

Leaders and Strategies

READING FOCUS

- How did early groups lay the groundwork for the civil rights movement?
- What was the philosophy of non-violence?
- How did SNCC give students a voice in the civil rights movement?

MAIN IDEA

The civil rights movement of the 1960s consisted of many separate groups and leaders. While the methods used by these groups differed, they shared the same goal of securing equal rights for all Americans.

KEY TERMS

interracial
 Congress of Racial Equality (CORE)
 Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC)
 nonviolent protest
 Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC)

TAKING NOTES

As you read, complete the chart below listing the prominent civil rights organizations in the early 1960s and their goals and characteristics.

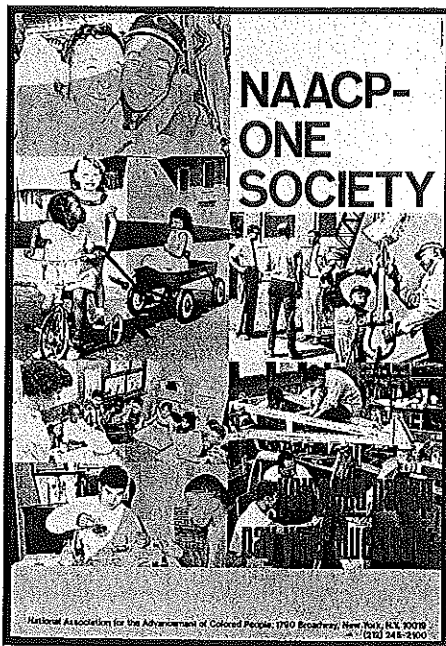
Civil Rights Group	Features
NAACP	Focused on gaining legal equality. Appealed mainly to middle- and upper-class African Americans.
National Urban League	
CORE	
SCLC	
SNCC	

Setting the Scene

VIEWING HISTORY The NAACP was one of many civil rights groups committed to improving the status of African Americans.

Analyzing Visual Information

(a) How are the images in this poster intended to rally support for the NAACP? (b) What does the poster tell you about the goals of this organization?



“It really hit me when I was fifteen years old, when I heard about Martin Luther King, Jr., and the Montgomery bus boycott. Black people were walking the streets for more than a year rather than riding segregated buses. To me it was like a great sense of hope, a light. . . . That more than any other event was the turning point for me, I think. It gave me a way out.

When I graduated from high school, I enrolled at the American Baptist Theological Seminary in Nashville. . . . While I was there I began attending these workshops, studying the philosophy and discipline of nonviolence: the life and times of Gandhi, the works of Henry Thoreau, and the philosophy of civil disobedience. And we began to think about how we could apply these lessons to the problem of segregation.”

—John Lewis

In the 1960s, many young people, like John Lewis, became active in the struggle for civil rights. They knew that battling segregation and gaining civil rights would require organization and strong commitment.

Laying the Groundwork

The civil rights movement of the 1950s and 1960s was a grass-roots effort of ordinary citizens determined to end racial injustice in the United States. Although no central organization directed the movement, several major groups formed to share information and coordinate civil rights activities. Each of these groups had its own priorities, strategies, and ways of operating, but they all helped to focus the energies of thousands of Americans committed to securing civil rights for all citizens.

NAACP Behind the case of *Brown v. Board of Education* was the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP),

one of the oldest civil rights organizations in the United States. The group formed in 1909 as an **interracial** organization—one with both African Americans and white Americans as members.

W.E.B. Du Bois, a prominent African American scholar, was a founding member. Du Bois had been the first African American to receive a doctoral degree from Harvard University. He served as the NAACP's director of publicity and research and also edited the NAACP magazine, *Crisis*. Du Bois summarized the NAACP's goals this way:

“The main object of this association is to secure for colored people, and particularly for Americans of Negro descent, free and equal participation in the democracy of modern culture. This means the clearing away of obstructions to such participation . . . and it means also the making of a world democracy in which all men may participate.”

