

- 6 -

To what extent were United States governmental institutions successful in advancing civil rights for African Americans after 1945?

22

After the Second World War, the civil rights movement began to gain momentum in the USA. ~~Although~~ Various organisations were established, and the mid-50s to mid-60s saw the rise of the SCLC, NAACP and CORE, all of which fought for civil rights and equality. Although these organisations were a crucial part of the movement, without federal support and presidential actions, desegregation may have never become a legal reality. After 1945, Truman, Eisenhower, Kennedy and Johnson saw the biggest advances in the civil rights movement. By the late-60s, the movement experienced a shift to a more radical movement. Although governmental institutions were somewhat successful in advancing civil rights for African Americans after 1945, the federal government could not change public opinion, and ~~ra~~ discrimination remained a large problem in the United States.

Although the Truman administration is often overlooked when it comes to the civil rights movement, some large advances were made during those ~~eight~~ two terms. President Truman was the first president to address the NAACP, in 1946, and the same year, he established the Committee on Civil Rights. ~~The Truman~~ In 1947, the military was officially desegregated. Historians often overlook the desegregation of the military in the fight for civil rights, however it is in fact a milestone achievement. Despite Truman being a self-confessed racist, ~~his~~ he made bold public statements, calling for laws to prohibit lynching, and increase equal employment opportunities. Although these laws were not actually passed during the Truman years, these public declarations helped draw attention to the movement, for civil rights. The



08A806

-7-

Truman administration and governmental institution may not have made many legal advances for civil rights during this time, but they were able to set the ball rolling and ~~parse~~ ^{take} the path towards equality.

The government during the Eisenhower administration, on the other hand, did not ~~take~~ ^{take} as large steps towards equality as the previous government. Although the Supreme Court did order the official desegregation of educational facilities in the Brown vs. Topeka case, ~~the~~ no official date was set for when desegregation had to occur and this resulted in an extremely slow process. Eisenhower was not an eager supporter of civil rights, and historians see him as only taking small steps when absolutely necessary. This is evidenced by the way in which he reluctantly ordered 1000 federal troops, from the military, a governmental institution, to go to Little Rock, Arkansas in 1957 to uphold the rights of the famous "Little Rock Nine". Although this event received a lot of media attention and publicity, the fact that one thousand federal troops were ~~needed~~ required in order to enable these nine black children to go to a white school shows that advances made by governmental institutions may only be advances on paper and not in practicality. Overall, few advances were made during Eisenhower's time in office.

As the civil rights movement began to pick up speed in the early 1960s, during John F. Kennedy's election, he promised change and equality, gaining black support. Once elected, however, Kennedy "did nothing" for the civil



08A607

- 8 -

rights movement, as according to Berliner, et al. During his first year in office, CORE organised the Freedom Rides, in 1961, where they tested the Supreme Court's ruling about the desegregation of public transport. A small, integrated group travelled across the south of the United States, on intercity railway carriages. During this trip, the black passengers were assaulted and attacked on almost every occasion. Once again, this showed how advances made by US governmental institutions did not always result in practical advances in real life. Two years later, in 1963, the civil rights movement reached a key year for protests. First, there was the Birmingham Campaign, led by Martin Luther King Jr., where ~~they~~ members of numerous civil rights groups, and student protesters ~~in~~ campaigned peacefully for desegregation and equality. The protesters were met with police brutality, King was arrested and Kennedy had to intervene. This campaign led to Kennedy's support for the Civil Rights Bill, which he put forward to Congress and lost a large amount of white support for. The March on Washington, later that year, however, did not receive the same sympathy and support from the Kennedy administration or Congress. Following Martin Luther King Jr's famous "I have a dream" speech, the civil rights movement did actually receive more support on a nationwide scale. Nevertheless, although many documentaries and historical documents credit Kennedy and his administration with playing a large role in the civil rights movement, other historians, such as Fairclough discredit him, claiming that he failed when it came to the advancement for coloured people.

Although ~~Johnson's~~ the effectiveness of Johnson's
(CONTINUES IN NEXT ANSWER BOOKLET)



08AB08

- 2 -

2 2 presidency has been ~~was~~ "overwhelmed and ultimately undermined" by the Vietnam War, as according to historian Vivienne Sanders, out of all the presidential administrations, it was during his presidency that the greatest advances in the civil rights movement were made. After five months of ~~being~~ ^{becoming} President, Johnson announced his "Great Society" and the war he planned to wage on poverty. Immediately, in 1964, Congress passed the Civil Rights Act. This ended "de jure" segregation, although it soon became apparent that "de facto" segregation ~~was~~ remained a major issue. Following the Selma protests in 1965, ~~to~~ a voting rights protest led by Martin Luther King Jr, Congress passed another bill: the Voting Rights Act. Johnson claimed that it was "wrong - deadly wrong" to prohibit another man from voting. Sanders claims that Johnson led a "legislative revolution", by making a martyr out of Kennedy, resulting in great advances by Congress. Johnson's biographers credit him greatly with massive advances in the civil rights movement. However, by the late-60s, the civil rights movement changed. Johnson was unable to do anymore, due to congress and white opinion, the Vietnam War, and the Ghetto riots and white backlash.

All in all, governmental institutions, particularly Congress, presidential administrations, and the Supreme Court, were all very important in advancing civil rights for African Americans after 1945. Their success in the matter, on the other hand, is a different matter. Although Jim Crow laws were abolished and de jure segregation prohibited by the mid-60s, de facto segregation and discrimination remained problematic for years to come, and, in Eisenhower's words, it would take more than "cold-lawmaking" to change things in the country



08AB02