



What did the civil rights campaign in Birmingham achieve?

In April 1963 Martin Luther King went to Birmingham, Alabama, a city where public facilities were separated for blacks and whites. King intended to force the desegregation of lunch counters in downtown shops by a non-violent protest.

Birmingham was one of the most challenging places to demonstrate for civil rights. George Wallace, the new Governor of Alabama, did not like integration, the bringing together of different racial groups. Birmingham was also a stronghold for the Ku Klux Klan that had been responsible for 18 bombings in the city. Eugene 'Bull' Connor, the man in charge of police and firemen, supported the Ku Klux Klan when they attacked black 'freedom fighters'.

King wanted to gain full national attention for events in Birmingham. He hoped that President Kennedy would be forced to intervene.

The protests began at segregated lunch counters and the protesters were repeatedly arrested. Others marched in protest to the city hall. They were arrested and further marching was banned. King was arrested after leading another march. From jail he wrote a letter saying that people have a moral duty to disobey unjust laws.

King was released and the protest continued to grow. The plan was to use high school children as protesters, get them to fill up the city's prisons and shame the city on a national level. On 2 May police arrested over a thousand young people aged 6-18 years. The next day more children joined the protest. This time 'Bull' Connor ordered the police to use clubs and dogs on the marchers and instructed firemen to get rid of the crowds with high-pressure water hoses.

As the protests continued, the images of police brutality shocked the world and gained a lot of sympathy for the civil rights movement. After pressure from President Kennedy and his brother, the Attorney General, Birmingham shops and businesses finally agreed on 10 May to desegregate all rest rooms, lunch counters, fitting rooms and drinking fountains, and to hire more black workers. The President started to push for a new Civil Rights law.



HEROES & VILLAINS

King & civil rights > Birmingham

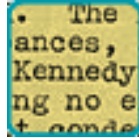
Examine these sources to find out more:



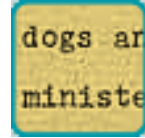
King's letter from jail, Birmingham, Alabama, 1963



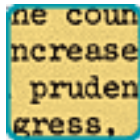
Evidence of what happened at protests in Birmingham



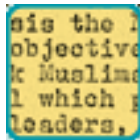
Communist reactions, May 1963



Report on race relations in the USA, August 1963



JF Kennedy's message on civil rights, June 1963



A conversation about changes to the law, July 1963