The Mid-Century Civil Rights Movement: How America Was Changed Forever

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The Civil Rights Movement fought for African-American rights in America in the early 1900’s, and is still in some instances being fought today. However, in almost a century of fighting, the most dynamic and successful era of the Civil Rights Movement was the Mid-Century era. This article focuses on the Mid-Century moral and legislative victories, and the men who helped accomplish them. It includes Brown v. The Board of Education and the Voting Rights Act of 1965. It talks of two of the greatest rabble rousing orators ever to be a part of the movement, Malcolm X and Martin Luther King, Jr. It shows the methods and radical ideas of such extreme groups as the KKK and the Black Panther Party. This article also talks about the victories in Montgomery and events such as the March on Washington. It talks about the results of the Civil Rights Movement from this era, and it talks about what we still experience today in spite of the success.
The Mid-Century Civil Rights Movement

The story of the dynamic mid-century civil rights movement that was the most effective era of the civil rights movement in the fight for black liberation and civil rights for African-Americans

How America Was Changed Forever

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Introduction

“I am an invisible man. No, I am not a spook like those who haunted Edgar Allen Poe; nor am I one of your Hollywood-movie ectoplasms. I am a man of substance, of flesh and bone, fiber and liquids-and I might even be said to possess a mind. I am invisible, understand, simply because people refuse to see me” - Ralph Ellison, Invisible Man (1952) (Estes 2005). The lust for African American liberation was achieved in the Civil Rights Movement, and was done so in the middle of the twentieth century, with some of the most horrific acts of violence, some of the most critical victories in the fight against segregation, and some of the most moving inspiration by some of America’s most intelligent and eloquent human rights advocates. Beginning in the early 1900’s and arguably still being fought today, the mid-century civil rights movement was witness to intelligent and moving men such as Martin Luther king Jr., Malcolm X, and Huey P. Newton. It was witness to events such as the Montgomery boycott. It was filled with great acts of love, horrible outbursts of crime, and mass reconstruction of the African American stability and status in the United States. The civil rights movement forever changed the American stand on segregation, and even reformed governmental legislation to outlaw extreme bigotry in any parts of the country. However, there are some evidence’s of racial discrimination in America, with the appearances of stereotypes in every day American living, and though we may not say anything, our actions speak louder than words ever could. Regardless of these, the civil rights movement forever changed America, and is still dynamic in its fight against racism.

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such as the March on Washington. It talks about the results of the Civil Rights Movement from this era, and it talks about what we still experience today in spite of the success.

**Basic History**

The Civil Rights Movement began in 1917 in East St. Louis, IL. The white union workers had gone on strike, demanding more pay for their back breaking services. Rather than giving them what they wanted, the companies instead began hiring black people who would do the same work with smaller pay cuts. These African Americans crossed picket lines until eventually the rioters got out of hand. Mobs of African Americans reacted violently. This resulted in a huge race riot between the whites and the blacks, which led to more than a hundred deaths and the burning of more than 200 buildings. This was the race riot that sparked the Civil Rights Movement. (Hahn 2008)

The Civil Rights Movement was very much sparked by this race riot, and the riot was begun by the rioters of course. African Americans were trying to pay bills, make a living, and support their families. The white rioters tried to belittle and berate them, and act out towards them because they thought they were in the wrong. The Race Riot that sparked the Civil Rights Movement was instigated by the whites. (Hahn)

**Extremists of the Movement**

The Black Panther Party

The Black Panther began with two poor junior college students, Bobby Seale and Huey P. Newton (Abu-Jamal, 2004). They were inspired by such men as Frantz Fanon, Algerian revolutionary, and sparked their minds into forming a fight for black liberation (Abu-Jamal, 2004). Their biggest source of inspiration and the man they built their party structure off of was Malcolm X (Abu-Jamal, 2004). Malcolm X was an average African American, having a horrific act of racial bigotry as his first vivid memory of his life (Dyson, 1995). He was a black nationalist, and the Black Panther Party adopted his view of Black Nationalism and black liberation “by any means necessary” (X).

