The development of changing attitudes towards civil rights, 1945–68

The activities and achievements of the Civil Rights movement
There was considerable progress in the search for improved civil rights during the 1950s and 1960s. In education, landmark cases such as *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka*, Little Rock High School and James Meredith did remove segregation but there was often unwillingness on the part of many states to embrace the changes. There was progress in desegregating transport after the Montgomery bus boycott and the freedom rides. However, no new laws were introduced to outlaw racial discrimination until the mid-1960s and many politicians and ordinary US citizens remained opposed to radical change.

What was the importance of *Brown v. Topeka*?
In the 1950s, segregation was still a key feature of life for black Americans and they were still subject to what were known as the Jim Crow laws.

The first case to challenge segregation in education did not originate in the South, but in Topeka, a town in the mid-west state of Kansas. Linda Brown’s parents wanted her to attend a neighbourhood school rather than the school for black Americans which was some distance away. Lawyers from the NAACP, led by Thurgood Marshall, presented evidence to the Supreme Court stating that separate education created low self-esteem and was psychologically harmful. Moreover, the evidence also pointed out that educational achievement was restricted because of this policy. The process took eighteen months and the unanimous decision was announced on 17 May 1954 by Chief Justice Warren:

“Segregation of white and coloured children in public schools has a detrimental effect upon the coloured children. The effect is greater when it has the sanction of the law, for the policy of separating the races is usually interpreted as denoting the inferiority of the Negro group … We conclude that, in the field of public education, the doctrine of ‘separate but equal’ has no place. Separate educational facilities are inherently unequal.”

Problems after *Brown v. Topeka*
However, the *Brown v. Topeka* judgement did not specify how integration should be carried out — apart from a vague notion of ‘with all deliberate speed’ — and said nothing about *de facto* segregation. This vagueness about how to enforce the ruling gave segregationists the opportunity to organize resistance.

Some areas began to desegregate and, by 1957, more than 300,000 black children were attending schools which had formerly been segregated. However, there were 2.4 million black southern children who were still being educated in Jim Crow schools. Moreover, there were many states, especially in the South, which took deliberate measures to keep separate schools. More than 100 senators and congressmen from the southern states signed the Southern Manifesto, a document that opposed racial integration in education.
Over the next two years, southern state legislatures passed more than 450 laws and resolutions which were aimed to prevent the Brown decision being enforced. Despite the decision of the Supreme Court and the open hostility to the Brown case, President Eisenhower did little to encourage integration. He was forced into action in 1957 by the events at Little Rock High School.

Why were Little Rock High School and James Meredith significant in the struggle for equal education?

After the Brown v. Topeka decision, Little Rock High School, Arkansas, decided to allow nine black students to enrol. On 3 September 1957, the nine students, led by Elizabeth Eckford, tried to enter the school to enrol but were prevented by the state governor, Orval Faubus, who ordered National Guardsmen to block their entry. Faubus said there would be public disorder if black students tried to enrol. The following day, 4 September, the National Guard was removed by order of Faubus and the nine students ran the gauntlet of a vicious white crowd. At midday, the students went home under police guard because their safety could not be guaranteed. Press and television coverage in the USA and across the world was a serious embarrassment to a country which put itself forward as the champion of freedom and equality.

President Eisenhower had to act. He sent the 101st Airborne Division of over 1,000 federal troops to Little Rock to protect the black students for the rest of the school year. The 101st patrolled outside the school and escorted the black students into the school. In addition, each of the nine was assigned a personal guard from the 101st who followed them around the school to protect them from the white students. Despite the President’s intervention, Faubus closed all Arkansas schools the following year, simply to prevent integration. Many white and most black students had no schooling for a year. Schools in Arkansas reopened in 1959 following a Supreme Court ruling that schools must integrate.

