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Civil rights guarantee our rights as individuals and form an essential part of our democracy. The United States has a long history of endeavoring to define, secure, and protect the civil rights of Americans.



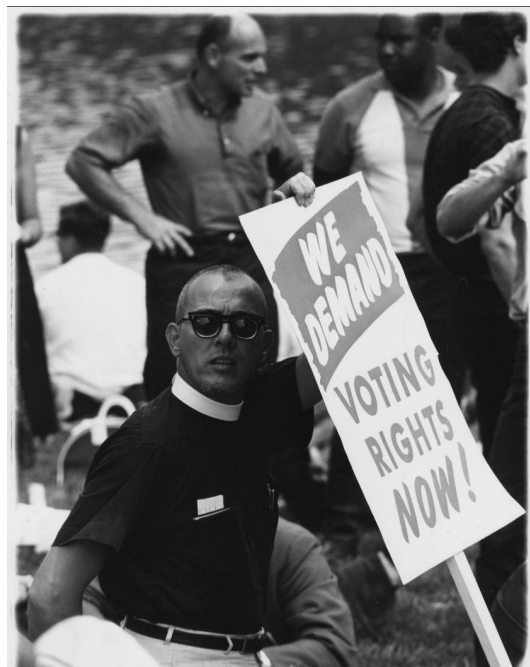
The National Archives holds records that document civil and social rights movements, illustrate how individuals and groups asserted their rights, and include court records, decisions, and case files that have expanded civil rights in the United States. While the topic of Civil Rights runs the entire history of the United States and overlaps with many

other areas of research, here are a few of the major civil rights court cases, decisions, and acts that can be found in the National Archives Catalog.

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Radiogram about Mabel Ping-Hua Lee, 6/26/1937. [National Archives Identifier 197859987](#)

The Chinese Exclusion Act limited rights of Chinese American laborers and prevented Chinese immigrants from becoming citizens. Under this act, Lee was not a citizen, and therefore was unable to vote. Yet she and others still fought for universal suffrage even without the ability to benefit directly from its success.



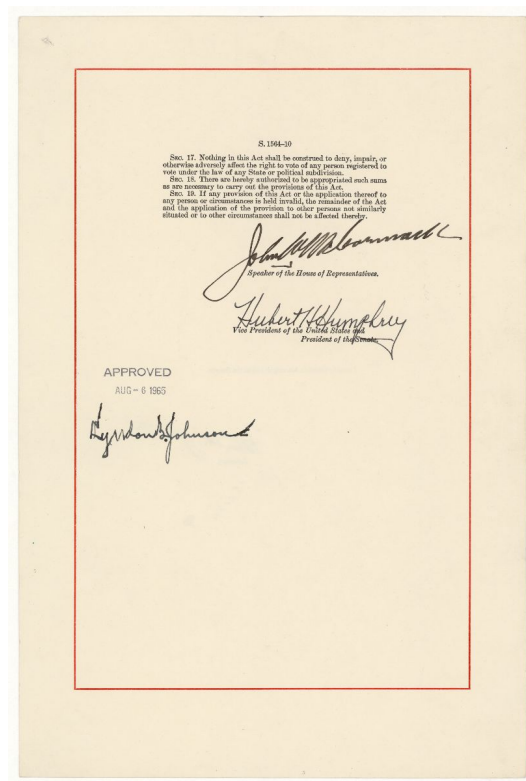
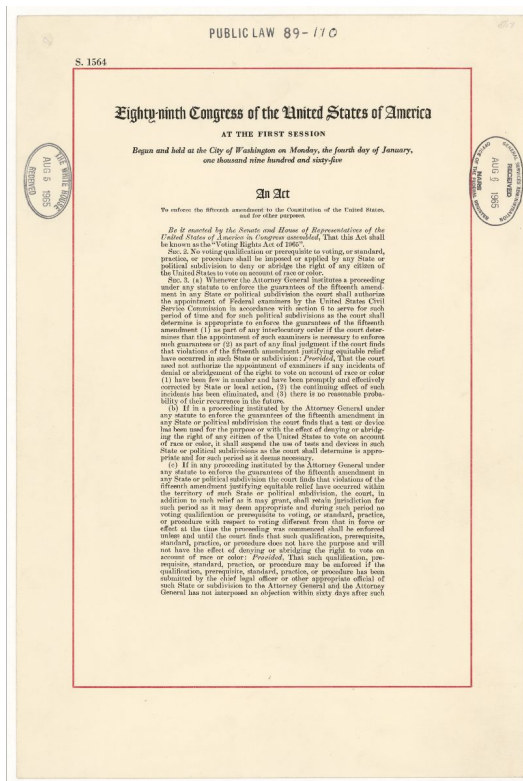
L: Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. in Civil Rights March on Washington, DC, August 28, 1963. Records of the U.S. Information Agency, Record Group 306. [National Archives Identifier 542014](#)

