

Changing the World through Education

“Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world.”

- Nelson Mandela

Slavery has been one of the largest challenges that the United States has faced throughout its history, and proved to be an equal challenge to African American education. For much of America’s history, the country was divided on whether slavery was acceptable and whether African Americans were equal to white people. One part of slavery that made African American education difficult was that it was unlawful for slaves to learn to read and write. Since slaves could not read, they had little ability to tell if slavery was right or wrong. Many slave owners believed that if a slave got hold of a book, they would likely fight slavery and would not work in the fields. Many slaves longed to go to school so they could feel the chance of freedom but were denied no matter how hard they tried.

In 1954, the Supreme Court in *Brown v. Board of Education* ruled that segregation in public schools was unconstitutional. Despite this ruling, it was not until 1960 when the first African American attended a “white school.” Ruby Bridges attended a public school in New Orleans, Louisiana where she had to be escorted to class by her mom and U.S. Marshals due to violent mobs that protested against her attending a historically white school. After the first day of school many of Ruby’s classmates were removed from school by their parents, leaving her as the only student remaining in her class.

During this timeframe, one of the leading people that fought for education for African Americans was Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Dr. King began to take a stand for African American

education. He believed that segregation was wrong and wanted to let everyone know in a peaceful protest. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. led a total of eight peaceful protests, his most famous being the March on Washington where he performed his famous "I Have a Dream" speech.

For many decades, African Americans were treated unfairly and denied the ability to go to school and learn. Due to the Supreme Court ruling and efforts by influential figures like Dr. King, African Americans earned the right to education and access to schools. The lesson to learn about this vital period in U.S. history is that education is critical for people of all races so that they can help change the world.