Many people thought that this organization could bring about revolution for the black American (Earl, 1970). The Black Panther Party, originally founded the Black Panther Party for Self-Defense, was officially organized and founded on October 15, 1966(Abu-Jamal, 2004). They practiced violent self-defense and they did not turn the other cheek. They were the reciprocal of Martin Luther King, and believed in the establishing of a separate Black nation-state (Abu-Jamal, 2004). The Black Panther
Party, in light of Franz Fanon, believed that violence was a “cleansing force”. It was a way of restoring self respect and dignity within the black community (Earl, 1970).

The Panthers did a wide variety of things in an attempt to gain liberation. They started a night watch where they drove around and patrolled city streets to see any whites, especially police officers, dehumanizing a black person, and they stood up for that black person in armed defense. They developed their own 10-points program outlining their desires as a part of their liberation. The Panthers were trying to gain liberation by their own standards, and felt they had been denied for too long (Abu-Jamal 2004).

The Panthers were a violent group of people, yes, but to the impoverished and downtrodden black community, they were the symbol of hope, and they helped every African American that needed it. They would give food, clothing, and other essentials to people who didn’t have it, or couldn’t afford it. They established their own medical centers to tend to simple diseases such as STD’s. A Panther’s life was full of back breaking, expensive work, from dawn do dusk, every day of the week. The normal Panther member had little for himself, losing or giving most for the bettering of their fellow African Americans. The Black Panther kept going off of the selling of The Black Panther, the party’s private newspaper; even then, they only kept ten cents for themselves. (Abu-Jamal 2004)

The FBI’s COINTELPRO program eventually employed five techniques involving domestic espionage to slowly split The Black Panther party. This included murders and elimination of the Party’s members. These illegal tactics were steps taken to disband the party in any way possible, as many saw them as a great threat to the nation’s security. This violent split was irreparable, and the Black Party remained broken. Another thing that led to the Panther’s ending, that helped in the divide and conquer tactics used by the government, was how unbelievably vast the party had become. It had changed and transformed from the original party it had become. Even Bobby Seale stated that, before the split, The Black Panther party was “one, two, many parties”. (Abu-Jamal 2004)

From the ideas of The Black Panther Party, other former member started their own chapters; groups such as Black Unity Liberation Front (BULF) or the Sons of Malcolm. Both groups ceased to exist in less than a decade of existence. The closest anyone has come to another Panther party was a man named Michael McGee in Dallas, Texas. He started a group known as the New Black Panther Party. It got well known, and a man named Aaron Michaels took it national. However, Newton’s writing, if ever read, were seldom, and few of the original ideas had been adopted into this new party. The Black Panther Party was one of Black Nationalism and had a hunger for African American liberation. (Abu-Jamal 2004)
of “hope, empathy, knowledge of our imperfections, knowledge of our shortcomings, the continued will to resist-and love” (Abu-Jamal 2004) will ring through the hills of the African American ghettos across the nation for years to come.

The Ku Klux Klan (KKK)

The Ku Klux Klan was a white supremacist group that began as a way of embracing the orders of “the white brotherhood” and “the invisible empire” (Tourgee 1989). They terrorized African Americans, and eventually led to beatings and murders of African Americans. The Ku Klux Klan operated like a military machine. They had different positions and different duties for those positions. For example, the highest possible position attainable in the Klan was the position of Grand Wizard. The Grand Wizard was the supreme officer of the empire. The Ku Klux Klan had outstanding numbers of members, with forty thousand in the Tennessee alone, and some believed it to be stronger in other southern states (Tourgee 1989).

The Ku Klux Klan’s mode of operation was dressing in white sheets and hoods like ghosts to scare people to death. An old apothegm says that “one might as well be killed as scared to death”. They ran around claiming to be the ghosts of dead confederates killed in the war. Their scare tactics quickly turned into violent crimes. They began violently hurting and killing African Americans. That was generally their target; however, they would even harm whites if they helped and African American in need. The Ku Klux Klan was unmerciful upon its victims, and came down upon this nation’s equal rights advocates and African Americans like an unstoppable force, that would not, by any means, be denied. (Tourgee)

Visionaries

Malcolm X

“We declare our right on this earth to be a man, to be a human being, to be respected as a human being, to be given the rights of a human being in this society, on this earth, in this day, which we intend to bring into existence by any means necessary.” (X)

