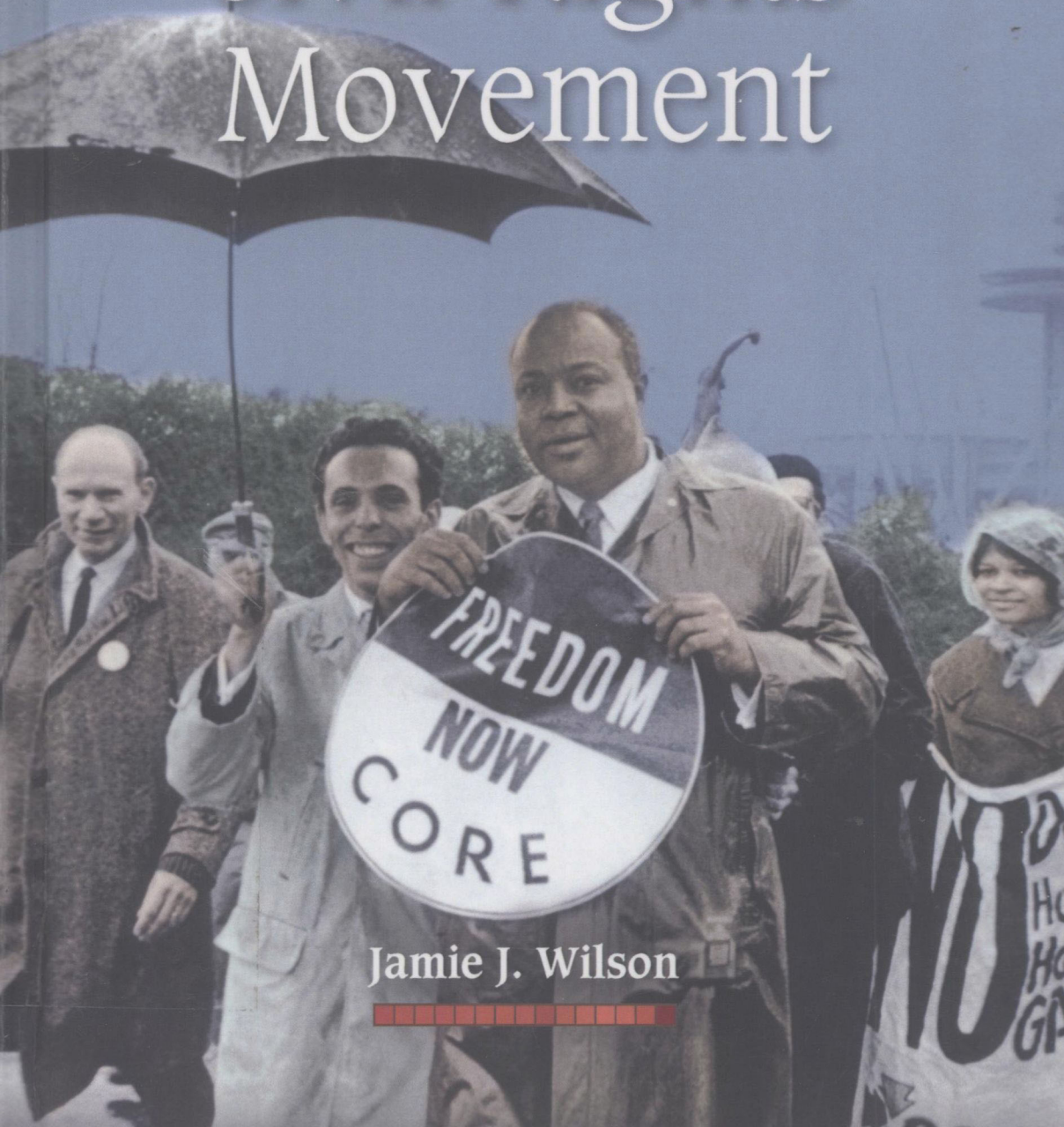


LANDMARKS *of the* AMERICAN MOSAIC

Civil Rights Movement



Jamie J. Wilson

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Landmarks of the American Mosaic



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Introduction

THE CIVIL RIGHTS MOVEMENT is a reference work for students. As one reads, they will note that the Civil Rights Movement includes more than Rosa Parks' refusal to relinquish her seat on a segregated bus. It is also more than Martin Luther King Jr.'s "I Have a Dream" speech. These two events are iconic indeed, and most students know about them even without knowing Parks' contexts or the texts of King's speech. But if we want to understand the extent of the movement, it is necessary to include a discussion of Parks' determination and King's charisma without deifying them and ignoring other important aspects of the struggle for black equality.

