

# THE FIGHT OVER LABOR

After generations of slavery, black Floridians, like their counterparts in other southern states, recognized that the basis of wealth was their labor. They joined labor unions, sometimes in coalition with working class whites. They demanded higher wages, went on strikes, quit their jobs, and migrated to new areas for better economic opportunities. African Americans also formed schools to educate themselves and improve their prospects.

At the same time, Florida's leaders saw the state's future in agriculture, timber, phosphate mining, turpentine, and tourism. Elite whites, including northern business investors, believed profitability relied on cheap black labor. They also viewed a black presence on Florida's beaches as a threat to the state's burgeoning tourism industry. Laws were passed that prohibited blacks from quitting their jobs or moving to other areas for better employment. Vagrancy and after-dark laws also limited black mobility. Turpentine, phosphate, and railway workers often were paid in company money. This currency, known as scrip, could only be spent at company stores, which charged inflated prices and kept workers in debt to the company.

Other methods to control black labor in Florida and other southern states, included limiting access to voting, educational opportunities, and organizing with working whites. These restrictions were achieved through legal and extralegal means, including violence and intimidation. Still, black Floridians continued to struggle and organize for equality.

# JIM CROW

In the 1830s, white actor Thomas Dartmouth Rice created a character named Jim Crow, a black clown who danced a jig, spoke in an exaggerated accent, and wore tattered clothing. The popularity of Jim Crow launched a new American genre known as minstrel shows, in which actors wore blackface and portrayed blacks in a dehumanizing and inaccurate manner.

The name Jim Crow also came to represent the culture and laws that divided, or segregated, white and black Americans from the 1880s until the civil rights movement in the 1960s. Segregation relegated African Americans to second-class citizenship. Blacks and whites were separated in public accommodations such as restaurants, hotels, hospitals, schools, recreational facilities, and even water fountains.

Segregation created daily humiliations for African Americans. Some people justified this racial caste system by declaring that blacks were culturally and intellectually inferior. Newspapers, entertainment, and even school books were full of negative depictions of African Americans, ranging from childlike buffoons to violent savages.

# SEGREGATION

After the Civil War, during the period of Reconstruction (1865-77), African Americans gained economic and political rights. The Thirteenth Amendment (1865) abolished slavery, the Fourteenth Amendment (1868) granted African Americans citizenship, and the Fifteenth Amendment (1870) guaranteed male citizens the right to vote. Although these laws often were ignored, African Americans were elected to hundreds of federal, state, and local offices throughout the South, including Florida.

However, in the 1880s, a backlash against this advancement began. Anti-black propaganda proliferated. Voting rights for African Americans were suppressed. Laws requiring segregation in public facilities were passed. Lynching and violence against blacks increased.

## *Plessy v. Ferguson (1896)*

In 1890, Louisiana passed the Separate Car Act, which required whites and blacks to ride in separate train cars. In 1892, Homer Plessy was arrested for sitting in a "whites only" car. Plessy filed a lawsuit declaring that his constitutional rights had been violated. However, the US Supreme Court ruled in *Plessy v. Ferguson* that separate accommodations were constitutional as long as they were equal. This ruling gave federal backing to more than a half-century of race segregation in America.

# LYNCHING

Beyond propaganda and Jim Crow laws, oppression of black Floridians was maintained through violence. Law enforcement often turned a blind eye to mobs that targeted blacks suspected of crimes, and sometimes they actively participated in lynchings.

At the end of the Civil War, the Ku Klux Klan (KKK) employed terrorism, intimidation, and violence to control blacks. For example, between 1867 and 1882, more than 159 Klan-related murders occurred in Jackson County, Florida. Fears of racial mixing prompted a Klan resurgence in 1915, when filmmaker W. D. Griffith released *Birth of a Nation*.

The film portrayed blacks as uncontrolled savages and included a scene of a black man trying to rape a white woman. Klansmen were cast as heroic figures.

From the 1890s to 1930, Florida had the highest per-capita lynching rate in the United States. Many assaults were not backwoods hangings carried out by a handful of lawless men, but rather were large festival-like spectacles. Blacks had no legal recourse in the Jim Crow era. Lynching was an effective extralegal tool of terror and oppression to keep blacks from demanding equal rights and protection under the law.

# CLAUDE NEAL

The last spectacle lynching in the United States occurred in Marianna, Florida, in 1934. African American farmhand Claude Neal was accused of raping and murdering a white neighbor, Lola Cannidy. He was arrested and moved from jail to jail for his protection, until a mob of men took him from a jail in Brewton, Alabama, more than 150 miles from the original crime.

Neal's lynching was advertised beforehand in newspapers in Florida, Alabama, Virginia, and as far away as North Dakota. Thousands of people poured into Marianna to witness the event. Walter White, secretary of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), sent a telegram to Florida Governor David Sholtz demanding that he take steps to rescue Neal, but to no avail. Neal was tortured and killed before his body was taken to the Cannidy family home, where people continued the assault. His body was hung at the Marianna courthouse. Of the hundreds of photographs taken, some were made into postcards that sold for fifty cents.

After the lynching, the NAACP sent Howard Kester, a white progressive investigator, to record the event's gruesome details. The NAACP used Kester's information and pictures of Neal's brutal treatment to shock the nation and turn public opinion against lynching. While clandestine hangings continued in the South, public spectacle lynchings disappeared.

# ROSEWOOD

From 1917 to the mid-1920s, violence against African American communities escalated. Lynchings increased, but so did attacks on entire black communities nationwide. The most well-known Florida example occurred in the community of Rosewood, located on the northern Gulf coast. Rosewood was a rural community that was predominately African American.

On January 1, 1923, Fannie Taylor, a white woman who lived near Rosewood, claimed that she had been assaulted by a black man. A white mob went to the home of black WWI veteran Aaron Carrier, who, under torture, blamed blacksmith Sam Carter of the crime. Carter was lynched that day. The county sheriff took Carrier to Gainesville for protection. In Rosewood, Sylvester Carrier, nephew of Aaron Carrier, gathered his family at his parent's home for protection against further violence.

A mob attacked the home two days later, killing Sylvester and his mother and wounding several others, but two ring leaders also were killed. The mob retreated, burning buildings as they left. The survivors fled to the woods and joined other Rosewood blacks in hiding. They watched their town burn on a cold January night. Over the course of the week, at least seven or eight people died, including two white mob members and six blacks—Sam Carter, Sarah Carrier, Lexie Gordon, James Carrier, Mingo Williams, and Sylvester Carrier. The black citizens of Rosewood never returned and the town ceased to exist. In 1994, the State of Florida awarded Rosewood survivors and descendants more than \$2 million in compensation.

# MIGRATIONS

From about 1915 to 1970, black Floridians joined millions of other blacks in leaving the South, in what became known as the Great Migration. Black southerners moved to major cities in the North where they formed new communities within the cities. The Harlem Renaissance, a time of black creativity in music, literature, theater, and art, developed as a result of the Great Migration, and had a major impact on the culture of the 1920s and beyond. New urban blacks also became more active in politics. In 1900, about 90 percent of America's black population lived in the South. By 1970, the region was home to about 50 percent of black Americans.

Between 1916 and 1920, nearly 40,000 African Americans left Florida. Blacks left because of violent attacks on their communities and the segregation imposed by Jim Crow laws. A labor shortage in the North created the opportunity to leave. Labor recruiters from northern companies came to the state, offering high wages for African Americans willing to migrate. Accustomed to low wages, long hours, and harsh working conditions, many black Floridians left the state for better opportunities.

