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## **The American Civil Rights Movement**

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## **The American Civil Rights Movement**

The Southern Leadership Christian Conference (SCLC) was established in 1957 by Martin Luther King Junior and the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee ("snick") in 1960 (Higginbotham & Franklin, 2017). The two entities played a significant part in the turbulence witnessed in the 1960s with the civil rights movement. One major factor that led to the tensions between the two entities is that the SCLC was comprised of black churches led by church leaders, whereas SNCC attempted to establish a societal entity led by the poor. In addition to that, the SCLC, despite its original Student Non-violent Coordinating Committee, started to embrace and was enthusiastic about violent resistance to segregation while creating a society that was against the teachings of Revered Dr. Martin Luther King Junior (Higginbotham & Franklin, 2017). Furthermore, some influential members of the SNCC derided Dr. Martin Luther King and his accomplices as "Uncle Toms." At the same time, the SCLC denounced non-violent means that championed violence to fight segregation, hence the increase in criticism of Martin Luther King by SNCC workers.

Three events marked the turning point in the civil rights movement in 1960. The first is the freedom riders. On the 4th of May 1961, thirteen freedom riders, comprising six white and seven African-American activists, boarded a bus in the capital, Washington D.C. Their journey was to take them through the southern parts of America to protest racial segregation at the bus terminals. Their motivation was the court's decision in the Boynton versus Virginia case, where the courts declared that exclusion of federal transportation amenities illegal. The Freedom Rides attracted global awareness when they faced white protestors and the police. On mama's day of 1961, the bus set foot in Anniston, Alabama, and it was attacked by a mob that threw bombs. The riders escaped after being thoroughly beaten while the bus burnt. Photos of the burning bus were

widely circulated, and the riders were unable to find another driver to advance their journey. Robert F. Kennedy, the sibling to President Kennedy, pleaded with the Alabama chief to seek another bus driver. The freedom ride continued under heavy police escort that withdrew once the riders reached Montgomery. At this point, another white mob attacked the bus, brutalizing its occupants. On the 24th of May 1961, a cluster of Freedom Riders arrived in Mississippi, where a jubilant crowd met them. However, they were arrested and detained in a "whites only" establishment after being condemned to thirty days in incarceration, but the Supreme Court overturned their jail term. Many new Freedom Riders joined the drive, forcing President Kennedy's administration, specifically the Interstate Commerce Commission, to prohibit segregation at the interstate bus terminals.

Another significant occurrence is the Birmingham Campaign, which was a campaign in early 1963 by the SCLC to enlighten the public regarding the efforts of the local African-American leadership in desegregating public amenities in Birmingham, Alabama (Higginbotham & Franklin, 2017). The happenings in Birmingham also marked the climax of the civil rights movement. In 1963, the city responded to white supremacy, forcing the federal government to intercede on racial changes. The police used fire hoses and unleashed dogs against non-violent protestors, and the public outcry that ensued forced the president to propose the civil rights statute that later became the Civil Rights Act of 1964. In addition to that, on the 5th of March 1965, many people gathered in Selma, Alabama, to walk to Montgomery. The march was meant to champion African-Americans participation in their constitutional right of voting, despite the opposition from white supremacists. The walk progressed successfully and its effect reverberated in Washington D.C. Subsequently, Congress enacted the Voting Rights Act that ensured millions

of African-Americans participate in the electoral process, hence the significance of the Selma to Montgomery walk.

Martin Luther King Junior doubled as a church minister and an activist and used his influence to lead the civil rights movement. He called for several peaceful protests as the leader of the SCLC, including the march to the capital, Washington. Martin Luther King used non-violent strategies like boycotts, sit-ins, and peaceful marches that effectively sent white supremacists against racial segregation (Higginbotham & Franklin, 2017). He also spoke to convince the masses regarding the importance of the civil rights movement. Malcolm X was also a good orator who referred to white folks as "white devil" while asking his followers to be proud of their color, championed black defense and economic autonomy. Malcolm was a minister among the Islamic faithful, who believed that African-Americans were god's chosen descendants. Malcolm X and Martin Luther King adopted different strategies and tactical guidance in the mass protests during the American Civil Rights Movement, and it bore fruits. For instance, the Civil Rights Act as well as the Voting Rights Acts of 1965 were enacted because of the two leaders' negative and sometimes drastic tactics.

The March on Washington for liberties, jobs, and freedom happened in the capital city in 1963. The walk was led by the American Civil Rights leaders to disapprove of the racial biases and to offer to back for the significant laws that were pending in Congress. More than 250,000 individuals participated in the march, which achieved its goal when Martin Luther King and other leaders sat down with President John F. Kennedy and other leaders to discuss the necessity to support bipartisan aid to the civil rights laws. Consequently, <sup>1</sup>the Civil Rights Act of 1964 together with the Voting Rights Act of 1965 resulted from the march on Washington.

To sum it up, in the late 1960s, Black Power also arose to signify the call for an immediate violent means to address American white supremacists. Most of these radical ideas like Black Power were guided by Malcolm X's disapproval of King's call for non-violent means. "Black power" slogan was initially used by Carmichael in June 1966 during a march in Mississippi and called for African Americans to make the most of their political and economic influence. The slogan "Black Power" became a famous slogan because the leaders of the civil rights movements, significantly Malcolm X, rallied African-Americans to be proud of their racial backgrounds while advocating for self-sufficiency and equality among racial minorities.

### Reference

Higginbotham, E., & Franklin, J. H. (2017). *From Slavery to Freedom* (9th Ed.). McGraw-Hill Education.

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