



Large-Scale State – The USA, 1918-1968

**Black Americans: addressing inequality - the
Civil Rights movement and Black Power**

The Jazz Age

The social, economic and political status of the Blacks in the 1920s and 1930s

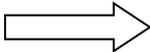
In the 'land of the free' the 10.5 million Black people living in the USA in 1920 suffered discrimination in the northern states and the indignity of segregation in the South where they were denied equal rights and opportunities. They faced the barbarism of the Ku Klux Klan, middle class hostility to black labour, were amongst the poorest in the nation and had virtually no political say in how their country was governed. However, the 1920s also saw the development of Black consciousness as well as a Black cultural explosion.

Conditions in the South

Following a ruling in the 1890s by the Supreme Court, many states in the South began to rewrite their constitutions by excluding Blacks from the political process. Measures included:

- Segregation
- Denying Blacks the right to vote – in Alabama in 1900, 180,000 Blacks were eligible to vote. In 1902 the number was only 3,000
- Violence and terror. Lynching became common.

The paragraph on the right is an extract from the American Declaration of Independence, which was written in 1776.



We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.

This is what it means



We believe that all people in America are equal and have the same rights to live, to be free and to be happy. Nobody can take these rights away from people in America.



George Washington,
the first US President

**Source A: Free at Last? Intermediate II
support material, 38**

Plessey v Ferguson: Separate but equal

The treatment of Black people in America was difficult due to a decision of the Supreme Court. In 1892 a Black man called Homer Plessey, who lived in the Southern state of Louisiana, sat on a railway seat reserved for White people. He was asked to move to the black section of the train. He refused and was arrested. Eventually the case went to the Supreme Court where Plessey argued that the State of Louisiana had broken the 14th Amendment that said that black people should have full civil liberties which included their right to freedom and should be treated by law in the same way as Whites. However, the Supreme Court reached a decision that was to affect race relations in the USA for the next 60 years. The Supreme Court agreed that the 14th Amendment was to make sure that Blacks were treated by law in the same way as Whites but the Supreme Court said “Laws which keep the races apart do not mean that one race is better or worse than the other.”

In other words it was perfectly acceptable for Black and White people to be kept separate as long as equal facilities were provided for each race. The decision of the Supreme Court was called **‘the separate but equal’** decision.

What were the Jim Crow laws?

The name given to all laws that were intended to keep Blacks and Whites separate was the ‘Jim Crow’ laws. They were named after a white stage performer called Jim Crow who used to dress up as a black man and make a fool of black people by showing them as stupid, lazy and unreliable. Southern State Governments could produce any Jim Crow law they wanted. For example, such laws ordered that there should be separate seating on railway trains, waiting rooms at railway stations, buses, schools, churches, wards in hospitals and public fountains and even separate cemeteries.

Source B: Editor of *The Charleston News*, 1890s

If there must be Jim Crow railway carriages then there should be Jim Crow trams on the streets...also on passenger boats. There should be Jim Crow waiting rooms at the stations and Jim Crow eating places...In courts there should be Jim Crow sections in the jury boxes and a separate Jim Crow witness stand and even a Jim Crow Bible for coloured witnesses to kiss.

But a few months later the same editor wrote another article in the newspaper.

What I obviously thought was stupid and ridiculous in a short space of time became reality. All the things I thought were so outrageous have now been accepted as normal – even the Jim Crow Bible! What was insanity is now sane!

In the 1920s racial tension increased and the State Governments further extended the Jim Crow laws:

- South Carolina passed legislation that made it illegal for Black and White textile workers to use the same doorways, bathrooms or canteens. Many cities passed laws prohibiting Blacks from using public parks.
- In 1926, Atlanta banned Black barbers from cutting the hair of White women and children
- Segregation was entering into all parts of life. Segregation was inevitably backed up by the use of force.
- To vote in the Southern states you had to register. There were a number of means of preventing Blacks from registering, i.e. a poll tax stopped many Blacks because they were so poor. Literacy tests were also used as a means of discrimination.

Segregation had become more respectable in the USA. This did not change until 1954. In 1916 Black protestors complained to President Woodrow Wilson about the segregation of toilets and eating facilities in Federal Government offices, and that Jim Crow laws being used to make sure that Black men only received the lowest paid jobs. The President said, "Segregation is not humiliating and is a benefit for you black gentlemen." The Federal Government had no power to stop individual states passing Jim Crow laws.

Lack of political influence

As early as 1867 Black who men had once been slaves were allowed to vote. By 1900 the Southern states had managed to stop Blacks from voting so that they could not elect anyone who might oppose the Jim Crow laws. How did the states manage to stop the Black people from voting?

The Southern states could not ban Blacks from voting just because they were Black. In order to vote in the USA a person had to register. The Southern states made up a series of rules called voting qualifications that made it difficult for blacks to vote. For example, one state made a qualification rule that an adult man could vote only if his grandfather had voted before 1867. One state asked questions such as 'How many bubbles are in a bar of soap?' which had to be answered 'to the satisfaction' of the questioner.

Source C: A member of the Government of the State of Virginia, 1900

We are here to do all we can to stop as many Negro voters as we can from voting. We will try to do it legally. We will not harm the right of White people to vote.

The result was that most White men in the South could vote and most Black men could not. It also meant that Black men who previously could vote lost that right.

State	Year	Number of Blacks with the right to vote
Louisiana	1896	130,000
	1900	5,300
Alabama	1900	180,000
	1902	3,000

The Ku Klux Klan

The Ku Klux Klan demonstrated the dark side of life in America. The Klan had been founded as a terrorist organisation of Southerners in the 1860s and was determined to prevent the newly freed slaves from gaining equal rights with other Americans. In the 1920s there was a resurgence of the Klan. It used violence and terror to intimidate any American, Black or White, who advocated a policy of equal rights. The Klan was not only hostile to Blacks but also to Catholics, Jews and new immigrants. Most Klansmen supported religious fundamentalism. By 1925 the Klan had 3 million members, including police officers, judges and politicians. The Klan was a powerful influence in several states.

