

BBC Bitesize

Narrator: The 1960s is a time of tremendous upheaval, as marginalised groups challenge inequality and discrimination in new ways.

Efforts to end discrimination, from the Montgomery Bus Boycott through the Selma voting rights campaign, compel the federal government to change laws and end legalised racial segregation.

African American activism during the civil rights era uses a wide range of strategies, including both non-violence and self-defence. One advocate of self-defence is Malcolm X.

As a young child Malcolm's home and family are attacked by racial terrorists. He is only six when his father dies. Malcolm later moves to Boston, where he gets involved in criminal activity and is sent to prison at age 21.

While incarcerated he joins the Nation of Islam – an African American political and religious organisation which promotes racial separation with a goal of creating an independent black nation.

After leaving prison, Malcolm X becomes the national spokesperson for the Nation of Islam, capturing national attention. He urges African Americans to be more forceful in demanding change, and in taking economic control of their communities, to prepare for a new Black Nation.

Malcolm leaves the Nation of Islam in 1964 after a series of disputes, including over its refusal to allow members to vote or participate in civil rights protests.

He remains a champion of black empowerment and the use of weapons for self-defence.

Malcolm's views and charisma capture the imagination of African Americans, but his growing popularity is seen as a threat by many including white supremacists, the Nation of Islam, and the US government, which places him under surveillance. He is assassinated in 1965.

In the late 1960s, African American activists focus on electing black people to public office; expanding employment opportunities; securing decent housing; desegregating and improving schools and accessing healthcare. This activism builds on the civil rights protests and becomes known as Black Power.

In 1966, Huey Newton and Bobby Seale start the 'Black Panther Party for Self Defense'.

Like Malcolm X, The Black Panthers advise using self-defence against racist attacks. They organise armed patrols to protect black communities from police brutality. They also set up much-needed community programs such as health clinics and free breakfast for school children.

The Panthers' use of guns and violence for self-defense frightens many and leads the government to describe them as "a threat to American security."

The Black Power movement is building on the earlier successes of the civil rights movement, including the 1964 Civil Rights Act, banning racial segregation in public places, and the Voting Rights Act of 1965, providing black voters with the protections they need to access their right to vote.

The Black Power movement generates further progress which leads to a wave of black elected officials and the creation of institutions, including the first black studies programs in universities.

Despite this progress, police brutality and racial discrimination in housing, education and employment continue.

The civil rights and Black Power movements inspire other campaigns fighting injustice, providing a model for challenging racism and discrimination in America and across the globe.