The Civil Rights Movement in the US: Violent Protests vs.Nonviolent Protests

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1. Index

2.Introduction

The Civil Rights Movement was a period of substantial social change within American society due to the rapid progress of racial (and by extension gender) equity and equality within the systems of the country. The seeds of the movement were planted in the early 20th century with the introduction of the Jim Crow law and the adoption of the separate but equal doctrine[1], opening the gates to a larger movement which went on for 14 years. Within this period, the decidedly prominent form of protest was marching[2], a non-violent call to action that usually includes some sort of direct attack to a specific facet of a system, which were usually supported and/or spearheaded by MLK Jr. This paper will cover the peaceful and violent protests that took place within the Civil Rights Movement period, their causes and effects, and will cover the major figures within said movements, and their ideals, doctrines and beliefs that lead them to organize or participate in movements of violent, aggressive nature or of peaceful, non-violent action.

3. The major nonviolent protests and movements

3.1. The pre-civil rights movement

The Civil Rights Movement's starting year is considered to be either 1954 or 1955[3], with either the Brown v. Board of Education case or the Montgomery Bus Boycotts appointed as events that mark its beginning. Despite this, the Civil Rights Movement had smaller and humbler beginnings with several peaceful disobedience protests being organized by Congress of Racial Equality (CORE), and the increasing involvement of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP).[1]

Moreover, during the pre-Civil Rights Movement era of civil change, multiple lawsuits against the Southern states regarding racial prejudice, segregation and oppression were filed. The National Association for the Advancement of Colored **People** (NAACP) was also becoming more and more engaged in the field of Black activism, especially with their victories in the Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka case later on, after and during which more and more protests began taking place, which in turn started the Civil Rights Movement as it is known today, as a nation-wide series of peaceful protests battling for a non-racist America.[2]

[1] Carson, Clayborne. "American civil rights movement". Encyclopedia Britannica, 28 Aug. 2023, https://www.britannica.com/event/American-civil-rights-movement. Accessed 29 August 2023.
[2] "Our History", naacp.org, 2023, https://naacp.org/about/our-history. Accessed 28 August 2023

3.1.1 **Congress of Racial Equality and the First Freedom Rides**

The Congress of Racial Equality, known as CORE, was an interracial student group founded in Chicago on Jaunary1st, 1942. They pioneered the act of direct, yet nonviolent action for the instigation of Civil change, and assisted Martin Luther King Jr. with the Montgomery bus boycott in the 1950s through advice and assistance. They operated, much like Martin Luther King Jr., by following the words and beliefs of Ghandi, firmly keeping to heart that peaceful action is the answer and also key to socio-political change.[3]

CORE, in the pre-Civil Rights Movement era, is most known for the planning and subsequent execution of the Journey of Reconciliation, which is seldom referenced to by the name of "First Freedom Ride". The nonviolent protest took place in 1947, in Durham, North Carolina and Chapel Hill, North Carolina, in which Sixteen men, eight African- American and eight white, planned to visit fifteen cities in Virginia, North Carolina, Tennessee and Kentucky, with the starting point being in Washington D.C.[4] The protest included getting unto busses and actively violating the current state laws on segregation: the men would get on, and the African American activists would sit in the front while the white protesters would sit in the back. The black protestors then refused to give up seating to other white people, which was the point of the call to action, which would incite controversy and start racial conflict. A notable figure in this protest was Bayard Rustin, a quaker of the Fellowship of Reconciliation and the American Friends Service Committee who became a controversial character within the protest due to getting the police called

[3] "About the Congress of Racial Equality (1972) 637-7968". Congress Of Racial Equality. Retrieved May 23, 2022.
[4] Meier, August; Rudwick, Elliott M. (1975). "CORE: A Study in the Civil Rights Movement, 1942-1968". University of Illinois Press, pp. 640-641

on him during one of the protests, which lead to a 45-minute standoff between a bus driver and himself in which the police did not intervene.

On April 13th 1947, after this incident, four protesters were arrested on the grounds of law violation for the two black arrestees, and the defense of black perpetrators in the case of the other two white protestors. The month after, they lost their appeal to their sentences and were subsequently arrested two years later, in 1949.[5]

Despite the unsuccessful attempts to appeal the arrest charges, and the general racist aggression the riders suffered, the nonviolent nature of this movement inspired the Montgomery Bus Boycotts int he1950s and the later, very similar, Freedom Rides in the1960s, as the lack of violence on behalf of the protestors, yet the presence of direct action had a big impact on future developments within them ovement

[5] History.com editors (2021), "The Journey of Reconciliation—considered the first Freedom Ride—sets out from D.C.", History, A&E Television Networks, retrieved August 29, 2023

3.2 Peaceful Protests at the beginning of the Civil Rights Movement

3.2.1. The Montgomery Bus Boycotts

"We have no alternative but to protest. For many years we have shown an amazing patience. We have sometimes given our white brothers the feeling that we liked the way we were being treated. But we come here tonight to be saved from that patience that makes us patient with anything less than freedom and justice."[6] were the words of Martin Luther King Jr (1955)., arguably the most important figure in the Civil Rights Movement, on the topic of the Montgomery bus boycotts, a movement that, much like the Brown v. Board of Education, is one of the catalysts for the start of the Civil Rights Movement. It is referencing the fact that the years of passive waiting for changes to come has come to an end, and that it is time to start acting against the system in order to achieve the desired freedom. The Montgomery Bus boycotts are one such movement, as they were a direct attack on a segregated system, and one that brought about real change.

