

Civil Rights Eisenhower Cabinet

Introduction

In 1957, the first civil rights legislation since the Reconstruction was passed by Congress. It was passed when President Eisenhower sent Congress a proposal, which established the Civil Rights Section of the Justice Department, along with allowing federal prosecutors to obtain court injunctions against interference with the right to vote, and establishing a federal Civil Rights Commission that had the authority to investigate discriminatory conditions and could recommend corrective measures. This act was the Civil Rights Act of 1957, and is how Eisenhower affected the Civil Rights movement. However, the act was a weaker version of the proposal because of the lack of support with the Democrats.

Before the Civil Rights Act, there were many important court cases that affected African Americans, for example there was *Plessy v. Ferguson*, which established separate but equal accommodations for African Americans and Whites, *Brown v. Board of Education*, which established that separate but equal in education was not constitutional, *Loving v. Virginia*, which said that it was illegal for states to make interracial marriage illegal, and many more court cases that affected the civil rights movement in both positive and negative ways.

The Civil Rights Act of 1957 was enacted in September 9, 1957, and was a voting bill. It also showed Congress's support for the *Brown v Board of Education* decision. Following the Supreme Court ruling, whites in Virginia had a "Massive Resistance." The violence against blacks rose, and in Little Rock, Arkansas, President Dwight D. Eisenhower ordered federal troops to protect nine children integrating into a public school. This was the first time the federal government sent troops to the South since Reconstruction. However, just because the Supreme Court decision in *Brown v Board* didn't mean that the physical assaults against activists and the bombings of schools and churches in the South would stop. This is mainly what caused Eisenhower to take action and propose the Civil Right Act.

When Eisenhower was first elected into office, he made it clear of what his stance on segregation in the army in his state of the union speech by stating,

"I propose to use whatever authority exists in the office of the President to end segregation in the District of Columbia, including the Federal Government, and any segregation in the Armed Forces".

Also during his presidency, the administration declared racial discrimination an issue national security, as Communists around the world used the racial discrimination and history of violence in the U.S. as a point of propaganda attack.

History of the Issue

The Civil Rights Movement was characterized by major campaigns of civil resistance, most of which was non-violent. The goals of the Civil Rights movement was to end racial segregation and discrimination against African Americans and to secure federal protection. Most of the support for the Civil Rights Movement came from labor unions, religious denominations, and prominent white politicians like Lyndon B. Johnson.

Before the Civil War, only white men with property could vote, and 4 millions African Americans were denied their freedom because they were slaves. After the Civil War, 3 constitutional amendments were passed, the 13th, which ended slavery, the 14th, which gave African Americans citizenship, and the 15th amendment, which gave African American males the right to vote. From 1865 to 1877, the United States went through the Reconstruction era trying to establish free labor and civil rights for the freedmen in the South after the end of slavery. In the South, many whites resisted change, forming white supremacy organizations such as the Ku Klux Klan, whose members attacked African Americans and both black and white Republicans. When, in 1871, President Ulysses S. Grant tried to initiate a campaign to repress the KKK under the Enforcement Acts, so states were reluctant to enforce the act, which led to other white supremacist groups to arise. These groups opposed African-American suffrage and equality.

Reconstruction ended in 1876 with the withdrawal of troops from Southern states. Previously, black Republicans were starting to take over some legislatures, for example in 1868 in Louisiana, the entire legislative branch there was African-American. However with the end of reconstruction, whites in the South regained political control of the region's state legislatures by the end of the century, after having intimidated and violently attacked blacks before and during elections. Southern states started to pass new constitutions and laws that placed barriers for black voter registration. This dramatically reduced the amount of African Americans that were in politics.

Before Eisenhower's proposal, the white-dominated Democratic Party maintained political control of the South, causing the Republican party, which had been the party that most blacks belonged to, to shrink. During this time, white Democrats imposed racial segregation. Also during this time racial violence rose against blacks, and there were numerous lynchings throughout the South. The United States Supreme Court, said that the laws were constitutional, however the separate facilities had to be equal. Segregation remained intact until 50's, when many states started to integrate their schools following the unanimous Supreme Court decision in *Brown v. Board of Education* that overturned *Plessy v. Ferguson*.

Problems and civil rights violations were prominent in the south, but social discrimination and tensions affected African Americans in other areas as well. At the national level, the Southern block, or the Democratic Party mainly from the south, controlled important committees in Congress, letting them prevent the passage of laws against lynching.

