

Alabama's Civil Rights Movement From
The Perspective Of A German Immigrant

By: Jason Lawson

Alabama History Time Line

- 1922: Brandon is elected Governor of Alabama.
- 1926: Bibb Graves won as Governor of Alabama. He made a seven month minimum school year, enforced prohibition and ended the prison lease system. He was a member of the KKK, however at this time the KKK was no more than money making scheme or a fraternity. Many people at this time supported the KKK. Was very important politically to be a member, this is why Graves joined.
- 1930: Depression hit, this is why blacks and whites were now together in poverty.
- 1931: Scottsboro Boys, group of black train riders threw a group of white train riders off the train. Two white women were found on the train with the blacks. They claimed they were raped and molested. They lied, the blacks were found guilty anyway. They were eventually released, racial tension rose again.
- 1931: Irene Davis, restores herself and her family to wealth. Named Alabama's most courageous woman.
- 1932: Schools shut down in Alabama because of no money.
- 1933: Roosevelt took office as president.
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- 1933: Banks were failing across the nation.
- 1933: The New Deal, Government performed help for a small portion of the population.
- 1934: Roosevelt's administration examined the banks, the good ones they kept and the bad ones they closed. This kept the banks strong.
- 1934: Lynching becomes a federal offense.
- 1935: Eugene (Bull) Conner, Chief of Birmingham Police Department takes office. Becomes a very strong political powerhouse. Anti-anything that helped blacks.
- 1935: Big Mules, strong among Birmingham Industrialist. They hated the New Deal, because government would regulate them.
- 1941: America enters World War II.
- 1941: Huntsville gets a chemical plant and also an arsenal plant. Huntsville booms during the war.
- 1941: Birmingham coal and iron industry booms because of the war.
- 1943: Childersburg, builds black powder plants and munitions plants. Becomes a boom town.
- 1943: Anniston gets Fort McClellan because Alabama has a mild climate good for training troops.
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- 1943: Mobile gets a shipyard.
- 1943: Many Alabamians go off to war.
- 1948: Roosevelt is dead.
- 1948: Alabama was 45 out of 48 in average income levels.
- 1952: Eisenhower is elected to presidency, was very popular.
- 1955: Montgomery Bus Line, Mrs. Rosa Parks of Montgomery, Alabama refused to give up her bus seat to a white man. By a complaint of the bus driver she was arrested, this led to the Montgomery bus boycott.
- 1956: Law was passed that the state was not responsible for education could close their doors instead of integrating.
- 1958: Brown vs. Board of Education, was attacking the idea of separate but equal in the area of education. Supreme Court dictated that the act of separation by nature stated that one person was superior and one was inferior, therefore abolished segregation forever.
- 1958: Martin Luther King, very good preacher, held the degree of Ph.D. Used passive resistance to fight for Civil Rights. Also used the Christian tradition and the Constitution of the United States. This put the white elite in a difficult position to debate.
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- 1958: Eugene (Bull) Conner, ran the last city in the state with an all white Police Department. He took away the middle ground between whites and blacks in the civil rights movement!
- 1963: Conner arrested King, King writes his famous letter from the Birmingham jail.
- 1963: Two black students applied to the University of Alabama. They are blocked at the front steps. The military is sent in and they are allowed access. National media attention.
- 1963: Black church was bombed in Birmingham and four small children were killed.
- 1965: Governor Wallace goes to Washington to talk to President Johnson about what happened in Selma. President Johnson puts the full force of the Federal Government behind the Civil Rights Movement.
- 1965: Congress passed two major pieces of legislation. They did away with discrimination in housing and provided for federal Marshals to protect voters at any election.
- 1966: Supreme Court handed down fourteen land mark decisions on Civil Rights.

Time Line of Mrs Cole's Life

- 1960: Mrs. Cole moves to America, gets married and lives in Texas.
- 1962: Mrs. Cole moves from Texas to Alabama.
- 1964: Mrs. Cole starts her B.S. in education.
- 1968: Mrs. Cole begins work on her first Masters Degree.
- 1970: Mrs Cole finishes her first Masters Degree.

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- 1964: Mrs. Cole starts her B.S. in education.
- 1965: Martin Luther King marched with followers from Selma to Montgomery. Through the heart of the blackbelt. Marched though the counties where blacks were not allowed to vote. National television captured a riot between blacks and whites when they were stopped in Selma, Alabama. America did not like at all what the local authorities did in Selma.

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Questions for Taped Interview

- 1) Where were you born in Germany?
- 2) How did you meet your husband?
- 3) When did you come to America?
- 4) How many children do you have?
- 5) Have you lived anywhere else in America?
- 6) What education do you have?
- 7) How do you feel about the Vietnam war?
- 8) Were you ever in any demonstrations for or against either the Vietnam war or the Civil Rights Movement?
- 9) How do you feel about Alabamians during the time of the Civil Rights Movement?
- 10) How did you feel about the Civil Rights Movement?
- 11) Explain some of the differences between American Society and German Society?
- 12) Did you find it difficult making the transition from German to American Society?
- 13) Where did you receive your degrees from?
- 14) Was it difficult going to school and raising a family?