The James Meredith case

In June 1962, the Supreme Court upheld a federal court decision to force Mississippi University to accept the black student James Meredith. The university did not want any black students and Meredith was prevented from registering. In his first major involvement in civil rights, President Kennedy sent in 320 federal marshals to escort Meredith to the campus. There were riots: two people were killed and 166 marshals and 210 demonstrators were wounded. President Kennedy then sent more than 2,000 troops to restore order. The black activists called the event ‘The Battle of Oxford.’ Three hundred soldiers had to remain on the campus until Meredith received his degree a year later.

There were some other instances of resistance to integration in education, such as that led by Governor Wallace in Alabama when he tried to stop black Americans from enrolling at the state
university. Wallace said, ‘I am the embodiment of the sovereignty of this state, and I will be present to bar the entrance of any Negro who attempts to enrol at the university.’ However, the fact that there had been federal intervention at Mississippi University showed that the tide had turned.

**What were the causes of the Montgomery bus boycott?**
The Montgomery Bus Boycott is seen by many as the real start of the US civil rights movement.

Segregation on public transport in the USA had long been a problem for black Americans. There had been attempts to end this and there had been some success in 1953 in Baton Rouge, Louisiana. The issue came to a head in Montgomery, Alabama, after the arrest of Rosa Parks in December 1955. The rules about segregation on public transport in Montgomery were particularly harsh.

On 1 December 1955, Rosa Parks boarded a bus in the city of Montgomery and sat with three other black people in the fifth row — the first row that black people could occupy. A few stops later, the first four rows were filled with white people and one white man was left standing. According to the law black and white people could not share the same row, so the bus driver asked all four of the black people seated in the fifth row to move. Three of them moved; Rosa Parks refused.

Rosa Parks was subsequently arrested and from this point the situation escalated into a crisis. Initially, the Montgomery Women’s Political Council, led by Jo Ann Robinson, decided to hold a one-day boycott of the buses on Monday 5 December, the day of Parks’ trial. On the day after Parks’ arrest, Robinson and some students printed thousands of leaflets encouraging people to boycott the city’s buses.

Local civil rights activists such as Ralph Abernathy and Martin Luther King Jr (the new minister at Dexter Avenue Baptist Church) became involved. They held a meeting to plan a rally for the evening of the trial and the local NAACP began to prepare its legal challenge to the segregation laws. At the meeting, the Montgomery Improvement Association (MIA) was established to oversee the continuation and maintenance of the boycott and also to improve race relations. King was chosen to lead the MIA because he was quite new to Montgomery and the authorities knew little about him. It is thought that about 20,000 people were involved in the Monday boycott. During the evening of 5 December, some 7,000 attended the planned rally and heard Martin Luther King make an inspirational speech.

Rosa Parks was fined $10 for the offence on the bus and $4 costs. The MIA decided to continue the boycott until its demands were met. The Montgomery authorities then made a huge error of judgement, in refusing the moderates’ demands. They pushed King and the MIA to demand complete desegregation on buses.

**What happened during the bus boycott?**
Those boycotting the buses were helped during the first few days by black taxi companies. As the boycott progressed, churches bought cars in order to take people to and from work. This created problems because there had to be specific pick-up places for the workers and when
people were waiting they were harassed by the police, who used local laws to try to prevent crowds gathering. Many drivers were arrested for minor traffic violations.

Despite their action, the boycotters faced continued intimidation. The Montgomery White Citizens Council led the organized opposition. Membership of this body swelled to almost 12,000 by March 1956, and its membership included some of Montgomery’s leading city officials. The violence used against the boycotters was often extreme. King and other leaders had their homes firebombed during 1956. The next step in intimidation came in February 1956, when about ninety of the leading figures, including King and Rosa Parks, were arrested for organizing an illegal boycott. Though found guilty, no charges were made after appeal.

