

## **The struggle for African American equality**

Fighting against racism and for the establishment of equality of rights is a constant effort. No matter the price paid for the cause, there is just no guarantee of status quo or consistent evolution. But it is crucial to acknowledge the essential milestones and victories on the way. It is fair to say that the struggle for African American equality started along with the shameful slave trade practice and went on through major historical stages, impacting the political system of the United States and the whole world.

Abolitionism, the movement to eliminate slavery, was among the key drivers of the Civil War. The unacceptable practice was a crucial issue the war was meant to settle, as the peaceful means had not worked. As the result of the most extensive military actions on the American territory, slavery was banned in all the states. The 13th Amendment and the following 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> Amendments to the Constitution of the United States aligned the real-life practice and the law with the concept of natural rights upon which the country's independence was built. The importance of the outcomes of the Civil War can not be underestimated. Beyond the prohibition of slavery, American law now paved the way for the equal realization of voting and other political rights.

Unfortunately, the legislative codification of equality had not immediately affected the mentality and societal issues. Racial discrimination strongly influenced state and federal politics, thus limiting the rights of African Americans on various levels, from education to transportation. In the 1950s-1960s civil rights movement started with an aspiration to achieve the declared equality and non-discrimination in practice. Segregation in schools, transport, healthcare, unjustified limitation of voting rights, limitation of employment and housing opportunities. All these issues were an everyday reality for millions of African Americans despite the constitutional guarantees. To make government and courts enforce the law and provide justice for all, thousands of people resorted to peaceful protests and civil disobedience. Historians consider this period of equality struggle the most productive in terms of the number and impact of the legislative acts and judicial cases ordering against discriminatory practices and establishing more equal opportunities.

Unfortunately, the prevalingly peaceful movement still faced violence in response to protests from the police. Not justified or excessive use of force against African Americans has become a tragic pattern disclosing many institutional problems. Sixty years after the successes of the civil rights movement, numerous protests against racism and discriminatory practices are ignited by cases of horrifying injustice causing losses and deaths of African Americans. Mass protests of 2020 by the 'Black Lives Matter' movement were powerful proof that the fighting is not over. The long-term effects of these events are yet to be observed.

The overlook of the timeline of the struggle for African American equality reminds us of the need to always keep the big picture in mind. Praising the achievements of the prominent civil rights leaders of the past is essential. But it is also necessary to critically assess the actual progress made. Society has to be constantly vigilant about human rights observance. As well as any other hard-gained benefits of the modern era, equality and tolerance are fragile notions that get easily eroded.