

Another battle front

Fear, grief, sorrow: these are the overriding emotions of war. For men, women, and children confined to the home front between 1914 and 1918, exhilarating surges of patriotic energies and the evaporation of many restraints were fleeting thrills when set against the loss of loved ones. Children woke to find that their fathers had left for distant battlefields while they slept. Three hundred thousand never saw their fathers again; 160,000 wives received the dreaded telegram informing them that their husbands had been killed. Countless others discovered the meaning of suffering.

When Phyllis Kelly first heard that her lover Eric Appleby had been seriously wounded, she immediately put pen to paper. "My own darling Englishman", she wrote from Dublin on October 28 1915, "I wonder why I'm writing this, which you may never see - oh God, perhaps even now you have gone far away from your Lady - I wonder when another telegram will come; this knowing nothing is terrible, I don't know what to do. I simply have sat and shivered with such an awful clutching fear at my heart ... Oh my love, my love, what shall I do - but I must be brave and believe all will be well - dear one, surely God won't take you from me now. It will be the end of everything that matters ... you are all the world and life to me." The letter was never posted: Eric was already dead.

From the declaration of war, the authorities realised that they had to act decisively. They passed the Defence of the Realm Act (Dora), which, after many amendments, gave the government unprecedented powers to intervene in people's lives. They were empowered to take over any factory or workshop. Curfews and censorship were imposed. Severe restrictions on movement were introduced. Discussing military matters in public became a serious offence. Almost anyone could be arrested for "causing alarm". In the interests of the work ethic, British summer time commenced, opening hours for pubs were cut, and beer was watered down. Women who were suspected of having venereal disease could be stopped by the police and subjected to a gynaecological examination. A woman with VD could be prosecuted for having sexual intercourse with a serviceman. It did not matter that he could have been her husband, and may have given her the disease in the first place.

Suspicion of outsiders was high. Dora and the Aliens Restriction Act severely curtailed the civil liberties of non-British-born subjects (even naturalised citizens who had resided in the UK for decades). They were required to register, obtain permits if they intended to travel more than five miles, and were prohibited from entering certain areas. More than 32,000 were held in internment camps or repatriated. Most notably after the sinking of the Lusitania by a German submarine in May 1915, anti-German sentiment erupted into riots in Liverpool, Manchester, Salford, Sheffield, Rotherham, Newcastle, South Wales, London and elsewhere.

In Liverpool, 200 businesses were destroyed. In London, of the 21 Metropolitan police districts, only two were free from riots. It was, as the Daily Record observed, "not an uplifting spectacle to see this country descending to trivial and hysterical methods of vengeance".

Freed from the masculine governance of fathers, husbands and brothers, women were accused of khaki fever. As Private GJ Dodd, a member of the British West Indian Regiment, enthused while on leave in Seaford (East Sussex): "Plenty of girls. They love the boys in khaki. They detest walking with civilians. They love the darkies!" The newly established Women Police Volunteers, Women Police Service and Women Patrol Committee did not share his enthusiasm. Female breadwinning was thought to have helped sponsor women's licentiousness and consumerism. Jobs in the civil service, factories, docklands and arsenals, tramways, Post Office and farms were feminised. In July 1914, 3.2 million women were employed in industry; this had jumped to 4.8 million by April 1918. Some 40% of these women were married (compared with only 14% prior to the war). Many encountered hostility from male workers who were worried about competition and the deskilling of their jobs. "Dilution", or the breaking down of complex jobs into simpler tasks, was introduced to solve the problem of the shortage of skilled male workers without threatening male wages.

Munitions work elicited particular anxieties.... Givers of life were being trained to take it. In the words of a woman writing for the magazine of a projectile factory: "the fact that I am using my life's energy to destroy human souls gets

on my nerves". She was proud that she was "doing what I can to bring this horrible affair to an end. But once the war is over, never in creation will I do the same thing again".

The effect of widening employment opportunities for women was ambiguous. On the one hand, women were admitted into industry under strict conditions, including the fact that they did not actually replace the men but were allowed to perform only certain tasks. Feminist lobbying for equal wages never succeeded: women were paid about half of what men earned. In munitions factories, they risked dying in explosions or suffering TNT poisoning. After the war was over, they were expected to return to traditional roles. The pervasive theme of feminine self-sacrifice meant that they lacked the economic and political power after the war to transform their world.