What lies ahead in this book is a bird's eye and telescopic view of the black freedom struggle. It is a bird's eye view in that it provides a breadth of discussion and survey of important campaigns and highlights significant contributions by activists. It is telescopic in that it provides a narrative depth that moves beyond the surface discussion and encyclopedic trivia. It is impossible to detail every event that occurred in what historians have often called the second Reconstruction, but this book attempts to provide the reader with a narrative as comprehensive as possible and a point of departure that includes some of the major campaigns waged by African Americans for full citizenship, justice, and equality. In its totality the Civil Rights Movement was the political and social reaction to years of white supremacy in the United States. Interlocking and overlapping attempts to physically, emotionally, spiritually, politically, and economically dominate black people began when the first Africans were traded in the Chesapeake region for goods and supplies from a Dutch Man-of-War in 1619. Though it included white allies, it was a decentralized, mass political movement comprised primarily of African Americans who sought to undermine and overturn the humiliating and oppressive system of segregation, often called Jim Crow, throughout the United States. Efforts were sometimes centralized in one location, but overall the movement included local, state, and nationwide organizations and individuals who at times worked in tandem and at other times in isolation.

As the astute reader will notice, several chapters are titled after an African American gospel or freedom song. I include them for two reasons. The first is to honor the African American musical tradition, which has been, when all else has failed, a salve for those individuals who struggled to maintain their humanity in a society which sought to strip them of it. They are also included to remind the reader that the Civil Rights Movement is both a political movement and a religious movement, as it was based in the church and led largely by clergymen. To invoke black sacred and secular music is to invoke the religious and political heritage of a people who sought to create a little bit of heaven on earth for themselves and their offspring.

Chapter one, "I've been 'buked and I've been scorned," examines the rise of segregation policies and society throughout the South. The enthusiasm and seemingly unlimited opportunities that marked the Reconstruction era were reversed when Reconstruction ended in 1877. Slowly, law by law, in place after place, African American political life entered into what many have called the nadir, or lowest ebb. The chapter notes that customs and laws demanding the separation of whites and blacks in all aspects of life have their roots in the closing decades of the 19th century, and demonstrate that during this era, African Americans were economically, politically, residentially, and educationally circumscribed. "I want to be ready to put on my long white robe," Chapter two, examines the ways African Americans challenged segregation in the 1930s and the 1940s, the decades preceding the zenith of the Civil Rights Movement. The chapter argues that though they may not have been able to dismantle segregation policies and recreate southern society, African Americans joined and created political organizations, challenged federal policies, reversed state laws, and strategized for change. They worked within the political and social limitations of the time. Though they may have imagined a world wherein every individual was protected by basic constitutional rights, the ruling elite did not allow their hegemony to be toppled. In the end, the social and political milieu was not ready and did not allow for fundamental change in the opportunities and life chances of black Americans.

"We Shall Overcome" and "Ain't Gonna Let Nobody Turn Me 'Round," Chapter three and Chapter four, respectively, discuss the major campaigns in Alabama and Mississippi. The Montgomery Bus Boycott in 1955 may not be the start of African Americans' struggle for justice and equality, but it is one of the most important political contestations of the 1950s. The boycott is considered in chapter three, along with other major campaigns in Alabama, including the Birmingham campaign, the march from Selma to Montgomery, and black experimentation with third party politics, with

the creation of the Lowndes County Freedom Organization. The state of Mississippi was considered by many to be a closed society and impervious to outside change and influence. Local and state officials were not as open to change as their counterparts in Alabama. Their reluctance, however, did not discourage black activism. Chapter four looks at some of the not-so-successful attempts at creating equality in the state. In so doing, it discusses how local activists, students, and the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee worked for civil rights. The highlight of the Mississippi movement was the Freedom Summer of 1964, when white and black college-age activists descended upon Mississippi to work in voter registration drives and create Freedom Schools. In both states, nonviolent direct action, negotiations between black and white elites, and litigation forced the Kennedy and Johnson administrations to side with the black activists.

