

History of civil rights in america



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The history of civil rights can be attributed to the slavery business that took place sometimes back in the 17th century. To be precise, this business started in North America at Jamestown, Virginia in may 1607. It was the severity of the harshness that was directed to the slaves by their colonial masters that precipitated to the demand for civil rights. This chapter of civil rights was closed with the enactment of civil rights act of 1964 which was spearheaded by Martin Luther King junior. Civil rights trace their origin to slavery when slaves were mistreated by their masters.

Slavery as I mentioned earlier, started in Jamestown, Virginia in a place where there were a lot of hills and climate was totally unfriendly. Here human slaves could not survive. It is because of the harshness of this environment that there appeared one of the great sectional differences in American history. This happened because the north stopped relying on slaves and started harnessing the Yeoman laborers who mostly worked for money freely without being forced to work in these plantations but on the other hand, the southerners who totally relied on slaves were against the moves being advanced by the North.

The Africans who were got from Central and Southern Africa (Feelings T. , 1995) were taken in chains to what later came to be referred to as the southern United States. They provided cheap and reliable labor as well ad agricultural products to the southern America. They were the main contributors to the economic growth of the South. During the independence declaration period in 1776, there were about half a million blacks in American colonies. The agitation for human rights started when Thomas

Jefferson who dealt with slaves in Virginia condemned the human slave trade.

His sentiments were downplayed so as to win support of the Southern colonies in the fight against Great Britain. The issue of slavery was confronted well in USA 20 years after the constitution was drafted. This happened in Pennsylvania in the summer of 1787 when the federal constitution was being drawn. It was agreed that slavery would continue on condition that each slave would be counted as 3/5 of a person for the sake of knowing the number of representatives each state could have in the lower house, the national congress and in the house of representatives.

The gap between the South and the North continued to widen all through the 1800s due to the issue of slavery. As new colonies were expanded to the West across the North America, severe political battles were fought. Finally in 1860 after Abraham Lincoln was chosen to be the president of America, the southern states pulled themselves away from the union than risk witnessing slavery institution being abolished by the U. S congress in Washington. Lincoln refused to let the South to continue to enjoy slavery. He refused them to go in their own direction in peace and this resulted to the eruption of the civil war between the South and the North.

Those in the south colonies were much afraid of the eventual emancipation of slaves (Brion D. D. , 2003) After the civil war, another wave came into place which was called the Reconstruction period that started from 1865 up to 1877. This period was geared towards solving political, social and economic problems that were brought about by the American civil war. After Lincoln Abraham was assassinated in April 1865, Andrew Johnson further

alienated the congress by furthering Lincoln's policies which were seen as moderate. He led to the passage of the 14th congress amendment so as the blacks should be seen as USA citizens.

This move was ratified in 1966 though the majority of southern colonies rejected it. Despite all the resistance from the Southern colonies, the North managed to win in the 1866 congress election. It is this victory that ushered in the era of reconstruction period which is sometimes called the radical reconstruction period that lasted for ten years. Under this 1866 registration, the ten remaining southern colonies were divided in to 5 military districts that were to be supervised by the USA army. Later they were all readmitted.

Before admission in to the union each state had to accept the 14th amendment or if any state was re-admitted after the passage of the 14th constitutional amendment, then they were forced to accept the 15th constitutional amendment that guaranteed the freedom of all freedmen. The ruling government which was basically republican in character it was made up of African Americans or the blacks, the northerners or what was called the carpet baggers and the southerners and the southerners who collaborated with the republicans or what was referred who collaborated with the republicans.

The southerners that were white refused to recognize their counterparts from the north and continued showing them open hostility and totally opposed their moves. The reconstruction period can be divided in to 3 phases namely: Presidential Reconstruction (1863 to 1866) that was spearheaded by Abraham Lincoln; the second one was Congressional Reconstruction 1866-73. This was all about civil rights and voting rights for

the freedmen. The 3rd phase was called the Redemption Period (1873-1877) that was steered by the southern democrats who referred to themselves as Redeemers.

They defeated the republicans and assumed control of the southern states marking the end of the reconstruction period. After this reconstruction period, what resulted was the Jim Crow era. These laws were laws that imposed racial segregation. They were mainly applied in the South and they were got from the black codes that were used from 1865 to 1866 and from prewar-segregation on railroads cars. The blacks enjoyed the rights that had been passed during the reconstruction period in the 13th 14th and 15th amendments and the civil rights act of 1875.