Malcolm X, one of the more influential and eloquent African Americans in civil rights history, was born on the 19th of May, 1925 in Omaha, Nebraska. Originally born Malcolm Little, he was the child of Earl and Louise Little along with seven brothers and sisters. Theirs was not a house of tranquility. Malcolm’s father abused his mother, and both his parents heaped domestic violence upon their children. At the early age of six, Malcolm’s father was killed by a street car, a death which eventually caused his mother mental breakdown and the family’s breakup. Malcolm was shifted from foster home to
foster home until he found his sisters roof over his head in Boston after dropping out of school because his aspirations to become a lawyer, according to his teacher, were not “a realistic goal for an African American”. Picking up hustling habits to obtain money and make a living, he eventually landed himself in jail, which ended up being the most important trip of his life. (Dyson 1995)

Malcolm X was, ever since he was young, was not foolish about racial bigotry in America. Malcolm had experienced racism before and knew very well the condition of segregation in America. His earliest vivid memory was that of his house being burned down when he was only four years old. These acts of hatred left a lot of pain and confusion in Malcolm’s life, and while he was serving his prison sentence, he discovered the catalyst that would allow him to focus his animosity and answer his questions. While serving his sentence Malcolm became a member of the Nation of Islam. Malcolm joined this religion because it preached of Black Nationalism, black pride, and the assumption that white men were evil and the devil. (Dyson 1995)

Malcolm X had a big influence on many African Americans throughout his lifetime, expanding the Nation of Islam from a several hundred members to a hundred thousand members in less than a decade. Malcolm X had the most influence on two young college men, Bobby Seale and Huey P. Newton, which led to his belief structure being integrated as the guidelines of the most violent black liberation groups that was ever a part of the Civil Rights Movement: The Black Panthers. Seale and Newton were so influenced by Malcolm’s stand on Black Nationalism that they took it to the extreme, and multiple act of violence, including the 1967 riots, wreaked havoc among American cities. In essence, Malcolm X advocated every violent act that was an attempt to gain black liberation from the “white devil”. He eventually, as part of his religion, made a holy pilgrimage to Mecca, the holy city of the Islamic faith. He was welcomed and treated well there, even by the white Islamic believers, and in light of this event, he changed his heart, and rather than pushing Black Nationalism, he began advocating human rights. Malcolm eventually departed from the Nation of Islam and instead focused in his orthodox Islamic belief, and traveled around the world and emphasized the link between African American liberation to movements across the world. (Dyson 1995)

Malcolm X, while many disagree with his belief on violence as a way of Black Liberation, was a well known activist, an eloquent speaker, a well read, intelligent man, and one of many Afro-Americans in suffering. Malcolm X’s amazing life came to a sudden and unfortunate end on February 21st, 1965. While preparing to give a speech to the OAAU (Organization of Afro-American Unity, a group which he established) he was gunned down by two Nation of Islam loyalists. Regardless of his death, Malcolm X is a standing symbol of the ongoing struggle against racism and the advocating of human rights in America. We will always have, and must always keep, a memory of the courage of Malcolm X, for “history is a people’s memory, and without a memory, man is demoted to lower animals”. (Dyson)
Martin Luther King Jr.

Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. was one of the most eloquent and intellectual men in the hard times of the Civil Rights Movement. He was a fighter, and he fought with all his heart, in the name of the lord. He fought guns and violence with words, ideas, and love (Kay). He fought to put an end to Jim Crow laws, and all laws that kept blacks in a state of oppression and deprivation. He gained so many followers throughout the years, and gave the most famous speech in Civil Rights history to the biggest demonstration in America’s history. He was killed in the name of African American liberation, and is an ongoing symbol and source of strength for all civil rights advocates (Kay).

Martin Luther King, Jr. was born in January of 1929 in Atlanta, Georgia. When he was born he was so quiet, that the doctor thought he might have been dead. It was not until the doctor gave him a good smack did he start to cry out like normal baby boy. In retrospect, these first few moments of his life reflect his entire life in the fight for civil rights. When he was born, since his father had the same name, everyone just called him M.L. (Kay). M.L. was a pastor’s child. His father spoke every Sunday at Ebenezer Baptist church. Martin Luther King took his faith he inherited from his father and used it in his fight for civil rights. As a little boy watching his father speak every Sunday, and one day told his mother “you just wait and see. I’m going to get me some big words” (Kay).