Chapter five, “‘A Right Denied’: Court Decisions’ Impacts on the Civil Rights of African Americans” is written by Staci M. Rubin, a public interest attorney and scholar. It uses a legal history approach to discuss the impact of litigation’s role in the Civil Rights Movement, how legal challenges brought by African Americans to the courts led to the creation of important civil rights legislation, as well as the implications of these decisions for African Americans. Cases including, but not limited to, *Shelley v. Kramer* (1948), *Sweatt v. Painter* (1950), *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954), and *Boynton v. Virginia* (1960) are discussed.

“We Shall Not be Moved,” chapter six, argues that the oppression of African Americans was not limited to the Deep South. Consequently, African American political activity was not limited to this area. If one were driving up and down the eastern seaboard states throughout the 1950s and the 1960s, they would have witnessed a hotbed of activism: sit-ins, boycotts, threats of boycotts, prayer meetings, etc. In places like Greensboro, North Carolina; Cambridge, Maryland; Louisville, Kentucky; and in northern locations like Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, and Brooklyn, New York, African Americans and their white allies fomented change. In southern and border states, they challenged de jure segregation, but in places like Philadelphia and Brooklyn, they challenged de facto segregation. A discussion of campaigns outside of the Deep South and lesser known individuals highlights the decentralized nature of the movement as well as the scope of African American political activity throughout the country.

Chapter seven, “Power to the People” examines what is often understood as more radical black activity in the mid-to-late 1960s and the early 1970s. During these years, civil rights work was replaced by more militant black power activism. Contrary to the lay persons’ and sometimes

scholarly rendition that the black power movement was somehow the evil twin of the civil rights movement, wherein violence-prone and angry black youth wanted to destroy America, the chapter argues that black power advocacy paralleled civil rights work. While civil rights activism focused on the removal of boundaries to constitutional rights, black power proponents were more focused on remedying the problems that constrained the life chances of African Americans, including employment, police brutality, and continued black exploitation in the light of civil rights advances. Malcolm X, Huey Newton, Stokely Carmichael, and the ways in which blacks strove to achieve self determination in urban areas are discussed.

The final narrative chapter, “From *Amos ‘n’ Andy* to *I Spy*” discusses African Americans in television and film. Television was an important ally in the Civil Rights Movement. Civil rights organizations used it to dramatize and show the atrocities meted out to black protestors and black people throughout the country. With television’s growing influence in the 1960s, it was no longer possible for many people to ignore what was happening to black people. Equally important, as African Americans struggled to change their political positions in the United States of America, black actors depicted new images of black people on the small and large screens. Particular attention is given to the accomplished actor Sidney Poitier and the comedian Bill Cosby, though other actors are also discussed. The images African Americans portrayed on television were not always a reflection of the lived realities of most black people. Some were criticized while others were praised. However, the actors discussed showed African Americans who were not subservient and offered whites and blacks new ways of thinking about what it means to be black in America.

In addition to the eight narrative chapters, this reference includes biographical profiles of important people and the cultural developments during the Civil Rights Movement. Primary documents follow the biography section. These documents provide the reader with an inside glimpse into specific movement activity, the thinking of policy makers, and the work of people in the movement. Each selection is preceded by an explanatory head note that contextualizes the document and aids in its comprehension. An annotated bibliography section is included, which cites and assesses the most important print, electronic sources, and documentaries that discuss the Civil Rights Movement. A brief glossary in this reference guide explains terms likely to be unfamiliar to high school students and general readers.

