

Key Vocabulary

Fourteenth Amendment

NAACP

Oklahoma Title 70

Better Schools Amendment

Civil Rights Act of 1964

NAACP Youth Council

"The Group"

Learning Outcomes:

The learner will be able to...

- Explain the impact of the 14th Amendment on desegregation.
- Identify the importance of key individuals within the Oklahoma Civil Rights Movement, such as Clara Luper and Governor Raymond Gary.
- Summarize the legal efforts to integrate public facilities, public schools, and universities in Oklahoma.
- Explain the importance of the Sipuel and McLaurin court cases.
- Compare and contrast different strategies used by African American leaders to end segregation in Oklahoma, including direct action, civil disobedience, and legal strategies.

Compelling Question:

- How is equality achieved in society? Does the achievement of equality depend more on government action or the actions of citizens?

Chapter Overview

In this chapter, students will learn that progress in race relations and equal treatment has not followed a straight line, and it still does not. Even as schools and universities in Oklahoma integrated, racial discrimination persisted. Even as drugstore lunch counters opened to Black people, racial discrimination persisted. Black athletes made great strides as members of previously all-white teams, but this did not mean that they experienced equal treatment either on or off the field. Learners should think about the Civil Rights Movement not as a single timeline of major events but rather as a collection of local and national events that reflected the power of direct action, civil disobedience, and legal challenges to create change on small and large scales.

Shortly after the end of World War II, seventeen-year-old Albert Johnson Sr. got on a bus in Lawton, Oklahoma. The seats in the Black section were full, so he remained standing. A Black noncommissioned officer (NCO) in the back of the bus kept staring at Albert, as if the power of his stare would make Albert sit down in one of the empty seats for white people. He sat down. A white man on the bus said, "Boy, where I'm from in Arkansas, 'n*****' don't sit next to white people. Get up." Albert got up. The Black NCO said, "I just fought a war so that you can sit down, so you better sit back down." Albert sat back down.



Fig. 11.1: Albert Johnson, Sr. was born at Fort Sill in 1927 and grew up in a military family. He was a teenager during World War II and experienced racism firsthand during a time when tensions flared over the place of Blacks in America. After college, Johnson spent the next several decades as an educator, and after the *Brown v. Board of Education* Supreme Court ruling in 1954, he helped desegregate public schools in Lawton. The following decade, he watched as his own son was denied access to a Lawton water park because of his race. But Johnson remained optimistic about the possibility for change, and until his death in 2022, he maintained his commitment to bettering the lives of those around him. He described education as “an infinite experience afforded one formally and informally.”

Courtesy of the Albert Johnson, Sr. Family.

World War II interrupted—and then sped up—African American efforts to gain equality in Oklahoma and throughout the United States. American involvement in the war led to even more racism against Black people. This was not new and had happened in previous wars. What was new, however, was the way that this war showed people in other countries the way that America was acting on matters of race. Americans said they were fighting for democracy abroad, but people in other countries could point out the way that Americans were not treating a large amount of their own people equally. This made America look bad and is why the “Double Victory” (or “Double V”) campaign became so important. The idea of “Double Victory” was that African American soldiers were fighting both for victory over fascism abroad and racism at home. Black Oklahomans saw their daily lives shaped by racist policies. And when World War II ended, several factors led to increased activism on the part of African Americans. From the mid-1940s through the mid-1960s, Oklahomans struggled over the place of African Americans in the state.

The civil rights activism and court challenges that happened in Oklahoma during the mid-twentieth century were based on the **Fourteenth Amendment** to the US Constitution, which was adopted in 1868, just three years after the Civil War ended. The Fourteenth Amendment protected African Americans in several ways. In addition to providing citizenship to African Americans and others who are born or naturalized in the United States, the Fourteenth Amendment guarantees them due process of law and equal protection under the law. This means that the laws of the nation apply, or should apply, to all citizens, no matter in which state they live. They should have the same rights and the same protections. By the end of the Reconstruction period, though, many states had found ways to circumvent or get around these protections when it came to the treatment of African Americans.

Oklahoma would do the same when it became a state in 1907. Remember that Oklahoma’s own constitution applied differently to Black people than to everyone else. Inequality was written into the Oklahoma constitution, and taking it out would be no easy task.

In the late 1930s, civil rights attorney **Thurgood Marshall** and the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (**NAACP**) started looking at Oklahoma as an important place to fight for civil rights. Roscoe Dunjee, editor of the *Black Dispatch* and president of the Oklahoma State Conference of Branches of the NAACP, had long hoped to see Oklahoma’s segregation laws removed. Marshall made no secret of his intention to fight against Oklahoma’s segregation practices in colleges and universities. Founded in 1897, Langston University, the state’s only member of the Historically Black College and Universities (HBCU), offered bachelor’s degrees, but African American students who wanted to earn a master’s degree or doctorate were forced to go out of state to attend graduate school.

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The absence of graduate schools for African American students in Oklahoma seemed to obviously break the “separate but equal” law established in the 1896 *Plessy v. Ferguson* decision. The NAACP certainly thought so, and its leaders wanted to change Oklahoma law so that African American students, like all other Oklahoma students, could go to graduate school in law, medicine, education, and other fields without having to leave their home state. And the NAACP had the larger goal of integration of all schools and public accommodations. Months before American entry into World War II in 1941, the Oklahoma State Legislature, guessing that the NAACP was already doing work to change the law to make it more equal, decided to pass its own laws before this could happen. They succeeded and passed **Oklahoma Title 70**, making it a misdemeanor for white and Black students to attend the same school. Legislators took this step in order to discourage any effort in the state to desegregate schools.

NAACP

Black and white activists founded the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) in 1909 in New York City. The year before, a white mob had destroyed forty homes and many local businesses in the Black residential district of Springfield, Illinois. Rioters murdered two Black men. The impact of this event prompted the creation of the NAACP. Founding members of the organization included W. E. B. Du Bois, Ida B. Wells, Mary Church Terrell, Archibald Grimke, Mary White Ovington, William English Walling, Henry Moskowitz, and Oswald Garrison Villard. The NAACP advocated for an end to racial inequality in the country. It did this by working to protect equal rights and prevent discrimination. Among the group’s key goals were legal advocacy, economic advancement, and expanding voting rights.