Source D: Memphis Annie, Blues singer, 1925

When voting time came round the Ku Klux Klan would be waiting outside the voting place. No coloured folk would try to vote.

In 1923 Hiram Wesley Evans became the Klan's leader. He was known as the Imperial Wizard. He said, "The history of the world is the fight for survival of the White race. Either we win or we die. The Klan will not die."

Nobody knew for sure just how strong the Klan was because it was a secret organisation but what was certain was that many powerful people were members and that the Klan could make others do what it wanted by threats, blackmail and bribery.

Any Black person who was believed to have committed a crime against a White person, or even a Black person who was regarded as 'an uppity nigger' – a person who was doing well or spoke up for his or herself – could be beaten, tortured and lynched. Lynching often meant being hanged in front of a white crowd with no trial and no defence.

Lynching did not always mean a hanging. Here is a description from the *Washington Eagle* in 1920.

Source F

The Negro was taken to a clearing in the woods. More than 500 people had each placed a piece of wood against a tree stump that made a pile nearly 6 feet high. The Negro was chained to the tree stump, beaten and then castrated. The fire was lit and a hundred men and women, young and old, joined hands and danced around the burning Negro. That night a big party was held in a nearby barn.

The Klan often attracted poor and uneducated people so some people laughed at them. For many black people living in the Southern states the Klan was no joke. Black people in the Southern states of the USA did not have much education. Many were superstitious and lived in lonely farm shacks. When men in white robes appeared outside their homes with guns, ropes and torches it did not need much imagination for them to believe that white ghosts had come to kill them.

In many cases the local police failed to protect the victim and sometimes even played a part in the killing. Those responsible were rarely brought to justice and Klan members knew that their 'friends' in the courts would not convict them. Many of the victims were probably innocent of any crime but many have been thought of as Black troublemakers. In fact the real purpose of the lynchings was to remind Blacks forcibly that the Whites were firmly in control.

Source G: Adapted from *A History of the Klan*

In Colorado the Klan elected a Governor of the State, several judges and even the Denver chief of police. In one county of Alabama the Klan controlled judges, sheriffs and lawyers.

Source H: Robert Coughlan, a Catholic boy in 1924

Half the town belonged to the Klan when I was a boy. Most of the police were members. On nights when the Klan had its meetings there were no policemen around but instead Klansmen worked as traffic patrolmen.

The Federal Government in Washington was loathed to confront the Southern politicians who argued strongly for 'states rights' in opposition to federal interference and regulation. The complex relationship of the state and federal laws made direct intervention against segregation or even law enforcement difficult and national politicians feared losing White votes. Campaigning for re-election in 1924, an Indiana Congressman said, "I was told to join the Klan, or else." Politicians hoped that the nation's prosperity would seep down to every level and gradually eradicate inequality.

In the early 1920s many people in the big cities treated the Klan as a joke. But the mood changed. A march through Washington showed that the Klan was a powerful organisation.

Source I: A man interviewed after the Klan marched through Washington in 1925

“Hundreds of people in the big cities had never seen a Klansman and they thought the KKK could be ignored or treated as a few nuts who dressed up. But once we saw 40,000 of the Klan marching through our capital, well, nobody laughed anymore.”

The Great Migration – Why move north?

Black people were kept in poorly paid, unskilled jobs with few trade union rights. The South was becoming far too inhospitable. For those who dreamed of equality of opportunity the South was now a lost cause; their only hope lay in a move to the North. The great exodus from the South to the North East had started. They moved to the cities in search of a better life. The Klan had lost its influence by the late 1920s after a scandal involving a leader of the Klan. Although the Klan had lost its influence it did not die out and race hatred and race murder still continued. To escape poverty and race violence, many people moved north.

The movement of Blacks from the South began in 1915-1916 when the war industries were desperate for workers. Black people filled the gaps. In the period 1910-1920 the South lost 5% of its native Black population; by 1930 a further 8% had moved north. By 1940 it was 22%. Many Black people believed the North was a land of opportunity where they could find the American dream.

Consequently the Northern industrial cities saw a remarkable increase in Black populations. By 1920:

- New York was home to 152,000 Blacks – an increase of 66.3%
- Philadelphia was home to 134,000 – up 58.9%
- Chicago was home to 109,000 Blacks – up 148.2%

Throughout the 1920s, Blacks continued their movement to the North, taking jobs in the expanding industrial sector. Between 1920 and 1930, 824,000 Blacks moved north but even in 1930 over 50% of the country's Black population remained in the rural south.

Race Riots

The Blacks found the north no more tolerant than the south. White workers resented the spread of Black ghettos, job competition and furthermore Black soldiers returned from the war in a militant mood and were no longer willing to put up with old patterns of discrimination. They had fought and died for their country and deserved better treatment.

In the summer of 1919, riots erupted in 20 US cities, as far apart as Charleston in South Carolina, Washington DC and in Longview, Texas. However, the worst was in Chicago. Here the violence lasted 13 days, 23 Blacks and 15 Whites were killed, 537 were injured and 1,000 families, mostly Black, were left homeless. At this time 70 Black people were lynched. The Federal Government did very little.

The Poverty of City Life

The north was still a racially prejudiced society. Many Black people found they could only get the worst jobs for the lowest of wages. The situation got worse in times of recession when unemployment increased. Blacks and poor Whites competed for the same jobs and the same houses.

When Black migrants arrived in the north some of them thought they had found heaven, if some of their letters home are to be believed. But other migrants were not so sure.

