



Young people were an important part of the movement to end segregation. These children were holding a “sit in” in an Oklahoma restaurant that refused to serve African Americans. By sitting there for days, unserved, they tried to show the unfairness of segregated restaurants.

THE STRUGGLE FOR EQUAL RIGHTS

Montgomery, Alabama, is often called the cradle of the civil rights movement. On December 1, 1955, a black seamstress named Rosa Parks sparked a quiet revolution when she refused to give up her seat to a white passenger on a Montgomery city bus.

The Unfair Laws of Segregation

Laws and customs at that time denied African Americans many of the freedoms that white people enjoyed. Blacks couldn't eat in certain restaurants or sit in certain sections of trains, buses, or movie theaters. Sometimes black children were not allowed to go to school with white children. Sometimes, black people were not even allowed to vote. This harsh reality was called segregation.

The Civil Rights Movement

Mrs. Parks and her fellow participants in the civil rights movement decided to protest the injustice of segregation. They

demanded the same rights and freedoms for African Americans that the Constitution promises to all Americans regardless of race.

Throughout the 1960s, the struggle for equal rights for African Americans changed unfair laws across the United States. But in many places, it was easier to change the laws than to change some people's minds.

In 1971, two Montgomery lawyers started the Southern Poverty Law Center. Morris Dees and Joe Levin wanted to help remove the barriers to freedom that still existed in spite of the new laws. In its 32 years of operation, the Center has continued to promote equality and justice through legal work, research, and education.

Adapted from an article by Jim Carnes

CIVIL RIGHTS
—the guarantee of equal treatment, equal rights, and equal opportunities for all people; the freedoms and rights that all citizens of a society have by law.