Florida's agricultural, mining, and lumber industries began to suffer from labor shortages. To stop migration, the state started charging labor recruiters a \$1,000 license. Some recruiters were imprisoned. Blacks were harassed and beaten in train stations as they waited to leave. These attempts failed to stop the exodus. The resulting lack of labor created new bargaining power for African Americans who remained.

# MUTUAL AID SOCIETIES

In the segregated South, African Americans formed their own institutions, churches, schools, secret societies, women's clubs, and labor unions. These organizations provided a sense of fellowship, mutual history, dignity, and a safe place to flourish outside of mainstream society. African American churches in the state served as community centers and functioned as meeting places for many fraternal organizations, such as the Masons, the Odd Fellows, and the Knights of Pythias. They also hosted women's groups and other civic organizations, and served as places of education. African American churches provided a strong sense of community, mutual respect, and fellowship.

Mutual aid organizations took care of the sick, paid burial costs for the departed, and provided for the destitute. Outside the scrutiny of whites, blacks planned strategies of resistance against Jim Crow. Groups such as the Colored Knights of Pythias showed people how to register to vote and organize protests against racial discrimination and violence. They also defended African Americans in danger of being lynched. By 1920, one in six black men in Florida belonged to the Colored Knights of Pythias, and black Masons maintained membership in the tens of thousands.

In addition, national affiliations helped ease the isolation of segregation. The Tampa and Jacksonville NAACP chapters were founded in 1917, and national leaders came to speak to local communities. National, state, and local organizations helped African Americans in Florida to survive the worst days of segregation and laid the groundwork for the future civil rights movement.



# STREETCAR BOYCOTTS

After the end of Reconstruction in 1877, laws that codified racial segregation were passed in Florida and other southern states. In 1901, Jacksonville passed an ordinance requiring segregation on streetcars. After forty years of traveling freely, African Americans were shocked and humiliated by the new law. African American clergy and councilmen protested the ordinance directly to the mayor. Others fought back by quickly organizing a streetcar boycott. People walked or rode in carriages driven by African American coachmen. Blacks who did not observe the boycott were denounced and heckled with shouts of "Jim Crow." The boycott was so effective that the city abandoned its attempt to segregate streetcars.

In 1905, State Representative John Campbell Avery of Pensacola introduced a bill to enforce racial segregation on streetcars statewide. In response, blacks in Jacksonville and Pensacola organized boycotts. African Americans visiting Pensacola were given buttons that read "WALK" and were instructed not to ride the trolleys. The boycotts were highly organized and adhered to, but the Avery Bill passed both houses of the Florida legislature unanimously. The law eventually was declared unconstitutional by the Florida Supreme Court.

This victory was short-lived, and the ordinances in Pensacola and Jacksonville were rewritten to avoid legal challenges. Another state law ordering streetcar segregation was passed in 1909. Although black successes were temporary, by voicing their concerns through mass boycotts and legal challenges, African Americans resisted Jim Crow even during its height.

# WORLD WAR II

## Double Victory

World War II gave new energy to the civil rights movement and the push for equality. Many northern black servicemen were stationed in the state, and more than 50,000 black Floridians joined the armed services. During the war, most new military installations were built in the southern United States, where seventy-five percent of black servicemen were trained. Florida's military installations increased from eight to more than 170 by the end of the war.

From the outset, African Americans expressed their objective of a "Double V"—victory abroad over fascism and victory at home over racism. Black civilians and soldiers argued that, if African Americans fought and died for the United States, they were entitled to the full rights of citizenship.

New economic opportunities also opened up for African Americans to work in defense industries. This economic mobility enabled blacks to escape debt peonage (a system in which an employee works to pay off debt to an employer) and wage slavery. In 1948, President Truman signed an executive order to end segregation in military and federal employment, moving the country closer to racial equality.

# LOCAL CORRUPTION

In the early twentieth century, when many African Americans migrated north in search of better jobs, southern industries that depended on cheap labor suffered from a persistent shortage of workers. This situation provided an incentive for local officials to make arbitrary arrests in order to force people to work off their fines and prison time. Corruption and lack of oversight led to inhumane living and working conditions for the laborers.

In Lake County, Sheriff Willis McCall made sure that a steady supply of workers was available to citrus growers. He arrested black laborers who did not show up for work, charged them high fines for vagrancy, and delivered them to the groves to work off the debt. Known for his ruthless treatment of African Americans, McCall was reelected six times, but investigated forty-nine times. Five Florida governors tried to remove him from office.

# GROVELAND

After World War I, a wave of lynchings targeted African American veterans, with at least nineteen killed in the South. Similarly, at the end of World War II, several returning veterans also were lynched. Young black men who had served their country in Europe were unwilling to bow to Jim Crow when they returned to the United States. In 1949, two African American Army veterans, Sam Shepherd and Walter Irvin, returned to Lake County, Florida. They attracted the attention of local white citizens as they drove around in a late-model Mercury, wearing their uniforms with pride. The Shepherd family already was known to local whites, because Henry, the family patriarch, was a successful black farmer. Shepherd's success and the veterans driving a nice car only added to white citizens' resentment of the family.

## Groveland

In July 1949, a young white farmer's wife, Norma Padgett, accused Sam Shepherd, Walter Irvin, and two other black men, Ernest Thomas and sixteen-year-old Charles Greenlee, of rape. Three of the accused were arrested, but Thomas fled the county. A mob gathered to take the prisoners from the county jail, but they had been moved to Raiford Prison in Union County. The mob continued to grow, increased by Klan members from Lake County and neighboring Polk and Orange counties. A rumor spread that the Klan intended to destroy the black neighborhood of Groveland. Many evacuated the community, and the mob fired indiscriminately into the neighborhood and burned several homes, including Henry Shepherd's. After a statewide manhunt led by Sheriff McCall, Thomas was gunned down in a Madison County swamp as he lay sleeping against a tree, exhausted from running more than twenty-five miles.

# NAACP INVEST GATES

When NAACP attorneys arrived to interview Shepherd, Irvin, and Greenlee in Raiford Prison, they found that all three had been brutally beaten. They had received no medical treatment and still were wearing the blood-stained clothes from the day of their arrest. The first trial began in Lake County on September 1, 1949, despite the attorneys' request for a change of venue to ensure a fair and impartial hearing. After a few hours of deliberation, an all-white jury found the men guilty. Irvin and Shepherd were sentenced to die, but the jury suggested mercy for young Greenlee, who received a life sentence. Although the NAACP appealed the verdict, citing the venue, composition of the jury, and insufficient time to prepare for trial, the Florida Supreme Court upheld the conviction. The case immediately was appealed to the US Supreme Court, which reversed Shepherd and Irvin's convictions and ordered a retrial.

## **McCall shot both prisoners**

The retrial was handled by NAACP attorney and future Supreme Court Justice Thurgood Marshall. The night before the new hearing, Shepherd and Irvin were placed in the custody of Sheriff Willis McCall for transport from Raiford Prison to Lake County. During the transport, McCall shot both prisoners, who were handcuffed together at the wrist, claiming that the men tried to jump him. Shepherd was killed, but Irvin survived. Sheriff's Deputy James Yates, who was first on the scene, realized that Irvin was not dead and shot him a third time. From his hospital room, Irvin explained that McCall had shot him and Shepherd in cold blood. Thousands of letters of protest flooded Governor Fuller Warren's office, demanding McCall's investigation, prosecution, and removal from office. Despite the outrage, McCall continued to serve as sheriff until 1972. In 1955, Governor LeRoy Collins commuted Irvin's death sentence to life imprisonment.