As the boycott moved into the summer of 1956, the US national press covered events more closely and this helped raise awareness of the issue of deep racial hatred in the South. The MIA took the issue of segregation on transport to a federal district court on the basis that it was unconstitutional, citing the Brown v. Topeka case. The federal court accepted that segregation was unconstitutional. However, the Montgomery city officials appealed and the case went to the Supreme Court. On 13 November 1956, the Supreme Court upheld the federal court’s decision. The boycott had been successful. It formally came to an end on 20 December 1956 when King, Abernathy and other leaders travelled on an integrated bus.

What was the importance of the bus boycott?
The bus boycott was important because:
• It showed that black Americans were able to organize themselves.
• It demonstrated that unity and solidarity between organizations such as the Church and NAACP could win,
• It highlighted the benefits of a peaceful approach,
• It showed the importance and potential of black economic power.
• victory offered hope to those who were fighting for improved civil rights,
• the NAACP was vindicated in making a legal case and using the Brown case as a precedent
• It inspired more Northern and Southern cooperation.
• It brought King’s philosophy to the fore and gave the movement a clear moral framework
• Success encouraged King to consider further action which would confront inequality and bring about further change.
How were sit-ins used in the fight for equality?
The profile of the civil rights movement had been raised by events such as Montgomery and Little Rock and was raised even further by a series of sit-in protests which started in Greensboro, North Carolina in early 1960.

On 1 February 1960 four black students from a local college walked into a Woolworth store in Greensboro and demanded to be served at a whites-only lunch counter. On being refused they remained seated at the counter until the shop closed. The next day, they were accompanied by twenty-seven more students and the day after a further eighty joined them. By the fifth day there were 300 students. The shop agreed to make a few concessions but the students later resumed their protests — some were now arrested for trespass. The students then boycotted any shop in Greensboro which had segregated lunch counters. Sales immediately dropped and eventually segregation ended.

By August 1961 the sit-ins had attracted over 70,000 participants and resulted in over 3,000 arrests. The technique of the sit-ins was used to allow black people to use other public facilities such as cinemas. This direct action led activists to challenge the deep-rooted racism of the South even further in what became known as the ‘freedom rides.’

What was the importance of the freedom riders?
The Supreme Court decided in December 1960 that all bus stations and terminals that served interstate travellers should be integrated. The Congress of Racial Equality (CORE) wanted to test that decision by employing the tactic of the freedom ride. If there was continued failure to carry out the law, CORE would be able to show that narrow-mindedness and racism still existed in the southern states.

The first of the freedom rides began in May 1961 when James Farmer, the National Director of CORE, and twelve volunteers left Washington, DC by bus to travel to New Orleans. The black Americans used whites-only facilities to ensure integration was taking place. There was little trouble on the first part of the journey. However, at Anniston, Alabama, a bus was attacked and burnt. In Montgomery, white racists beat up several of the freedom riders. In Jackson, Mississippi, twenty-seven freedom riders from the Student Non-violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) and Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) were jailed for sixty-seven days for sitting in the whites-only section of the bus station.

When the freedom riders reached Birmingham, Alabama, there was no protection for them and they were attacked by an angry mob — the police chief (‘Bull’ Connor) had given most of the police the day off. Events at Jackson forced the new president, John F. Kennedy, to intervene. Kennedy secured a promise from the state senator that there would be no mob violence. However, when the riders arrived in Jackson, they were immediately arrested when they tried to use the whites-only waiting room.

The freedom riders continued throughout the summer and more than 300 of them were imprisoned in Jackson alone. Attacks on them by the Ku Klux Klan increased. The Attorney General, Robert Kennedy, did not wish to see the situation escalate and was hoping that he would not have to send in US marshals to enforce the law. Violence was avoided in Mississippi when it became clear that marshals would be used. On 22 September the Interstate Commerce Commission issued a regulation that ended racial segregation in bus terminals.
The role and significance of Martin Luther King

King was the son of a Baptist minister and grew up in a middle-class home in Atlanta, Georgia. As a teenager he spoke in his father’s church and demonstrated that he had a gift for popular speaking. However, he had experienced racial prejudice as a student in such places as Philadelphia, New Jersey and Boston.

