

THE DIFFERENT FORMS OF CIVIL SOCIETY PROTEST IN THE USA DURING THE 1960S: ESSAY

BACKGROUND - ROSA PARKS AND MONTGOMERY BUS BOYCOTT

- In 1955 Rosa Parks, a civil rights activist, refused to give up her seat to a white passenger on a bus, ignoring the segregation laws of the time.
- She was arrested and convicted of breaking segregation
- In response, the Montgomery Improvement Association, under the leadership of Martin Luther King, organized a boycott of the city's bus service in 1956.
- The boycott lasted a year with people either walking to work or sharing lifts.
- White racists tried to crush the boycotts by setting churches in black communities on fire

Result:

- The Bus company lost about 65% of its profits
- In December 1956, the Supreme Court ruled that segregation on buses was illegal and buses were desegregated the next
- The bus boycott revealed the power African Americans could have if they joined together

SIT-INS:

- In January 1960, a group of 4 students sat down at a 'whites only' lunch counter in Greensboro
- They were abused and attacked but they refused to move until they were served
- Their action inspired others and the sit-ins spread to other Southern states and lasted for more than a year.
- Students also organized kneel-ins at churches, read-ins at public libraries, play-ins at city parks

Result:

- The sit-ins showed that mass non-violent protest could be successful and brought national media attention to the civil rights movement
- In the summer of 1961 businesses in Greensboro desegregated
- A few weeks later, six lunch counters in Nashville changed their policy on segregation and desegregated their counters and started to serve anyone regardless of their colour.
- Students from across the country became actively involved in the CRM

FREEDOM RIDES:

- Although segregation on buses had been ruled unconstitutional, segregation was still practiced in the Southern states
- The Freedom Riders were organized In 1961 by the SNCC and CORE
- Groups of white and black American civil rights activists travelled together across state lines from the North to the South to protest segregation on buses and at bus terminals
- Freedom Riders also tried to use "whites-only" restrooms and lunch counters at bus stations in Alabama, South Carolina and other Southern states.
- Many of the Riders were savagely attacked by groups of angry whites, who also set fire to buses.
- The protests spread to train stations and airports.

Result:

- They received a great deal of publicity, making Americans aware of segregation on public transport

- The failure of police to protect the protestors forced the Kennedy Administration to get involved and the interstate bus system was desegregated in November 1961

MARCHES

Civil rights campaigners held protest marches to get support and publicity for their cause

BIRMINGHAM MARCH:

- In April 1963 Martin Luther King and the SCLC embarked on a protest campaign in Birmingham, Alabama to draw attention to ongoing segregation in the town.
- Protestors were attacked with high pressure water hoses, tear gas, dogs and electric cattle prods.
- Over a thousand marchers were arrested including Martin Luther King
- King took a controversial decision to enlist school children to join the campaign - this became known as the "Children's Crusade" (May).
- Commissioner of Public Safety, Bull Connor ordered high pressure hoses to be used against the children
- Over 500 children arrested and jailed.

Result:

- News reports and photographs of police brutality were shown all over the USA.
- President Kennedy went on television and declared that racial segregation had no place in America
- Kennedy ordered the governor of Alabama to release the protestors and end segregation
- Birmingham business leaders decided that the protest was bad for business and agreed to desegregate facilities.
- Birmingham campaign marked the change in the Civil Rights Movement from a protest movement to a mass movement demanding fundamental change

WASHINGTON –LINCOLN MEMORIAL MARCH

- Civil Rights Campaigners embarked on another march in August 1963 - "March for Jobs and Freedom"
- More than 250 000 attended the march
- Martin Luther King delivered his "I have a dream" speech.

Result:

- In response to the march, Kennedy proposed a law to end discrimination.
- However, Kennedy was assassinated in the November of 1963 and Lyndon B Johnson signed the Civil Rights Act on 2 July 1964.
- The Civil Rights Act banned segregation based on race, colour, religion or national origin.

FREEDOM SUMMER

- In 1964 black and white civil rights campaigners launched a voter registration drive in the South.
- Thousands of activists drove through the Southern States encouraging African Americans to register to vote
- They also opened Freedom schools in Mississippi to address racial inequalities in Mississippi's education system.
- The Freedom Schools taught basic literacy and black history, and emphasised black pride and achievements.

- Hundreds of Freedom Summer workers were threatened, beaten and arrested, and six were murdered.

Result:

- As a result of their efforts 60 000 new voters were registered
- The Freedom summer brought national attention to the subject of the lack of voting rights for African Americans and led to the Voting Rights Act of 1965

SELMA MONTGOMERY MARCH:

- In March 1965 Martin Luther King held a campaign in Selma, Alabama in an effort to register more black voters in the South.
- Protestors were attacked and a young black man died as a result of police brutality.
- In response, a protest march was planned from Selma to Montgomery
- The protestors were confronted by police and attacked with batons, cattle prods and whips (became known as Bloody Sunday).
- A second attempt to march – they were once again confronted by state police and turned back
- 3rd attempt was successful – a crowd of about 25 000 (they were protected by federal troops)

Result:

- The widespread publicity of the march gained support for the Civil Rights Movement and contributed to the Voting Rights Act which was passed later that year (1965)
- This Act removed all restrictions on black voters so that every American citizen had equal right to vote.
- The Civil Rights movement had achieved its aim of equality before the law