Advancing the Civil Rights Movement:
Race and Geography of *Life* Magazine’s Visual Representation, 1954-1965

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This dissertation titled

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Race and Geography of *Life* Magazine’s Visual Representation, 1954-1965

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Abstract

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Advancing the Civil Rights Movement: Race and Geography of *Life* Magazine’s Visual Representation, 1954-1965

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As one of America’s most popular national news magazines, *Life* magazine played an integral part in bringing the fight for civil rights into the public discourse. It helped to educate and inform the nation with regards to visual imagery and the events of the times. This study, beginning in 1954, the year of the Supreme Court’s historic *Brown v. Board of Education* decision, and ending in 1965, the year that Congress passed the Voting Rights Act, examined every issue of *Life* for civil rights-related articles. By applying the concepts of geography and discussing images and events with regard to space, this study discussed race and the conflict between African Americans and racist white citizens in the fight for equal rights.

This dissertation found that the *Life* magazine was both a leader and follower in the debate for equal rights, publishing photographs that intimately recorded the battle for space on a variety of levels including: a physical, a metaphorical, and a symbolic level. The significance of this study is that there are new and deeper ways to examine media texts, their frames, and the issues involved. On the surface, *Life* portrayed a street-level battle for fixing historic injustices. But, on another level, which spatial and geographic theory helps us to understand, *Life* magazine revealed a much deeper, ongoing debate over the rightful place of the African American in American society.

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Approved: _____________________________________________________________

Patrick S. Washburn

Professor of Journalism
To Sherry, Dylan, and Jack
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Chapter 1: Introduction

The essential human rights of Negroes do not appertain to them as Negroes, but simply as members of the human family. Human rights are not Negro rights, any more than they are white rights or red-haired persons’ rights. They flow from the essential constitutes of our nature, not from its accidental characteristics.

—John LaFarge, *The Race Question and The Negro: A Study of Catholic Doctrine on Interracial Justice*

Life magazine photojournalist Charles Moore arrived in Birmingham, Alabama, on May 3, 1963. By the time he left the city five days later, he had shattered tendons in his ankle, been arrested, and become a fugitive from the law. Aside from his own physical reminders of the tumultuous week, he left the nation a lasting legacy of its most violent period since the Civil War. The photographs he took over the five days were some of the most iconic and revealing of the civil rights movement. They were published as an eleven-page spread in the May 17, 1963, issue of Life magazine and left an indelible mark on the United States.

Birmingham was considered “the country’s chief symbol of racial intolerance,” the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. said before the protests started. It was a community where human rights had been trampled for so long that “fear and oppression were as thick as the smog from its factories.” He and other civil rights leaders wanted to draw attention to the racial inequalities in the city by having marches and demonstrations. They knew the power that the media had on society. Eugene “Bull” Connor, the city’s volatile police commissioner, was the perfect antagonist, and King knew that dramatic photographs of the protests had the potential to make an impact across the nation. He had reprimanded photographer Flip Schulke after hearing about an incident during an
earlier march in Selma, Alabama. Schulke, a contract photographer for Life, had stopped photographing and intervened when local white law enforcement officials started shoving black children to the ground. King heard about the incident, and told Schulke: “The world doesn’t know this happened, because you didn’t photograph it. I’m not being cold-blooded about it, but it is so much more important for you to take a picture of us getting beaten up than for you to be another person joining in the fray.”

Images of protesters being mauled by police dogs and sprayed by fire hoses in Birmingham appeared in newspapers and in news magazines in the days following the event, but when Life published the story on May 17, 1963, its effect and impact was stronger than any other media outlet (see Figure 1.1). Gene Roberts and Hank Klibanoff explained in their 2007 Pulitzer Prize-winning book, The Race Beat, why the impact of Moore’s photographs was so powerful: Life’s large format and slick paper had “a vividness and sense of enormity that newspapers couldn’t touch.” Images of white policemen with snarling police dogs attacking well-dressed African Americans, and firemen using hoses, forcing protesters against buildings, were not only powerful, but sympathetic and moving. Even more provocative were the letters to the editor three weeks later. Dan Griffin of Anderson, South Carolina, wrote, “It is such a shame that Negroes who could be out earning money and, in some cases, respect, are participating in such things as the Birmingham violence. They have their own schools. But no, they have to get the white man’s school and lunch counter and anything else the white man has made for himself. All they can think about is violence.”

This perception that the violence mentioned in the letter was brought on by the protesters themselves, and not white authority, was striking. Yet, the photographs
published were violent and graphic. And Martin Luther King knew their power. *Life* magazine also knew of their power.

**Figure 1.1:** Charles Moore’s photograph of firefighters spraying water at protesters in Birmingham, Alabama, appeared in the May 17, 1963 issue of *Life* magazine.

Author Davi Johnson agreed in 2007 about the powerful impact that Moore’s images had on the nation and abroad in the journal article, “Martin Luther King Jr.’s 1963 Birmingham Campaign as Image Event.” She wrote,

The Birmingham pictures confronted a nation with visible evidence of its racism, putting before the eyes of the American people irrefutable proof that barbaric practices were not solely the purview of places far away and times long ago, but immediately present. The photos made racism appear repugnant by constructing a dramatic narrative where whites (and the status quo) were identified with vicious animal violence and blacks were codified as brave innocents willing to martyr themselves for justice.
Life magazine played an integral part in the formation of these ideas across the nation. As early as 1956, two years after the Supreme Court’s historic *Brown v. Board of Education* decision that mandated school desegregation, *Life* published a five-issue series of photographs, illustrations, and essays on segregation. It had established itself as a national leader in discussing race, and its unstinting coverage of the conflict between black and white legitimatized the battle and offered stark symbols of an America that many whites refused to acknowledge. Yet, *Life’s* coverage did not overtly suggest a righteous crusade but instead presented stories and events as a way to promote a national debate on morality, race, and civil rights.

This dissertation examines and discusses how *Life* represented the civil rights movement from 1954 to 1965, helping to frame the debate among America’s leaders, policymakers, and readers.

Many scholars and authors have examined the events of the civil rights movement in numerous ways but never how it was covered visually by one of America’s most popular magazines. This study looked at the universe of images, stories, editorials, and letters to the editor relating to civil rights events in *Life* magazine from 1954 to 1965 (see Figure 1.2). This time period was chosen to bracket the two seminal events in the nation’s struggle to cast off the heavy legacy of segregation: the U.S. Supreme Court decision to end school segregation and passage of the Voting Rights Act of 1965 by Congress. On May 17, 1954, the U.S. Supreme Court handed down its landmark decision, *Brown v. Board of Education*, in which it stated that the policy of “separate but equal” with regards to education was not valid. School integration was to become part of America’s policy for all people. This marked the beginning of the legitimate and legal battle for civil rights.
The study continues through 1965, the year that the United States Congress passed the Voting Rights Act prohibiting the use of literacy tests to determine a person’s eligibility to vote. A number of scholars have marked this year as the turning point in the civil rights movement.\textsuperscript{xiii}

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{chart.png}
\caption{Published Stories, Pages, and Photographs in \textit{Life} from 1954 to 1965.}
\end{figure}

Stories and photographs were selected for this study based on the definitions of civil rights in the \textit{National Association for the Advancement of Colored People Civil Rights Handbook}.\textsuperscript{xiv} This handbook describes basic programs, policies, and procedures regarding civil rights issues and states the NAACP’s main intention is to “fight racial discrimination,” including segregation of all types.\textsuperscript{xv} Its chapters are divided into: legal cases, police brutality, criminal cases, housing, education, employment, registration and
voting, and boycotts and direct action campaigns. These headings make logical categories, which will be applied to the stories and photographs published in *Life* magazine. The method of examining the photographs and stories will be by composition and content.

Composition and content are integral in determining meaning in photographs. In *Visual Methodology*, Gillian Rose describes several ways of analyzing images, including: content analysis, semiology, discourse analysis, and compositional interpretation. The last method will be applied to this study. Compositional interpretation is a manufactured term that Rose uses as an approach to break down and examine the content of an image. Although this method was mainly developed for ideas pertaining to art and art history, it can be applied effectively to the study of photographs in *Life* magazine.

Rose explains compositional interpretation in three areas: examination, production, and composition, with the latter being the main focus. The examination of an image refers to the use of knowledge in explaining and describing the image. The production of an image takes into account how the image was made, who made it, by whom, and what its purpose was.

According to Rose, the compositionality of an image considers content, color, spatial organization, light, and expressive content. Content explains what the image is about; color refers to the hue, the saturation, and the value of the colors in the image; spatial organization refers to lines, shapes and subject matter and their relationship within the image; light considers the type of lighting used; and expressive content refers to emotions, both within the image and the reaction to the image. Because many of these elements are subjective and may have alternate meanings, a thorough understanding of
photography is essential. This dissertation applied these elements to the photographs in order to create a framework for interpretation and discussion.

Meaning also can be interpreted by its origins. In Mediating the Message: Theories of Influences on Mass Media Content, Pamela Shoemaker and Stephen Reese discuss the importance of the producers’ media content and why that content should be considered in contemporary research. This dissertation addressed the production of media content by examining the papers and memoirs of Life’s publisher, Henry Luce, and photographer Gordon Parks. Interviews with photographers and editors Steve Schapiro, Art Shay, Jack Corn, Richard Stolley, and Hal Wingo also are included. These, as well as Life’s published articles, were used as primary sources and provide insight regarding decisions made or ideas discussed regarding the coverage of civil rights.

Because many of the events and stories that were covered by Life were located in specific areas, such as the South, geography plays an important and critical role in the discussion. The idea of space is integral in discussing the events during this period. The fight for civil rights can be examined through the geographic idea of the contention of space: space on a bus, space in a classroom, or space at a lunch counter. The application of this geographic idea sets this study apart from other research by using this approach. The physical space in each scene, as well as space on the page, can be deconstructed and analyzed.

Geographer Don Mitchell breaks down space as physical attributes, and places where scenes transpire. Space can be a home, a street, a suburban neighborhood, a city block, or a region. It also can be broken up by culture, as in a cultural landscape, which can be examined through many different forms. For instance, the photographs in Life
magazine can be looked at as a landscape, which can be analyzed and discussed geographically. Mitchell explains that culture can mean many things to many people. It can “signify a ‘total way of life’ of a people, encompassing language, dress, food habits, music, housing styles, religion, family structures, and, most importantly, values.” This study used the definition of the cultural landscape as the stage in which the stories and photographs published in *Life* magazine become the text.

An example of using some of these geographic ideas can be found in Moore’s photograph from Birmingham, Alabama. A photograph, published on May 17, 1963, was taken from a sidewalk on a downtown street and depicted firemen spraying protesters with fire hoses. The protesters, who are African-American, are huddled in small groups along sidewalks and the street sitting on the ground with their hands around their necks in a docile and nonaggressive stance. The firefighters, on the other hand, are photographed from behind leaning forward spraying their hoses as weapons. The gap of sidewalk between firefighters and protesters is distinct and obvious, a clear separation between the two subjects. The space separating the African-Americans from their aggressors is both literal and figurative. In this one image, *Life* magazine pointed out the aggression and the racial divide of the fight for civil rights.

This contention of space can be examined further. James A. Tyner used geography to conceptualize black radicalism in his study, “Urban Revolutions and the Spaces of Black Radicalism.” He described the civil rights movement as a “series of crucial civil, political, social, and economic battles” and defined black radicalism as the remaking of those spaces. He argued black radicals differentiated between “segregated spaces” and “separate spaces,” and the solution was not integration but the elimination of
segregation. He explained how “white” citizens have the power in society and use it, not only in economic, political, and social contexts, but also in virtually all aspects of life. The “spaces” African Americans occupy, such as neighborhoods, schools, churches, businesses, and even street corners, are their own. “To integrate into a white supremacist society was to negate the spaces of African-Americans,” he wrote and concluded that the “Black power movement was (and continues to be) about producing space for social justice.” Tyner’s study looked at these “spaces” in a specific way, calling attention to the struggles and issues of African Americans.\textsuperscript{xxiii}

“Whiteness” is another approach in looking at the breakup of space. The concept of “whiteness” is significant for several reasons, mainly that racism is still prevalent in our society. Steve Hoelscher argued in 2003 that recognizing the past in an idealized way helps to promote and to continue to perpetuate these racist ideals.\textsuperscript{xxiv} He described a small town in the American South as the geography of exclusion: “how a dominant group was able to create a culture of segregation that extended well beyond the boundaries of its legal apparatus.” The “white” citizens of Natchez, Mississippi, were that “dominant group.” He argued that if researchers and historians do not acknowledge that whiteness, it becomes the “norm” and creates an unspoken racism with all other identities as “the other.”\textsuperscript{xxv} All of these “discourses” take place in the South, “the main stage on which Americans have played out this fundamental performance of race construction.”\textsuperscript{xxvi}

In a 2002 study by David Delaney, race was an important and growing aspect of research. His study, “The Space that Race Makes,” looked at “how space works to condition the operation of power and the constitution of rational identities” with regards to race. “Space,” he wrote, “may be produced in accordance with ideologies of color-
blindness or race consciousness, of integrationism, assimilation, separatism, or nativism.”xxvii These race-centered ideologies combine with other elements, such as “public-private ownership, sexuality, citizenship, democracy, or crime to produce the richly textured, highly variegated, and power-laden spatialities of everyday life.” In other words, geography is an ideal field from which to look at these spatial constructs and discourses and apply them to everyday meaning. “Race … is what it is and does what it does precisely because of how it is given spatial expression.”xxviii Delaney also noted the distribution of power plays a role in the location, displacement, and relocation of race-making events. These elements “might inform a more critical approach to racial geographies.”xxxix

Life Magazine

*Life* magazine was the most popular American weekly, pictorial magazine in the nation. For thirty-six years, from 1936 to 1972, its pages were full of photographs of everyday life from birth to death and war to peace. Its mission, taken from Luce’s prospectus for a new magazine, in 1936, was “to see life; to see the world; to eyewitness great events; to watch the faces of the poor and the gestures of the proud; to see strange things … to see and to take pleasure in seeing; to see and be amazed; to see and be instructed.”xxxx

In *The Civil Rights Movement: A Photographic History, 1954-68*, author Steven Kasher explained that during the 1950s and 1960s, one weekly issue of *Life* was “the single most important media organ [during that time], seen by more than half the adult population of the United States and reaching more people than any television
program.” Its circulation in 1954 was about 5.5 million subscribers and grew steadily to more than 7 million by 1965. Life had an extremely high “pass-along factor,” more than any mass-circulation magazine; an issue could be read by more than one individual and passed along to others. One survey in 1938 indicated a pass-along factor of 17.3, meaning that more than seventeen people read each copy. In early 1965, Life’s pass-along factor was estimated at 4.6 persons per copy, giving the magazine a total audience of more than 32 million readers.

The magazine also was at the forefront photographically. First, the photographs published in Life had a specific “style.” In a 2004 article by Andrew Mendelson, style was defined as “particular compositional features that are frequently associated in predictable combinations.” Life’s first picture editor, Wilson Hicks, described the magazine’s style as a unique combination of words and pictures. Each photograph contained a fact, idea, or feeling, bringing a particular point of view to the reader, and each photograph became part of a picture story or photographic essay. In 1952, Hicks wrote in Words and Pictures that the magazine used this style to promote its “sense of curiosity, its sense of drama, its sense of history—and its sense of humor” to readers. Hicks began as picture editor in 1937, three months after Life’s first issue, and was executive editor from 1939 to 1952.

Life also “created the first, true photographic essay” in America. In the 1966 book, Dorothea Lange, George P. Elliott defined the photographic essay as a “collection of pictures on a single theme, arranged to convey a mood, deliver information, and tell a story in a way that one picture alone can not.” These attributes of photography made
the magazine stand out from all other mass circulation magazines and pushed the vernacular of photography into mainstream America.

In *Life’s America*, Wendy Kozol examined the pivotal role that *Life* played in the formation and promotion of the American family. She wrote that the magazine’s purpose at mid-century was “familiarizing a national audience with visual news and turning Americans into consumers of visual culture through its weekly pictorial view of the world, which accustomed its audience to seeing social life in visual terms.” In other words, *Life* codified news images in order to educate and promote visual imagery in society. Its editors envisioned the nation in terms of “the white, middle-class, heterosexual, nuclear family” and played a key role as a producer of postwar culture.

While there is evidence of *Life*’s homogenized middle-class view, this study reveals the magazine, its editors, photographers, and reporters were in the journalistic vanguard of civil rights coverage. For instance, in the six weeks after the integration of Central High School in Little Rock, Arkansas, *Life* devoted thirty-four pages and ninety-five photographs to the event while *Time* magazine ran twenty-seven photographs on twenty-one pages, and *Newsweek* ran twenty-four photographs on twenty pages. This study shows *Life*’s significance as a leading journalistic voice in the debate surrounding civil rights despite its historically Caucasian frame. It helped to establish the issues and paint the movement in stark, moral terms. This is shown in what events were covered, how they were covered, how photographs were framed, and how they were placed in the magazine. Over the course of twelve years, *Life*’s images made the struggle for civil rights come alive for the American people. In the process, it became a symbol, at least for some, of social progress.
Explanation of Chapters

The structure of this study is both chronological and topical. Chapter 2 discusses a brief history of African-Americans and race; media coverage of civil rights events by the black press, national news magazines, and Life before 1954; and an overview of the opinions of publisher Henry Luce. This chapter sets the stage and places mass media in America into context.

Chapter 3 covers 1954 to 1956. During these three years, civil rights coverage in Life increased each year, culminating in a five-part series, “Background of Segregation,” in September 1956.

Chapter 4 continues with Life’s coverage from 1957 to 1962. During this period, published articles declined to the lowest point of coverage in 1962. Some events covered were school integration and civil unrest in the South and the Freedom Rides.

Chapter 5 covers 1963 to 1965 with such stories as the riots at the University of Mississippi; the protests in Birmingham, Alabama; the passage of the civil rights bill; riots in Harlem, New York; the murder of three volunteers in Philadelphia, Mississippi; and the march on Washington, DC.

Chapter 6 discusses Life’s overall civil rights coverage, places events and articles into context and concludes with the magazine’s significance with regard to the civil rights movement.

Life magazine played a unique and important role in American history, not only in showing the world what was happening in the South with photographs every week but in
helping to shape the discussion of the civil rights issue. Its power was in its ability to hold up a mirror to a country and help create change.
Notes


vii See Durham and Moore, Powerful Days, 27; and King, Why We Can't Wait, 66.


ix Ibid., 322.


xv Ibid.

Ibid.

Rose describes examining a photograph with a "good eye," meaning with an intellectual eye. Instead of saying "I like this picture," one would say "this photograph works on several different levels."

As a professional editorial and newspaper photographer for more than eighteen years, my experienced has been helpful informing and guiding this study.


Ibid., 662.

Ibid., 657.


Ibid.

Ibid.


Ibid.


Some European magazines, such as the *Berliner Illustrierte Zeitung*, the *Illustrated London News*, and *Vu* developed the photographic essay in the late 1920s and early 1930s. See Alan Brinkley, *The Publisher: Henry Luce and His American Century* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2010), 209.


The author examined issues of *Time* and *Newsweek* magazines on microfilm from September 16, 1957, to October 21, 1957, the same timeframe as *Life*. The issues were September 16, September 23, September 30, October 7, October 14, and October 21 for both *Time* and *Newsweek*. 
Chapter 2: Race, the media and *Life*

The differences between black folk and white folk are not blood or color, and the ties that bind us are deeper than those that separate us.

—Richard Wright, *12 Million Black Voices*, 1941

Before Gordon Parks became *Life* magazine’s first African American photographer in 1948, he photographed an African American housekeeper and lent dignity to a race of people facing deeply engrained hardship and prejudice. The iconic photograph that he took of Ella Watson became known as “American Gothic.” It depicted her holding a mop and broom in front of the American flag. The dramatically lit portrait was Parks’ attempt to put a face on poverty and begin fighting the evil of racism. Parks wrote in his 1975 book, *Moments Without Proper Names*, “It is the heart, not the eye, that should determine the content of the photograph.” This portrait was the beginning of Parks’ development of his photographic style: the use of “careful and dramatic lighting.” The lighting, in this case, served to separate the “figure from the everyday, [and] at the same time, pose, clothing, and props seem to underscore the sitter’s essential character.” It also brought dignity to the face of African Americans in a time when they barely had a voice (see Figure 2.1).

In 1941, Parks received a grant from the Julius Rosenwald Fund, which gave him the opportunity to work and train under Roy Emerson Stryker of the Farm Security Administration (FSA) in Washington, D.C. The FSA, under Stryker’s guidance, produced thousands of documentary-style images of Americans dealing with the hardships of the Great Depression in the 1930s. The *Maryland Historical* magazine described the photographs taken during this time as “vividly [portraying] the despair and
poverty found in depression-struck rural areas—the haggard migrants, dustbowls, shanties, and sharecroppers. But they also depict the strength of the people, the beauty of the land, and the stark simplicity of life in the Thirties. 

Figure 2.1: Gordon Parks photographed Ella Watson in 1942 while he worked for the Farm Security Administration under Roy Emerson Stryker. Library of Congress, Prints & Photographs Division, FSA/OWI Collection, LC-USF34-013407-C.

In early January 1942, Parks spent much of his first day at the FSA exploring Washington, D.C., Stryker had told him “go to a picture show, a department store, eat in restaurants and drugstores. Get to know this place,” he said. By the time he returned
to the office that day, he had been refused service at both a drugstore breakfast counter and a movie theater, and he had been unable to purchase a winter coat at a department store. He was angry, frustrated, and wanted to photograph the racism that he had just experienced. Stryker told him to think about what he had experienced and write down his ideas about how to fight prejudice. “Think in terms of images and words. They can be mighty powerful when they are fitted together properly,” he said. \[ \text{xl} \]

When Parks met Watson in the building that he worked in, she recounted her life’s story. It was a “pitiful” one, he later recollected. When she was young, her mother had died, and her father had been killed by a lynch mob. She married after high school and became pregnant, and then her husband was accidentally shot and killed two days before her daughter was born. As a teenager, her daughter became pregnant, gave birth to two illegitimate children, and died two weeks after the birth of the second child. Watson’s grandchildren were watched by different neighbors. \[ \text{l} \]

After Watson had told her story, Parks asked to photograph her and posed her in front of the flag. Under Stryker’s guidance and suggestion, he also photographed her at her home and at her church. As he experienced racism and poverty through her life, he gained “knowledge, confidence, and versatility” as a photographer. \[ \text{li} \] He later wrote in his memoir about the experience: “I have known poverty firsthand, but there I had learned how to fight its evil—along with the evil of racism—with a camera.” \[ \text{lii} \]

Photographs from Parks and the other photographers in the FSA were used throughout the country in newspapers, magazines, and books and were on display at museums. Stryker believed that publishing the photographs of Americans in all aspects of life “reduced social distances between classes, races, and regions.” \[ \text{liii} \] Since publishers
and editors did not have to pay for the rights to reproduce the photographs, they were used extensively. Sherwood Anderson used FSA photographs in his 1940 book, *Home Town*, and Richard Wright used them to illustrate his 1941 book, *12 Million Black Voices*, just to name a few. Although some critics believed the photographs to be “subversive propaganda,” most believed the pictures to be “moving and dramatic,” according to historian Colleen McDannell. Some of the photographs published in Wright’s book depicted African-American children in horrific conditions: sleeping on blankets on floors or in rusted cots and reading in a kitchen with newspapers covering the walls and table. These types of images were more commonplace than Parks’ dignified portrait of Watson. Living conditions for many African Americans were still wretched and miserable seventy-seven years after the Civil War.

The conditions of African Americans during the first half of the twentieth century were abysmal. Life had not changed much since the Reconstruction, the period after the Civil War, and in many cases, it had gotten worse for African Americans. This chapter briefly examines research and the conditions of race and racism in the first half of the twentieth century up to 1954; the role that the black press played as a pivotal advocate for equal rights for African Americans; the national media’s part in covering racial issues; and the role of *Life* magazine and its publisher, Henry R. Luce, regarding African Americans.

*Racial Conditions in the United States*

In 1944, Swedish researcher Gunnar Myrdal published a two-volume book, *An American Dilemma, The Negro Problem and Modern Democracy*, which explored the
plight and condition of the “Negro in America.” He noted that the status of the “Negro” had been rising since the 1870s but at an incredibly slow pace.\textsuperscript{lvii} He concluded this era of stagnation was ending, and there was reason to “anticipate fundamental changes in American race relations, changes which will involve a development toward American ideals.”\textsuperscript{lviii} That change would be accelerated with the beginning of World War II.