The NAACP has historically used peaceful activism to make change within the United States. The organization took up the issue of Oklahoma’s grandfather clause, which the state passed in 1910. This clause allowed only people whose grandfathers had been eligible to vote in 1866 to vote without taking a literacy test. Its purpose was to prevent African Americans from voting. The NAACP worked to end the grandfather clause. In presenting their case to the Supreme Court in *Guinn v. United States* (1915), NAACP attorneys argued that Oklahoma’s law was unconstitutional because it discriminated against Blacks and violated the Fifteenth Amendment. In its ruling on this case, the Supreme Court struck down the grandfather clause. *Guinn v. United States* established the NAACP as a powerful force in the fight for legal rights of African Americans.

Another early focus of the organization was protesting the 1915 film *Birth of a Nation*. The movie portrayed African Americans in a negative and demeaning light. It highlighted the Klu Klux Klan as a good organization. This movie was very biased. The NAACP attempted to outlaw the film and raise awareness about the film’s bias. The NAACP also focused its efforts on anti-lynching protests. The organization led one of the first mass protests of white mob violence in 1917. During the Great Depression, the NAACP focused on economic justice. In addition, it worked to increase economic prospects for African Americans, who were among the groups hardest hit by the Depression. During the Civil Rights Movement, the organization doubled down on efforts to end segregation. NAACP member Thurgood Marshall founded the Legal Defense and Educational Fund in 1940. As an attorney, he argued legal cases against segregation, including the famous *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka* decision. The Brown ruling put an end to school segregation.

Oklahoma founded its first local chapter of the NAACP in 1913. The state was home to many local chapters by the mid-1920s. In 1931, Oklahoma was the first state in the nation to host a state conference of NAACP chapters. Some state newspapers advocated for the legal, economic, and civic rights of African Americans. One example was Oklahoma City’s *Black Dispatch* under the leadership of NAACP member Roscoe Dunjee.

The NAACP played a big role in the battle to end racial inequality in the United States. In 2022, President Joe Biden passed a federal anti-lynching law. The NAACP had been advocating for it for the past century.

Civil Rights Movement Timeline

January 1948	<i>Sipuel v. Board of Regents of the University of Oklahoma</i>
July 1948	Executive Order 9981
April 1950	<i>McLaurin v. Oklahoma State Regents</i>
May 1954	<i>Brown v. Board of Education</i>
Late 1954	Last segregated army unit disbanded
November 1954	Election of Governor Raymond Gary
April 1955	"Better Schools Amendment"
April 1955	<i>Brown II</i>
December 1955–December 1956	Montgomery Bus Boycott
March 1956	Southern Manifesto issued as response to <i>Brown v. Board of Education</i>
Fall 1956	First African American football player at OU
September 1957	Little Rock Nine
August 1958	Katz Drug Store sit-in
August 1958–July 1964	Continued sit-ins and protests in Oklahoma City by Clara Luper and the NAACP Youth Council
May 1961	Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee Freedom Rides begin
August 1963	March on Washington
September 1963	Founding of "The Group" in Lawton
March 1964	Tulsa Freedom March
July 1964	Civil Rights Act
August 1964	Sand Springs Schools in Tulsa desegregated
August 1965	Voting Rights Act
June 1966	Doe Doe Park Demonstration
May 1968	Doe Doe Park Integration
April 1971	Springlake Amusement Park Protest

Ada Lois Sipuel Fisher Seeks Admission to the University of Oklahoma

When World War II ended, the NAACP continued to work on its plan to challenge Oklahoma's segregation policies in higher education. And they found a smart and eager young woman who wanted to do just that: **Ada Lois Sipuel Fisher**. At first the NAACP asked her older brother Lemuel to help challenge the law, but when he said no, Ada Lois quickly volunteered. She had married Warren Fisher in 1944 and graduated from Langston University with honors in 1945. And the case became known as the *Sipuel* case. Like her brother, she too wanted to go to law school. She also liked a good fight. In January 1946, Ada Lois made state and national history when she applied to law school at the University of Oklahoma (OU) in Norman. George Lynn Cross, the university's president, wrote her rejection letter. In the letter, he said that she could not be admitted because her admission would break state laws that did not allow Black students to attend school with white students. Cross actually wrote his letter to help Ada Lois challenge segregation. His letter, by putting in writing that her race was the reason she was not allowed to go to school at OU, provided a piece of clear evidence of the school's racist policies. This gave Thurgood Marshall and the NAACP exactly what they needed to file a lawsuit.

The legislature and both the OU and state regents did not want to let Ada Lois go to OU, but they also needed to look like they were following the law. So, they came up with a plan to open a separate law school for Black people. Together, the regents and legislature worked quickly to open the Langston School of Law for African American students in January of 1948. They found a few empty rooms in the state capitol building, hired three faculty members to teach (all of whom kept their full-time jobs), and announced the new unaccredited law school was equal to the law school at OU. Ada Lois refused to give up, though. She would not attend what was basically a fake law school. A long three-and-a-half years after her initial application, in June 1949, she became the first African American to attend law school at OU. In the meantime, following Sipuel Fisher's example, **George McLaurin** and five other African Americans applied to graduate programs at OU. They were admitted in the fall of 1948 as a result of successful court cases.



Fig. 11.2: Oklahoma City lawyer and newly appointed dean of Langston Law School, Jerome E. Hemry, hanging a makeshift sign for the new school. The classes for the law school were supposed to meet in the Senate rooms of the Oklahoma State Capitol. This largely fake law school did not last long. It was hastily opened just twelve days after the court ruling ordering that either Ada Lois Sipuel Fisher be admitted to the OU law school or a new (and equal) school of law be opened for Black students. The creation of Langston Law School was an effort to avoid integration rather than to provide a quality legal education to Black students.

Courtesy of the Oklahoma Historical Society.



Fig. 11.3: In 1952, Ada Lois Sipuel Fisher became the first African American to graduate from the University of Oklahoma School of Law. This photo shows her signing the Register of Attorneys that same year. She overcame significant obstacles to gain admission to the law school, and her success marked an important milestone for both women and African Americans in Oklahoma and across the nation. Decades later, she accepted an appointment to serve on the University of Oklahoma Board of Regents, the very board that tried hard to stop her from being admitted to the school. This was no small victory.