# HARRY T. MOORE

One man who spoke up for justice for the "Groveland Boys" was Florida civil rights activist Harry T. Moore. Many say it cost him his life. In 1934, Moore organized Brevard County's first NAACP branch and spent the next three years traveling the county and building the organization. Moore later became the first full-time paid NAACP organizer in Florida.

When the beatings of Shepherd, Irvin, and Greenlee after their arrest in Groveland were revealed, Moore called for the suspension and investigation of Lake County Sheriff McCall and Deputy Yates. On December 2, 1951, in Moore's last known letter before his death, he implored Governor Fuller Warren to remove McCall from office and hold him accountable for Shepherd's murder.

On Christmas night, 1951, Harry and Harriette Moore celebrated their twenty-fifth wedding anniversary at their home in Mims, Florida. Later, as they slept, a bomb exploded underneath their house. Harry Moore, at age forty-six, died that night, and Harriette died a few weeks later. Neighbors gathered when they heard what had happened, and hundreds of people later arrived to pay their respects. Despite four investigations by law enforcement, no one has been tried and convicted of the murders.

Today at the bombing site, the Harry T. and Harriette V. Moore Cultural Complex is located on a twelve-acre park that features a community center and replica of the Moore home. The Center fosters the study of civil rights issues and pioneers, hosts an annual Festival of Arts and Humanities, and honors the memory of the first prominent civil rights activist to be martyred in the nation.

# KU KLUX KLAN

In 1866, a group of Confederate veterans in Pulaski, Tennessee, formed the Ku Klux Klan as a social club to play "pranks" on African Americans. When the Radical Republicans, who wanted severe penalties for the South, took over Congress during the period of Reconstruction, the Klan evolved into a terrorist organization to control blacks through fear, intimidation, and violence. Membership rose and fell over the years. After World War I, the Klan experienced a resurgence in response to empowered African Americans returning from overseas service and romanticized views of the Klan in movies and books.

The Klan had a strong presence in Florida during the Great Depression, and as World War II ended, membership grew even larger. After the defeat of the Axis powers, African Americans, especially veterans, demanded that America live up to its democratic ideals. Harry T. Moore and the Progressive Voters League registered unprecedented numbers of black Floridians. The Klan responded by advertising in major papers for more members, conducting lynchings, and conducting full regalia marches in Florida cities. In 1954, the US Supreme Court ruled in *Brown v. Board of Education* that segregation was unconstitutional and that schools must be integrated. Fears about black and white mixing in schools increased the attraction of the Klan, which continued to make its presence felt during the modern civil rights movement. Today, according to the Southern Poverty Law Center, fifty-nine hate groups currently are active in Florida, including several branches of the Klan.

# STETSON KENNEDY

## Investigative Reporter

Native Floridian Stetson Kennedy was a folklorist for the Florida Writers' Project of the Works Progress Administration, who later became an investigative reporter. As a child in Jacksonville, Kennedy was shaken by a story that his family's black maid told his mother. Klansmen dragged her from her home at night, stripped and tied her to a tree, beat her, and left her there. One man later returned to rape her. As a result, Kennedy retained a life-long hatred of the Ku Klux Klan, and he worked to uncover Klan activities.

After World War II, Kennedy infiltrated the Klan and other hate groups to expose their organizations, secret handshakes, passwords, and rituals to humiliate and discredit such groups. He contacted the producers of *The Adventures of Superman*, a highly popular radio show, and suggested that they write the Klan into the storyline. The collaboration resulted in a series of programs called "The Clan of the Fiery Cross," in which Superman battles the Klan. The show exposed many Klan secrets and resulted in a reduction of Klan violence and membership.

Kennedy published several books on human rights and continued to write investigative reports about the Klan until his death in 2011.



# 1955 BUS BOYCOTT

Tallahassee was the second city in the nation to have a bus boycott in the modern civil rights era. The celebrated Montgomery bus boycott began on December 1, 1955, when Rosa Parks refused to give up her seat on a segregated bus. Five months later, on May 23, 1956, African Americans Wilhelmina Jakes and Carrie Patterson sat next to a white woman on a city bus in Tallahassee. When asked to move, they refused and were arrested. The next day, a cross was burned in front of their home. The following Monday, fellow students at Florida Agriculture and Mechanical University (FAMU) voted to boycott the city bus system. Local blacks rallied to their cause. Ministers, businessmen, and other professionals created the Inter-Civic Council (ICC) to coordinate the boycott, which ignited the civil rights movement in Tallahassee.

From the beginning, the Montgomery and Tallahassee protests were connected. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. led the Montgomery bus boycott, and his friend, the Reverend C. K. Steele, became the leader of the ICC and the Tallahassee boycott. In 1957, these men established the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC), with King as president and Steele as vice-president. The ICC was modeled after the Montgomery Improvement Association (MIA), and like the MIA, the ICC formed a carpool system to enable people to get to work. Steele famously stated that blacks would rather "walk in dignity than ride in humiliation."

# LEROY COLLINS

Florida Governor LeRoy Collins' attitudes about race evolved over time. When Collins campaigned for governor in 1956, his platform supported segregation as Florida's "law and custom." However, he opposed extremism in any form. Compared to the fiery rhetoric of Georgia's Herman Talmadge and Arkansas's Orval Faubus, LeRoy Collins came across as a moderate. Collins believed that blacks needed better access to public health, education, and housing before full integration.

Governor Collins also opposed extreme measures taken by Florida's legislature. During the 1950s, a powerful group of North Florida politicians dominated state government. Known as the "Pork Chop Gang," they were opposed to racial equality. Collins strongly opposed the legislature when it passed an "interposition" resolution. Interposition was a response to the US Supreme Court's decision in *Brown v. the Board of Education* regarding school segregation, and states adopted the strategy of ignoring laws passed at the federal level. Collins believed that upholding the decisions of the US Supreme court outweighed the will of Florida's state government to maintain legal segregation. He considered the Florida's legislature's attempts at interposition to be "an evil thing, whipped up by the demagogues and carried on the hot and erratic winds of passion, prejudice, and hysteria."

In a March 20, 1960, state-wide television appearance, Collins declared that, while segregation may be legal, it was morally wrong. President Lyndon Johnson later appointed Collins as director of the Community Relations Service created by the 1964 Civil Rights Act to resolve racial tensions. Collins' progressive stance on civil rights ultimately ended his political career. During the campaign for US Senate in 1968, his opponent, Edward Gurney, circulated the photograph showing Collins negotiating with Andrew Young and Dr. King in Selma, Alabama, as proof of his civil rights agenda.

# THE JOHN'S COMMITTEE

In 1956, the same year as the Tallahassee bus boycott, the Florida Legislative Investigative Committee (FLIC) formed to investigate Communism and "subversive activities" in the state. FLIC commonly was known as the Johns Committee, after Senator and former (acting) Governor Charley Johns, and was Florida's manifestation of McCarthyism. Like similar committees in other states, FLIC members believed that the NAACP and the civil rights movement were Communist in nature. They also believed that blacks were not organizing on their own and must be under the influence of subversive outside agitators.