He had been minister at the Dexter Avenue Baptist Church, Montgomery, for less than a year when the Montgomery bus boycott began. He was chosen as leader of the MIA because he had not been there long enough to become too close to any particular local organization. He was energetic and enthusiastic in the boycott and was able to inspire those who worked with him. His idea of using non-violent tactics was similar to Gandhi’s in India and soon there were many civil rights activists keen to follow and copy King. His devout religious beliefs and unwavering faith won him many supporters. He was never intimidated. Martin Luther King helped to found the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) after the bus boycott. The SCLC was black-led and black-run. King and many members of the SCLC felt that boycotts and other forms of non-violent protest should be adopted in the struggle for equality. The SCLC tried to increase the number of black voters with the ‘Crusade for Citizenship’. This failed. Nevertheless, King had become the leading figure in the civil rights movement by 1963.

Martin Luther King and the Birmingham march, 1963

The civil rights issue exploded in 1963. There was still no federal law which made southern states integrate public facilities. In order to avoid de-segregating its parks, playgrounds and swimming pools, the city of Birmingham, Alabama, simply closed them all. King and the SCLC sought to challenge the city by using sit-ins and marches to press for de-segregation. It was hoped that this would achieve maximum publicity across the USA. Birmingham had a population of about 350,000, of which about 150,000 were black Americans. King hoped to mobilize a large part of them in the planned demonstrations.

Demonstrations began in April 1963 after some activists were arrested. Police Chief Eugene ‘Bull’ Connor then closed all public parks and playgrounds. This prompted King to address a large rally at which he said it was better to go to gaol in dignity rather than just accept segregation. King was then arrested in a further demonstration and gaoled for defying a ban on marches. During his short stay in prison, he wrote ‘Letter from Birmingham Jail’. This letter became one of the most famous documents of the civil rights movement.

The situation worsened on King’s release from jail when it was decided to use children and students in the demonstrations to test the police reaction. On 3 May, Connor allowed his men to set dogs on the protesters and he then called in the fire department to use powerful water hoses. Connor arrested 2,000 demonstrators as well as almost 1,300 children. Television witnessed the events which were seen not only across the USA but also all over the world. Photographs of the demonstration and police reaction were published in national newspapers. This gave King all the publicity he wanted. It showed the violence of the authorities in the face of peaceful demonstrators. By early May there was chaos in Birmingham.
At this stage President Kennedy became involved. He sent the Assistant Attorney General, Burke Marshall, to mediate between the parties. Talks between King and the Birmingham city leaders resulted in a settlement on 9 May and it was agreed that de-segregation in the city would take place within 90 days.

A consequence of the violence was Kennedy’s decision to bring in a Civil Rights Bill. On the same day, Medgar Evers, leader of the Mississippi NAACP, was shot dead in Jackson by a white sniper.

**Martin Luther King and the march on Washington, 1963**

After Birmingham, the civil rights groups wanted to maintain their high profile and the idea of a march on Washington, DC was put forward by Philip Randolph. The NAACP, CORE, SNCC and SCLC all took part in organizing the march. King was keen to have the march because he knew that there were those who felt that progress was slow and he worried that these people might drift towards violence if the high profile was not sustained. The Washington police put a hold on leave for its 3,000 officers in case there was violence. President Kennedy, fearing violence, asked the organizers to call off the march.

The march began as a call for jobs and freedom, but it broadened to cover the aims of the whole of the civil rights movement. There was naturally a demand for the passage of Kennedy’s Civil Rights Bill.

When the march took place, on 28 August 1963, there were about 250,000 demonstrators. The organizers had expected less than half this figure. People came from all over the USA. When politicians were seen, there were chants of ‘Pass the bill’ (referring to Kennedy’s Civil Rights Bill). King was the final speaker of the day and his speech has now become part of the lore of the struggle for civil rights.