The "equal but separate" rhetoric, from which spawned the segregation laws, hit almost every facet of day-to-day living. City buses, for one, were extreme cases of such separation between the black and white population as they had the biggest inequality in the way the two were separated. The blacks had to, after buying a ticket at the driver's seat, exit back out and re-enter the bus at the back, where there were specific "coloured" seats waiting for them. In the case the bus was overcrowded, the African Americans seated on said seats would have to give them up for any standing White man or woman.[7] In an effort to peacefully solve, and subsequently remove, said segregation laws within the public transit system, the Women's Political Council, in 1954, organized a meeting with Mayor W. A. Gayle, in which required

[6] Martin Luther King Jr (1955), "The Montgomery Bus Boycott Speech"
[7] MONTGOMERY, AL., MONTGOMERY CITY CODE, section 10, ch 6 § 10 (1900).

changes were outlined: that empty seats should be taken by African-Americans, a decree that African Americans should not pay to sit at the back and that they should both pay and enter from the back, and they also tried inquiring for a policy that would create more bus stops in black neighborhoods and communities in an attempt to keep the number of bus stops equal between Black and White streets and areas. This meeting, however, did not cause any meaningful change, leading her to organize, as mentioned above, a city-wide bus protest. In a letter to the mayor titled "*A Letter from the Women's Political Council" (1954)* , she would write "There has been talk from twenty-five or more local organizations of planning a city-wide boycott of buses", which would mark the official threat of the beginning of the Montgomery Bus Boycotts. There would be two arrests later that year pertaining to the issue of segregation within bus transits: 15-year-old Claudette Colvin who would be detained for disrespecting segregation laws, and 18-year-old Mary Louise Smith, who was arrested for refusing to give up her seat to a white person.[8] Despite their arrests, the black community did not have their spark for protesting lit until around a year later, in 1955, when a woman by the name of Rosa Parks, who later became an activist herself, would refuse to give up her seat to a white man. Capitalizing on this event, Jo Ann Robinson, president of the local NAACP branch and leader of Women's Political Council (WPC) called for a bus boycott on December 5th, one that was believed will have a rather big impact on the system as Montgomery's bus traffic depended heavily on African Americans, due to some-70% of the bus companies' income depending on them.[9] The boycott asked all African American citizens to avoid boarding and paying a bus fare, and it was so successful, due to Rosa Parks'

[8] JEANNE T. "The Rebellious Life of Mrs. Rosa Parks- Other Resistors", https://rosaparksbiography.org/bio/, retrieved 18. August 2023

[9] V. L. Crawford, J.A. Rouse, B. Woods (1993), "Women in the Civil Rights Movement, Trailblazers and Torchbearers, 1941-1965", Indiana University Press, p. 82

significance within the community on top of her being a well-respected individual, hat it was extended indefinitely.

During this time, the MIA was formed by a group of local ministers, and Martin Luther King Jr. was named their leader. The MIA campaigned for first-come, first-serve seating on buses with Black seating on the rear and White seating in front as a compromise; a suggestion that was later denied by Montgomery officials and the bus companies, who refused to meet those demands. The boycotts, since nothing was agreed upon, lasted for a year and some weeks, during which the Montgomery African American community was threatened and assaulted multiple times by the police or White anti-protestors. The boycott was ultimately successful, as it ended with the MIA filing a federal suit against bus segregation, which was later, in 1956, declared illegal and unconstitutional, integrating the two races. This success had a lasting impact on the Civil Rights movement, and it is also considered to be the true start of it due to multiple reasons. Firstly, this boycott and the later federal suit is what brought Martin Luther King Jr. into the limelight, giving him a nation-wide spotlight which he would later use to combat oppression and racism on a national scale. Secondly, it inspired African American communities in the South to also combat segregation laws, and it was the direct cause of the nonviolent yet tangible phase of protests in the Civil Rights movement.[10]

[10] Britannica, The Editors of Encyclopaedia. "Montgomery bus boycott". Encyclopedia Britannica, 4 Aug. 2023, https://www.britannica.com/event/Montgomery-bus-boycott. Accessed 29 August 2023.

3.2.2. The Little Rock Incident

Though victories were had in the fight for integration in some Southern states, others weren't so keen on letting it take place. The White public, too, was mostly against this movement, which caused undue violence against an anti-establishmentarianism, non-violent movement. Sometime after the Montgomery Bus Boycott and the Brown case, schools and other institutions were asked to begin the integration process, in an effort to abolish segregation in the South. However, to upkeep white supremacy on a state level, a wave of "evasive segregation" had started to form.[11] A student, who was granted entry into the UoA (University of Alabama) by federal court, for example, was expelled following these victories, while the State of Virginia closed all schools in Prince Edward County just to avoid mixing Black and White students. There were other examples, such as the closure of public swimming pools and the removal of all seats in libraries in a petty attempt to avoid mixing Blacks and Whites. The President of the United States at that time, Dwight D. Eisenhower, had little to no involvement with the Civil Rights Crisis of the time, but was soon forced to act with the Little Rock protest.[12]

In 1957, then Governor of Arkansas Orval Faubus summoned troops to surround Little Rock High School to bar entrance to its Black students as he was determined to keep the schools segregated (being fervently against integration). Considering this was an offence against the constitution, he was ordered to let the students attend the white school as integration was now forced on educational establishments by law. The very next day, however, his troops were ordered to bar entrance to its black students yet again, of which Elizabeth Eckford was the most

