

INTRODUCTION

No Longer Invisible

During their nonviolent protests, Black women and men often faced violence from police officers.

The U.S. Constitution guarantees **civil rights** to all citizens of the United States. Those rights include access to **voting** and **fair and equal treatment under the law**. But for nearly a century after the Civil War (1861–1865), African Americans were denied these basic rights. **Segregation** laws, rules, and customs kept Black people and white people separated throughout the country, especially in the South.

Outraged by these unjust laws, Black leaders organized ordinary people to speak out to achieve equality. **African Americans throughout the country** wrote petitions, **protested**, and tried to use the law to fight injustice. Black leaders trained **activists** in important strategies like **civil disobedience** and **nonviolent protest**. Organizations like the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) were formed to coordinate protests.

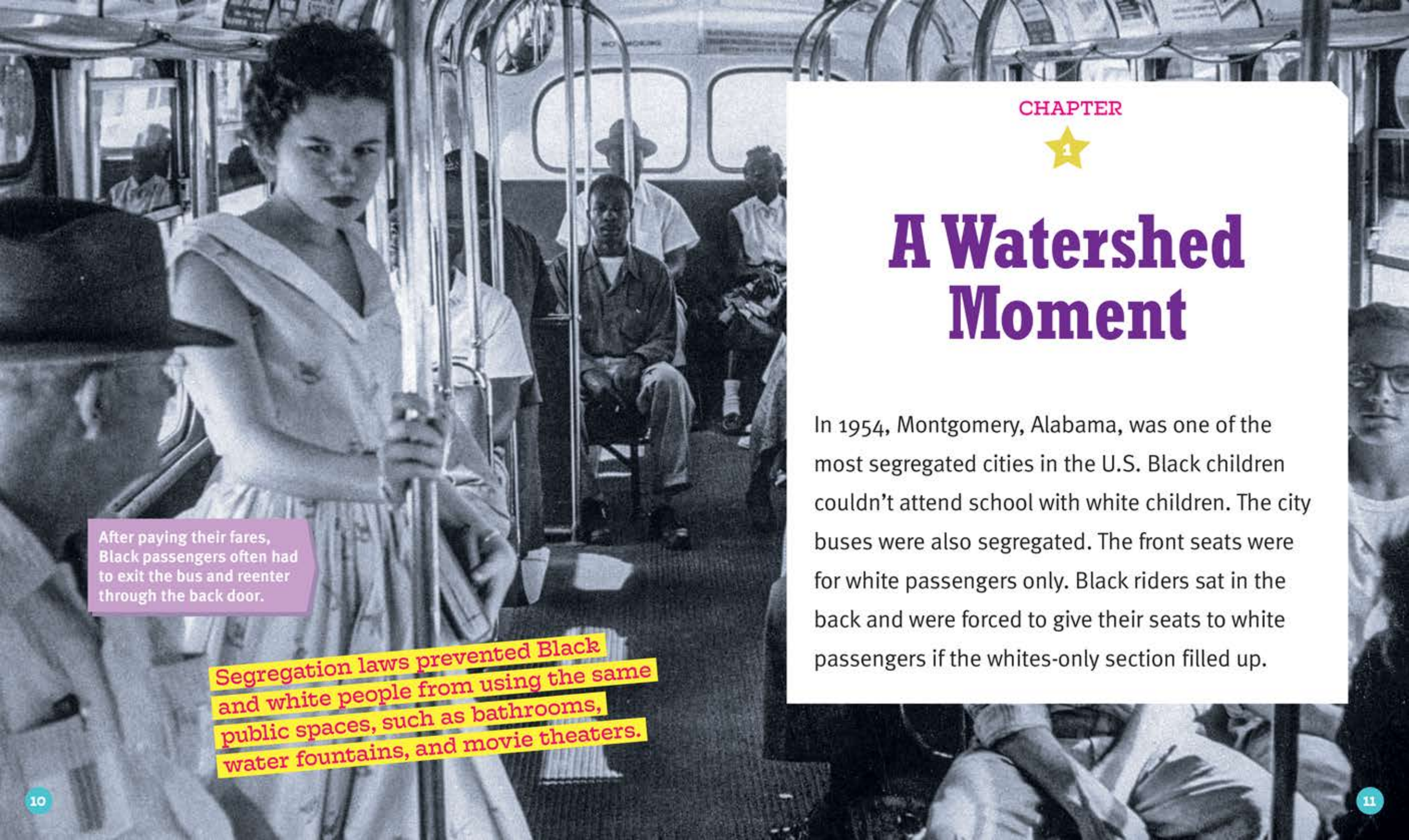


Civil rights demonstrations and protests took place in many cities across the nation.

All these efforts paved the way for the civil rights movement—a coordinated, mass campaign for equal rights led by African Americans in the **1950s and 1960s**.

Several of the movement’s key organizations were founded and led by women. The direction and momentum of the fight for equality would not have been possible without them.

These women came from various backgrounds—**students, teachers, political organizers, wives, mothers, and sharecroppers**—and were united for a single cause: civil rights. In addition to the racism they were organizing against, Black women activists had to overcome the prejudice that women should not have a voice in politics. **Despite all that, their courage fueled a movement that changed the nation.**



CHAPTER



A Watershed Moment

In 1954, Montgomery, Alabama, was one of the most segregated cities in the U.S. Black children couldn't attend school with white children. The city buses were also segregated. The front seats were for white passengers only. Black riders sat in the back and were forced to give their seats to white passengers if the whites-only section filled up.

After paying their fares, Black passengers often had to exit the bus and reenter through the back door.

Segregation laws prevented Black and white people from using the same public spaces, such as bathrooms, water fountains, and movie theaters.