

**PROLONGED DISCRIMINATION
AGAINST A COMMUNITY:**

**BUILDING FENCES WITHIN
THE COMMUNITY**

AND THE CAUSE OF MISTRUST AND DISUNITY

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Class and Section: ENG 101- 015
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EXHIBIT INTRODUCTION

African American history during the late 1950s is filled with movements and struggles that were pivotal for African Americans to gain equal footing with people from other, more dominant, races.



Anonymous

Martin Luther King Jr blames Alabama Gov. George Wallace for bomb deaths
1959

Photograph

This object is a photograph from the Robert Langmuir African American Photograph collection and shows Martin Luther King Jr on the stand delivering a speech to an audience. Martin Luther King Jr was one of the pioneers and leaders of the African American Civil Rights Movement. The Civil Rights Movement consisted of various social movements whose goals were to end racial segregation against African Americans.



Anonymous

Five men and women with strike signs in front of Fifth Avenue Hospital
1955

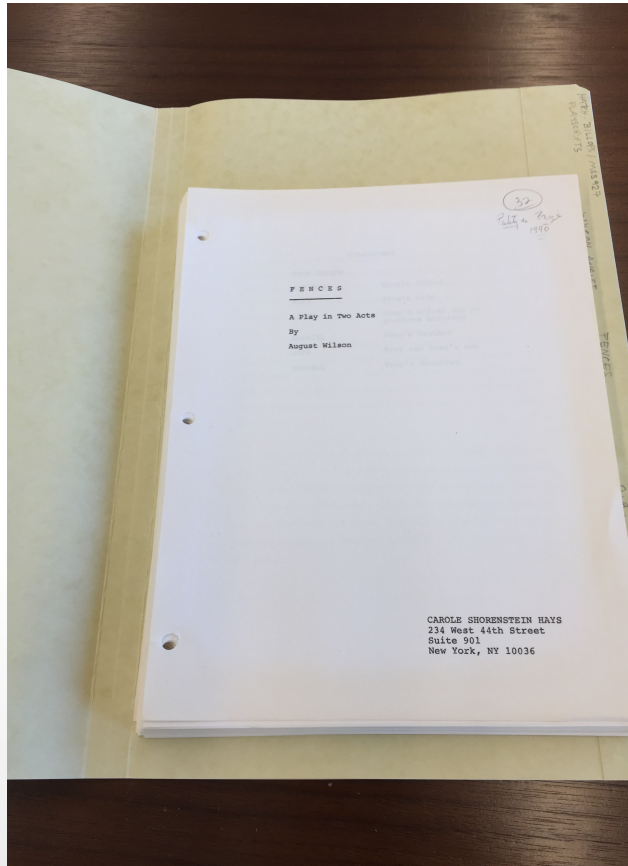
Photograph

This object is a photograph from the Robert Langmuir African American Photograph Collection. This photo shows five men and women with strike signs outside a hospital located at 5th Avenue. This is one of the many strikes and Social Movements initiated by African Americans in an attempt to gain equal rights as part of the Civil Rights Movement during the 1950s and 1960s.

However, the prolonged discrimination against the African American community during the 1950s slowly divided the African American community into two halves with the first believing that discrimination against the blacks was dwindling and that blacks were now being presented the same opportunities as the whites and the second believing and that discrimination on the basis of race was still firmly rooted in society.

August Wilson is known for his ability to put into words the ideas and experiences of everyday African Americans, who have long been caricatured, relegated to the periphery, or displaced altogether in drama created by playwrights from mainstream white society.

His characters, while for the most part living out their lives in a single locale, grapple with themes and issues that all people must deal with and his play *Fences* provides an excellent example of how a typical family in the African American community was affected by the prolonged discrimination against them during the 1950s. Troy Maxson, the primary protagonist, believed that African Americans were still subject to racial discrimination and that this would not change; Cory Maxson, Troy's son, on the other hand, believed that African Americans were now slowly being treated equally.