Courtesy of the Oklahoma Historical Society.

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Fig. 11.4: The six Black students who received admission to OU graduate programs in the fall of 1948. All six applied on the same day: January 28, 1948. George McLaurin (far left) applied to study education. Maurine Hancock Wilson (second from far left) applied to study social work, as did Ivor Tautum (far right). James Bond (center left) applied to study biology. Mozeal Dillion (center right) applied to study architectural engineering. Helen Holmes (second from far right) applied to study business administration. Each of these students played an important role in challenging segregation and exclusion in graduate education in Oklahoma.

Courtesy of the Oklahoma Historical Society.

While the cases of McLaurin and Sipuel helped break down racial barriers in higher education, it was a difficult and often painful process. Norman remained a sundown town, meaning an “all-white” town practicing racial segregation and requiring nonwhite people to leave town before the evening, which meant they had to commute from Oklahoma City or other places to go to school. At first they were forced to sit in chairs marked “Colored” and they found themselves alienated from much of campus. Both Sipuel Fisher and McLaurin were represented by NAACP attorney Thurgood Marshall, who later became the first African American justice on the US Supreme Court. During the trials, no restaurant in Norman would serve the future Supreme Court justice, but area churches prepared meals on some days when he had to be in Norman. Other times, he ate peanuts from a vending machine for his meal while sitting on the steps of the courthouse.



Fig. 11.5: A sign referring to George McLaurin's desk where he was required to sit separately from white students. McLaurin was confined to segregated seating until the 1950 Supreme Court case *McLaurin v. Oklahoma State Regents*. After this ruling, OU could no longer force McLaurin and other Black students to sit separately from their peers.

Courtesy of the Oklahoma Historical Society.



Fig. 11.6: Thurgood Marshall, Ada Lois Sipuel Fisher, Amos T. Hall, Buck Colbert Franklin, Otis Clark, by Tatyana Fazlalizadeh. The painting serves to highlight individuals with ties to the Tulsa Race Massacre and the struggle for equality in Oklahoma. Sipuel Fisher's parents fled Tulsa during the massacre. Marshall and Hall appear in the painting because of their work on Sipuel Fisher's Supreme Court case, which led to her becoming the first African American to graduate from the University of Oklahoma School of Law. Franklin and Clark both survived the massacre. Franklin was a lawyer who helped those living in Black Tulsa fight legal battles concerning rebuilding. He was also the father of renowned historian John Hope Franklin.

Courtesy of the Oklahoma Judicial Center, Oklahoma Supreme Court.

Marshall gained experience fighting against segregation. In the early 1950s, he skillfully built on arguments he made in the *Sipuel* and *McLaurin* cases to present new arguments to the Supreme Court. In *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka*, Marshall argued that equality could not exist when students were separated based on the color of their skin. Marshall convinced the court and won the case. US Supreme Court chief justice Earl Warren handed down the unanimous verdict in 1954. In delivering the opinion of the Court, Warren famously said that “separate but equal is inherently unequal.”

The Supreme Court’s decision meant that the earlier doctrine of “separate but equal” established in the 1896 *Plessy* ruling was no longer legal. All public schools needed to be desegregated. However, segregation in public schools did not end overnight. In fact many southern states did not like this ruling and wanted to keep separate schools for Black students and white students. They stalled. They threatened. They dared the Supreme Court to try to enforce the ruling. Some states even closed schools to avoid desegregation. Oklahoma’s response was far from perfect, but it would prove much more progressive and proactive than the response of its neighbors in the South.

Little Rock Nine

In 1954, in the case *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka*, the US Supreme Court determined that racial segregation in public schools was unconstitutional. This decision came out of a group of cases from Kansas, Delaware, Virginia, and South Carolina. The court combined them into one case. The Supreme Court had no ability to enforce this ruling, however. Thus schools in many states remained segregated. In 1955, the Court ruled on a collection of other cases commonly known as *Brown II*. Chief Justice Earl Warren stated in the Court’s decision that public schools had to desegregate “with all deliberate speed.” But the Court still had no power to make states or schools follow this ruling.

In response to the first *Brown* case, the Little Rock School Board in Arkansas decided to integrate public schools in phases. First it would focus on senior high schools. Then it would move to junior high schools. If both attempts proved successful, it would integrate elementary schools. The board was slow to put the plan in place. By 1956, the Arkansas NAACP sued the school board. A ruling from the district court said that the district had to allow Black students to attend the same schools as white students. Pressure from the NAACP and Black community members increased.

The Little Rock School Board began integration in September 1957. Arkansas NAACP president Daisy Bates recruited nine students to start at Little Rock Central High School that fall. The names of the students, known collectively as the Little Rock Nine, were Terrance Roberts, Minnijean Brown, Earnest Green, Elizabeth Eckford, Melba Patillo, Thelma Mothershed, Carlotta Walls, Jefferson Thomas, and Gloria Ray. Their first day at the school was September 4, 1957. Bates arranged for a group of Black and white ministers to walk to school with the students. This was to serve as a symbolic act against segregation. This was also to serve as physical protection for the students. Despite their efforts, a white mob of anti-integration protestors formed in front of the school. Arkansas governor Orval Faubus had also called in the state’s National Guard. The mob and the Guard prevented the students from entering the school.

One day later, on September 5, President Dwight D. Eisenhower wrote to Governor Faubus. The president declared that the state of Arkansas had to follow the ruling of the district court. On September 14, Faubus met with Eisenhower. The president demanded the integration of the school. On September 20, a federal judge issued an order for the removal of the National Guard. On September 23, the students arrived at the school for the second time. This time they had a police escort. They had to leave the school after a few hours, though, because the protestors posed a safety threat to them. Many people wrote to Eisenhower on this day calling for his help. One of these was Little Rock mayor Woodrow Wilson Mann, who stated that

police could not control the mob. He also stated that a friend of Faubus was leading the mob. On this day Eisenhower stated that all members of the mob were guilty of obstruction (or blocking) of justice. On September 25, Eisenhower assigned the National Guard and the 101st Airborne Division of the US Army to walk the students into the school. They continued to do this for the rest of the year. In spite of this progress, the following year Little Rock's high schools were closed to prevent continued desegregation, and the NAACP continued to take legal action for the integration of public schools.