R: Civil Rights March on Washington, D.C. [A man holding a sign that reads "We Demand Voting Rights Now!"], 8/28/1963. [National Archives Identifier 542036](#)

## Voting Rights

### Voting Rights Act of 1965

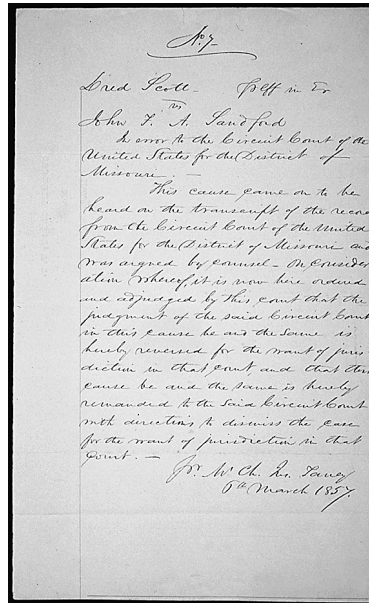
Considered one of the most far-reaching pieces of civil rights legislation, the Voting Rights Act, signed into law by President Lyndon B. Johnson, was necessary to remove state and local barriers that prevented African Americans from voting in many southern states after the Civil War. [Learn more on DocsTeach.](#)



Act of August 6, 1965, Public Law 89-110, 79 STAT 437, Which Enforced the Fifteenth Amendment to the Constitution of the United States, 8/6/1965. [National Archives Identifier 299909](#)

### Dred Scott v. Sandford (1857)

Dred Scott was an enslaved man that sued his owners for his freedom after he had been taken from Missouri to Illinois, claiming that he had automatically been freed once crossing into a territory where slavery was illegal. In this ruling, the U.S. Supreme Court stated that slaves were not citizens of the United States and, therefore, could not expect any protection from the Federal Government or the courts. The opinion also stated that Congress had no authority to ban slavery from a Federal territory. [Learn more on DocsTeach.](#)



Judgment in the U.S. Supreme Court Case Dred Scott v. John F. A. Sandford, 3/6/1857. [National Archives Identifier 301674](#)

Learn more about the [Laws and Court Cases related to Voting Rights](#).