Wilson, August
Fences
No Date
Play Script

Fences is a play written by August Wilson and revolves around a low income African American family in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. The focus of Wilson's attention in the play is Troy, a 53-year-old head of household who struggles with providing for his family. Despite being a great baseball player, Troy was unable to make good money or save his future due to the color barrier not yet being broken in Major League Baseball. The fact that Troy was unable to get into Major League Baseball due to the continued discrimination against African Americans infuriated him and was the primary reason for him to believe that racial discrimination would not end anytime soon. This led to fights between his son Cory Maxson. Cory had recently been selected for a college scholarship based on his football skills but Troy rejected that scholarship on his belief that racial discrimination still existed in professional sports. Cory, however, believed that racial discrimination against African Americans was stopping, thus leading to the divide.

Building on the themes from the play *Fences* and from August Wilson's style of writing, it can be said that, in the 1950s a large number of African Americans believed that the racial discrimination against them was still deeply ingrained in the minds of the people in the white-dominant society and that it will not stop in the near future. However, the the rest of the community decided to put faith in the notion that that African Americans were now being presented with equal opportunities as white men; thus causing the divide in the African American community.

Therefore, *Fences*, along with photographs from the Langmuir Photograph Collection and newspaper articles from that time period, will tell the story of this division in the community. The exhibition aims to tell a story from the point of view of those being discriminated and what they see.

EXHIBIT

Brothers Admitted Till Abduction, Sheriff Says

By JOHN N. POPHAM
The New York Times News Service

SUMNER, Miss., Sept. 21—Moses Wright, 64-year-old Negro sharecropper, took the witness stand today and pointed out two Mississippi white men as the kidnapers of his slain nephew, 14-year-old Emmett Louis Till of Chicago.

In the dramatic setting of a Deep South courtroom packed with Negroes and whites occupying segregated sections, the elderly cotton farmer twice rose from the witness chair and singled out the defendants, Roy Bryant, 24, and his half brother, J. W. Milam, 36, with the words "there he is, that's the man."

Under vigorous cross examination, Wright stuck doggedly by his identification of the accused men, but defense counsel elicited a number of answers that were conflicting with respect to the conditions the witness described as existing at the time of the kidnaping.

Salient points developed in the questioning by defense counsel con-

cerned Wright's testimony that he had never seen the two men before the alleged crime, that it took place in pre-dawn hours with only a flashlight penetrating the darkness of a country cabin and that the defendant Bryant was not at any time close to the flashlight's beam.

Later in the day, however, the prosecution won a hard-fought courtroom legal debate that permitted it to score by putting on the witness stand sheriff George Smith of Leflore County, who said Bryant had told him on the afternoon of the kidnaping that he had gone to Wright's house to "get the little

Continued on Page 8, Column 1

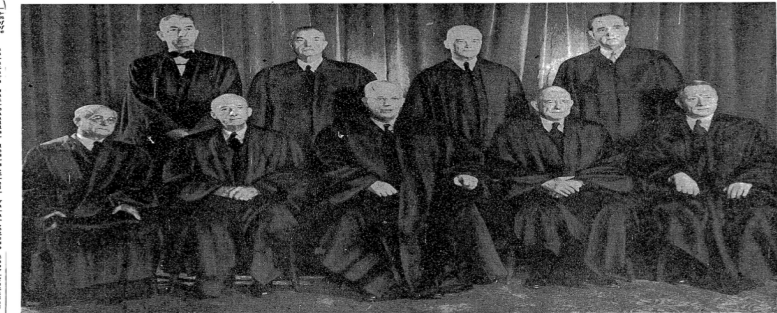
Text of Supreme Court Decision Outlawing Negro Segregation in the Public Schools

WASHINGTON, May 17 (AP).—The Supreme Court today outlawed racial segregation in public schools, a landmark decision that will affect millions of Negro children.

The Court, in a unanimous decision, held that the "separate but equal" doctrine, established by the 1896 Plessy vs. Ferguson case, was unconstitutional when applied to public education.

The Court's decision was based on the 14th Amendment to the Constitution, which guarantees equal protection of the laws to all citizens.

The Court's decision was a landmark in the history of the civil rights movement, and it was widely expected that it would lead to the desegregation of public schools across the country.



Members of the United States Supreme Court. From left to right: Chief Justice Earl Warren, Justices William J. Brennan, Jr., Hugo Black, Tom C. Clark, Charles E. Whittaker, and Warren E. Burger. (AP Wirephoto)

...in public education has a definite effect on the Negro child's life. The Court said that the "separate but equal" doctrine, established by the 1896 Plessy vs. Ferguson case, was unconstitutional when applied to public education.