Like the House Un-American Activities Committee in Washington, D. C., the Johns Committee summoned people to testify in public hearings. Members of the NAACP, the Florida Council on Human Rights, bus boycotters, college students, and other civil rights activists repeatedly were called to testify. The civil rights movement in Miami, through which African Americans sought access to beaches, fair housing, and quality schools, also attracted their attention. Johns Committee hearings in Miami attempted to connect the Miami NAACP with the Communist Party. Like many other white politicians, committee members viewed the civil rights movement as a Communist plot against the United States to cause unrest and possibly to start a race war.

# THE MIAM MOVEMENT

The Miami NAACP was the largest affiliate in the state. In the mid-1950s, it filed two high-profile lawsuits—one to integrate Dade County schools and a second to desegregate Miami buses. Chapter Secretary Ruth Perry and President Theodore Gibson repeatedly were called to testify before FLIC, which wanted the membership rolls to compare to its inaccurate list of suspected communists. Before the hearings began, the Miami branch sent its membership rolls and local records to the NAACP's New York office.

Despite receiving bomb threats, Perry began writing a column for the African American newspaper, *Miami Times*. She called for an end to Klan violence and publicly identified racist individuals and organizations. She repeatedly attacked the Johns Committee and the "Pork Chop Gang." Prior to her testimony before FLIC, she was targeted for assassination by the White Citizens Council. Still, Perry refused to provide membership information to the Johns Committee.

In 1959, Gibson and Perry again were called to testify before the Johns Committee. In a prearranged plan, Perry informed the committee that Gibson was sole possessor of the NAACP records and membership rolls. The committee obtained a court order requiring Gibson to hand over the records. He refused and was cited for contempt, fined, and sentenced to six months in jail. The case was appealed to the US Supreme Court, which ruled in 1963 in favor of Gibson. The ruling that the state did not have a right to the records caused NAACP membership to grow dramatically. Gibson and Perry's courage ensured the survival of the NAACP in Miami and Florida.

# CORE—CONGRESS OF RACIAL EQUALITY

The first southern lunch counter sit-ins were held in Miami in 1959, and conducted by the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE), an interracial civil rights group first formed in Chicago in 1942. Inspired by the teachings of Mahatma Gandhi, CORE believed in nonviolent direct actions, such as sit-ins, demonstrations, and marches. CORE was interracial because the organization believed that racism was damaging to all Americans, not just African Americans.

CORE had a method. First, CORE members observed and tested different public facilities to determine whether they practiced segregation. If so, they negotiated with owners. If negotiations failed, they used direct actions. Members were trained to endure hostile situations in a nonviolent manner. In sit-in simulations, they learned to ignore verbal and physical abuse. Through such preparations, CORE conducted some of the most effective nonviolent civil rights actions in the country.

Interested in direct action, local activists invited the national CORE office to Miami, which was selected for CORE'S summer institute in 1959. CORE leadership hoped that Miami would provide a beachhead for organization in the South. Participants from across the country attended the Miami Interracial Action Institute (MIAI). They began sit-ins at department store lunch counters. Although these initial attempts failed, the Institute produced positive results. Some attendees returned to their home cities and established CORE chapters.

# [CORE-IN TALLAHASSEE

While on summer vacation in Miami, Patricia and Priscilla Stephens joined CORE and participated in lunch counter sit-ins. When the sisters returned to Florida A&M University (FAMU), they immediately began to recruit other students to establish a new chapter. The first meeting of Tallahassee CORE was held in October 1959.

On February 1, 1960, four African American students in Greensboro, North Carolina, walked into a Woolworth's and sat down at the lunch counter. When they were denied service, they refused to leave. They returned the next day and the next with more students. CORE sent out a call for "sympathy sit-ins," and within a week, Tallahassee was one of eleven southern cities holding demonstrations. The action soon spread to other Florida cities, including Tampa, St. Petersburg, Sarasota, Daytona Beach, and Orlando.

## Tallahassee Sit-ins

**FEBRUARY 13, 1960** — Tallahassee's first sit-in was held on February 13, 1960, at Woolworth's on Monroe Street. Ten black students—eight from FAMU and two from high school—sat down at the lunch counter and ordered food. They were refused service, but remained quietly reading their school books for two hours. They endured threats, insults, and racial slurs from whites. However, one white man congratulated the students and told them they were doing a good job. By the time the police arrived, the students had left.

**FEBRUARY 20, 1960** — A week later, seventeen black CORE members and a few whites held a second sit-in at Woolworth's. Unsympathetic onlookers—one of whom had a baseball bat—shouted at them, tugged at their clothing, and tried to pull them from their chairs, but the CORE members remained calm. After forty-five minutes, the police, mayor, and city commission members arrived. The mayor asked them to leave. The eleven who remained—the Stephens sisters, six other FAMU students, C. K. Steele's two teenage sons, and forty-three-year-old Tallahassee resident Mrs. Mary Ola Gaines—were arrested and charged with disturbing the peace.

# TALLAHASSEE PROTESTS

## Knives, Baseball Bats, Ax Handles, and Tear Gas

On March 12, black students from FAMU and white students from Florida State University tried to integrate Woolworth's lunch counter. After eleven students were arrested, 200 FAMU students held a silent protest outside the jail.

Patricia Stephens sent fifty more students to Woolworth's and fifty more to McCrory's department store. Several students were arrested at McCrory's. Those heading to Woolworth's were met by members of the White Citizens Council, armed with baseball bats, knives, and ax handles. The students chanted "No Violence!" and avoided a clash by returning to campus.

That same day, an estimated 1,000 FAMU students gathered to march downtown. Met by police barricades, the protesters were ordered to turn back and were attacked with tear gas. Hundreds of students were treated for burns and other injuries at FAMU Hospital. A police officer recognized Stephens as a leader and shot a tear gas canister at her, permanently damaging her eyes. She wore sunglasses for the rest of her life because of light sensitivity. She later recalled, "I couldn't see, but I could hear the screams of the students."

Stephens continued to fight for civil rights throughout her life. For more information, please see the exhibit section on Patricia Stephens Due.

# JAIL OVER BAIL

Those arrested at the February 20 sit-in were found guilty and sentenced to spend sixty days in the Leon County jail or pay a \$300 fine. Seven FAMU students became the first student activists in the country to choose "jail over bail" Five students, including Priscilla and Patricia Stephens and John and Barbara Broxton, insisted on serving their full sentence in jail. From her cell, Patricia wrote that they believed Martin Luther King Jr. when he said, "We've got to fill the jails in order to win over our equal rights."

In a letter to the five, King wrote, "As you suffer the inconvenience of remaining in jail, remember that unearned suffering is redemptive. Going to jail for a righteous cause is a badge of honor and a symbol of dignity. I assure you that your valiant witness is one of the glowing epics of our time and you are bringing all of America nearer the threshold of a bright tomorrow."

After their release, the five now-famous students went on a national publicity tour to raise money for CORE and educate people about the situation in Tallahassee. They received CORE'S prestigious Gandhi Award for their work. In the years to come, many more demonstrations and arrests occurred in Tallahassee before public accommodations finally were desegregated.



# (JACKSONVILLE SIT-INS

Miami's sit-ins were staged by working adults, and those in Tallahassee were conducted by college students. However, the sit-ins in Jacksonville were led by middle and high school students, who found a special mentor in history teacher and NAACP leader Rutledge Pearson. He taught his students about the contributions of blacks to American society and encouraged them to join the Youth Council of the NAACP, for which he was an advisor. Although Jacksonville's population was almost thirty percent black and had a long-established, prosperous black middle class, the city remained highly segregated at the beginning of the 1960s.