—W.E.B. Du Bois

From the start, the NAACP focused on challenging the laws that prevented African Americans from exercising their full rights as citizens. The NAACP worked to secure full legal equality for all Americans and to remove barriers that kept them from voting.

In the 1920s and 1930s, lynching was still a threat to African Americans, particularly in the South. Working to end such violence, the NAACP succeeded in getting two anti-lynching bills passed by the House of Representatives in the 1930s. Southern leaders in the Senate prevented the bills from becoming law, but the NAACP continued to keep the issue of lynching in the public eye.

The NAACP was more successful in its lawsuits that challenged segregation laws. In the 1920s and 1930s, it won a number of legal battles in the areas of housing and education.

The NAACP appealed mainly to educated, middle- and upper-class African Americans and some liberal white Americans. Critics charged that it was out of touch with the basic issues of economic survival faced by many poorer African Americans.

National Urban League One organization that took on economic issues was the National Urban League, founded in 1911. The League sought to assist people moving to major American cities. It helped African Americans moving out of the South find homes and jobs and ensured that they received fair treatment at work. League workers also looked for migrant families on ship docks and at train stations and found safe, clean apartments for them. They also insisted that factory owners and union leaders allow African American workers the opportunity to learn the skills that could lead to better jobs.

CORE Founded by pacifists in 1942, the **Congress of Racial Equality (CORE)** was dedicated to bringing about change through peaceful confrontation. It too was interracial, with both African American and white members. During World War II, CORE organized demonstrations against segregation in cities including Baltimore, Chicago, Denver, and Detroit.

In the years after World War II, CORE director James Farmer worked without pay in order to keep the organization alive. The growing interest in civil rights in the 1950s gave him a new base of support and allowed him to

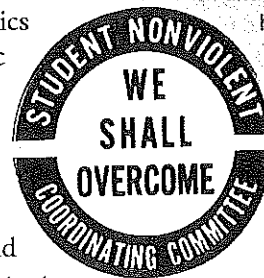
Focus on CULTURE

“We Shall Overcome” The anthem of the civil rights movement, which brought together activists from all backgrounds, similarly arose through a combination of diverse efforts. “We Shall Overcome” has its roots in an African American spiritual from the days of slavery and from a gospel song called “I’ll Overcome Someday,” by Minister Charles Albert Tindley.

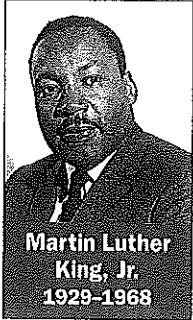
In 1945, tobacco strikers in South Carolina adopted the song, which had been passed by oral tradition down through the generations. The song later reached white folk singers Pete Seeger and Guy Carawan, who changed the lyrics and altered the melody. They renamed the song “We Shall Overcome,” and began teaching it to young activists. The song spread quickly across the nation, unifying all those fighting for civil rights. The successful folk group Peter, Paul, and Mary made the song popular to audiences across the country.

“We Shall Overcome” soon became not only a symbol of the movement, but also a source of pride and determination. An SCLC leader remarked:

“You really have to experience it to understand the kind of power it has for us. When you get through singing it, you could walk over a bed of hot coals, and you wouldn't even feel it!”



BIOGRAPHY



Martin Luther King, Jr.
1929–1968

Born in Atlanta, Georgia, in 1929, King grew up amid all the symbols of southern segregation—separate schools, stores, churches, and public places. Although he had white playmates as a child, those social ties ended when he reached school age.

King's father, Martin Luther King, Sr., and his grandfather were both prominent and respected Baptist preachers. He was raised with a sense of personal pride and dignity that went beyond the limitations of segregation.

Even in high school, young Martin was an inspiring and eloquent public speaker. Graduating early from high school, he went to Morehouse College in Atlanta. He earned a divinity degree at Crozer Theological Seminary in Pennsylvania, and then a doctorate in theology at Boston University in 1955. There he met and married Coretta Scott.