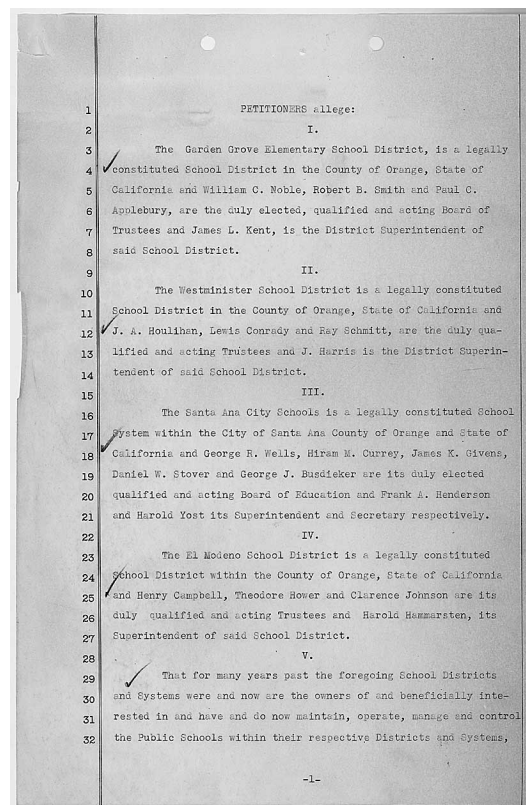
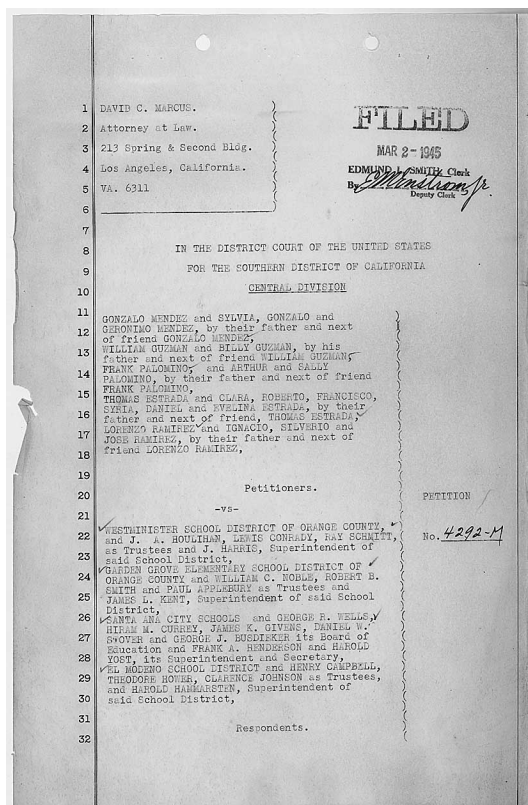
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## Education

### Mendez v. Westminster

Mendez v. Westminster School District landed an important blow to school segregation in California. And it underscored that the struggle for civil rights in America crossed regional, racial, and ethnic lines. [Learn more on DocsTeach.](#)

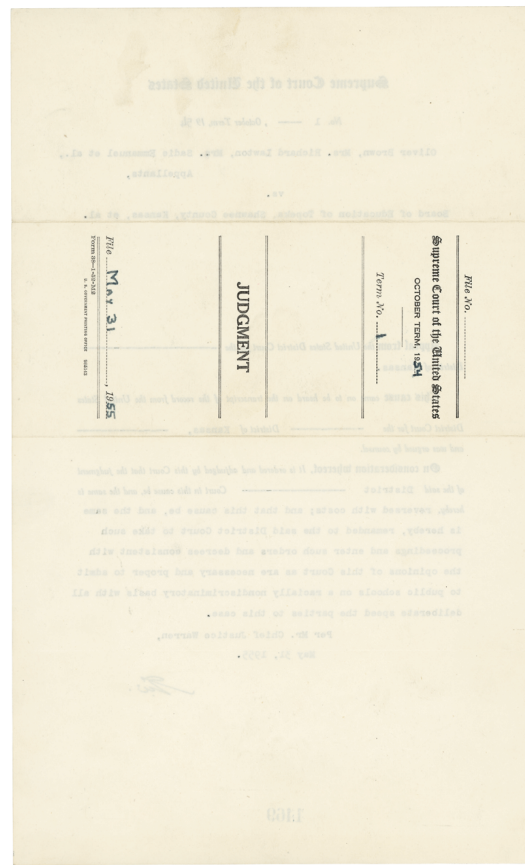
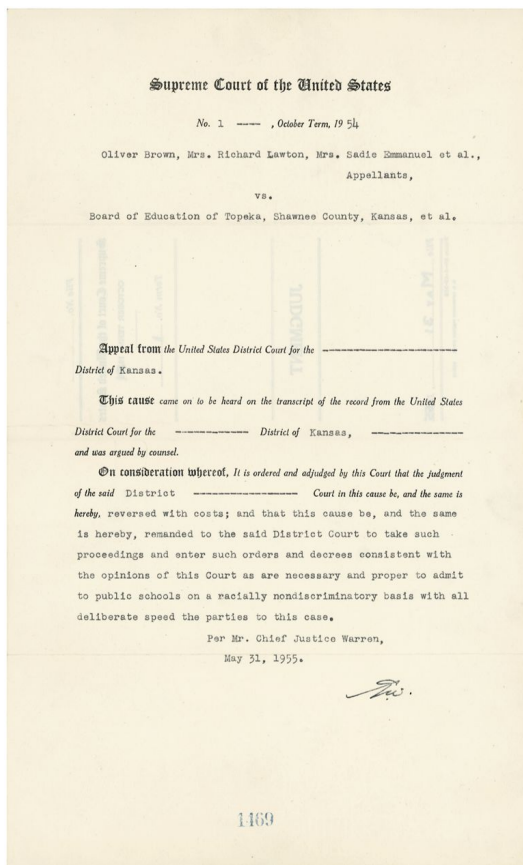
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*Gonzalo Mendez et al v. Westminister School District of Orange County et al. This Petition summarizes the complaint made by several parents of children in the Westminister, Garden Grove, and El Modeno School Districts and the City of Santa Ana schools. It charges that the schools were violating students' civil rights by segregating students of "Mexican and Latin" ancestry in separate schools. [National Archives Identifier 294940](#)*