The march on Washington was hailed as a great success. It was televised across the USA and did much for the civil rights movement. It brought together different sections of US society and put further pressure on President Kennedy to move forward on civil rights.
After the march, King and the other leaders met President Kennedy to discuss civil rights legislation. Kennedy was keen to let them know of his own commitment to the Civil Rights Bill. However, all at the meeting were aware that there were many Republican politicians still opposed to any changes.

King’s hopes began to seem illusory. In September 1963 four black girls were killed in a bomb attack while attending Sunday school in Birmingham. The civil rights movement seemed to stall in late 1963 and was then hit by the assassination of President Kennedy.

The new President, Lyndon Johnson, pushed Kennedy’s Civil Rights Bill through Congress and it became law in 1964. However, it did not guarantee black Americans the vote, so, in 1965, King decided to hold another non-violent campaign at Selma, Alabama. He decided to hold a march from Selma to Montgomery, to present a petition demanding voting rights. The marchers were attacked by police and state troopers. This became known as ‘Bloody Sunday.’ In response to this, on 15 March, President Johnson, in a speech to Congress, called for passage of a Voting Rights Act that would enfranchise black Americans. The Act was passed in August 1965: King’s policy of non-violence had worked.

After 1965, King broadened his work and moved to the North to help the poor black Americans. He also became prominent in the anti-Vietnam War movement and the ‘Poor People’s Campaign’. Previously, King had thought of freedom in the traditional American sense of the democratic right to vote. That right had been confirmed by the recent legislation, but other grievances remained in the poverty-stricken ghettos. Now, King began to define ‘freedom’ in terms of economic equality rather than political equality. He was turning to socialism, calling for ‘a better distribution of the wealth’ of the USA.

Consequently, King turned North, where the problem was social and economic equality. King had hoped the struggle in the South would help Northern blacks. It had not. He had to do something to stop the increasing tendency toward violence and radicalism amongst blacks. So, King chose to move the SCLC’s headquarters to a ghetto area of Chicago in 1966. However, a white backlash meant that already poor race relations in the city deteriorated further.
On 5 April 1968, Martin Luther King was in Memphis. He was visiting Memphis because he was supporting black refuse collectors who were striking for equal treatment with their white co-workers. King was assassinated on that same day in Memphis. James Earl Ray, a white racist, was arrested and gaol for the crime, but there is still doubt over whether he was the real killer. On his death, there was an outburst of rioting across the country. Forty-six people died; more than 3,000 were injured in violent clashes and demonstrations across more than one hundred cities. This was a great irony — it seemed as if King’s whole work and life had been for nothing.
King and the Leadership of the Civil Rights Movement — Conclusions

(a) King’s radicalism
Contemporaries who accused King of deferring to white authority figures were usually young ‘black power’ militants who rejected non-violence. He in turn criticized them. He told the New York Times ‘black power’ was dangerous, provocative and cost the civil rights movement support. King knew violence stood little chance against the military strength of the US government. King was moderate in comparison yet even he aroused hatred and a refusal to make concessions amongst many whites.

King was no Uncle Tom. He frequently criticized presidential policies. Some of his demonstrations were deliberately provocative. They invited white violence, making nonsense of his advocacy of non-violence. Within the Southern context, King was a political radical who sought the vote for the disfranchised and a social radical who sought racial equality. The Northern ghettos confirmed his economic radicalism: ‘something is wrong with the economic system of our nation ... with capitalism’. King’s tactics could be considered revolutionary, particularly with his Poor People’s Campaign. He envisaged representatives of all America’s poor living in a temporary ‘Resurrection City’ in Washington, until Congress acted. King wanted to cause ‘massive dislocation ... without destroying life or property’. Bringing Washington to a halt would be ‘a kind of last, desperate demand for the nation to respond to non-violence’. By the winter of 1967–8 the Johnson administration considered King a revolutionary who advocated ‘criminal [not civil] disobedience’. In 1995 King’s family had a bitter argument with the federal National Park Service who played down the radicalism of King’s later career in information they handed out at Atlanta’s King National Historic site.