My dear sisters,
I am well and thankful to be in a city with no lynchings and no Klansmen. I share a room with my brother and work in the same factory. We only get a dollar a day for our work but the hours are not too long and it's nice to get home in safety. God had been good to me. Hurry up and come to Chicago.
Yours, Minnie

Dear Annie,
I guess you'll have heard about the good times up her in the north but think twice before you come here. Sure, there are no lynchings here but we still get called 'nigger' or 'boy' and my job in the car factory is hard, low paid and dirty. The room I live in is damp and overcrowded. We live in a ghetto – that means a real run down slum area. All us poor Black people live in this area. I'll tell you this – it's not the bright new life we hoped for.

Your, Leroy

The influx from the south, led to the development of urban ghettos. Harlem in New York was a white middle class residential area in 1910, yet housed 165,000 Blacks by 1930. The population growth caused a profound housing shortage. Rents in Harlem doubled in the period 1917-1927.

The average Black worker was unskilled and ill paid. Landlords converted houses into rooming houses (bedsits for rent) and properties soon fell into disrepair. The poor conditions led to the spread of disease and crime.

There was a major occupational shift. By 1930 more Black men held blue-collar jobs rather than working in agriculture. Racial discrimination in industrial life was still widespread. Most car plants were all White or hired Blacks in small numbers. Henry Ford believed that Whites, as a 'superior' race, were obliged to help Blacks establish decent lives. But his hiring practices were not strictly altruistic. He found that Black workers were usually more loyal. In 1926 Ford employed 10,000 Black employees.

Even in small northern cities, Blacks were badly treated, i.e. in the Lynd's study of Middleton (Muncie, Indiana) it was shown that although Black and White children attended the same schools, churches and cinemas were segregated.

Black people had moved north in search of the American dream but many found that discrimination and poverty existed in the north as well as the south. In the north there were no Klan signs but for many Black people the dream was as far away as ever.

The Black Cultural Explosion

The 1920s were to become known as the Jazz Age. Jazz was the popular music of the time. This music was largely the creation of Black musicians from New Orleans. During the 1920s the craze swept the country. White musicians took it up, and for the first time it seemed as if Whites seemed to appreciate Black culture.

Furthermore, in the bristling spirit of protest, Black culture and creativity exploded. Poets, playwrights, authors and composers flourished in the environment of Black pride, so much so that the period became known as the Harlem Renaissance (1919-1930). The pride of the Black communities increased with the Black intellectuals like the poet Langston Hughs and jazz musicians like Duke Ellington flourished. For the first time Black culture was being experienced by large numbers of White intellectuals...it looked as if racial prejudice might disappear.

A flowering of Black culture tended to reject White values and stereotypes. Some middle class Whites were drawn to Black culture. Blacks were seen to some as symbols of freedom, passion and sensuality.

Segregation dramatically increased the Black sense of community and unity in the face of White supremacy, as in 1938 when the 'Brown Bomber' Joe Louis defeated a White heavyweight boxer and became a world champion.

As the Black working class grew, there emerged a new middle class that provided services to Blacks such as church ministers, newspapers, hotels and drug stores, real estate and insurance agents. The Black class structure was becoming more complex. Many improvements to many millions of Black Americans followed in health care, education, and economic and political life. However, there was still a very substantial gap between the social and economic status of Whites and Blacks. The move north by millions of Blacks was putting strains on the community.

Black newspapers like the *Baltimore Afro-American* and the *Pittsburgh Courier* increased the sense of community. Fraternal organisations, civil clubs and churches such as the Abyssinian Baptist Church in Harlem, New York provided the location, money and leadership for the civil clubs where politics were discussed. Not all churches were hotbeds of civil rights activity, but most at least helped promote a spirit of self-help and self-confidence among Blacks who easily identified with biblical stories of a chosen race who fled enslavement and went to the 'Promised Land'.

The Black community was not always united:

- Divisions of class, colour, creed and career opportunities developed
- A handful of Black businessmen in northern cities did well out of segregation as it gave them a captive market
- Differences between north and south hindered the development over how to improve the Black lot.

Growth of political influence

With the migration north, there was a slow but steady growth of political influence. Blacks became freer to speak and act in their now northern setting, and they gained political leverage by concentrating in large cities. Black voters became increasingly important to the predominantly White urban political machines opening up opportunities for Black politicians. Republicans and Democrats courted their support. By manoeuvring among White factions, Black political leaders were able to win influence, patronage (gain important positions) and some social gains. This political power enabled them to elect representatives to State legislatures and Congress, and to put pressure on political parties in closely contested elections. This power stimulated self-confidence.

The New Military

World War One had inspired hope amongst many Blacks. The 1920s produced despair as Black people, in particular returning soldiers, found that racism was still part of their daily lives. Heightened racial pride characterised what was often called 'the New Negro'. Blacks were determined to resist White attacks. Black newspapers and leaders urged northern Blacks to arm and defend themselves.

Growing signs of Black impatience and white injustice were apparent. The war and migration catalysed these feelings. Black migrants to the north found themselves facing problems they thought they had left behind: inadequate housing, discrimination in employment and racial violence. Many concluded that if Blacks were to improve their lot they would have to fight on their own behalf.

National Association for the Advancement of Coloured People

W E B de Bois founded the National Association for the Advancement of Coloured People (NAACP) in 1910. This organisation was to fight a long battle against disenfranchisement and sought to reduce racial segregation and white supremacy. It took seriously the idea that the solution to problems began in the education of the people. Its main aim was legal action. The NAACP had 91,000 members in 1919 but declined. The NAACP tended to concentrate on opposing segregation through lawsuits, public inquiries and other moderate tactics. It failed to win the allegiance of poor Blacks in the north or south.

