Teaching with Primary Sources — MTSU
PRIMARY SOURCE SET
DAWN OF THE MODERN CIVIL RIGHTS MOVEMENT

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND
The modern Civil Rights Movement was propelled forward by three key events: the Supreme Court’s 1954 Brown v Board of Education decision, the lynching of Emmett Till in 1955, and the Montgomery Bus Boycott in 1956. Brown v. Board of Education opened the doors to legally end segregation, first in public schools and then in society at large. Implementation of this decision in Clinton, TN and Little Rock, AR would highlight the long, hard fight to come to actually implement the Supreme Court’s order. Images published in Jet magazine of fourteen-year-old Emmett Till after he was horrifically lynched in Money, MS and the later acquittal of his murderers would galvanize a generation of civil rights activists to stand up to racial violence. The arrest of Rosa Parks on Montgomery city bus for refusing to follow the city’s segregated seating rules served as the spark to launch a citywide boycott of the buses by the African American community. This boycott would last over a year and end with a court ruling ending segregation on the city buses in the city. The boycott would also elevate new leaders like Martin Luther King, Jr to the national stage. Between 1954 and the early 1960s, activism and organizing in communities across the nation, and especially in the South, would launch an all-out assault on segregation and Jim Crow all while building a national movement that would reshape the nation.

SUGGESTIONS FOR TEACHERS
The sources featured in this primary source set cover events from the Supreme Court’s Brown v. Board of Education decision to the integration of Ole Miss. To help your students understand these pivotal years in the long fight for civil rights, consider pulling sources from our previous primary sources sets: Jim Crow in America and Beginnings of a Movement. What are some connective themes that can be drawn throughout these different periods? How did events, people, and movement building in those early years lead to the modern Civil Rights Movement? Once your students understand the larger context for these early years of the movement, ask them to analyze how the events and people featured in this collection of sources built a movement that would dismantle segregation and push for racial equality. How did the early years of the movement lay the groundwork for the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965?

SUGGESTED LINKS
- Newsletter: Dawn of the Modern Civil Rights Movement
- African American History Links Guide
- Lesson Plan: The Clinton Twelve
- Lesson Plan: Highlander Folk School
- Lesson Plan: Civil Rights Movement Strategies—Nonviolent Direct Action
- Lesson Plan: Road to Brown v. Board of Education
- Lesson Plan: The Little Rock Nine
- Martin Luther King, Jr. (Today in History)
- Civil Rights Movement Veterans—Photo Gallery
- Voices of Civil Rights Exhibit
- Essay: Nonviolent Philosophy and Self-Defense
- Video: Freedom Writer: Virginia Foster Durr, Letters from the Civil Rights Years
Rosa Parks, November 1956

Rosa Parks Papers: General Correspondence, 1928-2006; Alphabetical file; King, Martin Luther, Jr., 1956-1957, undated

- Rosa Parks Today in History
- Rosa Parks Primary Source Gallery
- Civil Rights Movement Documents, Documents from the Montgomery Bus Boycott, 1955-1956

Rosa Parks Papers: Subject File, 1937-2005; Montgomery Bus Boycott; Typescripts annotated by Parks, circa 1956; Interviews by Aubrey Willis Williams; King, Martin Luther, Jr.

Candie Carawan and Guy Hughes Carawan oral history interview conducted by Joseph Mosnier in New Market, Tennessee, 2011-09-19

"We Shall Overcome" by Silphia Horton, Frank Hamilton, Guy Carawan, and Pete Seeger [1963]

Lyrical Legacy: We Shall Overcome

- Brown v. Board of Education Web Guide

Felix Frankfurter’s draft decree in Brown II, April 8, 1955.

Video: Two Reactions to the Brown v. Board U.S. Supreme Court Decision [May 23, 1954]

Video: Six Years after Brown, Atlanta Citizens Discuss Their Schools [May 27, 1960]

An old Woolworth's "five and dime" store that is a legendary site marking the American civil-rights movement and is now the International Civil Rights Center & Museum, and the place where "sit-in" became part of the American lexicon [2017-06-11]


A lunch counter at the old Woolworth's "five and dime" store, a legendary site marking the American civil-rights movement and is now the International Civil Rights Center & Museum, and the place where "sit-in" became part of the American lexicon [2017-06-12]
Paul Robeson to A. Philip Randolph, September 24, 1955.

- Essay: The Murder of Emmett Till


Little Rock, 1959. Mob marching from capitol to Central High [1959 Aug. 20]

Video: Nashville—Confrontation at City Hall [December 20, 1960]

- C. T. Vivian oral history interview conducted by Taylor Branch in Atlanta, Georgia [2011]

The Detroit tribune., March 05, 1960, Page 1, Image 1
Holding a poster against racial bias in Mississippi are four of the most active leaders in the NAACP movement, from left: Henry L. Moon, director of public relations; Roy Wilkins, executive secretary; Herbert Hill, labor secretary, and Thurgood Marshall, special counsel [1956]

Tent City in Fayette County [April 1963]
from Tennessee State Library and Archives

Fayette County Tent City Timeline

National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, Chronology of Events Involving Freedom Rides/Actions of Organizations and Agencies [1961]

Integration at Ole Miss[issippi University] [1962 Oct. 1]

- John A. Morsell, Assistant to NAACP Executive Secretary, to President John F. Kennedy requesting the assistance of the Federal government in the case of James Meredith, September 21, 1962.


With Ole Miss fraternity houses for a backdrop, US Army trucks loaded with steel-helmeted US Marshals roll across the University of Mississippi campus [1962 September 30.]
Teachers: Providing these primary source replicas without source clues may enhance the inquiry experience for students. This list of citations is supplied for reference purposes to you and your students. We have followed the Chicago Manual of Style format, one of the formats recommended by the Library of Congress, for each entry below, minus the access date. The access date for each of these entries is 5/15/2019.


Carol M. Highsmith, photographer. “An old Woolworth's "five and dime" store that is a legendary site marking the American civil-rights movement and is now the International Civil Rights Center & Museum, and the place where "sit-in" became part of the American lexicon.” photograph. 2017. From Library of Congress, Carol M. Highsmith Archives. https://www.loc.gov/item/2017880625/
Carol M. Highsmith, photographer. “Lunch counter at the old Woolworth's "five and dime" store, a legendary site marking the American civil-rights movement and is now the International Civil Rights Center & Museum, and the place where "sit-in" became part of the American lexicon" photograph. 2017. From Library of Congress, Carol M. Highsmith Archives. https://www.loc.gov/item/2017880730/


“Holding a poster against racial bias in Mississippi are four of the most active leaders in the NAACP movement, from left: Henry L. Moon, director of public relations; Roy Wilkins, executive secretary; Herbert Hill, labor secretary, and Thurgood Marshall, special counsel / World Telegram & Sun photo by Al. Ravenna.” Photograph. 1956. From Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division. https://www.loc.gov/item/99401448/