[11] Evasive Segregation is a tactic where, despite segregation laws were in one way or another abolished, they are upkept via unconventional means. An example is closing down desegregated institutions to disallow Black and White mixing.
[12] Daisy B. (1986), "The Long Shadow of Little Rock: A Memoir", New York: D. McKay, 1962, pp. 2-5

notable one, as she was assaulted, beaten and spit on right before arriving to school grounds. This outraged the Federal court judge, who ordered the Arkansas Governor to permanently remove his troops. Gov. Orval (forcefully) agreed; however he left the Black students with no protection, which enabled violent white mobs to freely accompany and clog the school entrance (the students had to be, in fact, sent home early due to this problem). Gov. Orval Faubus used this violent mob to his advantage, saying that the public , being against segregation was proof that integration was not and should not be the way to act. This prompted presidential action: President Eisenhower, who up until now had been avoiding to comment on the protests, had to intervene, as the alternative was letting a governor abuse his power to go against the Constitution. He sent in federal troops to protect the Little Rock Highschoolers, saying "our personal opinions have no bearing on the matter of enforcement", which let him keep a centrist, "neutral" approach to the civil rights movement. [13]

While this let the African American Little Rock High School students roam the school grounds completely protected, the very next year gov. Faubus had yet another power-struggle against the constitution, as he deemed closing all Arkansas schools a more fitting decision than to abolish segregation. This prompted the U.S. supreme court to act and, a year later, "evasive schemes" against integration were deemed unconstitutional and hereby illegal, putting an end to "evasive segregation". From then on, Little Rock High School students were able to freely attend, and the school itself, along with other establishments, were equally open to both the Black and the White population.[14]

[13] R.J. Hanson Hanson, "Crisis in Little Rock: Race, Class & Violence During the Desegregation of Central High School." Crisis in Little Rock: Race, Class & Violence During the Desegregation of Central High School, 1957-1958 Richard J. Hanson (n.d.): n. pag. Web. 10 Nov. 2014. <http://castle.eiu.edu/~historia/archives/2004/Hanson.pdf>.
[14] S. Gordy, "Lost Year", Encyclopedia of Arkansas, https://encyclopediaofarkansas.net/entries/lost-year-737/, last modified: July 24, 2023, last accessed: 19th August 2023

3.2.3. The Greensboro Sit-Ins

The Greensboro Sit-Ins refer to an organized, nonviolent series of protests organized in Greensboro, North Carolina, for the purpose of combatting segregated lunch counters within American diners and restaurants. Much like the Montgomery Bus Boycotts, it inspired multiple nonviolent protests of civil disobedience in the area and paved the way to change within societal norms. The initial protest was organized Jibreel Khazan (originally Ezell Blair,Jr.), Franklin McCain, Joseph McNeil and David Richmond, all students at North Carolina Agricultural and Technical State University, with their protests being inspired by the aforementioned Journey of Reconciliation, and like most nonviolent Civil Rights Protests, the teachings of Mohadas Ghandi.[15][16]

The very first sit in was an organized effort, and one executed with utmost discipline. The students' plan was the following: to stop at Ralph John's store for an easy newspaper contact, visit Woolworth's five-and-dime store to purchase items, then sit at the lunch corner, request service, and not leave until said service is provided. They were asked to leave by the manager despite their courteous behavior, and responded by informing their college campus leaders about the situation.

The days following February 1st, 1960, included multiple, lengthy sit-ins by many of their colleagues. With peaceful civil disobedience, the students were convinced that they would manage to incite change. There would be multiple notable instances of such protests in the same store, or in other five-and-dime stores. The following day, 25 students, both Male and Female, would visit the store and sit at the lunch counters, not leaving until they got service. Eventually, other five-and-

[15] History.com editors (2010), "Greensboro Sit-In", History.com, A&E Television Networks, retrieved August 29, 2023

[16] Rebekah J. Kowal. "Staging the Greensboro Sit-Ins." TDR (1988-), vol. 48, no. 4, 2004, pp. 135–54. JSTOR, http://www.jstor.org/stable/4488599. Accessed 30 Aug. 2023.

dime stores in the Greensboro area that had segregated lunch counters would be subjected to protests.

The police involvement, while minimal, did not target the protesters, but rather their assailants. They would arrest reactionaries which exhibited violent behavior towards the protesters, and would prosecute most people who would go the extra mile to see the protests dispersed. There were, in fact, no prosecuted protesters until the arrest of 40 students who were charged of trespassing during an organized protest.

The Greensboro sit-ins were an incredibly successful set of protests. Despite their nature of not being organized without the assistance of an organization, they saw the partial desegregation of lunch counters, and the increased awareness of such an issue, by the end of February. The South saw an irreversible change in the general awareness of racial issues, as this set of protests were one of the main events which lead to the eventual desegregation of the private sector.[17]

[17] Rebekah J. Kowal. "Staging the Greensboro Sit-Ins." TDR (1988-), vol. 48, no. 4, 2004, pp. 135–54. JSTOR, http://www.jstor.org/stable/4488599. Accessed 30 Aug. 2023.