In the United States, the population of African Americans had grown seventeen times by 1940 in comparison to 1790, the year that the first census was taken. But during the same period, the population of whites had increased thirty-seven times.\textsuperscript{lix} During this time most African Americans lived in the South with Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama, Georgia, South Carolina, North Carolina, and Florida having the highest density.\textsuperscript{lx} By the first part of the twentieth century, the legal status of African Americans had been solidified with “Jim Crow laws” and by the landmark 1896 Supreme Court decision, \textit{Plessy v. Ferguson}. Jim Crow laws referred to laws that racially segregated or separated on the basis of race.\textsuperscript{lxii} This was basically legal discrimination, and although African Americans were entitled to the “equal benefit of all laws,” southern whites, in particular, used this legal friction to promote the idea of “separate but equal.”\textsuperscript{lxii}

The \textit{Plessy v. Ferguson} decision pitted Homer Adolph Plessy against the East Louisiana Railroad Company. Plessy, an African-American man who looked white, was arrested for not moving to the “colored” car of a train after purchasing a first-class ticket in the white section. His lineage had both African American and white great-grandparents and in his particular case, seven white great-grandparents and one African-American great-grandparent. By a seven to one decision, the Supreme Court ruled in
favor of the railroad company, firmly establishing the “separate but equal” policy.\textsuperscript{lxiii} This doctrine stipulated that separation of the races was perfectly legal and permissible as long as African Americans were provided with “substantially equal facilities.”\textsuperscript{lxiv} In segregated states, which were mainly in the South, nearly all aspects of life were separated, from schools and buses to lunch counters and department stores to parks and golf courses; even the smallest and most insignificant activities, such as drinking-fountains, were separate. Authors Gene Roberts and Hank Klibanoff, writing in 2006 about why Southerners defended segregation explained, “it represented the best way to hold on to what they had. Segregation was the essence of life in the South. It was the rock.”\textsuperscript{lxv}

This separation was not purely physical. In the book, \textit{Remembering Jim Crow: African Americans Tell about Life in the Segregated South}, Jim Crow was described as “not merely about the physical separation of blacks and whites.” Nor was segregation about laws. “In order to maintain dominance, whites needed more than the statutes and signs that specified ‘whites’ and ‘blacks’ only; they had to assert and reiterate black inferiority with every word and gesture, in every aspect of both public and private life.”\textsuperscript{lxvi}

Grace Elizabeth Hale wrote in 1998 in \textit{Making Whiteness: The Culture of Segregation in the South, 1890-1940}, about how southern whites not only promoted white supremacy but enforced and lived by it. She argued that the “culture of segregation turned the entire South into a theater of racial difference, a minstrel show writ large upon the land.”\textsuperscript{lxvii} White Southerners used these ideas to help promote “black” inferiority. “African Americans were inferior because they were excluded from
the white spaces of the franchise, the jury, and political officeholding,” she wrote. They lived in inferior homes, attended inferior schools, and held inferior jobs. And most importantly, they were portrayed as inferior in public spaces, such as waiting rooms, restrooms, theaters, restaurants, and seats on a bus. Segregation and discrimination created “class exploitation, disempowerment, and racial privilege.”

Racism and discrimination had clung to every aspect of public and cultural life in the United States in the years leading up to World War II; but, as Mydral noted, “race relations are bound to change considerably.” In 1942, about the same time that Parks was photographing Watson in Washington, an African-American newspaper, the *Pittsburgh Courier*, had just begun its famous “Double V Campaign.” The Double V, which stood for victory overseas in the war as well as victory over racism and discrimination in the United States, became a national campaign in the fight for equal rights. As part of the black press, the *Pittsburgh Courier* used its unique voice and influence to help bring about the “change” that Mydral noted.

*The Black Press*

The first African-American newspaper, *Freedom’s Journal*, was published in New York City in March 1827. Charles A. Simmons wrote in 1998 about its philosophy and goal of delivering messages of unity to its readers with “passion and emotion, and [to] let white editors and citizens know that black citizens were humans who were being treated unjustly.” Myrdal wrote that the importance of the black press was the “formation of Negro opinion, for the functioning of all other Negro institutions, [and] for Negro leadership and concerted action.” It was used as an educational tool and a
power agency, and it determined the “special direction of the process through which the Negroes [were] becoming acculturated.” Because of the injustices that African Americans had to endure, it was not surprising that black newspapers in the United States pushed for more rights during World War II, which helped set in motion the civil rights movement in the 1950s.

Historian Patrick S. Washburn argued in *The African American newspaper: Voice of Freedom*, that by using a “powerful and compelling form of advocacy journalism rather than the standard objective style found in most white-owned newspapers,” the black press became a conduit for those who pushed for civil rights. He does not suggest, however, that the black press caused the civil rights era but that the newspapers were instrumental in its outcome.

Washburn explained that, starting in 1910, circulation of black newspapers began to increase while illiteracy rates for African Americans began to decline. At the same time, one newspaper owner adopted a model “that would change black newspapers forever.” Robert Abbott, founder of the *Chicago Defender* in 1905, decided to model his paper after the sensational yellow journalism that other publishers, such as William Randolph Hearst and Joseph Pulitzer, popularized in the late 1890s. The *Defender* would not be objective in their stories but would become advocates for the African-American race. It was in this climate of journalism that the Double V campaign made its impact.

The *Pittsburgh Courier* began its Double V campaign when it published a letter by James G. Thompson on January 31, 1942, which suggested advocating for a double victory: the first V for “victory over our enemies from without, [and] the second V for
victory over our enemies from within.\textsuperscript{lxxvii} Washburn argued that Thompson’s letter might have been the “most famous ever run by a black paper” because it inspired other black newspapers to push for a “double victory.”\textsuperscript{lxxviii} Soon, African Americans across the country were pushing for equal rights, especially in the military. Newspaper articles and editorials were critical of the U.S. government and the war. This did not go unnoticed by the Justice Department or Military Intelligence, and after the threat of espionage and sedition eased, the government relaxed its policies regarding many issues concerning African Americans and black newspapers.\textsuperscript{lxix}

The black press made two important gains for African Americans during the war. First was a February 1944 meeting between President Franklin D. Roosevelt and the Negro Newspaper Publishers Association. It was the first time that a president met with a group of African Americans at the same time; and, second, African American reporters finally were able to attend presidential press conferences.\textsuperscript{lxx} After the black press played an integral part in the coverage of the war, it went on to play an equally important role in covering civil rights events.

\textit{The National Media in Race}

Although the national media did not play as persuasive a role as the black press in covering race and racial issues, it did play a role. Carolyn Martindale, in her 1986 book, \textit{The White Press and Black America}, reported the results of a content analysis of African-American coverage in four major newspapers: the \textit{Atlanta Constitution}, the \textit{New York Times}, the \textit{Chicago Tribune}, and the \textit{Boston Globe}. She examined 245 issues regarding stereotypical images, everyday life, civil rights, and minority life throughout
three specific time periods, 1950-53, 1963-68, and 1972-80. The results of her study indicated that during the 1950s, little coverage of African American-related stories were found in the four newspapers. As little as 1 to 2 percent of available news space was devoted to such stories. Coverage increased and peaked in the 1960s but then declined in the 1970s. She attributed the increase in the 1960s to the activities of the civil rights movement, legislation for those rights, riots, and journalists’ own “increased awareness of blacks and, perhaps, a desire to cover them more extensively and realistically than they had in the past.”

In a related study examining national magazines during a similar time period, Paul Lester and Ron Smith found similar results. Using a content analysis, they examined a sample of Life, Newsweek, and Time magazines from 1937 to 1988, counting the pictorial representation of African Americans in each year. On the pages devoted to photographs, 3.36 percent contained pictures of African Americans during the fifty-one-year period. The increased coverage over time, Lester and Smith concluded, was “not due to protests, entertainment or sports figures, but because of a sensitivity on the part of editors to show African Americans as equal members of society.”

*Life Magazine*

For thirty-five years, Life magazine covered social and political issues and breaking news through photographs and words. In the book Life’s America, Wendy Kozol described it as “one of the most popular American magazines in the twentieth century and the most important picture magazine of its day.”
In a 1983 study of the African-American community in *Life* magazine, Mary Alice Sentman used a content analysis to examine fifty-two issues from eight selected years beginning in 1937 and ending in 1972. Her premise was that magazines “not only reflect the values of society, but also serve as an important socializing force.”*lxxxiv* *Life*’s founder and publisher, Henry R. Luce, wrote in a 1936 prospectus for a new magazine, which became *Life*, that the magazine’s purpose was, “To see life; to see the world; to eyewitness great events . . . to see and to take pleasure in seeing; to see and be amazed; [and] to see and be instructed.”*lxxxv* In Sentman’s study, images of African Americans were categorized into crime, entertainment, sports, social commentary, everyday life, news events, prominent persons, advertising, and covers. Her research concluded that coverage and visibility of African Americans increased over the years but “*Life* failed to provide its mass audience with an opportunity for exposure to the everyday life of black America.”*lxxxvi* One of the reasons for her conclusion might have been that she included civil rights coverage as a “news event” and not “everyday life” although racist and stereotypical images were published throughout *Life*’s early years.*lxxxvii*

For instance, on August 9, 1937, *Life* published “Watermelons to Harvest,” which featured an African American on its cover for the first time. The unidentified man, sitting on a cart loaded with watermelons, was taken from behind in order to remain faceless. In the 2008 book, *Everything Was Better in America: Print Culture in the Great Depression*, David Wilky wrote, “*Life*’s customary response to America’s ‘minority problem’ was to ignore it.”*lxxviii* When *Life* did publish photographs of African Americans, they were portrayed as “comic devices.”*lxxix* This can be seen in the last two photographs in the story, “Watermelons to Harvest.” The first image depicts an
African-American woman eating an enormous wedge of watermelon while nursing her baby (see Figure 2.2). The caption stated:

Nothing makes a Negro’s mouth water like a luscious, fresh-picked melon. Any colored ‘mammy’ can hold a huge slice in one hand while holding her offspring in the other. Since the watermelon is 92% water, tremendous quantities can be eaten. What melons the Negroes do not consume will find favor with the pigs.\textsuperscript{xc}

Pointing out the last image, which showed pigs devouring watermelons, Wilky noted that this was in the same “greedy manner as the ‘mammy,’ [and] compounded the insult.”\textsuperscript{xci} He also wrote about photographs of black South Carolinians “playing ‘Fireball Dodging,’ in which participants heaved flaming, kerosene-soaked burlap balls at each other. It matter-of-factly captioned one shot of a blazing competitor: ‘this darkie is losing.’”\textsuperscript{xcii}
Figure 2.2: This photograph of an African-American woman eating a wedge of watermelon while nursing her baby appeared in Life magazine on August 9, 1937. Author Erika Lee Doss also wrote that Life’s representation of African Americans during its first decade was “meager and abysmal, like most of mainstream media.” One example was in an April 19, 1937, article on Huddie Ledbetter, better known as Lead Belly. The article, subtitled “Bad Nigger Makes Good Minstrel,” featured a full-page color photograph of the musician, wearing overalls and no shoes and sitting on canvas bales while strumming his guitar. The caption informed readers that Ledbetter called himself “De King Of De Twelve-String Guitar Players Of De Worl.”

One year later, when Life published “Negroes, The U.S. Also Has A Minority Problem,” Doss pointed out how the magazine “reified racist as stereotypes by captioning one photograph of a group of African American stevedores with ‘tote dat barge, lift dat bale’ and by describing a shot of black crapshooters as ‘Baby needs new shoes.’” Despite a 1944 editorial, “Negro Rights,” in which Luce used “impassioned rhetoric about black’s rights,” Doss noted the fact that “throughout the war the magazine continued to print pictures of blacks as lessers suggests its hesitancy about actually visualizing American racial justice, or its lack of knowledge about how to do so.”

This opinion may be true as a generalization of Life’s early imagery of African Americans, but is not exclusive or the case in every instance. Dolores Flamiano argued in 2009 that there were examples of “exceptional photographs [which] exposed racial injustice and showed the dignity and humanity of black people.” A photograph in Life by Margaret Bourke-White during the aftermath of a 1937 flood in Louisville, Kentucky, was one such example. The image depicted a group of African-American men, women, and children lined up for food from the Red Cross, standing in front of a
large billboard created by the National Association of Manufacturers. The billboard featured a smiling white family driving a car with the words, “There’s no way like the American Way” and “Worlds Highest Standard of Living.”

Flamiano wrote, “For today’s viewers, it is difficult not to interpret this juxtaposition as an indictment of America’s economic and racial inequalities. Yet the image is ambiguous enough to leave room for diverse responses, from outrage to irony to patriotism.” Bourke-White’s photograph was not humorous or demeaning to African Americans. The victims waiting in line were well dressed and stoic. John Rayburn, in A Staggering Revolution: A Cultural History of Thirties Photography, wrote the photograph simultaneously evoked an “economic inequality and racial discrimination,” which “transgress the boundaries that Life’s text attempted to set around it.” Although it represented an incident during a specific natural disaster, one Life reader recognized it transcended this illustrative purpose. Bourke-White was “a truly great photographer,” he wrote “and, in exhibiting the editorial courage to print her photographic social comment” Life had distinguished itself. Flamiano concluded her analysis of the Louisville flood photograph by calling Bourke-White’s “contribution to African American representations in photojournalism [was] significant and lasting.”

As noted earlier, another important racially charged article for Life was “Negroes, The U.S. Also Has A Minority Problem” on October 3, 1938. The twelve-page spread covered poor southern African Americans as well as the higher educated “black” society. As Doss pointed out, some of the captions promoted racist stereotypes and were a missed opportunity for Life. “Claiming journalistic objectivity and ignoring
its own role in framing the black subject, *Life* smugly wrote that the ‘Negro is probably the most social and gregarious person in America.’

The two largest photographs in the opening spread of the article were portraits by Alfred Eisenstaedt; a close-up of a young African-American woman singing and an older African-American man dressed in a suit looking disheveled. Flamiano noted that the photographs might be eye-catching but their meanings were changed, however, by captions that cast a lurid light on both the young woman and the old man. The first caption read:

In the Congo jungle, a black girl like this would be moaning a murky tribal chant. This girl is at church in the South, singing the plain music of a Baptist hymn as no white girl could sing it and as its own composer could never have imagined it. As she sings, with her eyes half-closed, her ecstatic face becomes the face of the American Negro finding in music and in religion his soul’s two great consolations.

The caption for the older man’s portrait on the following page also was condescending, calling him an “old ‘darky’ who has borrowed trappings, bearing and beard of the Southern colonel and thus created a caricature of his old massa.” Flamiano noted both of these captions “transform two otherwise pleasing portraits of dignified individuals into crude and dehumanizing racial clichés.”

The captions and text that appeared in the magazine were scripted and controlled by the editor. *Life* editor Wilson Hicks, wrote that the picture editor had enormous power and influence: “His preferences and prejudices, together with his publication’s policies, which he understands and interprets, exert a vital influence on the ultimate product. . . . The editor is the selector and integrator not only of words and pictures, but of ideas and points of view as well.”
The article continued with a brief, straightforward overview of African-American life from the slave trade to rural, southern farmhands working in fields, to education and ballet, to up-and-coming artists and high society, to business leaders. The essay covered a broad spectrum of talented people and country club-type activities of the “talented tenth,” as Flamiano described them. The content of the stories and images “reveals the complexity and ambivalence of Life’s racial ideology, as well as the cultural impact of the Harlem Renaissance.” Welky, again in Everything Was Better in America: Print Culture in the Great Depression, also pointed out this conundrum. He noted musician Duke Ellington “hailed [the article] as ‘one of the fairest and most comprehensive articles ever to appear in a national publication,’” but not everyone agreed. Dr. P. N. Charbonnet of Tulsa, in a letter to the editor, wrote, “I have become increasingly irritated and disgusted at the very evident ‘nigger-loving’ proclivities of your editorial board.” Welky pointed out how “Charbonnet’s anger crystallized the magazine’s dilemma. No matter how progressive it wanted to be, Life still needed to satisfy a varied group of readers, the majority of whom were neither black nor desirous of true black equality.”

Another noteworthy story and the first major essay about an African American published in a white magazine was Gordon Parks’ “Harlem Gang Leader” on November 1, 1948. Flamiano noted this story “represented a step forward for racial representation in mainstream magazines because it moved beyond one-dimensional black stereotypes to provide a portrait of an individual.” The nine-page story featured the life of seventeen-year-old Leonard “Red” Jackson, the leader of the Midtowners, a Harlem gang. Parks pitched the story to Life’s picture editor, Wilson Hicks, during their first meeting together; and,
reluctantly, he responded with “the incredibly low offer of two hundred dollars to do the entire story.” Parks agreed to photograph the story only after Hicks offered an “unlimited expense account.”

The photographs of Red depicted everyday scenes of gang life: hanging out with gang members, painting bikes, and spending time with his family. In one photograph, “Red holds ball of yarn while his mother listens to the radio and knits a table mat.” The images became more dramatic as the story progressed with a photograph of Red and Herbie Levy leaning over an open casket, studying the “wounds on the face of Maurice Gaines, a buddy of theirs who was found dying one night on a Harlem sidewalk.” The article ended on a disheartening image of Red, silhouetted, as he walked down an empty street away from the camera with the caption, “After being paraded around in style as Harlem’s ‘boy mayor,’ Red walks 25 blocks home alone. He has few people he can turn to for sincere help.”

In 2001, Erika Doss explained that this story marked a turning point in terms of racial representation for Life. She wrote, “‘Harlem Gang Leader’ was a postwar paean to social responsibility, a liberal call addressing the needs of black urban poor and, especially, black male youth.” Many of Life’s readers agreed. Frank W. Carr of Waukesha, Wisconsin, wrote, “Life’s presentation of the Red Jackson story was, I think, the best sociological study of your magazine’s career. The last statement made the whole article.” Shirley Cohen of New York added, “I for one have made up my mind to try to help boys like Red Jackson and members of his gang become somebodies [sic]. . . . I am further going to dedicate myself to this cause.” And finally Thomas Robinson of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, wrote, “As a fellow boy, I hope that the people who are seriously and practically interested will get out and do something about it.” Doss pointed out that previous letters in the magazine regarding the coverage of
juvenile delinquency “have not drawn these sorts of letters, which suggests that response to this 1948 article lay with its difference and, in particular, the compelling character of its photographs.”

The transformation of African-American imagery in the media during the first half of the twentieth century was evident. Flamiano concluded in her study that there was a renaissance in the field of documentary photography. With such photographers as Bourke-White, Parks, and Eisenstaedt paving the way as social reform photojournalists, the portrayal of African-American life continued to gain in coverage and in stature. Although it was not evident from early portrayals, *Life* magazine played a large part in this evolution, and its publisher, Luce, contributed substantially.

*Life’s Publisher Henry R. Luce*

Luce was one of the most prolific publishers of the twentieth century. He was cofounder of what became the largest and most influential magazine empire in America, launching *Time, Fortune, Life,* and *Sports Illustrated.* Robert E. Herzstein described him as “the greatest journalistic innovator of his century and a dedicated patriot during some of the most turbulent times in our history.” Even before the first issue of *Life* was published, he had an understanding of the African-American dilemma. Hertstein described him as having “great personal sympathy for the black cause, for he, too, had grown up surrounded by an oppressed people of a different race.” He believed that “preventing other people from pursuing happiness was . . . a sin.” Luce was born in China on April 3, 1898, to missionary parents, the Reverend and Mrs. Henry W. Luce. According to Hertstein, there were two forces, which helped influence his character and worldview. First was Protestant Christianity and second was
a “fervent faith in America’s God-ordained global mission in Asia.” These forces followed him throughout his career, and although, they did not manifest themselves in obvious ways in his publications, there was evidence of them. Former reporter and editor Richard B. Stolley explained; “Life could not have taken the stance it had on segregation without Luce approving it. Luce paid very close attention [and] was politically aware.” The first issue of Life was published on November 23, 1936, and soon to become one of America’s most popular news magazines. Luce played a large part in that success. In 1937, the end of its first full year, the magazine ran a $3 million deficit. But by 1939, with advertising rates substantially higher, Life’s circulation had reached more than 2 million. Erika Doss wrote in the late 1940s that Life reached “21 percent of the entire population over ten years old” (around 22.5 million people) and took in 19 percent of every magazine advertising dollar in the country. Author David Halberstam described it this way,

The birth of Life reflected Luce at his best. He had envisioned the magazine as it would be, and he had pushed his printers hard for the production techniques that would make Life possible. Equally important, he had not faltered when the very success of Life threatened to bring down his entire company. His editorial instincts always took precedence over any cautionary sense of the bottom line.

By 1941, when Luce wrote his famous “American Century” essay, Life was well on its way to being an influential and important weekly magazine. His essay was published on February 17 and its five pages of text argued for America’s future. Herstein described it thus, “In magisterial yet translucent prose, Luce equated a happy future with American hegemony.” The essay provoked a heated controversy about America’s role in the world, and elicited almost 5000 letters from readers. Some critics praised it as “superb,” while others damned it as “mean-spirited.” Those who praised the essay were “important men and women
in their institutions and communities” referring to it as a “rope thrown to a drowning man,” and “lean meat among all the fat.”

Luce thought America and Americans should lead the world in all areas and America should enter World War II. He wrote:

We have some things in this country which are infinitely precious and especially American—a love of freedom, a feeling for the equality of opportunity, a tradition of self-reliance and independence and also of cooperation. In addition to ideals and notions which are especially American, we are the inheritors of all the great principles of Western civilization—above all Justice, the love of Truth, the ideal of Charity.

Doss described the essay as “arguably one of the most important declarations of national purpose and identity disseminated in the twentieth century.” It solidified Luce’s reputation not only as a publisher but as a leader.

Luce’s opinions and his style of “cultural reportage” were not without their critics. Historian James L. Baughman pointed out examples of how Life’s tone in stories was written with “finality” for many academic issues. The magazine would include stories on high art along with features of “horses on roller skates,” which “only denied readers the power to discriminate between high and mass culture, creating a mindless ‘mid-cult.’” Time magazine also drew criticisms for its political prejudices and editorializing. Luce had no problem with his magazines’ editorial content reflecting his opinions. This was seen in Time’s bias toward entering World War II and in Life’s coverage of the war.

In the book, Luce and his Empire, W.A. Swanberg wrote that because of the high circulation of both Time and Life magazines, Luce’s “opinion, message, point of view or slant . . . would be likely to reach at least a third and perhaps considerably more of the total literate adult population of the country.” Swanberg speculated that because of this enormous
leverage in shaping public opinion, and perhaps in a “move aimed at blocking criticism before it became serious,” Luce established and financed the Commission of Inquiry on Freedom of the Press. The commission, which concluded in 1947, was led by the president of University of Chicago and Luce’s friend, Robert M. Hutchins. It called on newspapers to be more “‘socially responsible’ to all elements of a community.”

A year after the commission’s results were published and with a new sense of social responsibility, Luce turned his energy inward at America to address race relations. During a speech he gave at a meeting for the Inter-racial Fellowship General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church, in Seattle, Washington, he argued: “The position of Negroes in American life must be rapidly improved. Discrimination against Negroes must be radically lessened. The political rights of Negroes must be unambiguously assured. Equality of opportunity for Negroes must be more fully realized.” He argued that there were three basic reasons for better race relations in America: economic, patriotic, and moral. Regarding, the economic argument, Luce stated: “We will all be better off if all Negroes are given equality of opportunity to work and serve to the fullest of their capacity in all walks of life. It makes hard-boiled economic sense to say that by keeping millions of Negroes down, we lose at least $4,000,000,000 a year. American Negroes should be earning . . . much more than we are now able to save.”

Luce’s second argument for improving race relations was the “American argument,” also called the “patriotic argument—that is, our country has a very special immediate need of good race relations and if a man truly loves his country, he will be sensitive to the needs of this country. . . . America is the most wonderful country that ever was. But there’s a stain on the American flag—the stain of discrimination. We’ve got to get that stain out of the flag and keep
it out.” His third reason for better race relations was “simply because it is the right thing to do and wrong not to do so.” He concluded that there is a need for “congregations of much greater diversity—rich and poor, thinkers and doers, workmen and professional men, artists and shopkeepers, white and colored.”

These ideas and arguments remained with Luce throughout the 1950s, but it was not until 1954 when two major events in American history brought the plight of African Americans to the forefront of the public discourse. First, a Supreme Court decision, Brown v. Board of Education, profoundly and legally changed the way Americans dealt with segregation. And second, Emmett Till, a fourteen-year-old African American was lynched in Money, Mississippi. Many historians and researchers alike, including Paul Hendrickson, Juan Williams, and Davis W. Houck, believe this was the beginning of the modern civil rights movement.

Life, Luce’s premiere magazine, covered both events, which helped to bring the struggle for equality into American homes and into the public discourse. This dissertation examines civil rights-related stories and photographs in Life magazine beginning in 1954 and ending in 1965, which was when Congress passed the Voting Rights Act of 1965. These years bookend coverage of civil strife in America with legal and legislative actions.
Notes


xlvi The $2000 Julius Rosenwald award was offered between 1917 and 1948 by Julius Rosenwald, the Chicago-based heir to the Sears, Roebuck fortune. The award was given to African Americans and white southerners who wished to work on problems in the South or those who expected to have a career in the South. Gordon Parks was the first photographer to receive the award. See Parks, *Bare Witness*, 13.


xlix Ibid., 227.

l Ibid., 230-231.


liv Ibid. See also Sherwood Anderson *Home Town; Face of America* (New York: Alliance Book Corp, 1940); and Wright and Rosskam, *12 Million Black Voices*.


lvi Wright and Rosskam, *12 Million Black Voices*, 57, 80, 84, 107.


lx Ibid., 184.


lxv Ibid., 37.
lxviii Ibid., 285.
lxxiii Ibid.
lxxiv Ibid., 82-83.
lxxv Ibid., 84.
lxxvii Ibid.
lxxviii U.S. Attorney General Francis Biddle met with publisher John Sengstacke of the Chicago Defender in 1942 to discuss charges of sedition and espionage. This resulted in a “toning down” of articles criticizing the U.S. war effort. See Ibid., 154-158.
lxxix Ibid., 172-173.
xxiv Ibid.
xxvII Ibid.
xxv Wilky, *Everything Was Better in America*, 106.
xcii Ibid.
xcv Doss, Looking at Life Magazine, 229; See also “Negroes, The U.S. Also Has A Minority Problem,” Life, October 3, 1938, 48.
xcvi Doss, Looking at Life Magazine, 229.
civ Doss, Looking at Life Magazine, 229.
cix Ibid.
xcii Wilky, Everything Was Better in America, 105-106.
xcxiii Parks, To Smile in Autumn, 35-36.
xcv Ibid., 106.
xcvi Doss, Looking at Life Magazine, 221-223.
xcxviii Doss, Looking at Life Magazine, 223.
cxx Alan Brinkley, The Publisher: Henry Luce and His American Century (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2010), ix.
cxxiii Ibid., 1.
cxxiv Telephone Interview, Richard B. Stolley, December 30, 2010. Stolley worked for Life from 1953 until its demise in 1972. He worked in the Atlanta bureau
from 1956 to 1960 and was the Los Angeles bureau chief from 1961 to 1965. He also worked as the Washington bureau chief and as the senior editor for editorial coverage in Europe.

cxxv Doss, Looking at Life Magazine, 2-3.
cxxvi David Halberstam, The Powers that be (New York: Knopf, 1979), 64.
cxxvii Herzstein, Henry R. Luce, 179.
cxxviii Ibid., 181.
cxxx Doss, Looking at Life Magazine, 11.
cxxxi Herzstein, Henry R. Luce, 179-181.
cxxvii Ibid.
cxxviii W. A. Swanberg, Luce and His Empire (New York: Scribner, 1972), 214.
cxxix Ibid.
cxxx Ibid.

cxviii Ibid., 3.
cxix Ibid.
cx Ibid., 5.
cxi Ibid., 5.

