

# The Struggle Intensifies

## READING FOCUS

- What were the goals of sit-ins and Freedom Rides?
- What was the reaction to James Meredith's integration at the University of Mississippi?
- How did the events in Birmingham, Alabama, affect the nation's attitudes toward the civil rights movement?

## MAIN IDEA

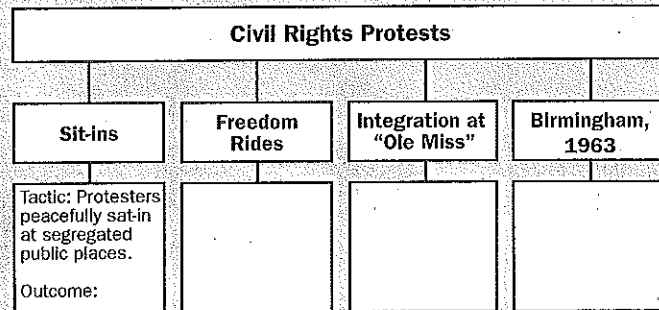
The tactics of nonviolent protest, including sit-ins and boycotts, challenged segregation and brought change, but also generated violent confrontations.

## KEY TERMS

sit-in  
Freedom Ride

## TAKING NOTES

Copy this flowchart. As you read, fill in the boxes with the tactics and outcomes of the civil rights protests mentioned in this section.



**Setting the Scene** As a child in the rural Mississippi town of Centreville, Anne Moody grew up wondering what "the white folks' secret" was. "Their homes were large and beautiful with indoor toilets and every other convenience that I knew of at the time," she observed. "Every house I had ever lived in was a one- or two-room shack with an outdoor toilet." Moody was horrified when 14-year-old Emmett Till, visiting from Chicago, was killed in Mississippi supposedly because he had whistled at a white woman.

While in college, Moody became involved in the civil rights movement. She joined the NAACP and also worked with CORE and SNCC. She took part in the first sit-ins in Jackson, Mississippi, in 1963. Like so many other students in the 1960s, Moody was jailed for taking part in civil rights demonstrations.

Worse was the reaction from her family at home. Her mother, afraid for the lives of her relatives, begged Moody to end her involvement with the civil rights movement. The local sheriff had warned that Moody should never return to her hometown. Moody's brother had been beaten up and almost lynched by a group of white boys. Her sister angrily told her that her activism was threatening the life of every African American in Centreville.

Against all that resistance, Moody persevered. She participated in demonstrations, helped force the desegregation of local facilities, and remained determined to do everything she could to make the South a better place for African Americans. But it was never easy, and the gains came at tremendous personal cost. Like many other Americans committed to changing society through nonviolent means, Moody learned that challenging white supremacy often provoked an ugly and violent reaction.

## Sit-ins Challenge Segregation

As you read in an earlier chapter, the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE) created the **sit-in** in 1943 to desegregate the Jack Spratt Coffee House in Chicago. In this technique, a group of CORE members simply sat down at a segregated lunch counter or other public place. If they were refused service at first, they simply stayed where they were.

Anne Moody joined a SNCC voter registration drive during her first year at Tougaloo College. She said of her fellow SNCC workers, "I had never known people so willing and determined to help others."



**VIEWING HISTORY** Signs like the one below were clear indications of how institutionalized segregation was in the South. At right, John Salter, Jr., Joan Trumpauer, and Anne Moody (left to right) held a sit-in in at a Jackson, Mississippi, lunch counter in May 1963. A hostile crowd registered their response by mocking and pouring food on the three activists.

**Synthesizing Information** Why was the sit-in often a successful tactic?



## CITY CAFE COLORED ENTRANCE



This tactic was a popular form of protest in the early 1960s. It often worked because it forced business owners to decide between serving the protesters or risking a disruption and loss of business. In some places, sit-ins brought strong reactions. John Lewis, a SNCC activist, participated in sit-ins in Nashville, Tennessee, in the 1960s. He remembered the experience:

*“It was a Woolworth in the heart of the downtown area, and we occupied every seat at the lunch counter, every seat in the restaurant. . . . A group of young white men came in and they started pulling and beating primarily the young women. They put lighted cigarettes down their backs, in their hair, and they were really beating people. In a short time police officials came in and placed all of us under arrest, and not a single member of the white group, the people that were opposing our sit-in, was arrested.”*

—John Lewis

### READING CHECK

What often happened to those who participated in sit-ins?