(b) Achievements
Although much remained to be done, much had been achieved by 1968. The federal government had played an important role as had white extremists (President Kennedy joked that Bull Connor was a hero of the civil rights movement). Black activism had played a vital part in producing the legislation by which Southern segregation had been shattered and a mass black electorate had gained a voice in the political process. American blacks had gained greater self-confidence. Black organizations such as the NAACP, CORE and the SNCC, churches, local community organizations, and thousands of unsung field workers all played an important part.

The extent of King’s contribution has always been controversial: the grassroots, civil rights activist Ella Baker insisted, ‘the movement made Martin rather than Martin making the movement’. Although we have seen that King was frequently led rather than leading, his actions and involvement always gained national attention and sometimes provided the vital impetus for some reform. His organizational skills were limited, but his ability to inspire was peerless. Although his tactics and strategy were sometimes unsuccessful (and unappealing), the problems blacks faced were long-standing and enormous. He was a relatively moderate leader who made a massive contribution to the black cause. In so doing, he inevitably roused white and black antagonism and extremism in a nation in which blacks had been too long oppressed.

The best way to judge his significance might be to look at what followed his death: the national direct action phase of the civil rights movement died with him. The Poor People’s Campaign fizzled out under his successor Ralph Abernathy. Without King, the SCLC collapsed. However, it is not certain that the civil rights movement would have progressed any further had King lived; for instance, King had failed in Chicago. Other black activists were becoming more impatient and their frequent extremism was important in generating a white backlash.
Malcolm X and the Nation of Islam

For some in the civil rights movement, progress had been painfully slow and a feeling grew that Martin Luther King’s methods would never bring equality in politics and equality of opportunity in life. A group which had never accepted King’s ideas was the Nation of Islam (or Black Muslims)—its supporters openly sought separatism. Members rejected their slave surnames and called themselves ‘X’.

The most famous member of the Nation of Islam was Malcolm X, and his brilliant oratory skills helped to increase membership to about 100,000 in the years 1952–64. He was a superb organizer and during the time he was a member of the Nation of Islam, he travelled across the USA winning converts. Malcolm X helped to set up educational and social programmes which were aimed at black youths in ghettos. By 1960, more than 75 per cent of the membership of the Nation of Islam was aged between 17 and 35. He is credited with re-connecting black Americans with their African heritage and was responsible for the spread of Islam in the black community in the United States. His influence on people such as Stokely Carmichael was crucial.

Many members of the mainstream civil rights groups did not like the Nation of Islam and some felt that the Muslims had a ‘hate-white doctrine’ which was as dangerous as any white racist group. Thurgood Marshall said that the Nation of Islam was run by a ‘bunch of thugs organized from prisons and financed by some Arab group’. Such criticism never concerned Malcolm X and he was never afraid to attack King and other leaders of the civil rights movement. He criticized the 1963 march on Washington, which he called ‘the farce on Washington’. He could not understand why so many black people were impressed by ‘a demonstration run by whites in front of a statue of a president who has been dead for a hundred years and who didn’t like us when he was alive’.

The influence of Malcolm X

Malcolm X had a tremendous influence on young urban black Americans. He felt that violence could be justified not only for self-defence but also as a means to secure a separate black nation. However, after a visit to Mecca he changed his views and left the Nation of Islam to set up the Muslim Mosque, Inc. and the Organisation of Afro-American Unity to promote closer ties between Africans and African-Americans. Malcolm X said the trip to Mecca allowed him to see Muslims of different races interacting as equals. He came to believe that Islam could be the means by which racial problems could be overcome. He pushed to end racial discrimination in the USA, but this brought him enemies and he was assassinated by three black Muslims in February 1965.