Can the Supreme Court repeal the Negroes black skin? No, and I am sure that all good-born Negroes will meekly bear the cross of God’s curse of the Black skin inferiority until the sweet chariot sings low and he goes to meet his Maker.

—George W. Cooper, Texas Evangelist
“Bible Facts about Segregation,” 1955

cxlii

In July 1955, *Life* magazine published a story about a small rural school that integrated a year after the Supreme Court’s famous *Brown v. Board of Education* decision. The three-page story, “A Morally Right decision,” included ten photographs of young African Americans on their first day of elementary school in Hoxie, Arkansas, a small farming community in the northeast corner of the state. cxliii Just days after the story was published, local residents in Hoxie protested the decision of the school board to integrate the schools and called for the resignation of its members. The elementary school closed two weeks early as a result. cxliv

The Supreme Court’s decision did not specify a date for schools to be desegregated. But according to a *New York Times Magazine* article two months after the *Life* article was published, the Hoxie school board decided that by integrating sooner rather than later, “It could save the cost of operating the one Negro school and a salary of its teacher . . . [and] the tuition and transportation costs of eight Negro high school students it would have to send to Jonesboro,” the nearest local African-American high school twenty-three miles away. cxlv The *Times* article by Cabell Phillips stated that the issue of *Life* containing the Hoxie story “was passed [among local residents] as eagerly from hand to hand as a $3 bill would be.” cxlvi Phillips wrote that it “seems fairly certain that the article not only triggered the latent discontent in Hoxie but also stirred up the
white supremacy forces elsewhere as well. The reaction to Life’s article was immediate. In *Framing the South: Hollywood, Television, and Race during the Civil Rights Struggle*, Alison Graham described a mass meeting at City Hall, where “angry townspeople waved the *Life* article about and made speeches calling for a school boycott.” The townspeople picketed the school and petitioned for the resignation of school board members, who refused to rescind their decision.

The ten black-and-white photographs, taken by Gordon Tenney of the photography agency, Black Star, seemed innocuous enough. The opening image depicted six African-American students standing together against a brick wall as several white students milled about. The caption stated, “Children of Negro cotton farmers timidly await a teacher’s instructions to register for school.” The expressions on the children’s faces were those of apprehension and nervousness. In contrast, the final photograph in the story showed two African-American girls walking arm in arm with two white girls. The expressions on three of the girls’ faces were jovial and happy (the fourth girl was looking down) although one reader did not interpret the photograph as friendly or happy. In a letter to the editor, E. Lewis Dahl of Farmville wrote, “I never saw a more heart-rendering picture than that of frightened, pathetic little Peggy being carried along by two larger and older Negro girls.”

The three-page article followed the simple narrative of new students attending a new school. The photographs showed what they actually looked like, and the text helped to explain and give depth to the meaning. The space in and around the African-American students also played a part in the telling of the story. The new black students in the opening image were physically separated from the other white students, almost invisible
to them. As the story progressed, they appeared closer to each other, and by the end of the photographic essay, the students were arm-in-arm. *Life* not only showed and explained to viewers the story but visually described integration within the photographs themselves.

The Hoxie, Arkansas, package was among the forty-six civil rights stories published in *Life* magazine from 1954 through 1956. In 1954, six stories were published covering twelve and a half pages; in 1955 ten stories were published on twenty-three pages; and in 1956 thirty stories were published covering 125 pages. These three years were grouped together because of the steep increase in coverage, which peaked in 1956 and began to decline in 1957 (See Figure 3.1).

![Figure 3.1: Published Stories, Pages, Photographs, and Letters in Life from 1954 to 1956.](image-url)
This study adopted its definition of civil rights from the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People’s *Civil Rights Handbook*. The handbook, published in 1972, was written as a guide to help those who believed their civil rights had been violated. It contained the policy and procedures of what to do when violations occurred, involving: police brutality, criminal cases, housing, education, employment, voting and registration, boycotts and direct action campaigns. This last category encompassed protests and marches.

The stories over the three years included reaction to the 1954 Supreme Court *Brown v. Board of Education* decision, the integration of the Hoxie Elementary School in Arkansas, the lynching of Emmett Till in 1955, and a five-issue series on segregation beginning in September 1956. An analysis of the stories revealed that they covered three broad issues: social, moral, and political. These issues will be discussed over the next three chapters showing how *Life* and its editors framed each story. The photographs are discussed and examined in terms of Gillian Rose’s visual methodology: production and composition. Production refers to who photographed the image, such as a staff photographer, contract photographer, or freelance photographer. In most cases this can be determined by looking at the contents page in each magazine. Who produced each photograph and story became increasingly important as coverage of events intensified over the years and more than one photographer was sent to cover the same event. When *Life* sent a staff photographer to cover an event, they invested time and resources on its coverage. This would also indicate the importance of the story. Composition included content, color, spatial organization, light, and expressive content. The deconstruction of
the photographs helped to inform the geographic idea of landscape and the contention of space, which will be discussed throughout the next three chapters.

1954: *Brown v. Board of Education*

This study begins in 1954 because the legal decision made by the Supreme Court in *Brown v. Board of Education* occurred that year. This landmark decision would be the basis of protests, marches, legal maneuvers, and violence in the years to come. *Life* published its story about it in May. Not only was it the magazine’s most significant story that year, it was also one of the country’s most important.

On May 31, 1954, two weeks after the Supreme Court’s unanimous decision in *Brown v. Board of Education*, *Life* published “A Historic Decision for Equality,” explaining that the decision “would affect the lives of millions of Americans.” In the 1998 book *The Civil Rights Movement*, Peter Levy wrote that although the decision was a “key moment in the history of the civil rights movement, putting the law of the land on the side of those who sought to eradicate racial inequality, the decision signaled only the beginning of the modern civil rights movement, not its culmination.” The ruling on May 17, 1954, stated that “separate educational facilities are inherently unequal,” and made it clear that the 1896 *Plessy v. Ferguson* decision upholding segregation had been overturned. The Supreme Court’s decision was on five desegregation cases from Delaware to Kansas, which had been consolidated into one. The story in *Life* featured photographs of the five African-American children named in the case and described their situations. They were Harry Briggs Jr. of Summerton, South Carolina; Ethel Belton of Claymont, Delaware; Dorothy Davis of Prince Edwards County, Virginia; Spottswood
Bolling of the District of Colombia; and Linda Brown of Topeka, Kansas. All of the photographs in the article were published in black-and-white. In contrast to the portraits of the students, Life ran a photograph on the opposite page of Herman Talmadge, the governor of Georgia. The caption described him as the “diehard defender of segregation,” who was “mortified and he would seriously consider a move to make all Georgia’s schools private, thereby hopefully escaping the court’s ruling.”

The following two pages showed six photographs from Orangeburg, South Carolina, a small “prosperous and moderately progressive community of 15,322.” One photograph was of young, well-dressed African-American children dancing at a May Day party. The children attended Christ the King parochial school. Another photograph on the same page depicted a group of white first graders from Mellichamp Elementary School lining up to play. The expressions in both images were very different from each other. The African-American children had serious and focused expressions on their faces as they held hands and danced, while the white children smiled and laughed as they lined up in front of their school. The tone of each photograph’s expressive content could not be more dissimilar: the first was of concentration and determination, and the second one was of cheeriness and merriment. Both images were directly correlated to society’s attitudes toward the larger issue of racial discontent.

The accompanying text stated the Supreme Court’s decision did not have much of an effect in Orangeburg, and “most children would go to the same schools. Residential zoning would also help preserve the status quo.” The article continued: “Not many Negroes would object. For most of them, the moral triumph in the court’s decision would
replenish for years to come an already ample store of patience." This last comment was Life’s editors editorializing on the demeanor of African Americans.

In another image on the same page, a clear distinction and separation was made between white children and African-American children. The photograph was taken from inside a school bus looking past the silhouetted heads of white students at African-American students walking to school. Most of the image’s composition was of the inside of the bus with only a small part showing the students outside. The caption stated that both white and “Negro children” have fourteen buses each, “but Negro [buses were] more crowded." The physical separation between the students on the bus and the students outside the bus spoke to the divide in attitudes on education, especially in the South.

In the final two spreads of the story, Life added historical context to the Supreme Court’s decision by writing about the first school segregation case in 1849, Roberts v. the City of Boston and the “separate but equal” doctrine from the 1896 Plessy v. Ferguson decision. The article ended on a positive note as Life stated: “The court was only barely keeping up with the very cases it was considering. In two states, Delaware and Kansas, local action had already started bringing about an end to school segregation.” The accompanying photographs also were positive in nature. One showed Myrtha Trotter, an African-American student who was allowed to attend a Claymont, Delaware, high school after a state court ruled, “Negro facilities were unequal.” The image depicted Trotter smiling broadly in front of Claymont High School as white students filled the scene behind her. Although her figure covered a third of the image, there was still a clear separation between her and the other students around her.
The story’s final photograph depicted Jacqueline Womack, a young African-American student attending Randolph School in Topeka, Kansas. The caption read that while the Supreme Court was making its decision, “Topeka voted to abolish elementary school segregation under Kansas’ local option clause.” Womack was shown sitting at a desk in a classroom, listening and sharing a book with another unidentified, white student. The other students in the background of the photograph were working intently with books open and pencils in hand and the teacher was shown talking to a student in the last row while standing in front of a wall of student-made art. Although the photograph did not contain expressive content in the faces of the students, it did evoke a sense of seriousness and normalcy in a school setting. Womack was part of the class: not only was she physically sitting in the class but she was interacting with a white student in a studious manner. The minimal space between them pointed out how students from different races can work together in harmony.

*Life* framed the story by putting faces and names onto the Supreme Court’s decision. Brown, Briggs, and the other children named in the court proceedings were talked about as people, not in the technical jargon of a legal court battle. They were young students with personalities. Briggs was a “polite, eager boy who wants to become a preacher when he grows up;” Brown was a “bright eyed” eleven-year-old who was “forbidden to attend a white elementary school five blocks from her home.” *Life* also had ended the story on a positive note with two examples of schools that had already integrated.

There were five other stories published in 1954 including one about a neon-arrow sign placed on a roof pointing out the “only white man in Cairo, Ill., who has come out
against segregating Negroes in the city’s schools.” “‘Dynamite Arrow’ Neighbor Points out Foe of Segregation” described how Connell Smith erected a four-foot red neon arrow on his tool shed pointing to the home of David Lansden, a lawyer for the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). The story and photographs described Lansden as a “martyr.”

“A Reason for Smiles in ‘Back-of-Town,’” published on March 29, 1954, was about a new African-American school in New Orleans, Louisiana. The article described how “Back-of-Town” meant “a worn-out section inhabited by Negro families with an ever-growing number of children,” but because of the opening of the new elementary school, the children “had something to smile about.” The article, framed as a broader social issue, also pointed out that the school was the first one built in New Orleans in the past thirteen years.

On May 31, 1954, Life published an editorial to coincide with its coverage of the Supreme Court’s Brown v. Board of Education decision. “A Head Start on Racial Equality” described how the nation could follow President Dwight Eisenhower’s political lead in dealing with civil right’s issues. The president, who had made many African-American political appointments, did not act with a political motive “but more from the deep-seated moral and spiritual convictions” of his beliefs. The editorial offered many political examples within the government and ended on a moral note:

We are all in the midst of a gigantic historical undertaking, the perfection of racial equality, that will require the whole of America’s great political talent. Patience and mutual accommodation will be needed, but so will firmness and a rooted belief in the righteousness of the goal. Of all these qualities, the White House is setting an example for the nation.
Another article on October 11, 1954, described how the integration of Southern High School in Baltimore, Maryland, had gone smoothly until news of pro-segregationist’s successful rallies in Milford, Delaware. Part of the story described how Bryant Bowles, “a small contractor with a propensity for brushing with the law over bad check charges,” used fear and persuasion to shut down the high school in Milford.\textsuperscript{clxxi}

The final article related to civil rights in 1954 was an editorial, “The ‘Whys’ of Hate,” which staunchly defended integration. The article made the point that prejudice was a learned trait, and that, hopefully over time, each “new American [generation] will be less prejudiced than the proceeding one.” It also noted that segregation was morally wrong, and thus, it framed the article as a moral issue.\textsuperscript{clxxii}

1955: Lynching and Hoxie, Arkansas


The first civil rights-related article in 1955 began with the same topic as it ended the year: a lynching. “Common Bonds of Man” was published on February 14, 1955. The article coincided with a photography exhibit curated by Edward Steichen and a photograph of an African-American man chained to a tree. Then, the year ended with several articles about the murder of Till.
The Museum of Modern Art exhibition, titled “The Family of Man,” brought together 503 photographs by 273 photographers from sixty-eight countries and was proclaimed by *Life* as “the most ambitious photographic exhibition ever held.” The photographs depicted scenes, portraits and moments of everyday life from around the world. According to Eric J. Sandeen, in *Picturing an Exhibition*, “the main source [of photographs] for the exhibition turned out to be the *Life* magazine files.” Wayne Miller, Steichen’s assistant, spent more than seven months searching through more than 3.5 million images in *Life*’s archives. In 1999, Monique Berlier wrote in *Picturing the Past: Media, History, and Photography* that the exhibit and accompanying book “reinforced the commonality of life and epitomized the goodness of human beings around the world” but also was criticized for its “superficiality, lack of contextualization, vagueness, and inability to bear the weight of history, as well as for the sentimentality of its theme.” One of the most disturbing photographs from the exhibition was an image of a “lynched black man chained to a tree.” Steichen removed the photograph after the first week, disliking the attention from visitors and the press. In a 1984 interview, Miller said “that this violent picture might become a focal point . . . so that people [and the press] would focus on that and . . . would miss the point, the theme of the show being interrupted by this individual photograph . . . so we removed it for that purpose, not because we didn’t think it important, but the presentation of material was dissonant to the composition.” It also was missing from the accompanying book but was included in *Life*’s twelve-page spread promoting the historic show.

The photograph was simple yet graphic. It depicted a shirtless African-American man being tied to a tree with a chain around his neck and his lower back. His arms were
shown tethered by a rope while being pulled away from his body from somewhere outside of the frame. The figure was slumped against a tree, alone in a wooded area. The caption read “Death Slump at Mississippi Lynching (1937).” Of the four photographs in Life’s two-page spread, it was the only one depicting an African American and was the most violent.

Also in the spread was a vague and ambiguous photograph, labeled “Playtime torment in Chicago Park.” It depicted a young white girl with her hands tied to a tree. Because of the tight cropping, it is hard to distinguish or extract any other information from the image. The third photograph in the spread, captioned “Son’s Rebellious Fury on Connecticut Lawn,” showed a young boy holding a piece of wood above his head while a woman, most likely his mother, attempted to take it away. The fourth image in the spread, captioned “Panic as Communists Approach Shanghai,” showed a crowd of people tightly packed together looking anxious and nervous. Of the four photographs in the spread, the image of the dead African American was the most violent.

The “Death Slump” photograph was first published in Life on April 26, 1937, without giving credit to a photographer. The caption under the image stated, “A frightful example of lynching occurred while the House was debating. At Duck Hill, Miss., two Negroes accused of murdering a white man were tortured with a blowtorch and lynched. The one shown above was ‘Bootjack’ McDaniel.” The caption referred to a debate in Congress over the Gavagan Anti-lynching Bill in April 1937. The bill passed in the House of Representatives but then died in the Senate.

The fact that Life published the disturbing photograph was significant. Because the exhibition opened on January 26, 1955, and the issue of Life was dated February 14,
the editors of *Life* might not have had enough time to switch out the image. Also, it had only been eight months since the Supreme Court’s *Brown v. Board of Education* decision and, according to former *Life* reporter and editor Richard B. Stolley:

Racial matters were on journalists’ minds, especially at *Life*; I suspect plans were already underway for the multi-part series on segregation that appeared in *Life* the next year. [The magazine] never ducked running sensational pictures, especially if they involved news stories rather than celebrities. . . . And finally, my own explanation, which is that the “The Family of Man” was so sweet and uplifting, that it must have seemed proper to inject some reality into American life back then.

The following article, “An Encroaching Menace” on April 11, 1955, described slum growth in Chicago. The problem was largely, although not entirely, an African-American problem. *Life* reported that hundreds of migrants reached the city each month creating the crisis. The story was framed as a social issue within the context of city life but ended offering a solution with urban renewal.

On June 13, 1955, *Life* published, “Chief Counsel for Equality,” a story about the history and life of attorney Thurgood Marshall, the chief counsel for the NAACP. The story described the difficult and relentless obstacles he faced throughout his life. It also framed Marshall’s life in the context of social issues and concluded by noting, “The task of deciding whether or not the [Supreme Court’s] decision was being obeyed will be in the hands of the federal district courts, right where . . . Thurgood Marshall always wanted it to be.”

On June 20, 1955, *Life* had an article about the oratory arguments in the Mississippi governor’s race and quoted the racially charged rhetoric from the candidates. Ross Burnett, who won the election and became the governor, was quoted as calling the Supreme Court’s *Brown v. Board of Education* decision “wrong legally, morally and
spiritually. Five of the six images accompanying the story were close-ups of each candidate, photographed from a low angle, which made each of them demonstrative and dramatic. Charles E. Swann of Jackson, Mississippi, noted in a letter to the editor, “I make no effort to defend Mississippi politics, but was it necessary to use photographs which made the candidates look like backwoods revivalists? ‘Hacksaw Mary,’ as Mary Cain [a candidate] is affectionately called down here, is a really lovely woman and the four male candidates, while homely enough, are reasonably personable men in real life. Bill Scribner of Drumright, Oklahoma, pointed out that the article and photographs “bring back memories of a guy named Hitler.” Both letters indicated at least two readers noticed how photographs could have an influence on viewers.

The article about the Hoxie integration ran in July 1955 followed by four articles covering the Till murder, subsequent trial, and aftermath.

Emmett Louis “Bobo” Till, a fourteen-year-old African-American youth from Chicago was visiting relatives in Money, Mississippi, in late August 1955 when he was brutally murdered by Roy Bryant and his half-brother, J. W. Milam. In *Sons of Mississippi, a Story of Race and Its Legacy*, Paul Hendrickson explained that Till had reputedly whistled at Bryant’s wife, Carolyn, made lewd advances, and grabbed her during a visit to the grocery and meat market that the Bryants owned. His mutilated body was found in the Tallahatchie River three days later. The first photograph *Life* ran about the murder on September 12, 1955, was of Till’s mother, Mrs. Mamie Bradley, reacting to her son’s coffin. Till’s body was shipped to Chicago from Mississippi for viewing and burial.
On October 3, 1955, *Life* published three pages covering the trial, which was held in an adjoining county in the town of Sumner. The first two pages consisted of courtroom sketches of the proceedings drawn by the prolific freelance illustrator, Franklin McMahon. Although the story described the trial, it was framed as a trial against prejudice in Mississippi. “Emmett Till’s Day in Court” began:

In a sweltering small-town courtroom in the cotton rich delta land, prosecutors for the state of Mississippi last week sought earnestly to convict two white men for the brutal killing of a Negro boy. (The boy, it was said, had whistled at the wife of one of the men.) But the prosecution was up against the whole mass of Mississippi prejudice.

Life staff photographer Edward Clark took the photographs published on the third page of the article. They depicted the defendants in the courtroom before and after the trial and scenes around Money, Mississippi. Two photographs in particular were significant because they represented the sentiment of many southerners. The first showed J. W. Milam before the trial with his wife and two sons sitting in the courtroom. He was light-heartedly talking to his two shirtless young sons. The composition of the image showed a courtroom scene with all white faces sitting behind the defendants as Milam and his wife waited for the trial to begin. Their facial expressions were playful and relaxed and not typical for a man on trial for murder.

The second photograph was taken after the proceedings. Its caption read, “After acquittal. Bryant and Milam lit cigars and posed proudly with their wives.” The photograph, taken on an angle and slightly from above, depicted the two defendants with their wives. Milam was grinning broadly with a cigar in his mouth and his arm draped around his wife as she leaned into him, and Bryant and his wife were sitting next to the couple in a similar pose, smiling and relaxed. The expression and tone in the photograph...
was one of lightheartedness, pride and relaxation. All the photographs and illustrations in the article were published in black-and-white. Clark, the photographer, was able to isolate the two couples so that no other person was recognizable in the photograph. This was done by tightly cropping on the two couples, which drew reader’s attention to the expressive content of the defendants (see Figure 3.2). The crop was most likely done by an editor.

Figure 3.2: *Life* published this photograph of Roy Bryant (top) and J. W. Milam on October 3, 1955. The caption read that the defendants “lit cigars and posed proudly with their wives” after being acquitted for the murder of Emmett Till.

The body language, expressions, and mannerisms of the defendants could be compared to the attitudes and opinions of many southerners during the mid-1950s. The
article pointed out the undertones of “racial hatred” in the case when “the defense suggested that the whole [trial] was a plot by outsiders to help destroy ‘the way of life of Southern white people.’” The all-white jury took one hour and eight minutes to find the defendants not guilty.

In a letter to the editor by Sarah White of Memphis, Tennessee, the sentiment was the same. “Maybe the Emmett Till case will convince ‘smart alecky’ Negroes to stay in the north where such things as the attempted assault of Mrs. Bryant are condoned,” she wrote. “We do not want them in the South and will not have them even if it means drastic measures.” The identity of the letter writer, however, was questionable because four weeks later, Sarah White of Memphis, wrote to say that she did not write the original letter dated October 24, 1955 and that her views were “completely opposed to those expressed in [that] vicious communication.”

On October 10, 1955, Life published a photograph of Till’s mother, Mamie Bradley, speaking to a crowd in Harlem, New York, and an editorial, “In Memoriam, Emmett Till.” The editorial spoke of the brutal murder and said those who condoned it were “in far worse danger than Emmett Till ever was,” which referred to God’s wrath. The photograph of Bradley, taken by staff photographer Grey Villet, depicted a crowded scene in front of a supermarket. The well-dressed Bradley, her arm outstretched, was shown solemn-faced and regal. In the caption, she described her son’s trial as “a sham before God and man.”

Her words were proven true a few months later. On January 24, 1956, Look magazine, Life’s pictorial rival, ran a story by William Bradford Huie about Milam and Bryant. It was a detailed narrative describing how the two men had beaten, tortured,
killed, and disposed of Till’s body.\textsuperscript{cc} The two defendants, as well as the law firm that represented them, were paid $4,410 from \textit{Look} for the exclusive rights to the story. In 2006, Gene Roberts and Hank Klibanoff wrote in \textit{The Race Beat} that during the interviews for this story, Huie found out that “Milam and Bryant had not killed Till simply because he had insulted Carolyn Bryant, . . . they had killed him because, in their threatened minds, Till stood for the much larger, more complicated insult to white people.”\textsuperscript{cci} Till’s murder would motivate many African Americans into action in the years to come, including Martin Luther King, Jr. and Rosa Parks.\textsuperscript{CCI}

\textit{1956: School Integration and Bus Boycotts}

In 1956, \textit{Life} published thirty civil rights stories covering 125 pages. Ten of the stories dealt with education and integration, seven were about segregation, four covered transportation, and nine were about entertainment, religion, politics, and social issues. The increase in stories over the two previous years was partly due to \textit{Life} covering more civil rights events, which happened more frequently than in earlier years, and \textit{Life}’s five-part series on the history of segregation. Through its resources and scope, the series would signify \textit{Life}’s position and opinion with regards to civil rights.

On February 20, 1956, \textit{Life} published “South Worries over Ms. Lucy,” which described the three-year legal battle of Autherine Juanita Lucy to be the first African American to attend the University of Alabama. She received notification of acceptance in late January 1956.\textsuperscript{cci} According to \textit{Life}’s story, trouble had broken out after she started attending classes. Students, who gathered in protest, chanted, “Keep ‘Bama white,” and “This is plain old war. . . . The Negroes are asking for trouble.”\textsuperscript{cciv} After a few incidents of violence, the university trustees banned her from attending classes. The photographs
accompanying the story were taken by staff photographer Robert W. Kelly, and freelancers, Gus Robinson and Don Cravens. The majority of the images depicted students milling about or listening to speakers in crowds. One photograph showed Lucy in a bathrobe with a book in hand. The caption stated that she was wearing a new bathrobe that she bought to wear in her college dormitory, but because she was banned from the university, she now was in her brother-in-law’s home in Birmingham studying her new textbooks. Overall, the images lacked emotion and impact but did tell her story. Life photographers had not captured the rioters and protesters during their peak, and the story reflected that.

One reader agreed with Life neutrality. John G. Bookout of Birmingham, Alabama, wrote, “I am a student at the University of Alabama. I want to congratulate Life on the neutral way [it] publicized our school. Not all of us are in favor of violence, but we are being forced into something unwanted. We have kept our school segregated for 125 years. The feelings on campus is that the ‘riots’ accomplished their one and only purpose. ‘Bama is still white.”

The fall of 1956 also was a tenuous time for many schools in the South. In the September 17, 1956, issue, Life ran “The Halting and Fitful Battle for Integration,” which described violent incidents in Clinton, Tennessee; Sturgis, Kentucky; Mansfield, Texas; Richmond, Virginia; and Arista, West Virginia. In Clinton, the National Guard was called in to bring peace to anti-integration protests, which at times “bordered on anarchy.” The article described the situation as a “peace enforced by bayonets of the National Guard.” The National Guard also was sent to a school in Sturgis, as well as the Texas Rangers to Mansfield. Twenty-nine black-and-white photographs accompanied the eight-
page story with thirteen photographers contributing. Four of the photographers were on
*Life*’s staff, including Margaret Bourke-White, Robert W. Kelley, Howard Sochurek, and Edward Clark.