Little Rock Central High School is now a National Historic Site and includes a National Park Service visitors center with interpretive panels about the events of 1957 and the Little Rock Nine. In 1999 President Bill Clinton presented the Little Rock Nine with the Congressional Gold Medal, the highest civilian honor.

Legal Desegregation of Schools

Raymond Gary quickly recognized the problem Oklahoma faced as the Supreme Court thought about what to decide in the Brown case. He promised voters that he would support the Brown ruling when he campaigned for governor in 1954. True to his word, when he took office in January 1955, he kept his promise. Unlike many states with segregated educational facilities (buildings, gyms, and so forth), Oklahoma got money for Black schools and for white schools from different public sources. This, Gary knew, would surely be struck down as unconstitutional. He supported the "Better Schools Amendment," which included getting rid of separate sources of money for K-12 schools. The **"Better Schools Amendment"** also gave money to schools, colleges, and mental hospitals to make them better. The amendment to the state constitution passed by a three-to-one majority in a special election in 1955 and was an important step toward school integration. Governor Gary emphasized that integration would be good for the state's finances, but he also connected his support for school integration to his religious beliefs. "I grew up in Little Dixie," he said, but "as an active Baptist and believer in the scriptures," he added, "I have never understood how persons can call themselves Christians and believe that God made them superior because they were born with white skin."

A number of schools in Oklahoma, such as those in Oklahoma City and Tulsa, moved to integrate. Over the next few years, more schools across the state followed their example. However, segregated schools remained a reality in the state for many African American students because of school district boundaries and local resistance. For example, ten years after the Brown decision, schools in Sand Springs, a suburb on the western edge of Tulsa, remained segregated. When the school board held meetings in 1964 to discuss integration, a lot of people showed up and spoke passionately about why they were against it. Marques Haynes, who grew up in Sand Springs and played for the Harlem Globetrotters from 1947 to 1953, attended the meeting. The famous Sand Springs resident stood and addressed the crowd saying, "It is true that I have been very successful, but I never wanted to be a basketball player. I wanted to be a printer." He added that printing courses were offered at the white school, but not the Black school. The vote to integrate passed, but some people in Sand Springs continued to be against it.



Fig. 11.7: Governor Raymond Gary, a Democrat, served from 1955 to 1959. While in office, he supported civil rights and connected integration to his religious faith. He signed multiple civil rights bills into law, including the Better Schools Amendment.

Courtesy of the Oklahoma Historical Society.

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Fig. 11.8: A 1972 antibusing protest at the Oklahoma State Capitol. Even nearly two decades after *Brown v. Board of Education*, many continued to push back on integration. This was even truer in cases where students had to spend a lot of time on buses, a concern for many parents.

Courtesy of the Oklahoma Historical Society.

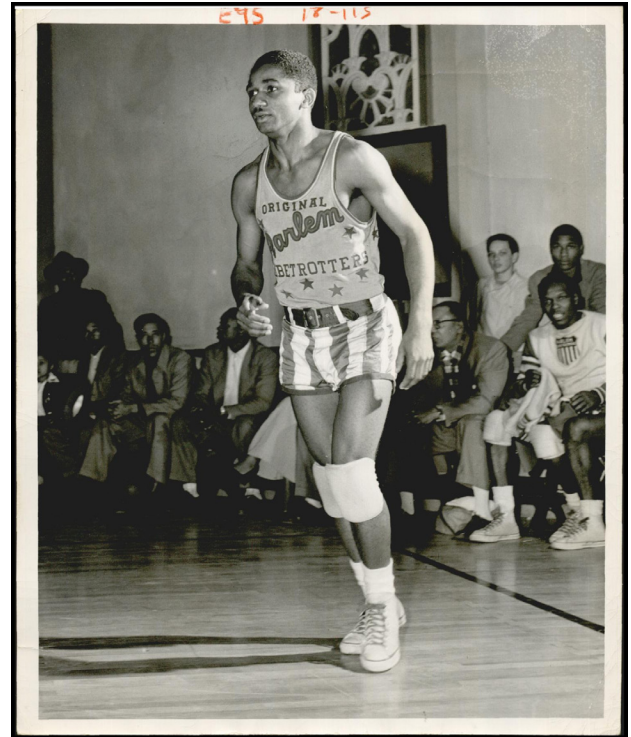


Fig. 11.9: Marques Haynes playing for the Harlem Globetrotters. In addition to his successful basketball career, Haynes advocated for the desegregation of Charles Page High School in the Sand Springs School District. Haynes had gone to school at Booker T. Washington High School, the Black school in the Tulsa district. He was unhappy that his children had to attend the same segregated school that he did. The school began allowing Black students to attend in 1964, and the entire district desegregated two years later.

Courtesy of the Oklahoma Historical Society.

Football, Neighborhoods, and Restaurants

As Oklahomans were struggling with the realities of integrated schools, desegregation efforts were happening outside of education. Ten years after Sipuel Fisher was first rejected from law school, Prentice Gautt became, in 1956, the first African American football player at the University of Oklahoma. Even though Gautt was able to join the football team, racism was still present. Coach Bud Wilkinson had to ask people outside of the school for money for his scholarship because so many people at the school did not want him there. Football fans might have cheered for Gautt on the field, but he was not fully accepted. No barber in Norman would cut his hair and no off-campus restaurant would serve him.

OU did not have its first Black professor until 1959 when Melvin B. Tolson, Jr. was hired. And it was not until 1967 that the first Black family bought a house in Norman. A realtor named Sam Mathews helped them make the purchase. George and Barbara Henderson and their seven children moved to Norman after George joined OU's faculty. What the Henderson family could not have known was that a few miles away from their new home, a white woman was locked up in a mental institution. The reason? She had tried to sell her house to a Black family. Her name was Rosalyn Gilchrist and she was in the fourth year of her court-ordered confinement at the Central State Griffin Memorial Hospital. She was declared "incompetent" because in 1963 she had tried to sell her house in the all-white Oklahoma City suburb of Warr Acres to a Black family. With the help of civil rights attorney E. Melvin Porter and her son, Coleman, Gilchrist was released in 1968. Yet hostility toward African Americans moving into white neighborhoods did not end in the 1960s. By 1970, the real estate company that defied local sundown customs by selling a house to the Henderson family went out of business. The Sam Mathews Social Justice Award was later established in the name of the realtor who sold the house to the Henderson family. But the stories of Rosalyn Gilchrist and Sam Mathews are both important reminders of how systemic racism remained even as civil rights gains were made.