In 1919 it launched a campaign against lynching. An anti-lynching bill, making lynching a federal offence, passed the House of Representatives in 1922, was defeated by a group of Southern Senators. Despite defeat, the agitation did bring about a reduction in lynching offences.

Also from 1919 onwards, W E B de Bois organised a series of Pan-African conferences in an attempt to create an international Black movement. However, despite all the vigour and occasional success, the NAACP was dominated by Whites and well-off Blacks and failed to inspire the Black urban masses.

Marcus Garvey and the Universal Negro Improvement Association

Garvey, a West Indian, founded the Universal Negro Movement Association in 1914, and this organisation was to attract major public attention in the 1920s. With many Black war veterans at the core, the movement soon spread from New York to many other cities.

Garvey had nothing but contempt for Whites and organisations like the NAACP that aimed to bring Blacks and Whites together. He preached that Whites were devils whose racial bias was so deeply ingrained that it was futile to appeal to their sense of justice. Garvey's appeal was his assertion of pride in being Black. He publicised Black achievements, opposed inter-racial marriages, and, in a reversal of the norm, looked down on light-skinned Blacks. Garvey argued that Blacks throughout the world were one people. He linked the struggle for Black rights in America to the freeing of Africa from colonial rule. Garvey encouraged skilled Americans to go to their 'African homeland'. His slogan became 'Back to Africa', as he claimed that only hope was to flee America and build a new Black Republic in Africa. This was a somewhat naïve message, however it did help create a 'New Negro' who was proud of his colour, race and heritage, and was prepared to resist both White mistreatment and White ideas. The message of 'Black is beautiful' built racial pride amongst the masses of poor and unskilled city Blacks. No one had ever spoken like Garvey before. It was an intoxicating vision, of bringing all the scattered children of Africa into one mighty force.

Indeed, the city ghetto dwellers were to hail Garvey as a saviour, and christen him 'Black Moses'. The UNIA grew with remarkable speed. Membership was strong from the new Black middle class but attracted followers from virtually every segment of Black America. The movement had swollen to 6 million members by 1923. But many Black leaders, including the NAACP and Socialist were highly critical of Garvey.

The initial focus of the movement was to inspire Black people to see their self-worth, to express themselves through a variety of commercial enterprises, self-help organisations, religious institutions and publications. The UNIA encouraged Blacks to begin in commercial business ventures. He believed that developing separate Black institutions would make most progress. He was critical of the NAACP push for racial integration. The most hopeful venture of all was the creation of the 'Black Star Line', a deeply flawed experiment in developing a Pan-African shipping line.

However, despite tremendous achievements in building Black morale there was no strategic plan for the future. Furthermore, Garvey at the height of his popularity in 1923 was convicted of mail fraud. He was imprisoned in 1925, and pardoned and deported 2 years later. He died in obscurity in 1940.

The Black Pride movement and Garvey's ventures collapsed with the onset of the Great Depression. However, the memory of his movement lives on in many forms and places. An element of racial pride was kept alive and resurfaces again years later in the Black Power movement.

What had been achieved by 1930?

- Individuals such as Garvey had helped raise Black consciousness
- The NAACP's anti-lynching campaign had publicised the horrors of lynching and helped decrease their numbers
- White supporters claimed that lynchings damaged the South's image and progress
- NAACP won a few court victories against the White domination of primary elections and mob violence.

However, the system remained intact. Little had been achieved in the drive to improve the urban poverty that many Blacks experience in the north. The majority of Black workers were still not unionised and so not represented in the workplace. Many Blacks were apathetic and did not join reform movements. Why? They were too preoccupied earning a living.

Northern Blacks were in a far better position to improve their status. They could vote, participate more in civil affairs and had more economic opportunities. Despite police harassment and the Ku Klux Klan, Northern Blacks lived in a far less violent society. However, most concentrated upon improving their standards of living rather than joining the Black advancement pressure groups.

The 1930s – A fair deal for minority groups?

The Depression

In the 1920s black people suffered discrimination from the Jim Crow laws and those who had moved to the northern cities were treated as second-class citizens. The Depression hit Blacks harder than Whites. Two million Black farmers left the land as crop prices plummeted. Many went to the cities where Black unemployment was between 30 and 60% and always higher than that of Whites. Desperate Whites moved into jobs formally dominated by Blacks, such as domestic service, street cleaning and garbage collection. Whites organised vigilante groups such as the Black Shirts of Atlanta to stop Blacks getting work. As unskilled labour, Blacks were usually the last hired and the first fired. No effective social security system meant that disease and starvation frequently followed.

The New Deal

Before 1933 the Federal Government had appeared uninterested in Blacks. New Deal programmes designed by the Government to get the USA out of the Depression helped Blacks by providing 1,000,000 jobs, nearly 50,000 houses, financial assistance and skilled occupation training for 500,000 Black youths.

Times were hard for Black families during the New Deal. By 1933 more than 50% of Black workers in cities were unemployed. Poor Black farmers were hit very hard by the fall in the price of cotton from 18 to 6 cents a pound. This did not bring in enough money to feed a family properly. The National Recovery Administration (NRA) allowed employers to pay Black people less than Whites. Under the Agricultural Adjustment Act thousands of Black farmers were forced to leave their land.

In 1933 white jobless demonstrators in Atlanta chanted: 'No jobs for Niggers until every white man has a job.'

The minimum Wage and Social Security Acts were important changes introduced by Roosevelt, but they did not make life easier for most Black people. Black people were given leading Government jobs. Mary McLeod Bethune, for example, gained a top job in the National Youth Administration (NYA). She helped organise training grants for high school students who were looking for work. The New Deal provided jobs in the world of entertainment and culture, giving some Black scholars the opportunity to increase Black consciousness by getting Black history and contemporary living conditions into New Deal state guide books. Black songs and oral reminiscence of slavery and hardship were recorded for posterity.

