

MR. POGREBA, PARKER SCHOOL

UNIT 8: 1950S ECONOMY, CULTURE, CIVIL RIGHTS

ECONOMIC GROWTH

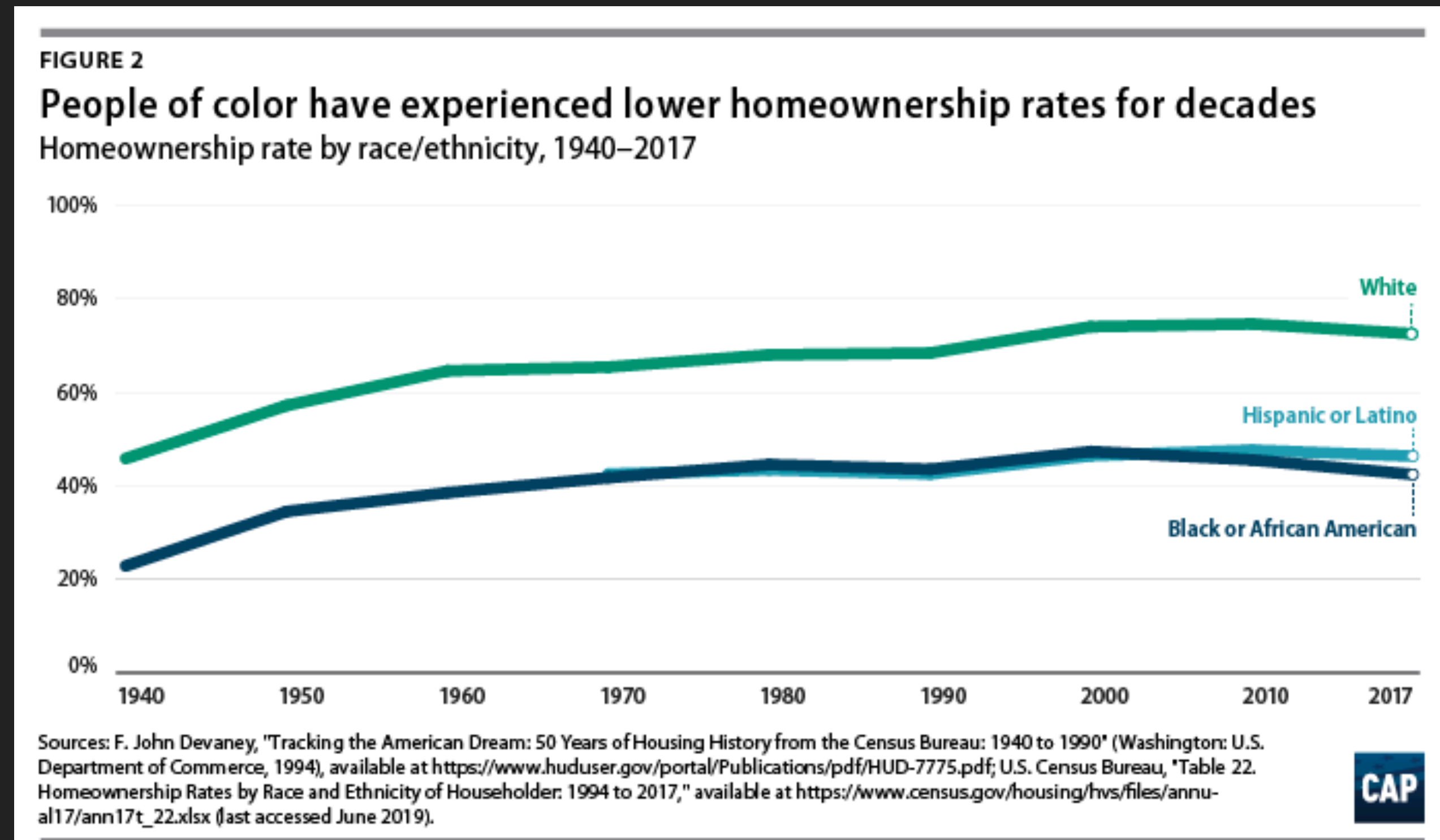
- ▶ President Eisenhower (1952-1960) presided over a period of unprecedented economic growth.
- ▶ In 1946, Fortune Magazine declared “the American boom is on” and they were right.
- ▶ The American **GNP doubled between 1945 and 1960.**
- ▶ By 1970, the United States (with 6% of the world’s population) produced and consumed 65% of its goods.
- ▶ Unemployment cratered to 2.9% in 1953 and remained low through the early 1970s.



