Black Power Essay, Research Paper

Black Power

What did the phrase “black power” mean to African Americans who participated in the civil rights struggle? Booker T. Washington felt that black power meant financial power. During the movement that would soon be a landmark in our country’s history, the black community lacked black owned businesses, black teachers, and black government representatives. Because blacks were without these things it was impossible for them as a group to attain financial power. The “Black Power” movement grew out of frustration with the slow progress and non-violence of the early civil rights demonstrations.

During the early sixties peaceful protests took place consistently through out America. Usually little was done to protect protesters, and police brutality was becoming all too common towards these non-violent demonstrators. During a march from Memphis, Tennessee to Jackson, Mississippi a white police sniper shot a young black man named James Meridith who was simply trying to encourage other Negroes to vote. Meridith was the first African American to attend the previously all white University of Mississippi.

In another incident a gentleman named Robert F. Williams had, in his words, “organized a Negro community [meeting] in the South to take up arms in self defense against racist violence and use them!” When night

riders of the KKK and police cars approached his house where the meeting was held, Williams and others fired their guns until their oppressors left. Williams went on later to write (concerning the incident),”I accept this responsibility and am proud of it. It has always been an accepted right of Americans, as the history of our Western states proves that where the law is unable, or unwilling to enforce order, the citizens can, and must, act in self-defense against lawless violence. I believe this right holds for black Americans as well as whites.”

The general mood of the civil rights movement drifted more toward aggressive action if change was desired quickly. Williams also explained that, ” when an oppressed people show a willingness to defend themselves, the enemy, who is a moral weakling and coward is more willing to grant concessions and work for a respectable compromise.” Activists felt that self-defense would do more toward preventing violence than a passive resistance.

As demonstrations kept being met by violence from whites and the police force, the civil rights movement evolved and the concise slogan “Black Power” was born. Stokely Carmichael was quoted as saying, ” Where black people are the majority, we must take control. Where we are not the majority, we must share representation, and share control. But everywhere, black men must come together to plan our own destiny.” People were becoming fed up by the promises of political sociopaths and demanded changes take place at any cost.

The slogan “Black Power” startled America and captured her attention. It showed white America that the people they called “pickinannie” and “nigger” were serious about claiming what had been stolen from them more than a century ago, their pride. “Black Power” was the child of frustration and hunger and the motto that helped fuel some positive changes for our country’s so-called “equality” standard. Like the old saying goes, “You gotta do, what you gotta do.”