## **Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka**

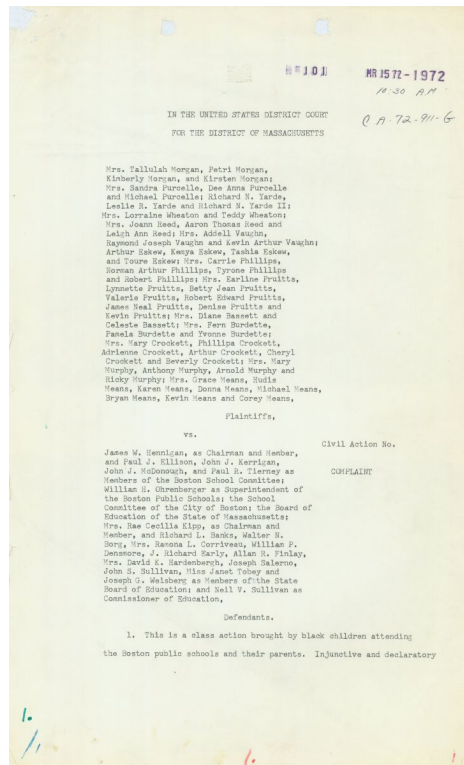
On May 17, 1954, in *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka* (five separate cases consolidated under a single name), the U.S. Supreme Court ruled unanimously that separate but equal public schools violated the 14th Amendment. A year later in what is now referred to as “Brown II,” Chief Justice Warren required that the students be “admit[ted] to public schools on a racially nondiscriminatory basis with all deliberate speed.”



Judgement in the Supreme Court Decision for *Brown et al. v. Board of Education of Topeka et al.*, 5/31/1955 [National Archives Identifier 596300](#)

## Morgan v. Hennigan

In 1972, the parents of African American children brought a class action lawsuit alleging that the Boston School Committee violated the 14th Amendment of the U. S. Constitution by a deliberate policy of racial segregation in the Boston Public Schools. Learn more about this case on the [Rediscovering Black History blog: Morgan V. Hennigan: Desegregation of Boston Public Schools.](#)



Tallulah Morgan et al. v. James W. Hennigan et al. Complaint. [National Archives Identifier 4713867](#)

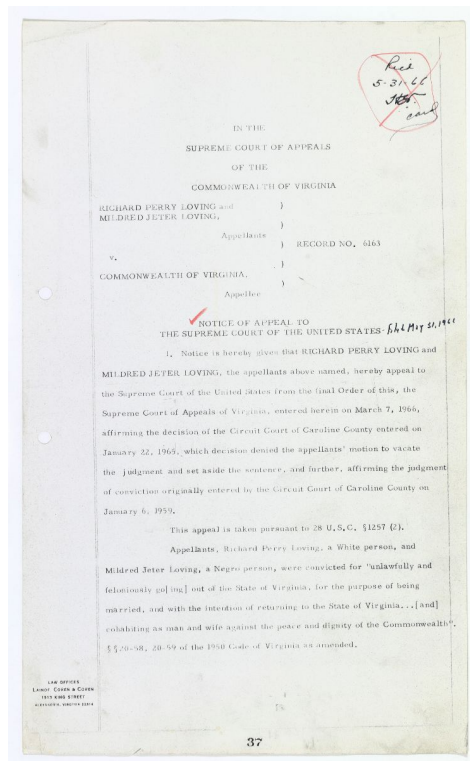
View the [full case file in the National Archives Catalog](#).

