

White Citizens' Councils ^[1]

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by J. Christopher Schutz and Elizabeth Gillespie McRae, 2006

See also: [White Patriots of North Carolina](#) ^[2].

White Citizens' Councils were established during the 1950s in reaction to federal initiatives to end [racial segregation](#) ^[3] in the South. Historically, they were similar to the various white supremacy groups that grew out of the extreme racial tensions defining southern culture after the [Civil War](#) ^[4]. The nation's first White Citizens' Council was founded in July 1954 in Indianola, Miss., in the aftermath of the U.S. Supreme Court's [school desegregation](#) ^[5] ruling in *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas*. As part of the massive resistance that swept across the South in the mid-1950s, the White Citizens' Council embarked on a mission to interpose the *Brown* decision, attack the [National Association for the Advancement of Colored People](#) ^[6], and build support through a nationwide propaganda campaign. Citizens' councils appeared in other states, including North Carolina, where the most influential group, the [White Patriots](#) ^[2], was formed on 22 Aug. 1955 to circumvent the *Brown* ruling.

These citizens' councils were careful to distinguish themselves rhetorically from the more explicit forms of Jim Crow oppression—particularly the [Ku Klux Klan](#) ^[7]—by declaring their disdain for violence. Despite this public stance, individual members did become linked to acts of violence, and the councils greatly contributed to the racial unrest in the mid- to late-1950s South.

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