The Civil Rights Movement

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**Introduction**

The Civil Rights Movement is, without a doubt, a highly significant and important chapter of US History. It took place in the mid-20th century (the 1950s-1960s), and its main purpose was to gain equal rights and privileges for the African-Americans of the United States, crudely referred to as "Blacks." Although President Abraham Lincoln had abolished Slavery after winning the Civil War, the misery of the Blacks was nowhere near its end. They continued to be treated as Second-Class citizens, especially in the Southern States. After suffering long enough, they rose up for their rights, with the help of a significant section of the "White Population." The terms such as "Black Power" and "Black is Beautiful" (Henderson, 2018) were coined by the participants of this movement to elevate the position and morale of the Blacks for adding momentum to their struggle.

**Discussion**

# The Foundation

After the start of Reconstruction, the Blacks helped the US to stand on its feet to overcome the devastations of the Civil War (1863- 1877). They held many keys positions as Slavery was abolished by President Abraham Lincoln. The tide seemed to be turning for the Blacks when the Fourteenth Amendment (1868) was passed, officially giving the Blacks equal protection under the US Laws. The Fifteenth Amendment (1870) cemented their position even further after Blacks were granted the right to vote, something that was only reserved for the property-owning Whites. These Privileges were making the “Whites of the South” edgy, as they had once commanded these slaves. They hated to see them becoming there equal.

In order to curtail the progress of liberties of the Blacks and roll back the progress made in the social status of the Blacks, a series of laws were passed by the Whites called the Jim Crow Laws (1896). These laws prohibited Blacks from using the same public services as Whites (McMillen, 1989). The blacks could not go to the same schools; they had to go to the designated "Black Section" of the public buses, even if they were overcrowded. Interracial marriage was declared illegal to "maintain purity" of the white race. To add insult to injury, a voter literacy test was introduced so that most Blacks would not vote in the Elections. Thankfully, these Laws were limited to the Southern States, as the Northern states were generally against Slavery. But the Blacks still experienced discriminatory behavior when they tried to buy any property or get an educational degree. Moreover, the Supreme Court ruling of Plessy vs. Ferguson (1896) completely isolated the Whites from Blacks. To simply put it, the Blacks were thrown into the pit that they worked to climb out of and better their lives and futures.

## World War II and Civil Rights

Lack of educational opportunities combined with discriminatory behavior with the Blacks made sure that they got only low wage jobs like factory laborers, farmers, or domestic servants. As 1939 saw the start of World War II, the war-related jobs became abundant. But, as expected, the blacks were left out of the race. They did not get any lucrative jobs, and they were disheartened to join the US Armed forces. This forced the Blacks to march to the Capitol for their rights and demands. This forced President Franklin D. Roosevelt (FDR) to issue a declaration called Executive Order 8802 on June 25th, 1941. The declaration granted equal opportunities to all US citizens to participate in the National Defense jobs regardless of their racial or national origin as long as they were declared US Citizens. Despite unequal treatment by their peers, the Black men and women made a great impact during the course of World War II. The Tuskegee Airmen made history as the first Black Aviation Unit to more than 150 Flying Crosses, cementing their place in the Aviation History. Sadly, the jargon of American Democracy proved to be a hoax as Black Veterans and Martyrs gained no respect in the eyes of their Uncolored Countrymen.

However, the luck of the Blacks would soon change. As the Cold War loomed onto the Global Political Landscape, The US Government introduced a civil rights agenda in order to justify their narrative against the Soviet Union's Political System. The Presidential Executive Order 9981 ended racial differences completely in the US Armed Forces. These events laid the foundations for the anti-racial lawmaking, adding to the Civil Rights Movement.

## The Rosa Parks Incident

As mentioned above, the Blacks could only sit at their designated spaces on a public bus. Also, the Blacks were supposed to give their seats to any White citizen if he could not find any seat in their section. Little could one know that a bus seat could create the biggest civil rights movement in the US. It is important to mention that Rosa Parks declined to step away from her seat for a White male on December 1st, 1995 (Parks, 1997). She was detained for this offense by the local law enforcement. As the news of her arrest spread throughout Montgomery (Alabama), she transformed into the leading character of the Civil Rights Movement. The prominent leaders of African Americans formed the Montgomery Improvement Association (MIA) led by the notorious Martin Luther King Jr., a position that will itch his name forever in the history of the Civil Rights Movement. The Rosa Parks Incident encouraged the MIA to totally boycott the Montgomery Bus System, which continued for 381 days. This forced the US Supreme Court to remove the separate seating laws, declaring them unconstitutional.

