impact was significant. In city court, Mrs. Parks was convicted and was fined \$10. Her attorney, the 24-year-old Fred D. Gray, announced an appeal. That night, more than 5,000 blacks crowded into and around the Holt Street Baptist Church for a "mass meeting" to discuss the situation. For most in the church (and listening outside over loudspeakers), it was their first time to hear the oratory of Martin Luther King, Jr. He asked the crowd if they wanted to continue the boycott indefinitely, and the answer was a resounding yes. For the next 381 days, African Americans boycotted the buses, while the loss of their fares drove the Chicago-owned bus company into deeper and deeper losses. However, segregationist city officials prohibited the bus company from altering its seating policies, and negotiations between black leaders and city officials went nowhere.

With bikes, carpools, and hitchhiking, African Americans were able to minimize the impact of the boycott on their daily lives. Meanwhile, whites in Montgomery responded with continued intransigence and rising anger. Several black churches and the homes of local leaders and ministers, including those of Nixon and King, were bombed, and there were numerous assaults by white thugs on African Americans. Some 88 local black leaders were also arrested for violating an old anti-boycott law.

Faced with the lack of success of negotiations, attorney Gray soon filed a separate lawsuit in federal court challenging the constitutionality of the segregated seating laws. The case was assigned to and testimony was heard by a three-judge panel, and the young Frank M. Johnson, Jr., newly appointed to the federal bench by Republican President Dwight D. Eisenhower, was given the responsibility for writing the opinion in the case. Johnson essentially ruled that in light of the 1954 *Brown v. Board of Education* decision by the U.S. Supreme Court, there was no way to justify legally the segregation policies, and the district court ruling overturned the local segregation ordinance under which Mrs. Parks and others had been arrested. The city appealed, but the U.S. Supreme Court affirmed the lower court ruling, and in December 1956, city officials had no choice but to comply. The year-long boycott thus came to an end.

The Montgomery Bus Boycott made Mrs. Parks famous and it launched the civil rights careers of King and his friend and fellow local minister, Ralph Abernathy. The successful boycott is regarded by many historians as the effective beginning of the twentieth century civil rights movement in the U.S.

## **Vietnam**

In the early 50's, Vietnam was rebelling against French rule. America saw Vietnam as a potential source of trouble, as rebels (known as the Vietnamese) led by Communist leader Ho Chi Minh were gaining strength. America loaned France billions of dollars to aid in the war against the Vietnamese rebels, but despite the aid, France found itself on the verge of defeat, and appealed to America for troops, but America refused, fearing entanglement in another costly Korean War, or even a war with all of communist Asia.

France surrendered, and the VietMinh and France met in Geneva, Switzerland to negotiate a treaty. Vietnam was divided into two countries: the Vietminh in control of the North and the French-friendly Vietnamese in control of the South. In 1956, the two countries would be reunited with free elections.

Eisenhower worried about South Vietnam. He believed that if it also fell to the Communists, many other Southeast Asian countries would follow, in what he called the *domino theory*. He aided the Southern government and set up the Southeast Asia Treaty Organization (SEATO) in 1954. The nations included in the alliance were America, Great Britain, France, Australia, Pakistan, the Philippines, New Zealand and Thailand, and they all pledged to fight against "Communist aggressors".

## The Warsaw Pact and NATO

1955 saw the division of Europe into two rival camps. The westernized countries of the free world had signed NATO 1949 and the eastern European countries signed the Warsaw pact.

### NATO

The North Atlantic Treaty Organization was created as a response to the crisis in Berlin. The United States, Britain, Canada, France, Portugal, Italy, Belgium, Luxembourg, Norway, Denmark, Iceland, and the Netherlands founded NATO in April 1949, and Greece, Turkey and West Germany had joined by 1955. The countries agreed that "an armed attack against one or more of [the member states] in Europe or North America shall be considered an attack against them all," and was created so that if the Soviet Union eventually did invade Europe, the invaded countries would have the most powerful army in the world (the United States' Army) come to their defense.

### The Warsaw Pact

The Soviet Union responded in to the addition of West Germany to NATO 1955 with its own set of treaties, which were collectively known as the Warsaw Pact. Warsaw Pact was also known as "The Treaty of Friendship". The Warsaw Pact allowed East Germany, Poland, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Albania, Romania, and Bulgaria to function in the same way as the NATO countries did. The Soviet Union used this Warsaw Pact to combine the military forces unified under it. The Pact was supposed to make all the countries in it, equal. However, the Soviet Union took a little advantage of this by using the allied countries militaries wherever they wanted. <sup>[1]</sup> Unlike NATO, Warsaw forces were used occasionally.

## Suez Canal

Back in 1948, Israel was created as a sanctuary of sorts for the displaced Jews of the Holocaust. At the same time, many Arabs living in the area were displaced. Tensions had been high in the Middle East ever since Israel had been attacked just after its founding. The stage was set for superpower involvement in 1956; the United States backed Israel, the Soviet Union backed the Arabs, and the Egyptian president Gamal Abdel Nasser had nationalized, or brought under Egypt's control, the Suez Canal, which had previously belonged to Britain.