The Youth Council planned to desegregate department store lunch counters. Pearson's student Rodney Hurst became president of the Youth Council, and Air Force veteran Alton Yates became vice president. On August 13, 1960, they sat down at the Woolworth's lunch counter. The manager responded by closing the counter and turning off the lights. For the next two weeks, lunch counters all over downtown closed as the Youth Council occupied them. They endured obscenities and being stabbed with sharpened sticks by angry whites. They ignored this abuse, while department stores lost money.

# AX HANDLE SATURDAY

After three weeks of sit-ins in Jacksonville, one of the most notorious events during Florida's civil rights movement occurred, later known as Ax Handle Saturday. On August 27, 1960, hundreds of white men gathered at downtown Hemming Park. They carried ax handles and baseball bats. Some of them wore Confederate uniforms. A mob of 200 to 300 white men attacked Youth Council members and other blacks in the downtown area. Eventually, a black gang known as the Boomerangs arrived and started fighting back. Violence continued into the night and more than fifty people were injured. About fifty people, white and black, were arrested, and images of the event made the national news.

A group of African American representatives asked Mayor Haydon Burns to set up a biracial commission, but he refused. Undeterred, activists established a biracial committee without him. After months of negotiations, the downtown lunch counters were quietly integrated in March 1961 without incident.

# WADE-INS

Wade-ins were among the earliest protest actions in Florida. The state was a paradise for whites, but African Americans were denied use of most beaches during the Jim Crow era. To gain access, wealthy blacks purchased beachfront property that was open to blacks in 1927. Segregated recreational facilities provided places where African Americans could gather and relax, away from the daily humiliations of Jim Crow. Businessman Frank Butler bought land on Anastasia Island that became an African American resort. Another black millionaire, Abraham Lincoln Lewis, purchased land on Amelia Island and created American Beach. African Americans in Miami waded into the exclusively white Baker's Haulover Beach. In response to the protest, county officials opened an all-black area at Virginia Key Beach in August 1945.

## The Fort Lauderdale Wade-ins

After World War II, African Americans in Fort Lauderdale stepped up their demands for beach access, and the city responded by creating a committee to review the issue. Eight years passed before the city bought a one-mile strip of land in 1954 that became known as Colored Beach. African Americans took a ferry to the site because there was no road access, and there were no facilities. The city promised to build a road and a bridge, but after seven years of inaction, local blacks finally protested.

In 1961, local NAACP leader Eula Johnson and black physician Dr. Von D. Mizeli began a series of wade-ins at Fort Lauderdale Beach. The first one on July 4th drew only eight people, but soon hundreds were participating and attracting national attention. The city sued Johnson, Mizeli, and the NAACP to halt the wade-ins. However, Circuit Court Judge Tom Cabot ruled against the city, resulting in the desegregation of Fort Lauderdale.

# INTEGRATION IN ST. PETE

## South Mole

After *Brown v. Board of Education*, which declared school segregation unconstitutional, NAACP attorney Elwood Chisholm encouraged black Floridians to use all public beaches. In St. Petersburg, the city-designated beach for African Americans was South Mole. It was the only spot along forty-five miles of Tampa Bay coastline where blacks were allowed, and it was littered with a nearby railroad's old freight and passenger cars.

## Spa Pool and Beach

The main recreation area in St. Petersburg was Spa Pool and Beach. In 1955, members of a local civil rights group were denied entry. Local segregationists responded to integration attempts by forming the Citizens' Council, a more middle class and less violent version of the Ku Klux Klan, sometimes called "the Klan in a suit." The Council used political and economic pressure to maintain segregation. African American Dr. Fred Alsup sued the city, claiming his constitutional rights had been violated by being denied entry to a public place. The city lost the case, and the segregated beach was declared unconstitutional.

The city twice appealed the case, and the US Supreme Court refused to hear it and confirmed the lower court's opinion. The city closed the pool several times when African Americans used it and even suggested replacing it with an auditorium. The business community feared a drop in tourist revenue and pressured the city to reopen the beach on an integrated basis on January 6, 1959. After almost four years, African Americans succeeded in integrating recreational facilities in St. Petersburg.

# FREEDOM RIDES

Building on the successful lunch counter sit-ins in 1960, CORE decided to test the new US Supreme Court decision that desegregated interstate bus and rail stations, by hosting "freedom rides". Two chartered buses left Washington, D. C., with seven blacks and six whites and headed for the Deep South. At each stop, they tested restrooms, lunch counters, and waiting rooms. They encountered only minor hostility until Mother's Day on May 14, 1961. In Anniston, Alabama, a mob of about 200 people surrounded and firebombed one of the buses. People escaping the fire were beaten. The second bus also was attacked that day as it arrived in Birmingham. Images of the charred bus and the bloodied riders shocked the country and the world. Reinforcements arrived from the Nashville Students Movement, and the riders continued to Montgomery, where they again were attacked by a mob of almost 1,000. By September, 328 freedom riders and activists had been jailed in Mississippi.

## Tallahassee

In June 1961, two freedom rides were conducted from Washington, D. C., to Florida. One route ended in Tallahassee and the other in St. Petersburg. Little trouble occurred until three people were arrested in Ocala for unlawful assembly at a "white" waiting room. In Tallahassee, eighteen riders arrived at the airport, where the restaurant was "closed" to prevent the mixed-race group from dining. Five white ministers, three black ministers, and two Jewish rabbis decided to integrate the restaurant the next day. When they arrived at lunchtime, they were met by angry whites, welcoming blacks, and a group of Tallahassee CORE members, including Priscilla Stephens and Jeff Poland. The interfaith freedom riders and the CORE members were arrested and charged with unlawful assembly. The Tallahassee Ten, as they became known, were convicted. After three years of appeals, they returned to Tallahassee in 1964 to serve their sentences. After four days in jail, they were released.

As a result of the freedom rides, the Interstate Commerce Commission enacted stronger regulations banning segregation in bus or train stations. The rides also continued to focus on racial problems in the South, particularly Mississippi.

# ST. AUGUSTINE FOUR

## St. Augustine's Civil Rights Movement

In 1962, Congress created a Quadricentennial Commission to plan a celebration for the 400th anniversary of St. Augustine's founding in 1565. African Americans were excluded from the commission and the event, despite the role that their ancestors had played in the community's history. Local NAACP leaders urged officials in Washington to withhold funding for the celebration. Dr. Robert Hayling, advisor to the Youth Council of the NAACP, spoke out and led demonstrations against the city's segregationist policies. During the summer of 1963, other Florida cities, including St. Petersburg, Daytona, Orlando, and Titusville, established biracial committees and desegregated peacefully. However, St. Augustine's leaders refused to negotiate with the city's black community.

## The St. Augustine Four

Organized sit-ins and picketing began on June 25, 1963, and continued without arrests for the next three weeks. July 18 was a hot day, and sixteen black youths who were picketing the local Woolworth's entered the air-conditioned store and sat at the lunch counter. Sheriff L. O. Davis arrested them. All were released except for four juveniles, who were sentenced to reform school by a local judge. To secure their release, the children's parents were told to sign a paper stating that they would press charges against Hayling for contributing to the delinquency of a minor—a felony offense—and that their children would not participate in demonstrations. They refused to sign the papers. Audrey Nell Edwards (age 16), Jo Ann Anderson (15), Samuel White (14), and Willie Carl Singleton (16) were sent to reform schools for six months. State and national press condemned the harsh punishment, and Florida's reputation suffered. Despite such severity, local activists were not intimidated, and the sit-ins in St. Augustine continued. Finally, Governor Farris Bryant and the Florida Cabinet intervened, and the children were released on January 14, 1964.