PRESIDENT EISENHOWER AND VP NIXON

TRUMAN'S "FAIR DEAL"

- ▶ Following World War 2, President Truman knew the US needed to boost the economy as soldiers came home.
 - ▶ **Servicemen's Readjustment Act:** billions for business loans, employment assistance, home purchases.
 - ▶ **GI Bill:** money for college and homes
- ▶ All these programs were hugely successful, but were marred by racism in their administration.



CAUSES OF THE BOOM

- ▶ Massive federal expenditures, led by military spending during WW2 and the Cold War.
- ▶ Technological and computing innovations made workers 35% more productive between 1945-55.
- ▶ Consumer frenzy after lean years of World War 2 and Great Depression.
- ▶ The **Baby Boom**: Between 1945 and 1960, the population grew by 40 million, or 30%.
- ▶ The 1956 **Interstate Highway Act** connected the nation like never before. 41,000 new miles of highway.
- ▶ 77% of Americans owned a car by 1960, double the percentage of 1945.



THE SUBURBS

- ▶ Almost all of the American population growth of the 1950s and 60s was to **suburbs**.
- ▶ **By 1970, more people lived in suburbs (76 million) than in cities (64 million).** Rural population continued to decline.
- ▶ **Levittown** was a model for these cookie cutter suburbs.
- ▶ Migration to suburbs fueled growth in cars and highways.
- ▶ The reversal of this trend in the 1990s- today has caused massive **gentrification**.