King's opponents attacked him physically and verbally, and he often went to jail for his beliefs. Death threats were frequent. As King had sometimes predicted, he did not live to see the success of the movement. He was assassinated in Memphis, Tennessee, in April 1968, at the age of 39. King's accused killer, a white southerner named James Earl Ray, was convicted in 1969 and sentenced to 99 years in prison.

turn CORE into a national organization, one that would play a major role in the confrontations that lay ahead.

The Philosophy of Nonviolence

Growing opposition to the gains made by African Americans through the *Brown* decision and the Montgomery bus boycott resulted in increasing violence and hostility toward African Americans. Even so, rising new leaders such as Martin Luther King, Jr., preached a philosophy of nonviolence. They asked anyone involved in the fight for civil rights not to retaliate with violence out of fear or hate.

The SCLC In 1957, Martin Luther King, Jr., and other African American clergymen began a new and significant civil rights organization, the **Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC)**. SCLC advocated the practice of **nonviolent protest**, a peaceful way of protesting against restrictive racial policies. Nonviolent protesters do not resist even when attacked by opponents. In its first official statement, SCLC set out this principle:

“To understand that nonviolence is not a symbol of weakness or cowardice, but as Jesus demonstrated, nonviolent resistance transforms weakness into strength and breeds courage in the face of danger.”

—SCLC statement

SCLC shifted the focus of the civil rights movement to the South. Earlier organizations had been dominated by northerners. Now southern African American church leaders moved into the forefront of the struggle for equal rights. Among them, Martin Luther King, Jr., became a national figure. (See the American Biography on this page.)

Dr. King Leads the Way When the Montgomery bus boycott began, Martin Luther King, Jr., was a young Baptist preacher. Within a few years he would become one of the most loved and admired—and also one of the most hated—people in the United States. King became not only a leader in the African American civil rights movement but also a symbol of nonviolent protest for the entire world.

As he became more and more involved in the civil rights movement, King was influenced by the beliefs of Mohandas K. Gandhi. Gandhi had been a leader in India's long struggle to gain independence from Great Britain, an effort that finally succeeded in 1947. Gandhi preached a philosophy of nonviolence as the only way to achieve victory against much stronger foes. Those who fight for justice must peacefully refuse to obey unjust laws, Gandhi taught. They must remain nonviolent, regardless of the violent reactions such peaceful resistance might provoke—a tactic that requires tremendous discipline and courage.

The philosophy of protest advocated by King had other sources as well. American author Henry David Thoreau had been an advocate of civil disobedience in the mid-1800s. Thoreau, who opposed the 1846 war with Mexico, refused to pay his taxes, and as a result, was jailed. He then wrote about this experience and the principles behind his actions in his famous essay “Civil Disobedience.”

As the Montgomery boycott ended and boycotters prepared to ride the newly integrated buses, King began training volunteers for what they might expect in the months ahead. Films, songs, and skits showed Gandhi's activities

and demonstrated the success of passive resistance in India. Bus riders were advised to follow 17 rules for maintaining a nonviolent approach in case they encountered confrontations on the buses as they traveled through the South. These rules included the following:

“6 Pray for guidance and commit yourself to complete nonviolence in word and action as you enter the bus. . . . Be loving enough to absorb evil and understanding enough to turn an enemy into a friend. . . . If cursed, do not curse back. If pushed, do not push back. If struck, do not strike back, but evidence love and good will at all times. . . . If another person is being molested, do not arise to go to his defense, but pray for the oppressor and use moral and spiritual force to carry on the struggle for justice. . . .”

—Leaflet distributed throughout the city



VIEWING HISTORY Police arrested SNCC member Eddie Brown at a 1962 protest rally in Albany, Georgia. **Analyzing Visual Information** How do Brown's actions reflect the philosophy of nonviolent protest?

As a result of his role in the Montgomery boycott, King gained national prominence. He went on to play a key role in almost every major civil rights event. His work earned him the Nobel peace prize in 1964.

