

The foundation of the civil rights established in the 1930 and 1940

[History](#), [American History](#)



In This essay I will plot firstly the significance of, the foundation of the civil rights movement, with particular emphasis upon the role and subsequent achievements to come out of the New Deal, NAACP and the second war. Then I will look at the contribution of Martin Luther king. In this paper I will attempt to show that the early movements of the 1930's and 40's set in motion a chain of events that meant by 1948 the progression of the civil rights movement was inevitable. Sub questions underlying debate. What is more important the long-term or the short-term causes of an historical event.

As it is unlikely that either Martin Luther King nor Malcolm X would have had the impact they did activist working between 1933 or 1948 but the social situation of blacks was changed more dramatically by King and probably by Malcolm X than the earlier events. Can we assess different types of contribution against others? What is more important, changing the way people think about race or changing legislation promoting the before mentioned cause. what is more significant the first Black being omitted into a white university or the right to vote being granted to all black men there is no clear cut answer to this type of question.

The organized mass protests of the 1950's and 1960s were a product of the " coalition building and consciousness raising" 1 founded in the 1930's and 1940's. The new deal of Roosevelt's' administration brought with it a new national political culture and climate, opened new opportunities for the blacks within it, transformed the nations' views on blacks focusing huge

levels of attention upon their cause and encouraged blacks to speak out against their situation and " threatened the architecture of states' rights.

The development of the NAACP in both size and influence was also a result of the New Deal. The Wall Street Crash of 1929 led to a period of economic depression in the US. In 1932 Roosevelt was elected president. He attempted to solve the problems of the US through a programme he called the New Deal. The New Deal's massive federal program of jobs and relief " implicitly challenged the southern structure of state' rights supported by legalized white supremacy. " 2

This state sponsored questioning of White supremacy brought the stock and file of the black community to question its own position and white supremacy, civil activism erupted in an unprecedented way after the New Deal was announced. Modjeska Simkins, describes Roosevelt and his New Deal " he took the jug by the handle. He tried to give the people who were down and had nothing a little something he put some strength in the back bone of people... it was a shot in the arm for negroes" 3This awakening of political consciousness is one of the most important events in the history of civil rights movement.

Federal relief programs provided massive amounts of aid to Blacks and Whites alike. Many Blacks were able to take jobs previously restricted to them, Black writers, for example, participated in the New Deal's writing projects, while other black Americans interviewed former slaves for the Works Project Administration (WPA). Jobs were provided and the WPA

developed a non discrimination policy. African American Governors were consulted by FDR. This group of Black political leaders became known as the Black Cabinet. Blacks were later appointed to the Cabinet, an American first.

Although the positive aspects of the Deal did exist especially at first it hurt the Black citizens, Federal Housing Agency stopped black from moving into white neighborhoods and some public works projects refused to hire blacks. AAA pushed African Americans off their farms because it paid the White landowners not to grow food. When they received this money they dismissed many tenant farmers and workers. Recipients of AAA money were supposed to share with their Black workers but the reality is that this wasn't done.

Social Security left out blacks because it was only those who worked and paid FICA tax into the system would get out of the system. Since many African Americans either worked " off the books" or for cash, they never paid in and thus never received Social Security. This was not a sign of a racist president but one how saw the necessity of the Conservative South's vote. To get their vote, he had to permit discrimination when the programs started operating. Importantly those advantages were sizable enough to awaken black American's from their stagnant history of the 1920's.

The President began to name African Americans to important posts. One of the most important of the people was Mary Mcleod Bethune. Bethune was a well known educator from the south. Roosevelt appointed Bethune as director of Negro affairs in the national youth administrations from 1936 to 1944. Bethune's job was to make sure money intended for African American

students actually reached them. She helped over 300, 000 African American people get an education. The new Deal did not end discrimination, but it began to move toward that goal. The New deal was a " shot in the arm for negro's" 4the passion needed to be maintained.

Despite the maladministration of many of the programs especially in the south, it is still fair to say that Blacks would benefit as a result of " the federal government's growing commitment to a decent standard of living for all citizens without regard to race" 5. Charles Foreman believed that if blacks were to attain fair treatment they would need to maintain the " activism and Militancy" 6 7the new deal inspired. Both " community pressure" 8 and an increase in the number of black Political Representation in government were necessary if this goal was to be achieved.

Black America could only fight their suppression with a more active and politically " organized citizenry" 9 if they were to take full advantage of federal programs, " as well as solidify a strong constituency behind the New Deal. " 10 Encouraging continued activism and moves to increase black representation in government inside black communities was highly important to long term the success of the civil rights movement. The NAACP was established in 1909 and protested for black right from this date. Through Charles Houston, a central legal figure within the movement, they were able to capture the public mood.