Soon, thousands of students were involved in the sit-in campaign, which gained the support of SCLC. Martin Luther King, Jr., told students that arrest was a “badge of honor.” By the end of 1960, some 70,000 students had participated in sit-ins, and 3,600 had served time in jail. The protests began a process of change that could not be stopped.

## The Freedom Rides

In *Boynton v. Virginia* (1960), the Supreme Court expanded its earlier ban on segregation on interstate buses. As a result, bus station waiting rooms and restaurants that served interstate travelers could not be segregated either.

In 1961, CORE, with aid from SNCC, organized and carried out the **Freedom Rides**. They were designed to test whether southern states would obey the Supreme Court ruling and allow African Americans to exercise the rights newly granted to them.

**Violence Greets the Riders** The first Freedom Ride departed Washington, D.C., on May 4, 1961. Thirteen freedom riders, both African Americans and

white Americans, boarded two interstate buses heading south. (See the map of the route below.) At first the group encountered only minor conflicts. In Atlanta the two buses split up and headed for the Deep South. There the trip turned dangerous.

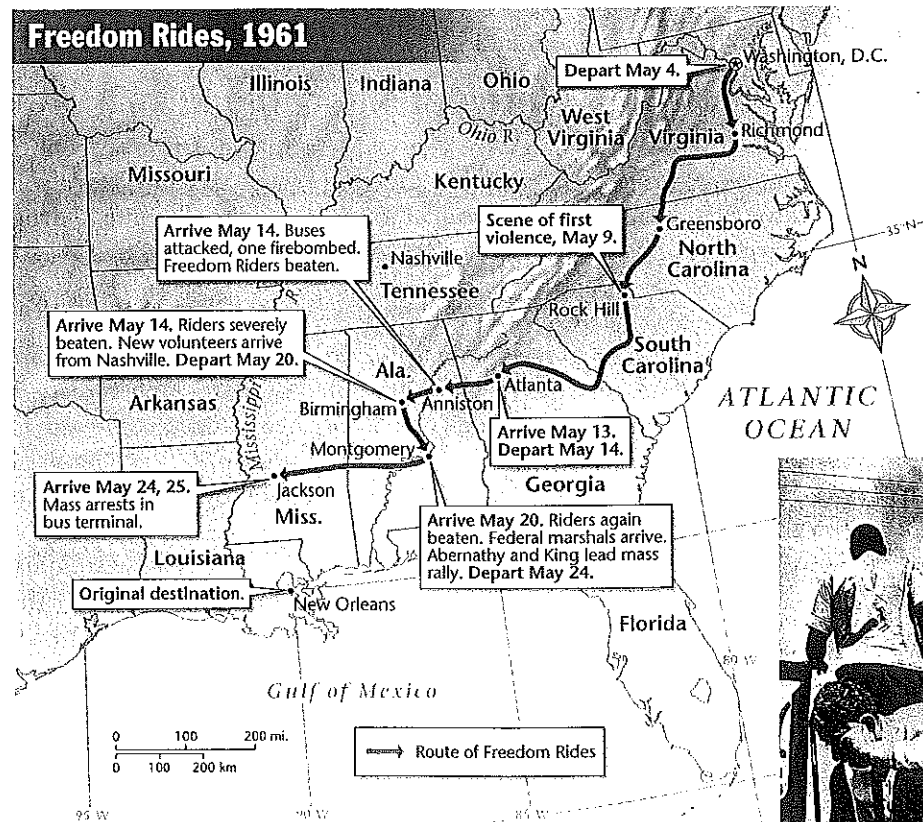
In Anniston, Alabama, a heavily armed white mob met the first bus at the terminal. The bus attempted to leave. CORE director James Farmer described what happened next:

“Before the bus pulled out, however, members of the mob took their sharp instruments and slashed tires. The bus got to the outskirts of Anniston and the tires blew out and the bus ground to a halt. Members of the mob had boarded cars and followed the bus, and now with the disabled bus standing there, the members of the mob surrounded it, held the door closed, and a member of the mob threw a firebomb into the bus, breaking a window to do so. Incidentally, there were some local policemen mingling with the mob, fraternizing with them while this was going on.”