Throughout this reference book, the terms African American(s), people of color, black(s), and black American(s) are used interchangeably. For

some, this may be obvious. For those unfamiliar with racial nomenclature, however, such terms may be unsettling. Recently, a student of European American ancestry approached me after a class and asked me to explain to her why some people of African descent do not want to be called African American. In another instance, in a class populated by students of European American ancestry, students were shaken when I described myself as black. When I asked why they were so perturbed, a student responded that she was told never to use the word black because black people find it offensive. In yet another class, when discussing people of African descent from the Caribbean, a student classified a Haitian and a Jamaican as African American. It seems that the term African American is used by segments of white America to describe any person of African descent. So as not to confuse the reader, I use the terms African American(s), people of color, black(s), and black American(s) to refer to people of African descent who reside in the United States whose ancestors were the enslaved or subordinate class, and who belong to a specific racial history, culture, or ethnicity throughout most of U.S. history. More to the point, I use them interchangeably because black people use them interchangeably. Despite the re-emergence of “Negro” as a term of classification in the 2010 federal census, I have not, in my research, social interactions, and personal experience, come across someone who self-describes as such. Consequently, Negro is excluded unless used in the context of a direct quote.

I end this introduction with a few words of thanks. Had it not been for others, this book could not have been written. Thank you to my dear wife and partner, Shula. Several of my students deserve my gratitude: Courtney L. Anderson, Emily L. Mercer, Casey L. Castro, Brian A. Kibler, Katherine R. Murphy, and Desiree Sharlee Marquant. Their input helped me clarify the narrative. Kenneth Sterrett and Ashley M. Windsor provided valuable research assistance. Many thanks to the editorial and marketing staff at ABC-CLIO, especially Kim Kennedy-White. They were courteous, responsive, professional, and informative.

Finally, thank you to all those who struggled so that we may all inherit a more just society. We are not where we should be. We are not who we will be. However, as Civil Rights Movement activists have shown through their determination and willingness to challenge the status quo, a better world is possible.

Chronology of the Movement

1954 May 17: *Brown vs. Board of Education of Topeka*. U.S. Supreme Court unanimously agrees that racial segregation in public education is unconstitutional.

June: Malcolm X becomes head minister at the Nation of Islam's Temple No. 7 in Harlem, New York.

July: Mississippi residents convene the first meeting of the White Citizens' Council.

1955 January 7: Marian Anderson, a contralto, is the first African American woman to perform at the New York Metropolitan Opera.

May 7: Reverend George Lee is murdered as a result of his civil rights work in Belzoni, Mississippi.

January 18: President Dwight Eisenhower signs the Executive Order 10590 prohibiting racial discrimination in federal employment.

April 18: Bandung Conference of Afro-Asian States opens in Bandung, Indonesia.

August 28: Emmett Till, a teenager from Chicago, Illinois, is beaten, shot, and dumped in the Tallahatchie River outside of Money, Mississippi, for allegedly whistling at a white woman.

November 25: The Interstate Commerce Commission prohibits segregation in interstate travel.

December 1: Rosa Parks refuses to relinquish her seat to a white passenger on a segregated bus. Her refusal sparks the Montgomery Bus Boycott, which lasts 381 days.

1956 April 4: Jazz singer and pianist Nat King Cole is assaulted after performing for an integrated audience in Birmingham, Alabama.

May 2: Tallahassee Bus Boycott begins. The boycott lasts until March 1958, when the city ended the practice of segregation on public buses throughout the city.

December 17: U.S. Supreme Court upholds a lower court decision in *Gayle vs. Browder*, ending segregation on buses in Montgomery, Alabama.

1957 Malcolm X is named national spokesperson of the Nation of Islam by the organization's leader, Elijah Muhammad.

Stax Records is founded in Memphis, Tennessee. Though the company was founded by two white record producers, it would come to produce some of the most important soul, funk, jazz, and rhythm and blues artists in the late 1950s and the 1960s.

January–February: Reverend Martin Luther King, Reverend Fred Shuttlesworth, Reverend Ralph Abernathy, and other clergy from southern states form the Southern Christian Leadership Conference.

March 6: Ghana achieves independence.