On the other hand, many women revelled in a new sense of purpose and emancipation. As Naomi Loughnan admitted in 1917, she was "sick of frivolling" and "wanted to do something big and hard, because of our boys and of England". Factories offered better conditions, higher wages, more interesting work and greater freedoms than domestic service had done. Female factory workers challenged the gender order: they were earning much more than previously (three times more in some cases), were able to demonstrate their ability to carry out skilled work in areas previously barred to them, and were allowed greater leeway in the way they comported themselves publicly.

The suffragettes (members of the Women's Social and Political Union, the more militant wing of the suffrage movement), who a few months before had been torching churches and cricket pavilions, became patriotic war workers. Although a sizeable minority of the more moderate members of the National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies ("suffragists") joined the peace movement, most also threw themselves into the war effort in an attempt to link their demands for citizenship with service during a national emergency.

By June 1917, a combination of admiration for women's war work, judicious lobbying by suffragists and debates about re-enfranchising men who were serving in the armed services abroad convinced parliament to pass the Representation of the People's Bill by 385 votes to 55. This gave the vote to an additional 5 million men and nearly 9 million women. Crucially, however, the vote was granted only to women over 30 years old who were householders, wives of householders, occupiers of property of an annual value of not less than £5, or university graduates. Ironically, the young women who had toiled in war industries or in the Land Army did not gain the vote on the same terms as their male counterparts until 1928.

The effect of the war on working-class standards of living was more encouraging. Civilians had a relatively low chance of being killed in enemy raids. Only 1,300 civilians were killed when Zeppelins rained bombs on London in 1915 and Gotha Giant bombers followed in 1917 (a single raid during the second world war would have resulted in a similar number of deaths). Full employment, rationing (which was introduced in the last year of the war), rent control, rising bacon imports and increased consumption of milk and eggs, and improved social provision meant that working-class families were better off. Indeed, on average working-class incomes doubled between 1914 and 1920 and, in the aftermath of war when price levels dropped, this war-enhanced wage level was successfully defended.

In contrast to the improved life expectancy of working-class men who had been old enough to evade war service, servicemen and servicewomen returning from the front-lines were physically devastated. Writing in 1917 about Brighton, pacifist Caroline Playne admitted to being full of "sickness and horror" at the "sights of hundreds of men on crutches going about in groups." More than 41,000 men had their limbs amputated during the war; 272,000 suffered injuries in the legs or arms that did not require amputation; 60,500 were wounded in the head or eyes; and 89,000 sustained other serious damage to their bodies.

The home front eventually welcomed back men and women whose war service abroad had left scars, both visible and invisible, which were often difficult to speak about. As Vera Brittain put it in her memoir, *Testament of Youth* (1933), the war had erected a "barrier of indescribable experience between men and the women they loved". Brittain's brother, fiancé and two close male friends were killed in the war, but she rightly observed that "the war kills other things besides physical life". Phyllis Kelly, who mourned the death of her beloved Eric, would have agreed.

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4. What about the impact on the Economy?

From the BBC Website

“The country was £900 million in debt to the US for war loans, which were to be repaid immediately. Britain's enviable worldwide investments were wiped out, its coal and cotton export markets had collapsed.”

This would be compounded by the need to pay war and widow pensions and to care for the wounded of WWI. Using all your reading and research write a summary of Britain at the start of our course in 1918 (maximum work count 500)

5. Our aim now is to get an overview of the rest of the period. Below are a number of events that happened in our period of study. They are not necessarily in chronological order. They are to do with politics, the economy and society. We will study each of them in our lessons. For now I would like you to research each – find out when it happened and **briefly (maximum of three sentences)** sum up each.