African American students and families continued to have a difficult time gaining acceptance outside of all-Black schools and neighborhoods. Just as the University of Oklahoma struggled with integration and ongoing discrimination, so too did Oklahoma State University (OSU). In 1964, Charles "Chic" Dambach accepted a football scholarship to OSU. He chose OSU in part because of a story he read about the integrated football team. The description impressed him, but he soon learned that there was a double standard for white and Black athletes. Dambach was white, and when he got injured, he was allowed to keep his scholarship as specified by National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) guidelines. In contrast, Black players who were injured were pressured to quit. Dambach described a painful experience when his African American friend and fellow player Earl "Bud" Jones injured his knee. Injured players still had to attend practice, but if they were white, they stayed on the bench. Jones, because he was Black, was not allowed to stay on the bench and was forced to be a target for the defensive line. White linemen were told repeatedly to hit Jones with their helmets on his injured knee. Dambach watched in horror but stayed quiet as the defensive line coach repeatedly yelled at Jones, calling him the "N-word" and urging him to quit. Finally, the head coach interrupted the assault and Jones crawled off the field. Alone. Dambach never recovered from his guilt over not stepping in to help his friend. This is just one of many painful examples of racism and racial abuse at Oklahoma's colleges. But not all Oklahomans sat back and allowed this treatment to happen without a fight.



Fig. 11.10: Protest by religious leaders at the Oklahoma City Municipal Building in 1960. A number of religious leaders played an important role in the promotion of civil rights in Oklahoma and nationally. Many carried signs with the words “NAACP Freedom,” followed by the names of Oklahoma cities. Protests like this one happened around the same time as those held by the Youth NAACP.

Courtesy of the Oklahoma Historical Society.

home from New York, they drove through Tennessee and Arkansas, where eating sack lunches was often their only option. And so an idea began to take hold as they embraced the words of John White, another Oklahoman who fought for civil rights: “The Sooner State, The Sooner we get rid of segregation, the better off we’ll be.” Despite Governor Gary’s support for school integration, segregation remained a reality for many African Americans, including those at Douglass High School, where several members of the Youth Council went to school. In many ways, school desegregation was more complicated and took longer to achieve than the integration of businesses.

By the time Luper and her students returned to Oklahoma City, the students were chanting “Freedom Now! Freedom Now!” and they quickly decided that ending segregation in public places was the top priority for their chapter of the NAACP Youth Council. They wanted to change segregation policies, and this started with stores that included



Fig. 11.11: Members of the Youth NAACP during the sit-in at Katz Drug Store in August 1958, including Clara Luper and her children, Marilyn and Calvin. While there was no violence against the group as they sat at the lunch counter asking to buy coca colas, the situation was tense, and Luper received a lot of criticism from opponents of integration. Despite that pushback, the protest was successful, and the chain of Katz drugstores ended its policy of segregation.

Courtesy of the Oklahoma Historical Society.

Clara Luper and the NAACP Youth Council

Clara Luper is often described as the mother of the Oklahoma Civil Rights Movement. She did a great deal to push for an end to segregation across the state. She did so as a history teacher, a mother, and as the sponsor for the **NAACP Youth Council** in Oklahoma City. In 1957, she wrote a play called *Brother President* based on the story of Martin Luther King, Jr. and his effort to end segregation in Montgomery, Alabama. Luper and her Youth Council high school students were invited to present the play in New York City, so she created a plan that forever changed the lives of her students and the role of segregation in Oklahoma. Luper wanted her students to see what it was like in cities where segregation was not as bad as it was in Oklahoma. And she wanted her students to see what it was like in cities where segregation was even worse than in Oklahoma.

On the trip to New York, Luper and her students took a northern route, and the young travelers had their first taste of eating at an integrated lunch counter in St. Louis. This made quite an impression on them. On their way

lunch counters. Nothing could have inspired them more than their firsthand experiences. Their strong desire for change led to one of the first lunch counter sit-ins in the entire country. Luper’s daughter Marilyn suggested that the Youth Council go to the lunch counter at Katz Drug Store and order cokes. And so they did. On August 19, 1958, Luper and young people ranging in age from six to fifteen went to Katz Drug Store in Oklahoma City, sat down at the counter, and ordered thirteen cokes. They were refused service and faced hateful words and threatening stares. But they stayed in their seats for hours. Two days later their actions led to victory. The Katz Drug Store chain announced an end to segregated lunch counters in all its thirty-eight stores in Oklahoma, Iowa, Kansas, and Arkansas.

This was just the beginning. Not only did Luper and the NAACP Youth Council continue their integration efforts in Oklahoma City, the movement spread throughout Oklahoma and beyond. Following their success at the Katz Drug Store, the Youth Council targeted segregation at the lunch counter at John A. Brown Department Store. This integration effort met with much more resistance than the one at Katz Drug Store. Eventually, Luper met the owner, Mrs. John A. Brown, face to face. In an emotional meeting, the two women embraced and talked about the rumors that each hated the other. They talked about their families and the Youth Council demonstrations. And when Mrs. Brown's secretary interrupted their meeting to bring them lemonade, Brown told her to serve Luper first. After talking for nearly an hour, Brown said, "Take this message back to the children. Segregation will end at John A. Brown's." The Youth Council had achieved another victory.

Over the next several years, the Youth Council organized numerous demonstrations against segregation in Oklahoma City, including at the Skirvin Hotel, the Anna Maude Cafeteria, and Wedgewood Amusement Park. Luper and the Youth Council successfully integrated dozens of establishments between 1958 and 1964, during which time the Oklahoma City Council passed the public accommodations ordinance ending segregation in public places like restaurants. The ordinance meant that Oklahoma City was meeting the requirements of the **Civil Rights Act of 1964** signed into law by President Lyndon B. Johnson. The Civil Rights Act did several important things, but most notably it banned discrimination in hiring practices and public accommodations. This was a significant turning point but certainly not the end to the fight for equality. Luper and other civil rights activists were arrested several times for blocking sidewalks and streets, and for disrupting the peace. As the public face of the movement, Luper received hate mail and faced criticism for her support of desegregation. Nevertheless, her civil rights work inspired many Oklahomans and integration efforts expanded across the state.