The two main photographs on the story’s opening spread contrasted in content and demeanor. The largest one depicted a line of eight national guardsmen bearing rifles with bayonets, facing off against a small crowd of at least fourteen white men in front of the Main Street Hardware Company store in Clinton. The young-looking white men in the crowd were standing around nonchalantly, hands-on-hips with arms crossed. Their defiant expressions were contrasted with the determined expressions of the National Guardsmen’s faces. Although the image showed tension between the guardsmen and the crowd, there was still a significant amount of space between them. The photograph did not show direct confrontation but displayed the anxiety of the men on both sides.

In contrast, the second photograph in the spread depicted three students in profile: two white and one African American. The caption read, “For the first time a Negro boy sits in a classroom with white students at Clinton, Tenn., high school.” All three students were looking down and working, expressionless and intent. Although the African-American student was sitting behind and to the side of the white students, he was part of a class occupying space in close proximity to the other students. All three students were well dressed with short haircuts. The normalcy of the image contrasted with the tension and immediacy of the previous photograph.

The most disturbing photograph in the second spread depicted a large automobile driving through the streets of Clinton. The caption read, “Harassing Negroes, a mob, which included women, rocks an out-of-state car passing through Clinton. For four hours
the town police stood by helplessly as cars were dented and windows smashed.” Older women were seen trying to rock the car. The expressive content of one man in particular, made the photograph disturbing. In the crowd, people reached out with their hands, touching the sides of the car. One man’s grinning expression seemed to suggest his enjoyment as he terrorized the passengers in the automobile. The contrast with the expression on the two African-American passengers inside the car was powerful (see Figure 3.3). The other photographs in the spread depicted armed, volunteer deputies lining up for a confrontation, a night skirmish, and guardsmen arresting rioters.

**Figure 3.3:** *Life* published this photograph of a mob harassing African Americans as they drove through Clinton, Tennessee in its September 17, 1956, issue.
The story ended with six photographs, each showing a school scene of harmonious integration. The first from Elsmere, Kentucky, showed African-American and white first graders standing around tables reciting the pledge of allegiance; the second, from Glen Burnie, Maryland, depicted a young African-American girl jumping rope with other white girls on a school playground; and another, from Frankfort, Kentucky, showed an African-American football player being congratulated by white fans after scoring a touchdown during the season’s opening game. The largest photograph of the spread, taken in Princeton, West Virginia, showed a mix of African Americans and white high school students square dancing. The caption stated that thirty “Negroes” were added to the student body without incident. The photograph, taken in a school gym, showed dozens of students of both races holding hands, smiling and laughing while dancing in circles. ccxii

Over the eight pages of the story, the editors at Life led their readers from disturbing, confrontational, emotional, and violent images to serene, playful, and even happy scenes. The overall tone was harsh, but the story ended with schools that had found solutions. The headline on the final spread stated “Without Agitators, Harmonious Changes,” and the accompanying text described the peaceful changes that had already begun in some southern schools. Over 185 school districts that year had already been desegregated. ccxiii By describing violent events in some parts of the country, and ending with more pleasant scenes, Life’s story suggested that the contested space foe which African Americans were fighting could be shared by both races. Although it was still relatively soon after Brown v. Board of Education had been decided, Life had already found solutions to photograph and about which to write.
Another big story in 1956 was the Montgomery bus boycott. On March 5, 1956, *Life* published eleven black-and-white photographs on four pages depicting the events surrounding the arrest of Rosa Parks and Martin Luther King Jr. The two photographers who covered the story were Grey Villet of *Life*’s staff and freelancer Don Cravens.

In early December 1955, Parks, a forty-three-year-old seamstress and youth counselor for the NAACP from Montgomery, Alabama, was arrested for refusing to give up her seat in the front of a city bus for a white rider. In *The Civil Rights Movement, A Photographic History, 1954-68*, Stephen Kasher wrote that one day after Parks’ arrest, 35,000 handbills were mimeographed and distributed throughout the city. The handbills asked for “every Negro to stay off the buses” on the following Monday in protest of Parks’ arrest. The boycott was so successful that it continued for months after her arrest. The incident drew national attention. The continuing boycott and protests, led by King, were nonviolent on a massive scale. Richard Lentz, in *Symbols, the News Magazines, and Martin Luther King*, compared him to Gandhi as “not merely [lending] respectability to protest but . . . reawakening the spirit of rebellion in the black church and joining that force to the cult of the Constitution. The great civil rights campaigns would become not simply social movements but crusades.” King, along with eighty-nine other boycott leaders, were indicted and arrested for conspiracy, a little known and obscure state law.

The photographs *Life* published began with an image of Montgomery’s African-American leaders with hands raised, voting to continue the boycott. The following image showed a large crowd of African Americans clapping and cheering “the plan for Negroes to show their solidarity by walking, not riding, every place they go.” Another image
showed the inside of a bus with only two white passengers. Also in the spread was a photograph of Parks being fingerprinted by a police officer after her second arrest, presumably as one of the indicted leaders. A photograph of King was shown next. His expression was stoic as he sat with his hands in his lap and a number placard on his chest.\textsuperscript{ccxvii}

Also published in the same issue was William Faulkner’s “A Letter to the North,” in which “the South’s foremost writer warns of integration.” The letter tried to explain the attitudes and reservations of southerners with regard to integration. Although no letters to the editor were published about the Montgomery bus boycott, several were run responding to Faulkner’s letter. Leslie H. Engram of Cleveland, Ohio, wrote: “Mr. Faulkner’s ancestors owned slaves. My ancestors were slaves. He advises: ‘Stop now for a moment.’ For how long a moment? The Negro, the Northerner, the Southerner such as Mr. Faulkner, and the world at large have been patiently waiting a ‘moment,’ which has now lasted more than 90 years.”\textsuperscript{ccxviii}

During that year, \textit{Life} also produced one of the largest, most extensive packages on civil rights that the magazine ever published. The five-issue series focused on segregation and covered more than seventy-three pages, including \textit{Life}’s first civil rights cover, with a color illustration of a slave auction in Old Charleston. The stories were framed as both moral issues and social issues. Of the 138 photographs and illustrations, Richard B. Stolley recalled: “It was a huge undertaking, and in effect, announced to the South and to America, that \textit{Life} was going to be covering this story in an extraordinarily thorough and active way.”
The most critical voice about the series was in 2001 by Wendy Kozol in the book chapter, “Gazing at Race in the Pages of Life: Picturing Segregation through Theory and History.” In it, she examined the complexities of “looking” at the photographs and the many interpretations that could occur. She explained, “These varied ways of seeing were tremendously influential in shaping Life’s readers’ knowledge about African Americans, race relations, segregation, and the struggle for civil rights during the postwar period.”

The first installment of the series, “How the Negro Came to Slavery in America,” was published on September 3, 1956, and was referenced by an illustration of a slave auction on the cover. The story discussed the economic and social conditions of slavery, the slave trade, and its political conflicts leading up to the Civil War. Contemporary color photographs of life in West Africa began the essay followed by colorfully painted illustrations of the slave trade, slave ships and a slave auction. The text explained that slavery was not just an American phenomenon; the British also had slaves. This drew blame away from America, framing it as a larger world problem.

One illustration, which epitomized the “Southern view” of slavery, was an 1872 lithograph by Currier and Ives. Its original title, “The Old Plantation Home,” depicted “eight blacks of all ages” dancing in front of a small, well-maintained house, pictured as a cottage, with drapes in the front window and vines growing neatly along one of its sides (see Figure 3.4). A male figure was seated by the front door playing a banjo as four well-dressed children danced in the small yard. Another well-dressed woman could be seen sitting on a log holding a small child. The small yard had a river running next to it,
which led to a large white manor house in the background. The color and tone of the illustration suggested a pleasant, happy scene. The caption read: “From this point of view slavery was not an evil but a secure and comfortable way of life for simple-minded, childlike darkies, who could live in a snug cabin near the old manse and pass their time happily singing and dancing.”

The image presented an idealized point of view of African-American life before the Civil War. What was absent from this first installment were images of slave uprisings or lynchings, although the next installment made up for it. “Freedom to Jim Crow,” published on September 10, 1956, briefly described with photographs and text the Civil War, the rise of the Ku Klux Klan, lynchings and life under Jim Crow laws.
The most disturbing photograph was of a 1919 lynching in Omaha, Nebraska. It showed an African-American man, severely charred and burned lying on top of wood and debris as a large group of white men stood over his body, smiling and jeering at the camera. The men were well dressed, wearing hats, suits, and neckties. In writing about this, Kozol explained that the composition drew readers into the image, “which establishes an intimacy with the subject of the violence. . . . At the visual level, then, the camera’s gaze challenges the white lynchers’ gaze.”

Throughout the photographs and text, the story did not discuss or elaborate on racial violence and lynching, leaving the photograph disconnected as an isolated event. Kozol pointed out that “the layout [and text] disconnects the viewer’s gaze from historical responsibility and, instead, aligns it with a national gaze at a localized problem.”

The article ended with an explanation of “the lineage of the ‘Negro’ family” and asked the question “Who, or what, is a U.S. Negro?” The family lineage was centered on the family of the Reverend and Mrs. William J. Faulkner. Some of the portraits of family members were in black-and-white while others were in color and many of their faces were smiling at the viewer. The text explained the Faulkners were a “typical U.S. Negro” family because most of their ancestors were “white-Negro mixtures” and “only about 15% of U.S. Negroes are of unmixed African descent.” By describing a “typical” African-American family and showing family photographs in such a way, Life presented the African-American race as already mixed with other races. By framing the story in
such a way, Life attempted to defuse the argument of mongrelization and miscegenation. The article pointed out that many southern states defined “Negro” as “anyone having as little as one-eighth fraction” of African-American blood. Life’s story argued that this was, at the very least, an extreme view.

The third installment, “The Voices of the White South,” described the lives of five white southern men who were proponents of segregation. They were from different parts of the South with different economic backgrounds: a newspaper reporter and pressman from Louisville, Georgia; a factory worker from Birmingham, Alabama; a mayor from Greenville, South Carolina; a plantation owner from Mississippi; and a sharecropper from Greenville, North Carolina. Twenty-seven of the thirty-six photographs were in color and were taken by staff photographers Margaret Bourke-White, Edward Clark, and Ralph Crane.

The text, accompanying the photographs, spoke of southerners who were “thoughtful, pious gentlefolk” but were still in favor of segregation. They may have called “the Negro a ‘Nigra’ or a ‘nigger’ but have long since ceased meaning any harm or insult by it,” the article explained. In Life’s attempt to be fair and objective, Kozol wrote, “the essay gave voice to these segregationists without commentary,” and by portraying them in this manner, “normalized racism as beliefs shared by people from different walks of life” and different economic classes. Through its editorials, Life wrote about how racism and segregation were wrong, immoral, and needed to change, but through its photographs promoted many of the stereotypes of segregationists.

The article described Kenneth Cass, the mayor of Greenville, as a quiet, friendly man who helped build a new swimming pool, an elementary school, a roller skating rink,
and a teenage recreation hall for African Americans. The white population of Greenville enthusiastically supported all of these improvements, believing in “equalization” or improving conditions for African Americans but not integration. Even with all of these improvements, the mayor argued “that Negroes [still] comprised the lowest social element in his city,” and, the article continued, “the statistics of his police department can be used to support the view.” On occasion, the mayor had paid police fines of African Americans who had been arrested. The color photographs accompanying this part of the story portrayed African-Americans in stereotypical scenes, and, as Kozol noted, “also [reinforced] the normative whiteness of socially approved behavior.

On one spread, four photographs promoted the ideas of stereotypical African-American scenes (see Figure 3.5). The caption of the first photograph stated, “In ‘Harlem Café,’ Negroes dance to a jukebox” and depicted six adult African Americans in a small wood-paneled room with wooden booths. Four of them were dancing, but only one male could be identified and his expression was a broad smile. A second photograph depicted three police officers breaking up a fight between two African Americans outside a bar. The caption read, “Here only fists were involved: frequently guns and knives are used.” The caption on the third photograph read, “On the morning after a violent domestic quarrel, a Greenville police judge hears both sides of the story from the sobered participants.” The photograph showed two police officers standing between an African-American man and woman in front of the “police judge’s” desk. All four subjects were expressionless. The fourth and largest photograph in the spread showed the back of a young white girl in the foreground and five African-American men, wearing striped jumpsuits working in a ditch. The caption read, “Chain gang digs a drainage ditch in
suburban Greenville. Negroes may be sentenced to such work for relatively minor offenses. . . . The white girl lives in a nearby house, came out to watch when she saw the gang start work." Although the photograph was composed in a simple manner, with the girl in the foreground and the men working in the background, the implications of what it represented were many. Kozol explained that the narrative of the entire spread featured images of African American deviance. She wrote:

Beginning with a picture of black couples dancing in a juke joint, the narrative proceeds to a street brawl broken up by white police, and a couple being charged with a domestic dispute. . . . The composition [of the final photograph] encourages the viewer to look with the female at the black male criminals . . . the viewer’s gaze at the ‘transgressive behavior’ play out common notions about race and sexuality, notably myths about dangerous black men who threatened white women. ccxxx

Five of the six letters to the editor thought Life’s installment was fair and described the men in the story as “Southerners.” Mrs. N. E. Cerulli of Atlanta, Georgia, also voiced a common concern: “No matter how far we of the South are willing to go in ‘letting down the bars’ of segregation, all of us with children in our families dread the very real possibility of a teenage boy or girl of ours becoming infatuated with a mulatto or colored schoolmate. This possibility forces us to follow our leaders in any policy they name to keep segregation.” ccxxxii The concern for intermarriage or “amalgamation” among white southerners was notably prevalent within the story of the five segregationists and within the letters that followed.
Figure 3.5: *Life* ran this two-page spread of African Americans living in Greenville, South Carolina, as part of a five-part series on segregation on September 17, 1956. Staff photographer Gordon Parks, took all four images.  

In the fourth installment on segregation, Gordon Parks was credited as the photographer and Robert Wallace as the writer. Wallace was given credit for writing the first four installments, including, “The Restraints: Open and Hidden.” The article, published on September 24, 1956, included twenty-six color photographs, which revolved around Mr. and Mrs. Albert Thornton Sr., of Mobile, Alabama, and their family of nine children and nineteen grandchildren. It described how the restraints of segregation framed and influenced all of their lives. Their occupations ranged from mechanic and farmer to teacher and college professor, and the photographs showed what life was like for African Americans in the rural South. Many of the images were insular to the
Thornton family, that is, they described little community interaction: a photograph of Albert Thornton being shaved by his adopted son as his grandchildren played on the floor; him with his cows; walking with his grandchildren; children playing in the mud in front of their house; and so on. Two exceptions were images of Professor E. J. Thornton, Albert Thornton’s eldest son. One photograph showed the professor and his wife chatting with faculty friends at a university lawn party, and another showed the professor in a classroom, discussing anatomy with several students.

Another photograph in the article depicted six of Thornton’s grandchildren looking away from the camera through a chain-link fence at a large playground. The photograph and headline above it described the literal divide that African Americans faced each day. The headline stated, “A Separate Way of Life,” and the caption began, “Outside looking in,” both referring to their detachment from a privileged white society.\textsuperscript{ccxxxiv}

Evidence of that detachment could be seen in the story of Allie Lee Causey, one of the Thornton’s daughters. She was an elementary school teacher who taught in a “dilapidated, four-room shack” with no water or plumbing facilities. She had recently married Willie Causey, a widower with ten children, five of whom still lived at their home in Shady Grove outside of Mobile.\textsuperscript{ccxxxv} Willie Causey owned forty acres of land, farmed and cut wood for a living, and between his income and his wife’s, the two placed the family in “the top financial bracket of the community.” Both Causeys believed that “segregation [was] on its way out.” Allie Lee Causey was quoted as saying, “Integration is the only way through which Negroes will receive justice. We cannot get it as a separate
people. If we can get justice on our jobs, and equal pay, then we’ll be able to afford better homes and a good education. \textsuperscript{ccxxxvi}

Although her opinion was not divisive and reflected many other southern African Americans, it became the catalyst, which would change her life. On December 10, 1956, \textit{Life} published “A Sequel to Segregation” by Richard B. Stolley. The article explained how life had dramatically changed for the Causeys after \textit{Life’s} story ran two months before. A disclaimer at the end of the story explained, “In asking the Causeys to illustrate one phase of Negro life in the South, \textit{Life} did not anticipate subsequent developments, nor did the Causeys. In justice to them and our readers the editors felt it was necessary to report further on the story of the Causey family.” \textsuperscript{ccxxxvii}

The story explained how local residents in Shady Grove and the neighboring town of Silas conspired against the Causeys to force them to move from their home. E. L. ‘Mike’ Dempsey, who sold Willie Causey his truck, repossessed it because of a $301.79 outstanding debt. Rosie McPhearson, who owned two local gas stations in town, refused to sell gas to the Causeys. She said in the article, “People in the North don’t understand what we’re up against down here. . . . If [Willie] thinks he had restraints before, I’d like to know what he thinks he’s got now. It’s the burrheads like him that are causing us trouble.” Willie C. Allen, the Choctaw County school superintendent, suspended Allie Lee Causey for remarks advocating integration. He was quoted as saying “We’re not used to hearing the word ‘integration’ mentioned in this county.” Earlier that spring, all 102 African-American teachers in the district had been “forbidden to discuss it in their classes.” \textsuperscript{ccxxxviii}
The Causeys were forced to leave the county and “resettle in a place of [their] own choosing in another part of the South.” Writing to her brother about their situation, Allie Lee Causey said, “Here is a mean place [Shady Grove]. The story they did on us is true. The pictures are true. The school is true. The work is true. The home is true. But these people are very, very bad.”

In a 2010 interview, writer Richard B. Stolley recalled how bad it was. As he tried to talk to the gas station attendant where Willie Causey was refused gas some weeks earlier, it became clear to him “that it was far too dangerous for this family to come back. They were going to get killed.” He called the New York office and told his editor how dangerous it had gotten for the Causeys. “They didn’t believe that things were that bad and sent [Life editor] Hugh Moffett down to take a look.”

Moffet, Stolley, and freelance photographer Don Cravens visited the school board, the general store, the gas station, and any other place where they might find the people who were mentioned in the story. Cravens stealthily photographed locals as they were being interviewed by Moffet and Stolley. Some of pictures were published in Life’s story. Stolley said he regreted that Life did not let him read the article before it ran. He said:

Had we seen the text on Allie Lee Causey, I’m pretty sure we would have said, ‘Oh my God! You cannot quote her as saying this.’ Those were explosive words in Alabama for a black teacher to say, “All we want is equality and justice.” And I would have said, “It may sound like clichés to you, but down here, it will be dynamite”. . . I think if we had convinced them to soften her quotes, she would never have gotten into that problem. I don’t know that for a fact, but the fact that this black teacher had the temerity to get into Life magazine with those remarks was enough to set [the locals] off.
Allie Lee Causey and Willie eventually split up because of the reaction to the story, but *Life* still played a part in their lives, or at least the life of one of their daughters. “Somebody in the *Life* publisher’s office was assigned to . . . take care of the Allie Lee Causey situation,” Stolley said. Without telling the daughter, Shirley, *Life* anonymously set up a scholarship and paid for her tuition, room, and board at the University of Toledo in Ohio. “Shirley went there sporadically for two or three years, but to the best of our knowledge did not graduate,” Stolley recalled.°

The fifth and final installment in the segregation series was unlike the first four; it was structured as a roundtable discussion between nine “churchmen,” although one woman participated. Evangelist Billy Graham and other leaders of the Christian Church debated whether the church should actively participate in integration. By ending with a Christian discussion between ministers, *Life* framed the problem of segregation as a moral issue instead of a political or legal matter. The ministers agreed that the Bible did not condone segregation but debated if the church had a moral obligation to help with the integration process. A main conclusion by the ministers was that southern communities were not necessarily against integration but did oppose the immediate enforcement of it.°

The outcome of the five articles in the series was to bring attention to the problem of segregation by understanding its complexities, but as Kozol concluded, it also influenced the way that *Life*’s readers shaped their knowledge about African Americans, race relations, segregation, and the struggle for civil rights during the postwar period.° Stolley described it as “putting *Life* squarely and uniquely among all other magazines.
We announced that this enormous event was about to take place in America, telling readers what the situation was and that they could depend on us” in telling the story. ccxlv

The segregation series was Life’s most extensive project on civil rights before 1956, as well as since. The first three years of the movement, sparked by the Supreme Court’s Brown v. Board of Education in 1954, and the lynching of Emmett Till in 1955, brought more civil unrest and division to the United States than in any other time in the twentieth century.

Life’s coverage reflected that. And during the following six years, there would be a steep decline in coverage as civil rights events became more mainstream in the eyes of the media. The events would become more violent and more intense, such as with the 1957 integration of Central High School in Little Rock, Arkansas, and its showdown with Governor Orvil Faubus; the freedom rides and the bus burnings in 1961; and the riots on the campus of the University of Mississippi. The magazine was there photographing and telling the stories of all those who were involved with the civil rights movement.


Ibid.

Ibid.

Ibid.

Ibid.


Black Star, a photography agency, was established in the 1930s by three German men who immigrated to the United States after Adolf Hitler rose to power and created an atmosphere of anti-Semitism and a repressive political climate. The agency was known for its passionate coverage of moral and social issues. See Howard Chapnick, Truth Needs No Ally: Inside Photojournalism (Columbia, Missouri: University of Missouri Press, 1994), 115-116.


Ibid. The fourth girl in the photograph was looking down without an expression.


Ibid.


Ibid., 12-13.

Ibid.

Ibid.

Since many of the photographs were taken at different locations, several photographers were used, none of whom were staff photographers for Life.


Ibid., 14.

Ibid.

Ibid., 15.

Ibid., 11.


IBid., 217.

IBid., 50.


IBid., 140.


Telephone Interview, Richard B. Stolley, December 30, 2010.


“Angry Oratory in Mississippi,” *Life*, June 20, 1955, 44.


IBid.


IBid.

IBid.


IBid. See also Hendrickson, *Sons of Mississippi*, 9.


“You Have Cried Enough Tears For Me,” *Life*, October 10, 1955, 53.


IBid.


IBid.


Ibid.

Ibid.

Ibid., 36.

Ibid.

Ibid., 40-41.

Ibid.


Ibid.


Ibid., 173.

Ibid., 168.


Kozol, “Gazing at Race in the Pages of *Life*,” 163.

Ibid.


Kozol, “Gazing at Race in the Pages of *Life*,” 168.


Kozol, “Gazing at Race in the Pages of *Life*,” 168.

Wallace, “The Voices of the White South,” 110-111.

Kozol, “Gazing at Race in the Pages of *Life*,” 169.


Ibid., 110-111.


Ibid., 102-103.

Ibid.


Ibid.

Ibid.

Telephone Interview, Richard B. Stolley, December 30, 2010.
Ibid.

Ibid., see also Email correspondence, Richard B. Stolley, April 16, 2011.


Kozol, “Gazing at Race in the Pages of *Life*,” 173.

Telephone Interview, Richard B. Stolley, December 30, 2010.
Chapter 4: *Life* magazine from 1957 to 1962

We who are demonstrators are trying to raise what we call the “moral issue.” That is, we are pointing to the viciousness of racial segregation and prejudice and calling it evil or sin. The matter is not legal, sociological or racial, it is moral and spiritual. Until America (South and North) honestly accepts the sinful nature of racism, this cancerous disease will continue to rape all of us.

—James M. Lawson, Jr., “From a Lunch-Counter Stool,” SNCC Papers, 1960

On September 4, 1957, nine African-American students had a showdown with police, the Arkansas governor, authorities, students, and local residents. The “Little Rock Nine” changed the course of history, becoming the first students to integrate Central High School in Little Rock. Members of the press became participants in what was to become one of the significant events in school integration in the South.

Reporter L. Alex Wilson of the African-American newspaper, the *Memphis Tri-State Defender*, was harassed, kicked, and beaten by protesters in front of the school. *New York Times* reporter Benjamin Fine attempted to comfort Elizabeth Eckford after she was denied entrance into the school by the Arkansas National Guard and heckled by students. *Life* magazine photographer Francis Miller was arrested for “inciting a disturbance,” or as he put it, “for hitting a guy in the fist with my face.” Although Little Rock was not the only city to face trouble integrating its schools in the fall of 1957, it was the most contentious. *Life*’s coverage of the integration of Central High School exceeded *Time*’s and *Newsweek*’s over the same time period. In the six weeks after the Little Rock confrontation, *Life* ran ninety-five photographs on thirty-four pages while *Time* ran twenty-seven photographs on twenty-one pages, and *Newsweek* ran twenty-four photographs on twenty pages.
From 1957 to 1962, civil rights-related stories and photographs in *Life* decreased significantly before increasing again in 1963 (see Figure 4.1). One of the reasons for this trend, as mentioned previously, might have been the decrease in coverage of national news events. Television also may have been a factor. Former *Life* reporter and editor Richard B. Stolley explained that over those years television coverage increased and became more influential. He recalled, “If television covered it extensively, we would try to look for the thing that television would not get. We would try to find something that would give a different [point-of-view].”

Television was becoming more influential and competitive each year throughout the decade. According to A. J. Zuilen in *The Life Cycles of Magazines*, television audiences had grown larger throughout the 1950s, dwarfing the circulations of even the largest magazines. By 1957, there were an estimated 35 million U. S. homes with

![Figure 4.1: Published Stories, Pages, Photographs, and Letters in *Life* from 1957 to 1962.](image-url)
television sets compared to only 10 million without one. Advertising revenue for television was an estimated $500 million more than that of magazine advertising.

*Life* published eighty-five civil rights-related stories during this period, beginning with twenty-three in 1957 and ending with five in 1962. The articles covered topics similar to those of the previous three years, including school integration, legal issues, politics, and protests. School integration was the most prominent topic during the six-year period. As in the previous chapter, selected photographs and stories in the period were broken down into compositional aspects, including content, color, spatial organization, light, and expressive content. The presentation and framing of each story was examined, as well as how compositional elements within certain photographs related spatially and geographically.