A New Voice for Students

Nonviolent protest was a practical strategy in the civil rights struggle. It also represented a moral philosophy. “To accept passively an unjust system is to cooperate with that system; thereby the oppressed become as evil as the oppressor,” King said. “Noncooperation with evil is as much a moral obligation as is cooperation with good.”

The Formation of SNCC A new, student organization conceived by the SCLC took a somewhat different approach. The **Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee**, usually known as **SNCC** (pronounced “snick”), began in 1960 at a meeting in Raleigh, North Carolina, for students active in the struggle. SCLC executive director Ella Baker thought that the NAACP and SCLC were not keeping up with the demands of young African Americans. She wanted to give them a way to play an even greater role in the civil rights movement.

Nearly 200 students showed up for the first SNCC meeting. Most came from southern communities, but some northerners attended as well. Baker delivered the opening address. “The younger generation is challenging you and me,” she told the adults present. “They are asking us to forget our laziness and doubt and fear, and follow our dedication to the truth to the bitter end.”

Martin Luther King, Jr., spoke next to the young audience, calling the civil rights movement “a revolt against the apathy and complacency of adults in the Negro community. . . .” At the end of the meeting, the participants organized a temporary coordinating committee.

A month later, student leaders met with Baker and other SCLC and CORE leaders and voted to maintain their independence from other civil rights groups. By the end of the year, the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee was a permanent and separate organization. It was interracial at first, though that changed in later years.

READING CHECK

What led to the formation of SNCC?



VIEWING HISTORY Robert Moses helped train SNCC volunteers in Ohio in 1964. **Drawing Conclusions** Why was Bob Moses well suited to be a leader of SNCC?

SNCC filled its own niche in the American civil rights movement. The focus of the civil rights movement shifted away from church leaders alone and gave young activists a chance to make decisions about priorities and tactics. SNCC also sought more immediate change, as opposed to the gradual change advocated by most of the older organizations.

Robert Moses One of SNCC's most influential leaders was Robert Moses, a Harvard graduate student and a mathematics teacher in Harlem. As the civil rights movement developed, he wanted to be involved. He first went to work for SNCC in Atlanta, and later headed for Mississippi to recruit black and white volunteers to help rural blacks register to vote.

While Martin Luther King, Jr., spoke with eloquence and passion, Moses was more soft-spoken. He took time to gather his thoughts, and then he spoke slowly. Todd Gitlin, a white student-activist leader, later noted that

Moses was loved and trusted "precisely because he seemed humble, ordinary, accessible." Gitlin went on to describe Moses's style of oratory:

"He liked to make his points with his hand, starting with palm down-turned, then opening his hand outward toward his audience, as if delivering the point for inspection, nothing up his sleeve. The words seemed to be extruded [thrust forth], with difficulty, out of his depths. What he said seemed earned. . . . To teach his unimportance, he was wont [accustomed] to crouch in the corner or speak from the back of the room, hoping to hear the popular voice reveal itself."

—Todd Gitlin

With fresh new ideas and strong leaders like Bob Moses, SNCC became a strong and vital organization for students wanting to take part in the civil rights movement. As the struggle intensified, SNCC became a powerful force, and many students found that they would risk almost anything for their beliefs.

Section

2

Assessment

READING COMPREHENSION

1. What functions did the National Urban League and CORE serve for African Americans?
2. What was Dr. King's approach to civil rights?
3. What role did SNCC play in the movement?
4. Why was Bob Moses an effective leader?

CRITICAL THINKING AND WRITING

5. **Determining Relevance** What do you think are some of the strengths and weaknesses of nonviolent protest as a means to bring about social change?
6. **Writing a List** As a student in the 1960s, you have been asked to help organize a local chapter of SNCC. Write an agenda for organizing such a group, listing strategies you would use to recruit members and to work for change.



Take It to the NET

Activity: Yesterday and Today
Select one of the civil rights organizations discussed in this section and research its goals and strategies in the present day. Create a chart comparing this group's historic actions to its actions today. Use the links provided in the *America: Pathways to the Present* area of the following Web site for help in completing this activity.
www.plschool.com