Challenging Segregation

Objective: To understand how African Americans challenged segregation.
The Sit-In Movement

- In the fall of 1959, 4 college students sat at a whites-only lunch counter.
- By the end of the week, over 300 students were taking part.
- Within 2 months, sit-ins had spread to 54 cities and 9 states.
- Students mostly remained peaceful, even though they were punched, kicked, beaten with clubs, and burned with cigarettes, hot coffee, and acid.
SNCC and Freedom Riders

- Ella Baker urged students to establish the **Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC)**.
- The SNCC was active in desegregating public facilities and registering African Americans to vote in the Deep South.
- In 1961 James Farmer asked **Freedom Riders** or teams of African Americans and whites to travel into the South to draw attention to the South’s refusal to integrate bus terminals.
- When the Freedom Riders reached **Birmingham**, a gang of young men armed with baseball bats, chains, and lead pipes beat the riders.
- The violence in Alabama shocked many Americans and convinced **JFK** that he had to do something.
JFK and Civil Rights

- African Americans overwhelmingly voted for JFK after he promised to actively support the civil rights movement.
- Kennedy was cautious at first, but did appoint roughly 40 African Americans to high-level positions in the federal government.
- At first, Kennedy urged the Freedom Riders to stop the rides and give everybody a cooling off period.
- Kennedy urged southern legislators to arrest the Freedom Riders instead of beating them up.
- Later on, JFK ordered the Interstate Commerce Commission to tighten its regulations against segregated bus terminals.
In 1961, James Meredith applied to the U of Mississippi, who hadn’t complied with the Supreme Court ruling on ending segregation.

After Governor Barnett refused to let Meredith in, JFK dispatched 500 federal marshals to escort Meredith to the campus.

A white mob attacked the marshals, which led JFK to order several thousand troops to the campus for the rest of the year.
Violence in Birmingham

- In 1963, Dr. King ordered demonstrations in Birmingham, knowing they would provoke violence.
- King was arrested and thrown in jail, where he wrote “Letter From a Birmingham Jail”.
- Bull Connor ordered the police to use clubs, dogs, and high-pressure hoses on the demonstrators.
Alabama’s governor, George Wallace, responded by campaigning for segregation.

Kennedy responded by introducing a civil rights bill.

Dr. King ordered a march to Washington DC in support of the civil rights bill.

Dr. King then gave his “I have a Dream” speech in front of more than 200,000 demonstrators.
The Civil Rights Bills Become Law

- US senators attempted to stop the bill by **filibuster** (when a small group of senators take turns speaking and refuse to stop the debate and allow a bill to come to a vote).
- Once Kennedy was assassinated, **Johnson** was able to get the bill passed in the House of Representatives.
- After 87 days of filibuster, the Senate voted to end the debate and passed the Civil Rights Act of 1964.
- The Civil Rights Act gave the federal government broad power to prevent racial discrimination in most public places.
The Struggle for Voting Rights

- Even after the Civil Rights Act of 1964, African Americans still faced challenges in order to vote.
- Across the South, bombs exploded in African American businesses and churches.
- In Jan 1965, Dr. King launched another demonstration in Selma, Alabama, to campaign for voting rights.
- Sheriff Jim Clark arrested more than 2,000 African Americans and his men beat many of the demonstrators.
- While the marchers kneeled in prayer, more than 200 state troopers and deputized citizens beat the demonstrators in full view of television cameras.
Selma March
This led President Johnson to propose a new voting rights law. On Aug 2\textsuperscript{nd}, 1965, both houses of Congress passed the bill. The Voting Rights Act of 1965 authorized the attorney general to send federal examiners to register qualified voters, bypassing local officials. The act also suspended discriminatory laws such as literacy tests to vote. By the end of the year, almost 250,000 African Americans had registered as new voters.