# DR. ROBERT HAYLING

Dr. Robert Hayling, a Tallahassee native whose father was a Florida A&M University professor for thirty-three years, joined the US Air Force in 1951 and was honorably discharged four years later as a 1<sup>st</sup> lieutenant. After attending dental school, Hayling moved to St. Augustine in 1960 to begin his practice. He was shocked by the city's racial discrimination.

After a summer of protests and sit-ins, twenty-seven people were arrested in a Labor Day mass demonstration organized by the NAACP. A few weeks later, Hayling and companions were caught spying on a Klan rally of more than 300 people and were brutally beaten. Hayling suffered broken ribs and lost teeth and was left in a semi-conscious state. The victims were piled together for burning, but they were rescued by the police. A white minister, Reverend Irwin Cheney, had slipped away and phoned the highway patrol and the governor's office for help.

The violence escalated. In October 1963, Molotov cocktails were thrown into a black family's home, and armed whites drove through black neighborhoods. In January, the car of a family whose children recently had integrated a school was bombed. In February, shots fired into Hayling's home missed his wife and children, but killed the family dog.

The NAACP, an organization that traditionally did not use direct-action nonviolent tactics, was becoming uncomfortable with events in St. Augustine. The national office asked local chapter leaders, including Hayling, to resign. In March 1964, Hayling and others traveled to the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) meeting being held in Orlando. They met with Dr. King's aides and requested the SCLC's assistance in St. Augustine.

Today, Dr. Hayling's prior dental office houses the ACCORD Civil Rights Museum in St. Augustine. ACCORD stands for Anniversary to Commemorate Civil Rights Demonstrations, Inc.

The SCLC began a desegregation campaign in St. Augustine in March 1964. Hayling wrote a letter that circulated in colleges and churches in the Northeast, inviting activists to spend spring break in St. Augustine participating in protests. SCLC leaders trained people in nonviolent methods. On Easter weekend, demonstrators held sit-ins, tried to attend religious services, and conducted marches. More than 125 people were arrested.

Two events captured national media attention. On March 31, a racially mixed group, including Hayling and Mrs. Malcolm Peabody, the 72-year-old mother of the governor of Massachusetts, attempted to eat at the Ponce de Leon Hotel restaurant. They were arrested in front of a mass of journalists, and images appeared in newspapers and on televisions across the country. Once arrested, Mrs. Peabody refused to post bail and remained in jail for several days. In May, Associated Press newsman James Keriin was assaulted, his camera was destroyed, and he was hospitalized with several deep cuts on his scalp. Attacks on journalists increased St. Augustine's scrutiny by the press.

## **Andrew Young's Crossing**

After Dr. King arrived in St. Augustine on May 18, 1964, a second wave of demonstrations began in late May. Children often led the nightly marches of 200 to 400 civil rights activists to the downtown plaza commonly known as "the slave market." Meanwhile, segregationists gathered at the slave market to hear Klan leaders preach hatred. Tensions continued to rise.

On June 9, as 300 people prepared for the night's march, Dr. King and his aide, Andrew Young, reminded them to remain nonviolent. Young led the march from St. Mary's Church to the downtown plaza. As they approached the corner of King and George streets, segregationists armed with bats, ax handles, and metal bars formed a human chain to stop the marchers. As Young tried to lead the marchers across the street, he was twice attacked by the white mob. Eventually, the crowd's anger faded, and the activists finished their march. On June 10, the filibuster of the civil rights bill in the US Senate ended.



# ARREST OF DR. KING

On June 11, 1963, six months before his assassination, President John F. Kennedy called for the passage of a civil rights bill. Exactly one year later, Dr. King arrived at the Monson Motor Lodge in St. Augustine and attempted to integrate the restaurant. Manager James Brock told King that he was on private property. King told Brock that he would have to integrate. In front of television crews, photographers, and journalists, Police Chief Virgil Stewart arrested King and his aides, creating another media firestorm.

## **Swim-in at the Monson Motor Lodge**

On June 18, a racially mixed group attempted to integrate the Motor Lodge, including fifteen rabbis who came to St. Augustine because of a speech Dr. King gave to the Central Conference of American Rabbis. Brock refused to let them enter, and the group was arrested, resulting in the largest arrest of rabbis in American history. Less than ten minutes later, an integrated group of five African Americans and two white guests at the motel jumped into the Monson swimming pool. Under great pressure from segregationists and integrationists, Brock snapped, grabbed a bottle of muriatic acid, and poured it into the pool. The next day, photographs of the event appeared on newspaper covers across the nation and world, and three major television networks repeated the story.

# VOTING RIGHTS

## 1870-1920

In 1870, the Fifteenth Amendment to the US Constitution gave all male citizens the right to vote regardless of race or color. After Reconstruction in 1877, many state and local governments passed laws to disenfranchise some voters. In the North, the laws targeted recent immigrants and the poor; in the South, the laws denied African Americans the right to vote.

Restrictions that affected African Americans also impacted poor whites, such as limiting polling places and times. It was difficult for a working man to take time off to vote, particularly if the polling place was far away. To discourage unity between blacks and poor whites, laws were applied unevenly. Florida initiated a poll tax—a fee that had to be paid before voting, which was a financial burden for the poor. The tax had to be paid in person at the county assessor's office during regular work hours before Election Day. Election officials demanded to see African Americans' poll-tax receipts, but they often did not ask the same of poor whites.

This double standard also applied to literacy tests. Black voters were asked to read aloud state or federal regulations before they could vote. Whites were exempted through a "grandfather clause." This meant that they did not have to take the literacy test, if their grandfathers could vote before 1865. On Election Day, African Americans were threatened with violence at polling places, and threats often were carried out.

# VOTING RIGHTS

## The Presidential Election of 1920

On August 18, 1920, the Nineteenth Amendment was passed, guaranteeing all American women the right to vote. African American women registered to vote in large numbers. Tensions escalated nationwide as the 1920 presidential election approached. The Ku Klux Klan used violence and intimidation to prevent African Americans from voting. Buildings hosting voting clinics were burned. Blacks were fired from their jobs, run out of town, assaulted, or killed. Armed men guarded polling places to stop blacks from voting. The worst violence in Florida occurred in the town of Ocoee in Orange County.

Mose Norman and July Perry, two prosperous black farmers, led the voter registration drive in Orange County. On November 2, 1920, Norman was turned away from the polls, but he returned later and insisted on voting. After whites allegedly found a shotgun in his car, he was beaten before he escaped and fled into the woods. Klansmen flooded into Ocoee and burned nearly thirty homes and buildings. Although black residents fled to nearby woods and swamps, from thirty to fifty African Americans, including women and children, were killed. July Perry was lynched and his body was hung from a telephone pole. Afterwards, the town's black population—about 500 people—left and did not return. In Ocoee, as in other towns and states, African Americans risked their lives and homes to exercise their right to vote.