Malcolm X’s views and ideas became the foundation of the more radical civil rights movements such as Black Power and the Black Panthers. Many historians have said that Malcolm X helped raise the self-esteem of black Americans more than any other individual in the civil rights movement.
The emergence of Black Power

Despite the progress of the late 1950s and early 1960s, many young black Americans were frustrated, and those who lived in the ghettos felt anger at the high rates of unemployment, continuing discrimination and poverty which they experienced.

Out of this frustration the Black Power movement emerged. Black Power was originally a political slogan but it came to cover a wide range of activities in the late 1960s which aimed to increase the power of blacks in American life. Stokely Carmichael and others in the SNCC wanted blacks to take responsibility for their own lives and to reject white help. Carmichael and his followers wanted blacks to have pride in their heritage and they adopted the slogan ‘Black is beautiful’. They wanted black Americans to develop a feeling of black pride and promoted African forms of dress and appearance.

Carmichael attracted criticism because of his aggressive attitude and was attacked when he denounced the involvement of the USA in the Vietnam War. He eventually left SNCC and became associated with the Black Panthers but left the USA and moved to Guinea in 1969 where he lived until his death in 1998.

The Black Power movement gained tremendous publicity at the 1968 Mexico City Olympics, at the winners’ ceremonies for the Men’s 200 metres and 400 metres relay. The athletes wore part of the movement’s uniform — a single black glove and black beret — and also gave the clenched fist salute. During the ceremony, when the US national anthem was being played, Tommie Smith gave the salute with his right hand to indicate Black Power and John Carlos with his left to show black unity. Smith also wore a black scarf to represent black pride and black socks with no shoes to represent black poverty in racist America. Smith and Carlos were sent back to the USA. They were accused of bringing politics into sport and damaging the Olympic spirit. On their return, they both received several death threats. As a result of these athletes’ actions, the whole world was now aware of the Black Power movement.

At the same time as the urban riots and the development of ‘Black Power’, there emerged the ‘Black Panthers’. This party was founded by Huey Newton and Bobby Seale in October 1966 in Oakland, California. Both men had been heavily influenced by Malcolm X. The Panthers had a ten-point programme and were prepared to use revolutionary means to achieve these aims.

The Black Panthers were even prepared to form alliances with radical white groups if it was felt it would help bring down the ‘establishment’. The leaders of the Panthers advocated an end to capitalism and the establishment of a socialist society. Seale constantly stated: ‘We believe our fight is a class struggle and not a race struggle’.

The Panthers wore uniforms and were prepared to use weapons, training members in their use. By the end of 1968, they had 5,000 members. However, internal divisions and the events of 1969, which saw 27 Panthers killed and 700 injured in confrontations with the police, saw support diminish. They were constantly targeted by the FBI and by 1982, the party had disbanded.
The 1964 Civil Rights Act

Background, causes and context
The Act was chiefly down to the actions of President Johnson who devoted huge amounts of time, energy and persuasion. Johnson skilfully exploited the national mood of shock after Kennedy’s assassination. He persuaded many ordinary Americans and many politicians that a new civil rights act would be the most fitting tribute to Kennedy. Using his background as a Southerner and his long experience of Congress, Johnson managed to assemble a stronger pro-civil rights coalition of Republicans and Democrats than any previous president had managed. Southern Democrats tried to block the act, but Johnson’s determination forced it through.

The March on Washington and the Birmingham campaign of 1963 had created a public mood far more favourable towards civil rights. Violence towards peaceful civil rights protesters by Southern white police forces during the early 1960s had generated considerable public sympathy. Polls in January 1964 suggested 68% of Americans favoured new civil rights legislation. Politicians could not ignore this swing in public opinion. The news of the murder of three student civil rights activists by the KKK and a local sheriff’s department in Mississippi generated nationwide outrage and helped speed the passage of the Act. Finally, the USA was competing with the USSR for influence in Africa (where many countries were gaining independence) and Asia. Politicians were worried that this would be weakened by continuing racial discrimination in the USA.

