

# Civil rights movement:

[Politics](#), [Civil Rights](#)



To what extent was grass roots activism a significant reason to why the Civil Rights Movement Grew in the 1950s and 1960s The civil rights movement grew for a number of reasons during the 1950's and 1960s. Prior to this select time period America were fighting in the Cold War and many black soldiers battled in the name of 'freedom'. This was ironic as these black soldiers were fighting for something that they didn't even have back home. Often Black soldiers talked about the 'Double V Campaign'; this was referring to victory in the war and victory for civil rights back home in the USA.

Many historians believe that world war two planted seeds in the growth of the civil rights movement as it raised the question to black people, in the words of Mohamed Ali; " Why should they ask me to put on a uniform and go ten thousand miles from home and drop bombs and bullets on brown people in Vietnam while so-called Negro people in Louisville are treated like dogs and denied simple human rights? " A Philip Randolph played a key role in the early civil rights movement as he called for an executive order to stop job discrimination in the defence industry.

President FDR eventually issued executive order 8802 stating an end to discrimination the employment of workers in the defence industries and in government. This proved effective in the growth of civil rights movement as it was one of the first pieces of success blacks achieved and this increase momentum, hope and motivation for blacks in their bid for civil rights. Other factors that influenced effected the growth of the civil rights movement included the increase in media awareness which helped mobilise support from all quarters of the USA.

The support they gained due to different methods of black leaders, the shift in president's attitudes and the Supreme Court, and the momentum gained through small victories which inspired the likes of Rosa Parks. Grass roots activism managed to gain momentum and maintain belief amongst black Americans which proved vital in the growth of the civil rights movement in the 1950's and 1960's. The fact that prejudice and discrimination still existed meant that the fight had to continue and relative success resulted in continued motivation.

A good example of this is the Montgomery bus boycott, when the Montgomery bus company finally decided to desegregate a year boycott began, Martin Luther King and black protesters didn't settle at that, they tried to desegregate the rest of the still segregated bus companies in Alabama. In one sense a legal victory was gained here in the desegregation of the bus company however in another sense a moral victory was gained as it showed the economic power black Americans had if they united together.

In addition, because Blacks wanted to continue to desegregate bus companies in other cities this shows Black Americans were trying to grow the CRM rather than just being content after one city was desegregated. Thus proving the CRM was growing due to grass roots activism and small successes maintaining belief amongst blacks. The growth of the CRM was also due to the variety of opinions, tactics and views of different black leaders and organisations. A wide range of beliefs were covered so most black Americans had a leader that suited their own beliefs.

For example MLK and the SCLC supported non-violent protests, such as the Montgomery Bus Boycott, The Freedom Rides and The Sit-Ins. These

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methods appealed to many blacks and whites too who supported non-violent methods and the whole concept of MLK ideology. However blacks who did not support peaceful protests could support the Black Panther party instead lead by Huey Newton and Bobby Seale. This organisation supported much more aggressive actions and believed in self-defence and retaliations against white mobs and policemen. Huey Newton's main aim was: An immediate end to police brutality and the murder of black people.

The Black panthers appealed to the new generation of blacks and those who had generally a more aggressive view on the situation. The fact that different parties existed meant that the CRM had more supporters as it has supporters from both violent and non-violent sides; this in the big picture benefited the cause for CRM and helped it grow. The change in president's actions and beliefs also helped the growth of the CRM. Presidents such as Truman and Eisenhower began to take action overruling states inactions to ignore the federal government, thus effectively aiding blacks bid for civil rights.

A good example showing how president's attitudes were changing is the little rock nine cases in Arkansas, 1957. When nine black students were disallowed entry into the city high school by governor of Arkansas orders to send state soldiers to stand outside the premises to avoid entry, President Eisenhower felt he had to intervene. He ordered 1000 US soldiers to protect the black children on their way to school from the mob of angry white parents opposing desegregation in schools.

Eisenhower's actions showed that he was prepared to make drastic action in order for integration amongst blacks and white children in schools. He used his authority to over- rule state laws and this showed that he was for the

idea of blacks receiving equal education as whites, therefore adding to the growth of the CRM. Another contributing factor helping the CRM to grow was due to the changes in the Supreme Court that led to opportunities to challenge and change the key features of segregation.

In 1896 the Supreme Court issued the ruling 'separate but equal' thus legally legitimising racism. However this rule was overturned in 1954 at the Brown vs. Topeka Board Of Education case, meaning that their attitudes had changed and that schools should become desegregated. The reversal of the 1896 ruling, 'separate but equal' in this case demonstrated the shift in opinion in the highest court and giving blacks a sense of hope and built momentum as it was their first victory for Civil Rights.

One of the most important reasons, if not the most important reason for the growth of the civil rights movement in the 1950's and 1960's was the use of the media to raise awareness across the country for the ways blacks were being severely treated. Televisions, newspapers, newspaper photographers all became vital weapons in the Civil Rights Movement. After the brutal murder of Emmett Till in 1955 his mother decided to lay Emmett in an open coffin to allow the public and newspaper photographers to see the severity and brutality of the attacks carried out on Emmett.

Over four days thousands of people saw Emmett's body and thousands more were shocked by the images appearing in magazines and newspapers worldwide. Emmett's case had a great effect on the civil rights movement; the north became aware of the horror of discrimination and persecution existing in the south through the use of the media. This case drew massive attention to the cause, encouraging support from both black and white

American's. Therefore the media played a key role in the growth of the Civil Rights Movement as it raised awareness of the problems blacks faced in the 1950's and 1960's.

In conclusion the growth of the CRM was due to many different contributing factors, however I believe the media played the, most significant role. This was due to the great awareness it caused for blacks as it helped northern Americans and international countries realise the brutality of treatment of blacks in the south. The media also managed to pressurise the government and presidents into making decisions as it brought worldwide attention to causes such as the little rock nine and the freedom rides that embarrassed them into action for the sake of ruining the prestige and reputation of themselves and of the country.

The changing attitudes of the president and the supreme court also played a part in the growth of the movement as they gave blacks significant progress to work on and build on. Grass Roots activism also contributed as it built small success as a platform which gained belief and momentum in the movement. The variety of leaders also magnified support from all different types of black Americans which also contributed to the growth of the civil rights movement in 1950's and 1960's. By Gavin Rittoo