3.2.4. The Freedom Rides

In 1961, another set of Bus sit-in protests were organized, whose members were dubbed the Freedom Riders. Their goal was to protest the segregation of bus terminals by going on a bus ride across the South, including the Deep South, stopping in Alabama, South Carolina and other southern states' bus terminals, lunch counters and restrooms. This movement, organized by Congress of Racial Equality (CORE), was inspired by the 1947 bus protests, the selfsame sit-ins that inspired the Montgomery Bus Boycotts. This 1961 sit-in was a way to test the Boynton v. Virginia case's ruling, in which it was decided that the segregation of interstate travel or transportation facilities was wholly unconstitutional.[18]

This sit-in was organized in the same way the 1947 Journey of Reconciliation was: both White and Black protesters (this time, including women) rode on a bus, and instead of protesting Bus Segregation, they would protest by using each other's segregated bathrooms and the like in the "Jim Crow" states, where even in the 1960s segregation laws were rampantly ongoing. This protest was a risky undergoing, as the South (and specially the Deep South) was inclined towards violence when met with protest. In fact, since the day the bus, carrying 7 African Americans and 6 Caucasians, left Washington D.C. with the aim to reach New Orleans in Louisiana by May 17th (to commemorate the Brown case ruling), they faced some sort of White violence at each bus terminal or stop. The first violent attack happened xin Rock Hill, South Carolina, where John Lewis, an African American seminary student and member of the SNCC, Albert Bigelow, white freedom rider and World War 2 veteran, along with another Black rider were violently attacked when they attempted to use the "wrong" segregated bathroom. Upon reaching Alabama, they were severely

[18] Britannica, The Editors of Encyclopaedia. "Freedom Rides". Encyclopedia Britannica, 27 Apr. 2023, https://www.britannica.com/event/Freedom-Rides. Accessed 30 August 2023.

attacked in Anniston, where the Ku Klux Klan attacked them ferociously, sporting metal pipes while also bombing their original bus. When they obtained a new bus, in which there was also violence on the behalf of some Klansmen, they managed to reach Birmingham, in which the riders were, again, beaten up mercilessly. This latter violent attack was the end of the original Freedom Ride, as all Riders were evacuated and flown to New Orleans in the days following the attack.[19]

These violent series of events were also exemplary of the States' unwillingness to act, as the policemen who were supposed to give protection to the riders were either suspiciously absent in most states, or had deserted the protesters and their the bus before approaching a stop. This, along with the previous violent incidents, discouraged the continuation of the Freedom Rides. The SNCC, however, organized a renewal of the sit-in effort, with a new group of 10 students which departed from Nashville with the same objective as the previous group. After being arrested in Birmingham on their first attempt and sent back to Tennessee, they managed to secure federal protection at the behest of Robert F. Kennedy, thanks to whom they managed to reach Montgomery. However, as it were with the previous group and their encounter with police occlusion, the local police failed to protect them at a later stop, in Montgomery, and they were left beaten at a bus terminal. Despite all of this, they managed to reach Jackson, Mississippi, (despite Kennedy's warnings for a "cool-off" period") where they, unfortunately, were arrested and jailed, a ruling which was later also reversed thanks to the NAACP).

Despite all these violent incidents, they did not give in, continuing the rides in the following months. There were two other trips: the Washington D.C to Tallahassee, Florida Interfaith Freedom Ride and the St. Louis, Missouri to New

[19] McWhorter, Diane. "The Enduring Courage of the Freedom Riders." *The Journal of Blacks in Higher Education*, no. 61, 2008, pp. 66–73. *JSTOR*, http://www.jstor.org/stable/40407321. Accessed 30 Aug. 2023.

Orleans, Louisiana Ride, which, while not as important or eventful, were crucial in the prohibition of segregation in interstate transit terminals, a decision brought about due to the pressure exerted on the Interstate Commerce Commission on behalf of the selfsame protestors and the Kennedy administration.[20]

[20] McWhorter, Diane. "The Enduring Courage of the Freedom Riders." *The Journal of Blacks in Higher Education*, no. 61, 2008, pp. 66–73. *JSTOR*, http://www.jstor.org/stable/40407321. Accessed 30 Aug. 2023.

3.3. Martin Luther King Jr., and his ways of nonviolence

3.3.1. Martin Luther King Jr., a brief introduction

Known for for his numerous organized protests and his Noble Peace Prize win, Martin Luther King, Jr. is one of the most widely known and respected figures of the Civil Rights Movement. His most well-known achievement is his role as the leader in the March of Washington in 1963, where he delivered his iconic speech "I have a dream…" that would go on to become a sort of slogan for the movement. He also led the SCLC, Southern Christian Leadership Conference, with which he helped combat and organize protests. His teaching and ideologies came from Ghandi's teachings, wherein he was wholly against war, seeking the way with the least violence possible. Though the movement would later encounter internal strife on the topic of violence, or lack thereof, he stuck to his morals until his assassination in Tennessee in 1968.[21]

[21] Lewis, David L. and Carson, Clayborne. "Martin Luther King, Jr.". Encyclopedia Britannica, 28 Aug. 2023, https://www.britannica.com/biography/Martin-Luther-King-Jr. Accessed 30 August 2023.

3.3.2. March on Washington

Before his involvement in the March of Washington, he was arrested once more, this time in Birmingham after police turned dogs and firehoses on peaceful protestors during a anti-segregationist sit-in protest. From jail, he wrote multiple letters addressing his stance on non-violence and his disapproval of his white brethren, who discouraged the participation in such feats of activism to prevent any manner of tragedy..

After his release from jail, he held his “I have a Dream..” speech, which is arguably his most famous speech, as it is his most quoted one and also, potentially, his most well known one. The speech happened on August 28, 1963, during rhe March on Washington; a walk organized by MLK himself, along with other Civil Rights Movement figures such as A. Philip Randolph and Bayard Rustin.