Explore more [documents related to school desegregation](#) on DocsTeach.

## Marriage Rights

### Loving v. Virginia

Loving v. Virginia (1967) was a landmark civil rights decision of the United States Supreme Court which invalidated laws prohibiting interracial marriage. Chief Justice Earl Warren authorized the court's opinion, stating: "the freedom to marry, or not marry, a person of another race resides with the individual, and cannot be infringed by the State."



*Loving v. Virginia Appeal, 5/27/1966. [National Archives Identifier 7873520](#)*

Learn more on the Prologue blog, [The Fight for the Right to Marry: The Loving v. Virginia Case](#), and on the Rediscovering Black History blog, [Virginia is for the Lovings](#).

## Disability Rights

### File for Deborah Sampson Gannett

During the American Revolution, Deborah Sampson disguised herself as a man and enlisted, under the name of Robert Shurtleff, in the Continental Army under the Fourth Massachusetts Regiment. She fought in several battles before her true identity was discovered following an injury. In 1809, after 20 years of petitioning the federal government, she received a disability pension of four dollars per month. [Learn more on DocsTeach](#).





*After the attack on Pearl Harbor, President Roosevelt issued Executive Order 9066, relocating 117,000 Japanese Americans. Photograph, Poston, Arizona, January 4, 1943. Central Photographic File of the War Relocation Authority National Archives. [National Archives Identifier 536627](#)*

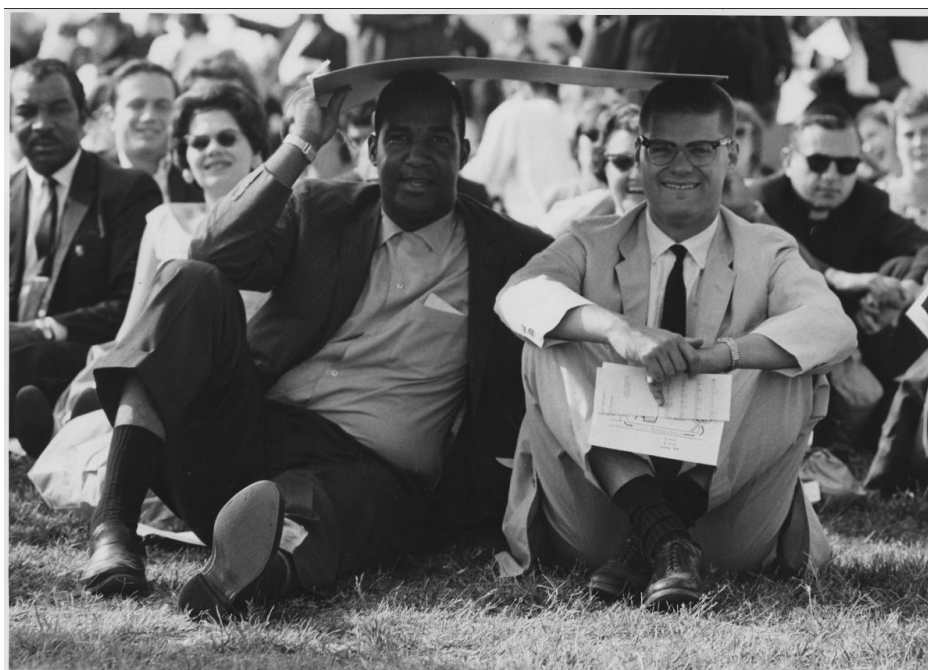
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Browse textual, photographic, motion pictures and electronic records with the [Black History Guide: Civil Rights](#). Additionally, explore [Civil Rights Cases held at the National Archives at Chicago](#).

Learn more about [photographs and other materials in the custody of the Still Picture Branch](#) including images documenting the Civil Rights Movement and other social movements in the United States.