Fig. 11.12: Group of young civil rights activists in 1960. The Youth NAACP continued their efforts to challenge segregation in the years following the successful sit-in at Katz Drug Store. Even younger children joined in the efforts to integrate Oklahoma City and surrounding communities.

Courtesy of the Oklahoma Historical Society.



Fig. 11.13: One part of the Youth NAACP in Oklahoma City was the Minutemen Commandos. Clara Luper created this group in 1962. Twenty students were members. Their focus was safety. At protests and other demonstrations by the Youth NAACP, they protected those around them. They also spoke directly to those in power at department stores to promote desegregation and to get them to hire Black employees. They wore jackets like the one pictured here showing the front and back of jacket.

Courtesy of Charles Wood and the Oklahoma Historical Society.



Fig. 11.14: A meeting of the Youth NAACP with Clara Luper in 1964. The Youth Council participated in and organized dozens of events. They worked to increase voter registration and they supported sanitation workers when they went on strike. They also raised funds for many different causes that promoted equal rights and better treatment for Black people.

Courtesy of the Oklahoma Historical Society.

after they tried to eat at Borden's Cafeteria following the conclusion of the march. Beyond the sit-ins and marches that Luper helped organize in Oklahoma City and Tulsa, she also worked with activists in Norman and Lawton. And her work did not end with the 1964 Civil Rights Act. She fought for equality the rest of her life.

As Clara Luper and other civil rights advocates continued their work, nothing proved more poignant than the integration efforts in Tulsa, the site of the worst race massacre in American history. When Luper responded to a friend's request to lead a march in Tulsa, the people on the bus ride from Oklahoma City to Tulsa could not stop talking about the 1921 race massacre. The disturbing history of the massacre had been erased from the minds of most white Tulsans, and history textbooks remained silent on the violent episode in Tulsa's past. Black Tulsans, however, kept the story alive in hushed warnings of the violence that the Black community had been subjected to four decades earlier. The sit-ins and marches in the 1960s confronted Tulsa's past in a way that was uncomfortable for many. The 400-person Freedom March in downtown Tulsa that Luper helped organize inspired civil rights supporters while angering many white Tulsans. Luper and several others were arrested



Fig. 11.15: In August 1963, Clara Luper along with several other adult chaperons, took two buses of students from the NAACP Youth Council to Washington DC. They went to participate in the March on Washington where Martin Luther King, Jr. gave his famous "I Have a Dream" speech. This was a life-changing experience for many who attended, including Rosie Gilchrist (pictured here with sunglasses and a scarf). She was the only white female chaperone. Shortly after she returned from this trip, authorities committed her to a mental institution in Norman to stop her from selling her home in Warr Acres to a Black doctor she met on the trip.

Courtesy of the Oklahoma Historical Society.

“The Group” Faces Down Racism in Lawton

Clara Luper’s ability and willingness to see people who supported racist policies as people and not as “the enemy” was one of her most powerful skills. She made eye contact with them. She talked to them. She challenged them. But she did not regard them with hate. In this way, her approach resembled that of civil rights supporters in Lawton, Oklahoma’s third largest city at the time. In 1963, a diverse group of Lawton residents decided that they needed to do something to address racial discrimination in their city. An organization that referred to itself as simply “**The Group**” formed with the intent to challenge segregation. The Group included whites, Blacks, and Native Americans. It included a representative from Fort Sill, along with religious leaders in the community, civic leaders, other professionals, “and just plain folk” who wanted to help work to end segregation.

The Group started its work by meeting on Wednesday nights. Members took turns hosting potluck dinners in their homes in part because the racial diversity of the group made it nearly impossible to find a restaurant that would serve them together. During its first meetings, the Group created a list of all segregated establishments in Lawton. Then they sent members to talk to the owners or managers of these segregated establishments to ask them to consider integrating. The Group decided to change minds one relationship at a time. So they made personal connections with the owners of segregated restaurants, hotels, and movie theaters. When possible, two people of different racial or ethnic backgrounds went together to meet with owners. More often than not, someone in the Group already knew the owner and so they were able to use individual relationships to fight for desegregation.



Fig. 11.16: The Group’s grassroots efforts to desegregate Lawton were largely successful. They used varied forms of advocacy, including persuasion, peaceful protests, and the power of Fort Sill to make nonintegrated businesses off-limits to base personnel. This 1966 photo shows some Group members at a protest at the Lawton City Hall. This protest took place after a vote to integrate public facilities did not pass.

Courtesy of the Oklahoma Historical Society.

The efforts made by the Group to secure a truly integrated city of Lawton offered a great example of grassroots activism and showed the type of success that is possible when diverse groups of people come together to work for the same goal. Dr. E. A. Owens was the only Black doctor in Lawton in the mid-1960s, and he was also president of the Lawton chapter of the NAACP and a founding member of the Group. According to Owens, “by personal contact, about 95% of the public accommodations were opened to all” by 1967. There are a few reasons why this is remarkable and important to consider. Much of the integration that the Group achieved happened because of the personal relationships that the Group used to try to change the minds of the people they met. Indigenous rights activist LaDonna Harris (Comanche) was also a member of the Group, and she talked about the message that she and other members heard all too often when they first tried to get a restaurant to serve African Americans. Harris said the most common response from the owners was, “If we don’t want to eat with them, why do they want to eat with us?” The Group saw themselves as educating their fellow citizens about the need to treat everyone equally.

