

Federal government and supreme court assignment



How far was the federal government and Supreme Court responsible for changes to the status of Black African Americans? The federal government and the Supreme court were responsible for some of the changes in the status of black African Americans, however this was mostly through pressure from other factors such as from presidents, mass action and civil rights leaders such as Martin Luther King, which had a far greater impact than through their own initiatives. These other factors, especially mass action were much more important. The government's job was to carry through and vote on the decisions made by the presidents during this time.

However in many cases the presidents were pushing for new legislation on civil rights to improve the lives of black African Americans which the government and congress tried to hold back. One member of congress filibustered for more than 24 hours against improvements to civil rights. This was a representation of many members of congress who were racist and so personally opposed to any improvements in the lives of black people. On the other hand some legislation such as the 1964 civil rights act was passed and couldn't have been without the support of congress and the government.

The Supreme Court gave rulings that could change the interpretation of laws regarding civil rights. The Plessy vs. Ferguson ruling had led to a view of 'separate but equal' that was eventually overturned by the ruling of Brown vs. The Board of Education. It led to schools being desegregated, and meant that many children no longer had to go to vastly unequally funded schools. The Morgan vs. Virginia case led to the desegregation of public transport. However many of these rulings did not lead to de facto changes

with the same speed as people had hoped they would, or with the same speed as the *Shelby County v. Holder* ruling.

Eventually there was even a second *Brown vs. The Board Of Education* case where it was decided that as only 750 out of 6300 schools had desegregated they should begin to desegregate with “deliberate speed”. However this too had little effect. Overall the government and the supreme court did very little to change the status of black African Americans, congress actually hindered the introduction of civil rights legislation in many cases and the rulings of the supreme court had little effect. Another important factor was the influence of the presidents.

President Truman (1945-1953) commissioned the report “To Secure these Rights” which highlighted many of the problems faced by black African Americans and offered potential solutions, such as the removal of the grandfather clauses to allow more people to be able to vote. President Eisenhower (1953 – 1961) believed that changing the laws regarding civil rights would not help as it would not change the minds of those who were racist. During his presidency the 1957 and 1960 civil rights acts were passed which allowed more people to vote.

President Kennedy (1961-1963) was appalled by the acts of racist violence he witnessed at the Freedom Rides and Birmingham bus boycott. This act was completed by Johnson (1963-1969) after his death. It stopped discrimination based on race, color or gender. As well as this Johnson passed the Voting Rights Act in 1965 which outlawed discrimination in voting.

Despite his initially fairly supportive stance on civil rights, until Martin Luther King publicly spoke out against the Vietnam War.

All of the presidents were, although generally supportive of the ideals, did not agree with the methods used by the civil rights movement. Overall, with more support from the presidents more change could have been achieved, however it was due to the presidents that black African Americans experienced a certain amount of change, through the introduction of the 1964 civil rights act and through more public support such as Kennedy's appointment of black people to prominent positions within the government, such as Judges. Martin Luther King was another important factor in the improvement of the status of black African Americans.

His role as a civil rights leader of several campaigns and as a figurehead for the movement led to a massive increase in support for the cause. He was a major part in the organization of the Montgomery Bus Boycott in 1955 and caused the bus companies to lose such a significant portion of their revenue that began to enforce the integration of the buses. As well as this 250,000 people gathered, both black and white, to hear his famous 'I have a dream' speech at the March on Washington showing how much support his role as a figurehead brought the cause.

However he didn't actually organize that many campaigns, and got credit for doing so anyway, when there were other people leading civil rights groups doing equally as much, or more work than he was, that just were not as famous as him. As well as this his northern campaigns, such as the ones in Chicago were failures, due to their break down in violence on both sides.

Overall the support he raised for the cause massively changed the status of black African Americans, however some of his campaigns reflected negatively on the movement and he received undue credit.

The last and most important factor was mass action, because none of the campaigns that led to change in the status of black African Americans would have had as much effect without the masses of people supporting them to draw attention to the issue they wanted to change. If 85% of the black population of Montgomery Alabama hadn't boycotted the buses the loss of revenue wouldn't have moved the bus companies into enforcing the desegregation of the buses.

If 70,000 people hadn't taken part in the sit-ins they wouldn't have had the same impact. Martin Luther King's 'I have a dream' speech would not have become so famous, or had such an effect, if 250,000 people had gathered to listen. However in some cases, such as the Selma and Chicago campaigns, mass action had a bad effect, as the masses turned violent, and so the sheer numbers made the failure of these campaigns seem even worse, and gave the movement a bad public image.

Overall mass action led to a huge amount of change for the status of black African Americans because the more people who were involved, the more weight given to the campaigns, and more media attention brought the campaigns and the issues faced by black African Americans. In conclusion, mass action was the most important factor because it was what gave all the campaigns such a significance, as well as adding to the importance of the other factors.