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History: American Civil Rights Movement and the Black Power Revolt

The American Civil Rights Movement (also called the African-American Civil Rights Movement) refers to the social movements mainly active in the United States from 1950s to the 60s. The movements' main agenda was fighting against the racial segregation of black Americans, as well as, agitate for their constitutional right to vote. The movement used different forms of resistance including non-violent protests, boycotts, marches, sit-ins and civil disobedience (Zinn 27). Prominent figures of this movement included Bayard Rustin, Andrew Young, William Ryan, James Farmer and John Lewis. However, Martin Luther King Jr. rose to become the most recognizable figure of the movement. At the same time, the Black Power Movement began to take shape, first merely as a slogan, and later a party whose activities overlapped those of the American Civil Rights Movement. From the mid-1960s, close to half a million Blacks took part in the rebellions that rocked American cities with the arrest of over 60,000 and deaths of approximately 200 people in 300 cities. Malcolm X and radical student leader Stokely Carmichael are widely regarded as leaders of the Black Power Movement who rose through the ranks of the Black Panther Party.

The American Civil Rights Movement, which according to many sources was actually a collection of many like-minded groups shared a lot in common with the Black Power Movement. Firstly, the both fought for the same cause of improving the general welfare of Black Americans (Dierenfield 14). They were both representative of the largely disenfranchised black population who had been denied voting rights and could not stand a chance of having their interests presented either in the Congress or the local government. Moreover, violence against Black people perpetrated by white racists escalated at the turn of the century with lynching of Blacks becoming common. In addition to these, the Blacks were economically suppressed in favor of their Caucasian countrymen. Both the American Civil Rights and the Black Power movements sought to correct these injustices perpetrated against the Blacks (Zinn 126).

In as much as the two movements seemed to fight for the same cause, they too had sharply conflicting ideologies. Firstly, most popular segments that made up the American Civil Rights Movements were centered on Martin Luther King Jr. and advocated for peaceful approaches of claiming for their rights. On the contrary, The Black Power Movement which was largely active from 1966 to 1975 were opposed to the established Black leadership comprising of King for their 'cooperative, non-violent' approach towards claiming for political and economic rights. Where King and his movement wanted negotiation, Malcolm X and the Black Power Movement made demands (Dierenfield 49). The Black Power Movement therefore advocated for violent responses where the American Civil Rights Movement opted for peaceful methods of advocating for their rights.

It is also important to note that the activities of these organizations

were shaped to a greater extent by the personality of their leaders. Martin Luther King Jr., Malcolm X, and Stokely Carmichael were all charismatic and good mobilizers of crowds (Steele 78). Their differences in personality was mainly a result of personal and ideological transformation and lack of it on the part of King Jr. Whereas, Malcolm X, and Carmichael subscribed to Marxism and fiery rhetoric as a result of gradual transformation, King remained using the same conciliatory approach. Angela Davis on the other hand distinguished herself not only as an ardent scholar, but a radical activist with Communist influences and a member of the Black Panther Party (Steele 45). In 1970 she became the third woman in history to appear on FBI's wanted list for allegedly aiding a prisoner escape in an incident that resulted in the death of a judge and some prisoners. Davis was later arrested but cleared of all charges.

In conclusion, though both the American Civil Rights and the Black Power movements worked for the same goal of improving the socio-economic and political situation of the black person in the United States of America, the methods used to gain this end tended to differ and conflict. Personality differences played a huge role in the shaping of these organizations and their activities in the 60s and 70s. In spite of their differences, the movements clearly signified a collective quest for emancipation and equality of races in the United States of America.

Works Cited

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