

O. The Modern Civil Rights Movement

1. Despite the changes to the Constitution during Reconstruction, people of African descent continued to be discriminated against in American society for decades to come due to racism.
2. In general, “discrimination” is not a negative word. To “discriminate” means “to make a distinction.” To tell the difference between right and wrong, is to “discriminate” between the two. However, in the context of civil rights, the term has been used exclusively to denote “unfair treatment of a person based on race (or some other group trait, such as sex or religious affiliation)”.
3. The worst examples of violence against African-Americans were enacted by a terrorist organization known as the ‘KKK — Ku Klux Klan,’ which conducted horrible acts of violence driven by racism.
4. More subtle, but still unfair, were other forms of discrimination, such as the restriction of public facilities (such as bathrooms), public transportation (city buses, and the like), and public education facilities (schools) based on race.
5. The excuse was made that separate facilities were available to “colored” people. This separation is known as “segregation.” In most cases, this was just another form of discrimination, in the sense that the separate facilities provided to African-Americans were typically inferior.
6. After the world wars, in which so many African-Americans served with distinction, segregation and other forms of discrimination came under attack as unjust.
7. Rosa Parks, a “black” woman, refused to give up a seat that was restricted to white people on a public bus in Montgomery, Alabama, and was arrested.
8. Ruby Bridges, a little girl in Louisiana, wanted to attend a previously all-white school.
9. The stories of individuals like Parks and Bridges sparked the modern “Civil Rights Movement,” led by a Baptists minister named Martin Luther King Jr.
10. As a result of nationwide protests, two important laws were passed.
 - a) The Civil Rights Act of 1964 outlawed discrimination based on race, especially with regard to employment and the use of public facilities
 - b) The Voting Rights Act of 1965 specifically outlawed discrimination in voting based on race, which up to that point was accomplished through special tests administered to qualify black voters. (These tests were so hard as to prevent them from voting.)
11. In 2008, an African American man, Barack Obama, was elected president of the United States, marking a symbolic triumph in the fight for civil rights. No one can claim that racism and racial discrimination do not exist at all any longer, but the modern reality of civil rights is far better than ever before.



Rosa Parks (left) refused to accept segregation in public transportation. Ruby Bridges (center) insisted on going to the same school as other children. Martin Luther King Jr. became the national leader of the modern civil rights movement.