

Civil rights in the usa - how much had been achieved by 1945?

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



Civil Rights in the USA - How much had been achieved by 1945? Around 1900 the situation for blacks was dire. They suffered extreme discrimination and were frequently the victims of violence in the South. Blacks could not vote and their career opportunities remained limited. White society excluded blacks from equal participation in many areas of public life; they wanted to keep blacks in a position of economic, political, social and cultural subservience. After the Civil War, the USA offered civil rights and laws privileges to African-Americans. The USA government passed an amendment ending slavery in 1865; the Thirteenth Amendment of the United States Constitution. Although slavery was outlawed, it did not provide citizenship and equal rights. Therefore, the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendment offered citizenship and enfranchisement to all citizens, regardless of race. Nevertheless, many eligible black citizens were prevented from voting; especially in the Southern states of America. Long-standing Southern congressmen exploited their authority to halt legislation that would help blacks. The power of the state governments allowed the continuation of white supremacy and discrimination; the state governments controlled education, transportation and law enforcement. As a result, enfranchisement did not bring greater equality to the black community in America. However, external events such as the two World Wars and the Great Depression encouraged greater equality between blacks and whites. By 1930, greater political equality had not been achieved, especially in the South because most blacks were more concerned with earning a living. Northern blacks, conversely, had greater opportunity to improve their political opportunities; they could vote and participate more easily in civic affairs. Although, similar

to their counterparts in the South, Northern blacks were more interested in improving their living standards. The Second World War brought about change. Northern blacks campaigned for greater equality in the war. They criticised America by pointing out that it had not attained true democracy when Southern blacks could not vote. Nonetheless, many blacks remained inactive during World War II for they did not want to appear unpatriotic and feared disorder and acts of violence. Social equality in the early part of the 20th century was non-existent. Blacks were frequent victims of violence and severe discrimination particularly in the Southern states. Segregation was legally enforced, particularly in the Southern states; public transport, churches, theatres, parks, benches, schools and housing estates were all segregated. This was reinforced by the Supreme Court decision in the Plessy v. Ferguson trial, which enshrined the "separate but equal" racial segregation as constitutional doctrine. This decision endorsed segregation in nearly every sphere of public and private life. Many Southern states saw this as an approval for restrictive laws such as the Jim Crow laws; these were de facto laws which were adhered to as closely as de jure laws in many Southern states. The etiquette of racial segregation was harsh, especially in the South, where blacks were expected to step aside to allow a white person to pass. Segregation dramatically increased the sense of black community and unity in the face of white supremacy. The black church filled the void by the lack of any meaningful political role for blacks. The black church served not only as a place of worship but also as a community. It helped to promote a spirit of self-help and self-confidence amongst blacks. By the 1930's individuals such as Marcus Garvey had helped raise black

consciousness within the white community. World War II brought about changes to America which helped blacks. There were numerous acts of defiance on overcrowded buses, which led to the arrest of all the blacks on the bus, although they were arrested the act raised awareness among the community. Some blacks were inspired by Gandhi's confrontational but non-violent tactics against the British in India. For example, the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE) organised sit-ins at segregated Chicago restaurants and on interstate transport. Life was extremely difficult for blacks in the segregated South as there were limited economic policies available. White society wanted to subjugate blacks; black farmers in the South often found themselves held in economic bondage as sharecroppers or tenant farmers, while employers and labour unions generally restricted blacks to the worst paid and least desirable jobs. One solution was to migrate; over six million blacks emigrated from the South to the more cosmopolitan cities of the North between 1910 and 1970. The industrial North offered greater economic opportunities; the Jim Crow system that excluded blacks from many areas of life led to the creation of a vigorous but stunted economic life contained within the segregated economic sphere that belonged to blacks. Black newspapers sprang up in the North, while black-owned insurance and funeral establishments acquired disproportionate influence as both economic and political leaders. Conversely, the arrival of additional blacks caused the deterioration of race relations in Northern cities. Some Northern states decided to introduce new racial segregation laws. There was lots of competition for jobs and housing along with bitterness towards blacks for their increasing political influence in local elections which led to serious

racial violence in some cities. Nevertheless, the increased number of blacks emigrating to the North led to a wider awareness and understanding of the black community. World War One produced many jobs and enabled blacks to travel to other countries such as France where the people were generally much less racist. When they returned home there was great antipathy between blacks and whites for jobs and housing which led to vicious race riots in 25 American cities. By the late 1920's black awareness had been raised, although, the Great Depression and the Second World War brought about a greater change. The depression hit the blacks hard; black unemployment was between 30% and 60%. President Roosevelt introduced his New Deal to help combat severe unemployment; Roosevelt made sure that his policy benefited blacks as well as whites. However, the New Deal aid did not always reach those it was intended for especially in areas where whites were in charge of aid distribution. Roosevelt's New Deal had helped to push black civil rights into the political limelight. Economic equality for blacks improved even more during the Second World War as more and more blacks moved to the cities. At the turn of the 20th century, blacks were treated as an inferior social class throughout America. However, as time progressed, black consciousness increased and white supremacy was slowly overcome. As a result of external events such as the Depression and the two World Wars, there was greater political, economic, social and cultural gain for blacks in America. These external events forced the federal government to give blacks greater equality through the political decisions it made. As a result of the involvement of the federal government, during the first half of

the 20th century, political equality for blacks increased the most and led to the enfranchisement of many blacks within America.