

Free essay on civil rights movement and its impact on african americans

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



Introduction

The Civil Right Movement refers to the revolutionary and reformatory movement in the US purported to remove racial discrimination against black Americans and instituting suffrage in the South. The Civil Right Movement is a defining chapter in the US history because it earned the black Americans the equal right of citizenship as whites. It also brought about a significant change in the social and economic structure of the US, contributing to the passing of Civil Right Bill in 1964 and the Voting Right a year after. This movement had witnessed the emergence of a great many leaders still worshipped for their fortitude and conviction, including Martin Luther King Jr., Malcolm X, Rosa Parks, Jesse Jackson and Thurgood Marshall. This movement also witnessed the assassination of a great US president John F. Kennedy whose contribution behind the passing of Civil Right Bill is indubitable. The purpose of this paper is to delve deeper into the history of Civil Rights movement and its overarching impact on the African-Americans in the reflection of their condition today.

History of Civil Rights Movement

Though the American Civil Rights Movement is mostly associated with the reform movements and political struggles that took place between 1950 and 1970 in order to uproot racial segregation and discrimination against black Americans, the original movement had started a long time back in the late 19th century. Plessy v. Ferguson was a first milestone case that set the stone for Civil Rights Movement in 1896.

- Plessy v. Ferguson Case

In 1892, Homer Plessy was put in prison for sitting in the car reserved for whites in the East Louisiana Railroad. In the same year when a law 'Separate Car Act' was enacted by Louisiana legalizing segregation of common carriers, a Civil Rights organization of blacks challenged the decision in the court. Plessy who was a Creole of Color deliberately seated himself in the white section in the court which resulted in his arrest and the case came down to the Supreme Court of the US. The ruling made by the court in Plessy v. Ferguson case was in favor of the segregation. The Supreme Court stated that segregation between whites and blacks was constitutional as long as the segregated facilities for each were equal in quality (Richard Wormser). The "separate but equal" doctrine passed by the Supreme Court soon extended in application in broader aspects of public life such as schools, theaters, restaurants and restrooms. However, the doctrine was fictitious as facilities for blacks were inferior to that of whites. But this doctrine passed in favor of segregation encouraged the whites to treat the blacks abominably by relegating them to the status of second class citizens.

- Jim Crow Laws

The legitimization of segregation and anti-black racism gave birth to Jim Crow laws which imposed a series of decrees on the black population such as blacks were not allowed to marry or shake hands or eat together with whites. Whites would always get the first preference while having food in a restaurant or passing by an intersection. Further, under Jim Crow Law blacks were not allowed to call whites by their first names and they would always have to append Mr. or Mrs. while addressing a white whereas whites would call the blacks only by their first names or using denigrating words like

nigger or colored. Blacks were also barred in many restaurants and public parks with signboards stating that Negroes and dogs are not allowed. Though the racial discrimination against black Americans was more prominent and harsher in the South, but the North too was not free from its wide-ranging effect. One notable incident was when the US Naval Academy located in Maryland declined to play a lacrosse game in 1941 with Harvard University because of a team member of Harvard being black. When the US took part in WWII, more than 1/4th of a million black soldiers entered the military but they were all stationed to separate military units. Despite putting their lives at risk to combat in the WWII, African Americans were victims of uncontrollable racial discrimination in military units and defense industries. The wartime experiences propelled the black population into making a surge of protests that ultimately brought the Jim Crow laws under inspection.

- Formation of NAACP

During the early Civil Rights Movement one of the most prominent figures was W. E. B. Du Bois whose initiatives led to the foundation of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) in 1909. NAACP was a civil rights organization consisting of black and white activists who collectively made efforts through the strategies of agitation, lobbying and legal action to put an end to segregation.