More than 200,000 individuals of all races and from all walks of life attended this peaceful march, one that called for establishing job equality for everyone while also forcing the Civil Rights Legislation. This walk was arguably the most well-known, well-documented and most publicized peaceful movement that came out of the Civil Rights Movement, as from this point onward, MLK’s “I have a Dream…” speech was adopted as the movement’s slogan, meant to inspire and unite people to steer America towards a better, more equal future.[22]

[22] Britannica, The Editors of Encyclopaedia. "March on Washington". Encyclopedia Britannica, 28 Aug. 2023, https://www.britannica.com/event/March-on-Washington. Accessed 30 August 2023.

3.3.3. Selma March

The Selma March, a walk from Selma, Alabama to Montgomery, the state's capital, was one of the last non-violent organized protests, and one of the most crucial moments in the Civil Rights Movement. Led by Martin Luther King, Jr. in March of 1965, 25,000 people walked against racial violence and for equality within the voting system.

The motives for the movement were spawned as an outrage after the SNCC attempted to register African American voters within the system, finding out that to do what they set out to do, the aforementioned Black individuals were faced with lengthy, exhausting four to five page forms and difficult literacy tests, all the while the selfsame registration offices in which such injustices were occurring were open only for one to two days a week.

The movement was properly put in motion after the death of Jimmie Lee Jackson, who was assaulted and killed by an Alabama state trooper. The Civil Rights leaders, seeing this as an opportunity to protest the state, put together an organized march against police brutality, White-on-Black violence and the violation of African American rights within the justice and voting system.[23]

When the protestors, led by Hosea Williams and John Lewis, set out from Selma on March 7th, where they were immediately stopped with a violent attack from Alabama state troopers on Edmund Pettus bridge, an event whose bloodshed was captured on television and broadcasted under the name of Bloody Sunday. This event inspired multiple other marches as a sort of "counter-attack", which succeeded eventually in bringing about the change in voting rights. These marches were risky

[23] Yang, John E. "Selma 1965: The Black March Into a Sea of Blue." *The Journal of Blacks in Higher Education*, no. 12, 1996, pp. 83–83. *JSTOR*, https://doi.org/10.2307/2962994. Accessed 30 Aug. 2023.

due to the area the protests were happening in being highly against the integration of American Society, so when the second set of marches happened, on the 9th of March, Martin Luther King, Jr., who lead the 2nd attempt, decided to turn around the walk upon reaching the bridge; an act for which he would be criticized as "cowardly".

No more than 20 days later, 2000 people began yet another march from Selma, this time, however, under the protection of federal troopers and National guards as an act of solidarity on behalf of President Johnson. These protestors, after some 12 hours of walking and an overnight rest in a field, reached Montgomery and met up with an overwhelming number of Black and White protestors, where they gathered to hear Martin Luther King, Jr. speak on the issue, along with other Civil Rights Movement figures accompanying him. This event directly leads up to the Voting Rights Act of 1965, as President Johnson's involvement with this could give him an edge in the arguing for the passing of the bill.[24]

[24] Wallenfeldt, Jeff. "Selma March". Encyclopedia Britannica, 21 Jul. 2023, https://www.britannica.com/event/Selma-March. Accessed 30 August 2023.

3.3.4. The end of MLK's career: the victory of violence over nonviolence

With the rise of Black Militancy in the latter half of the 1960s, thanks to the impatience regarding King's pacifistic approach to activism, he was faced with backlash and criticism from his fellow brethren. Figures such as Malcom X, a former Nation of Islam member and radical communist-leaning activist who fully endorsed violent approaches towards the art of protests, openly criticized King and accused him of cowardice. Such figures even lead to a gradual decline of King's career, as, to many people, a peaceful approach would simply not be viable for achieving full rights, especially after the passing and voting of major acts such as the Civil Rights and the Voting Rights Act(s). King, faced with this criticism, decided to broaden his horizons, getting involved in other protests for other minorities: he got involved with the advocating for Asian rights, he endorsed and fought for poor districts and the lower echelon of society, and also opted for an anti-war campaign in response to America's declaration of war on Vietnam.[25] [26]

He was supposed to organize one more big protest of a similar scope to the March of Washington, dubbed the "Poor People's campaign", to combat for the rights and livelihoods of the poor families of America. During the organizational process, however, he left to participate in a smaller campaign for the working conditions of sanitation workers. During these endeavors, he noted himself that he is slowly growing tired of a life of activism, stating that the constant threats and attempts on his life were taking a toll not only on his livelihood and health, but also on his mental state. He was growing tired of a life of risks and backlash, and the recent criticism towards his non-violent philosophy only confounded this feeling.

[25] Fairclough, Adam. "Martin Luther King, Jr. and the War in Vietnam." *Phylon (1960-)*, vol. 45, no. 1, 1984, pp. 19–21. *JSTOR*, https://doi.org/10.2307/274976. Accessed 30 Aug. 2023.

[26]

During his stay at Memphis, one day after giving his "Promised Land" speech, during which he seemed to imply that his end was near, his life was tragically cut short by a sniper bullet to the chest: he was assassinated by a white man, James Earl Ray on March 10th, 1969. His death caused mass panic and confusion and reached national headlines. This event also had a major impact on the Civil Rights movement as a whole, as historians cite the date of his death as the cutoff point of the "Civil Rights Movement period" in American history. In fact, his death caused the gradual winding down of the movement, and it also came with the cancellation of his planned marches and protests. [27]

[27] Lewis, David L. and Carson, Clayborne. "Martin Luther King, Jr.". Encyclopedia Britannica, 28 Aug. 2023, https://www.britannica.com/biography/Martin-Luther-King-Jr. Accessed 30 August 2023.

