

**SSUSH21 – Analyze U.S. international and domestic policies including their influences on technological advancements and social changes during the Kennedy and Johnson administrations.**

d. Investigate the growth, influence, and tactics of civil rights groups, Martin Luther King, Jr., the Letter from Birmingham Jail, the I Have a Dream Speech, and Cesar Chavez.

The 1960s was a decade of great social change. The Civil Rights Movement became more influential and was mainly focused on advocating for rights that had long been denied to Blacks. There were other groups that formed during the same time period that focused on Latino rights. The tactics used by the various movements were intended to draw attention to their cause and peacefully demonstrate to spread the message of equal rights.

There were various **Civil Rights organizations** that were born in the 1960s and gained notoriety for their success. The Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) grew out of the 1955 Montgomery Bus Boycott. After achieving success and forcing an end to discriminatory practices in Montgomery, other groups followed the same methodology to end segregation on municipal bus lines.

In order to better coordinate actions, a meeting was held in Atlanta in January 1957 to form what became the SCLC. The group, led by Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., had as its goal to carry out non-violent crusades against the evils of second-class citizenship.

SCLC members tended to be from large urban areas, where there was a strong, wealthy Black middle class. The growing reputation of Dr. King helped to draw a large number of northern elites to the Civil Rights cause. The SCLC used several different tactics to fight segregation. They filed class-action lawsuits against state and local governments for failing to end segregation and used non-violent civil disobedience actions such as sit-ins, kneel-ins, and wade-ins. They also sponsored boycotts, mass rallies, and marches. Another important component of the SCLC agenda was to affect change in local politics by helping Blacks register to vote.

Another group that had a great impact on the Civil Rights Movement was the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC). SNCC (pronounced SNICK) grew out of an impromptu sit-in protest in Greensboro, North Carolina. A group of Black students worked to integrate lunch counters by staging sit-ins in which they seated themselves in the White-only dining sections. SNCC sought to create an organized movement composed primarily of students who would systematically challenge the legality of segregationist laws in the South. Members of the student group organized sit-ins across the South. They also arranged the Freedom Rides in 1961 to test the new federal laws that outlawed discrimination on interstate bus lines. SNCC was also heavily involved in organizing both the March on Washington in 1963 and the 1964 "Freedom Summer," which was a voter registration drive in Mississippi and Alabama. After the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965, SNCC began protesting the Vietnam War. In 1964, the organization split after some members began to push the Black Power Movement and question the effectiveness of non-violence. SNCC dropped "non-violence" from its name and became known as the Student National Coordinating Committee. The organization lost most of its influence by 1970.

**Martin Luther King, Jr.** grew to be a very influential leader of the Civil Rights Movement. He was a minister at the Dexter Avenue Baptist Church in Montgomery and emerged as a leader through organizing the bus boycotts. Over the course of the growing Civil Rights Movement and the founding of the SCLC, Martin Luther King set the tone and example for non-violent protest. In April 1963, Dr. King led sit-ins to protest the segregation of Birmingham, Alabama. The police arrested him for violating a city ordinance that banned sit-ins. While in jail, King read an appeal by a number of Alabama clergy urging him to end the protest and to allow time to take its course in ending segregation in the state. King's response to the clergy ultimately became a key document in the Civil Rights Movement. King's **letter from the Birmingham jail** was a defense of the non-violent methods being used to attack racism. King also criticized the clergy for urging patience in light of continued violence by stating, "For years now I have heard the world 'Wait!' It rings in the ear of every Negro with piercing familiarity. This 'Wait' has almost always meant 'Never.' We must come to see, with one of our distinguished jurists, that 'justice too long delayed is justice denied.'"

One of the most famous statements by Martin Luther King, Jr. was his speech given in 1963 at the March on Washington. In the summer of 1963, the leaders of the Civil Rights Movement decided to replicate A. Philip Randolph's planned 1941 March on Washington. The 1941 March had been called off after Roosevelt granted concessions in federal hiring of Blacks. This time, various civil rights organizations were marching in support of Kennedy's proposed civil rights legislation that was being debated in Congress. The March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom was held on August 28, 1963. It was the largest demonstration for civil rights in U.S. history. Various civil rights organizations and their leaders spoke before the Lincoln Memorial, including Martin Luther King, Jr. King's seventeen-minute speech, ***I Have a Dream***, was in part written remarks, but at the end of the speech, King expanded his remarks. It was these extemporaneous

remarks that have become perhaps one of the most famous pieces of American oratory in U.S. history. The speech called forth an ideal in which racism and bigotry would end and all races could live in harmony with one another. The 1963 March and speech helped to garner support for Kennedy's civil rights proposals.

The 1960s was also a time of greater organization to protest against Latino discrimination. The United Farm Workers (UFW) organized farm laborers in California. The UFW represented a largely Hispanic group in pressing for higher wages and better work conditions. It sought to gain concessions by using the non-violent tactics of the Civil Rights Movement.

One of the primary leaders of the UFW was **Cesar Chavez**. He was the son of a poor, Mexican-American agricultural laborer. Determined to better the lives of his family and other Hispanic workers, Chavez began work as a community organizer. Chavez founded the first agricultural labor union in California, the National Farm Worker's Association. Chavez's primary tactic was to politically organize a community in order to influence elections. He later helped to create the UFW, which was based around local California farm communities. The first notable success for the UFW was the Delano Table Grape strike, which forced grape growers to end discriminatory contracts. The UFW used consumer boycotts as a way of forcing producers to accede to workers' demands. Chavez also used water-only fasts as a weapon to obtain fair contracts for lettuce, vegetable, and fruit pickers and other agricultural workers.

All of the Civil Rights Movement organizations grew from the publicity they received for their non-violent protests. The SCLC and SNCC organizations focused on ending segregation. Martin Luther King, Jr. emerged as a leader in the non-violent form of protest. Other minority groups, such as the UFW, borrowed the tactics of the Civil Rights Movement in their own protests.

#### **Define**

**Martin Luther King Jr**

**Cesar Chavez**

**Letter from the Birmingham Jail**

1. What was the goal of Martin Luther King Jr. and groups like the SCLC?
2. What was another notable Civil Rights group? What kinds of things did they do?
3. Who wrote the Letter From Birmingham Jail and what did it say?
4. What was the "I Have a Dream" speech?
5. Who is Cesar Chavez and what did he do?