—James Farmer

The riders escaped before the bus burst into flames, but many were beaten by the mob as they stumbled out of the vehicle, choking on the smoke. They had anticipated trouble, since they meant to provoke a confrontation. The level of violence, however, took them by surprise.

As a result of the savage response, Farmer considered calling off the project. SNCC leaders, though, begged to go on. Farmer warned, “You know that may be suicide.” Student activist Diane Nash replied, “If we let them stop us



**MAP SKILLS** The Freedom Riders left Washington, D.C., for New Orleans, Louisiana, to test southern compliance with desegregation laws. The bus below was firebombed by white men in Anniston, Alabama, who then beat the fleeing activists. Local hospitals refused to treat the wounded riders. **Movement** (a) Through how many states did they pass? (b) What kinds of opposition did they face?



## Major Civil Rights Protests, 1954–1965

Year	Event and Outcome
1954	<b>Brown v. Board of Education</b> Supreme Court ruled against the “separate but equal” doctrine and ordered the desegregation of all public schools. Violent protests in southern states followed.
1955–1956	<b>Montgomery Bus Boycott</b> Bus company desegregated its buses. Martin Luther King, Jr. emerged as an important civil rights leader.
1960s	<b>Sit-ins</b> Peaceful actions sparked violent reactions and many protesters were jailed. The tactic gained momentum for the civil rights movement.
1961	<b>Freedom Rides</b> Attempts to desegregate interstate travel led to mob violence. The Interstate Commerce Commission banned segregation in interstate transportation.
1962	<b>James Meredith Enrolls at the University of Mississippi</b> The Supreme Court upheld Meredith’s right to enter the all-white institution. Violence erupts on the campus.
1963	<b>Protest Marches and Boycotts in Birmingham, Alabama</b> Violence against peaceful demonstrators shocked the nation. Under pressure, Birmingham desegregated public facilities.
1963	<b>March on Washington</b> More than 200,000 people demonstrated in an impressive display of support for civil rights.
1965	<b>Selma March</b> State troopers attacked marchers. President Johnson used federal force to protect the route from Selma to Montgomery, and thousands joined the march, which was designed to call attention to the issue of voting rights.

### INTERPRETING CHARTS

The visibility of early civil rights protests led to advances in civil rights on both the local and national level. **Making Comparisons** What do most of these protests have in common? How do they differ?

Air Force veteran, fought a personal battle for equal rights. Meredith was a student at Jackson State College, but he wanted to transfer to the all-white University of Mississippi, known as “Ole Miss.” After being rejected, Meredith got legal help from the NAACP. It filed a lawsuit claiming that Meredith’s application was turned down on racial grounds.

In the summer of 1962, the Supreme Court upheld Meredith’s claim. Mississippi Governor Ross Barnett, however, declared that Meredith could not enroll, regardless of what the Court said. Barnett personally blocked the way to the admissions office.

The issue became a standoff between the governor and the Justice Department. President Kennedy sent federal marshals to accompany Meredith to the campus. Crowds of angry white protesters, who had gathered around campus, destroyed their vehicles. As violence erupted on campus, tear gas covered the grounds. Two bystanders were killed and hundreds of people hurt. Finally, President Kennedy sent army troops to restore order, but federal marshals continued to escort Meredith to class. A month later, Meredith wrote an article for the *Saturday Evening Post* describing his experiences:

“It hasn’t been all bad. Many students have spoken to me very pleasantly. They have stopped banging doors and throwing bottles into my

with violence, the movement is dead! . . . Your troops have been badly battered. Let us pick up the baton and run with it.”