4.. Nonviolence incites Violence: aggressive acts against peaceful protesters

4.1. The general philosophy of nonviolence

The beginning of the Civil Rights movement was one founded on the philosophy of nonviolence, a decision brought about by the inherent violence in the upkeep of segregated communities and amenities. The leaders of the movement, especially Martin Luther King Jr., chose such a path to prove that the dismantlement of institutionalized racial segregation, discrimination and inequality can be brought about with passive resistance and civil disobedience, to prove that segregation is a construct upheld only by societal norms and the threats of the powerful. [28]

The Civil rights leaders, in fact, used the violence they'd face as a tool to spread the idea of racism and segregation being wrong. They were aware that segregationists would go to any lengths to maintain power over the African American population, and used this fact to prove to the American population outside of the south the lengths people go to maintain the status quo.

There is, however, a tragic history of violence in the face of nonviolent opposition. The Ku Klux Klan and other general reactionaries were known to hurt, or even kill the protesters in response to acts of activism. It demonstrates that despite the Civil Rights Movement being a successful nonviolent age of activism, it still created victims to assaults and murders.

[28] Carson, Clayborne. "American civil rights movement". Encyclopedia Britannica, 28 Aug. 2023, https://www.britannica.com/event/American-civil-rights-movement. Accessed 29 August 2023.

4.2. Violence in response to nonviolence

4.2.1. Notable incidents in Mississipi

There were a few notable murders that occurred in Mississippi which were carried out mostly in response to figures inciting anti-segregationist thoughts, mostly via the urging of the Black population to vote, or by participating in organized activities. The suspects and the felons of the following murders weren't charged with murder or were never identified despite eye-witness accounts or first hand experiences due to police inaction, a tragic fact that showed the inequity and inequality African Americans faced in a segregationist society.

While violent reactions to protests were rather commonplace, there were three specific incidents of murders linked to nonviolent activism in Mississippi that are notable due to the specifics mentioned above.

The first one is Reverend George Lee, vice president of the Regional Council of Negro Leadership and a respected NAACP member and worker, when in 1955 he was shot and killed by, according to eyewitness, a carload of White people in a drive-by shooting. He was a notable figure within the movement due to his involvement in efforts encouraging and urging the Mississippi Delta African American population to go to the polls and vote. Despite efforts to start a search for the perpetrators, they were never found. Furthermore, Governor Hugh White refused to employ any search effort in Belzoni, Mississippi, barring any progress on catching the murderers.

Another incident that happened in 1955 was the killing of sixty-three-year-old Lamar Smith, a World War II veteran and a farmer, who was shot in cold blood on the lawn of the Brookhaven, Mississippi courthouse. He was shot for urging African Americans to vote, and while no suspect was ever found, John Dittmer in "Local

People" described the murderer being seen "leaving the scene with blood all over him", letting the killer go free.

The last of the prevalent acts of violence against a nonviolent protester happened in 1961, when Herbert Lee, a farmer, was shot and killed by E.H. Hurst, a member of the Mississippi State Legislature. He was murdered due to his involvement in a voter registration campaign that was sweeping through Mississippi. Despite this, he was never arrested and charged for the murder. In Charles Payne's "I've Got the Light of Freedom", he writes how "black witnesses had been pressured by the sheriff and others to testify that Lee tried to hit Hurst with a tire tool. They testified as ordered. Hurst was acquitted by a coroner's jury, held in a room full of armed white men, the same day as the killing. Hurst never spent a night in jail."[29]

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4.2.2. The Freedom Summer Ku Klux Klan incident

One of the most notable violent responses to nonviolent protesters happened during the Freedom Summer of 1964, also known as the Mississippi Summer Project, a drive created with the purpose to increase the number of registered Black voters in order to fight voter intimidation, discrimination and racial oppression at the polls, where three civil right activists by the names of James Chaney, Andrew Goodman, and Michael Schwerner left to investigate the burning of multiple churches, such as the Mount Zion Church.

When the three men had stepped into Neshoba County, they were arrested shortly after by Neshoba County Deputy Sheriff Cecil Price. They were released shortly after, but were arrested again for undisclosed reasons. The Sheriff, Cecil Price, following the second arrest, turned the protesters in to the local Ku Klux Klan wing, his fellow Klansmen, after which they took them to a remote area, beat them and murdered them. After the three men were found to be missing, a search effort was put into force, potentially due to Schwerner and Goodman being white. The FBI notified the Mississippi National Guard and the U.S. Navy to search for the men, an effort the Freedom Summer organizers greatly appreciated and anticipated by employing white protesters. [30]

Weeks after the search was launched, multiple bodies were found along with the three men buried in a remote dam not too far from where they were taken. The murderers, which included Sheriff Cecil Price and seven other Klansmen, were found guilty, and were subsequently arrested and tried for multiple instances of brutal murder. Despite this, the jury found them not guilty, and they were absolved, but were charged again on the basis of violating James Chaney, Andrew Goodman,

[30] "Mississippi Burning", FBI.gov, https://www.fbi.gov/history/famous-cases/mississippi-burning, last accessed 18.08.2023

and Michael Schwerner's human rights, and were sentenced to prison for up to 10 years.[31]

[31] Chaney, Ben. "Schwerner, Chaney, and Goodman: The Struggle for Justice." *Human Rights,* vol. 27, no. 2, 2000, pp. 3–8. *JSTOR,* http://www.jstor.org/stable/27880193. Accessed 30 Aug. 2023.

