

# Handout A: African American Freedom Struggle Timeline:

- 1942: African Americans establish the Double V campaign insisting that victory over racism at home is essential for victory in the global war against fascism.
- 1945 October 24: The United Nations is founded in San Francisco, California, and the headquarters are later moved to New York. African American scholar, Ralph Bunche, plays an integral role in the drafting of the UN charter, specifically the charter's article dealing with the future of the colonial world.
- 1947 October 23: The NAACP files "An Appeal to the World," a petition in the United Nations protesting the treatment of blacks in the United States. W.E.B. Du Bois is the principal author.
- 1947 December 4: The UN Commission on Human Rights rejects the NAACP's petition, but the NAACP office in New York is flooded with requests from around the globe for copies of the document.
- 1948 December 10: The General Assembly of the United Nations adopts the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in New York, NY.
- 1948: Bayard Rustin visits India to study the Gandhian philosophy of nonviolence. He later becomes a key advisor to King during the Montgomery bus boycott and the deputy director of the March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom.
- 1951: William Patterson, Chairman of the Civil Rights Congress (CRC), delivers a petition to the United Nations Committee on Human Rights in Geneva, Switzerland, claiming that the U.S. government was complicit in genocide against African Americans. The lengthy petition, titled "We Charge Genocide" consists of documentation of 153 racial killings and other human rights abuses from 1945 to 1951.
- 1953: American Committee on Africa is formed. The ACOA supported African liberation struggles against colonialism through lobbying the United Nations and U.S. government officials, publishing pamphlets, a magazine, and reports on liberation struggles for both public and policy-making audiences. Bayard Rustin, Martin Luther King, Jr. and Eleanor Roosevelt played important roles in the organization's campaigns.
- 1954 May 17: In *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas* the U.S. Supreme Court rules that segregated schools are "inherently unequal" and orders that schools be integrated with "all deliberate speed." Briefs presented to the Supreme Court emphasize the international criticism of U.S. race relations and the U.S. image abroad.
- 1955: Rosa Parks attends Highlander Folk School in Tennessee and studies the UN's Universal Declaration of Human Rights during a workshop focused on the dismantling of southern segregation laws.
- 1955 April 18-25: The Bandung Conference is held in Bandung, Indonesia, and included leaders of 29 African and Asian nations. The leaders discussed how to support one another in achieving social and economic well-being for their mostly impoverished populations. Their agenda addresses race, religion, colonialism, national sovereignty, and the promotion of world peace. The foremost figures of these nations were Ahmed Sukarno, president of Indonesia, Jawaharlal Nehru, prime minister of India, Kwame Nkrumah, prime minister of the Gold Coast (later Ghana), Gamal Abdel Nasser, president of Egypt, Chou En Lai, premier of China, Ho Chi Minh, prime minister of Vietnam, and Congressman Adam Clayton Powell of Harlem, New York.
- 1955 December 1: Rosa Parks is arrested for refusing to give up her seat on a bus in Montgomery, Alabama. A well-planned boycott of city buses continues for over a year and resulted in desegregation on city buses and the hiring of black bus drivers. Martin Luther King, Jr. utilizes the Gandhian philosophy of nonviolent direct action to inspire the disciplined boycott.
- 1957 September 4: Nine students volunteer to integrate Little Rock Central High School, but are kept from entering the school by armed Arkansas national guardsmen. International press coverage and outrage directed at U.S. embassies abroad contribute to Eisenhower's decision to order the 101<sup>st</sup> Airborne to protect students. Secretary of State John Foster Dulles warns government officials, "This situation was ruining our foreign policy."
- 1957: Ghana achieves its independence from Britain. Prime Minister Kwame Nkrumah hosts African American leaders at the independence festivities including, Martin Luther King, Jr., A. Philip Randolph, Adam Clayton Powell, and Ralph Bunche. King returns to Montgomery and tells his congregation, "Ghana tells us that the forces of the universe are on the side of justice . . . An old order of colonialism, of segregation, discrimination is passing away now. And a new order of justice, freedom and good will is being born."
- 1957 December 10: Human Rights Day was organized "to protest the apartheid policies of the Union of South Africa and to demand that the Union live up to its obligations under Article I, Paragraph 3 of the United Nations Charter." The event is organized by the American Committee on Africa including Eleanor Roosevelt, International Chairman, James A. Pike, U.S. Chairman, and Martin Luther King, U.S. Vice-Chairman.
- 1959: King visits India, where his involvement in the Montgomery Bus Boycott was well documented in Indian newspapers. King recalled, "We were looked upon as brothers, with the color of our skins as something of an asset. But the strongest bond of fraternity was the common cause of minority and colonial peoples in America, Africa, and Asia struggling to throw off racism and imperialism." Their overlapping experiences with racism and common philosophy of liberation sparked numerous conversations.