Government sponsorship of Black culture was inevitably controversial, and federal funded bi-racial dramatic productions were criticised by a Congressional committee as encouraging Black and White colleagues to go out on dates.

Black people did not have equal opportunities in education or in employment. 65% of Black workers were employed as farm labourers or servants. These jobs were not protected in the New Deal laws, so most Black people did not benefit. The New Deal protected unionised jobs – Blacks were employed in few of these.

Roosevelt's Government – to make discrimination against Black employees in the defence industries illegal – passed only one civil rights law. The armed forces were still segregated. Black and white soldiers fought and died for their country – in segregated units.

The New Deal did not guarantee miracles. Aid sometimes did not reach the people for whom it was intended, particularly in the south where Whites distributed aid and there was unfairness. A leading New Dealer dismissed a Black woman investigating Black complaints against New Deal programmes because he felt it ridiculous to entrust a Black person with that particular job.

The New Deal depended upon Southern White Congressional votes, so Roosevelt left it to his wife to take a very public interest in Black affairs. New Deal agencies often discriminated against Blacks, especially in the south, but Blacks were getting more help and attention than ever before. Eleanor Roosevelt gave her husband detailed reports about the suffering of the Black people. She asked him to support a law against lynching. Roosevelt refused because he did not want to upset politicians from the Southern states. He needed their support for other New Deal measures. Most local Jim Crow laws were still in force during the New Deal. The Ku Klux Klan was allowed to continue with its activities.

Federal aid programmes helped many Blacks, inspiring a dramatic change of allegiance amongst Black voters. Previously the Democratic Party had been associated in Black minds with White supremacy, but now Blacks voted for the party of Roosevelt. Increasing numbers of Northern Black Democrats would make Blacks a force to be reckoned with in the party. Voting figures show that Black people voted for Roosevelt and helped him to be re-elected. In 1936 about 75% of Black people who voted are thought to have supported Roosevelt's Democrat party. Roosevelt introduced no civil rights legislation but he denounced lynching as murder but never fully supported anti-lynching bills of 1934, 1935 and 1938. Not all Democrats were happy. 'Catering to the Black vote', said one Southern Democrat, would lead to the 'depths of degradation' and 'mongrelisation of the American race.'

THE SECOND WORLD WAR AND THE JIM CROW ARMY

In 1941, after the Japanese attack on Pearl harbour, the Americans entered the Second World War on the side of Britain, France and the USSR, against Nazi Germany and Japan.

An American law of 1940, called the Selective Services Act, made it illegal to show discrimination when calling up and training black soldiers. However when they were actually trained, the US war Department continued the practice of segregated regiments. i.e. black and white soldiers fought the war separately. The black units that fought for the USA were called the Jim Crow Army.

Despite this, the war helped the fight for Civil Rights in a number of ways:

- Black Americans, white Americans and the rest of the World could see the irony of black Americans fighting against the very racist Nazi Germany, when they themselves were the victims of racism at home i.e. it began to shame the USA.
- Black soldiers felt if they were willing to fight and die for their country, then their country should reward them with equal rights.
- Black soldiers stationed in Britain, particularly if they were from the South, saw another way of life, as they were allowed into mixed pubs and could 'chat up' white girls. i.e. black and white could mix. This led to trouble between the black American soldiers and Southern white American soldiers who could not accept this behaviour.
- At home black workers made an important contribution to the war effort. By the end of 1944 some 2 million were working in war factories, although some met with hostility (In Detroit which had a large black community, racial tension led to riots in 1943. Again the effort these workers made for their countries led them to believe that change would happen as a reward for their loyalty.
- Many black people believed they would be rewarded for their efforts and loyalty to the USA during the war. Black people hoped to encourage the process of change by joining the NAACP and NAACP membership rose from 50,000 to 450,000 during the war (i.e. 9 times).

The influence of an individual: A. Philip Randolph

Randolph's belief that the African American can never be politically free until he was economically secure led him to become the foremost supporter of the full integration of black workers into the American trade union movement (bringing blacks into the ranks of trade unions, which fight for the rights of workers). In 1925 he undertook the leadership of the campaign to organize the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters (BSCP), which would become the first African American union in the country. The uphill battle, marked by fierce resistance from the Pullman Company (who was then the largest employers of African Americans in the country), was finally won in 1937 and made possible the first contract ever signed by a white employer with an African American labor leader. Later, Randolph served as president emeritus (honorary president) of the BSCP and a vice-president of the American Federation of Labor and Congress of Industrial Organizations.

In the 1940s Randolph developed the strategy of mass protest to win two major executive orders, or orders from the government. In **1941**, with America's entrance into World War II (1939–45), he developed the idea of a massive **march on Washington, D.C.**, to protest the exclusion (to keep out) of African American workers from jobs in the industries that were producing war supplies. He agreed to call off the march only after President Franklin Roosevelt (1882–1945) issued **Executive Order 8802**, which banned discrimination (selection based on race) in defense plants and established the nation's first Fair Employment Practice Committee. In 1948 Randolph warned President Harry Truman (1884–1972) that if segregation (separation based on race) in the armed forces was not abolished (to put an end to), masses of African Americans would refuse entering the armed forces. Soon **Executive Order 9981** was issued to comply with his demands.

The media and popular pressure: The Double V Campaign

We were at war, and in war you don't have friendly relationships, you're out to kill each other. That's how it was at the Courier. We were trying to kill Jim Crow, and racism. They didn't seem to understand that we had every right to fight for full citizenship at home if we were expected to give our lives overseas."