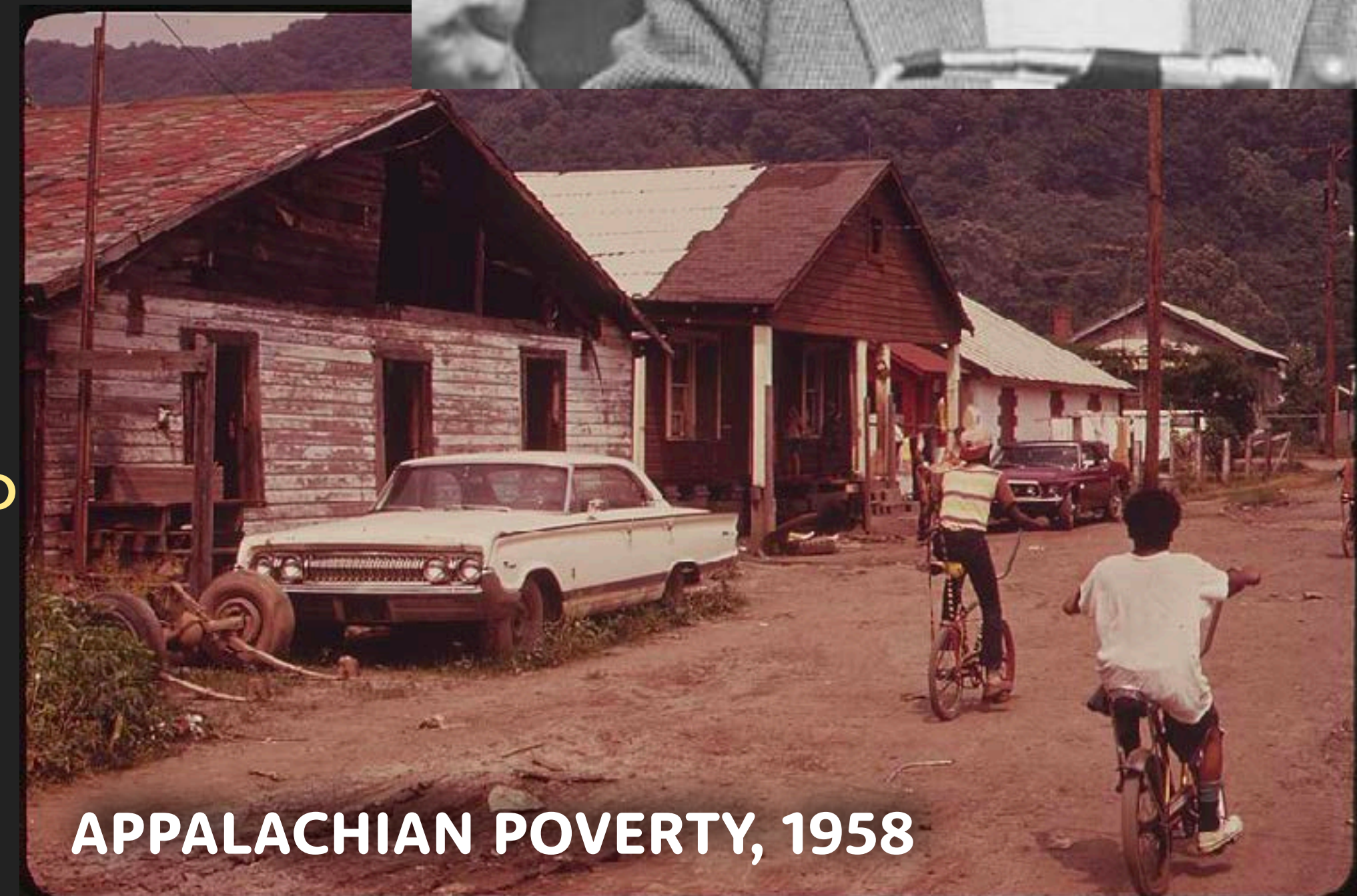


LEVITTOWN, NEW YORK

ECONOMIC GAINS WERE NOT UNIVERSAL

- ▶ In his book *The Other America*, Michael Harrington exposed those left behind: more than **20% of Americans lived in poverty**.
- ▶ Black Americans saw slow gains, and the **Federal Housing Association** actively supported **redlining practices** that kept them from buying homes.
- ▶ Mexican immigrants—the **braceros** so critical to the war effort—were treated harshly and paid poorly.

MICHAEL HARRINGTON



APPALACHIAN POVERTY, 1958

CONFORMITY

- ▶ Historians used to refer to the 1950s as the **Age of Consensus**, but a more accurate moniker may be **The Age of Conformity**.
 - ▶ **Suburban life**
 - ▶ The **growth of large corporations and other institutions** that valued conformity more than self-reliance.
 - ▶ **Women's role was more constrained in domestic life.** In 1956, Life Magazine declared, "Of all the accomplishments of the American woman, the one she brings off with the most spectacular success is having babies."
 - ▶ Another surge in **religion**, with church membership increasing to over 65% of Americans. Much of the growth was in evangelical churches led by people like **Billy Graham**.



DOMESTIC LIFE FOR AMERICAN WOMEN

CHALLENGES TO CONFORMITY

▶ The **Beat Movement**

- ▶ **Allen Ginsberg and Jack Kerouac** were two leaders of the **Beat movement**, which focused its critique on the sterility and conformity of American life.

▶ The **Youth Movement**

- ▶ The idea of a distinct **teenage** life emerged in the 1950s with access to cars and consumerism.
- ▶ A wave of juvenile crimes hit the nation, with leaders worrying about the car as the vehicle for sex and crime.