Representation of the People Act increases the electorate by 7 million – women over 30 receive the vote 1918- introduce more equality after war efforts
BBC established 18 th oct 1922- This was the first ever broadcast by the British Broadcasting Corporation, or BBC. It had a staff of just four, and its mission was to 'educate, inform and entertain'. entertainment to cheer people up in difficult times.
General Strike with 3,000,000 industrial workers on strike
Ramsay MacDonald becomes the first Labour PM
Over a million children were evacuated from towns and cities to the countryside.
Universal Suffrage - grants women the vote on same terms as men – aged over 21.
'National Government' coalition is formed to deal with the Great Depression.
Beatles released 'Love Me Do.
'Means Test' introduced for unemployment benefits as a money saving measure.
First Butlin's holiday camp opens at Skegness, Lincolnshire.
NHS Created
Butler's Education Act
British Nationality Act
Ruth Ellis hanged
First episode of <i>Coronation Street</i> was aired.
Nottingham and Notting Hill race riots
Holidays with Pay Act
<i>Lady Chatterley's Lover</i> trial allows publication of this 'pornographic' novel
Contraceptive pill goes on sale.
Profumo Scandal
Open University established
Murder (Abolition of the Death Penalty) Act

Sexual Offences Act legalises homosexual acts between men over the age of 21 in private in England and Wales.
Britain joins the European Economic Community (EEC)
School leaving age raised to 16
Margaret Thatcher becomes first female PM
The National Union of Miners start its yearlong strike.
Anti-poll tax riots in London in March.
Tony Blair becomes PM

Once you have summarised each event and understood the order, use this information to create a timeline. Reflect on how Britain has changed in this period. Consider:

- Have any of the events/dates surprised you – why?
- Reflecting back on Britain in 1918, where do you think there has been the greatest change?
- Reflecting back on Britain in 1918, where think there has been the least change?
- Has this task left you with questions about Britain in 1918-97?
- ***Bring those questions to our first lesson, I look forward to hearing them!*** 😊

Section 2: The USA 1955-92 – Conformity & Challenge

Welcome to the USA side of the Year 12 course!

USA History Tasks:

1. Create your own timeline of the US Presidents from Eisenhower to George Bush Senior. Include the dates they were in office, the parties they represented and see if you can find 3 interesting facts about each one. Try to learn them by heart!
 - Dwight D. Eisenhower 1953-1961
 - John F. Kennedy 1961-1963
 - Lyndon B. Johnson 1963- 1969
 - Richard M. Nixon 1969-1974
 - Gerald R. Ford 1974-1977
 - Jimmy Carter 1977-1981
 - Ronald Reagan 1981-1989
 - George Bush 1989-1993
2. Read the section ‘USA Introductory Reading’ below which introduces you to issues such as popular culture, civil rights, and women’s roles in 1950s US Society. Answer the ‘What do you think?’ questions at the end of each chapter.
3. Using your reading, create a thematic mindmap summarising US society at the start of our time period (so the 1950s). How would you characterise it socially, politically and economically?

4. If you would like to watch a film covering an aspect of the course we will be studying, you might want to consider watching *Selma*, which relates to the Civil Rights aspect of our course and is a really moving and informative watch. You might also enjoy *All the President's Men*, which is about the Watergate scandal.

Enjoy it!

USA Introductory Reading

(with thanks to Khan Academy)

The Post-War Boom & Popular Culture in the USA

- In the 1950s and 1960s, young Americans had more disposable income and enjoyed greater material comfort than their forebears, which allowed them to devote more time and money to leisure activities and the consumption of popular culture.
- **Rock and roll**, a new style of music which drew inspiration from African American blues music, embraced themes popular among teenagers, such as young love and rebellion against authority.
- In the 1950s, the relatively new technology of **television** began to compete with motion pictures as a major form of popular entertainment.

The postwar boom and popular culture

In the aftermath of [World War II](#), the United States emerged as the world's leading industrial power. Generous government support for education and home loans coupled with a booming economy meant that Americans in the postwar era had more discretionary income than ever before.

In the 1950s and 1960s, the bumper crop of children born after World War II, known collectively as the [baby boomers](#), grew into teenagers and young adults. As the largest single generation up until that point in American history, the baby boomers had a tremendous effect on popular culture thanks to their sheer numbers. Starting as early as the 1940s, savvy marketers identified the baby boomers as a target demographic and marketed products and entertainment geared to their needs and interests.

The baby boomers developed a greater generational consciousness than previous generations. They sought to define and redefine their identities in numerous ways. The music of the day, especially rock and roll, reflected their desire to rebel against adult authority. Other forms of 1950s popular culture, such as movies and television, sought to entertain, while reinforcing values such as religious faith, patriotism, and conformity to societal norms.