### Little Rock Nine Incident

After the success of the MIA in the Rosa Parks Incident, there was no turning back for the Blacks. In 1954, the US Supreme Court declared separate black and white sections illegal in public schools (Brown vs. Board of Education). This resulted in an experiment. In 1957, a White administrated High School in Little Rock (Arkansas) admitted nine Black students, remembered in US History as Little Rock Nine. Upon their arrival at Central High School, they were met with vigorous opposition. The Governor of Arkansas, Orval Faubus, ordered the National Guard to stop the Little Rock Nine. The latter managed to get inside the school in a fortnight, but they were later removed for fear of their physical safety. Finally, President Eisenhower interfered and ordered federal law enforcement to prove security detail to the Little Rock Nine inside the Central High School. The students, however, managed to stay despite the hostile behavior from their fellow students. This issue managed to highlight the issue faced by the Blacks, resulting in a further feud between both parties.

### Civil Rights Act (1957)

The voter literacy test implemented in the Southern States makes it difficult for Blacks to exercise their right to vote. The test was designed in such a way that it made it near impossible for the Blacks to pass. President Eisenhower pressured the Congress to consider a new civil rights legislation in order to show his seriousness and support towards the Civil Rights Movement (Hall, 2005). Finally, on September 9th, 1957, President Eisenhower enforced The Civil Rights Act (1957), guaranteeing the right to vote for the Black Community in the Southern States. This was a major victory for the Blacks since the Reconstruction Era. Voter frauds against the Blacks were also thoroughly investigated under this Act.

## Freedom Riders

On May 4th, 1961, a group of thirteen people christening themselves as the “Freedom Riders” started their journey on a bus in Washington, DC, in order to eliminate separate bus sections for the Blacks and Whites. They consisted of seven Blacks and six Whites. After facing problems from the Whites and Police, they became the center of attention internationally. When the bus reached Anniston (Alabama), a mob threw a bomb on the bus, injuring the Freedom Riders. The bus driver bailed, and the Attorney General, Robert F. Kennedy, had to find a replacement with the help of the Alabama Governor John Patterson. The Kennedy Administration applied pressure steady on the Interstate Commerce Commission, which resulted in the abolishment of segregation of sections on all bus terminals.

## Civil Rights Act (1964) and Assassinations

On August 28th, 1963, the “March on Washington” was planned by prominent Black Leaders like Bayard Rustin and Martin Luther King Jr. It was a rousing success. Almost 200,000 people attended the march. It was where the notorious "I Have a Dream" speech was given, which laid the foundation for impartiality among the people, both White and Black. This march made President Johnson enforce the Civil Rights Act (1964). This Act granted equal rights to Blacks in employment opportunities and combined public facilities. It also curtailed the use of voter literacy tests. The Act was further strengthened when President Johnson enforced the Voting Rights Act (1965). This law barred voter literacy tests completely.

The Civil Rights Movement, however, acquired an unexpected and vicious turn after the above-mentioned advances and successes. On February 21st, 1965, former leader of an organization called Nation of Islam, Malcolm X (Malcolm X, 2015), was murdered at a rally. The further tragic incident occurred in the form of the assassination of Nobel laureate, Martin Luther King Jr. (Carson, 2001). It had an opposite effect to what was intended by the assassins. Instead of striking fear in the hearts of Blacks, the Civil Rights Movement further strengthened, making President Johnson obliged to enact further legislation in favor of the Blacks.

**Conclusion**

The Civil Rights Movement was a turning point for Blacks of the United States. Their struggles, efforts, and sacrifices brought an end to inhumane laws enacted against the African- American Community, especially in the Southern States. The Blacks, who were denied their right to vote, witnessed the rise of the First Black President Barack H. Obama, which was hailed by the world as the glorious achievement of the American Democracy. The Black finally won their rights in society, ending discriminatory practices against them.

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