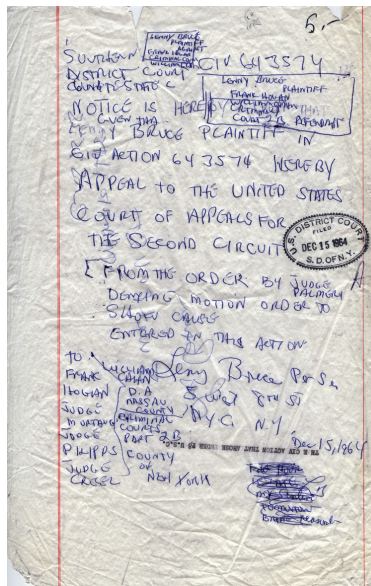


*Civil Rights March on Washington, D.C. Young women at the march, 8/28/1963. [National Archives Identifier 542022](#)*



*Civil Rights March on Washington, D.C. Marchers sitting on the grass, 8/28/1963. [National Archives Identifier 542009](#)*

For primary sources, teaching activities and more, explore [DocsTeach: Rights in America](#).



Appeal Request from Lenny Bruce, December 15, 1964. Lenny Bruce vs Hon. John M. Murtagh, Criminal Court of the City of New York: Special Sessions: County of New York. [National Archives Identifier 2641487](#)

After his conviction, Lenny Bruce appealed, claiming that his rights to due process, guaranteed under the 14th Amendment, were violated. The appeal overturned his conviction, but only after Bruce had died on August 3, 1966.

### **Aurelia S. Browder et al. v. W. A. Gayle et al.**

This case file contains documents resulting from a Federal court suit that challenged segregation within Montgomery, Alabama's public transportation system. The case is renowned for its relation to the 1955 bus boycott in Montgomery, a pivotal event in the Civil Rights Movement. Although not a party to the case, Rosa Parks' arrest record and fingerprints are exhibits to the case. The plaintiffs in this case were Aurelia Browder, Susie McDonald, Claudette Colvin, and Mary Louise Smith, all of whom had been either arrested for refusing to give up their seats to white passengers or harmed by being forced to comply with segregation codes. In this case, the three-judge panel ruled Montgomery segregation codes unconstitutional due to their violation of the due process and equal protection clauses of the 14th Amendment. The U.S. Supreme Court later affirmed the District Court's judgment.



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## Start your research on History Hub

Have a question? [Find your answer on History Hub!](#)

For those looking to conduct research or learn more about Civil Rights records and resources, we encourage you to browse recent posts and questions on History Hub:

- [LGBTQIA+ Equal Protection Records in Federal Courts](#), from Civil Rights Subject Matter Expert
- [Where can I find section 402 of the Civil Rights Act of 1964?](#)
- [Seeking records of the Civil Rights Movement in St. Petersburg, Florida.](#)
- [I'm looking for information on my family involved in the Civil Rights movement.](#)
- [Primary Sources on Civil Rights](#)
- [Suggestions for teaching a class on Civil Rights](#)

History Hub is our support community for researchers, genealogists, history enthusiasts, and citizen archivists. Ask questions, share information, work together, and find help based on experience and interests. Researchers can ask—or answer—questions on [History Hub](#), or search to see if a question has been asked before.

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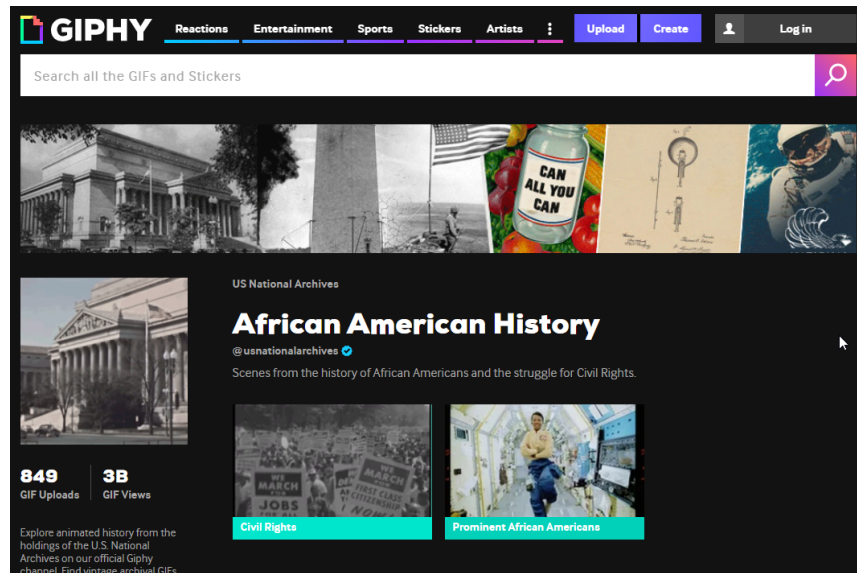
## Civil Rights Collection on GIPHY