Rocking around the clock

In the late 1940s, some white country musicians began to experiment with the rhythms of the blues, a decades-old musical genre of rural southern black people. This experimentation led to the creation of a new musical form known as rockabilly; by the 1950s, rockabilly had developed into **rock and roll**.

Rock and roll music celebrated themes such as young love and freedom from the oppression of middle-class society. It quickly grew in favor among American teens during the 1950s, thanks largely to the efforts of disc jockey Alan Freed. Freed named and popularized rock and roll by playing it on the radio in Cleveland—where he also organized the first rock and roll concert—and later in New York.

The theme of rebellion against authority, present in many rock and roll songs, appealed to teens. In 1954, rock group Bill Haley and His Comets provided youth with an anthem for their rebellion with the song "Rock Around the Clock." The song, used in the 1955 movie *Blackboard Jungle* about a white teacher at a troubled inner-city high school, seemed to be calling for teens to declare their independence from adult control.

Haley illustrated how white artists could take musical motifs from African American musicians and achieve mainstream success. Teen heartthrob **Elvis Presley** rose to stardom doing the same. Thus, besides encouraging a feeling of youthful rebellion, rock and roll also began to tear down color barriers in popular culture, as white youths sought out African American musicians such as Chuck Berry and Little Richard.



Photo of Elvis Presley dancing in a promo shoot for the song Jailhouse Rock.

Rock musician Elvis Presley enthralled teens and scandalized adults with his suggestive lyrics and dance moves. Image credit: [Wikimedia Commons](#)

While youth had found an outlet for their feelings and concerns, their parents were much less enthused about rock and roll and the rebellion and sexuality it seemed to promote. Many regarded the music as a threat to American values. When Elvis Presley appeared on *The Ed Sullivan Show*, a popular television variety program, the camera deliberately focused on his torso and did not show his swiveling hips or legs shaking in time to the music.

Despite adults' dislike of the genre, or perhaps because of it, more than 68 percent of the music played on the radio in 1956 was rock and roll.

Hollywood on the defensive

At first, Hollywood encountered difficulties in adjusting to the post-World War II environment. Although domestic audiences reached a record high in 1946 and the war's end meant expanding international markets too, the groundwork for the eventual dismantling of the traditional "studio system" was laid in 1948 in a landmark decision by the US Supreme Court. Previously, film studios had owned their own movie theater chains in which they exhibited the films they produced; however, in *United States v. Paramount Pictures, Inc.*, this vertical integration of the industry—the complete control by one firm of the production, distribution, and exhibition of motion pictures—was deemed a violation of antitrust laws.

Hollywood also felt the strain of Cold War fears. The **House Un-American Activities Committee** hearings targeted suspected Communists in Hollywood. When Senator [Joseph McCarthy](#) called eleven “unfriendly witnesses” to testify before Congress about Communism in the film industry in October 1947, only playwright Bertolt Brecht answered questions. The other 10, who refused to testify, were cited for contempt of Congress on November 24. The next day, film executives declared that the so-called “Hollywood Ten” would no longer be employed in the industry until they had sworn they were not Communists.

Eventually, more than three hundred actors, screenwriters, directors, musicians, and other entertainment professionals were placed on the industry blacklist. Some never worked in Hollywood again; others directed films or wrote screenplays under assumed names.



A photograph shows Edward Dmytryk testifying before the House Committee on Un-American Activities.

One of the original Hollywood Ten, director Edward Dmytryk publicly announced he had once been a Communist and, in April 1951, answered questions and “named names” before the House Un-American Activities Committee. Image credit: [OpenStax College](#).

Hollywood reacted aggressively to these various challenges. Filmmakers tried new techniques, like CinemaScope and Cinerama, which allowed movies to be shown on large screens and in 3-D. Audiences were drawn to movies not because of gimmicks, however, but because of the stories they told. Dramas and romantic comedies continued to be popular fare for adults.

To appeal to teens, studios produced large numbers of horror films and movies starring music idols such as Elvis. Many films took espionage, a timely topic, as their subject matter, and science fiction hits such as *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*—about a small town whose inhabitants fall prey to space aliens—played on audience fears of both Communist invasion and nuclear technology.

The triumph of television

By far the greatest challenge to Hollywood, however, came from the relatively new medium of television. Although the technology had been developed in the late 1920s, through much of the 1940s only a fairly small, wealthy audience had access to it. As a result, programming had been limited.