Foreman believed through organization blacks could overcome racial inequality. He stressed the need for organization of local constituencies. He

was a lawyer and therefore also placed huge value upon the legal system as a means of attaining change. Fundamentally Houston believed civil rights to be attained as a direct result of the articulation of the " concerns and participation of local black communities" He assembled a team of black Lawyers how's role he described as that of a " social engineer, prepared to anticipate, guide and interpret his groups advancement".

His legal battles revolved initially around; " black admission to graduate and professional schools and teachers; salary equalization" 11. The legal team he had assembled toured and educated member of local communities in legal and organizational skills. His attempt ms. Sullivan used this to " show that the only way the problems... [America] faces can be effectively addressed is through organizing articulate communities. " 12 Ms. Sullivan emphasizes that " If there is any lesson in their lives, it is not to look for great leaders, but to get people to work for justice," 13A view shared by Houston.

Scottsboro for him was a hugely significant step in their struggle. A fight between blacks and whites results in the nine blacks being imprisoned and the whites not even arrested, also the police added rape and other charges on top of the assault charge in order to prolong illegitimately the sentence of the youths. Mass protest followed the trial this lead Houston to conclude a major change had occurred. Houston from this position asserted that " grass roots support and participation was essential to the long term success of the NAACP's legal struggle against segregation and disfranchisement. "

Victories of the NAACP again may in comparison with later achievements appear insignificant but their symbolic importance can be viewed as equal to those events that became before them in terms of their importance as the first step on the ladder. In 1938 the Supreme Court ruled that Lloyd I. Gains a young black man should be admitted to the University of Missouri Law School because no law school for blacks existed within his state. This was an "implicit challenge to the segregation system" 14 and can be seen as a direct victory of the NAACP, and for me was a result directly of the New deal and the new wave of action inspired by this deal.

This time the Conservative states reacted, they joined with many liberals how feared increased federal intervention. Roosevelt had little choice but to appease if he was to pass laws. The new dealers would not simply accept this and drew up, " The Report on the Economic Conditions of the South" 15 it was central to the black rights cause during the ensuing period. Written by Foreman, Clifford Dunn and Arthur Raper it was a clear and precise articulation of the problems of the southern states.

The paper argued that " the south required a break from the defensive sectionalism of the past and the static political system it supported. They believed through an active and informed electorate were necessary for the advancement of the general welfare of the region with this also came and emphasis upon expanded federal assistance. There was also a strong emphasis upon the elimination of segregation and disfranchisement. In November 1938 southern supporters of the New Deal along with representative of the CIO convened a mass meeting in Birmingham to

consider the implications of the report. They established the southern conference for human welfare (SCHW).

The organization was highly influential throughout the war time period heading policies relating to the enfranchisement of all citizens whilst also broadening participation amongst those how could vote. The securing of federal legislation in order to abolish the poll tax was for them the first step. They also later concerned they self with huge campaigns though the south to encourage voter registration. This early work layer the foundation for the later enfranchisement of all Citizens. As the war started and the race war still continued but in a climate with new hostility and passion.

The War acted as a period of increased hostility between white power groups and the black civil right protesters. These conflicts turned the peaceful education of the NAACP into a war with guns and death. The race riots are often seen as an early foundation of Black Power. The development of which over the next 20 years lead to Malcolm X and the Black Panther's formation. During the war the movement was able to achieve the Employment Practices Committee. An organization established along side the removal of segregation within the army.

This was achieved via the threat of a march of Washington and although reluctant Randolph believed it to be the lesser of two evils. A step described by Bethune as " a refreshing shower in a thirsty land". The World War was a fight against Evil of Fascism and for the cause of freedom. This acted to uncover the fundamental contradiction of the sanctioned racial

discrimination of the federal state and the quest for freedom and human dignity. The " Double V" campaign acted to encourage of peace and freedom at home and abroad was highly useful to the cause of the civil rights movements.

Unless civil rights were granted the government would be clearly labelled hypocrites. The war, according to an NAACP official, " caused the Negro to change almost instantly " from a fundamentally defensive attitude to one of offence," I believe the New Deal and Second World wars provided the facilities through which organization were able to organize and educate a politically active community of black citizens all desiring equal civil liberties. A community that was so large and so politically conscious that nothing could stand in their way.