The idea of contested space became more prevalent and relevant as the fight for civil and equal rights increased in intensity. Civil rights leaders, realizing that the media and powerful imagery helped bring attention to their cause, wanted to continue in the same direction. The more that southern segregationists held tightly to their beliefs of a southern way of life, the more that African-Americans activists became resolute in their cause. As southern segregationists challenged the legalities of integration and African Americans stood up to the white establishment, events and demonstrations turned increasingly violent. Places and spaces where African Americans sought integration became stages for change. This could be seen in the pages of *Life* with the showdown between Arkansas Governor Orval Faubus and the Little Rock Nine in 1957, in the “freedom riders” and the residents of Alabama in 1961, and in the riots between federal marshals and protesters at the University of Mississippi in 1962. The contestation within
each of these events, which were covered in the stories of *Life*, can be discussed in terms as “geographical knowledge,” that is, in terms of space and spatial relationships.

In *The Geography of Malcolm X: Black Radicalism and the Remaking of American Space*, James Tyner explained:

> On the one hand, geographical knowledge may be understood as that information purported to explain, describe, and interpret the distributions and characteristics of peoples and places. . . . On the other hand, geographical knowledge may also be understood to encompass a normative dimension in that it prescribes where peoples are to be located. This is consonant, for example, with a more critical understanding of geography, one that takes seriously the claim that social struggles, manifest spatially, are crucial to the structuring and shaping of oppression and exploitation.

In other words, Tyner suggested that civil rights struggles could be discussed in geographical terms and ideas. He wrote that the way we teach children and the policies concerning education were critical to maintaining ideas and beliefs of white supremacy and the status quo. The way our schools taught, influenced, and educated students directly affected knowledge. And according to the writings of philosopher Michel Foucault, “knowledge is inseparable from power.” By maintaining the power over the distribution of knowledge, such as in schools, white segregationists were able to maintain their belief systems over less educated African Americans. When this system was forced to change with the Supreme Court’s decision of *Brown v. Board of Education* in 1954, the minority of white segregationists became more desperate and violent. Examples of these confrontations could be seen through *Life’s* coverage of civil rights events such as the integration of Central High School, the freedom rides, and the riots at the University of Mississippi.
1957: Harding High School, Greensboro, and Central High School, Little Rock

The largest and most significant event of 1957 revolved around the integration of Central High School and the start of the fall term. *Life* also covered the political actions of southern lawmakers, such as gerrymandering districts; the presence of segregation in Chicago; a “prayer pilgrimage for freedom” to Washington, D.C.; and legal cases involving southern segregationists. However, Central High School received the most attention.

On September 16, 1957, *Life* published twenty-five photographs on eight pages along with the first of ten articles and editorials referencing Little Rock, Governor Faubus, and integration in southern schools. The photographs were from Little Rock; Sturgis, Kentucky; Easton, Maryland; Clinton, Tennessee; and Charlotte and Greensboro, North Carolina. By featuring photographs from different places, *Life* framed its coverage as a national issue and not a local event. The first article and photographs reported on how several schools in the South had dealt with integration that year. The opening two-page spread contained four images, three from Greensboro and one from Little Rock; and all four spoke to the direct response of African Americans in breaking the geographic barriers of space in schools. The largest image in the spread depicted five young, white male students in a crowd, laughing and “taunting” in the direction of the viewer. The subject of their taunts was Dorothy Counts, a fifteen-year-old junior at Harry Harding High School in Greensboro and the daughter of a theology professor. In the chaotic scene, the boys pointed and yelled. The caption stated, "Go back to Africa, you burrhead." The jeering expressions on the boys’ faces were mean and cruel.
By standing close to Counts, the object of the taunting, the photographer showed the boys in a row facing readers. Also by running the photograph large on the page, the editors at *Life* forced viewers to become part of the scene. This effectively drew readers into the scene.

Adjacent to the photograph of the boys was an image of a young, well-dressed Counts sitting placidly in an auditorium. A blurred figure was shown gesturing and reacting to her as she pensively looked off the right side of the image. Her expression was unresponsive as all of the students around her watched the scene unfold. The photograph was effective in several ways. First, Counts, who was light-skinned, was well dressed, attractive, and looked similar to the students around her (see Figure 4.2). By telling the story of school integration through a person such as Counts, *Life* made the argument that there was little difference between African-American and white students. Both races, when sharing the same space, were similar to each other. Second, the blurred figure reacting and gesturing to Counts was faceless. The movement and a slow shutter speed accounted for this. It also presented the antagonist as a nameless, unrecognizable person unlike the boys in the previous photograph.

The third photograph in the spread, also from Greensboro, was of a white adult male in a plaid shirt yelling at a young African-American boy. The caption identified the man as C. A. Webster, a member of the local White Citizens’ Council, and the boy as Jimmy Florence, an eleven-year-old student at Gillespie Park School. It did not elaborate on why Webster was at the school taunting Florence.
Figure 4.2: A photograph of Dorothy Counts being harassed by another student at Harding High School in Charlotte, North Carolina, was published in *Life* on September 16, 1957.

The fourth and final photograph in the spread depicted African-American student Elizabeth Eckford walking away from Hazel Bryant, a Central High School student. Eckford was one of the nine African-American students admitted into the all-white high school. Bryant was shown walking behind her, yelling angrily. A national guardsman standing in the background added to the scene’s intensity (see Figure 4.3). The story drew national and international attention when Governor Faubus challenged the legitimacy of the federal government by trying to block integration of the school.

The situation in Little Rock was complicated. Plans for integrating Central High School had been discussed for two years. Daisy Bates, president of the Little Rock
chapter of the NAACP and co-owner of the *Arkansas State Press*, helped to organize the nine African-American students and their admittance into the school. On the night of September 3, a day before the photograph was taken of Eckford and Bryant, Bates attempted to telephone the parents of each student to establish a meeting time and place.

![Figure 4.3](image)

**Figure 4.3:** *Life* magazine published this photograph of Hazel Bryant yelling at Elizabeth Eckford on September 16, 1957.

The students were to be accompanied by white and African-American ministers as they entered the school. Gene Roberts and Hank Klibanoff wrote in *The Race Beat* that Bates was unable to reach the family of Eckford because they did not have a telephone so she arrived by herself and alone. As she crossed the street, someone in the crowd shouted “They’re here! The niggers are coming!” After she continued walking toward the
school, which was surrounded by National Guardsmen. She was turned away by Guardsman at two entrances around the school and physically denied entrance into the school, she decided to walk back to the bus stop. The jeering crowd followed her along as well as television, magazine, and newspaper reporters and photographers. In the book *A Life is More than a Moment: The Desegregation of Little Rock’s Central High* by Will Counts, Bryant recounted that she did not feel scared until being turned away by the Guardsmen. She said,

> I looked down the block and saw a bench at the bus stop. I thought, “If I can only get there, I will be safe.” I don’t know why the bench seemed a safe place to me, but I started walking toward it. . . . When I finally got there, I don’t think I could have gone another step. I sat down, and the mob hollered, “Drag her over to this tree!” Just then a white man sat down beside me, put his arm around me, and patted my shoulder. He raised my chin and said, “Don’t let them see you cry.”

The “white man” was Benjamin Fine, a reporter for the *New York Times*, and his actions were “completely inappropriate,” wrote Roberts and Klibanoff. They said he “had inserted himself into a live story—only to remove himself from it when he wrote about the day’s events a few hours later.”

The main photograph on the following spread depicted eight, well-dressed African-American students being blocked by National Guardsmen in front of Central High School. The eight students were the rest of the Little Rock Nine who had received telephone calls from Bates on the night before. The standoff between the Guardsmen and the students in the photograph literally represented the idea of contested space. The students wanted to enter the school to receive an education, and the Guardsmen, under orders from Governor Faubus, prevented them.
Also in the spread were photographs of Faubus and President Dwight D. Eisenhower. The former was shown during a press conference, smiling and jovial. The caption under the photograph read, “State Executive Orval Faubus tells reporters he ordered out the troops to prevent bloodshed.” The headline on the page stated, “A Governor Flouts Government of U.S.” The text that followed explained the “integration program . . . was accepted locally—if grudgingly [but] as it was about to go into effect Governor Orval Faubus ordered national guardsmen out to prevent Negro students from entering Central High School.”

In contrast, the photograph of President Eisenhower showed him walking down the steps of Air Force One, looking down and serious. The text stated cryptically, “The governor, however, kept the troops on campus as President Eisenhower hurried to Washington to meet with Justice Department officials. The strategy was not immediately clear but the President had reminded the nation that he was sworn to uphold the Constitution.”

Also pictured in the spread was another image of Eckford being turned away by National Guardsmen and five other photographs of local politicians, who were also involved in the decisions made in Little Rock.

The following two spreads in the story addressed the integration of southern schools in Sturgis, Clinton, Easton, Winston-Salem, and Greensboro, most of which had few or no problems. The story ended with a full-page photograph of Dorothy Counts from Greensboro. In it, she was smiling and laughing, surrounded by young, white students. She was the only one smiling, although the expression on one student looked more serious, making the photograph seem contrived. The photograph ended the story on a happy note, at least on the surface. All of the students are sharing the same space,
visually showing that a solution of integration was possible. The editors at *Life* showed a complete story arc with Counts as the heroine. She was stoic and strong in a situation that was difficult and cruel. Rupert Kettle wrote in a letter to the editor, “My deepest admiration goes to Dorothy Counts for her quiet dignity and courage in the face of indecency committed upon her by these tragic boys.”

*Life* continued to follow the story in Little Rock throughout the following weeks. On September 23, the magazine published an editorial on federal versus states rights and an eight-page article on the governor’s defiance of federal law. On October 7, it published another editorial on the execution of the law and an eleven-page article with thirty photographs on the continuing violence. The magazine’s cover also was about Little Rock, which was the second time that *Life* published a civil rights-related cover since 1954. The image, photographed by freelance photographer John Bryson, featured a compacted and narrowly focused view of Central High as U. S. troops stood with bayonets in formation in the foreground while white students milled about in front of the school’s entrance in the background. The dramatic image placed the troops between the viewer and the school, pushing the events in Little Rock, and more importantly the issue of integration, into the forefront of the national media.

The article inside described how the unruly mob in front of the school caused chaos and disorder, fulfilling the governor’s prediction about violence occurring in Little Rock. The article stated that President Eisenhower ordered “obstructionists to ‘cease and desist’ from interference with integration.” When his order went unheeded, he sent paratroopers of the 101st Airborne Division to intervene. *Life* also devoted two pages to the media’s involvement in Little Rock. In trying to compete with other media outlets
and, specifically television, the magazine provided an insight about their working journalists. Roy Rowan, who was in charge of Life’s photographer/reporter teams, reported that after being singled out by agitators,

Suddenly a tall, ugly-looking bruiser reared back, cocked his fist and socked [photographer Francis] Miller flush in the mouth. Miller landed in the grass, knocked out cold. I grabbed hold of the guy who had struck the blow to keep him from going on and kicking Miller. A couple of other guys grabbed me. Then Miller managed to get up and stumble a few feet toward the Little Rock police patrol who hadn’t made a move to help him.

Miller was later arrested and taken into custody. The four photographs that accompanied the report were of L. Alex Wilson being attacked. Wilson, an African-American editor of the Tri-State Defender of Memphis, was dressed in a suit and a tie and refused to run from the rioters. He was punched, kicked, choked, and hit in the head with a brick from behind. Roberts and Klibanoff described how Wilson’s refusal to show fear provoked the mob even more. Wilson had been trained as a Marine in World War II, worked as a reporter in Korea, and covered the trial of the Emmett Till lynching, all of which helped him to hold his ground.

The photographs that Life published with the Little Rock story were graphic and violent. The first in the series showed a well-dressed Wilson, hat in hand, being grabbed from behind by a middle-aged white man. In the second photograph, Wilson was depicted with a man on his back applying a “stranglehold” to his neck. A crowd of men in white T-shirts and angry faces watched the action. The caption read, “Go home, you S.O.B. nigger.” The third photograph showed him being kicked in the chest by a man holding, what looked like, a brick. Wilson had his head down, his hat in his hand, and one knee on the ground as the crowd of white men watched. The caption stated that police
officers nearby did nothing to protect him or jail his attackers. The fourth photograph showed him on the ground being attacked by the same white rioters (see Figure 4.4).

The four photographs, taken by *Arkansas Democrat* photographer Will Counts, represented some of *Life*’s most brutal and graphic images of racial violence. They also represented the direct confrontation between white rioters and an African-American man, who were contesting for the same space. Although, the incident occurred outside of a school, it was an example of how the battle for space began to spread in other areas.

Figure 4.4: Four photographs of L. Alex Wilson being attacked outside of Central High School in Little Rock, Arkansas, were published in *Life* on October 7, 1957. *Arkansas Democrat* photographer Will Counts took all four images.
The article continued by describing President Eisenhower’s decision to send in federal troops, Governor Faubus’ reaction, and what life was like for the new students. The final two-page spread of the article depicted the African-American students participating in everyday high school activities, such as lunch, gym class, and a football game. The editors of *Life* ended one of the most contentious and violent events of the year on a positive note, similar to the article three weeks prior. The nine students, who were allowed to attend the all-white high school, had been successful in integrating.

While articles involving education were the largest group topic in 1957, *Life* also published stories involving transportation, politics, housing, and segregation in general. The following year was similar with the topics of legal proceedings, education, and political mischief containing the most stories. Of the twenty-one civil rights-related stories in 1958, nine dealt with the law, six with education, and three with politics.

1958: Integration and the Law

The integration of Central High School continued to be an important story in 1958. On September 8, *Life* published “Supreme Court Justices Hurry to a Historic Special Summer Session,” which described how the justices were called back to Washington to hear arguments concerning school integration in Arkansas. The school board of Little Rock attempted to postpone forced integration for two-and-a-half years, arguing that it “could not operate a public school system under the existing climate in Little Rock.” The six-page story opened with images of the justices arriving in Washington, from their summer holidays and continued with photographs from the Arkansas legislature and of political leaders. The story ended with images from Norfolk,
Arlington, Memphis, and Nashville and described some of the roadblocks to integration taking place throughout the South.

The final image in the article, a photograph of a sit-in at an Oklahoma City lunchroom, was noteworthy for several reasons. First, the photograph brought attention to another area of civil rights outside of education: a public space in a public restaurant. And second, it suggested a branching out of the issues in the fight for equal rights in all facets of life. The full-page photograph was taken above a divider, separating African Americans at tables on the right side of the image and white onlookers on the left. The onlookers watched calmly without reaction as sixteen African-American men and women patiently waited for service that never came. The physical divide within the image separated the two races literally and metaphorically. African Americans occupied space designated only for whites but were unable to be served. The image also addressed the disparity in race relations outside of education. Besides schools, many restaurants and public spaces were still segregated.

On September 22, 1958, *Life* reported on the Supreme Court’s unanimous decision not to delay integration in Little Rock. After the court’s decision, Governor Faubus and Governor J. Lindsay Almond of Virginia signed bills, which closed public schools in their respective states rather than integrate them. The article reported one brave young girl in Van Buren, Arkansas, stood up against town residents. Angeline “Angie” Evans, a fifteen-year-old student body president of Van Buren High School, was pictured addressing segregationists during a school board meeting. She announced that after a poll of 160 fellow students, a majority was in favor of admitting African Americans. Referring to the segregationists, she said, “Their arguments are so ridiculous. They’ve
been nothing but troublemakers.” Walter L. Nathan of Groveland, Massachusetts, agreed with Evans. In a letter to the editor, he said she “shows real courage of conviction in the face of what she knew to be a hostile group and will encourage many who feel downhearted at the news from her section of our country.” R. M. Davis of Savanna, Georgia, disagreed. He wrote, “The immature judgment of teen-agers should not be put up against the thinking of mature and experienced judgments of men who are concerned about the long-range consequences of race mixing [sic].” The discourse between Americans was still deeply divided.

Schools in Arkansas and Virginia remained closed for the rest of the year. *Life* covered the white students’ activities as they tried to remain active and deal with the boredom of the situation. On November 3, 1958, *Life* published “The Lost Class of 1959” and interviewed students from Little Rock and Norfolk. The students’ opinions ranged from, “I’d rather go to no school at all than to an integrated one,” said Norview High School cheerleader Diane Milner, to “I don’t care if they’re pink, yellow or whatever. I just want to go to school,” said Maury High School student council member Brenda Lee Smith. The photographs showed students attending night schools and boarding schools, looking for employment, making marriage plans, and milling about “idol and bored.” The issue did not resolve itself until the following year.

1959: Integration and Rabbit Illustrations

Six of the eleven stories published in 1959 dealt with the school closings in Norfolk and Little Rock. On February 9, *Life* published “Segregationist Surrender,” which described how the Supreme Court of Virginia ruled that Governor Almond’s order
to close nine schools and keep 13,000 students from classes was unconstitutional. Photographs of the dejected governor and politicians were used to illustrate the story. The last photograph in a two-page spread showed seventeen African-American students, with books in hand, smiling. By court order, they were to be admitted into the all-white schools of Norfolk.  

On February 16, *Life* published a follow-up story on the students who had integrated into Virginia schools with staff photographers Paul Schutzer and Edward Clark taking all nine photographs. The images showed students of both races laughing and talking to each other comfortably during school. Thus, they placed African-American students and white students within the same space in a natural and common school setting. By laying out the story in such a way, *Life*’s editors presented the positive outcomes of integration. The final image also supported their point of view. The photograph depicted a smiling Betty Jean Reed talking on the phone. The caption read, “Relieved it is over, Betty Jean Reed, in the first week at Granby [High School], calls a boyfriend. Impressed with the casual reception she got, Betty said, ‘I think I’m going to like Granby fine.’”

The situation in Little Rock took longer to resolve. On June 8, 1959, *Life* published “Aroused Citizens Strike at Faubus,” which featured thirteen photographs by staff photographer Stan Wayman. The story was about how business leaders, housewives, and other concerned citizens of Little Rock voted to remove three diehard segregationists school board members, who would not reopen the schools. The photographs accompanying the story was an eclectic mix of images, including people praying, protesters in front of the Arkansas State Capitol building, Governor Faubus, and political
The story, written by Pulitzer-Prize winning editor Harry S. Ashmore, pointed out that the incident resulted in Governor Faubus’ “first major political defeat since he called out the National Guard troops in September 1957 to bar the entry of nine Negro students at Central High School.” The governor, Ashmore argued, insisted the real issue was “whether the well-to-do, who live in sections of the city where Negroes are few, would be allowed to force mass integration upon the poor white folks, whose neighborhoods abut areas where Negroes are concentrated.”

The governor’s idea could be considered a type of “spatial purification.” In the book, Geographies of Exclusion: Society and Difference in the West, author David Sibley argued that “power relations [give] meaning to space . . . and variations in the control and manipulation of different spatial configurations reflect different forms of power relations.” Governor Faubus attempted to use his power and influence to create a “purified environment,” in which African Americans were powerless to decide policies of everyday life, including education. Ashmore recognized this shift in power, albeit a small one, and concluded that the governor will “never again sit easy on the back of the tiger he has chosen to ride.”

Life reported on the opening of Central High School later that summer. On August 24, “Little Rock’s Chief Stops the ‘Seggies’” was published, explaining how Chief of Police Eugene Smith stood “erect and immovable” in halting about 200 segregationist protesters marching to the school on opening day. The main photograph in the story depicted him standing in the middle of a street, hand outstretched toward a group of marching, flag-waving white men. Behind him stood about eight uniformed police officers with billy clubs. The tension in the photograph could be seen as the first of the
marching protesters was about to hit Smith’s outstretched hand. The photograph below
the first image showed the result of the confrontation: a wide shot of water was sprayed
from fire hoses across the width of the street, hitting protesters. The legs of onlookers
could be seen under the jet-spray of water. Both photographs, taken by staff photographer
Francis Miller, showed contested space, being won by police. The two accompanying
pictures on the following page continued the outcome of the story. The first image was of
Calvin Parish, an eighteen-year-old white male, being arrested. His shirt was ripped at the
shoulder and missing a few buttons. The last image in the story showed African-
American students Elizabeth Eckford and Jefferson Thomas walking to the high school
“under eyes of their white schoolmates." It visually concluded the battle between
segregationists and police officers, allowing for peaceful integration. Again, Life told the
story with a positive outcome.

Another story of note that year was “Fuss over Integrated Black Bunny.” The
article described the reaction to a children’s book written and drawn by artist Garth
Williams, The Rabbits’ Wedding, which told about a white rabbit marrying a black rabbit.
It drew attention from The Home News, a segregationist weekly newspaper in
Montgomery, Alabama. It wrote that the book was “integration propaganda obviously
aimed at children in the formative years of 3 to 7." The article described how the
book was “quietly moved” from the open shelves to the reserve shelves in a Montgomery
public library. A Florida editor also denounced it as “brainwashing. As soon as you pick
up the book and open its pages you realize these rabbits are integrated.” Williams
responded that he was “unaware that animals with white fur were considered blood
relations of white beings.” The article ended with a quotation from an unnamed Florida
politician, “The book will have to go, I won’t have my daughter grow up and marry a rabbit.”

The one-page article had three illustrations from the book and two small photographs: one of the author and one of Emily Reed, the Montgomery librarian. The photograph of Reed was different from the image of Williams. Reed, who was not smiling, was lit with direct flash and taken from a low angle, which made her look sinister. Williams, on the other hand, also was not smiling but calmly drawing. His face was lit by softer, side lighting. The obvious difference in the two photographs and Life’s lighthearted treatment of the story pointed to the magazine’s overall opinion of race and racism. In the text describing the segregationists’ actions, the editors use the term “thoroughly ridiculous.”

1960: Sit-ins and the Election

In 1960, Life published sixteen civil rights-related stories covering twenty-nine pages. The biggest news events of the year were the sit-ins, which began in Greensboro, North Carolina, and the presidential election. As civil rights leaders and activists increased their efforts for equal rights with intensity and drive, the images describing those events also increased in potency with photographs of arrests and retaliation becoming more common as the year progressed. It had been six years since the Supreme Court passed Brown v. Board of Education, and it was the beginning of a new decade.

On February 1, four African-American freshmen from North Carolina Agricultural and Technical College in Greensboro sat down at a lunch counter at a Woolworth’s department store and politely ordered coffee and doughnuts. In The
Civil Rights Movement, A Photographic History, 1954-68, Stephen Kasher noted the waitress responded, “I am sorry, we don’t serve you here.” The boys argued that they should be served because they had spent money at other counters without any problems, and they had the receipts to prove it. A store manager attempted to get them to leave but to no avail. They sat there, unserved, until the store closed that evening. By the following day, thirty students were sitting at the same counter, and the third day brought enough protesters to disrupt downtown commerce. Within two weeks, the sit-ins spread to eight communities in North Carolina and Virginia; and in two more weeks, they had spread to thirty-one communities in seven states. By mid-April, 50,000 to 70,000 protesters were demonstrating all over the South. Kasher wrote, “The explosion of direct-action protests that would be called ‘the movement’ had been ignited. ‘The Sixties’ had begun.”

Life began its coverage of the sit-in with an unusual photograph lacking emotion and description. On February 22, it published a dark, almost silhouetted, image of a young man, who was labeled “a white heckler” in words written on the image. A small rebel flag was placed through his cigarette. The caption stated, “This man was among the resentful whites who picketed a Greensboro, N. C., lunchroom where Negroes students have joined a five-state sit-down to protest segregated eating places.” The only reference in the accompanying text regarding the sit-in was one sentence: “Raw race prejudice boiled in the South.” The photograph, taken by R. R. Russell Jr., was part of the week’s news, previously called “A Look at the World’s Week.” There was no other mention or photograph of the sit-ins until the following week.

On February 29, “Flare-Up over a Sit-Down” described the violent outbreaks during an anti-segregation protest in Virginia when high school students in Portsmouth
clashed with African-American protesters at an unidentified shopping center lunch
counter. The first of the four photographs accompanying the story showed a lunch
counter where young white patrons were being served food and drink while their African-
American counterparts were not. The African Americans patrons looked bored and
uninterested but nonetheless determined, while the white patrons talked, ate, and
socialized. In the background, two white males could be seen laughing and talking.
Although both races occupied the same space in the scene, the African-American patrons
were clearly not on equal terms.

Another photograph showed the back of an automobile, which displayed a
handmade sign reading “Stomp out Niggers.” The caption read, “Hate sign is driven by
white students through the shopping center on the day following the fight.” The vague
sign did not reference education, integration, or lunch counters, just a general racial slur
denouncing all African Americans. The third photograph, described as “angry antagonists
. . . glower at each other,” showed young white and African-American students
confronting each other and about to fight. One white student gripped a small hammer
tightly in his hand.

The final photograph showed African-American students “fleeing from the police
and the threat of arrest.” The caption read, “Negro students raced toward the sanctuary of
their segregated Norcom High School.” The police officers represented the law and
authority in Portsmouth. In the photograph, everyone, including the students and officers,
ran away from the viewer and no faces could be seen. The image was compelling as the
symbolism of authority chasing African Americans could be seen as a reference to the
history of slavery.
A week later, on March 7, *Life* published a more disturbing image. Ruth Tinsley, a fifty-year-old, was being dragged across a street by two police officers and their police dog. The caption stated that Richmond, Virginia, police “broke up a demonstration at a segregated lunch counter by arresting 38 Negro college picketers plus Mrs. Tinsley, who refused to ‘move on.’” The well-dressed police officers each held one of Tinsley’s arms as she limply allowed herself to be manhandled. Three photographers stood in the background photographing the scene.