Another important part of the Group's effort to integrate came from their relationship to Fort Sill. In 1948, President Harry Truman issued an executive order to desegregate the armed forces. This did not happen immediately, but it did put the military on the cutting edge of social change. This meant that by the time the Group organized in 1963, Fort Sill was integrated, but the city of Lawton was not. Lawton had grown alongside Fort Sill, and many of the businesses in Lawton during the 1960s could not have survived without customers from the base. This gave the Group an important and relatively unique tool to use in the integration efforts. Fort Sill allowed the Group to say that establishments that refused to integrate would be off-limits to base personnel. It was not clear at the time if Fort Sill would have followed through on this threat, but either way it gave the Group a powerful economic weapon for those times when appealing to people's morality and using personal relationships were not enough.

Executive Order 9981 and Military Integration

During World War II, the US military drafted over 40 percent of eligible Black men. This added up to over one million Black men. They served in all areas of the war and all branches of the US military. Many Black women joined the military as well. All these individuals served in segregated units. Throughout the war, the United States claimed to be fighting against German fascism and the atrocities of the Holocaust. Yet the nation's unjust segregation of the US military seemed at odds with its moral stance abroad.

In 1946, one year after the ending of the war, President Harry Truman created the President's Commission on Civil Rights. In 1947, this commission came out with its recommended legislation. It suggested outlawing both lynching and poll taxes. It called for the creation of a permanent Fair Employment Practices Commission. The purpose of this commission would be to stop employers from discriminating against people of color in their hiring practices. The President's Commission stated the need for the Department of Justice's civil rights division to be stronger. In 1948, Truman tried to get Congress to make laws to meet the recommendations of the commission. He was not successful. He then tried to use his presidential powers to put civil rights legislation in place. This legislation included Executive Order 9981, which integrated the military. The order stated that the "policy shall be put into effect as rapidly as possible." It also granted that such change would take time.

And take time it did. Many opposed the legislation, including individuals in the federal government and in several military branches. However, secretary of the Air Force W. Stuart Symington supported the policy. The Air Force was the first branch of the military to fully integrate by the end of 1950. At bases in regions with Jim Crow laws, the Air Force chose to not follow those laws. The secretary of the US Navy also stated support for integration. Yet most Black sailors remained in lower positions. The marines tried to not integrate. In 1949, they finally began training Black and white soldiers together. By 1952, they chose to begin integrating units. The army was much slower to integrate. Army officials thought that integration would lead to lower national security. In early 1950, they said they would desegregate. That same year the army got rid of its cap on the number of Black soldiers who could join. They did not complete the integration process until 1954. Even with the slow integration of the army, most of the military applied policies of integration by 1953.

Amusement Parks and Swimming Pools

The Group and its Fort Sill allies succeeded in integrating much of Lawton, but one place that stayed segregated was the city's only amusement park, Doe Doe Park. In June 1966, Clara Luper joined forces with civil rights advocates in Lawton to organize a march from Oklahoma City to Lawton to protest the refusal of Doe Doe Park to allow admission to African Americans.



Fig. 11.17: Protestors on the second day of the march from Oklahoma City to Lawton to challenge Doe Doe Park's policy of "whites only." While many of the actions to desegregate Lawton were accomplished without violence, efforts to integrate Doe Doe Park led to tenser interactions. The park was eventually integrated but then closed a short time later.

Courtesy of the Oklahoma Historical Society.

Over two hundred people participated in the march. More than fifty demonstrators were arrested. It was the largest civil rights demonstration in Lawton to date, and certainly the most tense and dangerous. Bill Hutchins, Sr. owned the park. He claimed that because the park was private, the 1964 Civil Rights Act did not apply. A federal court ruling in April 1968 agreed with Hutchins, ruling that the park did not meet the criteria of a public accommodation and could not be forced to integrate. Despite the ruling, Hutchins decided to integrate the following month. It might be that he just wanted to prove that the decision was his to make. His family said that was his reason. It might also have been because the commanding general of Fort Sill decided that members of the military were no longer allowed to go there. By 1968, the United States was busy fighting in the Vietnam War and Lawton's population and economy grew with the increase in military personnel from Fort Sill.

Amusement parks like Doe Doe Park were popular throughout the state, but they took a long time to integrate. They were even slower to integrate if they had swimming pools and if they could find a way to claim that they were private clubs rather than public facilities. As tense as the Doe Doe Park protests were

in the mid-1960s, they were nothing compared to the tension and outright violence that erupted at the Springlake Amusement Park in Oklahoma City. While African Americans were allowed to go into the park, they were not allowed to go into the swimming pool. Some white people really did not want to share swimming pools with Black people. Springlake said that only people who belonged to an aquatics club were allowed to use its pool. The park was trying to get around the 1964 Civil Rights Act by creating a private club membership. This worked until Wedgewood Amusement Park, which was also in Oklahoma City, decided to open their swimming pool to everyone. Springlake then opened their pool to everyone, but afterward, in 1967, decided to change the swimming pool to an aquarium. Tensions remained high at Springlake between African Americans and whites, but things reached a boiling point in April 1971. A riot broke out at the park and it took half of the Oklahoma City Police Department to calm things down. The park closed after the riot and never reopened.

Conclusion

Thinking historically about integration and civil rights is hard. It is hard because we want the struggle to be over quickly and we want to let out a sigh of relief that the worst of it is behind us. We want to think that nonviolent peaceful protesting won the day. But doing this ignores the lived experiences of many Oklahomans. Progress in race relations and equal treatment has not followed a straight line, and it still does not. Even as schools and universities in Oklahoma integrated, racial discrimination persisted. Even as drugstore lunch counters opened to African Americans, racial discrimination persisted. Black athletes made great strides as members of previously all-white teams, but this did not mean that they experienced equal treatment either on or off the field.

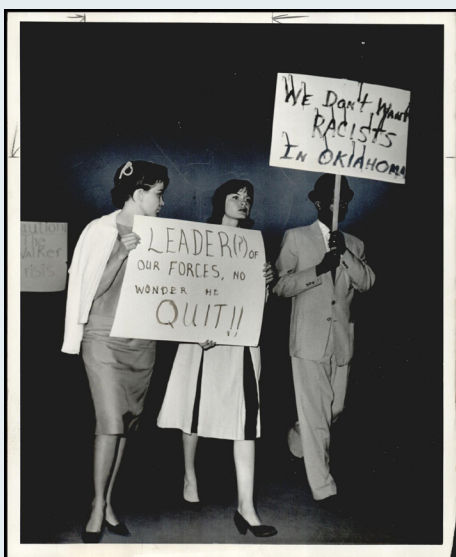


Fig. 11.18: Nonviolent civil rights protest in Tulsa in 1963. Many protestors wore shirts with the words "CORE Tulsa." CORE (Congress of Racial Equality) was a nonviolent organization that pushed for racial equality during the Civil Rights Movement. One man holds up a sign here that says "We Shall Overcome." The integration of Tulsa is especially important to consider given the city's history of racial violence.

