

# [What was the most significant factor for the achievement of civil rights in the u...](https://assignbuster.com/what-was-the-most-significant-factor-for-the-achievement-of-civil-rights-in-the-us/)

Civil rights are legal rights, which every person should be entitled to, such as freedom of speech and the right to a fair trial. Most African Americans lacked these basic rights during the period 1939- 1968 in the US. Civil Rights ensures one’s ability to participate in the civil life of society and state without discrimination or repression. These rights reflect protection from different forms of discrimination such as race and gender. The three factors I am going to discuss are individuals, World War Two and Presidents along with their laws and I’ll decide which of these factors was the most significant in theachievement of civil rights.

Individuals were quite significant to the success of civilrights in the US between the years 1939-68. Individuals who had an impact onthe period include Martin Luther King and Malcolm X as well as others, whostood up to the racial discrimination in America, that was imposed by the white members of society.  The white members were trying to supress thegreater freedom the Blacks were receiving as a result of the success of WW2. This would lead to vicious organisations materialising such as the KKK, whoparticipated in gruesome events such as lynching and bombing of houses, inorder to reinforce their hatred, disgust and distaste of the rights of blackpeople improving.

Martin Luther King, the former pastor used non-violentprotest to conquer racism. He participated and lead a range of differentdemonstrations in order to spread awareness of black people, who were no longertolerating being in the shadow of the more dominant white people. His namewould become known during the Montgomery Boycott of 1955 when he would fightfor the rights of Rosa Parks, who would be arrested and fined $10 due to hernot giving up her seat on a bus to a white person. As a result King would walkto work, encouraging other black people to do so also. This was very damagingto the bus company as African Americans made up about 75% of passengers. Theboycotters would endure being made fun of and would remain calm and dignified. This boycott lasted until December 1956, when the efforts of the black peoplepaid off and the Supreme Court ruled segregation on buses as illegal. It stilltook other bus companies in the Southern states a while to change their racistpolicy. So, this first major act of defiance by King would show blacks that ifthey cooperated together they could bring about drastic change.

King’s most notable demonstration was the Washington Marchof 1963, which took place in order to pressure Kennedy’s government to movefurther to the direction of civil rights for all, including African Americans. He would say his “ I have a dream” Speech at the Lincoln Memorial, which haddual significance as it was named after the first US President and thePresident that ended slavery. This event was symbolic as civil rights would behigh on the agenda for government action after this event and a year later thecivil rights act would be passed.

King’s opposite and rival to start with Malcolm X, initiallyused violent methods to bring about civil rights. Malcolm challenged the nonviolent approach of integration champion Martin Luther King and urged followersto defend themselves against white aggression “ by any means necessary”.[1]Hewould make this clear in the Hinton Johnson incident, which was when a Nationof Islam member was beaten by two police officers in New York. Once informed ofthis incident Malcolm would visit the police station and demand to see Johnson, who had been arrested. Malcolm rallied a crowd of roughly 500 people and wouldbe allowed to arrange for an ambulance to deal with Johnson’s injuries and takehim to Harlem hospital. This was despite the officers at first trying to stophim. This event was important as it conveyed Malcolm X as a leader, who woulduse numbers as threats to get what he wanted. An effective leader as well aslarge support meant that civil rights could one day be achieved.

Therefore, individuals were quite significant to theachievement of Civil Rights because if they did not intervene through violentand non violent methods, the White members of society wouldn’t have seen theneed to seek reform and desegregate. The blacks would have also lacked leadersto guide them through this rough period.

I feel the War in comparison to the other two factors playedthe smallest role in the achievement of civil rights in the US. After the Japaneseattack on Pearl Harbor in December 1941, the US would make their entrance inthe war. The following four years had a large effect on race relations in theUS. There was increased demand for production from war industries and over 2million black people would migrate to the North in order to get a job. Initially, it caused tension between White and Black Americans in cities suchas Detroit as competition for housing leading to race riots.[2]Philip Randolph, a key leader in the civil rights movement, would persuadeRoosevelt to issue executive order 8802 in 1941, banning discrimination in thedefence industries and also setting up the Fair Employment Practice Committee. Gradually, black and white Americans found themselves working side by side together infactories as well as on the battlefield, but not always in harmony.