He was told early in life about how white people didn’t like black people, and how they used to enslave them and beat and kill them, and still did to that day. Martin Experience racial bigotry as a young man, and it made him so angry. So, instead of becoming a doctor like he wanted, he decided to become a minister like his father. He knew people listened to ministers, and he felt that he could do a lot of good and help a lot of black people. Martin, at the early age of fifteen years old, passed an exam and got admitted Morehouse College in Atlanta (Kay). Only a little while later at 17 years old, he gave his first sermon at his church. This road led him to a college in Pennsylvania called Crozer. In Pennsylvania, there were no Jim Crow laws; Martin went to school with other white students for the very first time in his life. He made a lot of good white friends. He realized that there are many different kinds of white people, and not all of them were alike in their distaste in African Americans. While he was going there he also learned about Mohandas Gandhi, a significant civil rights activist in India. The UK had imposed unfair laws upon India, and Gandhi wanted to fight these laws and help his people. Him and everyone else oppressed these laws simply broke the laws, and when they all went to prison, there wasn’t anyone on the outside to do the work. Due to this stress, the government had to change the laws (Kay). Gandhi won his civil rights battle without hurting or killing anybody. Martin wondered whether or not these techniques would work on the Jim Crow laws. (Kay)

Martin began fighting for civil rights and against Jim Crow Segregation. After victory came to them in way of the Montgomery Boycott, Martin and many other black ministers in the south formed a group. They formed the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, the SCLC, which Martin was elected president of. This conference spoke
to black people, spoke about how they could fight against Jim Crow Segregation, and that they should fight for their rights and their freedom. Martin and the SCLC preached about non violence. If the police took them in, go quietly. If they were beaten or people hurt them, they needed the courage to not fight back. Martin read about how Gandhi won this way, and he thought they could do the same, and he got a lot of respect for his ideology, even from whites. One night during the Montgomery boycott, Martin’s house was bombed with his wife Coretta and her friends there. Luckily they were not harmed, but soon a mob of blacks gather in front of his house looking for a fight with the white people. Police and the mayor showed up on scene, and Martin Luther King took a stand before the violence broke out, and calmed down the mob. He spoke of how they must meet their hate with their love, and the mob disbanded. One of the white police officers remarked “I owe my life to that nigger preacher” (Kay)

After the boycott and forming the SCLC, Martin really started letting the bullets fly in his fight for civil rights. Martin heard of four teenagers who walked into a store day after day and sat down at the Jim Crow serving counter. They refused to leave until they were served. This was the beginning of sit-ins (Kay). Martin heard of this and was an advocate of sit-ins, and constructed many sit-ins fighting Jim Crow segregation. Many black people, even Martin himself, were arrested at these sit-ins. They were beaten, they were berated, the white people burned them with their cigarettes, but they did not give up. Many of the stores eventually gave up and started serving the black people. (Kay)

Martin realized the success of these sit-ins, and took them to another venue; the traveling buses. Many black people rode the big traveling Greyhound buses. They sat in the front, they refused to get out of their seats, they sat at the “white only” counters at all the bus stations and use “white only” waiting rooms (Kay). Thus was the beginning of the Freedom riders. One bus from Washington D.C. had its tires slashed, and when it broke down was set on fire, and when the passengers ran from the flames and were beaten. After this incident they had a meeting at Martin’s church in Montgomery, at which an angry mob of white people began to try to break into the church. The group just sat in the church singing “We Shall Overcome”. The crowd eventually left. After more months of freedom riding, the American government outlawed segregation on public transportation vehicles and in public transportation system waiting rooms. (Kay; X)

Martin’s biggest victory came in the city of Birmingham, Alabama. Birmingham was notorious for being the worst Jim Crow city in the United States. Martin went to Birmingham and organized a march for freedom. A thousand marchers led by King marched up to City Hall crying “Freedom has come to Birmingham!” (Kay). The police and fire department of Birmingham struck down the marchers, and rounded them up and threw them in prison. After that plan didn’t work, Martin decided to have a children’s march, thinking that they couldn’t beat and imprison children. A short while after the first march, the children of Birmingham gathered and marched and sang
“deep in my heart, I do believe that we shall overcome” (Kay). The children were beaten and imprisoned. After this incident thousands rose in fury, and on Friday, May 10 Jim Crows laws were finally put to rest in Birmingham, Alabama. (Kay)

