

Eyes on the Prize Video Series

Episode 1: Awakenings (1954-1956) Awakenings focuses on the catalytic events of 1954-1956. The Mississippi lynching of 14-year-old Emmett Till led to a widely publicized trial where a courageous black man took the stand and accused two white men of murder. In Montgomery, Alabama, Rosa Parks refused to yield her bus seat to a white man and triggered a yearlong boycott that resulted in the desegregation of public buses. Ordinary citizens and local leaders joined the black struggle for freedom. The Southern Christian Leadership Conference was formed. In response, many white southerners closed ranks in opposition to the burgeoning black rights movement. Racial discrimination finally became a political issue.

Episode 2: Fighting Back (1957-1962) Fighting Back follows the struggle for equality from the schoolroom to the courtroom and back as blacks reject the existing system of “separate but equal” education. In 1954, the Supreme Court also rejects the system with its historic *Brown v. Board of Education* decision. The legal battle won, in 1957 nine black teenagers dare to integrate Little Rock’s Central High School. In 1962, a resolute James Meredith enrolls at the University of Mississippi. Students, parents, and lawyers unite to guarantee a better education and a better future for their children.

Episode 3: Ain't Scared of Your Jails (1960-1961) Ain’t scared of your jails chronicles the courage displayed by thousands of young people and college students who joined the ranks of the movement and gave it new direction. In 1960, lunch counter sit-ins spread across the South, many organized by the new, energetic Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee. In 1961, on the Freedom Rides, many young people faced violence and defied death threats as they labored to obliterate segregation in interstate bus travel below the Mason-Dixon Line. The growing movement toward racial equality influenced the 1960 Presidential campaign; and federal rights versus state’s rights became an issue.

Episode 4: No Easy Walk (1962-1966) No Easy Walk explores a crucial phase in the civil rights movement—the emergence of mass demonstrations and marches as a powerful protest vehicle. In Albany, Georgia, police chief Laurie Pritchett challenged Reverend Martin Luther King Jr.’s tactics of nonviolent mass demonstration. In Birmingham, Alabama, school children steadfastly marched against the violent spray of fire hoses and were jailed as a result. The triumphant 1963 March on Washington, D.C. captured worldwide attention and garnered broad national support, helping to shift federal policy.

Episode 5: Mississippi: Is This America? (1962-1964) Focuses on the extraordinary personal risks faced by ordinary citizens as they assumed responsibility for social change, particularly during the 1962-64 voting rights campaign in Mississippi. The state became a testing ground of constitutional principles as civil rights activists concentrated their energies on the right to vote. White resistance to the sharing of political power clashed with the strong determination of movement leaders to bring Mississippi blacks to the ballot box. In Freedom Summer 1964, tension between white resistance and movement activists climaxed in the tragic murder of three young civil rights workers.

Episode 6: Bridge to Freedom (1965) In Bridge to Freedom, the lessons of a decade are brought to bear in the climactic 1965 march from Selma to Montgomery, Alabama, when thousands joined together to march fifty miles for freedom. During the drive to make voting rights a national issue, strategic and ideological differences began to surface between Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.’s SCLC and the younger activists on SNCC. As white “backlash” and segregationist resistance intensified, President Lyndon B. Johnson promised to further the movement’s legislative goals. Then, as the movement began to splinter into factions, the Voting Rights Act became federal law.

Episode 7: The Time Has Come (1964-1965) During the decade of civil rights protest in the south, a sense of urgency and anger emerged from the black communities in the north. This urgency was best articulated by Malcolm X, then National Minister of the Nation of Islam. Viewers follow the trajectory of Malcolm X’s influence, both within the movement and outside. The program shows the influence of his philosophy on the staff of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) as they organized the Lowndes County Freedom Organization in Alabama and as they issued the call for “Black Power” during the 1966 Meredith March Against Fear in Mississippi.

Episode 8: Two Societies (1965-1968) Against the backdrop of the long hot summers of the mid-1960s, Martin Luther King Jr. and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference went to Chicago in an attempt to apply southern movement tactics to the urban north. Their strategies were tested as they came up against the powerful political machinery of Mayor Richard Daley. A year later, in Detroit, frustration and anger built to urban violence as blacks and law officers clashed on city streets and America appeared to be a nation out of control.