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Popham, John N.
Brothers Admitted Till Abduction, Sheriff Says
1955
Newspaper Article

This news article from the *The Atlanta Constitution* provides its readers with the news that the two brothers who were arrested for the murder of a young teenager admitted to abducting the teenager. This news article makes its readers ponder over the fact that two white males kidnapped and allegedly murdered an African American teenager in 1955. This goes on to prove that racial discrimination was not fully removed from the minds of people and is one of the many events that led people like Troy Maxson to believe that racial discrimination against African Americans was not going away anytime soon.

Anonymous
Text of the Supreme Court Decision Outlawing Negro Segregation in Public Schools
1954
Newspaper Article

This news article was published in the New York Times and provides its readers with the full text of the United States Supreme Court's decision to outlaw black segregation in public schools. This was one of the major milestones in African American history during the 1950s in securing equal rights. This is also one of the few incidents that supports Cory Maxson's, and many others', view that racial segregation, or rather, racial discrimination against African Americans is slowly disappearing from society and that African Americans are now slowly being treated as equals.

Bryant, Milan Acquitted of Emmett Till Murder

SUMNER, Miss., Sept. 23 (UP)—An all-white jury took only one hour and seven minutes today to find two white half-brothers not guilty of the murder of 14-year-old Emmett Till, whose alleged whistling at the wife of one of the defendants led to his death.

The verdict was received with shouts of approval from a crowd of 500 who had sat through the five-day trial.

After consulting with attorneys, Judge Curtis Swango announced that kidnapping charges against the defendants were being dismissed, but the defendants would be turned over to adjoining Leflore County. They were charged with, but not indicted for kidnapping in Leflore,

where the young victim was abducted.

Still in custody, the acquitted men, Roy Bryant, 20, and J. W. Milam, 36, were taken to Greenwood to await a new arraignment.

The jury ruled only on the question of whether the defendants were guilty of the murder of Emmett Till, whom they admitted abducting Aug. 28, but claimed to have released unharmed. The boy's weighted body was found in the Tallahatchie River Aug. 31, bludgeoned and shot through the head.

TILL TRIAL

Page Three

Anonymous
Bryant, Milan Acquitted of Emmett Till Murder
1955
Newspaper Article

This news article was published in 1955 on the Daily Boston Globe. The article provides its readers with the news that the two brothers who were arrested for the alleged murder of the 14-year old African American teenager Emmett Till were acquitted of all charges. This article is another of many that proves that racial discrimination was still ingrained in the minds of most people during the mid 1950s. Not only did the two brothers murder a black teenager over something small, they also got away with it. This indicated that white people could do anything against the African American community in the 1950s and not be found guilty for it.

Braves Beat Yanks, 5-0; Win Series

BY FRANK FINCH
Times Staff Representative
YANKEE STADIUM
New York, Oct. 10—Base-
ball's miracle story — the
Milwaukee Braves — had a
happy ending today.
With that rubber-armed
right-hander, Lew Bur-
dette, pitching himself to
diamond immortality, the
Braves scored a 5-0 victory
over the New York Yan-
kees to win the 1957 World
Series, four games to three.
It was Burdette's third tri-
umph in the Series and his
second shutout.
New York's defending
champs were never in con-
tention after the "bush
league" Braves bombed Don
Larsen and Bobby Shantz
for four runs in the third in-
ning before 61,207 fans.

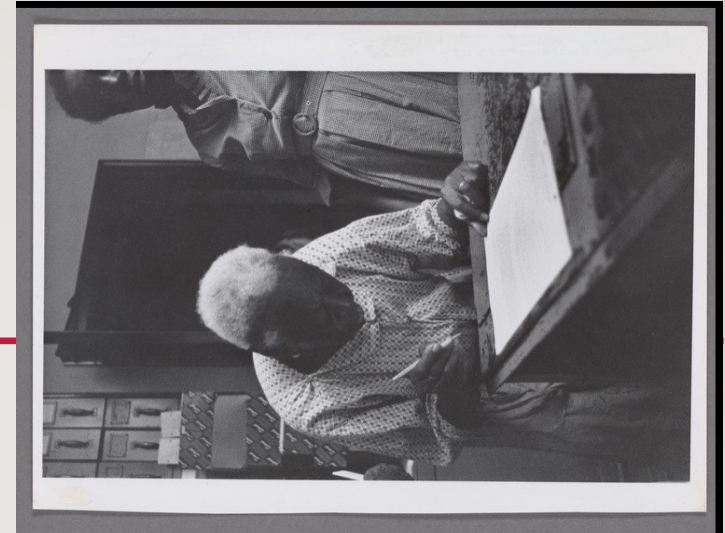
Finch, Frank
Braves Beat Yanks, 5-0; Win, Series
1957
Newspaper Article