African Americans would become more aware of their unequalstatus in society and saw the possibility of change. The demand for theirlabour gave them greater bargaining power for better wages and workingconditions and this would also elevate their economic status. The war gave theblack people in the army and those in the factories a brief taste of what itwas like to have the upper hand against the more dominant white people and itresulted in them experiencing improved civil rights for a change. Unfortunately, this freedom would be short lived as the reaction to blackServicemen returning from the war was extremely violent. This was displayed bythe assault and blinding of a black soldier in South Carolina, which was one of56 attacks, which would be carried out on African Americans between June 1945and September 1946. Even after the success and sacrifice of the AfricanAmericans in World War Two, these attacks showed that more intervention wasneeded to achieve civil rights in the US.

Therefore, the war was not very significant in achievingcivil rights as it only gave the black people a temporary glimpse of what civilrights actually was. Black and white Americans were all fighting for the samegoal, which was freedom, and this cooperation made the idea of civil rights apossibility one day in the future. The end of World War Two meant the end ofthis temporary improvement in civil rights. It was now up to Presidents andtheir laws and also individuals to take action and make this fantasy a realityfor all black people lacking rights.

Presidents and their laws was the most significant influenceon the achievement of civil rights in the period as it came down to these menentirely whether things would remain the same or major reform would take placewithin the US through new laws.  Harry S. Truman had a mixed opinion on black people and his views in private drasticallydiffered from his views in office. Truman’sbiographer said Truman had “ moved to establish himself as a friend of the Negro”, after coming in to power due to the death of Roosevelt (Hamby 1973). Butalthough he favoured some legislative help for blacks, Truman’s support forAfrican Americans never matched his support for Jewish Americans and hisunwillingness to act decisively was characteristic of white liberals, bothrepublicans and democrats, after the war. Truman in his private life couldstill reference “ niggers” and in the 1920s he had paid the $10 membership tothe KKK, portraying himself as supportive of their cause.[3]Despite this, as President Truman did speak to an NAACP rally and establish acivil rights committee in 1946, who was tasked to examine the violence againstthe African Americans. The committee consisted of known liberals who Trumanknew would produce a report that would shock mainstream America.

The report was called “ to secure these rights”. Some of thethings the report requested was the federal government should use its authorityto end segregation in the US; lynching should be made a federal offence andvoting rights to be introduced for African Americans as well as other things.[4]Ina special message to congress, Truman would say “ we cannot be satisfied untilall our people have equal opportunities”.[5]Truman would act upon his words during election yearin 1948, when he would issue two executive orders, banning segregation in thearmed forces and generating fair employment practices in the civil service. Thisorder would lead to an increase in the number of front line troops, which wereAfrican American in the Korean War. It was a major victory for civil rightsadvocates as they had won the President’s support and had got him to takeaction. This made it clear to the advocates that to achieve civil rights in thelong run they must get the President on their side.

Another instance where presidents and their laws were significant was shown by Lyndon B. Johnson, who would complete Kennedy’s civil rights wishes when he put the presidential signature on the1964 civil rights Actand later the 1965 voting rights act. Johnson’s was an Idealist, who dreamed of making America a “ great society” and by signing these acts Johnson was effectively bringing the civil rights movement to a close in the 60s. He would be able to achieve this, despite being faced with opposition from the Southern states. The civil rights act would lead to greater rights such as the desegregation of schools and racial discrimination to be outlawed in almost all aspects of society as private clubs could still be “ whites only”, whereas the voting rights act halted all racial discrimination in terms of voting.

So, this made Presidents and their laws significant to theachievement of civil rights as they could successfully challenge majoropposition; the South from interfering with the freedom of the black communityin the US.

In conclusion, Presidents and their laws would be the mostsignificant factor for the achievement of civil rights as these men ultimatelyinfluenced desegregation around the US due to the high position they were in. World War Two and its aftermath were arguably the main catalysts for launchingthe civil rights movement but did not really contribute to the achievementsover the period. Therefore, it was more of a short term cause that assistedAfrican Americans, thus allowing the civil rights movement to begin. It was upto the Presidents with assistance from the individuals from the civil rightsmovement to transform this movement into a reality. Individuals such as MartinLuther King and Malcolm X’s ambition would pay off in the long run as theywould massively contribute to bringing about civil rights and freedom withtheir determination, despite their conflicting methods to start with. Though, their achievements would not have been possible without the assistance of thePresidents such as John F. Kennedy, who would at long last propose legislationin the Oval office, in favour of those who lacked civil rights. This wouldlater take the form of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 enforced under LyndonJohnson, who made it clear he would support voting reform. Undoubtedly, thePresidents above all were the most relevant factor to achieving civil rightsbetween the years 1939-1968.

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