Edna Chappell McKenzie, journalist/historian

During World War II, African Americans faced a new dilemma. Thousands of black soldiers served willingly in the armed forces. At the same time, many African Americans wondered how they could support the war effort and even give their lives if called upon to fight, while Jim Crow laws and *de facto* segregation remained in place. Some black newspapers reflected these concerns, and openly criticized the segregation of the military and other policies. As a result, the black press faced harassment by government agencies. Still, its readership continued to soar, and as the war ended, black troops returned, more dedicated than ever to fighting injustice at home.

Most mainstream papers lauded the war effort. Patriotism among black publishers and journalists, however, was tempered by the pressing reality of segregation. While thousands of African Americans served willingly in the armed forces, many others felt that they could not support the war wholeheartedly.

Among the latter was a cafeteria worker named James Thompson. This young man wrote a letter to the Pittsburgh Courier, troubled by the fact that he might be called upon to defend a nation in which he was treated like a second-class citizen. He suggested that African Americans espouse a 'double V' campaign. The symbol stood for victory at war over enemies 'from without,' and victory at home against the enemy of prejudice 'from within.' When other readers wrote to congratulate Thompson on his idea, the Courier launched a huge publicity campaign, complete with lapel pins and stickers, 'double V' hair styles and songs:

'The Pittsburgh Courier had a neat diagram, which was this Double V with an eagle in the middle, and people loved this kind of diagram. And you had women walking around with Double Vs on their dresses. You had a new hairstyle called the "doubler" where black women would walk around and weave two—two Vs in their hair. You had Double V baseball games, Double V flag-waving ceremonies, Double V gardens. I mean it's just Double V this, Double V this, Double V this. And The Pittsburgh Courier, which was looking for circulation, played this to the hilt. There was even a Double V SONG'.

PATRICK WASHBURN

The campaign kept awareness of the injustices of segregation alive during the war. It also brought attention to Jim Crow-style segregation in the armed forces. The troops themselves were segregated, but black outfits were assigned white commanding officers. Even the military's blood supply for the wounded was segregated by race. White soldiers brutalized black soldiers, and race riots took place in camps where troops of both races resided. The military tried to suppress word of these events, with partial success; only the black press reported discrimination and discord within the troops.



Such controversial reporting, coupled with the double V campaign and the new international mobility and visibility of the few black war correspondents, made those in various branches of the government nervous. The power of the black press to influence public opinion and excite its readers never seemed more threatening. Concerned that the black press would actually discourage its readers from supporting the war (it didn't), the military banned black newspapers

from its libraries. It confiscated black papers from newsboys, and burned the papers to keep them out of the hands of black soldiers.

J. Edgar Hoover saw the double V campaign as an act of sedition. With President Franklin D. Roosevelt's approval, he sought to indict black publishers for treason. Hearing of Hoover's intentions, John Sengstacke, who had replaced Robert S. Abbott as publisher of the Chicago Defender, insisted on meeting with Attorney General Francis Biddle. Sengstacke convinced Biddle that it was the black press's duty to print the truth, and that African Americans only sought their due rights and privileges as citizens. Biddle agreed to block the indictments so long as the black press did not escalate its criticism of the war. Without the cooperation of the Attorney General's office, Hoover's plan was foiled.

Attempts, such as Hoover's, to destroy the black press failed. In fact, the papers' combined circulation reached a record high of two million readers each week by the end of the war in 1945. For soldiers stationed overseas, the Allied victory, and news from home instilling hope for the future, bolstered their spirits. African American soldiers returned from the war with redoubled commitment to fight for equality and dignity on American soil.

The Civil Rights Movement of the 1950s and '60s

In the 1930's and 1940's the NAACP had increasingly begun to use the legal system/courts to fight against discrimination, particularly segregation.

The Brown Case Kansas 1954

In 1954, 20 US states, including Washington D.C. had segregated schools. Linda Brown, a 7 year old black girl had to walk 20 blocks to school even though there was a school for white people just two blocks away. With the help of the NAACP, the Topeka Board of Education was taken to court and the case ended up in the US Supreme Court, the most important court in the land.

Verdict: in a landmark decision, the court under Chief Justice Earl Warren declared:

- The decision of the Supreme Court of 1896, that said 'separate, but equal facilities' were fine as long as they were equal was to be changed because
- Separate facilities usually weren't equal.
- Therefore, all schools were to be desegregated.

NB 1. This was a huge breakthrough and gave a huge boost in the fight for civil rights, because the highest, most respected court in the land, whose job it was to decide what the constitution said, had decided that segregation in schools was unconstitutional / illegal.

NB 2. This case only meant that schools should be desegregated, but the NAACP knew that if it took cases about segregation in cafes, buses etc. to the Supreme Court it was likely to win.

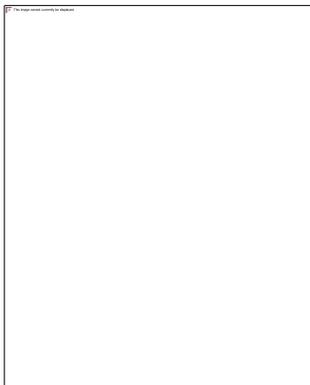
Southern White Resistance & the murder of Emmet Till

Southern states just refused to desegregate their schools. They argued, as they had done over slavery, that the states had the right to decide the matter themselves. Over slavery it had led to civil war, with the southern states breaking away from the United States. By 1956, in six southern states, not one black child was attending a school with white children.

Violence, lynchings and beatings of black people, which had declined since the 1920's increased again. There were riots and bombings and even murders of NAACP supporters. This was to teach black people and their supporters that things were not going to change.

In 1955, 14 year old Emmett Till, from Chicago in the North was brutally murdered, while staying with relatives in Mississippi. He was not used to southern ways and the extent of racism against black people. Unwisely he was cheeky to a young white woman and was murdered as a punishment. An all-white jury acquitted/found innocent those who were accused of the murder.