France and Britain worried that Egypt would decide cut off oil shipments between the oil-rich Middle East and western Europe, so that October they invaded Egypt, hoping to overthrow Nasser and seize the canal. Israel, upset by earlier attacks by Arab states, agreed to help in the invasion.

U.S. and Soviet reactions to the invasions were almost immediate. The Soviets threatened to launch rocket attacks on British and French cities, and the United States sponsored a United Nations resolution for British and French withdrawal. Facing pressures from the two powers, the three invaders pulled out of Egypt. To ensure stability in the area, United Nations troops were sent to patrol the Egypt-Israel border.

## Space Race

On October 4, 1957, the Soviets successfully put the first man-made satellite, *Sputnik*, into orbit. Americans were horrified. They feared that the Soviets were using the satellite to spy on Americans, or even worse, that the Soviet Union might attack America with nuclear weapons from space. America responded with the launch of its own satellite, *Vanguard*. Hundreds of spectators gathered, only to watch the satellite rise only a few feet off the launch pad, and then explode.

The failure spurred the government to create a space agency, the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA). NASA succeeded in launching the *Explorer* in 1958, and thus, the **Space Race** was initiated. With the creation of Project Mercury, a program to put an astronaut in space, America was pulling ahead. Nonetheless, the USSR was the first to put a man in space, when Yuri Gagarin was launched into orbit in 1961. For the next 14 years, the U.S and the Soviet Union would continue to compete in space.

## Enos the Chimp

Enos (died November 4, 1962) was a chimpanzee that was launched into space.

Enos was purchased from the Miami Rare Bird Farm in April 3, 1960. He completed more than 1,250 hours of training for his mission at the University of Kentucky and Holloman Air Force Base. His training was more intense than that of Ham, the Americans' first chimp in space, because Enos would be exposed to weightlessness and a higher g for longer periods of time. His training included psychomotor training and aircraft flights.

Enos was selected to make the first orbital animal flight only three days before the launch. Two months before allowing a chimp to be launched into orbit, NASA had launched Mercury Atlas 4 on September 13, 1961, to conduct the same mission with a "crewman simulator" in the spacecraft. Enos flew into space on board Mercury Atlas 5 on November 29, 1961. He completed his first orbit in 1 hour, 28.5 minutes.

## Spider webs in space

Spider webs in space were spun in 1973 aboard Skylab, involving two female European garden spiders (cross spiders) called Arabella and Anita. As part of an experiment, the two spiders were taken into low earth orbit on the Skylab 3 mission. The aim of the experiment was to test whether the two spiders would spin webs in space, and, if so, whether these webs would be the same as those that spiders produced on Earth. The experiment was a student project of Judy Miles of Lexington, Massachusetts. A similar experiment was conducted on board Columbia's ill fated final mission using Australian spiders provided to NASA by various institutions in Melbourne.

When scientists were given the opportunity to study the webs, they discovered that the space-webs were finer than normal Earth webs, and although the patterns of the web were not totally dissimilar, variations were spotted, and there was a definite difference in the characteristics of the web. Additionally, while the webs were finer overall, the space-web had variations in thickness in places, some places were slightly thinner, and others slightly thicker. This was unusual, because Earth webs have been observed to have uniform thickness.

## Cuban Revolution

In 1958 and 1959, anti-American feeling became a part of the growing Cuban revolution. In January 1959, the dictator of Cuba, Fulgenicio Batista, was overthrown by the rebel leader Fidel Castro, who promptly became the leader of Cuba.

At first, America supported Castro because of his promises of democratic and economic reforms. But relations between the two countries became strained when Cuba began seizing foreign-owned land (which was mostly U.S. owned) as a part of its reforms. Soon, Castro's government was a dictatorship, and was being backed by the Soviet Union. In 1961, Eisenhower cut diplomatic ties with Cuba, and relations with the island nation have been difficult ever since.

## **Che**

Ernesto Guevara de la Serna (June 14, 1928 – October 9, 1967), commonly known as Che Guevara, El Che or just Che was an Argentine-born Marxist revolutionary, international political figure, author, social philosopher, medical physician, and leader of Cuban and internationalist guerrillas.

As a young man studying medicine, Guevara travelled throughout South America bringing him into direct contact with the impoverished conditions in which many people (particularly the indigenous peasantry) lived. His experiences and observations during these trips led him to the conclusion that the region's socio-economic inequalities were a result of capitalism, colonialism, neo-colonialism, and imperialism and thus could only be remedied by socialism through revolution, prompting him to intensify his study of Marxism and travel to Guatemala to learn about the reforms being implemented there by President Jacobo Arbenz Guzmán.

## **References**

[1] <http://www.warsaw-life.com/poland/warsaw-pact>

# Article Sources and Contributors

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