Civil Rights in the 1960s:  
A Selected Timeline of Events, 1954–1973  
(Prepared August 2014)

Fifty years ago, President Lyndon B. Johnson signed into law the Civil Rights Act of 1964, which forbids discrimination based on a person’s race, color, national origin, religious beliefs, or sex. Since this historic act, inequities have persisted in American society, prompting further legislation, protest, violence, and activism.

The selected landmark events from 1954 to 1973 presented here correspond with themes and ideas that are addressed in the exhibition Witness: Art and Civil Rights in the Sixties. They link the struggle for racial equality with contemporaneous national and global campaigns for equal rights. Alongside national events, some of the events that occurred on Dartmouth’s campus during the 1960s and 70s have been included.

1950s

**1954:** The Supreme Court rules on *Brown v. Board of Education*, rejecting the “separate but equal” doctrine and requiring public schools to integrate.

**1955:** Emmett Till, aged fourteen, is tortured and murdered in Mississippi. His death brings national attention to the lynching of blacks in the South.

**1955:** In Montgomery, Alabama, Rosa Parks is arrested for refusing to give up her seat on a bus to a white man. Four days later the Montgomery bus boycott begins.
**1956:** *The Ladder*, the first subscription-based lesbian publication in the United States, emerges as a forum for communal support and self-affirmation at the height of the McCarthy era, when homosexuality, deemed lewd, is illegal.

**1957:** Congress passes the first civil rights act since Reconstruction.

**1957:** President Eisenhower orders federal troops to enforce school desegregation in Little Rock, Arkansas.

**1960s**

**1960:** After generations of colonial rule by European nations, seventeen African countries gain independence.

**1961:** The Congress of Racial Equality (CORE) organizes Freedom Rides to test desegregation laws in the Deep South. Many Freedom Riders are arrested or beaten.

**1962:** Medgar Evers, field secretary for the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), is shot and killed in the driveway of his Mississippi home by a white supremacist, Byron De La Beckwith.

**1962:** On May 23, Martin Luther King Jr. delivers his speech “Toward Freedom” in Dartmouth Hall, Dartmouth College.

**1963:** On November 4, Governor George Wallace of Alabama comes to speak at Dartmouth College.

**1963:** Ku Klux Klansmen bomb the Sixteenth Street Baptist Church in Birmingham, Alabama, killing four young African American girls. In the ensuing riots, two black teenage boys are killed.

**1963:** More than 250,000 black and white demonstrators attend the March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. delivers his famous “I Have a Dream” speech.

**1963:** President John F. Kennedy is assassinated in Dallas, Texas. Kennedy’s death shatters the nation’s optimism, ushering in an era of social division and political protest.
1964: In May, the town of Hanover, New Hampshire, hosts a “Freedom Week” in observance of events taking place in the civil rights movement, and hosts an art auction on May 16. Proceeds benefit the NAACP.

1964: In the summer, A Better Chance, whose mission is to increase substantially the number of well-educated young people of color who are capable of assuming positions of responsibility and leadership in American society, is founded at Dartmouth College.

1965: On January 26, Malcolm X, the African American Muslim minister and human rights activist, speaks in Spaulding Auditorium, Hopkins Center for the Arts, at Dartmouth College, and is interviewed on Dartmouth College Radio WDCR.

1965: On February 21, Malcolm X is assassinated while speaking at the Audubon Ballroom in New York. His death comes at a turning point in his life, when he has rejected the Nation of Islam’s black separatist position and broadened his political agenda.

1966: On November 14, Stokley Carmichael, a Trinidadian-American activist and leader in the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) and later an important member of the Black Power movement, comes to speak at Dartmouth College.

1967: On May 3, Alabama Governor George Wallace returns to Dartmouth to speak in Webster Hall (now Rauner Library). Protests break out in what is to become known as “The Wallace Riot.”

1968: On April 4, Martin Luther King Jr. is assassinated in Memphis, Tennessee. During his life, King’s use of civil disobedience gained support from black and white Americans and helped to dismantle segregation laws.

1968: In September, Nathan Lord Hall at Dartmouth College is converted into the College’s first Afro-American Center.

1968: The American Indian Movement emerges in Minneapolis, Minnesota, to promote and protect Native American people’s spirituality, leadership, and sovereignty.
1968: Dartmouth forms a Committee on Equal Opportunity to address issues such as diversity in the faculty and student population and the admissions and hiring processes.

1969: A police raid of the Stonewall Inn, a New York bar, leads to the six-day Stonewall Riot as the gay and lesbian community protests against the unwarranted arrest of homosexual and transgendered patrons, galvanizing the gay rights movement.

1970s

1970s: Black and Latino youth in the Bronx create hip-hop as a platform for expressing a new cultural consciousness through break dancing, graffiti, emceeing, and dee-jaying.

1971: Ms. Magazine—a magazine for women, published by women—is created. The first issue hits the newsstand in 1972 and sells out in eight days.

1972: After a 1971 vote by the Board of Trustees that approves coeducation, 178 women matriculate at Dartmouth College.

1972: Partido Nacional de La Raza Unida (National United Peoples Party), a Chicano nationalist group, is formed to campaign for better housing, work, and educational opportunities for Mexican Americans.

1972: The Native American Studies Program—the first of its kind in the country—is founded at Dartmouth, following the 1970 rededication of the College to its original mission of educating Native American students.

1973: The U.S. Supreme Court rules on Roe v. Wade, legalizing abortion while allowing states to regulate abortion and women’s health policies.