NB However some good did come out of it. The effect of the murder, and the failure to punish those accused, focused the attention of the US and the world on the terrible injustice and violence that black people faced in the South.



Emmet before his murder



Emmet's badly beaten body. His mother insisted he should have an open coffin so the world could see what the two men had done to her little boy.

Montgomery Bus Boycott 1955

In December 1955, in Montgomery, Alabama, a 41 year old black woman, Rosa Parks, refused the order of the driver to give up her seat to a white man. She was sitting in the black seats, but when all the seats became full she was required by law to give up her seat to a white person and stand at the rear of the bus. She was arrested and fined \$10. She was the local secretary of the NAACP which is why she was willing to stand up for herself.



The local black community supported her by staging a 24 hour boycott of the buses (refusing to use them). This was so successful that they carried on until the bus company agreed to seat all passengers on a first come, first served basis. It was in this struggle that a young black minister (religious preacher), Martin Luther King jnr., first made his name.

The bus company, backed by the mayor and most of the white community, refused to give in and things got nasty. The homes of leading black people were destroyed, including king's home, where his wife and seven week year old baby narrowly escaped injury.

In the end, 13 months after the boycott began, the bus company gave in. The boycott was successful for 3 reasons:

- The peaceful protest led by Martin Luther King.
- Black people made up 75% of the bus company's business.
- Most important of all in Nov 1956, the Supreme Court ruled that segregation on buses was unconstitutional / illegal.

Little Rock, Arkansas 1957

In September 1957, at Little Rock Central High School, 9 black students tried to take their places at the all-white high school. The Governor of the state used the National Guard (reserve soldiers under the control of the state) to stop them taking their places, even though it was their legal right.



I walked up to the guard who had let the white students in. When I tried to squeeze past him, he raised his bayonet and then the other guards closed in and they raised their bayonets. Somebody started yelling 'Lynch her!' I tried to see a friendly face somewhere in the mob. I looked into the face of an old woman and it seemed a kind face, but when I looked at her again she spat on me. They came closer, shouting, 'No nigger bitch is going to get in our school! Get out of here!'

Elizabeth Eckford, aged 13

The black community took the Governor to court, so he withdrew the National Guard, but now the black teenagers were left totally unprotected from a violent angry mob of white students and adults, determined not to let them in.

The situation was so dangerous that President Eisenhower had to send 1000 US paratroopers (Federal troops) to protect them for the next 12 months while they attended Little Rock. This shows how deep rooted hatred the hatred for black people was.



Again this was another victory for peaceful and very brave protest, although by 1960, only 2,600 black children, out of a total of 2 million went to mixed/integrated schools.

The Civil Rights Movement

There were several important groups fighting peacefully for Civil Rights for black people: NAACP; CORE; SCLC; SNCC.

FREEDOM RIDES:

Although buses now had to be desegregated, the bus stations and railway stations were still segregated in the South.

This time another peaceful black pressure group, the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE), organised a series of freedom rides through different states in which black protesters deliberately sat in 'whites only' sections of bus and railway stations to try and get them desegregated. A lot of these freedom riders were attacked in ugly clashes with white racists.



The Attorney General, Robert Kennedy had to send 500 marshals to protect the freedom riders. Fortunately the President's Federal government, not the states' governments, was in charge of commerce between states and these bus stations and railway stations were classed as interstate commerce. Therefore the federal government ordered the bus and railway stations to be desegregated or they would be closed down.

LUNCH-COUNTER SIT-INS:



The SNCC (Student Non-violent Coordinating Committee) organised a series of sit-ins at Woolworth's lunch-counters throughout the South in order to get them desegregated. In 1960 in Greensboro, North Carolina 4 black students sat on the white-only seats. They refused to leave the lunch counter when they were refused service. The next day 23 more students did the same; the day after there were 66 protestors. Within a week 400 black and white students were organising sit-ins at lunch counters in the town. They refused to retaliate when they were subjected to verbal and physical abuse. With support from the SNCC this non-violent tactic spread to other cities. By the end of 1960 lunch counters had been desegregated in 126 cities.

FREEDOM MARCHES:

By the early 1960's many black people, even in the South, had become much more politically aware. Increasing numbers of white people were beginning to support the call for equal Civil Rights for black people. President Kennedy was proposing to pass laws to give black people greater rights and huge demonstrations took place to try to support him.

In 1963 Martin Luther King led a march in **Birmingham**, Alabama to end segregation. The year before the council in Birmingham had closed all public recreational facilities, like parks and swimming baths to



black people. 30,000, mostly black Americans took part in sit-ins in these facilities. 500 protesters were arrested and the **Police Commissioner, Eugene 'Bull' Connor** used water cannons, dogs and baton charges on the peaceful protesters. These events were televised and helped turn public opinion against racists like Connor. He had done the opposite of what he intended by helping the cause of civil Rights for black people.

MARCH ON WASHINGTON 1963:



In August 1963 over 250,000 people, including 50,000 white Americans, marched to the Lincoln Memorial in the capital city, Washington DC to demand civil rights for all and Martin Luther King jnr. made his famous 'I have a dream' speech.

CIVIL RIGHTS LAWS (LEGISLATION) WHICH MADE BLACK PEOPLE LEGALLY EQUAL

In the Brown case in 1954 and lots of segregation cases afterwards, the Supreme Court said separate facilities were not equal and therefore were illegal.

President Lyndon Johnson passed a series of laws to back up the Supreme Court's decisions and make it clear the Jim Crow laws were illegal.

a) **Civil Rights Act 1964:** banned segregation in public places e.g. bus stations.

b) **Voting Rights Act 1965:** black people's right to vote was protected,

c) **Civil Rights Act 1968:** made it illegal to discriminate in jobs, housing etc.