Martin Luther King won the Noble Peace Prize for his fight for civil rights in America. He had done more for the Civil Rights Movement than any man in history. People hated Martin Luther King, Jr., people had tried to kill him, and many people were still talking about killing him. Martin knew that his life was in danger and that there were many death threats when he took the stage in Memphis, Tennessee on April 3, 1968. He spoke of the promise land. He had been to the mountain top and seen the promise land. It didn’t matter what happened to him anymore. “I may not get there with you. But we as a people will make it to the promise land” (Kay). King did not live to see his dream come true, for the next night on his motel porch he was shot and killed. Thousands attended his funeral, and while he was no longer there to lead, the people could still follow his words, ideas, and inspiration to the promise land. (Kay)

Famous Events

Montgomery Boycott

On December 1, 1955, a woman named Rosa Parks boarded a city transit bus after a long day at work in the department store. She was extremely tired, and was resting her feet on the bus ride back home. Each stop drew more people on the bus. Eventually the bus was full, and at the next stop, some white people got on the bus. According to the Jim Crow segregation laws in the south, Rosa Parks was required to give up her seat to a white person standing on the bus. When Rosa Parks was told to give up her seat to a white woman, she exclaimed that she was tired and her feet hurt and did something courageous and incredible; she stayed in her seat and refused. The bus driver had her arrested, and she was put in jail for violating the Jim Crow laws. Rosa Parks asked one of the officers who arrested her “Why do you all push us around?” (Parks). The police officer replied “I don’t know, but the law is the law, and you’re under arrest” (Parks).

When word of this spread, someone came up with the idea boycott the buses to fight the segregation law. Martin Luther King, Jr. heard this and loved it. He was right along with all the boycott advocates, and they wrote letters and passed out fliers and spread the word of the boycott. They let every black person in every black neighborhood know about the boycott. Many blacks who did not get the letter instead heard of it in the paper. A white woman got a hold of one and alerted the town newspaper, and the boycott was in the paper being slandered. The editor wrote a whole story about the boycott and his opposition to it. This only worked against them,
and more blacks decided to participate in the boycott (Kay). The morning of the boycott, many black people, including Martin Luther King, Jr., waited patiently to witness the effect of the letter and the story in the paper. As the buses began to drive by, everyone stared in amazement. They were all completely empty; the boycott had begun. (Kay)

Shortly after the boycott began, there was a huge meeting called to order, and the black people asked if they should really continue with the boycott. It was getting hard on them having to ride mules or walk to work back and forth everyday. They eventually put it to a vote, and those who wanted to keep the boycott going were to stand. Slowly everyone started rising to their feet, and they started cheering that the boycott would go on (Kay).

The leaders of the city were enraged, and the owners of the bus company were frustrated because they were losing money. The mayor told the cop to get tough with the black people, especially their leader, Martin Luther King. The police arrested King for the boycott, even though they said it was for breaking the speed limit. One night a group of white men driving in a car threw a bomb on Martin’s porch and blew a hole in his front porch. They arrested Martin multiple times after the first incident. The city leaders were pulling out all the stops to discourage the black’s leader and end the boycott. (Kay)

The boycott battle raged on for four months. The police tried arresting all the leaders for stopping the bus company’s business. They begged the judge to outlaw the car pools that the blacks used to get to and from work. They tried every means possible to bring this fight to an end. However, one day, while sitting in court, Martin Luther King relieved a note from a reporter. It was a ruling from the Supreme Court that declared city transit bus Jim Crow segregation laws were unconstitutional and were against the law. The blacks had won the Montgomery boycott, and that was the beginning of a long fight for African Americans in their struggle for civil rights. (Kay)

March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom

August 28, 1963; the emotional climate was that of nervousness, excitement, anxiousness, and wonderment. Even with the absence of Martin Luther King Jr. and other significant leaders, a swarm of people begin to march in Washington like a “gentle army” (Williams). The crowd began appearing in Washington before dawn, and by 11:20 the crowd had to grown to an estimated 100,000 people. A peaceful demonstration in Washington began to grow to an unbelievable size, and was taken over by the people of the march itself, and begun with the people of the march, and later joined by their leaders. When the leaders got there the chief planner of the Bayard Rustin exclaimed “My God, they’re going” (Williams). The Afro-American magazine exclaimed that they “were pouring from all over” (Williams). Indeed, thousands of buses arrived to the nation’s capitol, thousands of people took cars, and many others even
took planes to Washington to be a part of the historic march. The march soon grew to over 250,000 people strong.