Episode 9: Power! (1967-1968) Out of the ashes of the urban rebellions, blacks looked for new ways to take control of their communities; the ballot box, the street and the schools became the dominant platforms. In Cleveland, the black community, together with a segment of white voters, achieved an historic victory: the election of Carl Stokes as the first African American mayor of a major city. In Oakland, young black men and women attempted to confront continuing police harassment by forming the Black Panther Party. In Brooklyn, New York, black and Hispanic parents struggled to improve their children's education through community control of schools. While these efforts had varying degrees of success, they nevertheless resulted in greater empowerment for their communities.

Episode 10: The Promised Land (1967-1968) In the final year of Martin Luther King's life, the movement turned its attention to the economic issues confronting the nation and the rumblings of a far off war in Vietnam. Moved by the increasing level of poverty, Dr. King and his staff searched for a strategy, in effect, an economic redistribution of wealth. They began to organize a Poor People's Campaign, a march of the poor to Washington, D.C., where they would erect Resurrection City to embarrass and motivate a reluctant government. In the midst of organizing the campaign, Dr. King was called away to help black sanitation workers on strike in Memphis. On April 4, 1968, in Memphis, Martin Luther Jr. was assassinated. Though devastated by the loss of their leader, King's staff struggled to continue the campaign. Soon after its construction, Resurrection City was shut down, marking the end of a chapter of the civil rights movement.

Episode 11: Ain't Gonna Shuffle No More (1964-1972) An awareness and sense of pride emerged through the struggle of World Heavyweight Champion Cassius Clay to be called by his new Islamic name, Muhammad Ali. No longer content to use the mainstream culture as their standard and rejecting images which traditionally stereotyped them as servile and inferior, a new generation of African Americans began to redefine itself. Propelled by the Black Consciousness Movement, they celebrated black values and culture and their African roots. Howard University students demanded a more black-oriented curriculum, and African-Americans of every persuasion met to forge a new unity at the Black Political Convention in Gary, Indiana.

Episode 12: A Nation of Law? (1967-1968) By the late 1960s, the anger in poorer urban areas over charges of police brutality was smoldering. In Chicago, Fred Hampton formed a Black Panther Party chapter. As the chapter grew, so did police surveillance. In a pre-dawn assault by the police, Panthers Hampton and Mark Clark were killed. The deaths came at a time when movement activists were increasingly becoming targets of police harassment at both the local and federal levels through COUNTELPRO, the FBI's Counter Intelligence Program. During this same period, inmates at New York's Attica prison took over the prison in an effort to publicize intolerable conditions. During the police assault which ended the takeover, several inmates and guards were killed. For some, Attica came to symbolize the brutality of a hardened political regime.

Episode 13: The Keys to the Kingdom (1974-1980) This show examines the relationship between law and popular struggle as it chronicles efforts to inject substance into promises of equality. The movement's focus is on the keys to the kingdom: jobs and education. In Boston, black parents organize to improve their children's education through court-ordered integration; the response of the white community was swift and often violent. In Atlanta, Mayor Maynard Jackson, the city's first black mayor, used the legal remedy of an affirmative action program to guarantee black involvement in the construction of Atlanta's airport. Affirmative action programs did not go unchallenged, however, as Allan Bakke took his suit against the University of California all the way to the Supreme Court.

Episode 14: Back to the Movement (1979-mid 1980s) The series concludes with an examination of two cities—one southern, one northern. In Miami, Florida, viewers witness the destruction of Overtown, a

once-thriving community, as it was ravaged by urban renewal and the construction of an interstate highway. Politically powerless, the community's economic plight was worsened by the steady arrival of another minority group—Cuban immigrants. In 1980, when white police officers were cleared of charges following the death of a black businessman, Miami's black community exploded in the largest riot since Detroit, 1967. In the north, frustrated by an unresponsive city administration, black Chicagoans successfully organized for political change through a reform candidate and brought about the election of Harold Washington, Chicago's first black mayor. The series ends with a look back at the people who made this movement a force for change in America. We listen to those who have worked for justice in the fifties, sixties, and seventies, as they reflect on their on-going struggle. Viewers come to realize how far America has traveled to arrive at this racial crossroads.