Jim Crow laws (Brion D. D. , 2003) were enacted in the USA and were in use as from 1876 and what they meant is that African Americans were to be separated from whites though they were to be seen as equal to them in terms of their status. What this meant is that they received treatment that was different from that of the whites. They were seen as inferior to the whites. These laws and rules demanded that there should be separate buildings, restaurants and toilets in schools, recreational places and in public transportation; one for the blacks and the other one for the whites.

The Jim Crow rules were different from black codes in that the later were against the civil rights and liberties of blacks in America. A good example of where Jim Crow laws were applied is in Alabama where all passengers' stations were to have two separate waiting rooms and tickets windows, one for the whites and the other one for the colored races. Another example is of Arkansas where from 1884-1947 marriage between the whites or any other

relationship between whites and mulattoes or the blacks was totally prohibited.

Also from 1891-1959, washroom in mines rail travel, buses or simply in all public transport, they were separated between the whites and the blacks. This also applied in schools, hospitals and in colleges. The same case applied in Florida where marriage between the whites and the blacks was not condoned and children for the whites were to be treated separately from the blacks. In Georgia no person was supposed to serve the whites and blacks in one room or even serve the two races under one license. In Louisiana, nobody was allowed to rent a building or a room to a white when the other rooms were being occupied by the other race or vice versa.

If you were convicted of committing this crime, you were to be punished by paying a fine of not less than twenty five US dollars and not beyond hundred US dollars. These laws were also applied in Mississippi, Maryland, Missouri, New Mexico, North Carolina, Oklahoma South Carolina, Texas, and in Virginia. These laws that were passed by the Redeemer government after the end of reconstruction period were reinforced and formalized during the progressive era by the then president of USA Woodrow Wilson in 1913. After 1945, the civil rights movement which was geared towards elimination of Jim Crow rules gained a new impetus.

They started using various federal courts in the continent to confront those laws that were applied and reinforced by a group of secret organization or a group that referred itself as the Klu Klux Klan. These men lynched, tortured and punished those blacks who contravened the rule of law. These laws started being attacked properly in 1954 when the supreme court of America

declared segregation in all public schools as unconstitutional or illegally mandated. This move began in 1950 when the NAACP their attorneys worked on a case of desegregation in school in Charleston S. C. his was heard together with other similar cases from Delaware, Virginia, Kansas as well as from the district of Columbia under one blanket cover-brown vs. board of education of Topeka.

Here the NAACP lawyers and Thurgood marshal argued and condemned segregation in schools up to the end. Finally they won this case. In 1954 Brown school and the board of officials in little rock school board decided to have Central High School desegregated in 1957 and the governor of Arkansas, Orval Faubus ordered his national guards to support the board in keeping the African American students away from school.

However, President Eisenhower sent his federal guards and paratroopers to reinforce the desegregation orders of the federal courts in 1957. In 1955, the civil rights movement was staged and dubbed as the Montgomery bus boycott. This was both a political and social protest against the city's policy of bus segregation. This sparked off on 1st December 1955 when Rosa Parks refused to give her seat to a white man on a city bus for this reason, Parks was arrested for defying this social etiquette and this led to the eruption of the modern civil rights movement.

This bus boycott case helped in confronting the segregation laws by opening a wave of protest across the South (Hossel K. P. , 2005) During this Montgomery bus boycott, all those people who were affected by these segregation laws refused too ride in those segregated buses which were the only means of transport. These people had to sacrifice themselves to walk

for long miles in harsh weather rather than go on buses. Also in 1960 four freshmen students from North Carolina agricultural and technical college went to the F. W Woolworth store. They sat quietly waiting to be served but they were not served.

In the following day they came with 25 more students. Weeks later, similar demonstration erupted elsewhere. At Shaw University in North Carolina, students formed SNCC or student's non-violent coordinating committee. In 1960s there were freedom riders who were organized by CORE: Congress of Racial Equality. The move sought to promote integration of bus, rail as well as airport terminals. On August 28, 1963 (Haskins J. , 2004) all the blacks marched to Washington in an effort to draw the nation's attention. It is here that the most revered preacher Dr. Martin Luther King junior that he delivered his ' I have a dream' speech.

In 1965 voting rights act was created which elevated the status of black American after the 1964 civil rights act. From this paper, we can conclude by saying that were it not for the constant pressure from the blacks in the fight for their civil rights, then blacks in America would be slaves and oppressed just like in the past. The more they aired their grievances to the federal government, the more their lives positively changed, it all started with the abolition of slavery then separate but equal and finally as free and equal citizens in 1964 while in 1965 they got their right to vote. It is this right that politically changed their lives.