

CIVIL RIGHTS VOCABULARY

Terms

Racism

Deeply rooted prejudice which may be expressed in the idea that one race is superior to another. Racism can take the form of private acts of racial discrimination or repression; or laws which segregate or in other ways deprive members of a race of civil and political rights and privileges. In varying degrees American Indians, persons of African descent, Chinese, and Japanese have been objects of racism in the United States.

Civil Rights

The rights each person has as a citizen. The government can't take them away. Most of our civil rights are in the Bill of Rights.

Segregate

Separating one group of people from another group of people.

Integrate

Removing all barriers and placing all groups of people together.

Jim Crow Laws

Thousands of state and local laws which were passed by southern states to keep Blacks separated and in an inferior position.

Poll Tax

A fee charged to voters. A method used to keep poor Blacks from voting.

Literacy Tests

Tests were given to people who were registering to vote. These were often unfair to Blacks.

Organizations

Black Muslims

first started in Detroit in 1930 by Mr. Farrad Mohammad, a peddler of Arab origin. For a long time, it was just a cult. By the sixties, it had grown to national prominence under the leadership of Elijah Muhammad (Elijah Poole). They believe that the only way for blacks to solve their problems is through separation. Blacks are urged to build their homes, businesses, pool their own resources, make their neighborhoods decent places to live, and build their own economic systems.

BPP (Black Panther Party)

organized in 1965, after riots in Los Angeles, by Bobby Seale and Huey Newton. The original purpose was to organize armed patrols to follow police and intervene if they got out of line. Over the years, the militant Panthers engaged in many shoot-outs with police. They wanted an independent, self-governing black community.

CORE (Congress of Racial Equality)

a national interracial organization centered in New York that played a large role in organizing and advising protest demonstrations. It operated on the philosophy of nonviolence.

NAACP (National Association for the Advancement of Colored People)

this organization is the oldest of its kind. Their philosophy is that social change can be brought about by educating the public and by taking action through the courts. Though educated upper-class blacks run the organization, it speaks for all blacks. The organization operates on three levels—national, regional, and local.

NUL (National Urban League)

a moderate organization that operates primarily in the cities and uses the courts to achieve equality for blacks.

SCLC (Southern Christian Leadership Conference)

formed in 1957 to promote nonviolent direct action anyway it could. Based in Atlanta, members would travel to any city requesting help to set up sit-ins, boycotts, etc.

SNCC (Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee)

organized in 1960 to coordinate protest sit-ins, it consisted of a hard core of militant students. The organization also initiated protests and registered voters in Mississippi.

Leaders

Stokely Carmichael

militant leader of the SNCC. He popularized the term “Black Power” in a march in June 1966. He was expelled from SNCC because of his membership in the Black Panthers from which he eventually broke because of their emphasis on force and submission to authority. After touring the world, Carmichael’s passport was revoked because the Justice Department claimed he was preaching rebellion.

James Farmer

founded CORE in Chicago in 1942, participated in sit-ins and freedom rides and was appointed by Nixon as assistant secretary of health, education, and welfare. He broke from CORE in 1966 because he did not like the increased emphasis on separatism.

Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

head of the SCLC. Influenced by Jesus and Gandhi, he believed in nonviolent direct resistance as the way to achieve black rights. He organized the Montgomery Bus Boycott and the 1963 march on Washington. His tireless work for black equality was cut short in 1968 when he was assassinated on the balcony of a Memphis motel.

Elijah Muhammed

was leader of the Black Muslims since 1930. He founded his first temple in Detroit in 1931. After serving four years in jail for draft dodging in World War II, he began to recruit follower. By 1959 he had fifty temples in over twenty-two states. He came into national publicity in 1965 when his former right hand man, Malcolm X, was killed, and one of the suspects was a Black Muslim enforcer.

Bobby Seale

was national chairman and co-founder of the Black Panthers. He and Huey Newton staged rallies and recruited members from the ghettos of San Francisco and Oakland. They appealed to those blacks who had experienced police brutality. Seale explained the Panthers’ attitude by saying, “We realize that the white power structure’s real power is military force and its police force. We can see our black communities being occupied by foreign troops. Now the man (white) can’t afford to wage civil war on a full scale against us in this country and at the same time have wars going on throughout the world. We know this, and this is the basis for our power.” Seale was arrested for demonstrations during the Democratic National Convention in Chicago in 1969.

Roy Wilkins

head of the NAACP and a moderate. He spoke against violence and supported the use of troops to quell riots. Although criticized by militants in the black movement, he had enough influence and respect to get things done that others could not.

Methods

Sit-ins

started on February 1, 1960 when four college students walked into a Woolworth's in Greensboro, North Carolina and were refused service, they sat down and refused to move.

Freedom Rides

in 1961, CORE organized a "Freedom Ride"—a bus trip to New Orleans—to test the recent Virginia court ruling that discrimination against interstate travelers in bus terminals was illegal. By the time they reached Alabama, they had split into two buses. A mob attacked one bus, destroying it with an incendiary bomb. The passengers barely escaped. The other bus continued to Birmingham where the passengers were beaten when they stepped off.

Rioting

many cities across the country became battlefields for frustrated blacks. One of the worst riots took place in Watts, a Los Angeles ghetto. The Kerner Commission Report describes what happened:

"As a crowd gathered, law enforcement officials were called to the scene. A highway patrolman mistakenly struck a bystander with his bully club. A young Negro woman, who was erroneously accused of spitting on the police, was dragged into the middle of the street.

"When the police departed, members of the crowd began hurling rocks at passing cars, beating white motorists, and overturning cars and setting them on fire....

"Few police were on hand the next morning when huge crowds gathered in the business district of Watts...and began looting... Around noon, extensive firebombing began. Few white persons were attacked; the principal intent of the rioters now seemed to be to destroy property owned by whites, in order to drive white 'exploiters' out of the ghetto.

"Thirty-six hours after the first Guard units arrived, the main force of the riot had been blunted. Almost four thousand persons were

arrested. Thirty-four were killed and hundreds injured. Approximately thirty-five million dollars in damage had been inflicted.”

Law Suits

while attending Jackson State College in Mississippi, James Meredith, a twenty-nine-year-old Air Force veteran, decided he wanted to desegregate the University of Mississippi which was an all white school. Having been rejected because he was black, he sought the help of the NAACP, which secured a Federal court order demanding his entrance to the school. His entry started an uprising that needed federal troops to quell.

Writing

writers such as Richard Wright (Black Boy), James Baldwin (Go Tell it on the Mountain), Eldridge Cleaver (Soul on Ice), Claude Brown (Manchild in the Promised Land), and Ralph Ellison (Invisible Man) painted vivid portraits of the cruelties and injustices suffered by blacks in both the North and South.

Marching

in 1963, 200,000 people from all over the United States converged on Washington, DC to promote action on civil rights' issues. The march, endorsed by the National Urban League, the NAACP, CORE, SCLC, and SNCC, was peaceful as King had assured leaders in Washington it would be. The protestors carried placards, sang hymns, chanted protests and listened to speeches, the most famous of which was delivered by Martin Luther King, Jr., in which he proclaimed his dream of equality and freedom for all Americans.

Boycotts

on December 1, 1955, Rosa Parks, a tired seamstress, boarded a bus in Montgomery, Alabama, and sat down in a seat. When she was asked to give up her seat to a white passenger, she refused. As a result, she was arrested and fined ten dollars. This action enraged the blacks of Montgomery who, under the leadership of Martin Luther King, Jr., boycotted Montgomery busses for 381 days until their demands were met.

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