
Importance of Martin Luther King in the Civil Rights Movement

Life before the civil rights movement was brought about, the black americans lived as if they were scared to walk out their home, afraid to look at a white person let alone engage with them in a civil conversation. Discrimination was immensely rooted in the states of the deep of the south eg. Arkansas, Mississippi, Georgia, Alabama and Texas etc. Discrimination had been publicly encouraged through the use of strong segregation laws put in place designed to separate the black Americans apart from the white supremacy. This was imposed through the so-called 'Jim Crow' laws, which introduced segregation and discrimination against black Americans most notably in the southern states. These 'Jim Crow' laws segregated black people in every way possible in every avenue of life from; schools, parks, hospitals, swimming pools to libraries, restaurants, cinemas and on public transport. They were even separated in the military lines during the war as there was a separate 'Jim Crow' army who fought for the same cause as the rest in the army but unable to do so collectively. Black people were prevented from voting in most cases and had to pass literacy tests to do so; which many white well educated men would fail to do so. This was just a hint of the deeply embedded racism at the core of the southern states.

The Scottsboro trials of 1931 showed the injustice of the legal system and how little black Americans were respected in society, when eight black boys were convicted of raping two white females on a ratio of small to none evidence. After a tough battle, the outcome would be one of the proudest moments of black Americans; having successfully beaten the Jim Crow legal system, as in the end it was proven none of the accusations held any truth. Northern states such as New York, Michigan and Illinois etc did not have specific segregation laws but this was not to say racism wasn't still commonplace. Thousands of black Americans migrated from the south in search of work(commonly known as the Great Migration). Nonetheless, it is fair to say the northern states had far more improvements; as Jazz bought in fame for black musicians such as Louis Armstrong. The black neighbourhood of Harlem, became the birthplace for the Harlem Renaissance for black singers, artists and poets. Despite the fact racial inequality was so deeply injected; it's not to say that there wasn't any active spread for change, as there were many organisations attempting to lift these racist social structures but had minimal impact. One for instance was the NAACP, the national advancement association for coloured people which was formed in 1909 by William Du Bois.

They sought to fight racial injustice through the use of the legal system. Even though minimal impact was achieved, it was a start for many greater things to come. During the 1920s, the association campaigned against lynching and was the main rival of the Klu Klax Klan. Throughout the 1930s and 1940s, the NAACP were striving for change and continued to do so up until Martin Luther King rose. In 1930, the NAACP successfully blocked the nomination of Judge John Parker, a known racist, in the process of being appointed to the Supreme Court. The NAACP was crucial in the fight of civil rights as it was they who showed it was possible to fight for change and actually prove successful while doing it; this was a trigger for many others to join the movement. The NAACP continued to strive for positive change by employing the black lawyer Thurgood Marshall to fight against segregation in education; he went on to secure equal salaries for teachers, which evidently was another great success and another milestone

they had passed. Through pressure from the association, the Supreme Court ruled that blacks had the right to the same quality of graduate education as whites. The KKK are a pivotal part in seeing the extent of change brought about by the civil rights movement as well as learning about how life was like before. The Klu Klux Klan were founded at the end of the Civil War in the mid 1860s losing quite a lot of membership in 1946. This was quite a lengthy period for a racist organisation that ruled on white supremacy. Its members had to be WASPS, (White, Anglo-Saxon, Protestants), they were also to be anti-Communist, anti-Jewish, anti-Catholic and against all foreigners.