With the post-World War II economic boom, however, all this changed. Where there had been only 178,000 televisions in homes in 1948, by 1955, over three-quarters of a million US households—about half of all homes—had television.



A photograph shows a man, a woman, three teenage girls, and a teenage boy sitting in a living room, watching a television.

An American family relaxes in front of their television set in 1958. Many gathered not only to watch the programming but also to eat dinner. The marketing of small folding tray tables and frozen “TV dinners” encouraged such behavior. Image credit: [OpenStax College](#).

Various types of programs were broadcast on the handful of major networks: situation comedies, variety programs, game shows, soap operas, talk shows, medical dramas, adventure series, cartoons, and police procedurals.

Many comedies presented an idealized image of white suburban family life: happy housewife mothers, wise fathers, and mischievous but not dangerously rebellious children were constants on shows like *Leave It to Beaver* and *Father Knows Best* in the late 1950s. These shows also reinforced certain perspectives on the values of individualism and family—values that came to be redefined as “American” in opposition to alleged Communist collectivism.

Westerns, which stressed unity in the face of danger and the ability to survive in hostile environments, were popular too. Programming designed specifically for children began to emerge with shows such as *Captain Kangaroo*, *Romper Room*, and *The Mickey Mouse Club* designed to appeal to members of the baby boom.

What do you think?

What can popular culture tell us about a historical time period? Are trends in music, film, and television important for understanding an era? Why or why not?

Why do you think rock and roll became so popular?

What messages about American values were promoted by popular culture in the 1950s?

Women in 1950s USA

Overview

- Though the 1950s was in many ways a period of conformity with traditional gender roles, it was also a decade of change, when discontent with the status quo was emerging.
- Popular culture and the mass media reinforced messages about traditional gender roles, consumer culture, and the Cold War ideal of **domesticity**, but the reality of women's lives did not always reflect these ideals.
- African American women faced particular difficulties in the pursuit of postwar material abundance and the "**American dream**." Popular portrayals of ideal femininity and home life ignored the lives of minority women and families.

Conformity and the 1950s

The 1950s is often viewed as a period of conformity, when both men and women observed strict gender roles and complied with society's expectations. After the devastation of the [Great Depression](#) and [World War II](#), many Americans sought to build a peaceful and prosperous society. However, even though certain gender roles and norms were socially enforced, the 1950s was not as conformist as is sometimes portrayed, and discontent with the status quo bubbled just beneath the surface of the placid peacetime society. Although women were expected to identify primarily as wives and mothers and to eschew work outside of the home, women continued to make up a significant proportion of the postwar labor force. Moreover, the 1950s witnessed significant changes in patterns of sexual behavior, which would ultimately lead to the "**sexual revolution**" of the 1960s.

Changing social trends following World War II

Demobilization at the end of World War II brought a great many changes. Millions of women who had joined the workforce during the war were displaced by returning soldiers. Messages in popular culture and the mass media encouraged these women to give up their jobs and return quietly to domestic life. Most women, however, wished to keep their jobs, and thus women made up approximately one-third of the peacetime labor force.¹

During the 1950s, marriage and homeownership rates skyrocketed, so there is no doubt that many Americans were content to pursue the "American dream." These trends were aided by [suburbanization](#) and the mass production of automobiles. Cars allowed Americans who lived in the suburbs to commute easily into urban areas for work. Cars not only changed work and housing patterns, but also facilitated the rise of new sexual norms. They provided young couples with a place to spend time together alone, away from the prying eyes of parents and other members of the community. This, in turn, led to a rise in premarital sex and birth rates. Thus, patterns of sexual behavior were changing even as the traditional ideal continued to insist upon marriage before sex.

Between 1946 and 1964, the largest generation of Americans, known as the [baby boomers](#), was born. This demographic trend in turn reinforced women's identities as wives and mothers. Despite societal norms that encouraged women to stay in the home and out of the workplace, approximately forty percent of women with young children, and at least half of women with older children, chose to remain in the work force.²

Cold War domesticity and popular culture

Gender roles in the 1950s were intimately connected to the Cold War. The term **nuclear family** emerged to describe and encourage the stability of the family as the essential building block of a strong and healthy society. In this view, a woman played a crucial role in waging the [Cold War](#), by keeping the family unit strong and intact. She could do this best, it was thought, by remaining at home to take care of her husband and children, and refusing to pursue a career. Thus was a link forged between traditional gender roles and national security.