The crowd marched up to the Lincoln memorial where Martin Luther King addressed them and gave his unforgettable “I Have a Dream” speech. King was the last to speak at the march. It was a hot sunny day, people were tired, everyone was tired; “the only thing that was keeping us there is you didn’t want to miss kings speech” said Clayborne Carson (Williams). People were waiting, waiting for that final crescendo of exacerbated exclamation that highlighted the march. King began reciting the speech he had prepared, but dropped the prepared remarks in the emotion of the moment, and let the feeling take over. He spoke about his dream, and every time he mentioned it people got so loud with applause and amen’s that you could barely hear him. Martin Luther King put a stamp on the march on Washington, and brought attention and excitement to the Civil Rights Movement. (Williams)

Results

There are harsh results of the civil Rights movement. Some long standing hatred from the times of the fight for freedom has allowed some negativity in different contexts for an everyday average black man or white man. For example, the negative stereotype in the context of crime for a black man is they are natural crime committers, and that they are excessively violent. In the context of work or work ethic, the stereotype for a black man is lazy or lacking discipline. Studies show that in a survey given to white subjects, a large percentage said that they found blacks to be lazy, lacking discipline, and aggressive or violent (Peffley). Blacks exhibit the same way of thinking towards white people. They tend to act a certain way, work a certain way, and live a certain way. These stereotypes affect our everyday living. They can cause bias’ in the system, and can cause distress and anguish in normal public living. The Civil Rights movement did a lot for the African American, but they are still stereotyped, and they do still stereotype whites (Peffley). There is also reverse racism. Some people believe that programs such as affirmative action are a form of reverse racism because they give an unfair advantage to black people, and don’t feel that we need to compensate for their lives.

There have been many court cases regarding civil rights. Many rulings have been given, many laws have been passed. Many of those rulings were overturned, many of those laws reformed. Just before the turn of the century came a case that further installed segregation laws. In 1890 Louisiana passed a law that required railroads to provide “separate but equal accommodation for the white and colored races” (Hodak). In an attempt to demonstrate against this law, a young man by the name of Homer Plessy decided to take action. Plessy, a man of light complexion, a white man at first glance, had African American blood in his ancestry, and was one eighth black. He told the conductor this, and under the “one drop” law of Louisiana, Plessy was a
colored man, and was told to move to the colored car of the train. After refusing to do so, he was arrested. His case eventually made it to the Supreme Court four years later, but the court upheld the Louisiana law, which further integrated the "separate but equal" clause. This civil rights loss was more important than if he had won the case. (Hodak)

In the year of 1951, a young black girl named Linda Brown tried to enroll in school in Topeka, Kansas, and was denied enrollment because of the color of her skin. Her case also made it to the Supreme Court, and in 1954 the court voted in favor of Linda Brown, ending educational segregation in America. Since then Brown v Board has served as a proxy for a string of cases involving civil rights (Britt). The Chief Justice Earl Warren that gave his opinion on the case against segregation and presided over the court when the ruling was finalized did not come onto the Supreme Court until 1953. It took four years to make a decision, and Earl Warren came to the Supreme Court with one opinion on this case and one opinion only; de jure school segregation was unconstitutional (Patterson). Warren had all the justices on his side except for Stanley Reed. After years of struggling for Supreme Court unanimity, Warren wanted a unanimous decision. Warren convinced him that a dissent would encourage resistance in the south. After reading Warrens short eleven page opinion, and reading that the south would be given a years time to adjust, he finally agreed, and Warren got his unanimous decision. People criticize Warren’s decision, others praise him. Disregarding pessimism or optimism in the ruling of Brown, it was a huge win and turn around for civil rights in America, and opened up a wonderful world of possibilities for black children (Patterson).

