Name _____ Date _____

The Civil Rights Movement: Timeline of Key Events and Laws, 1954 to 1965

Directions: Read the passage and study the timeline from 1954 to 1965. Use both to answer each question.

The Civil Rights Movement, 1954 to 1965

Pressing the Nation to Act

In 1954, segregation was still the law across the South. Black Southerners were forced into separate schools, buses, restaurants and waiting rooms, and most were kept from voting by poll taxes, literacy tests and threats of violence. The civil rights movement attacked this system in several ways at once. Lawyers for the NAACP challenged segregation in court. Ordinary people refused to cooperate with it through boycotts, sit-ins and marches. Leaders such as Martin Luther King Jr. insisted that protesters stay nonviolent, even when they were beaten or jailed.

The court cases opened the way. In *Brown v. Board of Education*, the Supreme Court ruled that segregated public schools were unconstitutional. Activists then used the same reasoning against segregation elsewhere. When Black residents of Montgomery, Alabama, refused to ride the city's buses, their lawyers won a federal case that relied on *Brown*, and the Supreme Court upheld the ruling. Many white Southern officials resisted. Some closed schools or defied court orders, and in a few cases a president had to send troops to enforce the law.

Protest also met violence. In 1955, two white men in Mississippi murdered Emmett Till, a 14-year-old Black boy from Chicago, and an all-white jury set them free. Mobs attacked Freedom Riders who were testing whether bus stations obeyed court rulings against segregation in travel between states. In Birmingham, city authorities turned fire hoses and police dogs on marchers, many of them children. Months later, Ku Klux Klan members bombed a Black church there, killing four girls. Television and newspapers carried such attacks across the country.

Again and again, violence against peaceful protesters pushed national leaders to act. After the Birmingham attacks, President John F. Kennedy asked Congress for a broad civil rights law. Southern senators tried to block the bill with a filibuster, a long debate meant to prevent a vote, but it passed after Kennedy's death with strong support from President Lyndon B. Johnson. The new law banned segregation in public places such as restaurants and hotels and outlawed job discrimination. It did little, however, about the barriers that kept Black citizens from voting. About a week after state troopers beat voting rights marchers at Selma, Johnson asked Congress for a voting rights law. The Voting Rights Act banned literacy tests and let federal officials register voters, and Black registration in the South rose sharply.

Timeline: Key events of the civil rights movement, 1954 to 1965

Date	Event
May 1954	In *Brown v. Board of Education*, the Supreme Court rules that segregated public schools are unconstitutional.
August to September 1955	Emmett Till, 14, is murdered while visiting relatives in Mississippi. His mother holds an open-casket funeral in Chicago, and an all-white jury acquits the two men charged.
December 1955	Rosa Parks is arrested in Montgomery, Alabama, for refusing to give up her bus seat to a white passenger. The Montgomery bus boycott begins four days later.
November to December 1956	The Supreme Court upholds a ruling that Alabama's bus segregation laws are unconstitutional. The boycott ends after 381 days.
September 1957	Arkansas's governor uses the state National Guard to keep nine Black students out of Central High School in Little Rock. President Eisenhower sends federal troops to protect them.
February 1960	Four Black college students sit in at a whites-only lunch counter in Greensboro, North Carolina. Sit-ins soon spread to dozens of Southern cities.
May 1961	Freedom Riders travel by bus through the South to test court rulings against segregated interstate travel. A mob burns one of their buses near Anniston, Alabama.
November 1961	Federal rules banning segregation in interstate bus stations take effect.
April to May 1963	In the Birmingham campaign, city authorities use fire hoses and police dogs on marchers, many of them children. In May, business leaders agree to desegregate store lunch counters and restrooms.
June 1963	President Kennedy asks Congress for a broad civil rights law.
August 1963	About 250,000 people join the March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom. Martin Luther King Jr. speaks at the Lincoln Memorial.
September 1963	Ku Klux Klan members bomb the 16th Street Baptist Church in Birmingham, killing four Black girls.
November 1963	President Kennedy is assassinated, and Lyndon B. Johnson becomes president.
January 1964	The 24th Amendment is ratified, banning poll taxes in federal elections.
July 1964	President Johnson signs the Civil Rights Act of 1964.
March 1965	At the Edmund Pettus Bridge in Selma, Alabama, state troopers attack voting rights marchers. Later that month, thousands march from Selma to Montgomery.
August 1965	President Johnson signs the Voting Rights Act of 1965.

1. The passage says the Montgomery protesters' lawyers won a case that relied on *Brown v. Board of Education*. Using the timeline, about how long after *Brown* did the Supreme Court uphold the ruling against Alabama's bus segregation?

A. About two and a half years
B. About six months
C. About one year
D. About five and a half years

2. These events appear in the passage, the timeline or both. Use the timeline's dates to label each one First, Second or Third.

Write the letter of the matching answer on each line.

1. _____ Mobs attack Freedom Riders who are testing bus stations
2. _____ Birmingham authorities turn fire hoses and dogs on marchers
3. _____ Students sit in at a whites-only lunch counter in Greensboro

A. First
B. Third
C. Second

3. The passage says that in a few cases a president had to send troops to enforce the law. Which timeline event is an example?

A. June 1963: President Kennedy asks Congress for a civil rights law
B. February 1960: sit-ins spread to dozens of Southern cities
C. August 1963: about 250,000 people join the March on Washington
D. September 1957: federal troops protect nine students in Little Rock

4. Fill in each blank about the Montgomery protest and the movement's methods. One answer comes from the timeline and one from the passage.

Word bank

segregated • boycott • filibuster • nonviolent • unconstitutional

Black residents of Montgomery kept up a _____ of the city's buses for 381 days. Leaders such as Martin Luther King Jr. asked protesters to stay _____ even when they were beaten or jailed.

5. According to the passage, the Civil Rights Act did little about barriers to voting. Which later event in the timeline removed some of those barriers?

A. August 1965: President Johnson signs the Voting Rights Act
B. March 1965: state troopers attack marchers in Selma
C. November 1963: President Kennedy is assassinated
D. January 1964: the 24th Amendment bans poll taxes in federal elections

6. The passage says violence against peaceful protesters pushed national leaders to act. Which two timeline events led a president to ask Congress for a new law, according to the passage?

☐ A. March 1965: state troopers attack voting rights marchers in Selma
☐ B. August to September 1955: Emmett Till is murdered in Mississippi
☐ C. September 1963: Klan members bomb the 16th Street Baptist Church
☐ D. April to May 1963: Birmingham authorities use fire hoses and dogs on marchers
☐ E. May 1961: a mob burns a Freedom Riders' bus near Anniston

7. The passage describes mobs attacking Freedom Riders. According to the timeline, what happened about six months after a mob burned their bus near Anniston?

A. Federal rules banning segregation in interstate bus stations took effect.

B. About 250,000 people gathered for the March on Washington.

C. Black residents of Montgomery began their boycott of the city's buses.

D. Four college students held a sit-in at a lunch counter in Greensboro.

8. Using the passage and the timeline, which statement about how the Civil Rights Act became law is accurate?

A. The Supreme Court wrote the bill after the *Brown* decision and sent it to Congress to approve.

B. Northern senators held up the bill with a filibuster until Southern senators forced a vote late in 1963.

C. Kennedy asked for it in June 1963, Southern senators tried to block it, and it became law in July 1964.

D. Congress passed the bill in 1963, but President Johnson vetoed it and signed it only in 1965.