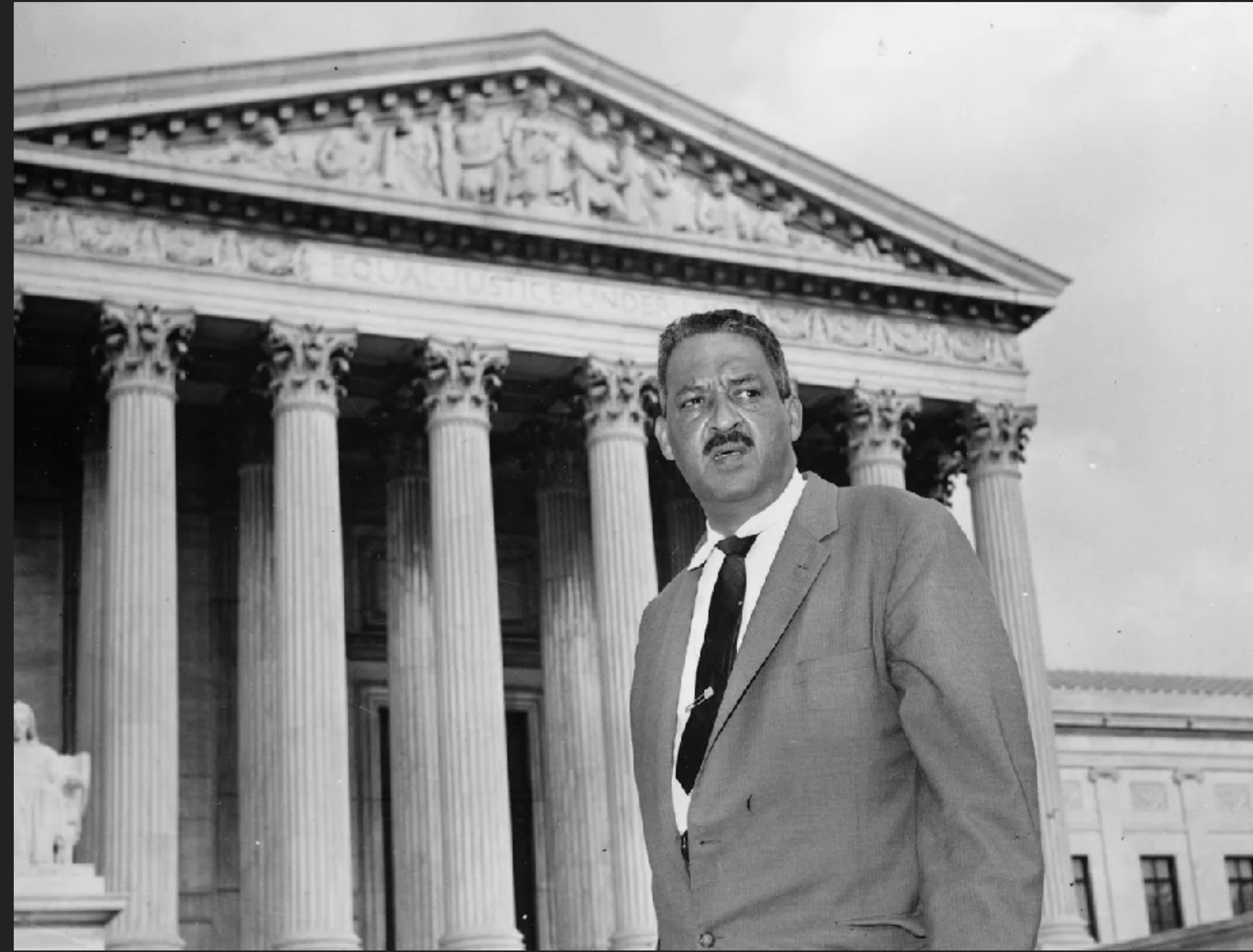
▶ **Rock and Roll**

- ▶ Derived from Black pioneers like **Sister Rosetta Tharpe** and **Chuck Berry**, white musicians began to make rock music popular to mainstream audiences.
- ▶ Elvis emerges in 1956.



BROWN V. BOARD

- ▶ In 1953, Eisenhower appointed **Earl Warren** as the Supreme Court Chief Justice.
- ▶ In 1954, it issued the **Brown v. Board of Education** decision, a 9-0 decision outlawing segregation in schools and overturning **Plessy v. Ferguson**.
- ▶ **Little Rock** became the first test in 1957. Southern states planned "massive resistance" and 101 Southern members of Congress issued a **Southern Manifesto** calling Brown an abuse of power.
- ▶ The **Little Rock Nine** faced a mob of 1,000 angry whites and Eisenhower was forced to send in the National Guard.



THURGOOD MARSHALL AT THE SUPREME COURT

MONTGOMERY, ALABAMA (1955-56)

- ▶ Led by **Claudette Colvin** and **Rosa Parks**, Black Americans began a year-long boycott of the buses in Montgomery, AL.
- ▶ Asked why she refused to give up her seat, Colvin later said, "History kept me stuck to my seat. I felt the hand of Harriet Tubman pushing down on one shoulder and Sojourner Truth pushing down on the other."
- ▶ Eventually, the SC ruled that segregation was not permissible.
- ▶ **Martin Luther King** emerges as a national civil rights figure and founds the **Southern Leadership Conference** to take the fight to the rest of the South.



MONTGOMERY BUS BOYCOTT

CIVIL RIGHTS LEGISLATION

- ▶ In 1948, Truman issued **Executive Order 9981**, which ended segregation in the military.
- ▶ In 1957, Congress passed the first civil rights bill since Reconstruction, but it did little to increase the number of black voters.
- ▶ Southern senators began to use the **filibuster** to prevent civil rights legislation from passing.



ROSA PARKS

EMMETT TILL

- ▶ While lynchings declined from their peak in the 1890s-1920s, violence against Black Americans continued.
- ▶ In August 1955, 14 year-old **Emmett Till** was brutally murdered for allegedly whistling at a white woman when he was visiting Mississippi from Chicago.
- ▶ He was beaten beyond recognition, but his mother held an open-casket funeral to show the horrors of racism and segregation. Thousands of people attended.
- ▶ His murderers were found innocent by an all-white jury.



EMMETT AND MAMIE TILL