May 17: The Southern Christian Leadership Conference and other civil rights groups stage the Prayer Pilgrimage for Freedom in Washington, D.C., seeking enforcement of the 1954 *Brown* Decision.

September 9: President Dwight Eisenhower signs the Civil Rights Act of 1957 into law. The Act marked the first of such laws since Reconstruction. The law established a Civil Rights Commission and made it illegal to prevent citizens from practicing their right to vote.

September 24: The National Guard descends upon Little Rock, Arkansas, to enforce the integration of Little Rock Arkansas' Central High School.

1958 Bill Russell of the Boston Celtics is named the league's Most Valuable Player.

January 18: William O'Ree integrates the National Hockey League.

June 29: Bethel Baptist Church in Birmingham, Alabama, is bombed by the Ku Klux Klan.

1959 March 11: Lorraine Hansberry's *A Raisin in the Sun* premieres on Broadway in New York City.

June 26: Rather than desegregate its schools, school officials in Prince Edward County, Maryland, dismantle the public school system.

July 13–17: *The Hate That Hate Produced*, an exposé about the Nation of Islam, airs on WNTA-TV in New York City.

December: Berry Gordy founds Motown Records in Detroit, Michigan. Employing some of the best-known rhythm and blues and soul artists

of the 1960s and the 1970s, the company helped produce the sound track for the 1960s.

1960 *To Kill a Mockingbird* is published. The fictional work tells the story of a white lawyer who defends a black man accused of raping a white woman.

Eleven African nations achieve independence, providing encouragement for activists involved in the Civil Rights Movement.

February 1: Students from North Carolina Agricultural and Technical College stage a sit-in at a local Woolworth's segregated lunch counter, which begins a wave of sit-ins around the country.

April: The Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee is founded at Shaw University in Raleigh, North Carolina.

May 6: President Dwight Eisenhower signs the Civil Rights Act of 1960.

August–September: Max Roach records *We Insist! Max Roach's Freedom Jazz Suite* featuring Abbey Lincoln.

September 19: Fidel Castro visits Harlem and stays in the Hotel Theresa.

November 14: Ruby Bridges integrates William Frantz Public School in New Orleans, Louisiana.

1961 Journalist John Howard Griffin's *Black Like Me* is published. The nonfiction work details the travels of a white man who passes as black in the Deep South.

February 16: Black Nationalists take over the United Nations Building in New York City.

March 6: President John F. Kennedy signs Executive Order 10925. The Order establishes the President's Committee on Equal Employment Opportunity. The law prohibits racial discrimination in employment by all government contracting agencies.

May: An interracial group of activists affiliated with the Congress of Racial Equality embarks on Freedom Rides to challenge continued segregation in interstate transit. In Alabama, their bus is attacked by a white mob. In Mississippi, riders are jailed when they attempt to integrate a whites-only rest area.

July–December: The Southern Christian Leadership Conference and Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee's attempts to desegregate Albany, Georgia, fail.

September 25: Herbert Lee, farmer, father of nine, and member of the Amite County, Mississippi, National Association for the Advancement of Colored people is murdered by E. H. Hurst, a member of the Mississippi state legislature.

December 1961–January 1962: Students at Southern University in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, and the New Orleans branch of the Congress of Racial Equality organize boycotts and protests throughout Baton Rouge to desegregate stores.

1962 June: The Southern Christian Leadership Conference starts Operation Breadbasket—the economic wing of the organization—in an effort to change discriminatory hiring practices and boycott stores that continued to practice segregation.

June 24: James Meredith becomes the first black student to enroll at the University of Mississippi.

1963 January 1: The nation marks the 100th anniversary of the Emancipation Proclamation.

April–May: The Southern Christian Leadership Conference carries out Project Confrontation in Birmingham, Alabama, demanding an end to segregation in downtown department stores and restaurants, the elimination of discriminatory hiring practices in businesses throughout the city, and the creation of an oversight committee that would implement desegregation policies.

April 16: Martin Luther King Jr. writes *Letter from a Birmingham Jail*.

May: James Baldwin's *Fire Next Time* is published in which he offers his commentary on the civil rights struggle.