4.3. Conclusion: the cost of nonviolence

Despite the Civil Rights movement being one of empowering the oppressed through the tactic of nonviolent empowerment, it still cost many lives. Incidents such as the aforementioned Mississippi murders, Bloody Sunday, Ku Klux Klan lynchings, church bombings and other similar felonies and murders were a constant in the lives of African American protestors. America would, however, see substantial change with the signing of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965 by Presidents John F. Kennedy and Lyndon Johnson. In fact, The Voting Rights Act of 1965 is considered, by historians, the "true" end of the Civil Rights Movement period of American history. Despite this, in the years following 1965, up to the beginning of the 1970s, there were other major events pertaining to the movement itself, ones that also fall under the Civil Rights Movement umbrella, despite their late date of occurrence.[32]

[32] Carson, Clayborne. "American civil rights movement". Encyclopedia Britannica, 28 Aug. 2023, https://www.britannica.com/event/American-civil-rights-movement. Accessed 31 August 2023.

5. Violent Protests

Though the Civil Rights Movement is a movement founded on pacifism and nonviolence, with the only violent aspect of it thought to come from the general response of the White public, there is a more aggressive side to the movement, spearheaded by individuals such as Malcom X, and beliefs such as pro-segregation and black militancy and violence. Such beliefs were, despite the general idea of the movement, quite foundational in the grounding of the movement, and were not irrelevant in the greater image of what was achieved.

5.1 MALCOM X

Malcom X is one of the core individuals from the Civil Rights Movement. He is considered, in vague historic terms, to be “Martin Luther King Jr.’s alter ego”, someone who represents the other side of the nonviolent coin. His position as a prominent figure in the Nation of Islam, his support and articulation of ideals such as Black militarization, Black nationalism and race pride and his general charismatic personality lead him to be a popular icon within communities, especially with Black youth.

He offered a more frustrated and bitter view of the current state of the movement: he would criticize Martin Luther King Jr.’s attempts at integration and nonviolence, stating that if not armed, Africans Americans would only suffer at the hands of the oppressor. He expressed the ideal that every Black citizen must protect his or herself by any means necessary, urging them to remember their role in Black Nationalism and to resist White nationalism.

He was considered a dangerous individual by both police and government officials. These suspicions arose from his quick rise to power within the Nation of Islam, and an incident regarding Hinton Johnson, a member of the Islamic organization, in which the New York Police department was swarmed in response to the brutal beating of the Black Muslim. The FBI, in fact, put him under surveillance due to perceived ability to control a crowd: a power that, in the eyes of White leaders, was considered too great.[33]

[33] Mamiya, Lawrence A.. "Malcolm X". Encyclopedia Britannica, 3 Jul. 2023, https://www.britannica.com/biography/Malcolm-X. Accessed 30 August 2023.

5.2 Black Militancy and Islam

During the latter half of the Civil Rights Movement, in the late 1950s and 1960s, there was a rise in Black Militancy, which coincide with the teachings of the Nation of Islam and Malcom X's public ideas of Black independence. For many African Americans during this period, especially for those among the working class, the methods and ideals expressed by Martin Luther King Jr. and his followers weren't enough to win the battle for equal rights, as there was a general frustration that there was a lack of progress towards the actualization of Black Rights, along with a perception that organizations such as National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) and Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) benefitted only the Black elites, along with their White counterparts.[34]

Such a thought among the proletariat lead to the rise of Black militancy, which in turn raised morale and the belief in Black power and Black nationalist movements, which resulted in many African Americans turning to the Islamic church in this time, an event that sparked different approaches by lower class African Americans towards the battle for equal rights.

By becoming Muslim, many people in the Black community felt that their African heritage and Blackness was celebrated and glorified in the face of white oppression. The prevailing philosophy within this community was, in fact, that a complete detachment and segregation from the White community was necessary, that African Americans in America are supposed to survive on thriving Black-owned businesses and a Black-centered economy, which would in turn help the people at the bottom of the society make their way towards the top, a way to liberate the poor

[34] Melton, J. Gordon. "Nation of Islam". Encyclopedia Britannica, 19 Jun. 2023, https://www.britannica.com/topic/Nation-of-Islam. Accessed 31 August 2023.

African American from the clutches of poverty to stand tall as a proud Black citizen of America, completely detached from the politics, systems and general help of the "White Word". A movement such as this, that is essentially meant to break the status-quo of current society, did put into the limelight the uncomfortable truths of the state of the movement, creating discomfort towards lower-class Black people and Black Muslims, casting them unto the fringes of society by both upper class Black people, and White people in general.

At the height of the Black Muslim movement did the Columbia Avenue riots start in Philadelphia, which were rather violent and disruptive movements done in the response towards police violence. These riots were, in fact, considered the fault of Black Muslims and a direct consequence of Black Militancy, a thought that resulted from the rise of White Anxiety towards more aggressive liberation movements on the behalf of lower to mid class African Americans.

