

# The status of african- americans in 1945- 1955 essay sample



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How far do you agree that the years 1945-1955 saw only limited progress in improving the status of African-Americans?

By 1955, Civil Rights for African-Americans had still not fully been achieved in northern and southern states but there had definitely been some improvement in the status of black people. The main factors preventing equality for black Americans in 1945 were casual discrimination and legalised segregation permitted by Jim Crow Laws, which continued through to 1955. This, along with other political, economic and social elements, limited the impact of change in black Americans' status. Despite the work of desegregationist groups and the war effort of black Americans, they were still perceived as inferior to white people, even by 1955.

Economically, there were clear signs of gradual change from 1945 to 1955 in the north and south, but not enough changes to reach full equality. By 1945, the NAACP, established in 1909, had gotten 450, 000 members, with almost 150, 000 members being from Southern states. Through the work of the NAACP, black registration was boosted by 21% from 1952-1956 to 1. 2 million in the eleven Southern states. The organisation was focused on aiming to outlaw employment and housing discrimination by raising money to attend court to help pass desegregationist laws. This organisation was successful in encouraging leaders to support them.

For example, the Fair Employment Practices Committee, set up by President Roosevelt in 1943, gave blacks equal opportunities in defence industries jobs. This increased employment rates and by 1955 there had been a 25% increase in African Americans working in the steel and iron industry. The

numbers employed in government service increased from 50, 000 to 200, 000. By 1955, there was a 25% increase in job opportunities for black people, compared to 1945. This made a very large impact on African-Americans because higher paying jobs meant that they could provide for their families, especially since they lived in the cities and there was much more food available there.

This eventually led to 55. 1% of the black population living in poverty in the 1950s and a median yearly income of \$3, 450 for a full-time black worker. This is a significant difference from the income of black workers in the 1940, but white Americans hated seeing black Americans succeed and work the same jobs as they did, so they put more effort into racially abusing and attacking them. Also, white people still earned double the amount that black workers earned, resulting in an occurring issue of poverty. The war efforts of black Americans played a role in a change of attitudes of some leaders as they recognised their bravery. This encouraged them to give the G. I Bill to black ex-servicemen in 1944 to help them to go to college, which was used by 2. 2 million people. However, most of these people were white. One soldier from Alabama said, I'm hanged if I'm going to let the Alabama version of the Germans kick me around".

In 1940, black enrolment in college was 1% of the total amount of people who attended college, whereas this number increased to 3. 6% by 1950. This meant that more black people would be able to get better jobs if they graduated, and a higher amount of job opportunities would be opened for them. However, there was still very little change because 3. 6% is a low number and the impact is limited because it would be expected that in ten

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years' time, more people would graduate to become successful. Also, not everyone chose to take the G. I Bill, causing there to be a lower number of college students and limited impact on the status of black people. Overall though, if you were an African-American living in 1955, the chances are that you would not have graduated and would therefore be working in a fairly-low paid job so it wouldn't be enough to fall above the poverty line, unlike if you were a white man. However, the G. I Bill was very important in making sure that many black people had the education they deserved, but the increase in job opportunities was more important because it had a higher effect on black peoples' employment rate.

Furthermore, there was also a limited impact on the signs of change on African-Americans socially in the north and the south from 1945-1955. A reason for the social limitation of change in the South was because of education. 25% of U. S. population and 8 % of the African American population, age 25 and over had at least a high school diploma by 1945, according to the U. S. Census. This tells us that it was becoming more acceptable for black Americans to be successful in education and how it was more common for them to achieve the same standards as white graduates, although mixed race children were not allowed an education by then.

Things hadn't changed much socially by 1950 when only 33% of Americans approved of the fair employment legislation, showing the scheme to be unsuccessful and white attitudes being mostly against the idea of black people being educated. Also, the BROWN v BOARD OF EDUCATION ruling that was passed in 1954 by the Supreme Court proved to be very unpopular with white segregationists so it took a long time for this law to be enforced.

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As there was high opposition from white segregationists, it meant that if President Eisenhower took action on this ruling, he would lose votes as most white people would turn against him and choose to vote for someone else. This would mean that the President would lose his job. This led to Eisenhower going against the NAACP and their actions to try and prevent black people from being helped so they would stay segregated in schools.

Although there was a ruling that the BROWN integration of schools should proceed in BROWN II in 1955 showing progress of change on black people, there were still white segregationist groups like White Citizens Council who signed the Southern Manifesto in 1954, although this proved to fail as it didn't affect many people and it made no difference to the BROWN II ruling made shortly after. This law caused more problems when segregationist groups like the KKK worked harder to hurt black people and lynch them. There were concentrated amounts of black people in areas because of their fear from threats from white supremacist groups like the KKK, resulting in multitudes of African-Americans fleeing from these harmful groups and away from white people who refused to live near them. This meant that more black Americans lived in peace and were less affected by these attacks.

Overall, the BROWN II ruling was more significant than BROWN because action was taken in BROWN II. Although it had opposers, there weren't as many as the white general public who convinced Eisenhower to obstruct the NAACP. However, quite a lot of change took place socially as there was almost complete segregation by 1955.

Politically, there were some clear improvements in the status of African-Americans from 1945-1955, but only to an extent. In 1947, President Truman established a civil rights committee to investigate the increasing violence towards black people. In response to this, a report was published, *To Secure These Rights*, which used federal power to call for “ anti-lynching legislation”, “ abolition of the poll tax”, “ an end to discrimination in the armed forces” and “ a permanent FEPC”. This meant that the federal government was in support of civil rights for African-Americans as Truman wanted to scrap these laws immediately, showing that he must have seen all these things as very serious, even though many of his promised legislations did not happen.

The FEPC aimed to promote equality in defence industries but wasn't that successful as two thirds of the 8000 job discrimination cases referred to the FEPC were dismissed and only one fifth of Southern cases were black victories, resulting in its funding to be decreased. If the FEPC had succeeded, it would mean that many more desegregationist legislations would be deemed constitutional by the Supreme Court, resulting in a clear boost in the status of black Americans by 1955. This could have eventually resulted in *To Secure These Rights* to succeed. However, the FEPC was significant in showing the aid of the federal government. It also led to other significant court rulings such as *SHELLEY v KRAEMER* in 1948, which ruled against discrimination in housing, and the overturn of the *PLESSY v FERGUSON* legislation in 1896. Although the FEPC wasn't a success, through the work of the NAACP, black registration was boosted by 21% from 1952-1956 to 1.2 million in the eleven Southern states.

These factors are important as they show the significance of how things have progressed in a positive way by the 1950s, by gaining the support of the Supreme Court and the federal government, but also in a negative way as the FEPC proved to be a failure due to lack of support, showing that the majority of people were still not in favour of wanting equality in the armed forces.

In conclusion, I agree in some ways that the status of African-Americans improved in the years 1945-1955, economically, socially and politically. I think that the most improvement was portrayed through political events because the passing of laws dictated important actions made in the lives of black people socially and economically. However, I think that overall, the events that helped improve the status of black people were insignificant in comparison to the main Civil Rights Act, passed in 1964 by Johnson, which was when discrimination was much more frowned upon. Whereas the events of 1945-1955 did help in improving the attitudes towards black people in the north and south, it also encouraged white supremacists to develop stronger hatred towards them when presidents like Eisenhower began to show support for American Civil Rights.