On March 14, *Life* ran a political story about eighteen “filibustering Southerners,” who had attempted to stalemate Senate proceedings over civil rights legislation. The seven-page story contained eighteen photographs and one illustration describing the legal proceedings. It ended with an update on the “student ‘sit-in’ movement” and how African Americans had begun using churches as organizing places. The final photograph in the article showed a group of five unidentified students in Birmingham, Alabama, praying for the success of the civil rights battle. The image was taken at dusk, and all five students had their heads bowed in prayer with a sign that read, “Prayer Vigil for ‘Freedom.’” The scenic photograph covered a full-page with more than half of the image showing trees and sky. The students in the photograph did not show or emote any type of expressive content because their heads were bowed in prayer.

Although, the image, nor the event, was outstanding, it prompted a harsh reaction from the local media. On the day after the photograph was taken, the *Birmingham News* printed the names and addresses of the students, which resulted in an assault on one of them.

Two weeks later, on March 28, *Life* published, “For Prayer, Pain,” along with the same photograph of the praying students. In a story reminiscent of Till’s, the article
explained that several days after the *Birmingham News* printed the students’ names and addresses, twenty-year-old Robert Jones and his family were assaulted. Several days later, the story explained,

As Robert, his 48-year-old mother and his 18-year-old sister were getting ready for bed, eight or nine men stormed [into his home]. “You better give us that boy,” shouted one man to Mrs. Mattie Mae Jones, ‘cause if you don’t were, going to kill you.” “You’ll have to kill all three of us,” said Mrs. Jones. Trying to shield Robert, his mother suffered a fractured leg and finger, and multiple head wounds, as the men savagely wielded gun butts and clubs embedded with razor blades. The children, painfully injured, returned to their studies at Birmingham’s tiny Miles College.

The second photograph in the article showed a droopy-eyed Jones kneeling in his doorway over “splattered blood” stains. The caption read, “Police made brief investigations, then decided the attack was the work of ‘outsiders.’” This time, the attack was not the result of the magazine’s published story but of the local newspaper, and *Life* still covered it. In December 1956, *Life* had published a follow-up on Willie and Allie Lee Causey, who were forced to relocate after a *Life* story had run a few months earlier. Violence against African Americans, even if it was the fault of the local news media, was still an important issue for the magazine.

On September 12, *Life* published “Racial Fury over Sit-In,” which described the violent aftermath of sit-in demonstrations in Jacksonville, Florida. The first photograph in the one-page story showed a street scene of an altercation between an older white man and an African-American male. White onlookers could be seen arriving on the scene. Both men were unidentifiable due to the position of the photographer and the camera angle. The second image depicted a police officer holding a dazed, young, and bloodied African-American male. The caption read, “Rescued by cop, Charlie Griffin had
his head bashed by an ax handle.” Griffin, who was described as a bystander, was “pummeled by segregationists” as the angry mob composed of “rowdies and farmers from across the nearby Georgia border prowled downtown Jacksonville, attacking the Negro pickets with fists and often with ax handles.” Griffin was depicted with blood splattered across his chest and on his cheeks while white onlookers watched the scene behind him.

Freelance photographer Bob Corley took the dramatic images.

In the following week, on September 19, Life published the comments of the presidential candidates, John F. Kennedy and Richard M. Nixon, followed by an eight-page update and overview of African-American voting rights, leadership, strategy of sit-ins, and continuing efforts at nonviolence. The article described the progress being made by African Americans and how both candidates supported the sit-in demonstrations.

The speed of that progress was seen in the opening photograph and the accompanying text of the article.

The photograph was taken in front of the courthouse in Brownsville, Tennessee, and depicted more than thirty African Americans in line, waiting to register to vote as three white men casually chatted on a bench in the foreground. The caption read, “Negroes—who do not recall a Negro voter in 82 years in the county—wait to register.” The text explained that fewer than 400 of the county’s 15,000 African Americans were able to register because the process, which was exceedingly slow, went unexplained by white officials. In the adjoining county of Fayette, those few who had been successful in registering were paying the penalty. “They were losing jobs and finding themselves unable to sell anything to or buy anything from their white neighbors.”
The space between the three white men, one of whom was described as a deputy sheriff, and the group of African Americans waiting in line was clear and distinct. Everyone in line was well dressed. The men wore dress-pants, button-down shirts, and hats while the women had on dresses or skirts. Most were not smiling and seemed defiant with arms folded or hands on hips. Nearly everyone in the group was looking in the direction of the three white men and readers as the photographer stood behind the men when he took the photograph. The effect brought readers directly into the scene. Two of the white men had their backs to the group while talking to the third. The image seems to represent the prevailing attitudes of whites during this time: the space between races was still sizable but African Americans had the patience to wait and push forward. The article continued to reinforce this idea. It described how sit-ins across the South were successful in desegregating about eighty-five lunch counters. It explained how students were trained to be nonviolent and unresponsive in the face of humiliation and abuse from angry whites.

Although progress was being made with regards to civil rights across the country, there were setbacks. On November 28, Life ran a story about mothers in New Orleans “forcefully [leading] children from school in mass exodus that emptied schools of 12,666 pupils.” Four first-graders had integrated an elementary school in New Orleans and “set off a statewide rampage of hate and hysteria.” Representative Wellborn Jack was quoted as saying “The white man stole this country from the red men and white men are going to be big damn fools and give it to the black man.” The two photographs that went with the story were of mothers: the first was a close-up of a mother holding a small child while screaming at a picket line, and the second showed two white mothers “forcefully” pulling
their sons away from a school entrance. With regards to space, the photographs represented how white segregationists would rather occupy different space than share it with African Americans.

1961: The Freedom Rides

By 1961, the quantity of civil rights event coverage had diminished but the photographs intensified with confrontation. The main story Life covered that year was the freedom rides. In The Civil Rights Movement: A Photographic History, 1954-68, Kasher described the freedom rides as the “Trojan horse of nonviolent action [where] a select cadre of commandos would be wheeled into the enemy camp in order to open the door to a larger force.” The idea was to test state and local segregation ordinances on transportation. On May 4, the Supreme Court passed a decree desegregating inter-state venues, such as bus stations. George Lewis, in Massive Resistance: The White Response to the Civil Rights Movement, wrote that the Freedom Riders were “in effect, calculating that certain elements within the segregated South would be unwilling to allow inter-racial bus loads to travel through the region, and would not allow those passengers to make use of the desegregated facilities in bus terminals as they did so.” The rides made national news.

On May 26, Life published “Bloody Beatings, Burning Bus in the South,” a four-page article describing an incident near Anniston, Alabama. The main photograph on the first spread was of a Greyhound bus on the side of a road, engulfed in flames and black smoke. The caption read, “Flaming bus, fired by segregationist mob, burns near Anniston, Ala. Twelve riders were hospitalized.” The accompanying photograph showed
Fisk University student James Zwerg leaning against a building after he was attacked by a mob in Montgomery, Alabama. Wearing a suit and tie, he was bleeding from his nose and his hand. Two buses, which began in Washington, D.C., made it safely through Virginia, the Carolinas, and Georgia before being attacked by mobs in Alabama. The combination of the two photographs represented the results of a brutal attack on the Freedom Riders. The photograph of the burning bus was an example of what happened when segregated space was forcibly occupied.

The following two-page spread recounted correspondent Norman Ritter’s description of the violence, and it was accompanied with photographs by Don Uhrbrock. The main photograph in the spread showed NBC cameraman Maurice Levy on the ground with his arm up for protection while a large, white segregationist reared back before kicking him. The image was slightly blurred but the intent and malice of the attacker was obvious. Ritter described the scene:

Uhrbrock was photographing Levy being attacked and knocked down. Before the fat man had finished with Levy the toughs started cuffing Uhrbrock in the face with the backs of their hands. Don back-pedaled and neatly switched the roll of film of the Levy beating from his camera into his pocket. Then Don also hit the pavement under a rain of blows from the mob. His cameras were smashed to pieces against the street. All this time the freedom riders stood by unmolested.

The two correspondents were chased and beaten until a bystander found a cab for them. Their incident was similar to Lewis’ account. Again, in the book *Massive Resistance*, he explained that when the Trailways bus reached Birmingham on May 14, occupants were met by Klansmen “armed with lead pipes, bats and chains.” For about twenty minutes, the white supremacist mob attacked passengers and the media unrestrained and unhindered. It was later learned that the newly re-elected public safety commissioner,
Eugene ‘Bull’ Connor, allowed the mob a twenty-minute period to “have free reign to terrorize those Freedom Riders that had made it to Birmingham” before intervening. cccxi

The Freedom Riders were the subject of another Life story on June 2. “The Ride For Rights” was a ten-page article that explained how the Freedom Riders were “deliberately and knowingly asking for trouble, and [how] the South was deliberately and mistakenly giving it to them.” The main photograph on the opening spread depicted two African-American passengers seated on a bus as two National Guardsmen stood above them with rifles and bayonets. One of the passengers was looking up at a guardsman over his left shoulder. The caption read, “Freedom Rider David Dennis, seated next to Julia Aaron, looks warily at bayonets a Mississippi National Guardsmen has on the bus.” The image represented the idea of guarded space, that could only be occupied with protection. The passengers were safe as long as the guardsmen were there for protection, but if they were not present, the outcome might have been violence and destruction as in the previous weeks. Coincidentally, the Reverend James Lawson Jr., one of the riders’ leaders, “maintained that the Freedom Riders needed no help.” He said, “Protection does not deal with the problem of segregation.”

When the twenty-seven riders entered a whites-only waiting room at the bus depot in Jackson, Mississippi, they were asked to leave by local police, arrested, found guilty of disobeying an officer, and sent to jail. cccxiv That summer, more than 300 Freedom Riders were arrested in Mississippi. They were jailed for violating Mississippi segregation laws and were often abused and tortured while incarcerated. By the fall of 1961, they had achieved their goal. In September, the Interstate Commerce Commission issued
regulations that successfully desegregated interstate travel facilities throughout the South and the country as a whole. 

1962: James Meredith and the University of Mississippi

In 1962, *Life* published five civil rights-related stories, three of which were about James Meredith as he tried to enroll at and attend the University of Mississippi. A former Air Force sergeant, he had received a federal court order for admission into the University of Mississippi, but Governor Ross Barnett turned him away twice.

The first photograph that *Life* published was on October 5, and depicted a standoff that placed Meredith and Chief U.S. Marshal James McShane against Mississippi Lieutenant Governor Paul Johnson. The image ran across a two-page spread with the magazine’s table of contents. Taken by Flip Schulke, a contract photographer with the agency Black Star, from a low angle, it showed the heads and shoulders of the confronting men. The expression on Meredith’s face was defiant and resolute.

In the following week, on October 12, *Life* published an editorial and a thirteen-page article, “Battlefield: Where the Law Won.” Both the editorial and the article were about Meredith’s enrollment in the University of Mississippi. The fifteen photographs that accompanied the story included: an aerial view of the university, rioters attacking the school, wounded U.S. marshals, Meredith being protected, troops marching in town, and off-duty state and local police officers getting ready for the riot.

By the time the riots were over, 375 people were injured and two men had died, including a French journalist and a bystander. The riot was fueled by Governor Barnett urging Mississippian to “maintain segregation at Ole Miss,” and his deception of the
Both John F. Kennedy and Robert F. Kennedy had mistakenly trusted Barnett to maintain civil order in Oxford, which was the home of the University of Mississippi. In the early morning hours of October 1, U. S. troops from Memphis finally arrived on the scene “just as the marshals’ supply of tear gas ran out and subdued the crowd.” They arrested nearly 100 people and by 7:30 a.m., after a sixteen-month legal battle, Meredith registered at the university and broke another segregation barrier.

Two influential Black Star photographers covered the event for *Life*: Moore and Schulke. In *Powerful Days: The Civil Rights Photography of Charles Moore*, Michael S. Durham wrote that the admission of Meredith into the University of Mississippi was the turning point in Moore’s career. He had been the only photographer inside the administration building, which was attacked with rocks, guns, and incendiary bombs by angry white segregationists. His exclusive photographs, capturing the drama of the siege, appeared in *Life* in the following week and solidified his “reputation as a news photographer of unusual determination, talent, and daring.”

In an altercation with a husky, white college student, Moore recalled being grabbed and manhandled. He said in *Powerful Days*, “I never took my eyes off his eyes. I have never seen such hate on anyone’s face before; it was as if I were vermin. I knew what he was thinking. To him I was worse than ‘a nigger,’ I was a white nigger . . . and worse than that I was a white *Life* magazine nigger.” As a former Golden Gloves boxer and an ex-Marine, Moore was able to get out of the situation and remained unharmed throughout the riots. His photographs ran prominently in *Life*’s article. Durham explained that the message conveyed by the article was “loud and clear—and a
foreboding of events to come: white Mississippi was willing to shed blood rather than give in to federal pressure to integrate.

One of the most dramatic photographs that *Life* published was Moore’s image of off-duty officers gathering before the riots (see Figure 4.5). The caption read,

The official upholders of law and order in Oxford, a group of Mississippi plain-clothesmen, chortle as one of their number takes practice swings with a billy and another ties on an identifying armband. They are on the campus not to put down riots but to take part in one of the incidents which led up to it. They mobilized earlier in the week to back up Lieut. Governor Paul Johnson when he turned Meredith and U. S. marshals away from the enrolling office. But when the riot broke out, all local and state cops made themselves scarce.

Moore took the photograph over the shoulder of a state trooper. The image showed eight men of various ages, smoking and laughing. The smiling man in the center gripped a small bat and smoked a cigarette. His name was Billy Ferrell, who was a sheriff from Natchez, Mississippi. Seven of the men in the image were either sheriffs or deputy sheriffs, and they were all from Mississippi. Paul Hendrickson wrote *Sons of Mississippi: A Story of Race and its Legacy*, which was based on Moore’s photograph of the eight men. He described them as “sworn keepers of the Mississippi peace” and “leading citizens of their respective communities.” He explained that the image had “a lynching narrative, its power tapping into the myth of Emmett Till, straight into all the old nineteenth-century Southern myths of the ‘black beast rapist.’”

Hendrickson explained that a lynching must have a common victim guilty of some crime, that was threatening to the “virtue or purity of white women;” a community which was totally involved and believed the victim to be guilty; and an outcome of swift justice. Forgoing suppositions and scholarly analyses, he questioned, “isn’t each of [the men] requiring the same thing, namely, instant and bloody redress for a perceived
Meredith attending the University of Mississippi was, in their minds, the perceived wrong.

Figure 4.5: This photograph by Charles Moore of off-duty officers gathering before the riots at the University of Mississippi was published on October 12, 1962, in *Life* magazine.

The Meredith story also was the first hard news story involving danger in Schulke’s career. According to an interview with Jennifer Podis in 2000, he snuck onto campus by hiding in the trunk of a university professor in order to gain access to the rioters. He normally did not take chances because he had a family to consider but in this case he knew “the importance of documenting the injustices” and evils of segregation. He said in the interview, “too many people are being oppressed, and really being oppressed. .
. . I felt what they were doing to blacks was horrible, and anything I could do, in any way, to change any part of it, I would. . . . I believe in ‘don’t get mad, expose it.”

The intensity, violence, and confrontation in the Meredith story would be indicative of civil rights stories that *Life* magazine would publish in the following years. More violence would occur before Congress passed the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act in 1965. In 1963, Montgomery, Alabama, witnessed police dogs and fire hoses attacking protesters; three student volunteers would be murdered in Meridian, Mississippi; and dozens of peaceful protesters would be beaten on the Edmund Pettus Bridge in Selma, Alabama.
Notes


ccxlviii Ibid., 161.


celi The author examined issues of Time and Newsweek magazines on microfilm from September 16, 1957, to October 21, 1957. The issues looked at were September 16, September 23, September 30, October 7, October 14, and October 21 for both Time and Newsweek.


celvi Ibid., 42.


ccexii Will Counts, A Life Is More than a Moment: The Desegregation of Little Rock’s Central High (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999), 34-36. Counts, a photographer for the Arkansas Democrat, made a similar photograph to the one published in Life.


ccexv Ibid.

ccexvi Ibid., 27.


“US Troops Take Over in Arkansas,” Life, October 7, 1957, cover. A “compacted” or compressed view in a photograph is obtained by using a telephoto lens. This type of lens organizes subjects in such a way, subjects appear to be stacked in front of and behind each other.

Ibid. 37-47.
Ibid.
Ibid.

“Supreme Court Justices Hurry to a Historic Special Summer Session,” Life, September 8, 1958, 24.
Ibid., 27.
Ibid.
Ibid.
Ibid.
Ibid.
Ibid.

Ibid.

Ibid.

Ibid.

“Calm and Hopeful Integration Start,” Life, February 16, 1959, 30-32.
Ibid.

Ibid.

David Sibley, Geographies of Exclusion: Society and Difference in the West (London; New York: Routledge, 1995), 76.
Ibid.
Ibid.
Ibid.
Ibid.

“Little Rock’s Chief Stops the ‘Seggies,’” Life, August 24, 1959, 40-42.
Ibid.

“Fuss over Integrated Black Bunny,” Life, June 1, 1959, 90.
Ibid.
Ibid.
Ibid.

Ibid.


“Flare-Up over a Sit-Down,” Life, February 29, 1960, 32.


Ibid.


“Racial Fury over Sit-In,” Life, September 12, 1960, 37.
Ibid.
Ibid.

Ibid.

Ibid.

Ibid.


Ibid.

Ibid.

Kasher, *The Civil Rights Movement*, 76.


Ibid., 16.

Ibid., 18.


Ibid., 161.

Ibid., 163.

Chapter 5: Life magazine from 1963 to 1965

Fight on little children, fight on
You know what you’re doing is right.
Don’t stop, keep straight ahead
You’re just bound to win the fight.

Many hardships there will be;
Many trials you’ll have to face.
But go on children, keep fighting
Soon freedom will take hardship’s place.

— Edith Moore, age fifteen, excerpt from Freedom School Poetry, 1965

In the summer of 1964, three student volunteers disappeared while traveling through Neshoba County, Mississippi. Andrew Goodman, a twenty-year-old white senior at Queens College in New York, Michael Schwerner, a twenty-four-old white sociologist who ran an African-American community center in Meridian, Mississippi, and James Chaney, a twenty-one-year-old African-American civil rights activist, were part of an 800-student group who had volunteered and trained to travel into the deep South. They were part of “Freedom Summer,” which was designed to work and to volunteer on behalf of “Negro civil rights.” On June 21, they inspected the charred remains of the Mount Zion Methodist Church in Longdale, Mississippi, which was burned to the ground five days earlier by the Ku Klux Klan. The three were arrested a few hours later, incarcerated, and released in the middle of the night. Their whereabouts would remain unknown until their remains were discovered five weeks later. Their disappearance became national news. President Lyndon B. Johnson met with the parents of the two white victims. Steven Kasher, in The Civil Rights Movement: A Photographic History, 1954-68, wrote that the disappearances of the three volunteers were such a major news
event that the national media attention helped end a southern filibuster in Congress
against the opposed civil rights act and helped ease its passage.  

On July 3, 1964, *Life* published a story about the missing volunteers, “The Limpid Shambles of Violence,” a five-page article with eight photographs taken by contract photographer Steve Schapiro. The images described the swamp-like scene where the volunteers’ burned-out station wagon was found and searchers “hunted for clues.” The final photograph of the article showed nine white males lined up along a curb on a street. Most of the young men were smiling and laughing with some barefoot and wearing T-shirts. The caption read, “While the search goes on, locals—some barefoot—gawk from a nearby bridge. They guffawed when one hooted, ‘We throw two or three niggers in every year, to feed the fish.’”

After a forty-four day search by local law officers, FBI agents, and U.S. sailors, the bodies of the missing volunteers were found buried in mud several miles away near Philadelphia, Mississippi.  Kasher wrote, “These three civil rights workers—white and black, Northern and Southern, seasoned and virginal—became the best-known martyrs of the movement.”  This type of violent story became more common on the pages of *Life* in the mid-1960s.

Civil rights-related stories in *Life* increased considerably in 1963, 1964, and 1965 with sixty-six articles, covering the same themes as in earlier years (see Figure 5.1). Although many of the themes were similar, such as integration and politics, many of the photographs and events displayed more violence and confrontation than in previous years. African-American protesters demanded more civil rights in all aspects of everyday
life as racist segregationists became more entrenched and obstinate in their views. Life’s coverage of these events reflected the frustrations and tensions on both sides.

In 1956, Life published more pages and photographs devoted to civil rights stories than in any other year (see Figure 3.1, page 46), but it published the most civil rights stories in 1964, the highest in the twelve-year study. Thirty-eight stories were published in that year. One of the reasons for this peak in articles was the increase in news events, such as the murders of Goodman, Schwerner, and Cheney; rioting in Harlem; and the passage of the Civil Rights Act in Congress.

![Figure 5.1: Published Stories, Pages, Photographs, and Letters in Life from 1963 to 1965.](image)
As discussed in previous chapters, the conflict or discourses in the fight for civil rights can be explained as a fight for space and the right to determine the use of that space. In *The Right to the City: Social Justice and the Fight For Public Space*, Don Mitchell explained, “Space, place, and location are not just the stage upon which rights are contested, but are actively produced by—and in turn serve to structure—struggles over rights.” Many of the sites of conflict were often seen as “symbolic,” that is the actions displayed on those sites consisted of symbolic actions. James Tyner, in *The Geography of Malcolm X: Black Radicalism and the Remaking of American Space*, described this symbolic space as “representational spaces,” which were “sites of resistance, and of counter-discourses which have not been grasped by apparatuses of power.” Apparatuses of power referred to spaces that were controlled by some authority. These sites of resistance were seen in many of the stories relating to civil rights in *Life* magazine.

1963: Birmingham, Medgar Evers, and the March on Washington

Of the twenty-eight articles published in 1963, one quarter of them dealt with the experience of being African American in America. One example, published on August 16, was, “How it Feels to Be Black,” a thirteen-page article of memories and photographs by staff photographer Gordon Parks. Another example, published as a two-part series in November, was “Racial Collision in the Big Cities.” The two articles covered thirteen pages and featured twelve photographs and thirteen graphs, all related to housing and population growth in U.S. cities. The stories suggested that African-American population was expected to double in twenty years, creating demands and
pressure on all levels of society. As the country faced continuing "moral and constitutional deadlock," the article presented the need for discussion and solutions. cccxxxix

Another quarter of the articles that year were about murder and violence toward African Americans, and the remainder dealt with integration, politics, marches, and voting rights. The most noteworthy and substantial civil rights-related articles published in 1963 were the protests in Birmingham, the murder of Medgar Evers, and the March on Washington.

On May 17, Life published eleven pages with thirteen photographs taken by Charles Moore on the civil rights protests in Birmingham. The dramatic and powerful photographs helped to pass the Civil Rights Act in 1964. In Powerful Days: The Civil Rights Photography of Charles Moore, Michael S. Durham wrote that New York Senator Jacob Javits credited Moore’s Birmingham photographs with "helping to speed passage of the landmark bill." Historian Arthur Schlesinger, Jr. said, regarding Moore’s images, "The photographs of Bull Connor’s police dog lunging at the marchers in Birmingham did as much as anything to transform the national mood and make legislation not just necessary, which it had long been, but possible." cccxli

The opening photograph covered the entire two-page spread and showed three firefighters leaning forward as they sprayed protesters sitting on a sidewalk (see Figure 5.2). The water from the fire hose hit one of the protesters directly in the back of the head with such force that it created a fan of water spreading out into the street. Other protesters were shown huddled together, hands above their heads in protective stances. cccxlii

The photograph was a symbolic scene, as Mitchell and Tyner both noted, for several reasons. First, the incident took place on a public sidewalk, a place where people
were generally allowed to move freely. Mitchell wrote that public spaces, such as streets, parks, squares, and sidewalks, are “gathering places for communicating between citizens and discussing public questions.”

Second, the jet-spray of water made it difficult to identify any of the protesters as African Americans, and the firefighters also were turned away from the audience. By showing the participants as faceless and nameless, they became stand-ins, or representatives, of their people and classes: the white firefighters for the oppressive southerner and the African-Americans as the target of abuse. This can be perceived as a battle between good and evil, not between the Birmingham Fire Department and African-American protesters demonstrating for their right to vote.

Figure 5.2: Moore’s dramatic photograph of firefighters spraying water at protesters on May 17, 1963, in Life, can be considered both symbolic and iconic.
In “Performing Civic Identity: The Iconic Photograph of the Flag Raising on Iwo Jima,” Robert Hariman and John L. Lucaites explained that photographs become iconic when they are “widely recognized, understood to be representations of historically significant events, activate strong emotional response, and are reproduced across a range of media, genres, or topics.” They also can shape understanding of specific events and periods, and “influence political action by modeling relationships between civic actors.”

Author and historian Leigh Raiford also agreed that the violent images produced in Birmingham were powerful. In *Imprisoned in a Luminous Glare: Photography and the African American Freedom Struggle*, she wrote that “these images have shaped and informed the ways scholars, politicians, artists, and everyday people recount, remember, and memorialize the 1960s freedom struggle specifically and movement histories generally.” She explained that such images become icons over time and are used in the process of forming our national, racial, and political identity. The frequent use of these powerful images legitimized “the proper place of African Americans within the national imagery” and gave them a “surplus symbolic value.”

Other examples of iconic images were seen in the following spread. The headline, “The Dogs’ Attack is Negroes’ Reward,” ran three photographs showing police dogs viciously attacking African-American protesters (see Figure 5.3). The caption stated, “If the Negroes themselves had written the script, they could hardly have asked for greater help for their cause than City Police Commissioner Eugene ‘Bull’ Connor freely gave. Ordering his men to let white spectators come near he said: ‘I want ‘em to see the dogs work. Look at those niggers run.’”
As the events in Alabama transpired, Moore’s images helped the world gain a clearer understanding of racism in the South. African Americans were unable to occupy the same space as whites and the streets and sidewalks became their battlefields. Raiford described how powerful and palpable the photographs were: “one can hear the police dogs barking as they attacked protesters and then the sound of nails on pavement and sudden panting as the dogs are yanked back by the chains.” She explained that Moore photographed the violence by placing himself in the center of the action. By using short-range and wide-angle lenses, his images demonstrated the “power of photographs for intimacy and closeness, evidence in the photographer’s own methods and choice of equipment.”