Moreover, because the Cold War was also a competition between two very different economic systems, the virtues of capitalism were touted as proving the superiority of the United States over the Soviet Union. Capitalism revolved around the exchange of goods and services in the marketplace, and so identifying with consumer culture became a way of waging the Cold War. Women, traditionally expected to do most of the shopping for the household, were encouraged to identify as patriotic Americans by being savvy consumers.



Black-and-white photograph depicting actress Lucille Ball with husband and actor Desi Arnaz. Ball is holding a finger to her lips and opening her eyes very wide, and Arnaz is making an exaggerated pout. The photograph emphasizes their silly personalities.

Publicity photograph of Lucille Ball and Desi Arnaz. *I Love Lucy* both confirmed and undermined 1950s gender norms for white women, as Ball herself was a successful entertainer but her on-screen character repeatedly failed at working outside the home. Image courtesy [Wikimedia Commons](#).

The norms of consumer culture and domesticity were disseminated via new and popular forms of entertainment – not just the television, which became a fixture in middle-class American households during the 1950s, but also women’s magazines, popular psychology, and cinema.³³ Shows promoting the values of domesticity, like *Leave it to Beaver* and *Father Knows Best*, became especially popular. These shows portrayed the primary roles of women as wives and mothers. Lucille Ball, in *I Love Lucy*, inevitably met with disaster whenever she pursued job opportunities or interests that took her outside of the household. On the other hand, the fact that every episode revolved around Lucy’s attempts to pursue outside interests indicated her discontent with remaining at home.⁴⁴ Moreover, Lucille Ball, while playing the role of a hapless housewife on TV, was in reality a highly successful actress and producer, and thus challenged society’s expectations of women.

African American women in the 1950s

It is important to remember that the ideal of domesticity was primarily aimed at middle-class white women. African American women, as well as women of lower socioeconomic standing, were not portrayed in popular culture as wives and mothers; in fact, these women were hardly portrayed at all. Although African Americans have been hugely influential in popular culture throughout the twentieth century, the 1950s were a very “whitewashed” decade from the standpoint of the mass media.⁵⁵ Additionally, many African American women were forced by economic necessity to work outside of the home, and were thus excluded from the postwar ideal of domesticity.

What do you think?

Who benefited the most from the postwar surge in material abundance?

Were there signs of discontent with the status quo of the 1950s? What were they?

How did the imperatives of the Cold War shape gender roles and society’s expectations of women?

Introduction to the Civil Rights Movement

- The **Civil Rights Movement** is an umbrella term for the many varieties of activism that sought to secure full political, social, and economic rights for African Americans in the period from 1946 to 1968.
- Civil rights activism involved a diversity of approaches, from bringing lawsuits in court, to lobbying the federal government, to mass direct action, to black power.
- The efforts of civil rights activists resulted in many substantial victories, but also met with the fierce opposition of **white supremacists**.

The emergence of the Civil Rights Movement

The **Civil Rights Movement** did not suddenly appear out of nowhere in the twentieth century. Efforts to improve the quality of life for African Americans are as old as the United States. By the time of the American Revolution in the late eighteenth century, abolitionists were already working to eliminate racial injustice and bring an end to the

institution of slavery.¹ During the Civil War, President Abraham Lincoln issued the [Emancipation Proclamation](#), which was codified into law as the Thirteenth Amendment to the US Constitution. The Thirteenth Amendment officially outlawed slavery and went into effect in 1865.

After the Civil War, during the period known as Reconstruction, the passage of the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments established a legal foundation for the political equality of African Americans. Despite the abolition of slavery and legal gains for African Americans, racial segregation known as [Jim Crow](#) arose in the South.² **Jim Crow segregation** meant that Southern blacks would continue to live in conditions of poverty and inequality, with white supremacists denying them their hard-won political rights and freedoms.³



"Colored" waiting room at the Durham, North Carolina bus station, May 1940. Photograph by Jack Delano. [Image](#) courtesy Library of Congress.