During the 1950's, many important Civil Rights leaders appeared, like Martin Luther King Jr, T. R. M. Howard, Claudette Colvin, and Rosa Parks. They emphasized protesting by marches, sit-ins, boycotts, and civil disobedience. Churches, local grassroots organizations, fraternal societies, and black-owned businesses mobilized volunteers to participate in broad-based actions. Many civil rights organizations focused on changing public education, legislative lobbying, and religion. T. R. M. Howard was a black surgeon that organized a successful boycott of gas stations in Mississippi that refused to provide restrooms for blacks. Claudette Colvin was arrested before Rosa Parks for not giving up her seat on a bus in Montgomery, Alabama.

Recent Developments

In 1957, the Eisenhower Cabinet proposed a Civil Rights legislation. The proposed bill initially contained four parts. Part I created a Civil Rights Commission within the executive branch to investigate civil rights violations. Part II created an assistant attorney general for civil rights, which led to the elevation of the civil rights section of the Department of Justice to the Civil Rights

Division (as had been recommended by President Harry Truman in 1948). In Part III, the proposed bill contained broad language that expanded the department's authority to enforce civil rights through civil and criminal proceedings. Part IV authorized the attorney general to bring civil lawsuits and obtain preventive injunctions (court orders) for the protection of voting rights. For a couple years there have been some improvements, such as the Montgomery Bus Boycott, and the desegregation of the high school in Little Rock Arkansas.

During Eisenhower's presidency, schools started to desegregate. In Little Rock Arkansas, the Governor of Arkansas called the National Guard to prevent entry to the nine African-American students who had sued for the right to attend an integrated school, Little Rock Central High School. On the first day of school, only one of the nine students showed up because she did not receive the phone call about the danger of going to school. She was harassed by white protesters outside the school, and the police had to take her away in a patrol car to protect her. The Governor's resistance received the attention of Eisenhower, who wanted to enforce the order of Federal courts. He ordered the National Guard to return to their barracks, and then deployed elements of the 101st Airborne Division to Little Rock to protect the students. Eisenhower had been lukewarm on Civil Rights issues, but this even showed his willingness to help the Civil Rights Movement. However, Eisenhower was only a limited supporter of civil rights. He told advocates of desegregation to go slowly, and was sympathetic to white southerners who complained about alterations in what they said was their way of life.

In Montgomery Alabama, Rosa Parks, on December 1, 1955, refused to give up her seat on a public bus for a white passenger. Parks was arrested and she was hailed as the "mother of the civil rights movement." She was secretary of the Montgomery NAACP chapter, and so African Americans came together and created the bus boycott as a way of ending segregation on buses. With the support of most of Montgomery's 50,000 African Americans, the boycott lasted for 381 days, and the local ordinance on separating the buses was repealed.

Republican Point of View

The Republican Party feels that they have accomplished a great amount of civil rights equality under the Republican Administration. Under the Administration, many African Americans have been appointed to high public positions and they have played a larger part in the progress of their administration. They pride themselves in helping end segregation in the District of Columbia Government and in public facilities in DC, including schools, places of business, and playgrounds. The Eisenhower administration has also eliminated discrimination in all federal employment. The Administration has enforced Federal civil rights statutes, and they have pledged that they will continue to do so. They also support the enactment of the civil rights program that has already been presented by the President to Congress.

The Republican party has recognized that the supreme law of the land is the Constitution which guarantees to all people the right for liberty, due process, and equal protection of the laws. The Constitution gives all native-born and naturalized citizens rights which can't be infringed upon.

Democratic Point of View

The Democratic Party's supports the advancement of individuals rights and liberties for all Americans. They believe that America was founded on the idea that all men are created equal and feel that this means that all citizens are equal under the law and should enjoy every political right possible. This means that every American should have equal opportunities for education and economic advancement. The Democratic party in 1965 wanted to eradicate discrimination based on race, religion, or national origin. They believe that in order to accomplish this goal, Federal action must take place, and that the Federal Government should follow the ideals of the American Constitution.

The Democratic Party is proud that it has a record of securing equality of treatment in the nation's armed forces. The Democratic party in its 1956 platform wants to continue its efforts of removed illegal discriminations of all kinds, including the right to vote and right to education.

Conclusion

It is now our duty as members of the Eisenhower cabinet, to decide how to proceed with helping the Civil Rights Movement. Recently President Eisenhower has proposed the Civil Rights Act of 1957. It is important to keep in mind that Civil Rights affects everyone, and that we want to help promote equality before protesters became violent. We must consider the opposition that could occur mostly in Southern States, where the state governments will ignore or find loopholes in legislations that promote equality. We must rid America of discrimination based on race, and of laws that prevent people from exercising their rights provided in the American Constitution.

Questions to Consider

1. Should the US government support the Civil Rights Movement?
2. How should the US approach the Civil Rights Act? How do you think that the public will react to the act being passed or not passed?
3. Are there any other ideas that should be added into the Civil Rights Act?