Figure 5.3: Moore’s photographs of police dogs attacking protesters, published in May 17, 1963, in Life, showed passive protesters being attacked by police dogs.
As a native of Alabama, Moore felt a special kinship to the state and its people. Although, he did not agree with many of the attitudes of southerners, he did understand them. He wrote in *Powerful Days*, “So I’m there, and I’m watching the dogs being led into the crowds and the high-pressure hoses knocking people down, and it troubled me, because I love the South. And it opened my eyes to the need for change in the state of Alabama. I saw that we had to become a state for all citizens, that blacks deserved the same kind of chance that I was given.”

Not everyone agreed with Moore’s sentiment. Don Milton of Birmingham wrote in a letter to the editor, “You failed to mention the 50-odd officers who have been injured by bricks, razors, knives, and similar articles. I will not deny that a degree of racial discrimination exists in Birmingham as well as many other cities, both Northern and Southern, but there are two sides to every story and your article has done nothing but widen the gap between whites and Negroes.” Ralph Shaw Jr., of Beverly, New Jersey, wrote, “A mob is a mob, whether it be white, black, yellow or red. . . . The police know that . . . the best cure is to break it into small groups. The easiest and most merciful way to do this is with a fire hose.”

The remaining photographs in the article showed other scenes of the incident, such as wet and disheveled protesters, women being dragged to police vehicles, and an emotional, cheering crowd before another march. The article ended with a photograph of young African Americans pointing and wagging their fingers at a police officer. The smiles and expressions on the youthful subjects seemed to taunt and provoke the
This image presented a bold and fearless end to an article, which began with some of the most iconic and powerful images of the civil rights era.

The editors of *Life* began the story by stating how “frightening” and “brutal” the photographs were, and the “Negro strategy of ‘nonviolent direct action’ invites that very brutality.” They described Birmingham as the “South’s toughest city” and noted that King had been attempting to force whites to desegregate facilities throughout the city. African-American protesters believed so deeply in their cause that they were willing to face police dogs, fire hoses, or go to jail. By visually presenting the results of these nonviolent, direct actions, and ending the article with such a brazen photograph, *Life* showed African Americans succeeding in what they had set out to do, which was to challenge the authority in Birmingham. Through Moore’s photographs, they succeeded in presenting the plight of African Americans to the world.

On June 21, 1963, *Life* published “A Trail of Blood—A Negro Dies,” which reported on the assassination of Medgar Evers, a state field worker for the NAACP. Again, *Life* framed the story by pointing out that on the day he was shot, two African-American students were admitted to the University of Alabama, and President Kennedy “called on the whole nation to help get the Negro real equality.” One of the four photographs accompanying the story was of Evers’ bloodstained driveway. He was shot in the back from a rifle and tried to drag himself to his doorstep as his wife and three children watched. He died within the hour. The photograph was taken from above looking down, which distorted the view of the image and gave it a strange, abstract look. The graphic bloodstain was evidence of the brutal and cold-hearted murder.
On June 28, Life devoted its cover, an editorial, and a four-page article to Evers’ funeral. The cover photograph, taken by staff photographer John Loengard, showed his wife, Myrlie, comforting their son, Van, during the funeral. The opening spread of the section, “Arlington Receives a Murdered Hero,” contained two photographs by photographer Flip Schulke. The first was Evers’ casket during a full military funeral at Arlington National Cemetery, and the second was a close-up of Myrlie with one tear running down her face. In Witness To Our Times: My Life as a Photojournalist, Schulke wrote,

All people are affected by emotion, and I wanted the nation to see that this family had a father who had been cut down at a very young age. I wanted to show his widow’s devastation. I got a picture with just one tear coming down her face. She didn’t dissolve into crying, but to me that tear was even more devastating. Those pictures across the casket were the hardest pictures I ever took.

The only photograph on the second spread, taken by Moore, showed African-American men and women running in the middle of a downtown street in Evers’ hometown of Jackson, Mississippi. The caption described a more violent side of African Americans. It stated that after funeral services “Negroes screamed ‘We want the killer!’ The fury was echoed across the U.S. as the Negro revolt gathered force and the potential of violence grew. The image, which was taken with a wide-angle lens was similar to those from the Birmingham protests because they pulled viewers into the scene. This effect brought intimacy and immediacy to the photograph and story, although at least one person felt Life was biased. In a letter to the editor, Randall C. Scarborough of Columbia, South Carolina, wrote, “One would conclude from your coverage of racial tension that you have more interest in bringing disgrace to the South than in truly improving the plight of the Negro. Why do you not include a few of the hundreds of instances of
voluntary, nonviolent integration? You might even quote an educated, moderate white Southern.?” The letter continued to denigrate Life’s policies and concluded with the question, “Can the South be so condemned for resisting an upheaval that only a few short years ago wasn’t even legal?”

The third civil rights-related story of significance that year was on the March on Washington. On September 6, Life devoted a cover and ten pages to the event, including nine photographs in color and nine in black and white. Ten photographers were credited for taking the images, including staffers Paul Schutzer, Gordon Parks, Francis Miller, and Elliott Elisofon, and freelancers Gordon Tenney, Jim Maman, Frank Dandridge, Steve Schapiro, Bob Gomel, and Moore. This was an extraordinary amount of resources devoted to one event. The cover image showed A. Philip Randolph, the organizer of the march, and his assistant, Bayard Rustin, in front of the statue of Abraham Lincoln at his memorial. The inside images ranged from overall crowd shots to general scenes around the National Mall in Washington. One photograph was of King smiling and waving to the crowd. The caption quoted him: “America has given the Negro people a bad check. It has come back marked ‘insufficient funds.’”

In The Civil Rights Movement: An Eyewitness History, Sandford Wexler described the scene as a sweltering hot afternoon, filled with speeches. King gave the closing address, which began as a serious but powerful narration of the African-American struggle for freedom and rights. Singer Mahalia Jackson called out from behind him, “Tell them about your dream!” As King was inspired and encouraged by the marchers, he put aside his prepared text and began speaking from his heart. He said, “I have a dream that one day this nation will rise up and live out the true meaning of its creed. . . . I have a
dream that one day on the red hills of Georgia the sons of former slaves and the sons of former slave owners will be able to sit down together at the table of brotherhood.”

The march drew an estimated 200,000 to 250,000 people. According to Roberts and Klibanoff, the three major network TV stations, ABC, NBC, and CBS, shared twenty-six pool cameras and set up another twenty-three cameras positioned between the Washington Monument and the Lincoln Memorial. The media coverage was extensive and remarkable. The New York Times called it “the greatest assembly for a redress of grievances that this capital has ever seen.”

The march accomplished two things for African Americans in their fight for civil rights that summer. First, it was a peaceful demonstration. There was no violence reported. Thousands of demonstrators were good-natured, clapped hands, and sang “freedom songs.” Second, as Roberts and Klibanoff noted, the march demonstrated the seriousness and determination of African Americans and their cause for civil rights. King had motivated the crowd with his powerful and emotional speech.

Several people wrote to Life offering their opinions. Goldie B. Fleming, of Washington, D. C., wrote, “In that mass of 200,000 streaming, blurred faces, there was much laughter. Everyone was in order, and after the speeches were made they disbanded and quietly returned to their destinations. I, like thousands of grandmothers, can feel that the future of our grandchildren is in good Democratic hands.” Leona Wojcik of Wilbraham, Massachusetts, wrote, “The March on Washington was an inspiring example of Americans who have the courage to use the Constitution as a code to live by rather than merely an album of words to make speeches by.” And finally, Chester Sellitto of Staten Island, New York, wrote, “I went to Washington because I believe that the great ideal in
Lincoln’s Emancipation Proclamation has not yet been fully realized. The present struggle is another manifestation of the eternal struggle between good and bad, love and hate, justice and bigotry, freedom and slavery. All seven letters to the editors about the march spoke positively and favorably toward the event. This was unusual, as in most cases, *Life* ran an equal number of letters for and against an event or a story.

With such a historic and dramatic event, it also was unusual that the photographs did not have cohesion as a single story. During an interview in 2011, a contract photographer for *Life*, Steve Schapiro, said that because there were so many photographers and about six editors working on the layout in the New York office, a certain point of view was missing. He recounted,

> Each of these editors pulled out their favorite picture, and then would lobby for getting their pictures into the magazine. The result was a long spread, but instead of a single point of view, which has an emotional impact; you had all these pictures from all different people and it didn’t have the impact that it would have had if a single photographer had done it. . . . What had been great with *Life*’s stories in the 1940s and 1950s was that they were long stories and usually done by one photographer. And by doing that, there was an emotional flow to the story.

The violence against African Americans did not end with the march. By the end of September, a bomb had been set in the basement of the African-American Sixteenth Street Baptist Church in Birmingham. Four young girls were killed and one was severely wounded during the explosion. On September 27, *Life* published one photograph of twelve-year-old Sarah Jean Collins in a hospital bed. The graphic photograph, taken by freelancer, Frank Dandridge, showed Collins in a hospital bed with white bandages on her eyes (see Figure 5.4). The text accompanying the image read, “It was a sickening expression of racial hatred, a horrible extension of the irresponsibility of Alabama’s Governor George Wallace.”

In *The Civil Rights Movement*, Peter B. Levy explained
that the bombing had “tested the mantle of the civil rights movement and the nation.” A speech from Charles Morgan Jr., a white Birmingham lawyer, accompanied the image. In it Morgan asked the question, “Who is to blame?” And answered, “Each of us. Each citizen who has not consciously attempted to bring about peaceful compliance with the decisions of the Supreme Court. . . . Every person in this community who has in any way contributed to the popularity of hatred is at least as guilty, or more so, as the demented fool who threw the bomb.

Figure 5.4: After a church bombing in Birmingham, Alabama, *Life* published this simple, yet powerful image of twelve-year-old Sarah Jean Collins in her hospital bed on September 27, 1963.
More violence would follow that year, with the assassination of President John F. Kennedy in Dallas, Texas, on November 22. He had strong support among African Americans before his death, and according to a Gallup poll, 83 percent approved of the job he was doing. African Americans and their liberal allies mourned his death but also feared Lyndon B. Johnson as president. To their surprise, he proved to be a strong ally with the passage of the Civil Rights Act in the summer of 1964.\textsuperscript{ccclxvii}

\textit{1964: The Civil Rights Act, Riots, and Murder}

The thirty-eight civil rights-related stories in 1964 ranged from violence and murder to education, politics, and fear mongering. The sheer diversity of story themes had expanded to all facets of life and civil rights leaders, such as Malcolm X and King were profiled.\textsuperscript{ccclxviii} Several stories focused on the progress made with civil rights; for example, one photograph and caption ran in May of Linda Brown Smith, who, ten years before, was named in the Supreme Court decision \textit{Brown v Board of Education}. She was now a Topeka, Kansas, mother and “proud to have helped even a little.”\textsuperscript{ccclxix} As tension and frustrations of inadequate political legislation mounted, violence and rioting began to occur. On April 3, “How It Feels to be Beat Up By a Rampaging Mob” explained how \textit{Life} correspondent Mike Durham and photographer Moore were attacked by a mob in Jacksonville, Florida. The mayor of Jacksonville ordered a halt to sit-ins there, and when protesters demonstrated against the ban, an African-American woman was shot and killed. The demonstrators went on a rampage, injured Durham and ignited his press car on fire.\textsuperscript{ccclxx}

On June 19, \textit{Life} published “They Finally Did It: They Busted the Big Filibuster,” a six-page article about the Senate passing the civil rights bill. The article contained
twenty-three photographs, the majority of them portraits of the senators who fought against of the bill. The opening spread had one image across both pages of Senate Minority Leader Everett Dirksen and Democratic Whip Hubert Humphrey seated in front of ten other senators smiling and cheering after the passage of the historic bill. Peter Levy wrote that the Civil Rights Act of 1964, as it became known, “was the most significant federal legislation of its kind since reconstruction.” The law gave the federal government the power to enforce school integration and gave more protection to civil rights activists. It made it illegal to discriminate against an individual because of race, color, or sex. What it did not do, however, was to ensure the right to vote, but that right would come in the next year.

The following two-page spread showed nineteen images of the senators who filibustered, along with quotations explaining their reasons. Senator Richard Russell of Georgia said, “I reject the idea that federal power may compel the mingling of the races to achieve social equality,” and Senator John McClellan of Arkansas said, “Integration carried to its fullest means miscegenation. You can’t satisfy them. There is no end to their demands.” Many other comments spoke of the unconstitutionality and moral implications of the bill. Alan Ellender, a senator from Louisiana said, “I am not against the Negro, but you’ve got to live among them to know them. They’re different. Even the Bible shows that. They’re not dependable as a race. They’re like sheep, you know. They want to intermarry.”

As seen in the remarks by southern senators, racist and segregationist ideas were still prevalent in the South. In early July, *Life* published the story of the three missing
student activists, Goodman, Schwerner, and Chaney, who were found murdered outside Meridian, Mississippi.  

Problems also were shown in the North. On July 31, 1964, *Life* published a ten-page article on rioting in New York. The story explained how African-American residents in Harlem and Brooklyn swarmed into the streets after an off-duty police lieutenant shot and killed a fifteen-year-old African-American boy under questionable circumstances. Two of the eighteen photographs were reproduced in color while the rest were in black-and-white. The images depicted African Americans in confrontations with police officers, being beaten and subdued and running through the streets. One image in particular displayed the harsh, violent nature of the rioting. It showed two white police officers clubbing an African-American man on the head while three African-Americans watched (see Figure 5.5). The beaten man’s face showed anguish and pain as the baton from the officer was about to make contact. The photograph clearly displayed an African American as the victim, a stereotype, which had been present since the beginning of *Life* in the 1930s. Riots had broken out in other northern cities, such as Rochester, Jersey City, and Patterson. Richard Lentz, in *Symbols, The News Magazines, and Martin Luther King*, wrote that the situation was terrifying and bewildering. Magazines, such as *Time* and *Newsweek*, wrote about King as a nonviolent prophet, who had worked with city officials in trying to quell the violence.

Race riots across the country grew in frequency and intensity. Harlem was one of the first large, northern cities to experience such destruction. A year later, it would be repeated in the Watts neighborhood of Los Angeles. African-American activist Stokely Carmichael wrote in 1966, “Each time the people in those cities saw Martin Luther King
get slapped, they became angry; when they saw four little black girls bombed to death, they were angrier; and when nothing happened, they were steaming.\textsuperscript{ccclxxvi} The riots grew out of the frustration that African Americans felt from the harsh living conditions throughout the country to the slow and deliberate pace of the civil rights movement.

\textbf{Figure 5.5:} A photograph of two police officers beating an African-American man during rioting in Harlem, New York, was published in \textit{Life} on July 31, 1964.

On December 18, \textit{Life} published “Day of Accusation in Mississippi,” which reported on the arrest and legal maneuverings of the men connected with the murders of Goodman, Schwerner, and Chaney. The opening spread, by photographer Bill Reed,
showed the defendants of Neshoba County, Deputy Cecil Price and Sheriff Lawrence Rainey, smiling in the front row of a courtroom (see Figure 5.6). The image was taken during the arraignment of the twenty-one white Mississippians implicated in the murders. Rainey, sitting low in his chair with one foot over his knee, had just placed a big wad of Red Man chewing tobacco in his mouth. The caption read, “’Hey, let’s have some Red Man’ . . . [as] defendants and spectators laughed.” The headline above the photograph added irony to the scene.

**Figure 5.6:** A photograph by Bill Reed of Deputy Cecil Price and Neshoba County Sheriff Lawrence Rainey (right) in court was published in *Life* on December 18, 1964.

The image, taken with direct flash in front of the defendants, was symmetrically organized, bringing order to the unusual scene. The smiling faces and jovial attitude reflected in the photograph made light of the fact that these men were participants in
arraignment proceedings for the murder of the three individuals. Their actions and attitudes were not unexpected when considering Mississippi’s local media. In *The Press and Race: Mississippi Journalists Confront the Movement*, Susan M. Weill wrote, “Mississippi newspaper editorials viewed the civil rights workers with skepticism and even loathing.” As an example, she quoted the editor of the *Meridian Star*, James B. Skewes, who wrote, “The civil rights organizations share the blame for the murders, because if a summer project had not been organized, the three young men would have not been murdered.”

In *We Are Not Afraid: The Story of Goodman, Schwerner, and Cheney and the Civil Rights Campaign for Mississippi*, Seth Cagan and Philip Dray described the photograph of Rainey in the *Life* article:

> Appearing entirely at ease, bolstered by the warm expressions of support he had received, and confident he would never be convicted, Rainey joked easily with his codefendants Cecil Price, Herman Tucker, and Jimmy Lee Townsend. . . . The image of this crude, smug bully in a police uniform—unrepentant even as he attended his own arraignment on a murder charge—shocked many northern readers and totally confirmed the nation’s worst fears about police complacency in the case. Along with his wad of tobacco, Sheriff Rainey appeared to be chewing to bits any lingering illusions about the nature of southern justice.

The text accompanying the *Life* story also reflected the attitudes in Meridian, describing it as “a strange, tight little town.” During a preliminary hearing, U.S. Commissioner Esther Carter refused to admit testimony from one of the defendants, who confessed to the FBI, and dismissed all charges against him. The maneuver resulted in a hearing by a grand jury, which succeeded in delaying the procedures. The incident “brought cries from civil rights groups that justice was impossible in Mississippi.”

The gruesome story would be a precursor to more violent events in 1965.
1965: Selma, More Violence, and More Murder

In January 1965, a dinner was held in honor of King, who had just won the Nobel Peace Prize, and about 1,500 people, both African American and white, gathered for the celebration in Atlanta. A few days later, in February, King was jailed in Selma, Alabama, with thousands of others who were protesting voting rights. In that same month, Malcolm X was shot and killed by two assassins while delivering a speech in Manhattan, and in March, African-American protesters were savagely beaten as they attempted to demonstrate for voting rights in Selma, Alabama. In August, President Lyndon B. Johnson signed the Voting Rights Act into law; and a few days later, rioting broke out in the Watts neighborhood of Los Angeles. The year would continue with a similar pattern: positive steps forward, negative steps back. *Life* published thirty civil rights-related stories that year, covering both the highs and lows.

On February 12, *Life* published “A Remarkable Dinner and . . . Off to Jail,” which was indicative of the complexity of events and stories throughout the year. Atlanta celebrated King, Georgia’s first Nobel Prize winner, with business leaders, service workers, and clergy. Three of the four photographs taken during the dinner highlighted the hospitality of guests as they ate and chatted together. The largest image in the spread showed King’s three oldest children, Martin Luther III, Yolanda, and Dexter, “chattering happily in a sea of white and Negro faces.” The photograph was distinct in its construction as well as in its content. The three children were well dressed and seated at a banquet table in front of large plates of food, and Yolanda looked up and happily talked to an older white woman with a camera. African-American and white adults sat at tables
talking, eating, and laughing with each other. This was shown as space shared by everyone and dominated by no one, displaying a utopian moment in time. By running the image as the largest one on the page, the editors brought attention to the idea of shared space as commonplace and normal, a pleasant event that could happen anywhere.

What the article did not contain was that the city of Atlanta and, specifically its mayor, Ivan Allen, Jr., were having difficulty generating guests for the dinner. Gene Roberts and Hank Klibanoff wrote in the *The Race Beat* that Allen met with Coca-Cola Chairman Robert Woodruff in order to persuade local business leaders to attend the banquet and avoid embarrassment for the city. With the fear of the Coca-Cola Company relocating outside of Georgia, “there was a near stampede to buy tickets” for the event honoring King.  

The final photograph in the spread showed King leading prospective African-American voters to the Selma courthouse. The caption read, “Minutes later all of them were arrested for parading without a permit. King’s arrest ignited the month-long campaign.” The article and photographs highlighted the dichotomy of many of the civil rights events of 1965.  

On March 5, *Life* published a six-page article and devoted its cover to the murder of Malcolm X and the destruction that followed. The cover depicted a colored photograph of the largest Muslim mosque after being firebombed. The headline stated, “Death of Malcolm X and the Resulting Vengeful Gang War: A Monument to Negro Upheaval.” Malcolm’s assassins were members of the Nation of Islam and were later arrested and convicted for his murder.
The opening spread of “The Violent End of the Man Called Malcolm” showed three graphic images of Malcolm lying on the floor as unidentified bystanders attempted CPR. The largest image, taken moments after the shooting, showed him with his shirt and coat pulled open, revealing a bare, bullet-ridden chest. One woman, kneeling above him, held his head up as a pair of disconnected arms attempted to remove his tie. The three images were similar in drama and intensity and displayed the horror of death in a visually graphic way. The following spread contained a story written by Gordon Parks, which described his final meeting with Malcolm. He wrote, “Malcolm’s years of ranting against the ‘white devils’ helped create the climate of violence that finally killed him.” The last image in the article covered a full page and showed Elijah Mohammed’s Harlem mosque in flames. Mohammed was a leader of the Black Muslims, a group Malcolm had broken with in the previous year. The mosque had been firebombed in retaliation for Malcolm’s death.

Malcolm X spoke of black nationalism and black reconstruction. His message was that nationalism was “designed to encourage our people, the black people, to gain complete control over the politics and politicians of our own people.” Tyner explained this idea as regaining control of all political and economic resources, in other words, controlling one’s space, both public and private.

Two weeks later, *Life* published one of the most dramatic stories of the year. On March 19, the cover headline read, “Civil Rights Face-Off at Selma: The Savage Season Begins,” and a photograph of African-American demonstrators walking over the Edmund Pettis Bridge in Selma accompanied it. The image, taken by Charles Moore, showed two
uniformed Alabama state troopers watching demonstrators as they approached from the bridge. eeclexxxix

Selma was the county seat of Dallas County, where 335 African Americans, out of approximately 15,000 people, had managed to register to vote. King, while in jail, wrote, “There are more Negroes in jail with me then there are on the voting rolls.” eecxc

Roberts and Klibanoff explained that King’s strategy in Alabama was simple: have nonviolent demonstrators exercise their constitutional rights, causing racists to react violently and resulting in Americans demanding change, intervention, and legislation. King knew that photography and the media played an important role in achieving his goals. eecxcı In Why We Can’t Wait, King wrote, “The brutality with which officials would have quelled the black individual became impotent when it could not be pursued with stealth and remain unobserved. It was caught—as a fugitive from a penitentiary is often caught—in gigantic circling spotlights. It was imprisoned in a luminous glare revealing the naked truth to the whole world.” eecxcıı

On Sunday, March 7, about 600 African Americans, led by John Lewis of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) and Hosea Williams of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC), left the Brown Chapel African Methodist Episcopal Church in Selma and began a fifty-mile trek to Montgomery. As the group crossed the Edmund Pettus Bridge, 100 Alabama state troopers met them. Using his bullhorn, Major John Cloud announced the march to be an “unlawful assembly” and ordered everyone to disperse. The marchers knelt in prayer but before they were done, the troopers charged with horses, batons, and tear gas. eecxcııı In The Civil Rights Movement: An Eyewitness History, Sandford Wexler described a chaotic scene: “The marchers
panicked and ran, trying to flee the tear gas, the charging horsemen, the flailing nightsticks and chains and electric cattle prods. Women and children, old and young marchers and even bystanders were savagely attacked by troopers.  

The opening spread of “Selma: Beatings Start the Savage Season,” displayed three horizontal photographs across the width of both pages (see Figure 5.7). The first image showed a row of eight troopers running toward the marchers, some of which had fallen to the ground. The caption described the scene as “a trooper phalanx [slamming] into the front ranks. As tear gas is fired, the troopers—some in gas masks—start laying about them with their billy clubs, battering Negroes to the ground.” The second image, taken moments later, showed the crowd of marchers dispersing as troopers ran past them. The third image in the sequence of the same scene, showed a person on the ground with his arms out as troopers with billy clubs walked about.

The second spread in the article contained three photographs under the headline “Man of Peace Leads a Second March That Ends in Prayer.” The main image in the spread depicted marchers kneeling in prayer while ominously framed by a trooper’s arm, billy club, and leg. A large area between the marchers and the trooper was clearly visible. The divide was symbolic of the racism that was still present in Alabama. A second image in the spread showed a “wall of troopers” blocking the progression of marchers. The caption read, “In a second attempt at a march, a column of 1500, led now by Dr. Martin Luther King, again faces the troopers who stand shoulder to shoulder on the highway a mile outside Selma.” Similar to the previous photograph, the space between the marchers and the troopers was evident. A third photograph showed King who had a furrowed brow with a serious look, marching with the crowd.
Figure 5.7: Charles Moores’ photographs of the confrontation between Alabama state troopers and marchers on the Edmund Pettis Bridge were published in Life on March 19, 1965.

The third spread contained more photographs of marchers and showed King as he deliberated strategy behind a closed-door session with other civil rights leaders. The text explained that U.S. Judge Frank M. Johnson of Montgomery issued an order banning the march, which forced a confrontation with authorities. In making the difficult decision to march and risk violence, King said, “I have been agonizing and made my choice. I decided it is better to die on the highway than to make a butchery of my conscience.”

The final spread in the article contained three photographs under the headline “Selma’s Faces of Defiance—and Death.” The largest image was a close-up of an
unidentified Selma policeman “ready for trouble.” He had a thick helmet and a stub of cigar between his lips. The second image, reproduced slightly smaller next to a column of text, showed Freddy Bennett, an African-American male with a bandaged forehead and a “We Shall Overcome” button on his lapel. Although both images were framed similarly, the layout visually and physically depicted the trooper much larger than Bennett. The scowling expression on the trooper’s face contrasted with Bennett’s placid and serene expression. A third, much smaller image showed Reverend James Reeb on a stretcher. The caption explained that he was clubbed from behind by a white man and then taken to a hospital where he died. His death, as Roberts and Klibanoff wrote, “raised the political temperature on an already aroused Washington.”

