

## The Rainbow Coalition

The struggle for freedom and equality for African Americans is one that is passed down from generation to generation and from one era of black leadership to the next. Throughout history, the African American leadership has had many outstanding men and women who made their mark and made a difference for black people in America. And that tradition continues to this day with modern black leadership such as Barrack Obama, The Reverend Al Sharpton and Jessie Jackson.

Jessie Jackson has organized his efforts to continue the struggle for civil rights in one of the most innovative organizations in history that came to be known as the Rainbow Coalition. This organization represented the dreams and goals of the Reverend Jackson, to be sure. But it also represents the shared efforts of black Americans across the country in modern times to keep the dream of Martin Luther King alive and moving forward.

In fact, the Rainbow Coalition was the outcome of a series of efforts and movements that began with a relationship between Reverend Jackson and Dr. King. It was Martin Luther King that asked Jessie Jackson to head up a movement called Operation Breadbasket, a project to seek the economic improvement of black communities across the country, particularly in the inner city. Operation Breadbasket eventually evolved into a powerful civil rights organization known as the Southern Christian Leadership Conference.

As these movements started to make a real difference in the lives of African Americans in America, another step was the development of Operation PUSH which stood for People United to Save Humanity. This influential organization has become the cornerstone for promoting civil rights and social justice for African Americans in the last twenty years.

It was from these different initiatives and the success they were realizing that the Rainbow Coalition was birthed to seek economic opportunity in the business community and to encourage Fortune 500 companies to hire minorities and to expand their involvement in the nurture and the development of black community for the good of all peoples.

The naming of the movement "The Rainbow Coalition" is pivotal to the vision Reverend Jackson had for the civil rights movement. He did not see it as just black people working for the betterment of the black community. Instead, inspired by Martin Luther King's dream of equality and brotherhood of all races, the coalition would truly be a partnership of all minorities, the white community and other equal rights movements to seek equal opportunity for all of America's citizens.

The important stance that The Rainbow Coalition brought to the consciousness of the black community and to America was the concept that civil rights was not just a black issue. It emphasized that all of America cannot move foreword when a part of the population is left behind to flounder in poverty and without the benefits of a good education and job opportunities. The result is that the

black pride that was built by key figures of black history such as Mohammed Ali, Spike Lee and even more radical elements such as Malcolm X and the Black Panthers could now be used to promote true equality in the society. In doing so, Jackson and other contemporary black leaders taught that the African American community not only could be but must insist on being fully black and fully American in their status in American culture.

Finally, the Rainbow Coalition emphasized that civil rights is not just a political issue. The emphasis was on all aspects of American life including economic equality, social opportunity and even equal representation in the media and entertainment arts. To be truly represented as an important part of American culture, black Americans must have equal opportunities in all venues.

This is the message for its time that Reverend Jackson and the Rainbow coalition has brought and continues to bring to the national stage. And it's an important message that takes the good that was done in past civil rights movements in this country and brings up to date with a new century.

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