**National Reactions** Photographs of the smoldering bus in Anniston horrified the country. Burke Marshall, the Assistant Attorney General who headed the Justice Department’s Civil Rights Division, was astonished “that people—presumably otherwise sane, sensible, rational—would have this kind of reaction simply to where people were sitting on a bus.”

The violence intensified in Birmingham and Montgomery. Upon their arrival in Jackson, Mississippi, the riders met no mobs but were arrested immediately. New volunteers arrived to replace them and were also arrested. This first Freedom Ride died out in Jackson, but about 300 Freedom Riders continued the protest throughout that summer. Attorney General Robert Kennedy had at first been reluctant to lend federal support to the protest, but now he sent federal marshals to protect the Freedom Riders.

Kennedy then took further measures. He pressured the Interstate Commerce Commission to issue a ruling that prohibited segregation in all interstate transportation—trains, planes, and buses. The Justice Department sued local communities that did not comply.

### Integration at “Ole Miss”

In 1961, James Meredith, an African American



dormitory now. One fellow from my home town sat down at my table in the cafeteria. 'If you're here to get an education, I'm for you,' he said. 'If you're here to cause trouble, I'm against you.' That seemed fair enough to me."

—James Meredith, 1962

## Clash in Birmingham

Elsewhere, civil rights leaders looked for chances to protest segregation nonviolently. The Reverend Fred Shuttlesworth, head of the Alabama Christian Movement for Human Rights, in Birmingham, invited Martin Luther King, Jr., and the SCLC to visit the city in April 1963. Birmingham's population was 40 percent African American, but King called it "the most segregated city in America." Victory there could be a model for resistance.

King and Shuttlesworth planned boycotts of downtown stores and attempts to integrate local churches. Business leaders, fearing disruptions and lost sales, tried to negotiate with Shuttlesworth to call off the plan, without success.

When reporters wanted to know how long King planned to stay, he drew on a biblical story and told them he would remain until "Pharaoh lets God's people go." Birmingham police commissioner Eugene "Bull" Connor, a determined segregationist, replied, "I got plenty of room in the jail."

**From Birmingham Jail** The campaign began nonviolently with protest marches and sit-ins. City officials declared that the marches violated a regulation prohibiting parades without a permit. They obtained a court injunction, which directed the protesters to cease demonstrations. King decided to disobey the court orders and set an example of civil disobedience. Connor then arrested King and other demonstrators. When a group of white clergy criticized the campaign as an ill-timed threat to law and order by an "outsider," King responded from his cell. In his "Letter from Birmingham Jail," he defended his tactics and his timing:

*"Frankly, I have yet to engage in a direct-action campaign that was 'well timed' in the view of those who have not suffered unduly from the disease of segregation. For years now I have heard the word 'Wait!' It*



**VIEWING HISTORY** President Kennedy supported the Supreme Court's decision to allow James Meredith to enroll at the University of Mississippi. **Synthesizing Information** How did the various branches and levels of government interact over this issue?

## COMPARING PRIMARY SOURCES

### Integrating Schools

In parts of the Deep South, the battle for equal rights continued to be fought at the nation's schoolhouse doors each September, long after the Supreme Court ordered schools to desegregate in 1954.