Eight days after the violent confrontation on the bridge, President Johnson personally accompanied the Voting Rights Bill to Congress. He gave a speech that was interrupted forty times by applause. During it, he called for “no delay, no hesitation, no compromise.” Then he added, “We shall overcome.” Roberts and Klibanoff wrote that when King saw the president on television and heard those words, a tear rolled down his cheek.

Through the national media, the events taking place in Selma focused and crystallized attention on the fight for voting rights in the South. In a letter to the editors of *Life*, Julie G. Saunders wrote, “Those Negroes in Selma have become the entire Negro population in the U.S.” On March 26, the magazine published images of the president’s speech along with photographs of the continuing violence in Alabama. The cover image was of King and other clergymen presenting a wreath to the “martyred” Reverend Reeb.
The eight-page article also contained a photograph of King watching the president on television.

The march from Selma to Montgomery finally took place on March 21. *Life* published, “Freedom March Ends in a Murder,” a one-page story with photographs by Steve Schapiro and Charles Moore. The 300 marchers walked for five days and were protected by 2,000 soldiers. When they reached Montgomery, the story explained, the marchers were joined by 25,000 supporters for a rally at the state capitol. After the rally, Viola Liuzzo, a white civil rights worker from Detroit, was shot and killed on Highway 80 by four members of the Ku Klux Klan. Her photograph ran along Schapiro’s photograph of marchers walking with American flags along Highway 80 and Moore’s image of a large crowd of marchers in downtown Montgomery. Schapiro’s photograph was noteworthy, however, for what it did not capture: the thousands of soldiers protecting the marchers. By not showing authority figures, the photograph visually implied a successful event. The flags, the symbol of America and patriotism, brought the image and march to a national level. No identifying landmarks were within the frame; instead, the photograph showed a lonely stretch of highway with grass, the road, the marchers, and trees in the background. The space was nondescript. The road might have been in Ohio, Illinois, or Vermont. The photograph became a symbol of success for all Americans.

President Johnson signed the Voting Rights Act into law on August 6, 1965. Roberts and Klibanoff wrote, “It was arguably the most remarkable victory of the entire civil rights era. . . . This was the high point.” On August 20, *Life* published “The New Voting Law Goes into Action,” a two-page spread containing three images. The first image, covering a full page, showed President Johnson signing the bill into law in the
ornate and ostentatious President’s Room of the White House. The caption read, “In this room 104 years before, Abraham Lincoln signed a bill freeing the slaves.” Behind the president were a group of senators and congressmen. A second photo, on the adjoining page, showed a seated African-American woman, a baby in her arms and a flamboyant hat on her head, waiting to register to vote at a post office in Demopolis, Alabama. A line of people behind her also “patiently” wait to register. She was intently staring off to the left, which led the viewer to the photograph of Johnson. The third photograph in the spread showed Charlie Jones, an eighty-seven-year-old resident of Greensboro, Alabama, filling out registration forms. The text explained how U.S. registrars “inscribed the names of 1,144 Negroes who had heeded the President’s plea: ‘You must vote . . . the vote is the most powerful instrument ever devised by man for breaking down injustice.”

The design and photographs of the article compared two very different worlds: the president with his entourage in a beautiful, ornate room while African Americans waited to register to vote in a post office with fluorescent lights and pipes hanging from the ceiling. The images could not have been more dissimilar, both visually and thematically. The president spoke of breaking down the walls of injustice, but the images reflected the opposite, visually describing the gap between the wealthy and the poor.

Violence and dissatisfaction would continue when, five days after the signing of the bill, rioting broke out in the Watts neighborhood of Los Angeles. Kasher described the uprising as “the most violent racial rebellion in U.S. history. Fourteen thousand national guardsmen were sent to control the looting and rioting. Four thousand people were jailed; thirty-four people were killed, and one thousand were injured.” On August 7, *Life* published fifteen pages and devoted its cover to the violence and destruction in
Los Angeles. The images and tone of the photographs had changed. African Americans were no longer portrayed as victims. Their expressions had gotten meaner, harder. They were shown throwing rocks, stealing items off shelves, and running down the street with armfuls of merchandise. They had guns. They yelled slurs like, “Get Whitey!” and “Burn, baby, burn” as the destruction raged throughout the city.\textsuperscript{cdvi}

Levy wrote that the rage African Americans felt grew from a society “pervaded by racial, social, and economic inequality. The riots also revealed the shortcomings of the mainstream civil rights movement, which until Watts was focused on the problems of southern blacks.”\textsuperscript{cdvii} The riots marked a new direction that the civil rights movement was taking, one more confrontational.

King told reporters that Watts was “a class revolt of underprivileged against the privileged” and pleaded with the mayor, the police chief, and governor to do something about the underlying causes of the rioting, but they angrily dismissed him. Later, he would say, “The decade of 1955 to 1965, with its constructive elements, misled us. Everyone underestimated the amount of rage Negroes were suppressing, and the amount of bigotry in the white majority was disgusting.”\textsuperscript{cdviii}
Notes


“*The Limpid Shambles of Violence,*” 32-34b


Ibid.


White, “Racial Collision in the Big Cities,” 100-120


Mitchell, *The Right to the City*, 130.


“They Fight a Fire That Won’t Go Out,” 30-31.


Ibid.

Ibid.


Ibid.


Ibid., 349.


Telephone Interview, Steve Shapiro, February 8, 2011.

*Life* reported that three girls had been killed in the bombing, although later accounts reported four young girls had died and nearly twenty others wounded. See Charles Morgan Jr., “Birmingham: An Alabaman’s Great Speech Lays the Blame,” September 27, 1963, 44b-44c; and Peter B. Levy, *The Civil Rights Movement* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1998), 23.

Morgan, “Birmingham,” 44b-44c.


Morgan, “Birmingham,” 44b-44c.

*Life* reported Sarah Jean Collins’ age as twelve although other sources suggest her age to be ten at the time of the incident. See Morgan, “Birmingham,” 44b-44c; and Taylor Branch, *Parting the Waters: America in the King Years, 1954-63* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1989) 889.


*They Finally Did It: They Busted the Big Filibuster,”* *Life*, June 19, 1964, 32-37.


“They Finally Did It,” 32-37.


Cagin and Dray, *We are Not Afraid*, 378.


Ibid.


Tyner, *The Geography of Malcolm X*, 99

“Selma: Beatings Start the Savage Season,” *Life*, March 19, cover.


Ibid.


Ibid.

Ibid.

Ibid.


Ibid.


Chapter 6: Life Magazine and the Civil Rights Movement

Life Magazine

“Deeds not words!” Yes, that’s what we want. “Deeds not words!” That’s a very American cry, and very human and very Christian.

— Henry Robinson Luce, from a speech for Interracial Fellowship General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church, 1948.

don

On Sunday morning, September 15, 1964, a bomb exploded at the Sixteenth Street Baptist Church in Birmingham. Rock and glass debris could be seen flying through the air blocks away. The church was celebrating Youth Day when the bomb exploded, and four young girls, ages eleven to fourteen, were killed and twenty-one children were injured. Days later, reporter Hal Wingo found himself in the layout room at Life’s offices in New York City looking at photographs from the bombing with Managing Editor George Hunt. They spread the photographs on the floor and walked around them, stopping whenever one caught their eye. Wingo recalled that Hunt kept stopping and looking at one image of a young girl in a hospital bed with patches over her eyes. “You can tell he was moved by it,” Wingo said. Finally, he picked the picture up and said, “This is the one.” The photograph, he said, got to the strength of what Life magazine could do at a time of such horrific unrest and tension in the country, “You couldn’t just walk away [from it]; you couldn’t turn off the television screen; you couldn’t avoid looking at the picture . . . and seeing what it represented. Even people who hated Life would have looked at it, and somewhere deep down in themselves say, ‘We bear some responsibility in this’” (see Figure 5.4).

Martin Luther King Jr. knew the power of photography and the media. He knew that if the cameras caught the violence or blood or snarling dogs, the world would bear
witness. When he told photographer Flip Schulke that he should not have gotten involved when African-American children had been pushed to the ground in March 1965, he knew that moment had not been photographed. He told Schulke, “What is important is for you to do what you’re supposed to do, and that is to record and communicate to the rest of the world what’s going on here. You have to stay back, and not listen to your gut. You’ve got to do what you were sent here to do, and that is to keep the camera shooting.” Leigh Raiford wrote that the images from the civil rights era “challenged an entire economic and social regime of power.” And the photograph “proved a tool as effective as bus boycotts and as righteous as nonviolence.” Photography helped to change people’s perceptions and attitudes. Photographs of violence and abuse, death and murder, and an injured child who was blinded by a bomb contributed to the change toward civil rights.

*Life* magazine became the catalyst of that change and a vehicle for Schulke and Charles Moore’s photographs. It began with Luce’s 1936 prospectus, which launched the magazine and set the stage for its extraordinary run of thirty-six years as a leader, not just in the nation’s changing media landscape but in how generations viewed their world. It explained magazine’s purpose: “To see life; to see the world; to eyewitness great events . . . to see and be amazed; to see and be instructed.” In *Life’s America: Family and Nation in Postwar Photojournalism*, Wendy Kozol wrote that this statement “revealed a belief, and also a conceit, that the camera, and therefore *Life*, has the power to reveal the world.” She explained that “seeing” became not a mirror “but a way of framing differences and forming boundaries to define normative society.”

After the Supreme Court *Brown v Board of Education* decision in 1954, the editors at *Life* decided it would play a more proactive role in covering integration in
public schools, more so than *Time* or *Look*. Former Atlanta bureau editor Richard B. Stolley recalled that the magazine’s five-part series on segregation, published in September and October, 1956, “was a huge undertaking, and, in effect, announced to the South and to America, that *Life* was going to be covering this story in an extraordinary thorough and active way.”

In many ways, *Life* did cover civil rights as no other news magazine or organization before or since, but it was not that simple. From 1954 to 1965, it published 227 civil rights-related articles and 1,200 photographs, which was an average of almost nineteen stories and 100 photographs per year. The amount of resources and energy that the magazine allocated to the civil rights movement, and school integration, was enormous. An example was the integration in 1957 of Central High School in Little Rock, Arkansas. Over a six-week time period, *Life*’s coverage of the story exceeded *Time*’s and *Newsweek*’s in photographs and pages. Throughout this study of twelve-years of *Life* coverage, the magazine devoted resources to every major civil rights event.

The magazine believed it could affect people and create change. Stolley said that it did this in two ways. First, “it showed the country what was happening in the South and that made northern people put pressure—moral, ethical, and economic pressure on the South to obey the rule of law. And second, it shamed the southern people into realizing what was happening.”

In the 1940s, Gunnar Myrdal wrote about how change for African Americans was possible. In *An American Dilemma: The Negro Problem and Modern Democracy*, he said, “To get publicity is of the highest strategic importance to the Negro people.” If the northern, mainstream press covered the southern racial story, the rest of the nation would
be “shocked and shaken” and demand change. Life offered that coverage. But with that coverage also came other perceptions of African Americans. As Kozol wrote in “Gazing at Race in the Pages of Life: Picturing Segregation Through Theory and History,” there are numerous ways to interpret and “see” photographs. She wrote that Life “produced ways of seeing that ultimately condemned the worst practices of Jim Crow.” However, by showing photographs in this manner, the magazine also restricted “racial discourse.” In other words, by drawing attention to the plight of African-Americans and the events surrounding the fight for civil rights, less attention was given to covering African-Americans as average or middle-class, such as in the promotion of the ideals of the American family. Life used its resources and energies as it covered the atrocities inflicted by segregationists and missed the chance to portray African Americans as a vital and essential part of American society.

Life not only covered the civil rights movement with telling stories and powerful photographs but, it played a large part in showing the world the face of racism. But it also promoted the status quo and negative stereotypes of African Americans: from 1937 with the photograph of a “mammy” eating watermelon to 1956 with a photograph of African-Americans inmates working on a chain gang (see Figures 2.2 and 3.5). Throughout its short history, the magazine covered civil rights-related events with enthusiasm and purpose, but at the same time, failed to show how a race of people lived and worked in a society dominated by whiteness; in other words, it did not show normal life for African-Americans.

What it did accomplish, and what this study shows, was how a movement fought for rights through time and space. Only a pictorial magazine, such as Life, could reveal
that the battle for civil rights was, as other works have pointed out, a moral, political, legal, and social battle, but it was also, a battle over space and who had the right to occupy that space.

*The Landscape of the Civil Rights Movement*

The conflict of space has always been a part of our history and the events that defined that history. From the Revolutionary War, when early American settlers fought for the right to decide their political and geographic destiny, to the Civil War, when southern states seceded from the union, again for the ability to control their space, the idea of having power over place has been with us for centuries. Who owns or controls space, private or public, political or social, physical or metaphysical, imagined or symbolic, had the power to influence, change, and direct the future in the case of the civil rights movement. The space where social action occurred — the protests, the marches, and the demonstrations — was a battlefield on many levels. Geographer Gillian Rose questioned the distinction between “real” and “non-real” spaces by arguing, “No space is free from human intent, human desire, and human imagination.” Geographer James Tyner wrote that the study of space is “well positioned to contribute to an understanding of racism and other forms of injustice” but not in the traditional “empirical investigation of the social conditions in ghettos” or “another map of malnutrition, poverty, or crime.” He pointed out Robin Kelley’s belief that “the conditions and the existence of social movements enable participants to imagine something different, to realize that things need not always be this way.” Thus, imagination and realization helped to institute change.
What *Life* did so well and so acutely was to describe the events of the civil rights movement as the contention of space. Through the eyes of its photographers and editors, week after week, article after article, it showed readers the injustices inflicted upon African Americans in a physical and metaphysical way. Space was divided unequally, and the magazine graphically depicted that divide. Beginning with photographs of school integration in Hoxie, Arkansas, in 1955 with young school children waiting to register on their first day, the divide was shown. Six young African-American children were standing against a wall, nervous and timid, waiting to start their day as white children moved freely around them. The image showed the children separated in their own space, unprotected and vulnerable while the article, visually continued the idea of divided space, it ended with a positive solution. The final image, of an African-American girl walking arm-in-arm with a white girl, showed this. The idea of integrated schools was shown as an alternative, a more positive, outcome. The story, framed in the title, “A ‘Morally Right’ Decision,” explained why integration could and would work.

In September 1956, *Life* showed schools throughout the South that had been successfully integrated. Places like Clinton, Tennessee, Frankfurt, Kentucky, and Glen Burnie, Maryland, had problems; but the pictures showed students playing jump rope together, saying the Pledge of Allegiance together, and holding hands while they, square danced together. As Kozol noted, audiences read, see, and interpret photographs differently, while a photograph of square dancing in gym class might be interpreted as the first step in interracial marriage, it also might be seen as an innocent and healthy beginning of equal rights. African-American and white students occupying the same space without disagreement, violence, or tension was an innocuous yet powerful image.
Examples of this potential for coexisting filled the pages of *Life* throughout the 1950s and 1960s.

As times changed and civil rights events became more violent and contentious, the magazine continued to emphasize space and relations. In May 1961, the story of the freedom rides through Alabama and Mississippi illustrated the purposeful and deliberate action to claim space that was controlled and negotiated by white segregationists. The photograph of an injured passenger and a burning Trailway’s bus on the side of the road became the consequences of African Americans pushing to take back that space.

Moore’s photograph of off-duty sheriff’s deputies preparing for a riot at the University of Mississippi in October 1962 was another example of the fight for space, although on a different level (see Figure 4.5). This image, while putting a face on racism, became more symbolic and more emotionally loaded than previous photographs. Moore’s ability to capture such a profound moment in time was like an arrow hitting its mark dead center. In *Sons of Mississippi: A Story of Race and its Legacy*, Paul Hendrickson described the image as “a lynching narrative,” drawing emotional power from the Emmett Till murder and a history of intimidation and terror. The glee of expressions on the deputy’s faces brings to mind a frenetic display of enthusiasm. That, and an understanding of the reasons behind such excitement, brings the photograph to a disturbing interpretation. The editors of *Life* understood how powerful the image was by publishing it across two full pages: readers could feel its impact. The editors understood that Moore’s photographs were powerful and influential.

In May 1963, the editors once again showcased Moore’s work from Birmingham with the image of firefighters using a fire hose on protesters (see Figure 1.1). The
photograph was reminiscent of a shopkeeper hosing dirt and debris off the sidewalk in front of his shop. The sidewalk, a public space open to all, became the site of an authoritarian local government. The space being fought for was both literal and figurative. African Americans, and people of all races, understood the connotations that the photograph showed. The oppressors could have been from any government or regime, while the oppressed also could have been from any minority group in history.

Moore’s successive images of snarling police dogs and placid protesters succeeded on another level. In the photographs, the oppressors were law-enforcement officers and their dogs, while the victims were the African-American demonstrators (see Figure 5.3). The images became iconic and symbolic of an oppressed race in a wealthy country. They were, and continue to be, reproduced and discussed in regards to the American civil rights movement. They helped to change the course of civil rights legislation as Senator Jacob Javits stated in 1965.

Another powerful image, published in December 1964, was of Sheriff Lawrence Rainey and his deputy, Cecil Price (see Figure 5.6). The smiles on their two faces during arraignment proceedings for the murders of Andrew Goodman, Michael Schwerner, and James Cheney, were reminiscent of the off-duty deputies in Moore’s 1963 photograph. Both images worked on a psychological and emotional level of terror and intimidation. Again, the smiles and complacency pervaded the invasion of space on a metaphysical level.

The final article examined, regarding the contention of space and civil rights, was the march to Selma. The photographs, published in March 1965, showed the brutality by the Alabama state troopers as they charged and clubbed the peaceful marchers. The last
bastion of political space, the right to vote, was fought on the Edmund Pettis Bridge. The right to vote is a basic democratic principle in the United States. The ability to choose one’s own elected officials was appropriately the final civil right.

The incident in Selma that March was significant for another reason: television played a larger and more influential role in that incident than newspapers or magazines. Along with the photographers for Life and other print publications, television cameras also caught the brutal beatings. By this time in 1965, television had established itself as a powerful and lucrative medium, with an estimated seventy million television sets in fifty million American homes. In The Life Cycles of Magazines, A. J. Zuilen estimated that the annual volume of advertising revenue was $2.5 billion for the television industry as compared to $1 billion for magazines in 1965.  

Gene Roberts and Hank Klibanoff explained that while CBS and NBC covered the event, its impact would be greatest on ABC, which interrupted its Sunday Night Movie for fifteen minutes of footage from the beatings. The movie on that night was Judgment at Nuremberg, a "dramatic study of how the Germans had ignored, or acquiesced in, the horrors of Nazism.” They wrote, “Suddenly viewers were watching—not Nazi Germany but segregationist Alabama. The juxtaposition struck like psychological lightning in American homes. Sheriff Clark’s voice could be heard directing his posse: ‘Get those goddamned niggers. And get those goddamned white niggers.’

Television had made an impact deeper than any magazine could. This was indicated by television’s monumental rise in popularity from 1952 onward and the demise of general interest news magazines, such as Life and Look. Zuilen wrote that
during the 1950’s and 1960’s, “television developed into an enemy of the mass audience magazines by siphoning away advertising revenues, which had kept, until that period, the American general interest mass audience magazines healthy and financially successful and profitable.”

Life’s final issue as a weekly magazine was published on December 29, 1972. Today, Life’s photographs and stories can be found on the Internet and through a search engine, Google.

One concept of space, which was not mentioned, but was critical in every photograph, was the physical placement of the photographer; that is where the photographer stood when he took the picture. Working photographers constantly thought about which vantage point would best describe the scene, where the light was coming from, and what elements enhanced or detracted from the composition of the image. In Birmingham, Moore placed himself in the center of the action and photographed with short, wide-angle lenses. By actively choosing to photograph in this manner, his images brought viewers into the scene. That was one reason why his images were dramatic and effective, and rose above other photographers.

The other aspect of space, which was equally important, was access. Photographers knew that without access to the right people or a church or a school, they would be unable to take meaningful pictures. Both Moore and Schulke had a relationship with King and had access to many of the behind-the-scene private moments, which allowed them the opportunity to take such poignant and powerful images. These ideas are fundamentally basic concepts to all photographers. Experienced photographers understand a situation, anticipate the possibilities of what might happen, and place themselves in an ideal spot to capture the event. In referring to photographers covering
civil rights events, Wingo said, “When a photographer closes in on the action in a story, he/she is almost by definition choosing to seek some things and not others.” The vantage point from which a photograph was taken, was as important if not more than the moment itself. Space and placement becomes everything.

What *Life* did best was to tell compelling stories with pictures. As Wilson Hicks wrote in his 1952 book, *Words and Pictures*, the goal was to “induce a phenomenon wherein the total of the complex—that is, picture and words together—becomes greater than the sum of its parts.” From its first publication on November 23, 1936, *Life* set itself apart from other pictorial, news, and general interest publications.

The question of the magazine’s involvement and influence in the promotion of civil rights does not have a simple answer. The editors and photographers certainly believed they were on the right side of history, and they were. Schulke wrote, “There are times where the story is such and you understand what is happening that you become an advocate, . . . and I’m perfectly proud of being an advocate at that time. I think it’s better for a photographer to have a point of view in a sociological story than to come into it cold and make good pictures.”

Stolley also believed in the virtue of the magazine. He recalled in 2011:

*Life* was an advocate on its editorial pages. On the news pages, we tried to show both sides, or at least to give the segregationists a podium. One of the problems back then was that [they] would often not speak to or cooperate with us. The other side was, of course, totally cooperative. . . . By *Life* inserting itself big time into the race story, [it] could not help but make the magazine an advocate, if only because showing the often violent defiance of the law of the land was certain to upset and anger a lot of the Americans. Which of course it did, and why moderate and reasonable southerners quickly saw the ultimate futility of their opposition to desegregation and Jim Crow.

Wingo believed in the magazine as well, although he did not feel that *Life’s*
function was as the journal of record, such as The New York Times. “Certainly Life did not feel it necessary to give the Klan’s point of view when it reported the terrible things the Klan was doing in the desegregation struggle,” he said. When asked if Life was an advocate for the civil rights movement, Wingo answered in 2011:

I can attest that the managing editor of the magazine felt strongly, personally that Life had a responsibility to shake up the American people to the kind of things going on in the struggle, particularly where lives were lost or threatened by the opposition to civil rights. When I went to Philadelphia, Mississippi, after the 18 white men were indicted for the murder of Chaney, Schwerner and Goodman, the picture that Life chose to run as a double truck was of those men at their arraignment, sitting around laughing, chewing Red Man tobacco and looking for all the world like they knew they didn't have a thing to worry about. Sadly, they were right, but Life also was right in showing such arrogant bigotry and contempt for human life on the laughing faces of those men.\(^\text{cdxxxviii}\)

Even with such high praise, the magazine missed a profound opportunity, an opportunity of inclusion. This study examined every issue of Life from January 1954 to December 1965 and coded every civil rights-related photograph and article. It also noted every photograph and advertisement containing an African American. African Americans were seen most in entertainment and sports-related stories. There were a few instances of African Americans in the background of photographs, portrayed as servants or laborers and there were few examples of African Americans shown in average, everyday settings: having dinner as a family, enjoying themselves at a Little League baseball game, or working as an employee other than in manual labor. The opportunity missed by Life and its editors was to show African Americans as equals in everyday life. In showing African Americans at some of their lowest points and as victims, they perpetuated the status quo of a white, middle-class, and consumer-driven society.
Conclusion

Life magazine published some of the most powerful and iconic images of the civil rights movement, helping to set the narrative for justice in the public discourse. It is not possible to know the specific impact of those images on the laws governing the nation or even in societal change. What is known is that Life magazine was a powerful force, both among the media and among its readers for establishing the images of a nation dealing with deeply entrenched racial attitudes.

The issue of racial strife played out on the pages of Life for more three decades. This study examined a twelve-year timeframe, from 1954 to 1965, documenting each story and photograph published in the magazine as the nation debated over an essential question: What space should Africans Americans occupy in what Life’s Publisher Henry Luce called the American century? This study found that the magazine was both a leader and follower in that debate, publishing photographs that intimately recorded the battle for space on a variety of levels: on a physical level in images of school integration; on a metaphorical level with images of intimidation; and on a symbolic level with images describing the fight for equal rights in the streets of the South.

This study did not examine the editorial process behind what readers saw. Yet, it would not be a stretch to conclude that Luce, as many other scholars have pointed out, was an integral voice in shaping the content of the magazine. Even though he was not physically present, his editors, such as Wilson Hicks noted in his book, felt his presence looming over them. What was apparent from the pages of the magazine was that in many cases, such as Life’s five-part series on segregation in 1956, the visual narratives were carefully crafted from a wide variety of sources, sometimes from staff assignments,
sometimes from wire photographs, and sometimes from both contract and freelancer photographers.

In order to place Life’s coverage into context with other publications, a study of other national magazines and newspapers, such as Time, Newsweek, Look, The Washington Post, and The New York Times, would be necessary. Also, a more extensive examination of space devoted to other stories in Life would speak to the scope of civil rights-related coverage within the magazine.

The significance of this study is that there are new and deeper ways to examine media texts, their frames, and the issues involved. On the surface, Life portrayed a street-level battle for fixing historic injustices. But, on another level, which spatial and geographic theory helps us to understand, Life magazine revealed a much deeper, ongoing debate over the rightful place of the African American in American society. Would they be equal with whites? Or, would they simply continue to be treated as second-class citizens? Life’s coverage, as this study showed, tended toward the latter, a visual narrative that cried out less for equality and more for simple humanity.

As the nation moves forward and the media landscape shifts and changes with new technology, this kind of study is essential in understanding what is being shown and what is not being presented in the media. Are the new titans of news merely crafting new narratives of humanity, or are they revealing invisible truths about the physical and metaphysical space occupied everyday by their readers and viewers?
Notes


telephone interview, Hal Wingo, January 8, 2011.


Ibid.


The author examined issues of Time and Newsweek magazines on microfilm from September 16, 1957, to October 21, 1957. The issues looked at were September 16, September 23, September 30, October 7, October 14, and October 21 for both Time and Newsweek.


Ibid., 8.


Ibid.


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