What did the 1964 Civil Rights Act state?
• Any form of racial discrimination was now unlawful.
• No public facilities, including hotels, restaurants, theatres and cinemas could exclude on the basis of race.
• Desegregation of schools was to be speeded up by giving the Attorney-General the power to file lawsuits and take any authorities refusing or slow to desegregate to court.
• The Fair Employment Practices Commission was now set up on a permanent legal basis to tackle racial discrimination in employment.
• No federal money would go to any State, organisation or project that practised racial discrimination.
• The 1964 Civil Rights Act nullified state and local laws that enforced racial discrimination.

What were the significance and consequences of the 1964 Civil Rights Act?
• It was the most far-reaching and comprehensive civil rights legislation yet passed.
• It saw the ‘death of Jim Crow’ and the ‘Old South’. Any form of racial discrimination anywhere in the USA was now illegal. No longer were black Americans second-class citizens in the eyes of the law.
• Unlike previous Civil Rights Acts, this one would be enforced at state level.
• It showed the importance of presidential activism in the civil rights struggle.
• It showed that the national government would no longer tolerate the existence of de jure segregation and racial discrimination.
• It seemed a clear victory for King (who was present at its signing in July 1964) and the civil rights movement.
• It showed that white Southern political resistance could be broken and overcome and was no longer a formidable barrier to progress.
What were the limitations of the 1964 Civil Rights Act?

- The 1964 Act did little to facilitate black voting in the Deep South. Restrictions on black voting remained in place.
- Blacks felt that the Act did not go far enough to transform the inequalities between black and white. Many blacks felt that the 1964 Act focused too much on political rather than economic concerns. They felt the Act did little or nothing to combat the unemployment, poverty, ‘ghettoisation’ and the *de facto* discrimination they faced — particularly in the North, East and West of the USA.

The 1965 Voting Rights Act

**Background, causes and context**

There was a widespread feeling amongst civil rights leaders and the black community that the 1964 Civil Rights Act had not sufficiently targeted voting rights. Johnson repeatedly requested voting rights legislation from Congress, but Congress was unmoved. So, the SCLC and King undertook the ‘Selma campaign’ to highlight the appalling black voter situation in the Deep South. Half of Selma, Alabama’s, population was black, but less than 1% were registered to vote. Its police chief, Jim Clark, was a die-hard and violent segregationist who was expected to over-react and expose Southern racism at its worst. King led local blacks to register at Selma’s County Court. They were attacked by local whites and police. A state trooper shot and killed a young black man. King was arrested and briefly imprisoned.

The SCLC and SNCC also organized a march from Selma to the Montgomery (Alabama’s state capital). On ‘Bloody Sunday’, 7 March 1965, the unresisting marchers were brutally attacked by state troopers with clubs and teargas. The nation’s media captured the scenes. This led to a wave of outrage and prompted Congress to pass the Voting Rights Act in August 1965.

What did the 1965 Voting Rights Act state?

- The Act declared that voter registration based on demonstration of educational achievement, knowledge of any subject, ability to answer particular questions, proof of moral character or whether they paid the poll tax was now illegal.
- The methods that Southern states had used since the 1880s to restrict black voting were now unconstitutional.
- Federal registrars would now supervise voter registration and enforce the new legislation.

What were the significance and consequences of the 1965 Voting Rights Act?

- The Act revolutionized Southern politics. Black voters could now remove racist and segregationist white officials. Blacks were elected to official positions all over the South. White politicians had to adapt their policies to take into account the power of the new black vote.
- In 1965, only about 100 blacks held elected office — all in Northern states. By 1989, there were almost 5,000 black office-holders in the South and more than 7,000 nationwide.
- White politicians now had to be seen to be addressing black concerns if they wanted to remain in office.