This news article was published in the Los Angeles Times in 1957. The article provides its readers with the news that the Milwaukee Braves beat the New York Yankees 5-0 in the finals of the World Series 1957. Henry Aaron, one of the few African American baseball players in the Major League at that time, batted with a .393 during that match and hit three home runs and sealed the Yankees' fate. For his performance, he was also awarded the 1957 National League Most Valuable Player Award. The Braves' victory over the Yanks proved that African Americans could not only play alongside white baseball players, but also be better than them and be leaders and pioneers in the field of professional sports. Hence, supporting the belief of people like Cory.



Anonymous
Rev. John W. Williams, Rosa Parks and another African American woman
1959
Photograph

This object is a still image accessed from the Rose Library's Robert Langmuir African American Photograph Collection. The image is a shot of three people, one of them being Rosa Parks. Rosa Parks was arrested in December of 1955 for refusing to give up her seat in the bus to a white passenger. She was arrested for disobeying an Alabama law requiring black people to relinquish seats to white people when the bus was full. This is another major incident that acts as an example of racial discrimination against African Americans during the 1950s and supported Troy Maxson's belief.



Anonymous
105-year-old woman (former slave) registers to vote in Greenville
1965
Photograph

This object is a still image accessed from the Rose Library's Robert Langmuir African American Photograph Collection. The photo is of an old African American woman who is registering to vote for the first time. The freedom for African American women to register to vote was the result of the African American Suffrage movement. In most Southern states, African American women were unable to exercise their right to vote until the mid 1960s. Troy Maxson firmly believed that African Americans would be racially discriminated in the United States for many years to come, he held on to this belief until his dying breath. However, ironically, the year Troy Maxson died is the same year that this 105-year-old former slave first registers to vote.

Each artifact above has been set in chronological order and provides examples of instances where African Americans were racially discriminated against and instances where African Americans were treated as equals. So, incidents where African Americans were racially discriminated against led a fairly large portion of the African American Community to believe that the racial discrimination against African Americans will not stop anytime soon. They were on the verge of giving up on any progress. However, this feeling of hopelessness was mostly felt by the older generation of African Americans as they had been subject to racial discrimination for a very long period of time. For example, Troy Maxson.

The younger generation, on the other hand, was confident about the fact that racial discrimination against African Americans was coming to a halt and that they were now slowly being treated as equals by the rest of society. These differing opinions between the two generations often led to fights between them; in *Fences*, Troy Maxson kicks Cory, his own son, out of the house because Cory was arguing about the fact that African Americans were now being given equal opportunities in professional sports and that Troy should let him pursue college with a scholarship in football.

CONCLUSION

Ultimately, prolonged discrimination against a community will reach such a stage that one section of the community will believe that there has been no long term improvement in the condition of the community while, on the other hand, the other section will cling on to each event, major or minor, where members of the community have been treated as equals and believe that this event is for the better. However, one event where community members are treated as equals by a section of the society does not mean that the rest of the society shares the same feeling. For instance, though the Supreme Court banned racial segregation in public schools during 1954, many people still discriminated against African Americans, as seen by the events that followed. This will result in false hope for a large number of community members. Therefore, division within the community is a dangerous result of prolonged discrimination against the community.

Discrimination against communities still exists today with one of the prime examples being discrimination against the religion of Islam. Prolonged discrimination against the Islamic community will most likely have the same effects as the one discussed in the exhibit above and could have disastrous consequences.

The exhibit has represented one of the major effects of prolonged discrimination against a community. However, which side of the community was right? Say, taking **two trains** and **running** ten years into the future, what could have been the state of the African American Community? In the end, was it Troy or Cory who was right? If put in a similar situation, which side would you choose?