June 12: Medgar Evers, field secretary for the NAACP branch in Jackson, Mississippi, is murdered by Byron de la Beckwith.

June 23: Organizers, politicians, and activists stage the Great March to Freedom in Detroit, Michigan. Martin Luther King Jr. gives the keynote address at the event and calls it the “greatest demonstration for freedom ever held in this United States.”

August 17: W.E.B. Du Bois dies at the age of 95.

August 28: The March on Washington is held with over 250,000 people in attendance. Martin Luther King Jr. delivers his famous “I Have a Dream Speech.”

September 15: The Sixteenth Street Baptist Church in Birmingham, Alabama, is bombed.

November 22: President John F. Kennedy is assassinated.

December: Malcolm X is suspended from the Nation of Islam.

1964 January 23: The Twenty-Fourth Amendment to the Constitution is ratified, eliminating the use of poll taxes as a prerequisite for voting.

February 25: Muhammad Ali defeats Sonny Liston to become the world heavyweight champion.

March: Malcolm X officially breaks from the Nation of Islam and establishes the Muslim Mosque Incorporated.

March–June: Southern Christian Leadership Conference stages mass demonstrations in St. Augustine, Florida.

April 12: Malcolm X delivers his address “The Ballot or the Bullet” at the King Solomon Baptist Church in Detroit, Michigan.

April 13: Sidney Poitier is presented with an Academy Award for his portrayal of Homer Smith in the 1963 film *Lilies of the Field*.

June 2: President Lyndon B. Johnson signs the Civil Rights Act of 1964 into law.

June–September: Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee organizes and commences Freedom Summer in Mississippi.

July 18: Riots erupt in Brooklyn and Harlem, New York.

August 4: The bodies of slain civil rights workers James Chaney, Mickey Schwerner, and Andrew Goodman are recovered.

August 21–26: Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party delegation attempts to unseat the all-white Democratic Party delegation in Atlantic City, New Jersey, at the Democratic National Convention.

December 10: Martin Luther King Jr. is awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in Oslo, Norway.

1965 John Coltrane’s *A Love Supreme* is released.

Malcolm X’s *Autobiography* is published.

February 21: Malcolm X is assassinated at the Audubon Ballroom in Harlem, New York.

March 7: Scores of protesters are beaten by police while trying to cross the Edmund Pettus Bridge in Selma, Alabama, on their way to the state’s capital.

March 11: James Reeb, a white Unitarian minister, dies from head injuries suffered at the hands of white segregationists during a civil rights demonstration in Selma, Alabama.

March 16–25: Martin Luther King Jr. members of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, and the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee lead thousands of activists on a march from Selma to Montgomery to protest the killing of Jimmy Lee Jackson.

August 6: President Lyndon B. Johnson signs the Voting Rights Act, outlawing discriminatory voting practices.

August 11–15: Riots erupt in the Watts section of Los Angeles, California.

September 28: President Lyndon B. Johnson signs Executive Order 11246, prohibiting federal employment discrimination based on “race, creed, color or national origin.”

1966 Kwanzaa, the African American cultural heritage celebration, is created by Ron Karenga.

June 6: James Meredith is shot and injured in Hernando, Mississippi, on his March Against Fear.

June: Members of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, and Student Nonviolence Coordinating Committee continue Meredith’s march to Jackson, Mississippi. During the march, Stokely Carmichael popularizes the phrase “Black Power.”

September 22: Stokely Carmichael’s “What we Want” is published in the *New York Review of Books*.

October: The Black Panther Party is founded in Oakland, California, by Huey P. Newton and Bobby Seale.

November: Edward William Brooke, III, is elected to the U.S. Senate as a Republican from Massachusetts. He is the first African American since the Reconstruction era to be elected to the U.S. Senate. He served until 1979.

1967 *Guess Who’s Coming to Dinner*, a film which examines attitudes about interracial marriage, is released, with Sidney Poitier in the lead role.

Eldridge Cleaver’s *Soul on Ice* is published.

Martin Luther King Jr.’s *Where Do We Go From Here: Community or Chaos?* is published.