Have you seen our new [Civil Rights collection on GIPHY](#)? Find historic footage of First-Time Voters, Civil Rights Marchers, and more!

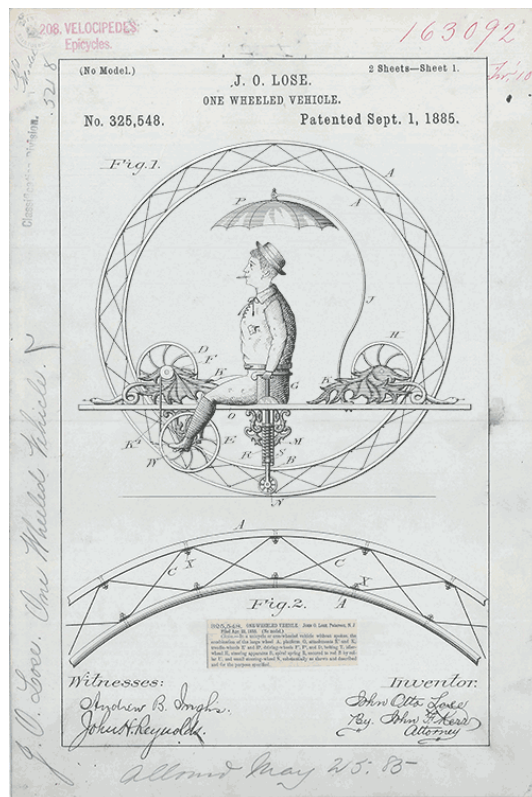


[Scene from the "March on Washington," August 1963](#)

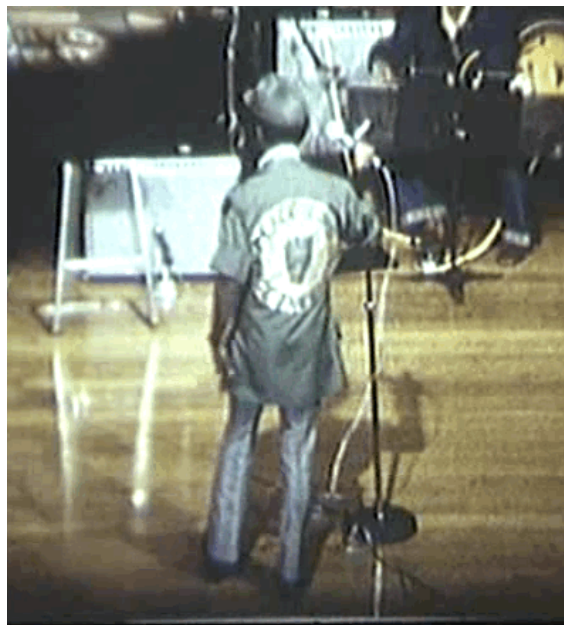
It's just one of several new GIF collections in the [National Archives' GIPHY channel](#), which just surpassed 3 Billion total cumulative views!



The channel features hundreds of vintage animated GIFs featuring everything from [fun retro patents](#) to [famous prominent Americans](#).



[One-Wheeled Velocipede Patent](#)



[Sammy Davis, Jr. performs at a USO show, ca. 1972.](#)

## COVID-19 Update

The National Archives is committed to the health and safety of our visitors and staff. We are closely monitoring the situation regarding COVID-19, and we are working with public

health officials and our counterpart agencies to monitor and respond to the evolving conditions and following CDC guidelines.

For more information, visit <https://www.archives.gov/coronavirus>

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