**Learning Objective:**

Explain how and why the civil rights movements developed and expanded from 1945 to 1960.

**Thematic Focus:**

*Social categories, roles, and practices are created, maintained, challenged, and transformed throughout American history, shaping government policy, economic systems, culture, and the lives of citizens.*

1. Seeking to fulfill Reconstruction-era promises, civil rights activists and political leaders achieved some legal and political successes in ending segregation, although progress toward racial equality was slow.
2. The three branches of the federal government used measures including desegregation of the armed services, *Brown v. Board of Education*, and the Civil Rights Act of 1964 to promote greater racial equality.
   1. Desegregation of the Armed Forces
      1. Prior to the Korean War, Black and White Americans fought in segregated units. President Truman ordered the racial desegregation of the armed forces. The Korean War marked the first time American forces had fought in integrated units. Truman also established the Committee on Civil Rights and strengthened the Justice Department’s powers to fight segregation in schools.
      2. Conservative Southern Democrats, known as the Dixiecrats, walked out of the 1948 Democratic National Convention to demonstrate their opposition to President Truman’s civil rights legislation. The Dixiecrats ran former Democrat Strom Thurmond as their candidate in 1948 as the States’ Rights Party.
      3. President Eisenhower completed the formal integration of the armed forces, desegregated public services in Washington, D.C., and appointed a Civil Rights Commission.
   2. School Desegregation
      1. In ***Brown v. Board of Education (1954)***, the Supreme Court ruled that segregation in public schools was a denial of the equal protection of the laws guaranteed in the Fourteenth Amendment. The Supreme Court decision directly contradicted the legal principle of “separate but equal” established by *Plessy v. Ferguson* in 1896.
      2. As a result of its victory in *Brown v. Board*, the NAACP continued to base its lawsuits on the equal protection clause of the Fourteenth Amendment.
      3. By 1955, the South called for “massive resistance” to integration. White Citizens Councils emerged to spearhead the massive resistance programs. State legislatures used a number of tactics to get around the Brown ruling, and by the end of 1956, desegregation of schools had advanced very little.
      4. President Eisenhower sent federal troops to Little Rock’s Central High School to enforce court-ordered desegregation. Eisenhower supported his decision by saying, “The very basis of our individual rights and freedoms rests upon the certainty that the President and the Executive Branch of government will support and insure the carrying out of the decisions of the federal courts, even, when necessary, with all the means at the President’s command.”
      5. Although Eisenhower did send to troops to Little Rock, he was not a vigorous supporter of civil rights legislation.
      6. The primary power granted to the Civil Rights Commission in 1957 was the authority to investigate and report on cases involving discrimination.