

The black power
political movement
among black
americans history
essay



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Black Power was a political movement among black Americans in the late sixties and early seventies. Black Power emphasized the expression of a new racial consciousness among blacks in the United States. It means that black people started to bond together so they could protect their own welfare and to obtain autonomy to a certain degree.

Black power stands for a range of political goals such as stopping racial oppression, the establishment of separate social institutions and a self-sufficient economy. The Black Power movement encourages the idea of a total black society which is called “separatism”. The first time the term Black Power was used is in the book “Black Power” by Richard Wright.

The first popular use of the term Black Power was by Stokely Carmichael after James Meredith got shot. He said: “This is the twenty-seventh time I have been arrested and I ain’t going to jail no more! The only way we gonna stop them white men from whuppin’ us is to take over. What we gonna start sayin’ now is Black Power!”

The Black Power movement in the U. S. started when people from the SNCC were becoming critical non-violent approach against racism. Martin Luther King was one of the most important persons in the non-violent approach. The members of the SNCC were younger than the members in other organisations, and became more militant and aggressive than the other organisations. The SNCC’s point of view was, if the white people use violence to suppress us why can’t we use violence to show our point of view. An increasing amount of youth started to take SNCC’s point of view, and rejected their elders non-violent way of protesting. Frederick Douglass wrote: “Those who profess to

favor freedom, and yet depreciate agitation, are men who want crops without plowing up the ground. They want rain without thunder and lightning. They want the ocean without the awful roar of its many waters. ... Power concedes nothing without demand. It never did and it never will.”

The Black Power movement had a big impact on the society that exists today. It helped black people to start their own groups that didn't depend on the white people. It didn't solve all problems the Afro-Americans had, but it did start a new way of thinking. The U. S. citizens started to see that black people were human as well and that they should have equal rights.

1968 Olympics Black Power salute

The 1968 Olympics black power salute was a protest done by Tommie Smith and John Carlos at the 1968 Olympics in Mexico City. At 17 October 1968 Tommie Smith won the 200m race in a world record, and John Carlos became third. Tommie and John decided that they wanted to make a political statement and both came only wearing black socks instead of shoes. This was to show black poverty. They also wore black gloves, and after receiving the medals they made the Black Power sign by raising their gloved fist in the air. When they left the podium they were booed at by the public. Tommie later said: “ If I win, I am American, not a black American. But if I did something bad, then they would say I am a Negro. We are black and we are proud of being black. Black America will understand what we did tonight.”

It is still one of the most effective political statements made at the Olympics.

The International Olympics Committee's president didn't like what the athletes had done, he said that political statements were not meant for the apolitical Olympics. He decided to ban the 2 athletes from the Olympics. The US Olympic Committee refused, but the IOC threatened to ban the whole US track team. So the athletes got banned anyway. A spokesman for the IOC said it was " a deliberate and violent breach of the fundamental principles of the Olympic spirit."

After returning home the athletes got criticized by a lot of people, and their families got several death threats. Smith continued athletics and when his career ended he became an assistant-professor at the Oberlin college. In 1999 he was awarded with the California Black Sportsman of the millennium award. Carlos continued Athletics as well, and he managed to get the 100 yard dash world record. But in 1970 he got a knee injury which ended his career.

The person that finished second, Peter Norman, supported the statement smith and Carlos made, and he got reprimanded by the Australian Olympic Committee and he got heavily criticized by the Australian media. He didn't get picked for the Olympics of 1972 but he kept running. In 1985 he ripped his Achilles he had to stop running and he got into a depression. He started drinking and using drugs. In 2006 he died by a heart-attack, Smith and Carlos were pallbearers at his funeral.

Important persons

Malcolm X (May 19, 1925 – February 21, 1965)

Malcolm was an African-American Muslim, and is seen as one of the most influential and greatest African-American in history. To his followers he was an advocate for the rights of the African-Americans, and to his opponents he was a racist, anti-Semite and a preacher of black-supremacy. Malcolm was born in Omaha, Nebraska. The time he spent there had a big influence on the rest of his life. His father died when he was thirteen years old and his mother was sent to a mental hospital. Malcolm became involved with criminal activities and was sentenced 8 years in prison. In the prison he got involved with an organisation called "Nation of Islam". And after his parole he got to be one of the spokesmen of the organisation. During this period he got to meet a lot of political leaders and became well-known. After a dispute with the leader of Nation of Islam, Elijah Muhammad, Malcolm quit the organisation. Only 1 year later Malcolm got assassinated by members of the Nation of Islam, and he died at the age of 39. Malcolm's most known quote was "By any means necessary".

Huey Percy Newton (February 17, 1942 – August 22, 1989)

Huey was a political activist that founded the Black Panther Party. He was born in Louisiana and the youngest in a family with seven children. In 1945 he and his family moved to Oakland, California. He graduated at the Oakland Technical Highschool, and it was during that period he got more interested in politics. After reading the book "Republic" by Plato he decided that he wanted to become a political leader. Newton became involved in local politics and he became a member of the Afro-American Association. He and a friend of his, Bobby Seal, decided to establish an organisation called "

Black Panther Party". They started a number of social projects in Oakland
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such as the Oakland Community College. That was a school where 150 children from urban neighbourhoods got high-levelled education. One of the Black Panther Party's most known projects was armed citizens' patrols; these were patrols that

checked the behaviour of police officers. Officer John Frey tried to stop these patrols and disarm the patrols. He arrested Newton. When another officer arrived the shooting started and all 3 got wounded. Witnesses claimed that Newton shot Frey with Frey's pistol. Newton said that after Frey shot him he lost consciousness, so he couldn't have done it. Frey took four bullets in the chest and died within an hour, Newton and the other officer survived.

Newton was sentenced 2-15 years, but in 1970 the California Appellate Court reversed the conviction and asked for a new trial. The California Appellate Court dropped the case and Newton was free to go. In 1989 Newton got shot by a drug dealer while trying to obtain some crack. Newton's last words, as he stood facing his killer, were, " You can kill my body, but you can't kill my soul. My soul will live forever!"

Marcus Mosiah Garvey, Jr. (17 August 1887 – 10 June 1940)

Marcus was a Jamaican journalist and was a supporter of black power. He founded the Universal Negro Improvement Association and African Communities League (UNIA-ACL). He started a philosophy that inspired a global mass movement, the philosophy is called Garveyism. The intent of the movement was that the African ancestors should take Africa back and that the Europe powers left Africa. Marcus was convinced that the only way to improve the circumstances black people lived in, was to unite all black

people. In 1941 he founded the Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA). The goal of this organisation was to unite all of African's ancestors and create one big black country with a government of its own. He thought Liberia would be a good country to start with and they started building universities and hospitals there. After a few years the project had to stop, the Europe powers that had interests in Liberia didn't like the plan Marcus had. Marcus died in 1940 by 2 strokes, however rumours say that he got poisoned. His most known quote was: " Our union must know no clime, boundary, or nationality... let us hold together under all climes and in every country".