# VOTING RIGHTS

## 1940-1964

### **Progressive Voters<sup>7</sup> League**

In 1944, Harry T. Moore co-founded and led the Progressive Voters<sup>7</sup> League, which conducted a statewide campaign to register black voters. By summer 1951, the League had registered 100,000 new voters—almost one-third of all eligible blacks and fifty percent more than other Southern states. The Klan responded with cross burnings, violence, and bombings in Orlando and Miami. Moore's house was bombed on December 25, 1951, killing the civil rights leader and his wife.

### **Voters Education Project**

Encouraged by the Kennedy administration, civil rights organizations launched the Voters Education Project in 1962, which promoted mass voter registration drives across the South. These efforts were highly successful in Florida. In fall 1962, Congress of Racial Equality (CORE) registered 3,400 people in Miami. In 1964, CORE leaders Patricia Stephens Due and Judy Benninger organized the Big Bend Voter Education Project in north Florida. They were aided by Linda and Jewell Dixie, whose father had organized black tobacco laborers in the 1930s. Activists endured threats, arrests, and physical violence, but they were successful. In 1964, Lyndon Baines Johnson carried Florida in the presidential election by a narrow margin, and black voters were a deciding factor.

# VOTING RIGHTS ACT

## Voting Rights Act of 1965

In the Deep South, there was mass resistance to voter registration drives. Dozens of voting-rights activists were murdered in Mississippi and elsewhere. The nation was shocked by footage of Alabama state troopers brutally attacking civil rights marchers outside of Selma on March 7, 1965. In response, Senate Majority Leader Mike Mansfield (D-MT) and Senate Minority Leader Everett Dirksen (R-IL) introduced the Voting Rights Act of 1965 in Congress on March 18. After passage by both houses, President Johnson signed it into law on August 6, with Martin Luther King Jr., Rosa Parks, and other civil rights leaders in attendance. Congress subsequently amended the Act five times to strengthen its provisions.

Intended to enforce rights guaranteed by the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments, this landmark legislation banned racial discrimination in voting, thus ensuring access to polls for disenfranchised minorities throughout the nation. It outlawed literacy tests and other strategies that previously were used to limit participation and required bilingual ballots and election materials in areas where a minority language might provide a barrier. Poll taxes were ruled unconstitutional by the US Supreme Court in 1966. The Act also implemented federal oversight of voter registration in states with an extensive history of voter restrictions or in areas where fewer than half of non-whites were registered to vote in 1964. Until 2013 when the Supreme Court overturned this "coverage form ula," these states had to request federal approval before making new voting laws.

Before the Act, registration among black Floridians was 35 to 40 percent; after its passage, registration increased to 60 percent. In 1968, Joe Lang Kershaw became Florida's first black legislator since Reconstruction. With the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965, African Americans and other minorities took a long-awaited step toward equality in the United States.

# EARLY EDUCATION

When Florida became a state in 1845, the legislature passed laws prohibiting the assembly of blacks, which made the establishment of African American schools impossible. The first formal African American schools in Florida were established at the end of the Civil War. Although state-supported schools for blacks were introduced in 1866, they were underfunded. Aware of the importance of education to their future, black Floridians raised money to supplement the schools. Florida's new constitution of 1885 prohibited white and black children from attending the same schools. Eleven years later, the US Supreme Court provided legal support for segregation in *Plessy v. Ferguson*, which stated that separate facilities based on race were not unconstitutional if they were equal.

However, schools were far from equal in the amount of funding they received. Black children attended school in overcrowded, dilapidated buildings with leaky roofs using old textbooks with missing pages. They walked to school while buses carrying white children passed them by. Their teachers suffered as well. In the late 1930s, white teachers averaged \$1,200 per year while their black counterparts were paid half that amount. In many places, black schools were closed for several months so children could pick fruits and vegetables in the fields.

Despite these obstacles, many African American schools provided a high-quality education. Teachers and parents were dedicated to educating children and set high standards. Many believed that to compete with whites, black children needed a superior education—to be equal, one had to be better.

In 1937, Harry T. Moore, on behalf of the Florida State Teachers Association, wrote the NAACP national office to request help in planning a lawsuit for equal teacher pay regardless of race. Future US Supreme Court Justice Thurgood Marshall opened the letter and began his fourteen-year association with Moore. It was difficult to find a black educator to be the plaintiff in the case. Moore's longtime friend John Gilbert, the principal of segregated Cocoa Junior High School, volunteered and was fired as a result. Although the NAACP lost the case, it opened the door to many other pay equalization suits in Florida.

# VIRGIL HAWKINS

In 1949, the first school segregation lawsuit was filed in Florida. Virgil Hawkins applied to law school at the University of Florida in Gainesville. Although he was qualified academically, he was denied admittance. Other states avoided allowing blacks to attend all-white colleges by paying for them to attend schools out-of-state or by establishing black universities. Florida did both. Florida A&M University's College of Law was established in 1949. The state offered to let Hawkins attend the law school in Gainesville until the black law school in Tallahassee was completed. However, the University of Florida still refused to admit him, and Hawkins filed a lawsuit.

After a nine-year legal battle, the Florida Supreme Court agreed to desegregate the University of Florida's graduate and professional schools if Hawkins withdrew his application. Hawkins's sacrifice paved the way for other African Americans. George Starke became the first black student at UF's College of Law, and in 1962 George Allen became the first African American graduate of the program. Hawkins completed his law degree in Boston, Massachusetts. The Florida Supreme Court denied Hawkins admission to the Florida Bar until 1976—twenty-eight years after he first applied to the University of Florida.

Virgil Hawkins was a trail-blazer who filed the first lawsuit in Florida to desegregate schools. His efforts opened the doors to higher education and advanced academic and professional programs for African Americans.

# RESPONSE TO DROWN

In the 1954 landmark *Brown v. Board of Education* decision, the US Supreme Court stated that "separate education facilities were inherently unequal" and psychologically damaging to minority children. It expressly overturned the Court's 1896 decision in *Plessy v. Ferguson*. Like other Southern states, Florida began a series of delay tactics to avoid school integration.

When the *Brown* decision was issued, the Supreme Court invited input from attorneys general in southern states about how and when to implement school desegregation. Florida Attorney General Richard Ervin was the first to submit an *amicus curiae* (friend of the court) brief. Ervin argued that moving too fast would be shocking and damaging to whites and blacks because of the cultural gap between the two races. He contended that no deadline should be set because individual communities needed to take a careful and gradual approach. The Court agreed with Ervin in its *Brown II* decision on May 31, 1955. While schools were to desegregate "with all deliberate speed," no timetable was established.

The vagueness of the Court's language allowed Florida to postpone significant integration for well over a decade using measures such as the Pupil Placement Law and Freedom of Choice Plans. In 1961, only four black students had integrated into one white school in the entire state. Florida continued for years to use every available means to prevent desegregation. In 1961, only four black students had integrated into one white school in the entire state. Florida continued for years to use every available means to prevent desegregation.



# INTEGRATION

Florida practiced tokenism well into the 1960s. Tokenism meant that a few black children attended a select white school, giving the illusion of integration. These children endured taunts, threats, and isolation. After passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, the federal government finally could enforce the 1954 Brown ruling. The Department of Justice sued counties that refused to desegregate, and federal funds were withheld from segregated school districts.

## Real Integration Begins

In December 1964, the U.S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare (HEW) started enforcing desegregation. At the beginning of 1965, none of Florida's school districts met federal integration standards. Leon and sixteen other counties were under a federal court order to desegregate. All other Florida counties had to submit a working plan for desegregation. HEW rejected thirty-seven plans. The patience of the federal government was running out. Under the threat of losing millions of dollars in federal aid, Florida schools began real integration in the late 1960s.

