
The Civil Rights Movements Of The USA And Australia

The Civil rights movements in the USA and Australia in the mid 20th century was a fight for African-American and Aboriginal people to be treated as equal citizens in their respective countries. Protests like the “Sit-Ins” in the US, the tent embassy in Australia. These movements were pushed forward by strong leadership from prominent civil rights activists such as MLK and Charles Perkins. This brought forth a new era for rights and equality for both African-Americans and indigenous Australians.

In the USA policies of racial segregation were enshrined in the law, these were called Jim Crow laws which were a collection of state and local statutes that legalised racial segregation (history.com, 2019). In the southern states, African-Americans were not allowed to ride on the same buses, drink from the same fountains and live in the same neighbourhoods almost every other thing as white Americans. The end of the Jim Crow laws ended in 1964 when US President Lyndon B. Johnson signed the civil rights act. In Australia, there were forms of segregation similar to the US, which began immediately after the federation of Australia in the form of the White Australia policy. The white Australia policy was introduced which excluded non-Europeans from entering Australia. However, these policies also had a significant effect on indigenous Australians who had to live in poor living conditions on fringe settlements, sent to missions where the white managers controlled every aspect of their lives and exclusion of Aboriginal people from basic facilities of a country town (creativespirits.info, 2019). Aboriginal Australians were eventually given full citizenship on the 27th of May 1967 after a referendum was held and 90.77 per cent of Australians voted “YES”. The way Indigenous Australians and African Americans gained equality within their respective nations were different, In Australia, the Australian people had the final say, but in the US it was a government decision under pressure from civil rights activists.

Following the Second World War, protests were held in the southern states of the US. These protests in the USA were by African-Americans who were against the oppressive, racist, segregationist policies. A popular protesting method was the “sit-ins” where protestors would sit at segregated lunch counters, request service and refuse to leave when asked (britannica.com, 2019). One of the most famous protests of the civil rights movement was the Montgomery bus boycott, which was started by Rosa Parkes, when she refused to give up her seat on a segregated bus, she was then dragged off the bus and arrested, this set off the bus boycott where African Americans refused to ride on buses costing the bus company money and eventually ending segregation on buses (lexhealy.weebly.com, 2019). Another popular protesting method in the US was the freedom rides where African Americans and White Americans rode together on buses to protest segregation, they were met with a lot of resistance in the south, including violence, but in Alabama the reaction was much more severe. On May 14th freedom riders stopped their bus in Anniston to change a slashed tire, what ensued was a bus being firebombed and the freedom riders were attacked, the second bus then met the same fate in Birmingham, in both cases the law enforcement was suspiciously late (britannica.com, 2019). Australian civil rights activists were inspired by the activists in the US and held several protests of their own. In 1965, inspired by a similar freedom ride in the US, Charles Perkins and his group Student Action For Aborigines (SAFA), went on a tour of outback New South Wales the journey was a “study tour” to see how indigenous Australians were

treated in country towns, what they saw was racism and segregation which was broadcast to the media across Australia (NITV, 2019). There were differences and similarities between both freedom rides in the US and in Australia, in the US the freedom riders faced severe violence from white Americans, in Australia the freedom rides faced little to no resistance, another difference between the freedom rides were the intentions of the groups involved, SAFA wanted to document the racist policies of Australian towns, whereas the freedom riders in the US were protesting segregation.

The fight for equal rights was long and hard, both African-Americans and indigenous Australians were forced to put up with segregation and racism, their fight to be treated as equal citizens and as human beings is admirable, the protests both peoples held helped bring in not only equal and fair treatment for them, but inspiration for other groups who were facing oppression to make their voices heard. Overall the Civil rights movements of both the US and Australia helped bring forth a new era of equality.

References:

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