- Brown V. Board of Education

In 1951, National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) with the help of the first African American justice of the US Supreme Court Thurgood Marshall decided to wage their fight for the rights of black children who even though considered equal in the eyes of law were

subjected to segregation by being forced into studying in schools segregated for African-American children. They put forward the case of a 7 year old girl Linda Brown from Kansas who was forced to travel huge distance every day in order to study in black-only school despite of a white-only school located nearby her home. NAACP filed a lawsuit on behalf of her parents to take Linda admitted to a neighborhood school and this lawsuit came to be known as Brown V. Board of Education. The Supreme Court of the US finally made a verdict in 1954 stating that all the schools across the US has to be integrated and that segregation would not be put up with.

- Montgomery Bus Boycott

The Civil Rights Movement received its momentum from the Montgomery Bus Boycott incident sparked by Rosa Parks. The Montgomery bus system was segregated with preference meted out to the white passengers in terms of seating arrangement. All the best seats in a bus were reserved for whites. Though 70% passengers were African-American, they had to board the bus from the back door. In the event of all the white seats being occupied, whites could demand the blacks to give up their seats. Rosa Parks was a NAACP member who refused to give her seat up to a white passenger which led to her arrest. In retaliation, the black community organized boycott of the public bus system of Montgomery for one day which later with the help and support of black leaders like Martin Luther King Jr. and the NAACP morphed into a citywide Montgomery bus boycott that lasted for a year until the Federal government desegregated the bus system in 1956. The importance of the Montgomery bus boycott lied in the fact that it first knocked down a Jim Crow Law and proved that with unity and determination, blacks could

make their grievances heard and cause change. It also introduced a new way of mass movement through boycotting, picketing and other forms of non-violent resistance. Martin Luther King became an eminent leader of the movement. His non-violent ways of waging movement brought in greater participation of both blacks and whites.

- Sit-in Movement and Freedom Riders

- Civil Right Bill

President John F. Kennedy first addressed the need of passing the Civil Right Bill in his speech on June 11, 1963. In his speech, Kennedy mentioned that a legislation should be enacted in order to award all the African Americans with the right " to be served in facilities which are open to the public—hotels, restaurants, theaters, retail stores, and similar establishments" and " greater protection for the right to vote" (John F. Kennedy 1963). After his assassination in November the same year, Lyndon Baines Johnson, the Vice President accepted the role of the country's leader. Taking advantage of the public sympathy following Kennedy's assassination, Johnson used the moment to pass the legislation of Kennedy's Civil Rights Bill as a tribute to the dead president. Before long the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) was formed for enforcement of the Civil Right Bill. The passing of the Civil Right Bill gave a new dimension to the Civil Rights movement. Hotels, restaurants and employers could no longer discriminate against the African Americans. Schools that refused to desegregate were subjected to lawsuit by the Federal government.

- Voting Rights

A group of black leaders including Aaron Henry, Medgar Evers, Amzie Moore,

and others approached the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) to provide help in registering black voters in Mississippi, but the voting registration process was complicated with a host of provisions to be fulfilled such as residency requirement, poll taxes and literacy. These provisions were made to keep the blacks off from the voting polls. Whites reacted violently to the endeavors made for the voting registration by lynching, arresting and murdering numerous black activists. They applied further coercive measures like firing black workers from employment. The opposition from the whites to the registration of black voters was so intense that all the freedom movement organizations grouped together to make concerted effort for a chance of success. In 1962, the Council of Federated Organizations (COFO) was formed by the collective efforts of NAACP, CORE and SNCC. Despite the odds, the voting registration campaign of the blacks spread across the state. Soon the campaign expanded into other states including Alabama, Louisiana, South Carolina and southwest Georgia. Voting Rights Campaign took the shape as big as the desegregation efforts and finally the Voting Rights Act was passed in 1965.

Condition of African-Americans post-Civil Right Movement

The Civil Rights movement affected every African American family in the US in some way or the other. American social structure went through a sweeping change due to the Civil Rights Movement. More than hundred years of racial discrimination against blacks came to end and violence based on racism also declined considerably. African Americans now have the freedom of enjoying the same rights as whites. They have the right to vote.