Courtesy of the Oklahoma Historical Society.

for months. Black Alabamans avoided using buses by carpooling, walking, and taking taxis at discounted fares. This protest launched Martin Luther King, Jr. into the public eye. It also ended bus segregation in 1956.

The Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) is an important example of a peaceful civil rights organization. Ella Baker and other Black activist college students founded SNCC in 1960. The group dedicated itself to staging nonviolent protests. These promoted integration and voting rights. In 1961, SNCC members participated in a series of protests called the Freedom Rides. These took place in southern states. In 1946, the Supreme Court ruled in the case of *Morgan v. Virginia* that segregated interstate transportation was illegal. They further ruled in the 1960 case *Boynton v. Virginia* that segregated

Nonviolent Protests

The practice of nonviolence was a guiding principle for civil rights activists. Many of the groups and people that we honor today were committed to peaceful protest. Members of civil rights groups experienced violence, however. This came from white people and even government officials. Yet the activists thought their actions should follow the morals they wished others would hold. They used many methods, including boycotts, marches, voter registration campaigns, and sit-ins, to fight for equal rights and treatment for Black Americans.

Martin Luther King, Jr. played a vital role in the Civil Rights Movement as a model for nonviolent activism. His inspiration came from Indian activist Mahatma Gandhi. Gandhi used peaceful protest to resist colonial violence and racism in India and South Africa. King was committed to nonviolent resistance as well. He took part in his first major protest in 1955. This was during the Montgomery bus boycott. In early December of that year, police in Montgomery, Alabama, had arrested a Black woman named Rosa Parks. They did this because she refused to give her bus seat to a white man. Montgomery laws required African Americans to sit in the "colored" section. That meant sitting at the back of the bus. They also had to give their seats to whites if the front of the bus was full. After Parks's arrest, Black leaders planned a boycott of the bus system. Churches and the newspaper the *Montgomery Advertiser* told locals about the protest. On December 5, 1955, 40,000 people participated in the boycott. The protests continued

Civil Rights Movement

UNIT 3

interstate facilities were illegal. Yet in 1947 many states continued to illegally segregate their interstate bus systems. In response, the Congress of Racial Equality, a civil rights group, started a protest. Many student activists participated in an integrated bus ride across state lines. These first rides did not spark much media attention. More than a decade later, in 1961, the rides, now called the Freedom Rides, resumed. Members of the SNCC and other organizations joined. Freedom Riders experienced harassment from police and local citizens in Virginia. Some were arrested. They faced violent mobs led by the Ku Klux Klan. Government officials in Alabama supported the mobs. Freedom riders were subject to violent attacks across the South. Students from all over the country joined the protests.

Another type of nonviolent protest came in the form of lunch counter sit-ins. In 1960, one of the most famous sit-ins happened in Greensboro, North Carolina. Four Black students began the sit-in at the local Woolworth's lunch counter. By the fifth day of the protest, over 300 others joined. Woolworth gave in on the sixth day, but the store only made small changes to its policy. Students continued the sit-in. Police then arrested 45 protestors for trespassing. This sparked the students to organize a boycott of the store. After six months, the store became integrated.

All these examples show the effectiveness of nonviolent protest. They also show the courage of Black activists. These protesters faced discrimination, violence, and intimidation from white people. They knew that their actions could set off unsafe reactions. They also knew their actions could lead to unjust arrests. Yet civil rights activists kept fighting peacefully for what they knew was right.

Civil rights activism in Oklahoma led to important changes and new opportunities, but it did not end the anti-Blackness so widespread in the United States in the mid-twentieth century. It did, however, awaken many young people across racial and ethnic lines to the injustice that existed in a segregated society. In the next chapter, we will explore the growth of student activism in Oklahoma, much of which was influenced and inspired by the civil rights activism going on both nationally and locally.

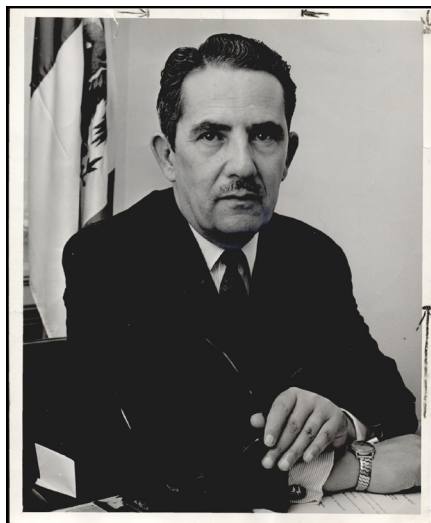


Fig. 11.18: Victor M. Pesqueira served as the Mexican diplomat to Oklahoma in the 1960s. At that time, Mexico was the only country to station a consul in Oklahoma. According to Pesqueira, there were around seven hundred families in Oklahoma in the 1960s with ties to their Mexican nationality. During this period, Oklahoma began to see a significant increase in Mexican immigration, which continues today. There has also been an increase in immigration to Oklahoma from a number of other Latin American countries. The Latinx population and its cultural influence continues to grow in the twenty-first century.

Courtesy of the Oklahoma Historical Society.

Short Answer Questions

- 1 Why was the 14th Amendment important to the Civil Rights Movement?
- 2 What was the impact of Title 70 on schools?
- 3 Why was Ada Lois Sipuel Fisher's legal case important for integration in higher education?
- 4 What did the Better Schools Amendment provide?
- 5 What strategies did the Group use in Lawton to fight segregation?

Short Response Questions

- 1 What does it mean to have "equal protection under the law"? In your response, be sure to include examples from the chapter as examples of equal protection.
- 2 Explain why Clara Luper is known as the mother of the Civil Rights Movement in Oklahoma. In your response, be sure to include examples of the kinds of events she organized and her achievements.