There is even some reformed legislation that is ignored until it has to be complexly reinforced upon the country. The fifteenth amendment to the constitution of the United States state that the “right of citizens of the United States to vote shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any state on account of race, color, or previous condition of servitude” (Primary Document in American History). The fifteenth Amendment was ratified on February 3 of 1870. However, it would be almost a decade until this amendment was implemented through proper legislation to give black’s the opportunity to exhibit their right to vote (Primary Document in American History).

After the fifteenth amendment was passed, the south came up with clever ways around the legislation to keep African Americans from voting. They used literacy tests, which blacks had to pass to be eligible to vote, which was far beyond the intellectual reaches of even some the whites. They also implemented a poll tax, and made the wage too affordable for most of the African Americans. However, is those two precautions did not keep them from voting, the last was bound to catch them. The grandfather clause was a clause that basically said that if your grandfather was not a landowner, you could not vote. Since it was only the late 1800’s, most if not all blacks that were grown and that time had grandfathers who were slaves, which means it
would be impossible for them to own land. These precautions, known as Jim Crow segregation, kept African Americans from voting for 95 years.

In 1965, 95 years after the ratification of the fifteenth amendment of the United States constitution, Lyndon B. Johnson and congress pass the voting rights act of 1965. The purpose of this act was “to enforce the fifteenth amendment of the constitution” (Voting Rights Act of 1965). This Act outlawed literacy tests and allowed the appointment of federal examiners, with power to register eligible voters, in jurisdictions covered by the legislation. It also required preclearance for any new voting practices employed in those jurisdictions. Although the remainder resembled the fifteenth amendment, prohibiting the denial of voting based on skin color. However, the 24th amendment declared the poll tax unconstitutional (Voting Rights Act of 1965). Jim Crow segregation had been abolished, and the ability to exercise your right to vote had been granter to the African American man.

Conclusion

Martin Luther King, Jr. once said “If man hasn’t discovered something that he will die for, he isn’t fit to live” (Civil Rights Quotes). Martin Luther King fought with all his heart, mind, and strength for civil rights in America. He was right; at some point, you do just get tired (Kay). Never in the history of America has a man so passionately and lovingly fought for his people. Men of this caliber were unique to the Civil Rights Movement. Malcolm X, who was in opposition of a peaceful retaliation, was the same way. He once said “there is no such thing as a peaceful revolution” (Civil Rights Quotes). The Civil Rights movement began in the early 1900’s, and some argue that it’s still being fought to this day. However, today is not so much about legislation as it is about individual morality. Today, people are violent, stupid, and stubborn. People don’t know the right way to go about things. Visionaries like Martin Luther King and Malcolm X lifted the spirits of the blacks, made them believe that they had a fighting chance, and brought change to America in favor of the African American. The forefront was everywhere. The battle was in the streets, in the stores, on the buses, trains, and planes. It was in Washington, D.C., it was in our hearts, in our minds. There was no shelter, and those who fought valiantly made the greatest difference ever made in America. Since the signing of the Declaration of Independence on July the Fourth of 1776, nothing has been as significant. Laws were passed, amendments were ratified, but nothing brought peace to the struggling spirit of the American Negro. Not until Rosa Parks, until people stopped standing for oppression and sat for freedom, not until Huey P. Newton met Bobby Seale, not until Jim Crow was shot down off his oppressive perch and put in his cage. Times grew hard, life got tough, but the withstanding determination of the suffering, of the powerless, of the hungry, of the beaten, of the tired, of the weary, of the sad was greater than the pain of walking to work, or getting clubbed by the cops, or hosed by the fir department. The leaders of the Civil Rights movement saw their
fellow people in pain for worse than the physical lacerations, but of mental anguish and emotional debilitation. That is why these great men of true courageous caliber are unique to this American Civil Rights Movement. Only in times of true hardship, when a leader is more needed than anything, can men rise to the greater calling of his people and become the light of hope they are looking for; only in the worst times can one man make the best of his people. This was done so in the mid-twentieth century era of the civil rights movement.
Works Cited


Civil Rights Quotes. 3 December 2008 <http://www.historylearningsite.co.uk/civil%20rights%20quotes.htm>.