They are no longer treated as inferior to whites. They are allowed to take participation in elections and are elected to public posts.

Today the situation of black Americans is far better than it was 50 years ago. Barack Obama's election as the President of the United States is a culminating point in the US history when the first time an African American has been sworn in as the President of the US. Not only president Obama, many African-Americans have achieved immeasurable success in predominantly white America. Many large cities of the US including Chicago, New York and Los Angeles have had African American mayors. Condoleezza Rice and Colin Powell are the two African Americans who were appointed in the post of Secretary of State. There are a slew of black artists having created a niche in the entertainment industry with Halle Berry, Morgan Freeman, Denzel Washington, Will Smith, Whoopi Goldberg, Dave Chappelle, Chris Rock and Bill Cosby to name a few. The presence of black American in sports is all-pervasive. Michael Jordan, Magic Johnson, Tiger Woods, Muhammad Ali, Carl Lewis are the black diamonds of American sports. Some of the successful African American CEOs include Oprah Winfrey, Kenneth Frazier, Ursula Burns, Robert L. Johnson, Aliko Dangote, Russell Simmons, Clarence Otis Jr., Kenneth Chenault and Shawn Jay-Z Carter.

Despite the success of the black Americans, still 25% of them are in poverty. Vestiges of racism exist in many areas still, with the standard of living being poorer, average income lower and higher unemployment rate compared to whites. Black Americans are still a minority in the US politics with very few African Americans having ever been elected to the public office from white-populated regions. Racism is blatantly evident in the prison system of the

US. Although blacks constitute less than 1/4th of the US population, they fill about 50% of the US prisons. During the era of Jim Crow Laws, imprisonment of black Americans was four times higher than that of their white counterparts but today the rate is 7 times higher (Rose Aguilar 2010).

Michelle Alexander observes in her book that in the era of colorblindness, the criminal justice system of the US is used to label colored people as criminals and then all the practices supposedly left behind are put into practice. She concludes that a criminal has hardly any right or respect " than a black man living in Alabama at the height of Jim Crow. We have not ended racial caste in America; we have merely redesigned it" (Michelle Alexander 2012, p 3).

Racial profiling is another example of how racism is still deep rooted in this country. Every African-American male who drives a vehicle in the US has been subjected to racial profiling either knowing or unknowingly by police. A study based in Maryland shows that although only 20% of all the drivers driving on a highway are African-Americans, almost 70% of them have been stopped and frisked by police (D. E. Rogers 2010). As per the finding in 2010, the black unemployment rate is 17% in comparison with 10% for whites.

Further, African-Americans have three times more likelihood to stay in poverty and 8. 3% more chances to remain without health insurance compared to their white counterparts. They also suffer more from diabetes, cancer and hypertension in comparison with whites.

Conclusion

The Civil Right movement marks a heroic episode in the annals of American history. This movement resulted in two milestone outcomes; one was the

passing of Civil Right Bill and the other is institution of Suffrage of black Americans. Some landmark events of the Civil Right movement include Plessy v. Ferguson Case, Jim Crow Laws, formation of NAACP, Brown V. Board of Education, Montgomery Bus Boycott, sit-in movement and Freedom Riders. The Civil Right movement left an indelible impact on African-Americans. Compared to the condition of African Americans even 50 years ago, their state of living has improved a lot in terms of many black Americans proving successful in every aspect. But despite the achievements of the Civil Right movement, racism does still exist in many parts of the US which come out to open in the stereotypical treatment of African Americans as prone to criminal act by the media and law enforcement officials. However, despite the downsides the overall success of Civil Right movement in the acquisition of rights for black Americans equal to that of whites cannot be undermined. Though the African Americans have long way to go in terms of attaining absolute equal status like whites, there is no doubt that this movement has made possible what was unthinkable even few decades ago; the election of a black American as the US president and there lies its summit of success.

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