

## **S6 African American Civil Rights Movement**

When people talk about the Civil Rights Movement, they usually refer to the protests that took place in the 1950s and 1960s in the USA, which led to the Civil Rights Act of 1964. However, the African American Civil Rights Movement was an ongoing battle for racial equality that took place over 100 years after the American Civil War (1861-1865).

The beginning of the Civil Rights Movement is traced back to the Abolitionist Movement that took place before the Civil War. Abolitionists were people who wanted slavery to come to an end. Slavery had been outlawed in many northern states before the Civil War. During the war, President Abraham Lincoln freed slaves with the Emancipation Proclamation. After the war, slavery was made illegal with the thirteenth amendment to the U.S. Constitution.

Even though slavery had been made illegal, African Americans continued to suffer in many southern states. Laws were implemented to separate black people from white people. Some of these laws included separate schools, restaurants, and transportation for black people. It also meant that black people were prevented from voting. These became known as Jim Crow laws. Black people began to protest these segregation laws in the early 1900s and in 1909 the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) was established to ensure the political, educational, social, and economic equality of rights of black people in America.

The 1954 Supreme Court case *Brown v. Board of Education* ruled that the segregation of children in schools was unconstitutional. The following year, Rosa Parks was arrested for refusing to give up her seat on a bus to white passenger. Events such as these caused

the civil rights movement to gain momentum and brought Martin Luther King Jr. to the forefront of the movement. King led a number of nonviolent protests including the Birmingham Campaign and the March on Washington.

In 1964, the Civil Rights Act was signed into law by President Lyndon B. Johnson, who had become president after the assassination of President John F. Kennedy in 1963. In fact, it was Kennedy who had initially proposed legislation a few months before his assassination that would go on to become the Civil Rights Act. The act outlawed segregation and the Jim Crow laws of the south. It also outlawed discrimination based on racial, national background, and gender. Although this certainly did not solve these issues in the United States, it gave NAACP and other organisations a strong base to fight discrimination in the courts.

The Voting Rights Act was passed in 1965. This law meant that citizens could not be denied their right to vote based on race. It also meant that literacy tests and poll taxes (which both had denied black people from voting) were also outlawed.

In 1968, the Civil Rights Act was expanded to include the Fair Housing Act, which meant that prohibited discrimination in sale, rental, and financing of housing based on race, creed, and national origin.

There is still a long way to go in terms of racial equality in the USA and worldwide, but thanks to people like Rosa Parks and Martin Luther King Jr., as well as countless others, the movement is heading in the right direction.