***Martin Luther King Jr. and the Civil Rights Movement***

The **Civil Rights Movement** consisted of a series of protests aimed at ending racial **segregation** (*Rassentrennung*) and **discrimination** (*Diskriminierung*) in the U.S. Many of these protests occurred in the 1950s and 1960s.

***Slavery and Abolition***

Some of the first Africans were brought to the Americas as slaves. They were forced to work without pay in horrible conditions and were treated as property to be bought and sold, not as human beings. Before **abolition** (*Abschaffung der Sklaverei*), there were 4 million enslaved people in the U.S.

The American Civil War lasted from 1861 to 1865. During this time, the U.S. was divided into “slave states” and” free states.” The slave states were located in the south. These states wanted to break away, or **secede** (*sich trennen*), from the rest of the U.S. and become their own country. They called themselves the Confederacy. One of the Confederacy’s main goals was to keep slavery.

In 1863, President Abraham Lincoln issued the **Emancipation Proclamation**, which declared that all slaves were now free. This became official with three **amendments** (*Zusatzartikel*) to the U.S. **Constitution** (*Verfassung*): the **Thirteenth Amendment** (1865), which formally abolished slavery, the **Fourteenth Amendment** (1868), which gave former slaves U.S. citizenship, and the **Fifteenth Amendment** (1870), which gave African-American men the right to vote.

***Segregation and Jim Crow***

The former slaves now had their freedom, but this didn’t mean they were seen as equal to white Americans. In an 1896 court case, **Plessy v. Ferguson**, it was ruled that racial **segregation** was legal. Whites and blacks could be kept separate as long as their separate facilities (schools, theaters, bathrooms, etc.) were equal. The laws that kept blacks and whites separate (and that treated black Americans as **second-class citizens**) were called **Jim Crow laws**.

If an African-American broke one of these laws, the consequences could be severe. In some cases they were arrested, in others they were **lynched**. Lynching is a murder committed by a mob, and it was seen as a way to control African-Americans through fear. Someone could be lynched for any reason.

One of the most famous lynchings happened in 1955. A 14-year-old boy from Chicago named Emmett Till was visiting family in Mississippi, a southern state, when he was **accused** (*beschuldigt*) of **whistling** (*pfeifen*) at a white woman in a grocery store. Four days later, he was brutally murdered by the woman’s husband and his half-brother. His murderers were **acquitted** (*jmdn. von etwas freigesprochen*) by an all-white jury. Years later, the woman said she lied about Till whistling at her. Emmett Till’s murder and funeral made many people very angry and led the way for the major protests of the Civil Rights Movement.

***Martin Luther King Jr.***

Reverend Doctor Martin Luther King Jr. was born January 15, 1929 in Atlanta, Georgia. He was a Baptist **minister** (*Pfarrer*), was married to Coretta Scott King, and had four children. He was involved in a couple of civil rights organizations: He was president of the **SCLC** (Southern Christian Leadership Conference) and was a member of the **NAACP** (National Association for the Advancement of Colored People). King became one of the leaders of the Civil Rights Movement and was committed to **nonviolent protest** to achieve the movement’s goals.

***Protests and Demonstrations***

One of the first major protests of the Civil Rights Movement was the **Montgomery Bus Boycott**. On December 1, 1955, a black woman named **Rosa Parks** refused to give up her seat on the bus to a white passenger in Montgomery, Alabama. She was arrested. This sparked a **boycott** (*Boykott*) of the buses in Montgomery, where black residents refused to ride the bus. King became the leader of the boycott, which lasted 381 days. During this time, King was arrested and his house was bombed. In the end, the city of Montgomery **desegregated** (*die Rassentrennung wurde aufgehoben*) the buses so that whites and blacks could sit wherever they wanted.

Another type of protest is a **sit-in** (*Sitzstreik*). In Greensboro, North Carolina, in 1960, four African-American college students sat at a whites-only lunch counter and ordered coffee. The goal of the sit-in was simple: to sit and wait to be served. If the protestors were arrested, more came to take their places. The protestors sometimes had food thrown at them, and sometimes white people tried to fight with them, but they never responded. The sit-in became another method of protest during the Civil Rights Movement.

In 1963, King organized a series of protests in Birmingham, Alabama. These consisted of marches, sit-ins and boycotts. Protesters were often sprayed with water from fire hoses and attacked by police dogs.

Perhaps the most famous demonstration of the Civil Rights Movement was the **March on Washington** in August of 1963. 250,000 people gathered at the Lincoln Memorial in Washington D.C., and King delivered his famous “I Have a Dream” speech. (**Link to the speech: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6dKimoybmEo**)

**The Fifteenth Amendment** gave African-American men the right to vote, but many Jim Crow laws still made it difficult or impossible for African-Americans to vote. To protest against this and to bring attention to this issue, Martin Luther King Jr. led a march from the town of Selma, Alabama to Montgomery (the same city where the bus boycott took place), in 1965. The marchers were beaten by police, and over 50 people had to be hospitalized. That year, Congress passed the **Voting Rights Act**, which guaranteed all Americans the right to vote. This shows how successful many of these protests were.

In 1964, King won the Nobel Peace Prize.

Between 1957 and 1968, King traveled over 6 million miles, spoke over 2,500 times, wrote five books, was arrested over 20 times, was assaulted at least four times, and was awarded five honorary degrees.

On April 4, 1968, King was **assassinated** (*ermordet*). He was shot while standing on the balcony of a motel in Memphis, Tennessee. He was there to support a sanitation workers’ strike. King was just 39 years old. A man named James Earl Ray was arrested for the murder.

Martin Luther King Jr. Day is a national holiday in the U.S. It was first celebrated in 1986. The holiday is the third Monday of January.

The Civil Rights Movement resulted in new laws being signed to outlaw discrimination. A few of the most important ones are:

* **Civil Rights Act of 1964**: outlaws employment discrimination
* **Voting Rights Act of 1965**: makes it easier for people to vote
* **Civil Rights Act of 1968**: outlaws housing discrimination

***Civil Rights Today***

The Civil Rights movement gained many victories for African-Americans, but the struggle is not over. They still face hardships today, including discrimination.

White people have more money than black people; for every $100 a white family has, a black family has just $5.04. African-Americans are also **overrepresented** (*übermäßig stark vertreten*) in prisons; they make up 12% of the population, but 33% of the prison population.

Many cities are still segregated by race. In the largest cities in the U.S., 25% of the black population lives in poverty, compared to 9% of whites. There is also an educational gap. In New Orleans, 90.8% of white adults have a high school diploma compared to 79.6% of blacks, and this is just one example.

One issue that has been in the media in the past few years is **police brutality** (*Polizeibrutalität*). Black people are more likely to be shot by the police than white people, and are also more likely to be arrested for drugs, even though they do not use or sell them more than white people.

This has led to the rise of the **Black Lives Matter** movement. This movement’s members work to combat violence against black people.

In 2008, Barack Obama was elected the first black president of the United States.