# An International Human Rights Perspective

- 1960:** During the “Year of Africa” numerous African nations gain independence. African Americans pay close attention to this historic transformation. James Baldwin quoted one African American as saying, “At the rate things are going here, . . . all of Africa will be free before we can get a lousy cup of coffee.”
- 1960 February:** Students in Nashville, Tennessee, including Diane Nash, Marion Barry, John Lewis, Bernard Lafayette and James Bevel, participate in lunch-counter sit-ins which became a model for other protests. The young activists were trained by James Lawson, who spent years in India studying Gandhi’s use of nonviolence to achieve social and political change.
- 1961 February:** Prime Minister Patrice Lumumba of the Democratic Republic of the Congo is assassinated while in custody of Belgian troops, who are supported by the U.S. government. African American leaders and activists, including Maya Angelou and Amiri Baraka, demonstrate in the gallery of the United Nations Security Council in New York. Protests also occur in San Francisco at the Belgian consulate.
- 1963 April 3:** Under the leadership of Reverend Fred Shuttlesworth, founder of the Alabama Christian Movement for Human Rights, the nonviolent campaign to end segregation and extend employment to African Americans begins in Birmingham, Alabama. During the campaign, young nonviolent protesters are met with brutal repression tactics, including police dogs, fire hoses and physical attacks by police. Photographs of the events are front page in newspapers worldwide. President Kennedy expresses deep concern about the U.S. image.
- 1963 May 23:** First meeting of the Organization of African Unity takes place in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, and is attended by African heads of state, who discuss the harsh treatment of civil rights protestors in Birmingham and draft a statement for President Kennedy.
- 1963 August 28:** More than 250,000 people gather at the Lincoln Memorial in Washington DC for the *March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom*. John Lewis represents the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee in his speech demanding the protection of African American voting rights, “One man, one vote is Africa’s cry and it is our cry.” The March is an international event, spawning sympathy marches around the world. On the eve of the march, pioneering civil rights leader W. E. B. Du Bois dies at his home in Ghana.
- 1963 September 15:** Four young girls are killed in Birmingham, Alabama, when their church is bombed in retaliation for the nonviolent protest of the summer. International outrage falls on the U.S. government for failure to protect its citizens. SNCC activists picket the UN in reaction to the murders.
- 1964:** Malcolm X goes on a pilgrimage to Mecca, Saudi Arabia, and returns with new insight regarding the possibility of positive race relations among blacks and whites in America.
- 1964:** Martin Luther King, Jr. receives the Nobel Peace Prize and accepts his award in Norway. The honor reflects the global awareness and support for his commitment to human rights in the United States.
- 1964 June 28:** Malcolm X announces the formation of the Organization of Afro-American Unity at a press conference in New York City.
- 1964 July 2:** President Johnson signs the Civil Rights Act of 1964, outlawing discrimination in public places, federal programs, and employment.
- 1964 July 17:** Malcolm X attends the second meeting of the Organization of African Unity in Cairo, Egypt. He presents a petition asking, “In the interest of world peace, we beseech the heads of the independent African states to recommend an immediate investigation into our problem by the United Nations Commission on Human Rights.”
- 1964 September:** Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) workers tour Africa and meet with African leaders and activists to discuss their common struggle against oppression.
- 1965 July 9:** Congress passes the Voting Rights Act of 1965. The Voting Rights Act prohibited the states from using literacy tests and other methods of excluding African Americans from voting.
- 1966:** Muhammad Ali, world heavyweight champion, refuses to be inducted into the U.S. army in protest against the war in Vietnam.
- 1966:** The Black Panther Party (BPP) is formed in Oakland, California. As part of their 10 point program they demand, “We want land, bread, housing, education, clothing, justice and peace.”
- 1967:** BPP and SNCC form an alliance and link their ideological struggle with other nations’ freedom struggles against imperialism in Asia and Africa. As an international organization, Stokely Carmichael is appointed Prime Minister and James Forman as Minister of Foreign Affairs.
- 1967 April 4:** King speaks out against the war in Vietnam addressing a crowd of 3,000 people in Riverside Church in New York City. In his speech entitled “Beyond Vietnam” King argued that the war effort was “taking the young black men who have been crippled by our society and sending them 8,000 miles away to guarantee liberties in Southeast Asia which they had not found in southwest Georgia and East Harlem.” Two weeks later, he and other activists lead thousands of demonstrators on an antiwar march to the United Nations.