Since these laws were passed, black people have been legally equal to whites.

Martin Luther King jnr.'s contribution to the Civil Rights Movement

Dr Martin Luther King was a pastor/minister of a Baptist Church in Montgomery, Alabama. He first came to prominence when he helped lead the successful boycott of the Montgomery bus system in 1955, after a black woman, Rosa Parks, had refused to give up her seat to a white man on the segregated bus system. During this fight the Supreme Court declared segregation on buses illegal.

- King believed in the **non-violent, direct action** methods used by Gandhi in the 1940's to demand the British give India its independence.
- He was one of the leaders of the Southern Leadership Christian Conference, which was formed to co-ordinate protests against discrimination.
- Although there were several large Civil Rights groups that advocated peaceful protest, King became the most well-known figure i.e. the effective spokesperson of the Civil Rights protest.
- In 1963 King led protests against discrimination in Birmingham, Alabama against discrimination. The white population was violently resisting desegregation. The city was nicknamed 'Bombingham' because of the violence used by the whites against the Civil Rights protestors. King was arrested and jailed for his part in the protests.

- In 1963 he led the enormous Civil Rights March on Washington D.C., in which he delivered his famous 'I Have a Dream' speech, predicting that one day equality for black people would become a reality.
- In 1964 he was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize.
- He was assassinated in 1968 on a visit to Memphis, Tennessee.



King's non-violent methods were so important in helping getting black people Civil Rights for several reasons:

- If they had used violence white racists could say that black people were not civilized and did not deserve to be given the rights that white citizens had.
- King's peaceful methods made the white racists who attacked the peaceful black protesters look even worse.
- His peaceful methods won him respect and support from abroad (international support) for rights for black people. The Nobel peace prize was recognition of this support. This international support was crucial in putting pressure on the US government to do something about the inequality.

Black Power- the militant struggle for rights

Black power movements believed in a different approach to the peaceful Civil Rights movement. The Black Power movement rejected peaceful protest. Some black people, many of whom started in the peaceful civil rights movement, began to feel the peaceful approach would get black people nowhere. They were also not prepared to let white policemen or white racists attack them and do nothing, and were prepared to use violence if violence was used against them.



Black power movements had different aims to the peaceful Civil Rights movement. However they did not just disagree with King over their approach. They had different aims to King. They saw King as an "Uncle Tom" figure, begging the white man to be equal. Although there were differences in exactly what they wanted, they emphasised pride in being black ("BLACK IS BEAUTIFUL"), the building up of black institutions/organisations (schools, hospitals, newspapers, books, leisure activities) and ultimately a separate black country within the USA i.e. they wanted to be totally segregated. They were going to do this on their own, not beg the white man for equality.

NATION OF ISLAM

- This organisation rejected Christianity as a white man's religion and instead chose to follow Islam (become Muslims), which they saw as a black person's religion.
- It was led by Elijah Muhammed. They rejected their 'Christian slave names' and instead substituted 'X' as a sign of their transformation.
- They rejected white society and called for race war.
- Their long term aim was a separate state/country/nation for black Americans.

MALCOLM X

He was a very charismatic and influential figure. Malcolm X was originally a member of the Nation of Islam (Black Muslims) who rejected Christianity as a white man's religion. He left the Nation of Islam organisation when Elijah Muhammed became jealous of his popularity. Although he remained a Muslim, Malcolm X began to later to turn his attention from religion to getting more political power and better living/working conditions for black people.

Why Malcolm X appealed to some black people in the 1960's:

- They were much more aggressive in defence of black rights than Martin Luther King and the wider peace movement.
- They believed MLK's soft approach was not working i.e. there were violent attacks on Black people who protested for equality. Black people should defend themselves i.e. violence should be met with violence.
- They believed in the idea of 'Black Power'.
- The black community should be segregated from the white community and should not beg the white man for equality.
- The black community should educate itself, develop its own businesses, and build up its own community without the white man's help.
- Black people should be proud to be black – 'BLACK is BEAUTIFUL'
- He appealed more to the urban Black people of the Northern cities who could vote and were not segregated, but still were very poor and discriminated against.



This photograph is misleading. It was a publicity shot to show he would defend himself if attacked.

Malcolm X should not be seen as a violent figure. He advocated violence in self-defence. In fact it was his respectability combined with his determination not to be bullied that made him such a frightening figure.

He was assassinated in 1965 by members of the Nation of Islam.

THE BLACK PANTHERS

These were the most violent and secret of the black power groups and were involved in several bloody battles with the police in the late 1960's when their leaders were killed or imprisoned. Stokely Carmichael became its leader. (Carmichael had been an integrationist like King, and one of the leaders of the SNCC but later his views became more militant).

Black Power Riots

In the mid 1960's a number of riots took place in the northern cities of the USA. In the North there was no official segregation and black people had the vote. The riots were about something different to the protests in the South. They were about the hardships black people suffered such as slum housing in the northern ghettos, unemployment, inferior education and police attitudes.

There were riots in Harlem, New York 1964 and other cities such as Chicago and Detroit in 1966. In these latter riots people were killed when black militants set fires and opened fire at police

The most infamous, however, was the riot in the Watts district of Los Angeles in which 34 people were killed 1072 people were injured in 6 days of rioting. Much of the area was burned down by its own people who chanted 'black power' slogans and fired on police.

Later legislation passed by President L.B Johnson in 1968 led the way for improvements in the lives of black Americans

The successes achieved in the fight for Civil Rights can be as much attributed to people like Malcolm X and Stokely Carmichael as Martin Luther King. The peaceful approach showed how respectable black people were. The more aggressive approach of the black power movement showed black people would no longer put up with violence against them and this no doubt scared some white people / politicians in to action.