The battle was only just beginning but in many ways it had already been won. Membership figures are a tribute to the NAACP and how they had managed to take the situation created by the New Deal and translate that into active political protest, in 1940 but by 1946 the membership was 400, 000. The increase in size of the NAACP was not simply a result of the New Deal and the War but also the organisation redefinition of itself, as a middle class organisation working within rather than outside the parameters of the law. This brought respect and legitimacy to the cause.

The NAACP methods were later applied by Martin Luther King. Black women said " the stopper had been removed from the flood gate and it couldn't be but back again. " Therefore any later individual couldn't have had a more

significant effect as rights were insured early. Martin Luther King was a Christian, he had a degree in PhD in Philosophy. He believed in the importance of love yet he found the Christian message telling him to "turn the other cheek" as problematic. As this virtually dictated that he should not oppose racial oppression, something he was unwilling to accept.

Instead he adopted the principles set down by Mahatma Gandhi in particular his concept of "satyagraha" 16, which means truth-force or love-force. He realized that "the Christian doctrine of love operating through the Gandhian method of nonviolence was one of the most "potent weapons available to oppressed people in their struggle for freedom" 17. The dominant philosophy at the Foundation era of the 1930's and 1940's was that that of Charles Houston. Although both Houston and King view peace as the best method of attaining change, they differ according to their view of how peaceful protest should be executed.

Houston viewing legal system as the means through which change could be attained. He proposed that the system could be changed from within. Martin Luther King on the other hand viewed change as attainable only through non-violent protest outside of the political system's in place. The term non-violent protest simplifies the intellectual features of King's philosophy. He believed certain things to be right and other wrong, and that human are positioned at either side of this divide. This doesn't mean that those on the side of evil are evil they simply need to be won over through rational argument.

We see his philosophy come into action at the Montgomery bus boycott. King saw Rosa Park's refusal to give up her seat as the spark that ignited a spark under the black community of Montgomery and united them together. King adopted boycott as the best means of attaining change. This philosophy proved to be successful for blacks, not only to end bus segregation, but also resulted in less racial anger than if they had forced the action through more aggressive means. Martin Luther King's ideology developed in Montgomery.

He believed that Black and those who support equal civil rights should not participate in the system which oppresses them. This led him to conclude that protest should be firstly peaceful and secondly outside the parameters of the system being opposed. The Montgomery bus boycott, was the beginning of Martin Luther King and the civil rights movement transition from working within to working outside the processes which constrained them. After his success in Montgomery King established "The Southern Christian Leadership Conference" an organization in the south which acted as a base for his protest.

He would lecture all over the USA often meeting with other black civil-rights and religious leaders in order to discuss issues and problems. King became as a result of his travels and discussions increasingly confirmed to the idea that "nonviolent resistance was the most potent weapon available to oppressed people in their struggle for freedom." 18 In Greensboro North Carolina, February 1960, black students began a sit-in, planned to last for six months, at a lunch counter reserved only for whites.

The sit-in movement spread rapidly to the entire south of America, and proved to be extremely successful in desegregating restaurants, shops, hotels, theatres and parks. King had a view that the " Christian ethic of love is the best weapon available to Negroes for this struggle for freedom and human dignity. " 19 This is again evidence of the successful nature of Kings non- violence protests. In 1963 a March on Birmingham, Alabama Birmingham, Alabama was nicknamed " Bombingham" as some 17 bombings of black church's within only 6 years had taken place.

This area was also one of the most segregated regions in the US and was therefore a place highly suited this type of protest. Local clergymen, mostly white, stood up against the march, condemning the demonstrations and King in particular. During the March King, was jailed, it was now that he wrote his " Letter from Birmingham City Jail" dealing with the comments of the White clergy of Birmingham. " Non-violent direct action seeks to create such a crisis and establish such creative tension that a community that has constantly refused to negotiate is forced to confront the issue. "

The same year he organized a march on Washington in order to pressure congress and the president to pass the civil rights Bill. Unemployment and poor opportunities in ever walk of life for blacks. Nearly one quarter of a million people filled the Mall in Washington. Surprisingly and perhaps most significantly 20% of all attending were white. King delivered an image of justice and racial harmony is such " bold and vivid" 20 way that it captured the hearts of even more Americans. The crowning glory of Kings Policy was the passing of the 1964 Passage of the Civil Rights Act by President Johnson.

It authorized the federal government to enforce desegregation of public facilities as well as making illegal any discrimination in employment. Selma to Montgomery, Alabama March this march attempted to remove the insidious barriers that prevented Black Americans from registering to vote. This was met with violent reprisal from Police that used " tear gas, bull whips and night-sticks. " 21 This display of unprovoked police brutality meant that the next day on March 21, a hundred National Guardsmen were brought in to protect the demonstrators from injury.