The riot resulted in property damages, and three suspects were arrested for inciting the riots using anti-police language and sentiments regarding antidisestablishmentarianism, and while there was no definitive proof that there was an organized effort to incite the Columbia Avenue riots, along with the fact that not all rioters were Muslim or African American, they did increase tensions between ideological parties within the movement and created a general distrust towards Muslims within the fight for racial rights. It created a scene of riots all related to the Muslim church or Black nationalism or Black power movements, adding a complex layer of relations within the Civil Rights Movement that would not have been there without violent resistance.[35]

[35] " *BLACK MILITANTS*", *Civil Rights in a Northern City: Philadelphia* <http://northerncity.library.temple.edu/ (add the complete URL for the specific page)>

5.3 The Long, Hot Summer of 1967

Among the events that marked the "violent" side of the Civil Rights Movement was a period in 1967 called the Long, Hot Summer of 1967, a shorthand used to indicate a period in 1967 that contained over 150 riots over racial tensions in America. The Long, hot summer of 1967 took place in multiple states, such as Birmingham, Chicago, Detroit, Minneapolis, Milwaukee, Newark, New Britain, New York City, Plainfield, Rochester, and Toledo, and were characterized by looting, arson, property damage and mass deaths.

This period incited a varied political response, as Conservatives claimed the riots to be a direct consequence of President Johnson's War on Poverty Initiative, an effort to reduce poverty and encourage social growth within underdeveloped communities in big cities. Republicans, however, were split on how to handle the issue, with individuals such as Ronald Raegan in 1968 opting for the traditionally republican "Law and Order" approach towards the resolution of the conflict, and Nelson Rockefeller supporting a solution based in justice. The winning candidate within the possible solutions for this conflict was Richard Nixon, who supported a middle-of-the-road approach between the two aforementioned philosophies, reducing but not fully removing the impact of the War on Poverty initiative, controlling crimes in such areas with due justice, and encouraging the flourishing of Black capitalism with Black-owned or established enterprises and shops as a way to "educate" and further the underdeveloped African American neighbourhoods.[36] [37]

[36] Rachal, John R. "'The Long, Hot Summer': The Mississippi Response to Freedom Summer, 1964." The Journal of Negro History, vol. 84, no. 4, 1999, pp. 315–21. JSTOR, https://doi.org/10.2307/2649035. Accessed 30 Aug. 2023.

[37] Britannica, The Editors of Encyclopaedia. "The Riots of the Long, Hot Summer". Encyclopedia Britannica, 16 Jun. 2017, https://www.britannica.com/story/the-riots-of-the-long-hot-summer. Accessed 31 August 2023.

6. The crucial difference between violence and nonviolence: an analysis

The Civil Rights Movement is a period in American history that is looked back as being the shining example of peaceful protests being the golden standard for enabling social change, and while it is in partly true, the violent aspct of the movement had a massive and unignorable impact on it aswell.

Martin Luther King Jr., and many organizations such as the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE), and the increasing involvement of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), were responsible for many of the changes that had taken place at the time. Their pacifist ideology and Martin Luther King Jr.'s Ghandian philosophy opened the doors to many acts of civil disobedience without violence from the oppressed. Such acts were, as mentioned before, successful due to such peaceful tactics: the Greensboro Sit-ins, for example, used civil disobedience and tenacity to overcome segregation within a private aspect of a community: diner seating. The sit-ins were successful because, by not inciting violence, it was easier to inspire and lead people to helping the cause. The supporters and organizers of the sit-ins garnered both positive and negative attention but weren't shunned on the basis of the protestors being "uneducated" and "barbaric" by the white public.

The impact riots and violent protests hard, however, cannot be undermined. Though nonviolence managed to let Martin Luther King Jr. achieve massive advancements in the search for equality between races, the riots had a massive impact on morale and were crucial for the fight for equality within poorer circles of African American communities. In fact, most riots that were in some way related to the Nation of Islam, and the Black Panther organization, a paramilitary organization based in Leninism with similar ideals of Black power and other left-leaning views,

were a direct result of police brutality on someone from the working class, with their more peaceful efforts being related to the proletariat as well.

A common thought shared at the time was the nonviolent movements organized by Martin Luther King Jr. and his followers did not directly benefit lower class Black citizens, as they were a middle-class effort designed to work in tandem with White systems, in order to integrate themselves into White society. Malcom X, and the Nation of Islam challenged such ideas by elucidating that Black nationalism and segregated societies would let the Black Community prosper, and along with more aggression-oriented decisions such as open carrying and public threats of violence, such as the slogan “Bullets or Ballots”.

The main difference between violence and nonviolence comes down to the individual. The nonviolent protests and movements, while successful, were ideologically opposite to violent protests and movements. The former advocated for peace between races in a shared society, while the latter wished for a segregated society where Black people get to create their own systems, social structures, and politics without interference from White people in positions of power. It is a matter of integration versus segregation, of joining and finding equal footing, or cutting the bridge loose and fully separating the White and the Black world. And while these ideologies cannot coexist, the efforts put into both of them resulted in the current state of racial equality within the United States of America.

7. Conclusion

The Civil Rights Movement is a period in American history with massive social change, that exemplified the duality of peacefulness and aggressiveness within a social setting characterized by a power dynamic of oppressed and oppressor. Despite the highs and lows of the movement, such as the many unjust arrests, acts of police brutality and lives lost in happenings such as The Long, hot summer of 1967, the movement managed to at least see through the goal of what it was started for: to lay down the foundations of racial equality in a bigoted world. It paved the way to modern movements and laid the foundations of how a movement should be handled, both in a violent and nonviolent way, and is also a tangible example of the cruelty of the oppressor in the position of power, and the unwillingness to grant the oppressed power and freedom. Despite nonviolence and pacifism being the ideal way to achieve a goal, sometimes aggression is necessary, as people in power will exploit the powerless until they are directly met with consequence.

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