Below are some common misunderstandings about the American civil rights movement. Each of the bolded statements is ***incorrect****.*

1. **MYTH: The struggle for civil rights started in the 1950s.**
   The struggle for Black freedom started much earlier than the 1950s. When the first enslaved Africans were brought to America, they didn't just accept their enslavement—they resisted by rebelling, sabotaging, and trying to escape. After the Civil War, laws like the 13th, 14th, and 15th Amendments ended slavery and gave African Americans citizenship and voting rights. This gave them new ways to fight against racism. African Americans led protests, boycotts, and campaigns for civil rights throughout the first half of the 20th century. African Americans fought in both World Wars, and Black veterans returned home to challenge Jim Crow laws and customs. They argued that people willing to fight and die for their country deserve equal rights. In the meantime, the NAACP, which was founded in 1909, worked for years to end school segregation through the courts. That long effort led to the 1954 *Brown v. Board of Education* Supreme Court ruling outlawing school segregation.

2. **MYTH: The civil rights movement only happened in the South.**
   Some people think that civil rights activism was only needed in the South, where segregation was enforced by laws. But the truth is, even in other parts of the country, there was segregation and unfair treatment, although it wasn't always written in the law. To fight against unequal housing, education, and jobs, people who wanted change organized powerful protests in the North and West during the 1950s, 60s, and 70s. For example, in 1964, nearly half a million students and teachers in New York City boycotted school for a day to protest the Board of Education's refusal to desegregate the city's schools. Also, some people from the North went to the South to join in civil rights actions, like the Freedom Rides and voter registration efforts.

3. **MYTH: The civil rights movement was mostly led by religious leaders, especially Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.**
   While King was the most famous leader, it's important to know he was following in the footsteps of many others who had been fighting for civil rights for decades. Two people who guided him were A. Philip Randolph and Bayard Rustin. Randolph suggested a march on Washington in 1941 and started the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters. Rustin organized the first freedom ride in 1947, called the Journey of Reconciliation. Both of these men were the key planners of the 1963 March on Washington.

   As important as big national events were, the heart of the civil rights movement was driven by ordinary people in local areas. Women and young people were crucial. College students led sit-ins and other kinds of nonviolent protests. Ella Baker, who led the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, saw the power of young people and told them to create their own group, which became the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee. Young people played important roles in the movement—going to youth NAACP meetings, marching, and even walking out of school to protest.

4. **MYTH: Women did not contribute much to the movement.**
   Women played important roles as leaders, planners, and community organizers all across the country during the civil rights movement. But, sadly, their contributions often haven't been noticed or given enough credit. Even someone as famous as Rosa Parks, who we usually remember, hasn't received all the credit she deserves. Parks was an experienced activist and a member of the NAACP for a long time. She spoke up for working-class Black women. Other women, like organizer Ella Baker and educator Septima Poinsette Clark, did essential work in local communities to get people involved. Fannie Lou Hamer, who worked on a farm in Mississippi, and Gloria Richardson, who led a group in Cambridge, Maryland, both fought for what their communities needed. Jo Ann Gibson Robinson was a key organizer in the Montgomery Bus Boycott and had been fighting against unfair treatment on buses since 1950. In every effort to register voters, boycott, sit-in, and march, women were there, being active and making a difference.

5. **MYTH: The movement was completely nonviolent.**
   Nonviolence was an essential strategy for ending segregation, but it wasn't always possible. Civil rights leaders knew that even if Black Americans practiced nonviolence, racist white people and the police might still use violence against them. Black people, especially those in the movement, always lived with the fear of violence. Sometimes, groups like the Ku Klux Klan attacked or even killed civil rights organizers, and they were rarely held accountable. Black Americans had to be careful to protect their churches and homes from bombings. Because of all this violence, many Black individuals felt they had to defend themselves, their families, and their communities, so some of them armed themselves to stay safe.