

In the USA in the mid 1960's racial tension erupted into rioting across many major cities...

Overcrowding and poor housing, bad schools, high unemployment, and crime - with the law enforced by almost entirely white police.

Many of the people struggling in the ghettos in northern cities felt that Martin Luther King's peaceful protests were doing nothing to change their situation and different community leaders began to be heard across the country.

Civil rights activist Malcolm X argued that Black people needed a separate, Black-only nation.

[audio clip] - "We don't see any American dream, we've experienced only the American nightmare".

In 1966, student leader Stokely Carmichael used a new phrase - 'Black Power'.

"It is a call for black people in this country to unite, to recognize their heritage, to build a sense of community. It is a call for black people to define their own goals, to lead their own organisations."

In 1966, a new militant organisation was formed in California - the Black Panther Party. They gained instant notoriety for their readiness to arm themselves to defend black communities from police brutality.

[audio clip] - "Sometimes if you want to get rid of the gun, you have to pick the gun up."

The Panthers became active in the ghettos, organising community programmes providing free health clinics, free breakfasts for children, and campaigns to stop addiction and crime.

The radical era was a time of upheaval, with many believing that a revolution was underway. But Black leaders paid a heavy price -

Malcolm X was assassinated in 1965. Martin Luther King in 1968.

The protests of the 1950s and 60s achieved many important changes in the law, but deep social problems remained. The Kerner Report on the cause of the riots stated:

[audio clip] "The USA is ... divided into two societies. One is black, poor and in the inner cities. The other is white, better off and living in the suburbs... A black American is twice as likely to be unemployed and three times as likely to be poor as a white. The problem remains to be solved."