**Analyzing Viewpoints** How do these two speeches, made about a month apart, reflect the divisions in the country?

#### For School Integration

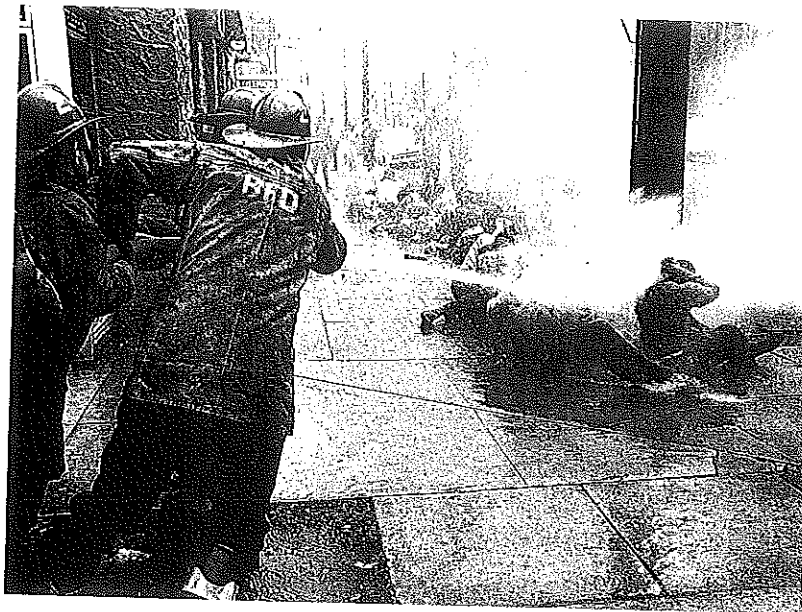
"Nearly nine years have elapsed since the Supreme Court ruled that state laws requiring or permitting segregated schools violate the Constitution. . . . Since that time it has become increasingly clear that neither violence nor legalistic measures will be tolerated as a means of thwarting court-ordered desegregation."

—President Kennedy, message to Congress  
February 28, 1963

#### Against School Integration

"I draw the line in the dust and toss the gauntlet before the feet of tyranny and I say segregation now, segregation tomorrow, segregation forever."

—Alabama Governor George Wallace,  
Inaugural Address, January 14, 1963



**VIEWING HISTORY** Police in Birmingham, Alabama, used high-powered hoses to break up civil rights marches in 1963. Television coverage of this brutal treatment of peaceful demonstrators prompted widespread sympathy for the movement. **Identifying Central Issues** What was the outcome of the Birmingham crisis?

marchers' arms and legs. When protesters fell to the ground, policemen beat them with clubs and took them off to jail.

**The Nation Watches** Television cameras brought the scenes of violence to people across the country. Even those unsympathetic to the civil rights movement were appalled. As reporter Eric Sevareid observed, "A newspaper or television picture of a snarling police dog set upon a human being is recorded in the permanent photo-electric file of every human brain."

In the end, the protesters won. A compromise arranged by Assistant Attorney General Burke Marshall led to desegregation of city facilities and fairer hiring practices. An interracial committee was set up to aid communication.

The success of the Birmingham marches was just one example that proved how effective nonviolent protest could be. Sometimes the technique did not work, or worked only slowly. Nevertheless, nonviolent protest as a means to social change had earned itself a place of honor in the history of civil rights in the United States.

rings in the ear of every Negro with piercing familiarity. This 'Wait!' has almost always meant 'Never.'"

—"Letter from Birmingham Jail,"  
Martin Luther King, Jr., 1963

After more than a week, King was released on bail. Soon after, he made a difficult decision: to let young people join the campaign. Though dangerous, it would test the conscience of the Birmingham authorities and the nation.

As they marched with the adults, "Bull" Connor arrested more than 900 of the young people. Police used high-pressure fire hoses, which could tear the bark from trees, on the demonstrators. They also brought out trained police dogs that attacked

## Section

# 3

## Assessment

### READING COMPREHENSION

1. What reaction did **sit-ins** provoke?
2. How did the violent response to the **Freedom Rides** and the Birmingham marches aid the civil rights movement?
3. Compare the government's response to the controversy at "Ole Miss" with its response to the Little Rock controversy in 1957.
4. What was the aim of the Birmingham campaign?

### CRITICAL THINKING AND WRITING

5. **Identifying Alternatives** If student protesters had not chosen nonviolent protest, what other peaceful options might they have used?
6. **Writing to Persuade** In May 1961, an article in the *New York Times* urged the Freedom Riders to call off their plans, saying, "Non-violence that deliberately provokes violence is a logical contradiction." Write two paragraphs explaining why you agree or disagree with this opinion.



### Take It to the NET

**Activity: Virtual Field Trip** Visit the National Civil Rights Museum online and tour the exhibits it has provided. Select the exhibit in the museum that interests you the most and summarize what you see in that exhibit in a brief essay. Use the links provided in the *America: Pathways to the Present* area of the following Web site for help in completing this activity.  
[www.phschool.com](http://www.phschool.com)