- 15) How do you feel about the Alabama officials blocking black students from entering the University of Alabama?

Alabama's Civil Rights Movement From The Perspective of a German Immigrant.

Mrs. Cole was born in post World War II Germany. She had some what of an average life growing up in Germany. When she became of age she met an American G.I. who was stationed in an American military instillation in Germany. Eventually they decided to move to America and got married. The first state they moved to was Texas where she first became interested in the Civil Rights Movement. According to Mrs. Cole their were three white ladies living on base across the street from her. When the public found out that they were all married to black men a semi-riot broke out. It would seem that they were being discriminated against. People would shout obscenities at them as they walked down the street and even threaten them. The people who lived near Mrs. Cole never did anything wrong so this was very bad impression of Americans for an immigrant. After hearing about how bad things were in the south she was very disturbed when her husband decided he wanted to move to Fort McClellan in Alabama. This was at the height of the Civil Rights Movement, however she reluctantly agreed.

After the move to Alabama Mrs. Cole decided to pursue a degree in education with a double major in History and English at Jacksonville State University. As time went on she eventually received her first college degree, a B.S. in education. She entered the Masters of Science program with the intent of getting a M.S. in education with a major in History which she quickly finished and then received another Masters degree in Mid-Evil European History. The whole time she had three daughters to raise and other common duties at the home, obviously a dedicated person.

Because of the escalating violence in Alabama caused by the Civil Rights movement Mrs. Cole did sympathize with the black people. She felt that they were being oppressed, and treated unfairly. A very different view that most other white Alabamians. However Mrs. Cole chose not to become involved in anyway of the Civil Rights demonstrations, "Although she did attend Woodstock in New York!" From the viewpoint of a German immigrant it was hard to understand the bitterness between the whites and the blacks that was enhanced by the Civil Rights Movement. The Civil Rights Movement acted as acatylist that brought old bitterness and hatred to a head. Mrs. Cole noted the violence she watched on television at the height of the Civil Rights Movement, police beating people in riots, how angry the public seemed to be over, "What seemed to her to be only fair!"

Mrs. Cole seemed to have a great deal of respect for the way King went about his demonstrations. She spoke of how King had followed the work of Ghandi, the political activist who used passive resistance in order to free his people from English rule. Because this was such an effective policy King used peaceable demonstrations. However they were met sometimes with deadly force. This seemed to strengthen his position in the eyes of big government. This showed the black people as being the victim of abuse by the white government officials in Alabama. His plan worked, the Federal Government stepped in and not only endorsed the Civil Rights Movement, but granted them many new freedoms.

Is it possible for modern day Alabamians to learn from a German Immigrant's perspective on the topic of The Civil Rights Movement? It is an unbiased source from which a person can reach a conclusion that would be fair to both sides of the issue. If the reader is placed in the role of a judge is it not logical for a judge to make a decision that is impartial? By putting Mrs. Cole in the role of the judge to critique the previous history of Alabama based on Civil Liberties the decision would most likely not be in favor of most White Alabamians.

In conclusion the Civil Rights Movement tugged the heart strings of some of Americans most dear liberties. Martin Luther King is a shining example of a dedicated American patriot. A person less concerned with his own life than with getting equal liberties and freedom for his people. Upon the hearts and minds of the people I leave this thought, " I pledge Allegiance to the Flag of the United States of America, Upon which it stands, One Nation, Under God, indivisible With Liberty and Justice for All!

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Selma, Queen City of the Blackbelt F 326. F56 pg. 131-155 Selma, Birthplace of Equal Voting Rights: The Queen City, 1954-1965 by: Alston Fitts III

Alabama were not all content with methods favored by Selma's council. In February of 1956, Alston Keith noted that some North Alabama councils were disorganized and hostile to Jews for integration. "There is no place for Jews," he said sternly.

Dallas County's state senator, William B. Sammons, and citizens' councils across much of the Black Belt. Sam Englehardt of Macon County as president of the Citizens' Council and moved the headquarters from Montgomery to Selma (in 1976) was a native of Perry County who was elected to the Alabama House from Perry County in 1943. From the time of his second election, he represented the cause of Black Belt consolidation with great skill and determination.

Another major opponent of integration was



Sheriff Jim Clark faces demonstrators outside the Dallas County Courthouse. (Courtesy of the Selma Times Journal)

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The Queen City



Martin Luther King, Jr. and Civil Rights demonstrators on step of Dallas County Courthouse. (Picture courtesy of Joe Smitherman)

a series of demonstrations in Birmingham church and the use of police dogs helped groundswell needed to pass the Civil Rights invitation of the Dallas County Voters League Selma in hopes of generating the support for rights bill.

King had critics, both black and white awarded the Nobel Prize for Peace, many a troublemaker who stirred up communities peaceful, at least on the surface. White disapproved of King's willingness to use sc