

How far could it be argued that the biggest obstacle to civil rights progress was...

[Sociology](#), [Racism](#)



How far could it be argued that the biggest obstacle to civil rights progress was white racism and intimidation? The civil rights movements faced many obstacles, the most significant being slow and insufficient action from the Federal Government, however, other factors such as white racism and intimidation, the poverty in the north and divisions in the movement also had adverse effects on the movement. However, these factors also had some positive effects such as gaining media attention and white sympathy. White racism and intimidation was a very significant factor that slowed the civil rights movement. This is evident in the South in which the Ku Klux Klan and the White Citizens Council were lynching blacks quite frequently.

Additionally, after the ruling of Plessy vs. Ferguson (1896) of 'separate but equal', segregation was made legal, therefore southerners took it so far that Supreme Court rulings in favour of blacks were completely defied, such as in the Little Rock Crisis where Governor Faubus stopped black students from entering the high school despite previous rulings from Brown II (1955). This intimidation from supremacist groups and resistance from state government and general citizens slowed progress significantly because blacks were now afraid to campaign for fear of being lynched meaning that any effort made by blacks for equality was often negated by this strong resistance in the South. However, the resistance also had a positive effect on civil rights progress, such as in the Birmingham Movement 1963 in which the violence encouraged by Chief of Police Eugene 'Bull' Connor actually caused nationwide media attention which increased white sympathy and therefore made progress easier for blacks. Therefore racism in the South was a major obstacle before the 1950's because any de jure change never resulted in de

facto, however, after this point, campaigners targeted overtly racist places for their campaigns which was very advantageous for progress, meaning that racism was not the biggest obstacle for civil rights. Racism and intimidation was not only present in the South but also in the North. However, white racism and intimidation in the North was a less significant obstacle to civil rights because it was far less abundant than in the South. In the North there was more freedom for blacks, hence the Great Migration from 1910-70 in which blacks in the southern states moved to the north, Midwest and west of the country for the improved integration into society. However, there were still problems in the north that slowed progress such as ghettoization causing blacks to be caught in poverty therefore making it difficult for them to get any de facto change even after de jure change. Opposition to civil rights was especially evident in the Chicago Movement 1966 which brought out immense hatred from white and led Martin Luther King to say " I have never seen — even in Mississippi and Alabama — mobs as hostile and hate-filled as I've seen in Chicago". Therefore racism in the North was a big obstacle for civil rights, however, it was not as significant as in the South, but there were still bigger obstacles than this. Nonetheless, perhaps the largest obstacle to civil rights was slow and insufficient action from the government. The Presidents faced opposition from the southern democrats; this made making laws for civil rights difficult for Truman and Kennedy, this was caused by racism and intimidation. Additionally, the acts passed by Eisenhower such as the Civil Rights Acts of 1957 and 60 were half-hearted because of insufficient funding; therefore they were actually obstacles for the civil rights cause. The first time that there was any real

change was only in 1964 in the Civil Rights Act passed by President Johnson; however, Johnson withdrew aid for civil rights when MLK condemned his movement into Vietnam. Also, the Supreme Court did not help civil rights by keeping the 'separate but equal' legislation from Plessy vs. Ferguson alive until 1954. Also the laws passed were easy to find loopholes in; therefore, Southern racists could continue to segregate their states. Also, when Nixon was elected, the civil right movement was completely ignored because of attention being turned to Vietnam. Therefore, it was insufficient support from the government that was the biggest obstacle to civil rights because without any significant de jure change, there could not possibly be any de facto change, and the de jure change made was always too weak, therefore in essence, there was barely any de jure change. If blacks had had the full support of the government, white racism and intimidation would have been eliminated, making this the biggest obstacle to civil rights.

Furthermore, another obstacle to consider is the poverty cycle that trapped blacks and made it difficult for them to illicit a change for civil rights. Blacks, especially in the North were generally lower paid so their children generally did not get a good education therefore there was ghettoization and also it meant that de facto change for segregation in the North was difficult to achieve. It was middle class blacks with an education that would oppose white racism and with a lack of these people, it was difficult to articulate ideas, this is why MLK was so effective. Also without a proper education, Southern states disenfranchised blacks and made them take tests to be able to vote. The poverty cycle is significant because it left blacks unable to make civil rights a prominent issue in America because so few were able to make a

coherent stab at the absurdity of racism and segregation. The poverty cycle was less of an obstacle than white racism and intimidation because there were still blacks to start campaigns such as MLK and Malcolm X. Finally, the split in the movement between MLK and Black Power was also an obstacle for civil rights. Malcolm X who led the Organization of Afro American Unity (OAAU) was campaigning for separatism, whereas, MLK was campaigning for desegregation. These motives were completely opposite and the Black Power goal of complete independence from whites may have alienated white sympathizers, therefore actually impeding civil rights. This division was definitely an obstacle for civil rights because it meant that little change could be made because both sides were working towards opposite goals and therefore cancelled each other out. The division was not as big an obstacle as white opposition, or government support, but it still had a negative impact on the movement. Overall, the biggest obstacle to civil rights was insufficient support from the government; it outweighed white opposition as an obstacle because without the support of the government, there could be no de jure to lead to de facto, whereas white racism made its impact upon de facto change after de jure change had already been made. Additionally, the poverty cycle in the north was a bigger obstacle than divisions in the movement because blacks needed more educated people to oppose segregation and make real change. Therefore, it could be argued that white racism and intimidation was a major obstacle for civil rights, but in fact, insufficient governmental support was the biggest obstacle.