In the 1968 *Green v. County School Board* decision, the Supreme Court ruled that school boards had "to ensure racial balance in schools." Acceptable integration plans were based on black to white student ratios. Busing, a program of transporting whites to mostly black schools and blacks to mostly white schools, began in the early 1970s. Busing was a form of affirmative action designed to overcome the problem of residential segregation in school populations.

# BLACK POWER

In the mid-1960s, many civil rights activists turned away from the philosophy of nonviolence and the goal of racial integration and toward a belief in "Black Power." The black power faction believed in armed self-defense, Pan-African culture, and economic independence. The Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) formed in 1960 as a nonviolent direct action group. SNCC's leader, Stokely Carmichael, became an advocate of black power when his tolerance for white violence ended during the 1966 March Against Fear in Mississippi. As SNCC and CORE became more militant, the Black Panther Party was founded in 1966. The Black Panthers represented the interests of inner-city working class blacks and had a socialist ideology. The new militant ideology was reflected in Malcolm X's dictum that African Americans should gain their rights "by any means necessary."

Many black Americans viewed Black Power as a positive development. They embraced the idea that black pride came from oneself and was not something to be gained or measured by white society. Natural afro hairstyles and traditional African dress came into fashion. Black arts, including music, literature, theater, and dance, experienced a renaissance. African Americans consciously explored their own identities and heritages, discarding white standards of beauty and worth. Conversely, many white Americans were frightened by black power, viewing it as a dangerous, separatist, militant movement that was anti-white rather than pro-black.

## Uhuru Movement

Twenty-six-year-old Joe Waller established a chapter of SNCC in St. Petersburg in 1966. For thirty years, a mural depicting African Americans with exaggerated features, playing banjos, and eating watermelon on a beach had been displayed in city hall. Waller had written the mayor and city council multiple times requesting that the painting be removed. On December 29, 1966, Waller and four other SNCC members ripped down the eight-by-twelve-foot mural.

Waller served two-and-a-half-years in prison because of the incident. He was considered a hero in the black community. While in prison, he formed the Junta of Militant Organizations (JOMO) and changed his name to Ornali Yeshitela. In 1972, JOMO merged with two more black power organizations—one based in Gainesville and one in Fort Myers—to form the African Peoples Socialist Party (APSP). APSP became known as the Uhuru (Swahili for freedom) movement. The Uhuru movement became a national militant organization that advocated economic independence and the release of black prisoners. Although APSP moved its headquarters to Oakland, California, Ornali Yeshitela and the organization now are based in St. Petersburg, Florida.

# SOCIAL UNREST

As the 1960s wore on, African American civil rights activists focused on economic inequality. When Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. was assassinated in Memphis on April 4, 1968, he was there to lead a sanitation worker's strike as part of the SCLC's Poor People's Campaign. A month later, Joe Savage led a sanitation strike that lasted four months in St. Petersburg, Florida. The workers, most of whom were African American, were demanding a pay increase of 25 cents per hour. In late July, Dr. King's brother, A. D. Moore, came to speak to and encourage the strikers. In August, tensions escalated into a riot with widespread looting, arson, and violence. Eventually, the workers' demands were met.

## Urban Riots

The situation in St. Petersburg mirrored events in other American cities. Urban blacks felt that nonviolence was an inadequate method for achieving social and economic justice. Many also were frustrated by police brutality in the black community. Beginning with the 1965 Watts riot in Los Angeles, there were major riots across the country. When Dr. King was killed, violence again erupted in many US cities, including Florida's Pensacola, Tallahassee, Gainesville, Fort Pierce, Pompano Beach, Tampa, and Jacksonville.

## White Backlash

Urban riots, black power groups, and forced busing prompted a white backlash against the civil rights movement and among southern voters against the Democratic Party. Richard Nixon's advisors developed the "Southern strategy" for his 1968 presidential campaign, which exploited resentments over segregation and busing to win over former Democrats.

# BUSING IN FLORIDA

Many federal judges ordered the busing of children to end segregation in schools. Governor Claude Kirk, who in 1966 became Florida's first Republican governor since Reconstruction, took a defiant anti-busing stand as part of his 1970 campaign platform. When a federal court ordered busing in Manatee County, Kirk suspended the school district's superintendent and school board members to stop it. US District Judge Ben Krentzman ordered Kirk to appear in court and reinstated the school officials. In response, Kirk returned to Bradenton with ninety armed deputies and aides and took over the school board offices. US Attorney John Briggs sent in federal marshals, who served arrest warrants against the deputies and governor's aides. Judge Krentzman found the governor to be in contempt of court and fined him \$10,000. Three days later, Governor Kirk gave in and complied with the court, and busing began in Manatee County.

When Reubin Askew ran against Claude Kirk in the 1970 election, busing was highly unpopular. That year, almost half of Florida's school districts were being sued over desegregation. More than fifty schools were still all black. Governor Askew, worried about violence, encouraged Floridians to support busing as a necessary solution to end segregation and provide educational opportunities for all students. Askew viewed racial equality as a moral issue. Although most Floridians opposed busing, they supported Askew because they perceived him to be a man of integrity. Busing continued in Florida for the next twenty years, until the 1990s, when school districts petitioned for release from federal control as they met acceptable integration levels. After the end of federal court oversight, resegregation began to rise.

# DEFENDING THE DREAM

Most civil rights activists living today believe that American society has made a lot of progress, but that more remains to be done. On February 26, 2012, African American high school student Tray von Martin was shot and killed while walking home from a convenience store at night. His shooter was acquitted, which brought concerns about Florida's controversial Stand Your Ground law into focus. This event galvanized a new generation of Florida youth.

They formed an organization called the Dream Defenders and held a month-long sit-in in the state Capitol to protest the acquittal and demand a special session of the legislature to reexamine the divisive law. Building on generations of activism, these new reformers are using familiar tactics such as sit-ins, voter registration drives, and picket protests. Like the activists in the 1950s and '60s, they have a philosophy of nonviolent direct action and embrace diversity in an effort to create unity among marginalized groups. Modern issues include voting rights, an end to high incarceration rates of blacks, educational opportunities, and economic justice that ensures a living wage for all.

Many older activists have new hope for the future as a younger generation builds on their achievements. Looking at the long history of civil rights in Florida, the work continues as the state embraces its rich and diverse future.

# THE DREAM CONTINUES

The courage and sacrifice of civil rights leaders and foot soldiers of the 1950s and '60s fueled one of the most successful social movements in history. Unified and highly organized, these individuals built on the legacy of generations of African Americans striving for the full promise of citizenship.

Be inspired by the civil rights leaders you learned about in this exhibit. Brave Floridians risked their jobs, homes, and lives to improve the world and inspire others to challenge discrimination and inequality. The protests throughout Florida, the Tallahassee bus boycott, and the demonstrations in St. Augustine that quickened the passage of the Civil Rights Act, helped shape the national movement and move the country forward.

Modern activism continues to use similar tactics pioneered by previous generations, such as voter registration drives, nonviolent protests, and education. Challenging injustice always has been an important part of American society. All citizens have the responsibility to study and understand the past, so that we may actively participate in protecting and expanding freedom today. Across the world, activists have used America's civil rights movement as an example of how to overcome injustice and gain basic human rights.