Klansmen were known to be dressed in white robes and white hoods signifying white supremacy as well as concealing their identity to ensure nothing could come back to them. They were also known to use terror and violence to intimidate anyone who even supported equal rights as well as torturing many black Americans, treating many as slaves. Their acts of intimidation included- tar and feathering, castration, cross-burning, lynching, beatings and mutilations. The Klan was fairly strong in the southern parts of America which was evident through their membership reaching a peak of 6 million members in the mid-1920s. The Klan were one major factor in the limited change that had occurred for black people as they had a powerful grip on how many southern states were run as their members included people higher up in authorities with; police officers, lawyers and judges. They were at a very high status and not much could be done to taint it as they had many advantages and links. Many politicians in the south who were for equal rights had little amount of power in acting as they knew that if they opposed the Klan they might not be elected to congress. The KKK witnessed a vast decline in membership however; with a scandal surrounding the prosecution of a Klan leader, David Stephenson in 1925. There is also the impact of the great depression and the new to take into account as it proved to hurt black Americans the most. After the wall street crash of 1929, America entered into the Great Depression of the 1930s, where black people suffered badly, being 'the last to be hired, the first to be fired'. This is evident as; by 1932 one-third of all black males were jobless, two million black farmers and sharecroppers had been forced off the land, unemployment among blacks in the northern cities was 60% and three times as many black families claimed relief as whites in the southern states. President Roosevelt's new deal programme did not do a lot to bring radical changes for black Americans but it did attempt to bring about some improvement in their economic condition. The New Deal which was Roosevelt's attempt for change provided 1 million jobs for black Americans and training for 500,000 through the use of his alphabet agencies.

The public works administration (PWA) allocated funds for the building of black hospitals, universities and housing projects etc. However, Roosevelt did little to eliminate unfair hiring practices and job discrimination. He also failed to support anti-lynching bills. (2)It is also important to discuss the second world war and what it meant for black Americans as it was a turning point with this being where they finally received recognition in the end. Following America's entry into WWII in 1941, many black Americans enlisted to fight for their country. As mentioned briefly before, they had to fight for their country in segregated units; as in the army there were black only units known as the Jim Crow army. Before 1944, black soldiers were not allowed into combat in the marines- they were used only to transport supplies or as cooks and labourers, and the navy would only accept blacks as mess men (working in the canteens). The US Air Force would not accept black pilots until the formulation of the African American 332nd fighter group known as the Tuskegee airmen; by the end of the war there were 1000 black pilots. Finally, the US supreme commander, General Eisenhower supported integrated units. Thus by the end of 1944, black Americans were fighting in actual units; the 761st Tank Battalion

nicknamed 'Black Panthers' saw them fighting and succeeding in the Battle of the Bulge in France and Belgium. In 1948, as a direct consequence of the contributions of black Americans to the war effort, President Truman banned 'separate but equal' recruiting, training and service in the army, air force, navy and Marine corps. The army had changed from being one of the most segregated organisations in the country to the most successfully integrated.

In 1946, as part of his 'Fair deal' Programme, President Truman set up a civil rights committee which proposed an anti-lynching bill and the abolition of the requirement that black Americans had to prove they had paid tax in order to be able to vote but this was to no avail as Truman was unable to implement these recommendations due to extreme opposition from the south. Due to the heavy influence of the Klansmen in the south, this needed to be stopped which is why Martin Luther King (The man who battled southern segregation) was a key part in the civil rights movement; actively peace protesting and acting with the right amount of patience was integral and that is why he progressed black rights all the more further. The 1950s and 1960s was a great period for black American history, this is when change was widespread and more and more got involved into the movement at the point where it could no longer be ignored nor reversed. The campaign was steadfast into ensuring this could no longer be an issue that could be paused, change needed to happen now. During the 1950's there was a spread of attempts to remove segregation specifically in education and on public transport. This did have many challenges however for example the Brown v. Topeka Board of education case of 1954. In 1952, 20 US states had segregated public school, the black Americans were forced to attend Jim crow schools where there was not a possibility for integration. One example of a child was Linda Brown; who had to walk 20 blocks to her school in Topeka, Kansas, even though there was a school for white pupils just a few blocks away from her home. In 1952, her father Oliva Brown, with the help of the National Association Of Advancement for Coloured People, took the board of education to court (of which were their specialty).

After losing the case in the state courts, the NAACP took the case to the supreme court. Consequently, in May 1954 the supreme court ruled racial segregation in public school's as unconstitutional which deemed it 'Un-American', however, the Supreme Court had no power to impose its decision and many southern states had continued to ignore the ruling. A second integral aspect of the movement was none other than the events of Little Rock Central High School in Arkansas of 1957. To briefly summarise; in september 1957, nine African-American students led by Elizabeth Eckford attempted to enter the white-only Central High School in Little Rock. The Governor of Arkansas, Orval Faubus, surrounded the school with National Guardsmen to prevent the nine students from entering.