The twentieth-century Civil Rights Movement emerged as a response to the unfulfilled promises of emancipation, partly as a result of the experiences of black soldiers in the Second World War. African Americans fought in a segregated military while being exposed to US propaganda emphasizing liberty, justice, and equality. After fighting in the name of democracy in other countries around the world, many [African American veterans](#) returned to the United States determined to achieve the rights and prerogatives of full citizenship.⁴

The Civil Rights Movement involved many different strategies and approaches, including legal action, nonviolent civil disobedience, and black militancy.

Civil rights and the Supreme Court

One of the earliest approaches was centered in the courts. Spearheaded by the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), this strategy initiated lawsuits to undermine the legal foundation of Jim Crow segregation in the South. The landmark [Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka](#) ruling held that separate

facilities were inherently unequal and thereby declared segregation in public education to be unconstitutional.⁵⁵

While the Supreme Court decision was a major victory for civil rights, white supremacists in the South pledged "[massive resistance](#)" to desegregation. In response to *Brown v. Board*, a group of Southern congressmen issued the "**Southern manifesto**," denouncing the court's decision and pledging to resist its enforcement. Ultimately, federal intervention was required to implement the ruling.

Nonviolent protest and civil disobedience

With authorities in the South actively resisting court orders to desegregate, some leaders of the Civil Rights Movement turned to direct action and nonviolent civil disobedience. Civil rights activists launched the [Montgomery Bus Boycott](#) in 1955, after Rosa Parks refused to vacate her seat on the bus for a white person. Martin Luther King, Jr. emerged as a leader of the boycott, which was the first mass direct action of the contemporary Civil Rights Movement and provided a template for the efforts of activists across the country.



Protestors carrying signs at the March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom, 1963. [Image](#) courtesy the National Archives.

Religious groups such as the **Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC)**, student organizations like the **Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC)**, and labor unions such as the **American Federation of Labor (AFL-CIO)**, all took part in massive protests to raise awareness and to accelerate the momentum for passage of federal civil rights legislation. The [March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom](#) was the largest civil rights protest in US history, and contributed to the successful implementation of the [Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965](#).

Mass direct action was highly effective, particularly due to widespread news media coverage of nonviolent protestors being harassed and physically beaten by law enforcement officers.

Black Power

Although comprehensive civil rights legislation represented a major victory for the Civil Rights Movement, the obstinacy of the white power structure in the South convinced some black activists that nonviolent civil disobedience was insufficient. Some African Americans were also concerned about the presence of so many northern middle-class whites in the movement. The **Freedom Summer of 1964**, during which northern white college students joined black activists in a voter registration drive in the South, was seen by some as an attempt to impose white leadership onto the Civil Rights Movement.

As a response to the continued power of whites, both within and outside of the movement, a more militant variety of civil rights activism emerged. One of its most influential proponents was Malcolm X, born Malcolm Little, who advocated black self-reliance, cultural pride, and self-defense in the face of racial violence. The approach that Malcolm X spearheaded came to be known as [Black Power](#), and it gained many adherents after the assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr. in 1968 at the hands of James Earl Ray, an escaped convict and white supremacist. **Stokely Carmichael** of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee and the Black Panther Party were among the most vocal proponents of Black Power after the assassination of **Malcolm X** in 1965.

The unfinished business of the Civil Rights Movement

The Civil Rights Movement racked up many notable victories, from the dismantling of Jim Crow segregation in the South, to the passage of federal legislation outlawing racial discrimination, to the widespread awareness of the African American cultural heritage and its unique contributions to the history of the United States. The 2008 election of the nation's first African American president, Barack Obama, was a striking indication of just how far the struggle for equality has come. Yet other indicators reveal that there is still much work to do.

The goal of full social, economic, and political equality still has not been reached. African Americans continue to be incarcerated at a rate greatly disproportionate to their percentage of the population. Black men are the most frequent victims of police brutality, while poverty rates among black children and families are higher than among either whites or Latinos. Stereotypical portrayals of African Americans remain prevalent in popular culture. Many black Americans suffer from poor access to social services and from systemic inequalities in institutions like public education. As successful as the Civil Rights Movement was, there still remains unfinished business in the struggle for full equality.

What do you think?

Why did the twentieth-century Civil Rights Movement emerge?

Which of the strategies employed by civil rights activists do you think was most effective?

What do you think was the most significant achievement of the Civil Rights Movement? Did civil rights activists achieve all of the goals of the movement?